

Blackbraes and Shieldhill
Parish Church
linked with
Muiravonside Parish Church
Summer 2015



Visit to The Mary Slessor Exhibition

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**From the Manse
July 2015**



Dear Friends,

I felt moved to write a prayer for our summer magazine rather than the normal letter. I am inspired by the words of Paul in Colossians Ch4 which he wrote to the church in Colosse whilst he was in prison -

'Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful. And pray for us too, that God may open a door for our message, so that we may proclaim the mystery of Christ, for which I am in chains. Make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation always be full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone.'

Please feel free to pray the prayer below at home, in the garden or on holiday during a quiet moment this summer.

Dear God,

I pray for our churches – Blackbraes and Shieldhill and Muiravonside,

I thank you for our linkage,
for the sharing of ministry, gifts, finances and resources,
for the delight of friendships,
and deepened faith.....

I thank you for our church buildings,
and pray that people would continue to give generously,
so that our churches can continue to be dignified and holy spaces,
for the benefit of our communities.....

I pray for all those who minister in your name,
the members, the elders, the minister,
who do their best to care for others,
and show your love.....

I pray for those who through the ministry of our churches,
find hope and healing,
strength and comfort,
light in the darkness.....

I pray for our Presbytery,
faced with a reduction of ministers,
reduced finances,
and an increasing number of vacancies.....

Help me always to be brave,
to continue to serve you,
and speak for you,
despite increased apathy,
ridicule,
and indifference.....

Help me to witness to my family and friends,
to continue to tell my children and children's children,
the story of Jesus,
and the wonder of your love.....

Lord God,
help me to rest within your love this summer,
renew and refresh me,
so that I can better serve you,
in the new session.....
I ask all this in Jesus name,
AMEN

***Every blessing for a refreshing and restful summer,
your minister and friend,
Louise***

Website - Our magazines are now available on our website www.bsandm-church.org.uk. If anyone would prefer to access them this way, instead of paper format, please let your Church Elder know.

Baptisms

'Whoever welcomes a little child like this in my name, welcomes me.'

Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish

Cameron Duncan McGregor Muir
together with his big sister
Charlie Ella Muir
son and daughter of
Stephen and Debra Muir
on the 22nd of March 2015

Aaron Ross McIsaac
youngest son of
Scott and Arlene McIsaac
on the 24th of May 2015

Funerals

'The Lord will protect you as you come and go, both now and forevermore'.

Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish

Mr Robert Anderson
Mrs Gwen Dick

Muiravonside Parish

Mr Andrew Allison
Mrs Jessie 'O' Donnell
Mr William Munro
Mrs Betty McIntosh
Mrs Anne Arnott
Mrs Jean Ferguson
Mrs Connie Ramage

Weddings

'Meanwhile these three remain - faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.'

Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish

*Gillian Coulter and Niall Roberts
at The Three Kings, Shieldhill
on the 7th of March 2015*



National Stewardship Programme

Here are the latest free will offerings for Blackbraes and Shieldhill Parish Church:

	2014	2015
Jan	£1308	£1397
Feb	£1487	£1382
Mar	£1923	£2491
Apr	£1816	£1665
May	£1358	£1918

Ministries and Mission for 2015 is £1785 per month.

Christine Jones

Food For Thought

The eagle, it seems, has a unique ability. To conserve energy it can lock it's wings in the outstretched position, gliding instead of flapping, waiting for the next current of air to lift it higher. Our equivalent of that locking mechanism must surely be faith. Next time you feel yourself getting in a bit of a flap, just stop and glide a while, knowing that a wind of inspiration will be along shortly.

"Those who wait upon God get fresh strength. They spread their wings and soar like eagles." (Isaiah 40:31)

The Lord is my shepherd. These are words we all know well, but why a shepherd? Why not a baker? Or a farmer?

One day, I was chatting to a shepherd, a man who had spent his whole working life on the hills. He recalled one Winter when the snow was so bad it had covered the whole flock - all except their ears, that is. Later, the rescue operation began.

"We nearly found them all," he said. "We brought three hundred and ninety-nine safely home." He slumped a little in his chair and bit his lower lip for a moment. "But we never found that other one."

