

The Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club

The Ninety Sixth Annual Dinner

2004

The Chairman, Sheriff Isobel Poole, welcomed the 89 members and guests to the dinner in the Balmoral Hotel, Edinburgh. After introducing the Top Table the chairman asked The Very Rev. Allan MacLean of Dochgarroch to say grace. Thereafter dinner was served. After a short interval the main toast of the evening to the Memory of Sir Walter was proposed by the President Tam Dalyell.

As Tam himself wrote to Fraser Elgin (Hon. Secretary and Bulletin co-editor), "The written word and the spoken word are two different forms of communication". Almost half his address was delivered without reference to notes and as a result it is not possible to print a verbatim record. The following is therefore only the gist of the excellent address with which the diners were entertained.

Ten generations separate the speaker of 2005 and his ancestor, General Tam Dalyell, Sir Walter Scott's "Bloody Muscovite". Like John Graham Dalyell, who lived at The Binns, 1842-1852, Tam Dalyell, MP for West Lothian/Linlithgow 1962-2005, resents Sir Walter's vilification of his kinsman, 1615-1685. Dalryelles think that Scott was trying to get Abbotsford out of debt and that any villain would do, without probing facts too rigorously. Our speaker was, he told the honorary secretary of the Sir Walter Scott Club, when he was invited to accept its supreme honour, conscious of the disapproval of the Shade of Sir Walter, at the choice of himself as President. When seven times a year I chair the Court of the University of Edinburgh in the Raeburn Room, I feel I have the approval of Raeburn's great portraits of Principal Robertson and other Principals. But Sir Walter, from the right-hand side of the room all too obviously disapproves of me!

First of all allow me to pay a tribute to the lady who should have been here last year, but whose place was taken at short notice by the distinguished scholar, Professor Ian Campbell. Dame Jean, Sir Walter's younger great- great-great grand-daughter, now lies in peace at beautiful Dryburgh Abbey. She was born on June 8th 1923 and died on May 5th. 2004. and with her elder sister, Patricia, were the last-surviving direct descendants. For 50 years they strove to ensure that Abbotsford, the mansion built by Sir Walter on the banks of the Tweed, remained much as it had been during his life-time, welcoming visitors from all over the world with great warmth and openness, sharing with them the history of the house and its first owner, who liked to be known as the Laird of Abbotsford.

When Patricia died six years ago, Jean, who was lady-in-waiting to Princess Alice, took over and carried on the tradition. She was the perfect hostess, welcoming, witty and charming; thanks to their joint efforts the number of visitors to Abbotsford at one point reached 86,000., although recently, thanks to foot and mouth and 9/11 this number has dropped to 30,000. Jean was an enthusiastic supporter of festivals celebrating Sir Walter and promoted every aspect of Border life. She had a great love of horses and her horse *Sir Wattie* twice won at Badminton. Sadly, with her death the future of the house is now uncertain.

I am hugely indebted to the Director of the Walter Scott Digital Archive Special Collections Division of Edinburgh University Library, Dr. Paul Barnaby, and his colleagues, for information on the Scott/Dalyell relationship. There is only one letter from Dalyell to Scott, out of the 20,000 letters to and from Scott in the Millgate Union Catalogue, so most of my information is derived from the Constable manuscripts in the National Library.

The letter, dated 3 October 1801, appears to be in response to an untraced letter from Sir Walter suggesting possible meanings and etymologies for unexplained terms in Dalyell's recently published anthology *Scottish (sic) Poems of the 16th Century*. Dalyell did not appear to be entirely satisfied with Scott's explanations and derivations. He goes on to discuss Scott's research into *Sir Tristrem*, which was published subsequently in 1804.

Dalyell was publishing his 16C poems at more or less the same time as Scott was producing *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* but Dalyell assured his publisher that there would be no overlap. Scott appears to have stayed at The Binns in August 1801 and was sent a presentation copy in September 1801 of Dalyell's *Poems*.

Dalyell and Scott must have made acquaintance with each other as fellow advocates, Scott being called to the Bar on 11 July 1792 and Dalyell on 31 January 1797. Dalyell does not seem to have had a courtroom practice but worked as a consulting lawyer. He appears to have spent much time in research in the Advocates' library and functioned as an informal Keeper of the Library.

