Doric
The Dialect of North-East Scotland

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Varieties of English Around the World

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Volume T8
Doric: The Dialect of North-East Scotland
by J. Derrick McClure
Doric
The Dialect of North-East Scotland

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John Benjamins Publishing Company
Amsterdam/Philadelphia
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Thanks are due to the following for permission to print copyright material: Ronald S. Wadsworth, secretary to the Charles Murray Memorial Trust, for Charles Murray’s *Winter*; James Michie, President of the David Rorie Society, for Mary Symon’s *The Glen’s Muster-Roll*; Steve Savage Publishers Ltd. for Flora Garry’s *Mains o’ Yawal’s Dook* and Peter Buchan’s *The Skipper’s Wife*; Margaret Duncan for J.C. Milne’s *O for Friday Nicht!*; Cath Scott for Alexander Scott’s *Haar in Princes Street*; Bet Mackie for Alastair Mackie’s *Aberdeen The-Day*; Sheena Blackhall for her *Wanted*; Sandy Stronach and Bennachie Publishing for Texts 18-23 in the Poetry section. Thanks are also due to Simon Fogiel for the extracts from the Student Shows and to Jill Hay for the extract from the Attic pantomime (Drama section, Texts 7 and 8). I have been unable to locate George Ritchie and Raymond Falconer, or to identify the copyright holders for their poems.
"The North-East," in Scotland, is not simply a geographical expression; though the fundamental reason for the region's distinctive identity is clear from the merest glance at a map. This great hump of land, bounded by coastlines running east-to-west and roughly north-east to south-west and on the landward side by mountain ranges, forms a natural territorial unit which has become home to one of the strongest and best-preserved regional cultures in Scotland (Maps 1 and 2).
The interior landscape with its delightful and often spectacular variety of farmland, forest, moorland and rugged mountains, and the coast with its alternations of long sandy beaches and imposing cliffs, have often been described; usually in terms which clearly reveal the affection which this part of Scotland inspires in both natives and visitors. We are here concerned with the topography of the area only to the extent that it has affected the traditional patterns of life, and hence the culture and language, of the inhabitants. Westward, the region extends to the Cairngorm Mountains, and southward to the Mounth, which runs almost to the sea near the town of Stonehaven. Until the advent of modern roads, these two vast highland massifs proved a virtually total barrier to communication between the North-East and the rest of Scotland. Only along the Laigh of Moray, the broad belt of low-lying land which extends along the northern (Moray Firth) coast, has land travel between the North-East and any other area of Scotland been easy. Until the eighteenth or even the nineteenth century, indeed, the regional capital, the ancient cathedral city and trading port of Aberdeen, maintained more frequent and regular contact with towns of the North European coast than with any other towns in Scotland. The traditional isolation and self-sufficiency of the North-East is certainly a contributory factor both to the highly distinctive nature of its dialects and to their unusually good state of preservation even in our own times.

Agriculture and fishing are, and have been for generations, two of the
principal industries of the area. In its southern part, a coastal belt of red sand-
stone-derived soil offers fertile arable and grazing land. Elsewhere, one of the
most potent contributory factors to the region’s distinctive identity, its folk-
memory, and its literature both oral and written, has been an intensive pro-
gramme of agricultural improvement begun in the nineteenth century, which
transformed the physical face of the North-East and established a way of life
which survived until well into living memory. Notwithstanding the efforts of
eighteenth- and nineteenth-century landowners to offset the small villages,
townships and farms scattered randomly on the more fertile spots by the
establishment of larger farms and planned settlements, the large-scale
improvement of the area is the work of the individual farmers and their fee’t
[hired] workers: a breed whose place in the social history of the North-East is
beyond challenge. The rich stocks of cod and herring in the North Sea, too,
have since ancient times supported a productive fishing industry. The fishing
communities in the small coastal settlements were strictly exclusive and
endogamous: young fishermen married girls from their own or other fishing
villages, and sons followed their fathers into the trade. Between the farming
and the fishing populations there was very little social contact: rather a tradi-
tion of mutual antipathy. Despite the daunting conditions of life in the trade
— the North Sea is notoriously rough and treacherous — the communities
not only endured but prospered; and the North-Eastern fishermen, adapting
over the years to technical and commercial developments, maintained the sta-
tus of the area as one of the most productive fishing grounds in Europe until
international overfishing in recent years resulted in disastrously depleted
stocks and reduced the industry to a state of crisis.

Aberdeen, not only the largest town in North-East Scotland but one of the
most northerly major cities in the world, is in every sense — economic, indus-
trial and cultural — the capital of the region. It is situated between the mouths
of two rivers, and was originally two distinct settlements focused respectively
on a Church foundation at the Don firth and the natural harbour provided by
the mouth of the Dee. Both settlements date from very remote times, and
though the Don area of the modern city is still known as Old Aberdeen and
the city’s name actually means “mouth of the Don”, there is no more concrete
evidence that either can claim greater antiquity than the other. Positioned
squarely on the principal (and until recently the only practicable) route from
South-East to North-East Scotland, and occupying a favourable position for
continental trade, Aberdeen was developed from early times as a commercial
centre. By a charter of King William I (William the Lion) in 1178 the city
became a Royal Burgh, and the establishment by the same monarch of a royal palace in the Green (now an unimpressive cobbled square surrounded by high walls and road tunnels, but then a southward-facing grassy slope open to the sea) indicates a thriving community. William’s generosity to the town was continued by his successors, and a series of royal charters endowed the citizens with such privileges as freedom from toll restrictions and the right to establish merchant guilds. Even before Robert I (Robert Bruce), in gratitude for the support of Aberdeen during his wars, granted the entire revenues of the burgh except for an annual fee to its citizens and enlarged its area by gifting what are still known as the Freedom Lands, Aberdeen was among the largest and most prosperous townships in Scotland: a status which it has maintained throughout its history.

The commercial importance of Aberdeen in the mediaeval and early modern periods, in fact, far surpassed that of Edinburgh or Glasgow. It was Scotland’s principal centre for trade with continental Europe, some of its most important mercantile links being with the Baltic ports. And as the Dee township developed, so likewise did the small, closely-knit twin community on the Don. Here, a religious foundation traditionally attributed to a fifth-century Celtic monk from Whithorn called St Machar had developed by the later Middle Ages into an imposing cathedral, the centre of the community; and here too King James IV in 1495 founded Scotland’s third university (after St Andrews and Glasgow).

The vicissitudes which Aberdeen, like the rest of Scotland, suffered during the Reformation, the Covenanting period and the Jacobite uprisings may be passed over here. Notwithstanding those, the city retained its commercial power-base. The enlarging of the Don harbour in the eighteenth century made possible the development of shipbuilding, of which Aberdeen was later to become an important centre. Extensive urban development in the same period not only extended the city’s bounds but earned for it the sobriquet of which the appropriateness is evident from first acquaintance: the Granite City. Smaller local communities were rapidly absorbed into the expanding conurbation, though the twin burghs of Aberdeen and Old Aberdeen remained legally separate till 1891. Aberdeen took full advantage of the increased trade with Europe after the Napoleonic Wars: one of its principal exports was textiles, the manufacture of which had been a staple industry since early times. The railway came to Aberdeen in 1850, the telegraph in 1854, a public water supply in 1866, a sewage disposal system in the late 1860s, the telephone in 1881 and electricity in 1894.
The First World War left the city physically unscathed, despite the loss of thousands of lives in combat. In the Second, by contrast, extensive damage was caused by air raids; and the period following the War saw massive rebuilding and developments which, continuing to the present day, have vastly extended the city’s boundaries and altered the face of it almost beyond recognition. Many of Aberdeen’s architectural treasures still survive, but much has been lost; and though the city centre and some of the older suburbs are both distinctive and impressive, the modern housing estates at the boundaries are in many cases dreary even by the expected standards of their kind. The advent of the North Sea petroleum industry in the early 1970s led to a sudden massive influx of immigrants, with which the city’s physical and social infrastructure have coped remarkably well: however, the long-term effects on the language of the North-East, as well as other aspects of the city’s and the region’s traditional culture, remain to be assessed.

What can be said with conviction is that the North-East, and its capital city, will retain for the foreseeable future a local identity, based on history, geography, language and culture, which will continue to be asserted with vigour and confidence.

Notes


2. Reproduced from, respectively, Grampian Region Official Guide, British Publishing Co. Ltd. 1990, and Sugden 1987. Both maps are projected on the politically-defined boundaries of Grampian Region, an administrative area which came into being in 1975 by a re-organisation of local government which replaced Scotland’s ancient system of counties and burghs by newly-determined units called “regions” and “districts”, and disappeared in 1995 when a second re-organisation replaced these with units in a single-tier system. Many of the old county names (Aberdeenshire, Ayrshire, etc.), which had continued in popular use throughout the period of the “regions”, have been restored under the new system; though the post-1995 districts are not co-terminous with the old counties.
CHAPTER 2

Demographic and linguistic history

The first traces of human settlement in North-East Scotland date from around 6000 BC and represent a Mesolithic culture; but the lost languages of those early peoples, the P-Celtic tongue of the Picts, and even the Gaelic which rapidly displaced Pictish after the union of the Scots and Picts in or around 847, may be passed over for the purposes of this study.

The linguistic map of the North-East began to assume the form we know today with the advance of what we will call Lowland Scots, the subject of this book. The change in reference of the name Scots, incidentally, should be noted. In accounts of the early history of Scotland, Scots (in Latin Scoti, in Anglo-Saxon Scottas) as the name of a people refers to the men of the western kingdom of Dal Riada, whose ancestors had come from Ireland; and lingua Scotica in the Latin chronicles refers to their language, Gaelic. (It is not true, though the statement is frequently made, that the word Scottis in the Lowland vernacular, when that came to be written, was customarily applied to Gaelic. The word by which the Scots of the Lowlands designated the language of their Highland neighbours was Irische or Erische: cf. McClure 1982.) Lowland Scots was and is an Anglo-Saxon tongue, originating in the dialect of the Kingdom of Northumbria, the northern half of which was annexed by the Scottish monarchy in the early eleventh century.

The conventions of language nomenclature in Scottish cultural historiography are, in fact, very confusing. The language which, in the course of the Middle Ages, superseded Gaelic in the east and south of Scotland is frequently referred to, in descriptions of the period, as English, and the process as Anglicisation. Certainly its own speakers called it by a name derived from the early form Englisc; and with equal certainty it was not until the late fifteenth century, as far as the records show, that any Scotsman began to depart from the practice of calling it Inglis. Yet this usage is regrettable for two reasons: it subsumes the only terminology possible for a much later and entirely distinct cultural development, the adoption of the metropolitan language of England.
as a prestige speech-form at the expense of the native dialects; and it ignores
the fact that the historical developments associated with the change of lan-
guage, namely the institution of feudal government and burghs, were no more
native to England than to Scotland but had been forcibly established in
England by the Norman kings. It is conceivable that English cultural influ-
ences had been operating in Scotland before the Norman Conquest of
England: evidence for this is the use of the Anglo-Saxon term *thane* for a local
government official responsible for the collecting of certain dues; but this
influence was overwhelmed by the process of Normanisation — not
Anglicisation — which brought Scotland along with England into the main-
stream of European cultural development. For convenience, in the present
book the northern Anglo-Saxon tongue used in Scotland will be referred to
from the outset as Lowland Scots or simply Scots, though this too invites a
well-grounded objection: that even in the late fourteenth century, when it first
emerges as a major literary language, it is distinguishable only by orthography
and some relatively minor details of grammar and vocabulary from the
dialects of northern England.

Lowland Scots, or the language which developed into this, had been spo-
ken within the domain of the King of Scots at least since 1017, when Malcolm
II, by a signal victory over the Saxons at Carham, extended his frontier to the
Tweed. The main influence in its spreading to parts of Scotland far beyond the
South-Eastern corner was the burghs: settled communities with trading rights
established by law. In the North-East, Aberdeen, Elgin and Forres had been
established as burghs by the mid-twelfth century; and Cullen, Banff and
Kintore by the beginning of the thirteenth. The spread of the Lowland tongue
in the North-East is shown by its use for the names of new burghs such as
(giving the names in their earliest attested forms) Reidfurde and Staneycroft
(cf. Nicolaisen 1976, esp. ch. 5). Besides this relatively peaceful spread of Scots
through internal colonisation and commercial development, the supersession
of Gaelic in the North-East probably was hastened by an episode during the
Wars of Independence: Robert Bruce’s Herschip (harrying) of Buchan in
1308, his revenge on his implacable enemies in Scotland, the Comyn family
who held the earldom. Though arguably a military necessity, this ferocious act
is still seen in the region as a blot on the reputation of the hero-king.
Certainly, most of the peasants slaughtered would have been Gaelic-speakers;
and when, after the restoration of internal peace, the earldom of Buchan
passed into the hands of the loyal Mowbray family, the population was large-
ly replaced by Scots-speaking tenants from lands south of the Forth. Gaelic

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continued to be spoken in the western areas of the North-East until almost within living memory (cf. Watson and Clement 1982); but the language of the prosperous coastal strip was Scots.\(^2\) And it is a source of local pride that the first major literary text in the Lowland tongue, the *Brus* of 1375, was the work of John Barbour, Archdeacon of Aberdeen.

The Scots language thus established in the North-East held the place of the native speech of the area from the fourteenth century to the eighteenth; and though the precise stages by which the local dialect assumed its distinctive form cannot be traced in any detail, it is clear from the first emergence of a regional literature that this was fully established by the eighteenth century. The North-East, that is, was by then clearly differentiated as an individual dialect area within non-Gaelic Scotland. (Some evidence for this is examined in Section 3.)

The well-documented phenomenon associated with the social, cultural and commercial development of Scotland in the eighteenth century, that of a deliberate attempt to adopt English rather than Scots as a spoken language in the name of social elegance and refinement, affected the North-East as elsewhere; but the enduring isolation and self-containedness of the region ensured that its effects were noticed somewhat later than in Scotland south of the Mounth. The principal source of evidence for this is the first *Statistical Account of Scotland*, published between 1791 and 1799.\(^3\) It is clear from this that Gaelic in the counties of Aberdeen and Banff was already in a virtually moribund state (Map 3: Horsburgh 1994). Only in one parish, Crathy (now spelt Crathie) and Braemar, is the condition of Gaelic relatively healthy: “The language generally spoken is the Gaelic. Most of the people, however, understand so much of the English as to be able to transact ordinary business with their neighbours of the Low Country.” (XIV: 469) The minister of Kirkmichael, who shows a strong interest in Gaelic and argues vigorously for the conducting of research into it, writes as follows: “The common idiom of this county, is a dialect of the ancient Celtic… The dialect spoken in this county is growing daily more corrupted, by the admission of Anglicisms… The young people speak Gaelic and English indifferently, and with equal impropriety. Their uncouth articulation of discordant words and jarring sounds, resembles the music of frogs in a Dutch canal, harsh and disgusting to the Attic ear of a genuine Highlander.” (XVI: 293) In the entries for other parishes Gaelic either is not mentioned at all or is specifically said to be dead or dying. The following are typical: “Their language is English [i.e. the local Scots dialect], except in the upper parts of the parishes of Tulloch and Glengairn, where some of them use a barbarous dialect of the Gaelic among themselves,
but they all understand the English” (Glenmuick, Tulloch and Glengairn: XIV: 505); “The language spoken is English, or rather broad Scotch, except in Curgarff. The people there, especially in the upper part of the district, speak also a kind of Gaelic; but that language among them is much on the decline” (Strathdon: XIV: 709); “No Gaelic is spoken within twenty miles, but most of the names of places are Celtic, as Tullicardine, a hillock where cairns are, Carnndaie, a place of cattle or oxen, Achath, the long field, etc.” (Cluny: XIV: 453); “English is the only language now known in this parish, the Gaelic having ceased to be understood” (Cushnie: XIV: 483).
The Scots dialect, by contrast, was clearly the general means of communication. This is attested for parish after parish by such entries as the following: “The language of the generality of the people here is the Aberdeenshire dialect, intermixed with several old French words and phrases, from the ancient intercourse between France and Scotland” (Cluny: XIV: 452-3); “The Scots language, with the enunciation peculiar to the county of Aberdeen, is the only tongue spoken in the parish” (Kildrummy: XIV: 542); “The common people speak the Scotch language, and in what is commonly called, and well known by the name of, the Aberdonian dialect” (Newmachar: XV: 354); “There is reason to think, that the Scotch dialect of the English language has been the language of the natives of this parish for at least 400 years” (Grange: XV: 204). Some contributors express interest in the local speech. The historically-minded minister of St Fergus observes that “It is thought to approach nearer to the ancient Gothic, than the language of any other district in Scotland.” (XVI: 415) A few others give brief accounts of some of its features. According to the minister of Keith Hall and Kinkell, “The frequent use of the vowel i, long e, or diphthong ee, for o and u; the sharpness of the accents, which makes strangers believe that the natives are always quarrelling, and a rise, instead of a cadence, at the ends of sentences, distinguish the pronunciation of the lower classes.” (XV: 235) The unfortunate impression seemingly conveyed to outsiders by the Buchan intonation is also referred to by the minister of Auchendoir: “The people in the south of Scotland, say that the tone is harsh, and to them has the appearance of passion and bad humour.” (XV: 25) Much the most detailed information is found in the entry for Peterculter: “The pronunciation used by some old persons here is very broad. Second they pronounce shocond, cough, keuogh, etc., gh and ch are sounded gutturally. …In words ending in –and, the –d gets the faint sound of th, a that of the diphthong au, and the whole is nasal, thus, land, laundth, sand, saunth, etc. Ale is pronounced ail, sale, sail, and so of similar words [his meaning here can only be conjectured].” Wheelbarrow is pronounced as wheelborrow, board as boerd, pease as pizz and hid as hudd. “They have also peculiar contractions, viz. cartfull, cartle, potfull, pottle, etc. They use the word frugal in the sense generally applied to the word liberal [the SND confirms this sense for as recently as 1953]. …A nuce [sic: a misprint for nace] or ness family is a destitute family.” (XIV: 664)

In one or two cases, the prevalence of Scots is seen as a matter for regret. The minister of Langside writes: “The Buchan dialect has been long famous for the want of that neatness of articulation, and of that elegance of sound and accent, by which the Southern and more cultivated nations have characterised
their respective languages… In this corner we retain all the broadness of articulation, and, I am sorry to add, all the vulgarity of idiom, metaphor and accent, which is to be met with in any part of the world. And it is probable that we shall retain these peculiarities of language longer than most places equally distant from the capital; because, except for the resort of strangers to Peterhead during the water season few visit us; and, of consequence, little of that intercourse is enjoyed by which language is so materially affected.” (XV: 298-9) The entry for Peterhead refers to the same source of hope: “The language spoken in this parish is the broad Buchan dialect of the English, with many Scotticisms, and stands much in need of reformation, which it is to be hoped will soon happen, from the frequent resort of polite people to the town in summer.” (XV: 417) And in Aberdeen itself, the decline of the Scots language is already visible: “The provincial dialect of the English, which is generally spoken here, is not considered as being very pure. Owing, however, to a much greater intercourse with the English than formerly, a visible change for the better has taken place in the idiom. Some old people remember when many broad Scotch words and phrases were current, even in the best companies, which are now scarcely to be heard in the lowest. The consideration also that this is a place of education, the seat of a university of considerable eminence, has proved an inducement to several, especially to those who have entertained thoughts of publishing in English, to make the proper idiom of the language more a matter of study than was ever done at any former period, a circumstance that has not failed to produce good effects.” (XIV: 297) As evidence of this, the writer notes that the traditionally Scots street names of the burgh are beginning to be replaced by English forms: Braidgate and Castlegate becoming Broadstreet and Castlestreet. (The latter appears to have suffered an apostasy, since the name used in present-day Aberdeen is Castlegate; and Gallowgate and Kirkgate, which the writer states have not been anglicised, still retain their Scots forms.)

The New Statistical Account of Scotland, completed in 1845, is much less helpful on the language, providing little information either on the extent of its use or on details of phonology or grammar. Apart from some remarks on the origins of certain place names, the entries for the county of Kincardine are barren of information. In Aberdeenshire, we learn that Gaelic was still in vigorous life in Crathie and Braemar: “The Gaelic is very generally spoken throughout the whole parish, and, during the summer months, is used in conducting part of the public worship, both at Crathie and Braemar. There are, however, very few if any of the inhabitants who are not so well acquainted with the English language as to be able to converse and transact business in it,
The Scots dialect and its state of health inspire only the following comments: “The dialect spoken here is the common patois of the district, called broad Buchan. It has been losing, during the last forty years, much of its provincial peculiarity, and assimilating itself more and more in phraseology, at least, to the English tongue. Many of the words and forms of expression used by very old people are scarcely intelligible to the rising generation.” (St Fergus: XII: 197); “The language spoken is the broad Buchan, or real Aberdeenshire, and this dialect is much the same as it was forty years ago.” (Aberdour: XII: 266); “Within the last 40 years, the language usually spoken here has been gradually improving [no elucidation is offered for this enigmatic remark]” (Auchterless: XII: 287). In Banffshire, a few short and uninformative entries refer to the decline or extinction of Gaelic, but only one, for Banff, makes any mention of Scots. This entry, however, is of considerable interest, and deserves to be quoted in full.

“Among the higher and better educated classes, the English language may be heard spoken in tolerable purity, both as to idiom and pronunciation: there are few who cannot express themselves in English, still fewer who do not familiarly understand it when distinctly spoken. Unmixed Scotch is never to be heard. The most common dialect is a mixture of Scotch and English, the Scotch used being of the somewhat vicious kind, known, I believe, by the name of Aberdeenshire. The Scotch, however, is gradually wearing out. Every person remembers the frequent use, in former years, of terms and phrases that are now seldom to be heard but among the older and more secluded. Even, however, in what is called, by courtesy, speaking English, or using English words, there is often a sore lack of the genuine English pronunciation. The defect is not so much in the accentuation, as in the vowel and diphthongal sounds. Thus all three different sounds of the letter a in far, fat, fault are given alike, as in far. The sound of i, as in him, is made the same as e in her—unless when some, flying from the Scylla of orthoepy, fall into the Charybdis of pronouncing it as if spelled heem. No difference is made between the two sounds of o in pop and pope, and the oa in broad. Rod, rode, broad are all made to rhyme together. The long a (as in made) is pronounced like the English short e: fed and fade are pronounced just alike. Unaccented sounds are generally lost, or sounded like the French e in le. Regular is pronounced regler or regeler, prelate, prelet; absolute, abselet. Even in the matter of pronunciation, however, there is a great and progressive improvement.” (XIII: 35-6)

The remarkable fact which emerges from this account is that the writer (one Alexander Smith, the author of a book entitled The Philosophy of Morals)
appears to be assuming not that Scots should be replaced by English, but that a Scottish accent of English should be replaced by an English one. Speakers of Scottish English to this day do not differentiate the vowels in *fat* and *far*, or *broad* and *road*. *Broad* is not a Scots word at all, the cognate being *braid*. If Smith's account can be taken at its face value, that is, fluency in English had become so widespread that a parish minister in Banff could criticise his flock for not speaking it with a Metropolitan accent! Smith was in fact an Englishman; and it may be conjectured that his expectations lacked some measure of realism.

The *Third Statistical Account of Scotland* confirms the enduring strength of the local dialect: “Most of the people are native born and speak the Buchan Doric” (New Deer: VII: 368); “The Buchan tongue remains little influenced by the travelling cinema” (Old Deer: VII: 379); “The common speech is, of course, Scots, though the young are thoroughly grounded in English at school. Most can keep up ‘the English’ for a little, but, as one woman expressed it, ‘nae for lang’” (Boharm: X: 348). The minister of Ellon remarks that the local speech is “notably more distinct in the landward areas, where the speech is broader and rougher in tone, but by no means unattractive, and full of the sap of character” (VII: 485). Even in Aberdeen, the same observation is made: “The dialect of Aberdeen and Aberdeenshire is as unmistakable as its accent is persistent. […] Of the Aberdonian abroad it is said that he may perfect his English grammar, but he can always be recognised by his accent. Perhaps this inability to lose his ‘brogue’ is conditioned in the Aberdonian by his intense pride in and love for his native heath…” (IV: 577). It is somewhat amusing to note that the loss of expressions familiar to old expressions to old people in the speech of the young is remarked on as it was a century earlier: “The Buchan dialect is used, but many old words are no longer current” (Fraserburgh: VII: 334); “The Scottish dialect is still the principal vehicle of communication, but some of the pithy words used 50 years ago are now unfamiliar to the younger generation” (Kincardine O’Neill: VII: 392). One entry is probably intended as a more elaborate statement of the same case: “In considering the language of the people, it is interesting to note how readily the small children take to the Buchan tongue, but more interesting to hear how a smart young shop assistant, for instance, can converse with one customer in perfectly correct English, if not with a BBC accent, while at the same time talking over her shoulder to another customer in the broad Doric of the North-East. It is doubtful, however, if this same young lady could read easily the language of Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk or Hamewith” (Fyvie: VII: 680). A couple of writers give brief
examples of dialect expressions: “Some very old expressions in everyday use are worthy of note: ‘fairly’ or ‘fairly that,’ a common expression of assent; ‘nae a bit’, an expression of surprise; ‘I’m nae seekin’ or ‘I am seekin’ anything; ‘It’s of some eese (use),’ of something good; and ‘fat like’ for ‘what like,’ meaning, how are you?” (Tyrie: VII: 359); “Should a stranger to Inverallochie or Cairnbulg enquire the distance to Fraserburgh, the native’s reply would be — ‘A mile’n hauf a san’ a sie b’yoot, tree mile a brig a sie b’yin’” (Rathen: VII: 323). The entry for Tough includes an interesting list of proverbs in the local dialect (VII: 223-4; see Text 16 in the Prose section).

Nearly half a century later, though predictions of its demise have continued apace, the “Doric” defiantly persists as an integral part of the region’s identity and self-image. (The commandeering of the word “Doric” by inhabitants of the North-East to refer to their own dialect as contrasted with other forms of Scots could be seen as a demonstration of this remarkable pride and confidence in the speech-form and in its local importance.) Its status (actual and desired) gives rise to perennial discussions, including columns in and letters to the press; the extent to which it can or should be taught or actively encouraged in schools is the subject of serious and sometimes heated debate; an annual Doric Festival, with songs and poetry readings, is held at various venues throughout the region and is enthusiastically supported, and “Doric Nichts” regularly take place as part of the popular culture of pub entertainment. Aberdeen’s annual Arts Carnival, a summer festival of popular entertainment, makes a central feature of readings, discussions and participatory events on and in the Doric. Popular books on the dialect, some containing a wealth of respectable information, regularly appear in local bookshops. Local writers use the dialect for poems and short stories: the most accomplished one now practising, Sheena Blackhall, is a poet of national stature, and several others produce work of high quality. The publication of a new edition of a classic of North-East literature (such as Charles Murray’s poems or William Alexander’s Johnny Gibb), and still more that of a new collection by a renowned contemporary writer, is invariably received with acclaim. The texts in the present book include not only examples of classic poetry and prose, but selections from regular weekly articles in the dialect published by the local press, entries for the writing competitions which form part of the Doric Festival, and extracts from Aberdeen University’s annual Student Shows and from one of the Christmas pantomimes written and produced by an amateur drama company in the city, both of which invariably make extensive use of the dialect.
On the cultural scene, that is, the dialect makes an unfailingly lively contribution; and holds a place which is unlikely to be questioned or challenged. Its position as an everyday community language is less certain; and it would be misleading to end this section on a note of unqualified optimism. Though accurate statistics are unavailable (for the simple reason that the necessary research has not been conducted), it is a matter of easy observation that the speech now heard in the North-East of Scotland is highly variable. Speakers with full fluency in the traditional dialect, for whom it is the normal and preferred means of communication, are readily found, in Aberdeen, the smaller towns and the rural areas: a large proportion of them, however, are middle-aged or older. Yet even among the young, authentic Doric speech is by no means rare; and when (as frequently in young urban speakers) the traditional vocabulary is largely replaced by, in varying proportions, standard English, general Scots, television-based pseudo-Glasgow demotic and international pop slang, the native phonology remains unaffected. (Illustrations of this appear in some of the texts in Section 4.) A notably consistent belief is that in Aberdeen the speech has become sadly corrupt as compared to the purity which it has retained in the hinterland: in objective terms, what constitutes the perceived “corruption” is partly the increasing prevalence of socially stigmatised pronunciation features such as the glottal stop (not a feature of traditional Doric), as well as the widespread use of slang and cant expressions.

As a counter to the unmistakable strength which the Doric still exhibits as a community language, and the affection with which it is regarded as a mark of the region’s distinctive identity, a truly astonishing degree of incomprehension regarding its actual nature and status, and a corresponding confusion and inconsistency of attitudes, can be readily identified among speakers of all ages. A recent research project (Middleton 2001) incorporated a series of interviews with Primary 7 school pupils (i.e. age 11 approx.) on their own use of and attitude to the local dialect. No information on the pupils beyond the locations of their schools is given in Middleton’s report, but the material on any showing suggests a deplorable social failure in the obvious lack of any attempt in the children’s education to instil any degree of knowledge and understanding of either the dialect itself or the historical and sociological facts concerning it. A representative selection from the children’s opinions as quoted by Middleton makes entertaining, if disheartening, reading:

- Aabody in my famly spikks Scots. I like Scots best. (p.25)
- I like Scots. It shows I’m Scottish. (p.25)
- My favourite language is Scots, because some folk canna understand it and
it annoys them. (p.25)
Some of the words in English are strange. (p.29)
Some people don’t like to speak it out in the playground, but I’ve heard
them speak it in the village. (p.27)
I just use Scots at home because I’m a bit embarrassed to use it with my
friends because they sometimes laugh. (p.30)
I canna really speak it because I’m frae Aberdeen. (p.25)
I rage him [the child’s dog] in English and I’m nice to him in Scots. (p.28)
I like to speak to my cat in Scots and English. If I was being silly and playing
with it, I’d speak in Scots. If I was being sensible I’d speak to it in
English. (p.30)
Sometimes I get fed up o the Aberdeenshire accent. Aabody we ging tae
visit says the same thing, ‘Ay, ay. Foo’re ye deein!’
It sounds like another language, like German or French. (p.26)
I don’t understand it and I think it’s horrible. (p.23: this child has always
lived in Ballater and has Scots-speaking parents and grandparents.)

What this appears to demonstrate is that the assumption, formerly accepted
without question, that schoolchildren were to be actively discouraged from
using the local dialect has — mercifully — ceased to operate; but that it has
not been replaced by a policy of positive encouragement or by any coherently
determined or consistently applied policy whatever.

Native speakers of the Doric in or beyond middle age, when questioned,
almost uniformly express fear that the mither tongue is dying or already dead;
and the easy response that this has been said for upwards of two hundred
years now sounds hollow in view of the incontrovertible fact that the decline
in farming, fishing and other long-established industries, the breakdown of
communities and of traditional social structures, the lack of a strong empha-
sis on the dialect or any other aspects of local culture in primary and sec-
ondary education, the dilution of the population (especially since the advent
of the petroleum industry) by large numbers of incomers, and above all the
culturally levelling effect of television, cinema, pop music and the now ubi-
quitous internet, have cumulatively produced an environment of ongoing
social change in which neither the dialect nor anything else can possibly
remain unaffected. Language is an aspect of social life, and in one sense a lan-
guage cannot live apart from the community to which it belongs: if that ceas-
es to exist, or is altered beyond recognition, the language too must either
change or disappear. On the most optimistic showing, the fact must at least be
recognised that the survival of the Doric as a community language, passed
down from generation to generation as hitherto, is no longer part of the natural order of things.

This recognition, it may be suggested, underlies the pessimism of traditional speakers. Yet there is a wide gap between the observation that a language’s survival cannot be guaranteed and the conclusion that it is therefore doomed. Mither-tongue speakers, confronted with the undeniable contrast between their own speech and that of today’s primary- and secondary-school children, may be excused for lapsing into defeatism; but against this must be set not only the fundamental strength of the regional traditions but the enthusiasm and commitment of many individuals in the fields of education and culture, who are keenly aware of the value of a strongly-defined local identity and the importance of the dialect as an aspect of this. If the distinctive speech of the North-East has a future, it will be founded on an alliance between the surviving native speakers with their massive store of knowledge, and the new breed of educational and cultural activists with their energy and their political, organisational and technical skills. Whether this alliance will materialise or not is a speculation beyond the scope of this book.

Notes

1. The general history of Scots and the development of its distinctive phonological and grammatical features will be assumed in this book as a basis from which observations on the North-Eastern dialects will be made. The foundation work to which all subsequent studies are indebted is Murray 1872; the most comprehensive general accounts of Scots produced in recent years are Robinson ed. 1985 (intro. pp. ix-xvi) and McClure 1994; the individual essays in Jones ed. 1997 provide more detailed examination of specific aspects of the language; among more accessible and popular treatments are Murison 1977, Kay 1986 and McClure 1988, rev.edn. 1997. Aitken 1977 is unlikely to be superseded as a summary history of Scots phonology; Purves 1997 is a convenient account of the grammatical features of the modern language. The standard reference works are the Scottish National Dictionary (Grant and Murison eds. 1931-76), the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (Craigie, Aitken et al. eds. 1931-2001) and the Linguistic Atlas of Scotland (Mather and Speitel, eds. 1975-86).

2. For the general history of Gaelic, readers may begin with Durkacz 1983 and Withers 1984.

3. The edition cited is The Statistical Account of Scotland 1791-1799, edited by Sir John Sinclair, with a new introduction by Donald J. Withrington, Wakefield (EP Publishing) 1982; Vols. XIV (Kincardineshire and South and West Aberdeenshire), XV (North and East Aberdeenshire) and XVI (Banffshire, Moray and Nairnshire).

4. Edinburgh and London (William Blackwood and Sons); Vols. XII (Aberdeenshire) and XIII (Banffshire).


7. I.e. Sheena Blackhall, referred to elsewhere as a poet and story writer in the North-East dialect. Quotations are taken verbatim from her thesis, using her orthographic renderings of dialect pronunciations.
Previous accounts of the dialect

Map 4 (Murison 1963) shows the boundaries of the NE Scots dialect area with reference to four distinctive shibboleths, namely:

1. The reflex of MSc long /æ/ before /n/. (For discussion of the early development of this see Macafee 1989.) In most dialects the normal reflex of this is /e/ in all positions: in the NE, uniquely, it has been further raised to /i/ before /n/. This is indicated by the spellings *steen* and *stane* (Ang. “stone”).
2. The development of MSc /ɔ/ in shortening positions (by the Scottish Vowel-length Rule or Aitken’s Law: see Aitken 1981). The reflexes of this vowel vary from dialect to dialect; close and half-close vowels, with and without rounding, are all found. The characteristic reflex in the North-East is /iː/: in this respect the dialect contrasts with that of the area immediately to the south, where a rounded /ø/ is still to be heard. This is represented by the spellings meen and muin (Ang. “moon”).

3, 4. The development of MSc /xw/ in grammatically differentiated word-classes. One of the most frequently-noted characteristics of the NE dialect is the development of this to /fi/ (instead of the general /ɔ/), a feature for which evidence can be found as early as the sixteenth century (see the *Scottish National Dictionary* introduction and Aitken 1971): however, an internal division within the dialect area is that in the southern part this is found only in pronouns and adverbs; in the northern, in words of all classes. This is represented by the spelling *fitte* to contrast with the standard white, and by *fa* (Ang. “who”).

These are far from the only respects in which the North-East maintains a distinctive identity within the Scots language area. The individuality of the North-East dialect has been recognised since the eighteenth century; and long before the emergence of language study as a modern scientific discipline attempts were made, by scholars of very different degrees of knowledge and sophistication, to provide descriptions of it. A selection of previous writings on the dialect will now be examined: what emerges is the remarkable consistency, over a long period, of the descriptions, and the readiness with which the distinctive local shibboleths have been recognised.

1. *A Dissertation on the Scoto-Saxon Dialect* by Alexander Geddes (1792).¹

The first discussion of the Scots language to make special mention of the North-East is this *Dissertation* by the Rev. Alexander Geddes, a native of Banffshire. This essay is a vigorous defence of the Lowland Scots dialects, the decline of which Geddes sees as a loss not only to Scottish but to English literature. “Scoto-Saxon” is intended as a parallel term to “Anglo-Saxon”, implying (what Geddes later argues with more historical detail) that Scots like English is descended from the language of the Germanic invaders of
post-Roman times, though distinct from English because of different foreign cultural influences. This language, Geddes says, “until of late was the general language of all the low-lands of North Britain, and is still prevalent among the people of the north-east provinces”: it is interesting that even in the late eighteenth century the North-East evidently had a reputation for linguistic conservatism. Geddes severely criticises the standard of recent writing in Scots, charging authors with excessive use of “low words and trite proverbial phrases in common use among the illiterate” and of words unknown to literary English, and with total neglect of spelling and grammar. Such misguided practices, he argues, have weakened what had once a claim to be a language of equal or superior expressive power to English: a language which can match its rival in “richness, energy and harmony”. (He proceeds to define and discuss these terms with meticulous care.) In Scots “many words and phrases are still preserved … which [English] wants, and which all its borrowed treasure but imperfectly supplies”.

Geddes makes many observations on Scots phonology and morphology, but most are generally applicable to all Scots dialects. A few, however, seem (though he does not say so) to refer particularly to those of the North-East. He remarks on the abundance of diminutive suffixes in Scots, comparing Italian capelletto, capellino and capellucio to hatty, hattick, hatticky, hattikin; “nor are these used indiscriminately, any more than capelletto and capellino” — though he does not specify the distinction between them. In reality, the first two were simple diminutives. –ie was and still is very common in the North-East; and since it has become less so in other parts of Scotland has acquired the status of a stereotype of this dialect. –ick (more commonly, and correctly, written –ock) is now generally obsolescent except in a few words where it has lost its status as a separate morpheme, e.g. puddock (toad), sourock (wild sorrel plant). –iky (generally spelt –ikie or –ickie) represents the first two in sequence, and is even more locally restricted. As early as c. 1780 its use was humorously exaggerated by the poet Alexander Watson in The Wee Wifickie:

There was a wee bit wifickie was comin’ frae the fair,
Had got a wee bit drappickie that bred her muckle care.

The same poem contains housickie and the names Bessickie, Doussickie and Tibbickie. -iken is probably a sequence of –ie and the English suffix –kin, and is not attested in the SND, though there is no reason to doubt Geddes’s claim that it was used in the Scots of his time. He also attributes to Scots (presumably his own dialect) two augmentative suffixes, comparable to Italian –one. -um for
adjectives (as *greatum, goodum*) and –o for nouns (as *heado, mano*). “It is true they are both become obsolete: yet it is not many years ago, since I heard a farmer’s wife laughing heartily at her neighbour for calling a horse of a middle size a *horsie*! ‘He is more like a *horso*’, said she.” These appear to be entirely obsolete: –um survives in some words, characteristically used by children or in a childish register (*nickum, totum*, etc.), but as a diminutive, not an augmentative; and for –o, the only attestations in the SND are Geddes’s own examples.

Two features of Scots phonology as he describes it suggest North-Eastern dialect pronunciation: they are characteristic local features today, and do not appear to be attested for other parts of Scotland in Geddes’s period. “The sound which we now express by *th*, and which almost all other nations, except the Spanish, in vain attempt to utter, was changed by the Scots into *d* or *dd*, or, to speak more properly, they retained the ancient Saxon and Teutonic sound and symbol d, which the English have changed into *th*, as *fad*er, *mod*er, *bro*der, *hid*der, *quhid*der.” Spellings suggesting the presence of a medial plosive in those and similar words are general in MSc, but in later periods this has become a North-East shibboleth, other parts of the country using [ŋ]. “The open or broad a ... was also retained in a number of Saxon words, in which we have gradually changed it into o long, as in *snaw*, *knaw*, *craw*, *blaw*, *thraw*, for *snow*, *know*, *crow*, *blow*, *throw*, etc.” Since the same sound, according to Geddes, also appears in the Scots pronunciation of *grass*, *hand*, *man*, *mass*, etc., and *same, dame, spake, awake, brake, take, nation, consideration*, etc., the reference must be to a sound in the vicinity of [ŋ]. The group of words which he spells with –aw are pronounced [snɔː, kɾɔː], etc., in the North-East (except *know*, which is obsolete in the modern dialect, having been replaced by *ken*); elsewhere in Scotland with [nɔː].

Geddes follows his essay with three poems, an original composition and two translations from classical literature. These are written in an alphabetic system of his own devising, expounded in the course of the dissertation. It contains forty-two symbols: Roman letters in their simple forms and modified by accent marks, and a selection of digraphs and trigraphs. A passage from Virgil is translated into a representation of Edinburgh dialect; by contrast, the First Idillion of Theocritus is rendered in “the Buchan dialect (which may be called the Scottish Doric)”. This classical term is now the accepted local name for the dialect, though most of the people who use it in this sense are wholly unaware of its Greek origin; and it is attested for what appears to be the first time here. In the translation, dialect words and idioms are very rare, and little besides the phonology distinguishes the language from literary
Augustan English. Geddes’s transcription is not entirely consistent, his interpretation of the sounds is sometimes faulty (e.g. of the sound in bone, which he writes <ö>, he says “ö long is only a protraction of o short”), and he has (as he acknowledges in his notes) at times allowed the traditional orthography to take precedence at the expense of strict phonological consistency. It is usually possible, however, to deduce the pronunciation he had in mind from his notes on the implications of his symbols. A passage follows in Geddes’s spelling and in an IPA version.

Nà! shép-hírd, nà! ’Tis nù the nèn of dei;
Huan o’ the py sp wè gyth-hírds dår nà pлеi,
For fèr o Pàn; hua tyrt’ wì’ silvan spôrts,
To sum quil kôv, to rest himself’, resôrts:

A kánkört god hè is — an’’ grief he shà
His àtri snùt, hè’ll sàrî fleig us à.
Ràthir, ò shep-hírd, — for ghè kàn relat
In màkles numbirs Dàphnis’’ wèf’ fàt —
Kum! sît wè dùn, aniou this èlm’s brûn shàd,

Huar hírdlik hânds a vérdant bink hà màd:
Huar Nimph-devòted springs pérennial flow,
An’’ spring-fèd ìks, árûn, luxûriant grou.
Kum, sît wè dùn! — An’’ Thîrsìs! gif thy strân
Be sî’k as Khromîs (of the Libian plàn)

Erst tyr’d to màtch, but vânli tyr’d — To thè
A gyt, that ilken ghèr brings tuins, y’l gè:
A gyt, hua, tho’ shè sukkil beth the twei,
Sâl fill útour the milk-kog tuys a’ dei.

Notes

2. Huan: surprisingly, even in his transcription of NE dialect Geddes does not indicate the very characteristic replacement of [hw] by [f], except once by writing whistle as <fussil>. The pronunciation was certainly in use by the eighteenth century.

Pyp: the letter <y> in Geddes’s transcription represents “y as in by, or i as in wine”. The two diphthongs are different, and were in Geddes’s time: I have therefore in the transcription rendered his <y> sometimes as [ae] and sometimes as [ai] in accordance with contemporary and historic usage.

Gyt: the lexeme-specific diphthongisation of [o] to [ai] in North-East dialects still survives in a few words, but not this one: the local word for “goat” is now the

*Dár nà:* it appears that the accents have been accidentally transposed. As Geddes specifically states that the difference between the sound values of his <á> and <à> is one of duration only (modern pronunciation gives credence to this), the spelling suggests [dar na]; but a more likely pronunciation would be [dar na].

7. *Tàr:* [sàr] or [sàr-li], but the modern pronunciation is [sìr-li].

*Fleig:* The meaning of Geddes’s *<ei>* is not clear. His description is “*ei* German and Italian, nearly English *ay*”, but unfortunately *<ei>* does not stand for the same diphthong in German and Italian; and as he uses it in *day* and *play*, which had been pronounced with a monophthong in Scots since the MSc period, it is likely that on at least some occasions he has been inadvertently influenced by conventional spelling. If this word is taken to be *fleg* “frighten”, for which the pronunciation in the North-East as elsewhere is [flæg], the use of the digraph seems erroneous. A possible explanation lies in the etymology of *fleg*: according to the SND, it results from the addition of an inorganic –g to the older word *fley* [flæ]. Possibly Geddes’s transcription indicates a pronunciation which marks the early stage of this development.

8. *Wefu’:* If this is *waefu’* (and nothing else suggests itself), the spelling is clearly wrong: the pronunciation is [wefu], and should be represented in Geddes’s orthography by <wâfu’>.

9. *Aniou:* a pronunciation of *anew* “beneath” representing the local diphthongisation of final [ju] to [jəu].

10. *Hànds:* in fact the final [d] of this and similar words had been lost in Scots long before the late eighteenth century.

11. *Pèrenniak:* the accent should certainly be on the second <e>, not the first.

11–12. Geddes states that “*ou* and *ow* are never confounded. The former is equivalent to the English *oo*, the latter to *ow* in *town*, or *ou* in *loud.* They are confounded here, however: *flow* and *grow* are both pronounced with [ju], and should presumably both be spelt with <ow>.

18. *Bèth:* this is evidently a mistake. The word for “both” in North-East dialects, as in most other forms of Scots, is [beθ], not [biθ] as this spelling suggests.

**Transcription**

Since Geddes has not as a rule altered the spellings of form words, nor made any attempt to suggest the pronunciation of those when unstressed, IPA symbols are used only for words which in Geddes’s text are written in his new orthography. The vowel letter which he uses in the unstressed syllables of polysyllabic words is often that of the normal orthographic form rather than one
chosen for the actual pronunciation (e.g. *devoted*): such words are transcribed phonetically throughout.

For *o’* pan hwa *tairt* *wi’* silvân sports
To *sam* *kwîl* *koy* *to* rest himsel risorts

ə *kankurt* *gæd* *hi’* iz *ən* *gif* *hi’* *ʃa’*
 *hiz* *ætri* *snut* *hîl* *serhî* *fleq* *əs* *ə:
reθər ə: *ʃephrd* fə *ji’* *kan* *rilət*

in mjækləs *nəmburz* dəfəs *wefu* *fət*
kam *sit* *wi’* *dun* *əŋjəu* *ðis* *ʾəlmz* *brun* *ʃəd*
hwaɾ hərdlik hənz *ə* vərdənt *bŋk* *heː* *med*
hwaɾ *numf* *dəvətəd* *springz* *prenoʃ* *fləu*
*ən* *spring* *fəd* eks arun *ləŋəʃərant* *ɡrəu*
kam *sit* *wi’* *dun* *əŋ* *dərsəs* *gif* *ðə* *stɾɛn*
*Be* *sk* *əs* *xramis* *of* *the* *libhən* *plen*
erst *traed* *to* *məʃ* *bət* *venli* *traed* *To* *də:
ə *gæt* *dət* *təkən* *jir* *brŋʃ* *twənəz* *æl* *ʃi’*:
ə *gæt* hwa *θə* *ʃiː* *səkəl* *beθ* *θe* *tweː*

sal *fəl* *utəur* *θe* *mlk* *kɔɡ* *twəis* *ə’* *deː:

2. *The Dialect of Banffshire* by Walter Gregor (1866).²

The first attempt at a systematic description of a North-Eastern dialect was *The Dialect of Banffshire* by the Rev. Walter Gregor. This is a substantial glossary of local words, containing about 3500 entries, with a preface in which some features of the dialect phonology and idiom are described. Gregor distinguishes four subdivisions of the Banffshire dialect: those of the fishing villages and of the lower, middle and upper portions of the county. The fishers’ speech is characterised by “accenting the words on the last syllable, using a circumflex, throwing the ictus on the last word of the sentence, and lengthening the vowels. For example, *comrade* becomes *comarədə*, *comradeship* becomes *comarədəriə*, *dog* becomes *dəʊg*.” These examples are dubious: the pronunciation [kəmə’red] is not unique to Banffshire, being a rare but general Scots form also attested in sixteenth- to eighteenth-century English; and [dəʊɡ] is likewise general Scots, whatever local nuance of pronunciation may be intended by Gregor’s circumflex. The middle dialect is said to be distinguished from the
lower by the use of [e] (the general Scots form) instead of [i] (peculiar to NE dialects) as a reflex of Old English long a before [n]: behn, stehn (Gregor’s spelling, from German sehr) instead of been, steen; and a similar contrast in words of different phonological history: mehl, peht, behst, beh for meal, peat, beast, beat. In the lower and fishing districts, medial [ɔ] becomes [d]: fadder, mudder, brudder, widder; and in the upper, the dialect shows a tendency to loss of post-vocalic [r], a change which Gregor attributes, improbably, to Gaelic influence: “puss for purse, cuss for curse, fisst for first; grass becomes girs in the lower and middle districts and in the upper giss.” These features are well attested, and still to be heard in the local dialect.

Of the other characteristics of the dialect which Gregor cites, some are general Scots (such as airm for arm, rin for run, the use of –t instead of –th as the ending for ordinal numbers), but several are genuine Banffshire or NE shibboleths. These include the well-known f- for wh- (Gregor’s “Fah fuppit th’ folpie?” (Who whipped the whelp?) has become a cliché), vr- for wr- (vrang, vratch), and — a less frequently-observed example — w- for v- in initial position (wail for vail: the SND gives other examples, such as wiggyban (vagabond), westure, wesshel (vessel)). The following are also characteristic of Gregor’s county: quile for coal (only used of glowing coals: unburned coal is simply coal), queel and squeel for cool and school, beet, reet, bleed and teeth for boot, root, roof, blood and tooth, wint for want, hive for hoof, foine and moin for fine and mind (though for a more accurate transcription of the latter word in ordinary spelling Gregor should have written moin), and spyke for speak.

The diminutive and augmentative, described by Geddes, receive more precise and detailed treatment from Gregor, who alleges that –ik represents a greater degree of diminution than –ie, and –ikie greater still. These suffixes can be combined with the use of little and wee, and the latter can be repeated up to three times, furnishing the dialect with the power to indicate very finely-graded degrees of smallness: Gregor, with no hint of humour or irony, asks us to accept a series of twenty-one precisely ordered stages from horse to little wee wee wee horsikie! Bit (“a bit beastie”) and nyaff (“a nyaff o’ a mannie”) are also used as diminutives, the latter with contemptuous force: this is still true, though the forms are not peculiar to Banffshire.

For augmentatives, Gregor provides the following list of suffixes: -ach, -ack, -art, -al, -um, -in and “in a peculiar sense” –o: for the last his only example is Geddes’s horso. This suggests an over-punctilious attempt to impose order on his data. The only genuine augmentative in his list is –ach (more frequently written –och, though –ach is closer to the Gaelic from which the form
is derived). Geddes cites *trailach* from *trail*, a dirty woman; and the SND (s.v. *–och*) gives several other examples of which most of the best attested are NE words: *dossach* (fondle, pet, cuddle), *fussoch* (a loose untidy truss or bundle), *glammoch* (snatch, grab, v. or n.), *squalloch* (scream, v. or n.). For *–ack*, his example is *dorle*, a piece of bread or cheese, giving *dorlack*, a large piece; but the derivation is probably in the other direction. The pair *trype* and *trypal*, “a tall dirty woman” and — presumably — a particularly striking specimen of this class, are probably independent derivations from French *tripe* and *tripaille*. For *–art* and *–in* he gives no examples, but in his glossary can be found isolated examples such as *bulf*, *bulfin* and *bulfart* (“a big fat person”), *buntin* (“a stout, thick-set person”), *gilp* (“a big fat person”) and *gilpin*: of these, the longer forms of the last two are apparently the earlier; and the status of the *–art* syllable in the first is doubtful. Certainly, except for *–ach* it is most improbable that they were in productive use as suffixes in Gregor’s time: most of his examples are, on the evidence of the SND, very rare.


Alexander Melville Bell’s monumental work in the history of phonetics contains, in an appendix, transcriptions of words and sentences in several dialects, including that of Strathbogie in Aberdeenshire: the name of his informant is given as Mr J. Forrest (Plates 4-5). Bell’s system of “self-interpreting physiological letters” is a masterpiece of ingenuity, but as his vowel symbols are based on inaccurate assumptions regarding articulatory factors it is not always possible to interpret them with certainty; and as there is no exact correspondence between them and the symbols of the International Phonetic Alphabet a precisely equivalent transcription cannot be made. What follows is a copy of Bell’s illustrations of Aberdeenshire dialect with approximate IPA transcriptions, renderings in conventional orthography and translations.
We’re going to the country tomorrow.

“My mother’s writing a letter to her daughter-in-law.”

“The stupid boy’s brought the wrong book from the school.”

“I’ll give you a halfpenny if you tell me who you belong to.”

