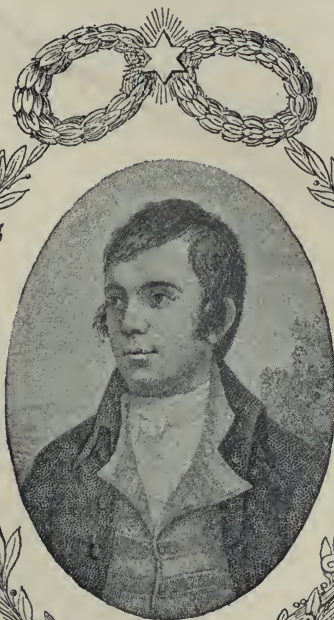


ANNUAL
Burns Chronicle
AND
Club Directory.

(INSTITUTED 4TH SEPTEMBER, 1891.)

Edited by **D. M'NAUGHT, Kilmaurs.**

Born at Ayr,
25th January, 1759.



Died at Dumfries,
21st July 1796.

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MOTTO.—"A MAN'S A MAN FOR A' THAT."

THE BURNS FEDERATION,

(KILMARNOCK INSTITUTED 1885).

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The object of the Federation shall be to strengthen and consolidate the bond of fellowship presently existing amongst the members of Burns Clubs, by universal affiliation ; its motto being—
"A man's a man for a' that."

The members of every Burns Club registered as belonging to the Federation shall be granted a Diploma admitting them to meetings of all the Clubs connected with the Federation, they being subject to the rules of the Club visited, but having no voice in its management, unless admitted a member of the Club visited, according to local form. The Affiliation Fee for each Club shall be One Guinea, and for each Member's Diploma, One Shilling, these payments being final and not annual.

The Funds of the Federation, so accruing, shall be vested in the Executive Council for the purpose of acquiring and preserving Holograph Manuscripts and other interesting Relics connected with the life and works of the Poet, and for other purposes of a like nature, as the said Council may determine.

The headquarters of the Federation shall be at Kilmarnock, the premier Club in the movement, the town in which the first edition of the Poet's Works was published, and which contains the only properly organised Burns Museum in the United Kingdom.

The election of an Honorary Council, comprising:—Presidents of the Affiliated Clubs, and other Gentlemen of eminence nominated by the Executive. The Executive Council to consist of the Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the leading Affiliated Clubs, and other eligible gentlemen, with power to add to their number.

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* All literary communications to be addressed to the Editor, Mr. D. M'Naught, Schoolhouse, Kilmaurs. Articles intended for publication must be forwarded not later than the month of October in each year.

P R E F A C E .

THE experiences of the first issue convinced the Executive of the Federation that some division of labour was necessary in the editorial department. It is hoped that the new arrangements will further aid in securing for the CHRONICLE a permanent footing as a Burnsiana Repository and Literary Annual of the limited pretensions which the title indicates.

The Federation having undertaken the financial responsibility, the duty of supporting the CHRONICLE is earnestly urged upon all Burns Clubs and admirers of the Bard at home and abroad. This can be done in many ways, and we will feel grateful for assistance in any department of the work. This appeal, we feel certain, will meet with all the more ready response, when it is mentioned that the labours of the editorial staff are given gratuitously for the good of the common cause.

Considerable additional expense has been incurred in the illustration of the present volume, and the letterpress has also been increased. Succeeding issues will continue to show further improvement, if the support accorded us warrant the necessary outlay. To those who so substantially aided us last year our warmest thanks are due. We also thank our contributors and other friends who have taken such a kindly interest in the preparation of this issue, and trust that their exertions on our behalf will be rewarded with the success they so well deserve.

D. M'NAUGHT.

SCHOOLHOUSE, KILMAURS,
January, 1893.

BURNS TOPOGRAPHY.

MAUCHLINE AND ITS NEIGHBOURHOOD.

