

**NNNI** ULSTER FOLK MUSEUM

# RHYMIN RAB'S RAMBLE

A grand tour aye of  
Ulster Folk Museum  
with Ulster-Scots  
'Bard of Moneyrea',  
Robert Huddleston

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## Come hither, freens, to Rhymin Rab's Ramble around Ulster Folk Museum. A grand welcome.

**H**aloo! Here I am, 'Rhymin Rab': farmer, craftsman, poet and songwriter. Why is this rambling trail in my name? Well, you might think I brag, but I am one of the gems of the museum. It holds my archive of thousands of manuscript pages that includes poems, songs, letters and even the novel that I wrote.

I was born not far from here at Moneyrea in the year 18 & 14. I'm now in my later years, aged 72 in January of 18 & 87. I've experienced some very eventful times in Ulster history. My writing chronicles this era and my native sod in verse and song. I can write rude or shrewd as a country bard should.

'I praise the good an' thrash the bad  
Without respect to person  
An' them **wha dinna** like R'ugh Rab  
**Maun** just cry down my versin'.'

I'm here to take you on a tour of buildings and places you'll see on your visit. I can't promise to have been at every original building. But my familiarity with County Down scenery, structures and society is unsurpassed. The houses, properties and vistas of Cultra are much akin to those of my life.

My dialect is laced with Scottish words, sounds and influences, and it's placed with pride within my poetry. Some people questioned my motives. As I explained back in the 1840s, no man should write 'out of his dialect':

'No man can do. ... Almost the half of Ulster, my native province, speak the very dialect in which my poems is written. Born and brought up in the County of Down and parish of Comber on the northern shores of the island, within forty miles of Scotland, what wonder if my language and that of the Scot almost agree. ... Thus it is, that so many rustic authors of Ulster are said to be sprung from Burns. Alas, what a mistake! And what a mischance that people who even talk the very dialect cannot read it – nay – even when they see it print.'



“When I was younger far than noo,” with “notions nine or ten,” I posed for a photograph. By this ye shall know me.

This dialect would become accepted as a language and known as Ulster Scots.

Follow me today as I lead you on our trail. Along the way I'll share some of my stanzas to illustrate the incredible heritage we have at Cultra, and I'll highlight words that you might not recognise. Even if you hadn't heard of me before, may you remember me – as 'Rhymin Rab', 'Blythe Robin', or plain Robert Huddleston, the Bard of Moneyrea – from this day forth:

'**Auld** Ayr by Bobby Burns has fame  
And Co. Down we've here at **hame**  
And what think ye if I tho' lame  
Might mount a tric  
And gi'e my birthright Shire a name  
Before I die.'

GLOSSARY: freens (friends), haloo! (hello), wha (who), dinna (don't), maun (must), noo (now), auld (old), hame (home)

## MEETING·HOUSE



In 'The Poet', I reimagine my own baptism in the 'Preachin' Hoose' of Moneyrea:

'The gossip bye, the Christening focused  
The parents glorying in their son  
The priest and guests all gathered round  
And named the brat 'Bob Huddleston'  
The water sprinkled o'er his face,  
The **bantling** laughed – the midwife said  
Tho' he might slide and lack of grace,  
God's love was not within him dead.'

Since its first building in 1719, the meeting house or kirk has been the centre of Moneyrea. As the settlement built around it, the population became mainly Presbyterian. I recall clearly how our congregation was one of the first two that split from the General Synod of Ulster in 1829 and became founding members of the Remonstrant Synod of Ulster. We're known variously as the Non-Subscribing Presbyterian branch, 'New Light', and Unitarians (or 'Arians'). We see the teachings of Jesus sufficient to guide the Church without imposing further man-made laws or creeds.

The kirk offers me a centre of spiritual guidance, connection and solace. It's where kith and kin celebrate the rites of passage. It's where I took my **waddin'** vows too.

It's also a powerful shaper of my identity and being. Generations of Irish Presbyterians, like Catholics, had to **thole** unfair Penal Laws imposed by government and pay tithes to the Church of Ireland. Growing up under the shadow of this history honed my view of the world and humanity. My system holds that individuals can connect directly to God through reading of the Bible, not needing others to do this for us. This, and the democratic model of Presbyterian governance through a committee of elected elders, made me wary and critical of any body in society, even 'spurious clergymen', who'd wish to inflict their will upon me.

One cleric above all made a big imprint on my pew and mind. Rev. Fletcher Blakely was minister of Moneyrea from 1809 to 1857 – more than half of my lifetime! He taught me about the Creator and Christianity, **richt frae wrang**, and nurtured my wider education. To this dear friend I paid tribute in verse – how else?! Blest we were to have such a sound, sincere son of the church.

I can't abide a ranting preacher. A while past the 'revival' of '59, one of this ilk came to Moneyrea to 'work wonders'; but he raved on about dark H\_\_I and 'teeth gnashing' and seldom spoke of a land of peace. In 'A Side-wipe at Something', I plead the Word be kept short and sweet to spur love of God:

'A good tight sermon, 'bout an hour,  
**Weel** kneaded down wi' pith and power;  
Is Priest and hearers fit to tire,  
And worth applaud.'

Still, I'll mount a defence for common sense against

"Science spouters' and their pretence.  
'Your Evolution, bunkum brats –  
You're evolutioned blind as bats!'  
Twas God formed all, this we allow  
All had the shape then they have now –  
... As well say that my cat's a donkey  
As say that man sprung from the monkey.'

GLOSSARY: Hoose (House), bantling (infant), waddin' (wedding), thole (endure), weel (well), richt frae wrang (right from wrong)

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**“The priest and  
guests all gathered  
round / And  
named the brat  
'Bob Huddleston”**

# THE·DIAMOND or TOON·SQUARE



You might call me **thran** to argue so, but, whether Scotch or Irish or Ulster topmost, I'd always speak proudly in my dialect when meeting **cronies** from hamlet to diamond.

Diamond areas were created in many new towns and villages after the Plantation of Ulster as the squares and marketplaces where goods, news and gossip were exchanged. For my ilk, a town diamond promises sundry capers. As a tradesman, I could go here to conduct business and show my skills to prospective customers. As a writer, I could find herein a forum to connect with readers and sell my poetry. As a singer, I could perform songs and find new material from incidents of everyday life around me. My poem, the 'Lammas Fair', celebrates a vibrant summer market day:

**Syne, trogger** Bell is up 'fore dawn,  
An' **doon** the road she's early;  
Yet faith she's **feart** she'll be **ower lang**,  
She's **skelpin't** on **sae** rarely:  
An' **niest** in text, comes **wabster** Jock,  
'Bout grey day in the mornin';  
An' Peg **tae** sell her **tawpen'd** cock,  
She strives tae get **afore** them  
'Bout clear that day.

Oh! Nought could match a fair for hubbub or a chance  
for my native words to flourish:

There some are **gaun** for **stirks** tae buy,  
And some are gaun for sellin';  
Here some are drivin' pigs an' **kye**—  
Some **powneys** from the Hi'lan',  
**Yon's** uncle Billy fleein' hard,  
Wi' his **twa** bra' big horses;  
He thinks he'll get a fine reward,  
An' **haes** prepared twa purses,  
**Fu'** lang that day.

GLOSSARY: toon (town), guid (good), thran (stubborn), cronies (friends), lammas (August festival day), syne (thereupon), trogger (pedlar), doon (down), feart (frightened), ower lang (too long), skelpin' (beating), sae (so), niest (next), wabster (weaver), tae (to), tawpen'd (tufty), afore (in front of), gaun (gone), stirks (bullocks), kye (cattle), powneys (ponies), yon (yonder), twa (two), haes (has), fu' (very/full)

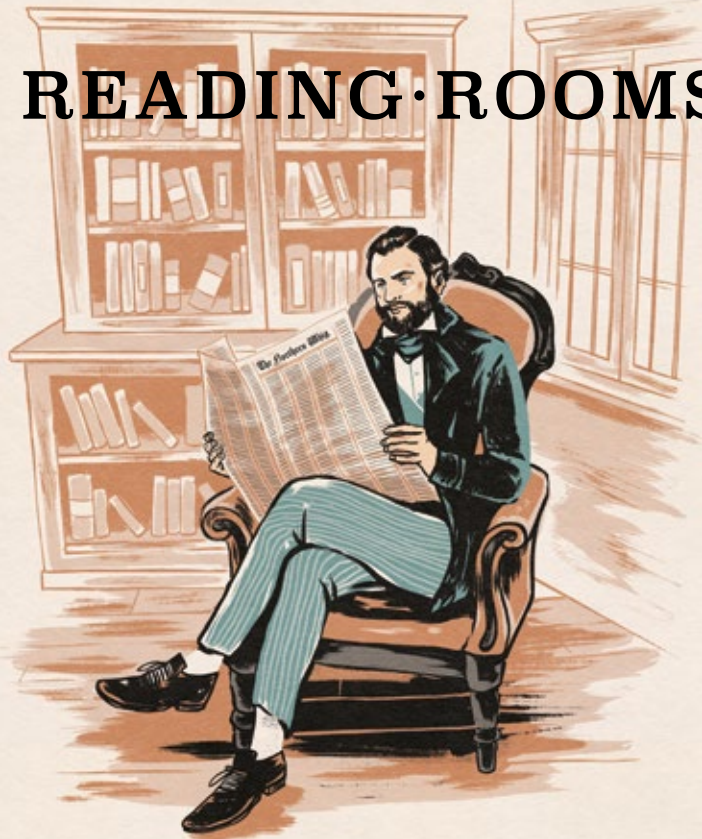
**T**he Diamond or Square of an Ulster **toon** is an ideal metaphor for the cultural fusion that spawned the unique regional speech of my verse.