“The poor old chap got drunk at Aikey Fair last Thursday and died on the way home.”

1. The central vowel is unusual: perhaps an idiosyncrasy of Bell’s informant.
2. Bell’s symbol suggests an apical fricative, not a trill.
3. The actual pronunciation is [ɛk/1711 fe/1106/ch57:0130+6608r]: i.e. Bell’s symbol should be ζ.
4. There should certainly be a length mark here [di/9063t]: i.e. Bell’s transcription should be ζl/1711/9063t
The Dialect of the Southern Counties of Scotland
by Sir James Murray (1872).4

Sir James A.H. Murray, for many years editor of the Oxford English Dictionary, for the first time raised dialect study to the status of a science by his account of Scots. The importance of this work goes far beyond its Scottish interest, as the methods of research and of organisation, exposition and interpretation of the data were immediately adopted by language scholars in France and Germany — though many years were to elapse before any further work of comparable importance was done in Scotland. The body of Murray’s paper is taken up with a historical account of the emergence, development and diversification of the Scots dialects and a detailed description of the form heard in the south of the country; but in an Appendix he provides some information on the dialects of other regions. Of the North-Eastern dialect, “most typically represented in Aberdeenshire and the district to the N.W. toward the Murray Firth”, the principal points which he notes are the following:

2. Unrounding of the fronted reflex of OE long o, as in dee, beet, reef.
3. The use of a “mixed” (i.e. central) vowel as an alternative to this vowel in its shortened reflex: Murray’s transcriptions <mín, mín, stîl, stîl> for the local forms of moon and stool suggest [mín mín stîl stîl], though in the contemporary language those words are heard simply as [min] and [stil].
4. [wi] as the reflex of OE long o following a velar plosive, and [ju] as its reflex preceding one, thus [gwid kwil skwil bjuk] for good, cool, school, book.
5. [kwai] corresponding to [ko] in such words as coal, coat: [kwail kwai];
7. [æ] giving a sound which he represents in his phonetic orthography as <y>, i.e. [i] (now generally a lower vowel, [i]), as in mother, son, bull, full.
8. [e(ː):] corresponding to the [a:] of southern dialects in [gen ext]: i.e. going, ought, though the Scots cognate of the latter word is used only in such phrases as fa’s aicht … “who owns …, whose is …”
9. Palatalisation of [g] to [ŋ], [d̪j] or even [d̪ːj]: “I have often found it difficult to distinguish the pronunciation of geng or gyang, go, (gjέq, djeq) [i.e. [gjeŋ djeŋ]] from jeng.”
10. Use of [d] for [ð]: Murray does not specify that this is only found in word-medial position, but his examples are fadder, mudder, widder (i.e. weather).
To illustrate the characteristics of three different dialects (Teviotdale, Ayrshire and Buchan), Murray gives a transcription of the first chapter of the Book of Ruth in the “Palaeotype” transcription system used by A.J. Ellis in his *Early English Pronunciation*. An extract from his Buchan passage follows, with renditions in ordinary orthography and IPA transcription (as with Bell’s *Visible Speech*, however, equivalence between Palaeotype and IPA symbols is not always exact).


1. The symbol <e> represents a “mid front wide” vowel. As the terminology appears to be used by Bell and Sweet, this suggests a centralised version of IPA [e]. Accordingly I represent it in my transcription as <E>, the symbol for the vowel commonly heard in SSE pronunciations of *never*, *clever*, etc.

2. <a> represents a “mid back wide” vowel. Murray clearly intends this to be different from <A>, which is “low back wide”. Before voiceless plosives and nasals (happen’t, belongin) the sound heard is very like SSE [a] as in *cut*, and I accordingly represent <a> by <A> and <a> by [q]: however, Murray’s transcription of *lann* (“land”) as <laan> is puzzling, as this sound is not protracted in most forms of NE speech. (I am unable to discover or conjecture what Murray intends by the raised dot in this and other words.)

3. <e> represents a “mid front” vowel. <é> does not appear on the table (p.99), but in a later passage (p.106-7) Murray discusses Bell’s suggestion of a tripartite subdivision of each of the classes high, mid and low, and argues that this could be adopted for at least the “mid” vowels in Scots. “High-mid” “mid” and “low-mid” front vowels would be represented as <é, e, è>: Roman for “wide”, italic for “primary”. By this argument, <é> can be taken as corresponding to IPA [e] and <e> to IPA [ɛ].

_Nou, it happen’t i’ the days fin the Judges rule’t, at there wes a famine i’ the lann. An there wes a man belongin tae Bethlehem Judaea gaed tae bide a file i’ the quintry o Moab, him an his wife an his twa_
sins. An the man’s name wes Elimelech, an they caa’d his wife Naomi, an the twa laddies Mahlon and Chilion, Ephrathites fae Bethlehem Judaea. An they cam intil the quintry o Moab an bade there. An Elimelech Naomi’s man dee’t, an she wes left an her twa sins. An they mairiet weemen belangin tae the quintry o Moab, the name o the teen wes Orpah, an the name o the tither wes Ruth. An they dwalt there near about ten ear.

5. Early English Pronunciation by Alexander J. Ellis (1889).

The fifth volume of Ellis’s massive work is entitled The Existing Phonology of English Dialects. His account of the “Mid North Lowland” dialect, identified with Murray’s “Moray and Aberdeen”, draws on the work of Murray, Gregor, Bell and the novelist William Alexander, and on conversation with and written investigation of local informants, to produce a detailed description of the dialect and some account of its historical development. Ellis comments specifically on Murray’s observations, refining or controverting several of them. He notes that the use of [f] for [w] is “limited” in the county of Angus: though he does not explain further, the fact is that here it is restricted to pronouns and adverbs, whereas in Aberdeenshire (especially its north-facing coast) and Banffshire it is more general. Other pronunciations than [vr] in words with historic [wr] are attested by Ellis’s informants: [wr] and a labialised [rʷ]. Ellis reports that he never came across the pronunciation [vra] in the area, though it can occasionally be heard even today. The “high mixed wide” vowel (this suggests [j]) does not occur in the local cognates of moon and stool [min] and [stil]: as already noted, Murray’s observation indeed appears to be inaccurate here; and the presence of an [i] corresponding to Gen.Sc. [e] derived from OE long a is said by Ellis to be “by no means general”: in fact it is restricted to words where the vowel is followed by [n], such as, in addition to Murray’s been
and *steen, een, neen* and *ileen*. As the words which Murray cites as not containing [i] (*meal, peats, fear, bear*) have different phonological histories, the comparison is rightly said to be irrelevant. Ellis also queries Murray’s statement regarding a “long” vowel for the [i] corresponding to English or Gen.Sc. [ʌ] in such words as *mother, son* and *bull* (Murray’s inclusion of *full* in this list is erroneous: the NE pronunciation of this word is [fɔl].) Murray’s [æːn] for *going*, usually [ɡæn] or [ɡaːn], is shown to be an alternative (even in the NE) to [ɡaːn] or (with a palatalised initial consonant) [ɡjaːn] or even [dʒaːn]. Ellis adds to Murray’s general observations the widespread use of an [æː]-like diphthong with a variety of historic sources: *spyke, gryte, wyke, quile, hyve, chyne, chynge, wyte, ryne* and *kwyte* corresponding to *speak, great, weak, coal, hoof, chain, change, wait, rein* and *coat*.

Ellis proceeds to discuss in minute detail the pronunciation of some informants: it is greatly to be regretted that the obscurity of his transcription system, and his attempts at indicating fine shades of sound by nonce modifications, make his transcriptions almost impossible to interpret with certainty.


James Forrest, a local minister and president of the historical society known as the Buchan Field Club, on January 14 1891 delivered a paper on the dialect to the society. Most of this is a cheerfully chaotic account of the phonology of the dialect of which the following extracts will give some idea of the author’s approach: “ò not only yields to ah, but lets itself be captured by smaller men — e.g., by ò when it allows *road* to become *rød* and *broad* as well as *board* to become *brød*. It can’t hold its own against ae even — *broad* may become *braed*; *oak, aek, toe, tae*; and even softens its firm *no* into *nae*. So compliant is it that it gives way to ✧ at times, for even its *board* may once more turn to *beerd*; *alone* becomes *aleen; stone, steen*; and its *bones* become *beens*.” Nonetheless, leaving aside the fanciful anthropomorphisations of the sounds, and allowing for the author’s total ignorance of the historical process of language development, his observations are generally correct: many of the features mentioned are common to all forms of Scots, but some are authentic characteristics of the local dialect. Examples include [æː] instead of the Gen.Sc. [ɛː] in *craw, snow*; [i] instead of [ɛ] as the reflex of OE long ò in *shee, dee, tee, beet, meen, Jeen* (i.e. *June*), and before [n] as the reflex of OE ñ in *ileen, been, steen*; a raising of [ɛ] to [i] before [n] in *sint, sine, fince* (a distinctive feature of the dialect to which...
Forrest is evidently the first to call attention; and, as consonantal shibboleths, [vr] as in vrang, vratch; the development of a palatal on-glise and fricativisation of the [w] in words with original āw, as snyav, blyav, gnyav, myav (i.e. snow, blow, guaw, mow; except in the word tyave, preserved no doubt because it has no currently-used English cognate, this pronunciation is virtually extinct); medial [ð] becoming [d] as in breeder, midder, hedder, wadder; and the familiar replacement of initial [æ] by [f] as in fite, fun [whin], furl [whirl] and fie [whey].

Of greater interest is Forrest’s listing of a few words illustrating what he calls the “Teutonic element” of the North-East dialect vocabulary. His etymologies, predictably, are in several cases wrong; but the list includes some interesting and rarely-attested words: oonseely, gloomy, ill-omened; Forrest cites a fisherman who had to get up in “the oonseely ‘oors o’ the nicht”; parle, a ring round the mast of a ship for hoisting the sail (ultimately from French, not Dutch as Forrest thinks); skilth, an otherwise unattested word for which Forrest suggests the meaning “defect, obligation, blame”, relating it (plausibly enough) to German and Dutch schuld; matet, exhausted (rare but authentic and not restricted to the North-East); dyag, fishermen’s term for a cloth tied round the fingers, apparently as a protection against rope burns; and the car-lin’ book, “in which the number of fish taken by each fisherman was daily entered ... the least successful, I think had to stand treat.” Despite his informants’ belief that this has “nothing to do with a woman” the usage is, in origin, a fanciful application of the familiar word for “witch.”

7. “A Phonology of the North-Eastern Scotch Dialect on an Historical Basis” by Heinrich Mutschmann (1909).^7

Mutschmann’s work is the first thorough and systematic study of NE dialect phonology. It was based, according to the author, on notes obtained during a field trip spent mainly in South Aberdeenshire, but including interviews with speakers from other parts of the North-East, in 1907. Mutschmann’s account is not of any individual’s speech but a conflation of evidence derived from a large number of informants.

The main section of the article consists of a detailed historical account of the development of the sounds of the dialect from MSc. In an introduction, Mutschmann provides an itemised list of the vowels and diphthongs which the dialect contains. To describe the vowels he uses Sweet’s terminology, which of course is no longer current and impossible to relate precisely to the para-
meters now employed for vowel description; however, Mutschmann’s system can be interpreted by examining the pronunciation of his keywords used by living speakers of the dialect. (Because of the typographical difficulty of reproducing his symbols I cite the keywords in conventional orthography.)

Mid-back-narrow: “its narrowness is much more marked than in the u of English hut”. Keywords: wark (work), grunn (ground), fussle (whistle). The last two words contain a half-open centralised back unrounded vowel, somewhat higher than that in Southern English hut, appropriately represented as [ʌ]. Wark in fact contains a more [a]-like vowel.

Mid-mixed-narrow, occurring only before r. Keywords: birk (birch), birn (burden), fir. Mutschmann compares this to the –e in German Rose as pronounced in his Essen dialect. The sound heard from modern speakers in these words is [ɛ], a half-open front-central vowel.

Mid-back-wide. Keywords: mak (make), saft (soft), wal (well n.) “Identical with the a in North German ratte.” This is what would now be described as a low back vowel, [a].

Mid-back-round. Compared to North German rotte. Keywords: brod (collecting box — i.e. as used in a church; the primary meaning of the word is actually “table”, though this sense is authentic), roch (rough), folpie (whelp). This is a decidedly higher sound than the [a] of Scottish English, but is distinguished from the [o] of this dialect (Mutschmann’s mid-back-narrow-round) by a lesser degree of height and more centralisation. Could be represented phonetically as [o].

High-mixed-wide lowered. Keywords: binn (bind), dist (dust), quintra (country). To the ear this is a half-close front-central vowel, somewhat more centralised than the [i] of SSE. If the symbol i is taken as having that value, this vowel in the dialect can be transcribed [i].

Mid-mixed-wide. Only found in unstressed syllables. Keywords winda (window), has and is unstressed, bury. A fully central vowel somewhat lower than the preceding, adequately transcribed [ʌ].

High-front-wide lowered. Keywords: ding (strike), hing (hang), mink (noose). “Somewhat different”, according to Mutschmann, from the [i]: it is different in being slightly lower and less centralised. The implications of [i] would be appropriate.

Mid-front-wide lowered: “not so open as the a in English hat ‘hat’, by which it is represented in the Southern parts of Scotland.” This is an interesting com-
parison. His keywords are *gerse* (grass), *cairt* (cart) and *leddy* (lady): the sound could be transcribed as [ɛ], since it is appreciably higher than the [ɛ] of SSE; and it is true that the corresponding sound in Border dialects is much lower, approaching the [æ] of turn-of-the-century RP.

**High-back-narrow-round slightly advanced.** Keywords *souch* (sough), *soun* (sound), *sou* (heap, stack — e.g. of hay). Mutschmann describes this as “higher in pitch” than the vowels in German *gut* or English *spoon*. “Slightly advanced” is more appropriate than a reference to “pitch”: the vowel is a somewhat fronted [u] (less fronted, and more rounded, than in forms of Scots heard further south).

**Mid-back-narrow-round,** “identical with German o in *rose*”. This is as true as a general phonetic statement can be: his keywords are *broken*, *door* and *amo* (among), and the vowel is an [o] approaching the IPA cardinal.

**High-front-narrow,** “identical with German i in *biene*”. Again, this statement is acceptable as it stands. Keywords: *neeps* (turnips), *weer* (wire), *dee* (do). An unequivocal [i].

**Mid-front-narrow,** “as the vowel in German *leer*”. Keywords: *aits* (oats), *rain*, *tae* (toe). This is a fully peripheral [ɛ], marginally higher than the IPA cardinal.

Assuming (as we surely may do) the reliability of Mutschmann’s informants and the accuracy of his perceptions and his descriptions, this gives a set of twelve phonetically-distinct vowels. Applying the principle of phonemic analysis, this could be reduced to a phonological system of ten, since Mutschmann’s mid-mixed-narrow, high-mixed-wide lowered and high-front-wide lowered, on his showing, appear to be in complementary distribution: the second being the primary form, the first appearing before [r] and the third before a velar nasal or plosive. The items in the phoneme system might be written thus, using the familiar IPA symbols:

/ɪ e ɛ a ɒ u ɔ ɔ/  

Regarding quantity, Mutschmann claims that the vowels fall into three classes: short, half-long and over-long. His description does not, however, suggest an inherent quantity distinction between some vowels and others, but a (correct) observation that the quantity of a given vowel can vary, being short before plosives, voiceless fricatives, [l] and consonant clusters; half-long before voiced fricatives and [r], and over-long in stressed open syllables. A particularly interesting observation is that /a/ when derived from MSc *au* is never fully short, though in quality it is indistinguishable from the reflex of MSc short *a* which can be fully short.
The sound-system also includes four diphthongs, two of which contain vowels not heard elsewhere. These are:

**Mid-back-narrow** followed by **high-back-wide-round**; keywords *stown* (stolen), *dowg* (dog), *byowty* (beauty). The second element is “the same as the *u* in English *put*”. Phonetically it may be marginally lower than the monophthong of *souch, soun, sou*; but there is no reason to regard it as a different item in the system: phonologically this diphthong is /aʊ/.

**Mid-back-wide advanced** followed by **high-front-wide lowered**; keywords *spyke* (speak), *grice* (young pig), *nine*. His description of the first element suggests a centralised version of [a]; but in fact the vowel is much higher than this and closer to an [α]; and the second element is **high-front-narrow** rather than **high-front-wide**: i.e. approaching [i] rather than [ɪ].

**Mid-back-wide** followed by **high-front-wide lowered**; keywords *rive, kye* (cows), *quine* (girl). The description suggests [ai], and this is accurate enough: the second element is more centralised than in SSE [ae]. This diphthong and the last contrast more strongly than Mutschmann’s description suggests, and are unmistakeably different items in the system: /ai/ (or perhaps better /ɔi/) and /aɪ/. *Quine* is actually /kwain/, not /kwaɪn/.

The fourth diphthong is stated not to be “genuine”, in the sense that it occurs only in “Polite Scotch” — not defined — in words like English *voice*. (In the dialect, words of this class generally have /aɪ/; except for *boy* which would invariably be pronounced [boɪ].)

Of the consonants, Mutschmann simply observes that the system is the same as in Standard English; though he makes the observation that *r* is “a strongly trilled point consonant” in all positions. He notes that the “guttural” *r* is not infrequently heard from NE speakers, but only as an individual idiosyncrasy and not with sufficient frequency to be regarded as a feature of the dialect (as in Northumberland): this is still true. Several instances are cited of dialect words differing in consonantal structure from their standard cognates: besides the features already cited by earlier writers and a number which are common to all forms of Scots (such as the loss, or failure to develop, of the plosive in word-medial sequences [mb nd nj]: [bram], [trəml], [kən], [hənər, fənər, həpər]), an interesting example is the frequent occurrence of metathesis: [brɪd] (“collecting box”), [brʊx] “burgh” (the town of Fraserburgh is still locally called “the Broch”), [ɡərs] “grass”, [kərsnt] “christened”, [fɪd] “field”, [wərd] “world”, [əks] “ask.”
8. *Manual of Modern Scots* by William Grant and James Main Dixon (1921).\(^9\)

This collaborative work, by two lexicographers and dialectologists of high distinction, was intended as a teaching text-book, containing a fully detailed account of the phonology and grammar of Scots and a wide selection of literary texts with phonetic transcriptions on facing pages. The individual dialects are not discussed in separate sections, but the discussions of linguistic features include mention of regional variations. Among the observations on North-East usages, the following may be cited:

3. Use, in some parts of the area, of a palatal plosive [ʃ] in [ʃn] gyaun (going); developing into an actual affricate [ʃʃ] in jing for Gen.Sc. gang (go).
4. Retention of [k] in the initial sequence [kn]: knee, kneel, knock (clock); and similarly of [g] in [gnʃn] (gnaw).
5. Replacement of a historic [w] (lost in both English and other forms of Scots) by [v], initially in the sequence [vr]: vrang, vrat (wrote); and finally: [blʃn] (blow), [lʌvʃn] (lawyer).
7. Loss of initial [ð] in the pronouns this, that, their, there.
8. Replacement of initial [æ] by [f], via the intermediate stage of a bilabial [ɸ]: fan, far (who, where).
10. [i] as the commonest reflex of OE [o] and the [y] of French loan-words: meen, freet, peer; with a preceding [w] developing between this and a velar plosive: cweet (Gen.Sc cuit, ankle), gweed (good). (Grant and Dixon, curiously, in discussing the reflexes of the front rounded vowel of Middle Scots suggest that [y] and [o] are still regular features of the general Scots sound system; though by 1921 the rounding had long been lost in most dialects.)
11. [ju] as the reflex of original [o:] before a velar consonant: beuk [bjuk], heuch [hjux] (crag).
12. [i] as the pronunciation for final unstressed -y or -ie: [hârdi], [robi] (Robbie).

In the section on grammar, most of the features described are illustrated by literary examples, several taken from North-Eastern writers such as George
MacDonald and William Alexander. Very few, however, are said to be unique to the NE dialects. Examples include:

2. *This and that* used without distinction of number.
3. Use of the past participle with *on* to signify lack or omission (see next section for discussion of this interesting usage).
4. Use of *-nin* as an alternative to *–na* as the cliticised verbal negative: *amnin, wisnin, mithnin*.
5. An idiomatic expression *or than no* to imply incredulity: “Poo’er or than no” — power indeed! (*Than* is “then”, and is stressed.)


Eugen Dieth’s landmark study, after nearly seventy years, retains its status as not only the most comprehensive description of the phonology of the dialect but one of the most scholarly and detailed studies ever made of any spoken form of Scots. Only the first volume, on the phonology of the dialect, was published: copious notes exist for what was planned as a second volume on grammar, but the task of editing these has never been accomplished.

Dieth in his Introduction remarks on the general uniformity of the farming dialects (the subject of his research) as contrasted with the diversity of speech heard in the fishing villages. The stability and conservatism of the farming culture, he suggests, has helped to maintain the dialect in spite of “[its] chief enemies … the press, the pulpit and above all the public school.” In a frequently-quoted passage, he describes the insidious effects of prescriptive schooling on the native speech: “The young folk have no sooner escaped the dominie’s rod, than they slip back, unconsciously, to their natural way of talking. The return, however, is not complete; the effect of the teaching lingers on in their speech. *fredd* for Friday is banished by the teacher and *fraide* taught instead; the hybrid *fraids*, however, is the result.” Shortly afterwards he lists some cases where the standard English word, but with a local pronunciation, has almost or completely displaced the traditional dialect word: *decter* for “daughter” (instead of *[d0θə]*), *erθ* for “earth” (instead of *[jəθ]*), and “*get* for *jt* ‘gate’, *tjårnɛn de* for *kårnɛn de* ‘churning day’, *(s)iθ-, *sɪɛl-* or even) *ol lamp* for *ɪl lɛmp* ‘oil lamp’”, and several words — not ones which are in any way
striking but simply unmarked and unobtrusive parts of everyday speech — which are disappearing: *fap* “whip”, *ausn* “oxen”, *njuz, krank* “talk” [i.e. “converse”], *fin* “feel”, *trevl* “walk”, *hft* “sky”, *tramp* “tread”, *spen* “wean”, *woiv* “knit”, *swn, dm* “noise”, *ward* “voice”, *de1, hol* “dig [potatoes]”, *vrjcf* “joiner”. (Many of those are still passively known to most natives of the area, and some can be heard at least in the speech of elderly people.) From this he argues for a greater degree of appreciation and tolerance of the dialect on the part of the teachers: it almost defies belief that even today his case has still not been generally understood, much less accepted and acted upon, in educational circles.

Though providing extensive refinements and corrections to Mutschmann’s description, Dieth’s examination of the vowel system of the dialect leads him to postulate a system which is similar in all but an intriguing few respects. On the phonetic level, according to Dieth, the dialect contains five long vowels *i e o u*, ten shorts *i e o a u* and three diphthongs *ai oe au*. Quantitative distinctions, however, are “largely blurred” owing to phonetic lengthening and shortening: Dieth cites as minimal pairs *steek* – *stick*, *peat* – *pit*, *cuist* – *kissed*, where the distinction *i* is purely one of quality. The historical distinction between long and short vowels, that is, survives only to the extent that some vowels — *i e o u* — have long, half-long and short allophones, whereas the others are always short. (After his initial exposition of the vowel table, Dieth discards the symbol *a*, using only *e* irrespective of duration.) Whereas *i o u* show no quality variation whatever their phonetic length, *e* and *o* are more open in their short than in their long forms: *goat* and *got* differ not only in duration but in that “the former is somewhat drawn and rather tenser than the latter”. Similarly, *get* “get” has a vowel that is “opener and laxer” than that of *get* “road”. Dieth chooses not to use the symbols *æ* and *e* for the “short” vowels because the sounds are “tenser and closer” than the /æ/ and /e/ of StE (this presumably means RP).

It thus appears that, notwithstanding the differing emphasis placed by the two linguists on the historical origins of the sounds, and their different preferences in notational conventions, Dieth’s *e e* (taken together) and his *e* can be identified with Mutschmann’s *mid-front-narrow* and his *mid-front-wide lowered*; and his *æ o* and *o* with his predecessor’s *mid-back-narrow-round* and *mid-back-round*. The items in Mutschmann’s system which, I have suggested, can be categorised as phonemes transcribable as /i e æ a o u/ are therefore those written by Dieth as *i* (length unspecified), *e* (long or half-long), *e* (short), *a* (length unspecified), *o* (short), *o* (long or half-long) and *u* (length unspecified). Dieth’s *æ* and Mutschmann’s *mid-mixed-wide*, which according
to both scholars is only found in unstressed syllables, can clearly be seen as a phonemic /ə/. The task of reconciling the remaining items in the two proposed systems, however, is (as Dieth acknowledges) much more problematic. “The cause of the confusion is the fact that ɨ e ɨ, all stand or may stand for MSc ɨ, so that they cannot be separated historically but merely phonetically.” This is only partly true of ɨ, which has a distribution overlapping that of StE /əː/: however, it also appears in many other words, and has a number of different historical sources. Mutschmann’s keywords for this vowel (his mid-back-narrow) are grunn, fussle and (erroneously, as already noted) wark; Dieth’s are grani “granny”, stann “standing”, aman “among”, aman “woman”, skaman “scumming”, wal “erring”, strandz “sour”, baxt “hut”, stadi “anvil” — clearly a very mixed bunch as regards the historical origins of the vowel. Nonetheless, this vowel quite clearly represents a distinct item in the sound system of the dialect: its contemporary status is that of a phoneme which has enlarged its original range of distribution by “capturing” what were formerly allophonic variants of other phonemes (/a/ before /n/ or /ŋ/, /i/ before /l/ and after /w/, and some individual cases). This enables us to bring the two systems into line in a further particular: Mutschmann’s mid-back-narrow can be equated with Dieth’s ɨ.

It is tempting simply to complete the picture by equating Dieth’s ɨ e with, respectively, Mutschmann’s high-mixed-wide lowered, high-front-wide lowered and mid-mixed-narrow: the phonetic descriptions are, with due allowance made for the ultimate impossibility of finding any form of words which will infallibly evoke a precise shade of sound in the inner ear of a reader, mutually reconcilable. The difficulty is that Mutschmann’s suggestion of a phonotactic distribution of the three sounds is not borne out by Dieth: his keywords for the first are hŋ “hang”, binar “humour”, gzen “to make leaky”; for the second liθ “joint”, kurn “churn” and jut “yet”; and for the third ɵen “thin”, left “sky” and bek “bitch”. Later, however, Dieth argues that the choice between ɨ and ɨ is at least partly phonotactic, the former appearing before nasal+cons. sequences (except mb), before voiced fricatives and “partly” before voiced stops, and the latter elsewhere; and ɨ appearing for ɨ in “broad” speech.

What this suggests, especially when taken along with the manifest difficulty of describing, transcribing and interpreting those vowels evinced by Ellis and Murray as well as Mutschmann and Dieth, is that a daunting amount of local, individual and perhaps free variation can be heard in words containing vowels in the mid- and low-mid front and central area; and that any postulated phonemic system must be offered with acknowledgement of a higher
degree of abstraction, and of uncertainty, than is sometimes the case.

This section will be concluded with some points on the grammar of the dialect noted by Dieth in the unpublished part of his work: it is hoped that a full edition of this will appear in the foreseeable future.

1. The partitive genitive without o’ is illustrated by examples such as a curn sticks, a pucklie girse, a stern gweed maut, contrasted with a hantle o’ time, a suppie o’ ream, twa dizzen o’ eggs. The preposition appears to be optional, and no explanation is suggested for its use on some occasions but not others.

2. A special “attributive” or “appositional” use of the genitive is frequent, and may be used of humans: a frow o’ a wife, twa strappin’ lads o’ sins, that peer simple vulgar crater o’ a mole-catcher; or of animals and inanimate objects: gey bachels o’ beets, a fyooach o’ a crap, a beenie runt o’ a coo, a flindrikin o’ a cloot, a gey weetie trachle o’ a hairst.

3. The gerund can designate the result of an action rather than the action itself: the riddlin’s, a milkin’ (i.e. the milk from one milking), the poorin’s o the sowens, faa’s shooin’ is’t (="who sewed it"), it’s some o’ ma ain brewin; and it can also be used to indicate not the result of a past action but the intended object of a future action: fess in the kin’lin’, he hid a hail winter’s burnin’.

4. The nominal use of the infinitive is more frequent than in Standard English (in word formation this is commonly classified as zero derivation). Numerous examples are cited: they’ve been haein’ a gey on-cairy, they hivna a setisfee, he didna wunt the say, he got a gey sterve, bide or a get a häd o’ ye, he’s waur i’ the girn nor i’ the bite.

5. The past participle is said to have “a wider use than in St.E. The general way of describing the p.p. of transitive verbs as passive & that of intransitive verbs as active does not include all aspects.” Dieth distinguishes between the passive perfective, passive imperfective, active perfective and active imperfective uses of the past participle. His examples for the first class include ye’re beat, yer steekit nieve, ma pipe’s full’t (this is preferred to ma pipe’s full or fu’), faar are ye fee’t at eynoo?, I widna be behaud’n to ye; for the second, she’s a muckle thocht o’ ʻoman, fat like maitet are ye?; for the third, ye’ll be a far-travel’t ʻoman noo, a wis that weel sleepit at a didna sleep again; and for the last, a weel-conduckit loon, ye’re nae sae nice spok’n ´his.

6. The passive is rarely used, various means being found of conveying its sense: I got a thrashin’ instead of I was thrashed, he got his house burnt instead of his house was burnt, ye need a dizzen tellin’s instead of you need to be told a dozen times.
7. A most interesting construction which Dieth describes as “the shibboleth of Buchan syntax”, according to him, “has never been closely investigated, neither as a historic form nor as part of the living speech.” This is the use of the prefix on with a past participle: *ongrutt’n, onhaud’n*. Examples given include: 

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 a’ll keep ye on-thocht lang, tae haurd the loons onmade sic a din and canna ye cum ben onca’d a’thing doon: these are equivalent in meaning to a’ll keep ye fae thinkin’ lang, tae haurd the loons fae makin’ sic a din, canna ye cum ben withoot ca’in a’thing doon. The three main functions of the on- construction are, according to Dieth, (1) “I could, would not do s.th. without doing s.th.” (he canna look at me ongle’t, aw cudna dee’t ongrutt’n, aw canna gyang fae hame onbid’n owre lang); (2) “I could not help doing it”(aw cudna be onlach’n at him, aw cudna be onrudi’d the sugar, it wis awfu’ hait, aw cudna be ondrunk’n); (3) “to keep s.b. from doing s.th.” (aw hed tae keep the hens ongaen in, ye dee’t yersel’ tae haurd ony ither body ondeen’t, her frocks needin’ takin’ in to keep them onfa’en aff o’ er body). Dieth discusses this construction in extensive detail citing parallels from other Germanic languages, and clearly regards it as one of the most interesting and distinctive syntactic features of the dialect. A sentence in his notes reads: “Whilst other Engl. & Sc. dialects have lost this means of expression it seems to be very much alive here”; and the present writer can confirm that it is at least remembered by some speakers. An examination of its current prevalence will be one of the most fascinating tasks awaiting the researcher who inherits the Dieth papers.
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8. The definite article has certain distinctive uses in the dialect (they are in fact general Scots usages for the most part): with expressions of place: they gaed awaa tae the skweel, was ye at the Kirk, he’s doon the stair; with expressions of unit: a shillin’ the pun’, we hed a gweed stoot stick the piece, he comes eens i the fortnicht; with names of times or seasons: sin’ever that skweel meetin i’ the spring; with the names of school subjects or professions: your wye winna be the same’s his wi’ the coontin, they’ll be begun to the herrin’ gin than; with the names of ailments: a’ve the teethick, he’s takin’ sair to the drink; and in stock phrases: dinna tak’ the huff, he gied me the wyle, tae gae awa’ to the frent’, aw hinna naething ahin’ the han’. The indefinite article too has its characteristic usages: with cardinal numerals: there’s a twa hun’er acre on’t, that’s a gweed therty year sine; with parts of the body in a figurative sense: he cudna gang a fit, he vreets a bonnie han’. River names are not preceded by the article (are ye dyaun tae wide Dev’ron wi’?): Dieth compares this usage to Gaelic, and to Old English, Middle High German and modern Icelandic.

David Murison, for many years editor of the Scottish National Dictionary, was a native of Fraserburgh with a mother-tongue knowledge of the dialect. In an address given to the Buchan Field Club he placed the Doric in its historical and linguistic context (it is a measure of the astonishing popular ignorance on the subject, which the intervening years have not fully dispelled, that one of the most distinguished scholars ever to make the Scots language his field was obliged to undertake this for a company of enthusiastic amateurs, many, like him, native speakers of the dialect). In successive paragraphs devoted to the various peoples who, with their languages, contributed to the development of Scotland, he lists words which modern Scots has borrowed from each language: these lists include General Scots as well as North-Eastern words, but examples of the latter are, from Gaelic, cran (measure of herrings), clyack (last sheaf of harvest), connach (spoil, ruin), greishoch (glowing embers), shargar (youngest child in a family or weakest animal in a litter), prann (crush, squeeze), closach (carcase of a fowl, or a mass of some soft material), etnach (the juniper tree or its fruit); from Scandinavian will (wandering, perplexed); from Dutch crannie (little finger), lunt (catch fire, or a column of fire and smoke), and loon (the sense of “boy” is peculiarly NE); and from French back-et (a wooden box for fuel or ashes), bed-pand (valance of a bed), scomfish (disgust, sicken) and Bon-accord (concord: the motto of the City of Aberdeen).

(Murison’s data are not really sufficient to support any conclusion that the influence of Gaelic on the North-East dialect is greater than on other dialects, or greater than that of other languages.)

Murison next cites a passage from Barbour’s Brus to illustrate the earliest form of written Scots: appropriately, the passage refers to the Herschip of Buchan (see p. 6), and contains several local place-names in fourteenth-century orthography: Bouchane (Buchan), Strabogy (Strathbogie), Enverrowry (Inverurie), Ald Meldrom (Oldmeldrum). Barbour’s language, he notes, as yet shows no sign of any distinctive North-Eastern phonological developments (although as there is no evidence that Barbour actually came from the North-East this does not amount to proof that there were none); but in the fifteenth century orthographic evidence can be found for such local characteristics as the emergence of [i] in words with French [y] and OE [œ] (seen, reef, sheen, bleak; breet, peer, eese), the raising of [e] from OE [æ] to [ɪ] before [n] (steen, been, leen), and the de-labialisation of [xw] (in SSE and other dialects of modern Scots [w]) to [f] (“By fu, far fat and fan, Ye can ken a Forfar man” — and
also futrät (< white + rat, weasel), furl (whirl), fummle (capsize, overturn: whummle in other dialects), fye (whey), fang (large slice of e.g. bread; whang in other dialects). Other characteristics, of which it is not possible to date the emergence by reference to the orthography of early texts, are the retention of [kn] (knock, knife, knee, knowe) and the change from [w] to [v] in initial [wr] (vricht, vrang, vrotch, vreet, vran) and in the reflex of OE [aw] (snyaave, blyaave, tyvaave).

Murison defines the land boundary of North-East speech as “a line drawn from beyond Nairn to Monifieth”, and calls attention to regional and occupational (farming and fishing) dialects within the area. Other distinguishing features are:

1. The emergence of [ai] in some words with a variety of original vowels (wyme, swyte, syven, quine, gryte, wyke; and uniquely to the fisher dialects leig, eigg, bryd “broad” corresponding to Gen.Sc braid) and of [ju] in words with [ju] in other dialects and in SSE (byowty, dyowty; besides Murison’s two French-derived examples this change is also observable in native words such as fyow, enyow);

2. Palatalisation of initial consonants: gyang (go: Gen.Sc gang), byeuk (book, baked), fyauchie (pale fawn or yellowish), cyarn (cairn), lyech (laughed), myaave (mew, i.e. seagull).

Some grammatical features are also cited:

1. The absence of a number distinction in the demonstratives this and that;
2. The use of on with the present or past participle: Murison extends Dieth’s detailed account of this by citing some illustrations of its use in fifteenth and sixteenth century texts;
3. The ubiquitous diminutive suffix –ie.

This short but wide-ranging study also includes a selection of local proverbs and sayings, e.g.

Fat’s the eese o an umbrella fan your sheen lats in?
That’s weel awa, as the man said fan his wife swallowed her tongue.
There’s naethin in him but fat the speen pits in and the been kame rugs out.
Lang may your lum reek — wi ither folk’s coal.
Pit canna in your pouch and try.

— and a list of expressive words in use until within living memory in the area.
Murison concludes by warning that the language, like other aspects of the local cultural heritage, is endangered through both neglect and wilful destruction. He would have been somewhat heartened, though assuredly far from satisfied, by the attempts that have been made in the intervening years to halt the erosion.

Summary

Of the many phonological features characterising North-Eastern dialect speech, some are restricted to a small part of the area (e.g. the loss of post-vocalic r and replacement of v by w cited by Gregor, found only in upper Banffshire); some appear to be diaphonic rather than systemic (e.g. the realisations of /u/ in various contexts examined by Mutschmann and Dieth and the characteristically high realisation of final -y or -ie); others still, though geographically widespread, are exemplified in only one or two words (e.g. want pronounced wint). The features which are general to the entire area, represent structural rather than surface features of the sound system, and have been consistently observed and listed since the eighteenth century as distinguishing North-East dialect from other forms of Scots, can be listed as follows.

1. [i] as the normal reflex of MSc [ø], irrespective of lengthening or shortening factors: [min, spin, sir, pir].
2. [ju] as the reflex of this before a velar plosive: [bjuk, hjux]
3. Development of a labial on-glide between a velar plosive and original [œ]: [gwid, skwil].
4. Raising of the reflex of MSc [a] to [i] before [n]: [bin, stin].
5. [æ] instead of [æ] as the reflex of MSc [au] and [al]: [sæ, fæ].
6. [æ] arising from lexeme-specific diphthongisation of a variety of MSc vowels: [ʃi:t, ʃwaɪt, ʃˈəɪn, ʃˈəɪndəɪ, ɾəɪn, ɡˈəɪt, kwəɪt].
7. Diphthongisation of [ju], from whatever source, to [jəu]: [ʃəu, bʃəu].
8. Retention of the initial consonant clusters [kn] and [gn]: [knɪ, ɡnˈəɪv].
9. Emergence of [v] to replace original [w] in initial [wr]: [vˈrəŋ, vˈrɪxt].
10. Development of original [aw] to [əv]: [snˈəʊv, ˈʃəʊv].
11. Replacement of medial [ð] by [d]: [mˈdɪr, hˈɛdɪr].
12. Simplification of the sequence [xt] to [θ]: [mˈθə, dɜθˈθə].
13. Development of original [xw] to [f], either throughout its range or in a grammatically-determined selection of words: [ˈfɛɪt].
14. Metathesis of certain consonant clusters: [ˈwɜrd, ˈfɪd].

All these are exemplified in some or all of the texts in the following sections.
Notes


4. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 1872; republished as a book by Asher & Co. the following year.


7. *Bonner Studien zur englischen Philologie* 1, Bonn (Hanstein) 1909.

8. In his table (not reproduced here), Mutschman uses *mid* to contrast with *back* and *front*, and *mixed* to contrast with *high* and *low*. This is probably an error, since Sweet uses *mixed* as a term on the horizontal axis and *mid* on the vertical; and in his enumeration and discussions of the individual items Mutschmann follows Sweet’s usage.


10. Cambridge (Heffer & Sons Ltd.).

11. I follow Dieth’s practice of printing the symbols in bold type. To avoid pre-empting the conclusions to which my examination will lead, I do not at this stage use the contrasting notation [ ] and //.

12. Including /w/ in the MSc sequence /xw/ which in this dialect has since become /l/; hence [fax], [fan], [faxi] and similar words.

13. Dieth demonstrates this by his discussion of the vowel in the main section of his book, where the historical origins of each of the vowels are traced in minute detail.

Examples of recorded speech

This section contains transcripts of spontaneous speech by a number of North-Eastern speakers. The orthography used varies, since absolute consistency is not to be found either in Doric or in SSE speakers, between the standard, the established conventions of writing in the dialect, and nonce (but self-explanatory) forms representing accidental or idiosyncratic pronunciations. One of the most vexed issues in current debates on Scots orthography is that of how to represent the sound [u]: though the present writer favours ⟨ou⟩ for literary texts, to avoid ambiguity the spelling used throughout the present section will be the anglicism ⟨oo⟩.

1. Text 1. Part of a recorded talk by Peter Buchan

Peter Buchan, besides his reputation as a poet and short story writer, was an excellent public speaker, with a fund of anecdotes of fishing life and reflections on the changing social world. His native speech was a topic on which (like many in the North-East) he held strong views. This extract is from a tape which he made for the present writer in the mid-1970s, in which a selection of his poems is interspersed with reflective monologues.

The North-East Doric, or the Buchan Doric, it’s an aal, aal tongue, bit — ah’m sorry tae say that it’s deein. It’s nae jist deid yit, bit it’s nae in a very healthy state. The words an the phrases at I use ivery day, they’re a foreign language tae the younger folk. There’s files at they jist dinna ken fit ah’m sayin. Bit ah’m jist usin the tongue that ah wis brocht up wi. But nooadays, ye see the young folk, they’re listenin tae TV , and eh — aa the Americanisms and the — ither-isms, an it’s aa English, English, English aa the time at’s Pumpit intae your hous, an your ain mither tongue at’s left getherin stew in a corner. An fin ey want tae use their ain mither tongue they canna dee’t. Nou there’s a lot o reasons for this, nae jist the
TV an the wireless. The biggest culprit here wis the schools. Cause for a lang, lang time the schools wis jist death on ye usin Scotch. They wouldna listen til a word o Scotch, ye hid tae speak English. Didna maitter if you could express yoursel perfectly in your ain tongue, ye daarna use’t, ye hid tae speak English. Nou — English is aa richt in its place, bit in this pairt o the world it’s nae necessary. It’s jist nae nott ava. We can manage fine athoot it. An folk that speak English in this pairt o the world, they’re fit we caa “talking”. Nou “talking” is a word at’s nivver used in the Buchan Doric. Ye’re “spikkin” or ye’re “newsin”. Bit if ye’re “talking” ye’re usin posh English words an phrases. An maist o the folk jist think, well nou iss is a lad tryin tae impress ye. He thinks he’s a wee bittie better, ye see, than the common run o folk. So he “talks”. An mair than — huh — mair than often he’s jist makin a feel o himsel. Bit as I said the schools wis largely responsible for the death or the weak state, the unhealthy state o the Buchan tongue. An nou they’re tryin tae revive the — Scotch, the aal Scotch words, they’re tryin tae revive them, bit they’ve left it a wee bittie ower late I think. Nou a lot o folk writes poems, an they write prose, supposed tae be Scotch, but it seems tae me that they maun ging tae aal libraries or museums or some ither places an howk for words at’s been oot o use for generations. Words at’s been deid for hunners o years. An they pit this intae their poems an their prose, an they think at this is Scotch. Nou wasn’t be an aafa lot better for aabody if they wid jist try tae keep livin the thing that is livin instead o tryin tae resurrect the thing at’s been deid for donkey’s years. But this is the wye at they ging aboot things. If it’s aal, twa-three hunner year aal, well it’s richt. Well I dinna think at at’s richt ava. They should try tae keep alive the thing that is alive. But that disna ging doun ower weel in some quarters. Ye’re nae supposed tae dee this kinna thing. Now the BBC in their Scotch programmes — you’ll hear aboot Wee Willie Winkie rins [rinz] throu the toun. Nou that’s the kind o thing at gars my bleed bile. I nivver heard at word in Scotland and I’ve been aa ower Scotland. Wee Willie Winkie rins [rënz] throu the toun. He disna rin [rin] throu the toun. Ah’m sure if ye gaed up the Back o Bennachie an said “I’m now in the country where the Gaadie rins [rën]”, they wid laach at ye. Fit wye div they nae stick tae the genuine article, instead o makin it an artificial kinna thing the same as they war ashamed o’t. At’ll get em nae wye.

Notes

10-11. The TV an the wireless: those terms sounded decidedly old-fashioned when this recording was made.
18. *Talking*: conspicuously pronounced with a final [ŋ].

27-31. The view expressed here is very common, and not restricted to the North-East. Writers such as Buchan who use a strongly-emphasised regional dialect enjoy a far higher level of popular interest and appreciation than poets of the “Lallans” school whose literary language contains rare or obsolete words.

39. The universal familiarity of the first four lines of this poem (in Anglicised language) causes many people, even in Scotland, to react with surprise on learning that it is part of a five-stanza bairnsang in excellent vernacular Scots, by William Miller (1810-72). The point which Buchan makes here is impossible to convey in ordinary orthography: he pronounces *rins* with the raised and fronted [i] of middle-class SSE, and then with the much lower vowel, phonetically [ɛ], of the Doric. Again, Buchan’s observation is pointedly appropriate: in radio and television programmes involving the use of Scots, such as poetry readings or dramatisations of classic novels, actors were often guilty of using their normal SSE (or even ESE) accents to deliver Scots passages. It may be said, however, that greater care has generally been taken in the last few years than in the period up to, and extending beyond, the date of this recording.

43-4. A reference to a song by John Imlah (1799-1846), one of the most accomplished of the minor poets of the nineteenth century.

In this and subsequent passages in phonetic transcription, length marks are used only when a vowel is protracted for what appears to be a stylistic purpose, to add emphasis to a word; or when a vowel is unpredictably long (e.g. *deid* [did]). They are not written for vowels that are long by position (before voiced fricatives or inflectional [d]), or in stressed open syllables. The quality of vowels in unstressed syllables of course varies, particularly with the variations in pace expected in spontaneous speech. A full investigation of this, including instrumental analysis, is long overdue; but it is no part of the aim of the present book. The actual quality of vowels in unstressed syllables, the extent to which the range of distinctions is preserved, the degree to which the range and quality of vowels in unstressed syllables forms a regional and social differentia, are important questions to which the current state of research provides no answers; and in the transcriptions included here vowels in unstressed syllables are simply transcribed on a nonce basis.
1. The speaker’s pronunciation of *now* “now” varies, seemingly at random, between a monophthongal [nəu], a slightly diphthongised [nəu], and a form identical to SSE [nəu]. [u] is a back rounded vowel, not the centralised and under-rounded variety common in Scots speech of central and southern areas.

2. *Dee’t* “do it” is [dit] with a short vowel, not (as might have been expected) [dit].
3. Here his pronunciation changes from [ŋlɪf] to [ŋlɪf].
4. This word is conspicuously pronounced not only with a final [ŋ] but with a vowel lower, more peripheral and more protracted than the speaker’s normal [ŋ].
5. This sentence is spoken in English. The initial fricative in [ʃær] indicates the speaker’s careful attempt to avoid the dialect form far.

2-6. Texts 2-6

This group consists of excerpts from a series of recorded interviews made in 1999 by Sheena Blackhall, and reproduced here with her kind permission. The speakers selected are regular users of the dialect and all are known for active efforts in writing, recording or broadcasting in it, or promoting its use in education. Excerpts are chosen to illustrate the interviewees’ experiences of and opinions about the local speech. Unfortunately the quality of the recorded sound was too poor to allow for the texts to be transcribed phonetically.

2. Text 2. Phyllis Goodall, schoolteacher and Doric poet

SB [e:::] — Fit year war ye born, Phyllis?
PG Nineteen-therty-sivin.
SB An place o birth?
PG Timberford, Glass, by Huntly.
5 SB [e:::] — War baith yir folk fae Huntly?
PG Aye, the’r baith fae Glass. [...] SB [e:::] — Fit aboot yir — [e:] — yir father’s backgroond: wis he Scots-speakin?
PG Oh aye, he wis Scots-speakin bit ah nivir kint him — ah met him wance fin ah wis aboot — forty.
SB Aye, aye. An fit aboot yir mam — wis she a Scots speaker?
PG Aye, she wis a Scots speaker. [...] Bit one [wən] o the formative people in ma childhood wis ma great granny. She’d been born in eighteen-fifty-six, an she’d gaen tae the school [skul] in the — winter time fin she wisna nott tae herd the cattle. [SB: Aye —] An she took a peat wi ’er tae iss dame school. So she spoke — she spoke very fluent Doric, an she’d hae been a very intelligent old body [bɔdi] she wis — eighty fin ah wis born an died fin she wis ninety. So my — sorta — language-learnin years war spent...
in her company.

SB Aye, aye. Did she bide in the hame wi ye, Phyllis?
PG Aye — aye, we bade in her hame.
SB Aye, an so — Fa wis actually in the family hame Scots-speakin?
PG There wis Great Granny, an Great-Uncle Charlie, an ma mam.

Great-Uncle Charlie couldn't fight … cause he got badly wounded in the First World War he'd a big chunk oot o an airm. [SB: Aye, aye —] Sae he wis the son at stayed at hame an workit the craft. A fairly quiet lad but they war aa Scots-speakers, there wis nae English-speakers. [SB: Uh-huh, uh-huh —]

Nae neebors war English-speakers either. Aye, sae it wis aa Scots-speakers …

SB [em:::] — Far did ye ging tae school first, Phyllis?
PG Well. Ah gaed tae school jist over the hill, a mile awa, it wis a little schoolie caad Beldorney [bɛldɔrni] which closed aboot the — och some time in the nineteen-fifties.

SB Fit aboot e teachers there — the teacher there did she speak —
PG Well, she spoke English [em] she wis a bonnie speaker. Bit she wid have understood Scots because her father — she wis a Mrs McBain she'd married a local — [ɛ:] — lad but she cam oot o a manse aboot Blackhall beside Banff — [SB: No nae Black—]

Blacklaw, her father wis the minister there, so she wid have been brought up maybe speakin English in the manse but certainly able tae speak Scots ootside.

SB [em] Is there ony — phrases or — [ɛ] that that ye can myn hearin in the hame that jist sticks oot?
PG [em] Well, ah myn “Weel ah wyte” — “Weel ah wyte” that wis een ma grunnie used a lot — ah canna myn a context at it wid get used in, ah think if she wis emphasisin a thing wis true. [SB: Aye — [ʃu ʃi] ] Ach there wid a been ither eens as well …

SB Ony rhymes at ye can myn on fin ye wis a bairn?
Pag Some o ’m were no affa repeatable! [Laughter] … Ah’d an Auntie Nelly — aye, a great-aunt actually — an — course the — the great-aunts wis — well — my great granny’d a family o fourteen, twelve survived intae adulthood — an the great-aunts ’d a been oot fee’d fan ey war quines afore they war married an Auntie Nelly’d been fee’d aboot Ythanwells an she’d this poem but it’s nae repeatable, but ah’ll repeat it: “There wis an aal wife o Bogfowten [bɒɡˈʃautn] ye ken, at dichtit her dowp wi a docken ye ken, the docken wis thin, her finger [fɪŋə] gaed in, an that’s
the aal wife o Bogfowten ye ken." [Laughter] ... Ye recited it aboot onybody ye didna like! Bogfowten wid be a fairm ...

Auntie Nelly wis quite a character ...

SB Did ye get ony Scots at school?

PG No. In the primary school it wid ha been very very discouraged.

But in the secondary —

SB Far did ye ging for secondary?

PG Well, I went tae Gordon Primary in Huntly for a year an then Uncle Charlie married very late in life tae a widow. And mam went in tae find work as housekeeper fir a — a sheep dealer a stockmaster or a thingie an I gaed tae Keith Grammar School.

And — yes there wis a — a — och, fit did ye caa’t competition — a Burns but it wisna caa’d that — vernacular — no, it wis caa’d something else but — every year I won the prize, we were encouraged tae write Scots poetry for that but — only tae write it, we still didnae get tae speak it.

SB Speak it — na. But at Keith ye’d hae heard a lot o Scots.

PG Oh, aye. [SB: Aabody.] An the old lad mam — Mr Bremner at mam kept hous til, he wis very much a Scots speaker. He wis ... sixty-nine an he must ha been born aboot eighteen-eighty an he haed — haed very little to do wi school. Cause his father wis a gamekeeper in Grange an he jist couldna — [Laughter]

SB Fit did he dee fin yer mam wis workin fur him?

PG [em] He bought an selt sheep. [SB: Aye, aye. Aye, aye.] Pastured them in various places. An I eesed tae ging in the Easter holi-
days an help him tae shift them tae the neep parks that he rent-
ed. He wis quite a figure in the sheep warld. He wid hae — bought sheep intendin tae mak seer the fairmers didna hae access til them. He often keepit them. Often — [e] — He’d’a’ been quite an expert on sheep. Bocht sheep fae folk at widna regularly — Got the richts at a pasture an brocht them aa in.

