



WORDS FAE HEARTH AN' HAME

Ulster-Scots: the 'heart language'
of Ards and North Down

FEATURING SIX O' OOR AIN AULD LOCAL WRITERS:

W.G. LYTTLE

ANDREW MCKENZIE

FRANCIS BOYLE

GEORGE FRANCIS SAVAGE-ARMSTRONG


JAMES MUNCE

WILLIAM HUGH PATTERSON

INTRODUCTION

‘Yonder stretches Scotia’s coastline
Here the coast of Down is seen
Kindred homes of kindred people
With the Copeland Isles between’.

from Alexander Knox, *A History of County Down* (1875)



Thanks to our close proximity to Scotland, just 18 miles across the North Channel, Ards and North Down has a very strong Scottish influence. For over 400 years Lowland Scottish families have been settling here, bringing with them all of their culture, including the Lowland Scots language, also known as ‘Lallans’, which then adapted here. As the poem above shows, we’re all the same folk.

100 years ago, **George Francis Savage-Armstrong** said that Ulster-Scots language was:

“an Ulster development of the Lowland Scottish – principally Ayrshire – brought over by Scottish settlers in the reign of James I”.

Scots language poetry is well-known and well-respected in Scotland. That’s not always the case on our side of **The Sheugh**. You might already know the poems and songs of Robert Burns. Maybe you still get a *Broons* or *Oor Wullie* annual at Christmas. But maybe you’re not aware of our own Ulster-Scots writers who lived in and wrote about our own Borough.

You probably use a **when** of Ulster-Scots words every day yourself, or your neighbours or parents do. As a 1980s Ards Borough Council booklet said of Ballyhalbert, the locals –

“speak with a tongue as broad as any Scot”.

Ulster-Scots words, expressions, literature and language are important, they help us appreciate our heritage yet are still very much part of daily life in Ards and North Down.

WORDS AND EXPRESSIONS

“Ye dinnae hiddae gie me ony mair o’ thon”

“Weel A didnae hae ony denner thenicht,
A’m wile seek an sair”

“Hoo can A dae ocht whun
A dinnae hae ocht tae dae ocht wi?”

These are expressions that most locals will be familiar with. Many will know what an **oxter** is, what a **hallion** is, and how **sair** a **skelf** or a **stoon** can be. Maist weans are toul fae they’re nae age no tae clod stanes for fear o yin dingin’ somebody on the heid or in the een - and then gettin’ a clout roon the lug for daein it. But ye cannae dae that noo or some powtaice wud hae the polis tae yer dure.

In 1880, following years of collecting, Holywood man **William Hugh Patterson** published a book of words from the local area, entitled *A Glossary of Words in the Counties of Antrim and Down*. He explained that ‘the Scotch entered Down by Bangor and Donaghadee, and pushed inland by Comber, Saintfield and Ballynahinch’. From the word **abin** or **aboon** (meaning ‘above’), to **yowlin** (meaning ‘a howling noise’), Patterson’s Glossary is **fu’ an’ skailin’** with Ulster-Scots words.

Many schools, the media, and ‘polite company’ will tell you that this is nothing more than bad English, or slang, and will mock people who use the words. They are only showing their own ignorance! They have no idea that all of these words have come from Scotland and have a rich pedigree in centuries of Scottish and Ulster-Scots language and literature.

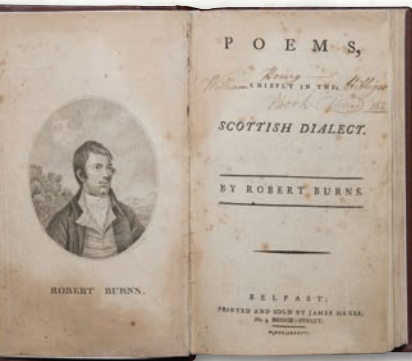
“Wha seen the Greba lasses?
Wha seen them gan awa?
Wha seen the Greba lasses,
Mairchin’ doon the Hard Breid Raa?”

SCOTS AND ROBERT BURNS

Scots can be understood by English speakers because Scots and modern English share the same “Old English” ancestor. They developed separately but are sister languages in the same way as Danish & Norwegian, Spanish & Portuguese and Czech & Slovak, all of whom can understand one another. They are more or less mutually intelligible but still unquestionably languages in their own right. As the Scottish poet, **Norman McCaig** (1910-1996) said, “It’s as absurd to call Scots a dialect of English as it is to call English a dialect of Scots”.

For most people around the world, the Scots language is associated with **Robert Burns**, Scotland’s National Bard. Who hasn’t struggled with the words of *Auld Lang Syne* on New Year’s Eve?

Scots was once the language of the Kings and royal courts. From the late 1300s onward, Scots language poets like **John Bruce**, **Robert Henryson**, **David Lyndsay** and **Robert Fergusson** gave the language status and expression. Scots, then also known as ‘Scottis’, began to be viewed as separate from English around the year 1500.



