

THE ROYAL
SOCIETY
OF EDINBURGH

ROBERT BURNS IN GLOBAL CULTURE



Conference Report

Friday 23 January 2009

The Royal Society of Edinburgh

22-26 George Street

Edinburgh, EH2 2PQ



Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Photographs courtesy of London Burns Society (Left)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Royal Society of Edinburgh acknowledges the help and support of the following organisations in bringing this event together:

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Robert Burns in Global Culture

Report by Jennifer Trueland

To mark the 250th anniversary of Robert Burns, the Royal Society of Edinburgh organised a number of events, including an important one-day conference on the poet's place in global culture. Leading Burns scholars from Scotland and around the world contributed to the event, both as speakers and in floor discussions. Topics included the role of Burns in Scotland's image abroad, his place in history and contemporary culture and the continuing celebration of the man and his works. The audience heard about Burns statues in Canada and America, Burns's influence on the rise and fall of the British Empire and his role in European democracy. Delegates were also shown direct evidence of his influence on contemporary American culture in the form of the recent film of *Sex and the City* – and heard about his potential part in the creation of Mickey Mouse.

Other events organised by the RSE to celebrate the poet's birthday included a Burns supper, a concert and a lecture from the renowned writer Neal Ascherson, a report of which can also be found on the RSE website.

Theme 1: Reception of Burns in Global Culture

Professor Nigel Leask FRSE, University of Glasgow

Burns creates problems for those who try to place him in a colonial context. On the one hand, he wrote beautifully about the plight of the slave, but against that, he planned at one point to emigrate to Jamaica, where his job would most likely have been that of slave-driver. Professor Leask made the intriguing suggestion that in the light of the Clan Campbell networks in Jamaica, his marriage to Mary Campbell shortly before his departure, might have been advantageous in practical terms, although of course primarily dictated by romantic motives

Professor Leask looked in general at Scotland's role in British empire building, and homed in on Burns's own particular case. Despite the inherent contradictions in Burns's life, poetry and letters, Professor Leask contended that his work offered resources to those who wanted to resist colonial power. So Burns's poetry influenced, for example, the thinkers behind 19th century Bengali nationalism, at the same time as it promoted a Scottish identity in the empire.

Without excusing Burns's plans to go to Jamaica, Professor Leask gave them an economic context. Scots in Burns's position couldn't afford to have a conscience about slavery and, in any case, their chances of surviving in Jamaica were not good. As a conclusion, Professor Leask spoke of the contribution made to establishing the Empire by Burns's children – while his poetry helped inspire its downfall.

Professor Ronald Jack FRSE, University of Edinburgh

Professor Jack spoke about an internet project which is helping to map and foster Burns's international presence. The Bibliography of Scottish Literature in Translation (BOSLIT) is an online resource hosted by the National Library of Scotland. With more than 25,000 records showing where and by whom Scottish literature has been translated, the website is a useful tool for academics, writers, translators and others.

Professor Jack described it as a 'uniquely rich database', but said it had faced, and still does face, challenges in getting funding. This is a shame, he said, particularly as the resource offers a valuable international perspective on Scottish literature.

Burns accounts for the second highest number of records for an individual author on BOSLIT, with more than 3,000 translations in languages including German, Danish, Russian and French. Professor Jack said that the resource could pose as many questions as it answers, but that it gives interesting information about, for example, who was translating Burns and at what time. There are gaps, he said, but it is an important research tool which deserves continued investment.

Questions

The possibilities and limitations of BOSLIT were questioned; the latter were freely acknowledged by Professor Jack, who said that while it is a good tool, it needs to be used intelligently.

The potentially useful family connections of Mary Campbell, with whom Burns intended to go to Jamaica, were raised. Did Burns have pragmatic reasons for wishing to marry into the Campbells and was Mary's death his reason for not going? Professor Leask said he thought that the whole Jamaica idea had been the last resort of a man 'down on his luck'. From the floor, Robert Crawford said he felt Burns was keeping his options open as long as he could.

