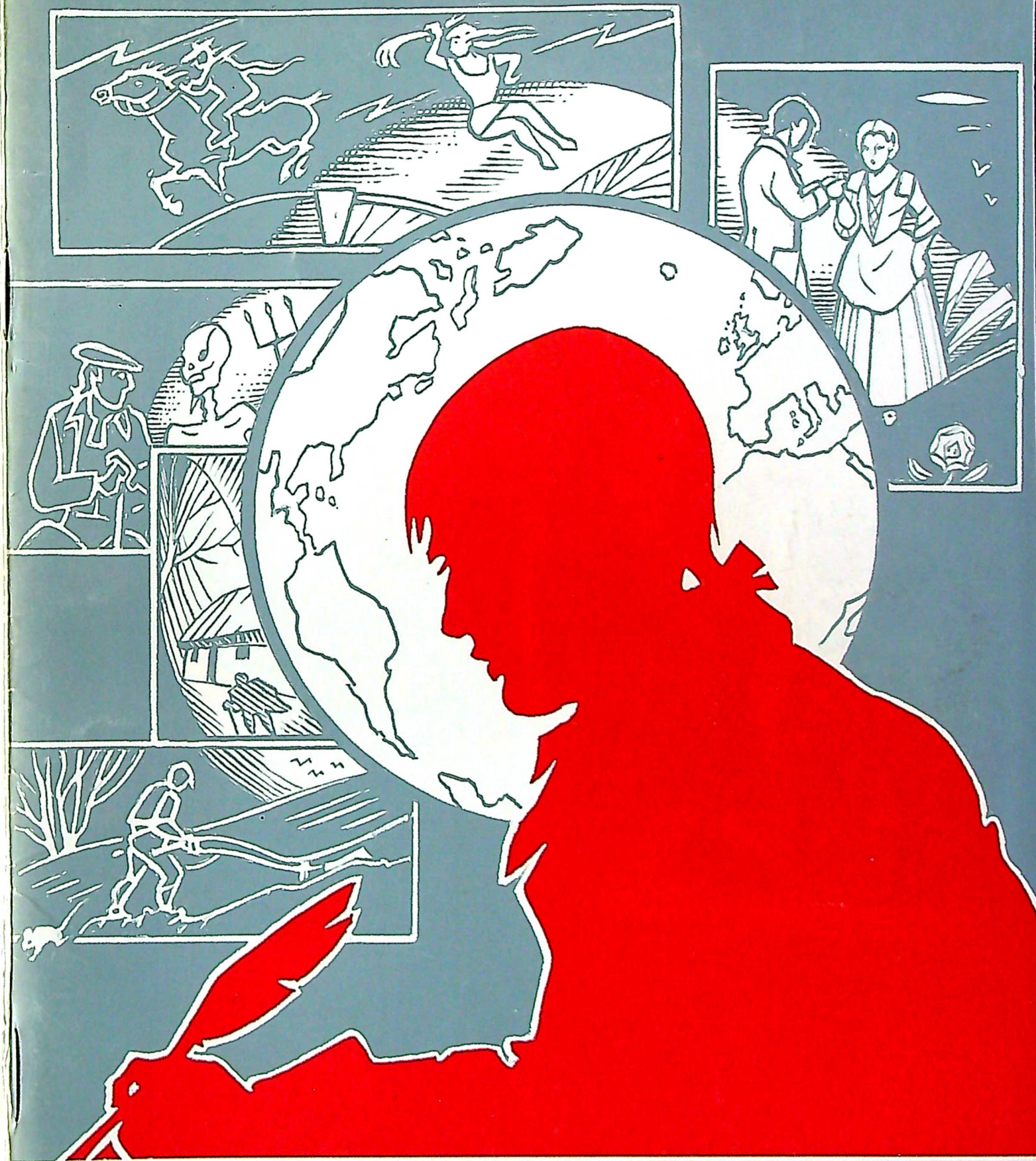




Royal Mail

Burns Bicentenary 1996

British Philatelic Bulletin Publication

No: 3



The Burns statue in Central Park New York
(Photo James Mackay)

Text by James Mackay, author of several works on Burns, including the award winning biography *Burns* (1992). He edited the Burns Federation's *Chronicle*, 1977-90, and his contribution to Burns studies earned him a D. Litt degree of the University of Glasgow in 1993. He is a regular contributor to the *British Philatelic Bulletin* and *British Postmark Bulletin*.

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Robert Burns – the Man and the Poet

Robert Burns, the Poet of All Humanity, is widely regarded as one of the 10 greatest poets of all time. Critics are agreed universally that no other poet has ever surpassed him in the ability to convey the entire gamut of human emotions, the longings and loves, the sorrows and joys, the ambitions and heartaches common to men and women everywhere, in all classes of society.

He was born of humble parents in Ayrshire, Scotland on 25 January 1759 and died at Dumfries on 21 July 1796. In July 1786 he published, at his own expense, a slim volume of poetry entitled *Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. Only 612 copies were produced by John Wilson at Kilmarnock, selling for three shillings (15p), but today a good copy would cost around £15,000.

A second, greatly expanded edition was published at Edinburgh and London in 1787 and was a best-seller. Pirated editions, at Belfast and Dublin, appeared later the same year, and the first American editions were produced at Philadelphia in July 1788 and New York in January 1789. Since the Kilmarnock Edition appeared in July 1786 there have been more than 2000 editions of the poems of Burns—an average of 10 a year.

Although widely regarded as a vernacular poet, Burns actually wrote mainly in standard English, while many other poems and songs contain only a sprinkling of dialect words.

Burns was strongly influenced by Goethe, but in turn he exerted an enormous influence on the Romantic writers of 19th century France, Germany and Britain. Alexander Pushkin, the celebrated Russian poet, acquired a copy of Burns's poems in 1800 and made the first translation of them into a foreign language. Since then the poems have been translated into more than 50 languages, from

Icelandic to Maori, from Punjabi to Japanese. Samuel Marshak's edition, published in Moscow in the 1930s, sold well over a million copies, while a recent Chinese edition, published in Beijing, ran to 100,000 copies and was sold out within three months.

Burns, though a government official (he was an officer of the Excise from 1789 till his death), often stuck his neck out on account of his radical politics. He dared to champion the cause of the American colonists and even wrote a Birthday Ode in honour of General George Washington. Thomas Jefferson and Abraham Lincoln, and Jefferson Davis were great devotees of Burns and often quoted from his poems.