The area of my birth had witnessed a large influx of Scottish settlers during the seventeenth century. Their Braid Scotch or **Guid** Scotch Tongue was the speech we were raised with, being used freely at home and central to daily existence. It gave us a broad vocabulary for life, and its rhythms and cadences shaped our outlook on the world. Scots can be termed a sister language of English, with much in common. It survives in various forms in Scotland and parts of Ulster. Despite a popular view that my lyrics were mostly Scotch in accent, I claimed in 1844 that I wrote in 'Ulster Irish'; if 'the inhabitants of Scotland are the descendants of the people of Erin,' as I heard sages say, then 'Erin must be the mother land.'

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**“There some are  
gaun for stirks tae  
buy, / And some are  
gaun for sellin’”**

# READING ROOMS



**T**hese reading rooms remind me of Moneyrea Reading Society and its library, where my neighbourhood joined in the growing literacy of a nation. My friend Rev. Blakely established the library in the old session room during my youthful years. Over 300 volumes adorned the shelves, a wide range of literature to put before a poor farmer's son.

An aspiring poet begins to think and write of himself in the third person. In this well of discovery, young Bob read avidly, broadened his mental horizon, and became an ardent and zealous lover of rhyme. Some people might think he had Burns on the brain. But in this local hideout he also consumed a litany of classic authors. Milton, Dickens, Thackeray, Tennyson and Goldsmith taught him much. The inimitable Carleton intrigued him too: an Ulster author capturing the manner and speech of peasantry and yet winning renown. He browsed further for Irish poets: Drennan, Griffin, Callanan, Davis and Moore. Here was a copy of William Anderson's *Collection of moral, instructive, and descriptive poems* (1830). If a poet from Saintfield could collect enough coin to be published, why not a swain from sweet Moneyrea?

I, Bob, dared to think I might have within me a trace of the sacred gem of genius; as if ordained a priest of the oracle of rustic poetry. I began to form doggerel in the years of early teens. While roosted in a muddy ditch, with a shovel in hand, and 'scourin' a dyke **sheugh**, the words took shape in my head. And I found the harmony of clink – words fitting in musical rhythm – came easier than prose.

Reading rooms like this were also popular places to read newspapers. The *Northern Whig* was my paper of choice, for its liberal leanings accorded well with the Moneyrea and north Down climate. It came out twice weekly from the 1820s, thrice from the late 1840s, and daily from the late 1850s.

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**“The Weekly Whig  
a’ I get / Since  
Finlay’s gane it’s  
no my pet”**

The *Whig* opened up the world to me in ways my ancestors could never have known. It informed me of events, fantastic deeds and tragic incidents in far-flung countries. News from these foreign lands trickled into my poetry. I wrote not only of Annacloy and Portaferry, but also the Andes and Pitcairn's Isle. The Great Chicago Fire of 1871 was the subject of an extensive verse.

In addition, it provided a platform for an unknown Bob Huddleston to introduce himself to the world through advertisement and numerous letters. But with a change of editor, its political slant altered, and contents did too. It forgot its roots and ties to local writers. Now I read but little daily print. ‘The Weekly Whig a’ I get / Since Finlay’s **gane** it’s no my pet,’ I wrote some years ago. You’d hardly expect me to keep quiet on the matter, surely?

From my poem, ‘Higgelty Piggelty’:

‘That “Paper” once the nurse of Genius,-  
Or prose or verse, – now counts it heinous  
To print a local diatribe  
Or quote, ’thout pay, a country scribe  
It tramps afar for London gossip  
And blows big guns to cream its **posset**  
... In Whiggie’s Poet’s Corner stare  
And see the rigmarole that’s there  
A **gather up** on every hand  
Of ‘poems’ thought brilliant great and grand ...’

GLOSSARY: sheugh (ditch), a’ (all), gane (gone), posset (a drink of hot milk curdled with ale or wine), gather up (motley group of things/people)

# PRINT·SHOP



Once, few but great and good could have books published in their names. In time, however, the printing press acted as a force for popular democracy, and let a humble ploughman cut it as printed poet.

‘Bob, you must publish,’ uttered friends as my verse overflowed. I felt divided between doubt and a hankering after plaudits. Which author truly does not? I resolved to publish. Did the authentic voice of my people not merit to be heard and read, among the tomes of far-famed scribes? There was but one way for a rustic rhymers to claim a spine for his own: by prior subscription. I learned that the boy McKensie, ‘the Bard of Dunover’, secured 2,000 subscribers’ names to preface his volume in 1810.

Still, I scaled a mountain to put to print. When canvassed to aid, some allies dithered or deserted. Yet many stumped up a half-crown to my rescue: schoolteachers, solicitors, surgeons and shepherds alike; one in Wales bought eight! I listed and thanked these gems of humankind. Their funds lifted the mood and Muse of a country bard. Old Mr Smyth of Belfast published *A Collection of Poems and Songs on Rural Subjects*, in 1844. Its coda, ‘To My Little Book, and My Harp’, defined my hopes:

‘Now farewell my wee Book! ‘gae whare ye like rovin’,  
**Nae** learned Author’s treatise a seekin’ for fame;  
 Be your fate as you like, be it dark or it bright,  
 ’Twill me **ne’er** give a moment of pleasure or pain.  
 ’Twas a’ my hale notion, or simple ambition,  
 To please e’en my countrymen, **cotter** an’ swain;  
 And if them I **hae** pleased, or listlessly teased,  
 I care for nae better, ’twas a’ was my aim.’

More barriers beset me. Like a horde of authors afore, I spotted errors too late. Then impious and filthy slanderers cast scathe, scorn and **geck** on the poems of uneducated Bob Huddleston! They presumed they could write better, but no printing press heard tell of these rhyming poltroons. Some locals **blethered clashmaclaver** that my text made satire of neighbours. And though I cleared my debts, nigh half of my subscribers reneged on payment. I knew **siller** was scarce, but these swindling **hallions** pushed their names into print only to break their pledge, keeping both books and money.

Still, I was proud of my modest success in trying the hearts and **reins** of folks. In spite of critics, I decided to bring another book to the world to record verse in the local dialect of my country and address the rural public in my own original way. I appealed for subscribers again. I dedicated this second volume, *A Collection of Poems and Songs on Different Subjects* (1846), to those few friends who looked with lenity on my first.

Next I set to write an epic novel. The task ate up my early forties, till a draft of 400 pages for *The Adventures of Hughey Funny* was ready in 1860. Alas! I found the printer too particular, and the book wasn’t published.

No more were my lyrics set to type. A wife and children arrived, my profile as a penman faded, and my audience did too. ‘Without the coin to bribe the Press / You ne’er can bask in Fame’s caress.’

But I had my precious moments in print, and who knows? I could return yet.

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**“Without the coin  
 to bribe the Press /  
 You ne’er can bask  
 in Fame’s caress.”**

GLOSSARY: gae (go), nae (no), ne’er (never), cotter (peasant farmer), hae (have), geck (derision), blethered (talked much (nonsense)), clashmaclaver (loose talk), siller (silver/money), hallions (coarse fellows), reins (feelings)

# POST-OFFICE



**I** have lived through a revolution in communications. Being able to afford to send frequent letters helped to make my name as a bard, long before Moneyrea Post Office opened at last in 1871 with Isabella Stewart as its trusted postmistress.