This had happened over half a century before. Now aged over ninety, the shepherd still keenly felt the loss of that one stray creature.

That's why the Lord was a shepherd.

Submitted by Muiravonside



Drew's
view

The Kindness of Strangers

I've never had much luck with self service petrol stations!

It's not that I don't like visiting them. Before supermarkets became 24 hour affairs, I loved the little shop that they all seem to have which appears to stock every single item that you have forgotten about earlier in the day, when the shops were open, but are now absolutely desperate to buy at the last moment, such as that card and flowers for your anniversary!

As a result, for men, they were and still are an absolute life saver, a Guardian Angel and an unofficial Patron Saint!

Women, of course, never forget these special dates. Alas, it is a different story for men! Many a time, while I've been waiting in the queue to pay for my petrol, I have seen many a man rushing in through the door with a look of fear and sense of doom etched on his face. When he spots the flowers, cards and chocolates, the look of relief is such a wonderful sight! In the queue, amongst the male contingent, there is an unheard but telepathic sigh of relief and each knowing face conveys the feeling of a great disaster that has just been narrowly averted!

This lifesaving facility does come at a premium cost, with the items being much more expensive than in other shops. However, when a total disaster is being averted that has implications which will come back to haunt this person for months as he is constantly asked in injured tones, "How could you ever forget?" – No one is worrying about the bill!

I've often wondered how many marriages and relationships have been saved because of these shops, with the wife or partner never suspecting or having any inkling that this very special date has almost been forgotten! Even though we now have 24 hour supermarkets, a similar scene to this can also be witnessed in the little shop on Valentine's Day and even - believe it or not - Mothers Day, when the same drama is played out!

So, once I've filled up and made it to the kiosk and shop, I'm home and dry with no problems. It's actually getting petrol into the car in the first place that is the area where my problems start!

I think it all stems back to a long time ago when I was working with a company that had a small Bedford van. Back then, there was a phase when it was fashionable to convert your vehicle to run on some kind of Liquid Petroleum Gas which was more economical. My company was wooed by this idea and went about adapting the little van by installing what seemed to be a very large tank in the cargo bay. This tank took up most of the available space and seemed to defeat the object of carrying any cargo! It was also right behind the driver and so large that I always, (quite wrongly, probably,) felt a sense of doom every time I drove it.

It was absolutely safe, and this was probably just in my imagination, but I could swear I kept hearing strange gurgling noises as I drove along the quiet and unassuming streets of the leafy Edinburgh suburbs. Disaster movies involving airships, as well as a vision of orbiting the earth kept popping up in my mind's eye as I drove past these beautiful Victorian villas.

The real fun started though when it was time to refuel. Back in those days, the special refuelling facility was situated away from the petrol pumps in a quiet, far corner of the filling station, almost as if the management secretly had the same unsettling visions that I had. Once there, you had to connect a special hose or boom, (a rather unfortunate pun!) which actually screwed onto a special fitting at the side of the van. Once everything was secured, refuelling could take place and as this was happening, at that time, an area around the van's fuel cap would turn white, as the Liquefied Gas was frozen!

I used to think this must be rather similar to refuelling a rocket and felt I should perhaps be wearing a special suit. I must admit though, I was issued with a very thick pair of rubber gloves. (Probably so that I didn't stick myself to the frozen side of the van!)

The very first time I was quite fortunate, because as I was starting to connect the hose, there was another van waiting to fill up. The driver realised by my demeanour that I was obviously doing this for the very first time and couldn't have been more helpful. He had filled up many

times and gave me a master class on how to carry out the operation safely, with lots of tips gained by where he had went wrong in the past! I was so grateful to him, but he told me to think nothing of it and wished me a very nice weekend! (It was a Friday.)

I left the company a year later, got a normal car that ran on petrol and for many years, my trips to the filling station went very smoothly. Then one day I drove in, unlocked my filler cap put the petrol pump in, squeezed the little trigger they have... and nothing happened! I squeezed again and still no success! To make matters worse, the pumps were making encouraging noises with their small generators running and everyone around me was merrily filling up!