Burns was born in Ayrshire in 1759, and his first edition of *Poems Chiefly in Scottish Dialect* was published in Kilmarnock in 1786. His poems were much-loved in Ulster and were printed in newspapers here, before the entire book was reprinted in Belfast in 1787. There is even a local legend that a poet from Donaghadee who admired Burns’ works invited him to sail across from Portpatrick. He is said to have greeted Burns at Donaghadee harbour, in verse, along these lines:

“A doot by yer claes, an the cut o’ yer hair
You’re the boy Rabbie Burns fae the oul toon o Ayr”

Burns wasn’t greatly impressed by the poem, but they are said to have spent the day in a local pub! It’s just a legend, but even folklore does demonstrate the local interest in Burns. Burns Night events have been regular activities in the Ards and North Down since 1895 when the centenary of his death was commemorated around the world. The late **Seamus Heaney** showed his admiration for Burns, and Ulster-Scots, in his 2009 poem *A Birl for Burns*. An earlier Ulster poet had this to say:

‘Lowland Scots is a language. It’s more than that; it’s a literary language.
It’s developing along its own lines and has its own writers... when we examine
the influence of Scottish speech on say, the town of Comber, in County Down.
What you hear there is not just the Ards, and it’s not the Braid,
where a blind man from Ayrshire might think he was in his own country.
But it’s very Scottish for all that ...’

Rev William Forbes Marshall, *Ulster Speaks*, BBC Northern Ireland (1935)

ULSTER-SCOTS FROM DOWN TO DONEGAL

Various parts of Ulster were settled by Scots-speaking families from the 1600s onward. In the early 1960s, **Professor Robert J Gregg** of Larne carried out a huge survey which mapped the core Ulster-Scots speaking areas.

Since then, through the influence of schools and the mass media, Ulster-Scots language has weakened in some places. Improving road networks meant that people moved away from those core areas, but they took elements of the language with them. So, while the Gregg map still shows the strongest speaking areas, Ulster-Scots words and expressions can be found almost everywhere. Centuries of Ulster-Scots literature exist from places right across the Province.

Sir Hugh Montgomery began to settle Scottish families in the Ards in 1606. His relative **Alexander Montgomerie** was the “maister poete” of the King of Scotland, and wrote famous Scots language classics such as *The Cherrie and the Slae* (1580). **James Hamilton** also settled Scottish families here. He was the son of a Presbyterian minister. Other ministers, like **Rev Robert Bruce** of Edinburgh, are known to have preached sermons in Scots as well as English. The people they brought were Scots speakers. In one famous incident in Comber in the 1660s a local woman was proud of having assaulted a clergyman, saying “These are the hauns that poo’d the white sark ower his heid!”

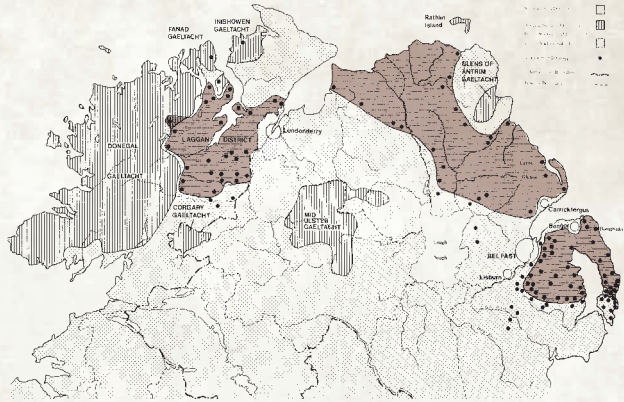
After decades of Scots language literature being printed in Belfast, the first published Ulster-Scots appeared in 1753, when six ‘Scotch Poems’ were included in *The Ulster Miscellany*.

“... A critick, wi’ a genius bright, Can, like his patron, god of light,
Gi’ ilka thing its proper view; Shaw what is faw’ty, ald, or new, ...”

Earlier, in Dublin in 1731, the world-famous author of *Gulliver’s Travels*, **Dean Jonathan Swift**, wrote a short story mocking the Ulster-Scots speech of sailors from Portaferry who had arrived in the city. Swift had worked in County Antrim for a while, so was familiar with locals speaking Ulster-Scots:

“... Whar I was I can ge ne Account of, but I can tell ye what I seed.
When first I ged in, I ged doon a great Place that a’ the Floor was
cover’d we bread Stens, and a Warld o’ Foke gaing up and doon thro’
yen another. We cam tell twa great Stairs, and ged under them,
whar was a Door gaing in. This Place was amest foo o’ Foke;
as weel aboon as whar I was, this they cad the Kirk ...”

Jonathan Swift, *The North Country-Man’s Description of Christ’s-Church, Dublin* (1733)



W.G. LYTTLE 1844–96

A brilliant and graceful writer ... a true son of County Down



Undoubtedly the most important figure in Ulster-Scots literature in Ards and North Down was Wesley Greenhill Lyttle. That there is a blue plaque on his former premises at 85 Main Street in Bangor underlines the claims on his gravestone in Bangor Abbey –

‘... a man of rare natural gifts, he raised himself to a high position among the journalists of Ireland. He was a brilliant and graceful writer, a true humourist and an accomplished poet. Robin was a kind friend, a genial companion and a true son of County Down’.

By day he was accountant and elocutionist, in his spare time he was a popular stage performer with his alter ego ‘Rabin Gordon’, a County Down farmer, entertaining audiences regularly. His first Ulster-Scots series of short stories was *Robin’s Readings*, which first appeared in the *Newry Telegraph* (a paper circulated across much of Ulster) in 1878. They were a roaring success, with the paper reporting ‘1,000 copies were sold in Belfast alone and this large number did not satisfy the public demand’.

He founded the *North Down Herald* in Newtownards in 1880, moving it to Bangor in 1883. The paper published a stream of his serialised weekly stories, many of which were based on well-known local history and folklore. Soon these were republished in book form – *Humourous Readings by Robin* (1879), *Sons of the Sod* (1886), *Betsy Gray and the Hearts of Down* (1888), *Daft Eddie and the Smugglers of Strangford Lough* (1889). The cover of an early 1900s edition of *Sons of the Sod* proudly declared it to be ‘the best local story ever written’!