But only sixty — I mean he wis sixty-nine fin we first knew him, so he wis no spring chicken.

Notes

16. Dame school: popular name for a parish school in the charge of a (usually elderly and unmarried) woman. Each child brought a peat every day for the classroom fire: a child who failed to do so was punished by being made to sit in a cold corner of the room.
46. *Weel ah wyte:* *wyte* is the dialect form of *wat*, same as English *wot*.

55. *Fee’d:* taken on as hired workers.

70. *Thingie:* This expression, used when the speaker does not know or has momentarily forgotten a word, is ubiquitous in North-East speech.

81. Could not have afforded to send his son for full-time primary and secondary education.


Fan I wis born? Nineteen-thirty-nine, the year the war [war] stertit. Aaand — I bade in Charlotte Street in Aiberdeen aa my life. Still bide in the same hous I wis born in. An I went tae Bradford’s, an I worked there as a trainee accounts clerk. Really enjoyed myself in Germany, it wis a super place, very cold in the winter, but fine folk, we had a great time ... I went tae Yorkshire again, tae a place caad Beverley which is a super place. An then I went doun tae Norfolk an I didna like it sae much, an then there was an aafa accident wi a bullet [bflt] baa an I hung aboot for six months deein nothin an then somebody said “Wid ye nae [like tae ging] hame?” an I said “Aye” [aː] “Far wid ye like tae ging?” I said Kinloss. So bein the Air Force I ended up in Northern Ireland [Laughter] — I couldna get hame at aa. But I loved that.

Northern Ireland wis jist marvellous. Great folk an a great place an I loved Coleraine. Aa the wifies hingen oot their haaf doors spikkin tae aabody, it’s really great, it’s a great — atmosphere in Northern Ireland, they’re [ɔx] really good folk. … This friend o mine bade there, ye see, this lad wis standin an he said “Hey there, James, what are you doin?” He said “I’m just waitin for a bus.” He said “I thought it was half an hour.” He said “Och — half an hour’ll not be ten minutes passin.” And that’s the — kind o folk there were, they were really nice folk. […] It wis — the funny thing was, I wis never — Although I knew Charles Murray cause at Skene Square every year ye learned *The Whistle.* [SB: Did ye?] Aye, everybody learned *The Whistle.* It wis like ballads ye see. It’s a right — People say “Oh fin ye wint tae school ye did aat in school.” An I’ll tell ye a curious thing. You’ll find this yoursel if ye go down tae spik tae groups ye gets: “Oh well, of course, at school, we were- na allowed tae spik Scots — cha-cha-cha — usual excuses — oh — ye got hit — nae good enough.” But they aa learned Scots poetry cause if you start sayin “Well div ye ken iss een?” ye see — “He cut a sappy suck-...
er [sukə] fae the muckle rodden tree —” — “Oh, we got aat at the school.” See? ’S the first thing ye get. “Ach, the burn wis big wi spate — An there cam tummlin doon — Tapsalteerie —” [sung] — “Oh aye, we myn that song, we learned that song at the school.” An it then becomes obvious that Scots wis OK as a literary language. Bit it hidna tae be spoken. Ye see, there wis a slight difference. Once it was printed on paper, an it was Doctor David Rorie, Charles Murray, railway engineer, at’s quite respectable. So the language became respectable as lang’s it wis in a book. See fit ah mean ere wis iss curious — sorta — idea they’ve got that Scots somehow — I mean I — maybe I’ve telt ye iss afore, I dinna ken the answer tae iss problem. I wis eence asked tae judge poetry competitions, canna myn far for bit the teacher involved taught them aa, ye see, Charles Murray. Frightfully nice about it. And I thocht tae mysel “Och, fit have ye deen wi at?” Nae the bairns’ faut. The teacher his made the effort. It’s a bit like me tryin tae recite Rimbaud — aye, nae Rimbaud at’s jumpin throu windows an the like […] in France, an it wid sound as strange tae them.

Notes

22. *The Whistle* is Charles Murray’s most famous poem. In the printed text the spelling *whistle* is used throughout and the speaker here pronounces the word with the SSE [wis], but when the poem is recited it is often given the local pronunciation [fəs].

29-30. First line of *The Whistle*.

31-32. From *The Muckle Spate*, by a local (but not Doric-writing) poet David Rorie whose experiences as a country doctor provide material for his lively and humorous verses.

42. *Frightfully nice*: an expression deliberately used as a stereotype of Anglicised speech, suggesting a glaringly inappropriate treatment of the Murray poem on the teacher’s part.


Ah wis born the therteenth April nineteen therty six, born in Dunecht. Father wis a soutar, eh — ma mother’s dad wis a jyner. She belonged tae Fyvie, aa her folks. […] My mother’s side are aa buried in Fyvie. Ma father — I canna trace his history aa that far back, a lot o folk can claim that ah’m relatit tae Shepherds fae up aboot Cushnie somewye. […] An my father wis a soutar, ah presume he’s — We’re aa a big family, an lost a couple o brither in the War. And — ehm — ither brither emigrated tae Canada [kənədi], in that time of course there wis nae wark. He — ah
myn him tellin me that he broke an ankle jumpin a dyke fin he wis in his
teens I suppose. Eh — he wisna — wisna supposed tae be fit I suppose
eh for fairm work. So he apprenticed till an aal curlin at Dunecht, at the
soutar’s at Dunecht. An he wis a soutar aa his life. Died reasonably early
because o lung cancer. But that wis caused by soutar’s — soutar’s stew as
well as his smokin. Bit he wis a jack o all [url] trades, ma dad, ah’d an
aafa likin for him, he wis — ehm — fit wis he noo he wis postie, ah
mean his day startit God knows fit time, he postied fae the early oors, he
went til his shop — eh — an his shop wis the focal point, for there wis
nae community cooncils in that day for the community tae hiv a centre,
and his wis the focal point, an if he wis in the middle o his work in the
efternoon, an they war een short — this is the aal mannies, sittin at his
muckle fire wi the roset hotterin there — if they war een short for a
game o whist, “Soutar, ye’ll jist play!” So soutar, he’d tae neglect aa his
duties an play till they gaed awa hame at tea time so he’s back at nicht.

I’m nae aat conscious o getting an aafa lot o Scots. I’m mair — wan
25 o the things at I myn maist o aa, as I presume aa primary schools, is
Pilgrim’s Progress. Yes, we got oot Pilgrim’s Progress an the teacher read it
aa ower, an all the journey richt up there tae the pearly gates an beyond,
[... ] I myn that one well. But I div myn her teachin us a Charles Murray
an — eh — a Robbie Burns. But that hid been the stretch o’t. The
30 Whistle [sisl] or somethin like that, maybe. Bit I wisna conscience —
conscious o gien’t ony genuine effort til speak Scots, an I wisna con-
scious o ony Scots bein spoken in the class.

It wis at Gordon’s College that put me on the road tae bein the nat-
ural — eh — Doric kinna craitur I am now. Because I wis aboot wan
month in there fin we’d tae read a bit oot about Cecil [sisl] Rhodes
buildin the railway in Rhodesia, an we aa gaed roon the class readin a
bit each. And it come tae me, an the teacher said “Now you, Shepherd”.
So I said [sisl] Rhodes, ye see, an the class startit titterin. Couldna
40 understand it, the teacher thumpit the desk an says “[sisl], my dear
boy!” Well, we’d a butcher at Dunecht ca’d [sisl], an I coudna see fit the
hell wye he’d become [sisl] in the twel mile fae Dunecht tae here.

Notes

13. Soutar’s stew: “cobbler’s dust”, the accumulation of fragments of leather and rosin in a
soutar’s workplace.

15. Postie: i.e. postman.
5. Text 5: Alistair Taylor, author and editor

I can remember all the characters, all the characters we were surrounded wi war Scots speakers. I can remember years afterwards, talkin aboot this to a colleague an — it was a party in Aberdeen and this was a colleague’s wife. An we war speakin aboot dialect an language an Scots, an folk speakin Scots an so on. And she said to me: “But you’re not speaking Scots at the moment.” And I said, “Oh but fin I ging hame tae Torphins an if I meet so-an-so in the street, I’ll be speakin Scots.” “Oh,” she said, “that is hypocrisy, absolute hyp- linguistic hypocrisy.” An we argued aboot this, ye see. I still think she’s wrong. And this, if you like, is code switching. But I didna realise fit it wis. Now — it never wis a con- scious thing, ye dinna dee this consciously, it aa depends fa ye meet. An it's nae a case o “I’ll be patronising, I’ll speak doon tae him, or up tae him”: ye're nae jist speakin at them, ye're speakin with them. An she thought this was wrong — well this is linguistic awareness, I think. An it mebbe wis — ach, ye know, it happens. Ye do change. The only trouble is, I dinna think I change the lexis, the language, the vocabulary very much. I’m nae sayin that I always — I’ll switch vocabularies. I dinna think that happens. It jist means that the occasional, the antrin — I dinna ken if I wid use the word antrin even, ye see, but the occasional, the occasional Scots word wid jist creep in naturally. But I wouldna make a sudden complete switch and say aathing at's English comes as Scots. It’s nae like that, it’s nae like that, it’s nae like sittin doon an writ- ing it. In which case you’d make a much more — you know if you were writing, sitting down to write something in Scots, it’ll be much more Scots than if you were saying I’m now goin tae speak in Scots, naturally. I’m nae makin that very clear. But if I’m speakin tae folk up in William Street, I’m mair or less speakin as I’m speakin at the moment, an it’s nae an affa lot o Scots words at’s in’t at aa, maybe jist a wee bit of a pronunciation, I dinna ken, an odd word here or there.

6. Text 6: David Ogston, poet and Church of Scotland minister

DO: I wis brocht up in a craft, eicht [ext] mile north o Ellon, twa mile oot o Auchnagatt, mebbe five mile fae New Deer, mebbe anither five fae Maud [mud]. An aa that kinno a network o places maitters, because we jist kinna felt that we were in the centre o a wee circle o villages that we aa used bit fur different
things. Ma father hid this wee placie, it wis aboot fifty acre, an he'd actually been born in the hoose, Sooth Kidshill [kədʃɪl].

SB: Your mither an father, did they baith spik Scots?
DO: Aye they did. Ye see, they had nae parental attitudes til it, cause it wis their tongue. Fit they micht ha' hid an attitude til wis a non-Scots intrusion. Bit Scots, it wis ... it wis like breathin.

SB: Could ye clarify a non-Scots intrusion? At's eh — fin the minister maybe or the teacher or somedy came in ... DO: If somebody wis in, Sheena, that they kint, bit they were mebbe bein official an therefore mebbe falsified themsels, an started, as we wid say in the derogatory wye we hid, if they startit comin the pan loaf. That wis, that wis intrusion. Dominies war expec-tit tae be English speakers, ministers, bit the kinna chiel I’m speakin aboot, mibbe the elder, if he wis, ye know, Jock Tamson aa the rest o the time, bit fin he came in in his suit an he startit bein jist a wee bittie stilted, that registered, an it wis never com-mented on, bit there wis an atmosphere aboot it.

SB: Your education, your early schoolin, David: wis Scots encour-aged there or suppressed?
DO: It wid be wrang tae say either. 'Twid be wrang tae say it wis encouraged, except it wis later on bit I'll come back tae that. It certainly wisna suppressed, bit there seemed tae be an unspoken assumption that in the confines o the room we war in a differ-ent universe o discourse fae the play green. However, I wis gaan tae say, when we got a dominie efter haein a lady head teacher, he began bein pro-active, an he started us on tae eh copyin doon Charles Murray poems, an the famous *Puddock*, an *Foo far is't tae Kirkcaldy*, which I can niver myn noo. "Ye ken by the smell it's Kirkcaldy", that poem. Hugh Milne definitely had an attitude that it wisna enough tae lat's jabber awa in the play green, he wis introducin us tae the written experience o the lan-guage that we took for grantit.

SB: Foo aal war ye fin ye war gettin that?
DO: Well, I wis at Clochcan [kloʊʃkən] School fae nineteen-fifty tae fifty-six, an I left fin I wis eleven [ɪljɪvən], so that wis up til the age o eleyven [ɪljɪvən].

SB: Did your mother or father hae ony sayins ye can myn aboot?
DO: I think my father's sayins are hauntin me noo. Well, he wis aye affa keen on comin ower fit his ain father eesed tae say. An he wid come awa wi things like "Aye, as aal Davie Ogston wid 'a'
said, fairmin’s jist washinˈ [waʃɪn] ae han wi the tither.” An I could nivver understan fit on earth he mint. Then ither sayins he hid, Sheena, an as ye got aaler, they made your teeth, eh, you know, made your teeth grate. “Gin we’re spared”, at wis a famous een. “Gin we’re spared.” An, ye know, eence ye war aaler a bit, ye think, well, bit fit’s gaan tae happen that we winna be spared, ye ken? Bit there wis this tremendous Scottish respect for eventuality, chance, happenin, fate, destiny, doom, aa this kinna pessimistic things. Fit else did ma father an mither eese tae say. Ma father eesed tae say a lot, aye, he wid pech a bit an he wid say aah, ah the gweed aal days. An I think at wis jist him bein nostalgic. […]

SB: Dae ye myn on ony Scots sayins at your mither hid aboot the hoose?

DO: Ehm — That’s nae sae easy. Eh — she hid distinctive expres-sions aroon the hoose, bit nae sayins risin tae the dignity o bein proverbs. […] My grannie mebbe wis mair inclined tae come ower certain phrases time an again. Fin me an my sister fell oot it wis aye the same, “Gree, bairnies, gree.” She wid use words like hippens for nappies, wyvin for knittin, Shank for wool. Bit as for sayins, ye’ve kinna come at me ower seen.

Notes

Ogston’s speech throughout shows a striking tendency to combine a consistent dialect phonology with the vocabulary and idiom characteristic of a learned register in English.

17. Pan loaf: a traditional expression for affected or anglicised speech.

19: Jock Tamson: The expression “Jock Tamson’s bairns” means “common humanity”. The name is used here simply to suggest a familiar acquaintance.

32: The Puddock is a popular poem by J.M. Caie. The other poem mentioned is The Boy in the Train by M.C. Smith, which ends “For I ken mysell by the queer-like smell / That the next stop’s Kirkcaddy”. (In the Fife town of Kirkcaldy, the odour from a linoleum factory permeates the atmosphere to this day.)

53: One is tempted to regret that this list does not include the Scots word weird

65. Shank usually means a woollen stocking or the action of knitting one.
7-10. Texts 7-10

Recorded conversations between the writer and some local speakers. The writer's words are given in italics and are not included in the passages of phonetic transcription. Personal names are changed for anonymity.

7. Text 7

The informant here is male, aged about 60, and a consistent Doric speaker.

_right — OK.
we're cookin.
aye, we're cookin. far were ye born?
I wis born — in Ballater. But fin I wis three year aal, I shifted doon
tae Dinnet, far ma faither took ower a fairm. [aye?] And we war there
until nineteen — [e] — nineteen — oh me — fifty-four.

_Fifty-four._

Fifty-four, when I — fan I cam oot o the services but I wis on on the
fairm until nineteen forty-eight. An then I wint intae the services. An I
cam oot in — fifty-wan — an I didna gae back tae fairmin I didna it
wisna my — wisna my cup o tea I gaed awa tae public works. I worked
at public works. Right up until nineteen — sixty. And as far as spikkin
the Doric, it wis spoken at school, an it wis spoken at hame. Aa the time.

_Did aabody spik it at the school?

Yes.

_yir teachers an aa?

Cause that wis — [e] — I startit at Dinnet School — that wis a —
infant school — Mrs McWilliams wis the teacher, an she wis a local, so
quite a bit o the speech in the school wis Doric. An then went tae
coldstone School, there wisna sae much in the classroom there, but in
the playground, aye. Aabody spoke it in the playground cause they war
aa fairmin. Aabody wis fairmin mair or less, it wis a fairmin area, at wis
Logie Coldstane school. An I cam intae Aiberdeen fir good — fir first
time I cam intae Aiberdeen wis fifty-five — but at wis only for a short
time, an I eventually cam back intae Aiberdeen fifty-nine. For good. An I
wis workin wi Tawse, the contractors. An then left them, an went tae
buses. An I finished my — workin life there on the buses. As for differ-
ences, definitely changed, because half the folk in Aiberdeen widna 'a
understood fit I wis sayin.
Nae even in Aiberdeen?
No. I mean a lot o the — well, especially the management side o the buses widna ’a understood the braid — the broad Doric.
The ither drivers?
Some o the drivers aye, but some o them no. Oh no, I hid an
Englishman as a driver for a while —
Och dear aye!
An I mean he wis totally lost! I mean if we war aa speakin in the canteen in wir local, as we — as we normally did, he wis jist totally lost, he’d jist nae idea. So— right enough, it — the Doric disappeared. An ye wint intae — fit wid ye caa’t? Scottish English? It’s nae Queen’s English, but its — it’s smoothed oot. Isn’t it?
It’s nae the real Doric.
No. It’s smoothed oot. An — definitely my ain speech is changed.
Because I mean at hame, it wis the Doric, now it’s — mair refined, ye
5

Aye they hiv.
Oot o Union street, George Street. ’S gone. Concrete jungle. ’S concrete.
It’s nae the toon I kent fin I cam intil’t. I mean even — aye, tae ging intae the toon — is totally different. I mean the roads ’iv aa changed. Ye ging intae the toon — ye ging in a different wye noo. I mean you gae doon Berryden, an doon towards Woolmanhill, ye canna get intae the toon.

Cause if you ging back the wye ye used tae ging in, ye finish up at the station. Tae get intae the toon ye’ve got tae gae up the back o the library an cut back. So it’s totally changed. Fit ither changes hiv I seen — transport, mair cars, less buses, [e] — nae bicycles, less folk usin bikes — mair cars, definitely. An the Doric disappearin —oh, it is disappearin, in fact I wid say it’s disappeared. Because hoo mony schools teach it. Na, very few.

Could ye gae back an speak it yoursel?
I think I could, aye. Well, as Janet says, fin Harry comes in, next door, an him an me get crackin, it’s aa — ye jist drift back intil’t.

Real broad — braid Doric?
It’s — aye. Oh, aye. Ye could — I mean, Janet even says hersel, sometimes she disna understand fit we’re spikkin aboot.

I’m sure she’s exaggeratin, though.
Oh no! I mean she wis born an brought up in Aiberdeen. Mean she canna spik Doric. She canna — she wouldna understand if I wint intae
— as Harry an me sometimes dee, the right Doric. She disna understand it. Because she wisnae used til’t. An it is disappearin.

*Ach, aye, 's a pity.*

**Doric: the dialect of North-East Scotland**
Examples of recorded speech

baiskalz les fok juzm baikz mer kurz defn?li in d?i d?rik dispirirm o tiz dispir?n
n?k?k ae w?d se ??s disspirt bikis h? m?ni skuls tit? it na veri fju

ae th?k i kud wil iz — sez ?n — kanz m nikst dor an hm an mi git krakin
its a ji d?is dr?f bak mtlt

its ae o ae ji kud a min — ivn sez irsel samtaims ji d?z?anirstan fit wir
spikin abut

o no o no min ji wiz born an br?t ap m eb?dn min ?ik ji k?n spik d?rik ji
k?n ji wudna andirstand if ae w?nt mte iz — n mi samtaims di ?i r?it d?rik ji
dizna andirstand it bikcz ji w?zni juzt tilt in it iz dispirirm

8. Text 8

Wife of the previous informant, late fifties. Speaks with a strong local accent but does not regard herself as a Doric speaker: dialect phonology does, however, appear sporadically and not infrequently in her speech.

Well, I was actually born here in Aberdeen, in fact not very far from where we’re sittin at the moment. I was born at — in Hilton Terrace, twenty-five Hilton Terrace, where Mum and Dad had a flat, and actually, it was durin the War, and they’d to put steel — eh — barriers on the window eh while the — event was taking place. Ehm — I suppose I —

kinna — grew up speakin partially Doric, partially Aberdeen, because my Dad was more English spoken, but my mother was a lot broader.

Was your Dad fae Aberdeen?

No. No, my Dad was English, [Oh, he was English] his parents were English. Aye, my father was a trawl skipper. Ehm — but my mother was born in Aberdeen. But when we were very small, from a very early age, we went t’e country for quite a bit o the summer time, and eh the couple that we went to, a brother and sister, eh they farmed outside Alford, an — they were very broad, very broad speakers, real Doric. You know the real, the real Scots. An I suppose some of that maybe — you know, ’s rubbed off.

Aye, did ye pick it up fae them?

Aw — Well I would — I would — I would say so, I mean they spoke about unca bodies, and all sorts of words that I wasn’t really understandin then, but obviously I know whit they mean. An Sandy, my husband, he’s an awful lot broader than me. Very much so. I wid say I’ve got mair an Aberdeen accent eh which — I would have to say is nae jist the bonniest o accents in the world, but you’re jist what you are, that’s it, that’s it.
Ehm — I’ve always stayed in Aberdeen but I do think there is a big
difference between an Aberdeen-born speaker and somebody that’s been
born in the country and — you know, has the Doric. There’s quite a dif-
ference in the accent, and in the vocabulary, which — a lot o people
dinna understand nowadays. Definitely not. I think maybe eh — that
my — speech has changed, cause I’m inclined to have a mish-mash now,
havin lived with Sandy for the last thirty-eight years [Laughter], eh
because I think your ear becomes tuned to — you know, maybe a differ-
ent type of speech, and eh you become — it just becomes slightly differ-
ent. I mean I notice, I notice that, even with my sister, because she went
to stay in the Borders, an ’ere again, there’s a different, oh yes, a very dif-
f erent, a different accent there eh altogether. Whereas here I think we’re
just — maybe we’re dour kinna folk, we’ve just got a broader accent alto-
gether, fit’s maybe nae affa — attractive. Here in Aberdeen I think some
o the main changes I’ve seen, much to my chagrin ma aal school at the
Central, it’s now a lot a shops, and eh — Pneumonia Alley which we
used to freeze in [Pneumonia Alley?] Pneumonia Alley was part of the
Central School and eh you used to have to walk up and down it actually
changin classes, because it was a very old school, and eh a lot the classes
that you had ye hid to walk quite a bit, and it was a very, very, very, very
cold corridor I can tell you, it wis far we kept wir bikes, there war bike
racks, you know an a lot o the kids used to cycle to school bein prudent
cause my parents couldna afford the bus fares, cause well my sister an
myself were at the school together, and the bus fares are nae very dear
now but they were gey dear then, an well in them days it was only your
Dad at went out to work.

9. Text 9

Senior lecturer at Aberdeen University with a professional interest in the
dialect and its literature, age 57. Uses SSE regularly in daily life. Although SSE
is the medium for his normal social and professional conversations with the
writer (a friend and colleague of long standing), the ease and consistency
with which he resumed the dialect for the present interview is noteworthy.

You were born and brought up speaking the Doric, am I right?
That’s right, aye. In fact I didna speak — I didna really learn
Scottish English until I went to infant school. Cause I went to — well,
initially I went tae — it was a kindergarten in Commerce Street. And I
went to there but I canna remember anything really in the way o — in the wye o, ye know, learnin a different variety. In fact I canna really remember, to tell you the truth, I canna really remember learnin Scottish English cause I think it wisna aa that important in fact until you got up to later stages o the primary school.

You never remember getting the Doric battered out of you, at least instructed definitely do not say I'm nae comin say I'm not coming?

No, I canna say that I — I had one experience fin I was aboot nine or ten, oh it's a — I've recounted it afore, actually, I think it's pretty common, it's a pretty common kyna experience. I — I had been aff in the mornin and my mother, recognising malingering fin she saa it, sent me back to school, iss wis at Cornhill Primary, and I — of course I wis kinna walkin doon the corridors at a time I shouldna have been, and so I was stopped by Mr Skene, an eh — he said, oh he said what're ye doin here, and I said, well I've been nae weel, sir, an he took iss to be impu-

You've always been naturally bilingual?

Well, I canna have been that wye aa the time, because neen o the faimily spoke Scottish English really, I mean they were aa quite broad, and as I say until I wis — well until I wis four and a bit, we bade wi Grannie an Granda in Ruthrieston Circle, an baith Grannie an Granda but especially Granda wis very broad, he's very country. So I canna have picked up Scottish English cause naebody used it, apart frae listenin tae the radio mebbe or somethin lik aat. But naebody used it, I mean nae-body used it roon aboot either, none o the other bairns wid ha spoken it.

And nowadays, when do you resume the mither tongue?

Well, as I've said afore, if somebody else spiks it — one or two, there are one or two colleagues in fact in the institution that's eh — well — at least fin ye're nae teachin, ye know — if ye're jist socialisin wi somebody ye know ye might ging back intil't. So, I used to travel a lot on my student recruitment side wi a colleague Tom Barrie in what was then the Physics Department an we — Tom wis an Aiberdeen loun as weel, an we would jist drop naturally back intil't. My relatives as well — depended
on the context, depended on fit ye were spikkin aboot as well. But if it
wis family life, ye know, or things fae the past, things that were domes-
tic, ye know, folk ye kent, ye wid — ye would jist ging back intil’t. Cause
that wis the — it wis the natural kind o language for spikkin aboot these
things.

An in Aiberdeen the day, do you think the young people can speak
the Doric?
I certainly dinna think — I dinna get ony sense — as I listen to — ye
know if ye listen to school kids or eh — you’re spikkin aboot, particularly
aboot the toon, I think, rather than aboot the country. Thinkin aboot the
toon, I mean it’s very clear tae me, fitever they’re spikkin, in the ordinary schools roon
aboot, it’s nae Scottish English. It’s mibbe mair influenced by Scottish
English than it wid have been ten years ago, but it’s certainly nae Scottish
English. And I think it’s one of these asymptotic things, you know, I
dinna think I dinna think in fact we’re ivver gauna get tae Scottish
English for one reason or another. It depends fit ye think is characteristic
o the dialect as well, if ye think its — Ye see for me a lot o the time it’s
nae really sae much the word stock, its — that’s part o the haill business
as well but it’s its — mair — fin ye’re thinkin about the spoken language
it’s mair or maybe — as much or maybe mair eh — ye know, the
cadences, it’s the rhythms, it’s the stress patterns, it’s the tunes, you
know it’s the pitch changes, it’s aa that stuff I think apart frae the lexis is
characteristic o a dialect, an I canna see — I mean I can see that — I can
hear that — hear that, it’s nae seein it’s hearin a change, I can hear that
changin, but I dinna think really that it’s turned intae anything like

Do you think it’s a development of a distinctive Aiberdeen dialect, as
distinct fae the country Doric?
Certainly I can — Well, speakin as somebody at can really dee baith,
I wid say at there’s jist a difference in the rhythms an a difference in the
souns, if ye spik country it’s — I mean if ye spik lik aat, it’s nae ’s just nae
the same ye know. But it seems to me again, that a lot of that, it’s a mat-
ter o rhythms as much as onythin else, rhythms an sound patterns. I
mean I’m nae a technical linguist, so I dinna ken fit the full story is, but
ye can certainly tell, I think, that the toon accent — the toon speech,
really, it’s nae jist an accent — the toon speech is different fae the coun-
try, aye.
A wenti ti ćer ba? A kana rimembar epoća rili m tvi we m tvi wae a ji no lemin A dufint varaiće n fakt A kana rili rimembar ti tel ji tvi truf A kana rili rimembar lemin skoćif nifl kiz A thunj tì? wisna o da? mporućit ŋ fak? Ńtul ji ga? Ćp tu lećar stedćiz A tvi praimarì skul

Pm A kana se daž A ae had wan ikspirins fin A wiz abut nain ćar ten o tìs A AV riqanui te tfor akgáli A thunj tìs priti koman tìs A priti koman kaina ikspirins ae ae had bin af m tvi mjarin nì mma mjarh rekajnae兹 malinjarin fì ji sa t smt mi baki ti skul ñts wiz ñt? karojì praimarì m ae ñkors ae wiz kina wakun dun ñt kòridarz ñt? A taim A jùntu av bin am so A wiz stapt bae mistr — in e: hi sed o ć sed as? e ji dum hir Ň ae sed wel aevel bin ne wil sir m hi tuk is ti bi mppjumms m ôf fakt iz A jùntu A min tì? wizinj: džibarti e ñtyn tì A A džist hûna rili adjastid baki inti ñt skul ne si mali ñt skul ñtyn bit m ñt kòridarz ñt ñt skul kina wae o spikin fën ñt wae a spok it at hem ji si so ae wiz kmpiliti teken abak fin i tuk mi ašoj ti ñt ñt hidi in ae get belted bit daôs ñ onli traumatiat djënànt ñ onli kina traumatiat inßant A had ñ kekènì wì skots fì A wiz at e seržini fì A wiz ñt praimarì skul its ñt onli in lìn kana rimembar A min it wiz anpëblamatiat apart fraam ñat

Wel A kana hiv bin daž? wae a ñt taim bikiz nin t ñt femli spok skoćif nifl rili m min ñt wìr a kwàit brad m zaa se nìl A wiz wel nìl A wiz forùd ñt wi bed wi frank ñ granda in ràdørst nirkj in beô grani ñ granda bi? isepjì granda wiz verì brad iz verì kanti so A kana hiv pikt âp skoćif nifl kiz nebuli juzd it ñmın apart fre lìsmn ti di ñtred mmbi âr samhì li ñt ñt nebudi juzd it run abut aedir ñan t ñt ñmba beržt wìd A spokan it

Wel iz av sed afor if samdi ents spiks it in e wàn ćar tu ñtir ar wàn it tu koligz n fakt in ñt mstifùjì dëži s wel tàit fìn jir ne tifjì ji no ñir dës sofjalaezì wì samdi ji no Ći mali gën bak mtilt so ae just ti travì A lënì mua stjùntu rikufrùntt samd uì l kolig — — in e æt wiz ñen ñt fìzïks departmant m wi — wiz øn ebûrd m ñn wi wàd dës dròp nafjàrâli bak mtilt e m relijuz iz wel ñpendit òn ñt konkekt pendîn ñìji wìr spikin abut iz wel bit ñf it wiz femli laif ji no ø ñuzu fe ñt past ñuzu it wìr dëmsitik ji ño fûk ji kënt ji wìd ji wàd dës gië gën bak mtilt kiz ñat wiz ñt wiz ñt natôrì kmå fìl lajwàdz ñf spikin abut òiz ñuzu

A seržîlì ñma thunj A ñma grì? oni sens in L ñst u jìnañsa ñst u tu skul kadz ør e jur spikì abut ñt e prtekjôlari abut ñt tun A thunj reðir ñn ñt abut ñt kanti e thunjì abut ñt tun A min ñt veri kler ti mi fittuvi piplì se abut ñt daelekt ñt kler ti mi ñt fittuvi ñir spikin m ñt ñrdnari skulz ru n abut ñùs ne skoćif niflì ñs ñt e s mbi mer imflust bxe skoćif nifl ñt wìd A bën ten jirz zago bit ñs serjì ne skoćif niflì ân A thunj ñs wàn A ñiz ñsmpìstuk ñtûzji jì no A ñma thunj A ñma thunj m fàk wìr ævù gòni get ñ skoćif niflì för wàn rízì ør ñnàðùr ñt ñpènz ñt jì thunj iz karikàrstik A ñt daelekt iz wel if jì thunj ñs jì si fàr mi L ñs? A ñt taim tìs ne:
10. Text 10

A brother and sister, aged mid sixties, both resident in Aberdeen, from a working-class background. The female speaker uses notably fewer dialect forms than her brother.

So ye hid the Doric haimmered oot o ye, ye say, in your schooldays?
B: Yes, that’s right. We were told tae speak — eh — proper English. Whin ye were speakin tae e teacher, addressin e teacher, ye hid — she insistit it ye hid tae speak properly.

But the ither weans in the class: in the playground wi each ither?
B: In the playground wis totally different. S: Oh, in the playground ye — ye were speaking Ab— I mean it’s knocked out of ye really, it’s very difficult tae get back intae speakin Aiberdeen.

And nowadays, dae ye speak it wi your freins, relations, wi each ither?
S: Not a lot.

B: I do, I think I speak it mair than Effie dis. S: Mhm, I stay out in Culter, and I — No, I jist speak as I do now, jist English I suppose. Although I know all the words, I could speak it.

And do you think that folk are speakin it less now than in your childhood days?
S: I think so, because I did the list of words that ye gave to find out how many people — well, an eighty-two year aal neighbour knew sixteen of them, a slightly younger one knew twelve, my eleven-year-old grandson knew four, and anither — nineteen-year-old knew six, I think it was. So it jist seems that the younger that ye are, the less words that ye know.

And I mean David lived in Peterhead for a couple of years, and used to speak aboot goin doon the toon — he picked up a fair — and he also recites like Geordie Webster, which is good, because that's — but that's Westhill School. They're encouraging Scottish poetry.

B: Aye, I think it depends on the school, the area the school's in as well. Wi schools up in iss area, the children are inclined tae speak in the Doric, ye know, speak in at naturally, but if your school's oot in Westhill or Milltimber the children speak differently, they're more inclined tae speak Standard English.

Ye were tellin me about that wee lassie that her teacher wis tellin her no tae say “fit” ...

B: Aye, it's a wee lassie Sandra, she comes in here sometimes at nine, an her mother drops her off, her mother works so she drops her off here, her mother's kyn o single mother, so she drops her off here wi her grandparents next door, an she wis through here e day, an she says — I wis sayin somethin lik —I wis saying faa or fit or something, an she says 'My mum gets me intae trouble if I say faa or fit, I've got tae say where or when or what', she says 'an I forget a lot o the time, an my mum gets me intae trouble'. So here's a mother, ye know getting ontae her child, not tae speak in the natural language o the area.

S: It's still associated with being poor, being in lower class, if ye spoke in the Aberdeen dialect, an we never spoke the very — ye know — glottal stops an aa the rest o't, we never got intae that.

B: An various different areas in Aberdeen, ye get a different — ye get different ways o speakin it.

S: I came across this, I don't know if ye've ever seen it, I must have copied it down from somewhere, an it's about the word bucket an bucket. Now I've had that for a few years, I don't know where I copied it from, but it must have intrigued me at the time.

Tae me a bucket's a dustbin.

B: Well, to us when we were kids, it was a bucket [bʌkt]. An a backet wis full o ashes at the fire. An a bucket [bækɪt] wis something to pit water in an wash the windows or something.

So a bucket an a backet were two different things?

B: Two different things. Definitely.
An even though younger folk dinna ken aa the words, they still say “doon” an “hame” an things?

B: Oh yes, aye. They’re inclined tae speak Standard English, but these words creep in. And if they’re speakin tae somebody like me, at quite often speaks in the — sort o the natural dialect up here, they know everythin ye’re sayin. Mean if I went oot an spoke to your grandchildren oot at Milltimber, an speak the wye I’m spikkin now, they ken exactly fit I’m sayin. I mean little [li?] Helen, she’s — foo aal’s Helen, ten or something, she speaks beautiful Standard English wi a nice Scottish accent, bit she kens exactly fit ah’m sayin, her father — aye, she kens aa the wye fit her father says. I mean he speaks in the Doric —

S: Well he comes from Dumfries. I mean he hasna got the strong — but that’s where he was brought up, went tae school.

B: He’s been up here that long that he’s got the local dialect, quite good.

S: But I bet if ye were tae say till’m “Say something tae me as ye wid say it doon in Dumfries” we probably widna get the gist o it, ye know.

An your grandchildren, dae they speak the Doric?

S: No, no, I widna say — Some words, probably, like widna or dinna, ye know, the ordinary common words, but as a general rule, no. … I remember when David wis in eh — Peterhead, the school there — we were invited along at Christmas time, an whit [wut] a show they put on, and they did — everything wis in the broad Buchan speak, yeah, it wis really excellent. And they could say their poetry and — jist everything wis comin over in that, ye know, so I wis very impressed. But I remem-ber being at George Street School and getting a poem “Come in ahint, ye wanderin tyke, did ever body [badi] see your like”. Now that was — we must have got quite a lot of Scots poetry, I think.

B: I think fin I wis at the school, Burns wis pushed quite a lot in poetry, rather than, ye know, like Milne or some o the other poets. Burns wis — seemed tae be the — the [ði:] thing that ye hid tae learn.

Notes

7-9. She begins the word Aberdeen with the SSE pronunciation, but then says it in full with the local [ˌbɜrˈdɪn].

20. Both informants at the time of the interview were attending a course on the language and literature of the North-East given by the writer. The “list of words” (traditional dialect words) was an exercise set to find how many were still actively or passively known.

26. “Picked up a fair —” this would presumably have continued as “a fair number of Doric words” or something similar. Geordie Webster is a poem by J.C. Milne (see Poetry Text 12).
30. *Iss area*: Springfield, a modern suburb with a mainly working-class population. Westhill and Milltimber, formerly self-contained villages outside Aberdeen, are now mainly professional-class commuter settlements.

46-7. Glottal stops are in fact not conspicuous in traditional Doric, but have increased to a remarkable degree in the speech of young urban Aberdonians (see next text).

51. *Backet*: cf. David Murison’s essay discussed in the section on previous descriptions of the dialect.

71. Dumfries is in the extreme South-West. The dialect spoken in that area differs in many respects from Aberdeenshire Doric.

11. Text 11. Extracts from recorded interviews with schoolchildren.

These extracts are from one of a set of interviews with children of various ages at primary and secondary schools in Aberdeen and elsewhere in the North-East, conducted as part of a research project by Aberdeen University Ph.D. student Mari Imamura, and used with her kind permission. This interview was held at Torry Academy. Torry, formerly a self-contained fishing village, is now officially a suburb of Aberdeen; but the residents maintain a strong community spirit and sense of distinctive local identity. Present at the interview are the researcher (R), four children (three boys, one girl) in S2 (second year of secondary school, age 14) and a middle-aged woman who is a fluent mother-tongue Doric speaker (D): it was hoped that her presence and contribution to the interviews would encourage the children to produce replies in Doric. The children had previously been asked to write a short composition in their native tongue. The monosyllabicity of most of the children’s replies proved disappointing, but an unmistakeable observation is that though their knowledge of traditional Doric vocabulary is extremely limited and the cultural heritage of the region has been largely ignored in their education, local dialect phonology and grammar are still very markedly present.

*Section 1. Questions by the native speaker and the researcher addressed to the four children. From the recording it is not always possible to determine which child is answering, but one boy does most of the talking.*

D: Fit aboot readin Doric, hiv ye ever read ony Doric?
C: Aye, some poems.
D: Wis this in the primary school?
C: Aye, we’ve read em in English an aa.
D: Here in the Academy?
C: Aye.
D: Dae ye myn fit ye read [red]?
C: [pause] No.
D: Did ye like deein it?

10
C: Aye.
D: Again, wid ye like tae dee mair readin, like Doric stuff?
C: Aye.
D: Fit hiv ye — Hiv ye heard o Stanley Robertson?
C: Nuh.
D: Bides in Torry an works in the fish-hooses an he writes stories.
Neen o the teachers have spoken aboot him or read ony o his stories?
C: Nuh.
D: He writes stories aboot his gran an people — ken, thaim that bides
in the toon aa durin the winter an then gings oot in their caravans
in the simmer. Hiv ye heard o him?
C: Nuh.
D: Heard o June Imray, the Torry Quine?
C: Nuh.
R: Dae ye ken the word Doric?
C: Aye.
R: Is Torry language part of Doric?
C: Well, like fin ye’re speakin Doric, like some o the words we dinna
ken fit it wis.
D: Hiv ye heard the word teuchter?
C: Aye.
D: So — fit dae ye think teuchter means, or —
C: Folk fae the country [fək fə ðə kʌntri].
D: An fit wye div ye ken — is it jist cause they bide in the country?
C: The wye they spik.
D: Wid I be a teuchter? Am I speakin like you eens?
C: Aye.
D: So I could be fae Torry? [...]
C: At’s the wye ma granma spiks.
D: Dis she bide in Torry?

40
C: Aye, jist doon the road.

Notes

4. English: i.e. the English class.
13. Stanley Robertson: a local writer and story-teller of travelling stock, whose books,
containing reminiscences and traditional tales, are in a highly idiosyncratic mixture of
dialect and travellers’ cant.

22. June Imray: a columnist who wrote weekly articles in Doric as “the Torry Quine”. She
was formerly employed as a television announcer by the BBC, her accent drawing an
unbecoming amount of criticism from English viewers.

29. Teuchter: contemptuous term for a Highlander or anybody perceived as rustic and
uncouth.

36. Aye: this is a response to the second question, not the first. If it can be taken at its face
value, the fact that the children perceive the strong traditional Doric of the questioner as
being the same as their own speech is interesting.

Section 2. The first boy reads his previously-written story, and is questioned on
his language by the Doric speaker. A phonetic transcription of his reading and a
version in ordinary orthography are given: the boy’s actual script with its errors
and ambiguities of spelling is not reproduced here.

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eftir t fitba a wz wakm dun i rod m a sin m met a tel? m a skord m a teld m
tel? m a skord a fab gol i dhôni biliv mi r? first br? a br? i did biliv mi a br? [da
(1) ken fr? is rz ae] br? i did aventfali a sed tm fr? wz ji dim fn a wz i? fr?ba j
sed hi wz plem ôi kimpju?fr fr? gem wz ji plem nok au? kmpz fan did ji ge?a? a
lu? qz? i? jet a dachs rmend i? fe i jispi dun i rod nr ji qud i? i? ne ril a lu? pled
hus so a km pr? ma fr?ba bu?s m a ra?i? en

[Efter e fitba ah wis walkin doon e road an ah seen my mate. Ah telt him ah
scored an ah telled him — telt him ah scored a fab goal. He didna believe me
at first but ah — but he did believe me a — dinna ken fit iss is [evidently
having trouble reading his own script] Aye — but he did eventually. Ah said
tae him, “Fit wis ye deoin fin ah wis at fitba?” He said he wis playin the com-
at?” — “Ah hinna got it yet, ah jist rented it fae the shoppie doon e road.” —
“Are ye good at it?” — “Nae really, ah hinna played it at much.” — “Fit boxer
dae ye like bein?” — “Oscar de la Hoya.” — “Oh aye, he’s aa right. Ye comin
tae my hoose so ah can pit ma fitba boots in?” — “Aa right en.”]

(1) The reduction of dinna to [da] — sometimes with an audible nasalisation
— is very common among young speakers. The similarity between the
extremely low and centralised [j] and the [a]-like vowel to which [a] is
reduced in unstressed syllables is certainly a contributory factor to this.
D now questions the children on the forms used in the story

D: Div ye aye spik aboot your mate, or your frein or your pal?
C: Jist say ma mate.
D: Ye usually say your mate [...] If ye hid a girl friend [frend] fit wid ye caa her?
C: M'a bloan.
D: Your bloan?
C: Mhm.
D: Wid ye say “aa richt” sometimes?
C: Jist "aa right".
D: Dis ony o ye say “aa richt”, or div ye aa say “aa right”?
C: Aa right [two or three voices]
D: Niver iver say “aa richt”?
C: Na / No [two or three voices]
D: Fit aboot “ging oot”? If ye're gaen oot at night, wid ye say ye're [gum] oot? [Mhm] An wid ye say “e night” or “e nicht” or —
C: Night. We'd say night.
D: An ye're awa tae pit in your fitba eh — fit wis it, your fitba fit?
C: Fitba boots. [fi\tha \büşis]
D: Aye, wis it boots [buts], dae ye nae spik aboot your beets?
C: Pair o shoes.
D: An if ye’re nae wearin boots, like durin the day, if ye’re nae wearin trainers, fit div ye wear?
C: Shoes? Your — grannie ever speak aboot her sheen? Ye heard o that? No? Never heard at word afore?

Notes

5. Blœan: a cant word of uncertain origin (conceivably a corruption of “blonde”). Its familiarity to a T'orry boy is unexpected and interesting.

18. The vowel in “boots” resembles those associated with the Glasgow conurbation, rather than the [u] of conservative NE dialects which is much closer to the cardinal.

Section 3. A second child reads her story and is questioned in the same way.
wiz ji baem fi? jì dìn dì nàlì? ën hòu jì ju jì and kler ar braem ge?m ën wì? jì stîl gàn ut wi it' tîr an fur ji gàn nu an stîf lâik a? ñ hop ñà? jur risertf goz rìlì rìlì

(2) wel

[Hiya, Mari. My name’s Jessie Calder. [To preserve anonymity this and the teacher’s name have been changed.] My English teacher Mrs Andrews has telt me that ye’re deein some research on how us Torry kids spik. Well, nàe aa my family come fae Torry. My Ma comes fae Bana— Ballantrae doon in Ayrshire but my Da comes fae Torry. Right, here we go. If I met my chum in the toon an we wir startit tae spik I wid ask her or him “How’s it gaan? Fit wis ye buyin? Fit ye deein the night? and how ye — you an Claire or Brian getting on wi’? Ye still gaan oot wi each ither? an far ye gaan noo?” an stuff like at. Ah hope that your research goes really really well.]

(1) An exceptionally low and centralised vowel here.

(2) [rili] rather than the expected [rilí], a feature associated in this case with emphasis.

[The native Doric speaker, discussing the girl’s language, bases her questions on the manuscript. This contained several instances of words written with Standard English spelling which the girl read aloud as Doric, e.g. 〈told〉 /tɛlt/, 〈doing〉 /dɪn/: an interesting fact which was observed in many of the children investigated.]

D: So — ye say Mrs Andrews told ye, wid ye say Mrs Andrews telt mi [mɨ]? If ye war speakin mibbe ye wad say Mrs Andrews telt mi.
C: Aye.

D: But again cause ye’ve written it doon ye probably writ [rɪ] doon “told”. Same wi “you’re doing [jur duın] some research”, wid ye say “ye’re deein [jur din] some research” if ye wir speakin?
C: Aye.

D: An she’s deein research on — ye’ve got doon “how us Torry kids”, wid ye say “foo us” or “hoo us” Torry kids? No! You’d say “how”? Mhm. See “kids” — hiv ye got anither word that ye can think on in Doric or Torry for “kids”? No? Nae spik about “bairns”?
C: Aye, bairns. Torry louns or quines.

D: Uh-huh. Bit nae bairns. [...] An ye say ye’re hopin her research goes really well, wid ye iver say ye hope it gangs really weel? or gings?
C: Sometimes [sæm?ʌɪzm] but ah dinna say’t [da se?] aa the time.
D: Wid ye say “I am — I’m gaan tae the shops efter deener time”?
Wid ye say “I ging” some wye? Or “I gang”?

C: Ah’m gaan.

D: Fit if it wis yisterday: wid ye say “I gid” [gid] ... or “I wint” [wint]?

C: Ah wis awa.

D: Ye wis awa til’t.

Section 4. A third child’s reading, with questions.

am kaď — — am fe toń [...] a lsik plem fi?ba am for?in jir al ae wiz
awa ti blakpul fər a wiken wi ma sistër in ma da δis dʒun am awa ti dʒermni wi
δi skul am gaan fər a wik a?i’s ti

[Ah’m caa’d Roy Strachan. Ah’m fae Torry. Ah like playin fitba. Ah’m four-
teen year aal. I wis awa tae Blackpool for a wik-enn wi ma sister an ma Da.
This June ah’m awa tae Germany wi the school. Ah’m gaan for a wik. At’s it.]

D: Ye’re gaan wi the school: div ye iver spik aboot the skweel?

C: No.

D: Hiv ye heard at word afore?

C: No / Nih. [...] 5

D: Hae ye deen tellin the time in German?

C: We’re jist deein at right now.

D: So if I said tae you it’s halb acht, fit time wid at be?

C: Half sivin / Half past sivin.

D: So — I tell e time e same wye, an long ago eh aabody in the
North-East, an includin Aiberdeen, ah should think, telt the
time e same wye, cause fin ah’m sayin “ah’ll meet ye at half acht”
I mean ah’ll meet ye at half past sivin.

Notes

9-12. The practice of using “half acht” with the same meaning as the German halb acht
— i.e. 7.30 — was normal in Scots until within living memory, though younger speakers
now invariably use the construction to mean half past the hour named.

11. In a section of this dialogue omitted here because of lack of clarity, the speaker
attempted to take the children through the Doric forms of the numerals. Her use of acht
(in the North-East [əxt], corresponding to [əxt] and [əxt] of other dialects), drew from one
child the comment “At’s German!”

Note

1. The recordings for this set of texts have been deposited with the Scottish
Corpus of Texts and Speech (SCOTS) project of Glasgow University.
The North-East of Scotland has contributed its full share to the literary heritage of the country, beginning with the first major work in the canon of Scots vernacular poetry, the *Brus* (an epic poem of the life and achievements of the hero-king) by an Archdeacon of Aberdeen, John Barbour. However, it was not until the eighteenth century that a distinctively regional voice, using the North-Eastern dialect, became audible. Soon after the Vernacular Revival had been initiated in Edinburgh, with Allan Ramsay as its first outstanding figure and most important influence, the North-East made the first of its many and distinctive contributions to Scotland’s literary culture; and though local dialect features were less conspicuous in poets of the eighteenth century than in the more deliberately regional literature of later times, they were sufficiently in evidence to establish an unmistakable local identity. (This is particularly noticeable by contrast with other parts of Scotland in this period, where poets seem to have deliberately minimised the use of regionally marked features in their language: the poetic idiolect of Robert Burns is much less obviously located in Ayrshire than that of Alexander Ross is in Aberdeenshire: cf. McClure 1987.)

In both poetry and prose, the North-East dialect has proved to be a literary medium of great expressive power. Poetry of the later eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is, unfortunately, no more remarkable for quality in this part of Scotland than in the rest of the country; but at least one writer of unchallengeable distinction, the novelist George MacDonald, utilised the full range of the vernacular in his dialogue. Later in the Victorian period, the productions of an energetic and prolific local press (with William Alexander as its most outstanding contributor) included a remarkable variety of texts in the dialect; and in the early years of the present century a poetess of respectable talent (Mary Symon) and a poet of admirable skill (Charles Murray) initiated a school of strongly and assertively local poetry which has continued in vigorous life to the present day.
This section of the book includes texts from the eighteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries, representing a variety of styles and genres, and chosen to illustrate the range and flexibility of the North-East dialects.

1. Poetry

The extracts in this section range chronologically from 1748 to 1996, and illustrate various styles and registers of North-East Scots as a poetic medium. It is of interest that the earliest text is a translation, the classic literary technique for extending the scope and raising the prestige of a language or dialect relatively undeveloped for literary use: whether or not this was Forbes’ conscious intention, the result is a remarkable vindication of his dialect. On the other hand, the elegance of Ovid is transformed by Forbes’ use of a realistic and strongly colloquial register, coupled with a ballad-like metre. The extensive reliance on colloquial words and idioms is taken much further by Skinner, whose poem is remarkable for its abundance of uncomplimentary epithets and words suggestive of noise or violence: many of those are not attested beyond the North-East, and several find their only recorded literary use in this poem. Alexander Ross, by contrast, while maintaining a consistent use of local phonology and grammar, raises the tone of North-East dialect writing and extends its emotional range by incorporating scenes, with realistic dialogue, of love, affection and domestic happiness. All these writers draw on existing literary models: James Beattie continues this practice, and increases the range of poetic forms available to a dialect writer, by his fluent and lively Habbie stanzas. William Beattie and John Burness continue the practice of using lifelike dialect for narrative poetry with realistic settings and characters.

During the chronological gap between Burness and Murray both the standard of poetry and the integrity of the literary dialect declined sadly: a North-Eastern identity in the local poetry, if present at all, was established by topical and geographical references rather than by careful use of the dialect. The revival initiated by Murray and Symon took place in a greatly altered social and literary context. Murray and those who followed him were no less native speakers of the Doric than Skinner or Burness; but their use of it as their medium, and overt and intimate association of it with the landscape, weather and traditional community life of the region, was now a more self-conscious literary endeavour. Caie and Garry draw on the register of farming and Buchan on that of fishing to produce poetic monuments to those aspects of the traditional
life of the region; similarly, Ritchie and Milne evoke the two kingpins of Scottish community life, religion and education, by their use of appropriate vocabulary and idiom. Those poets, though enterprising in exploiting the full range of dialect vocabulary, are firmly traditional in their poetic styles: poems by Scott, Mackie, Falconer and Blackhall are chosen to demonstrate the adaptability of the dialect for writing in a more modernist vein.

Finally, the continuing vitality of the dialect is demonstrated by a selection of poems by children and amateurs. The expected lack of literary sophistication highlights, rather than obscuring, the native fluency in the dialect. Contemporary settings and topics naturally do not call for the vocabulary of traditional rural pursuits, and the influence of modern slang is apparent; but the easy use of the dialect by writers of, presumably (certainly in the case of the children), no extensive reading in dialect literature is heartening evidence of its enduring life as a community speech.