It really started with the new Penny Black stamp in 1840, and the Penny Red especially from '41. For a pretty penny, I could reach any place in the kingdom. I posted enough mail to fill ten stagecoaches. These dispatches built confidence and a network; they put poets in contact between our pockets of the country to link ideas and unite us in our worthy cause. In time, my private and public missives helped to develop my profile and place in the market.

Letter-writing is so routine for me that I've shaped many verses as 'epistles' to friends, brother bards and even dead poets. The subjects include Francis Davis, 'The Belfastman'; Thomas Cunningham of Crossan, near Lisburn; James McKeown ('Kitty Connor'), bard of Lambeg; and Willie Keenan, Whiteabbey. Through these public addresses, we've conferred status on one another, mostly paying tribute, but finding some fault too!

The rising tide of emigration caused me more letters to write but no more books to publish. The drain of people took away much of my audience, and many who stayed at home turned away from 'backward' old traits as they wanted progress, profit and respectability.

By the parcel, I crafted letters to my own dear expatriates, to keep in touch and share affairs. I wrote to my nephew, Samuel Carleton, in New Zealand, and a slew over the Atlantic. Ohio over all states saw most of my postal to and fro. Mail from my sister, Mrs Mary Eliza Munce, in Yellow Springs, Green County, evoked fond memory of bygone days. Each address exuded a fertile New World, from Horatio Faulkland, Berry Werry Creek, Pennsylvania, to H. Fletcher, Blossom Prairie, Texas.

They relit a slight envy within me. I had yearned to escape to the 'dear land o' freedom'. I even visualised my voyage in song: 'Verses written at a time the Bard was on the eve of emigration to America'. At the same time, by replies I learned the American dream wasn't all it seemed. My cronies relayed that this new habitat lacked some of the natural beauty of *hame*.

Among my most prized epistles are those from the 'Bard of Dunclug' hi'self, David Herbison. Once acquainted in senior years, I sent him several poetic salutations, seeking to strengthen bonds of bardship with my 'auldfarrant, oily rhyming buddie'. Imagine Blythe Robin all **kittled** up when Dunclug sent a public reply to print in the *Whig* in 18 & 74! From my post-Hogmanay greeting to him in '75:

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**“Bards are like squids that fight the conger / Their love of ink with years grows stronger.”**

'My wild harp Herbison I lift  
A Downshire **sang** to thee to drift  
A Christmas or a New-year's gift  
Dear poet mine  
To let you know while time rolls swift  
I still am thine.'



I vied for his attention and craved his approval with exotic lines from **Poesy's train**. 'Bards are like squids that fight the conger / Their love of ink with years grows stronger.' Strange to relate, the more I wrote to the 'staunch auld oak', the less he replied. And for all I invited, Dunclug nary to me in Moneyrea visited.

GLOSSARY: auldfarrant (sage, old-fashioned), kittled (excited/nervous), sang (song), Poesy's train (the art of poetry)



# THE FORGE



**E**very village has had at least one blacksmith for as long as I've known. The clang of the forge rang through my ears from my younger years. My father worked as a farmer and a gunsmith, and often had to call with the local blacksmith, Robert Grace, to repair tools. (When I was 'wee Bobby', I accidentally let off a gun behind John Poundley; it was awful **scarsome**.) Bobby got bigger, took over the farming and gunnery in time, and rarely a month would go by without my having to take equipment to be fixed with anvil, hammer and tongs.

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## "I doiter, stroit and striddle"

The guns I've made have helped many local farmers to keep crows at bay from their crops, and other pests – maybe some humans too! – from harming their livestock. Some gentlemen also use their 'Huddleston of Moneyrea' sporting guns for shooting game, a long tradition in the countryside.

Talking of local recreation and blacksmiths, I'll tell you something now that might surprise you. The game of 'long bullets' – what some polite people call 'road bowls' today – has been played on the local roads for the past two centuries, if not longer yet! Using solid iron round shots, like cannonballs, made in a forge, the menfolk of Moneyrea have been assembling for bullet-throwing contests in the long evenings for perhaps as long as Huddlestons have dwelt here.

Indeed, a long bullets game in Moneyrea in the year 1739 became a matter of some renown. One Saturday in June, some young men were throwing along the road near the Meeting House, when a man dressed in scarlet, apparently an army officer, spoke to them in French, and offered them gold to enlist. They responded by capturing him and handing him over for arrest!

The scores I watched in my youth started at what became known as 'Post Office corner'. Bullet-throwing could be as parlous as it sounds. Some residents lodged a petition for its prohibition in this area in 1825. Well I may rue they didn't succeed. Back about 1835, a 'mettle bullet' **dunted** my leg and **cowped** me. That left with me a slight limp and a nickname of 'Lame Bab'. Today, 'I **doiter**, **stroit**, and **striddle**,' but it's mostly due to my old age!

Anyway, where would the country be without its army of blacksmiths? Here a few lines I penned about their work in the forge:

'The worse o' wear here **spavied yads**.  
Wi' weel brush'd hair over bruises;

On **wham** the smith haes spent on shods,  
A week tae fit their **hovies**.  
Wi' ancient snouts nigh tae the grin,  
They're dreamin' as they travel;  
Wi' hoots an' spurs their whipper-in,  
Yet scarce can mak' them **kevel**,  
**Frae** sleep that day.'



GLOSSARY: scarsome (frightening), dunted (struck), cowped (knocked over), doiter (stumble), stroit (stagger), striddle (walk with legs apart), spavied yads (lame workhorses or mares), wham (whom), hovies (hooves), kevel (toss its head, as a horse does), frae (from)

# WEAVER'S COTTAGE



‘What makes Ulster prosperous  
And richer than the rest  
... Don’t tell your lordly neighbour tha’  
Lest she our wealth may tax  
But the secret is – it’s labour, Pat  
And trimming up of flax.’

‘Flax’, my song, hails the prize plant of the north, and the hard graft behind its yield. Lint, as we call it, employs many rural people, and lights up our landscape, lives and language. When in bloom from spring to summer, lint-bells paint fields a **bonnie** blue hue. Our lush soil is a laboratory of linen. Hark! From 15½ pecks of seed sown, one Moneyrea farmer reaped 160 stone of flax, and sold it for £118:6, one week in 1859! But it’s tiring, dirty work, as the pounding beat of these lays depicts:

‘Oh! The ploughing, sowing, growing  
And the weeding on the lea  
And the pulling, steeping, spreading  
And the weary folk that be  
And the drying and the tying  
And the hurrying to the mill  
And the roughing and the buffing  
And the dust that’s like to kill.’

I had training to instruct others in the development of flax. Even so, I’d try to dodge anyone who has been working in a lint-hole or dam where flax stalks are steeped – the smell is rank. Though the loom takes up a lot of space, handloom weaving in a cottage such as this trumps many other forms of work, being less physically exerting and less exposed to the elements. Still, it isn’t an easy process:

‘And the spinning and the winning  
And the weaving into **webs**  
And the beetling and the smalting  
And the wet folks and red **nebs**  
And the bleaching out and lapping  
Up of linen sweet and clean  
Till now as white as snow it glows  
That once as **lecks** was green.’

In their heyday, skilled weavers were in demand, and could profit more from loom than farm. They could also read a book while working! With the extra leisure time provided by the trade, weavers such as James Orr of Ballycarry and Hugh Porter of Moneyslane earned fame for their poetry and songs. I saw the ‘Weaver Poets’ as my peers, from similar stock and writing in local vernacular; and I saluted them in epistles for capturing audiences with the wonder and genius of our land.

Scottish poets inspired us all. The great Rabbin Burns ‘ably ... man’s heart defined’. ‘He **canty tauks** us like a fiddle / In a’ his musings,’ I paid tribute to ‘the Bard of Bards’. I even visited his birthplace and monument in Ayrshire. **Snools** call us ‘Scotch mimics’. They have me **deaved!**

When he lived, Burns was spurned; but they toast him ‘since he’s low among the urns’. I’ve been bold enough to say in debate that Burns devised few original rhythms, copying much from his compatriot, Robert Fergusson. We’ve all adopted old tunes and adapted lyrics to our places. I’m but a **brither** poet writing for Erin, just as Rab did for Caledonia.

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**“And the spinning  
and the winning /  
And the weaving  
into webs”**

GLOSSARY: **bonnie** (beautiful), **webs** (pieces of woven fabric), **nebs** (noses), **lecks** (leeks), **canty** (jolly), **tauks** (talks), **snools** (cowards), **deaved** (deafened, annoyed), **brither** (brother)

# NATIONAL SCHOOL



‘At Cowan’s School at Moneyrea  
 A romping lad he spent his youth  
 The **deuce** for **frollick**, sport and play  
 Yet still his heart held love and truth.  
 These were the days he knew no care  
 Of devilment he was the **quoin**  
 Big was the feat he would not dare  
 And ill the fight he would not join.

