The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club

Annual Dinner, Friday, 12th. March 2010

The 101st Annual Dinner was held in the New Club, Princes St., Edinburgh with some 80 members and guests crambed into the Long Room. Due to the incidence of the Rugby International against England on the following day it was not possible to have the main dinning room. This has been resolved for 2011.

The introduction of those at the Top Table by the chairman was followed by this beautifully composed Grace by the Very Rev. Allan Maclean of Dochgarroch:

> O Almighty God, tonight we remember Sir Walter Scott, the 'Minstrel of the Borders' and the 'Wizard of the North'.
> We give thanks for the pleasure we enjoy from Scott, the person and the author, from the characters he drew and the verse he penned, and from our thoughts of the halcyon age in which he lived.
> This year, we remember Scott, the writer of books, and the collector of books and manuscripts, who loved a library so much he made most of his house into one.
> We remember him also as a 'Prince of Hosts', who greeted his book club companions as, 'You friends of old books and old wine'.
> And finally, we give thanks for Edinburgh, 'a finer scene he ne'er surveyed', recalling all that it meant to Scott, not least in his own words, 'its busy day and social night.'
> And for the 'social night', as well as the 'old wine', of this Gathering and Dinner, remembering Scott's own pleasure in conviviality and friendship, we pray that you will bless these gifts to our use as also ourselves in your service, through Jesus Christ our Lord.

After dinner was partaken The Chairman invited those present to Toast to the Queen. He then called upon the President Dr. Iain G. Brown to Propose the Toast to the Memory of Sir Walter Scott. As the Toast involved a special item the President felt it would be appropriate to give it the following title.

'CONSIGNED WITH INDIFFERENCE TO THE CHANCE OF AN AUCTION': THE LIVES AND MEANINGS OF SIR WALTER SCOTT'S WRITING-CABINET

It is a formidable task to speak at an occasion that follows a uniquely memorable one. Last year we held our one-hundredth dinner, and our society was honoured by the presence of Her Royal Highness The Princess Royal. My predecessor as President was His Grace the Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry. In composing his thoughtful and elegant address, Richard Buccleuch had the inestimable advantage of being able to draw upon a family archive rich in letters of our hero, Sir Walter Scott, written to three successive dukes as the men whom he regarded as his clan chiefs and with whom he had been involved throughout his life as lawyer, landowner, littérateur and borderer. Few Presidents in the Club's history can have had anything like such a resource on which to depend, or by which to be inspired in choosing their words of tribute to the immortal memory of Walter Scott.

Mine is not a distinguished name, nor is my inheritance that of a great territorial proprietor; but I have some slight qualifications for addressing you tonight. Walter Scott has been my companion, so to speak, for many years in my professional life: his hand, heart and mind have been, so it has sometimes seemed, as close to me as my own, as I have bought his letters, papers and literary manuscripts for the nation. The most significant Scott purchase with which I have ever been involved was the repatriation of the great Interleaved Set of the Waverley Novels from the United States. When I wrote the story of the acquisition of the Interleaved Set I had to pay tribute to Mr Robert Maxwell (he was the publisher of my book) for so generously opening his pocket in support of the National Library's cause. I now realise, of course, that he was in fact opening other people's pockets rather than his own, so let us pass over that episode while remaining profoundly grateful to have the emotive literary relic and textual Pandora's Box

that is the so-called 'Magnum Opus' safe again in this city.[i] I have felt this closeness, even intimacy, as I have read Scott's letters (frequently, despite long familiarity with the script, with difficulty and doubt as to what that dreadful writing actually says) in order to answer - or try to answer - the innumerable questions of enquirers from across the world. In my Library career I have known and corresponded with all the Scott scholars of modern times and with countless researchers in the general literary and artistic area that we may think of as a cultural realm constituting the Age of Scott. And I have served the cause of Abbotsford in various ways as a member of the Library Project Board which meets at the behest of the Faculty of Advocates.

My personal Scott connection becomes more direct still when I tell you that part of this address I give tonight was actually composed at the writing-cabinet that was first Scott's father's and then Sir Walter's until, at the time of his ruin, he gave it, full of financial papers bearing upon the tangled web of his business affairs, to his faithful solicitor and man of business, John Gibson. It descended through Gibson's family and was latterly exiled in Herefordshire (no unattractive part of the world, admittedly), before being sold about 1980. Then, five years ago, the cabinet was offered for sale again. An object of real emotional power which seemed to me to cry out from the inner fastnesses of its now-empty folio racks and pigeon-holes 'My own right hand shall do it!', it nevertheless attracted astonishingly little interest from all those institutions and bodies corporate which should have acquired it in order to preserve it for the public benefit. It was left for me to buy, if not exactly for a song, then for much less than it is surely worth, certainly as an evocative historic relic (indeed I would go as far as to assert that this is one of the most resonant of all Scottish literary relics or association items) and perhaps even as an interesting example of practical Georgian office or estate furniture.[ii]

Upon this cabinet, as I say, I have written part of this speech. It is my proposal, therefore, that I devote my address tonight to the vicissitudes of its chequered history. Having done that, I propose to consider the cabinet - in a process which one might term 'Reading a Relic'- as metaphor for Scott as writer, Scott as risk-taker, Scott as supremely noble soul in the gravest of adversity, and Scott as the DWEM or 'dead white European male' that the lack of interest in the fate of this piece of furniture at auction suggests him to be today, but which we in this Club know is very far from the truth.