Later, Burns espoused the cause of the French Revolution, and almost lost his job as a result. "Scots Wha Hae", for many years regarded as Scotland's national anthem, although supposedly a tribute to King Robert the Bruce at the Battle of Bannockburn, was in fact a radical song aimed at the British government of 1793 which tried to curb freedom of speech.

Burns, though enjoying a reputation as a womaniser (eight of whose 13 children were born out of wedlock), was also a pioneer of feminism, writing "The Rights of Women" for the actress Louisa Fontenelle. Though he became an ardent patriot and took an active part in the volunteer militia movement when France threatened invasion, he is better remembered for his radical songs about the brotherhood of man. Karl

Liebknecht, the Spartakist leader in Germany, 1919, died with the words of Burns on his lips – "That man to man, the world o'er, shall brothers be..."

In our own time, Burns has been a powerful inspiration, and a comfort to men in adversity. Professor Tom Sutherland, second longest serving of the hostages held in Lebanon, kept his sanity and helped

Black basalt bust of Burns by Josiah Wedgwood, c.1810 (Photo: James Mackay)



boost the morale of fellow hostages by reciting the poems of Burns to them. The first inkling of this was when Jean Paul Kaufmann, a French hostage, was released in 1989 and amazed his interrogators debriefing him in Paris by reciting "Tam o Shanter", Burns's great comic masterpiece.

Burns composed about 350 songs, many of which, in the jargon of Tin Pan Alley, are "standards" to this day. His best known work, of course, is "Auld Lang Syne", arguably the world's most widely sung song, but he wrote many others, such as "The Campbells are Coming" and "Coming Thro the Rye".

The word *gringo* derives from a song of Robert Burns. Actually he composed two versions of "Green Grow the Rashes O" and it was probably the bawdy version which was sung with such gusto by the troops of General Zachary Taylor during the Mexican War of 1846. It was so popular as a marching song that the Mexicans, hearing it afar off, would raise their hands in horror and cry, "Madre de Dios! Aqui estan los Green grows!" Soon this expression was simplified to *gringos*.

Burns has given many other words and phrases to the English language, from "The best-laid schemes of mice and men" to "man was made to mourn", "Man's inhumanity to man" and "now's the day and now's the hour". As well as composing over 600 poems and songs he was a voluminous letter-writer, and 715 of his letters are extant, demonstrating the range and power of his language. Strangely enough, only one of these letters was written in the Scots language.

With the name of the poet is associated that phenomenon, the Burns Supper. The first was held in July 1801, when nine friends of the late poet dined on sheep's head and haggis to mark the fifth anniversary of his death. The idea of holding a celebratory dinner on his birthday (25 January) began in 1802 and spread rapidly throughout Scotland and many of the clubs formed at that time are in existence to this day. The first Burns Supper outside Scotland was held at Oxford in 1806, and the first in America and India six years later. Countless thousands of Burns Suppers are held in every part of the world each January.

In 1859 the centenary of the birth of Burns was celebrated all over the world. The US authorities actually permitted the free transmission of telegrams for 24 hours to enable Burns dinners and devotees coast to coast to exchange fraternal

greetings without charge. Principal speakers at Burns dinners on that occasion included Abraham Lincoln, Stephen Douglas, Ralph Waldo Emerson, John Greenleaf Whittier and Horace Greeley.

The Burns Federation, the worldwide association of Burns clubs, was founded in 1885 on the Thames Embankment in London where devotees of the poet had come from all over the world for the unveiling of his statue. Its headquarters was instituted at Kilmarnock, where it has been ever since. It is now the world's oldest literary federation, with affiliated clubs, societies and members in every part of the world, from Finland to Argentina. Today, with some 400 affiliated societies representing a membership of about 60,000, it is a worldwide body whose annual conferences have been held in Canada and the USA as well as Scotland and England. The 1997 conference is scheduled to take place in Melbourne, Australia.

In Burns's own lifetime such composers as Haydn, Beethoven, Pleyel, Hummel, Weber and Kozeluch wrote music for his lyrics. Later composers who were inspired to set Burns's words to music include Mendelssohn, Max Bruch, Sir Henry Bishop, Malcolm Arnold, Benjamin Britten and Peter Maxwell-Davis. As he lay dying Burns turned to comfort his wife Jean saying, "Never mind. I'll be more thought of a hundred years hence than I am now." Two hundred years on, the reputation and influence of Robert Burns is greater than ever.



Burns Mausoleum, Dumfries, with (inset) the Muse of Poetry with Burns at the plough (Photo: James Mackay)

Philatelic Souvenirs

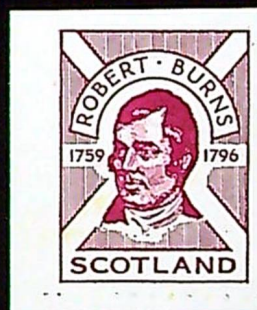
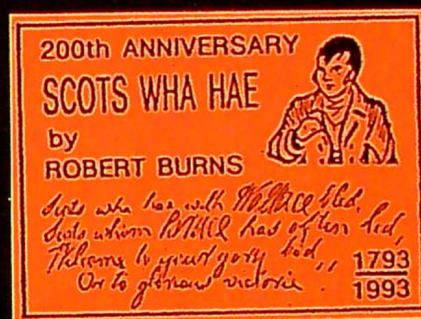
As long ago as the 1880s adhesive labels portraying Burns were in use. These were modelled on the Penny Red and bore a crude portrait of the poet with the words "Scottish Tour" and "Dinna Forget" at the sides. A somewhat similar label bore an inscription alluding to Birrell's Scottish Diorama Concert about 1890. Labels featuring a view of the poet's birthplace were produced about 1955 in a series raising funds for the Scottish Council for the Care of Spastics.

In 1957 the Scottish Secretariat (publishers of nationalist pamphlets) launched a Burns label in a bid to persuade the Post Office to mark the bicentenary of the poet's birth with stamps in 1959. This label bore the denomination "Twa Plack" (a plack being a small copper coin already obsolete by Burns's time). The following year saw a second label depicting Burns, a thistle and the Scottish flag, while the Caledonian Society of South Africa produced a booklet of four labels with a similar theme.