Theme 2: The Influence of Burns on the Image of Scotland Abroad

Professor James Chandler, University of Chicago

The work of Burns has appeared in hundreds of films and television programmes since the early 20th century; *Auld Lang Syne* has itself been played or sung in more than 170. These include renditions in classics such as *It's a Wonderful Life* (1946) and *When Harry Met Sally* (1989) right up to last year's hit, *Sex and the City*, where it is the background for a pivotal five-minute sequence. Sometimes Burns is directly mentioned as well. For example, in last year's *Made of Honour*, the poet is discussed after a rendition of *My Love is Like a Red, Red Rose*. Professor Chandler gave some reasons for the popularity in romantic comedy of *Auld Lang Syne* in particular, suggesting its connections with Scottish moral sentiment in Adam Smith, and Scottish notions of sensibility, in Henry Mackenzie, two writers Burns knew intimately. Burns also played a potential role in early animation, he said, citing a short Mickey Mouse film, *The Plow Boy*, where the hero is whistling a Burns air. Perhaps Burns, specifically *To a Mouse*, with its vivid imagination of a rodentine world, inspired that cartoon creation. Perhaps the Scots invented Mickey Mouse, too, suggested Professor Chandler mischievously.

Professor Martin Prochazka, Charles University, Prague

Burns has traditionally been popular in Czech culture and, in the century from 1850, was the most translated of Scottish poets, admired by those with and without specific links to Scotland. Professor Prochazka talked about the importance of the poetry of Burns in helping to construct the Czech national identity. In a time when many Czech poets were censored, Burns's work appeared in translation in a number of periodicals, both highbrow and more popular. His popularity stemmed from different traditions of romantic nationalism and political radicalism. His more pastoral works were seen as part of a folk tradition, a symbol of the country's idealised village-based past, but at the same time, his egalitarian poetry, such as *A Man's a Man for a' That* expressed the strength and equality of the people. Translations of Burns could sometimes be vague and even incomprehensible; in some cases, their radical political implications were glossed over altogether. Professor Prochazka discussed some of the most important translators of Burns and pointed out that he was also the subject of literary criticism and essays. Burns is not as popular now as he might be, but Professor Prochazka blames the translations, which he says use old-fashioned Czech and do not appeal to young audiences.

Questions

Questions ranged from whether Burns had been appropriated by Czech political movements and whether it was its use in films which had led to *Auld Lang Syne* being sung at New Year. On the latter, Professor Chandler said that *Auld Lang Syne* had been associated with New Year before films made it so, but pointed out that *It's a Wonderful Life* had taken a risk by having it on Christmas Eve. Professor Prochazka answered the former by saying that the impact of Burns on the nineteenth century Czech political movements has not yet been sufficiently studied. The main problem is the assessment of the influence of German radicals, especially the poet Ferdinand Freiligrath, a major follower of Burns. Professor Prochazka explained that nineteenth-Czech intellectuals were bilingual and could read Burns in German translations, so the Czech translations were for the general public.

Lunch and Music

Sheena Wellington and Dr Kirsteen McCue led an informal lunchtime concert, in which the audience was occasionally asked to participate. Sheena Wellington, perhaps best known for singing *A Man's a Man for 'a That* at the opening of the Scottish Parliament, sang (unaccompanied) a number of Burns's songs, including 'A Man's a Man'. Kirsteen McCue sang a number of Burns songs which had been set to music by composers from across Europe, emphasising his global influence.

Theme 3: The Performance of Burns in Culture

Professor Robert Crawford FRSE, University of St Andrews

Professor Crawford began by paying tribute to the poet Mick Imlah, who had died the previous week. In particular, he cited Imlah's poem, *The Ayrshire Orpheus*, which refers to Burns – thus placing both men in a tradition of Scottish poetry. The bulk of Professor Crawford's talk, however, concerned Burns as a European poet. When T S Eliot spoke of the '*mind of Europe*' in the early 20th century, he asked if there was such a thing as Scottish literature. To Eliot, Scots were not part of the mind of Europe and, indeed, he left Burns out. This could have been because Burns was the opposite of Eliot, who was a royalist, a classicist and an Anglo Catholic – the opposite of Burns. But Professor Crawford makes a case for placing Burns in the European literary tradition, saying he should be considered a poet of European democracy. Professor Crawford believes that Burns has had a lasting influence on European culture. He referred in particular to the composer Arvo Part's setting of *My Heart's in the Highlands*. Burns supplements the European order, said Professor Crawford, mutually enriching the way we look at his poetry and how we see European culture as a whole.