In March 1826 Sir Walter Scott, financially ruined, and in thrall then and for the foreseeable future to his creditors (however liberal and magnanimous they proved to be) was flitting - *anglice* moving house - from Castle Street, Edinburgh. Number 39, together with all its plenishings had been for sale since 14 February. Clearing the clutter of 24 years' residence, Scott shared his wife's sense of depression. She especially, as he put in his journal, lamented the prospect of seeing their once-treasured worldly goods 'consigned with indifference to the chance of an Auction.'[iii]

Were his possessions to be disposed of thus, Scott was adamant that they be sold as *his*. Even as he was unashamed of the 'productive labour' and wealth-creating activity that his life as a man of letters constituted, so he displayed no reluctance to make money now, albeit for his Trustees and creditors, by the sale of his goods and gear. To his solicitor, John Gibson, he wrote on 8 March:

> 'There is one point on which I beg to speak. I wish it to be advertized as *the furniture in No 39 lately occupied* by Sir W. S. Your delicacy would I know boggle at this but mine does not. My displeasure is that I am not able to pay every one their own, not on the measures necessary to effect payment, & I have some reason to think that if the public are aware it is mine better prices may be given. Some folks are curious to have even trifling articles belonging to those who have, right or wrong, made some noise [in] the world. I heard a fellow passing the house say: "Odd I'll have one of his chairs if it cost me
> 20/-." Others may have a similar whim & if so why should they [the pieces of furniture] go to the brokers to give them the advantage which would be gained by the Creditors'.[iv]

We may, perhaps, think of a somewhat similar and deeply affecting passage in the *Journal* where Scott muses that someone might love and care for his beloved dogs because they had been his.[v]

One item of furniture was not, however, sold with the rest. This was the writing-cabinet, which Scott gave to Gibson.[vi] Strictly speaking, it was Gibson's duty to sell everything for the benefit of the Trust for which he acted. But Gibson accepted this gift from a man whom he admired inordinately. Gibson bought for himself Scott's dining-table and other pieces. The cabinet had in fact been Scott's father's, so one Writer to the Signet now took possession of the former property of another WS. Recording the gift in his journal, Scott noted that the cabinet 'suits a man of business well'. Always courteous towards Gibson, Scott

expressed himself as if it were Gibson who was doing *him* a favour rather than the other way round, remarking in his letter of 8 March that he wished the cabinet were a more worthy offering. A further, short letter of 9 March accompanied the article of furniture when it was delivered either to Gibson's house at 23 Lynedoch Place or more likely to his office at 10 Charlotte Street. Scott wrote: 'I send you the cabinet and much gear may it hold. I enclose you the keys. There are in it receipts, regularly bundled up for more than twenty years which may as well be with you in case of reference…'. This second letter[vii] is today set into the cabinet itself. The document had been recorded by Sir Herbert Grierson (as the property of F. Maitland Gibson, of Ealing) and published in Grierson's edition of Scott's letters in 1935. At some point in its history, the cabinet was subjected to an operation, evidently designed to reinforce its associations. The inner writing surface of the secretaire front panel was adapted to take a flush-mounted, brass, niello-inlaid plaque, incorporating a glass panel behind which Scott's brief note of presentation was set. The style of lettering would suggest a date in the 1920s or 1930s, and the operation may indeed have been done about the time of the 1932 commemorations of the centenary of Scott's death. This plaque is neither a very tastefully-designed nor an elegantly-worded feature; but it now forms part of the archaeology of the cabinet.

The cabinet passed through the family of some of Gibson's descendants and was, when the National Library of Scotland heard of it for the first and last time, in 1978-79, in Hereford in the possession of his great-granddaughter. Then it had fallen to me, as a young Assistant Keeper, to discover what I could about the circumstances of donation by Scott to Gibson, this as a favour the then owner. Distant memories of that episode, made vivid by the finding of old correspondence on the matter, some of it even within the drawers of the cabinet itself as it stood in the auction room, started to my mind again in March 2005. It now appears that the cabinet must have been sold very soon after I was approached about its past history. The purchaser (apparently at an auction in the 'English Midlands': Herefordshire might just qualify) was the leading Edinburgh antiques dealer Eric Davidson. He subsequently sold it to George Tait, WS, of the Leith legal firm of G. W. Tait & Sons, SSC. Mr Tait placed the cabinet in the reception hall of his Constitution Street office, and there it remained, not at all widely known, until removed to Lyon & Turnbull's rooms with a view to sale in 2005.