The request for Burns stamps was turned down in 1959 but when the Post Office issued stamps for Shakespeare in 1964 this provoked an outcry in Scotland and a rash of labels, including a series inscribed "Boycott the Shakespeare Stamps! 'No Precedent' for Burns, why one for him?" In the USA Theodore Jensen's Fireside Post (a private local service in Toledo, Ohio) issued a 5c stamp in 1969 and a miniature sheet the following year.

The Scottish Philatelic Secretariat, established by Dr George Philp, produced some 84 labels between 1968 and 1976 and several of these had a Burns theme. Three labels, in various colours, were produce for the Tam o Shanter Museum at Ayr, but the best known are the pictorial vignettes showing Burns Cottage and Highland Mary's statue in the Clyde Fair International miniature sheet, and the two sheets of six produced in 1974-5 to publicise the Burns Heritage Trail.

Among the more elusive items is the typeset label produced at Mauchline in 1959 for the birth bicentenary. Robert McCutcheon of Stirling produced a series of Burns labels in 1971. Large, rouletted labels portraying Burns against a Saltire cross appeared in 1976 and some were overprinted for the Burns Conference at



Burns labels from the 1950s to the present

Glasgow in 1978. A large circular label was produced by the Scottish Tourist Board to promote the Heritage Trail, and in 1987 Clackmannan Burnsians produced a label to celebrate the bicentenary of the poet's visit to their county.

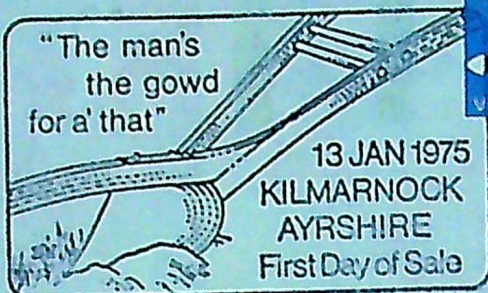
In 1966 Peter Westwood, now Publicity Officer of the Burns Federation, produced his first Burns label, showing the Nasmyth bust, thistles and a value of "one groat". Over a 30 year period he has produced well over 100 Burns labels, including strike post stamps (1971) and airmail stickers. More recently he has been kept busy designing labels for Burns clubs as far afield as Canada and Australia to adorn their bicentenary mail.

Burns Postal Stationery

"Man to man, the world o'er"

**BY AIR MAIL
AIR LETTER**

PAR AVION AEROGRAMME



The 1975 Scottish aerogramme with "First Day of Sale" postmark

The first piece of postal stationery with a Burns theme was produced not in Britain but in New Zealand, as long ago as 1900. This was a brown postcard with an impressed 1d stamp of Queen Victoria and a pictorial panel on the left showing the Octagon in Dunedin. The seated statue of Burns by Sir John Steell (the same as the statues on the Thames Embankment and in New York's Central Park) appears to the left of the picture. Dunedin (Gaelic for Edinburgh) was founded by the poet's nephew, the Very Revd. Dr Thomas Burns, and the statue is at the very centre of the city.

On 13 January 1975 Britain issued a 6p stamped aerogramme, designed by Fraser Haston, to publicise the Burns Heritage Trail. A mirror image of the Nasmyth portrait appeared on the left, while *Tam o Shanter* pursued by Nanie graced the central panel and a fieldmouse ("Wee, sleekit, cowrin tim'rous beastie") was featured on the back. A novel feature of this aerogramme was the use of appropriate Burns

quotations to illustrate the instructions for use. For example, "To open slit here" was accompanied by "An' cut you up wi' ready sleight". Some 247 of these aerogrammes were used on 13 March 1977 to mark the maiden flight of the MacDonnell-Douglas DC 10-30 airliner "Robert Burns", a commemorative inscription being applied to the address panel with the logo of British Caledonian Airways and a picture of the aircraft. These souvenirs were postmarked at Ayr, flown from Prestwick to Gatwick, and cacheted on arrival.

In 1989 a first class stamped aerogramme designed by David Driver was released to celebrate the centenary of the Scottish National Portrait Gallery; prominently reproduced on the back panel was the first of the bust portraits of Burns painted by Alexander Nasmyth in 1787. An engraving from this painting was used as the frontispiece of the first Edinburgh Edition later the same year. Both of these aerogrammes were lithographed by McCorquodale.

1996 Bicentenary Stamp Issue

To mark the bicentenary of the death of Robert Burns a set of four stamps is being released on 25 January 1996, the poet's birthday. It is intended that the stamps will remain on sale throughout the Bicentenary Year. They have been printed in multicolour offset lithography by The House of Questa in sheets of 100 using a virtually square format. The designs by Tayburn McIlroy Coates feature quotations from four of Burns's best known works, a poem and three songs. The Queen's profile is the half-tone version first used on the Bridges stamps of 1968. The numerals of value occupy the upper corners, while *Robert Burns 1759-1796* is inscribed across the foot.

The 19p bears the opening line of: "To a Mouse", one of Burns's best-loved nature poems. The text in this instance has been taken from the Kilmarnock Edition of July 1786 and faithfully reproduces the artless mixture of fonts used by the printer John Wilson. Born at Kilmarnock in the same year as the poet, Wilson operated the first press in Ayrshire, at the Star Inn Close (now part of a shopping precinct). The press itself was broken up in the mid-19th century and cannibalised to make an elaborate chair decorated with carvings of Burns and characters from his works. This Victorian extravaganza is on display at the Burns Birthplace Museum, Alloway, and was reproduced on the postmark used in July 1986 to celebrate the bicentenary of the Kilmarnock Edition.

At the time of the Kilmarnock Edition the Scottish language was in a state of rapid transition, and this accounts for the spelling *sleekit* and the use of the obsolescent gerund *cowran* which Burns changed to *sleekit* and *cow'rin* in the first Edinburgh Edition (1787), the version followed by every other edition to this day. The design is completed by a woodcut illustration by John Lawrence of the fieldmouse, whose nest Burns turned up with the plough one wintry day in November 1785.

John Lambie, employed by Burns as a labourer at Lochlie farm, claimed to have been with Robert at the plough on the day that they turned up the mouse, and had been rebuked by the poet for chasing the poor creature "wi murdering pattle". Lambie also recalled that the mouse had "an uncommonly large nest". An



The four stamps, featuring Burns quotations, designed by Tayburn McIlroy Coates

apocryphal tale, still part of oral tradition in Mauchline, claims that Burns subsequently showed Lambie the draft of the poem with the words, "Well, what do you think of your mouse now?"

The poem itself consists of eight six-line stanzas written in the Standart Habbie metre.