A few minutes passed by. Then all of a sudden, a loud voice was booming all around the petrol station. It seemed to be coming from the sky and I actually gazed comically upwards! Then there was a loud crackle and I realised the booming voice was coming from a more earthly source. The petrol station's tannoy system had come into life! I didn't know they even had one and have never heard it being used in over thirty years of motoring! After a few spluttering noises, I heard something like this:

"Attention pump number five! You have to... crackle crackle, then you... crackle crackle splutter splutter... Thank you!" The message then ended with something akin to a giant raspberry being blown, (probably feedback) and like all of those public address systems, I couldn't make out a word they were saying!

I looked down from the sky and over to the kiosk for guidance. The person there was pointing and gesticulating wildly. With a splutter, the tannoy came back into life, sounding a bit more desperate. "You need to...crackle crackle...then press the...crackle crackle crackle please!

The giant raspberry sounded again, echoing around the cars and bewildered motorists like the report from a large cannon. Then it gradually receded. I was finally rescued by a kindly person at the next pump, who simply said,

"They've changed the system and you can now pay either at the pump with a card or at the kiosk. You have to press this button if you want to

pay at the kiosk. I think that's what they're trying to tell you." He then pressed the small button which I hadn't even noticed and sure enough, everything sprung into life. I now had fuel and thanked him profusely for his help. With a smile his parting words were: "That's a really crazy tannoy system they have!"

We both laughed.

Much to the relief of the local filling stations, my visits were trouble free again. That was until this January! Between the months of November last year and February, I hired a whole succession of cars to tide me over until I eventually bought my present one. They all had to be filled up before being returned to the hire company and local filling stations must have went on red alert when they saw me turning up each week in a different model. With some of the cars I opened up the fuel cap with a key, with others I had to press a small button beside the driver's seat to release the cap.

But I was so proud. It all went without a hitch! (I had scrupulously read the car handbooks at home!) Then, I got complacent. I was hiring my last car before collecting my permanent one and didn't bother to check the handbook. I thought they'd all either open with a key or you would press that little lever beside the seat!

When the final evening arrived, I drove confidently up to the pumps, got out and walked round to open the little flap on the side of the car to gain access to the filler. You can guess what happened next. It wouldn't open! It was locked but there was no keyhole or any visible way to open it. "No problem," I thought. "There'll be a button beside the seat." I opened the door again... and...there was absolutely no release button to be found!

I still wasn't worried because I thought "It'll be on the dashboard somewhere." I spent the next five minutes scanning every little button and switch without success. After that, grabbing the handbook, I went back out to the small flap at the side of the car. Luckily, it was a quiet Monday evening and the station wasn't too busy. If it had been, I imagined by now, the other motorists would be rolling about laughing at this perplexed guy standing beside his car, turning page after page of the handbook, searching for an elusive button with one hand, while scratching his head with the other!

No tannoy system came into life this time to try and rescue me! Just as I was about to give up and take the car back home to do further research, the man at the next pump must have noticed and came over. "I bet you're trying to find the button!" he said with a hearty smile.

It turned out that he drove an identical model while at work and he told me that nobody could ever find the button at first. He opened the door and reached somewhere under the dashboard. Then with a loud "Pop!" the flap opened. I would never have found the release button. It was in such an unusual place I know I would never have thought of looking there. He looked down at the handbook I was holding. "There's no mention of it at all in there either. We searched for hours!" He added ruefully. "That's progress for you!"

I thanked him very much. He couldn't have been nicer and even waved as he drove away. I was immensely touched by how kind strangers can be sometimes when they see someone struggling. I thought back over those different occasions and instead of being laughed at or ridiculed for seemingly not being able to do a simple task, I was met instead with genuine sympathy and concern, together with a keenness to help put things right. Not only did it restore my faith in people, it put a spring in my step for the rest of the week!

"The Kindness of Strangers," is such a nice phrase. It has appeared many times over the years, probably most famously in Tennessee William's play *A Streetcar Named Desire*, as well as being the title of Kate Adie's autobiography. It has also been used in films and several songs. Every time I hear this phrase, it always conveys such a feeling of warmth and I am immediately drawn to the Parable in the Bible where Jesus describes a wonderful act of kindness – "The Parable of the Good Samaritan."

