

“Health and Home are Powerful
Magnets”. An Exile returns to
Berwick.

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EXILE RETURNS TO BERWICK.

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Chapter One: Introduction

John Mackay Wilson is best known for his *Tales of the Borders* which were hugely popular in the nineteenth century and are read to this day. At the time that he was publishing the Tales he was Editor of the *Berwick Advertiser*. Wilson was in this post from March 1832 to September 1835 and witnessed and commented on major governmental and social reforms before his death in October 1835.

Following a short biography of Wilson, the author will discuss the wider political, business and literary contexts in the early nineteenth century, before focussing on his literary and editorial work between 1832 and 1835. The author will critically examine his writings to consider not only what they reveal about Wilson, but also what they reveal about Berwick upon Tweed and the nation itself during this tempestuous period in British history.

Lord Macaulay claimed that the "... only true history of a country is to be found in its newspapers". Newspapers are key sources of historical information, but they of course only provide a *version or versions* of history, as they are coloured by political bias. This can be a problem for those seeking a 'true' understanding of what happened at a particular time. Here it is however the views of Wilson which are of interest and his editorial contributions to the newspaper are quoted extensively for the first time since his death. Of course, some Editors may simply reflect the views of the Proprietor of the newspaper, but it will be shown that Wilson was delighted with the freedom he had to express his views without interference from the owner in the short period he enjoyed at the *Advertiser*.

A discussion of literary publications and the study of a newspaper are however only based on access to information in the public domain. The private thoughts of individuals are studied in private letters, diaries and memoirs. Fortunately, there are some letters written by Wilson from this period which are available and these are

utilised in this study. It is a characteristic of this type of project however that one always wants more information. This is especially true of Wilson as there is no formal, substantial biography or memoir and a researcher must rely primarily on sometimes contradictory newspaper articles.

It is the contention of the author that Wilson's *Tales* are insufficiently read and appreciated today. It is thus intended here to quote extensively, not merely from his newspaper writing, but also from his literary output.

The author has examined the available sources to provide the following biography of Wilson.

Chapter Two: Wilson's Life prior to becoming Editor of the Berwick Advertiser in 1832

Most of the sources agree that John Mackay Wilson was born in Tweedmouth on 15th August 1804 (two sources say he was born in Duns and one says he was a "native of Ord"), the eldest child of William and Jean or Jane Wilson (the sources vary), who were married at Duns on 9th December 1801. Britain was of course at war with France at this time and thus, like the French Romantics discussed by Vigny, he was "... conceived between battles" and "... attended school to the rolling of drums". Both parents out-lived him and his brother James. The latter was a regular contributor of poems to the *Advertiser* during the period considered here.

In the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* of 2nd August 1910 Mrs James Swinney is quoted as saying Wilson was "a delicate youth", although, very old as she was, she could not have been reporting from direct personal experience of that youth. It will be shown below that Wilson's health was a serious concern to him in 1832 and it may be that it was always a problem for him.

His was a family of six children, three boys and three girls. In Tweedmouth they lived at No. 28 Kiln Hill, the house being eventually demolished to make way for the approach road to the Royal Tweed Bridge. During Wilson's boyhood Tweedmouth was a busy township with boat-building yards, other manufacturing activity, flour milling and timber milling, while salmon-fishing was also an important employer in the area. Walker (2001) points out that at this time Tweedmouth and Spittal, both on the south side of the Tweed, were more successful economically than Berwick on the north side.

William Wilson was from Duns^[1] while his wife was from Tweedmouth. Thus, they provided Wilson with insight into life on both sides of the border. It was apparently from his mother that Wilson developed both his religious belief and his love of literature. According to a report in the *Berwick Advertiser* of 3rd February 1927, she was related to Charles Mackay (1814 – 1889) who was a Scottish Poet, Journalist, Author, Anthologist, Novelist and Songwriter, remembered mainly for his book *Extraordinary Popular Delusions and the Madness of Crowds*¹. The Novelist and Mystic Marie Corelli² (1855 – 1924) was his illegitimate daughter.



Charles Mackay

The Wilson family had recently suffered from downward mobility as Wilson's father had been a Millwright, a skilled occupation, in Duns but, when the business there declined he

became a Sawyer in Tweedmouth. In Wilson's Tale *The Deserted Wife* the husband is a Millwright and Wilson demonstrates knowledge of developments in the trade. He writes:

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1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Extraordinary_Popular_Delusions_and_the_Madness_of_Crowds
 2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Marie_Corelli

Peter, however, had begun business, and he and I set up house. Trade was very guid in the millwright line at that period, for thrashing machines were just getting into vogue, though ignorant folk raised an unco outcry against them. My husband's having been wi' the great men, Mr. Bolton and Mr. Watt, threw a good deal in his way; and, on the second year after he began business, he had fifteen journeymen constantly employed, besides apprentices.

William Wilson and his wife were staunch adherents to the Church of Scotland and belonged to the Scottish Church in Tweedmouth under the ministry of the Rev. William Hall. According to a letter in the *Berwick Advertiser* of 1st April 1904 from W. F. Cameron of the Manse, Tweedmouth, John Mackay Wilson remained a supporter of this church all his life and died a Trustee of the institution. When Rev. Hall died in 1834 James Wilson had a poetic tribute to him published in the *Advertiser* (*Berwick Advertiser* (B. A.) 5th April 1834).

Wilson was apparently a keen and intelligent pupil. The author of the introduction to the *Tales of the Borders, Number 48*, Rev. J. K. Campbell, states of his childhood:

His early days were spent in peace and happiness under his parental roof and were marked with a kind of native thirst for knowledge. His tasks, when at school, were a mere pastime and pleasure for him ...

When he left school at the age of 11 or 12 (the sources vary) he worked briefly as an Assistant at the school before becoming an apprentice of Mr Lochhead, a Printer based in the main street in Berwick whose business operated from 1806 to 1834. Years later

Lochhead was still remembered in the town "... by many for his kind heartedness and genial disposition" (the *Border Magazine* 1863^[ii]).

At the time that Wilson was recruited the town had a number of printing businesses and several of the significant Edinburgh publishers utilized them. His employer was in fact largely engaged in printing for Edinburgh and London publishers. Lochhead printed the first directory of Berwick in 1806, the two volume *Buffon's Natural History* in 1809, the *Christian's Complete Bible* (published in parts) in 1813, *The Pilgrim's Progress* in 1815 and *The Life of Napoleon* in 1815. Wilson was thus able both to learn a trade and extend his education. He also read books from John Wilson's Circulating Library^[iii] on Hide Hill in Berwick. As Rev. J. K. Campbell in the introduction to the *Tales of the Borders, Number 48* also states:

He had the opportunity of drinking at the streams of human knowledge that passed by him.

According to Yates (2010, and others), when he was fifteen Wilson persuaded his employer to publish his poem *A Glance at Hinduism*^[iv]. This was an early indication of his literary ambition. The poem discusses the Hindu practice of suttee which involved the burning of the widow of her late husband on his funeral pyre. Wilson, reflecting concerns expressed in parliament at the time about Indian infanticide and other Hindu rituals, disapproved of this practice and wrote:

Shed Gospel light upon Hindostan's sons
And dissipate their darkened mental gloom
Make pagan folly (cruel, delusive dream)
Be seen by them in all its odious forms.
Lead them from penance to the prayers of faith
And faith in Christ, in Christ God's only son.

In choosing to follow a literary career Wilson was aware that he was choosing a life that was challenging and which might provide little financial reward. By the time he wrote his Tale *The Dominie's Class* he had experienced many such challenges. He quotes the Dominie, thus:

The classics, indeed, were his particular hobby; and, though I was proud o' Sandy, I often wished that I could direct his bent to studies o' greater practical utility. His exercises showed that he had an evident genius for poetry, and that o' a very high order; but his parents were poor, and I didna see what poetry was to put in his pocket. I therefore by no means encouraged him to follow out what I conceived to be a profitless, though a pleasing, propensity; but, on the contrary, when I had an opportunity o' speakin' to him by himsel, I used to say to him—

"Alexander, ye have a happy turn for versification, and there is both boldness and originality about your ideas—though no doubt they would require a great deal of pruning before they could appear in a respectable shape before the world. But you must not indulge in verse-writing. When you do it, let it only be for an exercise, or for amusement, when you have nothing better to do. It may make rhyme jingle in your ears, but it will never make sterling coin jink in your pockets. Even the immortal Homer had to sing his own verses about the streets; and ye have heard the epigram—

'Seven cities now contend for Homer dead,

Through which the living Homer begg'd his bread.'

Boethius, like Savage in our own days, died in a prison; Terence was a slave, and Plautus did the work of a horse. Cervantes perished for lack of food, on the same day that our great Shakspeare died; but Shakspeare had worldly wisdom as well as heavenly genius. Camoens died in an almshouse. The magical Spenser was a supplicant at court for years, for a paltry pension, till hope deferred made his heart sick, and he vented his disappointment in these words—

'I was promised, on a time,

To have reason for my rhyme:

From that time unto this season,

I received not rhyme nor reason.'

Butler asked for bread, and they gave him a stone. Dryden lived between the hand and the mouth. Poor Otway perished through penury; and Chatterton, the inspired boy, terminated his wretchedness with a pennyworth of poison. But there is a more striking example than these, Sandy. It was but the other day that our immortal countryman, Robbie Burns—the glory o' our age—sank, at our very door, neglected and in poverty, wi' a broken heart, into the grave. Sandy,' added I, 'never think o' being a poet. If ye attempt it, ye will embark upon an ocean where, for every one that reaches their desired haven, ninety-and-nine become a wreck'.

Before finally settling in Berwick in 1832 Wilson sought success in London, Edinburgh and Manchester. His initial sojourn to the capital followed a disappointment when a local girl he had been

courting called Sarah Sanderson married another. Sarah lived near the junction where the Tweed meets the Whiteadder, west of Berwick. In one of his Tales, *Tibby Fowler*, the central character comes from this area. Wilson writes:

All our readers have heard and sung of 'Tibby Fowler o' the glen'; but they may not all be aware that the glen referred to lies within about four miles of Berwick.^[v]

He then provides a beautiful description of the surrounding countryside, thus:

No one has seen and not admired the romantic amphitheatre below Edrington Castle, through which the Whiteadder coils like a beautiful serpent glittering in the sun, and spurts in fantastic curves beneath the pasture-clad hills – the grey ruin – mossy and precipitous crag – and the pyramid of woods, whose branches, meeting from either side, bend down and kiss the glittering river, till its waters seem lost in their leafy bosom.

Further, Andrew Ayre (2018) writes regarding Wilson's long, and most significant poem, *The Enthusiast*, that it is “... about a love affair in a setting that sounds a lot like the banks of the Tweed near Berwick, leaving one wondering if there is an element of personal input as he had a teenage dalliance with a girl from Gainslaw Hill some 4 miles or so upstream from Berwick”. The cave in the Tale *The Solitary of the Cave* is also in this area.

Given that he wrote several poems (for example see the extracts below) about the wrench of leaving home, one can assume that he missed not only his girlfriend but also the area from whence he came. Now by the brae where sings the Tweed, the beach where shouts the

ing dreams; and with them the word home is for ever associated, and

“Through pleasures and palaces though we may roam,
Be it ever so humble, there’s no place like home.”

We cannot forget the place where our eyes first looked upon the glorious sun; where the moon was a thing of wonder, the evening companion of our childish gambols, joining with us in the race, and flying through the heavens as we ran! where we first listened to the song of the lark, received the outpouring of a mother’s love upon our neck, or saw a father’s eyes sparkle with joy as he beheld his happy children around him; where we first breathed affection’s tale or heard its vows, and perchance were happy, wretched, blest, or distracted, within a short hour. There is a magic influence about nativity that the soul loves to cherish. Its woods, its rivers, its hills, its old memories fling their shadows and associations after us and over us, even to the ends of the earth; and while these whisper of our early joys, or of what we fancied to be care ere we knew what care was—its churchyard tells us we have a portion there—that there our brethren and kindred sleep. We may be absent from it until our very name is forgotten; yet we love it not the less. The man who loves it not, hath his affections “dark as Erebus.” It is a common wish, and it hath patriotism in it too, that where we drew our first breath, there also we should breathe our last. Yet in this world of changes and vicissitudes, such is not the love of many.

One is reminded of Scott’s famous lines:

Breathes there the man, with soul so dead,
Who never to himself hath said,

This is my own, my native land!
 Whose heart hath ne'er within him burn'd,
 As home his footsteps he hath turn'd
 From wandering on a foreign strand!

In his publication *The Enthusiast* Wilson cites this poem.

Wilson not only loved his native area, he was also proud of his home town and interested in its history. Given this interest he undoubtedly would have read Fuller's *History of Berwick* and his version of the most notorious event in Berwick's turbulent history as a key Border town (Yates 2010). Following the death of Alexander 111 in 1284 and the downfall of John Balliol, on the twenty-eighth of March 1296, Edward I (also known as Edward Longshanks and the Hammer of the Scots) passed the river Tweed with his troops and stayed at the priory of Coldstream³. From there he marched on Berwick⁴ the next day. The garrison was commanded by William the Hardy, Lord of Douglas⁵, while the besieging party was led by Robert de Clifford, 1st Baron de Clifford⁶.

In the Tale *The Red Hall; or Berwick in 1296* Wilson describes the siege in graphic detail, as follows:

For hours the battle raged, and the Tweed became as a sheet of blood. But while the conflict rose fiercest, again the Bell Tower sent forth its sounds of death. Edward, at the head of thirty-five thousand chosen troops, had crossed the river at Coldstream, and was now seen encamping at the foot of Halidon Hill. Part of his army immediately descended upon the town, to the assistance of his fleet. They commenced a resolute attack from the

3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Coldstream>

4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berwick-upon-Tweed>

5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_the_Hardy,_Lord_of_Douglas

6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_de_Clifford,_1st_Baron_de_Clifford

north, while the greater part of the garrison held bloody combat with the ships in the river. Though thus attacked upon both sides, the besieged fought with the courage of surrounded lions, and the proud fleet was defeated and driven from the river. The attacks of the army were desperate, but without success, for desperate were the men who opposed them. Treachery, however, that to this day remains undiscovered, existed in the town; and, at an hour when the garrison thought not, the gates were deceitfully opened, and the English army rushed like a torrent upon the streets. Wildly the work of slaughter began. With the sword and with the knife, the inhabitants defended every house, every foot of ground. Mild mothers and gentle maidens fought for their thresholds with the fury of hungry wolves—and delicate hands did deeds of carnage. The war of blood raged from street to street, while the English army poured on like a ceaseless stream. Shouts, groans, the clang of swords, and the shrieks of women mingled together. Fiercer grew the close and the deadly warfare; but the numbers of the besieged became few. Heaps of dead men lay at every door, each with his sword glued to his hands by the blood of an enemy. Of the warriors from Fife, every man perished; but their price was a costly sacrifice of the boldest lives in England. The streets ran deep with blood; and, independent of slaughtered enemies, the mangled and lifeless bodies of seventeen thousand of the inhabitants paved the streets. The war of death ceased only from lack of lives to prey upon. With the exception of the Red Hall, the town was an awful and a silent charnel-house. Within it were the thirty brave Flemings, pouring their arrows upon the triumphant besiegers, and resolved to defend it to death. Amongst them was the fa-

ther of Isabella, and by his side his intended son-in-law, his hands, which lately held a bride's dripping with blood. The entire strength of the English army pressed around the Hall; and fearful were the doings which the band of devoted merchants, like death's own marksmen, made in the midst of them. What the besiegers, however, failed to effect by force, they effected by fire; and the Red Hall became enveloped in flames—its wool, its silk, and rich merchandise blazing together, and causing the fierce element to ascend like a pyramid. Still the brave men stood in the midst of the conflagration, unquailed, hurling death upon their enemies; and, as the fire raged from room to room, they rushed to the roof of their hall, discharging their last arrow on their besiegers, and waving their swords around their heads, with a shout of triumph. There also stood the father, his daughter, and her lover, smiling and embracing each other in death. Crash succeeded crash—the flames ascended higher and higher—and the proud building was falling to pieces. A louder crash followed, the fierce element surrounded the brave victims—the gentle Isabella, leaning on her bridegroom, was seen waving her slender hand in triumph round her head—the hardy band waved their swords, and shouted, "*Liberty!*" and in one moment more the building fell to the earth; and the heroes, the bridegroom, and his bride, were buried in the ruins of their fortress and their factory.

Clifford's troops took the castle, whereupon Douglas surrendered and his life and those of his garrison were spared. Many of the people of Berwick were less fortunate. Sadler (2005) writes:

Although the women and children who survived the initial holocaust were permitted to depart, a significant pro-

portion of the male population was left dead in the ashes, an atrocity which the Scots were never to forget.

Walker (2001) writes:

Thousands were killed and every building was sacked ... The total number of citizens killed is impossible to calculate, but it was written that the streets ran with blood and the mill wheels were being turned by the quantity of blood flowing through the millstreams.

Wilson concludes his dramatic version of the event with this complaint:

Thus fell the Red Hall, and with it the commercial glory of Berwick. Sir William Douglas surrendered the castle to Edward, and the town was given up to plunder and brutality. Its trade in wool and foreign merchandise was transferred to its rival, London – and need we say that it has not recovered it?

Later of course an aspect of his role as Editor of the local newspaper was to promote the virtues of the town and its citizens. Being a local this came easy to him and, for example, during his editorship he defended the town and its inhabitants against criticism from William Cobbett, the English Journalist, Agriculturist and Political Reformer, who had passed through Berwick and also from critical comments in *Blackwoods Magazine*.

His sadness at leaving home and from lost love was not alleviated by success in London and he had to sleep rough and was “... unable even to purchase a breakfast”. Around this time, he had also failed to interest some Edinburgh publishers in his poetry. It would have

consoled him if he had known that Sir Walter Scott had also initially been a literary failure in London.

Writing to an acquaintance in Berwick, he described the experience in the capital and illustrated his determination to succeed, thus:

For many weeks I did wander friendless through this overgrown metropolis, without any definite prospect, totally destitute of money, while my sufferings were of a nature to have brought any ordinary constitution to the grave. But I will not exhaust your patience by a recital of calamities which a critic, ignorant of their meaning, or ashamed to look back on them, would pronounce vulgar and in bad taste. Neither you nor anyone can have an idea of the difficulties a *poor scholar* has to encounter in his road to literary eminence, when he has only his own talents and perseverance to procure him patronage - it requires, I assure you, no common calibre.

(cited in the *Berwick Advertiser* of September 18th 1891).

In the introduction to the *Tales of the Borders, Number 48*, published following Wilson's death, the Rev. Campbell states:

Difficulties and hardships, not a few, pressed hard upon him; and some of the most touching descriptions in the Border Tales of sufferings endured by the aspirant for fame, were actually endured by himself; and, though under a fictitious name, the sobs and tears which involuntarily burst from the family circle when these tales were read, were poured forth for him whose pen had described them.

Certainly, given Wilson's description of his unfortunate experience in London cited above, it seems reasonable to assume that he

utilised this experience to some extent in his two Tales which portray the life of would-be writers in London, viz. *The Poor Scholar* and *The First-Foot*.

The writer in the former Tale describes his experience and that of other aspiring writers in London, thus:

Reader, if ever thou hast been in "Babylon the Great," or, in other words, in the overgrown metropolis of the southern portion of these kingdoms, peradventure you have observed melancholy-looking men, their countenances tinged with the "pale cast of thought," in suits of well-worn black, "a world too wide," creeping, edging, or shuffling along the streets, each belike with a bundle of papers peering from his pocket. In nine cases out of ten, these neglected-looking men are the poor scholars who instruct or amuse the world. You may also find them, with anxiety in their eyes, and hunger sitting at home upon their cheeks, wandering in the most secluded corners of the parks, enjoying, by way of a substitute for dinner, the apology which the air in the parks offers for the pure and unadulterated breath of heaven. Daily, too, they may be seen in the library of the Museum, poring over an old volume, and concealing their shoes beneath the table, lest they should "prate" of the scholar's "whereabouts," and ask of the venerable volume, "Are you or we oldest?" Or you may find them in the corner of some obscure coffee-house, poring intently over the periodicals of the day, at intervals slowly sipping and mincing the cup of coffee and half slice of bread before them.

Wilson emphasised the need for a writer to persevere in the letter cited above and in a "*Report of a Soiree*", published in the *Advertiser* in 1834, Wilson quotes a 'Mr Grant' (he in fact may be fictitious,

a creation of Wilson himself) who also stressed the need for perseverance if an author is to succeed, thus:

And Sir, unless perseverance and ambition! – ambition and perseverance. Be written as in letters of fire upon his brow and in his heart, he will never Sir – I repeat he will never emerge from dark and obscurity, - or the cauld, chilling swamp of chained mediocrity.

(B. A. 9th September 1834)

The certainly fictional ‘Poor Scholar’ writer is determined to succeed and tries to market his literary products in the capital. Wilson writes:

With the same feeling which every author may be supposed to have for his productions, I considered mine were not inferior to others which were puffed and published. I say puffed and published; for, now-a-days, it is common for a puff to be both written and published before the work be-praised is in the hands of the printer ... At length, after passing and repassing several doors a dozen times, as often having my feet upon their thresholds, half drawing my papers from my pocket and thrusting them back again, I ventured into one; and, after a few words awkwardly expressed, holding the manuscripts in my hands, I made known my business. The gentleman, without looking at my productions, but not without looking at me, said his hands were full, and hurried back to his desk. I called on six others; and though my reception with some was more courteous, my success was the same. I applied to the eighth and last. A glimmering of hope returned with the first glance of his countenance. It was not what every one

would term inviting; but genuine feeling glowed through a garb of roughness. He received me with politeness, looked over my papers, delicately asked me a few questions, which I neither knew how to answer nor how to evade; he hinted his fears that I had written on subjects which were not exactly in demand in the market, and, in conclusion, requested me to leave the manuscripts, and call on him on the following morning ... "The longed-for and yet dreaded hour arrived," resumed the other. "I approached the shop with feelings as anxious, and not more enviable, than those of a criminal when he is dragged to the bar. The publisher was out upon business, and one of his young men returned me my manuscripts, and a letter, with his master's compliments and thanks. I do not remember leaving the shop. The stupefaction of death was dashed upon my soul. I believe that I appeared tranquil; but it was the tranquillity of misery immoveable beneath its own load. In despair, I broke open the letter—a guinea fell from its folds at my feet ... "I am not remarkable for brooking insults," added Musgrave, "and of that more than one of the company had cause to be convinced. In his letter, the bookseller spoke of my writings as displaying considerable originality and genius. Parts of them, he thought, exhibited marks of being written too hastily, and recommended their omission. He regretted that he durst not hazard their publication; as, unfortunately, too much depended upon patronage, connection, or the influence of a name. He recommended publishing by subscription, and brought forward the example of Pope, Burns, and others, to render the advice palatable, as children receive sweetmeats after acid drugs. He begged to enclose a guinea for two copies to himself; and, wishing

me success, he said it would afford him pleasure, by every means in his power, to forward the publication.