There are 8 volumes by Dalyell in the Abbotsford Library: *Fragments of Scottish History* (1798), *Scottish Poems of the Sixteenth century* (1801), Dalyell's editions of Richard Bannatyne's *Journal of the Transactions in Scotland, & c. from 1570-1573* (1806), of Sir Robert Lindsay's *Cronycles of Scotland* (1814), and of George Marioireybanks's *Annals of Scotland from 1514 to 1591* (1814), Dalyell's *Remarks on the Antiquities Illustrated by the Chartularies of the Episcopal See of Aberdeen* (1820), *Analysis of Ancient Records of the Bishopric of Moray* (1826), and *Analysis of the Chartularies of the Abbey of Cambuskenneth, Chapel Royal of Stirling, and St. Anthony's Preceptory at Leith* (1828). There is nothing in the volumes to indicate whether they were presentation copies or purchases. In all events, Archibald Constable is as likely to have presented copies to his best-selling author as Dalyell himself.

The first four of these works are cited in the notes to the Magnum Opus edition of Scott's works and appear to have been used as historical sources by Scott throughout his writing career. *The Fragments of Scottish History* (albeit misrepresented as 'John Grahame Dalzell's Sketches of Scottish History') are cited in *The Abbot*, *The Fortunes of Nigel*, *Chronicles of the Canongate*, and *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*.

In the introduction to the 1830 edition of *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*, Scott briefly reviews earlier collections of Scots verse and commends *Scottish Poems of the Sixteenth Century* by 'Mr John Grahame Dalzell, to whom his country is obliged for his antiquarian labours'.

The edition of Bannatyne is cited in the Magnum Opus editions of *Ivanhoe* and *Provincial Antiquities of Scotland*, while the edition of Lindsay is cited with great frequency through Scott's poetical and prose works.

Whatever their personal relations (and, untypically, there is no obvious personal warmth in the reference to Dalyell in the 1830 *Minstrelsy*), Scott, then, clearly had great respect for Dalyell as an antiquarian and editor.

As regards Dalyell's reading of Scott, an auction catalogue was published in 1852, advertising items from the library of 'the late Sir John Graham Dalyell'. It includes Scott's *Rokeby*, but there is nothing to indicate that Dalyell's complete library was for sale.

One final episode might be worth mentioning as bearing, tangentially, on Scott's relations with Dalyell. The first two issues of *Blackwood's Magazine* (1817) contained the notorious *Chaldee*

Manuscript, a satire on the Edinburgh literary scene purporting to be a translation of a recently discovered prophetic book by Daniel. Chapter III of the *Manuscript* written by John Wilson ('Christopher North') and Scott's future son-in-law John Gibson Lockhart contained a particularly vicious assault on Dalyell. Verse 36 reads:

"Now the other beast (Dalyell) was a beast which he (Constable) loved not. A beast of burden which he had in his courts to hew wood and carry water, and to do all manner of unclean things. His face was like unto the face of an ape, and he chattered continually, and his nether parts were uncomely. Nevertheless his thighs were hairy, and the hair was as the shining of a sattin [sic] raiment, and he skipped with the branch of a tree in his hand, and he chewed a snail between his teeth".

There follow a further eight verses, continuing to mock Dalyell's infirmity (he was crippled from birth) and alluding to Constable's dissatisfaction with Dalyell's contributions to the *General Gazetteer*.

Dalyell issued a writ for defamation and the affair was settled out of court with Blackwood's paying out the considerable sum of £230. The offending verses have never been reprinted. Scott is on record as deploring the *Chaldee Manuscript*, warning Blackwood that if the magazine 'could continue to be a receptacle for articles, however able, composed in the same tone, I could not [...] continue my permanent assistance'. He consistently attempted to reign in Lockhart's critical and satiric excesses, but it is possible that Scott's closeness to the *Blackwood's* circle might have affected his relations with Dalyell. (The attack, incidentally, appears to have been politically rather than personally motivated, Dalyell being a staunch Whig and Lockhart an equally staunch Tory,)

So far I have dealt only with my ancestor in the 1800s. but there was a rather more notorious member of the family mentioned by Scott in *Old Mortality*. In chapter 29 the Covenanters are dismayed to hear that the Lieutenant-General of the Royalist army will be "the celebrated General Thomas Dalzell of Binns, who, having practised the art of war in the then barbarous country of Russia, was much feared for his cruelty and indifference to human life and human suffering as respected for his steady loyalty and undaunted valour". In chapter 30 he is described in the following terms on the eve of the Battle of Bothwell Bridge:

"Beside him stood Claverhouse, whom we have already fully described, and another general officer whose appearance was singularly striking. His dress was of the antique fashion of Charles the First's time, and composed of shamoy leather, curiously slashed, and covered with antique lace and garniture. His boots and spurs might be referred to the same distant period. He wore a breastplate, over which descended a grey beard of venerable length, which he cherished as a mark of mourning for Charles the First, having never shaved since that monarch was brought to the scaffold. His head was uncovered, and almost perfectly bald. His high and wrinkled forehead, piercing grey eyes, and marked features, evinced age unbroken by infirmity, and stern resolution unsoftened by humanity. Such is the outline, however feebly expressed, of the celebrated general Thomas Dalzell, a man more feared and hated by the Whigs than even Claverhouse himself, and who executed the same violence against them out of a detestation of their persons, or perhaps an innate severity of temper, which Grahame only resorted to on political accounts, as the best means of intimidating the followers of presbytery, and of destroying that sect entirely".

Scott has General Dalyell oppose all attempts to parley with the insurgents and only reluctantly obey an order to give quarter to fleeing rebels after the Royalist victory. At the trial of the insurgents in chapter 36, Dalyell threatens Morton's manservant Cuddie Headrigg with physical violence ('Speak out, you scoundrel [, . .] or I'll dash your teeth out with my dudgeonhaft!') and urges torture to be employed on Ephraim Macbriar and then that he be led away to execution,

callously dismissing such work as 'drudgery'. A note refers to the 'unmanly violence' with which the General is recorded as having treated prisoners.

The editors of the most recent critical edition of *Old Mortality* (Edinburgh University Press) note that Dalyell was not actually present at the Battle of Bothwell Bridge, but 'presumably Scott wished a fanatical royalist to balance the picture of the opposing sides'. As such, he largely accepts the picture presented in pro-Covenanting historical accounts, as he pointedly does not for Claverhouse.

General Dalyell also appears in 'Wandering Willie's Tale' in *Redgauntlet*. The Blind Fiddler tells of his father being asked to perform at a ghostly banquet hosted by his recently deceased master Sir Robert Redgauntlet, a feared oppressor of Covenanters who 'was aye for the strong hand; and his name is kend as wide in the country as Claverhouse's or Tam Dalyell's'. The guests at the banquet are described as follows:

"But Lord take us in keeping! What a set of ghastly revellers there were that sat around that table! My gudesire kend mony that had long before gane to their place, for often had he piped to the most part in the hall of Redgauntlet. There was the fierce Middleton, and the dissolute Rothes, and the crafty Lauderdale; and Dalyell, with his bald head and a beard to his girdle; and Earlshall, with Cameron's blude on his hand; and wild Bonshaw, that tied blessed Mr. Cargill's limbs till the blude sprung; and Dumbarton Douglas, the twice turned traitor baith to country and king. There was the Bludy Advocate MacKenzie, who, for his worldly wit and wisdom, had been to the rest as a god. And there was Claverhouse, as beautiful as when he lived, with his long, dark, curled locks streaming down over his laced buff coat, and with his left hand always on his right spule-blade, to hide the wound that the silver bullet had made. He sat apart from them all, and looked at them with a melancholy, haughty countenance; while the rest hallooed and sang and laughed, that the room rang. But their smiles were fearfully contorted from time to time; and their laughter passed into such wild sounds as made my gudesire's very nails grow blue, and chilled the marrow in his banes".

The letters between John Graham Dalyell and Constable indicate that Dalyell was particularly sensitive to attacks on his ancestry and keen to defend the reputation of General Dalyell. It is unlikely, then, that he would have taken Scott's presentation of his forbear lightly.

John Graham of Claverhouse was a decent chap. Scott liked people who knew how to use a knife and fork. Perhaps Tam Dalyell was not a decent chap!

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Where better than the Edinburgh Sir Walter Scott Club for me to bury the hatchet and I am happy to have been given the opportunity to do so.

Ladies and gentlemen, please rise and join me in drinking to the Memory of Sir Walter Scott.