In Luke Chapter 10, verses 25 to 37, Jesus relates the kindly act that the Samaritan did by stopping to help the Jewish man who was left for dead after being robbed and beaten up. What makes this act of kindness even more remarkable is the fact that Samaritans and Jews generally hated each other at that time, but the Samaritan still stopped and couldn't have been more helpful.

The Parable has struck such a chord and touched so many hearts that even to this day, a person who carries out an act of kindness or helps someone is still referred to as “A Good Samaritan.” “The Samaritans” charity that does such great work also takes their name from this. The phrase is also used in all walks of lives both by people with faith and in the secular world as well.

It is great to see that even to this day, the Parable and its meaning of helping one another, still has so many connections with modern acts of kindness and that many organisations and hospitals take their name from this.

Getting back to the three people who helped me, I do not know if they had any faith, but I have always been fascinated by a concept that was put forward by a theologian called Karl Rahner whom I mentioned a few years ago in an earlier essay. Rahner had a theory about the existence of a group of people, who although they have no Christian background; or even any interest in Christianity, had somehow been given access to God’s grace. In the eyes of God, they would stand equally with people from a Christian background. He called these people the “Anonymous Christians.” If anybody deserved God’s grace, it would be certainly be people like the men who helped me, as their outlook on life would follow many of Christ’s teachings, whether they had faith or not.

Jesus would be very proud of them.

The acts of kindness that I experienced made me realise that in an age when so many terrible things happen, there are still basically good kind people in this world and all over the world people do help each other, even if it is in a simple way with everyday things. It’s just that good acts are rarely reported. We tend to just hear about the bad news.

Whether these people are “Good Samaritans or “Anonymous Christians” or simply just good souls, it is truly wonderful to have experienced and witnessed “The Kindness of Strangers.”

The Special Present

Every week I receive a very special present. Sometimes it arrives on a Wednesday. On other weeks it appears on a Thursday. This present is always awaited with great anticipation and excitement. At the beginning of the each week I am already wondering what it will contain. You see, its contents are different each time and there are always lots of nice surprises!

Very often, I try to guess what the contents will be, but I always get them wrong and find the actual end result that I do receive is much better than I could have imagined. It consists of so many nice things. It contains five hymns and an Introit which have lots of associations with the past and bring back such nice memories. They also give me hope for both the present and future, as they are absolutely timeless and just as good as the day I first heard them. Each one is very special. It is like meeting some old friends again, but they will never age like I do. They will be just the same in thirty year's time.

I also receive two pieces of Scripture. When I look them up, it is uncanny how they seem to relate to what is going on in my life at that moment. The words contained within them are a source of great comfort when I am sad, but they are also loaded with hope. Something new is revealed each time they are read and they provide a never ending source of inspiration.

The very special present is, of course, the Order of Service for each Sunday.

I feel extremely privileged because I am one of the very first people to know what will be happening every Sunday. When I prepare each slide with Ailsa's Introit and Louise's Order of Service, I get a wonderful preview of what's been planned.

I so enjoy receiving the Order of Service each week. It's like receiving a present and when I open it, all my favourite things are inside!

Drew Robertson



Christian Aid Week 2015

Shieldhill and California raised the sum of **£2072** for Christian Aid this year. Thanks are due to everyone who contributed towards this sum and to the volunteers who willingly helped to collect, count and bank the money.

The door-to-door collection in both villages, together with the small change collected in small boxes/jars by members and friends of the congregation, the Christian Aid lunch and other donations helped achieve this generous amount. The breakdown of the total is as follows -

Door-to-door collection	£1697.58
Money boxes	£ 186.87
Lunch	£ 162.55
Other donations	£ <u>25.00</u>
	<u>£2072.00</u>

The figures below show a continued generous response from our villages to help change peoples' lives for the better.

2013	2014	2015
£1827	£2066	£2072

Marion Zacks
Christian Aid Organiser

Spring Harvest 2015

A group of 9 of us attended Spring Harvest from 6 -10 April at Skegness. The theme this year was Immeasurably More and we were all inspired by many of the speakers and the music this year. We already have 14 booked to attend next year's event and if you were thinking about going we have a twin room provisionally booked and available and if you wanted to speak about it please have a word with me or any of the others who have been before.