1.1 Text 1: Robert Forbes, *Ajax his Speech to the Grecian Knabs*, ll. 1-92

The first sustained attempt at a piece of writing in a distinctively and unmistakably North-Eastern dialect is, impressively enough, a translation from Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. The only ascertainable fact about the author’s life is that he worked as a hosier in London, and the evidence for this is supplied by Forbes himself in the form of a rhymed “shop bill” advertising his wares. His rendering of Ovid was first published in 1742, and reprinted on numerous occasions. The language of the poem is vigorous and inventive, showing skilful use of both semi-archaic literary words and North-Eastern vocabulary items, for several of which Forbes’s is the first attested usage. Despite the historic interest of the 1742 edition, the text followed here is a slightly regularised one printed in 1748.

```
The wight an’ doughty Captains a’
Upo’ their doups sat down;
A rangel o’ the common fouk
In burachs a’ stood roun.

Ajax bangs up, whase targe was sught
In seven fald o’ hide;
An’ bein’ bouden’d up wi’ wrath,
Wi’ atry face he ey’d
The Trojan shore, an’ a’ the barks

That tedder’d fast did ly
```
Along the Coast; an’ raxing out
His gardies, loud did cry:
O Jove! The cause we here do plead,
An’ unco’ great’s the staik;

Bat sall that sleeth Ulysses now
Be said to be my maik?
Ye ken right well, fan Hector try’d
Thir barks to burn an’ scowder,
He took to speed o’ fit, because

He cou’d na’ hide the ewder.
Bat I, like birky, stood the brunt,
An’ slocken’d out that gleed
Wi’ muckle virr, an’ syne I gar’d
The limmers tak the speed.

’Tis better then, the cause we try
’Wi’ the wind o’ our wame,
Than for to come in hanny grips
At sik a driry Time.
At threeps I am na’ sae perquire,
Nor auld-farren as he,
But at banes-braken, it’s well kent,
He has na’ maughts like me.
For as far as I him excel
In touilzies fierce an’ strong,

As far in chaft-taak he exceeds
Me, wi’ his sleeked tongue.
My proticks an’ my doughty Deeds,
O Greeks! I need na’ tell,
For ther’s nane here bat kens them well:
Lat him tell his himsel:
Which ay were done at glomin time,
Or dead hour o’ the night,
An’ deil ane kens except himsel,
For nae man saw the fight.

The staik indeed is unco’ great,
I will confess alway,
But, name Ulysses to it anes,
The worth quite dwines away.
Great as it is, I need na’ voust,
I’m sure I hae nae neef
To get fat cou’d be ettl’d at,
By sic a mensless thief.
Yet routh o’ honour he has got,
Ev’n fan he gets the glaiks,

Fan he’s sae crouss, that he did try
To be brave Ajax’ maik.
Bat gin my wightness doubted were,
I wat my gentle bleed,
As being sin to Telamon,

Right sickerly does plead:
Wha, under doughty Hercules,
Great Troy’s walls down hurl’d,
An’ in a tight Thessalian Bark
To Colchos’ harbour swirl’d.

An’ Æacus my gutcher was,
Wha now in hell sits jidge,
Where a fun-stane does Sisyphus
Down to the yerd sair gnidge.

To be his ain dear boy,
An’ syne without a’ doubt I am
The neist chiel’ to his oye.
Bat thus in counting o’ my etion
I need na’ mak’ sic din,

For it’s well kent Achilles was
My father’s brither sin:
An’ as we’re cousins, there’s nae scouth
To be in ony swidders;
I only seek fat is my due,

I mean, fat was my brither’s.
Bat why a thief, like Sisypheus
That’s nidder’d sae in hell,
Sud here tak’ fittininment,
Is mair nae I can tell.

Sall then these arms be deny’d
To me, wha in this bruilzie
Was the first man that drew my durk,
Came flaught-bred to the toulzie?
An’ sall this sleeth come farrer ben,

Wha was sae dev’lish surly,
He scarce wou’d gae a fit frae hame,  
An’ o’ us a’ was hurly?  

Ajax his Speech to the Grecian Knabbs [...]  
Attempted in Broad Buchan by R.F., Gent.  
1748, location and name of publisher not stated; pp. 3-7.

Rhymes

[A note on the rhymes will be prefixed to each extract in the poetry section, except in cases where all the intended readings are self-evident. Valid rhymes are pairs of words which rhyme in the NE dialect though the rhyme is masked by the use of an English spelling. False rhymes are pairs which rhyme only if an English pronunciation is used for one or both words, i.e. if the poet has departed momentarily from the dialect: in such cases the transcription given represents the dialect pronunciation. Pairs which do not rhyme in either English or Scots, such as strong – tongue in the present extract, are not listed.]

Valid rhymes: down – roun [u]; scowder – ewder [skudər - jədər]; wame – time [ə]; swidders – brither’s [swidərz - bridərz].

False rhymes: hide [haid] - ey’d [id]; hurl’d – swirl’d [həld - swəld].

Notes

1. Wight: a poetic word, frequently applied to Sir William Wallace. The highly literary tone of this line contrasts ironically with the bathos of the next.

2. Rangel: also a poetic word, common in Older Scots verse.

10. Tedder: illustrates the regular NE development of medial [d] to [d]. Cf. swidders (78) and nidder’d (82). Despite the spelling, a pronunciation with [d] should also be understood for brither’s (80), as the rhyme shows, and for father’s and brither (76).

18. Thir: “these”. Not a NE form: in the local dialects this and that are used in the plural as well as the singular.

27. Hanny grips: hand grips, i.e. a battle. The phrase “to come to grips with s.o.” is originally Scottish, and illustrates the use of the word grip in this sense.

34. Toulzie: the z in the spelling represents the MSc ʒ, used to represent palatalisation in French- or Gaelic-derived loan-words. It is silent in the modern language. Cf. bruilzie (86).

35. Chaft-taak: lit. “jaw-talk”, an idiosyncratic compound meaning idle talk. The spelling taak represents the NE pronunciation with unrounded vowel.

54. get the glaik: be cheated, deceived.


83. fittiniment: lit. “footing-in-ment”, meaning “state of having a foothold”, hence intervention, interference. Rare and peculiar to NE, probably invented by Forbes.
1.2 Text 2: John Skinner, *The Christmas Bawin of Monimusk*, stanzas xii-xvii

John Skinner (1721-1806), an Episcopalian minister whose extensive scholarship and exemplary personal life earned him great respect, regarded his poetry as a diversion. Nonetheless, it won him the admiration of Robert Burns, with whom he conducted a friendly correspondence. His present-day reputation rests not on his wide range of theological and philosophical writings, but on his poems, and in particular *The Christmas Bawin of Monimusk* (*bawin* = football match), a contribution to the long series of poems modeled on the anonymous mediaeval song *Christis Kirk on the Green*. Skinner’s poem uses the same stanza form as its original, and imitates it in its emphasis on physical comedy of a somewhat brutal variety. The boisterous humour of the poem is highlighted by the dialect, which is emphatically North-Eastern in its vocabulary and phonology and includes a remarkable selection of insulting expressions and words suggestive of violent action. It was written in 1739, making it one of the first considerable poems in the North-Eastern dialect. The present extract is Stanzas 12-17. The text used here is of the poem’s publication in 1788 in the *Caledonian Magazine*: in the first collected edition of Skinner’s works, published in 1808, the ordering of the stanzas is different.

Was nae ane there coud Cowley bide,
   The gryte Gudman nor nane,
He stenn’d bawk-height at ilka’ stride,
   And rampag’d thro’ the green,
   For the Kirk-yard was braid and wide,
   And o’er a knabliech stane,
He rumbled down a rammage glyde,
   And peel’d the gardie-bane
   O’ him that day.

   His Cousin was a bierly Swank,
     A steir young man heght Robb,
   To mell wi’ twa he wadna mank,
     At staffy-nevel Job,
   I wat na fow, but on a bank

   Whare thrangest was the Mob,
     The Cousin’s bicker’d wi’ a clank,
   Gart ane anither sob
     And gasp that day.
Tho’ Rob was stout, his Cousin dang

20      Him down wi’ a gryte shudder,
     Syne a’ the drochlin hempy thrang,
     Gat o’er him wi’ a fudder,
     Gin he shoud rise and hame o’er gang,
     Lang was he in a swidder,

For bleed frae’s mou and nize did bang,
     And in braid burns did bludder,
     His face that day.

A huddrin hynd came wi’ his pattle,
     As he’d been at the pleugh,

30      Said there was nane in a’ the battle,
     That broolzied bend aneugh,
     But i’ the mids o’s windy tattle,
     A Chiel came wi’ a feugh,
     Box’d him on’s arse wi’ a bauld brattle,

Till a’ the kendlins leugh
     At him that day.

A stalwart Stirk in tartain claise,
     Sware mony a sturdy aith,
     To bear the Ba’ thro’ a’ his faes,

40      And nae kepp muckle skaith,
     Rob Roy heard the frieksome fraise,
     Well browden’d in his graith,
     Gowph’d him alang his shins a blaise,
     And gart him tyne his faith

And feet that day.

His Neipor was a man o’ might,
     Was few there cou’d ha quell’d him,
     He didna see the dreary fight,
     Till some yap gilpy tell’d him,

50      To Robin syne he flew outright,
     As he’d been gawing to geld him,
     But suddenly frae some curst Wight,
     A clammyhowat fell’d him
     Hawf dead that day.

Published in the Caledonian Magazine 1788; pp. 500-1.
Rhymes

Valid rhyme: *nane – green – stane – bane* [i].

Notes

3. *Bawk-height*: the bawk is the cross-beam of a roof, hence, as high as the rafters. The phrase occurs in *Christis Kirk on the Green*.


11. *Steir*: if this reading is correct (the 1808 edition has *derf* “bold” here), it is idiosyncratic: the SND does not record the use of *steir* as an adjective. Perhaps it is an apocope of *steerie* “lively, spirited”.

*Height*: called. This usage survived in Scots till the nineteenth century.

13. *Staffy-nevel*: nevel is a blow with the *neive* or fist, hence the phrase means “a brawl with cudgels and fists”.

19. *Dang*: past tense of *ding* “strike”.

23. *Hame o’er*: homewards.

31. *Broolzieed*: the use of this word as a verb is rare: it is normally a noun meaning “quarrel, affray” or the like.

*Bend*: defined as “bravely” in the SND, but this is the only attestation given for the usage.

35. *Kendlins*: in OSc this means “young animals”. The present passage is the only attestation in the SND of the sense “children”.

37. *stirk*: literally a bullock, but often used of people, with obvious implications. The alliteration is humorous: in mediaeval poetry *stalwart* is regularly collocated with *stour*, *sturt*, *strife*, etc.

41. *Freiksome*: a nonce compound meaning “capricious, perverse”, from *fraik* “whim”.

43. *Blaise*: another idiosyncrasy of Skinner’s. The meaning is “blow”.

44. *Tyne his faith*: because he had perforce broken his “sturdy aiths”.

51. *Gawing*: the pronunciation is /ɡeɪn/.

53. *Clamihowat*: this and its appearance in Forbes’s *Journal* (see Section 2, Text 1) are the earliest attestations of this fanciful word meaning a heavy blow. The more usual spelling is *clamihewit*: Skinner’s <ow> suggests the NE /jʊ/ corresponding to /ju/ in other dialects.

1.3 Text 3: Alexander Ross, *Helenore, or The Fortunate Shepherdess* (extract)

Alexander Ross (1689-1784), a graduate of Marischal College and subsequently a schoolmaster holding posts in various NE towns and villages, is sometimes known as Ross of Lochlea, the village in Glenesk where he lived for much of his life, to distinguish him from another NE poet of the same
name whose *floruit* was a century earlier. Unlike his namesake, Ross of Lochlea wrote in Scots; and is in fact the first major poet (Robert Forbes hardly being this) to write in the NE dialect. His best-known work is the long pastoral poem from which the present extract is taken, published in 1768 (though locally known in manuscript from a much earlier date) with an introduction by James Beattie (see Text 4). The simple story is told in an attractive, classical style, with excellent scenic descriptions and passages of lively dialogue. In the following passage, Helenore (Nory), lost and exhausted through searching for her lover Lindy who has been abducted by Highland caterans, has been found by a young man of good family and taken to his aunt’s house for shelter. Her dream relates in disguised form the events which have befallen her and Lindy.

But O, says Nory, I am far frae hame,
And this last night I had a dreary dream.
My heart’s yet beating wi’ the unco fright,
And when I’m waking, think I see the sight.

I thought that we were washing at our sheep,
In sic a pool, and O but it was deep,
I thought therein a lad was like to drown,
His feet yeed frae him, and his head went down.
Flaught-bred into the pool mysell I keest,
Weening to keep his head aboon at least;
But e’er I wist, I clean was at the float,
My eyn grew blind, the lad I could na see,
And ane I kent na took a claught of me;
And fuish me out, and laid me down to dreep.
Sae burden’d was I, I could hardly creep.
Great was the care this stranger took of me,
And O! I thought him bonny, blyth and free.
Dry claih, I thought, he gae me to put on,
Better by far, and brawer than my own;
And when I had come something to mysell,
Ayont the pool I spied the lad that fell,
Drouked and looking unco urluch like:
A lass about him made an unco fike,
Drying and dichting at him up and down,
I kent her no, but striped was her gown.
But O the skair I got into the pool,
I thought my heart had couped frae its hool.
And sae I waken’d, glamping here and there,
I vat ye might hae found me in my care.

Said Bess, ’tis true, your fump’ring waken’d me,
And I you joundy’d, that ye might be free.
As they are cracking, aunty chanc’d to pass,
And says, how are ye now, my bonny lass?

"Tis now fair-day, and Bess and ye may rise,
See lass, here’s for you a new pair of stays;
And there’s a gown, some langer nor your ain,
Bess, put a’ well upon her, and come ben.

Published by D. Chalmers, Aberdeen, 1826; pp. 39-40.

Rhymes

Valid rhymes: hame – dream [e], float – got [o], rise – stays [ae].

Notes

As often in Scots poetry of this period, the use of English spellings disguises what are intended as Scots pronunciations. As Ross would have read the poem, fright and sight are [fr/1711xt] and [s/1711xt], drown and down [drun] and [dun], head [hid], what [fit], blind [blin], eyn [in] (homophonous with ane “one” in the next line), heart [hert]. Own, however, must be pronounced as in English instead of Scots [en] to rhyme even approximately with on.

2. Though the alliterative phrase could have been devised independently, it is worth noting that it occurs in the ballad of Sir Patrick Spens, which would certainly have been known to Ross.

8. Yerk: a rare past tense of gae, from OE eode, found only in NE texts.

9. Keest: past tense of cast. This spelling instead of the more general cuist indicates the NE pronunciation.

11. E’er: should be ere.

15. Fuish: past tense of fesh, the Scots form of fetch.

23. Drouked: the ending is pronounced as if written –it: likewise striped (l.26), coupled (l.28).

27. Skair: simply “scare”: the spelling is generally used for the Scots cognate of share rather than for this word. Into means in, as regularly in Scots.

28. This line recalls “My heart out of its hool was like to lowp” from Allan Ramsay’s The Gentle Shepherd. Ross’s entire poem, though in the form of a narrative rather than a drama, is obviously influenced by Ramsay’s.
31. *Fumper*: NE cognate of “whimper”.


1.4 Text 4: James Beattie, introductory verses to Ross’s *Helenore*, stanzas 5-12

James Beattie (1735-1808) is one of the outstanding figures of the Scottish Enlightenment in respect of his philosophical works and his poetry in English, most notably *The Minstrel*. Scots writing, or speech, was not one of his enthusiasms: indeed, he disapproved of the vernacular, and in common with several other distinguished Scotsmen of his time compiled a list of “Scotticisms” to instruct his compatriots in how not to speak. His one Scots poem, of which he remarked that it “exhausted his whole stock of Scotch words”, was a congratulatory epistle to Ross of Lochlea, and is often printed along with his introduction in editions of *Helenore*. It is interesting to note that Beattie in his praise of Ross’s Scots specifically identifies him as a *Northern* Scottish writer (“... on this side Forth”): though *south* in the previous stanza refers to England, not Southern Scotland, as is shown by his contrast between those who “run South” and the patriotic home-domiciled Scot Allan Ramsay. Beattie’s poem contains several verbal echoes of Ramsay and Burns.

Ye shak your head; but, o’ my fegs,
Ye’ve set auld *Scota* on her legs.
Lang had she lyen, with beffs and flegs
Bumbaz’d and dizzie.

5 Her fiddle wanted strings and pegs.
Wae’s me! poor hizzie!
Since *Allan’s* death, nae body car’d
For anes to speer how *Scota* far’d;
Nor plack nor thristled turner war’d,
To quench her drouth;
For, frae the cottar to the laird,
We all run South.

The Southland chiel indeed hae mettle,
And brawly at a sang can ettle;
10 Yet we right couthily might settle
On this side Forth,
The devil pay them with a pettle
That slight the North.
Our country leed is far frae barren,
'Tis even right pithy and auldfarran.
Oursells are neiper-like, I warran,
For sense and smergh;
In kittle times, when faes are yarring,
We're no thought ergh.

O bonny are our greensward hows,
Where through the birks the burnie rows,
And the bee bums, and the ox lows,
And saft winds rustle,
And shepherd-lads, on sunny knows,
Blaw the blythe fustle.

'Tis true, we Norlans manna fa'
To eat sae nice, or gang sae bra',
As they that come from far-awa';
Yet sma's our skaith:

We've peace (and that's well worth it a')
And meat and claih.

Our fine new-fangle sparks, I grant ye,
Gie poor auld Scotland mony a taunty;
They're grown sae ugertfu' and vaunty
And capernoited,
They guide her like a canker'd aunty,
That's deaf and doited.

Sae comes of ignorance, I trou,
'Tis this that crooks their ill-fa'rd mou'

With jokes sae coarse, they gar fouk spew
For downright skonner,
For Scotland wants na sons enew
To do her honour.

Alexander Ross, Helenore, Chalmers edn. op. cit.; pp. 4-5.

Rhymes

Valid rhyme: hows – rows – lows – knows [xu].
Notes

1. Ye: Ross. *Shak your head*: because the previous passage praises his work in terms of high enthusiasm. *O* *my fegs*: an expression of strong emphasis.
2. *Scota*: the muse invoked in *Helenore*, and also in Ramsay's *The Vision*.
3. *Lyen*: a Scots past participle of *lie*.
5. *Plack ... turner*: Two coins, both of very low value. Both had ceased to be minted in Scotland with the Union of 1707, but the names of both, particularly the plack, continued to be used to denote something practically worthless. The turner bore on its reverse side the design of a thistle.
6. *Fa’*: “befall”, but the quasi-personal use of the verb is distinctively Scots.
7. *Taunty*: simply “taunt” with the characteristic NE diminutive and [a]-vowel.
8. *Sons enew*: Beattie goes on in the next few stanzas to produce an impressive list of earlier Scots poets.

1.5 Text 5: William Beattie, *A Yule Feast*, stanzas 5-14

William Beattie’s *floruit* was the late eighteenth century, during which time his poems were published in magazines including Andrew Shirrefs’s *Caledonian Magazine*, and he died apparently in 1815; but except for evidence that he worked as a flax dresser in Aberdeen and anecdotes relating to his prodigal and bibulous disposition, his life history is obscure. This extract is from his best-known poem *A Yule Feast*, in which the pleasures of convivial eating and drinking, a traditional theme of Scottish poetry since Allan Ramsay, are celebrated in a vigorous and strongly localised dialect. The Habbie stanza, by that time a staple of Scots poetry, is handled with adequate skill; though the stanza, with its epigrammatic last line, is not entirely suitable for a lengthy narrative poem.

```
“Come in! come in! my cauldriif loon,
I'm glad ye haena miss'd the toon;
For nae an hour syne, Lawrie Brown
Lair'd in the mire;
Cross-nook ye, bairns, an' lat him down
Afore the fire.
Troth, Lawrie wou'd hae ne'er been seen,
Had it nae been for Sandy Skeene,
Wha had been at Boghead for sheen,
```
An' heard him cry;
An' haul'd him out, his leefu' lane,
As he came by,
Cast aff yer sheen, an' warm yer feet,
I'm sure they canna' but be weet;
Hae, set them up on this bit peat
Anent the cutchack;
An', Tibby, bring him ben some meat,
Ye senseless smutchack!
Make haste an’ gi’e ‘m a glass o’ gin,
An' that will make a’ right within;
Syne, Tib, I trow ye'll need to rin
Forth to the stack
For peats, the roast will be ahin’;
An’ haste ye back.”
Tibby was back just in a jingle,
An’ soon set on a bleezin’ ingle,
Syne up afore’t she knit a lingle
To swing the roast;
They had nae jack, but this wou’d twingle
Wi’ little cost.
Upon’t she hung a leg o’ mutton,
As good as ever knife was put on:
Altho’ I say’t, I’m nae a glutton,
Nor yet ill fodder’d;
But, sang! thought I, I’ll slack a button
If ye were scowder’d.
Twa pots soss’d in the chimney nook,
Forbye ane hott’rin’ in the crook;
Wi’ viands, might ha’e pleas’d the duke
Of Derby’s heir:
Altho’ I say’t, my aunt can cook
Wi’ skill an’ care.
By this time I’m as warm’s a pye,
An’ a’ my doublets reeslin’ dry;
Quo’ I to aunty, “I’ll o’er by
To luckydady.”
“Do sae,” quo’ she, “I’ll gi’e a cry
When dinner's ready.
    Rob, dinna' sit an' burn yer sheen;

50  Gang out about, an' look for Jean;
    She's throw the snaw her leefu' lane,
    For Robbie Riddle,
    To bid him come to our conveen,
    An’ bring his fiddle.

55  O! laddy! ye're a hagmahush!
    Yer face is barked o'er wi' smush;
    Gae wash yersel', an' get a brush,
    An' brush yer claise:
    Yer head's just like a heather bush
    Wi’ strabs an’ straes.”

William Beattie, A Yule Feast [&c]. Published by Andrew Wilson, Aberdeen, 1862; pp. 2-4.

Rhymes

Valid rhymes: loon – toon – Brown – down: [u]; seen – Skeene – sheen – lane: [i] (and a similar set in the eighth stanza); roast – cost: [o]; hagmahush – smush – brush – bush: [u].


Notes

2. Toon: i.e. farm. The word implies the entire compound of the farm and its outlying buildings.

5. Cross-nook ye: move to the corner of the hearth.

9. Sheen: shoes. The spelling is used instead of the more general shuin to suggest the local pronunciation.

22. A stack of dry peats for fuel kept at the back of the house.

23. Ahin’: behind, i.e. late.

25. In a jingle: an idiosyncratic expression of Beattie's meaning “in an instant”.

35. Sang!: an exclamation characteristic of the dialect.

45. I'll o'er by: omission of a verb of motion is a common Scots idiom. Ower by: away in an unspecified direction.


John Burness, a second cousin of Robert Burns, was a baker by trade, but at different periods in his life served in the militia, though never taking part in actual warfare. It was during his military career that he embarked on his writing, his first productions being plays which were performed by his comrades-in-arms. His literary talent is best demonstrated not by the somewhat stilted English of his plays but by his terse and humorous Scots verse. *Thrummy Cap*, a slight but entertaining ghost story in fluent octosyllabic couplets, became enormously popular as a household tale: Robert Burns, too, whom his cousin visited while his regiment was stationed at Dumfries, is said to have approved of it highly. Burness, chronically unable to prosper as a baker, eventually found employment canvassing for subscribers on behalf of a publishing company; and while discharging this duty perished in a snowstorm.

Quo’ Thrummy, Sir, we hae gaen will,
We thought we’d ne’er a house get till;
We near were smoor’d amang the drift,
And sae guidman ye’ll mak a shift

To gie us quarters a’ this night,
For now we dinna hae day-light,
Farer to gang, though it were fair;
Sae gin ye hae a bed to spare,
Whate’er ye charge we sanna grudge,

An’ satisfie you e’er we budge
To gang awa, and when ’tis day
Will pack our awls an’ tak our way.
The landlord says, “O beds we’ve nane,
“Our ain fouk they will scarce contain;

“But gin ye gang but twa miles forat,
“Aside the kirk dwals Robby Dorat,
“Wha keeps a change, an sells guid drink,
“His house ye may mak out I think.”
Quo’ Thrummy that’s owre far awa,

The roads are sae blown up wi’ snaw,
To mak it is nae in our power,
For look ye, sic a dismal shower
Is comin’ on: ye’ll lat us bide,
Though we sude sit at your fire-side.
The landlord says to him, “na, na,
“I canna keep you here ava;
“Shamp aff, it is nae worth your while
“To byde, fan ye hae scrimp twa mile
“To gang; sae quickly aff ye’ll steer,
“For faith I doubt ye’s nae be here.”
Twa mile, quo’ Thrummy, diel speed me
If frae your house this night I gae;
Are we to starve in Christian land,
As langs my stick bides i’ my hand,
An’ siller plenty i’ my pouch?
To nane about this house I’ll crouch;
Come John, lat’s in, we’ll tak’ a seat,
Fat sorrow gars ye look sae blate:
Sae in he gaes, an’ sets him down,
Says he, they’re nane about your town
Sall put me out till a new day,
As lang’s I’ve siller for to pay.
The landlord says, ye’re rather rash,
To turn you out we sanna fash,
Since ye’re sae positive to bide,
But troth, ye’ll sit by the fire-side.
I tald you ance, o’ beds I’ve nane
Unoccupied, except bare ane;
In it, I dread, ye winna ly,
For stoutish hearts ha’e aft been shy
To venture in within the room
After the night begins to gloom;
It’s haunted by a frightfu’ ghaist,
Oursells are terrified amaist
To bide about the town a’ night;
Sae ye may chance to get a sight,
Like that whilk some o’ our folk saw,
Far better till ye gang awa,
Or else ye’ll maybe rue e’er day.

Rhymes

Valid rhymes: seat – blate [e], nane – ane [i].
False rhymes: nane [nin] - contain [knten].

Notes

1. *Thrummy*: the hero’s nickname is from his cap, made of *thrums* (waste yarn), which is described at the beginning of the poem.
2. Though the word-order in this line is most peculiar, till for “to” is regular Scots.
4. *Mak a shift*: stir yourself. Thrummy’s tone of confident familiarity in speaking to the master of the house is typical of the Scottish peasantry as traditionally represented.

*Guidman*: a term of address used between strangers of more or less equal rank.
10. *E'er*: should be *ere*. So in l.59.
12. *Our awls*: an expression meaning things in general, often *our ends and our awls*.
18. *Mak out*: succeed; often (as here) specifically = succeed in reaching a place.
27. *Shamp*: not attested elsewhere. According to the SND, the form may be erroneous, or a nonce derivation from *sham*, a rare local word for “leg”.
28. *Fan*: Burness is wholly inconsistent in his representation of NE phonological forms: cf. “*when tis day*” in l. 11.
33. *starve*: perish of cold, rather than hunger. *I'm stervin* in NE dialect still means “I'm freezing”.
38. *Fat sorrow*: an expression equivalent to “what the devil”.

1.7 Text 7: Charles Murray, *Winter*

Charles Murray (1864-1941) is the central figure in the sudden and remarkable efflorescence of North-Eastern dialect poetry which began in the late nineteenth century. While working as a colonial administrator in South Africa, Murray wrote poetic reminiscences of his rural boyhood life in the Howe of Alford; deliberately nostalgic but avoiding the sentimentality that had characterised so much nineteenth-century Scots poetry. He set a fashion which has lasted to the present day of describing scenes and characters representative of the North-East’s traditional way of life in an appropriate and realistic regional dialect. He was the first poet to emphasise, rather than understate, the local features of his poetic language; and in his Great War poems skilfully exploited the contrasting registers of Doric and general literary Scots to present different perspectives on the War and its effects on the
lives of the North-East communities. The present poem, from his first collection *Hamewith* (“Homewards”), recalls Fergusson in the keen, sympathetic observation with which both the labours and the pleasures of country life are drawn, though Murray falls short of the earlier poet’s shrewd and satirical perception.

Now Winter rides wi’ angry skirl  
On sleety winds that rive an’ whirl,  
An’ gaberlunzie-like plays tirl  
At sneck an’ lozen.

The bairns can barely bide the dirl  
O’ feet gane dozin.

The ingle’s heaped wi’ bleezin’ peats  
An’ bits o’ splutt’rin’ firry reets  
Which shortly thow the ploughmen’s beets;

An’ peels appear  
That trickle oot aneth their seats  
A’ ower the fleer.

The auld wife’s eident wheel gaes birr,  
The thrifty lasses shank wi’ virr;

Till stents are finished nane will stir  
Lest Yule should come,  
When chiels fae wires the wark mith tirr  
To sweep the lum.

The shepherd newly fae the hill  
Sits thinkin’ on his wethers still;  
He kens this frost is sure to kill  
A’ dwinin’ sheep:  
His collie, tired, curls in its tail  
An’ fa’s asleep.

Now Granny strips the bairns for bed:  
Ower soon the extra quarter fled  
For which sae sairly they had pled:  
But there, it chappit;  
An’ sleepy “gweed words” soon are said,

An’ cauld backs happit.

The milkers tak’ their cogues at last,  
Draw moggins on, tie mutches fast,  
Syne hap their lantrens fae the blast
Maun noo be met;
35  An’ soon the day’s last jot is past,
   Milk sey’d an’ set.
Syne Sandy, gantin’, raxes doon
His fiddle fae the skelf aboon,
40  Throws by the bag, an’ souffs a tune,
   Screws up a string,
Tries antics on the shift, but soon
   Starts some auld spring.
Sewith the fleer ilk eager chiel
Bangs wi’ his lass to start the reel,
45  Cries “Kissin’ time”; the coy teds squeal,
   An’ struggle vainly:
The sappier smacks whiles love reveal,
   But practice mainly.
   An opening chord wi’ lang upbow
50  The fiddler strikes, syne gently now
Glides into some Strathspey by Gow,
   Or Marshall ’t may be;
The dancers lichtly needle thro’;
   Rab sets to Leebie.
55  Wi’ crackin’ thoums “Hooch! Hooch!” they reel,
The winceys, spreadin’ as they wheel,
   Gie stolen glints o souple heel
   An’ shapely queet.
The guidman claps his hands, sae weel
   He’s pleased tae see’t.
60  The wrinkles leave the shepherd’s broo,
For see the sonsy mistress too
Shows what the aulder fouks can do,
   An’, licht’s a bird,
65  Some sober country dance trips thro’
   Wi’ Jock the herd.
Syne lads wha noo can dance nae mair
To cauldrife chaumers laith repair;
   An’ lasses, lauchin’, speed the stair,
60  Happy an’ warm.
For liftin’ hearts an’ killin’ care
Music's the charm!
When frost is keen an' winter bauld,
An' deep the drift on muir an' fauld;
75 When mornin's dark an' snell an' cauld
Bite to the bane;
We turn on thocht, as to a hauled,
To some sic 'en.


**Rhymes**


**Notes**

2. **Rive**: tear; when used absolutely, implies “tear the thatch or slates from the roof.”

In the first and third stanzas Murray uses conspicuously Scots vocabulary items for rhyme words; in the second, conspicuously NE phonological forms.

13. **Wheel**: i.e. spinning wheel.

29. **Gweed words**: i.e. prayers.

34. Note omission of the object relative pronoun.

36. **Set**: i.e. put aside for the cream to rise.

51-2. **Gow** is the name of a family of distinguished musicians who lived in Dunkeld, Perthshire, in the eighteenth century, and played a seminal part in the development of the Scottish fiddle tradition. The reference is probably either to Neil or to Nathaniel, the most celebrated of Neil’s five musical sons. In fact, a collection of pieces attributed to Neil which Nathaniel published in 1724 is known to contain some of his own compositions too, so that it could be a moot point which Gow is the composer of a given strathspey. Marshall is William Marshall of Speyside, whom Burns described as “the first composer of strathspeys of the age”.

55. **Sets to**: a movement in Scottish country dancing.

68. **Chaumer**: “bedroom”; here referring to the sleeping quarters of the men on a farm, often an outhouse or room above the stable.
1.8 Text 8: Mary Symon, *The Glen’s Muster-Roll*, stanzas 1-5 and 8-9.

Mary Symon (1863-1938), like many NE poets a child of farming stock with a sound education, was a linguist and literary scholar who first attracted attention through her stirring poems of the Great War. The local dialect in her writings is a flexible medium, varying in density: her humorous verses abound in expressive NE words, but these are less in evidence, though her grammar and phonology are consistently local, in some of her more serious poems. Her use of the Doric is a conscious gesture of national as well as local patriotism, as is shown by an attractive poetic tribute to Burns (*Burns Nicht in the Glen*) in which she gives thanks for “... the wealth he gae’s, The tongue that’s a’ our ain”, and praises Charles Murray (see Text 7) — making no mention of the dialect differences — as his natural successor: “Oh, Robin’s chair’s for lang been teem, Lat Charlie tak’ it noo”. In the present poem there is no dearth of Doric words. In realistic language the speaker (a country schoolmaster) recalls the boyhood of men who have served in the War, and the typical reticence which conceals an abyss of grief for the lost men of the parish is touchingly suggested.

Hing’t up aside the chumley-cheek, the aul’ glen’s Muster Roll,
A’ names we ken fae hut an’ ha’, fae Penang to the Pole,
An’ speir na gin I’m prood o’t — losh! coont them line by line,
Near han’ a hunner fechtin’ men, an’ they a’ were Loons o’ Mine.

A’ mine. It’s jist like yesterday they sat there raw on raw,
Some tyaavin’ wi’ the “Rule o’ Three,” some widin’ throu’ “Mensa”;
The map o’ Asia’s shoogly yet faur Dysie’s sheemach head
Ga’ed cleeter-clatter a’ the time the carritches was said.
“A limb,” his greetin’ granny swore, “the aul’ deil’s very limb” —
But Dysie’s deid and drooned lang syne; the Cressy coffined him.

Man guns upon the fore barbette!” ... What’s that to me an’ you?
Here’s moss an’ burn, the skailin’ kirk, aul’ Kissack beddin’s soo.
It’s Peace, it’s Hame — but owre the Ben the coastal searchlights shine,
And we ken that Britain’s bastions mean — that sailor Loon o’ Mine.

The muirlan’s lang, the muirlan’s wide, an’ fa says “ships” or “sea”?
But the təng o’ saut that’s in wir bleed has puzzled mair than me.
There’s Sandy wi’ the bristled shins, faur think ye’s he the day?
Oot where the hawser’s tuggin’ taut in the surf o’ Suvla Bay;
An’ owre the spurs o Chanak Bahr gaed twa lang stilpert chiels,

I think o’ flappin’ butteries yet or weyvin’ powet’s creels —
Exiles on far Australian plains — but the Lord's ain boomerang
'S the Highland heart that's aye for hame however far it gang.
An' the winds that wail ower Anzac an' requiem Lone Pine
Are nae jist a' for stranger kin, for some were Loons o' Mine.

25 They're comin' hame in twas an' threes; there's Tam fae Singapore
Yon's his, the string o' buckie-beads abeen the aumry door —
An' Dick Macleod, his sanshach sel' (Guidsake, a bombardier!) I see them yet ae summer day come hodgin' but the fleer:
“Please, sir” (a habber an' a hoast), “Please, sir” (a gasp, a gulp,
30 Syne wi' a rush) “Please—sir—can—we—win—oot—to—droun—a—fulp?”

... Hi, Rover, here, lad! — ay, that's him, the fulp they didna droom,
But Tam — puir Tam lies cauld an' stiff on some grey Belgian dune,
An' the Via Diolorosa's there, faur a wee bit cutty quine
Stan's lookin' doon a teem hill road for a sodger Loon o' Mine.

35 Fa's neist? The Gaup — A Gordon wi' the “Byland” on his broo,
Nae murlacks dreetlin' fae his pooch or ower his grauvit noo,
Nae word o' groff-write trackies on the “Four best ways to fooge”—
He steed his grun' an' something mair, they tell me, oot at Hooge.
But ower the dyke I'm hearin' yet: "Lads, fa's on for a swap? —
40 A lang sook o' a pandrop for the sense o' *verbam sap*.
Fack's death, I tried to min' on't — here's my gairten wi' the knot —
But — bizz! a dhubrack loupit as I passed the muckle pot.
... Ay, ye didna ken the classics, never heard o' a co-sine,
But here's my aul' lum aff tae ye, dear gowkit Loon o' Mine. ...

45 ... You — Robbie. Memory pictures: Front bench, a curly pow,
A chappit hannie grippin' ticht a Homer men't wi' tow —
The lave a' scrammelin' near him, like bummies roon a bike.
“Fat's this?” “Fat's that?” He'd tell them a' — ay, speir they fat they like.
My hill-foot lad! A' sowl an' brain fae's bonnet to his beets,
A “Fullarton” *in posse*, nae the first fun' fowin' peats.
... An' I see a blythe young Bajan gang whistlin' doon the brae,
An' I hear a wistful Paladin his patriot *credo* say.
An' noo, an' noo I'm waitin' till a puir thing hirples hame —
Ay, 't's the Valley o' the Shadow, nae the mountain heichts o' Fame.

50 An' where's the nimble nostrum, the dogma fair and fine,
To still the ruggin' heart I hae for you, oh, Loon o' Mine?
My Loons, my Loons! Yon winnock gets the settin' sun the same,
Here's sklates and skailies, ilka dask a' futtled wi' a name.
An’ as I sit a vision comes: Y’er troopin’ in aince mair, 
Ye’re back fae Aisne an’ Marne an’ Meuse, Ypres an’ Festubert; 
Ye’re back on weary bleedin’ feet — you, you that danced an’ ran — 
For every laughin’ loon I kent I see a hell-scarred man. 
Not mine but yours to question now! Y’ou lift unhappy eyes — 
“Ah, Maister, tell’s fat a’ this means.” And I, ye thocht sae wise, 
Maun answer wi’ the bairn words ye said tae me langsyne: 
“I dinna ken, I dinna ken.” Fa does, oh, Loons o’ Mine?”

Mary Symon, Deveron Days, Aberdeen (D. Wylie & Son) 1933; pp. 13-16 and 17-18.

Rhymes

Valid rhymes: raw – Mensa [ə], swap – verbum sap [ə].
False rhyme: head – said [hid] - [sed].

Notes

Several inconsistencies are visible in the form of anglicisms of spelling and grammar, sometimes (but not always) in passages where the speaker’s thoughts might seem to be appropriately expressed in a less colloquial tone. Examples: and (for an’): ll. 10, 14, 59, 65; to (for tae): ll. 11, 30, 41, 49, 56; what (for fat): ll. 11; where (for faur): ll. 18, 55. The Gen.Sc. forms cauld (l. 32) and whistlin’ (l. 51) appear instead of the Doric caul’ and fus-slin’.

Muster Roll: a list of the men of the parish who served in the armed forces.
3. Losh! — an exclamation, euphemism for Lord.
6. Widin’: “wading”, in this context suggesting struggling with difficulty. Mensa is the word customarily used as the model for the First Declension, and the declensions were invariably recited with a heavy stress on the inflectional syllable.

Carritches: a distorted form of “catechism”. The Shorter Catechism was traditionally a fundamental part of the education of Scottish schoolchildren.
9. Limb: i.e. limb of Satan. A common Scots term for a rogue or a mischievous child.
10. Cressy: a British cruiser sunk by a German U-boat off the Dutch coast in the first few weeks of the War.
12. Beddin’ s soc the ’s is for “his”.
17. Bristled: scorched. The suggestion is of legs made blotchy by sitting too close to the fire; i.e. that Sandy was lazy.
20. Buttery: not the still-current sense of the word, a crisp flaky roll, but a rare and local apocopeation of butterfly.
Creek: normally a wickerwork trap for lobsters or fish, but since tadpoles are the prey here, presumably a fine net.

28. But the fleer: across the floor, the children coming from their desks towards the teacher at the front of the room.

30. Win oot: get out. A common idiom, cf. win awa, win hame, etc.

35. Bydand (no longer popularly recognised as simply the MSc present participle of the verb bide “stay, remain”) was the motto of the Gordon Highlanders. The badge worn on their uniform bonnets showed the regimental crest (a stag’s head) and the motto.

38. Hooge: a village near Ypres, focal point of a battle in the summer of 1915 when a German attack using poison gas forced the British to retreat. Naturally, the native pronunciation of Hooge does not rhyme with fooge.

39. Fa’s on: who is ready, prepared, willing.

41. Fack’s death: an emphatic asseveration. The last phrase refers to a habit, frequently mentioned, of tying a knot in a handkerchief (or garter) as a reminder of something that needs to be done.

44. Lum: i.e. lum hat or top hat.

50. Fullarton: i.e. a winner of one of the Fullarton and Gray Scholarships in Classical Literature and Moral Philosophy, awarded by Aberdeen University.

51. Bajan, also bejan: this traditional Scottish name for a first-year university student now survives only at St Andrews University: elsewhere it has been superseded by the English term “freshers”.

63. Note the change to English for the apostrophe, and the resumption of Scots for the quoted words.

1.9 Text 9: John M. Caie, *The Auld Plooman*

John M. Caie (1879-1949), son of a minister and brought up on a farm, was an Aberdeen University graduate whose connection with farming work in later life was as a member, and ultimately Deputy Secretary, of the Board of Agriculture for Scotland. His knowledge of the realities of life on the North-Eastern farms never left him, and is the main inspiration for much of his poetry. His command of the dialect matches that of Charles Murray, and he is even less prone than his older contemporary to regard his subject in a sentimental light. The present poem, a clever and moving characterisation of a weary ageing man, employs a plain and realistic dialect to evoke both the tragedy of the subject’s life and the unbreakable fortitude with which he confronts it.

It’s a bonny-lyin’ craftie, fine an’ lythe ayont the hill,
An’ the hoose, gin it were snoddit up, wad dee;
Ma e’e was on’t for lang, but things has a’ gane vrang,
An' the hoosie an' the craft are nae for me.

Na, na, I'm nae compleenin', though auld age is drawin' on
An' I be tae steyter doon the brae my lane;
But I've vrocht sin' I was twal' in sun an' rain an' caul',
An' I'd likit weel a placie o' min' ain.

Ay, a couthy craft like thon wad jist hae ser't the wife an' me,
We'd hae keepit twa-three kye an' hens an' swine;
We'd hae tyaa'd awa' thegither, aye helpin' ane anither —
Hoot, ay, the place wad jist hae shuitit fine.

Ach, but fat's the eese o' thinkin' on the thing I canna hae,
For noo I've neither wife nor son nor gear?

Still an' on, it's gey an' sair tae be strippit, flypit, bare,
Efter trauchlin' i' the yird for fifty year.

The loon — we had but ane — he was a shortsome wee bit ted;
Tae his mither he'd nae marra in the lan';
Syne the mester at the squeel thocht him unco gleg as weel
An' begoo'd tae tak' the laddie by the han'.

'Twas the dominie that gar't us mak' a scholar o' the loon,
Though I dinna mean tae say that we were sweir;
Na, na, we baith were fain, but the bawbees we'd tae hain —
Dod, we'd little claes or kitchy mony a year.

We sent him til the college wi' the siller we'd laid by;
It was jimp eneuch, but that made little odds,
For, awat, the bairn got on; I've a lot o' buks he won
Wi' airm's an' mottoes stampit on the brods.

Syne a day cam' fan his mither an' the dominie set aff
Tae see the laddie gettin' his degree;
That's his pictir wi' his hood; fegs, his mither was fell prood
Fan he got it ta'en an' brocht it hame tae me.

He was aye a thochtfu' cratur, an' he'd fairly set his he'rt
On plenishin' a craft or wee bit ferm;
Gin ma laddie had been here I wadna noot tae speir
For the ingyaun' o' the craftie at the term.

But ma schemes, like plenty ither fowk's, hae a' gane sair agley,
For e'er he'd got a start or ta'en his stance,
The war cam' on an' syne of coorse he be tae jine —
An' noo he's beeried hyne awa' in France.
His mither never cower’t it; she was jist a kin’ o’ tint,
Like a body steppin’ oot intae the mirk;
She’d nae fushion left ava’, for she dwined an’ pined awa’,
An’ she’s happit i’ the mools ahin’ the kirk.

Ah, weel, fat maun be maun be, an’ there’s naething for’t but thole,
Though it’s langsome i’ the forenicht a’ yer lane;
Ye’ve waefu’ waukin’ dreams fan yer wardle’s a’ in leems —
But I’ll need awa’ an’ yoke — it’s chappit ane.
I’m fley’d I maybe winna hae the second pair for lang,
For I wasna swack eneuch tae tak’ the cowt;
I ken fat’s comin’ neist — I maun ca’ the orra beast,
Or gyang an’ help the byllie wi’ the nowt.
It’ll fairly be a come-doon fan I think upon ma craft,
But a sma’ affair compared wi’ a’ the lave;
An’ mony a cheil’ has trod that verra samen road
An’ like me gane quately hirplin’ til his grave.


Rhymes


Notes

1. *Bonny-lyin’*: nicely situated. A croft (with the dialect vowel and the local diminutive, *craftie*) is a smallholding of house and land.

2. *Things has*: Scots usage, singular verb form with full noun phrase (i.e. non-pronominal) plural subject; known as “northern subject rule” in modern sociolinguistic studies.

6. *I be tae be is bude*, a Scots reduction of *behoved*, personal instead of impersonal, pronounced in this dialect [bid] or [bit], with the final [t] subsequently coalescing with the initial of [te] “to”. Despite the spelling, the form is not related to the verb *be*. In line 39 the same form is used as a past tense.

8. *I’d likit*: “I would have liked”.

12. *Hoot aye*: emphatic asseveration: “yes indeed!”

15. *Gey an’*: intensifier.
20. *Begoo’d*: the spelling is misleading: *begoud* would be more historically correct.

23. *Bawbee*: historically a coin of debased silver or copper worth six or latterly three pence; in modern usage a halfpenny or by extension any small coin.

24. *Kitchy*: food (e.g. meat) to improve upon the plain staple fare of meal or potatoes.

35. *Wadna nott*: “wouldn’t have needed”. The omission of the auxiliary is Gen.Sc.; the form *nott* is NE.

36. *Ingyaun*: “ingoing”, i.e. taking up the tenancy (of a farm).

37. A reminiscence of an unfortunately clichéd line of Burns:
   
   The best-laid schemes of mice and men
   Gang aft agley.

41. *A kin’ o’*: “a kind of...” — “as you might say”.

49. *Pair*: i.e. of horses.

51. *Ca’*: i.e. drive. The *orra beast* is a horse kept for odd jobs. The speaker is evidently employed on a two-plough farm, with two pairs of horses for ploughing and the *orra beast* as a fifth. Managing a plough team required skill and practice: the speaker’s fear is that he will be obliged to take a job of lesser status.

1.10 Text 10: Flora Garry, *Main o Yawal’s Dook*

Flora Garry (1900-2000) is one of the most uncompromising of recent dialect poets; but the great affection in which she and her work are locally held is clear evidence not only for the vitality of her Doric as a poetic medium but for the strength of the folk-memory of traditional NE farming life. Her poems have local and often quite specific settings, and present with sharp accuracy the contrast between the natural beauty of the landscape in the changing seasons and the physically and spiritually exhausting work of those who make their living from it. The following poem, which makes expert use of the picturesque vocabulary of the dialect, is an imaginative development of an episode in Chapter 5 of William Alexander’s *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk* (see Text 3 in the Prose section), where some members of the farming community travel by cart to the coastal resort of Macduff for some healthy sea-bathing.

   The wark’s weel tee, the hey’s in cole, the mossin’s gey near by,
   Ben the midden dyke gwana bags hing furth to dry.
   The bailie an the orra loon’s awa to Aikey Fair
   An Main o Yawal’s aff to tak his annwal at Tarlair.

   Oh, blue’s the lift abeen the Firth this bonny Simmer day
   An blue’s the watter reeshlin ower the san’s on Deveron Bay.
The win' blaas saft doon Langmanhull an rare's the caller guff
O tar an raips an dilse alang the sea-wynds o Macduff.

Bit Mains is in a bog o swyte, his winkers fite wi styoo.
10 He's stecht in's vivven draavers an sair hankit in's surtoo.
He's burssen, fool an yokie, an crochlie i the queets.
The vera feet o him's roassen an fair lowpin in his beets.
Wi Mally lows't an stabl't noo, he hyters to the shore,
Skytin upo' knablick steens an' slidderin amo' waar.
15 He's caain for a lippin peel, a lythe an sinny nyook,
For he's dwebble an he's druchtit an he's mangin for his dook.
Brecks weel rowe't up, his hose an sheen he casts afore his claes.
He picks the strabs an yaavins oot atween his crunkl't taes.
Syne he tirrs doon tull his middle, hat, surtoo, sark as wee
An, ae fit syne anidder, he gyangs plype intull the peel.
20 He raxes for a puckle dilse an scoors his back an front
Wi mony a haach an pyocher, wi mony a pech an grunt.
Syne oot he spangs, his sark an cwyte an hat again he seeks
An tirrs up tull his middle, castin vivven draars an breeks.
He's lichtsome as a stirkie that's shakken aff the branks.
A pirl o win' plays hey-ma-nannie roun' his spinnle shanks.
He splyters in the peel again. Oh, rare an caul' an roch's
The gluff o saat sea-water slockenin Mains's gizzent hochs.
Bit dooks, like idder pleasures, come ower seen tull an en'.
25 Ower seen in draars an breeks the legs are clossacht up again.
An noo, upo' a girssy knowe, he dowps doon, decent carl,
For this ae oor o a' the year, at peace wi a' the warl.

Flora Garry, Bennygoak and Other Poems,
Aberdeen (Rainbow Books) 1974; p. 29.

Rhymes

Notes
1. Weel tee: making good progress, keeping well to schedule: still current as a NE idiom.
2. Ben: on the inside, the side towards the farm.
3. *Aikey Fair*: formerly held on the first Wednesday after July 19 at Aikey Brae near Old Deer. A popular fair often mentioned in the literature.

4. *Annwal*: the pronunciation is local, but the elliptic use of the word to refer to his annual visit to the seaside is a nonce usage.

8. *Sea-wynds*: a *wynd* is a narrow lane leading off a main street: the word is still common in street names. The sea-wynds led down towards the shore.

10. *Wivven*: same word as “woven”, but means “knitted”.

11. *Fool*: cognate of “foul”, but means simply “dirty”, without the strong pejorative overtones of the English word.

12. *Roassen*: past part. of “roast”. The form, and the use of the past instead of the present participle, are predominantly NE; the meaning of “uncomfortably hot” as applied to persons or parts of the body is Gen.Sc.


15. *Ca*: not “call” but “search”, a NE usage.

21-4. The ritual is described, with the same humorous observation, in *Johnny Gibb*.

23. *Cwyte*: same word as “coat”, with a diphthongisation restricted to this area and to a very few words. *Cwyte* often refers specifically to a fisherman’s oilskin jacket, but that is not the sense here.


27. *Rare an caul*: fine and cold. *Rare an* is little more than an intensifier.

30. *Clossacht*: an idiosyncratic usage meaning “enclosed”. *Clossach* is normally a noun of which the basic (Gaelic-derived) meaning is “carcase” but having also the derived sense of “an untidy mass”.

1.11 Text 11: George Ritchie, *The First Pase*

George Ritchie (born 1913) was a journalist by profession, and is one of many relatively minor poets who make use of the Aberdeenshire dialect. His use of ballad- or nursery-rhyme-like metres, his humour, and his unaffected, unexaggerated but precise and accurate use of the dialect make his work a pleasant if scarcely outstanding contribution to the local literary corpus. Several of his poems deal with religious topics; and his practice of making Biblical figures talk in a familiar homely idiom is of course in accordance with an ancient tradition of popular Christian literature.

The lassie grat. Half-blin wi tears an feart,
She saa a man, onkent fit Man he wis.
'Div ee ken far they've teen him till?' she speert.
‘He’s nae here noo fitever road He is.’

The Man said, ‘Mary,’ ae word an she kent
That aa He’d said wis true, for there He steed,
Alive — an mair — an garrin’s aa tak tent
He’s here, He’ll aye be here, an daith is deid!

Twa men gaed doon the road, syne far ahin

Anither cam, an aa the wye they spak.
At gloamin fin they won intil an inn
They kent Him fin He took the loaf to brak.
His freens, in fear, ahin a lockit door,
Said, ‘Fit is there to dee noo? Fit’s the eese?’

He cam, wi wounds that werena there afore:
The Word Himsel. His word for them was ‘Peace’.