The National School is one of the most important buildings in any community.

I was fortunate in my learning. I was aged just 10 in 1824 when Rev. Blakeley moved to have a school built, at a cost of £265, to provide a ‘classical and mercantile education’ for the locality. Rev. James Cowan was principal, and it taught the basics of reading, writing and arithmetic, plus algebra, Euclid, geography, astronomy, French, Hebrew, Latin and Greek.

The **Teachin’ Hoose** catered for boys only at first; girls enrolled from the 1830s.

I was sad to hear of my old schoolmaster’s untimely demise in America, and wrote a poem in his memory, ‘On the Death of the Late James Cowan, Addressed to His Friends’.

Ireland’s national school system was established in 1831 to provide education to children aged 6-12. Our school, like many others, did not affiliate initially due to concerns over how religion would be taught. Rev. Blakely persuaded the governors to adopt national school status in 1842, while religious instruction was supplemented by Moneyrea Sunday School. The National Board curriculum imposed an imperial standard form of English, overriding local accent and tradition. It was too rigid for my liking: ‘Ye bleating goats that cram the schools / Who judge of every thing by rule’.

Other schoolmasters inspired odes from my quill too. ‘Epistle to my Worthy Friend The Poet, Henry Fletcher’, marked his retirement from Comber in the 1860s. Odd to relate, he left education to work in the mills, before emigrating. We had oft visited each other, and he was much missed:

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**“Ye bleating  
 goats that cram  
 the schools / Who  
 judge of every  
 thing by rule”**

‘Dear Fletcher, **denty** civil **boddie**  
 We better brains than e’er graced **noddy**  
 This day the Muse being gi’en to study  
 I dirty paper  
 And hand you **ower**, like witless baby  
 Her empty **clatter**.

... Scholastic rules though I sink under  
 And gi’e you errors by the hundre’  
 I hope on my poor lore you’ll ponder  
 And e’en forgi’e  
 Gramatic flaws and every blunder  
 That you may see.’

GLOSSARY: teachin’ hoose (schoolhouse), deuce (devil), frolick (fun), quoin (cornerstone), denty (pleasant), boddie (person), noddy (a light two-wheeled cab), ower (over), clatter (gossip).

# THE · HILL · COURSE



**O**f all the sights I've witnessed in three score and dozen twalmonths, few have vexed me so much as the recent arrival of hare-coursing to Pea Hill, Moneyrea.

I'm long opposed to any form of cruelty. My disdain for slavery and capital punishment is writ large. With the progress made by the Belfast Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals since the 1830s, I thought the most vicious blood-sports were in decline. Then a few months ago, a coursing event was fixed for fair Moneyrea for the first time. The organisers sprang from various other places, but chose to invade this serene habitat for their sordid **hurry-burry**, obscured from public view.

The display was hideous to observe. Poor **maukins**, trapped on Maxwell's Finnebrogue estate, were sent to wanton slaughter for the perverse pleasure of

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**“The knaves who'd thus slaughter or cruelly kill / The poor harmless Toaties by valley or hill”**

strangers, gamblers, shapers and **glypes** from 'the slums of Belfast'; for the profit of bookies, pickpockets, burglars and shouting programme-sellers; and for the publican, Magill, peddling puncheon. How could these **roystering swills** boast of their takings, banquet and bouse after this barbarity? Worse still, I spied local grey heads, church-going Arians and Seceders. I seethed. 'You'll ... ask God for mercy, when none you would grant.'

Far better keep greyhounds chasing mechanical hares, like brave Master Magrath, thrice Waterloo Cup winner and **ance** hero of my verse. No animal flesh need be gored for human sport. My poem, 'Moneyrea Hare Course Meeting, March 1886, or the Hare Murderers,' lays it bare in graphic detail:

'A box now was opened – poor puss was out pushed  
 Into a strange field, all **unscroged** and unbushed,  
 The dogs they are slipped, and they after her go,  
 And hark as she shrieks, in her agony and woe!  
 She runs and she runs, and she doubles and turns  
 Till into the dogs' mouths she reels as she mourns.  
 Oh! Hark you wild yell, and now hear her death squeal  
 As they tear her in two by the head and the heels. ...

Oh, butchery dire! oh, massacre base!  
 Such cold-blooded work even Hell would disgrace,  
 Have the Police no powers to step in and act  
 When these scions of Nero don't mercy respect?  
 The knaves who'd thus slaughter or cruelly [sic] kill  
 The poor harmless **Toaties** by valley or hill  
 Would slay, had they pluck, or could do it by stealth,  
 Men worthy and honoured for sake of their wealth.

Magill was the winner – how many got drunk  
 We need not decipher, with liquor all stunk:  
 All **drouthy** boys there, there were but few dry  
 And they **skared** with the skunks all those who could buy.  
 Yell threepence the half pint, malt fivence a glass –  
 The bluestone and arsenic long stuck in their **hause**  
 No wonder that next day so many did spew  
 All vomiting wildly the poisonous brew. ...'

GLOSSARY: twalmonths (years), hurry-burry (commotion), maukin (hare), glypes (idiots), roystering (noisy revelry), swills (heavy drinkers), bouse (drink in excess), ance (once), unscroged (unshrugged), Toaties (small creatures), drouthy (thirsty), skared (connected), hause (neck/throat)

# ORANGE·HALL



**M**oneyrea is a place of political complexity. Some sympathy for the 1798 Rising lingered here in my early decades, and Liberalism held sway. Orangeism developed in turn, but quite slowly in this area.

Orange parades were banned in the 1850s-60s, and some Moneyrea men were prosecuted for a breach. Their hall was opened in 1878, giving a proper place for two local lodges to meet, away from pubs, and as such was part of Orangeism's own 'reformation'. More Protestants have taken up the sash in response to the advance of Irish nationalism in recent years. Still I stand apart. My aversion to the Order is clear in my poem, 'The Great Orange Meeting at **Rowdydowe Brae**'.

My identity is complex, and I fit in no party box. 'A Protestant I am unto the backbone,' my verse avers; and 'I am a bard of Erin's Isle' too. My reading of history leads me to lament that Albion 'reft all the soil from the chiefs she betrayed / And left the poor natives without lands or home'.

Mind you, we haven't been the worst treated in Moneyrea. When 'Famine ... shed her foul breath o'er the land,' Rev. Blakely was a strong advocate for

time-honoured 'Ulster Custom' and the Ulster Tenant Right Association set up by Sharman Crawford of Crawfordsburn. And even in the darkest years, Lord Dungannon never exacted the last shilling from tenants. Upon his death in 1862, I praised 'one of Ireland's noblest landlords' at a public meeting and in strains:

'My **blissin**'s on my auld lan'lord  
 He was **baith** good and comely  
 'Twas his delight to bread afford  
 For a' his tenant family'.

'Then came the knave that us enslaved,' his heir, Lord Edwin Hill-Trevor. 'The Poor, Downtrodden Farmer', my song, tells we made the land all that it is. 'We've **bigged** the hooses, hewed the woods / And **blawed** the rocks sae gruesome.' We 'daily toil from sun to sun / An' tae the **strae** gang stervin'.' Recompense is our deserving. But if we can't pay the rack-rent, our lord 'tauks about eviction'.

That's why 'Fairplay' is still my catchcry against gentry and grand juries, and Tenant Right my ultimate cause. To my chagrin, its local champion, Liberal W. D. Andrews of Comber, lost to Lord Castlereagh in the 1878 Down by-election, through a 'triple alliance' of Toryism, Orangeism and Home Rule **lickplates**. I mocked this 'Curious Marriage' in metre:

'Green and Orange **rapparees** –  
 C-----, along wi' these [Castlereagh]  
 Hoist your flag unto the breeze  
 You're pledged unto the rowdies.  
 Redress their woes, – they well you helped  
 Than party minions, **tanned or kelped**,  
 Nae better dogs for barking whelped,  
 Or supping **slops** or **crowdies**.'

I hailed the Land Act of 1881 and Prime Minister Gladstone for piloting peasant proprietorship – 'Liberty has got the **heeze** / Tyranny has got the squeeze'. But the vote was extended too far. 'The Election 1885 – the newly enfranchised', my poem, maligns 'those poor clegs wi' their bare feet and legs, / And those blood sucking spiders how loud they can bray; / A rabble o' boys amid cursing and noise ...'. An electorate tripled with suchlike, voting on sectarian lines, has riven factions orange and green, leaving no glee for in-between. Will we see free thinkers like me in Down in future?