The style of these is known as ‘kailyard’, where the narrative is in standard English but the dialogue of the characters is in Ulster-Scots. Poems and songs can also be found in them. All have been republished many times ever since, notably by the *Mourne Observer* as hardback editions in the 1960s and 1970s. Lyttle’s books have been handed down through generations of local families.

In 1885 Lyttle published a local tourist guide, *The Bangor Season*, full of satire, history and lyrical descriptions of the beauty of the Ards and North Down.

Lyttle held a Robert Burns Centenary event in Bangor in 1895. The following year, aged 52, he died and was laid to rest at Bangor Abbey, just inside the cast iron gates. His monument inscription only captures a wee hint of this remarkable man, without whom, Ulster-Scots language, literature and history in Ards and North Down would be much poorer.

HIS CHRISTMAS DAY (from Robin's Readings)

Yin Christmas Day A thocht A wud gang
tae Bilfast an' spen' a wheen hooers there.
A had niver seen the place, an' A had been
savin' up a' ma happens fur a guid while, so
that A wud be able tae enjoy mysel. A put
on my new claes, an' startit' fur the train.

A saw naebody that A kenned till A got
tae Bilfast. Waens, dear, it's a big toon that!
An' an awfu' place fur spendin' money.
Ye cud har'ly get ower the lang Brig afore
layin' oot a saxpence. Whun A got oot at
the station-hoose, an' saw the crowds o'
fowk rinnin' this road an' the tither road,
A got that scaured fur feer o' loasin' mysel'
that A had a noshin' o' lyin' doon ahint the
station-hoose till the train wud be reddy tae
birl back hame again. Hooaniver, A pluckit
up heart an' went oot tae the front daur.
A seen sumthin' there that pleased me. A'm
shair there wusnae less nor twunty horses
an' jauntin' cars. Some o' them wuz birlin'
awa' wi' fowk on them, an' ithers wuz
stannin' waitin'. A wuz aye terble fand
o' horses, so A stud lukin' at them an'
admirin' them. Behold ye, A hadnae stud
glowerin' very lang till yin o' the drivers
noddit at me, an' laughed...

A thocht A saw the chap lauchin' twa or
three times till he had tae wipe the water
oot o' his een, but then he wud say
sumthin' funny, aither tae me or tae the
horse, that made us a' lauch...

■ FIN OOT A WEE BIT MAIR

Many of WG Lyttle's books
were recently reprinted
and are available through
www.BooksUlster.com

TO MY FRIENDS

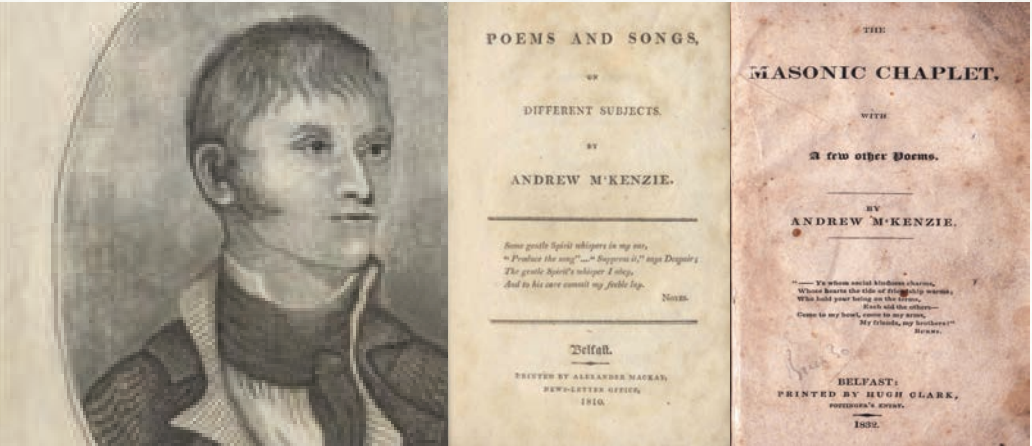
My friens, I wuz at your requist
I got this week book prented;
An' whun ye've read it till the en'
I hope ye'll be contented.
It tuk me mony a day an' hoor
Tae pit it a' thegither,
An' yit I hae as muckle left
As ocht tae fill anither...

My friens, I didnae write fur fowk
That think themsels sae nice;
Wha's hearts – if they hae got sich things
Ir jist like lumps o' ice.
My stories ir but little worth,
I ken that's very true,
But tak them as they come, my friens,
I wrote them a' for you...

An' mony an hoor they've help't tae pass,
An' aft it din me guid
Tae hear hoo hearty ye cud lauch
Whun I got up tae read.
Jist for the sake o' these auld times
I've put my book in prent,
An' if it pleases you, my friens,
Then "Robin" is content.

ANDREW MCKENZIE 1780-1839

The first published Ulster-Scots poet in County Down



Andrew McKenzie was a weaver who lived in the townland of Dunover just outside Ballywalter. In the preface of his first collection he wrote that he 'had not the advantage of a regular education ... frequently wrung by the hard hand of poverty'. Entitled *Poems and Songs on Different Subjects*, it was published in 1810 when he was 30 years old. It included a portrait of McKenzie, looking like Robert Burns, as well as a list of hundreds of local subscribers, some from Scotland, and even one from Jamaica.