Gyan doon the road or in a crood o men
Or in a hoose that’s steekit lock an key,
He’s here, although we maistly dinna ken.

He’ll aye be here — gin only we could see.


Rhymes

All rhymes in this passage are straightforward.

Notes

Title:  *Pase* [pes] as a name for Easter is virtually obsolete.

1. *Grat*: past tense of *greet* “weep”.

2. *Onkent*: without knowing. A NE idiomatic use of the past participle with a present sense.


7. *Tak tent*: a clichéd expression meaning “pay attention”.


John C. Milne (1897-1962) is one of the wittiest of North-Eastern poets, specialising in the quick-fire, epigrammatic style exemplified in this poem. Like
many local literary figures, he came of farming stock, and pursued a distin-
guished academic career at Fraserburgh Academy and Aberdeen University.
Education was his professional field, and his final position was as Master of
Methods at Aberdeen College of Education. The persona of the present poem
is the teacher in a country school: that such a person would in reality speak
the local dialect is even today not unlikely, and would have been entirely nat-
ural a few decades ago.

O for Friday nicht!
Friday — hame and hummin!
O for Friday nicht!
Friday's lang o’ comin!

Noo lat's hae Geography!
Fut's the toun for jute?
Sit at peace, Jemima!
Kirsty, dry yer snoot!
Hey there, Wullie Wabster!

Stop powkin in yer breist!
Fut? a horny-golloch!
Gweed be here, fut neist!
Faur's the Granite City?
Weel, Georgina Broon?

Glesga? Haud yer weesht, quine!
Glesga's just a toun!
Buckie? Hoots an' havers!
The Broch? Preserve us a’!
Hey there, Geordie Gammie!

Pit that preen awa!
O for Friday nicht!
Friday — hame and hummin!
O for Friday nicht!
Friday's lang o’ comin!

Noo lat's hear yer spellin's!
Fut? Ye got nane oot!
A'richt — Nature Study!
Fut gars tatties sproot?
Heat and moisture — fairly!

Fut mair, Wullie Gurk?
Fairmers! Gweed preserve's man!
Fairmers dinna work!
Dod, tak’ in the bottles!
Fa wants milk the day?

35  Gweed be here, fut’s wrang, Jock?
    Needin anither strae?
    No! Weel, man, fut gars ye
    Stan’ there and goup and glower?
    Twa deid fleas in yer bottle!

Be thankfu’ there’s nae fower! ...
Govie Dick — the Register!
Fa’s nae here the day?
Jockie Todd — the nickum!
Granny’s washin day!

40  Jeannie — German measles!
    Tammas — twa blin’ lumps!
    Jamie Tough? Fut’s that, Jean?
    His mither’s takin mumps?
    Noo the aucht times table!

Weel dane, Wullie Flett!
Man, ye’ll be Director
O’ the coonty yet!
Fut’s that? No ye wunna!
Weel, weel, please yersel’!

45  Dyod, it’s time for lowsin!
    Wullie, ring the bell!
    Geordie shak’ the duster!
    Jean, pit past the chack!
    Fut’s that, Wullie Webster?

A wyver on my back!
Jock, the aspidistra!
Tak’ it te the sink!
Canny wi’t ye gomeril!
It’s aul’er then ye think!

60  Noo, a word o’ warnin
    Afore ye tak’ the road!
    There’s twa Inspectors comin —
    Haud yer tongue, Jock Todd!
    Twa Inspectors comin
Te — fut's adee, Jean Squairs?
Yer mither’s mebbe comin?
Wha the deevil cares!
O for Friday night!
Friday — hame and hummin!

O for Friday night!
It's been gey lang o' comin!


Rhymes

All rhymes in this passage are straightforward.

Notes

6. The answer is Dundee.
13. Aberdeen. The children who do not know this, and the teacher who denigrates Glasgow as being, compared to Aberdeen, “jist a toon”, are equally objects of amusement. (Buckie and Fraserburgh, locally called “the Broch”, are fishing ports on the North-facing coast.)
15. Haud yer wheesht: “keep quiet!”
25. Refers to the once-universal custom in Scottish primary schools of administering a daily list of words for which the correct spellings had to be learned as homework.
34. Crates of bottled milk were until recently supplied to schools for the children to drink at break.
41. Govey Dick: an exclamation of surprise, exasperation, etc.
46. Blin' lump: a boil that does not come to a head.
72. Wha: an inconsistency: the North-East form is fa.

1.13 Text 13: Peter Buchan, The Skipper’s Wife

Peter Buchan (1912-1991) is the principal voice in modern letters of the fishing industry of the North-East. His active life was spent in the trade, as fisherman and latterly harbourmaster at Peterhead. Most of his poetry and short stories draw for their subject matter on life in the fisher communities, and many words peculiar to their dialect find their first or only literary attestation in his works. Besides being a popular local poet, he had a well-earned reputation as a raconteur and public speaker, exploiting the full expressive range of his mother-tongue.
Jock, neist door, has a score o’ cran,
But yer father hisna neen.
They say there’s a hantle o’ herrin’ tee,
So far can the gowk ha’e been?
5  He’ll seen be hame wi’s foul black face,
An’ he’ll look for mait, ’at’s mair.
An’ he’ll fidge an’ pech an’ he’ll grunt an’ blaw
Like a bear fin its belly’s sair.
He’ll ha’e to be deein’ wi’ pottet heid
Tho’ it’s nae jist ower sair jeeled.
‘Anither tattie or twa,’ did ye say?
‘Na, we’ll just chap the thing ’at’s peeled;’
It’s a gey sair fecht, an’ it’s true aneuch
The wordle’s ill-pairtit for some o’;
10  It’s time he wis gettin’ a shottie noo
Or it’s gweed kens fit’ll come o’.
Jock, neist door, has a cran or twa,
But yer father’s a hunner and twinty!
Hing in noo quine! Rin for fillet steak,
20  An’ be sure m’ dear ye get plinty,
An’ ye’ll sort it richt wi’ a fine fresh egg
An’ a bonny hame-made chip;
An’ ye’d better cry-te for a curran’ dad
For he disna get that in the ship.
Is there plinty o’ watter het noo quine?
He’ll be yirdit wi’ scales an’ saut.
If he starts t’ sing like the Rattra’ horn,
Jist dinna say it’s a faut.
He’s a richt smairt man yer father, quine,
30  There’s fyowe on the coast to beat ’im,
I think I’ll pit on my Sunday hat
An’ ging doon on the pier to meet ’im.

Peter Buchan, Mount Pleasant,
Peterhead (Offset Printers) 1961; p.22.

Rhymes

All rhymes in this passage are straightforward.
Notes

1. Cran: a measure for herring before cleaning, fixed at 37\(\frac{1}{2}\) imperial gallons and roughly equivalent to four baskets.

9. Pottet heid: a cold dish of meat from a calf’s head shredded and served in a jelly made from the stock.

10. Sair: the use in a phrase with a positive implication is regular. No sair... “not very...”.

12. The thing: the one (potato).


15. Shottie: shot in the specific sense of a draught of fish.

19. Hing in: local idiom for “hurry up”.


27. Rattray: Rattray, a headland north of the port of Peterhead. Horn: i.e. foghorn.

1.14 Text 14: Alexander Scott, *Haar in Princes Street*

Alexander Scott (1920-89), poet and scholar, was a leading figure in the literary, cultural and political movement known as the Scots Renaissance, with one of the strongest and most individual voices in twentieth-century Scots poetry. His poetic language is not a local dialect but the “synthetic Scots” of the post-MacDiarmid Makars; but his distinctive and brilliant use of it derives much of its uniqueness from his frequent use of NE words. The skill with which he manipulates the intricate sound-patterns of his poems, and his choice of emotive and phonaesthetically powerful words, has earned him a reputation as a master craftsman. The present short poem demonstrates these traits in abundance. The scene described is Edinburgh’s main street: to appreciate the visual imagery, it is necessary to know that on its south side is a deep and often fog-filled hollow, containing ornamental gardens, beyond which a splendid architectural skyline, dominated by the Castle on its high and precipitous cliff, rises imposingly in the distance. The statues (not a group, but positioned individually along the length of the street) are adjacent to the pavement on the south side, and face the street.

The heicht o the biggens is happit in rauchens o haar,
    The statues alane
Stand clearly, heid til fit in stane,
And lour frae theen and thonder at hencefurth and here.
The past on pedestals, girnan frae ilka feature,
Wi granite frouns
They glower at the present’s feckless loons,
Its gangrels tint i the haar that fankles the future.
The fowk o flesh, stravaigin wha kens whither

And come frae whar,
Hudder like ghaists i the gastrous haar,
Forfochten and wae i the smochteran smore o the weather.
They swaiver and flirn i the freeth like straes i the sea,
An airless swither,

Steeran awa the t’ane frae t’ither,
Alane, and lawlie aye tae be lonesome sae.
But heich i the lift (whar the haar is skailan fairlie
In blufferts o wind)
And blacker nor nicht whan starns are blind,
The Castle looms — a fell, a fabulous ferlie.
Dragonish, darksome, dourly grapplan the Rock
Wi claws o stane
That scart our history bare til the bane,
It braks like Fate throu Time’s wanchancy reek.


Rhymes

The phonology is not overtly North-Eastern, but it would be perfectly possible to read
alane-stane as [aline] - [stin], and similarly bane [bin] in the last verse. The use of
pararhymes in lines 1 and 4 of each verse and full rhymes in lines 2 and 3 is a characteris-
tic Scott device. Whar is used instead of the NE far, but must be pronounced [war] instead
of the W and SW [war] to rhyme with haar.

Notes

7. Loons: a well-known NE idiom is the use of loun as the common word for "boy". A sug-
gestion of inadequacy and immaturity is appropriately present here.
12. Smochter: the basic meaning of the word is “smoulder” — burn slowly with thick
smoke — but it is also applied to mist or drizzle, and when used of people means to
crowd or huddle together. All senses NE.
13. Freeth: usually means foam, as on beer or boiling liquid, but here idiosyncratically
refers to the fog.
16. *Lawlie*: this is apparently a nonce derivation from *law* “low”. Its only previous attestation is in an 1859 translation of St Matthew’s Gospel: “I am meik an’ lawlie in hairt”; but here the meaning appears to be “low-spirited, despondent”.

1.15 Text 15: Alastair Mackie, *Aiberdeen The-Day*

Alastair Mackie (1925-95) is among the most distinguished of twentieth-century Scottish poets. He was born in Aberdeen, graduated from Aberdeen University, and was by profession a schoolteacher until his retirement in 1983. His medium is neither the traditional rural dialect of most of the poets in this section nor the “synthetic Scots” with a high component of North-East vocabulary used by Alexander Scott, but a form close to city speech, showing fewer of the classic NE dialect differentiae and more features of urban vernacular than other local poets. He is so far the only poet to take the city of Aberdeen as a central theme in his work (Alexander Scott magnificently evokes the city in his poem *Heart of Stone*, but it is not his main source of inspiration), and to present realistically the grim and harsh aspects of life in what has always been presented, not without justification, as the most attractive of Scottish cities. The present poem refers to the massive (and unpopular) rebuilding projects which have greatly altered the appearance of the city centre (cf. Text 6 in Section 4).

Nou in the echties the granite’s nearhan smoored
wi plate gless an English brick. Bulldozers
bellyrive. The toun bounds rax the map
aa airts. Supermercats trok their wares
and bigg ower history. Yè gang ben George Street
into a tracheotomy. The toun’s kirk
’il hae mammon for a neibor. Profit
like murder has nae fatherland.

Fa ains Aiberdeen? Fremmit siller
like killer sharks ’Il rive the body’s fat.
Mind on St. Christopher the martyr? —
at pint-blank range the crossbows stobbit ’m
their bolts’ black leeches sookit his life,
the reid bleed dreeled like an ile-field.

*In The Living Doric*, op.cit.; p.65.
Notes

1-2. Aberdeen contains many outstanding examples of both civic and domestic architecture in locally-quarried granite; but the supply is now exhausted and the city's modern buildings no longer maintain the tradition.

5-6. At the time of writing, the connection between Union Street and George Street, the city’s two main shopping centres, had just been blocked (despite public protests) by a new shopping mall adjoining the grounds of a massive church. The immediate result of this was the dereliction of much of George Street.

14. The reference is to the wealth which has come to Aberdeen, or to some people in it, as a result of the North Sea oil industry: wealth which, as in all comparable cases, has had both good and bad results for the city.

1.16 Text 16: Raymond Falconer, *The Sair Hert*

Raymond Falconer (b.1953) is the youngest of the established poets in the present section, and has so far produced only a small collection of poems in the North-East dialect. His themes are fairly traditional (the collection includes a fable, a poem on the Highland Clearances, and several on the people of the region and their harsh life), but his style and idiom are thoroughly “modern”, demonstrating clearly that the literary viability of the dialect is not restricted to established genres.

Fower bairn’s bools,
grippet in the cratur’s haun.
Grippet like haudin back
his watery een,

5    till aa at eence doon in a gush
the tears, the bools
doon on his knees
in the caul wid glaur
an rotten leaves.

10   The loon grat
for aa he wis worth.
His mither lyin still,
fite faced,
deen wi toil

15   in the parlour, the sun’s
lang winter shadi, creepin
ower Westerton’s parks
through the curtains,
an the lace aboot her hauns.

20  The men wi his faither,
lum hats,
stinkin o baccy rick,
aye an dramas.
The loony grat

25  fair tint wi grief,
sickin nae mair fae
life,
noo his mither’s deed.

Sookin in the wid’s

30  caul guff wi ilka staggered
sob.
Til aa at eence
the grieve cam roon
ahent the tree

35  an hauled im doon
the brae,
roch an coorse
wi his unfeelin grasp.

“Ye’ll ging tae yer Aunt Jessie

40  noo,
for I’ve nae time for bairns
especially you.”

In Four Scottish Poets,
Aberdeen (Garron Publications) 1983; pp 6-7

Notes

1. Bairn: presumably used for the alliteration. The word is known in the NE, but the usual local word for “child” is littleen.

2. Cratur: same word as “creature”, but connotes sympathy.

5. Aa at eence: “all at once”. Scots, including NE Scots, has distinctive equivalents for this “common Anglo-Saxon” idiom.

8. Wid glaur: presumably mud on the forest floor. Not a normal collocation.

16. Shadi: the spelling is idiosyncratic: shaddae is more usual.

17. Parks: the fields of a farm.

37. *Roch an coorse*: very common NE words.

### 1.17 Text 17: Sheena Blackhall, *Wanted*

Sheena Blackhall (born 1945) is the most prolific and most accomplished writer currently practising in the North-East. Her steadily-increasing output includes several volumes of poetry and short stories, in which the dialect, with its full range of expressive vocabulary, is exploited with remarkable skill for not only evocative scenic descriptions, lifelike character studies and realistic dialogue passages, but flights of imagination and speculation far removed from the traditionally down-to-earth and realistic tone of Doric writing. The present poem is from a collection published in 1995.

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Soo-moued, ringle-eed Jock McBride
Is socht bi polismen far an wide
An identikit o his coorse physog
'S bin sent frae Turra tae Auchenshogue.

His teeth are nesty's a nettle's nip
His pow's as huddry's a scalfy's skip
His neb is brukken (a caber bowed)
His lugs are thirled tae the clink o gowd.

His broo is gurly, his mowser's jobby
His neive strikks fear in the boldest bobby
His thrapple's knotty ... a rinnin noose
He'd stert a fecht in an empty hoose.

McBride is hard as Barlinnie rock
He'd gie Count Dracula's bairns a shock

His fingers, crannies an thoombs are tarry
His claes fell aff the back o a larry.

His harns are crookit's a shepherd's cromack
Hate in his hairt an a big Kilmarnock
Stapped on his heid like a baker's bap

He's a blicht on the lan, frae taes tae tap.