The bible teaching this year was based on Paul's prayer in Ephesians 3:14-21. " now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us, to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations, for ever and ever! Amen."

The passage was explored by Jo Bailey Wells who is chaplain to the Archbishop of Canterbury. She took us through the 5 movements that the passage inspires. We discovered the size, power, breadth and wonder of God who is *higher* than we can understand and inspires holy awe.



We were encouraged to draw near to the God who is *closer* to each of us than any routines or religion and he desires real relationship with us. Jo then reminded us that God's resources are *deeper* than any other who refreshes us with living water to our roots. We then were invited to explore our God whose work is *wider* than we expect in the supernatural and miraculous work of resurrection life. Finally she told us that when we accompany God on our journey he goes further into the world and the future with us and equips us to build his Kingdom.

It was all very inspiring and encouraging for those of us there. It challenges and makes one think again about what we believe and what we are being called to do in our place and community. The music too was fantastic and was a mix of old and new and is always powerful when you are singing out with 3000 others with anything from Blessed be his Name to Be Thou my Vision.

Spring Harvest has found the last few years challenging financially but God has answered many prayers recently and the event is now again on a surer footing for the coming years. Next year we will be challenged by the theme "God is the ultimate Game Changer" and invited to encounter God and thus be equipped to engage in our world and empower others to join in. We are already looking forward to Easter Monday next year when we head off again for Skegness!

David McClements



Tea, coffee and a chat are always available in the hall after services. Please stay if you can.



The Banner Group



For a change from the usual Garden News, I thought that, as new banners have appeared in both churches, some news from the Banner Group would be a welcome change.

A few years ago Janet Hunter had a twinkling of an idea. She thought that a banner would be a good thing to create. Time passed.

Lorna Coulter is our church representative on the presbyterial council and, as a result, a group of us - including Janet - attend some of the council's events. These events are held in different churches within the district and it just so happened that some of these churches have banners. Just like Topsy, the idea grew and within both churches a buzz became a rumbling and a Banner Group meeting was arranged. We met for the first time on Friday 23 August 2013. Ladies from both churches attended. We bought a book and Louise put us in touch with a lady from St Helens Church, Bonnybridge who came to one of our early meetings and spoke to us about banner making. She also brought some of the banners that had been made by members of her own church

During the General Assembly 2013, Lorna and I attended Heart and Soul that is held in Princes Street Gardens on the first Sunday of The Assembly. Some ladies from a Dunfermline Church had a stall there. On their stall they had prayer blankets. These blankets can be knitted or crocheted and are usually worked in double knitting wool. They use a three stitch pattern-this represents The Trinity and this is the pattern on their paper pattern - Lorna and I both have a copy that can be photocopied. Knitters are of course free to choose another stitch pattern if they wish. The blankets are given to people who are in need of a cuddle and would be comforted by a prayer.

Lorna and I were fired up by this idea and we told our friends in the Banner Group about these blankets. The knitters and crochet folk leapt into action and soon we had quite a supply of blankets. Other people heard about this. We were given wool, people out with the Banner Group, out with the two churches, knitted shawls. We are humbled by the joy our shawls give. The love of Jesus is woven into the fibers of this blanket and His warmth is wrapped around the needy

person. To date, we have delivered over 100 prayer shawls. They have gone to England, Northern Ireland, Canada and Israel



Whilst at The Guild Gathering in the Caird Hall in Dundee, 2013, Lorna, Janet, Barbara and I saw a presentation by ladies from Dunfermline about prayer shawls.

They had a variety of different sized shawls on show. Some were small squares in blue and green. These they give to members of the forces. They can put them under their helmets. We now knit knee shawls and tiny shawls for premature babies. These wee shawls are great for new knitters and crocheters to practise on.

We also knit wee jumpers for The Chip Shop children. Chip Shop Children - their mothers wrap them in paper to keep them warm.

Alice had a pattern that she shared and soon the first bag of thirty jumpers was ready to be delivered the The Blytheswood Trust van.