The poet, contemplating the panic-stricken creature escaping from the nest crushed by the ploughshare, muses:

*But Mousie, thou art no thy lane,
In proving foresight may be vain:
The best-laid schemes o' mice an' men
Gang aft agley,
An' lea'e us nought but grief an' pain,
For promis'd joy!*

For the 25p stamp the title of one of Burns's best known love songs has been chosen, in nice time to prepay first class postage on Valentines. "O my Luve's like a Red, Red Rose" is an amalgam of several old ballads and vividly illustrates Burns's genius for reworking folk material and producing a poetic gem of the first rank. In the words of the American Professor Franklin Bliss Snyder (1932), "Burns took a phrase here, an adjective there, an entire line somewhere else, rearranged the material thus selected in a new and harmonious pattern, and the result is one of the world's most perfect lyrics". Professor Donald Low, the greatest living authority on the songs of Burns, comments "After all it is no small thing to have recognized the potential of the song in the first place, wherever it came from. Collecting a song of this quality is an achievement in itself". Incidentally, there are at least seven variants of the opening line, all in the poet's handwriting, and as a result there are probably more permutations and combinations of words, capitalisation and punctuation in this than in any of the other 370 songs which he composed.

Burns the poet is well known but Burns the folklorist and collector of traditional snatches of song is far less remembered. His interest in the subject went back to early childhood, both Burns's mother and an elderly relative named Betty Davidson who lodged with the family having a fund of ancient songs, jingles and rhymes. A more scientific approach to old ballads developed in 1787 when Burns was in Edinburgh. There he met James Johnson (1741-1811), publisher of *The Scots Musical Museum*, who asked him to collaborate on the project which eventually ran to six volumes. Burns eventually became even more enthusiastic than Johnson himself, and from then until his death, he was virtually the real editor of the *Museum*, contributing about 160 songs of his own, and mending and revising many others; his system of

signature letters still disguises how many! Three further volumes were published in the poet's lifetime and a fifth was in the press at the time of his death. It took Johnson, on his own, until 1803 to produce the final volume.

This song appeared as number 402 in the fifth volume, published in December 1796, and it also appeared in George Thomson's rival *Select Collection* three years later; but it actually first saw the light of day in April 1794 in *Selection of Scots Songs* published by Pietro Urbani (1749-1816), a Milanese tenor and composer who had settled in Edinburgh. The song is sung to the tune "Major Graham", which was first published in *Gow's Strathspeys* in 1784. A copperplate script has been chosen for the stamp because this closely resembles the style used by Johnson for his elaborate title pages. Below the quotation lies a wild rose in full bloom, with a rosebud alongside.

For the 41p, a bold typeface in seriffed capitals has been adopted, reminiscent of the lettering found on monumental inscriptions. The words "Scots, wha hae wi Wallace bled" are the opening line of the song sometimes known as Robert the Bruce's Address to his Troops at Bannockburn, sung to the tune "Hey tutti, taiti" of which Burns wrote, "I have met the tradition universally over Scotland, and particularly about Stirling, in the neighbourhood of the scene, that this air was Robert Bruce's march at the battle of Bannockburn".

In August 1787, during his Highland Tour, Burns visited Stirling and the site of the great battle of Bannockburn in 1314, and was deeply moved. To a friend he wrote, "... two hours ago I said a fervent prayer for Old Caledonia over the hole in a blue whinstone where Robert de Bruce fixed his royal standard on the banks of the Bannockburn". He did not write the song till six years later, when he was on another tour, a jaunt through Galloway. He was at Gatehouse of Fleet in August 1793 when he witnessed the sorry spectacle of Thomas Muir being led in chains through the village, having been apprehended on the coast where he had tried to escape to Ireland. Muir, a staunch advocate of parliamentary reform, was being taken to Edinburgh to stand trial for sedition, and a savage sentence of transportation to Botany Bay.

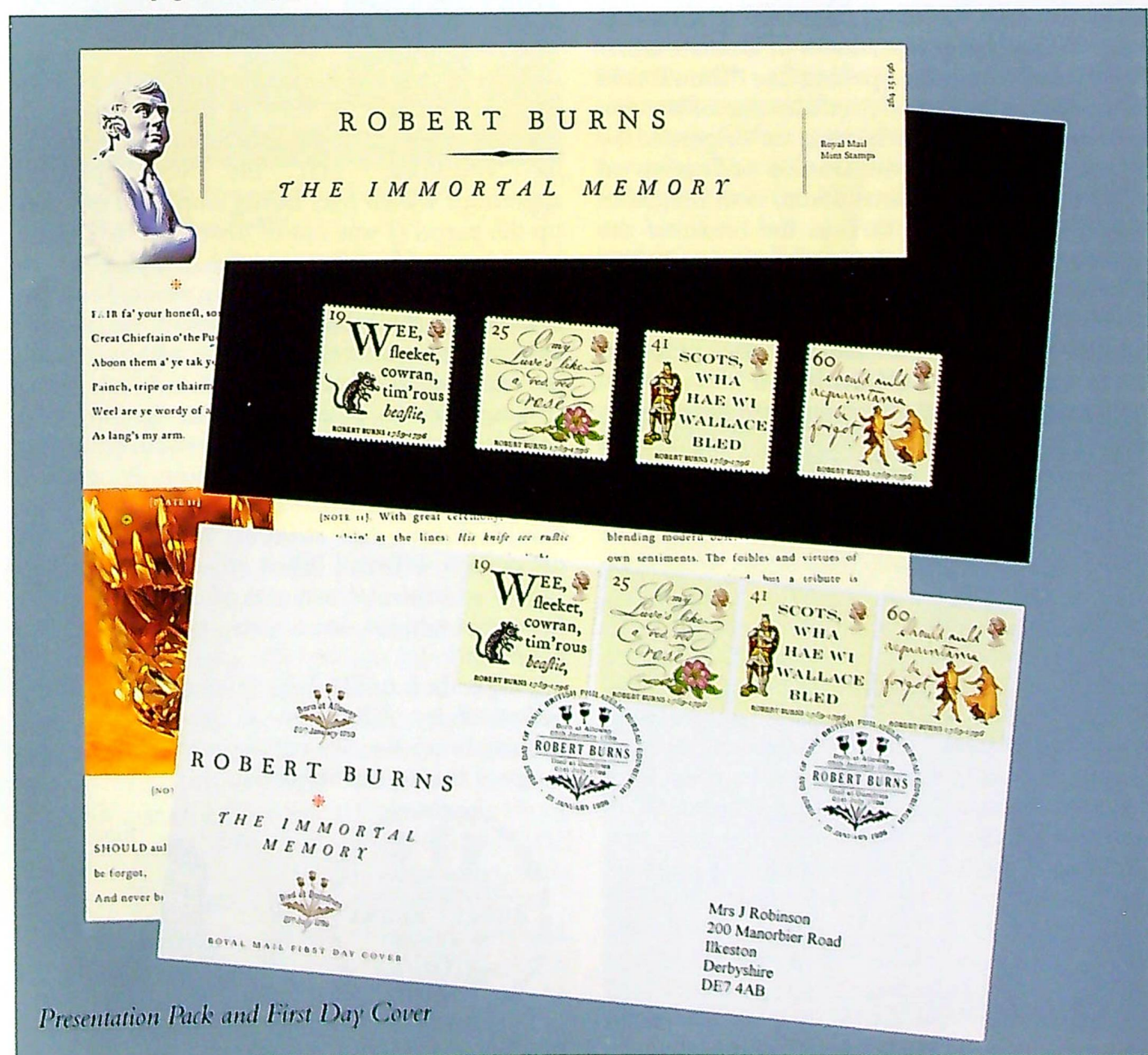
This sight reminded Burns of Bannockburn, and inspired him to write this song, a copy of which he sent to George Thomson (1757-1851) with a letter in which he wrote: "I shewed the air to Urbani, who was highly pleased with it, &