At the end of one of the poems, *A Poor Man's Petition*, he gives himself the name 'Philip M'Clabber, of Cabin-comfortless, near Ballywalter'. His poems also appeared in local newspapers. He was a member of Greenhill Masonic lodge No 985 of Drumawhey, and wrote a poem for the gravestone of the two Maxwell brothers who were killed in the 1798 Rebellion and buried at Whitechurch. His poet friend Robert Anderson wrote that McKenzie was 'gifted wi the saul o' Burns'.

... Whan cottars guid hae said their pray'rs,
An' wee tots sleep awa' their cares,
I musin', whyles think how it fares
Wi' friens a few;
But ane 'buin a', my wish aft shares –
I hint at you;

The peasant trudgin' hame at een,
Wi' heart untainted, thoughts serene,
Aft minds me o' yoursel, and Jean,
An weeans fair;
Sic lines gie pamper'd chiels the spleen,
But deil may care...

McKenzie made £200 from sales of the book and bought a house and a fishing boat, but the boat was wrecked in a storm and he almost drowned. He, his wife Jean and six children moved to Belfast. A second book, *The Masonic Chaplet with a few other poems*, was published in 1832. When he died he was buried in the Shankill Graveyard, with his gravestone inscription written by renowned Belfast publisher and writer William McComb. Unfortunately the gravestone has since been lost.

GANNAWAY BURN

Thy banks, silver Lagan, rich beauties discover,
An' commerce expands her braid wings on thy tide –
Tall ships frae thy port roam the universe over;
Between thy twa headlands a navy might ride.
Tho' blithe I hae stray'd on thy banks, noble river,
Yet visions o' boyhood would aften return,
An' tell me in whispers that here I might never
Be blest, as when wand'ring on Gannaway Burn

That ford is yet precious to fond recollection,
Whar fairies were said to dance roun' the auld tree;
Yet fearless, when guided by early affection,
I cross'd it at midnight my lassie to see:
Oh! sad is my soul when I think o' that maiden,
An' brood owre the joys that can never return–
Purer love never glow'd since its birth-day on Eden,
Than that which we felt on the Gannaway Burn ...

APRIL

Sweet April ! wi lenient smile
Proclaims gloomy winter's awa
Wha late did the lan'scape despoil
An' hid a' it's beauties wi' sna.

The sun, now, wi' nourishin' ray,
Bids verdure ance mair deck the plain;
The lammy skips blithe on the brae,
An' cheerfully labours the swain.

I'll hie to the shadowy grove,
Whar buds gently swellin' appear –
Whar newly pair'd birds fou' o' love
Their notes sing bewitchin'ly clear.

Whar the vi'let an' primrose sae pale
Sprout bonilie under the thorn –
Whar earliest May-flow'rs unveil
Their sweets by the wimpiln' burn...

■ FIN OOT A WEE BIT MAIR

Poems and Songs on Different Subjects (1810) and *The Masonic Chaplet with a few other poems* (1832) are available free online

STANZAS

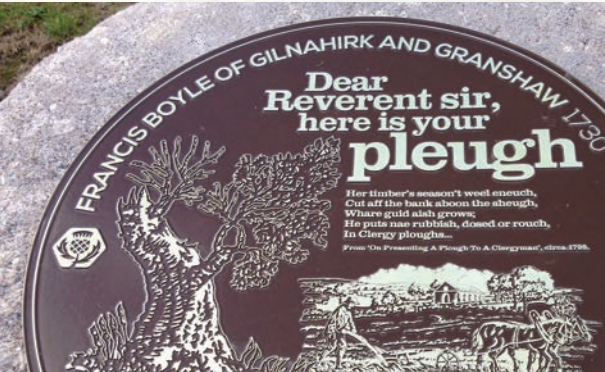
ADDRESSED TO MR. R– M–

The ever-flowin' stream o' time
Has floated down anither year,
An' leaves thee yet in manhood's prime,
While I, though auld an' craz'd, am here;
The bid the mantlin' cogie ream –
Let's talk o' joys we ken'd langsyne
An' lov'd anes sunk in that dark stream,
Whose virtues memory ne'er may tine...

An' thou, though few hae been thy years,
Hast felt the cauldrie blast o' woe
An' pour'd they unavailingin tears
Owre kindly kindred hearts laid low.
I've seen thee by they mither's knee,
Her gowden-hair'd – her dawted wean;
But she was snatch'd awa frae thee –
An' Jock an' Sandy baith are gane!...

FRANCIS BOYLE c. 1730–c. 1815

A weaver poet whose writing began before Robert Burns



Francis Boyle was born around 1730, and was a weaver and blacksmith. He was a member of Gilnahirk Presbyterian Church. He lived through the 1798 Rebellion, which he – as well as the church's minister, Scottish-born Rev Francis Pringle – were opposed to. Pringle resigned and a section of the congregation formed a new church at Granshaw, Boyle among them.

Boyle was writing poems before Robert Burns' works were published. His *Miscellaneous Poems* was printed in 1811 – in it he refers to the fact that he was 80 years of age and had written verse for 'lang forty years'. It has been pointed out that this means that his interest in poetry predates the publication in 1786 of the first poems by Burns. The book includes an exchange of verses with his neighbour John Meharg of Meharg's Thorn:

EPISTLE TO FRANCIS BOYLE

Dear Frank, it lang was in my view,
To write a verse or twa to you,
We Poets, poor discernin' few,
Love ane anither,
Wi' heart an' saul, an' far mair true
Than money a brither.
Let warly sons o' men combine,
An' gather gowd to mak them shine,
At this, dear Frank, we'll ne'er repine,
E'en let them gae;
We'll sing our joys in hamely rhyme,
On some burn brae ...