Relatively utilitarian in appearance, but with an almost Japanese purity of line, it is a simple but substantial mahogany George III estate cabinet on a low stand, having double doors opening to reveal an arrangement of 24 pigeon holes round a secretaire compartment concealed behind a fall-front, this central space being fitted with six small drawers and a series of moveable folio racks. It would have served Sir Walter's tidy-minded father well. Since it was the elder Scott's, it must pre-date 1799, the year of his death. However Scott senior had been ill for some time before his death, and he would surely have had no need to buy such an obviously functional piece of 'office' furniture late in life when his legal career was over. Furniture historians place the cabinet in the last decades of the eighteenth century, and though it is impossible to attribute it to a particular maker, it is almost certainly Scottish.[viii] The probability is that the cabinet was acquired by Walter Scott when he and his family moved from the squalor of the College Wynd to the salubriousness of their new-built house at 25 George's Square, about 1774, during the early childhood of his son Walter, who was born in August 1771. New and larger furniture would have been in order as an accompaniment to the increased dignity of the Scott domestic establishment. The grandeur of the cabinet must not be over-stated: it is more workmanlike and practical than stylish and elegant. But it is still, in its way, a fine thing.

Pre-sale publicity in 2005 gave the cabinet not to the elder Walter Scott but to his son, thus leaving out of account some of its early history and depriving the piece of at least a quarter of a century age. 'Scott's Waverley work-station goes up for sale', said the *Edinburgh Evening News*, the article also suggesting, imaginatively, that the cabinet had once contained the manuscripts of the novels. The auction house did not dispute this excited and almost certainly erroneous opinion. In the sale catalogue itself no mention was made of the elder Scott's erstwhile ownership. Attempts were made to interest likely corporate buyers in the shape of the Faculty of Advocates, the Society of Writers to HM Signet, and Messrs Murray Beith Murray as occupiers of the Scott house in Castle Street; and the auctioneers must further have hoped that some local or national public institution would bid in the rooms: the University of Edinburgh, perhaps, or the City of Edinburgh Council's Writers' Museum for, after all, the cabinet was being peddled as a literary relic, and Edinburgh had recently been nominated the first UNESCO World City of Literature. The National Museums of Scotland certainly toyed with the suggestion of purchase, but did no more than toy.

There is no evidence that Scott ever had the cabinet at Abbotsford. It is immensely heavy, and clearly it is not the sort of thing that Scott could have lugged about with him. It was always an Edinburgh

piece. Prior to Gibson's acquisition of the cabinet its homes had been George Square and then Castle Street, to which Walter Scott, advocate and coming man of letters, moved in 1801. Nevertheless Abbotsford, with its character as a literary shrine, would have been an excellent place for it to find a resting place. But, I for my part, and conscious of its Edinburgh history, would have chosen to see it in Lady Stair's House, there to keep company with as the dining-table from Castle Street, bought by John Gibson and sold subsequently by his descendants to the City. Last summer, however, the cabinet finally saw Scott's Conundrum Castle when it was taken there for the BBC Antiques Roadshow. It was allowed to spend two nights at Abbotsford. The cabinet and its new, and current, owners became temporary television stars just before Christmas.[ix]

As Scott's solicitor (which he had become in 1822) John Gibson was a major player on the dramatic stage of Scott's last years.[x] Neither man was to know how each would soon be tested in the great financial crisis that lay ahead. With the crash of 1825 Scott was relieved to place his entire affairs and all his confidence in what Sir Eric Anderson has called 'the polite precise figure' of Gibson, an ideal man for the task, 'prudent, painstaking … who let nothing pass him by.'[xi] This was to be Gibson's finest hour as well as Scott's. Gibson it was who advised Scott of the two courses open to him: sequestration as a commercial bankrupt, or the establishment of a trust on behalf of his creditors. The latter was the more worthy but more onerous course of action; and this was what Scott consented to do. It meant that a much harder road lay ahead. But it allowed the ruined man to do more for those to whom he owed money; and above all it preserved his honour as a gentleman, and helped to conceal his 'un-gentlemanly' involvement in the 'trade' of printing and publishing. Gibson was appointed the principal trustee, and was joined in the complex and distasteful financial work by men with the singularly inappropriate names of Jollie and Monypenny.