begged me to make soft verses for it; but I had no idea of giving myself any trouble on the Subject, till the accidental recollection of that glorious struggle for Freedom, associated with the glowing ideas of some other struggles of the same nature, *not quite so ancient*, roused my rhyming Mania".

Thus what appears to be a patriotic song of the War of Independence in 1314 was actually a metaphor for the political struggles of 1793. It became so popular that it was for very many years regarded as Scotland's national anthem. George Thomson liked the words but did not approve of Burns's choice of tune. Instead, he suggested a melody called "Lewie Gordon" which would have necessitated a weakening addition to every fourth line. Burns reluctantly gave way, though he came very close to falling out with his pigheaded publisher. The poet's first

biographer, Dr James Currie, restored the original tune and words in his edition of 1800, four years after Burns's death, and two years later Thomson himself tacitly admitted his error by following suit when the volume of the *Select Collection* was reprinted.

Appropriately, the motif at the side of the stamp is the figure of Scotland's great national hero, Sir William Wallace of Ellerslie, who also defeated the English, at Stirling Bridge, a few miles north of Bannockburn, in 1297. The figure of Wallace, clad in armour and holding his famous two-handed broadsword, is taken from the stained glass window of 1867 in the Wallace Monument on the summit of the Abbey Craig overlooking Stirling. Purists may cavil at his tartan plaid (a French import about 1471) and the type of sword (not in use till the late 15th century), but there are no authentic likenesses of Wallace and



the stained glass window is widely regarded as conveying the best impression of the hero, from the description in the epic poem by Blind Harry the Minstrel.

The subject of the 60p stamp is something of a paradox. "Auld Lang Syne" is probably the world's most widely sung song, yet in spite of its universal popularity it has aptly been described as the song that nobody knows. Even in Scotland, lines are misquoted, additional words inserted, and terrible liberties taken with the world's great song of parting. It has also appeared in over 50 films, from "Operation Petticoat" to "Peyton Place". In "The Fast Lady" it was actually recited, rather than sung, by Stanley Baxter, and in the film "When Harry Met Sally", the hero tries to explain the meaning of the words to his girlfriend. Here again, we all know what is meant by "auld lang syne" but it is virtually untranslatable, "old long since" being meaningless. The stamp reproduces in Burns's rather spiky handwriting the opening line "Should auld acquaintance be forgot", actually one of the few lines in the song which were *not* originated by Burns. In a letter to Mrs Dunlop of Dunlop on 17 December 1788 Burns wrote, with tongue in cheek, "Light be the turf on the breast of the heaven inspired poet who composed this glorious fragment! There is more of the fire of native genius in it than in half a dozen of modern English Bacchanalians." On the other page was his first version of "Auld Lang Syne".

Though Burns did not claim the song as his own, his version differs radically from all the others. The earliest version, "Auld Kyndnes foryett" was published in 1568, but Sir Robert Ayton (1570-1638) was the first to use the phrase "old-long-syne" as the punchline of a song beginning "Should auld acquaintance be forgot". Francis Sempill and Allan Ramsay both had a go at the subject, but their versions pale into insignificance by comparison. Burns himself had at least three attempts at the song before producing the final version which he sent to George Thomson in September 1793, describing it as "the old song of the olden times, and which has never been in print, not even in manuscript, until I took it down from an old man's singing". No version that comes close to Burns has ever been found so he must, indeed, receive the credit. Although the version published by Thomson is the one usually encountered nowadays, the version published by James Johnson is regarded as the better of the two.

The illustration on the stamp, showing a kilted highlander and a peasant girl dancing, is taken from the famous painting by David Allan entitled "A Highland Dance", now hanging in the National Gallery of Scotland, Edinburgh. It is singularly appropriate that the painting should be reproduced, for 1996 also marks the bicentenary of the death of the artist who, in his own lifetime, was hailed as the Scottish Hogarth.

Allan and Burns never met, although Allan (1744-96) was commissioned by Thomson to etch illustrations for Burns's songs in *The Select Collection*. Allan also painted scenes to illustrate "Tam o Shanter" and "The Cotter's Saturday Night", the latter being sent to Burns by Thomson as a gift. In this painting of a family gathered for prayers the eldest son bore a striking resemblance to Burns, being based by Allan on the well-known portrait by Alexander Nasmyth. Acknowledging the gift, Burns wrote to Thomson in May 1795:

"I have shewn it to two or three judges of the first abilities here, & they all agree with me in classing it as a first rate production. My phiz is *sae kenspeckle*, that the very joiner's apprentice whom Mrs Burns employed to break up the parcel (I was out of town that day) knew it at once... My most grateful compliments to Allan, that he has honored my rustic Muse so much with his masterly pencil. One strange coincidence is, that the little one who is making the felonious attempt on the cat's tail, is the most striking likeness of an ill-deedie, damn'd wee, rumble-gairie hurchin of mine, whom from that propensity to witty wickedness & manfu' mischief, which even at twa days auld I foresaw would form the striking features of his disposition, I named Willie Nicol, after a certain Friend of mine, who is one of the Masters of a Grammar-school in a city which shall be nameless."