GLOSSARY: Rowdydowe (rumpus or noise, like a drum), brae (brow or slope of a hill), blissin's (blessings), baith (both), bigged (built), blawed (blown (up), strae (straw), lickplates (sycophants), rapparees (bandits), tanned or kelped (old or young), slops (dregs), crowdies (gruel), heeze (hoist, impetus)

# FARMHOUSE



**M**y home – ‘Anes Ain Native Lodge’ – in the townland of Moneyrea is a typical Ulster farmhouse of its day. It has two storeys, **theek** and peat-brick walls plastered with a mixture of lime and **claber** or **sharn**. In the upper room of an adjoining outhouse, I’ve plied my trade, fitting wooden stocks to guns on a two-plank workbench that has a peculiar vice to hold guns. It’s the centre of my world: a place holding family memory and deep resonance, my base for business and a place for dreaming.

‘Oh! When I’m at home I can roam through the fields,  
Without either heartbreak or hardship;  
No sore heart have I, not to-morrow pain’d head,  
Nor ought sad to trouble my bardship;  
I can laugh in the face of my neighbours like fun,  
Nor neighbours have I that will shun me;  
I’m never so happy as when I’m at home,  
And there with my old clothes on me.’

Some folk, seeing my attire and **clarty** cart, say I’m **throughither**, unfit for farm or verse. Well, in the fields I’ve fertile soil for odes to grow, amid striving to and fro.

Often I take a notebook to pasture, to capture fleeting couplets at work. I toil by day, I scribe by night in upstairs study. That’s my balance.

The **pleugh** or the harrow my hale o’ employment,  
The Muse cheers me up as I’m drudgin’ away;  
And when to my **riggin’** in sheugh I am diggin’,  
While Care **wad** me worry, she keeps her at bay.

My strains empathise with fellow tillers of the land – like ‘Sammy, the farmer, who’s harassed wi’ rise rents, / And Jonnie, the slave, who maun toil until **dee**.’ While I laud their stoic dignity, I urge them to stop ‘bending the knee’ to the rich folk, who would ‘Aye tak’ the crame off poor men’s tay’.

‘There’s many **braw** nobles and lords round the empire,  
And many more gentles fu’ high in degree;  
Yet what have these nobles or gents e’er done for me?  
I care for naebody cares not for me.’

Time was, in early adulthood, I pondered giving up farming for adventure abroad or a job building for the Belfast and County Down Railway line. With age comes wisdom, however, and I grew to accept my yoke as a blessing to harmonise with nature. My ‘Epistle to an old Schoolfellow’ advises a trained minister who quit to become a farmer: ‘But when to it you’re inured, / You’ll far happier be, / Than monk of college ape, immured / Of gospel pedigree.’ I exalt the joy that rural swains can find in every hue that decks the fields. ‘All seasons bring reasons / To please the rustic hind’. ‘Far, **farder** sunk in care’ are the rich and great. ‘Not lang since, my lord lost at cards / Five tounlands for his fun.’

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**“Oh! When I’m  
at home I can  
roam through the  
fields, / Without  
either heartbreak  
or hardship”**

My few **beece** beat humans for honesty. Years ago a man from Malone, near Belfast, sold me a cow, but it was sick, so I took him to law and got £3 back. And I announced 5 of my kye ‘Strayed or Stolen’ in ‘57. Animals slog hard for our gain and shouldn’t be ill **taskit**. ‘Poor Rabin’s Soliloquy over his dead cow’ eulogises ‘my guid auld coo’, who filled the ‘nine quart can’ (churn) for 13 years, and had ‘ten bull calfs, the last a **quey**’. I vowed to ‘bury you **dacent**’ in a grave, no **trashtrie** heap or feeding trough; and ‘No Knacker’s **whittle** your flesh shall **hash**.’

GLOSSARY: anes ain (one’s own), theek (thatch), claber (mud), sharn (manure), clarty (muddy), throughither (untidy), pleugh (plough), riggin’ (backbone), wad (would), dee (die), braw (fine/brave), crame (cream), tay (tea), farder (farther), beece (beasts, usually cattle), taskit (overworked), quey (heifer), dacent (decently), trashtrie (rubbish), whittle (carving knife), hash (slice)

# ANCIENT·TOMB·STONES &·APPARITIONS



**A**ncient monuments make me dream. This court tomb was known as ‘the Giant’s Grave’ in its original location. It brings to mind the megalithic dolmen called the Kempe Stones, just east of Dundonald. They stand in the townland called Greengraves, though I used its old Irish name, meaning ‘Town of the Dolmen’, at the start of my poem, ‘The Kempe Stones – An Apparition’:

‘In Baille-clough-togal a long time ago  
Two mighty giants in mortal feud met  
A **Kempe** and a **Kern** their valour to show  
And the strife was so great Time will ne’er it forget  
They fought for the lands lay ’tween Bangor and Struel  
’Twere later still owned by the brave Con O Neill.’

‘The Kempe was a Norman,’ I wrote, ‘the Kern was a Celt.’ I’ll spare you the gory details, but the Kern slayed the Kempe, the Celts buried him and raised him a tomb before holding a banquet. The Kempe giant became local legend. But my poem tells of how a modern bard, Neal Gaw, who had ridiculed this legend, was

passing by one night when a gigantic figure appeared to him, gave him a scroll with lyrics, and sang a ‘Giants’ Song’. Revealing himself as the entombed giant ‘whom Finn MacCool slew’, he declared remorse for past crimes: ‘Now, thank God, I see the light.’ As they approached Scrabo Hill, off the giant flew: ‘I’m summoned afar to Sprite Revels in Skye.’

My slumbers are replete with eerie reverie. ‘The Nightmare: A Vision, or Hell and Heaven’, spans 31 pages, citing Cerberus the fabled three-headed dog; Beelzebub, Jesus and a biblical cast; even Land Leaguers Michael Davitt and C. S. Parnell (who visited Moneyrea in 1882 when invited by our own Rev. Rylett); and a sight of my late daughter – ‘As she once sang to her **da**’ ... / There I saw my Mary dear’ – upon which I awoke to find, ‘**Whar** was I, **wi**’ a’ this **fyke**, / But upon **Jone** Dempster’s dyke.’

Nature provides an entryway to the supernatural world, as we heard in stories of our rearing. Some trees are magical, we learned. As a young poet I ‘cursed the hand that thinned the grove / The **gorb** upturned the fairy **dell**.’ My verses include country encounters with fantastic characters and dialect words. **Broonies**, fairies, **kelpies**, witches, warlocks, the Phooka, Banshees, and **tha Deel**, **Auld Clooty** – these creatures of the night run through my **flysome** tales. ‘The Wail of Granuail’ tells of an ‘Angel vision’ of the feted ‘Pirate Queen’ of the west. I recount also an apparition of Rev. Blakely among the tombstones of Moneyrea; and of one at the ‘Lang X’ crossroads, where my body felt overcome, I had a vision of a ‘preaching sprite’, heard a voice speaking from a thorn bush, and fell ‘helpless as a child’ until:

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**“Whar was I  
wi’ a’ this fyke, /  
But upon Jone  
Dempster’s dyke.”**

‘Now something like a bonnie bird  
I **wat**, **wi**’ glancing e’e  
Again cried ‘cuckoo’ in its mirth  
And next the stars did flee  
And as I watched frae where I lay  
It left a streak behind  
Till diving in the Milky-way  
It left me dark and blind.’

GLOSSARY: Kempe (big stone/prehistoric tomb), Kern (Irish soldier or warrior), da’ (father), whar (where), fyke (commotion), Jone (John), gorb (greedy person), dell (grassy hollow), broonies (a household sprite), kelpies (water spirits), tha Deel, Auld Clooty (the Devil), flysome (frightful), wat (what)

## THE FLOWING·STREAM

**A**h! The gentle trickle of a stream flowing is one of the sweetest rural sounds. The landscape in all its allure has provided my livelihood, the space for my leisure and the place where my imagination roamed freely as a bard, to write and sing about my native land. I learned to understand the play of the seasons and day's turn to the **gloamin'** and night. I sharpened my senses to observe everything around me and let words follow the sights and sounds I encountered. Often these poems became songs. Creevy **Ha'** was a magical place to me. One gloamin' I remember the orchestra of corncraiks, **gowks**, **throstles** and robins that sang as night fell:



The eve got dusk, the wind was still  
The Corncraik tuned her **haverl** lyre,  
And far away o'er **Seefar-Hill**,\*  
The Cuckoo's chorus joined the choir;  
The thrush sang drowsy day to rest,  
In Anderson's lone sylvan **shaw**;  
And onward, as I homeward pressed,  
The Redbreast sung by Creevy **Ha'**.