In 1871, at the time of the Scott centenary, and as the last survivor of those most involved in the events of that fateful winter of 1825-26, John Gibson wrote a memoir of his dealings with the great man, to whose memory he remained devoted and whose sense of honour and integrity he revered. Here he rehearsed his role as trustee and agent for Scott.[xii] He explained how he had been the first to acknowledge definitively to the creditors Scott's authorship of the Waverley novels, a year before Scott's own famous public admission of the fact in 1827. Thereafter, in addition to his the technical legal and financial work for the trust, Gibson became something of what might now be called a 'rock' for Scott (as in 'he was my rock', said of Mr Paul Burrell). He was something, too, of a literary agent for Scott as mediator in the fate of Scott's literary property when he successfully sold *Woodstock* and the enormous *Life of Napoleon* to the highest London bidder. ('You have made a glorious sale', wrote Scott to the lawyer, signing himself here and elsewhere 'truly obliged and faithful.'[xiii]) And, along with the immortal *Journal*, Scott's inanimate confidant, Gibson found himself the recipient of Scott's intimate thoughts on various other literary projects, and on his constant toil for the benefit of the creditors. It was Gibson who put into memorable and elegant form the expression of the trustees' satisfaction, bordering on wondrous disbelief, at Scott's almost superhuman efforts on their behalf. [xiv] His 1871 memoir provides a succinct, tactful and charitable (perhaps too tactful and charitable) account of the vast edifice of paper credit, in the bewildering form of accommodation bills and counter-bills, that Scott had constructed, and which had crashed about him and his trade partners.[xv]

Oddly, in his *Reminiscences of Sir Walter Scott*, John Gibson never mentions the writing cabinet. Perhaps he was uneasy at having accepted it: after all, he recorded in his pamphlet that his 'painful duty' as trustee had been to see that everything Scott's Edinburgh house contained was transferred to the trust for its benefit, and that all was duly sold. For his part, Scott (homeless, now, in Edinburgh) was able to record of the occasions when he stayed with the Gibsons in Lynedoch Place the strange feelings that the sight of his own old furniture from Castle Street, duly bought by Gibson, gave him. Scott's consolation was that the pieces were 'in kind and friendly hands.'[xvi] In May 1826 Gibson seems to have believed that Scott, then accommodated in Mrs Brown's sparse lodgings at 4 North St David Street (no: I cannot claim kinship!), was in need of a desk and he, of course, had one by courtesy of his illustrious client; but in fact it was simple bookshelves that Scott then wanted most.[xvii]

That the cabinet set to be sold on 23 March 2005 was not actually Sir Walter's to begin with but his father's allowed those so moved to muse a little on matters of character and fate, time and chance. Was it not from him, douce Edinburgh lawyer that he was, that the younger Scott derived some at least of those characteristics which would be his undoing? Scholars, including Thomas Crawford and more recently John Sutherland, have hinted at this: Crawford, for example, saw in the elder Scott, the fount of the future man of letters' devotion to 'money values, worldly ambition and sober calculation', and the source of his 'practicality, his habit… of diligent labour.'[xviii] If this is correct, and if it is true that in Walter Scott the

elder's law office the young Walter was first 'exposed to the bourgeois side of his inheritance' which ultimately caused him to become 'a slave to the business man's neurotic compulsion to work',[xix] then the writing-cabinet found in the great Sir Walter Scott a worthy heir, and he in turn passed it on to Gibson, an equally diligent and upright pillar of the Edinburgh legal establishment. The furniture would 'suit a man of business well'. It is probable that the receipts it contained when handed over to Gibson were evidence of Scott's extravagant life: of spending the money he worked so hard to earn, simply that he might then spend it, and so on ... Abbotsford, his 'Dalilah', was, of course, the mistress on whom he lavished most, and who demanded from him ever more sacrifice to literary duty. Perhaps the cabinet also contained documentation bearing upon the speculative and shaky financial dealing which his involvement with Constable and Ballantyne so famously involved. In its way, the unremarkable cabinet offers its own silent commentary on the ruin of its owner, its contents, given under lock and key to the discreet Edinburgh lawyer, being (in the words of Scott's own punning device stamped upon his book-bindings) *Clausus tutus ero* - 'I shall be safe when locked up'.

It is not known for sure what writing-furniture Scott had at Castle Street.[xx] Did he therefore at any time, or even occasionally, use the cabinet when engaged in literary composition? We cannot tell. But we can indulge in intriguing speculation. Was it at this cabinet that Lockhart and his friends, peering from the George Street window along the east-facing rear elevation of 39 Castle Street, saw Scott writing that summer night in June 1814? Was it on this secretaire that the 'confounded' but 'unwearied' and ceaselessly-moving hand so famously scribbled and cast the endless sheets of manuscript upon the growing pile that was *Waverley* in the making? It would be pleasant indeed to think so; and it is also possible – just as possible, that is to say, as Lockhart's far-fetched story of the moving hand and its effect upon the *jeunesse dorée* of Edinburgh, so unsettled by the sight of it, is itself in the first place credible. Yes: at this desk *Waverley* and its successors *may* have been written, in part at least, and equally some of the earlier narrative poetry, and subsequently the history, journalism, biography, letters and so much else.

What is more certain is that, in some capacity - as furnishing of study, business-room or library - the cabinet will have witnessed the bleak events and bleaker thoughts of December 1825 and January 1826 when its owner learned that, as he put it in the *Journal*, his extremity had come. Maybe, just *maybe*, the greatest pages of that greatest of personal diaries were written upon it. Certainly these matchless passages were written in Edinburgh rather than at Abbotsford; and keeping company with the writer in his Edinburgh house was this silent, wooden witness to his hour of need. How the mahogany must have groaned as its owner wrote lines of truest pathos but yet greatest nobility. Imagine passages such as these being written on a piece of furniture one comes to own!