Professor Leith Davis, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver

Professor Davis examined Burns's use by creative writers in the last 150 years. She suggested that Burns, more than any other poet in the English-speaking world, has been read through the lens of his biography. This tendency was already there in early reviews of his work, but it was made official policy in James Currie's *Works of Robert Burns* (1800). Fictionalised accounts of Burns's life began after the Centenary celebrations and continued with such works as John Drinkwater's *Robert Burns* (1952), the "Immortal Memory" novels of James Barke (1946 – 53) and Lawrence and Lee's *Annie Laurie* (1954). These popular renditions, coupled with a critical move away from biography, have combined to exclude Burns from academia.

Questions

Professor Davis was asked about the poet Byron, whose life story is also well-known, but who is much studied in academic circles. She said that Byron could rise above his biography as he was seen – like the others in the Romantic canon – to write in a more intense way. Asked what difference it would make if Burns were seen as part of the mind of Europe, Professor Crawford said it would affect how we read Dante, our attitudes to dialect, for example, and would teach us to be more aware of the democratic and romantic aspects of Burns.

Theme 4: Graduate Students and Burns

The relevance of Burns to academia today, from his bawdy poetry to the way he is commemorated in North America and Canada, was underlined in the conference. The last session of the day provided concrete evidence that research into Burns is taking place in Scotland's universities. Four graduate students described their projects in a discussion chaired by Dr Gerry Carruthers of the University of Glasgow.

Pauline Gray

Burns's bawdry is a legitimate area for study, although it was seen as taboo until recently. His bawdy songs contain discussions on the themes of gender, religion and politics, which make them ripe for critical appraisal. Ms Gray spoke about gender in particular, and exposed some of the contradictions in Burns's work. For example, he may have had a reputation as a male chauvinist, but his poetry shows genuine notions of romantic love and appreciation of women's bodies. He uses religious language to suggest that sex is a gift from God - '*divine blisses*' - and also writes about women as lustful beings with sexual urges of their own, rather than being passive objects of men's desire. Burns acknowledges that sex is complex and often mutual and his bawdry deserves a place in the canon of his work.

Ralph McLean

This research centres on the seeds of the Scottish Enlightenment. Ralph McLean spoke about Burns's relationship with the Edinburgh 'literati', describing how the poet had a 'chameleon-like ability' to act in the way which would suit him best in a given situation. For example, if people wanted to see a rustic vernacular poet, that's what he would be, although he actually wrote sophisticated verse and had read deeply.

The literati were aware of Burns's abilities but, at the same, time, Burns appreciated the literati. Indeed, Burns was at the heart of the Enlightenment, which spread through all levels of society in a myriad of ways.

Catherine McBay

Are Burns statues erected abroad to honour the man and his poetry or as an expression of Scottish identity? Catherine McBay is trying to answer this question with a study of statues in Canada and the US. In particular, she is looking at the inauguration speeches, as reported in local newspapers, as well as who was behind the building of them. She is also looking at how he is represented, and has concluded that people want to feel they have the best and most authentic representation of the man. It may be that Burns statues are there for reasons of nostalgia – a permanent memorial of devotion to Scotland from generations of emigrants.

Jennifer Orr

Jennifer Orr described Burns's influence on the Ulster poets, a group of labouring class poets in what is now Northern Ireland. In particular, she is interested in Samuel Thomson (1766-1816) who wrote verse epistles to Burns. '*Anything but a bardoleter*' as she describes him, Thomson nevertheless puts Burns into a succession of Scottish poets and pits him against English poets of the time, such as Alexander Pope. She outlined how Burns's work had an influence on Ulster poets writing in the vernacular Scots tradition. There's a clear need to study the influence of Burns on political circles throughout the British Isles, she said.

Questions

The questions included a further exploration of Burns's appropriation by different political movements – the conclusion was that there was no one movement that you could 'pin on' Burns – and issue of how he would cope with writing for a patron. There was also some discussion of Burns's relevance today, with Pauline Gray pointing to his relatively modern take on female sexuality while the very fact of the existence of his statues across the world suggests a lasting memorial.