Despite his impecunious situation, the Scholar spends a considerable sum on an indulgence. Wilson writes:

"Siddons^[vi]! Kemble^[vii]! Cook^[viii]! and Bannister^[ix]!" proceeded our hero, "on the same boards, and on the same night! I thought myself transported to Elysium! I looked for the word Gallery, pressed forward with the eager crowd, and threw down my shilling. 'Another shilling, sir,' said the man of checks. I had followed the stream of the two-shilling gallery, and thus ... I plead guilty," said Robert; "I acted as a fool, but bore the consequence like a philosopher. My last shilling had disappeared. The performance proceeded—I was delighted, enraptured, overwhelmed. The curtain dropped. The house was crowded to suffocation—my throat was parched—and with my last penny—(keep your seat, Mr Liddell)—with my last penny I bought an orange from a fruit-seller in the gallery. The second piece was concluded. The human mass moved every one to the tavern or their homes, a supper and a pillow, and I—I alone of the thousands—went forth penniless into the streets, hungry, shivering, and fatigued, to wander without hope!"

He continues the account of failure, thus:

"My money," added the scholar, "was again reduced to five shillings; and to ward off the approach of starvation, I was compelled to renounce the comforts of a bed once in forty-eight hours, as a luxury I could no longer afford. The very shoes left my feet with ceaseless wandering. My feet

bled as I walked. My hat became shapeless; I was ashamed to look on it. The wind began to sport through my garments, and found loopholes for his sport. My person became like a moving spirit of famine, clothed with poverty, and shivering in a storm. My spirit was not broken, but it was bowed down. Yielding to the hope of despair, I attempted publishing by subscription. The plan may succeed where a man is known, where he has friends to push the subscription for him, or where he has impudence that is proof against insult; but, amongst strangers, it is a hopeless task. I was doomed to endure indignities from ignorant and contemptible menials, who, glancing at my figure, thrust the doors in my face, as on a common beggar! O sir! the recollection haunts me still. It is the only act of my life on which I cannot think without a burning blush coming over my face. I need not say it was unsuccessful. For thirty successive nights I wandered through the streets of this city, exposed to the storms of February and the bleak winds of March, sleeping as I moved along, or standing, and knowing not that I stood, till aroused by the jest of a passing unfortunate, or rudely driven on by the watchman of the night. Ten times in the hour, I would stumble beneath the oppression of sleep to the ground ... Now, at this period, sir, I should tell you that the greater part of the day was generally spent in attempts to sleep upon the seats in the Park; and, dreadful as the pangs of hunger were, at length (and this is no idle saying), I could have been content to die beneath their rage, to have purchased but one hour of rest and repose. The agony of hunger yields to the agony of sleep."

In his Tale *The Procrastinator* Wilson also describes an experience of being down and out in London, as follows:

My child screamed, my wife clung to my arm; she would not, she durst not, sleep in such a place. To be brief: we had to wander in the streets till the morning; and I believe that night, aided by a broken heart, was the forerunner of her death. It was the first time I had been compelled to walk trembling for a night without shelter, or to sit frozen on a threshold; and this, too, I owe to procrastination.

"For a time we rented a miserable garret, without furniture or fixture, at a shilling weekly, which was paid in advance. I had delayed making application for employment till our last sixpence was spent. We had passed a day without food; my child appeared dying; my wife said nothing, but she gazed upon her dear boy, and shook her head with an expression that wrung me to the soul. I rushed out almost in madness, and, in a state of unconsciousness, hurried from shop to shop in agitation and in misery. It was vain; appearances were against me. I was broken down and dejected, and my state of mind and manner appeared a compound of the maniac and the blackguard. At night I was compelled to return to the suffering victims of my propensity, penniless and unsuccessful. It was a dreadful and a sleepless night with us all; or if I did slumber upon the hard floor for a moment (for we had neither seat nor covering), it was to startle at the cries of my child wailing for hunger, or the smothered sighs of my unhappy partner. Again and again I almost thought them the voice of the Judge, saying, 'Depart from me, ye cursed.'

It is now impossible to determine where autobiography ends and fiction begins, but what is certain is that Wilson brought direct knowledge of poverty to his writing in, for example, the afore-mentioned Tales, and to others, including his Tale *Tibby Fowler* in which at one point he writes that Tibby’s “... own heart was sick with hunger”. The reader is also informed that the central character in his Tale *The Prodigal Son* “... wandered in a distant part of the country, his body was emaciated and clothed with rags, and hunger preyed upon his very heart-strings”. One can only agree with Wilson’s subsequent statement:

It is a vulgar thing, Sir, to talk of hunger – but they who have never felt it, know not what it means.

Wilson was able to return home after his first London visit with the help of James Sinclair^[x], an Agent for Lloyds, who was visiting London from Berwick and soon he was married to Sarah Gladstone, “a lady of humble means”, the ceremony being performed, according to a report in the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* on 14th June 1921, at Lamberton Toll. Marriage by declaration in front of two witnesses was legal in Scotland but in 1753 a law banned such irregular marriages in England. This led to couples crossing the Border to marry at places like Gretna Green, Coldstream and Lamberton Toll. The now demolished Lamberton Old Toll House, situated just across the border in Scotland, was famous for its irregular marriages. From 1798 to 1858 keepers of the Toll at Lamberton and others used to marry couples in the same fashion as at Gretna Green⁷.

In his Tale *The Royal Bridal* Wilson describes Lamberton and its then ceremonial role, thus:

It may be meet, however, that we say a word or two concerning Lamberton, for though, now-a-days, it may lack

7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gretna_Green

the notoriety of Gretna in the annals of matrimony, and though its "run of business" may be of a humbler character, there was a time when it could boast of prouder visitors than ever graced the Gretna blacksmith's temple. To the reader, therefore, who is unacquainted with our eastern Borders, it may be necessary to say, that, at the northern boundary of the lands appertaining to the town of Berwick-upon-Tweed, and about three miles, a furlong, and few odd yards from that oft-recorded good town, a dry stone wall, some thirty inches in height, runs from the lofty and perpendicular sea-banks, over a portion of what may be termed the fag-end of Lammermoor, and now forming a separation between the laws of Scotland and the jurisdiction of the said good town; and on crossing to the northern side of this humble but important stone wall, you stand on the lands of Lamberton. Rather more than a stone-throw from the sea, the great north road between London and Edinburgh forms a gap in the wall aforesaid, or rather "dyke;" and there, on either side of the road, stands a low house, in which Hymen's high priests are ever ready to make one flesh of their worshippers.

In this Tale he is however portraying a much grander affair than his and Sarah's wedding, viz. a royal occasion. Wilson writes:

Early in July, in the year of grace 1503, Lamberton Moor presented a proud and right noble spectacle. Upon it was outspread a city of pavilions, some of them covered with cloth of the gorgeous purple and glowing crimson, and decorated with ornaments of gold and silver. To and fro, upon brave steeds, richly caparisoned, rode a hundred lords and their followers, with many a score of gay and

gallant knights and their attendant gentlemen. Fair ladies, too, the loveliest and the noblest in the land, were there. The sounds of music from many instruments rolled over the heath. The lance gleamed, and the claymore flashed, and war-steeds neighed, as the notes of the bugle rang loud for the tournament. It seemed as if the genius of chivalry had fixed its court upon the heath.

About a quarter of a mile north of these, may still be traced something of the ruins of the Kirk, where the princess of England became the bride of the Scottish king, and the first link of the golden chain of UNION, which eventually clasped the two nations in one, may be said to have been formed.

The gay and gallant company were assembled on Lamberton, for within the walls of its Kirk, the young, ardent, and chivalrous James IV of Scotland was to receive the hand of his fair bride, Margaret of England, whom Dunbar describes as a

"Fresche rose, of cullor reid and white."

This extract refers to the marriage of James IV of Scotland and Henry VIII's daughter, Margaret Tudor⁸. After a wedding by proxy in London, Margaret crossed the border at Berwick on 1st August 1503 and was met by the Scottish court at Lamberton⁹. On 8th August 1503 the marriage was celebrated in person in Holyrood Abbey¹⁰. The rites were performed by the Archbishop of Glasgow¹¹

8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Margaret_Tudor

9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lamberton,_Scottish_Borders

10. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Holyrood_Abbey

11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Blackadder

and the Archbishop of York¹². The details of the proxy marriage, progress, arrival and reception in Edinburgh were recorded by the Somerset Herald, John Young. This union under-pinned the Treaty of Perpetual Peace¹³ with England.

Sarah is a largely unknown figure, even her religious background is not known. Could her marriage to Wilson have been an elopement over the border because one set of parents, or even both sets, did not approve? Perhaps, but the location in fact may just have been a matter of necessity since in Berwick the Church of Scotland was not able to stage weddings and staunch Presbyterians were unable to arrange a ceremony in the Church of England.

In Wilson's Tale *The Twin Brothers* there is an elopement, but the young lovers marry at Gretna not at Lamberton. He writes:

One day they had wandered farther than their wont, and they stood on the little bridge where the two kingdoms meet, about half a mile below Gretna. I know not what soft persuasion he employed, but she accompanied him up the hill which leadeth through the village of Springfield, and they went towards the far-famed Green together. In less than an hour, Miss Carnaby that was, returned towards Carlisle as Mrs. Sim, leaning affectionately on her husband's arm.

When the old grocer heard of what had taken place, he was exceedingly wroth; and although, as has been said, William stood high in his favour, he thus addressed him—

"Ay, ay, sir!—fine doings! This comes of your Sunday walking! And I suppose you say that my daughter is

12. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Savage_\(bishop\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Thomas_Savage_(bishop))

13. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Perpetual_Peace_\(1502\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Treaty_of_Perpetual_Peace_(1502))

yours—that she is your wife; and *she* may be *yours*—but I’ll let you know, sir, my *money* is *mine*; and I’ll cut you both off. You shan’t have a sixpence. I’ll rather build a church, sir; I’ll give it towards paying off the national debt, you rascal. You would steal my daughter—eh!”

Thus spoke Mr. Carnaby in his wrath; but when the effervescence of his indignation had subsided, he extended to both the hand of forgiveness, and resigned his business in favour of his son-in-law.

Similarly, in *The Deserted Wife* the lovers go to Gretna for a ceremony. Wilson writes:

The short and the long o’ the story is, that, finding there was nothing to be made o’ my faither and that he wadna come to, Peter got me to consent to elope wi’ him. My conscience tauld me that I was doing a daft-like action, and a thing I wad maybe rue. But Peter, according to an agreement between us, came to my bedroom window, which, after some hesitation, when I saw his frenzy and impatience, I opened, and he threw up to me the queerest sort o’ ladder I ever saw. It was just bits o’ sma’ rope tied thegither, wi’ twa cleeks at the one end. I had no sooner done wi’ it as he desired me, than up he came, and whispering to me to come out at the window and place my foot on it, I did so, and he taking me under his arm lighted me safe upon the ground in a moment.

One o’ his faither’s servants was standing at a distance holding a horse, ready saddled, to carry two. I gat on to the pad behind Peter, and he galloped away till we came to the side o’ the Solway, and there I found a boat was ly-

ing ready to take us across to Workington. Peter took out a license, and that day I became Mrs. Simpson. I heard that when my faither learned in the morning that I had run away, he didna offer to come after me, but he shook his head and said—"Aweel! 'they that will to Cupar maun to Cupar!' 'Poor infatuated lassie!—sorrow will bring her to her hunkers, and she will be glad to come back to the house that she has clandestinely left; and come when she like, for her mother's sake, she shall aye find a hame!"

He said this when his wife was not present. I hae often thought that there is something prophetic in a parent's words, especially when they speak concerning the consequence o' disobedience; and in my case I found much o' what my faither said owre true.

According to an account in the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* of 9th April 1889, in the autumn of 1828 Wilson again journeyed to London and briefly worked as a Law Clerk. One notes that George in *The First-Foot*, who like the 'Poor Scholar' experiences hunger and homelessness in London while trying to get published, eventually also finds work as a Clerk, but in a "counting house" rather than in a law office.

That Wilson was in London in that year is confirmed by the date of the poem "*To the Tweed*" cited below (the year of his first visit to London is not known). According to Yates (2010), a poem with an almost identical first verse, entitled *The Tweed near Berwick*, was written by Wilson in 1834 and was first printed in a copy of the *Berwick Grammar School Magazine* c.1965 by George Laidler, who had discovered the autographed poem in a scrapbook belonging to his maternal grandfather, Thomas Barker (1816 - 1878) of Berwick. The latter poem includes the following stanza:

Midst the daydream of boyhood, ere glowing ambition

Had sung the fond thrilling of beauty and love,
Thy banks were my study - my only tuition
The sounds of thy waters, the coo of thy dove.

The writer of the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* report of 9th April 1889 stated that Wilson found the work in London monotonous and he therefore “... soon set sail for Edinburgh” (if he did travel by ship then he was making a trip that Sir Walter Scott made at least twice, the last time as he was returning home to die). He had difficulty there also as the following anecdote involving John Henry Alexander, owner and manager of the Theatre Royal, Glasgow, reveals:

Beneath a frequently harsh exterior, Mr Alexander concealed a thoroughly kind heart. One morning while seated at breakfast in his father-in-law's house in Edinburgh, a poor man called and presented him with a manuscript which he wished him to read. The manager, who had been much pestered with similar applications, dismissed him with harsh refusal. Scarcely, however, had he re-seated himself at breakfast, when he seemed to relent. In a moment he started up, rushed to the door, and called the stranger back. He said he would look at the thing - glanced at the first line or two, gave him a shilling, and desired him to call next day. Next day he gave him half-a-crown, and made minute inquiries, at the same time, as to his way of life, apprehending that his extreme poverty could only result from misconduct. The poor author confessed that he had been a little unsteady once, but was



John Henry Alexander (1792-1851)

now an altered man. Mr Alexander straightway despatched his wife to find out his lodging, and make inquiries at his landlady respecting him. The result of the investigation was satisfactory. When next he called, Mr Alexander gave him £3. The manuscript was "The Conspiracy^[xi]" and the author Mr John Mackay Wilson. Mr Wilson wrote "The Highland Widow," and one or two other highly successful pieces for Alexander, and died at length, in receipt of not less than £700 a-year from his writings, and celebrated throughout Scotland as the author of "Wilson's Tales of the Borders".

(cited in the *Falkirk Herald* 25th December 1851)

In his Tale *The Dominie's Class* Wilson describes an aspiring writer enduring a similar experience in Edinburgh, thus:

"Now, doctor, here is poor Sandy's letter; listen, and ye shall hear it."—

Edinburgh, June 10, 17—

"Honoured Sir,—I fear that, on account of my not having written to you, you will ere now have accused me of ingratitude; and when I tell you that, until the other day, I have not for months even written to my mother, you may think me undutiful, as well as ungrateful. But my own breast holds me guiltless of both. When I arrived here, I met with nothing but disappointments, and those I found at every hand. For many weeks I walked the streets of this city in despair, hopeless as a fallen angel. I was hungry, and no one gave me to eat; but they knew not that I was in want. Keen misery held me in its grasp—ruin caressed me, and laughed at its plaything. I will not pain you by detailing a catalogue of the privations I endured, and which none but those who have felt and fathomed the depths of misery can imagine. Through your letter of recommendation, I was engaged to give private lessons to two pupils; but the salary was small, and that was only to be paid quarterly. While I was teaching them, I was starving, living on a penny a day. But this was not all. I was frequently without a lodging; and, being expelled from one for lack of the means of paying for it, it was many days before I could venture to inquire for another. My lodging was on a common-stair, or on the bare sides of the Calton; and my clothes, from exposure to the weather, became unsightly. They were no longer fitting garments for one who gave

lessons in a fashionable family. For several days I observed the eyes of the lady of the house where I taught fixed with a most supercilious and scrutinising expression upon my shabby and unfortunate coat. I saw and felt that she was weighing the shabbiness of my garments against my qualifications, and I trembled for the consequence. In a short time my worst fears were realised; for, one day, calling as usual, instead of being shown into a small parlour, where I gave my lessons, the man-servant, who opened the door, permitted me to stand in the lobby, and in two minutes returned with two guineas upon a small silver plate, intimating, as he held them before me, that 'the services of Mr Rutherford were no longer required.' The sight of the two guineas took away the bitterness and mortification of the abrupt dismissal. I pocketed them, and engaged a lodging; and never, until that night, did I know or feel the exquisite luxury of a deep, dreamless sleep. It was bathing in Lethe, and rising refreshed, having no consciousness, save the grateful feeling of the cooling waters of forgetfulness around me. Having some weeks ago translated an old deed, which was written in Latin, for a gentleman who is what is called an in-door advocate, and who has an extensive practice, he has been pleased to take me into his office, and has fixed on me a liberal salary. He advises me to push my way to the bar, and kindly promises his assistance. I shall follow his advice, and I despair not but I may one day solicit the hand of the only woman I ever have loved, or can love, from her father, as his equal. I am, sir, yours, indebtedly,

Alex. Rutherford."

Poem by John Mackay Wilson.

A lady correspondent sends us the original of the following poem, which was written to her aunt by John Mackay Wilson, author of "The Tales of the Borders," and a former editor of the "Berwick Advertiser," while he was in London:—

TO THE TWEED.

On thy banks, classic Tweed, still my fancy
shall wander,
Though away from the land of the thistle and
thee,
And follow thy course to its latest meander—
The place o' my birth where thou meetest the
sea.

For there is a language in thee, sweeping
river—
A voice in the woodlands that shadow thy
braes,
A home and a heart by thy side that shall ever
Be one with existence—be dear to my lays.
'Midst the day-dreams o' boyhood, ere glowing
ambition
Had sung the young thrillings o' beauty or
love,
Thy banks were my study, my only tuition,
The sound o' thy waters—the coo o' the dove.

Stream o' nativity! witness with heaven!
Of my vow on the breath of thy murmurs con-
veyed,
When pure as thy fountain, confiding was
given
To me the fond heart o' my favourite maid.

Here can I forget thee? my soul's deepest feel-
ing
Now tells me that thou art remembered indeed,
For to think o' the maid o' my heart is reveal-
ing
A tale that revisits the banks of the Tweed.

She is loved—we shall meet, and though des-
tiny sever
Our lives, and has blighted the hopes of our
youth—
'Tis the shade of a cloud on the breast of a
river—
A vapour at sunrise—the touchstone of truth.
Though years yet may number a varied suc-
cession,
Ere again on thy banks I enraptured may
tread,
Let this be the crown of aspiring ambition—
A home, heart, and grave on the banks of the
Tweed.

John Mackay Wilson.

London, April 21st, 1828.

This poem was published in the *Advertiser* in 6th June 1829 and in the *Border Magazine* (undated, 1831-1832) Wilson found another eminent benefactor in Edinburgh, viz. John Wilson, the Advocate, Literary Critic, Author and Professor of Moral Philosophy at Edinburgh University¹⁴, who famously wrote under the pseudonym of Christopher North in the eminent Edinburgh publication *Blackwood's Magazine*¹⁵. He helped Wilson obtain work at the *Literary Gazette*. It is perhaps not surprising therefore that this journal in 1830 provided an enthusiastic preview of Wilson's first play, *The Gowrie Conspiracy* (referred to as *The Conspiracy* above) which was to be performed at the Caledonian Theatre, when it was stated "... from what we know of the author's abilities we are inclined to augur favourably of its success". The following week the same magazine reported that the play "... was performed on Tuesday with great success".

Wilson was able to thank Professor Wilson by writing an admiring sketch of him in the *Border Magazine* (the magazine is discussed below) which was re-printed later in the *Advertiser*. He wrote:

He is almost the only writer I have met with, who thoroughly understands and feels what poetry is.

(B. A. 8th February 1834)

According to Wilson his namesake was 'a great poet' and even suggests he is superior to Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. Modern critics would not agree. For example, Noble (1988) states regarding Professor Wilson's poetry:

He wrote a mass of poetry throughout his life. The best of it struggles toward mediocrity.

14. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh_University

15. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackwood%27s_Magazine

Other plays written by Wilson followed, including *The Highland Widow* (based on the same Tale in Scott’s *Tales of the Canongate*), *Margaret of Anjou*^[xii], *The Expiation* and *The Siege*. In a footnote to the latter piece which is concerned with the failure of Edward II to capture Berwick in 1319, Wilson wrote:

I have not followed the popular tradition that the sons of Seton were executed, the story is improbable and is not countenanced by contemporary history. A skull, however, to which tradition gives a marvellous history and which is affirmed to be that of one of the Setons, has been for some years in possession of the writer.

(cited in the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* 9th
April 1889)

In collecting such relics Wilson was again following in the footsteps of Scott who had a major collection of Scottish historical memorabilia.

Wilson was thus a modest literary success in Edinburgh at a time when Scotland’s capital was a centre of literary excellence. The *Edinburgh Review*¹⁶ (founded in 1802) and *Blackwood’s Magazine*¹⁷ (founded in 1817) had a major impact on the development of British literature and drama in the era of Romanticism. Benchimol (2016) suggests that these magazines were part of a highly dynamic Scottish Romanticism that by the early nineteenth century caused Edinburgh to emerge as the cultural capital of Britain and to become central to a wider formation of a ‘British Isles nationalism’. Certainly, at this stage London was Edinburgh’s only possible British rival as regards literary influence.

16. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Edinburgh_Review

17. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blackwood%27s_Magazine

Not surprisingly Wilson was delighted with his progress and, prior to his third theatrical production, he wrote to a friend in Berwick, thus:

Thank God, without compromising either principle, feeling, zest of society, I have struggled, I have conquered. The field is now open before me, and my path straight and, indeed, I know no author now living who enjoys a greater portion of good-will from his fellow authors and all parties than I now do - with many I am on the most intimate footing.

My recent dramatic productions have been extremely successful. And another new one, which will be produced within a fortnight, called "Margaret of Anjou" or the "Noble Merchants," has, in numerous papers, been most flatteringly announced. With the increase in my reputation, I have in this instance increased my charges a full hundred per cent.

(cited in the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* 9 April 1889)



Professor Wilson

He continued:

Others of my works, besides my dramatic ones, are ready for the press, and now only wait the proper season to be brought out. I think you have very little in the shape of talent residing among you at present, and that little lost.

Wilson was looking forward to gloating at those in his home town who had doubted his talent and wrote:

I am at length firmly resolved on seeing your good town before the end of the present month—and then ‘the withered jades may wince^[xiii]’. I come to gratify numerous kindly affections - but not the less (if it be to my shame to

blast my enemies with a look of unrecognised disdain, or vice versa,) to heap coals of fire upon their heads.