> 'I suppose it will involve my all… Men will think pride has had a fall. Let them indulge their own pride in thinking that my fall makes them higher… how could I tread my hall with such a diminishd crest? How live a poor indebted man where I was once the wealthy – the honourd?... this will be news to wring your heart and many a poor fellow's besides to whom my prosperity was daily bread… For myself the magic wand of the Unknown is shiverd in his grasp… I can no longer have the delight of waking in the morning with bright ideas in my mind, haste to commit them to paper, and count them monthly as the means of planting such groves and purchasing such wastes… What a life mine has been… now taken in my pitch of pride …because London chuses to be in an uproar and in the tumult of bulls and bears a poor inoffensive lion like myself is pushd to the wall…I feel quite composed and determined to labour…I feel neither dishonourd nor broken down by the bad – miserably bad news I received. I have walked my last on the domains I have planted, sate the last time in the halls I have built. But death would have taken them from me if misfortune had spared them…There is just another dye to turn up against me in this run of ill luck – i.e. If I should break my magic wand in a fall from this elephant and lose my popularity with my fortune. Then …I may take to smoking cigars and drinking grog or turn devotee and intoxicate the brain another way. In prospect of absolute ruin I wonder if they would let me leave the Court of Session. I should like methinks to go abroad
>
> And lay my banes far from the Tweed.
>
> But I find my eyes moistening and that will not do. I will not yield without a fight for it… adversity is to me at least a tonic and bracer… My own right hand shall do it. Else I will be *done* in the slang language and *undone* in common parlance… No, if they permit me, I will be their vassal for life and dig in the mine of my imagination to find diamonds (or what may sell for such) to make good my

engagements, not to enrich myself… I will not put out of the [reach] of my creditors the resources mental and physical which yet remain to me.' [xxi]

Whether or not all this was written at the cabinet is speculation; but (I have to protest) it is at least informed speculation. May we not so indulge ourselves after a good dinner and among like-minded companions? And we can always return to the world of indisputable fact and truth. At the auction, little interest was shown in Lot 519. Few present saw the latent significance, or appreciated the resonance of something so 'ordinary' in itself in a world of unfashionable 'brown furniture'. Today plain, but solid and worthy Georgian mahogany is less 'commercial' than the flashy Second Empire ormolu and gilt-wood so beloved of Russian oligarchs. It is less desired, too, than the Habitat or IKEA that is the preferred choice of the young, aspiring middle-class British family. The cabinet was not exactly a 'John Lewis List' item, and not even the Speaker of the House of Commons could legitimately claim it on Parliamentary expenses; and the pampered, feathered flocks of a certain Honourable Member, so prominent in our thoughts last summer, might not readily take to it as a duck-house, despite its many useful pigeon-holes.

Considerations of furniture styles and priorities apart, Scott himself is out of fashion in the popular view, 'inaccessible' and wordy. Even the notion of heroism in adversity, personified in Scott's life between 1825 and 1832, appears itself to be unfashionable, and one confined to history; the very idea of effort seems to have had its day, in an age when one downloads from the internet, ready-made, everything from undergraduate essays to after-dinner speeches – though not, I have to say, this one! Who now wants, in Scott's phrase, used when writing of the fate of his own goods soon to be disposed of, 'articles belonging to those who have made some noise in the world'? Few indeed, it appears, in this time of anti-heroics and grudging admiration of, or even sneering at, real distinction and outstanding worth. Sir Walter Scott, greatest of all Scotsmen, was truly an 'A- List' celebrity; and the public now prefers the sordid Big Brother antics of the D-List or below. In him, Britain really had Got Talent: now, we idolize the mediocre, the worthless and the vulgar. Yes: Scott and his old furniture are, in today's parlance, 'Oh-My-God, so like, 1832, like'. What, I wondered on the day of the sale, thinking of modern-day comparisons, would the tables from either of the cafés which claim to be the place where J. K. Rowling scribbled the early chapters of the Harry Potter saga have fetched were they to come to auction? Surely they would be sought-after and collectable? In the event, the Scott cabinet was knocked down to me for much less than the price of a single Rowling first edition copy.

So, in our house the cabinet stands; and there we hold it in trust for the nation, until such time as some more suitable public place can (as I sincerely hope) be found for it when I have no further use for it. In the mean time it is mine, and my most personal and emotional material link with Scott. Should ever the University of Edinburgh make amends for its incomprehensible failure to acquire 25 George Square when the house was on the market four years ago, and there establish a Walter Scott Study Centre housing the vast Corson Collection and other materials relating to one of the University's greatest sons, I would be willing to see the cabinet return to its first home. Even as your President has managed to save this relic for Scotland and for the future, so let us all work to see that its erstwhile owner, Walter Scott, is not consigned to the lumber-room of history as some unfashionable and un-saleable piece of brown furniture – rather like your President, really!