I WAS first induced to visit Mauchline by statements Joseph Train made to Sir Walter Scott and Lockhart. These statements exist among the Laing Manuscripts, now lying in the Edinburgh University Library. Train, in his M.S. notes, describes a meeting held by Burns and John Richmond in "The Elbow Tavern," but the exact locality of the Elbow Ale-house he forgets to state. I wrote to Mauchline to enquire if any such hostelry existed there, and the Rev. Joseph Mitchell, Parish Minister of Mauchline, kindly replied as follows :—

MANSE,

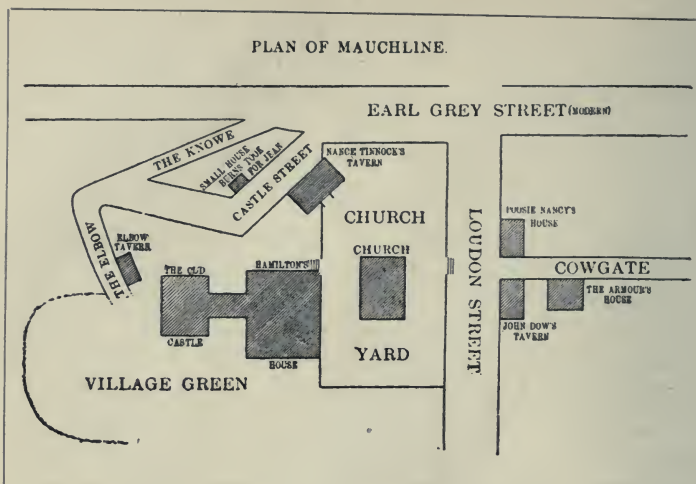
MAUCHLINE, 26th May, 1892.

I had never heard of the "Elbow Tavern" until I got your letter. Since then I have been making inquiries of a number of the old people in this place, and have learned from them that there existed a back lane in Mauchline, which bore the name of *The Elbow*. In it there stood a public house or tavern kept by an old sailor, whose name none of them remember, but who was commonly spoken of as *The Old Tar*.

I should think that there is every likelihood of this being the place of which you speak. None of my informants called the house *The Elbow Tavern*, but they all agreed in calling the lane *The Elbow*, and in saying that such a house stood there. One of my authorities is an old lady of 92, said to be the only person now living who has seen "Racer Jess," by whom she was frequently chased when a school girl. The lane called *The Elbow* no longer exists, but traces of one end of it are easily seen. If this information is of any use to you I shall be very glad. If you wish to prosecute any further enquiries it might be worth your while to pay Mauchline a visit, and I should be very glad to introduce you to my original authorities.

JOSEPH MITCHELL.

I went to Mauchline, and the matter became clear to me at once, as the accompanying rough plan of Mauchline Village will demonstrate. A short street, generally called "The Knowe," led from the upper part of the town. The street or lane in question branched off from this "Knowe" at a somewhat sharp angle, and this in old days swept down to Gavin Hamilton's house and the adjoining Castle. The angle at which the lane meets the "Knowe" sufficiently explains the



name it bore. It was at the corner or side, moreover, of the village, retired from the general bustle, and most easily accessible from Hamilton's grounds, which it skirted. I do not know if any proverbial Scottish expression describes an out-of-the-way place as an "elbow," but it is curious that Burns on first taking up residence in lonely Ellisland, used this phrase: "Here I am, at the *elbow* of existence." Possibly Burns had an image of Mauchline in his mind when he used this odd expression. At present, the "Elbow" lane has only one house in it. Opposite this house there formerly was a tanyard, and close by the tanyard was the tavern kept by "The Old Tar." In later days, before it was pulled down, it was used as a shelter for cattle. This was the place, there can be small doubt, which Train noted down as "a small ale-house called the Elbow." In common talk it would be indicated as the "Elbow Ale-house," just as a city clerk speaks of the "Ludgate Hill Bar"—meaning thereby, not that the bar is Ludgate Hill, but that there is in Ludgate Hill a place of refreshment.