THE ANSWER

Dear brither bard, when you begin
Your silken verses thus to spin,
Sae saft an' easy they do rin,
My canty callan,
That people say they're nought behin'
Rab Burns or Allan.
'Tis a' spun out o' your inside,
Like the silk-worms ayont the tide,
That deek our lasses a' wi' pride
An' mak them bonny.
Search a' the kintra braid and wide,
There's nane like Johnie ...

As part of the early Ulster-Scots poetic community, Boyle also knew Andrew McKenzie, the Bard of Dunover. Some of Boyle's poems refer to the Ards Peninsula, where he moved to in later life, almost certainly near Ballyblack, between Newtownards and Carrowdore.

OWRE HAMELY; OR, THE FAMOUS BASKET-MAKER

Great is the loss that we sustain,
Since our Owre Hamely's dead an' gane,
The bushes thrive on hill an' plain,
An' a' gaes wild;
His like we ne'er shall see again,
In Patrick's isle.

He cow't the knowes whar grey saughs grew,
An' guid aish suckers left but few,
He down the willow wands did hew,
An' alders young,
He snig't the holly souples through,
An' hazel rung.

He early rase on ilka morn,
Ere Phoebus did the fields adorn,
An' plunner't dykes an' glens forlorn,
To tak his prize,
An' mony burdens aff has borne,
Ere folk did rise.

Michaelmas moon he looed fu' weel,
She shone - he saw the rods to steal,
Guid osiers cut to mak a creel,
About midnight,
But ance he thought he saw the De'il,
Or some ill wight.

The De'il, I trow, he never saw,
Some brockit yowe or brawnit ca'
That frae the lave had stray't awa,
An' tint it's gate,
Had loupt in there to fill it's maw,
When it was late ...

■ FIN OOT A WEE BIT MAIR

Miscellaneous Poems (1811)

has never been reprinted.
Some of Boyle's poems can
be found online.

A short film about Boyle
can be seen on Vimeo:
(<https://vimeo.com/89080208>)

THE WIFE O' CLINKIN TOWN

... She reft the ladle frae a pot,
A bloody battle did ensue,
For Mungo reach't to Mary Scot,
A guid aish pettle frae the pleugh.

Then skite for skite a while they dealt,
Lang doutfu' wha wad won the day;
Till Mungo's maid at last was felt,
An' streekit on the midden lay.

This fight was a' for Randie's Rab,
A pauky chiel that woo'd them baith;
On lasses heads he bred a scab,
An' was the cause o' a' this skaith.

The guid wife then run to the pot,
An' steer'd the chappin' cog right fu'
O' guid fat brose, baith thick an' hot,
I supp't an' swore that a' was true.

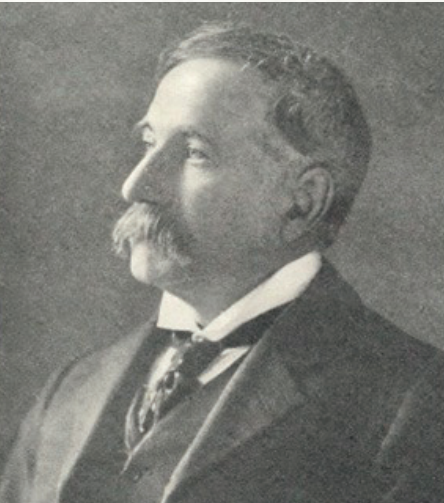
A house I had, but pay't nae rent,
I quarter't strowlers night an' day,
Them thro' the neighbourhood I sent,
An' tald them what to sign an' spae.

Wi' kintra wives they sped right weel,
The lasses' fortunes they did tell;
They brought in butter, beef an' meal,
An' I got share o' a' mysel'...

GEORGE FRANCIS SAVAGE-ARMSTRONG

1845–1906

Dublin-born, yet no less an Ulster-Scots son of the Ards



Ardkeen Castle Hill with the ruins of St Mary's Church

Born in Dublin to a Scottish-descended father and an Ards Peninsula born and bred mother (who had married in Holywood, County Down in 1839), G.F.S-A, as he was often known, was an academic and poet who almost became Poet Laureate in 1892, and was a public critic of W. B. Yeats and the Irish literary revival. The impact his mother made upon him was vast, passing down to him Ards Peninsula Ulster-Scots vocabulary, history and folklore. Her father, Rev Henry Savage of Glaslary, had been rector of St Mary's Church of Ireland, Ardkeen, on the slopes of Ardkeen Castle Hill just south of Kircubbin.

When she died in 1880, George was the Professor of History and English Literature at Queen's College in Cork. He travelled north and began to uncover and record his family history. A 400 page volume, *The Ancient and Noble Family of the Savages of the Ards* was published in 1888. A brilliant collection of poems and songs, dedicated 'to the memory of my mother', entitled *Ballads of Down*, was published in 1901, many of which were in Ulster-Scots. G.F.S-A described the language as:

‘an Ulster development of the Lowland Scottish – principally Ayrshire –
brought over by Scottish settlers in the reign of James I’.

He renovated the old St Mary's Church and moved from Wicklow to Strangford in 1905, dying there on 24 July 1906. He was brought by boat across the Narrows and was buried at St Mary's, in the family's old 'Glaslary Vault', against the outer wall, which is now heavily overgrown.