These other works included poetry which then was considered a superior form of literature. For Wordsworth, for example, poetic composition was a primary mode of expression; prose was secondary. Sir Walter Scott was conscious of this view when he published his early novels under a pseudonym. Trollope stated that Scott succeeded in making novel-writing respectable by putting history, which was serious, together with the novel, which was not. Pittock (2008) comments:

The novel's questionable status as a work of art is based on the widespread eighteenth-century suspicion that it might inflame its readers' imagination or blur the boundary between fact and fiction ...

For Wilson also, poetry was superior. In *The Enthusiast* he writes:

In prose, there is the piling up of thought upon thought, to form a single idea. In poetry, every idea is an idea of itself; or, if I may so speak, many ideas burst from one thought like seas of light, pours upon many worlds from one sun.

He continues:

It is the language of the soul, it is its actions. It is the grasping of the heart and its passions. It is, and is in, every thing that elevates man from the prose around him. Poetry is enthusiasm, - is every or any thing in which is beauty or power. It exists in the power of producing effect, and in the effect produced.

Wilson's poems at this time included *The Poet's Progress*, *The Border Patriots* and *The Sojourner*. It is interesting that these poems are not included in his verse published in the *Border Magazine* or *The Enthusiast*. Perhaps he rejected them as youthful attempts which were later to be ignored?

He did not find publishers who were keen to publish his poetry so at this time he also began writing lectures entitled *Poetry with Biographical and Individual Sketches* which included discussion and criticism of the leading poets of England and Scotland from the time of Chaucer. He began his lecture tour in Berwick and his two lectures there were reviewed in the *Berwick Advertiser* of November 1829. The reviewer wrote of the first lecture as follows:

On Tuesday evening Mr Wilson delivered his first lecture to a numerous and respectable audience in the Red Lion Assembly room.

(B. A. 14th November 1829)

He or she continued as follows:

After a very appropriate introduction in which he briefly alluded to his own particular circumstances, he proceeded to the subject of his lecture, poetry, which he described as consisting of two great divisions, the poetry of the heart, and the poetry of the imagination, or of a third classification in which both are blended – ‘the eye of a truly great poet,’ he said, ‘must command all space his mind begirt^[xiv] eternity.’

As regards the second lecture, the reviewer reported:

Mr Wilson's lecture last night was numerously attended ... and seemed to give the highest satisfaction to the auditors, by which they were heard with the greatest attention and loudly applauded.

(B. A. 21st November 1829)

About the 'blending of heart and imagination', Wordsworth and Coleridge had earlier expressed the view that a great Poet must unite the two qualities of thought and feeling. For example, for the former "... the excellence of writing ... consists in the conjunction of Reason and Passion".

Wilson toured Scotland and England delivering these lectures and received excellent reviews. For example, the *Western Literary Journal* stated:

The specimens we have seen of his poetical powers stamp him as a poet of the highest order.

The *Manchester Chronicle* was also complimentary, declaring:

He possesses one quality now rarely to be found, we mean that of originality.

Another newspaper reported that "... the audience before whom he delivered his lectures were highly delighted with the richness and originality of his thoughts".

He began this lecture tour in Berwick and he completed it in his home town as this 1832 announcement in the *Border Magazine* (undated, 1831-1832) reveals:

... Mr J. M. Wilson will deliver his popular "Biographical and Critical Lectures on the Poets of Britain" in this his native town, in the course of the ensuing spring. It will

be recollected that it was here, before an audience of his townsmen that Mr W. began his career as a Lecturer, and here he intends bringing it to a close. How much the Lectures have added to his reputation may be known by the panegyrics bestowed on him by the Press in every part of England and Scotland. The “Biographical and Critical Lectures” are entirely distinct from those he formerly delivered in Berwick. From some of the Journals now before us, we perceive that the “Manchester Chronicle” says “as a Lecturer he is decidedly without an equal”, and adds that his “manner and intonation strikingly resemble those of Lord Chancellor Brougham”. And the “Times” states that “his complete mastery over and delineation of every passion, to the perfect command of every movement of his finger and every glance of his eye can only be equalled by our greatest dramatic performers.

There was no review of his lectures in the newspaper this time even though by then Wilson was Editor^[xv].

John Everett (1804-1872) met Wilson in Manchester when he delivered three literary lectures there in 1831. It was not surprising that they became friends as they had a lot in common. Everett was a fellow Northumbrian from Alnwick and like Wilson was from a relatively humble background and had also taken up an apprenticeship (to learn the trade of Flax Dresser and Grocer) after leaving school. Wilson commented rather bitterly when he was Editor of the *Advertiser* that Everett had succeeded despite coming from a region which “... is more remarkable for producing talent than encouraging it” (B. A. 19th July 1834).

In his Tale *The Faa's Revenge: A Tale of the Border Gipsies* he however includes a conversation in which many eminent Northumbrians are listed:

"Why," said one, "but even Rothbury here, secluded as it is from the world, and shut out from the daily intercourse of men, is a noted place. It was here that the ancient and famous northern bard and unrivalled ballad writer, Bernard Rumney, was born, bred, and died. Here, too, was born Dr. Brown, who, like Young and Home, united the characters of divine and dramatist, and was the author of 'Barbarossa,' 'The Cure of Saul,' and other works, of which posterity and his country are proud. The immediate neighbourhood, also, was the birth-place of the inspired boy, the heaven-taught mathematician, George Coughran, who knew no rival, and who bade fair to eclipse the glory of Newton, but whom death struck down ere he had reached the years of manhood."

Wilson continued the conversation, thus:

"Come," said a third, who, from his tongue, appeared to be a thorough Northumbrian, "we wur talking about Rothbury ... You was saying what clever chaps had been born here—but none o' ye mentioned Jamie Allan, the gipsy and Northumberland piper, who was born here as weel as the best o' them."

Wilson and Everett shared progressive political views and Everett, like Wilson, was a writer of prose and poetry (he, in fact, presented one of his poems to the Duchess of Northumberland at Alnwick Castle). By 1834 he had published ten works of prose and poetry, one of the latter being published in the *Advertiser* in February 1834. He also for some time wrote for a periodical, the *Manchester Journal*, which he edited.

Everett reviewed Wilson's lectures favourably, stating:

The first impression ... of Mr Wilson, is that of a man of calm, delightful, unassuming modesty – a man more at peace than in love with himself – with an unbending resolution to view and to take the tide of events as it rolls before the eye ... The Lecturer is not long engaged in his work, before he scales some of the Parnassian heights, and convinces every listener of his skill and of his power, while standing on the plains below ... In his recitals, his sudden transition from the pathetic to the stern, the tragic to the comic, the rapid to the slow, the soft to the loud, accompanied by every variety of action, look and expression of feeling, can only be equalled by our best dramatic performers. He has the art of at once seizing that which gives prominence and character to the poetry and genius of the writer, and of striking off the whole in two or three bold sentences, illustrating the same with some daring and often beautiful imagery.

(the *Manchester Times* 23rd April 1831)

He also reported that Wilson followed good lecturing practice by using his notes “... as a reserve rather than a spring from whence he is taking in constant supplies”.

In the *Berwick Advertiser* in 1834 Wilson was less kind to Everett as follows:

His writings are distinguished by a keen perception of the quiet beauties of nature, and by frequent passages more remarkable for their power than their elegance. Their principal fault lies in an occasional stiffness in the rhythms or as if arising from the idea being extended or too strong for the form of expression. He is not one of your silky writers, who would weave words out of moonbeams, but he writes

as one having his heart in what he is doing, and who is more anxious to instruct than to please.

(B. A. 19th July 1834)

He continues:

The longest poem he has published is entitled “Edwin”. It has many striking beauties, but its effect and its power is impaired by the measure in which it is written.

Wilson does however end the review thus:

His next poem when published ... will place the name of Everett against the most honoured poets of the age.

Welford (1895) also provides an assessment of Everett’s poetry in which he cites Wilson. He writes:

At one period of his life Mr Everett ranked amongst what was commonly known as the ‘Sheffield poets’ – a local coterie at whose head stood his friend James Montgomery^[xvi] – and although the prediction of a Berwick journalist that the names of Montgomery and Everett would go down to posterity together as those of ‘Christian poets who dared to sing of the beauty of holiness when trifles were the song of the age’, has not been fulfilled, yet some of his effusions, as the Rev. Gilfillan^[xvii] remarked, are ‘full of sweetness and fire’.

Despite his damning of his friend with faint praise Wilson was keen to publish Everett’s work as the following quotation from the letter to him of 26th November 1832, illustrates:

What are you doing? Is the “Mount” finished? Respecting it, I have a favour to ask, - will you send me and allow me to print in my columns, the stanzas descriptive of the scene from the Mount, - and also the stanzas which describe the Maniac? - You really must. Without leave you will perceive I have printed the only two stanzas I had. I expect pieces from Hogg, Pringle and several others, and intend to make a show number like the Athenaeum.

The two friends shared an interest in religion. Everett’s maternal grandfather had built the first Wesleyan chapel in Alnwick and Everett had become a Methodist Minister at the age of 21 and had then preached his first sermon in Berwick at the Wesleyan Church. When Wilson and he met, however, Everett, because of a throat problem, was a Book-Seller at 10 Market Street in Manchester, having previously had a similar business in Sheffield. Wilson was impressed by Everett’s religious beliefs and commented:

But I do not hesitate to say that from the first day that I became acquainted with him, the Methodists became a very different people in my estimation.

(B. A. 19th July 1834)

Everett returned to preaching in Newcastle in 1834. According to Welford the Tyneside Pitmen “... gave him the sobriquet of ‘hell-fire lad’ and flocked to hear him”. Welford also cites a contemporary who stated “... when once seen and heard he was a man to be remembered”^[xviii].



James Everett

Wilson and Everett corresponded on theological, literary and personal matters until Wilson's death. As regards the former, Wilson wrote to Everett on 21st October 1834, thus:

Had my paper and time permitted, I intended to have said something about the dissensions which seem to be arising in your most respected body. I don't like the conduct of the Ashtonman^[xix], he is too much of a voluntary for me; while on the other hand, so far as I can perceive the Rev Jabez Bunting^[xx] and others seem too strongly to lean to episcopacy - I never like to hear the subject mentioned.

In the same letter Wilson indicates that he wants to hear his friend preach again in Berwick:

I am holding out to your admirers here that they in all probability will have the pleasure of hearing you preach here in the course of the Spring or Summer - and I am resolved you shall preach, - we won't let you leave Berwick without doing so.

Wilson comments on 'episcopacy' twice in his Tales. There is a description of a family at prayer in his Tale *The Bride* and he compares this activity with services in the "the Roman church and the Episcopal cathedral", as follows:

William Percy was esteemed by his neighbours as a church-going and a good man. He was kind to his servants; he paid every man his own; he was an affectionate husband and a fond father; the poor turned not away murmuring from his door; and every Sunday night he knelt with his wife and with his daughter, before their Maker, in worship, as though it were a duty which was to be discharged but once in seven days. Now, it was late on Saturday night when Henry Cranstoun arrived at their house; and, on the following evening, he joined in the devotions of the family. But Monday night came, and the supper passed, and the Bibles were not brought. Henry inquired—

"Is it not time for worship?"

The question went to the conscience of the farmer—he felt that before his Creator, who preserved him, who gave him every breath he drew, he had knelt with his family but once a-week. "Is not He the Almighty of all time and of all eternity," asked his conscience; "and have I not served Him as though He were Lord of the Sabbath only? I for-

sake him for a week—where should I be if he left me but for a moment?"

"Agnes, love," said he aloud, "bring the books."

She cheerfully obeyed; and the Bibles were laid upon the table. The psalm was read and the voice of praise was heard; and as the hinds in the adjoining houses heard the sound, they followed the example of their master. Hitherto, like their employer, they had lifted their voices in thanksgiving but once a week, as if a few minutes spent in praise and in prayer, and in the reading of a chapter, were all that was necessary for example to a family, or for gratitude to Him who sustained, protected, and gave them being from moment to moment. I should not dwell upon this, were it not that there are many good and Christian parents, who conceive that they fulfil the injunction of "praying often with and for their children" by causing them to kneel around them on a Sabbath night. But this certainly is a poor fulfilment of the oath which they have taken—or which, if they have not taken, they are equally bound to perform. I do not say that the man who daily prays with his family will have the gratification of seeing all of them following in his footsteps, or that all of them will think as he thinks; but he may be of one sect, and some of them of another; yet, let them go where they will, let them be thrown into what company they may, let temptation assail them in every form, and absence throw its shadows over their father's house, yet the remembrance, the fervour, the words of a father's prayers, will descend upon their souls like a whisper from Heaven, kindling the memory and awakening the conscience; and, if the child of such a man depart into sin, the small still

voice will not die in his ear. Nay, the remembrance of the father's voice will be heard in the son's heart above the song of the bacchanal, and the lowly remembered voice of psalms rise upon his memory, making him insensible to the peal of instruments. I have listened to the sonorous swell of the organ in the Roman church and the Episcopal cathedral, to the chant of the choristers and the music of the anthem, and I have been awed by the sounds; but they produced not the feelings of peace and of reverence, I might say of religion, which are inspired by the lowly voices of a congregated family joining together in their hymn of praise. I have thought that such sounds, striking on the ear of the guilty, would arrest them in their progress.

In Wilson's Tale *Ups and Downs; or, David Stuart's Account of his Pilgrimage*, David Stuart expresses concern about the fact that his *fi-ancé* is an Episcopalian:

"As I was saying, she was an Episcopawlian,—a downright, open-day defender o' Archbishop Laud and the bloody Claverhouse; and she wished to prove down through me the priority and supremacy o' bishops ower presbyteries,—just downright nonsense, ye ken; but there's nae accounting for sooperstition. A great deal depends on how a body's brought up. But what vexed me maist was to think that she wad be gaun to ae place o' public worship on the Sabbath, and me to anither, just like twa strangers; and maybe if her minister preached half an hour langer than mine, or mine half an hour langer than hers, or when we had nae intermission, then there was the denner spoiled, and the servant no kened what time to hae it ready; for the mistress said ane o'clock, and the

maister said twa o'clock. Now, I wadna gie tippence for a cauld denner.

Wilson's literary lectures were subsequently published in an abridged form in the *Border Magazine* referred to above, a monthly periodical established in Berwick in November 1831 and which continued until December 1832. It was an intellectual magazine, for example the fifth edition included *Translations from the German Novelists* by N. D. Stenhouse, *Sketches of Irish Life* by Alexander Campbell, *Scotch Songs* by Robert Gilfillan and *A Night with the Ettrick Shepherd* and poems by D. J. Leitch, in addition to prose and poems by Wilson, an example of which was cited above.

The magazine was edited by John Rennison who Wilson supported in his efforts at the magazine. Rennison was a Bookseller, Stationer, Publisher and Bookbinder whose business was located on the High Street in Berwick. It was printed by Daniel Cameron, a Printer on Church Street in the town, who mainly printed books on religious and local subjects.

In 1831 Wilson also began touring to lecture on the need for temperance and delivered these lectures in several cities including Manchester, Bristol and Warrington. The *Leeds Mercury* of March 10th 1832 printed a report, as follows:

LEEDS TEMPERANCE SOCIETY: On Tuesday evening, Mr John Mackay Wilson delivered an address which occupied upwards of two hours in the Methodist Chapel, Albion Street. He brought forwards many objections which are raised against the necessity or advantages of such societies, and then answered them by such sound arguments as completely to overturn them, and implant conviction in the minds of objectors. He made a powerful appeal to the female part of his audience, to come

forwards and support Temperance Societies, showing that they are themselves most deeply interested, and must be essentially benefitted by the success of such societies. The total number of members in this town exceeds 1,400.

There are numerous references to the dangers of alcohol in Wilson's Tales. His Tale *We'll Have Another* begins with the following warning:

When the glass, the laugh, and the social "crack" go round the convivial table, there are few who may not have heard the words, "We'll have another!" It is an oft-repeated phrase, and it seems a simple one; yet, simple as it appears, it has a magical and fatal influence. The lover of sociality yieldeth to the friendly temptation it conveys, nor dreameth that it is a whisper from which scandal catcheth its thousand echoes—that it is a phrase which has blasted reputation—withered affection's heart—darkened the fairest prospects—ruined credit—conducted to the prison-house, and led to the grave. When our readers again hear the words, let them think of our present story.

The Tale ends in tragedy:

"My husband! my dear husband!" cried Mary, flinging her arms around his neck; "look on me—speak to me! All is well!"

He gazed on her face—he grasped her hand. "Mary—my injured Mary!" he exclaimed, convulsively, "can *you* forgive me—*you—you*? O God! I was once innocent! Forgive me, dearest!—for our child's sake, curse not its guilty father!"

"Husband!—Adam!" she cried, wringing his hand—"come with me, love, come—leave this horrid place—you have nothing to fear—your debt is paid."

"Paid!" he exclaimed, wildly. "Ha! ha! Paid!"

They were his last words. Convulsions came upon him; the film of death passed over his eyes, and his troubled spirit fled.

She clung round his neck—she yet cried, "Speak to me!"—she refused to believe that he was dead, and her reason seemed to have fled with his spirit.

She was taken from his body and conveyed home. The agony of grief subsided into a stupor approaching imbecility. She was unconscious of all around; and within three weeks from the death of her husband, the broken spirit of Mary Douglas found rest, and her father returned in sorrow with her helpless orphan to Teviotdale^[xxi].

In the Tale *Ups and Downs; or, David Stuart's Account of his Pilgrimage* Wilson also writes of the dangers of alcoholic beverages. Stuart is lectured by his future mother-in-law, thus:

'Ye mayna think it bad,' says she again, 'but I fear ye like a dram, and my bairn's happiness demands that I should speak o' it.'

'A dram!' says I; 'preserve us! is there ony ill in a dram?—that's the last thing that I wad hae thought about.'

'Ask the broken-hearted wife,' says she, 'if there be ony ill in a dram—ask the starving family—ask the jailer and

the gravedigger—ask the doctor and the minister o' religion—ask where ye see roups o' furniture at the cross, or the auctioneer's flag wavin' frae the window—ask a deathbed—ask eternity, David Stuart, and they will tell ye if there be ony ill in a dram.'

'I hope, ma'am,' says I,—and I was a guid deal nettled,—'I hope, ma'am, ye dinna tak' me to be a drunkard. I can declare freely, that unless maybe at a time by chance (and the best o' us will mak' a slip now and then), I never tak' aboon twa or three glasses at a time. Indeed, three's just my set. I aye say to my cronies, there is nae luck till the second tumbler, and nae peace after the fourth. So ye perceive, there's not the smallest danger o' me.'

'Ah, but, David,' replied she, 'there is danger. Habits grow stronger, nature weaker, and resolution offers less and less resistance; and ye may come to make four, five, or six glasses your set; and frae that to a bottle—your grave—and my bairn a broken-hearted widow.'

'Really, ma'am,' says I, ye talked very sensibly before, but ye are awa wi' the harrows now—quite unreasonable a'thegither. However, to satisfy ye upon that score, I'll mak' a vow this very moment, that, except'——

'Mak' nae rash vows,' says she; 'for a breath mak's them, and less than a breath unmak's them. But mind that, while ye wad be comfortable wi' your cronies, my bairn wad be frettin' her lane; and though she might say naething when ye cam hame, that wadna be the way to wear her love round your neck like a chain of gold; but, night after night, it wad break away link by link, till the whole was

lost; and if ye didna hate, ye wad soon find ye were disagreeable to each other. Nae true woman will condescend to love ony man lang, wha can find society he prefers to hers in an alehouse. I dinna mean to say that ye should never enter a company; but dinna mak' a practice o't.'

Sadly, he ignores the warning and Wilson writes:

A' sort o' respectable folk used to frequent the house, and I was in the habit o' gaun at night to smoke my pipe and hear the news about Bonaparte and the rest o' them; but it was very seldom that I exceeded three tumblers. Weel, among the customers there was ane that I had got very intimate wi'—as genteel and decent a looking man as ye could see; indeed I took him to be a particular serious and honest man. So there was ae night that I was rather mair than ordinary hearty, and says he to me: 'Mr Stuart,' says he, 'will you lend your name to a bit paper for me?' 'No, I thank ye, sir,' says I; 'I never wish to be caution for onybody.' 'It's of no consequence,' said he, and there was no more passed. But as I was rising to gang hame, 'Come, tak' anither, Mr. Stuart,' said he; 'I'm next the wa' wi' ye—I'll stand treat.' Wi' sair pressing I was prevailed upon to sit doun again, and we had anither and anither, till I was perfectly insensible. What took place, or how I got hame, I couldna tell, and the only thing I remember was a head fit to split the next day, and Jeannie very ill pleased and powty-ways. However, I thought nae mair about it, and I was extremely glad I had refused to be bond for the person who asked me; for within three months I learned that he had broken and absconded wi' a vast o' siller. It was just a day or twa after I had heard the intelligence, I was telling Jeannie and her mother o' the cir-

cumstance, and what an escape I had had, when the servant lassie showed a bank clerk into the room. 'Tak' a seat, sir,' said I, for I had dealings wi' the bank. 'This is a bad business, Mr. Stuart,' said he. 'What business?' said I, quite astonished. 'Your being security for Mr. So-and-so,' said he. 'Me!' cried I, starting up in the middle o' the floor—'Me!—the scoundrel—I denied him point blank!' 'There is your own signature for a thousand pounds,' said the clerk. 'A thousand furies!' exclaimed I, stamping my foot; 'it's a forgery—an infernal forgery!' 'Mr. Such-a-one is witness to your handwriting,' said the clerk. I was petrified; I could hae drawn down the roof o' the house upon my head to bury me! In a moment a confused recollection o' the proceedings at Luckie Macnaughton's flashed across my memory, like a flame from the bottomless pit! There was a look o' witherin' reproach in my mother-in-law's een, and I heard her mutterin' between her teeth, 'I aye said what his three tumblers wad come to.' But my dear Jeannie bore it like a Christian, as she is. She cam forward to me, an', poor thing, she kissed my cheek, and says she, 'Dinna distress yoursel', David, dear—it cannot be helped now—let us pray that this may be a lesson for the future.' I flung my arm round her neck—I couldna speak; but at last I said, 'Oh Jeannie, it will be a lesson, and your affection will be a lesson!' Some o' your book-learned folk wad ca' this conduct philosophy in Jeannie; but I, wha kenned every thought in her heart, was aware that it proceeded from her resignation as a true Christian, and her affection as a dutiful wife. Weel, the upshot was, I had robbed myself out o' a thousand pounds as simply as ye wad snuff out a candle.

Jeannie's reaction to her husband's behaviour is in fact is very similar to that of Mary Douglas in relation to her husband's misdemeanour. Wilson's portrayal of wives is discussed fully later in this study.