\* 'See Far' (across to Scotland)

The stream is also a central motif of my grand poem, 'Dodderly Willowaim'. It's my attempt to outdo Burns's epic *Tam O Shanter*. Dodderly, like heroic Tam, sets out for home on a dark winter night:

The nights get **crabbit**, dark, an' bleak,  
The days but **doncy shortlin' peep**;  
While Summer cheers the southern Pole  
And warm the Antarctic regions Sol;  
While caul' December's **cranreuch** breath,  
Does **wreaselin** freeze the faded heath; ...

Despite a goodly amount of drink in him, the dark night proves very frightening. I embroidered local myths and features – such as 'the Onset', a farmyard on the Ballykeel Road edge of Moneyrea – into the tale to enhance the sense of eerie associations about the place.

Fast shou'derin' up against the win',  
He **lae's** the onset far behin':  
By this he's by no **kennin'** whar,  
The fairies **coblin'** Sam did **scaur**;  
And ower the dyke an' through the **scrogs**,  
Whar seen **hell's-fins** in shape o' hogs;  
Gaun doon the lowlan' south the glen,  
Whar witchin' Pegg chang'd tae a hen;  
Now ower the cav' **know** south the green,  
Whar Hainly's ghost was aften seen,  
An' **straught fornent** the gibbet moat,  
Whar Clooty's tracks stan's in the rock;  
Right left the wee **waul** in the fen;  
Whar **madwife** Jinsy had her den.

To make matters worse, Dodderly encounters legions of hellish creatures holding court by night. Diverted by their deliberations, he gives away his hiding place. They chase him and his only hope is to get across a flowing stream or river where the hosts of hell were not permitted to cross. The poem satirised the goings-on of the Presbyterian General Assembly, though you need not be aware of these to enjoy the fun. He makes his escape, through **bosky** wilds **hastit** for ten miles, at last ascending the **st'est**, '**heaghmost** peak o' Devis' (Divis mountain).

GLOSSARY: gloamin' (dusk), Ha' (Hall/House), gowks (cuckoos), throstles (thrushes), haverl (garrulous), shaw (small wood), crabbit (rough), doncy shortlin' peep (sickly, short appearance), caul' (cold), cranreuch (hoar-frost), wreaselin (crackling), lae's (leaves), kennin' (knowing), coblin' (pelting with stones or peat), scaur (scare), scrogs (stunted trees, bushes, shrubs), hell's-fins (hell's fiends), know (hillock, often associated with fairies), straught fornent (straight in front of), waul (a natural spring that forms a pool), madwife (mad woman), bosky (bushy), hastit (hastened), st'est (steepest), heaghmost (highest)



# CORN·MILL

**T**his corn mill is one of three mills you'll see on your rambles today. County Down has mills aplenty, due to our fairly dry climate and fertile soil growing a rich harvest of crops. Corn, wheat, oats, barley and potatoes are atop the crops we raise and reap. (And 'The **Pappling** o' the **Prittaes**' is the prettiest sound of hame. No more 'prashnagh broes we get to sup' as we had to do when blight struck.)

Curiously, the 'Money' in Moneyrea denotes *Móna(i)dh* – 'bog' if you take the Irish explanation, or 'heath' from Scottish Gaelic. That's Moneyrea, looking either way! I've inclined to the former, calling it the 'Red Bog' – though some experts would quibble with my choice of colour – as great quantities of turf are sent from here to Belfast and other places to light the fires of industry.

Anyhow, milling has been a great boon to the country this century, as a source of much employment and food, though the export of corn caused great distress during the Great Famine. That's why mills have featured in several of my rhymes. The lines, 'The clacking o' the Mill ... and the reek o' the kil' (kiln), convey a sense of the sound and smell of the place; but the **stour** was blinding!

'The Miller o' County Down' is a poem that tells the tale of an 'arch rogue'




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**“And the mair  
that he took,  
the ould souter, /  
Mair sly grew he  
Miller o' Down.”**

of 'auld times' called 'Habbe' (short for Herbert). There was 'Nae mill but his ain for miles roun'. His millrace, carrying the water to power the waterwheel, often flooded the farms around, though the **sloper** cared not. Worse again, he **reaved** some of the corn that local farmers gave him to grind.

'Thus on went the mill wi' a flurry  
The **mootre** he cast in the ark  
He whistled and sang in his hurry  
And aye kept the mill in the dark.  
A **bonnock** he took besides mootre  
**Ilk melder** he taxed as he groun'  
And the **mair** that he took, the ould **souter**,  
Mair sly grew the Miller o' Down.'

Eventually, the people of the **clachan** found out about the **progs**, and sought vengeance:

'Law yet they would ha'e for his rogueing  
He'd stole by the **stane**, no the poun'  
And after their **nieves** in him **bogeing**  
They left the Auld Miller o' Down.'

I claimed this was a 'true story'. Attacks on mills and farms were not unusual during times of want. In November 1848, a stack of oats in Rev. Blakely's yard at Creevy Hall were put on fire. A month after, on Christenmas night, Ballyknockan Corn Mill, just over a couple of miles away and drawing from a weir at Monlough in the townland next to us, was set on fire. Mr Porter, who ran the mill, gave up his tenancy soon after. But there's no connection between Porter and poem, of course!

Lest you think me mean, two more of my ballads honoured 'The **Couthie** Miller', Jock of Granshaw shaws; and 'The Lass o' Yonder Mill'. They were two **loosome** characters – no relations, mind!

GLOSSARY: pappling (boiling sound), prittaes (potatoes), prashnagh broes (oatmeal gruel), stour (cloud of dust), sloper (defrauder/idler), reaved (stole), mootre (the toll of meal taken by the miller as payment for grinding the corn), bonnock (oatmeal cake baked on a griddle), ilk (each), melder (meal made from a household's portion ground at mill), mair (more), souter (cobbler – then used as a term of abuse), clachan (hamlet/cluster of stones or houses), progs (plundered foods), stane (stone), nieves (fists), bogeing (sinking), couthie (agreeable), looseome (loveable)

# DRAPER'S SHOP & WEAVER'S SHED



**I**wrote a solid ream on the pursuit of love. This drapery and weaver's shed behind it prompts me to think of the poem, 'The Tailor twinned the Weaver'. Jack Wabster 'wooded a bonnie lass / And for her he was dying,' but a tailor came along and prised her from him. Jack learnt his lesson:

'When bonnie girls you **gang** to woo  
Boys, never gang **deleery**,  
The cheery way is aye the best  
And ne'er be rake or **reever**  
Should love you test, aye mind the rest  
How Tailor **twinned** the Weaver.'

Twelve dozen and more of my compositions, mostly songs, are on love themes. Song came naturally to me, as I grew up around lyrics and melody. We sang to pass time in work and in our play, and our church tradition even has singing schools to learn the Psalms where we improvised words to fit the tunes. Besides the sacred, we sang everyday airs by cosy **ingle** and heard them through hedgerows and on streets. Music was our great melting pot as Irish, Scotch and English tunes flowed together.

'I **anna** good at singing songs / I'm better at the makin'.' When I set to writing songs, I used many of the airs that seemed to fill the countryside, kept alive by family or community customs. If I had the money, I could buy songbooks and anthologies. Melodious Thomas Moore was my musical hero. Broadsheets and chapbooks were cheaper sources of inspiration. Or else I could listen at roadside **gaiterins** and **kaylies** in farmhouses, ready to trade tunes and songs I knew for those of other players. When writing song lyrics down, I've recorded the tune too so others could learn and sing it.

Like many songsters before me, I dedicated my love ballads to women I wanted to impress, such as in 'A Country Lass, My Love Sae Bra':

A country lass, my love sae **bra**,  
Sae fair's nae **ither hissy**, O,  
And oh! her mind's sae sweet o'er a'  
It peerless makes my **Leezy**, O.'

Recording local place is significant for the making of original work, and much valued by audiences. So many lasses and places are named, you'd think I had a girl in every town. 'The Lass of the Falls' is pretty Jane Hamill.