His showders are braid as the Forth Road Brig
His shanks are heigh as a Nor Sea rig
His oxters are blaik's twa bats frae Hell
It's sure he's sib tae the deil himsel.
```
25 Wi his elbucks sherph an his ragnails teuch
He’d howk a canyon ooto a sheuch
His kyte’s as lean as a Heilan stirk
An he picks yer lock wi a rooshty dirk.
His dowp, behouchie, his dock or hurdies
30 Are twa roon meens ower grim for wirdies:
   Wanted. McBride. Alive or Deid!
   Reward — Twa Tinnies o Best Shortbreid.

Sheena Blackhall, *Lament for the Raj an Ither Poems*,

**Rhymes**

False rhyme: *bowed* [bʊd] - *gowd* [ɡɔud]. The non-rhyme *cromack* – *Kilmarnock* is an obvious joke.

**Notes**

4. *Turra*: local pronunciation of Turiff, a village in Aberdeenshire. “Auchenshog” is a fictitious name.
12. Proverbial expression for a person of unusual pugnacity.
18. *Kilmarnock*: a flat woollen bonnet, named after the Ayrshire town in which it was originally woven.
29-30. The grotesque caricature here collapses into farce.

1.18-1.23  **Texts 18-23: Samples of amateur and children’s poems**

A feature of the North-East’s annual Doric Festival is a competition for writing in various categories and by various age groups. Selections are here given of poems published in a collection of prize-winning entries for 1995 and 1996: spellings are reproduced as in the collection, and obvious mistakes will not be noted. Since it would clearly be inappropriate to subject children’s poems to serious literary commentary, annotations will be restricted to points of linguistic interest: nonetheless, it is appropriate to observe that, besides the expected native familiarity with the phonology and grammar of the dialect, the level of knowledge of traditional vocabulary appears to be impressively high.
Text 18: Mark Price (primary school), *Skweel Denners*

Skweel denners, skweel denners,
Gweed sake Aa’m scunnert wi skweel denners.
Hiv ye iver seen their vegieburgers?
Rooshtie crumbs stucken on til a layer o tatties,
Their puddin’s rubarb crummle an nae milk!
It gars yer moo shiver.
Aa’m takin packit pieces fae noo on!

*In Sandy Stronach (ed.), New Wirds, Oldmeldrum (Bennachie Publishing) 1996; p.14.*

Notes


7. *Packit pieces*: this looks like a redundant conflation of the traditional Scots *piece*, a prepared snack carried to the place of work, and the English term *packed lunch* which is unfortunately coming into vogue.

Text 19: Kathryn Bruce (primary school), *Naitur’s Bairn*

A bairnie wi licht step travelled
Ower mossy turf an heather’s fadin flooers.
Aside her, shalla burnies trickled atween smooth stanes.
Anither dawn’s saft yalla beams glistered ower the gowden parks

Wi stooks new biggit bi the fite hairst meen.
Nae yet sax year aul an fu o life
A quine weel-eesed tae Naitur’s freenly wyes.
Brocht up bi faither, a man kent
For gweed wirk wi horse an ploo.

In look an wyes, she wis her mither’s bairn,
Tho she hid niver kent this couthy soul
She’d geen her life tae hiv this child she lo’ed.
Noo the brig ahin her, win’s sang
An birdies chatter faded as bairnies voices filled the air

Wi skirls o lauchter, greetin, a puckle girns as weil.
A bell rang oot, an fae a the airts
These bairns wi willin hairts fell intae line.
A day that she’d foriver min —  
Her first day at skweel!

_Ibid._, p. 23

**Notes**

17. In a poem remarkable, particularly in the work of a primary school child, for linguistic consistency, this Anglicism stands out unexpectedly: _this_ is used in singular and plural in NE dialects.

**1.20 Text 20: Mhairi Paterson (secondary school), The Rich and the Puir**

The sun’s rays ding doon on the huge hoose far she bided,
The caul weet rain dingin doon on the street far he bided.
Her body draped in jewellry an funcy claes,
His body lacked nourishment an care.
5 She hid siller, freens an love,
Aa he got wis looks o peety.
She hid aa ye cwid wish for,
He scranned for food.
Yet she wished for peace an quaet wi nae sic popularity an riches,
10 He wished for food, shelter an safety for ither.
Yet baith whispered thegither, “Fit wye’s life nae fair?”

_Ibid._, p. 13

**Notes**

1-2. The past tense of _bide_ is correctly _bade_, a form which is still in use.

**1.21 Text 21: Vicki McBain (secondary school), Up i Toon.**

Fin fowk gae up i toon on a Seterda nicht
I’ quines aa doolt up, i loons ready for a fecht.
They gyang inti nichtclubs an duncie the nicht awa
An the booze an the cigies ging in an oot their moo.
5 Fin they start getting bootzy an they’re stottin doon the street
Start sayin “Hiya” an “Fit like” ti aabody they meet.
They gyang inti nichtclubs an drink mair an mair
They dinna ken fit they’re sayin, in fac, they dinna care.
Then they say they feel sick an rinnin ti the bogs
Pukin aa ower i place like its rainin cats an dogs.
Fin they're ready ti ging hame they catch a taxi cab
They get inside an sit doon an hae a gab.
Fin they get in, jist wint ti gyang stracht ti their bed
An fin they get up in the mornin they winna myn fit they'd said.
They get up in i mornin an be sick an affa lot
They say they'll nivver dee't again; bit bi the next time they've forgot!

Ibid., p. 49

Notes

2. Doolt: probably a misprint for dollt: the familiar slang expression “dolled up” with a Scots ending.

15. Be sick: the be reflects the sense of “be sick” — i.e. vomit — as an active, not a stative, verb: “sick” in the sense of “ill” is not used in Scots except in stock phrases such as off sick “absent from work because of illness”.

1.22  Text 22: Patricia Scott (adult), Alairm

Lugs ferst, kick intae play.
Hearin, bit nae harkenin.
Domineerin, continuous soun.
Eyelids slowly lift,

5 Curtains openin on an impty stage.
Deavin soun.
Deafin message sint tae brain, deid brain.
Dirlin soun.
Nerves chunner.

Brain orders transmittit bit nivver received.
Body on automatic pilot,
Slings legs oot o bed.
Fushmanless stagger, fushmanless growp.
Fummelin fingers press button.

15 Blessed relief,
Alairm aff.
Like rewoun video
Breenge bak intae fleapit.
Sinkin, saggin intae still waarm spot.
20  Muckle gypin, mou yawnin
    Bowffin hoast, clearin claggy glet.
    Raspin brak o win.
    Cintentit claw.
    Eyelids lower. Peace, perfect peace.

25  Vyce o authority.
    Female alairm caa fae fit o stair.
    Reid alert!
    Aa hans on deck,
    Aa systems go.

Ibid., p. 22

Notes

1. *Ferst*: this spelling is intended to suggest the very open allophone of /e/ before [r]. Even so, the vowel is distinct from the [e] of a word like *Perth*.

5. *Impty*: represents the local pronunciation. Likewise *sint*, l.7.

7. *Deafin*: if correct, this is unusual: *deaf* [dif] is not used as a transitive verb.

18. *Bak*: a pointless idiosyncracy. *Fleapit*: slang for “bed”.

19. *Waarm*: to suggest [wɔrm] as contrasted with SSE [wɔrm].


1.23 Text 23. Eric Rice (adult), *The Bell.*

    Fan Ah’m reevin awa
    Up mountain braes,
    An gaan on for the heichts
    Ah start ti tyauve

5  Atween ma pechin
    Ah hear a bell
    Pealin,
    Pealin,
    Hyne awa.

10  Bit fan Ah lissen,
    Thir's nithin.
    Jist the win
    Siftin ower steens an girse,
An Ah’m aa masel
15 Wi the distant view
Under lang grey cloods.
Haudin awa’
Beet aifter beet,
Forrit an back,
20 Up Ah gyang;
Bit its aye there,
Plain,
Thin,
Hyne,
25 Hyne awa.
Ah ken it’s jist ma ain hert
Pumpin the bleed in ma lugs;
Bit ma ither hert hears the soun tee,
An gars mi myn ither days
30 Hyne awa.
Is’t a schoolday
An the bell caain aabody inti the class?
Or a quaet Sunday,
The Aul Kirk an the Free Kirk
35 Twynin awa thegither?
Or jist the Toon Haal knock
Tellin the lang oors o a warkin day.
The bell’ll aye come til me,
As wye Ah climm;
40 An the toon in the howie,
Hyne awa.

_Ibid., p. 51-2_

**Notes**

1. _Reevin:_ the sense, restricted to E and NE dialects, is “forcing one’s way forward”.
18. _Beet:_ somewhat unusual, but presumably this is “boot” and the sense is “stride after stride”.
29. _Mi:_ representing the pronunciation of the vowel in the reduced form of _me_ as [ɛ].
   With some speakers the sound is so much lowered and retracted as to approach [ʌ], to suggest which the spelling _ma_ is sometimes used. (There is no reason why _mi_ should be used here but _me_ in l. 38.)
2. Prose

Robert Forbes, whose translation from Ovid is the first recorded poem in the North-East dialect, also claims credit for its first piece of prose; and the tradition which he thus initiated continues, as does the poetic, to the present. Prose in Scots has always been less well developed than poetry; but the extracts included here show that in its more restricted corpus the medium provides for a remarkable range of styles.

Forbes’s Journal, with its loosely-structured paratactic sentences and vigorous colloquial vocabulary, is (especially considering the absence of literary models) a positively astonishing record of the words and idioms used in vernacular speech in the early eighteenth century. His idiolectal medium is in marked contrast with that of George MacDonald in the next section: MacDonald, unlike Forbes, is a writer of great sophistication, dramatically suggesting the rhythms and cadences of the spoken dialect. These two prose genres, narrative and dialogue, are exemplified in the remaining extracts.

Texts 3, 4, 5 and 9 are dialogue passages from nineteenth- and early twentieth-century novels. MacDonald’s moralistic fiction calls for a somewhat different literary use of the dialect from the politically loaded social realism of Alexander; but the actual tongue is essentially the same: the extract included here illustrates his humorous use of contrasting registers. The linguistic consistency of those two writers shows by contrast the less careful use of the dialect by Greig (a folklorist and songwriter rather than a novelist), in whose dialogue some English forms are occasionally found. The same is true of Philip, a forgotten writer even in the North-East, in the extract quoted; but here the intention is to illustrate (as other Scottish writers have done, e.g. Burns for satiric effect in Holy Willie’s Prayer) the ready ease with which the words and phrases of the Authorised Version could influence Scots colloquial speech. Robbie, by contrast, uses a realistic vernacular: it may be noted that his orthography occasionally departs from the standard in words shared by Scots and English to suggest a colloquial pronunciation (e.g. terrable).

The literary representation of the speech of characters is far more frequent in Scots than continuous narrative; but Texts 6, 7 and 8 illustrate contrasting, though equally interesting, experiments in the genre. Most striking is the exuberance of John Wight, who to an even greater extent than Forbes (and probably with more self-conscious artistry) exploits the semantic and phonoesthetic force of the dialect vocabulary. R.L. Cassie presents his realistic character-drawing in an appropriately less emotive register; and Scott, in a passage
originally written as a dramatic monologue for public performance, adds to
the humour of the situation described by the use of idioms and expressions
suggesting a light-hearted tone (e.g. *licket intae a tattie-basket*).

In the subsequent passages, the dialect, while still the mother tongue of
several of the writers, is used as a more conscious literary artifice. Gibbon
largely eschews dialect orthography but departs radically from standard liter-
ary English in his evocation of the conversational idioms and cadences of the
locality. Helen Pryde, not a native speaker of North-East dialect, cleverly uses
it for humorous effect: her fictional situation in which a speaker deliberately
exaggerates the stereotypical features of the dialect to puzzle her hearers is
handled skilfully to avoid a mere parody. Meticulous accuracy in presenting a
reconstructed form of the dialect at its most advanced stage of independent
development is the aim of W.P. Milne’s novel: the result presents difficulties of
comprehension even to present-day native speakers, but when measured
against the most conservative varieties of the dialect which survive, it is
nonetheless an extraordinarily convincing representation. The same cannot be
said with such conviction of the passages by Toulmin and Murray, both interest-
ing for their abundance of local words and idioms but marred by, in one
case, the author’s dependence on the highly individual style of Gibbon as a
model, and in the second, the excessive display of stereotypes. Peter Buchan,
as in his poetry, utilises the vocabulary of the fishing industry: the passage
reproduced here modulates from an explanatory section in which dialect
words are introduced and glossed in English to an anecdote recounted in
idiomatic Scots. A selection of local proverbs, cited for their academic interest
by a contributor to the *Statistical Account of Scotland* (see Chapter 2), serve as
confirmation of the vitality of folk idiom in the mid-twentieth century. Finally,
some selections from newspaper columns published in 2000 demonstrate that
the dialect, in contrasting registers (general Scots with only a few token North-
East features, highly conservative Doric, somewhat thin Doric dialogue inter-
spersed with English narrative, urban speech inconsistently influenced by ver-
nacular English) is still very much alive in popular culture; and two passages
written for children (by an experienced teacher) argue for the strong enduring
presence of dialect features among the rising generation.

2.1 Text 1: Robert Forbes, *Journal from London to Portsmouth*

Forbes’s *Journal*, a humorous account of his various misadventures during a
stagecoach journey, shows a linguistic exuberance surpassing even that of his
translation from Ovid (see Text 1 in the Poetry section). The very local and in
some cases archaic words, many of remarkable phonaesthetic power, add con-
siderably to the realism and humour of the writing. Who was the intended
recipient of the journal, and whether Forbes fulfilled the promise made in the
last paragraph to send him a similar account every week “in case I binna
thrang (provided I’m not busy)”, cannot be ascertained.

There happen’d to be i’ the house we came to lodge in, three young
giglet hissies, an’ they were like to split their sides fan they saw how
blubber’d and droukit the peer wary-draggels war fan they cam in; far ye
wou’d hae thought the yerd-meel had been upo’ their face: There wis an
5 o’ the queens, I believe, had casten a lagen-gird; the tither wis a haave
colour’d smearless tapie, wi’ a great hassick o’ hair, hingin in twa-pen-
nerts about her haffats; she looked sae allagrous that a bodie wou’d
nae car’d to meddle wi’ her, apiece they had been hin’ t to do’ t; but the
third wis a cauller, swack bit o’ beef, as mirkie as a maukin at the start,
an’ as wanton as a spenin lamb. I believe she wes a leel maiden, an’ I
canna say bat I had a kirnen wi’ her, an’ a kine o’ harlin favour for her;
bat didna care for bein aur brouden’d upon her at first, for fear she
shou’d say that I was new-fangle; however I took her by the bought o’
the gardy, an’ gar’d her sit down by me; bat she bad me haud aff my
10 hands, for I misgrugled a’ her apron, an’ mismaggled a’ her cocker-nony:
bat I had not set her well down by me, till in came sik a rangel o’ gentles,
an’ a liethry o’ hanziel slyps at their tail, that in a weaven the house wis
gain like Lowren-fair; for you wou’d na’ hard day nar door; syne the
queans wis in sik a fery-farry, that they began to misca ane anither like
kail-wives, an’ you wou’d hae thought that they wou’d hae flown in
ither’s witters in a hand-clap: I wis anes gain to speer fat wis the matter,
bat I saw a cum o’ camla-like follows wi’ them, an’ I thought they were a’
fremt to me, an’ sae they might aet ither, as Towy’s hawks did, far ony
thing that I car’d; far thinks I, an’ I shou’d be sae gnib as middle wi’
the thing that did nae brak my taes, some o’ the chiels might let a raught at
me, an’ gi’ me a clamihewit to snib me frae comin that gate agen. At last
ane o’ the hissies came an’ speerd at me gin I wou’d hae a bit o’ a roasted
grycie, or a bit o’ a bacon haam (that is the hinder hurdies o’ an auld
swine), for sipper, bat ye ken well enough that I was never very
30 brouden’d upo’ swine’s flesh sin my mither gae me a forlethie o’ t, ‘at
maist hae gi’en me the gulsach; an’ sae I tauld her I wou’d rather hae the
leomen of an auld ew, or a bit o’ a dead nout. By this time, it wis time to
mak the meel-an-bree, an’ deel about the castocks, bat nae ae word o’
that cou’d I hear i’ this house; well, thinks I, an’ this be the gate o’t, I’ll better gang to my bed as I’m bodden: fan they saw that, they sent in some smachry or idder to me, an’ a pint of their scuds, as sowr as ony bladoch or wigg that comes out o’ the reem-kirn; far they thou’t ony thing might sair a peer body like me: bat the leave o the gentles wis drinkin wine a fourth, tho’ I might nae fa that; Bat to mak’ an end o’ a lang story, I made shift to mak’ a sipper o’t, an’ gaed to my bed like a guid bairn, an’ the neist mornin they had me up afore the ky, an’ I believe afore the levrick or yern-bliter began to sing, and hurl’d me awa to Portsmouth.

Ajax his Speech to the Grecian Knabbs [&c]
Attempted in Broad Buchan by R.F., Gent.

Notes

3. Far: not “where” but “for”, an idiosyncratic spelling.
5. Casten a lagen-gird: i.e. borne an illegitimate child.
6-7. In twa-pennerts; “in two-penny-worths”, i.e. in dishevelled strands.
8. Apiece: elsewhere Forbes writes this as alpuist and apiest. It is a local variant of albeit.
9. At the start: on the alert; at the point of running or leaping.
11. Harlin: a special sense of the verb, meaning “an inclination of the affections”.
12. Aur: an idiosyncratic spelling of ower “too”.
17. Hanziel: The spelling with z (for MSc. 3) is long obsolete except in some proper names. The word is now generally spelt hangle or haingle.
18. Lowren-fair: either of two fairs held annually in August at Rayne in Aberdeenshire and Laurencekirk in Kincardineshire.

Day nor door: an expression implying complete inability to distinguish sounds, either through deafness or because of a loud confused noise.

21. Witters: witter in the singular means the barb of a fish-hook or gaff; witter is a jocular expression for teeth; hence flee in a body’s witters is “launch an attack on s.o.”.
22. Follows: a phonetic spelling for the local pronunciation of “fellows”.
23. Towy’s hawks: this reference is obscure.
24-5. Middle wi’ the thing that did nae brak my taes: middle is “meddle” (written with the standard spelling in l.8): the expression means “interfere in something that was doing me no harm”.
33. Meel-and-bree: oatmeal stirred in boiling water or stock.
35. Bodden: the form results from the conflation of bid with bode “bid at an auction, offer”.

35. Leave: i.e. leave, “the rest”.
39. I might nae fa that: it might not fall to me. This reversed use of fall is common in Scots.

2.2 Text 2: George MacDonald, *David Elginbrod*

George MacDonald (1824-1905) is one of the most individual and remarkable figures of the Victorian period in Scottish literature. His voluminous output includes poems, plays, sermons, essays on literary and philosophical topics, and a large body of fiction including children’s stories, novels with a realistic setting, and some extraordinary fantasies. The latter combine great imaginative power with a profound and mystical Christian vision: his intensely religious outlook also permeates his domestic novels, leading to an idiosyncratic and at first forbidding combination of vigorous realism in characterisation and dialogue with interposed authorial moralising. His mastery of Buchan Doric is the reason for his inclusion in the present book. The characters in the extract are the bailiff David Elginbrod (one of MacDonald’s exemplary Christian figures), his wife Janet, and the young tutor Hugh Sutherland, a family friend.

Hugh suggested that she might have gone to meet her father.

“How could you let him go, Janet?”

“Lat him gang, laddie! It’s a strang tow ‘at wad haud or bin’ Dawvid, whan he considers he bud to gang, an’ ‘twere intill a deil’s byke. But I’m no that feared aboot him. I maist believe he’s under special protection, if ever man was or ought to be; an’ he’s no more feared at the storm, nor gin the snaw was angels’ feathers flauchterin’ oot o’ their wings a’ aboot him. But I’m no easy i’ my min’ aboot Maggie — the wull hizzie! Gin she be meetin’ her father, an’ chance to miss him, the Lord kens what may come o’ her.”

Hugh tried to comfort her, but all that could be done was to wait David’s return. The storm seemed to increase rather than abate its force. The footprints Hugh had made, had all but vanished already at the very door of the house, which stood quite in the shelter of the fir-wood. As
they looked out, a dark figure appeared within a yard or two of the house. “The Lord grant it be my bairn!” prayed poor Janet. But it was David, and alone. Janet gave a shriek.

“Dawvid, whaur’s Maggie?”

“I haena seen the bairn,” replied David, in repressed perturbation.

“She’s no theroot, is she, the nicht?”

“She’s no at hame, Dawvid, that’s a’ at I ken.”

“Whaur gaed she?”

“The Lord kens. She’s smoored i’ the snaw by this time.”

“She’s i’ the Lord’s han’s, Janet, be she aneath a snaw-vraith. Dinna forget that, wuman. Hoo lang is’t sin’ ye missed her?”

“An hour an’ mair — I dinna ken hoo lang. I’m clean doitit wi’ dreid.”

“I’ll awa’ an’ leuk for her. Just haud the hert in her till I come back, Mr. Sutherlan’.”

“I won’t be left behind, David. I’m going with you.”

“Ye dinna ken what ye’re sayin’, Mr. Sutherlan’. I wad sune hae twa o’ ye to seek in place o’ ane.”

“Never heed me; I’m going on my own account, come what may.”

“Weel, weel; I downa bide to differ. I’m gaein up the burnside; haud ye ower to the farm, and spier gin onybody’s seen her, an’ the lads ’ll be out to leuk for her in a jiffey. My puir lassie!”


Notes

9. A variation of the proverbial expression “He’s no tae haud nor bind”: he cannot be restrained or governed.

10. He bud: it behoved him. The change in usage of this verb from impersonal to personal is regular in Scots.

33. Haud the hert in her: keep her courage up.

39. I downa bide to differ: I can’t stay to argue with you.

2.3 Text 3: William Alexander, *Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk*

William Alexander (1826-94) was born into a crofting family, but turned from farming to journalism after losing his leg in an accident. He was highly acclaimed for the quality of his writing, and acquired some notoriety for his radical political views. *Johnny Gibb*, the classic literary representation of one form of North-East Scots, is also a novel of great social and historical importance, depicting with insight and precisely-observed detail life in the Garioch farming communities at the time of the Disruption. It first appeared in serial form in the *Aberdeen Free Press* in 1868-9, and was received with great enthusiasm: its publication in book form in 1871 was so successful that seven editions appeared over the next ten years. It has continued ever since to be widely read and appreciated.

The characters in the present extract (from Chapter 10) are Jonathan Tawse, the dominie or schoolmaster, and Mrs Birse, a tenant farmer’s wife.

It was to Jonathan Tawse, such as I have described him, that the goodwife of Clinkstyle took her youngest son, Benjie, with the view of his addicting himself to the profession of the law. She had unfolded to the dominie her plans regarding the future of the young man, and wished his advice as to the requisite curriculum of study.

“Ou, weel,” said Jonathan, “we’ll jist hae to set him on for the regular coorse in classics.”

“I wudna won’er,” answered the goodwife. “An’ foo mony classes will he hae to gae thro’ syne? — ye ken he’s i’ the foort class, an’ complete maister o’ the muckle spell-buik, ’cep some unco kittle words ’t’s nain fader can mak’ naething o’.”

“Hoot-toot-toot, ye’re wrang i’ the up-tak’ — it’s classics — nae classes. Mair plainly, an he was a wee thing better grun’it in English — through Mason’s Collection may be — we maun put him to Latin an’ so on.”

“Dis lawvyers need muckle o’t, noo?”

“The mair the better, whan they want to bamboozle simple fowk,” said the dominie. “Like Davie Lindsay’s carman, that gat’s grey mare droon’t whan he ran to the coort:—

They gave me first ane thing they call *citandum*,

Within aucht days I gat but *libellandum*;

Within ane month I gat *ad oppenendum*;

In half ane year I gat *inter loquendum*;

An’ syne I gat — how call you it?— *ad replicandum*;

But I cud never ane word yet understand him.”
“Keep me, Maister Tawse! ye've sic a heid o' leernin yersel'. I dinna believe but ye cud mak' up a prett buik an ye war to try. But mithnin he dee wi' the less coontin?"

“No; certainly not; he maun hae Mathematics confeerin."

“An that be the gate o’ t, the seener he's begun the better, I wud think, to nae loss time. Cudna ye begin 'im at ance wi' a bit lesson? 'Leern ear', leern fair', they say, an' Benjie's a gran' scholar o' s size. He wud bleck 's breeder that's twa year aul'er nor him, ony day."

“Aweel, lat me see,” said Mr. Tawse, who, having at the time no Latin class, had begun to cast about as to the possibility of setting one agoing for the winter, “I'll see if I can get anither ane or twa, an’ try them wi' the Rudiments — ye may jist get a Ruddiman i’ the meantime, or we see.”

“That's the buik that they get the Laitin oot o', is't?”

“No, no; jist the grammar — the rules o' the language.”

“It cudna be deen wuntin, cud it? I dinna care aboot ower muckle o' that gremmar, 's ye ca’it.”

“Care or no care, it's quite indispensabel, an’ it's utterly nonsense to speak o’ wuntin’t,” said Mr Tawse, in an irritated tone.

“They're sic a herrial, that buiks,” pursued Mrs. Birse. “Aye, aye needin' new buiks; but maybe ye mith hae an aul' Kroodymans lyin’ about? I'm seer Benjie wudna blaud it — he's richt careful o’ 's buiks, peer thing.”

“No, no, Mrs Birse. I'm nae a dealer in aul' buiks” —

“Eh, forbid 't I sud mint at that, Maister Tawse; but an ye hed hed ane 't ye cud a len't the laddie, I'm seer we wud 'a been richt muckle obleeg't.”

“If ye dinna value yer son's edication sufficiently to think it worth yer while to pay for the necessary buiks, jist train 'im for the pleuch stilts at ance.”

“Deed, Maister Tawse, I'll dee naething o’ the kin'. There’s neen o’ s fader's familly requarin to work wi' their han's for a livelihood, an' it cam' to that, noo. Peter'll get the tack at hame, 's breeder Robbie'll be pitten in till a place, an' his sister sanna wunt 'er providin'; an' gin that war 't a' we cud manage to plenish the best faurm i' the laird's aucht for Benjie; but fan crairtsurs has pairts for leernin, it's a temp'in o' Providence to keep them back.”

“Oh, rara avis in terris!”

“Fat said ye?”

“Oh, that's only the Latin way o' expressin’ my admiration o’ the
boy’s pairs,” said Mr. Tawse, “an’ it shows ye vera weel what a compre-
hensive an’ elegant tongue it is. It wud be a perfect delight to ye to hear
Benjie rattlin’ off sentences fae Latin authors — I’m sure it wud.”

“Is that Kroodymans a dear buik, Maister Tawse?”

“A mere trifle — a maitter o’ twa shillin’s or half-a-croon.”

“Weel, I think ye mith jist get it the first time ’t ye’re sen’in to the
toon — they’ll maybe gi’e some discoont to the like o’ you — an’ we
can coont aboot the price o’ t at the en’ o’ the raith.”

Aberdeen (Robert Walker and James Murray) 1871, pp. 72-74.

Notes

1-2. Following a well-known literary tradition, Alexander gives his characters names
appropriate to their personalities. A tawse is a teacher’s belt; birse “bristle” suggests the
expression to set up s.o’s birse, i.e. to give annoyance or irritation; and the two syllables of
Clinkstyle imply respectively money, hence meanness, and snobbery.

10. The muckle spell-buik: a spelling book printed in capital letters, as contrasted with the
“wee spell-buik” which was printed in lower-case. These and the other books mentioned
were standard text-books in Scottish parish schools.


17. Davie Lindsay. Sir David Lyndsay of the Mount (c.1486-1555), poet and dramatist.
The dominie’s use of the familiar form Davie is indicative of the enormous popular esteem
in which Lyndsay was held, for his vigorous advocacy of the rights of the common people
and satire of corruption in church and government, until long after his death. The quotation
is from his play Ane Satyre of the Thrie Estaitis (1542), with the spelling somewhat
modernised.

28. No, certainly not: The schoolmaster uses essentially the same dialect as the farmer’s
wife; but displays his superior learning by his use of Latin terms, polysyllabic words and
English idioms not native to the North-East.

69. Twa shillins or half-a-croon: a shilling was one-twentieth of a pound sterling. A crown
was a coin worth five shillings, and half-a-crown one worth two and a half.

72. The en’ o’ the raith: the end of the quarter-year, when payment was made.

2.4 Text 4: Gavin Greig, Logie o’ Buchan

Logie o’ Buchan was first published in serial form in the Buchan Observer in
1897-8, and as a novel in 1899. It is not only an entertaining tale of intrigue
and adventure in the Jacobite period, but a vivid and delightful portrayal of
eighteenth-century society with its customs and superstitions, its music and song, and its strong community spirit. Many passages of dialogue admirably illustrate the local speech-forms, though his practice of making upper-class characters speak English and lower-class ones adopt it when addressing their social superiors reflects the literary conventions of his own time rather than the sociolinguistic facts of the period in which the novel is set. English is, by implication and at times overtly, associated with a world which is the enemy of the traditional culture: early in the novel a young man of good birth (but disreputable character) interrupts a conversation in Scots, on the subject of Scottish music, with: “d-n your Scotch rubbish! Give us something worth listening to — something from the operas.”

In the present extract, despite the author’s claim, the Scots is not entirely consistent; but the passage is included as a demonstration of Greig’s attitudes and habits concerning his native language and culture. Hugh Halket (a historical character) is a former schoolmaster, now a Jacobite fugitive and a virtuoso performer on the fiddle; Jamie is a young gardener who has been a pupil of Halket’s in both scholarship and music.

As became the subject they were discussing, they spoke mostly in good broad Scotch. In those days the vernacular was freely used by the educated classes in Scotland — ministers and even judges falling back on it whenever they wanted to compass a pithy remark or get into close touch with their hearers. Now-a-days such a thing is less common; but there are some yet who allow themselves considerable liberty in this way. And, just as the wealthy man may most safely upon occasion wear a shabby coat, so the learned man may most freely without compromising his intellectual prestige use wide liberties in the choice of vocable and idiom. There may be at times through this a certain surrender of dignity; but there is on the other hand a gain in the range and elasticity of expression.

Halket began to tell his young friend of the musicians and poets he had met in his late wanderings. Speaking of fiddle-playing, he said:-

“Man, there’s a young fellow ca’d Neil Gow gaun to beat a’ the fiddlers in braid Scotland.”

“Nae, Halket?”

“Ay, Halket; and Jamie Robertson tee.”

Jamie laughed delightedly.

“Noo, Mr. Halket, dinna be makin’ a feel o’ a body.”

“He’s only sixteen,” Halket went on, “and there was a competition at Dunkeld a few months ago, and young Neil licket them a’ to sticks.”
“Fiddlesticks!”
And both men took a good quiet laugh.

25 The transition to Scottish poetry and song was natural and easy.

Speaking of the prospects and outlook of native minstrelsy and its coming
men, Halket said:—

“And there’s a’ the pedagogic brotherhood, a dominie ca’d
Sandy Ross. He lives at Lochlee — the maist oot-o’-the-wye romantic
placie ye ever saw, i’ the ha’ir o’ the Grampians. He’s a clever chiel,
Sandy, and has a lot o’ the nat’ral spunk and fire in ’im. Some o’ ’s sangs
are fine, and he’s workin’ the noo at a pastoral poem.”

“Is’t ony like the ’Gentle Shepherd’?” Jamie asked.

“In some wyes, maybe. He read some bitties to me that nicht I
spent wi’ ’im. But in the first place his work will be in story form, while
Ramsay’s is a drama; and in the neist place — weel, Ross is nae sae guid
as Ramsay.”

“I could believe that,” said Jamie. “The ’Gentle Shepherd’ is jist per-
fect, I think.”

40 “Yes,” exclaimed the other with enthusiasm, “pastoral poetry has
there said its hinmost word.”

“Isn’t it a pity,” said Jamie reflectively, “that there’s sae little feelin’ for
this kind o’ thing in the north? There’s oor ain Buchan country — hoo
few bards we can muster! — What micht the reason be, d’ye think?”

45 “I dinna weel ken, unless it be that we are a kin’ o’ isolated up-by
here. The Grampians seem to brak’ the great tidal wave o’ inspiration
that the community o’ bards an’ bardic sentiment has produced in the
south. Syne, like a sma’ inland sea, we hinna space eneuch to raise a
wave o’ oor ain o’ ony consequence.”

“I see,” said Jamie. “I never lookit at it in that wye.” And he paused
to muse. But Halket went on. —

“A’ the same we’re nae jist destitute a’ thegither. We hae oor ain
poets, although they’re maybe few; and, though they dinna maybe com-
pare wi’ some o’ the great singers besouth the Grampians, they hae a
note o’ their ain.”

50 “Ye think that?”

“Ay; and I ken a man that has’t in him to tak’ awa’ a good bit o’ oor
reproach. That’s Mr. Skinner, chapel minister at Linshart, owre by in
Langside.”

“Wis’t his chapel that the sodgers burnt doon in the simmer time?”

“Ay; the Whig rascals!”

Halket looked fierce, but soon added with a grin, —
“But lat the scoondrels pass meantime. There’ll maybe be bigger fires than that yet.”

“He’s a very learned man, isna he?”

“Very. He can write Latin verse amaist as weel’s Buchanan or Johnston o’ Caskieben. But I wish he would let hexameters alane and tak’ till guid braid Scots. Nae man can dee himsel’ full justice except in his ain mither tongue. And when Skinner does that he’ll write sangs that will live.”

“And what about yersel’, Mr. Halket?”

“I dinna ken, Jamie. I’ve files thocht I micht dee something in this line mysel’. It has aye been my ambition to find a place, however hum-ble, amo’ the sons o’ Scottish sang:-

‘All hail oor native minstrel thrang!
Unmeet am I to join your gang;
But toil and trouble sair and lang
I’ll never grudge it,
Could I but add ae little sang
To Scotia’s budget.’”

“And ye’ll dee’t, Mr. Halket; ye’ll dee’t!” exclaimed Jamie with confi-dent enthusiasm ringing in his voice and beaming in his eye.

Logie o’ Buchan: an Aberdeenshire Pastoral of the Last Century, 
by Gavin Greig. Aberdeen (James G. Bisset) 1985; reprint of 1899 edn.; pp.41-44.

Notes

2. In those days: the date of this episode is 1746. The statement is of course correct.

15. On Neil Gow, see notes to Text 7 in the Poetry section. The construction “… a young fellow ca’d Neil Gow [who is] gaun to beat …” is idiomatic Scots.

28. If it is recalled that the speaker is a teacher, the phrase “the pedagogic brotherhood” is perhaps less unlikely than it seems.

29. Lives is an Anglicism: stays or bides would be more natural. The reference is of course to Alexander Ross, the author of Helenore (see Text 3 in the Poetry section). Whether Lochlea would have seemed “romantic” to a man of Ross’s own time is a moot question.

33. The enormous popularity of Ramsay’s play is attested not only by its wide-ranging influence but by numerous references of this kind.

58. The author of Monymusk (Text 2 in the Poetry section). Skinner, as an Episcopalian, was suspected of having Iacobite sympathies; hence the incident referred to.

66-7. George Buchanan (1506-82), tutor to the young James VI, was reputed the finest
classical scholar in Europe; Arthur Johnston, (1587-1641), sometime Rector of King's College and a native of Aberdeenshire, compiled an anthology of Latin poems by Scots poets as well as composing Latin versions of the Psalms.

2.5 Text 5: W.M. Philip, *It’ll A’ Come Richt*

First published anonymously in 1872, *It’ll A’ Come Richt* is a romantic novel with a stock cast of characters: an innocent but slandered heroine, a gallant hero from a humble background, a melodramatic villain, and a group of secondary characters who personify the virtues of piety, industry and thrift. Emphatically a product of its time, it is at any rate no worse than most of the “kailyaird” novels which characterise Scottish fiction in the late nineteenth century. The speech of the character Maggie, which makes striking creative use of the images and cadences of the Authorised Version of the Bible, is an attractive literary representation of a religious register in the Banffshire dialect.

Martha — “I hope you feel prepared for the change. Are you afraid to die?”

Maggie — “It’s an easy aneuch thing to dee, I reckon, as far as the flesh is concern’t — that winna haud a body lang — but fat than? fat than? Davit ca’d it the dark valley o’ the sheda o’ death; mony’s the print o’ feet doun that road, but never ane — no — nae sae muckle’s ane is turn’t backwurth, they’ve a’ gaen trampin’ forrit, forrit, till the soun grew faint an’ wis tint i’ the mist for ever.”

Martha — “Lazarus came back at the command of his Lord, and the Lord of death.”

Maggie — “That’s true, bit he had to gyang awa again, and never cam’ back ony mair, and fatever he had seen or kent ayont the veil, he spakna ocht tae mortal kin. It’s nae to be woner’t gin death sometimes leaks a terrible thing, and gars the hert dunt wi’ the thocht o’ it. A body wud rayther gyang to Heaven some bonnier road gin that war in their power.

Maist fouk, fatever they say, wud like to won up in Elijah’s fashion, but death is the wages o’ sin, an’ we maun a’ pay the penalty o’ the great transgression, and seek to get a firm haud o’ him that teuk the stang fae death, robbit the grave o’ victory, an’ led captivity captive. It’s only fan we’re wuppit to Christ that we sall float ower the jas o’ the Jordan.”

Martha — “I hope and trust you will be happy hereafter. Truly we have a sure and good friend above who will never fail us if we hold by him. David called it the dark valley, but he exclaimed triumphantly, ‘I will fear no evil there, for thou art with me. Thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.’”
Maggie — “Ay, dawtie, that’s hertsome words. ‘A freen in need’s a freen indeed,’ an’ that same is He. He says — ‘Come unto me a’ ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will gie you rest.’ He was aye kin’ to peer creturs like me, an’ liket to gyang aboot amon’s, an’ ease the back that wis boot, an’ the hert that wis sair. Wonerfu’ was He in his love.

Siccan a fechtin’s He hid for’s in this teuch wardle, an’ files he wud sit doon an’ greet aboot’s like a mither soughin’ ower her bairns that had a’ gaen the vrang gate, an’ fan the gloamin’ cam’ down he wud haud awa tae the heech hills his leen, and there, fan ilka ither ee was closet, pleadit for sinfu’ creturs till the starns glowert doun upon him in won’er, an’ the chawmer door o’ the King burst open wi’ a gust o’ soun, an’ a gush o’ licht, an’ the King hismself’ stappit furth wi’ his train an’ said — ‘My Son, fat wud you like?’ And the Son said — ‘I wud like gin ye wud lat me dee for this peer warld; there’s a heap o’ silly sowls in’t, an’ they’ve a’ fa’n into the hans o’ the black fae, bit I’ll close wi’ him, an’ warstle them oot o’ his grip, though he bite hard, and hurl him back tae his ain howff, and make this black and bleart yird bloom again like oor bonnie Eden.’ And the King his father rejoiced and said — ‘Ye sall see o’ the travail o’ your soul and be satisfeet. I sall gie ye the heathen for your heritage and the utmost ines o’ the yird for your possession.’”

Martha — “I am glad, Maggie, you are so well acquainted with your Bible.”

Maggie — “Thank God, I wasna born nor brocht up a heathen. I wis weel learnt at the perish squeel, an’ my granny fed me fan I was a bairn wi’ the milk o’ the word. Ye can tell the fouk in England gin ye gyang back, that Scotland’s nae sic a benichtet corner o’ the warld as some o’ them think. Some o’s maybe hae’na as braw duds on our backs as the fouk in Lonin, but we can read our Bibles and vreet our names, and we dinna forget to gyang to the kirk on Sabbath. We’re nae heathens here, Miss Dale, we’re nae heathens.”

It’ll A’ Come Richt: a Scottish Story of Thirty Years Ago.

Notes
2. To dee: this could mean either “to do” or “to die”. The latter seems more likely here.
20. Jas: Plural of the word for “wave” which is more often spelt jaw.
25. That’s: a feature of NE dialects is that the demonstratives this, that and you have no plural forms.
29. **Boot**: past part. of *boo* “bow”. Pronounced with a protracted vowel. *Boo’t* would be a more satisfactory spelling.

32. **Haud awa**: “hold away”, i.e. make his way: a common Scots expression.

44. **Ines**: NE form of “ends”, more often spelt *eyns*.

48. **Perish squeel**: a reference to the parish schools, instituted at the time of the Reformation, which gave Scotland a system of popular education unrivalled in Europe until they were abolished in 1872.

53-4. **Nae**: “not”, as in regular NE usage: it is not for “no” with the emphatic overtone that “we’re no heathens” would have in English.

### 2.6 Text 6: John Wight, *Tantersome Tibbockie* (extract).

John Wight, a postman and small crofter, contributed numerous articles on farming to a journal entitled *The Smallholder*; but his lasting importance is as an immensely knowledgeable and enthusiastic artist in and amateur scholar of the local dialect. Besides his creative writing, he contributed papers on the dialect to local periodicals, and was for many years a principal informant for the SND. His short stories, published in the series of local anthologies *Swatches o’ Hamespwn*, demonstrate a remarkable degree of linguistic inventiveness. His imaginative and extravagant use of rarely-recorded (and sometimes doubtfully authentic) words and of the grammar and idiom of the dialect at its most distinctive, combine with alliteration and other tricks of sound patterning. In the story from which the present extract is taken, an account of a flighty and spirited girl’s Hallowe’en encounter with a crazed man, the blending of humour and horror recalls much that is characteristic in Scottish literature.

> Faur cud they be for? Oh, gin Tam bit kent! Wuden he come het-fit tull her rescue? A dwaum teuk her. Her hochs wudna shochle nae farrer. She wud ’a fa’en clyte, but Wud Ockie Gefooseltam hulstered her on.

> Ower the Leeriebows, hine by the Boorachie Buchts, ower the Denmoo Brig, throwe the hedder an’ up the brae faur there wis a glack i’ the wid. Bonfires, like wee spunks, lowed hine awa’ on the knowes, an’ she files thocht she h’ard some squallachin’, but there wis an unco bizzin’ in her lugs an’ a yarkin’ in her breist.

> They cam’ on an aul’ clay biggin’, a byous forhooied-like howff. At sicht o’r, she clean fantit. Wi’ a moan, her heid fell dush on Wud Ockie’s shoodir; her hochs gid fae her. Like a caul’ clossach, she hung waffle on’s airm.
He laid her doon on the girss; waffed her gash face wi's bonnet, kitted her livs; straikit her bonnie broon hair; kissed an' clappit her, an' ca'ed her 's dearie, his lammie, his doo. The dwaum wis like death. He wis in a ter'le stew. He reeve his waukit tappie, an' goaved like a goakit stirk. He clauth her up in's oxter, an' swaggert wi's wanchancy birm tae the widder-bitten door, filk he gya a dinch an' birzed wide tae the wa'.

It wis pick mirk ther'in. The wee windockies i' the mudden wa's war mere keekthruilties. He kent's wye ben, an' didna dauchle for fears o' fa' in fool o' gear i' the fleer. Doon he laid her tentie, onen a shak-doon o' dry seggs an' hedder. On the laich hearthsteen, the foon o' a peat firie wis smouchterin' amo' the ase. He fuffed a quile alowe, kenelt a skelb or twa, an' wi' a burnin' cowe, lichtit a cannle-doup, stuck in a clamfurlock, set in a bole abeen the bink.

An aul' thrum o' a crook hung ower the fire; on the binkie sat a kettle wi' hauf a stroop; in the neuk fornent the ga'el winnock, a moch-aeten kist, a pilten pyock spread ower the lid o't. A coggie made oot the hauf o' an ale knaggie, a timmer caup, a horn speen, some shaups o' crockery, some roosty fite-iren gear, an' a wheel orra trock war rantered onen a skelf, filk wis naething better nor a bit roch beerd, streekit on twa aiken stoups an' siccard wi' a knappit barra tram wedged intul the wa'. Curns o' idder orra trooshlich, a girr-luppen, gizzent bowie, a teem saut trochie, twa-three cloggies, an' an aul' roozier lay reel-rall aboot the fleer-heid.

The reek wis unco thrawn tae fuff oot at the roon gaup i' the riggin', bit wud reddir sey throwe the spy-holes i' the clam an' smuchty wa's o' the raip-straen-theekit jambick.

Wud Ockie teuk the cannlie, an' shadin' the licht wi's liv, gid an' glowered wi' a mangin' e'e at the gash fettirs o' peer Tibbockie. He wis some eased tae see she wis stull in life. He skirpit a wee drap caul' water ona her face, filk gart her gluff, her breist throw, an' the bleed creep back tull her skittenich chouks.

Wi' a lang-drawn, shudderin' sech, she opened her e'en, an' leukit up inen the fearsome girmash o' Wud Ockie Gefooseltam. In a gliff, she min'ed faur she wis, an' grew unco fite aboot the gills again. The grue o't wud 'a gart her screel, bit terror heeld her on-geen a myoute.

She hushled back, hunkerin', an' 'vingin' her han's. Doon her jowls the tears trintled. Lang an' sair she grat. The blirt pat Ockie fell sair oot.

He cudna bide tae see's linkie pyowlin'.

"Oh, dinna greet, ma bonnie Tibbockie. Aw wunna lat ye come by nae amskeich. Fearna me, hinny. Aw've tauken ye awa' fae yon filch,
Tam Toshach. Nyattery tyke, he wud bit tirment ye. He sanna won at ye noo. Ye’re a’, a’ ma ain, uchu, ay ma ain! We’ll oot some braw nicht, an’ link it ower the green wi’ the fairies, the green-cwitet wee eemachs, fan the meen’s at her hicht, an’ a’ the wee pipies wull be playin’. Heech! Hooch! Wullen we na?”

It gart her flesh creep tae hear his wild yabblin’, bit, sair agen her wull, she snooled, an’ e’en tried tae eemir him.

“Achee, that wud be fine. Aw’m geyan gled ye’ve teuken me hine awa’ fae yon skellum. Ye ken Aw hid aye a notion o’ you.”

“Haith, na!” he yauped. “Diven ye min’ ye taul’ me — O, the cruel kitty ye wis! — ye wudna be ma wife? Say Aw’in wud? Nae the daft hair aboot me! Is there noo? Speak tull me.”

Tibbockie thocht she’d fa’ throwe the fleer. The caul’ swyte blobbit on her broo. Her heid swam. Her hert nearlins ceased tae thump. Wi’ a ter’le effort she geddert her scattered wuts, an’ spak as laich an’ couthic’s she cud.

“Tach! Ockie, ye’ve mair gumption nor tak’ a halloch quine at her wird.”

In a laich quaiver she begood tae lilt —

“Gin a budie like a budie, need a budie speer?”

Ockie steed like a stooka. A safter licht flaucht in’s skelly e’e

“Eh, bit that’s bonnie.”

He flang himsel’ doon on’s knees aside her, an’ laid her heid on’s breist.

It teuk Tibbie a’ her time tae be on-skirled, bit weel kent she, she nottna!

“Gie’s anidder wee liltie. Come noo. Aw wunna touch ye,” quo’ he.

“Ye’re ma precious jewel.”

“Am Aw, fegs?”

“Troth are ye.”

“Gey bein’ bonnie an’ weel likit,” quo’ she, tyauvin her harns tae google him. “Wullen we awa’ oot noo, an’ join inen the jingoring wi’ the fairies? This is Hallawe’en, ye ken, an’ the eemichs’ll be birlin’ ower the knowes. Eh, dinna ye hear the wee pipies playin’?”

“We’re nae ready else. Weesh! Div ye hear them, hine, hine awa’? The jowe o’ the ulf bells tee! See, here comes the carlin queen, bit fa’s for her noo! Heesh her awa’! Tibbockie’s ma jo! Uchu! We’se bide oor time.”

A geal cam’ ower her hert. Wanhoupe teuk her. She wis at the eyn o’ her teddir. By nae gegg nor idder cud she wile roon him. Gin she cud only get oot, wuden she skyce!
Mair Swatches o’ Hamespun, or Yarns in the Dialect of the North-East.
Banff (Banffshire Journal Ltd.), 1922; pp. 64-6.

Notes

1. Faur cud they be for? Where could they be going?

Tam: Tibbie’s admirer.

Wuden: Wight uses this local form of the negative in questions, but the more general wudna etc. in statements, as in the next line. Cf. Wullen we na? (l. 57), Diven ye . . .? (l. 62), Wullen we . . .? (l.84), Wuden she . . .? (l. 92).

3. Gefoseltam: a ludicrous name suggestive of not only colloquial English foozle (bungle) but fousome (filthy), fozele (to gasp or wheeze), feezele (wriggle, jerk), etc.

16. Reeve: NE pronunciation of ruve, pt. of rive “wrench, tug, tear violently”.

19. Mudden: made of mud, i.e. clay. The form is very rare.

20. Keekthrultie: a nonce-word for a spy-hole, concocted from keek (peep) through it with a diminutive -ie.

21. Onen: a rare local form for “onto”: ona (l. 42) is similar. Cf. ooten “out of” (l. 28), inen “into” (l. 45). Inen in l. 84 appears to mean simply “in”

25. Clamfurlock: defined by the author as “a rough cast in clay, such as used to be made to hold a candle in the days of the cruisie or ‘eely-lamp’, when candlesticks in the houses of the poor were ‘a sicht for sair een’.”

33. Girr-luppen: a girr is the hoop of a tub or barrel, luppen is the p.part. of lowp “leap”; hence this invented compound refers to a tub of which the hoop has sprung out of place.

38. Raip-strae-theekit: the meaning is “the thatch held in place with ropes of straw”. Jambick [dʒəmbɪk]: diminutive of jamb, the projecting wing of a house; hence, a hovel.

47. On-geen: geen is “given”, but the sense would be rendered in English by a present participle “without giving”. On this distinctive local construction see Text 9 in Section 3. Cf. tau be on-skirled, l. 77.

52. Amskeich: amshach is a local word for “accident, misfortune”. This form is idiosyncratic, perhaps arising from a conflation of amshach with skeich “wild, frisky”.

54. Uchu: an affirmative noise.

56-7. Heech! Hooch!: cries uttered while dancing.

57. Wullen we na?: this double-negative tag question here implies a request for confirmation, but the construction is now more commonly used with a negative statement.

72. A line from a folk song, best known in Burns’ version Coming thro’ the Rye.

78. She nottna: “she need not”, but the sense is clearly “she must not”.

Doric: the dialect of North-East Scotland
2.7 Text 7: R.L. Cassie, *Heid or Hert.*

R.L. Cassie, a member of a family which earned some local reputation for their ability to compose and recite verses, songs and anecdotes in the traditional dialects, retained his expertise even during a long period of residence in London. The short story from which this extract is taken is memorable, not for its plot (very slight) or its characterisation (competent but with no pretensions to originality or subtlety), but for being written entirely, narrative as well as dialogue, in the Doric. The dialogue passages include discussions of the origins and status of the tongue which, though irrelevant to the story and ill-informed by the standards of modern scholarship, represent a rare attempt to use the language, in a literary text, for serious argument. The present extract deals with the afflictions of an ambitious young man, and of his beloved whom he has alienated by persistent attempts at persuading her father to sell his farm.

Allan Hepburn hid gane throwe a puckle sair weeks. He hid tried tae gie a’ his thochts tae his wark, an’ there wis little rist for his heid or his han’s fae early mornin’ tull bed-time. He didna gyang tae markets gin he cud help it ava, for he wis fley’t at bein’ pitten oot o’ the machine kin’ o’ a wye that he hid made tull himsel. He wis kin’ tae a’body that he hid tae dee wi’, an’ in coorse, he seemed tae wun some ower the needle-brods that wud come in o’s breist, an’ gar him think for meenits that life cudna be tholet. He spak verra little, bit his min’ wis aye traivellin’ ower an’ ower the same grun’. Wi’ a’ this thocht, he grew less an’ less sure o’ himself. Hid he deen richt tae tak’ a road that micht pairt him for aye fae the sweet lassie o’ his hert? An’ hid he ever been deeing richt sin’ he began to be sae self-set? Hid’n’ he aye been ower fond o’ getting’ his ain wye in a’thing? He hid gane inta a’ kin’ o’ strife wi’ the fixed idea that he be tae wun. An’ ilka wun hid haimmer’t this idea the harder, tull it grew like steel. Faur wis the unnerstannin’, the thochtfu’ness, the wuss tae gie the richt wecht tae the idder body’s wye o’ seein’ a thing? Leukin’ back ower the years o’ his young life, Allan saw clearer an’ clearer that he hid been a hard-hertit brute in his dealin’s wi’ his fellow-craiters. An’ noo he wis peyin’ a lang an’ sair price for his thrawnness.

Bit the star o’ houp began tae blink doon on him. He hid near made up his min’ tae dae naething aboot tryin’ tae tak’ Knowefauld. He wis fley’t tae vreet tae Mary, or gyang in — or redder ower prood yet — bit he keepit houpin’ that they wud fa’ in by chance, an’ maybe come thegither o’ themsels. This thocht took a ticht haud o’ him, an’ he began tae wauner up tae the mairch roadie on meenlichtie nichts an’
Sundays. Hairst wis a’ bye, an’ Mary wud hae time tae tak’ the air on a bonnie nicht or a Sunday.

Mary hid been rael sair-set for a lang time. Thinkin’ o’ the comfort o’ her fader an’ the folk, wi’ her ain trouble aye gnyauvin’ awa’, she near brook doon a’the gidder fin the hairst wis deen. She hid tae rist a gweed heap, bit Lizzie wis sae kin’ an’ wullin’ that she cud hau her min’ fell easy.

Bit she wis growin’ anxious an’ fleyt aboot her fader. Jeems hid stress’t himsel a’ hairst, an’ wudna tak’ a tellin’. He aye said that it wid never dee for him tae play the gentleman an’ hain himsel’ fin a’ ‘dder body wis tyauvin’ sair. He wusna that ull throwe the hairst, bit for the last week or twa the lichtness in his heid hid been comin’ on fell aften. His een wud grow dim, an’ he wud need tae tak’ a haud o’ something or sit doon faurever he wis, wuntin’ ony warnin’. The dwaums didna lest lang, an’ he thocht little aboot them himsel, bit Mary cudna help bein’ some fleyt for him. The doctor hid made anidder examination, an’ said that he sud stop the jobs a’ the gidder, sit in his easy-cheir wi’ his beuk, an’ maybe tak’ a short daunder aboot the place on a sinny day. Bit aul’ Jeems wudna hear o’ t. He micht ca’ canny, he said, bit he cudna thole the thocht o’ bein’ laid bye a’ the gidder. An’ Mary an’ the doctor hid tae be deein’ wi’ that.

The autumn days wore on. The widder wis dry an’ sinny, an’ the elastic min’ o’ youth keepit Mary up. The blinkies o houp war a steady lowe by this time. She, tee, began tae dream aboot meetin’ Allan on the mairch roadie, faur they cudna be on-spoken i’ the bye-gyaun.

*Heid or Hert: a Story in Braid Scots* by R.L. Cassie.

**Notes**


7. *In o’s ...*: “in on his”, i.e. “into his”.

12. *Self-set*: in compounds the form *self* is usually retained, though in isolation the word in Scots is *sel*.

14. *He be tae*: see note to line 6 of Text 9 in the Poetry section.

18. *Brute*: this word has a local form *breet*, but it is generally used with affectionate rather than derogatory overtones.

21. *Dae*: there is apparently no reason for this use of the Gen.Sc. form rather than the NE *dee*. 
34. *Take a tellin’: a common Scots idiom meaning take a warning or advice.
44. *C’ canny: a stock phrase meaning proceed with caution.

2.8 Text 8: Dufton Scott, *Sandy on Sousa.*

Dufton Scott’s dramatic monologues, written for performance in concert halls and later on the radio, were widely popular in the North-East and beyond in the early decades of the present century. Though the characters and situations are, of course, humorously exaggerated, they are rooted in the social realities of the North-East and its inhabitants; and Scott’s expert use of the dialect gives them a value beyond mere humour.

While on a visit to Aberdeen some years ago, Sandy Macsiccar, from Blowieneuck, heard Sousa’s famous band. He enjoyed the music very much, and never tires in describing the performance to his friends.

Ye speak aboot music! Yon licket a’ thing I ever heard afore inta a tattie basket. It was i’ the Music Hall in Aiberdeen I heard it. I nivver was in yon hall afore, an’ the first thing that struck me was the eyn o’ a seat. It was stickin’ oot a bittie i’ the passage ta keep the shillin’ folk fae the aughteenpences. I was tryin’ ta get as far ben the hall’s I could, an’ that’s the wye I didna notic’t.

There was an awfu’ crood, bit I manag’t ta get a seat aside a lad and his lass — at least, I took them ta be coortin’ the wye they were makin’ een at ane anither. They didna seem awfu’ pleas’t at me sittin’ doon aside them, bit I couldna help that. I had ta sit faur there was room.

Hooever, I tried ta mak mysel’ as agreeable’s possible. The lassie was next me an’ I says ta ‘er, “That’s been a richt fine day.” She said — “Yes,” syne turn’t roon’ an’ spoke ta ‘er chap. So, seein’ she wisna on for conversation, I took a look aboot me an’ watch’t the folk comin’ ben the hall.

I nivver saw sic a lot o’ folk a’ thegither afore, an’ the queer thing was, naebody seem’t ta ken their neebour. A’body jist gaed ta their seat an’ sat doon an’ nivver hardly spoke.

There was ae mannie I notic’t comin’ ben the hall wi’ a lum hat an’ the awfu’st ill-ta-please girm’n face on ‘im ye ever saw. Ye wad hae thocht he was comin’ ben the kirk instead o’ a hall. He looket aboot ‘im ta see faur he wad sit, so I made room for ‘im aside me, an’ telt ‘im ta sit doon an’ mak ’imself’ at hame. He sat doon, bit he didna speak ta me. So ta open the conversation I says — “Aye, there’s a gey curr folk here, isn’t there?” He noddit his heid, bit said naething. Syne I says — “Are ye acquant wi’ this Susie man, noo?” He shook his heid this time. I began ta
think there was something batherin’ the mannie, so I says — “Ye dinna seem ta be in an awfu’ gweed humour!”

30 Syne he spoke. He didna say muckle, tho’; he jist says — “I wish you would hold your tongue.”

I micht hae said mair ta ’im, bit jist at that meenit the band cam’ on ta the Platform. An’ a fine lot o’ gweed-lookin’ chies they waur, I assure ye. An’ ilka ane o’ them was carryin’ a playin’ thing. I nivver kent there was sae mony different kin’s o’ music-makin’ instruments. There was trombones, cornets, big horns, little horns, tooteroos o’ shapes an’ sizes, flutes, fussels, drums, an’ bress clappers.

35 I turn’t ta the lassie aside me an’ said — “That’s a lot o’ gey lads, isn’t?”

She said — “Yes”; an’ jist as she said that, Susie ’imself gaed a bit tap wi’ his stick an’ they were awa. They carry’t me wi’ them.

I jist fairly forgot mysel’. I sat in my seat an’ diddit my fit, keepin’ time ta the tune, wi’ my een starin’ oot o’ my heid an’ my moo’ gapin’.

40 Foo lang I carry’t on like that I couldna say, bit I was brocht ta my senses wi’ a pouk wi’ the lassie’s elbuck, an’ she tell’t me ta keep my feet fae ‘er taes. My conscience! I had been duntin’ awa wi’ my big tackety beets on the puir craiter’s taes a’ the time! I was richt putten oot, an’ I says — “I’m verra sorry, lassie; I dinna ken I was touchin’ ye. Are ye bather’t muckle wi’ corns?”

At this his nabs — “little ta say” — on the ither side o’ me, startit ta pouk me wi’ his elbuck, so I turn’t roon’ an’ says — “Hiv I been trampin’ on your taes tee, man?”

He says — “Wish!”

He wasna jist fat ye wad ca’ a ceevil man, so I said nae mair, but hark’n’t ta the band again.

They were inta a new tune — a fine gyaun kin’ o’ a thing. It gart my bleed rush thro’ me like the burn o’ Muckledoo in spate, an’ set my verra taes lauchin’. An’ afore I kent o’ mysel, my feet were gyaun like flails again.

45 Bit the lassie was ready for me this time. She had ’er feet drawn oot ower a bit.

Efter we had gotten a puckle quick gyaun mairch tunes, they began ta play saft, solemn kin’ o’ things ’at brocht the water ta ma een, an’ gart me imagine I heard the auld kirk bell i’ Tillyfuttie tollin’ for the folk ta come ta the kirk on a Sunday.

There was ae awfu’ quaret, sad, soordrap tune ’at made a’body sit as quaret’s mice. It was sae quaret ’at I began ta feel uncomfortable, an’ wantet ta speak ta somebody.
I turn’t roon’ ta the lassie, bit she was sittin’ wi’ a far-awa look in ’er een, obleevious o’ er surroondin’s, as ye micht say. I was feart the music was haein’ some sair an effect on ’er.

There is folk like that, ye ken, for we hiv a cat at hame at grew ill ilka time it heard the fiddle. So I thocht it was a kin’ o’ my duty ta brack the spell. ’Er haun’ was lyin’ open on ’er lap, so I tickl’t ’er palm wi’ the p’int o’ my finger, an’ says, ’Kittlie, kittlie, roon’ the haun’.”

Man, she jumpit; an’ the chap aside ’er gaed me a look like ta knock me doon, an’ took chairge o’ ’er haun’ ’imsel’.

There was ae collection o’ tunes I was awfu’ pleas’t wi’. This was a mixter o’ a’thing throughither. There was “Annie Laurie,” wi’ the neck like a swan; “Jock o’ Hazeldene,” an’ “The Craw kill’t the Pussy O,” an’ fin they were playin’ it, I forgot myself sae far as ta sing’t alang wi’ them. Only I hadna sung mair than twa lines fin I got a split-pea i’ my lug, ’at somebody had blown thro’ ane o’ yon tin pluffer affairs at me. The time I was shakin’ oot o’ my lug, I happen’t ta see the chap ’at did it. He was twa seats ower fae me gettin’ ready ta skite anither ane at me. Bit fin he saw me lookin’ at ’im, he shov’t his pluffer inta his oxter pooch, an’ began ta claw his nose. I wintit ta lat ’im see I kent it was him, so I cries ower — “Aye, aye; ye’re jist giein’ yer nose a bit claw, are ye! If ye skite ony mair o’ yer piz I’ll maybe gie ye something else ta claw, my bonnie loon; min’ ye that.”

I didna hear fae him again.

I couldna tell ye which o’ the music I liket best; it was a’ sae gweed, bit “Home, Sweet Home” was extra special. It gart me think o’ hame, min’ ye, an’ I winner’t if they had notic’t ta gie the stirk ’at was nae-weel its medicine.

They feenish’t up wi’ a tune ’at made my hair rise. Whit a din they made! The whole lot o’ them yarkin’ in till’t for a’ they were wirth. It wis wirth twa Aikey fairs an’ a cattle show an’ a’ the fiddlers an’ pipers i’ them.

The only ane i’ the hall ’at wisna ony excitet was Susie ’imsel’. He jist steed there, waggin’ awa at his stick as tho’ it was common wark.

D’ye ken, fin I cam’ oot o’ the hall, I didna ken if my heid or my heels was tapmost!

Susie’s a gey billie, I tell ye!

**Dufston Scott**’s *Humorous Scotch Stories and Sketches: New Series.*

_Aberdeen: Aberdeen Press and Journal Office, 1928; pp. 49-54._
Notes

1. Macsiccar: a joke name coined from the cliché mac siccar — make certain.

4-5. Lickit … inta a tattie basket: far excelled (cf. colloquial English “knocked into a cocked hat”).

6 et seq. The speaker’s persistent use of hall instead of the dialect form ha’ indicates his awareness of the unaccustomed dignity of his surroundings.

7-8. Shilling (12 pence) and auchteenpence refer to the price of admission tickets: a definite social hierarchy was visible in the occupants of seats of varying quality and cost in theatres and music-halls.

14. Throughout, the humour of the passage inheres in both Sandy’s social naïveté and the unattractive standoffishness of the other members of the audience.

23. An ironic reference to the atmosphere of gloom associated until recently with the Presbyterian Church. Sandy is surprised at the stiff and formal deportment of people who have come to the Music Hall for entertainment.

31-2. The combination of English speech and rude manners in this character’s dialogue is pointedly realistic.

46. My conscience! — an exclamation of incredulity.

75. Part of a rhyme said while tickling a child’s hand.