There is a similar incident in the Tale entitled *The Simple Man is the Beggar's Brother*. He writes:

That very night we went to a public-house, and we had two half-mutchkins together; in the course of drinking which, he got out a stamped paper, and after writing something on it, which I was hardly in a condition to read, (for my head can stand very little,) he handed it to me, and pointed with his finger where I was to put my name upon the back o't. So I took the pen and wrote my name—after which, we had a parting gill, and were both very comfortable.

'When I went home, Nancy perceiving me to be rather sprung, and my een no as they ought to be, said to me—'Where have you been, Nicholas, until this time o' nicht?'

'Touts!' said, I, 'what need ye mind? It is a hard maiter that a body canna stir out owre the door but ye maun ask—'where hae ye been?' I'm my own maister, I suppose—at least after business hours.'

'No doubt o' that, Nicholas,' said she; 'but while ye are your own maister, ye are also my husband, and the faither o' my family, and it behoves me to look after ye.'

‘Look after yoursel’!’ said I, quite pettedly—‘for I am always very high and independent when I take a glass extra—ye wouldna tak me to be a simple man then.’

‘There is no use in throwing yoursel’ into a rage, added she; ‘for ye ken as weel as me, Nicholas, that ye never take a glass more than ye ought to do, but ye invariably make a fool o’ yoursel’ by what ye say or do, and somebody or ither imposes on ye. And ye are so vexed with yoursel’ the next day, that there is nae living in the house wi’ ye. Ye wreak a’ the shame and ill-nature that ye feel on account o’ your conduct upon us.’

‘Nancy!’ cried I, striking my hand upon the table, as though I had been an emperor, ‘what in the name o’ wonder do ye mean? Who imposes upon me?—who dare?—tell me that!—I say tell me that?’ And I struck my hand upon the table again.

‘Owre mony impose upon ye, my man,’ quoth she; ‘and I hope naebody has been doing it the night, for I never saw ye come hame in this key, but that somebody had got ye to do something that ye was to repent afterwards.’

‘Confound ye, Nancy!’ cried I, very importantly whipping up the tails o’ my coat in a passion, and turning my back to the fire, while I gied a sort o’ stagger, and my head knocked against the chimley piece—‘confound ye, Nancy, I say, what do ye mean? Simple man as ye ca’ me, and as ye tak me to be, do ye think that I am to come home to get naething but a dish o’ tongues from you! Bring me my supper.’

'Oh, certainly, ye shall have your supper,' said she, 'if ye can eat it—only I think that your bed is the fittest place for ye. O man,' added she in a lower tone, half speaking to hersel, 'but ye'll be sorry for this the morn.'

'What the mischief are ye muttering at?' cried I—'get me my supper.'

'Oh, ye shall have that,' said she very calmly, for she was, and is, a quiet woman, and one that would put up with a great deal, rather than allow her voice to be heard by her neighbours.

'My head was in a queer state the next day; for ye see I had as good as five glasses, and I never could properly stand above two. I was quite ashamed to look my wife in the face, and I was so certain that I had been guilty o' some absurdity or other, that my cheeks burned just under the dread o' its being mentioned to me. Neither could I drive the idea of having put my name upon the back of the bill from my mind. I was conscious that I had done wrong. Yet, thought I, Mr Swanston is a very decent man; he is a very respectable man; he has always borne an excellent character; and is considered a good man, both amongst men o' business and in society—therefore, I have nothing to apprehend. I, according to his own confession, did him a good turn, and I could in no way implicate myself in his transactions by merely putting my name upon the back o' a bit o' paper, to oblige him. So I thought within myself, and I became perfectly satisfied that I had done a good action, without in the slightest degree injuring my family.

‘But just exactly six months and three days afterwards, a clerk belonging to a branch o’ the Commercial Bank called upon me, and, after making his bow, said he—‘Mr Middlemiss, I have a bill to present to you.’

‘A bill!’ said I, ‘what sort o’ a bill, sir? Is it an auctioneer’s, for a roup o’ furniture or a sale o’ stock?’

‘He laughed quite good-natured like in my face, and pulling out the bit stamped paper that I had been mad-man enough to sign my name upon the back o’—‘It is that, sir,’ said he.

‘That!’ cried I; ‘what in the earthly globe have I to do wi’ that? It is Mr Swanston’s business—not mine. I only put my name upon the back o’t to *oblige* him. Why do ye bring it to me?’

‘You are responsible, sir,’ said the clerk.

‘Responsible! the meikle mischief!’ I exclaimed; ‘what am I responsible for, sir?—I only put my name down to oblige him, I tell ye! For what am I responsible?’

‘For three hundred pounds, and legal interest for six months,’ said my unwelcome visitor, wi’ a face that shewed as little concern for the calamity in which, through mere simplicity and goodness of heart, I was involved, as if he had ordered me to take a pipe, and blow three hundred soap-bubbles!

‘Oh! lack-o’-me!’ cried I, ‘is that possible? Is Mr Swanston sic a villain? I am ruined—I am clean ruined. Who in all the world will tell Nancy?’

'But that I found was a question that I did not need to ask; for she kenned almost as soon as I did mysel'.

'I need not say that I had the three hundred pounds, in-eerest and all, plack and farthing, to pay; though, by my folly and simplicity, I had brought my wife and family to the verge o' ruin, she never was the woman to fling my silly conduct in my teeth; and all that she ever did say to me upon the subject, was—'Weel, Nicholas, this is the first o' your bill transactions, or o' your being caution for onybody, and I trust it has proved such a lesson as I hope ye will never need another.'

'O Nancy, woman!' cried I, 'dinna speak to me! for I could knock my brains oot! I am the greatest simpleton upon the face o' the earth.'

Of course he makes other mistakes and ends up in prison because of debts. Wilson concludes the Tale thus:

'He had the cruelty to throw me into jail, just as I was beginning to gather my feet. It knocked all my prospects in the head again. I began to say it was o' nae use for me to strive, for the stream o' fate was against me.'

'Dinna say so, Nicholas,' said Nancy, who came on foot twice every week, a' the way from Langholm, to see me—'dinna say sae. Yer ain simplicity is against ye—naething else.'

"Weel, the debt was paid, and I got my liberty. But, come weel, come woe, I was still simple Nicol Middlemiss. Ne'er hae I been able to get the better o' my easy disposition. It has made me acquainted wi' misery—it has kept me con-

stantly in the company o' poverty; and, when I'm dead, if
onybody erect a gravestone for me, they may inscribe owre
it—

‘The Simple Man is the Beggar’s Brother’

In the Tale *The Sisters A Tale for the Ladies*, Wilson compares the
happiness of the sister who married a temperate man with the expe-
rience of the sister who is married to a drunkard, He writes:

Such were the miserable midnights of Margaret the beau-
tiful and meek, while Helen beheld every day increasing
her felicity in the care and affection of her temperate hus-
band. She was the world to him, and he all that that world
contained to her. And often as gloaming fell grey around
them, still would they

“Sit and look into each other’s eyes,
Silent and happy, as if God had given
Nought else worth looking at on this side heaven!”

Margaret by comparison has a miserable life with her drunken
husband:

A few years passed over them. But hope visited not the
dwelling of poor Margaret. Her husband had sunk into
the habitual drunkard; and, not following his business,
his business had ceased to follow him, and his substance
was become a wreck. And she, so late the fairest of the
fair, was now a dejected and broken-hearted mother, her-
self and her children in rags, a prey to filthiness and dis-
ease, sitting in a miserable hovel, stripped alike of furni-
ture and the necessaries of life, where the wind and the
rain whistled and drifted through the broken windows.

To her each day the sun shone upon misery, while her children were crying around her for bread, and quarrelling with each other; and she now weeping in the midst of them, and now cursing the wretched man to whom they owed their being. Daily did the drunkard reel from his haunt of debauchery into his den of wretchedness. Then did the stricken children crouch behind their miserable mother for protection, as his red eyes glared upon their famished cheeks. But she now met his rage with the silent scowl of heart-broken and callous defiance, which, tending but to inflame the infuriated madman, then! then burst forth the more than fiendish clamour of domestic war! and then was heard upon the street the children's shriek—the screams and the bitter revilings of the long patient wife—with the cruel imprecations and unnatural blasphemies of the monster, for whom language has no name!—as he rushed forward (putting cowardice to the blush), and with his clenched hand struck to the ground, amidst the children she bore him, the once gentle and beautiful being he had sworn before God to protect!—she, whom once he would not permit

"The winds of heaven to visit her cheeks too roughly"—

she, who would have thought her life cheap to have laid it down in his service, he kicked from him like a disobedient dog! These are the every-day changes of drinking habitually—these are the transformations of intemperance.

Wilson continues:

Again must we view the opposite picture. The unhappy drunkard, deprived of the means of life in his native town,

wandered with his family to Edinburgh. But on him no reformation dawned. And the wretched Margaret, hurried onward by despair, before the smoothness of youth had left the brow of her sister, was overtaken by age, its wrinkles, and infirmities. And all the affections, all the feelings of her once gentle nature, being seared by long years of insult, misery, brutality, and neglect, she herself flew to the bottle, and became tenfold more the victim of depravity than her fallen, abandoned husband. She lived to behold her children break the laws of their country, and to be utterly forsaken by her husband; and, in the depth of her misery, she was seen quarrelling with a dog upon the street, for a bare bone that had been cast out with the ashes. Of the extent of her sufferings, or where to find her, her sister knew not; but in the midst of a severe winter, the once beautiful Margaret Johnstone was found a hideous and a frozen corpse in a miserable cellar.

In Wilson's Tale *The Procrastinator* the main character wails "... I flew to the bottle – to the bottle!" he repeated; "and my ruin was complete – my family, business, everything, was neglected". The outcome is that the central character and his wife and son, like the authors discussed previously, are penniless in London.

Fortunately, in the Tale *Johnny Brotherton's Five Sunny Days*, the central character takes his wife's advice:

Finding that I was now a man of capital, I took a shop in the front street, and commenced business as a maister boot and shoe-maker. Katie was remarkably civil in the shop, and I always tried to put good stuff into the hands of customers, so that in a very short time I carried on a very prosperous concern. I also rose very high in the opinion of my fellow-craftsmen; and, wonderful to relate! I heard

that it was their determination to elect me to the high and honourable office of deacon of the corporation of our ancient and respectable trade, in the ancient burgh of Peebles.

This was a height to which my ambition never could have aspired, and when I heard of the intention of the brethren, it really made me that I couldna sleep. It made me not only dream that I was a deacon, but a king, a prince, a bashaw—a dear kens what—but anything but plain John Brotherton, I thought it was a hoax that some of the craft were wishing to play off on me; therefore, I spoke of the subject with great caution. But when it was put into my head, there was nothing on the earth that I so much desired. I thought what an honour it would be when I was dead and gone, for my son to be able to say—"My father was deacon of the ancient company of cordwainers in Peebles!"

"What a sound that will have!" thought I. On the morning of the election I awoke fearing, believing, hoping, trembling. I could hardly put on my clothes. However, the choosing of office bearers began, and I was declared duly elected deacon of the company of cordwainers. It was with difficulty that I refrained from clapping my hands in the court, and I am positive that I would not have been able to do it, had it not been that the brethren came crowding round me to shake hands wi' me.

I went home in very high glee, as ye may well suppose, and Katie met me wi' great joy in her looks. When the supper was set upon the table—"Katie, my dear," said I, "send out for a bottle of strong ale."

"A bottle of strong ale, John?" quoth she, in surprise; "remember that though ye hae been appointed deacon o' the shoemakers ye are but a mortal man! Remember, John, that it was by drinking wholesome water, wi' pickles of oatmeal in it, that enabled you to save a hundred pounds and so to become deacon of the trade. But had ye sent for bottles of strong ale to your supper, ye would neither have saved the one, nor been made the other. Na, na, John, think nae mair about ale."

"Weel, weel," said I, "ye are right, Katie—I canna deny it."

That was what I call my fifth sunny day—a remarkable day in my existence, standing out from among the rest, and crowned wi' happiness."

According to Wilson alcohol does not only ruin individual lives, it can also bring major problems to a community. Thus, in his Tale *The Recollections of the Village Patriarch*, the Patriarch states:

There have been a great many alterations, changes and improvements in it, since I first kenned it; but young folk will have young fashions, and it is of no use talking to them. The first inroad upon our ancient and primitive habits, was made by one Lucky Riddle taking out a licence to sell whisky and tippeny, and other liquors. She hadna carried on the trade for six months, until a great alteration was observable in the morals o' several in the parish. It was a sad heart-sore to our worthy minister. He once spoke to me of having Lucky Riddle summoned before the session. But says I to him—'Sir, I am afraid it is a case in which the session cannot interfere. Ye see she has out a king's license, and she is contributing to what they call the revenue o' the

country; therefore, if she be only acting up to her regulations, I doubt we canna interfere, and that we would only bring ourselves into trouble if we did.'

'But, Roger,' quoth he, 'her strong drink is making weak vessels of some of my parishioners. There is Thomas Elliot, and William Archbold, or Blithe Willie, as some call him for a by-word; those lads, and a dozen o' others, I am creditably informed, are there, drinking, singing, swearing, fighting, or dancing, night after night; and even Johny Grippy, the miser, that I would have made an elder last year but on account o' his penuriousness, is said to slip in on the edge o' his foot every morning, to swallow his dram before breakfast! I tell, ye, Roger, she is bringing them to ruin faster than I can bring them to a sense o' sin—or whatever impression I may make her liquor is washing away. She has brought a plague amongst us, and it is entering our habitations, it is thinning the sanctuary, striking down our strong men and making mothers miserable. Therefore, unless Lucky Riddle will in the meantime relinquish her traffic, I think we ought in duty to prohibit her from coming forward on the next half yearly occasion.'

I was perfectly aware that there was a vast deal o' truth in what the minister said, but I thought he was carrying the case to a length that couldna be justified; and I advised him to remember that he was a minister o' the gospel, but not of the law. So all proceedings against Mrs. Riddle were stopped and her business went on, doing much injury to the minds, bodies, purses, and families, of many in the village.

The Patriarch continues as follows:

The next thing that followed, certainly was an improvement, but it had its drawbacks. It was the erection of a woollen manufactory, in which a great number o' men, women, and bairns, were employed. But they were mostly strangers; for our folk were ignorant of the work, and the proprietor of the factory brought them someway from the west of England. The auld residenters were swallowed up in the influx of new comers. But it caused a great stir about the town, and gave the street quite a new appearance. The factory hadna commenced three months, when a rival establishment was set up in opposition to Luckie Riddle, and one public-house followed upon the back of another, until now we have ten of them. As a matter of course, there was a great deal more money spent in the village; and several young lads belonging to it, that had served their time as shopkeepers in the country town, came and commenced business in it, some of them beneath their father's roof, and enlarging the bit window o' six panes —where their mother had exposed thread, biscuits, and gingerbread for sale—into a great bow-window that projectet into the street, they there exhibited for sale all that the eye could desire for dress, or the palate to pet it. Yet with an increase of trade and money, there also came an increase of crime and a laxity of morals, and vices became common among both sexes that were unheard of in my young days. Nevertheless the evil did not come without a degree of good to counter balance it; and in course of time, besides the kirk, the handsome dissenting meeting house that ye would observe at the foot of the town was built. Four schools, besides the parish school,

also sprang up, so that every one had education actually brought to their door; but opposition at that time (which was very singular), instead o' lowering, raised the price of schooling, and he that charged highest got the genteelest school. Then both the kirk and the meeting-house got libraries attached to them, and Lucky Riddle found the libraries by far the most powerful opposition she had had to contend with. Some of the youngsters, also, formed what they called a Mechanics' Institution, and they also got a library, and met for instruction after work hours; and I declare to ye that even callants, in a manner become so learned, that I often had great difficulty to keep my ground wi' them; and I have actually heard some of them have the impudence to tell the dominie that taught them their letters, that he was utterly ignorant of all useful learning, and that he knew nothing of the properties of either chemistry or mechanics. When I was a youth also I dinna ken if there was a person in the village, save the minister, kenned what a newspaper was. Politics never were heard tell of until about the year 'seventy five or 'eighty, but, ever since then, they have been more and more discussed until now they have divided the whole town into parties, and keep it in a state of perpetual ferment; and now there are not less than five newspapers come from London by the post every day, besides a score of weekly ones on the Saturday. Ye see, sir, that even in my time, very great changes and improvements have taken place; and I am free to give it as my opinion, that society is more intellectual now, than it was when I first kenned it; and, upon the whole, I would say that mankind, instead of degenerating, are improving. I recollect, that even the street there, ye couldna get across it in the winter season, with-

out lairing knee-deep in a dub; and now ye see it is all what they call Macadamized, and as firm, dry, and durable as a sheet of iron. In fact, sir, within the last forty years, the improvements and changes in this village alone are past all belief—and the alterations in the place are nothing to what I have seen and heard of the ups and downs, and vicissitudes of its inhabitants."

In August 1834 Wilson turned to the subject of drink in an editorial in the *Advertiser* and stated as follows:

Intemperance is a great evil, and it is evident it prevails to a fearful extent, but government cannot crush it by force, they cannot put it down by direct means or abolish it by act of parliament. They must employ moral means against a moral evil.

(B. A. 16th August 1834)

In October of that year he wrote regarding the relationship between the tax system and smuggling, as follows:

But even in as far as the malt tax can be said to be a tax upon the agricultural interest, there also is inequality shewn, for it is a tax upon the poorest of the soil, such as is only capable of producing barley, while rich, wheat growing lands pay nothing. There is a tax, however, belonging to the Excise of which we cordially approve, and that is the tax upon spirits. Now that spirits have been removed from the shelves of the apothecary and become an article of common use, tax upon them is one of the most proper and the best of all taxes. At present the duty raised on home-made spirits in England, Scotland, and

Ireland, amounts to somewhat more than five millions a year. This is a prodigious sum, and it also is chiefly paid by the classes already referred to. Many friends of temperance have gravely urged the necessity of increasing the duty on spirits, hoping thereby to increase temperance. They who advise such a measure may be good philanthropists, but they are bad political economists. Instead of saying increase the duty," they might as well have said encourage the smuggler." It would not put down spirit-drinking, but it would cause drinking by stealth, and it would add to it in a tenfold degree, the immorality, the recklessness, the rioting, and the bloodshed to which the life of a smuggler invariably leads. We would say, equalize the duties in the three kingdoms, and we think this might be done in such a way as neither to injure the revenue, nor increase intemperance. If such measure were taking place, there would be an apparent increase in the consumption of spirits, but it would not follow that on account of that increase there had been a corresponding increase of drunkenness, but that the traffic of the illicit trader and the manufacture of deleterious commodity had been put an end to.

(B. A. 18th October 1834)

In his Tale *The Smuggler* Wilson discusses the demise of the smuggler, thus:

The golden days of the smuggler are gone by; his hiding-places are empty; and, like Othello, he finds his "occupation gone." Our neighbours on the other side of the herring-pond now bring us *dry bones*, according to the law, instead of *spirits*, contrary to the law. Cutters, preventive-boats, and border-rangers, have destroyed the *trade*—it

is becoming as a tale that was told. From Spittal to Blyth—yea, from the Firth of Forth to the Tyne—brandy is no longer to be purchased for a trifle; the kilderkin of Holland gin is no longer placed at the door in the dead of night; nor is a yard of tobacco to be purchased for a penny. The smuggler's phrase, that the "*cow has calved*," [signifying that a smuggling vessel had delivered her cargo] is becoming obsolete. Now, smuggling is almost confined to crossing "the river," here and there, the "ideal line by fancy drawn;" to Scotland saying unto England, "Will you taste?" and to England replying, "Cheerfully, sister." There was a time, however, when the clincher-built lugger plied her trade as boldly, and almost as regularly, as the regular coaster; and that period is within the memory of those who are yet young. It was an evil and a dangerous trade; and it gave a character to the villagers on the sea-coasts which, even unto this day, is not wholly effaced. But in the character of the smuggler there was much that was interesting—there were many bold and redeeming points. I have known many; but I prefer at present giving a few passages from the history of one who lived before my time, and who was noted in his day as an extraordinary character.

In fact, according to Walker (2001), Spittal, close to where John and Sarah lived in Tweedmouth, had "... a large number of people engaged in smuggling" even during Wilson's lifetime in the 1830s. One of the most successful, Richard Mendham, a Spittal Smuggler and Counterfeiter, was eventually tried and executed at Jedburgh in 1832 in the presence of Sir Walter Scott in his role as Sheriff of Selkirkshire.

There is some discussion as to whether Wilson himself had a problem with alcohol. Despite his temperance lecturing he does not seem to have been a tee-totaller. In 1829 he wrote to an unidentified friend thus:

Tell him I have not quite forgiven his not calling upon me when in Edinburgh, but by way of punishment will not fail to make an early call on him, and punish the best in his worship's cellar.

(cited in the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* 9th April 1889)

One notes in the anecdote about Mr Alexander above that he is quoted as follows:

“The poor author confessed that he had been a little unsteady once”, but was now an altered man.

Does this refer to a problem with the demon drink? Had he perhaps beaten his addiction and become a zealot preaching to others? This question must remain one of the mysteries about Wilson. If he did have a problem then there were eight pubs to tempt him in Tweedmouth, where he settled when he returned home in 1832.

In December 1831 the post of Editor of the *Berwick Advertiser* became vacant and Wilson was offered and accepted the job (later it will be shown that in July 1829 in a letter to a friend he had supported the establishment of an alternative newspaper in the town). In February 1832 he was offered a similar post in Manchester. He was tempted by the latter offer as he revealed to Everett in a letter written on 26th February 1832, thus:

Just after my return Mr Catherall sent for (me) yesterday afternoon, and informed me I have his place as Editor of the *Chronicle*. Had this been told me a month ago, - but I have affixed my signature to the articles regarding the Berwick paper, - and cannot draw back without self-reproach and disgrace. However Mr Catherall says he will not leave until June, and I believe he has spoken of me to Mr Wheeler, the salary would be three guineas a week. Now should I find after a trial at the Berwick paper that its advantages would not equal this, - I could leave it according to agreement by giving a month's notice. Now I will from time to time let you know my feelings and prospects thereon, which you can communicate to Mr C. so that the second string of the bow be not broken, but kept unstrung for a time, - and if I find it would be advisable, I could about June find my way back to Manchester. Yet health - and home are powerful magnets to draw me to the North and keep me there.