PROGRAMME

- 09.00** **Registration/ morning coffee**
- 09.30** **RSE welcome**
Wolfson Lecture Theatre
Lord Wilson of Tillyorn KT, GCMG, President the Royal Society of Edinburgh
- Chairman's welcome and overview**
Professor Murray Pittock FRSE, University of Glasgow
- 09.40** **Theme 1: Reception of Burns in Global Culture**
Wolfson Lecture Theatre
Professor Nigel Leask FRSE, University of Glasgow
Professor Ronald Jack FRSE, University of Edinburgh
- 10.45** **Tea and coffee break**
- 11.15** **Theme 2: The Influence of Burns on the Image
of Scotland Abroad**
Wolfson Lecture Theatre
Professor James Chandler, University of Chicago
Professor .Martin Prochazka, Charles University, Prague
- 12.30** **Lunch and Music**
Dr Kirsteen McCue, University of Glasgow and Ms Sheena Wellington
- 14.00** **Theme 3: The Performance of Burns in Culture**
Wolfson Lecture Theatre
Professor Robert Crawford FRSE, University of St Andrews
Professor Leith Davis, Simon Fraser University, Vancouver
- 15.15** **Tea and Coffee Break**
- 15.45** **Theme 4: Graduate Students and Burns**
Federation Round Tables
Convened by Dr Gerry Carruthers, University of Glasgow
- 17.00** **Close**
- 19.30** **Burns Concert: Lament for Mary Queen of Scots**
St Cecilia's Hall, Niddry Street, Edinburgh

SPEAKERS

**Lord Wilson KT, GCMG,
President the Royal Society of Edinburgh**

David Wilson (Lord Wilson of Tillyorn) is Chancellor of the University of Aberdeen. He holds honorary doctorates from the Universities of Aberdeen, Sydney, Hong Kong, Abertay Dundee and the Chinese University of Hong Kong and is an Honorary Fellow of Keble College, Oxford. He was educated at Glenalmond College and did his National Service in The Black Watch. After Oxford he joined the Foreign Service, studied Chinese at the University of Hong Kong and served in Peking (1963-1965) and on the China Desk in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. He resigned from the Foreign Service in 1968 and became Editor of the *China Quarterly*, at the School of Oriental and African Studies, from 1968-74, during which time he completed a PhD relating to a period of modern Chinese history. After re-joining the Foreign Service he served first in the Cabinet Office and then as Political Adviser to the Governor of Hong Kong (1977-81). He was later Assistant Under-Secretary of State at the FCO for Asia – Pacific and then, from 1987-1992, Governor of Hong Kong. On retirement from Public Service he became Chairman of Scottish Hydro-Electric (later Scottish and Southern Energy), from 1993-2000. For 8 years he was a member of the Board of the British Council and Chairman of the Scottish Committee. From 1992-2002 he was Chairman of the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland and he has been a Trustee of the Carnegie Trust for the Universities of Scotland since 2000. He has been a Fellow of the RSE since 2000, and served on the Council for 2000-2001 and 2002-2004. He was Convenor of the International Committee from 2001-2002. He was a member of the British Mount Kongur Expedition (in Northwest China) in 1981 and his hobbies include hillwalking, theatre and reading. He retired from the Mastership of Peterhouse, Cambridge at the end of June 2008.

**Professor Murray Pittock FRSE
University of Glasgow**

Biography

Murray Pittock is Bradley Professor of English Literature at the University of Glasgow, and was previously Professor of Scottish and Romantic Literature at the University of Manchester. His recent books include *Scottish and Irish Romanticism* (2008), *James Boswell* (2007) and *The Reception of Sir Walter Scott in Europe* (2007). He is a former prizewinner of both the Royal Society of Edinburgh and the British Academy, where he gave the 2002 Chatterton Lecture on 'Robert Burns and British Poetry', and is also the convenor of the Global Burns project, sponsored by the Arts and Humanities Research Council.

**Professor Nigel Leask FRSE
University of Glasgow**

Biography

Nigel Leask is Regius Professor of English Language and Literature, University of Glasgow. Born in Stirlingshire, he was educated in Edinburgh and Oxford before being elected to a Fellowship in English at Queens' College, Cambridge. He lectured in the English Faculty at Cambridge for 15 years before returning to Scotland in 2004. He has also held teaching posts at the University of Bologna, Italy, and the National University of Mexico in Mexico City. He has published widely in the fields of British and Scottish Romanticism and has a particular interest in travel writing and the literature of empire. He is currently completing a book entitled 'Scottish Pastoral: Robert Burns, Improvement, Romanticism' which will be published by Oxford University Press next year.