Busy knitters like knitting these jumpers. They are small enough to be knitted in a night and are great for using up small amounts of wool. Once again, people out with our church membership knit these jumpers and give us wool. Recently I wrote a small thank you note to one of Nan Morton's friends. This lady has provided wool very regularly - in fact the sparks are flashing off the ends of Nan's knitting needles as she turns this wool into wee jumpers. Nan also knits beautiful dolls and teddies.

Janey is Alice's sister and she is a regular at the Banner Group. Janey works at The Falkirk Food Bank and so is our contact for there. She also has a contact in the baby unit at Forth Valley Hospital. You may have guessed - we knit for them too - baby jackets and hats.

Tiny jackets, hats and bootees have been passed on to Janey's friend. Once more, 100 or more small things have been knitted by members of the group-and others. They have also received a few small shawls knitted and Nora Craig's crocheted ones. I just do not know how far into the district



this crafting has stretched because so much wool and knitting is done by friends and acquaintances and by folk who have heard about us.



Then a pattern turned up-from Alice I think – for a beany hat for the homeless people. Again this project uses up small amounts of wool and the scope is there to knit pretty ones for the homeless ladies-some hats have been knitted. At a guild event Lorna and I secured a contact and a pattern for hats for fishermen. So far I have handed over a bag containing 29 hats.

Both churches have cross-stitch pictures that were embroidered by Mary and Nicola from Muiravonside church - both banner group members.

The banners form the core of our Friday group meetings and both churches got an Easter banner. The in thing just now is “up cycling” and up cycled our banners most certainly are. We relied on discarded curtains for the background to the Easter banners. The Shieldhill Easter one has a thin, well-washed blanket giving the banner weight and is lined with curtain lining that had come to the end of its days at a window. We are new to banner making and learn something new with each new banner. They will be executed more skillfully each time a new one is created.

On that Friday in August I did not dream how our craft group would flourish and just how far its fingers would spread. So many knitted things are happily given to those who have a need comfort or a little bit of love. The Banner Group meets on a Friday afternoon, 2pm to 4pm, in Shieldhill Church Hall. There is coffee and tea and cakes as well as lively chat and much laughter. If you wish you can bring knitting, crocheting or needle work. The opportunity is there to learn a new skill and make new friends. Lorna, Alice and myself all have patterns should you want one.

All are welcome in this place-as that well loved hymn says. This prayer shawl ministry stretches much farther outside the church walls than I ever imagined; taking the word and love of Jesus out, into the community.

RSPB Big Garden Bird Count.

Some people in both churches took part in the RSPB's Big Garden Bird Watch during the last weekend of January. The results are in.

Over half a million people took part and counted 546, 845 birds.

- | | | |
|------------------|----------------|--------------|
| 1. Sparrow | 2. Starling | 3. Blackbird |
| 4. Blue tit | 5. Wood Pigeon | 6. Chaffinch |
| 7. Robin | 8. Great tit | 9. Goldfinch |
| 10. Collard Dove | | |

Rena Moore

A Favourite Poet

I have a long established love of poetry. Perhaps this began with hearing and chanting nursery rhymes with my mother and grandmother. At Primary School we learned and read many poems and if asked at a family party or school event, I could recite from memory a favourite verse. During my secondary school years my love of both Scottish literature and English literature blossomed, encouraged by an English teacher Miss Carnegie. She was short and petite and her thin lips never broadened into a wide smile. Her shiny mid brown hair was wound round her small head in two severe pleats. I think that I was a little afraid of her but her choice of books, poetry and even her grammar lessons delighted me. I was overjoyed when one year for my birthday, I received a collection of poems "Hamewith" by Charles Murray. This book is still one of my treasured possessions and Murray one of my favourite poets.

Charles Murray was born near Alford, Aberdeenshire on 28 September 1864. From his earliest years, he spoke and cherished the north east Doric language. His mother died young of tuberculosis and both he and his sister were raised by their aunt Mary, his mother's sister who devoted her whole life to caring for the family. After attending local schools, he began a 5 year engineering apprenticeship. He was a keen student and loved many sports. After

completing his training, he worked for some time in Aberdeen before sailing to South Africa for health reasons where he stayed for 36 years. He never forgot his strong attachment for Alford, its settings, surroundings, seasons, work patterns, music and folklore and these provided his inspiration for much of the verse he wrote although he was 7000miles from his beloved north east corner of Scotland.