The possibility of being a success with a steady income and considerable status in his home town clearly had its attractions by this time in his life. In order to take up the post however he had to raise money to pay for the journey to Berwick and this required a trip from Manchester, where he was then based, to London, as this letter to James Everett, dated 4th February 1832, reveals:

I trouble you with this under much perplexity and painful feeling ... Now as I have stated before I can go I must sell the copyright of my work. I wrote to my friend Pringle^[xxii] upon the subject and he and his friends are to assist me; but in order to accomplish my object as early as I wish, they consider it necessary that I should be in Lon-

don to push the business personally. Now I know this is necessary - that I must do so at whatever sacrifice. But I may have to remain two or perhaps three weeks in London before I obtain a settlement. And upon the cheapest calculation which I can make, I find it would require about two pounds more than I am in possession of. It is absolute agony for me to request you if you could befriend me with the loan of this sum till I am enabled to pay you on my return. Let the pain of my feelings and the pressure of my situation be my excuse in making a request at which my very soul blushes.

Wilson continued:

I leave Mrs Wilson here and am most anxious to set off on Monday night if possible. I will have considerable literary backing; and have again written to Jerdan^[xxiii], announcing my intention and the nature of my visit requesting also his influence, and reminding him of the kindness with which he offered to aid in promoting my views about six years ago. But though I should sell it at the Minerva Press^[xxiv] price of £15 a volume, it must go. But I hope its superiority over other works of its kind will save it from such a fate. I care not when they publish it, providing they give part payment in hand. What I do I must do speedily. They call upon me to come to Berwick, and with all my anxiety I am unable to comply with the demand, and without your aid to enable me to effect it by the only means in my power, I fear my hope must perish. I suppose you will not get this till Monday - so do let me have your answer as early as possible, - I would have called on you, - but I could not - it is with pain I have written this, - and

spoken it, I could not. If you can serve me in this matter, I will not talk of gratitude - for I have this day found, that words of kindness and gratitude are a false and a hollow sound. Believe me I would not forget your friendship. Let me have your answer as early as possible, and Believe to be yours in much confusion, But sincerity.

In the same letter he confided in Everett that he was not optimistic about success in London, thus:

Colburn and Bentley^[xxv] have informed me that owing to their present engagements being so numerous they could not undertake the publication of my work with any hope of doing it justice, until next season. This is as useless and profitless a hope to me as preaching repentance to a dead man.

Raising money by lecturing as previously was he thought then not possible as he felt he could not cope with the stress, given his poor health:

Had I been able to lecture, this might have done, but I feel that to risk doing so would almost be wilfully to destroy my own life.

Wilson was determined to be an Editor who was able to express his own views rather than merely the views of a newspaper owner. Thus, he said to Everett in the letter of 4th February:

Until I obtain a settlement with a publisher, I cannot go to Berwick to undertake the Editorship of the paper without incurring obligations which would make me rather the slave of the proprietor than the conductor of the jour-

nal. This I could not do and must avoid. But the prospect which that situation holds out of being always at home having a certain income, and independence, with a large portion of literary leisure, makes me tenfold more anxious to embrace the offer of it than ever I was to obtain anything on this earth. My brother is to manage it for two or three weeks till I can arrive; but in political matters he is wholly unskilled.

As he had anticipated, his visit to London was not a success as regards raising the money required to go to Berwick. He described the situation to Everett in a letter written on 26th February 1832 thus:

I found the London market at a standstill, and it is an understood thing among the trade that scarce any work will be brought out until after the settlement of the reform question. All the principal writers are of necessity resting upon their oars, and waiting for the turning of the tide. And there is not one of the second rate and inferior houses reckoned safe. Three publishers who have seen the MSS have engaged to make me offers for it as soon as the state of things will justify them in doing so. But at present all say they could not give any price. The three are Bull, - Kidd, - and Cochrane. I could not see Jerdan, but wrote him again.

Wilson is here referring to parliamentary reform which he was about to enthusiastically support in the *Advertiser*.

Despite his concern about his health Wilson showed his determination to take up the post in the same letter, thus:

I must be in Berwick in about a fortnight or less, - and it will cost me much labour to do that as we shall walk to

Newcastle – and I will stop in Leeds for a day or two and deliver my lectures, and then wither walk or coach it.

He had therefore decided to take a risk with his health and to go to great lengths to get to Berwick. The job was now obviously that important to him. A review of his lecture to Leeds Temperance Society was cited earlier.

Berwick was not necessarily the best place for somebody who was dubious about his health. Late in 1832, in fact, cholera arrived in Berwick. Even in 1850 problems remained as is revealed by the following quotation from a report published that year and cited by Yates (2010):

The borough of Berwick-upon-Tweed is not so healthy as it may be, on account of undrained streets, imperfect privy accommodation, crowded courts, houses, room-tenements, and large exposed middens and cesspools ... Excess of disease has been distinctly traced to the undrained and crowded districts, to deficient ventilation, and to the absence of a full water-supply, and of sewers and drains generally.

Unfortunately, it is not known how Wilson and Sarah did travel to Berwick. In Wilson’s Tale *The Procrastinator* he describes a journey to London which may reflect his own experience of travel at some stage:

We were at this period what tradesmen term *miserably hard up*.

Having sold off our little stock of furniture, after discharging a few debts which were unavoidably contracted, a balance of rather less than two pounds remained; and upon

this, my wife, my child, and myself were to travel a distance of three hundred and fifty miles. I will not go over the journey: we performed it on foot in twenty days; and, including lodging, our daily expense amounted to one shilling and eightpence; so that, on entering the metropolis, all we possessed was five shillings and a few pence.

On arrival Wilson and Sarah settled in Dock Road in Tweedmouth. The *Shield Daily News* of April 26th 1867 reported:

The room in which he composed his “Tales of the Borders” is frequently visited by sojourners at Tweedmouth and Berwick.

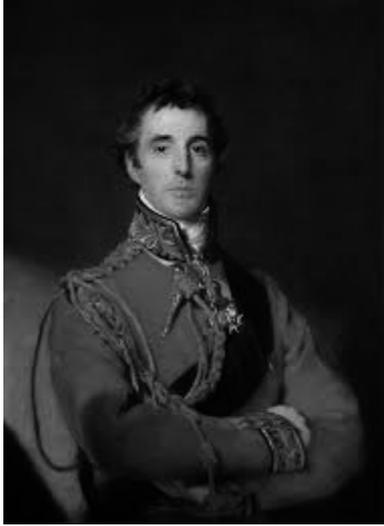
This was 32 years after his death and is an indication of the continuing popularity of his Tales at that time.

It is now necessary to consider the national political context that Wilson would be commenting on when he assumed the position of Editor.

Chapter Three: The Political Context 1830-1832

In 1830 the Tory government under Wellington was divided, especially over the Catholic emancipation issue^[xxvi], and faced unrest due to economic uncertainty. In the north rising unemployment led to strikes, and in the south, following a bad winter and consequent unemployment or the imposition of starvation wages, there were outbreaks of rural arson and machine-breaking, which were known as the ‘Captain Swing’ riots, named after their almost certainly mythical leader.

The death of George IV in June 1830 precipitated a general election^[xxvii] at which Wellington’s government retained power, but lost a significant number of seats. Pressure for parliamentary reform was building at Westminster and also in the country, due to the activity of political unions campaigning on this issue in various cities, most significantly in Birmingham. Over three thousand pro-reform petitions were presented to Parliament between October 1830 and April 1831. Abroad, the overthrow of the autocratic King Charles X and his replacement by the more liberal Louis-Philippe evoked comparisons with the 1789 French Revolution, which caused unease amongst the landed elite and stimulated further debate about the need for reform in Britain.



The Duke of Wellington

In November 1830 Wellington outraged many both in Parliament and elsewhere by emphatically rejecting reform, declaring in the House of Lords that:

Britain possessed a Legislature which answered all the good purposes of legislation ...

The present system he argued had allowed Britain to prosper and he therefore declared that “... he would always feel it was his duty to resist such measures when proposed by others”. He and other Tory opponents of the bill supported Edmund Burke’s view that even moderate reform would lead to revolution. As Robert Peel, who later followed Wellington as Tory Prime Minister, expressed it:

I was unwilling to open a door which I saw no prospect of being able to close.

By this stage the Prime Minister and the Cabinet^[xxviii] had evolved as the executive branch in the British political system, but the responsibilities of government were limited to the raising of revenue, the oversight of public finances, the up-holding of law and order and foreign policy and defence. To pass legislation the Prime Minister and the Cabinet had to negotiate with the Monarch and an aristocratic Parliament. The House of Commons, its members elected for seven years, was dominated by ‘the landed interest’, as, of course, was the House of Lords, which could reject all bills from the lower house except, by convention, money bills.

The electoral system was referred to by its critics as ‘Old Corruption’, since bribery and other forms of malfeasance were institutionalised. Given the need for bribery, standing for election in a contested seat was expensive, for example, an election in Liverpool in 1830 cost the two candidates £100,000 between them (approximately £10 million in current value). A parliamentary career was seen however not only as a way of increasing social prestige and political influence, but was also a route to advancement in a variety of other spheres, such as the law, the armed services and the civil service.

Electors were bribed individually in some constituencies, for example, in East Retford, a tariff of twenty guineas was charged per vote, and collectively in others. As an example of the latter practice, in 1771 eighty one voters in New Shoreham¹, who constituted a majority of the electorate, formed an organisation called the ‘Christian Club’ and regularly sold the Borough to the highest bidder. Especially notorious for their corruption were the ‘Nabobs’² or individuals who had amassed fortunes in the British colonies in Asia and the West Indies³. In some places the ‘Nabobs’ even managed to wrest control of boroughs from the nobility and the gentry.

1. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Shoreham_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Shoreham_(UK_Parliament_constituency))

2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nabob>

3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/West_Indies



“How To Get Made an MP” by William Heath, 1830.

The Agent says: Here they are all good votes—ready to vote for my coach horse if I order them. Find me the money and I’ll secure you the seat.

The Candidate replies: Well, here’s the cash, as for the votes I’ll leave them to you.

The direct purchase of votes was supplemented by more indirect forms of payment, such as gifts to electors. The obvious attraction of this form of bribery was that it was much more difficult to prove, since there was no formal transaction between the donor and the recipient. Furthermore, such payments often took place a considerable time before an election. The practice of paying gifts prevailed at Berwick at least until 1852. According to a Conservative agent in the town, R. B. Weatherhead, such gifts were considered by many of the Freemen as a right and were known as ‘gooseberries’ (Wickham 2002).

Sometimes loans were offered to electors but often it was the electors who approached the candidates. During the late eighteenth century, Sir John Delaval, a local landowner, who served as MP for Berwick ⁴for three periods (1754–1761, 1765–1774 and 1780–1786) received numerous requests for benefits from Berwick voters in exchange for their votes. These requests involved loans and leases at favourable rates, the settling of rent arrears, the paying of debts and the awarding of contracts. In Freeman boroughs such as Berwick candidates would also often pay for the Freeman's admission to the freedom of the borough in return for their support at election time.

Bribes were not just in the form of money, but also government posts or contracts were often offered. For example, at Harwich no fewer than seventeen places of profit were bestowed upon the electors during Peel's short administration of 1834-5. Voters also usually expected 'treating', i.e. offers of food and drink for their vote.

Further, voting was in public and therefore voters could be manipulated due to their need for employment and/or housing and/or the sale of goods and services. One of the most notorious cases of landlord intimidation occurred in 1829 at Newark, where the Duke of Newcastle evicted tenants when they did not vote as he wished. When he was challenged he asked:

Is it presumed that I am not to do what I will with my own?

The right to stand for election was restricted to adult males. There were two legal requirements that a candidate had to satisfy. Firstly, a candidate had to be of the age of twenty-one to stand. Secondly, he had to possess a property qualification of £600 per annum in freehold land for a county seat or £300 per annum for a borough seat. The property qualification continued until 1858, although a

4. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berwick-on-Tweed_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berwick-on-Tweed_(UK_Parliament_constituency))

modification was made in 1838 to include personal as well as real property.

Each candidate announced his candidature by issuing an address to the electors. This took the form of a letter which was published in the local press, displayed on walls and distributed as handbills throughout the constituency. The arrival of the candidates in the constituency was a much publicized event, as was the nomination meeting in the Town Hall, both occasions allowing non-electors the opportunity to participate and express their views.

Once the formalities had been dispensed with at the nomination meeting, the Sheriff would address the crowd, calling for each candidate to be given a fair hearing, but these were often rowdy events. After the Sheriff's address, each candidate would be nominated and seconded in speeches which would extravagantly extol the virtues and achievements of the proposed candidate.

In 1832 less than five per cent of the population were entitled to vote, i.e. approximately 400,000 men had the vote out of a population of about 13.89 million. Further, in England 54% of the electorate returned 71% of MPs. Each of the counties had two MPs and eight of these counties had fewer than thirty electors. The south was over-represented and the new industrial centres of the north were under-unrepresented. Six counties in the south-east elected one quarter of MPs, more than Scotland and Ireland combined. Scotland, in fact, was 'a vast rotten borough', since about 4,000 men elected 45 MPs and only one man in 114 had the vote, compared to one in seven in England.

There was uniformity in the organisation of representation in the counties, where two representatives were elected by the forty-shilling-freeholders, i.e. all those having 'free tenement to the value of forty shillings by the year at least, above all charges'. In comparison there was great variety in the borough arrangements, the most notorious being the 'rotten' and 'pocket' boroughs.

As regards the former, many had fewer than 100 voters and 56 boroughs had fewer than 40 voters. The most famous ‘rotten boroughs’ were Old Sarum⁵, a mound of earth in Wiltshire, Dunwich⁶, which had fallen into the sea but returned two MPs and Gatton which had seven voters. This extract from a letter written by Philip Francis illustrates that his task in 1802 was to persuade one elector in Appleby to support him:

The fact is that yesterday morning, between eleven and twelve, I was unanimously elected by one elector to represent the ancient borough in Parliament. There was no other candidate, no opposition, no poll demanded, scrutiny or petition. So I had nothing to do but thank the said elector for the unanimous voice by which I was chosen. On Friday morning I shall quit the triumphant scene with flying colours and a noble determination not to see it again in less than seven years.

In the ‘pocket boroughs’ the landowner owned the land and the votes. In 1800, in 30% of the constituencies the landowner nominated the MPs. Some noblemen even controlled multiple constituencies, for example, the Duke of Norfolk controlled eleven, while the Earl of Lonsdale⁷ controlled nine. In fact, eight members of the House of Lords controlled fifty-one seats. Harvie (1991) argues that the law at this time was “the tool of property” since there was a virtual monopoly of political power and influence held by the landed elite. Writing in 1821, Sydney Smith⁸ had proclaimed:

5. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Sarum_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Old_Sarum_(UK_Parliament_constituency))

6. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunwich_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dunwich_(UK_Parliament_constituency))

7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Lowther,_1st_Earl_of_Lonsdale

8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sydney_Smith

The country belongs to the Duke of Rutland, Lord Lonsdale, the Duke of Newcastle, and about twenty other holders of boroughs. They are our masters!

Two weeks after Wellington's highly controversial declaration against reform the Government fell and the new King, William IV (the brother of George IV) reluctantly appointed the Whig Leader, Charles, the second Earl Grey, as Prime Minister. The Whigs came to power supporting 'Peace, Retrenchment and Reform'. Following the war with Napoleonic France, demobilisation, deflation and distress had made the post-war period economically difficult and politically turbulent. Calls for 'cheap government' and, as noted above, parliamentary reform, had become significant rallying-cries across the country.

Through-out his career Grey had been an advocate of parliamentary reform, having attempted to pass a reform bill 40 years earlier and he used his first speech in the Lords in November 1830 to announce the commitment of his government to reform. He and his fellow Whigs however did not sympathise with those Radicals^[xxix] who, in addition to being concerned with the conflict between 'the productive and the parasitic classes', were concerned about the electoral dominance of the latter and thus supported universal suffrage, annual parliaments and a secret ballot. In 1815, the founder of modern utilitarianism⁹, Jeremy Bentham^[xxx] (1748 - 1832), had declared his support for these proposed reforms.

Derry (1992), one of Grey's biographers, comments on his subject, thus:

Even in his youth he never advocated universal manhood suffrage, household suffrage being the limit to which he

9. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Utilitarianism>

was prepared to go: a limit which he scrupulously refused to reach let alone pass in 1832.

The US model of democracy was to be avoided at all costs, rather the Whigs supported the more effective representation of interests, property and local communities.

The Whig approach was that the electoral system was to be reformed to reflect contemporary realities in terms of the distribution of wealth and the growth of the cities in order to prevent revolution. Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay summarized their position, as follows:

But, Sir, every argument which would induce me to oppose Universal Suffrage, induces me to support the plan which is now before us. I am opposed to Universal Suffrage, because I think that it would produce a destructive revolution. I support this plan, because I am sure that it is our best security against a revolution ... I support this bill because it will improve our institutions; but I support it also because it tends to preserve them. That we may exclude those whom it is necessary to exclude, we must admit those whom it may be safe to admit. At present we oppose the schemes of revolutionists with only one half, with only one quarter of our proper force. We say, and we say justly, that it is not by mere numbers, but by property and intelligence, that the nation ought to be governed. Yet, saying this, we exclude from all share in the government great masses of property and intelligence, great numbers of those who are most interested in preserving tranquillity, and who know best how to preserve it. We do more. We drive over to the side of revolution those whom we shut out from power.



William IV

Similarly, Grey reassured his opponents thus:

If any person suppose that the reform will lead to ulterior measures they are mistaken; for there is no-one more decided against annual parliaments than I am. My object is not to favour, but to put an end to such hopes and projects. The principle of my reform is to prevent the necessity for revolution – reforming to preserve and not to overthrow.

Popular support for reform was to be exploited, but it was to be controlled, not deferred to or stimulated. In fact, for both parties the general population was regarded as ‘the mob’ to be feared.

The Whig government’s strategy was to split the middle class, many of whom were concerned about the corn laws and taxation, from the working-class agitators for reform. By enfranchising more

men of property, the aristocracy was to be protected from revolution and American democracy.



Lord Thomas Babington Macaulay

Lord Brougham^[xxxix] during the second reading of the Bill described the men who the Whigs wanted to give the vote to, thus

... those middle classes, who are the genuine depositories of sober, rational, intelligent and honest English feeling.

These men Grey insisted during the debates “... form the real and efficient mass of public opinion, and without whom the power of the gentry is nothing”. As Thomas Dolby stated in 1832:

The Tories believe in the divine right of Kings and the Whigs believe in the divine right of noblemen and gentlemen.

Macaulay in March 1831 eloquently defended the Whig denial of the vote to the working class, thus:

But we know that it makes even wise men irritable, unreasonable, credulous, eager for immediate relief, heedless of remote consequences. There is no quackery in medicine, religion, or politics, which may not impose even on a powerful mind, when that mind has been disordered by pain or fear. It is therefore no reflection on the poorer class of Englishmen, who are not, and who cannot in the nature of things, be highly educated, to say that distress produces on them its natural effects, those effects which it would produce on the Americans, or on any other people, that it blinds their judgment, that it inflames their passions, that it makes them prone to believe those who flatter them, and to distrust those who would serve them. For the sake, therefore, of the whole society, for the sake of the labouring classes themselves, I hold it to be clearly expedient that, in a country like this, the right of suffrage should depend on a pecuniary qualification.

Due to his moderation Grey gained the support of Liberal Tories and ultra-Tories, the latter seeing the proposed extension of the franchise as potentially strengthening the anti-Catholic element. Thus, he was able to form a broad-based Cabinet which included both the ultra-Tory Duke of Richmond and the radically-inclined Lord Durham, his son-in-law.

Grey, of course at Howick, a landed aristocrat himself, formed in fact what was the most aristocratic Cabinet of the nineteenth century. He claimed that his Government represented more English acres than any previous Ministry. Further, nepotism was expected in government appointments at this time and Grey certainly conformed to this approach. Lord Lytton declared:

My Lord Grey! What son – what brother – what nephew – what cousin – what remote and un conjectured relative in the genesis of the Greys has not fastened his limpet to the rock of the national expenditure?

The expected reform bill was introduced to the Commons in March 1831. The extent of the proposed reform exceeded expectations and shocked the Tories. The government intended to disenfranchise 60 of the smallest boroughs and to reduce the representation of 47 others. Some seats were to be completely abolished, while others were re-distributed to the London suburbs, to large cities, to the counties and to Scotland and Ireland. Furthermore, the bill included proposals to standardise and expand the borough franchise.

The bill passed its second reading by one vote and therefore was inevitably to be destroyed in committee. The government was soon defeated on a motion for the grant of supplies and parliament was dissolved, the subsequent general election being fought on the single issue of parliamentary reform.

The result was a Whig landslide. They won almost all of the constituencies with genuine electorates, leaving the Tories with little more than the rotten boroughs. An almost identical bill was presented and this time, despite Tory opposition, it was passed in the Commons only to be rejected by the Lords in October 1831. There were widespread protests, with disturbances in London, Derby, Nottingham and in Wales.

The most significant disturbances however occurred at Bristol¹⁰, where rioters controlled the city for three days. The demonstrators there broke into prisons and destroyed several buildings, including the palace of the Bishop of Bristol¹¹, the mansion of the Lord Mayor and several private homes. Work on the Clifton Suspension Bridge

10. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bristol>

11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop_of_Bristol

was halted and Isambard Kingdom Brunel himself was one of the men sworn in as a Special Constable to keep the peace. Charles Dickens was a young Reporter on the scene.

Only one Bishop had voted for the bill and public anger was especially directed at this group (one notes the action of the rioters in Bristol described above). John Stuart Mill commented:

The first brunt of indignation has fallen upon the Prelacy. Every voice is raised against allowing them to continue in the House of Lords, and if I did not express my conviction of their being excluded from it before this day five years, it is only because I doubt the house itself will last so long.

Lord John Russell, the chief architect of the bill, was more moderate in the Commons (as his was a courtesy title he was able to sit in the House of Commons) when he stated that it was "... impossible that the whisper of a faction should prevail against the voice of a nation". Parliamentary rules dictated that no bill could be presented twice in the same session, so the King prorogued parliament and a new session began in December 1831. The Government then presented a third bill to the Commons, having compromised to some extent.

Crucially for the Freemen of Berwick there was a change in the proposed system in relation to the position of Freemen. Originally Ministers had planned the complete abolition of all the ancient Freemen rights of franchise in boroughs, merely reserving the rights of the existing



Earl Grey

for their lifetimes. This attack on the traditional rights was strenuously opposed by the Tories.

Others criticized the Government for inconsistency since they argued that the great principle of the bill was to open and not to close boroughs, to extend and not to contract the franchise. The disappearance of the Freemen as electors would in some boroughs in fact render the number of electors extremely small; in one at least it would have reduced the constituency from 1500 voters to 325.

Several Tories claimed that those who acquired their freedom through servitude had justly earned the franchise and that the Commons had no right to deprive them or their descendants of the privilege. Arthur Trevor MP conceived it unjust "... to deprive freemen of a privilege they had obtained by the sweat of their brows, a privilege which created an honourable spirit of emulation" and that a "... right

so obtained was as much the property of the freeman as was the coronet of the peer”.