**Professor Ronald Jack FRSE
University of Edinburgh**

Biography

Professor Ronnie Jack is a Fellow of the Royal Society of Edinburgh, Professor Emeritus in Edinburgh University's English Department and Honorary Fellow in Glasgow University Burns Centre. He held a chair in Scottish and Medieval Literature in Edinburgh University from 1987-2004. He has published widely in Scottish and comparative literature and is currently completing a monograph on J.M.Barrie.

**Professor James Chandler
University of Chicago**

Biography

James K. Chandler is Barbara E. and Richard J. Franke Distinguished Service Professor in the Department of English and in the Committee on Cinema and Media Studies at the University of Chicago, where he also serves as Director of the Franke Institute for the Humanities. He works in the areas of Romanticism, Irish and Scottish Studies, Cinema, and the institutional study of disciplines. His publications include *England in 1819* (University of Chicago Press, 1998) and *Wordsworth's Second Nature* (University of Chicago Press, 1984). He is co-editor of *Questions of Evidence* (University of Chicago Press, 1992) and *Romantic Metropolis* (Cambridge UP, 2005). He recently completed work on two edited volumes, the *Cambridge History of British Romantic Literature* (CUP, 2009) and, with Maureen McLane, the *Cambridge Companion to Romantic Poetry* (CUP 2009). He is now finishing a book about the history of the sentimental mode in literature and cinema and working on another, for Blackwell's, to be entitled: How to Do Criticism.

**Professor Martin Procházka
Charles University, Prague**

Biography

Martin Procházka is Professor of English, American and Comparative Literature and Director of Graduate Studies at the Department of Anglophone Literatures and Cultures at Charles University, Prague. He is the author of *Romantismus a osobnost* (Romanticism and Personality, 1996), a critical study of English romantic aesthetics, Coleridge and Byron, *Transversals* (2007), essays on post-structuralist readings of English and American romantics, and a co-author (with Zdeněk Hrbata) of *Romantismus a romantismy* (Romanticism and Romanticisms, 2005), a comparative study on the chief discourses in the West European, American and Czech Romanticism. With Zdeněk Stříbrný he edited *Slovník spisovatelů: Anglie* (An Encyclopaedia of Writers: England 1996, 2003). He has published two textbooks: *Literary Theory* (1995, 1997, 2008) and *Lectures on American Literature* (2002, 2008). Among his other publications there are book chapters and articles on Shakespeare, Romanticism and Poststructuralism, a translation of Byron's *Manfred* (1991) and M.H. Abrams's *The Mirror and the Lamp* into Czech (2001). He is the founding editor of the international academic journal *Litteraria Pragensia*. He was Visiting Professor at the universities of Bristol and Bowling Green (Ohio), Visiting Lecturer at the University of Heidelberg (Germany), Distinguished Visiting Scholar at the University of Adelaide and Visiting Scholar at the University of California at Berkeley.

**Dr Kirsteen McCue
University of Glasgow**

Biography

Kirsteen McCue was born near Glasgow and completed her Master of Arts in Music and Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow in 1989, winning both the prestigious Herkless Prize for top woman graduate in the Arts Faculty and also the Snell Exhibition to Balliol College, Oxford. Her studies in Oxford resulted in a D.Phil thesis on the song editor George Thomson (1757-1851) and

his collections of National Airs, a project which involved his collaborating with some of the most famous writers and musicians of the day, notably Robert Burns and Joseph Haydn.

In 1993 she spent a year working closely with the great Burns scholar the late Professor Donald A. Low at the Centre for Scottish Literature and Culture at the University of Stirling, where she focused specifically on Scottish women song writers of the late 18th and early 19th centuries. And in 1994 she became General Manager of the Scottish Music Information Centre, a unique archive of music by Scottish composers of all periods, and an organisation at the forefront of international promotion of Scottish music (now The Scottish Music Centre: www.scottishmusiccentre.com). There she edited the first ever *Scottish Music Handbook* in 1996, and, during her four years as General Manager, directed many different promotional and information projects, also securing major Advancement funding from the Scottish Arts Council/Lottery.