In South Africa, he worked and made progress as a civil engineer. He was happily married and the couple were blessed with a son and two daughters. Threatened by the Boer War he brought the family to Scotland for safety. He returned and lived alone in South Africa for a time. The Government there, recognising his experience and ability appointed Murray, Acting Secretary for Public Works and he was in charge of building roads, bridges and many administrative buildings. Alongside his civil engineering duties, his creative work flourished and further volumes of poetry were published. His contribution to Scottish literature was acknowledged when in 1920, Aberdeen University awarded him an honorary LL.D.

When he retired, he returned with his wife to Scotland leaving many friends in South Africa and for the next seventeen years, he lived partly in Scotland and partly abroad, playing golf, fishing or just enjoying being with his circle of friends. In 1935 he moved from Alford on Donside to Banchory on Deeside. He was saddened by the outbreak of World War 2 having known the carnage and misery of World War 1. He died on 12 April 1941 and his ashes lie in Alford West Kirkyard, his epitaph "Hamewith" is Home.



Charles Murray remains one of my favourite poets, although over the years, I have become familiar with the verse of many more. The poem following, published in 1906 is one of his best and one of my favourites. It may bring a tear to your eye.

The Whistle

He cut a sappy sooker from the muckle rodden tree
He trimmed an' he wet it an' he thumped it on his knee;

He never heard the teuchat when the harrow broke her eggs,
He missed the craggit heron nabbin' puddocks in the seggs.
He forgot to hound the collie at the cattle when they strayed,
But you should hae seen the whistle that the wee herd made.

He wheepled on't at mornin' an' he tweetled on't at nicht,
He puffed his freckled cheeks until his nose sank oot o' sicht
The kye were late for milkin' when he piped them up the closs,
The kitlin got his supper, and he was bedded boss;
But he cared na doit nor docken what they did or thocht or said ,
There was comfort in the whistle that the wee herd made.

For lyin' lang o' mornin'she had clawed the caup for weeks
But noo he had his bonnet on afore the lave had breeks
He was whistlin' tae the porridge that were hott' rin' on the fire
He was whistlin' ower the the travise tae the Baillie in the byre;
Nae a blackbird or a mavis, that hae pipin for their trade,
Wis a marrow for the whistle that the wee herd made.

He played a march to battle , it cam' dirlin' through the mist
Till the hafflin squared his shou'ders an' made up his mind to 'list
He tried a spring for woovers though it wistna what it meant
But the kitchen-lass was lauchin' an he thocht she maybe kent;
He got ream an' buttered bannocks for the lovin'lilt he played
Wasna that a cheery whistle that the wee herd made.

He blew them rants sae lively, schottisches , reels and jigs,
The foalie flung his muckle legs an' capered ower the rigs,
The grey tailed futt'rat bobbit oot to hear his ain strathspey
The bawd cam' loupin' through the corn to "Clean Pease Strae";
The feet o' ilka man an' beast gat youkie when he played-
Hae ye ever heard o' whistle like the wee herd made.

But the snaw it stopped the herdin'an' the winter brocht him dool,
When in spite o'hacks an' chilblains he was shod again for school;
He couldna sough the catechis nor pipe the rule o'three
He was keepit in an'lickit when the ither loons got free;
But he aften played the truant-'twas the only thing he played ,
For the maister brunt the whistle that the wee herd made.

Lorna Coulter

Great Aunt Nina

During the 1940s, when I was a child, my sister and I were sent at least twice a week to visit our Great Aunt Nina. She was my grandmother's sister but the two ladies did not get on well together and seldom visited. My mother, being a gentle, kindly person, felt it was her duty to keep the family together by making frequent visits to this great aunt and as I have said by sending us to run errands or help with jobs in the garden.