Another argument was that the acquisition of freedom acted as a sort of insurance; when a Freeman died, his widow and children participated in certain charities. It was feared that without the elective franchise there would be no inducement for the ordinary man to take up his freedom; becoming a Freeman entailed a fee and, without the suffrage, would result in no immediate recompense.

In order to win over those Peers wavering about reform, when the third Reform Bill was introduced provision was made that while all other classes of ancient rights should lapse with the lives of their possessors, the Freeman franchise should be continued, with the condition, however, that all Freemen created since March 1831 should be excluded; it was recognized that a large number of Freemen electors had been created by anti-reform corporations, during the months of debate, with the express object of defeating reform.

Traditionally non-resident Freemen could vote in elections and it was generally acknowledged that the non-residence of electors had been a major factor in the expense of elections, for it led to the payment of travelling expenses, which also served as a convenient cloak for wholesale bribery. Consequently, the Whigs insisted that non-resident Freemen should be prohibited from voting following the reform. After the reform freedom could only be acquired through inheritance at the age of 21 or apprenticeship to a Freeman for seven years.

It was following the passage of the bill in the House of Commons in 1832 that Wilson joined the *Advertiser*. At the beginning of 1832 Berwick was represented by two MPs and it was ‘a Freeman borough’, i.e. the MPs were chosen by the members of the Guild of Freemen which represented approximately 6% of the population. Traditionally, ‘out-voters’ formed a high percentage of the Berwick

electorate, for example in 1832 there were 1,118 Freemen, about 500 of whom were resident (Wickham 2002). Thus prior to the reform act the non-resident electors were potentially crucial to the result of the election.

In Berwick, until 1837 as elsewhere, the formal election process lasted four days, with a day for the nomination, two days for polling and a day for the declaration. Thus the

dis-enfranchised had a number of opportunities to express their views. Voting took place in the Guildhall and was in public. As the voters entered the polling booths, they might be cheered or mocked, depending on the way they recorded their votes.

Nationally the voters of Berwick had an unfortunate reputation. Prior to the 1832 election, J. Lambert wrote to Earl Grey:

...the Berwick electors are such a venal pack that I fear there can be little hope of them supporting even so straightforward and uncompromising a reformer as Sir F. (Francis Blake) upon the principle of political feeling only ... corruption has become such a habit in Berwick that I think no candidate could rely on success, if opposed, unless he was prepared to spend something...

(Grey Papers, University of Durham)

The author of a recent study commented on pre-1832 reform Berwick, thus:

The Border town and county of Berwick-upon-Tweed, known for its salmon, smacks and agricultural produce, was an open and venal borough ...

(Escott 2009)

Because the franchise was enjoyed by all the Freemen and because there was no local family of outstanding power and influence, its representation was relatively 'open', as compared with a 'rotten' or 'pocket' borough. Contested elections followed by petitions challenging the result were frequent, protracted canvassing customary and many Freemen expected payment and treating for votes cast. For example, Thomas Hall was unseated in 1803 for corruption and complained that by treating electors he was merely adhering to "... a custom that had been practised upwards of forty years in the borough at elections".

During the eighteenth century the rise in the number of Freemen from about 300 to over 900 made contested elections increasingly costly. In the Berwick election of 1786 supporters of Sir George Elliot were disgusted to receive only three guineas for their votes, while his rival, who was unsuccessful, paid five guineas. In fact, at this stage a minimum figure of £3000 (approximately £3 million today) seems to have been required by a potential candidate, but during the same period Sir John Delaval spent £6,000 in an election in the constituency, while his return at the by-election of 1764 cost him £3681 (Wickham 2002).

Rev. Thomas Johnstone, a Minister in Berwick claimed that the town's electors had one virtue, as follows:

It is not uncommon for the Burgesses of Berwick to promise their vote to a favourite Member of Parliament, several years before an election takes place, and, much to their honour, they have seldom been known to break their promise. Hence the Borough is often canvassed, and secured, long before the dissolution of parliament, and the Representative who is fortunate enough to obtain the promise of a vote, has no doubt of its being literally fulfilled.

A promise of support was regarded as morally binding, but there is much evidence that the Reverend exaggerated the honesty of Berwick’s electors. For example, in 1837 Donkin alleged that 43 electors “... who had solemnly pledged their support shamefully turned to the opposite side”.

In addition to bribery, intimidation in the form of physical threats, exclusive dealing, dismissal from employment and eviction from tenancies were all tactics utilised in Berwick elections. Consequently, as noted above, contested elections followed by petitions were frequent. Before the Reform Act there had been election petitions in 1802, 1803, 1820, 1826 and 1830. Two of these (those in 1820 and 1826) had been successful, resulting in a further election.

In the years prior to reform Berwick’s parliamentary representation had generally been divided between the Whigs and the Tories. The former benefitted from the substantial Non-Conformist electorate in the town. In 1832, for example, the town possessed eight Non-Conformist meeting-houses and only one Anglican church, the principal denomination being Presbyterianism. Rumney, the Vicar of Berwick, estimated that the proportion of Non-Conformists to Anglicans in Berwick was 2.5 to 1 at the end of the eighteenth century.

Yet despite the numerical superiority of the Non-Conformists the Tories traditionally performed well in Berwick. In 1832 the Tory MP was Marcus Beresford (1800 – 1876), an Army Officer, who was from one of the most powerful Irish Protestant families. Following in the footsteps of his cousin Sir John Beresford, he had been MP for Berwick¹² since 1826, having previously been MP for Northallerton¹³.

Like his cousin, Marcus Beresford strongly opposed Catholic emancipation and always voted against electoral reform, vigorously

12. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berwick-upon-Tweed_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berwick-upon-Tweed_(UK_Parliament_constituency))

13. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northallerton_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Northallerton_(UK_Parliament_constituency))

opposing the removal of the Freeman franchise. He had presented anti-reform petitions from Berwick, including a petition from voters resident in London wishing to preserve their right to vote in Berwick. When it became inevitable that non-resident Freemen were to be dis-enfranchised, he preferred a fifteen-mile residence qualification rather than the adopted seven-mile limit. During a meeting of the Freemen on 17th September 1831 those attending thanked him “... for his steady endeavours to preserve their rights and privileges ...”. At the previous general election however there had been a decline in his popularity owing to his opposition to reform, but he was returned in second place after a token contest (the third candidate, Frederick Gye, having withdrawn). The *Advertiser* had supported him and Blake against Gye, who had declared his preference for Beresford.

The Whig MP in 1832 was Sir Francis Blake (c. 1774 – 1860), a landowner who resided at Tillmouth Park, about ten miles from Berwick. Blake, who had eight illegitimate children by two mothers, was a commissioned Captain in the Northumberland Militia¹⁴ in 1794 and was appointed Colonel of the Northumberland Fencibles¹⁵ in 1795. Following in the footsteps of his great-great-grandfather of the same name, he was first elected MP for Berwick in 1820 and served until 1826, when he was defeated by John Gladstone, father of the future Prime Minister, but the result was successfully contested and he returned as MP in 1827.

Blake was an ardent reformer who consistently opposed Tory policies. In 1831 he presented and endorsed a pro-reform petition from Berwick but he, like Beresford, also supported the proposal of a fifteen-mile residence qualification for the Freemen franchise rather

14. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Northumberland_Militia&action=edit&redlink=1

15. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Northumberland_Fencibles&action=edit&redlink=1

than the adopted seven-mile limit, in order to appease his Freemen supporters.

It is now necessary to consider the development of the newspaper industry in general and that of the *Berwick Advertiser* in particular.

Chapter Four: The Business of Newspapers in the Early Nineteenth Century

Newspaper publishing in the nineteenth century was an expensive business. The government at an early stage had regarded such publishing as a commercial enterprise and had passed the Stamp Act 1712, which imposed a tax on newspapers, and later an advertising duty, which levied a fee on advertisements, had been introduced. Newspapers with large circulations like the *Times* and small papers like the *Advertiser* paid the same taxes.

With the introduction of the Stamp Act duty was to be levied on “all Books and Papers commonly called Pamphlets, and for and upon all News Papers, or Papers containing publick News, Intelligence or Occurrences” at the rate of 1/2d for a half sheet and 1d for a full sheet. This meant Printers had to use sheets which had been pre-stamped to show that the duty had been paid. Initially this was done in London but over the course of the eighteenth century official Stamp Offices were opened in Edinburgh, Manchester and Dublin to meet the needs of regional publishers. Those who produced newspapers therefore had to have the means to be able to stock up on stamped paper and also, as is discussed below, in Wilson’s time as an Editor, to pay the necessary sureties to the government against libel. In 1836 there were a total of 221 stamped papers in England, Wales and Scotland, including 79 in London, 83 in the English provinces, six in Wales and 53 in Scotland, according to official Stamp Office figures (Barker 1999).

In addition to raising revenue, the Stamp Tax also had the advantage for governments of ensuring that newspapers were expensive and thus the flow of information could be limited. The tax in fact rose incrementally until its peak in 1815 at 4d put “most popular

publications beyond the reach of literate working men and women” (Harvie 1991), when the average agricultural wage was 7 shillings a week. Barker (1999) writes of this period, thus:

For London artisans, the cost of a newspaper was about 2 per cent of their weekly wage, but it was between 6 and 12 per cent of the wage received by labourers outside the capital, such as pitmen on the Tyne and Wear and local miners in the Pennines.

Milne (1971) cites Burnett who calculated that Northumberland Miners earned a daily rate of between 3s 6d - 4s 6d in 1834 and argues that the duty put newspapers beyond the reach of “... the seething and seditious multitudes”.

Such taxation ensured the business model was one of high price, low turnover. That a publisher was aiming for a start-up circulation of 200 clearly demonstrates that these were not mass-market products. Thus, these papers reached the ‘political classes’ but were marginal for the majority of the population. The working classes tended to favour the lurid content of chapbooks^[xxxiii]. Day (1995) states:

For the man in the street the most readily available literature was the chapbook which ranged in subject and content from the Arthurian legend to the lurid confessions of the condemned criminal on the gallows ...

Stamped newspapers had to compete with the ingenuity of those who evaded the duty to produce unstamped newspapers. A circulation of 3,000 to 4,000 was needed to make an unstamped paper commercially viable, but some sold nearer to 10,000. As such these papers began to pose a real competitive threat to the stamped press and thus newspaper owners and others campaigned for a reduction

in stamp duty, arguing that cheaper newspapers would instruct and elevate the masses.

In addition to stamp duty, advertisement duty was payable at 1s, rising to 2s in 1780 and 3s 6d in 1815, regardless of how large the advertisement was. This duty was reduced from 3s.6d. to 1s.6d. in 1833 and stamp duty was reduced from 4d. to 1d. in 1836. Thus the ‘taxes on knowledge’ were at their peak between 1815 and 1833 and the average price of a stamped newspaper was 7d in the early 1830s. Even with the reduction in taxes by 1836, the average price of newspapers remained high and thus Milne (1971) argues that they were still well “... beyond the purchasing power of the ordinary man”. The stamp tax was finally abolished in 1855.

Further, in 1726 the government ordered the Post Office to buy a copy of every newspaper and Printers faced prosecution for libel if they overstepped what was defined by the government of the day as the political mark. In 1819 as part of Castlereagh’s “Six Acts”, introduced in the aftermath of the Peterloo massacre, the Blasphemous¹ and Seditious Libels² Act (or Criminal Libel Act) toughened the existing laws to provide for more punitive sentences for the authors of such writings, increasing the maximum sentence to fourteen years transportation³. Although the law was not rigorously applied there were 18 convictions for seditious libel and 75 for blasphemous libel between 1821 and 1834. Publishers and Printers had to provide securities for their ‘good behaviour’. The Act restricted the freedom of the legitimate press and this censorship was not lifted until the 1850s. Radical publications simply went ‘underground’. Thus, those people who produced newspapers obviously had to have the means to be able to stock up on stamped paper and to pay the necessary sureties to the government against libel.

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Blasphemous_libel

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seditious_libel

3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Penal_transportation

According to Brenchley (1997), in the eighteenth century there was a great interest in national and international news in Berwick. Thus, from early in the century arrangements had been made for the delivery of national newspapers to the town. By 1800 coffee rooms providing newspapers were established in the major inns. For example, according to Fuller (1799) the Red Lion provided two London daily papers, an Edinburgh paper three times a week and the Newcastle weekly *Hue and Cry*. In 1811 Mackenzie (1825, cited in Brenchley 1997) reported that the Hen and Chickens and the Angel took the ‘London and county papers’. The afore-mentioned Rev. Thomas Johnstone, writing in 1817, in fact complained as follows:

... we cannot help remarking that whilst towns in the neighbourhood of Berwick, which do not contain half its population, have each one and many of them *two* coffee-rooms, Berwick has not one, or a single newspaper in it, but what is found at a bar or inn, or in the houses of the inhabitants.

According to Day (1995), in North Eastern England generally in the eighteenth-century coffee houses tended to be associated with public houses, the earliest non-public house coffee house in North Northumberland being Bell’s Coffee Rooms in Alnwick which was established in the 1780s. As regards Berwick, he states that in 1823 William Neelson, a Barber, had begun providing newspapers at a coffee house. There were also libraries in the town which provided newspapers, one of which was established by William Phorson and, as noted above, John Mackay Wilson utilised John Wilson’s Circulating Library in the early nineteenth century.

The Berwick Subscription Library was established in 1811 and soon it offered 6000 volumes and had approximately 100 subscribers paying one guinea per year. Although women were significant customers of libraries their rights at the Berwick Subscription Library

were more limited than those enjoyed by male users, thus an advertisement for a meeting of members in 1834 informed readers of the *Advertiser* that:

Ladies and country subscribers may vote by proxy.

(B. A. 30th August 1834)

There was also a Subscription Reading and Billiard Room at Palace Green in the town.

Brenchley (1997) reports that Phorson, mentioned above, sold London, Newcastle and Kelso newspapers in his shop in the town and he was probably not the only shop-owner to do so. He writes:

In view of the appetite for the news it may appear surprising that the town never had its own newspaper during the eighteenth century. The most probable reason for this is the increasingly quick arrival of papers from London (and a lesser extent from Newcastle and Edinburgh) made it impossible for a local publication to compete at a time when the freshness of national and international news was of major importance.

The first Berwick newspaper to be established was the *British Gazette and Berwick Advertiser* (it became known as the *Berwick Advertiser* in 1823) which was first published on 2nd January 1808, the owner giving as the reason for its appearance "... the extraordinary influx of modern intelligence which had arrived during the past fortnight ... of which we shall endeavour to give an accurate abstract ...". The paper was initially sold at sixpence per copy, the stamp duty during that period being 31/2d, while, as noted above, there was also a duty upon the advertisements contained in each publication. The *Advertiser* at this stage was a four-page paper measuring 19 inches by 13 inches.

Many early newspapers did not have Editors, the owners taking it upon themselves to choose the material to be included and merely selecting material from other sources. The *Advertiser* has always had an Editor and the first to fill the position was Guy Gardiner, then Rector of the Corporation's Academy. Its inaugural declaration simply read:

In introducing our Paper to the world, we deem it unnecessary to offer any formal address or make any elaborate professions; our plan is before the public, and to it we shall as far as our information leads us strictly adhere.

The owner was Henry Richardson and he had presumably advertised his plan in the district prior to the launch of his newspaper. He was 34 years of age and a Printer based in Church Street in the town. He was the son of William Richardson, who had worked as a Pressman to John Taylor, a Printer, Bookseller and Papermaker, who also provided a Circulating Library in Church Street in Berwick. In 1785 a Literary magazine, the *Berwick Museum or Monthly Literary Intelligence* had been published in Berwick by William Phorson (who also printed books) mentioned previously, who had died in 1798 and, according Brenchley (1997), it is possible that Henry took over his business and thus that the *Advertiser* was preceded by a monthly magazine.

In 1801 Henry had published an edition of “*The Improvement of the Mind*” by I. Watts and also a two-volume edition of the work of Burns. A four-volume edition of *The Rambler* followed in 1805 and in 1807 he published *The Odyssey of Homer* by Alexander Pope. In 1810 he published the *Border History of England and Scotland* by George Ridpath, in 1813 *Meditations and Contemplations* by the Rev. James Hervey and in 1815 *The History of Berwick upon Tweed and its Vicinity* by the previously quoted Rev. Thomas Johnstone.

The printing process in the early nineteenth century was not unlike that in the time of Caxton. The casting and setting of the type, the operation of the flat-bed press, the folding and cutting of the printed paper, was all done by hand. Printing itself was also a slow and laborious process; done on a hand press, individual metal types were arranged by hand, inked, then paper was put under the press so that one side of the sheet was printed. To do the other side, the process was repeated. It was a two-man job and working together they might have been able to produce around 250 one-sided small sheets an hour working at full output. By the 1830s the faster and more efficient steam presses, first installed at the *Times* in 1814, were becoming common-place, but they were expensive and it is not known when Catherine Richardson, the then owner, purchased such a machine. It is revealed below that Wilson in fact complained in 1833 about her reluctance to invest in improvements in the printing process.

At this stage most newspapers were in fact created by Printers like Henry seeing a business opportunity as news was increasingly regarded as a commodity to be sold. In the *Berwick Directory* of 1808 there are two other Printers listed, viz. William Lochhead, who, as noted above, was based in the High Street, and William Gracie, who was a Printer, Bookseller and Stationer in Church Street. Hilson (1918) provides evidence of another, viz. G. Walker, Printer, Bookseller, Stationer and Bookbinder, who had purchased the stock of the above-mentioned John Taylor. Henry obviously saw a business opportunity that the other Printers were unaware of or rejected.

On the first anniversary of the newspaper in 1809, the Editor stated:

Twelve months have elapsed since the first number of this publication was presented to the public, during which time we should be wanting in gratitude not to acknowl-

edge the indulgence received in the early part for our labours, and though we do not presume to claim perfection, we may be permitted to say that the increasing demand for our journal is proof of public approbation; and we pledge ourselves still to make our endeavours unremitting in conveying that intelligence and amusement to our readers which is the avowed object of a newspaper ... Prompted by the hope of public approbation and anxious to maintain that share of public patronage they have already received, the conductors of this journal will persevere in the line they have hitherto adopted, by giving a faithful selection of the most interesting and useful articles of intelligence — “they shall not in any degree relax their assiduity in furnishing their readers with an impartial record of those great events in which the times we live in so wonderfully abound”.

(cited in B. A. 3rd January 1809)

In September 1815, the price of the *Advertiser* was raised, the Editor announcing the news as follows:

It is with extreme reluctance that in consequence of the additional duty on stamps which commenced on 1st September, we are under the painful necessity of informing our readers that the price of this paper will in future be 7d.

The price remained the same until stamp duty was reduced in 1836 and the price then became 4d per copy.

In 1823 Henry Richardson died at the age of 49 after collapsing on Bridge Street in Berwick and his widow Catherine took over the business. She was from a family of wealthy merchants who apparently, according to a report in the *Advertiser* of 22nd November

1958, had “a big business in Moscow”. She had been married previously and had a son Andrew Robson, from her first marriage, while the Richardsons had a son, also called Henry. According to Milne (1971), for a woman to run a newspaper was unusual but not unique. In fact, about 10% of newspapers in the North-East were owned by women. Most provincial titles tended to remain within a family for two or three generations, with ownership often acquired via inheritance or marriage. For example, like Catherine, Sarah Hodgson became owner of the *Newcastle Chronicle*, which her father had established, when her husband died in 1800.

At this stage Catherine printed a number of tracts and ballads, but no large-scale works. The printing was then carried out in larger premises in Western Lane to where the business had been moved from Church Street and while Catherine, in 1832, was also a Bookseller, Bookbinder and Stationer, by 1834 she was to abandon the retail business to concentrate on the newspaper production.

When Wilson arrived to take up his post in 1832 Catherine was proudly stating on the masthead that the newspaper was “printed and published by Catherine Richardson” and circulated to “the counties of Northumberland, Durham, Berwick, Haddington, Selkirk, and Roxburgh” at a price of 7p (then, as noted above, the average cost of newspapers). In order to maximize sales all local papers had to attempt to sell to a wide geographical area in an effort to create a sustainable circulation. They also relied on a complex network of regional agents. Thus, Catherine also proclaimed that she had agents in Edinburgh and London where “the paper is regularly sold”. Such agents – the original newsagents – not only delivered the paper to customers but also took in advertisements and were paid commission on both these roles. They also often informed the Editors of potential stories.

Given the reliance on national magazines and newspapers for much of his content the efficiency of the mail system was crucial to

an Editor so far from London. In 1834 Wilson was able to report on the acceleration by ninety minutes of the delivery of the mail (he was however critical of the service to local villages since their mail was first diverted to Morpeth) and in July of that year announced that “... we find it necessary to alter our day of publication from the Friday evening to the Saturday forenoon” (B. A. 26th July 1834). He continued:

In Berwick readers will receive copies about 11 AM – the surrounding area in the PM, further afield un-changed.

The newspaper, he informed his readers, “... will be published within an hour and a half after the arrival of the mail”. Wilson explained there was an advantage for the readers:

... the intelligence from London will be brought down to about seven o'clock, being a day's later news than they have at present.

(B. A. 26th July 1834)

In fact, many Berwick people did not want to change and only those wishing more up-to-date news accepted the new arrangement.

Circulation figures for the period of Wilson's editorship are unfortunately not available, but there are circulation figures (in 1000s) for the *Advertiser* for 1837. In that year the newspaper sold approximately 29,000 copies, thus averaging approximately 557 copies sold per week. At this stage there was however a rival Berwick newspaper, the *Berwick and Kelso Warder* (its establishment just after Wilson's death and its character are discussed below), selling approximately 529 copies per week. It is reasonable to assume that the existence of an alternative newspaper reduced the *Advertiser's* circulation, while there must have been some benefit for both newspapers from the re-

duction in stamp duty in 1836 noted above. Walker (2006) suggests that a weekly paper considered a circulation of 700 a week reasonable before the reduction of stamp duty, so in 1837 the *Advertiser* was in a serious local circulation war which, in fact, its owner eventually won. The *Advertiser*, like all legitimate newspapers, also had to compete with unstamped newspapers. According to Milne (1971) the output of such publications was greater in the North-East than in other parts of England apart from London. Mathews (2014) reports that a majority of local papers sold less than 2000 per week before 1850.