A memorial plaque to the Savage family, including G.F.S-A, his parents, his siblings and his children, can be seen inside Christ Church Ardkeen (built 1847), near Cloughey village today. Much of his library is now held at UCLA in Los Angeles.

THE HAUNTED HILL

Old Nancy Breen her skinny hand
Laid cold on Donald's shoulder;
"A seen yer doom yestreen," she cried,
"Whaur turf an' cinders smoulder;
A seen yer doom, young Donald Greer,
Wi'in the fire, tae warn me;
For aye an' aye ye've luv'd tae weel
Tae mock my years an' scorn me.

Then dinnae crass Ardkeen at night
Whun winter's murk and dreary;
'Mang a' the lanesome nuiks in Airds
By night there's nane sae eerie
Thon Castle Hill is haunted groun'
By elves an' ghaists it's guarded
There spectre Chieftains pace the fiels
Ower which lang syne they lorded...

Young Donald laughed with cruel scorn
"Gang hame til Portavogie!
A'm nae the lad tae cower wi' fear
At curse uv witch or bogie
This night the auld Kirk's ruin's wa'
A'll climb athoot a lather
An' whaur the conies root the graves
A deed mon's banes A'll gather! ...'

... The Castle Hill they searched in vain,
Dry moat and ditch and dingle,
And stranded hulk and stunted thorn,
And Dorn-shore's weedy shingle;
Till last the old Kirk-door they broke,
And there, a corpse, they found him,
Cold as the dead men's bones that lay
In mouldering dust around him.

■ FIN OOT A WEE BIT MAIR

Ballads of Down (1901)
is available free on
www.archive.org

A CANNAE THOLE YE

Ye may be clivver, may hae won
A wheen o' honour 'nayth the sun
But, whatsae'er ye've earn'd or done,
A cannae thole ye!

Ye may be genial noo and then
Wi' helpless waens an' humble men;
But, though ye'd gilt auld Poortith's den,
A cannae thole ye!

Ye may be guid; ye may be great;
Ye may be born tae rule the State;
But, though ye rowl'd the wheels o' Fate,
A cannae thole ye!

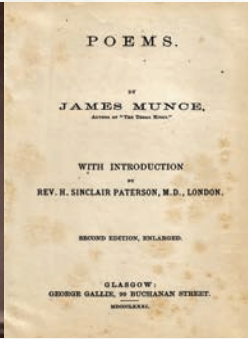
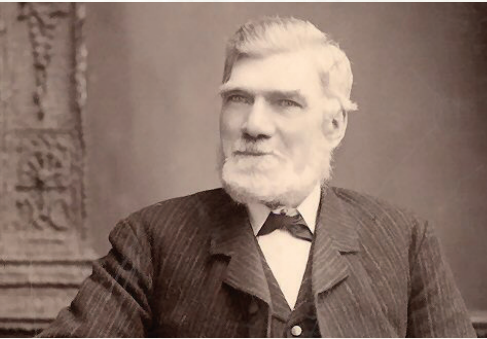
Ye may hae drawn yer watery bluid
Frae Noe's sel' that sail'd the Flood;
But, though in Noe's breeks ye stud,
A cannae thole ye!

Ye may be lord o' mony a rood;
Yer smile may mak' a monarch prood;
But, though the De'il afore ye boo'd,
A cannae thole ye!

It's nae that ye hae din me wrang;
It's nae A feel a jealous pang;
It's jist that, be ye short or lang,
A cannae thole ye!

JAMES MUNCE 1817–1893

*From Ballygowan to Glasgow, ‘The Rabbie Burns of Donaghadee’**



Munce is not a common surname in either Ulster or Scotland. Three brothers Thomas, William & Gilleland Munce, (sons of Hugh Gilleland Munce of France) fought with William of Orange at the Battle of the Boyne in 1690 and were subsequently awarded land at Drumreagh, Killinchy.

150 years later and James Munce was born at the adjoining townland Carrickmannon, to James Munce, a road constructor, and Margaret (Peggy) Beggs. He later moved to Donaghadee where he attended Shore Street Presbyterian Church. In 1845 he and his wife Agnes (nee Cleland) relocated to Anderston in Glasgow, where he was employed as a lead worker in one of the growing number of engineering firms on the Clyde. The family worshipped at St Marks Free Church; much of Munce’s work concerns the church and its Minister, the Rev. Dr. McGilvray. Agnes died at the family home in Partick in 1873.

His poems were published in Scotland – one called ‘The Three Kirks’ appeared in newspapers, and in 1863 a 240 page collection entitled *Poems by James Munce* was published in Glasgow. An enlarged 400 page edition was published in 1881. The *Aberdeen Journal* writes of the poet in 1863:

“If Mr Munce could be taken as a fair specimen of the class to which he belongs, the country might well be proud of them, for the spirit which breathes through these poems is of the highest and healthiest kind. They give evidence of Christian principles and moral habits which were at one point far from common among the mechanics of Glasgow; and should they prevail to any extent now it may be inferred that a mighty change has taken place among them in late years – a change that may well cheer the hearts of those who are labouring for the raising of the working classes.”

The collection has many references to people around the Ards Peninsula and Donaghadee in particular – some serious, some humorous and some deeply poignant.

Life had been difficult for James Munce and in 1887 he was deported from Glasgow to Newtownards as a pauper, after seeking assistance from the local Board of Guardians; despite having lived in Scotland for more than 40 years. Ultimately he was able to make his way back to Scotland, where he died on 14 March 1893 at 58 Hope Street, Partick, Glasgow.