I pass on to point out how little changed the Mauchline of to-day is from the Mauchline of Burns's time. The Parish Church was re-built about sixty years ago; and the Armour's house and Johnny Dow's Inn have been altered—the latter being replaced by a shop. Gavin Hamilton's house, in which Burns was married to his Jean, has been unoccupied for two years, and is fast becoming as much of a ruin as the ancient

Castle to which it is attached. Hamilton's business room—the very room in which Burns wrote “The Calf,” and where he took Jean for better or worse—is now a kind of dungeon, with boarded-up windows, a dank resort of graveyard rats and other vermin. Everything else in the village is much as Burns left it, and the noticeable thing about the place is its compactness. Never was any phase of a poet's life “staged” in such small compass as Burns's life in Mauchline. The plan given on page 54 exhibits all the buildings associated with him, and they lie within a square of one hundred yards. There is the garden in which, of a Sunday, Gavin Hamilton would walk up and down tending his cabbages and gooseberry bushes in sight of Daddy Auld's congregation, greatly to the scandal of the “unco guid.” There was the village washing-green where Burns and Jean spoke first to each other. There was Johnny Dow's tavern, from the back parlour-window of which Burns used to sign to Jean to steal from her father's cottage. There was Poosie Nancy's, where the poet studied “The Jolly Beggars.” There was Nance Tinnock's ale-house, from which Burns would step into the churchyard, his eye aglow with the humours of the “Holy Fair;” and directly opposite, the single room that Burns took for Jean when she was about to become a mother for the second time. There is the ruined castle where Mary Campbell used to meet Burns, and a few yards beyond, was the “Elbow,” where Train says Burns and Richmond and Captain Montgomery came together in somewhat strange circumstances; and all within a compass, as we have said, of a hundred yards. There too, in the graveyard, lie dozens of men and women Burns knew and wrote about. His own infant daughters lie buried there; and above them lie the bones of old Armour, and next their graves is the tombstone of Jean's brother:—“To the memory of Robert Armour, many years a merchant in London, who died in that city on the 9th day of February, 1846, aged 62 years.” Robert began life as a weaver, and died a rich man. In the graveyard, too, lies Gavin Hamilton, once known in the village as “the friend of the poor.” Neither poor nor rich have put any memorial on his grave: but I have been told that this “careless desolation” is what Gavin desired might surround his resting-place. Standing in the shadow of the Church and looking round, we see that this sleeping hamlet gave up its very core to be the

theatre of Burns's life-drama ; the leading events of which were enacted within the small space of set scenery before us.

In the manse I was allowed to look through the Kirk-Session Records, and found them to contain very strange reading. The following items I take from the Mauchline (or "Machlin") Records, as material interesting to all Burns enthusiasts.

"APRIL 2ND, 1786.—The Session being informed that Jean Armour, an unmarried woman, is said to be with child, and that she has gone off from the place of late, to reside elsewhere, the Session think it their duty to enquire But appoint James Lamie and William Fisher to speak to the parents."

"APRIL 9TH, 1786.—James Lamie reports that he spoke to Mary Smith, mother to Jean Armour, who told him that she did not suspect her daughter to be with child, that she was gone to Paisley to see her friends, and would return soon."

"JUNE 18TH, 1786.—Jean Armour, called, compeared not, but sent a letter directed to the Minister, the tenor whereof follows :—

'I am heartily sorry that I have given and must give your Session trouble on my account. I acknowledge that I am with child and Robert Burns in Mossgiel is the father. I am with great respect,

Your most humble servant,

(Signed) JEAN ARMOUR.

MACHLIN, 13TH JUNE, 1786.'"

The officer is ordered to summond Robert Burns to attend this day eight days.

"JUNE 25TH, 1786.—Compeared Robert Burns and acknowledges himself the father of Jean Armour's child(ren).*

(Signed) ROBERT BURNS."

"AUGUST 6TH, 1786.—Robert Burns, John Smith, Mary Lindsay, Jean Armour, and Agnes Auld, appeared before the Congregation professing their repentance for the sin of fornication, and they having each appeared two several Sabbaths formerly were this day rebuked and absolved from the scandal."†

"AUGUST 5TH, 1788.—Compeared Robert Burns with Jean Armour his alledged spouse. They both acknowledged their irregular marriage and their sorrow for that irregularity and desiring that the Session will take such steps as may seem to them proper in order to the solemn confirmation of the said marriage.

The Session taking this affair under their consideration agree that they both be rebuked for their acknowledged irregularity and that they

*The letters in brackets appear to have been added in at a later time, in lighter ink than that employed for the rest of the word.

†There are no Session-Book entries about the two previous appearances of Burns, but we know from a letter of his to Richmond (Scott Douglas, IV. 134), that the date of one of these appearances was July 9th.