In 1998 she went to work for the BBC in Scotland, presenting (and sometimes producing) a wide variety of music programmes for both BBC Radio 3 and BBC Radio Scotland. These included a 6-part series on Burns's songs for 1996 and 'Morning Performance' series on music in the Enlightenment both for Radio 3. For BBC Radio Scotland she wrote and presented a series of features on Walter Scott operas, and another Sunday afternoon series called 'Scots and their Songs'. She continues to write, present and contribute to a number of arts features for BBC Scotland, most recently contributing to its 'Songlines' series. During this time she also worked regularly for the Edinburgh International Festival, writing and presenting a number of lecture series for their continuing education programme. In 2000 she was invited to be a co-director of the Festival's award-winning and highly successful 'Work, Sex and Drink' concert series which comprised nine late-night concerts covering all aspects of song in Scotland over a two-hundred year period. In 2002 the Festival invited her to commission and edit all its music programmes.

In the same year, Kirsteen was appointed Lecturer at the Department of Scottish Literature at the University of Glasgow, where she has convened both the Level 1 and Level 3 courses and where she teaches widely across all courses at undergraduate and postgraduate levels. She is currently supervising PhD theses on James Hogg, William Soutar and Edwin Muir, and a Masters thesis on George Mackay Brown. From the Session 2006-7 she has been a post-graduate adviser for the Faculty of Arts and from August 2007 she will be the post-graduate Convener in the Department of Scottish Literature.

Kirsteen McCue's research work continues to focus closely on George Thomson, and the work of key Scottish song writers and editors of the 18th and early 19th centuries. She has been collaborating with colleagues Professor Marjorie Rycroft and Dr Warwick Edwards in the Department of Music at the University of Glasgow and the Haydn Institute in Cologne, to provide the new performing editions of all Haydn's Scottish and Welsh folksong settings for Thomson for the international *Haydn Gesamtausgabe*. Two volumes including well over 200 songs were published in 2001 and 2005. This project has inspired the Haydn Trio Eisenstadt and Scottish singers Jamie MacDougall and Lorna Anderson to record all the folksong settings and their multi-CD project is due to be completed in 2009, the 250th anniversary of Burns's birth and the 200th anniversary of Haydn's death.

At the moment research is focusing closely on James Hogg's songs, as Kirsteen is editing, with Janette Currie, James Hogg's final volume of songs, *Songs by the Ettrick Shepherd* (1831), and an additional volume of miscellaneous songs for the acclaimed Stirling/South Carolina Research Edition of *The Collected Works of James Hogg*. In 2005 this project was awarded a major research grant of just over £150,000 from the Arts and Humanities Research Council. This funding is allowing key research into both the literary and musical contexts of the songs, and the final volumes will present the songs in a new way for most literary editions, also encouraging performance of the songs themselves. As part of this project she is working closely with her principal co-investigator, Professor Emeritus Douglas Mack and the research assistant on the project, Dr Janette Currie, both of whom are at the University of Stirling. And further information

about past and ongoing work can now be found at a newly developed website:
<http://www.jameshogg.stir.ac.uk>

During 2006 Kirsteen was invited to give a lecture recital on Women's Scottish song at a special series of Scottish studies lectures entitled 'Enlightenment and Emigration' to celebrate the 40 th anniversary of Simon Fraser University in Vancouver, Canada. In June 2006 she was the visiting Ormiston Roy Fellow at the University of South Carolina, where she had the opportunity to work with the large collection of Scottish materials in the special collection of the Thomas Cooper Library. And in September 2006 she was invited to give a lecture/recital called 'The Ettrick Shepherd in Soho Square' at the Scottish Romanticism and World Literatures conference at the University of Berkeley, California. She has already been invited to give lectures/recitals as part of the 2009 Burns celebrations in Edinburgh, Beijing and Prague.

For the past few years she has been a Trustee of two performance organisations: the Keynote Trust in Ayr, which provides training and performance experience for young singers across North, South and East Ayrshire; and the Edinburgh-based Dunedin Concerts Trust, which supports the work of the finest small vocal ensemble in Scotland. She also serves on the advisory committee of the Muscia Scotica Trust, a body which supports the publication of key early Scottish musical texts.

Ms Sheena Wellington

Biography

Sheena Wellington's singing of "A Man's A Man For 'a That" at the Opening Ceremony of the first Scottish Parliament for three hundred years was by critical and popular acclaim the highlight of that very special day.