Mr Chairman, Bailie MacLaren, Your Grace, my Lords, Ladies and Gentlemen: I give you the toast of the immortal memory of Sir Walter Scott.

Writing-cabinet formerly belonging to Walter Scott, W.S., and Sir Walter Scott, Bart., of Abbotsford
Now the property of Dr Iain Gordon Brown, Edinburgh

The Chairman expressed the deep appreciation of the members to the President for his excellent Toast and invited Bailie Marilyne Maclaren to give the reply to the Toast to The City of Edinburgh.

The Lord Provost is sorry not to be here this evening but I am delighted to be able to take up your kind invitation to respond to the Toast to the City this year on his behalf. Many thanks to Prof Purdie for such a wonderful toast. As a City of Edinburgh Council Bailie and Councillor, and as a citizen of Edinburgh, I feel very proud that the City's long and rich literary history was recognised when it became the first UNESCO World City of Literature in 2006. It is important that we take pride in and celebrate our literary history. It is even more important that we encourage a new generation of readers and writers. I believe that literature is a potent vehicle for getting a message across. Recently, in their annual City of Literature reading campaign, the organisation gave away thousands of free 'Carry a Poem' books and poetry pocketcards and organised a month of poetry events

This brought 35 organisations together to run events attended by nearly 2,000 people in 28 days. They also ran the largest ever poetry event in Scotland 'Poets for Haiti' with the Poet Laureate Carol Ann Duffy and 18 other poets. Over 800 people attended and they raised £12,000 for the Haiti Earthquake Relief Fund.

Edinburgh is often presented as an ancient city, rich in culture, architecture and natural beauty, but it is much more than that. Edinburgh's heart and soul is its people, their talents and aspirations. As Convener of Education and Children & Families and a local Councillor, I meet them every day, ordinary people give a lot to this City and I am proud of this City and its people.

As you know, the Writers' Museum forms part of the City of Edinburgh Council's museum service and is dedicated to three of Scotland's greatest writers: Sir Walter Scott, Robert Burns and Robert Louis Stevenson. I'm delighted to say that in 2009, the museum welcomed over 53,000 visitors through its doors, a clear indication of the wonderful draw of Edinburgh's literary heritage to visitors both national and international, and of how much our literary heritage is valued.

An additional feature celebrating Edinburgh's literary heritage at the Writers' Museum is Makars' Court, a literary commemoration celebrating the lives and works of Scottish Writers. Each writer, including of course, Scott, Burns and Stevenson, is commemorated by a quotation. The quotations are inscribed in stone and set in the paving leading from both The Mound and the Lawnmarket to the door of the Writers' Museum. The quotation for Sir Walter Scott is taken from his poem *The Lay of the Last Minstrel (1805): "This is my own, my native land".* I am delighted to report that the sign for Makars' Court, sadly disfigured

with graffiti, will be replaced shortly. However, happily the enamel panel on the north wall of The Writers' Museum, incorporating bas relief profiles of Scott, Burns and Stevenson remains untouched, possibly due to its position high up the wall, though, given the acrobatic feats of some graffiti artists, I can't guarantee that it will remain so.

The City of Edinburgh continues to support the celebration of Edinburgh's literary heritage in many ways. Another initiative associated with the Writers' Museum the post of Edinburgh Makar, instituted by the City of Edinburgh in 2002. This civic appointment is selected by representatives of the Scottish Poetry Library, Scottish PEN, The Saltire Society, City of Literature Trust and the City of Edinburgh Council. The current Edinburgh Makar is the internationally renowned poet and author Ron Butlin who acts as the City's literary ambassador at home and abroad assists in the promotion of poetry in partnership with literary organisations.

A new development which I am highly pleased to announce is the forthcoming launch of the City of Edinburgh Museums and Galleries website (date to be confirmed; around March/April). This will give our service an opportunity to showcase our collections, including those of the Writers' Museum and of course Sir Walter Scott. The website is aimed at local and overseas visitors, making them aware of our literary and heritage facilities and the diversity of our collections. Connected to this is a digitisation project, which aims to put photographs and information on our collections onto the City Libraries 'Capital Collections' website. The Scott collection has been earmarked for inclusion on the site, making it accessible to a wide range of the public, including researchers, schools and Scott enthusiasts.

Yet another exciting new development is the revitalisation of the Museum Room of the Scott Monument. It is hoped the work will be completed in the next three months, ready for the busy part of the tourist season. The revitalised Museum Room will include: upgraded display cabinets with new biographical text about Scott; the installation of a smaller bronze copy of the main statue which is currently in storage; a new biographical display and material relating to the architect George Meikle Kemp; and new visitor sound points on four themes, namely: Scott - Wizard of the north, Scott's poems, influence and characters. Using the carved detail in the room, there will be more historic photographic images of the monument and more information on Scott's books and novels.

Sir Walter Scott, a writer of prodigious output, gained prestige and influence both nationally and internationally and his historical novels were not only an important influence on literature, painting and music in many countries, but changed attitudes towards the past. It is therefore such a great pleasure to celebrate Sir Walter Scott's heritage in the city while also celebrating Edinburgh's great literary heritage.