Of course, sales figures do not equate to readership figures. For example, in 1839 the owner of the *Leeds Mercury* estimated that each of its copies was read by between 15 and 20 people. The *Newcastle Courant* claimed in 1841 that every copy of the *Hue and Cry* was read by a considerable number of people, stating that every paper bought by a 'professional or commercial reader' was read by at least five people. By comparison, the report stated that in the rural areas at least six people read each copy and in public places upwards of fifty people saw each copy. People also hired out their copy, apparently at one time a woman in Tweedmouth lent out her *Advertiser* at the rate of a half penny per hour (B. A. 3rd January 1909).

The high price of the papers – the equivalent of £15 in today's money – also meant that people 'clubbed together' to obtain copies. For example, in the *Advertiser* of Friday 9th September 1904 a reader reported that his father was "... a member of a club of subscribers to the *Berwick Advertiser*. Each member was entitled to the use of the paper for one day and the last one to receive it became the owner".

Reminiscing about the 1820s, William Robb wrote:

... the sole source from which the citizens of Hexham derived their little knowledge of national or foreign affairs was the *Newcastle Courant* ... It was published weekly and

... was charged seven pence to the buyer ... To make the cost easier to the readers, companies of seven were formed, each person to enjoy the paper one day, and though the news were to the last man a week old, that did not matter ...

Elliot (2006) writes of a similar practice in the Megget Valley in the Borders, thus:

The first purchaser, usually in the lowest house in the valley, would buy a paper for say, ten pence, after reading it, he would sell for maybe seven pence to his next neighbour; and so it would travel up the valley until the top-most house would get the news a month later for a penny.

As shown above, newspapers were also read in pubs, coffee houses and libraries. The practice of reading aloud to groups in pubs, offices and workshops was also quite common. For example, Wallace (cited in Day 1995) records that at the Star and Garter in Blyth *Lloyd's Evening Post* was taken and those "... who took an interest in public affairs repaired (there) to hear the news". Thus, during the French Revolution, he recalled that:

Old Ebenezer Kell, a custom house officer read the paper aloud, while the company sipped their grog and smoked their pipes. Mr Kell sustained the Office of Reader for many years, and in this fashion made known to the lieges of Blyth, the wonderful campaigns and startling events in the history of the first Napoleon, as well as the naval victories of Nelson.

As regards the practice of reading newspapers in pubs, in 1836 the Chancellor of the Exchequer stated that he would rather that "...

the poor man should have the newspaper in his cottage than that he should be sent to a public house to read it". This was a sentiment that the Rev. Thomas Johnstone cited above would have heartily agreed with. In the pub, of course, the poor man would listen and discuss the news in the company of those who were not respectable, sober or loyal.

Governments were in fact concerned about the increasing awareness of events amongst the masses as compared with those whose constitutional standing, education or wealth, they believed gave them a legitimate say in public affairs. Lord Ellenborough stated of Wellington:

The Duke relies upon the support of the respectable people and despises the rabble, but the rabble read newspapers.

In 1823 *The London Gazette* declared that everywhere in Birmingham there was "... a voluntary disposition among the inhabitants to the investigation of the maxims of Government and the conduct of their rules; and many a lean unwashed artisan will discourse upon these topics quite as rationally as some of the theorists in higher places".

Of course, Radical writers saw knowledge as a crucial weapon for the common man in the fight against injustice. For example, in 1793 William Godwin had claimed the following:

In the invention of printing is contained the embryo, which in its maturity and vigour is destined to annihilate the slavery of the human race.

In 1818 John Wage wrote:

Before the commencement of these weekly papers, the labouring classes were, in a great measure precluded from political information ... But how wonderfully is the scene changed ... What a glare of light has been cast into every cottage and workshop of the kingdom!

For the newspaper owners extending readership was essential and they claimed to represent all of the people either in the country, if they were national newspapers, or, if they were provincial or local newspapers, in their areas. Mathews (2014) writes of this period that newspapers “... helped promote a new political culture which encouraged individuals outside the political elite to form independent political organization and to develop further notions of their own rights and liberties”.

At this stage local newspapers were almost completely comprised of national news selected for a local audience, rather than local news which was still circulated by gossip. Black (1987) contends that most readers then looked to their local paper to provide news of the wider world, rather than a replication of the local news they would still get verbally. Cranfield (1962) asserts that most provincial and local papers were neither original or local, but rather these titles provided a bridge between capital and country so that “... the old barriers and isolation were being whittled down; news could now travel quickly, and the events and opinions of the capital could be rapidly communicated to the countryside”.

Early newspapers often not only had no original material, but also many had no Editor to ensure that the newspaper spoke with a single voice and advocated a consistent point of view. As noted above, the *Advertiser* had an Editor and an editorial approach from its establishment, although, prior to Wilson’s assumption of the editorship, apart from the weekly editorial, there was virtually no local content other than advertisements.

Despite the claim cited above from Henry Richardson about “... assiduity in furnishing their readers with an impartial record of those great events,” like the majority of newspapers in the North-East and elsewhere in the early nineteenth century, the *Advertiser* supported the Whigs and opposed the Tories, although its first Editor initially made conciliatory gestures to moderate Tories. Of course, at the time of the establishment of the *Advertiser* the war against Napoleon was raging. After the war it was freer to criticize the Tories. Cowan (1946) in his extensive survey of Scottish newspapers comments regarding the *Advertiser*:

No provincial paper spoke more frankly for Liberalism between Waterloo and the Reform Act.

He continues:

The *Advertiser* steadily fought the landed interest – the county gentlemen, ...

In the early 1830s the *Advertiser* criticized the ‘High Tories’ who had opposed the repeal of the Test and Corporation Acts and the Catholic Emancipation Act⁴ of 1829^[xxxiii]. In contrast, the newspaper enthusiastically supported the Whig Sir Francis Blake as Berwick’s MP as he was pro-reform and anti-slavery. When he was re-elected as part of a substantial Whig majority in 1830 an editorial proclaimed:

The great cause of reform is now triumphant.
(B. A. 21 May 1831)

4. <http://spartacus-educational.com/PRcatholic.htm>

In the same editorial, the Editor made it clear that he was disappointed however that no second reformer had stood in the borough, having warned prior to the election:

Thus, the Borough, as it too generally is, will be completely neutralised.

(B. A. 30th April 1831)

There was certainly support for reform in the town. Thus, in August 1831 the *Advertiser* reported:

A meeting of the Livery took place on Tuesday, at the Guildhall coffee-house, when after some discussion, it was resolved that the Liverymen assembled should form themselves into a committee, with power to add to their numbers, with the express and sole purpose of watching progress of the Bill.

(B. A. 6th August 1831)

During Wellington's Premiership the *Advertiser* consistently supported the key Whig policies of peace and retrenchment. Thus, it opposed military intervention abroad while demanding a reduction in government expenditure to reduce the burden of taxation, a considerable proportion of which was on food and drink, on the general population. For example, in January 1830 its Editor called for "... the introduction of the most rigid economy in every department of state ... let them sell the Crown lands which are very considerable, and apply the produce to the relief of the nation" (B. A. 9th January 1830). The *Advertiser* also always opposed 'despots' abroad. Thus, as regards the latter, for example, its Editor was not sympathetic to the King of France, Charles X, when he was overthrown in 1830.

The existence of the successful unstamped newspaper had demonstrated that political principle and profitability were far from being mutually exclusive and Asquith (1976) suggests that the politicised Radical press stimulated the politicisation of the provincial and local newspaper. Embracing political partisanship was regarded as a way of attracting a wider readership. It could also be dangerous. According to Milne (1971) one of the owners of the Tory *Newcastle Journal* in the nineteenth century was twice assaulted in Newcastle because of the political stance of his newspaper.

Despite political partisanship in editorials, newspapers tended to be objective in their political reporting and the *Advertiser* conformed to this pattern, publishing transcripts of statements by public figures and at elections candidates' speeches were reported accurately (often verbatim). Until 1832 its main competitor was the Tory *Kelso Mail* (founded by Sir Walter Scott's friend and business partner James Ballantyne), but in 1832 a moderate Liberal paper, the *Kelso*

Chronicle, was established to also present Catherine Richardson and Wilson with a

Whig-supporting regional rival.

As indicated above, despite the best efforts of Catherine Richardson and her husband before her, and the dominance of Non-Conformists in the town, it was not the Whigs who dominated the town's politics: until 1832, the borough's parliamentary representation had been shared by the Whigs and the Tories, with the latter generally gaining the upper hand. When Wilson joined the *Advertiser* the key issue of course was electoral reform which, like the majority of newspapers^[xxxiv], the newspaper enthusiastically supported, having criticised Wellington's anti-reform outburst as "... imprudent and uncalled for" (B. A. 13th November 1830). The following year its Editor expressed his delight that the Whig reform Bill initially presented to the House of Commons was "... more liberal than was

generally expected” (B. A. 12th March 1831) In the same editorial he declared:

The Ministerial plan of reform has given the greatest satisfaction in every corner of the united Empire.

One suspects that a considerable proportion of its intended readership were Freemen and the Editor had previously attempted to re-assure this important group, thus:

The Burgessess must be under no apprehension that non-Freemen, though admitted to vote along with them for their representatives in Parliament, would in the smallest degree interfere with their meadows and stints^[xxxv], or any of their other rights and privileges.

(B. A. 4th December 1830)

The narrow win on the reform bill’s second reading in March 1831 was, according to its editorial, “... a signal and splendid triumph” (B. A. 24th March 1831). The newspaper opposed the approach of the Radicals who called for universal suffrage, triennial Parliaments and a secret ballot. In 1830 the then Editor had criticised the bribery and “intemperance and dissipation” around electoral contests but argued that the introduction of a secret ballot would not prevent bribery (B. A. 4th December 1830).

In October 1831, a Town meeting was held, chaired by the Mayor, where a pro-reform petition, supported by the *Advertiser*, was adopted for presentation to the House of Lords. That same month when the Bill was rejected by the House of Lords another meeting was held to discuss further action. Of course, as noted earlier, there

were also anti-reform petitions delivered to Parliament from the town which were supported by Beresford.

By the end of the year however cholera had become a more pressing issue in the town and at this stage the owner of the *Advertiser* had her own crisis to deal with, viz. the appointment of a new Editor. It is not clear when Catherine Richardson became aware of Wilson. Berwick is a small town and it quite possible that she knew him when he worked for Lochhead. She was certainly aware of him in 1829 when he wrote the following letter to her newspaper:

Being requested to prepare a volume of airs for separate publication, it is my intention in the interim, to give them occasionally to the world, in the columns of the *Literary Journal* and your own. To your reader their general locality may give them a degree of interest they would not otherwise possess. And as, in the present day, the simple unity of the Scottish song has been overrun by more presuming, but less effective compositions, it is little other than a duty to effect its rescue. For a time, therefore, any poetical contributions you receive from me, will be of this gloss.

(B. A. 7th February 1829)

In *The Enthusiast* Wilson explains his view of song-writing as follows:

Some of the ancient English and Scottish Ballads are models of this pleasing simplicity. The Ballad, whether historical or domestic, resembles an epic in miniature; and admits the change of time and place, and a varied succession of ideas. But, it is a fact either not generally known, or undervalued by the majority of song writers, that a perfect song admits of but one prominent idea to

pervade the whole, and that expressed in terms of the purest simplicity.

The best recipe for writing a good song, is, let it not exceed three eight line stanzas, and in each observe, unity-unity-unity / Many beautiful pieces, which are called songs, are rather classical odes. Most of our fashionable songs abound with what may be termed prettiness, rather than beauty; and, were I to describe my own idea of the beautiful and the pretty in such compositions, I should say, that in prettiness, though it may be pleasing, there is less or more of affectation; in the beautiful, there is a unique simplicity. The one is like a highly finished wax figure, decorated with the artificial flowers of a milliner; the other, is Nature, with her golden tresses loose, and waving in the summer breeze, Prettiness is the well-timed, and the well-turned compliment of a well-bred gallant; beauty is like words of feeling from the heart of an honest man.

Below this letter was a poem by Wilson entitled “*The Lammermuir Laird*”, with a sub-title “*A Scots Sang*”. During 1829 the *Advertiser* published a number of his poems, including “*Extempore*” (Subtitled “*On Seeing a Painting in the Scottish Academy entitled ‘The Fisher Boy’ by T. S. Good Esq.*”^[xxxvi]), “*The Shipwreck*” (written off Portland in April 28th 1825) and “*A Scots Bachannalian Song*”. None of these poems feature in *The Enthusiast*, his poetry collection.

In August 1829 the *Advertiser* reported that “There is a Heart that’s A’may Ain” by Wilson was “... sung by Miss Clarke in the Red Lion Assembly Room on Thursday and Monday evenings followed by “great applause” (B. A. 15th August 1829). On 26th December 1829 the newspaper published *A Christmas Tale* which was written

by Wilson “... especially for readers of the *Berwick Advertiser*”. This was probably Wilson’s first published Tale.

In recruiting Wilson Catherine was appointing an ambitious, hard-working, confident (one might say arrogant given the above letter he wrote to the newspaper) young man, with local knowledge, who was both literate and literary, and who also had experience of the printing process. Knowledge of literature was important as her newspaper had previously included considerable literary material. The appointment of such a person as Editor was not unique. In the nineteenth century a number of authors edited newspapers. For example, the *Sheffield Iris* was edited by James Montgomery (who is discussed below), Hugh Miller^[xxxvii] edited the *Edinburgh Witness*, James Hannay^[xxxviii] the *Edinburgh Courant* and De Quincey^[xxxix] walked into Kendal once a week to edit the *Westmoreland Gazette*.

Of course, it was also crucial that Wilson supported the *Advertiser’s* political stance and no doubt Catherine Richardson was aware that he was an ardent supporter of reform. He immediately changed the newspaper’s political coverage by introducing a regular political column which he wrote to strengthen the support of the newspaper for progressive policies. The first was on the need for improved infant education and soon there was an attack on *Blackwoods Magazine*, the Tory-supporting Edinburgh literary magazine.

The newspaper continued to include extracts from a variety of magazines and newspapers and in February 1834, when he expanded the newspaper, he announced that the selection would subsequently be more systematic. Thus, he intended to always cite the Whig press (the *Times*), the Tory press (the *Morning Post*) and the Radical press (the *Spectator*^[xli]) each week and where possible to quote them on the same subject. He added:

The miscellaneous matter in these columns is selected with the greatest care – with a desire to amuse and in-

struct, and we are certain we neither inserted nor will insert a paragraph that will offend the most fastidious.

(B. A. 15th February 1834)

Prior to Wilson's arrival the newspaper had been campaigning for electoral reform in a relatively moderate manner. On 2nd March the Editor, probably Wilson's brother James (see the letter to Everett cited above in which he says of his brother "... in political matters he is wholly unskilled"), had denounced the "... senseless clamour for the creation of Peers", which had been proposed to enable the passage of the legislation. As will be discussed below, Wilson considerably intensified the pro-reform rhetoric in the newspaper and this in fact suited the heightened tension in the country nationally as the reform debate reached a climax.

Further, he introduced what in modern newspaper jargon would be called 'features'. Thus, in May 1832 the first of his series of *Sketches of Border Characters* was on William Wordsworth and similarly in 1833, over three weeks, he published *Sketches Biographical and Critical, on the Literary characters and Literature of Britain, from the days of Goldsmith to the Present Time*. Like all writers working for a living he often re-published previous work, thus these sketches were mostly derived from his earlier lectures and also from articles which he had written for the *Border Magazine*.

He also published occasional accounts of conversations about topical subjects which he had participated in (or claimed to have participated in), of trips he experienced (for example, a trip on a Leith to Berwick Smack (B. A. 1st June 1833) and a trip to the Farne Islands (B. A. 8th June 1833)) and other topics of general interest. As regards the former, the longest example he wrote was his *Saying and Doings of the Border Literary and Political Club*, a conversation between himself and two Farmers which allegedly took place in a

'Temperance Coffee house in Berwick', a longer version of which had been published in the *Border Magazine* (undated 1832). As noted, previously the newspaper was almost exclusively devoted to national news. Wilson expanded the coverage of Berwick news and introduced regular extensive reports from the villages in the area.

For 'ladies' there were regular reports regarding clothes trends in London. 'Ladies' who were enticed to read these reports might have been surprised and disappointed by the following extract from Wilson's Tale *Lottery Hall*:

Thirty years ago, there dwelt within the village a man named Andrew Donaldson. He was merely a day-labourer upon the estate of the Squire to whom the village belongs; but he was a singular man in many respects, and one whose character very few were able to comprehend. You will be surprised when I inform you that the desire to become a *Man of Fashion*, haunted this poor day-labourer like his shadow in the sun. It was the disease of his mind. Now, sir, before proceeding with my story, I shall make a few observations on this plaything and ruler of the world called Fashion. I would describe Fashion to be a deformed little monster with a chameleon skin, bestriding the shoulders of public opinion. Though weak in itself, it has gradually usurped a degree of power that is well nigh irresistible; and this tyranny prevails, in various forms, but with equal cruelty, over the whole habitable earth. Like a rushing stream, it bears along all ranks and conditions of men, all avocations and professions, and often principles. Fashion is withal a notable courtier, bowing to the strong and flattering the powerful. Fashion is a mere whim, a conceit, a foible, a toy, a folly, and withal an idol whose worshippers are universal. Whenever introduced, it gen-

erally assumes the familiar name of Habit; and many of your great and philosophical men, and certain ill-natured old women, who appear at parties in their wedding gowns, and despise the very name of Fashion, are each the slaves of sundry habits which once bore the appellation. Should Fashion miss the skirts of a man's coat, it is certain of seizing him by the beard. It is humiliating to the dignity of immortal beings, possessed of capabilities the extent of which is yet unknown, to confess that many of them, professing to be Christians, Jews, Mahomedans, or Pagans, are merely the followers in the stream of Fashion; and are Christians and Jews simply because such a religion was after the fashion of their fathers or country. During the present century, it has been the cause of much infidelity and freethinking, or rather, as is more frequently the case with its votaries, of *no thinking*. This arose from wisdom and learning being the fashion; and a vast number of brainless people—who could neither be out of the service of their idol, nor yet endure the plodding labour and severe study necessary for the acquiring of wisdom and learning, and many of them not even possessing the requisite abilities—in order to be thought at once wise men and philosophers, they pronounced religion to be a cheat, futurity a bugbear, and themselves organic clods. Fashion indeed, is as capricious as it is tyrannical; with one man it plays the infidel, and with another it runs the gauntlet of bible and missionary meetings or benevolent societies. It is like the Emperor of Austria—a compound of intolerable evil and much good. It attempts to penetrate the mysteries of metaphysics, and it mocks the calculations of the most sagacious Chancellor of the Exchequer. At the nod of Fashion, ladies change their gloves, and the children of

the glove-makers of Worcester go without dinners. At its call, they took the shining buckles from their shoes, and they walked in the laced boot, the sandaled slipper, or the tied shoe. Individually it seemed a small matter whether shoes were fastened with a buckle or with ribbon; but the small-ware manufacturers found a new harvest, while the buckle-makers of Birmingham and their families in thousands, were driven through the country to beg, to steal, to coin, to perish. This was the work of Fashion, and its effects are similar to the present hour. If the cloak drive the shawl from the promenade, Paisley and Bolton may go in sackcloth. Here I may observe that the cry of distress is frequently raised against *bad government*, assuming it to be the cause; when fickle Fashion has alone produced the injury. In such a matter, government was unable to prevent, and is unable to relieve—Fashion defying all its enactments, and the ladies being the sole governors in the case. For, although the world rules man and his business, and Fashion is the ruler of the world, yet the ladies, though the most devoted of its servants, are at the same time the rulers of Fashion. This last assertion may seem a contradiction, but it is not the less true. With simplicity and the graces, Fashion has seldom exhibited any inclination to cultivate an acquaintance; now, the ladies being, in their very nature, form, and feature, the living representatives of these virtues, I am the more surprised that they should be the special patrons of Fashion, seeing that its efforts are more directed to conceal a defect by making it more deformed, than to lend a charm to elegance or an adornment to beauty. The lady of fortune follows the tide of Fashion till she and her husband are within sight of the shores of poverty. The portionless or the poorly por-

tioned maiden presses on in its wake, till she finds herself immured in the everlasting garret of an old maid. The well-dressed woman every man admires—the fashionable woman every man fears. Then comes the animal of the male kind, whose coat is cut, whose hair is curled, and his very cravat tied according to the fashion. Away with such shreds and patches of effeminacy! But the fashion for which Andrew Donaldson, the day-labourer, sighed, aimed at higher things than this. It grieved him that he was not a better dressed man and a greater man than the squire on whose estate he earned his daily bread. He was a hard and severe man in his own house—at his frown his wife was submissive and his children trembled. His family consisted of his wife; three sons, Paul, Peter, and Jacob; and two daughters, Sarah and Rebecca. Though all scriptural names, they had all been so called after his own relations. His earnings did not exceed eight or nine shillings a-week; but even out of this sum he did not permit the one half to go to the support of his family—and that half was doled out most reluctantly, penny by penny. For twenty years, he had never entrusted his wife with the management or the keeping of a single sixpence.

In fact, Andrew Donaldson, the central character, dies “... repenting that he had ever pursued the phantom Fashion ...”. Thus, not only ‘ladies’ might have reacted negatively to this Tale, perhaps also fashionable men might also have done so.

Wilson was developing these innovations despite ill-health. In a letter of 26th November 1832, he described his initial distress on his arrival in Berwick to Everett, thus:

You know I was ill when I left Manchester, but it grew worse - much worse and for the first four or five months of

my Editorship the thread of life quivered as if every hour it might be expected to break asunder. I grew unable to walk across the room, or to lie save upon one side. Every person thought I was dying - but myself. Many of their cheering prophecies reached my ear, and though I knew my days were numbered I did not believe that they had from my ghostly looks and wasted form been able to read the number.

By the end of 1832 his health had improved as he informed Everett in a letter on 26th November 1832, thus:

I never enjoyed such excellent health as I do now, and I have to thank my Maker that the months of illness endured have taught me to feel how delightful health is. - I need not inform you we have cholera here, - but I believe it is now extinct, or very nearly so. The deaths I believe amounted to about 260^[xli].

He continued

I am very comfortable here, in as far as we have enough to satiate every reasonable desire. But periodicals are old before I see them. Books are difficult to come at - that is useful books - for the libraries are filled with trash; - and literary society there is not even the shadow of. Save at two public dinners, and I have not been in the company of either one kind or another public or private since I arrived here. I have had many invitations, - but I have no taste for their society and it is my humour to appear as "a voice crying in the wilderness" ...

In his period as Editor Wilson mentions in the newspaper only two health problems interfering with his work. In September 1834 on the occasion of Earl Grey’s visit to Berwick, which is discussed below, he issued an apology, and stated:

At present a rather sudden indisposition renders us unable to continue our remarks on this and other subjects ...

(B. A. 13th September 1834)

On 20th June 1835 in an advertisement for a Tale entitled *The Unknown*, he informed his readers as follows:

As a consequence of the illness of the author the weekly parcels will not be issued until tomorrow (Saturday).