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**"Should love you  
test, aye mind  
the rest / How  
Tailor twinned  
the Weaver."**

Other 'Lass of' titles include Castleconnor, Carrigranny, Drumarragh, Drumgeen, the Knock, Kirmavey, the Round Hill, Catherwood's Hill and Moneyrea itself. There's 'The Maid of Tullyquilly', one on Cloughy Shore, and another by Banks of Bann. Then add 'The Roe of Girvan Vale', 'The Lovely Pink of Ballyhay', 'The Flower o' Melisle', 'Antrim Bella', 'Bangor Kate', 'Carryduff Star', 'Downshire Nannie', et cetera. Most were made up, but some lived at large, even the odd **targe**!

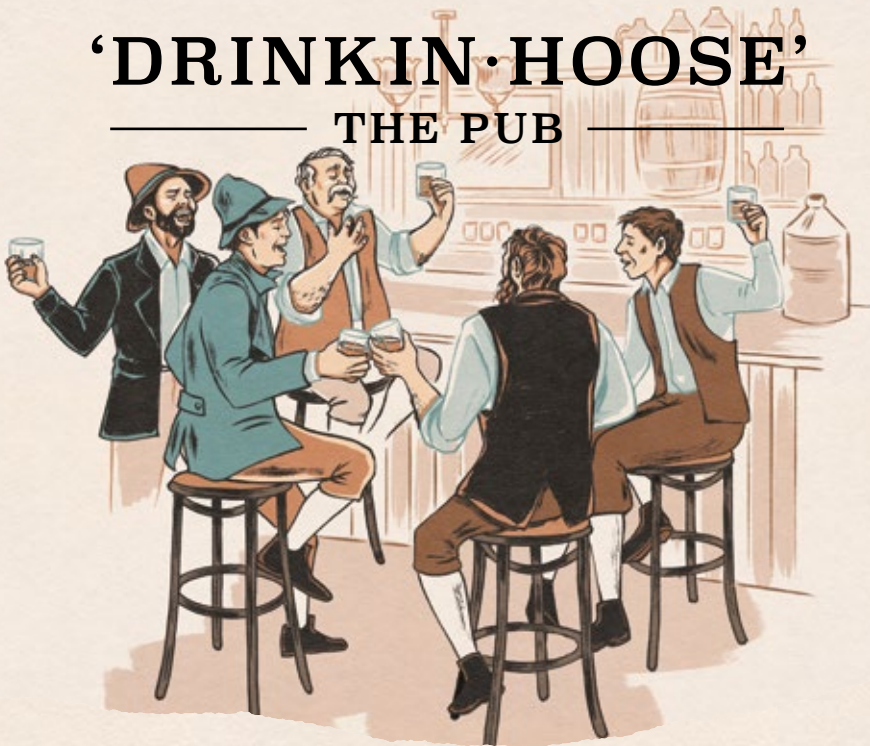
Oddly, when I wed at last in 1861, at a ripe 47, my wife was a Moneyrea lass. The Poet's Queen was just 19, and I wrote a song for her: 'There is a star could wile me hame / The magnet Margaret Jane.'

'But och, **alack!** the time's awa' / When Muse an' Music flourished.' Modern folks would sooner spend on 'Vile Opera imps an' lawyer pimps ... / Than pay for Bards for singin'.'

GLOSSARY: gang (go), deleery (delirious), reever (robber), twinned (robbed), ingle (hearth fire), anna (am not), gaiterins (gatherings), kaylies (social visits), bra' (fine), ither (other), hissy (giddy woman), Leezy (diminutive form of Elizabeth), targe (scolding woman), alack (alas)

# 'DRINKIN' HOOSE'

## THE PUB



'Of all the friends that e'er I've had,  
Commend me to the grog,  
The friend that ne'er deceived me –  
The friend in the jug,  
The friend in the jug, my **joes** ...'

I owe much **splore** to mirthful liquor. So paeans to drink are sprinkled through my corpus. These ditties capture my own happy memories, and urge others to keep up the singing tradition when they meet together for country crack and merriment. 'Come fill your cups, you hearty bucks,' I invoked in several numbers, in one form or another. Here's a short blast of 'O! Whiskey my Darlin' &c.:

'**Gie** me the Cork **caver**, wi' mountain dew flavour,  
The *poteen* tae drink, an' my lassie alang;  
Tho' **warls** care may wreck me, it ne'er can heartbrack me,  
Sae lang as the usquebaugh stifles my **rang**.  
O' a toss o' my head for a' their **state denties**, &c.

*Poteen* is still brewed in many parts, albeit **agin'** the law. Its name comes from the Irish language, as does *usquebaugh*, or *uisce bheatha* in pure form, meaning 'water of life'. Gaelic-origin words yet poured from the mouths of plain folk in my times, so I recorded them. 'O'er the "dushadorah" we'll chorus,' I wrote, referring to the *deoch an doris*, which means 'drink of the door' literally – a parting glass, if you wish. Elsewhere, 'Mavourneen! Acushla ... , aroon!' are three invocations of 'my darling' in the first line of 'Song of the Wee Bird'. 'Ma bouchal', meaning 'my boy', is dropped in elsewhere, and other drinking scenes had words such as 'skean' (knife) and 'mishnough' (courage) from Irish.

But back to **coges** I return. 'A Wee **Drap** o' Auld Comber, Tam', acclaims in song our locally distilled whiskey. Equally it defines my measure. Moderation is my watchword, not total abstinence. You'll see a Catholic church just down the road. Well, after Fr Mathew stormed northward on his sobriety crusade, I wrote a song in 1844, 'Teatotal, oh! the grave ha-boy'. 'Teatotal yet the swadling brat / Shall come to nought and ruin,' I proclaimed, adding that Noah and King David 'loved the drap to **pree**'.

You may also spy a temperance hall on your way home today. I've dipped my quill in defiance at the Protestant prohibitionists too:

### "Teatotal, oh! the grave ha-boy"

'Your 'Bands of Hope' may rave, whine, and mope,  
O'er the crimes beset Earth **sairly**  
But the 'Marriage Feast' spite o' knave or priest  
Sanctions the brew o' the barley.'

At the same time, I shun going on **the scud**. Keeping my senses takes me closer to God, while I've seen too many lives drunk to **mogher**. The moral of my poem, 'The Drunkard's Complaint', is in false friends, 'sotting away in the height of debauchery', addiction, and an inheritance reduced to a **shigher-shaughher**.

'A habit begun is not easily conquered,  
Especially in youth, when the spirits are gay;  
And day to day squandering my time on **the fuddle**,  
At last to the Lion I became a prey.'

GLOSSARY: joes (darlings), splore (frolics, carousal), caver (presumed: illicit drink), gie (give), warls (world's), rang (rank, position or status), state denties (nice things (dainties) in the country), agin' (against), coges (wooden drinking vessel), drap (drop), pree (sample), sairly (sorely), the scud / the fuddle (drinking sprees), mogher (a mess), shigher-shaughher (ruin)

# THE DISPENSARY



**L**adies and gentlemen here today, if I could dispense one piece of wisdom for the future, it would be this: drink salts. Seniority has schooled me of salts' supremacy over all medicinal drugs. Natural remedies are the purest, simplest, cheapest and best solution for any ailment.

I've seen apothecaries and quackeries passing off every sort of brew and pill at great cost to the ill and desperate, who need only have supped a ha'pence-worth of Epsom salts to recuperate.

I extolled the virtues in verse with some levity. 'On Salts' is original, drawn from a true story, and has a smatter of Scots and silliness. A guid bard should bathe in the lot. A dose of stanzas for you now:

---

**“Drink Salts,  
drink Salts, my  
freens, yeir fill, /  
An' crystal water  
frae the rill; / Ye'll  
lang respect yeir  
hale an' weel”**

'Ye Doctors 'mid yeir trampin' rife,  
'Mang lad an' lass, an' man an' wife,  
The king o' Doctors in a trice,  
Is guid clean Salts.  
Gie them the preference – meed o' life,  
An' health results. ...

Be honest, men, nor play the rogue,  
Nae mair e'en bruise the snake or toad;  
(An' for their hearts bluid to corrode,)  
Or poisonous smalts:  
Stan' teughly tae the healin' trade,  
An' order Salts.

Yeir this drug rid, the tither blue,  
An' white an' green, an' yellow too;  
An' then yeir drawers a motled vow!  
Wi' cunnin' names;  
But **cannie** notes the **sleekit** crew,  
Wi' a' yeir schemes. ...

Us poets, poor discernin' buddies,  
Are aft annoy'd amid our studies;  
By ane sae vile, the plague o' **caddies**,  
Ca'd Indigestion: –  
Salts are the boys that cleans the haggish,  
An' **tooms** the **brustin'**.