* From *Six Miles to Bangor*, by W.G. Pollock (1982)

YE NICHT HAE KINDER BEEN

I wonder, John, if ye forget
The lightsome days o' youth ;
Nae frown was seen then on your face.
Your words were love and truth.
But oh ! it's sadly changed noo
Frae what I once hae seen ;
It grieves my heart indeed to say,
Ye're no what ye hae been.

My love to you is aye the same,
An' shall be to the last ;
'Mid scenes like this 'twill no' be lang
Till a' my cares are past.
And when I'm laid aneath the clod,
An' ye come hame at e'en,
Remorse may force you to confess
Ye nicht hae kinder been.

'Mid a' the changing scenes o' life,
Its trials an' its care,
Without a frown I met them a'.
An' tried to tak' my share.
My object was to cheer you aye
When ye cam' hame at e'en.
But noo its hardly in my power —
Ye nicht hae kinder been.

Whate'er I thought wad gie offence
I tried aye to remove ;
To me the hardest task seemed light
When tempered down wi' love.
Your failings frae the world were hid—
I tried them a' to screen ;
Nae wonder, noo, I often think,
Ye nicht hae kinder been.

■ FIN OOT A WEE BIT MAIR

Poems by James Munce (1881)

is available free on

www.archive.org

ON HEARING A MAN COMPLAIN OF HIS WIFE'S BAD TEMPER

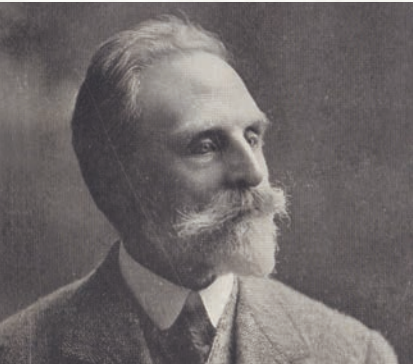
Sad news tae hear that man an' wife
Atween themsel's should hae sic strife;
But why lay a' the blame on Bell,
There's surely something in yoursel',
Of which, perhaps, you're not aware,
That mak's her aften flyte sae sair?
Does a' your silly actions tend
Her tongue an' temper to amend,
When ye come in, aye looking roon
Her fau'ts tae fin', ere you sit doon?
If that's the method ye pursue,
Tae hunt up fau'ts, you'd get anew
Tae mar your peace, an' kindle strife,
Had ye an angel for a wife.

VERSES

Noo, Reverend Sir, ye needna fret,
Nor shake your curly pow,
That 'cross the sea ye didna get
To join the clergy's row
A broken brick or lang kail-runt
Might sair disturb your brain;
You, like a bog fox, they wad hunt —
Ye're just as weel at hame ...

WILLIAM HUGH PATTERSON 1835–1918

A word collector and historian from a Hollywood family



A GLOSSARY OF WORDS
IN USE IN
THE COUNTIES OF
ANTRIM AND DOWN.

BY
WILLIAM HUGH PATTERSON, M.R.I.A.,

MEMBER OF THE ROYAL HISTORICAL AND ARCHAEOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION OF IRELAND;
MEMBER OF THE BELFAST NATURAL HISTORY AND PHILOSOPHICAL SOCIETY.

The Pattersons had been Belfast linen merchants and ironmongers for at least two generations. William was educated at Inst and Queens University and also worked in the family business. In 1863, aged just 28, he was a founder member of the Belfast Naturalists' Field Club, and in 1869 the Club published his booklet entitled *A Notice of some Ancient Tombstones at Movilla*. Helped by other correspondents, in 1880 he published his most famous work - *A Glossary of Words and Phrases used in Antrim and Down* :

“... The words and phrases in the accompanying Glossary will be found in the main to be of Scottish origin ... they naturally underwent changes consequent upon the lapse of time since their introduction to an alien soil ...”

For Patterson the origin year was “about the year 1607, when... immigration, previously a mere rivulet... became a flood”. The actual year was of course 1606, with Hamilton and Montgomery. The *Glossary* contains hundreds of Ulster-Scots words, some familiar and some more obscure.

That same year his brother, **Robert Lloyd Patterson** of Hollywood, published a landmark volume *The Birds, Fishes and Cetacea commonly frequenting Belfast Lough*, in which are Ulster-Scots names like **lythe** (pollack), **blockan**, **pickie**, **glashin** (all coalfish), **knowd** (gurnard) and **lurk** (a white bait worm).

The Pattersons were influential in Hollywood. Twisel Bridge (named after a bridge at the Battle of Flodden in Scotland) was built in 1912 in memory of Richard Patterson. In 1920 William Hugh's son, **William Hugh Ferrar Patterson** (1869 – 1947) of Donaghadee, published *Songs of a Port*, a collection of poems about the Ards Peninsula.

“... in some districts in the east of the two counties the people still talk a Scotch dialect, but with a modified Scotch accent; the old people talk more ‘broadly’ than the young ...”

abreard
aiblins
airle
alowe
amang hans
arr
attercap
auld-farrand
ayont
baghel
bairn
banty
beal
beece
begunked
biggin
binner
birl
birsy
bisna
black scart
blate
blether
blurtin

boke
booled
boose
box-borra
brae
braid
braird
brattle
bravely
breeks
bremmish
brock
broo
brough
bruckle
buffer
burroe
byre
cadge
cailey
caleery
canny
carf
carnaptious

■ **FIN OOT A WEE BIT MAIR**
*A Glossary of Words and Phrases
used in Antrim and Down (1880)*
is available as a
text-searchable database on
www.ulsterscotsacademy.org

cawsey
chander
chitterling
chivy
choller
clabber
claghtin
clam-jamfrey
clart
clatchen
claut
clearsome
cleg
cleush
clib
clint
clipe
clish-ma-claver
clockin'

A HUNNER WORDS

How many of these words do you know and use?