Aug. 5 Dep for Congress Robert Burns with Jean Armour &
his alleged spouse They both acknowledge their irregular
marriage and their sorrow for that irregularity And
desiring that the Deps will take such steps as may
lead to them proper in order to the solemnization
of the said marriage

The Deps taking this affair under their consideration
Agree that they both be rebuked for this acknowledged
irregularity and that they be taken solemnly engaged
to adhere faithfully to one another as husband and
wife all the days of their life

For a regard the Deps have a little in Love to
some fine for behoof of the poor They Agree to refer
to Mr Burns his own generosity

The above sentence was accordingly enacted And
the Deps Absolved the said parties from any
penal on this acc.^t

both Burns no longer very
The above sentence was accordingly inserted and
the Editors absolved the said parties from any
scandal on this acct.

William Auld Esq. Jr. R. W. B. W. W.

Leam. Thompson

Mr. Burns gave a general note for behoof of the poor
9 Aug. Information was made from the text that the seats in
the area of the Church be let upon Monday first for behoof of
the poor

be taken solemnly engaged to adhere faithfully to one another as husband and wife all the days of their life.

In regard the session have a tittle [*sic*] in Law to some fine for behoof of the Poor, they agree to refer to Mr. Burns his own generosity. The above sentence was accordingly executed, and the Session absolved the said parties from any scandal on this account.

WILLIAM AULD,

MODERATOR.

(Signed)

ROBERT BURNS.

JEAN ARMOUR.

Mr. Burns gave a guinea note for behoof of the poor."

The reproduction here given shows Jean Armour's signature, which is not in our judgment in Mr. Auld's style of writing, nor in that of Burns, though Scott Douglas states his conviction that it is in the handwriting of the latter. Her autograph here is one of several facts that might be adduced to disprove the too common belief that Jean was illiterate when Burns married her.

Mrs. Lucas, a Mauchline dame of 92 years, replied as follows to my queries regarding the house in the "Elbow":—"I mind people keepin' cows in it, and I had heard that it had been a public-house." Mrs. Lucas remembers Jean Armour coming from Dumfriesshire to visit Janet Armour, the wife of one Lees, a joiner. "Mrs. Burns" she continued "was a decent, audish woman, when I saw her—dark in the complexion." Since these words were taken down from Mrs. Lucas' lips, the old lady has died.

Mr. Hugh Gibb (aged 80), once a leader of "free-thought" movements in the district, spoke of a friend of his, Matthew Leerie, dead twenty years ago. He said Matthew had known Mary Campbell, when "she was a servant at Gavin Hamilton's, and reported her not a beauty, but decent-looking; slightly pox-marked." From Mr. Gibb's data it would be difficult to conclude that Matthew Leerie had indeed seen Mary. I find, however, that the Kirk Session books, under the date of "Jan. 11, 1787," mention "Matthew Leerie" as cited for being in debt. This may be Mr. Gibb's friend; and in that case we must suppose that Mr. Gibb, who is very infirm, makes an error of a good many years in calculating the date of Leerie's death.

Burns frequented Mauchline town, "off and on," from Martinmas, 1783, when he and his brother Gilbert entered on

possession of the Mossgiel Farm, (the farm-house has been recently modernised), until the Poet settled at Ellisland in Dumfriesshire. We may take it as certain that his acquaintance with Jean Armour and the other "Mauchline Belles" began in 1783, for the first thing he would do on entering a new district, would be to form the acquaintance of all the charming "fillettes" of the place. The most graphic picture of Burns in Mauchline is given in Hew Ainslie's lately reprinted "Pilgrimage." The scene referred to took place when Burns was in bad odour with the "Belles" and their parents. "When Burns was coming," said Jasper, "to get fun wi' the young fellows, he gaed aye at a braw spanking step, his staff in his han', an' his head heigh; but when ought black was in the win', his oak was in his oxter, the rim o' his hat laigh—wi' a look, bless us! would turn milk. I hae met him this gait mysel', an' then, by my certy, it would taen a buirdly chiel to say boo to him." "One night"—Hugh Anslie himself continues—"during the time his name was 'teased about in kintra clatter,' he met in the village a female friend, for whom he entertained a high respect; and understanding she had some distance to walk without any trysted companion, he offered to accompany her, provided she could get another to join them, 'for,' said he, 'I must not be seen with you alone, as I'm looked on just now in the country as tar.'"