79-80. Well-known Scottish songs, the last a folk-song.

98. Aikey Fair: see note to line 3 of Text 10 in the Poetry section.

103. A gey billie: “quite a fellow”.

2.9 Text 9: W. Robbie, Mains of Yonderton.

Mains of Yonderton first appeared in serial form in the Aberdeen Free Press in the 1880s, in the wake of Johnny Gibb of Gushetneuk. It is a less ambitious novel than its predecessor, making no attempt at the energetic grappling with religious and political issues that characterises Alexander’s book; but it presents an interesting portrayal of farming life in the nineteenth century, including some discussion of the great improvements in agricultural techniques which occurred during the time span of the novel. It also makes skilful use of the local dialect. In the following extract, David Buchan (called Mains from the custom of using the name of a farm to address its owner or tenant: the Mains is the home farm on an estate), a miserly old farmer, is talking to a younger man who shares his mercenary disposition without his redeeming features of humour and manipulative skill.

A little flattered perhaps by this testimony to his shrewd business capacity, Mains continued, “Aw’ll tell ye ae thing ’at I ey like t’ study whether
aw be t’ buy or t’ sell, an’ that is the canniest time for bringin’ stuff in t’ the market. In short, aw try as far as aw can t’ buy in a fu’ market, an’ sell in a teem een.”

“I daursay that’s a safe ruel to follow in a’ kine of business.”

“Oh, aw suppose so, but especially in oor line. There’s jist the ither day I had roon een o’ yer Peterheed merchants winitin’ t’ buy aits fae me. He wis offerin’ sax-an-twoonty shillin’ the bow, bit I taul’ im aw widna dispose o’ my crap enoo on ony conditions.”

“That wis a fair aneuch price, wisna ‘t?”

“Oh, aw daursay it wis jist as gweed’s agaen, bit it’s nae a wise thing t’ sell at this time o’ the year, fatever they be offerin’.”

“What wye isna’ the time o’ year shootable?”

“O weel, ye see, it only wints aboot three weeks t’ the Mairtinmas term, an’ aboot this time the market’s generally sae weel-stockit ‘at prices are ey comparitively low, an’ on the doon-gaen han’. Gin twa month or so aifter this there winna be muckle comin’ forrat, an’ aw’ve seen as muckle’s I may get thirty shillin’ for mine yet.”

“An’ hoo d’ye account for the market bein’ sae weel supplied at this time o’ the year?”

“Naething mair easy; the rent time’s comin’ on, ye see, an’ ither payments hiv’ t’ be made at the term; fouk maun hae sillar, an’ t’ get the sillar they maun sell their stuff, an’ that wye the man ‘at hisna mony spare bawbee’s t’ turn his han’ wi’ is ey at a disadvantage; or sellin’ grain at the wrang time is jist as profitless as cuttin’ t’ afore it be ripe.”

“Weel, Mains,” says Tam, “ye’re railly a wonnerfu’ man. The like o’ you for kennin’ hoo t’ dee a thing, an’ Fuin’ t’ dee’t, I never saw. An’, ae man, isna’ a gran’ thing ’at ye can affoord t’ bide ye’re time that wye. Ye can jist lock yer barn doors an’ refuse t’ open them till the corn comes t’ be that scarce i’ the countra’ at fouk’s gled t’ get a puckle at ony price.”

“Od, that remark o’ yours,” said Mains, “brings to my min’ a bit pil-get ‘at I had wi’ the gweedwife mony a year an’ day syne, or it wis jist shortly aifter we waur mairriet. It wis in the year eighty-twa, iv I min’ weel, fin there wis o’ terrible scarcity o’ corn, an’ a lot o’ fouk had t’ keep in their life wi’ pease meal an’ sic’ like; bit the crap on the Mains wisna jist sae feerior as bad as it wis mony roads, an’ I wis fortinate in haein’ a gweed curn bows o’aul’ corn besides. Weel, I thocht it wid be better nae t’ be in ony hurry pitten’t awa’, as it wis risin’ in value ilka day, bit she widna hear o’ keepin’ t’ up, an’ said ‘at her faader wid hae never deen ony-thing sae hertless; ’at aw micht be fear’t ’at aw wid ken yet fat it wis t’
wint breed an’ nae neen t’ tak; an’ got on at siccan a rate ‘at I wis near
fear’t at ‘er; jist as if tryin’ t’ get the best price ‘at we could for fat we had
t’ sell wis naething less than a cryin’ sin.”

“Aye,” says Tam, “that’s jist like the women fouk; they winna rizzon
wi’ a body, an’ they canna calculat’; it’s a’ be their feelin’s ’at they work,
an’ that wey they’re ey takin’ some silly wheen or ither in t’ their heeds.”

“Weel but though she wis nae han’ at makin’ a bargain,” said Mains,

“she had a hantle o’ gweed properties aboot ’er for a’ that, only she wis
terrible feelin’ hertit, an’ that made her simple an’ easy impos’t upon.”

**Mains of Yonderton** by William Robbie.

*Aberdeen* (Milne & Hutchison) 1928; pp. 42-44.

Notes

2 and *passim*: The alternation in spelling between *aw* and *I* for the first person pronoun appears to be random.

3. The subjunctive *be* is regularly used in this text; see also ll. 13 and 26.

6. *Kine*: i.e. “kind”; the spelling is appropriate for the pronunciation [kain], but it is less frequent than *kin*. Cf. *min’* (ll.33, 35, etc.), where the author has presumably rejected *mine* to avoid confusion with the homograph.

9. *Twoonty*: this spelling is very rare, and the pronunciation which is suggests appears to be completely obsolete.

12. *As gweed’s a gaen*: “as good as [was] going”.

14. *What*: there is no clear reason for the use of this instead of the expected form *fat*.

15. *It only wints* [i.e. “wants”, lacks] *about three weeks ...*: a common Scots expression.


18-19. *Aw’ve seen as muckle’s I may ...*: “I have reason to think I may ...”, an idiom which this character favours.

25. *Bawbees*: see note to line 23 of Text 9 in the Poetry section.

51. *Feelin’ hertit*: “feeling hearted”, i.e. sympathetic.

2.10 Text 10: Lewis Grassic Gibbon, *Sunset Song*

J. Leslie Mitchell (1901-35) is by common consent one of the greatest of twentieth-century Scottish novelists and a seminal figure in the development of modern Scottish prose literature. His most famous work, the trilogy of novels collectively entitled *A Scots Quair* (published under the pseudonym of Lewis Grassic Gibbon), shows the full development of a style with which he had pre-
viously experimented in short stories: a carefully-measured, paratactic prose suggesting the syntax and cadences of ordinary conversational speech, incorporating Scots words and idioms though rarely departing from English orthography, and subtly suggesting the change from one narrative voice to another by various linguistic pointers (e.g. in this extract “father” — as contrasted with “her father”, used elsewhere — indicates that the action is reported as seen by the heroine Chris).

Well, sure you may be there were claiks enough in Skite for Mutch to get all the story and drive home with it to the Bridge End. In a day or so it was all about the place, Will was the laughing-stock of Kinraddie. Father heard it first from the postman, who waved him down to the road to tell him, and soon’s he heard it John Guthrie went back to Will stooking in the yavl field and said What’s this I hear about you and some orra tink bitch in Drumlichtie?

Now Will had been in a fair fine temper all that day from seeing his Mollie again: and she’d made him swear he’d not fly in a rage or go making a fool of himself if he heard their coarse hinting at her. So he just went on with the stooking and said What the devil are you blithering about? Father shot out his beard and cried Answer my question, Will! and Will said Put a question with sense in it, then. How am I to know what you’ve been hearing? I’m not a thought-reader, and father said Damn’t to hell, you coarse brute, am I to stand your lip as well as your whoring every night? Is’t true there’s a tink called Mollie Douglas that’s with a bairn by you? and Will said If you call Mollie Douglas a tink again, I’ll knock the damned teeth down the throat of you, father though you be.

And they stopped their stooking, glaring at each other, and father made to strike at Will but Will caught his arm and cried Mind! So father lowered his arm, white as a ghost he’d turned, and went on with the stooking. Will stared at him, white himself, and then went on with the stooking as well. And that might have been the end of it so far as Blawearie went, but that evening they heard a clatter outside in the close and there was the minister’s bicycle and Mr. Gibbon himself new off it; and into the kitchen he came and said Good evening, Chris, good evening, Mr. Guthrie. Can I have a word with Will?

So Chris was sent to bring Will from the byre where he bedded the kye, he came back with her grey in the gills, there sat the minister and father, solemn as two owls in the loft of a barn, it was plain they’d been taking the matter through hand together. Father said Chris, go to your room, and there was nothing else for her but go; and what happened
after that she was never sure, for Will wouldn’t tell her, but she heard the sound of the three of them, all speaking at once and Will getting in a rage: and then suddenly the kitchen door banged and there was Will striding across the close to the barn where he stored his bicycle. Mr. Gibbon’s voice cried after him, angry-like, with a boom, Just a minute, Will, where are you going? and Will looked back and said You’re so anxious I should lie with my lass and get her with a bairn that I’m off to try and oblige you. And he wheeled his bicycle out by the honeysuckle hedge and pedalled away down the road and didn’t come back to Blawearie till one o’clock in the morning.

Chris hadn’t been able to sleep, she lay listening for him, and when she heard him come up the stairs she cried his name in a whisper Will!

He stopped uncertain outside her door and then lifted the sneck and came in soft-footed and sat on the side of her bed. Chris raised herself on an elbow and peered at him, there was little light in the room and no moon that night though the sky was white with stars, and Will no more than a shadow hunched on her bedside there, with a whitish blotch for a face. And Chris whispered Will, I heard what you said when you went away. But you didn’t do it? and Will gave a low laugh, he wasn’t in a rage, It wouldn’t be for want of prigging by half the holy muckers in Kinraddie if I had. But you needn’t be feared for that, I’d as soon cut my own throat as do hurt — HER.


Notes

1. Skite: a disparaging nickname for the village of Drumolithie, from its meaning “an unpleasant, objectionable person”.

6. Yavil: the form is the NE pronunciation of awald; the awald field is the “outfield”, i.e. the less fertile (more recently reclaimed) part of a farm furthest from the main buildings.

7. Tink: a reduced form of “tinker”; but the literal meaning of the word, an itinerant merchant or trader, has been lost sight of in the common use of the word as an insult term suggesting a coarse, vulgar or ill-bred person.

14-15. John Guthrie’s blasphemous language accords ill with his “coarse brute” (probably pronounced [kurs brit]) gibe at his son.

15. Lip: impertinence; not Scots but general English slang. Cf. grey in the gills, l. 29.

2.11 Text 11: Helen W. Pryde, *McFlannels United*

The McFlannels, Helen Pryde's celebrated Glasgow tenement family, were known throughout Scotland from the 1930s to the '60s, on radio, in print, and latterly on television. The humorous portrayals of the family, with its socially-conscious mother (Sarah) and irredeemably plebeian father (Willie), and of their relations and neighbours, were enlivened by the author's wickedly convincing renditions of Glasgow working-class speech. In this episode, a cousin from Aberdeenshire on her first arrival in the McFlannel household plays a joke on her relatives by assuming an exaggerated "hick" manner, including a broad Aberdeenshire dialect abounding in stereotypes.

Willie got to his feet. 'Hoo' ye, Sheena?' said he, with an out-stretched hand.

Sheena grasped it heartily. 'Foo are ye, Uncle Willie?' she bawled with equal heartiness.

'Fine, thanks,' said Willie. 'Are ye no' caul' comin' aff the train?'

'Na-na,' was the reply. 'I'm nae ca' ava.' Then, catching sight of Peter's attempts to choke his laughter, she rushed into further and broader speech. 'Eh me, but I'm forgettin'. My Mam gi'ed me a curran thingies for ye, Auntie Sarah. I hae them in my baggie. I'll get them for ye.'

The girl found temporary respite in the darkness of the lobby, while Maisie cast her eyes towards the clothes-poles on the ceiling and declaimed, 'Suffering snakes, she's got something in her baggie!'

Her father grinned. 'Ah wonder if it's got onythin' tae dae wi' a baggie-meenie?' he asked, adding, with a prod of his foot, 'Eh, Peter?'

Peter blew his nose elaborately and conceded that Sheena was a star turn. In a moment or two she was back in their midst, saying:

'Here ye are, Auntie Sarah. My Mam said I was to tell ye that this is jist a wee hennie an' it'll roast brawly.'

Sarah gaped with pleasure at the untidy parcel that was handed over.

'An' twa-three eggies.' went on Sheena, as she dived again into her shopping bag.

'Twa-three?' repeated Sarah. 'Goodness, there must be a dozen here. I don't remember seeing so many all together at one time for years. Are you sure this isn't Black Market?'

'Na-na,' insisted Sheena, turning a staunch back on her nose-blowing cousin. 'We hae nae mair nor twenty hennies, so we're nae con-trolled. An' here's a pucklie odds an' ends — some farm butter, some
shorties, a packettie oatcakes an’ a jar o’ run-honey.’

Sarah received the gifts wide-eyed. ‘Oh dear-dear,’ she exclaimed. ‘Did you folk in Drumforber know there was a war on?’

‘Oh fairly ay, min. Fairly ay! We kent it wis over onywye, for the mannie gaed alang the roadie ringin’ ’is bell...’

‘...’ie’” added Willie to her last word.

Willfully misunderstanding the spelling of his interjection, Sheena repeated her statement that a mannie had gaed alang the roadie.

‘It’s all right, Sheena,’ said Peter, finding his voice at length. ‘Dad heard you the first time. What happened when the man rang the bell — eh?’

Sheena simulated a pout. ‘Ye’re makkin’ a feel o’ me, Peter.’

‘Don’t heed him,’ said Maisie. ‘Go on with your story.’

‘We had a bone-fyer at the tap o’ the hill, an’ we a’ gaed up till’ on larries, an’ some o’s wis dancin’.’

‘Dancing,’ said Maisie, still condescending. ‘The Highland fling and all that, I suppose?’

‘Na-na. We hed mod-ren dancin.’

Once again Maisie appealed to the clothes poles. ‘I’d like,’ she said with solemn supplication, ‘to hear boogie-woogie on the bagpipes. Or would I?’

The teapot was produced and Sarah urged her visitor to sit down near the fire, but Sheena had one more gift to present. It was, she said, a cakie that her Mam had baked.

Sarah uncovered it, sniffing its excellence. ‘Oh, it smells lovely,’ she burst out. ‘Fancy, I wouldn’t ’ve thought there would’ve been ovens in Drumforber that could have baked a cake like this. Is it a paraffin one your mother has?’

‘Na-na,’ said Sheena; ‘it’s a coal een.’ As though to banish from her memory her mother’s latest model of cream-enamelled stoves, the girl fingered the tray-cloth. ‘My!’ she exclaimed, ‘this is an affa fine clothie, Auntie Sarah. Did ye mak it yersel’?’

‘I did that,’ said Sarah. ‘I used to do a lot of crochet.’

‘Wis’t a fikey jobbie?’

‘A what?’

Willie stepped into the breach. ‘Here, Sheena, lass, yer auntie’s needin’ tae go back tae school tae learn braid Scots. Sit ye doon here aside me. Whit’ll ye hae tae eat?’

The girl sat down beside her uncle and, ignoring the plateful of pancakes he held out to her, she clasped her hands and eyed him soul-
fully. ‘Eh, Uncle Willie,’ she said, ‘I like affa weel tae hear ye speak.’

70 The other three gasped ‘What!’ in unison, and with such conviction that Sheena demanded, ‘Fit’s a-dee? Do you lads nae like the wye he
speaks? He minds me on somebody on the wireless.’

‘Not an announcer, I’ll bet!’ said Maisie.

‘Na-na. Mair like een o’ thae wee comics. Fit’s ’is name again?…’

75 Sarah cut into the girl’s reminiscences of wireless comics with the remark: ‘So you’ve got the wireless in Drumforber! I wouldn’t ’ve thought you’d ’ve known what the wireless was!’

Sheena swallowed hard and, like Peter, reached for her handker-
chief.

‘I suppose it’ll be a one-teacher school,’ said Maisie.

80 Truth triumphed as Sheena admitted that the educational outlook was of greater scope than that encompassed by the activities of one teacher, but added quickly, ‘Foo mony teachers is there in your skweel?’

‘Oh, between sixty and seventy,’ replied Maisie off-handedly.

85 ‘Gweedsakes!’ was all Sheena could trust herself to say.

While the teacups were being handed round Peter found sufficient self-control to ask, ‘What size of a place is Drumforber — one street and a village well?’

‘Oh, we hae mair than jist the ae street. An’ we hae a squarie wi’

90 grass growin’ on’t.’

‘Whit’s the squarie fur?’ asked Willie. ‘Turnin’ the coos ontae when ye’re muckin’ oot the byre?’

‘Oh, the loons play on’t, filies. Last year we hed an affa fine do on’t. A fancy-dress fitba’ match — ae team wis loons dressed up as affa al’

95 fashioned wifies, an’ the ither team wis quinies dressed up as loons wi’ fitba’ jerseys an’ panties. Of course it wisna a fitba’ match ava, ye ken. It wis jist a wye-o’-deein’.


‘A wye-o’-deein,’ repeated Sheena distinctly.

100 Sarah suddenly became aware of her son’s facial contortions.

‘Peter!’ she exclaimed indignantly, ‘don’t sit there giggling like a schoolgirl. You’re very rude.’ Then, as if to compensate the visitor for the lad’s rudeness, she went on, ‘Peter’s looking forward to taking you to the pictures. That’ll be a treat for you, won’t it?’

105 ‘It will that!’ agreed Sheena, looking earnestly at her half-nibbled pancake. To her relief the family then occupied themselves with a lengthy and heated discussion as to the most suitable film to which she should be taken. Finally, the decision reached, her hostess urged her to
get ready for the outing, adding as an afterthought:

‘Ehm — are you sure your coat is warm enough? Maisie could lend you one of hers, if you like. A real smart one it is!’

‘Na-na. I’ll nae be cal’ if I’m to be hotterin’ ower the steens followin’ Peter. He flees alang the roadie like stoor, ye ken. Of course he’s as like as no’ ashamed o’ is country cousin an’ doesna want fowk tae ken he’s alang wi’ her.’


**Notes**

1-6. Note the contrast between the Glasgow and the Aberdeenshire pronunciations: *hoo* - *foo*, *Are ye no’ caul* – *I’m nae caal*.

9. *Thingies*: this word is still ubiquitous in local speech. The preponderance of diminutives in Sheena’s dialogue is intended as a humorous exaggeration, but it would be almost impossible to exaggerate the frequency with which *thingie* is used.

13. *Suffering snakes*: not Scots dialect but comic-paper English slang. Maisie is taking the patronising attitude of a city-dweller (albeit working class) to a country cousin.

14-17. Willie and Peter are aware that Sheena’s country manner is assumed. *Baggie-mee-nie*: a large minnow often caught and kept in jars by children, also called simply *baggie*. From *bag* in the sense of “stomach”.

23-5. Sarah and Maisie speak English as contrasted with the menfolk’s Glasgow vernacular: sociolinguistically this is not unrealistic. (Sarah is chronically irritated, however, by a neighbour, not mentioned in this episode, who affects the artificially elevated accent named after the Glasgow district of Kelvinside.)

31. The date is just after the 1945 armistice.

32. *Fairly ay*: an emphatic asseveration. *Min*: a vocative which can be addressed to hearers of either sex.

34. “Bell” with the diminutive would of course be homophonous with *belly*, considered a vulgurism. Sheena takes Willie’s “-ie” to be “Eh?”; i.e. “What did you say?” — though this would in fact be distinguished from his actual utterance by a rising intonation.

42. *Fyer*: presumably an attempt to represent the Aberdeenshire pronunciation [faːɾ] as contrasted with the Gen.Sc. [faːɾ], but this would not be clear to a reader without prior knowledge.

44-5 and 47-9. An interesting example of cultural deracination. Maisie, naively assuming the superiority of urban to rural culture, attempts to evoke the imagined lack of sophistication of the latter by citing some of the music-hall and tourist-brochure stereotypes of Scotland; but in fact Aberdeenshire is not within the Gaelic culture area from which this stereotype is ultimately, though with much distortion, derived, and bagpipes and Highland
dancing have exactly the same status in rural Aberdeenshire as in Glasgow.

65. *Tae school: tae the scuil* might have been expected in Willie’s speech.

70. Their surprise is due to the social and educational stigmatisation of Glasgow demotic speech. In this section of the dialogue Sheena, unaware that Willie is privy to what she thinks is a joke between her and Peter, is scoring off her uncle: broad Glasgow accents were (and still are) part of the stock-in-trade of radio and music-hall comedians.

71. *You lads:* seemingly including Sarah and Maisie. Very unusual.

74. *Thae:* the author has made a slip here: *thae* as the plural of *that* is not used in North-East dialects, *this* and *that* being unmarked for number.

98. *Wye-o’-deen*: a boisterous celebration, a “carry-on”. Both the expression, which is predominantly North-East, and the pronunciation, which is emphatically so, would be puzzling to Glasgow hearers.


This novel, published for the first and only time in 1952, is nearer to being a quintessential linguistic tour de force than any other extract in this section. Written long after the influence of English had begun to dilute the traditional dialects, it presents what purports to be a reconstruction of Aberdeenshire speech at the turn of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries but is in reality an extrapolation from the most conservative dialects still to be heard, or remembered, in the author’s own lifetime. As literature it is easy to find faults in the book: accounts of momentous historical events are feebly linked to a naïve and melodramatic plot, and the enormously long passages of dialogue and soliloquy in literary narrative style, absurdly unrealistic in themselves, jar irritatingly with the accurate and interesting presentation of the external details of peasant life in the period of the story. However, if *Eppie Elrick* is a very poor novel, it is a magnificent demonstration of the resources for narrative, as well as dialogue, available in a dialect as far removed from standard literary English as any that has appeared in written form.

In the present extract, a farmer who has been unwillingly drafted into the militia for the 1715 Jacobite uprising recalls a cheerful episode during the campaign.

“A wis jist sittin quàcitly upon a fell dikie newsin awa tae the mullert an’ a neepor an’ fucherin wi ma aal lunter tryin tae get ’er tae draa richt. ’ere wis a curn young flipes dancin awa at a kin’ o’ a Ram Reel in a nyookie a’ be them leens nae sae vera far awa, Jock Cheyne makkin the best o’ an ull job wi Elshiner Annerson for a pairtn. An aal piper wi a
stan o’ pipes wuppit here an’ there wi tow ’at lyookit near as muckle ’e
waa o’ the weer as ’e did ’imsel, wis blaa in doon ’e stroop-like thing ur
fativer ye caa’t, an’ lattin oot ’e maist yaafu whazzles an’ skryaachs ’at
iver ye hard. A thocht ’at ma jints wisna maybe freely sae swak as ’e ey hid
been an’ ’at A’d jist better bide stull upo the fell dikie an’ watch Jock
Cheyne an’ Elshiner Annerson an’ ’e lave o’ them ca-in awa at it. Sae A
jist sat ma stull an’ triet tae get ma cutty intae gweed wurkin fettle.

“Come time, ’ere wis a fyow mair weemen kin’ o’ fowk comin in
aboot, bit as far as partners for ’e dancin wis concern’t, it wis a case o’
deal sma an’ sair a’; ur mair licky first come best sairt an’ deil tak ’e hin-
maist.

“The aal piper grew forfochen an’ his breath gaed wuth. He laid
doon his pipes, an flappit on a dike tae rist.

“A strappin young birkie o’ a piper fae Skye cam forrit belyve an’
yokit tee tae blaa oot his pyock. Hard ye iver siccan soons? Haad yer
tongue. A cud niver winnerstan foo a piper disna strick up ’is meesick
stracht awa, but maan aye begin wi’ a’ that pechin an groanachin. Aa
weel, aifter ’e’d gotten ’e drones tull ’is min’ an’ ’e teen startit up in full
brr, an’ gweed faith a richt birr it wis, blaa in doon ’e stroop o’ his pipes
ur A wunneret fat rodd ’e pyock didna blaa up an’ birst, ’e mullert steed
up aside a fine weel set-up deem an’ criet oot, ‘Come awa noo laads, fix
yer partners. A saa ’im gie a great muckle dunt upo the yird wi’ ’is fit, an’
afore ye cud chat a tacket ’e war a’ i’ the thick o’it, yarkin at it as fast’s
’eir feet wid cairry them, crossin like baads an’ furlin like tottums. Weel,
weel, ’at wis a’richt anyooch for young swak breets, an’ sae A jist bedd
stull sittin upo ma fell dikie sookin awa at ma pipe an’ watchin ’em a’
hingin in at it.

“’is gidd on for a filock, bit deil hae ma fin ’ey yokit tee wi their
hoochs, ’at fair pat on ’e kepsteen. A fan a kin’ o’ a kittlin i’ ma taes,
an’ naething wid haad ma bit ’at A sud be i’ the thick o’it.

“A young Hielan demoshel happent tae come in aboot, a short stoot
blynky kin’ o’ a crater, as ready tae row’s rin, een o’ the kin’ ’at ’e aal
folk eest tae say hid been setten doon afore they war caal.

“Weel ’an, afore she kent faar she wis, A hid cleekit ma airm roon
aneth ’er oxtar, an’ ’eir oon an’ ’eir roon we gidd, hoochin an’ cleekin, an’ ’eir
o’layin at ’e grun wi wir feet like a young an’ metlesome styaaq yarkin
at its travis. She hidna muckle laist in ’er though. She wis some stoot
made an’ creshy forby tae be a great han at ’e reels, strathspeys an’ ’at
kin’ o’ thing. Sae aifter A hid gien ’er a byordinar gweed furl, she drappit
doon like a clite o’ new slyockit lime, fobbin like a fat kittlin. Sae A nip-
pit her up an’ clappit ’er doon o’ the dikie tae cweel an’ fuppit up anid-
der deemie ’at hid come in aboot meantime an’ hid jist sutten doon upo
the dikie. ’is second een wis a swupperter boddy a’thegiddier nur ’e first
een, a sclinner crater, a hantle mair kibble on ’er pins. Dyod faith, she
fair linkit at it teeth an’ nail, an’ fin it cam tae quick time i’ the reels an’
strathspeys, haad yer tongue, A’m perfectly seer ’at neen o’ the twa o’s
hid baith wir feet upo the grun at ’e same time. She danceet an’ hoocht ur
she wis hallach. It wis a perfit trett tak ’e fleer wi ’er, an’ fin ’e piper
stoppit, A cud dee naethin bit lowse ma haad o’ ’er, sitter back an’ flap o’
the tap o’ the fell dike an’ rax masel oot ur a got ma pech back again.”

Eppie Elrick, by W.P. Milne.

Notes
3-4. Ram Reel: a country dance performed by men only.
4. Be them leens: by themselves. Lane (NE leen) is generally preceded by a possessive pro-
noun: the use of the objective, apparently by analogy with St.Eng. himself, themselves
(hissel, theirsels in Gen.Sc.) is mainly NE.
6-7. ’E waar o’ the weel: the worse for wear. Milne’s spelling, here as generally (but not with
complete consistency) throughout the book, suggests that the intial [ð] of the and pro-
nouns is elided except when the preceding word ends in a vowel.
12. Sat ma still: ma = not “my” but “me”. In this phrase it is reflexive; in ll.33 and 35 it is
objective.
15. Deal sma’ an’ sair a’: a proverbial expression (“share out in small amounts and every-
body will get something) first attested in the eighteenth century and still current.
17. Gaed wuth: this unusual form of with is used only in this phrase, which means “give
out, become spent or exhausted”.
20-1. Haad yer tongue: an exclamation suggesting that comment is unnecessary.
25. Fat rodd: “what road”, i.e. how.
28. afore ye cud chat a tacket: “before you could chew a hob-nail”, i.e. straight away, “before
you could say Jack Robinson”.
33. Filock: “little while”, with the common NE diminutive -ock.
34. Fan: found. Fin meaning “feel” is a common NE usage.
36. In aboot: close to s.o.
37. As ready tae row [roll] as rin [run]: stock descriptive phrase for a fat person.
53. Ur i.e. “or”, meaning “until”.

Examples of written texts

In his use of long and loosely-constructed sentences to suggest an informal quasi-monologue style, with an abundance of Scots idioms and lexical items but relatively few phonological and morphological features, David Toulmin imitates Gibbon, though his dialect is that of Buchan rather than the Mearns. His writing, however, does not establish him as a match for his predecessor: in particular, the *you*, which in Gibbon’s novels is skilfully used to suggest a continuously varying series of literary personae, is here simply a pointless substitute for a first-person pronoun. The sudden increase in the density of the Scots phonology and grammar in the second paragraph of the present extract seems arbitrary and unmotivated, there is no obvious reason behind the selection of words given in their Scots forms, and the spellings ‘*er* and ‘*im*, representing what is the colloquial pronunciation of those words when unstressed in *all* forms of English, is simply unnecessary. Nonetheless, Toulmin’s writing incorporates some interesting and convincing renditions of Buchan idiom.

Of course you had your rivals at this game, but as none of the other chiel could get the quine to speak to them they gave her up as ‘a sulky bitch,’ bonnie though she was with her head in the air. The Third Horseman was the first to get a word out of the quine, and a bit of a smile as well, which made her even more desirable, and had its funny side to it. It was ‘Knotty-Tams’ for supper, brose made from oatmeal and mixed with boiling milk instead of water. But they were pretty solid, so that when the Third Horseman turned his bowl upside-down the brose never fell out but stuck to the bowl like cement, whereupon he asked the quine if ‘He was good looking?’ The quine stared at him in surprise and asked what he meant, or who the ‘He’ was? So the lad uprighted his bowl on the table and remarked: ‘Oh the lad ye was thinkin’ on when ye made this brose!’ The quine blushed, and told him she was not to blame; that the mistress herself had made the brose, and that he’d better ask her. But it was all he could get out of the quine and she would hardly speak to him again for his impudence.

Now Francie Gatt, that was Third, was your best pal in the chaumer and you wouldn’t have minded a bit though the quine had taken him on. He was the only one who really understood you and your flair for books and sometimes stuck up for you when the others would take the size of you. He was the only one who could swim in the mill dam and take music out of a stone almost: could play on anything from a saw...
blade to the bagpipes, with fiddle, dulcimer, jews’ harp, melodion and mouthorgan, and he had spent a whole fortnight mastering David Copperfield, a feat you admired in him more than anything he could do with a pair of horse in the ploo. You had worked with this lad for a whole year on another fairm and had moved together with your kists to Slabsteen; and you knew fine that Francie had a quine o’ his ain and didna want yer lass, but ye thocht maybe that ye could confide in the chiel, seein’ that he was yer best freen like, and had taken yer side in ither things, so after a bit tune together on the mouthorgans, sittin’ on the edge o’ your bed, and him on his kist, ye told Gatt how ye felt aboot this quine and what he thocht ye should do about it. So Gatt said she already had a lad, and that the last Sunday he was toonkeeper this lad cam’ tae see the kitchie quine, and got his denner in the fairm hoose, so that he must be gie far in with her and the fairm mistress and that ye hadna much chance; and besides, did ye no ken that the shepherd was after ‘er, sneak’in tae the chaumer here when the lassie was makin’ the beds, feart that she wad ravel his Sunday breeks that he was pressin’ under the mattress, but that it was only an excuse tae get a word wi’ her, or even try something bolder, but that she told ’im off; that she didna want ’im, that she had a lad o’ her ain without tripe like him. Oh maybe ye thocht she was quiet like but she could speak oot when she liked, and she might put ye in your place quick enough. All’s fair in love and war Gatt said but that you were a bit slow with the quines and that unless you looked nippy aboot it ye would never manage tae ding oot this ither lad she had, and that Gertie Troup wad be married before ye got started.

Straw into Gold, by David Toulmin.
Aberdeen, Impulse, 1973; pp. 30-32

Notes

6. Knotty-Tams: so-called from the lumps or “knots” formed by the partly-cooked oatmeal.
7. they: brose, porridge, soup and the like are generally referred to in the plural in Scots.
17. Chaumer: the men’s sleeping quarters on a farm.
20-1. Take the size of you: an obscure idiom apparently meaning “make a butt of you”.
34. Toonkeeper: man left in temporary charge of a farm during the absence of the farmer and the other workers, a task often assigned to each farm worker in rotation on successive Sundays.
37. Did ye no ken: alternation between English and NE dialect is understandable, but this use of the Gen.Sc. no instead of either not or nae looks like carelessness.
Tales of a Gamie, despite its sub-title “Modern Stories in the Scots Tongue”, is a set of anecdotes and reminiscences illustrating the traditional outdoor life of the North-East and the “characters” associated with it. The use of the dialect is somewhat self-conscious: the rambling speech-habits of the Gamie are clearly an excuse for a superabundance of local idioms, and suspicions of dictionary-dredging may be aroused by the unusual preponderance in the present extract of words beginning with B and C! — but the author’s stated intention of proving the continuing viability of the tongue for literature of the region may be said, with some reservations, to have been achieved.

“Aye fairly that than, sic a begeck’s I got the streen” said the Gamie. He wes an aulfarrant cratur o a mannie, guid at hert wi his antrin rabbit or twa but eh sic a blether, it blecks aa tae bin the gab o him eence he’s fairly yokit.

“Weel there cam a binner at the dor an me in the middle o ma maet ’at I set doun on the bink bi the fire — fair bladit it wes wi brook fae the crook fin I raxed for’t aifter, aa birselt an bruckly — deil tak them! Sic a bucker tae an me clean runtit o meal in the bowie for ait cyaks an thon’s a gey stey brae tae the millart’s. It maun be sweirty! Still an on, the millart’s aye guid for a crack an I’ll need tae bigg up a stockie o prone as weel sin I skailt the last suppie in the girnel. I’m gettin that blinterin an blin.

“Ach weel, this muckle chappin at the dor. I heard it brawly an wore awa till’t an drew the sneck. I got a rare stamagaster I can tell ye, for a bourich o orra lookin tykes o loons were pammerin an plyterin aboot. The smaarest bluffert would hae caaed me ower for I wes flyte they micht tak a breenge at me. Een o them wes mair lik a tattie boodie in’s breeks aa fyled in dubs an’s face aa barkit wi muck lik birss ... ... Bit haud ye, I jaloosed fa I hed, I twiggit the Minister’s sin.

“I spiered fit they nott an the upshot o aa their gabbin claic wes this. The coorse wratches hed cam on a curn cyards doun bi the sma widdie an for a protick hed rived oot divets an petlit the tinks’ campie an cowpit ower their hurlie wi aa its troke. Nae wunner there wes a culliehangie would beat a cleckin o futtrets or craws fleggit wi a shot or twa. Aifter the steer the loons heard a nyaterin then oot cam the reek, the cyards an a swarm o geets, eggit on by a stoot creishy wife grippin a muckle stick girnin an skirlin lik she would gyang gyte. The loons chuckit ower mair divets an cooriet doon ahin a dyke. The cyards rallied
an ae young chiel skirtit up ahin a shargart sheltie an landed oor clorty billie sic a clour on the lug that his legs gaed worth an he gaed heelstergowdie wi a clyte intae the lang ditch just as the stoot umman swore she'd skite the breeks aff the first loon she gat her clewks intae.

“I’m thinkin it wes mair the stink o the loon in’s claes aa sosst wi a sother o puddick scum an Guid kens fit, that connacht that prottick. It wes eneuch tae mak a cyard cowk wi scunner! The tinks tint interest. The loons lap the watter an awa.

“Sair did the sair-made loons prig wi me tae lat them dry oot the drookit chiel or they won hame but I kent brawly fas wight it wes. The drummly loon gaed a pyocher o a hoast, bit ... ‘Na, na ye nickums, awa wi ye,’ I says ses I. ‘Ye hae gotten yer sairin weel I wight, ye feil tawpies. Ye maun thole yer cauldriff claes an knype awa hame afore ye’re nabbit or daivert wi cauld an wi that I pit the smith’s fingirs on the dor.

“I took a tig for a drappie o’t and hech fit I leuch sinsyne thinkin on’t. Ach I mind’t young Tam the tink wes a braw winger for the local team last summer fan young Airchie wes aff wi the mumps. Fairly that...”


**Notes**

1-4. This paragraph reads like a compilation of as many stereotypes of NE conversational idiom as could be compressed into a short space: *fairly that*, an asseveration; *sic a begeck’s I got*, equivalent to “what a fright I got”; the interjection *eh; it blecks aa* “it beats all, it is an impossible task”; *bin the gab o him* “tie his mouth”, i.e. silence him; *fairly yokit* “settled to a task” — here, of conversing.

10. *Prone*: the residue of oat-husks after milling, used in preparing a dish called sowens.


38. *Wight*: here means “fault”; in l. 40 it means “know”. In both senses, it is more commonly and correctly spelt *wyte*.

### 2.15 Text 15: Peter Buchan, *No Job for a Volunteer*

In addition to his poetry (see Text 13 in the Poetry section), Peter Buchan has published a number of short stories, again drawing on his lifelong familiarity with the fishing industry. In the present anecdote, the language of the first part is in English with an occasional Scots word or phonological form: Buchan provides a gloss or a full explanation for words from the
register of fishing, but other Scots words are unobtrusively integrated into
the narrative.

At the tender age of fourteen Kitty was in the curing yard gutting her-
ring. With two of her former classmates she had taken up the tradition-
al occupation of the fisher quines, and now the trio formed a 'crew o'
learners'.

There were always three to a crew, two gutters and a packer, and
their uniform comprised an oilskin skirt and a bib, and a pair o' toppers
(rubber boots).

Their headgear was a cotton muffler and on the upper parts of their
bodies they wore a fisherman’s jersey with sleeves only to the elbow, or
even an old cotton blouse. As protection against the 'coorse saat' (rough
salt) with which the herrings were liberally clarted, the quines' fingers
were rowed in 'clooties', strips of cloth wrapped tightly round each finger
and secured with cotton thread.

The gutter's tool was a 'futtle', a short, stubby gutting knife with a
fixed blade; the packer's tool was a shallow circular metal scoop polished
like silver by the abrasive saat.

For a summer or twa I was 'the loon' in a curing yard.

It was hard, healthy work which I really enjoyed especially since the
stage and the farlin were in the open air. This was quite common.

Sometimes when the quines were working late I would light paraffin
flares or bubbles which were the only illumination.

It was all something of an adventure to a loon but the quines must
have been ready to drop. 'Ramona' and 'South of the Border' were
favourite songs with the younger women, but oh, when the Heilan'
deems sang their mournful Gaelic airs everything seemed so eerie it gart
me shiver.

Een o' my jobbies wis t' gie the quines their pey. If there wis nae
herrin' on pey-day I took the pey-packet t' the packer's hoose. If the
yard wis busy the packer got her envelopie at her wark.

I thocht this wis daft. Fit wis the peer quine supposed t' dee wi' a
pey packet an' her wearin' a cwite athoot pooches, her fingers rowed in
cloots an' hersel' clartit wi' gour?

The first time I gied Kitty her packet she grat like a bairn 'cos the
amount pencilled on the ootside wis jist pathetic. I left her greetin' an'
passed t' the next quine. Belle wis busy in the boddim o' the barrel so I
could see her form fae the waist doon only, but fin I gied her sonsie hip a
clap she cam' oot o' the barrel like a jake-in-the-box. Then she wis worth
seein'!
My private name for her wis 'The Busty Bombshell' an' I'm sure I wis in love wi' her at that time, tho' she widna look at a loon like me 'cos she wis eichteen an' I wis twa 'ear younger.

'Hey Belle,' says I, lookin' at her in silent worship, 'Here's yer pey packet!'

'Ooh, that's fine! But far am I supposed t' keep it?'

'That's up to you,' says I, preparin' t' move t' the neist packer.

'Wyte a meenit!' says Belle, an' stoopin' a wee bittie in my direction she fluttered her bonnie lashes towards her copious cleavage (I think that's the richt word).

'Pit the packetie doon there, my loon!'

'Me? Doon there? Nae fear! My mither wid be reid mad!'

'Nivver mind yer mither, ye gowk; she winna ken. An' forbyes ye're jist a gweed-faced innocent loon yet! Go on!'

So I stuck the packetie in the bonny letter-box.

'That's nae eese!' she says. 'Shiv the thing hyne doon or I'll loss't in the boddim o' the barrel, an' that widna dee!'

Oh boys-oh-boys! Oh my govies! Spik aboot clootie dumplins? I'll sweer she didna loss yon packetie in the barrel!

Three weeks later I was on the same job again. Kitty didna greet this time — the young quines wis learnin' fast!

Then I came to Belle. 'Aye aye, Belle! Will I pit yer pey far I pit it last time?'

'Awyte, na!' says she, wi' her cheeks like fire, 'Ye'll dee nae sic thing!'

'Foo nae?'' says I.

"Cos I had t' tirr afore I could get my pey yon day! Ye're nae near sic a gweed-faced innocent loon as I thocht, ye coorse vratch!"

Fancy her sayin' a thing like that fin I wis jist thinkin' that a volunteer wid dee the job far better than ony pressed man!


Notes

19. *Farlin*: defined by Buchan elsewhere as “a wooden trough whose bottom sloped downwards towards the front … along its front stood the row of guttin’ quines in their oilskin cwites (skirts).”

28. *Packer*: worker with the job of arranging the gutted herring in boxes for sale.
31. *Aa' her wearin’... This construction with a quasi-accusative pronoun as subject is common in colloquial Scots.

51. *Reid mako* furiously angry.

57. *Clootie dumplins* a clootie dumplin is a suet pudding boiled in a cloth, hence spherical in shape.

### 2.16 Text 16: Proverbs

The *Third Statistical Account of Scotland* in its entry for the district of Alford in Aberdeenshire includes the following list of proverbs of local currency, which illustrate not only the language but, in their characteristic combination of brevity with suggestiveness, something of the native cast of mind.

The folk of the parish have much weather lore and are very fond of proverbs — especially alliterative adages, such as "Burnt braid maks bonnie bairns" (said to induce a child to eat singed oatcakes); "Better wear sheen shoed than sheets"; "A bonny bride's easy buskit"; "Guid kale needs nae kitchie." Other familiar sayings and expressions are: "Sic sawin', sic mawin"; "It will a' be sawn wi' ae seed" (when there was a risk of snow in springtime while farmers were sowing); "A stanin' seck (sack) fills best" (to console someone who has no seat at table); "She wylt amo' the floors (flowers) an' gaed awa wi' a docken" (a flirt often marries the worst of her admirers); "My caup's nae aneth his ladle" (I am not under any obligation to him); "There's seet (soot) draps" (keeping conversation from the children); "The stang o' the trump" (the best of the lot); "Heels ower guddie" (head over heels); "Next bore to butter" (referring to a kettle almost boiling).

*Third Statistical Account of Scotland vol. 7: County of Aberdeen.*
*Ed. Henry Hamilton, Glasgow (Collins) 1960.*
*Entry for Tough in Alford by Rev. George Gillon, pp. 223-4.*

### Notes


5. *Kitchie* means "any food served in addition to plain or staple fare." The sense is that plain food (such as cabbage) is sufficient.

5-6. *Sic sawin', sic mawin*: "As ye sow so shall ye reap."

12. *The stang o' the trump*: literally, the tongue of a Jew's harp.
Texts 17-20: Samples of contemporary journalism

Standard literary English is not only normal but almost universal as the language of journalism in North-East Scotland. An occasional use of a local word or expression is not infrequently observed: this may occur in advertising (e.g., when cable television was introduced to Aberdeen a slogan adopted by one company was “Fit [punning on the dialect form of “what”] a good idea”), or in other contexts (reviewing a local amateur production of Much Ado about Nothing in March 2000 the columnist described the character of Claudio as “a glaikit young loun”). However, such concessions in the context of articles written in English are relatively infrequent. More interesting are the regular weekly articles in Doric included in several local newspapers. The four which follow were all published in March 2000, and are reproduced by kind permission of the authors and the newspaper editors.

Text 17: from Fraserburgh Herald and Northern Counties’ Advertiser, Friday 3 March 2000

The title of this weekly column is a humorous distortion of the name of the well-known American animated cartoon series “Loony Tunes”, with the syllable [lun] now used in its familiar NE sense of “boy” (or man), jingling with a partly Scotticised version of low-down, originally American slang for “inside information”. The author, Ian Johnstone, is a retired headteacher and comes originally from Galloway in SW Scotland, though he has wide experience of living and working in various parts of the country; and his language is a somewhat inconsistent General Scots with a few Doric features as local colour rather than the authentic dialect of the North-East — a fact which does not appear to diminish the popularity of his column.

Tuney Loon’s low doon
Weel, weel, at it agayn. Anither survey, report, piece o advice sae as tae improve athing we dae. This yin cam fae Italy no sae lang ago, an sayed that it’s healthier for bairns tae get a bit o muck aboot theirsels, sae as tae broaden their resistance tae bugs, germs, an aa the ither menaces that life inflicts upon a wheen folk.

Bairns must hae bin ower the mune, and back agayn, efter ten orbits, wi a report lik yon!

Jist imagine Mrs Whaever noo, tellin the bairns tae get in the hoose and get their haans oot o that compost heap in the corner o the gerden.
The brichter, better read rascally upstert amang them wull be quoting chapter and verse o this same Italian report, tae his, or her, ain mither, and confounding the puir wumman wha has nocht else in myne bit the weilbein o her weans, as maistly the case it is, in spite o the impressions laid aboot bae sensationalist stuff as ower aften substitutes fir the general ongaan.

But onyhoo, thocht o weanhood bring tae my mind a wheen daftish rhymes as went the roons an substanced mony a mischievous thocht amang us when I wis knee high tae a grasshopper (as we yaised tae say).

Things lik — Skinny malinky langlegs, umberella feet, went tae the picturs and fell through the seat .... Whit wunnerfu anarchy o words and mind sitch rhymes recaall!

That sedate guy, Lear, or yon Lewis Carroll wi his waalruses waalkin oot wi jiners on the esplanade, wir nae patch on the verve o the malinkies.

And the — No last nicht but the nicht before, three wee monkeys came tae the door; yin wi a fiddle, yin wi a drum .... an the rest we’ll forget incase we upset some.

And there wir ither — Yin fine day, in the middle o the night, twa daid men got up tae fight — mebbe ye’ve mind mair o it, I’ve forgotten.

The devilment o these wir a tonic, tae turn tapsalteerie the cause an consequence o the everyday, pittin aboot the idea that things wir less fixed and cast in certainty, less forecastable, as the upstannin, stern adult folk wir aye sae fixed and forecastable in tellin ye.

We wirnae supposed tae hae ony ither thocht o ony aalternative tae whit we wir telt wis the wey things wir, and wid remain.

Mebbe it’s nae wunner every noo an agayn, as i the Swingin Sixties, when younger generations get their bush telegraphs gaan, and gie vent tae ither lifestyles than them as adults hae sae persistently argied in favour o.

But of coarse, some micht sae it’s less the liberation o youth noo-times, than the liberation o the middle-aged, the aalder generations that is noo needed, gien the weys that youth culture bombards the aald bod-ies day efter day.

I mind it noo — Back tae back they faced each ither, drew their swords and shot each ither .... Ah the mayhem o it, marvellous! Weel, at least when ye’re young, or mebbe even middle-aged come tae that.

Commonsense and reason er aa very fine, bit they dinnae cover fir aa the questions folk ask. Sitch rhymes as them, cater fir the mair
absurd, bizarre, and unhidebound happenings o lang-ago weanhood.

Amid aa the weird rhymery, I can bring tae mind hoo, wi the healthiest o intentions, (and then some!), my folks delivered us young yins, the affspring, wi a dose o Syrup o Figs every Friday nicht.

Laxatives wir held in high esteem in them times, and there wis a regular league o odious candidates fir the Tap Division in the Laxative League, wi Castor Ile, and hivvens kens whit aa else concoctions battling it oot fir the maist nauseating prizery. Andrew's Liver Saalts wis a godsend compared tae some, except I yaised tae be o the view, that liking the stuff wis a doon reflection on the effectiveness o the thing, and sae Andrew's Saalts must aye hae been threatened wi relegation fae the Big League.

Them wir the days, as we say. Bit I never ever doobted we wir baein looked efter wi the best care and the best intentions, and aa the groanery gaes on presently aboot miserable weanhoods baein responsible fir aa kinds o crankery and unhappinesses amang adult folk, in which blaming the parenting o the past fir aa menner o miseries o the present, wid seem tae me muckle harder tae swalla in a wheen cases than a table spune o Syrup o Figs. Aagh, the thocht o it!

And then ye look at them Presidential elections getherin steam, on oor TVs. And the word Primaries, as indicated the earlier election stages, for some o us micht hoist the spectre o a six year aald skweel pupil shooting daid, the ither day, anither infant pupil in a Michigan elementary skweel classroom, and ye havti ask hoo folk contending fir whit is aften described as the maist powerful office in the hale warld, can thole wi gun lobbies, an gun laws, as wir mebbe okay fir Dodge City in its days o batwing saloons, rotgut whisky, and cross-holster toting daith draw singers, but er ayont commonsense in instances whaar skweels employ security folk fir frisking toddlers on their weys intae classrooms, incase they're cairrying fire-erms. The twa images jist fused this week, for me onyhoo, wi campaiging politicians in aa their razzamatazz, and this soart o occurrence happening in an infant classroom, in the same country, concurrently.

Banning guns, ay. Syrup o Figs, weel mebbe I'd hae bin for that when I wis a bairn.

Onywye, as I wis sayin ...
Notes

Of the many markedly Scots features of the author’s language, only *skweel* represents an unambiguously North-Eastern form. The others are mostly Gen.Sc., though some clearly suggest a dialect area other than the North-East, e.g. *yin* and *onyhoo* (West and South-West). The use of *them* as a demonstrative is common in Ayrshire, Galloway and the Clyde conurbation, but not in the North-East. *As* as a relative pronoun is very unusual and appears to be an idiosyncracy: the only two illustrative quotations for this usage in the SND are from neither the North-East nor the author’s native Galloway, but the East: Angus and Fife. The spellings *agayn* and *sayed* are intended to suggest the Gen.Sc. pronunciations [æɡen] and [sɛd] as contrasted with the common (but not universal) SSE [æɡen] and [sɛd].

6. *Bairns* (and *weans* which the author uses later), though of course understood in the North-East, are not used locally: the characteristic dialect word for children is *littleens*.

21-2. This rhyme is still current.

24. *Jiners*: the word “carpenter” is not current in Scotland, and the St.Eng. distinction between “joiner” and “carpenter” — to the extent that there is one — is not made.

26-7 For the record, the present writer’s recollection of the missing part of this verse is “An yin wi a pancake stickin tae his bum”.

71-3 This shocking incident, internationally reported, occurred in the week before the publication of the passage.

73. *Havti*: a nonce idiosyncratic spelling.

2.18 Text 18: from *The Press and Journal*, Monday 6 March 2000

Edited and published in Aberdeen and invariably known locally as “the P&J”, this is the principal daily newspaper of the North-East. Robbie Shepherd, author of the weekly Doric column, has a high reputation locally as a broadcaster and as a performer and compère of musical and other cultural events. His idiom (and his natural spoken language) is an uncompromising North-East dialect, far more consistent than that of the previous writer. In this extract, the writer gives his authoritative comments on an important feature of Scottish popular culture.

**Harknin tae the braw souns** by Robbie Shepherd

*Let’s dance again*

*To that old Scottish Waltz*

— Jock Morgan

Fit price oor ain Scottish music as we wammle inta the 21st century?

Healthy bit chaip maun be the answer bi the ongaun discussions as I hae been stravaigin aa ower Scotland in ma role as presenter on radio o
oo r kyn o music — Dumfries, Musselburgh an Ardrishaig, tae name three.

Setterday in Musselburgh wis the 26th annual festival organised bi the National Association of Accordion and Fiddle Clubs, and afa weel attendit.

Keekin intae the muckle main hall o the Brunton Theatre aroon five o’clock, the band competition wis on the go an the seats aa teen up, harknin tae the braw souns o some 10 new groups. It wis the same wi the individual competitions an the concert wi the winners at nicht.

The accordion and fiddle clubs aa cam aboot in the 70s, wi informal sessions at the famed Hole-in-the-Wa pub in Dumfries, run bi Max Houliston, fa’s brither, Billy, some o ye will myn, played fitba for Scotland an daa’re tae score against the aul enemy.

Max’s idea wis tae gie buddin musicians a platform tae appear in front o an adaeience an gie them the confidence tae perform for the pleasure o ithers.

That laid the foun for accordion an fiddle clubs noo dottit aa roun the country, an the association formed as a mither haudin her flock thegither wi a monthly magazine, a musical wikkeyn centre’t on the annual meetin an the Musselburgh Festival bringin aul an young alike thegither in music.

My visit tae Ardrishaig — that bonnie spot curlin roon the watter fae Lochgilphead an lookin ower tae the Kyles o Bute — wis tae see at first haun the healthy growth o een o the newest clubs on the go.

Ah! Bit fit price oor music, as I said at the start?

Clubs in general, as wi heritage societies, Burns groups, etc., are static wi the same aul faces an the subsequent dwinin awa. Far’s the bubblin youngsters o the Musselburgh festival wi a platform ready-mad?

It seems the clubs maun meeve wi the time. The nichts are ower cheap an wi nae eunuch siller in the kypie, a gweed 25-piece band is oot o range.

That maun be wrang. Noted band leader Bill Black, o Stanle, summ’t it up on a recent programme, that a couple o pound for a fower oors’ entertainment is jist nae on compar’t tae an oor o twa at Virgin Cinemas or a nicht at the theatre.

Why shid Bill Black cut back tae a trio tae bide within a club’s budget, drappin twa o’s band that he relies on for dance band work.

It’s nae that these musicians mak a fortune aff the clubs. It’s mair that they are daein their damnest tae encourage participation in oor music. Michty, Fraser McGlynn, fae that new Phoenix Club at Ardrishaig, thinks naething o traveillin aa the wye fae Lochgilphead tae Ellon an back on the same nicht cis there’s wark in the mornin.
Somewye or anither we maun attract the young talent sae abundant
at Musselburgh an that, Bill says, maun start wi the calibre o guest artists.
Nae disrespect tae the hard-wirkin committees aa ower. It's easier
said than deen, bit athoot the platform set oot bi Max Houliston, ye
winna hae the dance — anither scene sae vibrant the noo.
Fae Neil Gow in the 18th century tae Jimmy Shand in the 20th, the
dance music his been a major part o Scottish culture an maun be haudin
on till, simple as it may be tae the een an ears o some fowk.
“I aye play tae the best feet in the hall,” wis Sir Jimmy’s explanation
for his immaculate timin.
Finally, back tae the Phoenix Club at Ardrishaig an compere Fraser
McGlynn, fa cwidna resist a dig at the Dons, seein I wis there.
“Did ye ken they hid a braak-in at Pittodrie?”
“They didna get the cups did they?”
“Na, they nivver got as far’s the kitchen!”
Efter Setterday’s dooner, we maun jist keep oor fingers cross’t.

Notes
2.  *bi* judging by.
4. Dumfries is on the River Nith in the Western Borders, Musselburgh is on the Firth of
   Forth near Edinburgh, Ardrishaig is in Kintyre, Argyllshire.
32.  *Kypie* the usual meaning of this word is a small hole in the ground. Its use here appears
to be an adoption of the same sense of English “kitty”.
42-3 This would be a round journey of about 250 miles, much of it on narrow winding
roads.
49. For Neil Gow see Text 10. Jimmy Shand, who died towards the end of 2000, was an
accordianist, for many years a much-loved figure in Scottish popular entertainment.
55. *The Dons*: nickname of Aberdeen Football Club. Pittodrie is its stadium. The joke relies
on the double interpretation of “cups” as trophies and as domestic utensils. “Setterday’s
dooner” was a defeat which ended a run of nine successive victories for the Dons.
60.  *See ye neist wikk*: the author’s invariable concluding formula.

2.19  Text 19: *Stronach: A Weekly Look at Life in the Fictional North-East Village*,
from *The Press and Journal*, Saturday 11 March 2000
This feature is an endless serial by Norman Harper, incidents involving some
or other of the inhabitants of “Stronach” being narrated in episodes which occupy the readers’ attention for a few weeks until the focus takes another direction. The village, predictably, is full of “characters” representing traditional North-East types, and the entertaining if undemanding stories are usually enlivened with extensive dialogue passages in the Doric. (By contrast, in a part of the present episode not reproduced here, the character of “Reg” uses markedly English forms including some apparently intended to suggest his Manchester origin: aren’t I, me usual diet, what were it, mekk [“make”].)

Erchie Sotter was not on his customary perch at the Stronach Arms. Instead, he was closeted at a table in the back corner of the public bar, newising up a stranger.

“Een o Erchie’s aul Army buddies,” John the Barman said, answering Sandy Brose’s unspoken question. “I suppose Erchie’s keepin him ower in the back corner in case we ask ony difficult questions aboot Erchie’s glorious military career.”

“He’s nae a weel lookin man, faivver he is,” Sandy said, turning back to his half of lager shandy. “Yalla aboot the gullet. Erchie’ll hae a funeral afore lang.”

The others at the bar affected to be studying the decor of the bar in order to sneak glances at Erchie’s companion, then swivelled back on their barstools and murmured agreement.

“Will we cry Erchie across and speir aboot his pal?” Sandy said. Before the assembly of chums had a chance to agree or disagree, Sandy spun round once more. “Erchie,” he cried. “Hiv ye a mintie?”

Erchie shochled out from behind the table and trotted across. “Macallan,” he said.

“No, that’s fit ye’re buyin me for haein the neck tae cry me across here fin I’m catchin up on aul times. Reg bides in Manchester. I see him once in ilky 10 year, an you lot hiv the nerve tae bore in aboot.”

Sandy Brose nodded to John the Barman and began fumbling in his pocket for change. “I’d offer tae buy a drink for yer Reg,” Sandy said, “bit I dinna ken if he’ll hae the strength tae pit it ower. He’s affa washed-oot.”

“To tell ye truth,” Erchie said, “I’m a bittie worried aboot him masel. I ken he’s 76 an aathing, bit there’s definitely something adee wi him.” Erchie tapped his temple. “The man’s nae himsel. Nae in aa the years I’ve kent him his he been actin as queer-like as he’s actin the nicht.”

“He’s maybe jist tired efter the lang journey,” Walter said.
“He’s maybe jist tired o Erchie’s blaa in aboot the waar,” Sandy said. “Listen, laddie,” Erchie said, “I’m maybe twinty year auler nor you, bit I’m still man enough tae …”

And that was when there came a loud moan, a shattering of glass and the clattering of a table toppling on to its side. They looked round to see Reg sprawled in a heap on the floor. “I’ll phone the doctor,” John said, and the others rushed to Reg’s side. “I’m all right, I’m all right,” the old soldier said. “I get dizzy some times. That’s all. Leave me be and I’ll be fine. Just help me up on to a seat.”

Erchie took the village doctor to one side after the examination. “Hit me wi the news, doc,” he said. “I can tak it.” “I can’t really hit you with any news, Erchie,” said the doctor, still heading towards the door. “I can’t really hit you with any news, Erchie,” said the doctor, still heading towards the door. “That’s between him and his next of kin.” “He hisna got a kin. His wife deed a while back and his kids dinna look the road o him. I’m as near tae a kin as he’s got, and he’s bidin wi me this next wikk, so surely I deserve tae ken fit I’ve got on ma hauns.”

Notes

The surnames are humorous: sotter "work clumsily or ineffectually", brose “porridge”, dreep (derogatory word for a tall thin person).

3. Newsing up: news (vb.) or hae a news mean "chat, exchange gossip". The up suggests the recent influence of colloquial anglicisms such as “chat up”.


16. Mintie: “minute”, with affixation of the diminutive and elision of the second syllable: very often heard in the local speech.


22. Bore in aboot: “stick your nose in”.


45-6. Dinna look the road o him: don’t look in his direction.

2.20 Text 20: Dod ’n’ Bunt, from Evening Express, Saturday 11 March 2000

The Evening Express is a companion publication to the Press and Journal, rather more populist and lightweight. Dod ’n’ Bunt is a long-running weekly feature by Buff Hardie, one of a brilliantly accomplished team of comic writers and performers known collectively as Scotland the What, whose reliance on the North-Eastern dialect and local and topical allusions has earned them enormous pop-
ularity in the region and even in the rest of Scotland. The *Dod ’n’ Bunty* column takes the form of dialogues between a middle-aged, working-class and socially conservative married couple, and generally includes some pointed comments on a current local issue — in this extract, the proposed closure of a state prison which is something of a landmark in the fishing town of Peterhead.

Far’s the paper?

*Here it is. There’s some word that Peterheid Prison micht be closin’. Fit d’ye think o’ that? I think it’s criminal.*

Peterheid Prison? Too true it’s criminal. It’s oot the door wi’ criminals. It’s the real hard men that get pit tae Peterheid —

*Oh weel, we widna wint tae lose THEM fae wir idyllic North-East corner, wid we?*

— so it’s a very strict regime at Peterhead. Ye ken the slang word for daein’ time in jile is “porridge”? D’ye mind Ronnie Barker on the TV?

Weel, the tic-tac within the criminal fraternity is that the porridge in Peterheid is the toughest in Scotland.

*Is ’at richt? Is ’at fit the auld lags say?*

Aye. Mind you, neen o’ them his hid tae cope wi’ the stuff that you dish up for me on a Sunday mornin’.


Dinna remind me aboot my Access tae Leisure card. I widna care, but it wis you that telt me tae get a new photie ta’en tae stick on my new card.