Burns died on 21 July 1796 and was closely followed by Allan, on 6 August, his last commission, for 20 etchings illustrating the songs of Burns, uncompleted.



Royal Mail "First Day of Issue" postmarks

The Burns Stamps of 1966



The issued stamps featuring the Skirving and Nasmyth portraits of Burns

On 10 November 1964, barely three weeks in office as Postmaster General, Anthony Wedgwood Benn announced that he was reconsidering the stamp issue programme. On 1 February 1965 he outlined his plans for the forthcoming year and confirmed the issue of Burns stamps. Eight well known Scottish artists were commissioned to produce essays for the two stamps, ranging from an unfortunate pair with the quotation "O my luv's like a red, red rose" between portraits of Burns and The Queen, to Stewart Black's novel use of textiles (the Burns check) as a background to the design, bled off into the perforations. The designs submitted by A B Imrie were highly regarded and showed the poet's portrait with the Brig o Doon and Alloway countryside. Ruari McLean featured a wreath of flowers and birds in the Victorian style of decorative art. Ian McLeish presented a sketch of Burns, while Jack Fleming adopted a symbolic motif, showing a hand holding a quill-pen, with the Miers silhouette in the background.

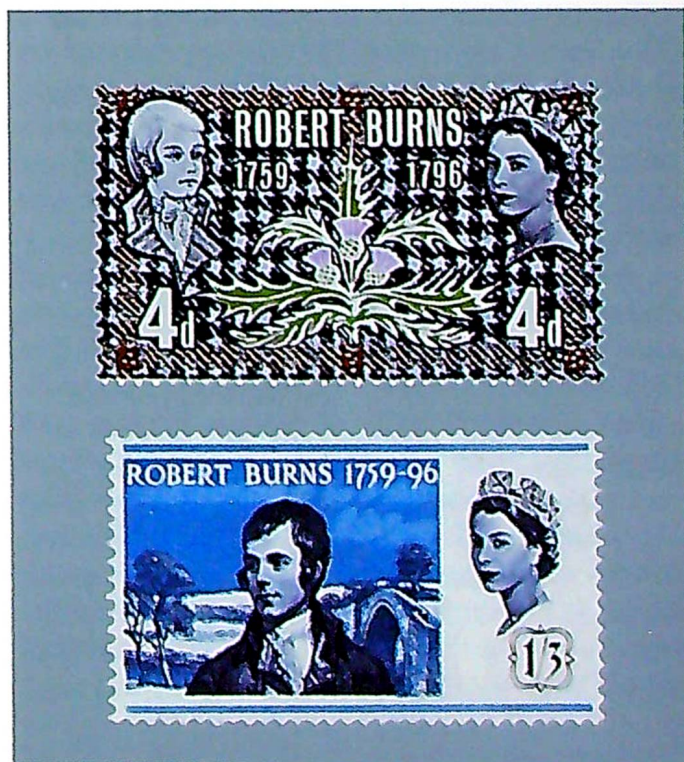
Gordon Huntly's winning pair was criticised for returning to the symbolism redolent of the 1950s and for his inaccurate depiction of the Scottish flag, barely recognisable as such. The 1s3d stamp showed the Nasmyth bust in reverse

against a background of plough, thistle, rose, stook of barley, quill pen and scroll. Tucked away in the corner was the gable end of the farmhouse at Mossgiel.

The 4d stamp reproduced an adaptation of the chalk portrait of Burns by Archibald Skirving, on blue ground, with ultra-thin diagonal lines supposed to represent the Saltire flag. Both stamps used the portrait of The Queen by Dorothy Wilding in a vertical panel above the value, on the extreme right. The 4d was captioned in white lowercase lettering, whereas the poet's name appeared on either side of his portrait on the higher denomination. It might have been better had the poet's autograph signature been used, but instead the words appeared in impeccable copperplate script.

The stamps were printed in multicolour photogravure by Harrison and Sons in sheets of 120 with a Multiple Crown watermark. The stamps sold in Southampton and Glasgow were issued with phosphor bands to facilitate electronic sorting. As well as presentation packs the Post Office provided a first day cover featuring the poet's birthplace.

At that time, the Philatelic Bureau was located in London but a temporary bureau was established at Edinburgh to cope with orders from collectors all over the world. So successful was this operation, that the Post Office decided to transfer the Bureau to Edinburgh permanently, later the same year.



Unadopted designs by Stewart Black and A B Imrie

Burns Stamps of the World

The first adhesive postage stamp honouring Burns was issued by the Soviet Union on 27 August 1956 to mark the 160th anniversary of the poet's death. That the stamp was released a month after the actual anniversary seems to indicate that it was a last minute decision by the Soviet authorities. The 40 kopek yellow-brown stamp was printed in photogravure by Goznak, from a design by E N Gundobin showing the Nasmyth bust in reverse. The design was retained for a new stamp on 29 June 1957, recess-printed in two colours with the vignette in sepia and the frame in Scottish blue. On 25 February 1959, one month after the actual bicentenary of the poet's birth, this stamp was re-issued with the dates 1759 and 1959 overprinted in red. These three stamps are usually encountered in cancelled-to-order condition, mint are increasingly elusive and first day covers scarce.

On 28 April 1959 Rumania released the annual series devoted to Cultural Anniversaries and included Burns. S Zainea designed the 55 bani stamp, printed in slate blue in photogravure by the Government Printing Works, Bucharest. The stamp featured a right facing bust of poet, loosely based on Nasmyth.

Tayburn designed a prestige booklet entitled "The Scots Connection" which was released on 21 March 1989. The mixed value pane of eight stamps with a lion rampant label in the centre had a marginal text showing portraits of Sir Walter Scott and Adam Smith, as well as the Nasmyth bust of Burns.

Although this represents the sum total of philatelic coverage of Burns to date there is one other stamp which deserves consideration. On 22 February 1995 New Zealand issued a set of six stamps, designed by Red Cactus Design and lithographed by Southern Colour Print of Dunedin, with the theme of New Zealand cities floodlit by night. The \$1.20 denomination showed Dunedin Town Hall and the Octagon, but photographed from such an angle that the Burns statue in front of the Town Hall is almost out of the picture!