This incident probably took place about the time of the first scandal regarding Jean Armour. In the Mauchline Parish Register I lately found the entry of Jean's birth, which occurred on the 25th of February, 1765.* In the same Register is to be found an entry about Burns's brother John. Scott-Douglas tells us that John died in 1783 (Vol. VI. 408), and that "Mrs. Begg believed his remains were carried to Kirk Alloway for interment; and when her own remains were laid there in 1853, the gravedigger is said to have unearthed the bones of the boy, John, along with those of his father." All this appears to be a mistake. The Mauchline Register says:—"Died John Burns, Mossgiel, buried Nov. 1st, 1785"; and it adds that a second quality mortcloth was used at his funeral.

In "The Land of Burns" and several other books, pictures

* In the Family Register of Burns, the date given is February 27th, 1767. (See Summary.)

are given of the Montgomery Castle towards which Burns at Mossgiel would often turn longingly with thoughts of Highland Mary serving there. A ludicrous error has been made with regard to these pictures. They represent Coilsfield or Montgomery Castle, a building of semi-Italian design, begun in 1806 and finished in 1809. When the foundations of this structure were laid, the old historic castle of Montgomery, a hundred yards off, was razed to the ground. The current pictures represent nothing with which Mary Campbell can have had any association. Montgomery Castle lay in Tarbolton Parish. Beyond persistent local tradition, and a remark made by Mrs. Dunlop's daughter, there is little proof that Mary ever served in the place ; yet I hold generally to the old tradition. I do believe, for reasons which it is not my intention or duty to give fully at present, that Mary spent some time in service at Stairaird, a farm in the parish of Stair, near Montgomery Castle, and just divided from Mauchline parish by the river Ayr. To show that this belief is not due to mere assumption, I may quote one of the proofs I possess, namely, part of a letter from the Rev J. K. Hewison, of Rothesay, formerly Parish Minister of Stair. "In 1881, when Minister of Stair Parish, I was told of Highland Mary by an aged woman, Mrs. Janet M'Clymont, who died at Wyndford, Stair, on the 30th December, 1883. She said her mother was at school in that neighbourhood with Robert Burns, knew him intimately, and kept up her acquaintance with him in Tarbolton and Mauchline. I asked Mrs.



M'Clymont if her mother knew Highland Mary. She replied "ma' mither often spoke o' her acquaintance wi' Mary Campbell ; they were neebour lassies at the farm o' Stairaird." Those who, like the Editor of this volume, have thoroughly followed up the traces of Mary Campbell in Ayrshire, know that there are other reasons for supposing that this famous girl lived at Stairaird. I only advert to Stairaird and Mary's probable connexion with it, for this reason, that if we think of her as staying at Stairaird during the latter part of her friendship with Burns, then great force is given to a hitherto faint but undoubted tradition that Burns and Mary plighted their troth on the banks of Mauchline Burn, which flows into the Ayr at the very foot of the crag on which Stairaird Farm is perched.

Let us examine the current theories concerning the spot where this lovers' pledge took place. Because Burns has said "we met in a sequestered spot by the Banks of Ayr," numbers of people suppose that this betrothal took place actually on the Ayr itself: and to this day a thorn-tree is shown on the Ayr, under which Burns and Mary are said to have sat on that famous day. The thorn-tree has of course grown into repute in answer to the needs of myth. Burns says "by the Banks of Ayr." The Ayr, in that part of the country, is a river perhaps thirty yards broad. How could lovers clasp hands over that? Some Burns students perceived the absurdity of supposing that the parting took place on the Ayr itself; and casting about for a smaller stream (still blindly believing the vague tradition about Coilsfield to imply that all Mary's experiences in Ayrshire were confined to Coilsfield), selected the Fail, which bounds part of the Coilsfield estate, as the proper place for the scene. One of the earliest writers, if not the earliest writer, to take up this notion was the Rev. Hamilton Paul, who in 1819 used these words:—

"Let the traveller from Ayr to Mauchline pause at the spot where the Fail disembogues itself into the Ayr. Let him take his station near the neat little cottage on the sloping green at the side of the wood, and let him cast his eyes across the stream where the trees recede from one another and form a vista, on the grey rocks, which, mantled over with tangling shrubs, wild roses, heath and honeysuckle, project from the opposite side, and we will tell him that there, or thereabout, the Poet took his last farewell of his sweet Highland Mary."