*Weel, the photie on yer last een looked as if it hid been removed fae the files at Lodge Walk. That’s foo bad an’ that’s foo auld it wis.*

An’ it wis you that telt me tae ging an’ get my photie ta’en at een o’ the booths far ye pit yer money in the slot an it coughs up fourer photies o’ ye a few minutes later.

*’At’s richt. Deid simple.*

Simple? I hid fourer separate goes at three quid a shottie, an’ I still hinna got a photie I can use.

*For ony sake. ’At machiné’s specially designed so’s the meanest intelligen-cence can cope wi’t.*

It’s easy seen you’ve never went through the trauma o’ sittin’ in ’at booth nae kennin fit tae dae or far tae look, an’ endin’ up a total nervous wreck.
Oh come on —

Bunty, I looked for some instructions tae read on the wa’s o’ the booth, but there wis neen.

**Did ye look on the reflectin’ screen in front o’ far ye were sittin’?**

Aye. An’aa’ I could see wis my ain face an’ a lot o’ squiggles an’ arras an’ signs an’ symbols, but nae WORDS. Naebody hid thocht o’ providin’ a wee printed message — jist a few words — tellin’ ye fit tae dae. I mean, in this great country of ours we have access to — an’ aabody’s familiar wi’ — the maist glorious an’ sophisticated language in the world. The language of Shakespeare, Bunty. He used it tae express the maist complex human emotions. Ye’d think the folk that operate ‘at photie booths could use it tae let ye ken far tae look an’ fit button tae press.

**But I thocht there wis audio instructions.**

If by that ye mean that suddenly an’ fan ye least expect it an’ adenoidal quine fae Birmingham blurs oot fit sounds like ten seconds o’ Esperanto, ye’re richt — there WIS audio instructions, but fan I said, “I beg yer pardon, I dinna catch ‘at, could ye repeat it please,” she jist ignored me.

**Weel, it wis a tape, ye feel. She couldna hear ye.**

‘At’s nae excuse. A bit o’ common courtesy widna hiv come amiss. Onywye, it wis a terrible tape — aa’ muffled an’ crackly — an’ the long an’ the short o’ it wis I missed ‘at instruction, so I dinna dae fit I should’ve deen afore the next instruction came. An’ fin IT came, it wis the same crackly tape, an’ I still didna hear onything till the last three words, which were “Press green button”.

**Weel, there ye are. Fit ye complainin aboot? So did ye press the green button?**

Bunty, there wis TWA green buttons. But I pressed een o’ them an’ waited, but naething happened. So I pit in mair money an’ pressed the ither een, an’ stil naething happened. So anither three quid an’ I tried pressin baith the green buttons, een efter the ither. Still nae joy. So then I pressed them baikth at eence, an’ this time I got fower picters o’ mysel.

‘At’s aa’ richt, ‘an. So fit ye moanin’ aboot?

Weel, by the time it wis the fourth shottie an’ I’d spent twelve quid, I wis lookin’ roon’ the booth tae see if there wis ony clear instructions ONYWYE, like on the wa’ ahint me, maybe. An’ the fower photies that I’ve got are o’ the back o’ my heid.
Notes

The medium is suggestive of contemporary urban Aberdeen speech, with a vocabulary marked by popular slang (tic-tac “inside information”, cough up, quid “pound sterling”, nae joy) rather than traditional Doric vocabulary and some minor, inconsistent and unmotivated switches between Scots and English. (The most conspicuous modulation to English in the passage, at ll. 42-5, is of course deliberate and for humorous effect.) A few spellings suggest a Gen.Sc. rather than a NE pronunciation: auld for aal, ta’en for teen, dae for dee. The author’s full native-speaker fluency in the dialect is attested by his expertise as a performer in it, and the reason for this feature is simply the existence of an established written form.

4. Oot the door: i.e. packed full.

9. Ronnie Barker is an English comic actor who had a leading part in a television series called Porridge, set in a prison.

49. If the speaker on the recording had a Birmingham accent, it would have been easily recognisable.

2.21 Text 21: Leslie Wheeler, samples of children’s writing

Leslie Wheeler, a retired headmaster (see Text 3 of Chapter 4), is locally well known in the educational field for his enthusiastic work in promoting the Scots language as a field of study, and as an actively-used spoken medium, in primary and secondary schools. In furtherance of this he has written numerous short stories and poems of a level suitable for use as primary school texts, using simple vocabulary and syntax and restricting the Doric element to words and phonological forms still current in popular speech. The two samples included here are respectively the first chapter of a book entitled Brockit, the Ferm Toon Cat and a collection called Doric Bairn Rhymes and Stories, both published privately.

The fermtoon cat wis missin. Far could it be? The fermer had seen that the cat wis missin fan the kye were being milked an the cat wis aye aroon for the milkin.

He spoke aboot it tae his wife. She kent the reason an tellt the fermer. The cat wis haein kitlins an the wife kent that the cat wad be seekin a safe place for the kitlins tae be born.

Twa days later the fermer wis in the barn fan he heard a gie lot a wee skirls an miaowins. Sure enuff, there wis the cat ahin an auld kist an the mither cat noo hid five wee, wee kitlins.

“The ferm mice will seen hae tae be lookin oot for themsels,” thocht the fermer till himsel.
He wint intae the ferm-hoose an tellt his wife an she gaed oot tae the barn tae see for hersel. There they wir; five wee, wee kitlins. Fower o the kitlins wir black wi fite paas but the ither een wis strippit black an fite.

They wir hardly able tae see, but the strippit kitlin wis gie lively an already lookin for tae dee some explorin.

Fan the ferm-wife wis servin the fermer’s tea that nicht she said:
“The ‘brockit’ kitlin is gyan tae be a richt handfae.”

Noo, “brockit” is the auld Scots word for haein black an fite stripes.

Foriver efter that the wee roguie o a kitlin wis kent as Brockit.

Notes
7. Gie: this is the usual spelling for [gĩː] “give”, but here and in l. 15 it represents the intensifying adverb or adjective [gĩː].
8. Enuff: the author’s reason for using a quasi-phonetic spelling for the English pronunciation, instead of either simply keeping the standard form or using a spelling to suggest the Scots [ɪŋjʊ], is not obvious. Sure is used instead of the local see, though this form is perfectly familiar.
15. “Hardly” able to see, of newly-born kittens, sounds like an understatement.

Billy wis only siven year aul, but fit he likit daein mair nor onything else wis playin fitba, an if he wisna playin fitba he likit tae watch it on the telly.

He’d nivver been tae a live game at ony o the big league gruns an ye can imagine fu he felt fin his father tellt him ae Setturday that he wis tae pit on his warmest anorak an his supporter’s scarf for he wis gyan tae the fitba in Aiberdeen. Billy wis ower the meen!

His father got the car oot an they set aff for Pittodrie Park, hame tae Aiberdeen Fitba Club or “The Dons” as the fans cried them. Neen o the loons in Billy’s class hid ivver bin tae a Dons’ first team game sae he wid raedly hae something tae tell them aa on Monday mornin!

Billy couldna believe the number o fowk that wir at the match. Fit a stramash!

Thir wis fowk shoutin an fowk singin, some rinnin, ither jist dannerin alang, but aa heidin for the game, caasin a steer an addin tae the excitement.

Billy wis rael prood o his Aiberdeen scarf, but at Pittodrie there wis hunners o them an flugs as weil. Thir wis a fair puckle green an fite scarves as weil for the Dons wir playin Hibs, a team fae Edinburgh.
Billy jined in the shoutin, singin aa the songs — even fan he didna ken the wirds! an ate his sweeties an crisps. It hid been a stotter o a day an jist tae mak it perfect the Dons won 3 – 1!

Noo, can ye improve on perfection? Weel, nae usually, but in Billy’s case ye could. Fit wye?

Weel, fin Billy got hame, an efter tellin his mither fit a smashin day he’d hin, he wint up tae his room tae pit awa his Don’s scarf an there on his bed wis the best surprise o aa. An Aiberdeen strip, stockins an aa, an spleet new fitba beets! Billy wis fair bumbazed!

Ye ken, there are times fin it’s jist smashin bein a svven year aul loon!

Notes

7. Ower the meen: a common expression indicating excitement and exhilaration.
8-10. See Text 17.
18. Flags: local pronunciation of “flags”.
19. Hibs: short for “Hibernian”, a team originally (but no longer) composed of immigrant Irish — hence the choice of green as its colour.
25. Hin: reduced form of haen, a common local form of the past participle.
Drama

Drama is the genre in which Scottish literature in general is the least developed. The authors of the first two passages here included owe their contemporary reputation to their work in other fields: Shirrefs for his poetry and his historical importance as one of the first writers in the dialect, and Greig as a folklorist and folk-song collector. Though plays for amateur performance in the local dialect enjoyed a short-lived vogue in the North-East, the resulting corpus, though quantitatively not unimpressive, shows such a degree of uniformity in style and language that an extensive selection would be unnecessary. Regrettably, this period in the cultural history of the North-East has been virtually lost even to memory; and the authors of Texts 3-6 in this section are almost unknown except to readers with a specialised interest in the local culture. On the other hand, the dialect retains its immense popularity as a vehicle for entertainment, and the extracts from contemporary amateur writings demonstrate the easy, light-hearted mode of humour to which the modern vernacular lends itself. The passages chosen illustrate the dialect in different registers: Shirrefs skilfully combines the exigences of rhymed couplets with a racy and vigorous realism of idiom and phrasing; the five early twentieth-century authors exploit their native knowledge of the traditional conservative dialect for lifelike if unsubtle characterisation; the scriptwriters of the modern lightweight sketches use a much simplified register, marked as Doric mainly by phonology and some common expressions. Since only Shirrefs, of the writers represented in this section, was a professional poet working from established literary models (and even he wrote before anything approaching a standardised spelling had emerged for the Doric), the orthographies of the various writers show somewhat more individual variation than in other sections.

3.1 Text 1: Andrew Shirrefs, Jamie and Bess

Andrew Shirrefs (1762-1800), known as “Cripple Andy”, was bookseller, editor, publisher, and a poet of very uneven talent. His avowed model was Allan Ramsay, whom at his best he matches in energy and vituperative force; but he shows Ramsay’s humour and satiric dexterity only in spasms, and his (rare but genuine) lyrical fluency scarcely at all. This extract from his pastoral play Jamie and Bess, an imitation of Ramsay’s The Gentle Shepherd, is included as being the earliest use of the dialect for drama.
Bess:  I’ll need a thought, ere ony thing I say.
But I maun leave you; Simon comes this way.
I wadna like to lat a lover die.

Ned, (alone):  I’m glad to hear’t, but troth it’s nae be me.

Die for a lass! na, faith, I’m nae so fool:
The lasses, first, may a’ gae to the De’il.
With me, love isna yet so freely deep,
Nor ever sall, or it’s be thro’ my sleep!
For a’ her beauty, I the lass cud lose,

10  Lat me but get my cloocks on aunty’s pose.

Enter Simon.

Simon:  I’ll warrant ye’ve been courting Bess e’en now:
O Ned, there’s little wit, man, in your pow.
Gin ye maun die for her, e’en stop your fyke,

And mak’ your test’ment, Ned, whene’er you like.
Think ye, she’ll ever look the gate o’ you?

Ned:  I’ve seen as great a ferly, tho’ she do!
Simon mith had his tongue, gin he were wise;
His ain lass’ stomach disna seem o’er nice!

20  Nane cud cast up, tho’ I were Bessy’s lad,
I ever wore the bonnet and cockade!

Simon:  What dare ye say, ye bladder-headed ass,
Either to me, or yet about my lass?

[Give Ned a cuff, and drives off his bonnet.

Ned:  Simon, nae doubt, is to the fighting bred,
But I can pay this debt, tho’ nae my trade.

[Returns the cuff, and Simon turns up his heels.

Geordy entering suddenly, gives Simon a cuff as he speaks.

Geordy:  Stop, gin ye’re wise, what can this bruilzie mean?

30  I fain wad ken your bus’ness wi’ my frien’.

Simon:  I dinna fear twa fools, tho’ I’m alone.
Of what he gets, ye’re welcome to a share.

[Strikes Geordy.

I dinna think I’ll yield to sic a pair!

35  Come on my lads; ............

[A battle, and Simon beats them both off.

Geordy and Ned:  ............ But dinna rug our hair!

Simon:  Ye cowardly tykes, I scorn sic silly game!

Geordy and Ned:  Oh mercy! mercy!......

Ned:  ............ Simon, I’m to blame!
Andrew Shirrefs, Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect.

Rhymes


Notes

4 and 8. It’s “it shall”.
5. Fool: the adjectival use is regular in Scots, and in fact very common in the North-East.
10. Get my clooks on … : clook is “claw”, hence “get my clutches on …”.
16. The gate o’ you: gate is “road”, hence “in your direction”.
21. Bonnet and cockade: an early episode in the play is Simon’s return from the army, in which he enlisted when drunk.

3.2 Text 2: Gavin Greig, Mains Again

An interesting though temporary phenomenon in the late nineteenth and early decades of the twentieth century was the emergence of a lively school of dialect drama in the North-East. The plays were mostly limited in scope, domestic comedies and farces predominating, and few have proved durable; but collectively they form a not unattractive or unworthy section of the local literary corpus. Gavin Greig (1856-1914) is today most renowned for his part in compiling the enormous Greig-Duncan collection of local folk-songs, but his own work as poet, dramatist and novelist (see Text 4 in the Prose section) likewise reveals his determination to preserve as far as possible, and where not possible to commemorate, the traditional qualities of life in the North-East. Mains Again (1913), described as “a drama of Northern rural life”, is a lightweight comedy of matrimonial misadventure. Like Greig’s earlier play Mains’s Wooin’ (1894) it centres on the efforts of John Sangster (Mains of Bungry), a conceited but kind-hearted middle-aged farmer, to find a wife. In the present extract, a letter (“a kin’ o’ a love-letter, a billie-doo, I think they ca’”) from Mains is deliberately given by his servant Peter to the wrong lady.
Peter — (alone — drawing big red handkerchief from pocket) I'm jist takin' oot my hankie to blaw my nose. (Mains's letter comes out with handkerchief and falls on floor). A body is surely at liberty to blaw their nose on a cauld nicht. Gin onything comes oot o' my pouch alang wi' the hankie I canna help it. (Blows nose). A body's the better o' that. — An' noo (returning handkerchief to pocket) I'll jist pit my hankie in o' my pouch again. That's a' that I've deen — taen' oot, blawn my nose, and pitten't back again. Gin ony orra trock cam' oot wi't I canna help it; it wis jist an accident. Kate'll likely get it fin she swypes the fleer, an' she can dee onything wi't she likes; it's nane o' my bizness. — The hale thing wis an accident.

Kate — (returning with ale) Jist tak' a drink, Peter. As I said, I think it's fell guid.

Peter — (drinking) Here's to yer guid-health, Kate; an' a guid man to ye.

Kate — (slyly) That's Mains ye mean, Peter?

Peter — Oh seerly; fa ither?

Kate — Thank ye for yer guid wishes, Peter — Fa kens? Queerer things his happened afore noo, ye ken.

Peter — That's a fac', Kate. As ye say, queerer things his happened. Bit I'll need tae be joggin'. (Rises).

Kate — Weel, weel, Peter, I winna deteen ye; bit jist haste ye back.

Peter — Oh, ay, I'll maybe look in again some time afore lang.

Kate — An' see foo things is aye gettin' on?

Peter — Seerly. — Guid-nicht eenoo.

Kate — Guid-nicht, Peter. An' — an' — ye winna forget aboot yon?

Peter — That's a' richt. — Guid-nicht.

Kate — Guid-nicht. (Exit Peter). (Returning from door) Fine chiel Peter ... An' he thinks Mains his an e'e on me? My certies that wid be a caption! (Lifts Peter's chair and puts it back. Sees letter on floor)

Oh, fat's this? A letter? I doot Peter his droppit it. (Lifts letter and looks at address) "To Kate." — It's for mysel'. Peter hid brocht it wi' 'im an' hidna jist liket to gie me'ntil my ain han'. It's sealed tee. It surely maun be something special. We'll see an' fa it's fae. (Breaks seal and opens letter. Reading) "My dearest darling...

Kate." (Putting hand on heart and sighing) Oh me, bit that's bonnie — awfu' bonnie! (Continues to read, with pauses, sights, and appropriate gestures. Coming to the end) "M.B.," — "M.B." — Oh, it jist means "Mains o' Bungry." It's fae Mains — jist Mains himsel'! He hidna liket to sign his ain name at first, bit jist in a wye to lat me ken it wis fae him. Yes, Mains, I'll be yours. I will! (Presses letter to lips)
Of course a body wid maybe hae liket a chap jist a wee bittie younger than Mains. But fin a bodie lives in a hoosie by themsel's as lang's I've deen, fegs they're nae sae ill to please as they wid ane hae been. Fin I wis auchteen or nineteen it wis fa will I tak'? At five-an'-twenty it wis fa will I get? An' noo at sax-an'-therty it's fa will hae me? Gin ye canna jist aye get the lad ye wid like, it's a great matter tae get a guid hame; an', min' ye, Mains o Bungry wid be a gran' doonsit for ony lass. Winna a' the rest o' the women be richt mad fin they ken fat's gaun to happen? My certies it'll mak' a gey commotion in this pairt o' the country. Jist think o't! — Nae mair o' yer “Kate M'Donalds” for me! Na — bit (striking an attitude) Mrs Sangster by your leave; yes, Mrs Sangster of Mains of Bungry! Exit — tossing head.

*Mains Again: A Drama of Northern Rural Life with Music.*

*By Gavin Greig. Aberdeen (D. Wylie & Son), 1913; pp. 20-21."

**Notes**

3. *A body*: Frequently used as an indefinite pronoun in Scots, like the impersonal *you*. The usage is equivalent to English *one*. *Their*: the pronominalisation of the impersonal *a body* by this quasi-singular use of *they* is also regular.

7. *In o'*: a local equivalent of *into*.

29. Caption: NE idiomatic usage meaning a lucky acquisition.

40. *Yes*: Kate in romantic mood uses the English affirmative instead of Scots *aye*.

44-6. Semi-proverbial. *Tak' and get* (in marriage) differ in that the first implies choice: cf. J.M. Barrie, "In Thrums we say, ‘Wha did she get?’ and ‘Wha did he tak?’"

47. *Mains o’ Bungry*: here refers to the farm, not the farmer.

52. Note the English forms *your*, *yes*, *of*: Kate is deliberately adopting a haughty manner.

3.3 Text 3: A.R. Birnie, *Janet Wilkins’ Washin’ Day*

The following passage is from an unsophisticated comic sketch published in 1913. The printed edition contains a tribute from Sir Harry Lauder, a comedian whose influence is seminal in the development of the Scottish music-hall tradition: “Of course, mind you, it is good, and should always be a big success”; but the level of the humour is decidedly naïve. In this extract, a policeman is attempting to calm the confusion resulting from a number of characters having had garments stolen.
Policeman — Look here, the first wurd oot o’ ony o’ yer mou’s an’ Aw’ll hanchackle the hale lot o’ ye. Min’, I’ve the lang airm o’ the law at my back.

Jean — An’ div ye think A’ m carin’ for yer lang — ?

Policeman — Jean Clubb, div ye see that? (Turning out handcuffs.) I say fat I say. Ye’ve a’ got an opportunitiy o’ blawin’ aff lowse steam, an noo we’ll get tae business. (Takes out notebook.) Noo, Mrs Wilkins, as ’e wis the first ane tae seek the protection o’ the law, I’ll hear your story first. Fat’s yer name?

Janet — Fat the deil needs ye speir a silly question o’ that kin? Ye ken my name weel enuch. Man, I nursed ye on my knee afore ye wis three days aul’.

Policeman — Weel, weel, we’ll jist lat that gang, though the law demauns a’ the same. Foo aul’ are ye?

Janet — Fat hae ’e adae wi’ foo aul’ I am — that’s a —

Policeman — Janet Wilkins, ye’re impident and ignorant forbye. Ye ken naething aboot fat the law demauns, but Aw’ll come back tae that again. Fat’s yer chairge?

Janet — I think I taul ye that already. My chairge wis that Davie Green’s aff his heid, but I think ye’ll better tak’ in Jean Clubb tae, an’ that’ll mak’ twa o’ them. Anither thing. I’ve got a kwyte o’ Jock’s liftit oot o’ this washin’-hoose sin’ denner time, and this taterwallap o’ a thing left in its place.

Policeman — (taking notes) — Fat wye dae ye spell taterwallap?

Janet — T – a – t — oh, never min’ spellin’; jist slap doon taterwallap.

Policeman — Oh, weel, this’ll dae or I get hame tae the dickshonary. Noo, Mrs Wilkins, accordin’ tae law, there’s a lot mair things I should speir. For instance — wis’t a gentleman’s kwyte? — fit wis the colour o’? — faur wis’t lyin’? — fan did ye see’ last? — fa wis the maker? Whomsoever A’m beginnin’ tae see a bittle o’ licht, so we’ll pass ower a’ that. Noo, Dauvit, fat hae ’e tae say for yersel’?

Green — Weel, confound it, my grievance amounts to this. I sent round a twelve-and-sixpenny hat on sight to Mrs Wilkins this forenoon, and, confound it, she had the effrontery to insult the firm of David Green, draper, grocer, iron—

Policeman — That’ll dae, we ken a’ aboot yer titles.

Green — She sent round her boy with this thing in a box, asking me to exchange it for another — theft, robbery, fraud, confound it; insulted David Green, draper, gro—

Policeman — That’ll dae, Dauvid; we’re comin’ at it. Noo, Mrs. Clubb, I
think ye said ye got a blouse stown aff the bleachin’-green. Ha, ha, ha, A’m beginnin’ tae see’t noo.

Jean — My certie, but it’s nae lauchin’ maitter — my best silk blouse that I wis daein’ up for the concert awa —

Policeman — Ha, ha, ha, again, Jean. A’m seein’ the thing noo, ’oman.

The short an’ the lang o’t is — a’ the things mentiont were stown frae or near this washin’ hoose sometime atween denner time and enoo. Noo, for form’s sake, did ony o’ ye see a suspicious-lookin’ character or characters loin’in aboot that wid hae haen the neck to hae liftit them?

Jean — Janet Wilkins is the only ane that A’m aware o’ be—

Policeman — Shut ’e up, Jean Clubb; ye’re ower ready wi’ yer tongue.

It’ll get ye intae trouble yet, or A’m a Dutchmin. Did ony o’ the rest o’ ye see anybody?

Janet — Od, ay, noo that ye mind me o’n’t. There wis a crater here, caa’d himsel’ an insurance inspector —

Policeman — Fat wis he like? Had he a wife wi’m?

Janet — Na, never a wife; but by’s news he seemed tae be sair needin’ ane, but A’m thinkin’ I gaed him the ootside o’ the door in a hurry.

Jean (aside) — Imphum, the ootside o’ the door, the randy.

Policeman — An’ did he say “dear me,” and “guid graciousness,” an’ things o’ that kin’?

Janet — Ay, did he, but A’m thinkin’ I cuttit him gey short.

Jean (aside) — Ay, imphum, gey short.

Green — Confound it —

Policeman — Whest, whest noo, Dauvid, that wisna ane o’se words. Na, Mrs Wilkins, it wisna him that liftit the goods. Yon stamp-licker cove’s genuine eneuch. Whomsoever he’s stoppin’ wi’ Taggerty at the hotel, so we’ll command his presence for fear o’ case bees. Rin roon, Jockie Wilkins, and tell Taggerty that the law demauns the presence o’ yon Lloyd George lodger o’ his in Poverty Raw washin’-hoose this vera meenit.

[Exit Jockie.

(Policeman seats himself on edge of tub.)

Policeman — Noo, we’re makin’ progress, we’re gaeitherin’ the criminals intae the meshes o’ the law. Afore ten meenits ye’ll see me —

(Tumbles backwards into tub.)

Janet Wilkins’ Washin’ Day: a Comic Play in One Act.
Notes


30. Whomsoever: probably intended as an erroneous quasi-anglicisation of housome’er “however”.

37. This thing: it is a tattered hat left by the vagrant who has stolen the garments.

49. The neck: i.e. the impudence.

59. Gaed: an unetymological double past, conflating the (now recessive) strong gae and the weak gied — or else simply a misprint. Gaed him the outside o the door: shut the door in his face.

60. Imphum: though the affirmative noise [mm/mm] is in fact very common, when represented in print the author’s intention is often to suggest sarcasm.

68. Cove: not Scots dialect but an English slang word for “chap” or “fellow”, unexpected in this context.

69. Case bees: case be is a NE expression for “perhaps”. The quasi-pluralisation is a nonce usage, presumably meaning “anything that may happen”.

3.4 Text 4: W. Cumming, Burnie’s Jeannie, or, Wut an’ Ginteelity

This is another domestic comedy first produced in 1924 — actually a submission for a Scots-writing competition. In a brief introductory note, the author (writing pseudonymously as “Knoweheid”) asked “Can we not preserve the tongue, and give at the same time a true picture of life?” To this, the response of a reviewer for the Aberdeen Journal (November 15, 1924) was to criticise the dramatist for his naïve assumption that a mere imitation of everyday scenes and characters could result in effective drama; but also to praise his excellent handling of the vernacular both in itself and as a contribution to the maintenance of the dialect in active use.

Jock — Heth! Sic a canally o’ fowk aboot the hoose the nicht! Fat’s a dee? A kin’ o’ a pairty affair, A’m thinkin.
Pete — Eh, Jock, man, ye are late for the fair; did ye nae see yon slauch-terin gyaan on amo’ the young coeks twa days syne? The place wis like a vera skemmels, an’ there wis as muckle scraachin’ an’ kecklin’ ye’d ‘a thocht a’ the hallach quines i’ the destrick hid been aboot.

Jock — Och, deil birst the gutsey kytes o’ them! It’ll be lang tull the day we get an orra hoch te pick.

Sandy — It ull sets ye te be speakin that wye. We get a bit taste o’ fat’s aga’ in, an’ sang! there’s nae mony toons better fed nor we are.
Peter — Thanks te aul John himsel an’ the missie. A’m thinkin gin aul lucky his her wulls o’s, we’d be as bare as the laads at Teuchatslap.

The deem telt me aul Burnie cam intill the kitchie at the back o’ the term, spiert fat the men war te get for their denner, an’ gid awa ben the hoose. Throwe cam the mistress wi’ a face like fire; we hinn na gotten barfit broth sin-syne.

Jock — Ye’re gey far ben wi’ Tibbie: ony chance o’ er spulzie-in some o’ the galshachs for’s the nicht?

Sandy — Nae need for that. I wis i’ the gairden this efterneen giein 20 things a kin’ o’ a extra-speeshil snod-up, an’ I h’ard Burnie himsel spierin the missie gin she’d onything extra for the men on sic an unca nicht, an’ she said she’d made siccar o’ that.

Jock — This’ll be a kin’ o’ a show te get the quine aff their han’s. Fatna wye his she nae been pickit up or noo?

Sandy — There’s been lads eneuch, bit they’ve been a’ like the laird o’ Cockpen. Bit fa’s his knabs at cam in aboot wi’ the twa seater, wi’ a gey perjink aul ramrod o’ a wife wi’ him?

Jock — I kenna him ava. Bit he wis fair drest in style. Nae cowmon dab, yon een.

Peter — Oh, he’s a chiel Gray; comes fae Port-san. The midder o’ ‘im keeps a gey bit hoose an’ wis thocht te be fell weel-aff, bit A’m thinkin the young billie’s lattin the win’ intill’t.

Sandy — Ye ken ‘im?

Peter — My aul midder bides there. He tried te get on for a doctor, I h’ard, bit cam little speed. He eese’t te gyang scungin aboot wi’ a motor bike, an’ I h’ard tell he’d gotten intill a snorl wi’ a quine this airt somewye.

(Enter Heather Jock. Jeannie’s voice is heard as she sings “Comin throwe the Rye.” All listen.)

Jock — Dash’t! that shid eickel up the young chiels. She’s flingin hersel at their heids.

Sandy — Man, faur the deil war ye brocht up? A cantier, hertier lass there’s nae in the countryside. A mair hamel craitur ye cudna meet; still-an-on she can keep her place, an’ 35 others in theirs. Is that bitin ye?

Jock — Och, A’m nae a faavrit like you, gettin a’ the bit fancy jobbies aboot the gairden te dee. I wis never een o’ yer in-haadin dirt. Man, ye’ve been here ten ’ear; gin ye’d haaf pluck, ye’d gyang oot aboot an’ see the wardle some.

Heather Jock — Noo, noo, lads, dinna cast oot. Can I dee ony trade wi’ ye? Ony reddins, Jock?
Jock — Na, sang! an’ ye’re nae my merchan at onyrate.
Heather Jock — No, min? Weel, I wis thinkin yon pair o’ yours is nae
in richt fettle. An’ dyod! I h’ard tell Burnies hid gien ye yer come-
again for yon neep-dreels ye set up. A’m thinkin ye winna bide sae
lang as the last foreman. It taks a man te please Burnie.

Jock — Oot o’ ma road, ye orra chyard, or A’ ll —
Sandy — Haad yer tongue, ye eediot: here comes the missie an’ the
young chiel.

(Enter Jeannie and Charles Gray.)

Jeannie — Yes, as you say, I’d like very much to see your car, but I must
speak to the men. Boys, gin ye haad roon te the kitchie, Tibbie his
something for ye.
Sandy — Thank ye, Miss Jeannie; me bein the aul’est han’, A’ ll tak it on
ma te speak for the idders an’ wuss ye gweed luck.

Burnie’s Jeannie, or Wut an’ Ginteelity: Rural Drama by “Knoweheid.”

Notes

3. Late for the fair: an expression meaning “not abreast of the latest developments.”
9. It ull sets ye: it ill becomes you.
10. Toons: not “towns” but “farms”.
11. The missie: the farmer’s daughter. “John” is the farmer, elsewhere referred to as
“Burnie” or “Burnies” from the name of his farm, Glenburnie.
11-12. Aul lucky: “lucky” is a name for the speaker’s mother or any older woman. Here it
is a disrespectful reference to the farmer’s wife. His her wulls o’s: has her way with us.
16. Barfit (i.e. barefoot) broth: broth made without meat.
17. Far ben wi’: ben is “in or towards the back room of a house”; hence the idiom means
“on close terms with”.
25-6. A reference to a poem by the popular poetess Carolina Oliphant, Lady Nairne, which
begins: “The Laird o’ Cockpen, he’s prood and he’s great…”
31. A gey bit hoose: the use of the diminutive bit is ironical in this very common idiom: the
meaning is “a fine big house”.
34. Aul midder: i.e. grandmother.
35. Cam’ little speed: had little success.
38. Throwe: this spelling suggests a NE dialect pronunciation of through: of course, a pop-
ular song such as this would naturally be sung in the singer’s own dialect rather than that
of the original author. The persona of the song Comin’ thro’ the Rye is a girl of independent
ways; hence the next remark.
5. *Pair*: i.e. of horses, for ploughing.

60-62. The farmer's daughter's change of language from English (for the genteel young man who is accompanying her) to Scots (for the farm servants) is obvious.

3.5 Text 5: Rowntree Harvey, *The Shepherds*

Knowingly or otherwise, the author of this simple nativity play (1927) is following the universal tradition of transferring the Biblical stories to the time and place of their intended audience. In the play, the Wise Men talk an English imitative of the style of the Authorised Version, the Angel uses the actual words of the canonical text, and the Shepherds speak broad Scots.

**JOSEPH:** *(who has been bursting with impatience)* Fit like wis the angel, grandda? A wid like fine te see an angel. A niver dream aboot anything like that.

**JOHN:** Wisht, laddie, dinna fash yer grandda.

5 **JOSEPH:** Da, fin Messiah comes wull 'e drive oot the Romans? Wull 'e be a sodger wi' a great muckle swoord an' a lot o' ither sodgers te help 'im?

**JOHN:** O, hud yer wisht, min; ye'd speir a body's heid aff an' syne speir foo it cam' te be like that.

**JOSEPH:** Bit A canna ken if A dinna speir, da.

10 **SIMON:** Wyte, laddie, wyte. Ha'e patience. Thon e'en o yours 'ull see a' the wunners that'll come o' this nicht an' the comin' o' Messiah. For masel, A praise God that he's lutten me live te see the beginnin' o' the promise o' the Scriptures.

**JOSEPH:** Ech, min, A'm gled am young, granddda. Mebbe fin A grow up

15 All be a sodger wi' the Messiah an’ —

**JOHN:** Ye’ll be nae sic thing. Ye'll be a shepherd the same as yer fadder, yer grandfadder an’ his fadder afore 'im — an' that's a’ aboot it.

**SIMON:** Aye, be a shepherd, Joey. There's niver lack o' fechters, an' shepherds are sairer nought than men o' war. The Messiah micht be a sodger to begin wi’, bit 'e'll be a shepherd i’ the ein'. Israel began wi’ shepherds, an' there wis peace an’ plenty than, an’ men wur nigh te God. Fin they left their flocks an’ their tints o’ the plain an’ biggit the toons that breed ill an greed an’ corruption they tint their hud on the Almighty. Oot here on the plains, on the hills, i’ the glens,

20 wi’ the caller air an’ the clear licht o’ the sin or at even aneth the stars there's peace an’ contintment, thocht that are kin’ an’ wide an’ deep. The prophets an’ the wise men dinna get their vessions an’ their thocht i’ the steer o’ the mairket. God leuks wi’ peety an’
compassion on the puir buddies i’ the thrang an’ dirt o’ the toons.

Bit awa’ i’ the quate neiks, wi’ the shepherds an’ the wise men, God
travels an’ spiks an’ is their neebur billie.

JOSEPH: I wid like fine te be a sodger, grandda; bit mebbe it wid be bet-
ter te be a shepherd an’ hae God for my billie. Onywye, A winna
mak’ up my min’ yet — A’l jist wyte a filie an’ see fit happens.

The Shepherds: a Nativity Play.

Notes

1. Fit like wis: The positioning of “like” here instead of at the end is characteristic of all
forms of Scots.

7. Hud yer wisht: “be quiet”. Wisht (or any of its various forms) is used only in this phrase
and by itself as an interjection.

7-8. A stock phrase.

14. An: i.e. “I’m”. This evident misinterpretation of the reduced form of pronoun and verb
is not uncommon in written Scots.

19. Nought: this should be nott, the dialect past tense of need. English nought “nothing” is
nocht in Scots.

22-3. Tint on its first occurrence (tints) is the local pronunciation of “tent” (cf. contint-
ment, l. 26) ; on its second, the regular past tense of tyne “lose”.

3.6 Text 6: Donald Campbell, Kirsty’s Surprise

The plot of this playlet is as slight as it could be, and virtually identical to
Burnie’s Jeannie and all too many other plays and stories: a mother attempts
to marry her daughter, against the wishes of the latter and the better judge-
ment of her husband, to a man of wealth who is eventually exposed as a vil-
lain, leaving the daughter free to marry a worthy man of humble birth. However, it is raised above the level of banality by the humorous riposte and
backchat which abound in the dialogue.

  FACTOR — Quite so, quite so. And how do you like being home again,
  Miss Webster?
  TIBBIE — Better than afore I gaed awa’; there’s nae place like it.
  PETER — Tib’s a gey hame-tied kin’ o’ a lassie, Factor, an’ they’re nae
  the warst. The nests seem ower crampit nooadays, judgin’ by the
  wey the fledglings streek their wings an’ flee awa’.
Factor — I suppose it’s just the law of nature after all, Mr. Webster, and you yourself must have done the same.

Peter — That’s jist faur ye’re wrong, Factor. I wis born in Muirton, mairried in Muirton, an’ gin I keep weel I houp tae be beeried wi’in sicht o’ it.

Factor — Truly a fine record of Scots steadfastness.

Tibbie — Ye better watch oot, faither, or ye’ll be readin’ yer ain name in the paper for brakkin’ records, same as ye spak’ o’ the nicht.

Peter — It’ll be for clingin’ on, lassie, an’ nae speedin’ on.

Factor — I’m sure that you and Mrs. Webster must feel very proud of your daughter’s achievements in her studies. I would congratulate you on all the happy results obtained.

Peter — Dod be here, Factor, that’s a topper o’ a speech tae come speelin’ affen yer ain bat. Ye’ll wauken up some mornin’ tae fin’ yersel’ in Parliament or thae talkie pictur’s fowks rave aboot.

Factor — I quite believe I would make a hit in either profession.

Peter — Fa wad ye hit, Factor?

Factor — Hit, used in this sense, means a deep impression, Mr. Webster.

Peter — Fine I ken that. Last Muckle Friday my foreman hit the orra man an’ left a deep impression abeen his lug. The peer breet hesna the eese o’ his senses yet.

Factor — It does seem rather a pity that the lower classes still resort to brute force as a means of settling a discussion.

Peter — Ging ye oot an’ tell my foreman he’s ane o’ the lower classes, Factor, an’ there’ll be nae discussion, naethin’ but an accoount for stickin’ plaister that wad paper the hale o’ The Toowers.

Factor — You’re specialising in rather grim humour tonight, Mr. Webster. By the way, Miss Webster, you’ve never seen my latest in cars. Come round to the gate and give me your opinion on it. We’ll be back directly, Mrs. Webster.

Kirsty — Dinna hurry, Captain Graham, dinna hurry; the nicht’s but young yet, an’ sae are the twa o’ ye. It’s the law o’ nature, ye ken. *(Tibbie and Factor go.)*

Kirsty — Really, Peter Webster, yer mainners in yer ain house are in sair need o’ dartin’. I dinna ken hoo the Factor disna roose on ye.

Peter — For the same gweed reason as he didna ging oot tae tell the foreman fu laich doon the laiddar o’ society he is. Ower feart.

Kirsty — Rubbish, man. The Factor’s jist gotten yer goat some road or ither, an’ noo ye’re aye buttin’ at him.

Peter — Dinna fash yersel’, wumman. His hide’s ower teuch tae pierce
wi’ the sma’ stobs I gie him, forbyes he’s nae worth arguin’ about. If
I’m nae mista’en there’s somebody fumblin’ aboot i’ the lobby.

KIRSTY — Ging tae the door then, an’ see fa it can be.

50

PETER — (crossing to the door) It’s maybe the Factor bringin’ back my
goat. Oh, it’s yersel’, Angus, my billy! Come awa’ in. I thocht ye
were a goat.

ANGUS — (entering) A goat, Peter? Were ye expeckin’ ane?
PETER — Na, na, there wis a soun’ like the bleatin’ o’ ane, but it maun
hae been yersel’ hummin’ a tune.

ANGUS — Sae that’s a’ he thinks o’ ma vocal pooers, Mrs. Webster —
thocht I wis a bleatin’ goat, weel, weel.
PETER — We a’ ken ye’re a Robin Crusoe at singin’, Angus, but dinna
blaw aboot it. Sit ye doon an’ gie’s yer crack.

60

KIRSTY — Are ye bidin’ lang, Mr. Stewart?
PETER — Fa’s mainner need dartin’ noo, I’d like tae ken? A bonnie
question that tae speir a veesitor afore his tackety beets hae dunted
the fender.

Kirsty’s Surprise: a Doric Comedy in Three Acts.
By Donald Campbell, M.C. Aberdeen (D. Wylie & Son); 1930; pp. 23-5.

Notes

25. Muckle Friday: the Friday on which the biannual feeing market was held.
32. The Tooers: the name of the Factor’s house.
44. Gotten yer goat: stock expression, not unique to Scots, for irritation. Peter makes a joke
in the next speech by pretending to understand it literally.
51. Billy: punning on billy “friend” and Billy (conventional name for a male goat).
58. Robin Crusoe: humorous confusion with Enrico Caruso.

3.7 Text 7: Extracts from Aberdeen Student Shows

An annual event in the theatrical life of Aberdeen is the performance, in the
city’s main theatre, of a comedy revue by the students of Aberdeen University
and other institutions of tertiary education in the city. This is part of the stu-
dents’ Charities Campaign, and has the unfailing support of the community.
Written by the students, the shows invariably make extensive use of the local
dialect and idiom.
**Extract 1: from Alas Poor Doric, 1994**

**THE DORIC VERSION OF HAMLET (extract)**

*In which Hammy, Prince of Denburn, meets the ghost of his dead father]*

**Ghost:** I’ve something affa important tae tell ye! I wiz murdered!

**Hammy:** Murdered? So that’s why yer deid? Fit happened??

**Ghost:** I wiz pizened in m’ ain gairden by ma brither.

**Hammy:** Awa! Nae feel Uncle Cloddy??

**Ghost:** Aye! An noo he’s shacked up wi yer ma.

**Hammy:** I ken. Gadsy, is it?

**Ghost:** I wint ye tae ging an gie ’im a hidin’, jist lik I taught ye.

**Hammy:** Fair enough, da, I’ll dae it!

**Ghost:** Swear!

**Hammy:** A’richt, I’ll bliddy dae it!

**Ghost:** At’s ma boy! But Hammy, get a bend on wi it. Yer an affa loon fer chavin aboot!

[Later, he ponders on his task, thus...]

**Hammy:** Tae be – or nae tae be.

Fit a scunner!

D’ye stun an tak it on i’ chin

Or d’ye gie it a square go, oot in i’ car park?

Tae snuff it, i’ big sleep. Tatties.

**20**

M’ mither’s shacked up wi ma uncle

M’ Uncle’s murderet ma da

M’ da, fa’s deed, keeps nippin’ ma heed

An’ ma’ blon’ thinks I’m a nutter an’ a!

**Notes**

Title: of course, a humorous reminiscence of *Hamlet* V.i.179: “Alas, poor Yorick!”

S.d.: Denburn is a district of Aberdeen.

7. *Gadsy* or *gadsies* is an exclamation of surprise, very common among young people. The sense of *is it?* appears to be “Is that really true?”

11. *Bliddy*: local form of “bloody”, a mild expletive. A humorously inappropriate reaction to the Shakespearean “Swear!”

12. *Get a bend on*: a current idiom for “hurry up”.

13. *Chavin aboot*: unlike *chavin* [various spellings] *awa*, which suggests “working steadily”, this has the sense of “ineffectually wasting time.”
17-23. The register of these lines is contemporary urban argot, recognisably influenced by film culture. *Nippin ma heed* [head]: pestering me (to do something).

*Extract 2*: ibid

GRUMPIAN TV SCENE (extract)

*[In which thick Doric quine Matilda Werk is forced to go live on Grampian TV after an accident to notable local TV personality Robin Galloway…]*

Matilda: Hello! Yer watchin' Grumpian! Wir top story 'is efterneen — tragedy the day fan Robin Galloway’s hair caught fire live on TV fan he wiz presenting the Birthday Spot, causin’ wild hilarity tae thoosan’s o’ young viewers. A spokesman fer Mr Galloway said:

“He’s niver been so popular”...

In the light o’ recent allegations by a city masoos, Lord Provost James Wyness wiz asked tae mak a statement. Fan asked if he wiz involved in a sex, drugs, and corruption scandal, Mr Wyness surprised naeb’dy by sayin’ that he wiz.

Director: Turn the page!

Matilda: [turns page of script] … Nae involved in ony wye.

*Notes*

Title: *Grumpian* represents the local pronunciation of “Grampian”, name of the independent television channel which serves the North-East.

S.d. Robin Galloway is a real television presenter. The surname of “Matilda Werk” is probably meant to suggest that of Kirsty Wark, an accomplished and popular interviewer and presenter of serious discussion programmes.

7. *Massoos* a corruption of *masseuse*.

8. James Wyness is the real name of the then Lord Provost of Aberdeen.

*Extract 3*: from *The Good, The Bad & The Buttery*, 1996

THE DISTRICT COURT (extract)

*[In which Coonciller Sandy Papers sums up the case]*

Sandy: Now, let me jist say fer the benefit o’ the press — Davie — We are here the day tae consider whether ’is foul,
deranged specimen o’ the criminal underclass should be allowed oot on the streets o’ is fair city. I shall hear representation fae the Cooncils fer Deference and Persecution, afore makin’ up ma ain mind as to his guilt. Though I must say, I ayewiz kent he wiz a bad lot iver since he maliciously and knowingly selt me a stale mingin’ rowie! You sealed your fate ’at day! Hamish Pastry, I hereby sentence you tae... death! Next!

Lawyer: Hang on! This is only the bail hearing.
Sandy: H’m'in, woah back, laddie! Dinna try an’ tell me my job! I’m in cherge o’ ’is Court an’ I can dae itiver I like! Watch ’is. Stand up! [they do] Sit doon! [they do]

All: Breeks!
Sandy: There ye are! Now we ken fa’ s boss! I am a Coonciler come Justice o’ the Peace, and an auld hand at stitchin’ folk up! Get on wi’ it, Fiona.

Clerk: Are you Mr. Hamish Gothenburg Glory Leighton Rugvie McMaster Simpson McLeish Miller Strachan Cooper Black McGee Weir Subs Gunn Angus Hewitt Porteous Kennedy...Pastry?
Hamish: ’At’s me.

Clerk: And you reside at 67 Byron Square, Northfield?
Hamish: Aye.
Sandy: H’m’in! We’ll hae neen o’ yer “aye” keigh here loon! Ye’ll spik the Queen’s English in ’is court, ken?

Hamish: Aye, Fair do’s.

Sandy: Fairly ’at. Richt, cerry on. I dinna think ’is is the kinda punter we should be lettin’ oot! Unless the Deference his ony masticatin’ factors tae tak intae account? Cooncil fer the guilty?

Lawyer: That’s “the accused”, your honour. My client is entitled to the benefit of the doubt. Your Honour will be familiar with the presumption of innocence?

Sandy: Eh? Noo jist whoa back, sonny. I’m nae a lawyer, I’m jist a humble time-served Freemason. Bit I canna see ony reason why I should grant bail and let ’at wee tink back intae society. I widnae even let ’im intae Cafe Society!

Lawyer: In that case, your honour, if I were to lay these pho-
tographs before the Court, we shall find the interests of justice best served.

45 Sandy: Justice! 'Is is the District Court, fit the hell’s justice got tae dae wi’it?

Notes

Title: A buttery is a crisp, flaky roll with butter as an ingredient. Rowie (l. 9) is the same thing.

12. H’mie: a phonetic spelling of a much-reduced “Hey min [man]”.

20-23. The device of a preposterously long name is borrowed from BBC Television’s crazy comedy programme Monty Python’s Flying Circus.

27-8. Shortly before this show, an actual sheriff had made himself an object of wide-spread ridicule by censuring a witness in a court case for using the word “Aye”.

Extract 4: from Scaffie Society, 1997

OUTSIDE THE ESCORT AGENCY
[In which local scaffie Ben Liner meets a dodgy character while trying to sell his car.]

Dod G. Deal: sst. Wint tae buy a car radio?
Ben: Nih.
Dod G: Affa cheap.
Ben: Is it nicked?

5 Dod G: Nih, it’s… er… fæ my car.
Ben: Fit wye dae ye wint tae sell it ’en?
Dod G: I’m deef.
Ben: No thanks.
Dod G: Eh??

10 Ben: NO THANKS! Och, fit am I gan tae dae? Hud on, fit’s ’is? ’Escort Agency — Escorts Winned? Yas! An’ jist fan I thocht I’d niver get ’at car selt!

[Curtain up to reveal Escort Agency set]

Notes

2. Nih: a quasi-phonetic spelling for a curt negative: the actual vowel is in the region of [ɪ].

11. Yas! exclamation of pleasure or satisfaction: probably a recent innovation in the local speech. The character is to be understood as confusing the normal meaning of “escort” with its use as the name of a make of car.
**Extract 5: ibid.**

FOSTERHILL HOSPITAL (extract)

*In which Doctor Deelittle deals with a patient in his own inimitable manner...*  

Dr. D: Aye aye. Fit’s a’de here? “Severe inflammation an’ blisterin’ tae posterior an’ surroundin’ areas”?  

Judy: I’ve got afa badly sunburnt!  

Dr. D: In Aiberdeen? Impossible. Yer clearly insane. I’ll hiv ye committed at once.  

Sonja: She’s not mad, she fell asleep under a sunlamp.  

Dr. D: I’ll be the judge o’at! Sit doon!  

*Judy sits, then springs up sharply*  

Dr. D: Nithin’ wrang wi’ yer reflexes ’en. Ye’ve obviously contracted B.S.E.  

Sonja: B.S.E.?!  

Dr. D: Aye, a Bliddy Sair Erse!  

Judy: Fit am I gan tae dae, I’m sair a’ o’er!  

Dr. D: Weel, in that case I’d say we should tak a’ yer claes aff an’ smear ye wi’ yoghurt.  

Judy: Fit good’ll ’at dae me?  

Dr. D: Neen, bit it’ll dae wonders fer me!  

Judy: You’re nae gan near me wi’ yoghurt!  

Dr. D: Suit yersel’. In ’at case, we’d better... tak a’ yer claes aff an’ keep ye under close observation.  

Judy: I think I’ll get a second opinion, thank you! [she exits at pace]  

Dr. D: A’right, half yer claes! Top half or bottom half? You choose? Dammit.

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**Notes**

S.D. Dr Deelittle: a linguistic localisation of Dr Dolittle, a character in children’s books (and a film version current at the time of the show).

6. This character has a German name and speaks standard English: probably for no other reason than exigences of casting.

11. B.S.E.: Bovine spongiform encephalitis, popularly known as “mad cow disease”. The suspicion of a possible link between this and a similar brain disorder in humans caused something approaching mass panic in Britain in the late 1990s: in North-East Scotland, where the farming of beef cattle is a major industry, the economic results were disastrous.
3.8 Text 8: Extract from an amateur pantomime

Another regularly-recurring and unfailingly popular item on Aberdeen’s entertainment calendar is a Christmas pantomime presented by the Attic Theatre Company, one of the city’s amateur dramatic groups. The traditions of pantomime (a well-defined theatrical form whose nature and origins are far outwith the scope of the present book) are faithfully observed in the Attic shows, but an invariable feature is that the “funny man” delivers his lines in the local dialect. Since an essential feature of pantomime is spontaneous clowning and ad-libbing of lines, the script is never identical to the words uttered on stage; and in an entertainment designed principally for children a high degree of sophistication is not required or expected. The following extract, however, conveys some idea of the tone of the show.

ALI: Hello loons and quines. Welcome tae Baghdad. Fit a rare nicht we’re a’ haein. Jist magic. Oh I’m dying tae see my pal Sinbad again. He’s my best pal. We were baith in Kittybrewster fitba team when we wis wee. He wis the centre forward and I wis left back ... richt back in the dressin rooms. I miss him fan he goes voyaging a’ ower the world seeking his fortune. My name is Ali. Uhuh ... honest! Ali. Na, na, nae Ali McLeod ... Ali Khan.

CROWD: Oh no he can’t!

ALI: Oh yes I can. [Etc.]

Aw stop it! That’s my name onywye. A’body tries tae mak’ a fool o’ me. I dinna ken fit wye. It’s no as if ony o’ the rest here wid pass as the cat’s earmuffs. Hey I’ve jist had a magic idea. Every time I come on I’ll wave to you and shout COOOEEE, and you can shout back if you like ... now, wait till I ponder.

Ponder, ponder, ponder. Right, I’ve got it. When I shout COOEE, you shout back “Hi-ya Ali”. Let’s have a practice. I’ll run off ... hold on now [Business]. Oh, that wis rare! Oh we do have a bright bunch of boys and girls tonight. That wis great that wis. Noo, dinna forget. Onywye, I must tell ye, there’s
some gey quaint craturs aroon here ... tak’ Sinbad’s mither ...

[In the following sequence Sinbad is introduced and offers to relate his adventures]

SIN: Well, if everybody is sitting comfortably, I’ll begin.

ALI: Jist a mintie till I get a cushion.

SIN: Certainly Ali. [Business] Ready now?

ALI: Fairly ’at. I’m jist dyin’ tae hear a’ aboot yer adventures. Div ye mind the time we climbed the wall o’ the palace ...

SIN: Yes, yes, and you fell into the camel pen and came out covered in ...

ALI: Confusion! Aye, we hid tae rin for oor lives wi’ the Wazir efter us.

SIN: Is Wazir Wisna still here?

ALI: Well, he wis here a mintie ago. Hae you seen Wazir Wisna?

VILL. 1 No, he wisna here.

ALI: Wis he nae. (To audience) Wis Wazir Wisna nae here?

[Enter Wazir]

WAZ: Make way for the grand Wazir!

ALI: Oh gee whiz, it’s the Wazir. He mebbe wisna here afore, bit he’s here noo.

WAZ: Clear off, you ruffians [Song] I am the most grand and powerful Wazir Wisna.

ALI: Powerful my eye. He’s aboot as powerful as the battery in my granny’s deaf aid and she canna hear a thing. He thinks he’s Archie. Fit a pit on. Actually he’s only a servant o the Caliph and he’s nothing bit a big poultice, pain in the neck and he his a face like a weet trades fortnicht.

Notes

The Attic pantomimes are written by members of the company and the scripts are unpublished and not edited for linguistic consistency. The comedian’s part may be assumed to be delivered in the local dialect throughout, despite the variable spellings.

4. *Kittybrewster*: a primary school in Aberdeen. An abundance of highly local and topical allusions in a purportedly exotic setting is an invariable ingredient of pantomime humour.

8. *Ali McLeod*: Ally McLeod was the manager of Scotland’s international football team in the year of this pantomime.

9-10. The exchange (several times repeated) “Oh no he can’t — Oh yes I can”, or something similar, in which the children in the audience invariably join, has become an indispensable feature of pantomime. *Khan* and *can* are identical in a Scottish pronunciation, hence the pun.


15-17. A typical piece of pantomime business.

22. The “principal boy”, invariably played by a woman, serves as straight “man” in exchanges with the comedian.

32. *Wazir Wisna*: suggests an apocopated form of “Was he or wisna ...” — not a complete phrase but providing a recognisable pun.

38. *Gee whiz*: long-established and not exclusively Scottish exclamation of surprise or disgust.

43-4. *He thinks he’s Airchie*: a Scots vernacular expression, of uncertain origin, for “He thinks highly of himself.”

44. *Pit on*: pretence, fake.

45. *Poultice*: common Scots expression for an individual with a depressing presence.

46. *Trades fortnicht*: the Aberdeen summer holiday period.
References


Wyness, F., 1966. *City by the Grey North Sea*. Aberdeen (Alex Reid & Son).
Glossary

abeen: NE form of Gen.Sc. abuin, above.
acquant: acquainted. NE.
airt: direction; airtless: without direction.
Gen.Sc.
allagorous: grim, ghastly. NE.
atry: angry, spiteful. Mainly NE.
auld-farran, aulfarrant: wise, skilful.
Gen.Sc.
awyte: indeed, certainly (interj.). NE.
bailie: cattleman on a farm. Mainly NE.
barfit: barefoot. Mainly NE.
bark: cake with mud etc. Gen.Sc.
begeck: trick, stroke of bad luck. NE.
bellyrive: a feast (n), eat voraciously (vb).
Gen.Sc.
bink: bench, wooden seat or settle. Gen.Sc.
binner: knock (at the door). NE.
birn: burden. Mainly NE.
birr: force, energy; whirr, as a spinning-wheel. Gen.Sc.
blad, blaud: stain (n. and vb.) Mainly NE.
bleck: (adj.) black; (vb.) blacken; surpass, defeat. Gen.Sc.
blinter: blink, squeeze the eyelids together.
blinterin: short-sighted. Mainly NE.
blirt: burst into tears (v); a burst of tears (n.). NE.
bludder: soil or disfigure the face with tears, blood, etc. NE form of Gen.Sc. bluther.
bluffert: squall, gust. NE.
blyunky: square, stocky. NE, rare.
bodie: ghost, goblin. tattie-boodie: scarecrow. NE.
bouden’d: swollen. Mainly NE.
bought: bend. Rare.
bowie: a box or small tub for meal etc. NE.
braw, bra': fine, handsome; well-dressed. Gen.Sc.
breet: NE form of brate, but often used affectionately.
brook: soot clinging to pots etc. Mainly NE.
brouden, browden: be intent on, fond of. Mainly NE.
bucker: fuss, bustle. NE.
bursen: breathless. E and NE.
busk: make (s.o.) look neat, smart, well-dressed. Gen.Sc.
bye: (of ants, wasps, etc.). Gen.Sc.
camla-like: sullen. V. rare.
canally: mob, rabble. Mainly E and NE.
chap: knock; (of a clock) strike; mash (potatoes). Gen.Sc.
chat: chew. NE.
clam: damp, clammy. Rare.
clank: a loud noise. Rare.
cloggie: log. Mainly E and NE.
clossach: mass of anything; (rarely) corpse.
clite, clyte: fall heavily, collapse (v.), a heavy fall (n.); a mass of soft or semi-liquid material.
cockernony: gathering of hair tied in a ribbon, or a cap with starched crown. Gen.Sc.
cower: recover (from an illness etc.). Mainly NE.
crochlie: slightly lame, rheumaticky. NE.
curn, curran: a few. Mainly NE.
cutchack: a small blazing fire. Rare, mainly NE.
cutty: (adj.) short (in stature); (n) a short person; a clay pipe.
cwyte: coat. NE.
dauche: hesitate. Mainly NE.
deen: girl, esp. kitchen-maid on a farm. NE.
dhubrack: smelt. NE, rare.
dicht, dight: wipe clean or dry. Gen.Sc.
dilse: a kind of edible seaweed. Mainly N and NE.
docken: dock (the plant or its leaf). Gen.Sc.
doup, dowp: (n.) backside. Gen.Sc.; (vb.) sit down, mainly NE.
drochit: parched, dehydrated. Mainly NE.
dub: mud. NE.
dunt: bump (n. and v.) Gen.Sc.
dwine: fade, decline, become weak with age or illness. Gen.Sc.
dyod: exclamation of surprise or impatience. NE form of Gen.Sc. dod.
edeech: ant; fairy. NE.
edmir: NE form of humour.
eickel: stir up, incite. NE.
etion: kindred, stock. NE.
ewan: stench of burning. Rare, mainly NE.
fankles: tangle (n.), entangle (v.). Gen.Sc.
fantine: faint. Mainly NE.
fleckless: ineffectual, lacking in energy or will. Gen.Sc.
fery-farry: state of excitement or disorder. Rare and obs.
feugh: a resounding blow. Rare, mainly NE.
ficher, fucher: fumble awkwardly. NE.
fich: lout. Rare, mainly NE.
flauch: flicker. Rare.
flought-bred: with limbs extended, spreadeagled. Mainly NE.
fliep, flipe: lout. Mainly NE.
flieye: frighten, worry (trans.) Mainly NE.
flirn: twist the mouth, make a wry face. Rare and lit.
flypse: play truant. NE.
forenicht: evening. Mainly NE.
forhooies: abandon, desert. Mainly E and NE, rare.
forlethies: surfeit, excess. NE.
fow: lift with a fork. Mainly NE.
freeth: foam. NE.
fudder: an impetuous, noisy rush or bustle. NE.
fulp: puppy. NE form of whelp.
fusion: vigour, energy (physical or spiritual). Gen.Sc.
galshach: tit-bit, delicacy. NE.
gardie, -y: arm. Mainly NE.
gaupe: (vb.) to stare or gape; (n) fool. Gen.Sc.
gegg: trick. Rare in NE: mostly Central.
girmash: ugly face. V. rare, NE.
glack: open corner in a wood. Mainly E and NE, rare.
glamp: grope. NE.
gluff: gasp, as from a sudden change of temperature. NE.
glyde: a break in a planted area caused by a hollow. Rare.
gnib: quick in action or speech. NE.
gnidge: press, squeeze. NE., obs.
gnyauve: NE form of gnaw.
goskit: foolish. NE form of Gen.Sc. gowkit
google: deceive, hoodwink. V. rare.
gour: mud, dirt; esp. the slimy residue which collects in fish barrels. Gen.Sc.
govies: euphemism for “God”. NE.
groanach: intensive form of groan. NE, rare.
greet: cry, weep. grat, p.t.
groff: coarse, clumsy; groff-write: large sprawling handwriting. NE.
gulsach: jaundice. N and NE.
gwana: guano, dried birds’ excrement used as fertiliser.
haach: noise of clearing the throat. Mainly NE.
ahber: stutter. NE.
hagmahush: slovenly person. Rare, mainly NE.
hain: save (money etc.) Gen.Sc.
hallach, halloch: giddy, hare-brained. NE.
heesh: make a hissing sound to drive (an animal etc.) away.
herrial: plundering, material or financial ruin or s.t. which causes it. Rare.
hissie, hizzie: young woman (often jocular or disparaging). Gen.Sc.
hodge: walk awkwardly or jerkily. NE.
horny-golloch: earwig. NE.
huddry, huddery: untidy. Mainly NE.
hulster: struggle along with a heavy burden. Rare, mainly E and NE.
hurly: a straggler, the last or tardiest of a group. Rare, mainly NE.
hushle: fidget; shrink, cower. Rare, mainly NE.
hyne: far away. Mainly NE.
hyter: stumble, trip. NE.
jambick: hovel.
jeel: set (of jelly or the like.) Gen.Sc.
jobby: spiky, prickly. NE.
joundy: push, jostle. NE form of Gen.Sc.
joundy.
kepp: suffer, endure. Rare, mainly NE.
kibble: active, agile. NE.
kirn: stir up, mix up. kirnin: dalliance, flirtation. Mostly NE.
kitty: a giddy, skittish young woman. Mainly E and NE.
kittle: (adj.) troublesome, precarious; (vb.) tickle, itch. Gen.Sc.
mairch: boundary (between farms, etc.)
Gen.Sc.
mang: long for; mangin: longing, eager.
NE
mank: fail. Rare.
mell: have dealings with. Gen.Sc.
mington: stinking. Mainly NE.
mint: hint, suggest. Mainly NE.
mirkie: cheerful, merry. E and NE.
mismaggles: crumbs. Mainly NE.
moggin: footless stocking. V. rare.
mool(s): earth; often specif. the grave.
Gen.Sc.
mossin: peat cutting. NE.
mullert: miller. Mainly NE.
murlacks: crumbs. Mainly NE.
mutch: a cap with a trimmed or gathered border, worn by married women.
Gen.Sc.
myoute: murmur, whisper. Mainly NE.
neef: difficulty, trouble. NE.
neep: turnip. neep-dreels: turnip rows.
Gen.Sc.
neiper, neipor: neighbour. NE.
nickum: mischievous child. Mainly NE.
nout, nown: calf; (as a collective) cattle.
Gen.Sc.
od: aphetic form of God, a mild oath.
Gen.Sc.
oxter-pouch: breast pocket. Mainly NE.
pammer: blunder, move clumsily. Mostly NE.
pandrop: a hard peppermint confection.
Gen.Sc.
pattle, pettle: ploughstaff (a wooden spade-like implement for cleaning earth off the mould-board). Gen.Sc.
pech: breath, puff (n.); gasp for breath.
(vb.) Gen.Sc.
perjink: prim, fussy, over-particular.
Gen.Sc.
perequre: word-perfect. Rare, liter.
pilget: disagreement, argument. Mainly NE.
pilten: trashy, worthless (of a garment etc.)
Rare, mainly NE.
piz: peas. NE.
plack: a copper coin valued at four pence.
Obs., hist.
pleiter, plyter: move aimlessly or ineffectually. NE form of Gen.Sc.
pitter, plooter.
pluffer: pea-shooter. Mainly NE.
plype: plunge, splash. NE.
powet: tadpole. NE.
powk: pull, pluck. Mainly NE.
prone: the residue of oat husks after milling. Mainly E and NE.
protick: exploit, brave deed. Mainly NE.
pyocher: a wheezing cough. NE.
rarmmage: rough, broken, uneven (of ground). Rare.
randy: mischievous girl. NE.
ranter: work hurriedly and carelessly. NE, rare.
rauchen: plaid. Rare and obsol.
raucht: a blow. V. rare.
reedin: combing (of horse-hair.)
reel-rall: in a confused, disorganised state.
roose: become excited or enraged. Gen.Sc.
roozer: watering can. Mainly NE.
runtit: "out of"; having used up a supply of st. NE.
sanshach: shrewd, wily. NE
sclinner: slender. NE.
scran: scavenge, scrounge. NE.
croked: dried up. N and NE, rare.
sounge: prowl, slink. Mainly E and NE.
sey, sye: strain (of milk etc.). Gen.Sc.
shauchle, shochele: shuffle, walk heavily or awkwardly. Gen.Sc.
shaup: fragment, broken piece. NE.
sheemach: tangled, matted. NE.
schoogle: shake, wobble (tr. and intr.) shoogly adj.
shortsome: cheerful, merry, lively. Mainly NE.
skelb: splinter of wood. Mainly E and NE.
skelly: splinter of wood. Mainly E and NE.
scraich.
skyce: go away quietly and unostentatiously. NE.
sleeth: lazy person. NE.
smachy: a mixed dish of food. NE.
smeerless: sluggish, spiritless. E and NE.
smore: a thick, close, suffocating atmosphere. NE.
smouchter: smoulder. NE.
smuchty: smoky, of a fire. NE.
smush: dust, fragments (of dirt etc.).
Gen.Sc.
smutchack: a mischievous child.
Idiosyncratic form of Gen.Sc.
smatchet.
snaw-vraith: snowdrift. NE form of
Gen.Sc. snaw-wraith.
snib: check, restrain. Obs.
snod: tidy (vb or adj.). Gen.Sc.
snorl: a knot or tangle, hence fig. a
predicament. Mainly NE.
snoordrap: an acid-flavoured confection.
Gen.Sc.
soss: simmer, cook slowly. Gen.Sc. (but
rare in this sense).
spen: wean. NE form of Gen.Sc. spean.
spleyter: splash. NE.
spulzie: steal, take away as plunder.
Gen.Sc. but obs.
squallach: scream. NE.
stag, styaag: a young unbroken horse.
NE.
stamagaster: shock, unpleasant surprise.
NE.
stew, styoo: dust, (often specifically) dust
blown in clouds. NE.
steyter, sitter: totter, hobble. NE
stilpert: tall and lean. NE.
stirk(ie): a heifer or bullock. Gen.Sc.
stook: pile of hay (n); to rake and fork hay
into small piles (vb.). Gen.Sc.
stoop: wooden prop, gatepost. NE.
strab: piece of straw. NE.
streen: the streen, last night, yesterday
stropp: spout or lip (of a kettle, jug, etc.)
Gen.Sc.
sucht: lit: buried; fig covered over. NE
form of Gen.Sc. sheuched.
surtoo: jacket. NE, rare.
swagger: lurch, stumble. NE, rare.
swaiver: totter, stumble. NE.
sweirty: laziness. NE.
swidder: be in a state of hesitation. NE
form of Gen.Sc. swither.
swippert, swuppert: quick, lively. E and
NE.
wither: hesitate (vb.); a state of hesitation
or uncertainty (n). Gen.Sc.
tack: lease of land or property. Gen.Sc.,
now hist.
tap: top; tappie: topknot of hair.
tapie, tawpie: scatterbrained, careless
ted: term of endearment (to a child or
young woman). Mainly NE.
teem: NE pronunciation of Gen.Sc. tuim,
empty.
thrang: crush of people (n), crowded
(adj.). Gen.Sc.
traivis: the wooden partition between the stalls in a stable. E and NE.
traigle: labour (n. or vb.), wearesome work.
trochie: small dish or trough. NE.
trooshlich: exchange, barter. Mainly E and NE.
turner: a copper coin valued at two pence. Obs., hist.
tringle: twist about. Rare.
tyaaave, tyauve: labour, work with difficulty. NE.
ugertfu': dainty, fastidious. NE, rare and obs.
urluch: miserable from cold, hunger or illness. NE.
voust: boast, brag. NE.
vratch: rascal, rogue. NE.
vreed: NE form of write.
wae: sorrow (n.), sorrowful (adj.). Gen.Sc.
waffle: inert, limp. Rare, NE.
wanhope: despair. Mainly lit.
weaven: moment. Rare, obs.
well-ee: spring, place in a bog from which a spring rises.
whazzle: wheeze. NE, rare.
wincey: cloth woven of linen and wool, or a dress made of it. Gen.Sc.
win, won: make or find one's way. Gen.Sc.
wint: NE form of want, meaning either “want” or “lack”.
wull: wayward, misguided. Mainly NE.
wyle: NE form of Gen.Sc. wale, choose.
wyster: spider. NE.
yaavin: aven, a husk or bristle of barley or other grain. NE.
yap: eager, keen. NE form of Gen.Sc.
yap.
yarr: quarrel, give provocation. NE, rare.
yerd, yird: (n) earth (Gen.Sc.); (vb) soil, bespatter (NE). yerd-meel: grave-mould. NE.
yern-bliter: snipe. NE.
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