"..... the most moving moment of all"- (The Times, London)

".... a moment to open the muscles of the heart....." (The Scotsman, Edinburgh)

Scotland's leading traditional singer, Sheena Wellington was born in Dundee into a family of singers and factory weavers.

Sheena's repertoire covers everything from Burns to ballads to the best of contemporary songwriting, drawing from the rich Scottish tradition passed from musician to musician through the ages. A passionate and articulate advocate for traditional music, she has played a leading role in the fight for recognition, status and improved funding for Scotland's traditional arts.

"..she can lay fair claim to being chiefly responsible for the seriousness with which her branch of the arts is now taken ..." The Herald (Glasgow)

On 3rd July 2007 Sheena received the Honorary degree of Doctor of Music from the Royal Scottish Academy of Music & Drama. Other honours bestowed on her for her work include Honorary degrees from the Universities of Dundee (2006) and St Andrews (2000), The Heritage Society of Scotland's award for her outstanding contribution to Scotland's culture and the coveted Herald Archangel for her Edinburgh International Festival's series of traditional song programmes "Work, Sex and Drink".

She is a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, an Honorary Life Member of the TMSA, and the UK-wide Association of Speakers Clubs Speaker of the Year 2001 and Patron of Lung Ha's Theatre Company and Voluntary Arts Scotland.

Sheena was made an Honorary President of Greenock Burns Club (The Mother Club) in January 2006, when she became the first woman in the Club's 204 year history to be invited to give The Immortal Memory.

**Professor Robert Crawford FRSE
University of St Andrews**

Biography

Robert Crawford is a poet and critic whose books include *Full Volume* (shortlisted for the 2009 T S Eliot Prize) and *Scotland's Books* (Penguin, 2007). In January 2009 Jonathan Cape and Princeton University Press publish his biography of Burns, *The Bard*, while Polygon and Princeton University Press publish *The Best Laid Schemes: Selected Poetry and Prose of Robert Burns*, co-edited with Christopher MacLachlan. He has also edited for Polygon an anthology of new work by twelve contemporary Scottish poets including Douglas Dunn, Kathleen Jamie, Liz Lochhead and Don Paterson, entitled *New Poems, Chiefly in the Scottish Dialect*. He is Professor of Modern Scottish Literature at the University of St Andrews.

**Professor Leith Davis
Simon Fraser University, Canada**

Biography

Leith Davis is Professor in the Department of English and Director of the Centre for Scottish Studies at Simon Fraser University in Canada. She is the author of *Acts of Union: Scotland and the Literary Negotiation of the British Nation, 1707-1830* (Stanford, 1998) and *Music, Postcolonialism and Gender: The Construction of Irish National Identity, 1724-1874* (Notre Dame University Press, 2005) as well as co-editor (with Ian Duncan and Janet Sorensen) of *Scotland and the Borders of Romanticism* (Cambridge, 2004). Together with Holly Faith Nelson and Sharon Alker, she is co-organizing a research project on "Robert Burns in Transatlantic Context."

**Dr Gerry Carruthers
University of Glasgow**

Dr Gerry Carruthers is Reader and Head of Department in Scottish Literature and Director of the Centre for Robert Burns Studies at the University of Glasgow. He is also General Editor of the new Oxford University Press edition of the works of Robert Burns.

ABOUT THE RSE

The Royal Society of Edinburgh (RSE) is an educational charity, registered in Scotland. Independent and non-party-political, our wide-ranging educational activities include:

- Organising lectures, debates and conferences
- Conducting major independent inquiries
- Providing educational activities for school students throughout Scotland
- Distributing over £2 million to top researchers and entrepreneurs
- Showcasing to the World the best of our research and development
- Increasing two-way international exchange
- Encouraging, promoting and rewarding excellence
- Offering state-of-the-art conference facilities
- Publishing internationally respected learned journals

The RSE was founded in 1783 by Royal Charter for the “Advancement of Learning and Useful Knowledge”. Today it has around 1500 Fellows whose expertise encompasses the full spectrum of the sciences, medicine, engineering and technology, education, law, the arts, humanities, social sciences, business, industry, the professions and public service. This multi-disciplinary perspective makes the RSE unique amongst the United Kingdom’s learned societies. It is funded by a range of carefully selected charitable, public and private bodies. Its mission today is providing public benefit through the advancement of learning and useful knowledge.

Opinions expressed here do not necessarily represent the views of the RSE, nor of its Fellows.