One of the least attractive jobs was being sent by the bus to Falkirk to Aunt Nina's favourite fish shop on the High Street where we were given a large bag of fish scraps - heads, tails and other smelly unsavoury pieces. We were given some funny looks on the bus journey home and the smell seemed to increase as the bus heated up. It might not have been so bad if my aunt had appeared grateful or pleased to see us but sadly she seemed to take great delight in making us feel clumsy and unattractive and often used a favourite word of hers - "common".

I still remember the sinking feeling I experienced as I pushed open the heavy, iron gate which grudgingly let us into her garden. The house itself, with its thick lace curtained windows and coloured, glass panelled porch, filled with ferns, was not welcoming. My sister and I knew to go round to the back door where, after knocking timidly, we would be admitted.

One never quite knew what to expect. Sometimes we were welcomed with open arms; her soft, high voice trilling "Come on my darlings, I've been so lonely today." we shuffled in, hot with embarrassment. On other days, we would be met with a frosty faced aunt, tight-lipped and grim. She would say nothing, but stand aside to let us in while staring at us with cold, pale eyes. And in we crept, feeling "clumsy, ugly" and worst of all - "common"!

Once inside, the feeling of claustrophobia, which had begun in the garden with its high, grassy bank and dense hedges and trees, was increased. Her rooms were always stuffy, and smelled of animals and a lingering aroma of cooked fish. The furniture, which was reasonable enough, was always draped in thick, brown covers to protect it from the cat's claws. The windows, never opened, were covered in dingy

lace and hung with heavy brown curtains. If one sat down, one was at once covered with clinging cat hairs, from Monty, a huge, fat, grey Persian cat who loved fish and had a very cross expression and temper to match.

In the dim light of that stuffy room it was all too easy to incur my aunt's displeasure by stepping on the toes or tail of Monty or Barney, her ancient, black Labrador. Too old and fat to get out of the way, he lay around, breathing heavily and emitting pungent odours into the already stuffy room.

To be invited to stay for tea was a nightmare. We would sit down at the table on which my aunt had previously brushed the cat, and lovingly combed out the tangles in his thick fur. She always set the table with an embroidered cloth and delicate floral china and sometimes a little vase of flowers, but it didn't encourage our appetites.

There would invariably be the same food. Rough, wholemeal brown bread, butter or margarine and homemade apple jelly, pancakes and vanilla slices from the bakers. The tea was always a thick, dark brown, made in a very small teapot, and instead of milk there was thick yellow cream in a tiny silver jug. And every item was liberally laced with cat hairs!

Suffice to say that nowadays my sister will never eat apple jelly without shuddering and I like my tea so weak as to see the bottom of the cup, and never served with milk, let alone cream.

Throughout the visit we would be commanded to "sit up straight and use your back bones children" or "breathe deeply! Stop snuffling!" And "use your handkerchief!".

In between times she questioned us non-stop about our mother and father, and our grandparents. "Where had they been? What had they been doing? When and with whom?" When she was up to date with all the family news and scandals, we were dismissed and it was with relief that the heavy iron gate clanged shut behind us and we escaped, joyfully, to fresh air and freedom, until the next time.

Phyllis McIntosh, Muiravonside

Prayer for Contemplation



Today dear Lord, I'm 80 and there's so much I've left undone,
So I hope that in your mercy, you'll let me live till 81.
If by then I haven't finished every-thing I want to do,
Would you let me stay a little longer – until I'm 82?

There're so many places I want to go, so much yet to see,
Do you think that you could manage to make it 83?
The world is changing very fast, with much more yet in store,
It would be interesting to be around, and live till 84.

And then, if by your Grace, I'm allowed to stay alive,
Could you stretch a little point, and make it 85?
Missing the wonder of your world would put me in a fix,
So I'd like to see what might happen if I live to 86.

I know Lord, that I'm pushing it - 'twill be fun to come to
Heaven,
But if you need the room up there, I'll wait till I'm 87.
I know by then I might be frail, and my memory in a state,
But I'd not be a nuisance, if I could stay till 88.

By then I will have seen so much, and had a super time,
And be quite ready to come up if called at 89.
But maybe by then you could find it in your grace and power
To let me go till 90 then take it hour by hour.



Submitted Etta Napier, Muiravonside.