It has been delightful to be in such good company this evening and I would like to extend a genuine thank you for your kind hospitality.

The Chairman thanked her for her reply and then asked Dr. Bill Zachs to respond to the Toast to The Roxburghe Club.

On behalf of my fellow Roxburghe Club members (and, I might add, with the approbation of our president, Lord Egremont) I would like to thank the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club and its members, Professor David Purdie, the Chairman, in particular, for the entertaining and even instructive toast in honour of our club. I personally would like to say thank-you for the kind invitation to be here this evening. I came to Scotland 27 years ago to study Walter Scott, so this event has special meaning.

Each spring, for nearly 200 years, at the anniversary dinner of the Roxburghe Club, the president makes a toast. It is a rather long toast, and over the years it has gotten longer, for reasons which will soon be evident . It is a toast which ends, for me at least, in poignancy – a poignancy that brings forth a smile and a perhaps even a tear, a poignancy which reminds each of the members why we have gathered together. And it is a toast in which, like the toasts heard this evening, Sir Walter himself would have regaled.

Indeed Sir Walter undoubtedly heard the Roxburghe toast in the year 1828, when he attended his first, and what was, sadly, to be his final Roxburghe Club anniversary dinner .This took place in London at the

Freemason's Tavern on 15 May 1828. The Roxburghe Club Minute Book (which I recently consulted in the Society of Antiquaries Library in London) records the attendance of the 'author of Waverley', for Scott was unique in the annals of the Club in that his election was pseudonymous. The Minute Book, for those interested in culinary matters, also notes that turtle was served – an expensive delicacy of the day which seems to have been consumed in excessive quantities at Roxburghe Club dinners. In his Journal Scott recorded the occasion:

> [15 May 1828.] Dined at the Roxburgh Club. Lord Spencer presided but had a cold which limited his exertions. Lord Clive, beside whom I sate, was deaf though intelligent and good humourd, the Duke of Devonshire was still deafer. There were many chirupping men who might have talked but went into committee. There was little general conversation.

Scott, it seems, was a disappointed with his first Roxburghe Club dinner. A few days before, he had had a rather better time dining slightly more informally with such fellow members and friends as Sir Francis Freeling, Edward Utterson, and Thomas Frognal Dibdin. Dibdin was the guiding force behind the founding of the Roxburghe Club. He was the librarian of Earl Spencer at Althorp, and the author of many books about books, including the *Bibliographical Tour to the North of England and Scotland*, which I highly recommend if you're interested in the bookish world of Sir Walter Scott's day.

More to Scott's taste than fine food, or 'chirupping' conversation with the hearing impaired, were the Roxburghe Club's books. These were productions typically of a literary or historical nature which are at the heart of the Club's *modus operandi*. For the most part they were printed in small quantities, distributed to members only and difficult to come by otherwise – the early productions in particular. Having been elected in 1823, eleven years after the Club's founding, Scott was desirous to obtain the books previously issued. And there were 37 of these at the time. When an opportunity arose, he paid the stately sum of £130 to his bookseller (Payne) for a set -- this in spite of his well known financial difficulties. Bibliomania was a ailment from which Scott, happily, suffered. The library at Abbotsford is evidence, if it were needed, of his condition. Sadly, many of these Roxburghe books do not seem to be at Abbotsford today. A copy of the book Scott *himself* presented to the Roxburghe Club is there, though, oddly, not his copy. (A member''s individual copy is designated by the printing in red of his name in the list of current members.) The work Scott presented is the *Proceedings in the court-martial held upon John, Master of Sinclair, Captain-Lieutenant in Preston's Regiment, for the murder of Ensign Schaw of the same regiment, and Captain Schaw of the Royals, 17th October 1708. With correspondence respecting that transaction*. There is also a copy in the National Library of Scotland where you can find one of the very few complete runs of Roxburghe Club books – currently standing at 280 titles.

When Scott was elected in 1823, he wrote [25 Feb. 1823] to Dibdin, on behalf of 'the Author of Waverley' to express his thanks, and told Dibdin:

> It will not be uninteresting to you to know that a fraternity is about to be established here something on the plan of the Roxburghe Club: but having Scottish antiquities chiefly in view. – It is to be called the Bannatyne Club from the celebrated antiquary George Bannatyne who compiled by far the greatest manuscript record of old Scottish poetry. Their first meeting is to be held on Thursday when the health of the Roxburghe Club [will be toasted].

Scott, of course, was the first president of the Bannatyne Club and the major figure behind its early printed productions. Not long after its establishment, a west coast counterpart came into being: the Maitland Club of Glasgow. Inspired by these organizations, others of a related kind, though open to a wider membership, emerged over the course of the 19th and 20th century: the Edinburgh Bibliographical Society founded in 1890 and the first of its kind; this Club itself founded in 1894 are two local examples. Most have come and gone. Your Club and the one I have the honour to represent this evening, the Roxburghe, have endured. This is something we can be proud of. In the spirit of intra-clubbability (if that's a word). I would like to conclude my reply to *your* very kind toast by reciting the toast given at the Roxburghe anniversary dinners.