In volume IV. of Paterson's six-volume "Burns" edited by Scott-Douglas, will be found a beautiful engraving from a sketch by Sam Bough, evidently drawn from the cottage indicated by Paul. The cottage itself figures in our own picture here, which was taken to supplement Sam Bough's sketch. Bough's sketch shows the Ayr at its junction with the Fail. Our engraving shows the Fail immediately above this junction.

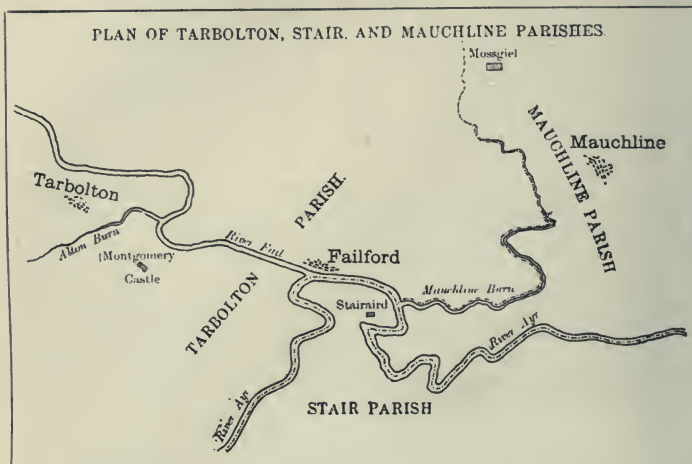


In studying the large survey map of this district, I was impressed with the idea that even the Fail would be too broad for two people to span with their arms; and I also became convinced that if the Fail were abandoned, only two other streams of the neighbourhood would remain as suiting the story at all—namely, the Alton (a tributary of the Fail), and the Mauchline Burn. This idea I reached before I gained any knowledge of Mary's having been at Stairaird.

I wrote to a Burns student of that neighbourhood, about the Fail, and he replied that the Mauchline Burn was just a ditch, unworthy of consideration, and that the Fail dried up so much in summer that two people could easily join hands over it. But I determined to go and see for myself, and thereby obtained another lesson about the necessity of examining with one's own eyes and ears, and hands and feet, in any enquiry of this sort.

I walked up the pretty Fail for some distance from its

junction with the Ayr, and found its water averaged a breadth of twelve feet, and never was narrower than ten feet. This was



in July. In May the stream would be broader. Common sense might solve the difficulty by saying that Burns and Mary, although they could not clasp hands over even ten or eight or six feet of water, would simply wade in a little. All they required was some quantity of running water between them. Even this plan is not likely to have been adopted on the Fail anywhere near its mouth, because the banks of the stream are quite open. The ancient village of Failford straggles up and down the junction of the river (on the further side of the Fail from the cottage), and any love-making on the rivulet here would have been preposterous. Mr Archibald Munro has noticed this, and therefore, in a *Scotsman* article published on October 7, 1891, he takes us to the Fail's tributary, the Alton, and says the plighting probably occurred on *that* stream. But the Alton joins the Fail a mile and a quarter from the Ayr; what, then, comes of Burns's statement that the betrothal was accomplished "by the Banks of the Ayr?" By this selective process of criticism we arrive at the Mauchline Burn as the only stream of the neighbourhood that fits in with the facts of the story. At the spot from which our picture of the Burn is taken, the rivulet averages a breadth of four feet. The water is covered in thickly with trees, and probably was so covered a hundred years ago; the spot is but a few yards from the ford which Mary had to



cross going to or coming from Stairaird, which overhangs it; and no nook in Ayrshire could be sweeter or more appropriate for "a day of parting love." The reader can judge for himself if the Mauchline Burn looks like a ditch.

E. R.