Russian and Rumanian stamps of 1956 and 1959-the first to feature Burns



In connection with the 1966 stamps five pictorial handstamps were used (at Alloway, Ayr, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Kilmarnock) showing the poet's arms and the quotation "That man to man the world o'er shall brothers be for a' that". The sixth postmark, used at Dumfries, featured the imposing mausoleum in St Michael's churchyard where his remains were interred in 1815, with the words "The friend of man, to vice alone a foe" (actually words composed by Burns for his father's tombstone at Alloway). The original set of six handstamps (one for each office) had broad lettering and virtually no space between the two parts of the inscriptions. Subsequently datestamps of the same diameter (38mm), but with narrow lettering, were adopted and also extended to Greenock and Mauchline. A third set of datestamps, similar to the second version but with a slightly smaller diameter (37mm) and minor differences in the lettering and designs, was held in reserve at the Philatelic Bureau and applied to covers sent there under cover.

The same eight offices participated in the issue of the 1975 aerogramme, with different handstamps on the first day of sale (13 January) and the poet's birthday (25 January). Both types featured a plough with the words "The man's the gowd [gold] for a' that".

The Scottish Tourist Board sponsored a slogan which reproduced the Skirving portrait with the words "Burns Heritage Trail" alongside. This

Special handstamps commemorating Burns



Burns Heritage Trail

slogan was originally confined to Ayr, Dumfries and Kilmarnock (7 July 1975 to 3 January 1976) but by public demand was later extended to Edinburgh (26 August to 20 September) and Glasgow (22 September to 18 October).

A pictorial datestamp featuring the Burns monument at Alloway was used to hand-cancel philatelic mail at Ayr from 1 February 1983 to 1 November 1989. This motif was retained in the postmark used on collectors' mail sent to the Special Handstamp Centre in Glasgow from 9 December 1993 to 21 July 1995.

The Dumfries Burns Howff Club (which meets in the Globe Inn, the poet's favourite howff or pub) celebrated its centenary in 1989 with a one-day handstamp as well as a slogan postmark.

Since 1978 pictorial datestamps have been used at several one-day special events associated with Burns. Such handstamps were used at the Burns Conferences in Glasgow (1978), Dumfries (1982) and London (1985), while Dumfries Burns Club sponsored handstamps for the poet's birthday in 1981 and 1982. A handstamp featuring the poet's birthplace marked the opening of the Ayr Philatelic Counter in 1981. Other handstamps include those publicising Souter Johnie's cottage (Ayr, 1985), the bicentenary of the Kilmarnock Edition (Kilmarnock, 1986), the bicentenary of Burns as a burgess of Dumfries (Dumfries, 1987) and Ellisland (Dumfries, 1988). The Scottish Philatelic Congress handstamp (Falkirk, 1988) marked the bicentenary of the poet's marriage to Jean Armour by featuring Burns House, Mauchline. One of the First Day handstamps associated with the Roses stamps of July 1991 featured the Nasmyth portrait and a quotation from the song "O my Luv's like a red, red rose". Last but not least is the handstamp showing a kilted piper which was applied to souvenir cards from Royal Mail's Burns Supper at Glasgow on 5 February 1993.

Postal History of Alloway

Alloway's first post office was a receiving house, opened on 6 September 1852, mail being marked with a framed undated stamp inscribed ALLOWAY. This receiving house, however, closed on 9 July 1861 when it was replaced by a wall letterbox.

As this hamlet on the banks of the Doon developed into a flourishing suburb of Ayr, however, the need for a post office was recognised, and on 18 June 1889 a sub office was re-established. As this offered telegraphic facilities it was given a steel "thimble" datestamp, and allocated the telegraphic code AMY. Money order and savings bank business were added on 2 December 1889. The small single circle datestamp continued in service until the 1930s when a double circle combined stamp inscribed ALLOWAY / AYR was substituted. The telegraphic facility was discontinued at the end of January 1944 and on 15 December 1948 Alloway was reduced from an independent sub office to a town sub office of Ayr, but retained its handstamp.

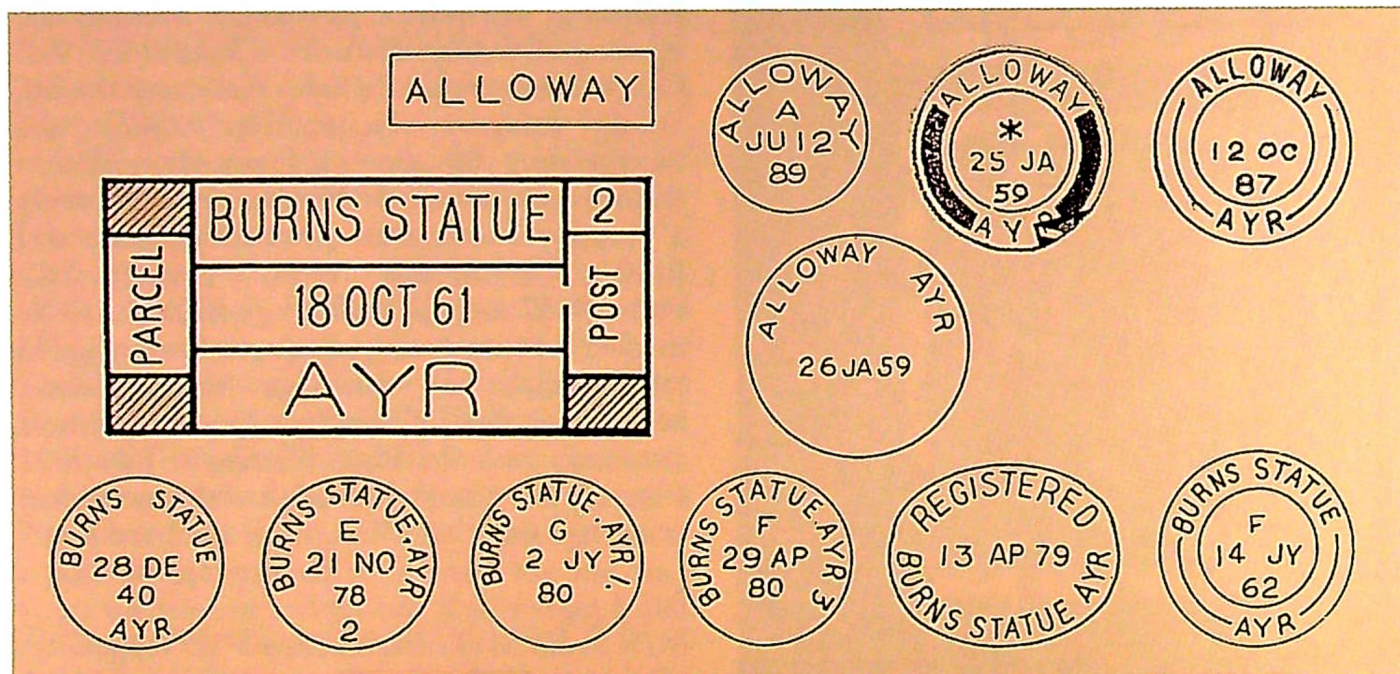
Until that time this datestamp was often used to cancel outgoing mail but thereafter all mail went to the main sorting office at Ayr for machine cancellation. As the celebration of Burns's birth bicentenary became imminent there was a nationwide campaign to get an issue of stamps. When that was rejected there was a

feeling that the occasion should be marked by a special postmark, but this likewise was turned down.