1. **aboon / abin** = above
2. **afeart** = afraid
3. **ahint** = behind
4. **aye** = yes / always
5. **banes** = bones
6. **birll** = revolve rapidly, whirl round, dance
7. **blether** = engage in conversation, long-winded or idle talk
8. **blirt** = loudmouth, offensive person, eg cheeky wee blirt
9. **blockan** = coalfish
10. **boak** = vomit
11. **breeks** = trousers
12. **coul** = cold
13. **canny** = cautious, careful
14. **carfuffle** = disorder, commotion
15. **carnaptious** = irritable, touchy, bad tempered, always finding fault
16. **cleg** = horsefly
17. **coorse** = crude, boorish
18. **coort** = go out with, court, eg 'Thon pair's coortin'
19. **coup** = overturn, fall over
20. **crabbit** = ill-tempered, grumpy, in a bad mood
21. **crack** = conversation, talk, chat, eg 'a bit o good crack'
22. **craitur** = creature, person
23. **danner** = a leisurely walk
24. **dinge** = dent
25. **divid** = divided eg 'he divid it between them'
26. **drooth** = thirst (especially for alcohol), habitual drunkard
27. **dunnerin-in** = tumbledown house
28. **dunt** = blow or thump
29. **eejit** = idiot
30. **farl** = quarter of a circular griddle scone, eg soda farl, potato farl
31. **flit** = move house
32. **footer** = useless, awkward person
33. **footery** = (of a thing) small and difficult to work with
34. **forbye** = also, besides
35. **founded** = very cold
36. **gaunch** = fool or a stupid person
37. **glipe** = uncouth person
38. **graip** = garden fork
39. **gulder** = shout loudly or angrily
40. **hallion** = a rascal
41. **happed up** = wrapped up (for warmth)
42. **heartsome** = cheering, encouraging
43. **hirple** = limp
44. **hoke** = dig, root around, eg 'He's hokin about for it'
45. **houl** = hold
46. **houl yer wheesht** = keep quiet
47. **jap** = splash of liquid
48. **jawbox** = kitchen sink
49. **jeuk** = evade, avoid (someone), nip into
50. **keek** = look surreptitiously or quickly

51. **lassie** = girl
52. **lilty** = a bouncy, energetic person
eg she went up the street like a lilty
53. **loanen** = lane
54. **lythe** = pollack
55. **marches** = where two pieces of
land meet
56. **mind** = remember
57. **mingin** = dirty and smelly
58. **mizzle** = light rain
59. **near cut** = short cut
60. **neb** = nose
61. **nyirp** = an unpleasant,
complaining person
62. **oul** = old
63. **oxter** = armpit
64. **poke** = ice-cream cone, folded
paper cone
65. **prootas** = potatoes
66. **prugh** = material possessions, free gifts
67. **quare** = considerable
68. **rare** = rear, bring up
69. **redd oot** = give a person a
dressing down
70. **redd up** = tidy up
71. **riff** = belch, burp
72. **scallion** = shallot, spring onion
73. **simmet** = man's vest
74. **scraigh o day** = the first glimpse of
dawn, very early in the morning
75. **scunnered** = disgusted, sickened

76. **shoogley** = unsteady
77. **shunners** = lumpy ashes
78. **skelf** = splinter, especially of wood
79. **skiff** = light shower of rain
80. **skite** = fly out
81. **skitter** = cheeky young person
82. **slabber** = loudmouth, saliva
83. **sleekit** = sly
84. **snib** = latch or fastening for a door or
window
85. **spraugle** = walk awkwardly, clamber,
behave awkwardly
86. **steamin** = very drunk
87. **stoor** = dust, especially in motion
88. **tay** = tea
89. **teemin** = raining hard
90. **thole** = endure
91. **thon** = that (over there)
92. **thonner** = there
93. **thran** = stubborn
94. **throughither** = untidy
95. **til** = to
96. **toul** = told
97. **wean** = child
98. **wee** = small
99. **wheesht** = be quiet
100. **whitterick** = weasel

“A jist write fur my freens aboot hame, an’ if ony weel lerned buddy happens fur til see this, a hope they’ll beer that in min’. They hae plenty till write gran books fur them, but there’s no mony fowk bother their heids writin’ ocht fur plain country workin men...”

Bangor author Wesley Greenhill Lyttle

Humorous Readings by Robin, Volume II, Second Edition (1886)

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE IN ARDS AND NORTH DOWN GREW UP WITH AND STILL USE ULSTER-SCOTS EVERY DAY

It has been passed down through the generations for over 400 years at hearths and hames – in conversations with family, friends and neighbours, and read from books of poems and stories written by local writers.

For us, Ulster-Scots is our ‘heart language’,
it gives us a level of expression beyond English.

In recent years, new writers in our area have carried on the tradition of publishing novels, stories, poems and songs using Ulster-Scots. This booklet is a very simple introduction to oor ain local Ulster-Scots words, expressions, language, writing and just a few of our important writers of the past.

“The language spoken in the Ards, Bangor and Killinchy approaches very closely to the Scotch, but is changing rapidly since the coming of the railway train, the bicycle and the motor car”.

Charles Russell, *The Ulsterman* (1923)