1. To the immortal memory of John Duke of Roxburghe

2. of Christopher Valdafer, Printer of the Decameron
3. of Gutenberg, Furst, and Schoeffer, the inventors of the art of printing
4. of William Caxton, the father of the British Press
5. Of Dame Julia Berners and the St. Alban's Press [1496]
6. of Wynkyn de Worde and Richard Pynson, the illustrious successors of Caxton
7. of the Aldine family at Venice
8. of the Giunta family at Florence
9. of Walter Chapman, the earliest Scottish Printer
10. the Society of Bibliophiles at Paris
11. the Prosperity of the Roxburghe Club
12. and the Cause of Bibliomania all over the World.

And if I may add: to the good health and happiness of all of you here this evening. Thank you very much.

The evening was brought to a close with a Vote of Thanks proposed by Alasdair Hutton.

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[i] Iain Gordon Brown, *Scott's Interleaved Waverley Novels ((The 'Magnum Opus': National Library of Scotland MSS. 23001-41): an Introduction and Commentary* (Aberdeen 1987).

[ii] Immediately after my purchase, and in the fresh enthusiasm of the moment, I wrote an account of the episode and the history of the writing-cabinet in an article published as 'Cabinet Reshuffle' in *The Times Literary Supplement*, 8 April 2005, p. 15. This was accepted by the journal for an issue largely made up and laid out, so it was cut substantially in the editing.

[iii] *The Journal of Sir Walter Scott*, edited by W. E. K. Anderson (Oxford 1972), p. 100, entry for 1 March 1826. On the Scotts' move from Castle Street and their mood see pp. 90, 107, 112.

[iv] *The Letters of Sir Walter Scott*, edited by H J C Grierson, 12 vols (London 1932-37), IX, p. 456 (8 March 1826).

[v] *Journal,* p. 39 (18 December 1825).

[vi] The gift is recorded by Scott in *Journal*, p. 109 (10 March 1826) and is referred to in *Letters*, IX, pp. 456 and 463. See also J. G. Lockhart, *The Life of Sir Walter Scott*, Edinburgh edition, 10 vols (Edinburgh 1902-3), VIII, p. 263 and Edgar Johnson*, Sir Walter Scott. The Great Unknown*, two volumes (London 1970), II, p. 977.

[vii] *Letters,* IX, p. 463.

[viii] I am indebted to Dr Sebastian Pryke, Stephen Jackson, Laurance Black and Christopher Payne for discussion of the cabinet.

[ix] See the BBC publication *Homes & Antiques*, January 2010, p. 125.

[x] In his *Reminiscences of Sir Walter Scott* (Edinburgh 1871), p. 4 Gibson explains how he became associated with Scott. Gibson was always known as 'John Gibson, Junior'. He is thus labelled in the inscription on the brass plaque laid into the cabinet.

[xi] *Journal*, Introduction, pp. xxxiv-xxxv. Scott expresses his satisfaction at having Gibson to act for him in letters to William Laidlaw and his son Walter, *Letters*, IX, pp. 378 and 381 (26 January 1826).

[xii] Gibson, *Reminiscences*, pp. 13 ff.

[xiii] *Letters*, IX, p. 508 (14 April 1826).

[xiv] National Library of Scotland, MSS. 112-114, Sederunt Books of the Trustees of James Ballantyne and Company. See also John Gibson's original letters and papers connected with his work for the Trustees in NLS Acc. 11878, some of which are engrossed in Sederunt Book II, MS. 113.

[xv] W. E. K. Anderson provides an admirable summary of Scott's financial circumstances and of his affairs at the time of the crash, and afterwards, in *Journal*, Introduction, pp. xxiii- xxviii.

[xvi] *Journal*, p. 348 (5 September 1827).

[xvii] *Letters*, X, p. 31.

[xviii] Thomas Crawford, *Scott* (Edinburgh 1965), p. 3. See also John Sutherland, *The Life of Walter Scott* (London 1995).

[xix] Crawford, *Scott*, p. 16.

[xx] When Scott moved from the family home to lodgings in the New Town – removing 'my camp' (as he put it, consumed with the military fervour of his life in the Royal Edinburgh Volunteer Light Dragoons) 'from Georges Square to Georges Street' – prior to his marriage at the end of 1797 he took with him, along with some other 'little moveables', his 'Scritoire': see *Letters*, XII, pp. 67-68 (14 November 1797, to Charlotte Carpenter). This writing-desk (about which nothing more is known) may have served him for some time thereafter, indeed into his Castle Street days, where it will have been supplemented, if and when the need arose, by his father's writing-cabinet from George Square.

[xxi] *Journal*, pp. 39-40, 42-43, 65, 68 (18 December 1825, 22 and 24 January 1826).