As a concession, however, the Post Office arranged for the Alloway post office to remain open on Sunday, 25 January 1959. Normally about 100 letters would be posted there daily, but on that momentous occasion over 27,000 covers and cards were sent from all over the world for re-posting. A team of eight postmen wielded the solitary datestamp and worked in relays all day in order to cancel the souvenir mail. Sub-postmistress Mrs T Mossie lent her garage for the purpose of sorting and stamping. The asterisk above the date was placed centrally on mail cancelled on 25 January; but as stamping of the souvenir mail continued the following day the asterisk was moved to the left to identify items actually cancelled on 26 January. In addition, a few registered items which could not be processed till normal counter work resumed on Monday, were cancelled with the ordinary Alloway datestamp (asterisk to left), but had to be stamped on the back with the correct date of 26 January. For this purpose a skeleton datestamp was employed.

In addition to Alloway, it should be noted that one of the other Ayr town sub-offices is actually called Burns Statue, being located opposite the bronze statue of the poet by George Lawson. A branch office opened on 20 October 1940 and continues to this day, using both single and double-circle datestamps, an oval registered stamp and various rectangular parcel stamps.

Operational postmarks of Alloway and the Burns Statue PO, Ayr



21 Holy Willie's Prayer —
Argument — And send the godly in a pet to pray-
scope

Holy Willie was a rather oldish batchelor Elder in the parish of Mauchline, & much & justly famed for that polemical chattering which ends in trifling Orthodoxy, & for that spiritualized Bawdry which refines to Leignorish Devotion. — In a Sessional process with a gentleman in Mauchline, a M^r Gavin Hamilton, Holy Willie, & his priest, father Auld, after full hearing in the Presbytry of Ayr, came off but second best; owing partly to the oratorical powers of M^r Rob^t Aiken, M^r Hamilton's Counsel; but chiefly to M^r Hamilton's being one of the most irreproachable & truly respectable characters in the country. — On losing his Process, the Muse overheard him at his devotions as follows —

O thou that in the heavens does dwell!
Tha, as it pleases best thyself,
Sends aye to heaven & ten to h-ll
And no for any gude or ill ^{It's} for thy glory!
They've done before thee. —

The subject of "Holy Willie's Prayer", a savage satire on the humbug and hypocrisy of the Kirk, was William Fisher (1737-1809) of Montgarswood, an elder of the Mauchline Kirk. Burns's note, giving the circumstances in which it was composed, was copied out for the volume of poems compiled by the poet for his friend Robert Riddell of Glenriddell in 1791. Now preserved in the National Library of Scotland, the Glenriddell MSS were bought by John Gribbel of Philadelphia in 1913, and presented to the Scottish nation.

The Burns Bicentenary Festival

The actual 200th anniversary of the death of Robert Burns, on 21 July 1996, will be the mid-point in a year-long programme of events in his honour which is being orchestrated by the Burns Festival under the presidency of HRH The Princess Royal. The Festival is described by its Director, John Struthers, as "a catalyst to generate additional economic activity in the South West of Scotland by organising events, helping to market the area and promoting Burns".

The year gets off to a resounding start with countless Burns Suppers in January and early February, of which the Biggest Burns Supper Around the World, at the Moat House in Glasgow, promises to have satellite links with similar festivities in America and Down Under. The first phase of the celebrations culminates in the Burns Federation Concert at the Royal Concert Hall in Glasgow on 4 February. From 3 May to 2 June the Tam o Shanter Spectacular will tour Kilmarnock, Largs, Ayr, Drumlanrig and Dumfries.

The Burns tributes are by no means confined to the South West of Scotland. The Royal Museum of Scotland in Edinburgh will be the venue for the great national exhibition entitled "Pride and Passion" from 8 June to mid-September, when it transfers to the Dick Institute in Kilmarnock until February 1997. The title, incidentally, comes from a letter to Clarinda (Mrs Agnes McLehose) in which Burns confessed that Pride and Passion were the twin emotions that ruled his life. The exhibition of books, manuscripts, paintings, relics and ephemera covers all aspects of Burns's life and career as farmer, poet and exciseman.

The Scottish Youth Dance Festival takes place at Dumfries (24-29 June), followed by the International Youth Theatre Festival in Largs (3-7 July), both events strongly Burns-related. The Burns Travelling Fair tours the South-West in June and July, beginning at Mauchline and continuing to Irvine, Kilmarnock, Ayr, Dumfries, Stranraer and Sanquhar. The Culzean Castle Music Weekend (12-13 July) is a prelude to the Southern Counties Commemorative Concert at Dumfries (19 July). This event coincides with the Burns Federation Conference. Two days later there will be a



INTERNATIONAL FESTIVAL

BURNS 96

*The Burns
Festival Logo*

spectacular re-enactment of the funeral procession of Burns. By contrast, Cumnock is the venue of the Dignity of Labour March on 27 July, a reminder of the poet's radical politics.

During the autumn there will be international festivals of country music (Dunaskin, 20-21 September) and folk music (Dumfries, 27-29 September). The international Burns Literature Festival takes place at Dumfries 3-5 October, and during that month "The Jolly Beggars", a theatrical production based on Burns's cantata of love and liberty, will be staged at various locations in Ayrshire, Dumfries and Galloway.

In addition to countless other concerts, ceilidhs, exhibitions and displays in libraries, museums and village halls up and down the land, there are international Burns seminars at the universities of Strathclyde (January) and South Carolina (March) and celebrations in Scottish communities all over the world.

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