Whan head or gut ache **sair** ye bothers,  
Or pains in rumps, or stuffin' mothers;  
**Pit** Salts just on the trail my brithers –  
Wi' stink an' win'; –  
Just hiss'n' like a bag o' ethers,  
Disease is gone. ...

A wee bit ower, an' time tae trickle,  
Oh! hear his tripes as rum'lin' keckle;  
Away it goes wi' row't an' rattle,  
An' rainbow thun'er;

An' tooms the brute – **losh!** losh! how **muckle**,  
O' perfect **scunner**.

Whan toddlin' **weanies** tak' the **dwam**,  
The cheapest Doctor's aye at han';  
Just kilt their coaties up them roun,  
Nor fear the ail:  
But pour the potent liquid doon,  
An' soon they're hale. ...

Drink Salts, drink Salts, my freens, yeir fill,  
An' crystal water frae the rill;  
Ye'll lang respect yeir hale an' weel,  
Nor **tine** yeir bliss;  
An' fin' my doctorship an' skill  
No far amiss. ...

## POSTSCRIPT

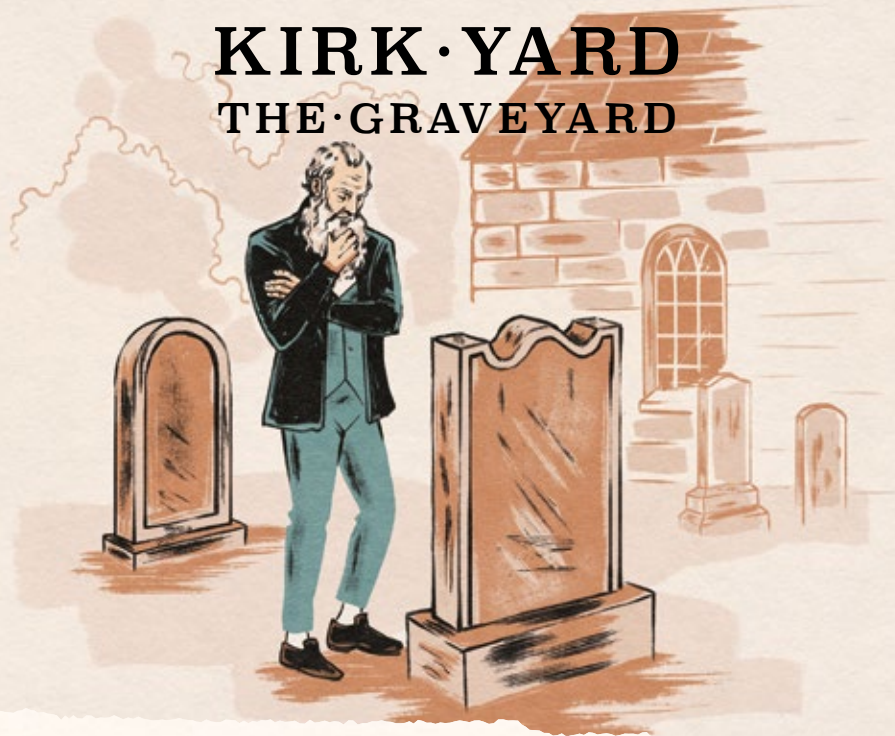
I'm much indebted tae ye madam,  
An' for the physic ye sent Rabin,  
May never sorrow bite yeir **droddum**;  
But happ'ly blest,  
Tae you may still turn fortune's totum,  
A lucky cast. ...

Ye'd thocht **ae** time my guts war churnin',  
Anither time I was a' **barmin'**;  
A third, a rowtin' till I's turnin',  
Sae rude in manner:  
While growl'd the win' like **Mons Meg** stormin'  
Or distant thunder.

But ower my **thrap** a wee bit doon,  
A wee drap drink my **drouth** tae droon;  
Och, **whishu!** Care struck up her tune,  
Ye may gie't credence;  
Savin' yeir present, at the **grun'**  
I got a **redence**.

GLOSSARY: cannie (wise), sleekit (sly), caddies (odd-job men), tooms (empties), brustin' (bursting), sair (sore), pit (put), losh! (expression of surprise), muckle (much), scunner (nausea), weanies (infants), dwam (weak turn/fainting/fit), rill (stream), tine (destroy), droddum (buttocks), ae (of), barmin' (fretting/fuming), Mons Meg (a famous cannon in Edinburgh), thrap (throat), drouth (thirst), wishu! (be quiet!), grun' (ground), redence (riddance)

# KIRK · YARD THE · GRAVEYARD



‘The auld kirk yard to me aye dear  
Whar nestles a’ my kin  
Oh often as I pass the same  
I ower the **wa’s keek** in’

I wrote a **whean** of strains about death. Some were of a light-hearted nature. ‘Epitaph to the Sexton of Moneyrea’ celebrates the very grave-digger:

‘Below these sods lies **lee** and low,  
The remains of Jonathan Gregg,  
Wha **’mang** prayers and preachers spent his life,  
And making the **deed** folk’s bed,  
He’s rotten now, and in the **mouls**,  
Wha buried ithers to rot—  
... I’d rather many a ane had **deeid**,  
As poor auld Jonathan Gregg.’

Passing years bring us ever closer to family graves. The Huddleston headstone was erected after my older brother James died in 1836, aged just 25. My parents, James and Agnes, both reached old age, and ‘now **moulder** beneath the turf’ too. This inscription may read a little flippant, but it’s a popular epitaph of its epoch. No larking, the pain persists. From ‘A Poet’s Lament for his Dead Parents’:

‘Tis ten long years since father fled  
And mother since has dropt from me  
An only brother earlier dead  
My young heart steeped in misery.  
And still remains with me the sting ...’

Losing my daughter, of but 9 years, a decade ago in ’67, hit hardest. Her elegy is ‘Mary on the Brain’:

‘Drear is my day, an’ lone the way  
Since I ha’e lost my **wean**  
Her prattle **swae** was company meet  
Her kiss and hug my gain ...’

From great grief came deep empathy for others. I wrote a memorial tribute upon the deaths of young daughters of my old cronies, Gawn Orr and Henry Fletcher. ‘A Dolefu’ Book’ contains my reflections on death, firstly ‘The Suicide’ and ‘Lamentation for President Garfield’, assassinated in 1881. And now in my vintage years, I’ve had a sad epiphany, ‘My freens all gane, I am left **alane**’.

Having written legion obituaries, I pray for one last to close – my own! I wrote ‘Epitaph for the Author’ back in 1846, still shy of 30; yet let it be a coda on a life’s quest, spared the yoke of renown:

‘But what is life? a bubble on a stream!  
And what is fame? an idiot’s fleeting laugh!  
Then, reader pause, before his race you run:  
Think on the thorny path you have to plod,  
... ’Tis man’s best study how to serve his God.’

GLOSSARY: wa’s (walls), keek (peep), whean (many), lee (sheltered, calm), ’mang (among), deed (dead), mouls (clay/earth), deeid (died), moulder (rot), wean (child), swae (sweet), alane (alone)

# Fare-ye-weel!

‘And let him know my songs and strains  
Are thousands strong – but where’s my gains?  
I’d print a book, but who’s to pay  
I’ll never beg nor borrow nae  
Yet some may ower my pages craw  
When I’m in dust, and long awa’.’

From ‘Epistle to Thomas Andrews Esq., The Mill, Comber’

## **HUDDLESTON MANUSCRIPTS, THE ULSTER LANGUAGE & DIALECT ARCHIVE**

The Robert Huddleston papers are held in the Ulster Language and Dialect Archive at National Museums NI Library, Cultra

The other significant collections include papers and glossaries relating to:

- G. B. Adams (1917-81), original Curator of the Ulster Dialect Archive at Ulster Folk Museum
- Robert J. Gregg (1912-1998), Glenoe, Larne
- Sir John Byers (1853-1920), Queen’s University Belfast
- Rev. W. F. Marshall (1888-1959), Sixmilecross
- Dr Robert L. Moore (1862-1946), Bangor
- Matthew Montgomery (1874-1959), Ballymena

You’re welcome to consult these papers for research by prior appointment, Monday-Friday, 10.00-17.00. Contact: [library.archives@nationalmuseumsni.org](mailto:library.archives@nationalmuseumsni.org)

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**ROBERT HUDDLESTON**  
**'The Bard of Moneyrea'**

Born 5 April 1814 | Died 15 February 1887  
Moulders in Moneyrea