One notes however that in the same issue he managed to publish an editorial and a political article.

It was not surprising that Wilson found life in Berwick intellectually rather dull after working and moving in literary circles in Edinburgh, which, as noted above, rivalled London in terms of its literary significance at this time. Occasionally however he was cheered up by some success. In a letter to Everett on 15th April, 1834, he wrote:

I was on my way to a sale of old books, and amongst others put up was a perfect and excellent folio edition of Barker’s Black Letter Bible, printed in 1611. There was a good deal of competition but I was the successful bidder. You will perhaps pity my Bibliomania – but you must not be too severe – I would rather want victuals for a day than a Book that I desire, and my library is already assuming no mean appearance.

It is now necessary to consider the development of his literary career during the period of his editorship.

Chapter Five: Wilson's Literary Career 1832 - 1835

Wilson's intention was not just to be a political Editor (in fact on 5th May 1832 he wondered whether his readers were "... sated with the subject of reform."), he also had a literary and commercial plan. He was going to use the *Advertiser* as a vehicle for promoting his literary career. On 7th April 1832 he announced in the newspaper:

... we intend giving from time to time a series of original Border Tales, embracing every subject 'from grave to gay, from lively to severe' ...

Below this statement was his Tale *The Highland Soldier* which was followed by *The Widow's Ae Son* on 21st April. By the end of July of that year he had included six Tales in his newspaper and he continued to include Tales and poems regularly until his death. He also often published his brother James's poetry in the *Advertiser*, but no poems by James appear in the *Border Magazine*. As indicated earlier, he rated his brother as "wholly unskilled" in "political matters". Did he perhaps regard his brother's poetry as suitable for the general public in his newspaper, but as unsuitable for the more intellectual columns of the magazine?

Wilson advised his readers to preserve the Tales so that they could be read at Christmas, presumably with the whole family assembled. Of course, it was important for sales to emphasise the suitability of the Tales for family reading. When the Tales were published separately from the newspaper, in the seventeenth issue he stated:

This tale has been written from the circumstance of *The Tales of the Borders* having already been adopted as a lesson-book in several schools.

According to Tait (1881), reading the Tales in family groups was popular. He writes:

It was customary to have the Tales read aloud in the family circle; and often the reading was accomplished only in broken accents with intermittent sobs, while the sleeves of the auditors were much occupied in brushing away the sympathetic tears.

Publishing fiction in a newspaper was by no means unique. Many newspapers had previously printed songs, poems and stories and even novel serialisations, including Defoe's *Moll Flanders*. Scott had similarly published some of his fiction in newspapers, including the *Kelso Mail*. Thus, it is possible that Wilson got the idea of publishing his Tales in his newspaper from the activity of a rival Editor. In 1833 Dickens also began publishing his *Sketches of Boz*, a collection of short pieces, in various newspapers and periodicals. The 56 sketches concern London scenes and people, and when published in book form the work was divided into four sections: *Our Parish*, *Scenes*, *Characters* and *Tales*. The material in the first three sections consists of non-narrative pen-portraits, but, as the title suggests, the last section is comprised of fictional stories.

Wilson was choosing an appropriate time to re-visit the past. As Harvie (1991) points out, by 1830 people were conscious of the substantial and permanent change brought by the industrial revolution. Further, in the rural areas enclosures had led to a shift to larger farms and the movement of people to the towns and cities. Sir Walter Scott noted that in 1688 there had been "... a hundred landed proprietors of the name of Scott living on the Borders", while in his day it was hard to find ten. He wrote:

**“HEALTH AND HOME ARE POWERFUL MAGNETS”.
AN EXILE RETURNS TO BERWICK.**

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I could name many farms where the old people remember twenty smoking chimneys and where there are now not two.

Wordsworth regarded these developments as a threat to “... domestic affections, familial bonds, and to the independence, prosperity, and health of rural societies”. James Hogg stated that the trend to larger farms was “a debasement, an enslavement”. In the past, he said “... every farmer had only one farm, and his family were his principal servants”, while in his time most farmers had several farms “... which makes the distance between master and servant wider and wider”.



Sir Walter Scott

John Younger, the radical St. Boswells Shoemaker and Poet, wrote of his family’s eviction from their croft at Longnewton which forced

them to rent a small, simple cottage at Elliestoun nearby. They were reduced to near starvation and subsisted on:

Young rooks taken from the trees, nettles with salt although salt was an unobtainable luxury as it was taxed to help carry on Mr Pitt's wars with the French, turnips fallen from the cart or stolen from the fields, beech, briar and thorn nuts, grains of wheat or barley gleaned from the field after the crop was cut.

Scott also was concerned about the change in employment relations in the towns compared to those in the mills based in rural areas. In the latter context, he said the manufacturer

"... exercised a salutary influence over men depending on and intimately connected with him and his prospects". In the growing towns and cities where men moved for work they lacked the communal support they had previously experienced.

During this period of rapid change people were anxious about the future and nostalgic about life in the past. For many the death of William Huskisson, a senior Tory politician, who was killed by Stephenson's Rocket at the opening of the passenger line between Liverpool and Manchester in September 1830, seemed to represent the destruction of the old world by the new (Colley 1992). The Duke of Wellington, who had once predicted that the steam engine would never catch on, was present when the accident occurred and had warned "I think you had better get in" to those on the line.

There was a considerable increase in the publication of novels, magazines and short fiction in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries and Killick (2016) describes how many of the writers challenged progressive, urban and rationalist thought by re-engaging with a common cultural property which pre-dated contemporary society, synthesising orally-derived narratives with the more

sophisticated prose forms which were becoming increasingly popular. Schama (2009) writes of Britain around this time:

The most industrial society in the world was also the most attached to its village memories.

The Romantic Movement had of course encouraged an increased interest in folk art and 'primitive' poetry and history. Manning (1982) comments:

The "Celtic Revival" of the later eighteenth century formed part of the wider European movement away from literary neoclassicism towards a primitivist stance which looked to the barbarous past of "uncivilised" nations as the true wellspring of untutored inspiration and poetic truth.

Thomas Chatterton (1752-1770) wrote his *Rowley* poems in the late eighteenth Century, which were purported to be the work of a fifteenth-century poet, and James Macpherson (1736-1796) had written hugely popular epic poems which he passed off as translations of an epic in Gaelic supposedly dating from some vague period of early Scottish history. The alleged original author was 'Ossian' who Macpherson claimed was blind like Homer and Milton. Macpherson's work was speedily translated into many European languages and has been credited with bringing about the Romantic movement in European, and especially in German literature, through its influence on Gottfried von Herder and Johann ¹Wolfgang von Goethe². It was also popularized in France by none other than Napoleon³. Eventually it became clear that the poems were not direct translations from the Gaelic, but flowery adaptations written

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Gottfried_von_Herder

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Johann_Wolfgang_von_Goethe

3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Napoleon>

to suit the aesthetic expectations of Macpherson's potential audience. That these poems were fake was a problem for Scott and others who later wished to promote genuinely Scottish traditional literary forms.

William Wordsworth (1770-1850) and Samuel Taylor Coleridge (1772-1834) wrote about common life, most notably in their *Lyrical Ballads* (1798), generally regarded as the beginning of English Romanticism. A ballad is a folk tale that tells a story and the Border areas of Scotland and England were fertile territory for potential writers of such tales as there was a rich and varied tradition of entertaining tales of adventure, love and the supernatural to be considered. John Ruskin in fact stated:

The Border district of Scotland was ... of all districts of the inhabited world, pre-eminently the singing country – that which most naturally expressed its noble thoughts and passions in song.

Sir Walter Scott commented:

... the Border was once peopled with poets, for every one who could fight could make ballads, some of them of great power and pathos.

In *Marmion* Scott wrote:

And ever, by the winter heart,
 Old tales I heard of joy and mirth.
 Of lovers' slights, of ladies' charms,
 Of witches' spells, of warriors arms.
 And marvell'd as the aged hind
 With some strange tale bewitch'd my mind,
 Of forayers, who, with headlong force,
 Down from that strength had spurr'd their horse,

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 Their southern rapine to renew,
 Far in the distant Cheviots blue,
 And, home returning, fill'd the hall
 With revel, wassel-rout, and brawl.
Methought that still with trump and clang,
 The gateway's broken arches rang;
Methought grim features, seam'd with scars,
 Glared through the window's rusty bars,
 And ever, by the winter hearth,
 Old tales I heard of woe or mirth,
 Of lovers' slights, of ladies' charms,
 Of witches' spells, of warriors' arms;
 Of patriot battles, won of old
By Wallace wight and Bruce the bold;
 Of later fields of feud and fight,
When, pouring from their Highland height,
 The Scottish clans, in headlong sway,
 Had swept the scarlet ranks away.
While stretch'd at length upon the floor,
 Again I fought each combat o'er,
 Pebbles and shells, in order laid,
 The mimic ranks of war display'd;
And onward still the Scottish Lion bore,
And still the scattered Southron fled before.

Ballads are narrative verse and those from the Border region celebrate lives and events from both the English and Scottish sides of the border. As James Reed (2003) points out:

The Borders is not a line but an area, in many respects historically and traditionally almost an independent region, certainly so in the eyes of the inhabitants who gave us the Ballads.

Similarly, A.L. Lloyd (2009) states:

The bare rolling stretch of country from the North Tyne and Cheviots to the Scottish southern uplands was for a long time the territory of men who spoke English but had the outlook of Afghan tribesmen; they prized a poem almost as much as plunder and produced such an impressive assembly of local narrative songs that some people used to label all our greater folk poems as 'Border ballads'.

The ballads, traditionally sung unaccompanied, belong to various groups of subjects - such as riding ballads like *Kinmont Willie*, historical ballads like *Sir Patrick Spens* and comic ballads like *Get Up and Bar the Door*. In pre-modern times they were sung to the whole family. For example, Thomas Bewick recalled how, in his childhood, "... the winter evenings were often spent in listening to the traditional tales and songs, relating to men who had been eminent for their prowess and bravery in the border wars".

Most ballads date from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries and, until the nineteenth century, no one regarded Border ballads as a literary contribution to be taken seriously, or even as a contribution that merited interest - either for their own sake, the culture they told of, or their art. Sir Walter Scott of course changed all that.

Scott, the son of an Edinburgh lawyer and a Professor's daughter, had a Borders background which he described as follows:

My birth was neither distinguished nor sordid. According to the prejudices of my country it was esteemed gentle, as I was connected, though remotely, with ancient families both by my father's and mother's side. My father's grandfather was Walter Scott, well known by the name of Beardie. He was the second son of Walter Scott, first laird of Rae-

burn, who was third son of Sir William Scott, and the grandson of Walter Scott, commonly called in tradition Auld Watt of Harden. I am therefore lineally descended from that ancient chieftain, whose name I have made to ring in many a ditty, and from his fair dame, the Flower of Yarrow — no bad genealogy for a Border minstrel.

He indicated the closeness he felt to his ancestors, as follows:

For three hundred years before the union of the kingdoms having murdered, stolen and robbed like other Border gentlemen, and from James' reign to the Revolution having held commissions in God's own Parliamentary army, canted, prayed, and so forth; persecuted others and been persecuted themselves during the reigns of the last Stuarts; hunted, drank claret, rebelled, and fought duels down to the times of my father and grandfather.

Scott was thus proud to be descended from robbers, extortionists, bullies, kidnappers, arsonists and rapists!

As a sick boy living with his paternal grandparents under the sixteenth century tower at Smailholm Tower, near Kelso, he had heard Border tales such as that of *Muckle Mou'd Meg*, and ballads such as that of *Kinmont Willie*, from his grandmother, his aunt and from the farm-



Smailholm Tower

hand Sandy Ormistoun. The Border ballads and tales remained important to him all his life. A. N. Wilson (2002) writes:

As a border sheriff, he was never far from the dark irrational tower of his infancy. His neighbours were farmers and aristocrats and peasants, whose history was recorded in ruins and unwritten ballads and legends, men and women who saw ghosts and fairies on dark nights, and who still remembered old feuds.

As noted above, Scott was very conscious of the fundamental societal changes occurring around him and he in fact claimed that:

There is no European nation which, within the course of half a century, or little more, has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland.

A young Scott had read Bishop Thomas Percy's *Reliques of Ancient English Poetry*, a collection of songs, folk ballads and more modern poems, which were a major influence on the poets of the Romantic generation. Inspired by the ballad and song collector David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs* (1776) he began collecting ballads himself in trips to the Borders from 1792 onwards.

This was an area in his view saturated with poetry. Famously he was scolded by Margaret Laidlaw, James Hogg's mother, for wishing to publish the ballads. She declared:

There war never ane o' my sangs prentit till you prentit them yoursel' an you hae spoilt them a'thegither. They war made for singing, an' no for reading; and ye have broken the charm now, an they'll never be sang mair. An' the worst thing of a', they're nouthar right spell'd nor right setten down.

In contrast Scott argued that if the superstitions and legends of Scotland were not collected then they "... must soon have been forgotten". The same was true of the ballads themselves. In collecting these ballads, he was of course following in the footsteps of Robert Burns, but, as Kelly (2011) points out, the focus for Burns had been lyric, sing-able poetry; for Scott it was narrative.

Hogg stated of his mother that her songs, ballads and stories "... formed the groundwork of my intellectual being", she was a "living miscellany" of this material. He, who despite his mother's views, himself collected and re-worked work from the Borders oral tradition, explained to Scott:

Till the present age, the poor illiterate people in these glens knew of no other entertainment, in the long winter nights, than repeating, and listening to, the feats of their

ancestors, recorded in songs, which I believe to be handed down, from father to son, for many generations.

By making such a statement he was of course ignoring the contribution of the women like his mother who were important in the preservation of the ballads, although Petrie (1980) does argue that his male relations were the main source of his knowledge of traditional lore.

The most important of Scott's early works concern the Borders. He first had the idea of publishing a collection of ballads in 1796, but it was not until he renewed contact with his old school friend, James Ballantyne⁴, who was a Printer, that the idea bore fruit. Thus, despite the scolding from Mrs Hogg, in 1802 Scott brought out a collection of Border ballads entitled *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* which was the first collection of orally transmitted ballads to be devoted to one area.

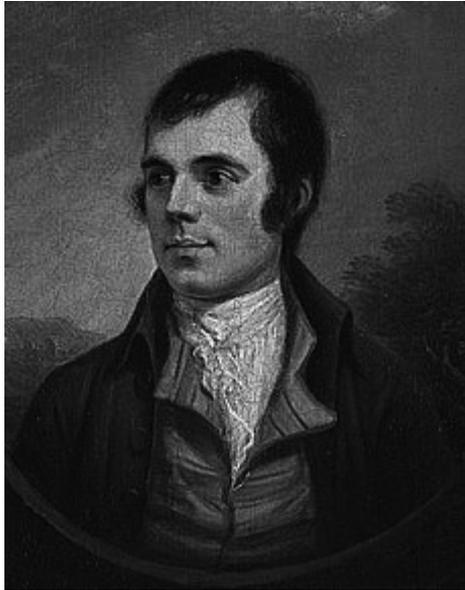
In the introduction he states:

... when the book came out, the imprint, Kelso, was read with wonders by amateurs of typography, who had never heard of such a place, and were astonished at the example of handsome printing which so obscure a town had produced.

He makes it clear that he had a patriotic agenda, declaring that he wanted:

... to contribute somewhat to the history of [his] native country; the peculiar features of whose manners and character are daily melting into those of her sister and ally.

4. <http://www.walterscott.lib.ed.ac.uk/biography/ballant.html>



5

Robert Burns

The collection contains many of the great Scottish ballads, including *Sir Patrick Spens*, *Johnie Armstrong*, *The Twa Corbies* and *Lord Randal*. Scott provided extensive notes and references to the ballads he included and he used earlier publications to source some of the Minstrelsy ballad versions. Allan Ramsay⁶ (1686–1758) had laid the foundations of a reawakening of interest in older Scottish literature, as well as leading the trend for pastoral poetry. His *The Ever Green* (1724), David Herd’s *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs* (1769) and George Caw’s *Poetical Museum* (1784) were all acknowledged as sources by Scott.

The popularity of Scott’s three volumes divided into historical ballads, romantic ballads and “imitations of those compositions by modern authors”, testified to the desire of the readers of this period

5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:PG_1063Burns_Naysmithcrop.jpg

6. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allan_Ramsay_\(poet\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Allan_Ramsay_(poet))

for the local and the historical, as well as for a 'primitive' art form. Scott's preference was for the ballads which memorialised some historical battle, skirmish, spectacular act of outlawry or a martial hero. He was less interested in the romantic ballads and there were no saucy ballads like the ones that Burns enjoyed.

It was however *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*, a romance set in the Borders and composed in a 'galloping rhythm', which made Scott famous when it appeared in 1805. It is a tale of love, murder, child abduction, sorcery and ghosts. In the Preface Scott states:

The Poem, now offered to the Public, is intended to illustrate the customs and manners which anciently prevailed on the Borders⁷ of England and Scotland ... As the description of scenery and manners was more the object of the Author than a combined and regular narrative, the plan of the Ancient Metrical Romance was adopted, which allows greater latitude, in this respect, than would be consistent with the dignity of a regular Poem ... For these reasons, the Poem was put into the mouth of an ancient Minstrel⁸, the last of the race, who, as he is supposed to have survived the Revolution, might have caught somewhat of the refinement of modern poetry, without losing the simplicity of his original model. The date of the Tale itself is about the middle of the sixteenth century, when most of the personages actually flourished. The time occupied by the action is Three Nights and Three Days.

A long narrative poem written in six cantos, the *Lay* is a verse romance in the gothic style. Scott based the tale on the old Scottish Border legend⁹ of the goblin Gilpin Horner. Its narrator, who is liv-

7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Borders

8. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Minstrel>

9. <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/legend>

ing during the late 17th century, is the last of the ancient line of Minstrels. A heroic age has disappeared. Scott writes:

The way was long, the wind was cold,
The Minstrel was infirm and old;
His wither'd cheek, and tresses gray,
Seem'd to have known a better day;
The harp, his sole remaining joy,
Was carried by an orphan boy.
The last of all the Bards was he,
Who sung of Border chivalry;
For, welladay! their date was fled,
His tuneful brethren all were dead;
And he, neglected and oppress'd,
Wish'd to be with them, and at rest.
No more on prancing palfrey borne,
He caroll'd, light as lark at morn;
No longer courted and caress'd,
High placed in hall, a welcome guest,
He pour'd, to lord and lady gay,
The unpremeditated lay:
Old times were changed, old manners gone;
A stranger filled the Stuarts' throne;
The bigots of the iron time
Had call'd his harmless art a crime.
A wandering Harper, scorn'd and poor,
He begg'd his bread from door to door.
And timed, to please a peasant's ear,
The harp, a king had loved to hear.

In the poem he tells the tale of a 16th-century feud between Lady Buccleuch and Lord Cranstoun, who loves the lady's daughter. The minstrel's¹⁰ "lay"¹¹ - the term refers to a variety of poetic forms,

10. <https://www.britannica.com/art/minstrel>

most of them medieval - is full of magical and folk elements and of knightly combat between the English army and Scottish clans. It also includes a number of ballads¹². The four-beat lines that create its distinctive galloping rhythm were influenced by a recital that Scott had heard of Coleridge¹³'s *Christabel*. The *Lay* was an immediate success, making Scott famous. The opening lines of Canto 2, "If thou woud'st view fair Melrose aright, Go visit it by the pale moonlight;" drew hundreds of tourists to Melrose Abbey.

Scott addressed history and national identity in a post-Union world within Britain and what other poets observed in the Lake District or the Alps, Scott saw in the Borders landscape. For Lamont (1995) the literary enhancement of geographical identity began in the late eighteenth century and celebrated the indigenous and local as an alternative to the metropolitan and national. Nineteenth century examples are of course the moors of West Yorkshire known as Bronte Country and Thomas Hardy's Wessex. Lamont concludes:

It was the works of Scott which gave the valleys of the border rivers of Teviot and Tweed the alternative name 'Scott country'.

Three years later Scott published another verse romance, *Marmion*, cited above, which is set in 1513 and ends with the battle of Flodden. One can only wonder why he developed a poem around the greatest catastrophe in Scottish history! The narrative begins with a description of Norham and ranges from Edinburgh Castle to Lindisfarne, and the Cantos have autobiographical introductions which contain descriptions of the Borders. It is a melodramatic story, involving lust, false accusations, a duel, the walling up of a sinful nun in a convent and a wronged lover wanting revenge. The reviewer for

11. <https://www.britannica.com/art/lay>

12. <https://www.britannica.com/art/ballad>

13. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Samuel_Taylor_Coleridge

The Satirist magazine (one of the Editors was the afore-mentioned Jerdan), summarized the plot in 1808, thus:

The pretended hero is a bold, bad man, who debauches a nun, practises a forgery, courts an heiress, maintains a lie, combats a real rival and a sham ghost, insults an aged nobleman, fights a tremendous battle, breaks a Toledo,^[xlii] receives a home thrust, gets spilt from his horse, swills water, rants, shouts – and dies.

The stanzas telling the story of "young Lochinvar¹⁴", excerpted from Canto V, particularly caught the public imagination being widely published in anthologies and learned as a recitation piece (a torture which the present author endured with thousands of other Scottish school-children of his generation).

Some of Scott's later novels also have settings in the borders, including *Guy Mannering* which has the famous character of Dandy Dinmont, a Liddesdale Farmer. Scott thus made medieval and more recent history from both documented and oral Borders sources hugely popular. A. N. Wilson (2002) comments:

For Scotsman of that generation, the figures of the past had an urgent, believable, pristine reality.

In *The Lady of the Lake* Scott writes:

Yet live there still who can remember well,
How, when a mountain chief his bugle blew,
Both field and forest, dingle, cliff; and dell,
And solitary heath, the signal knew;
And fast the faithful clan around him drew.
What time the warning note was keenly wound,
What time aloft their kindred banner flew,

14. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lochinvar#Gordons_of_Lochinvar

While clamorous war-pipes yelled the gathering sound,
And while the Fiery Cross glanced like a meteor, round.

The late 13th to the early 17th centuries were the years of the Border Reivers and Scott loved the tales of their deeds. The long wars between Scotland and England had created 'a debateable land' where the power of royal authority was intermittent and weak. In those days, this area displayed all of the characteristics of a frontier, lacking law and order. With the exception of the Scottish Highlands, the Borders were the last part of Britain to be brought under the rule of law.

It was a time when people owed their tribal or clan loyalty to their blood relatives or families and it was common for these families to straddle the Border. Cattle rustling, feuding, murder, arson and pillaging were all common occurrences. George MacDonald Fraser (1989) writes:

For if there are qualities in the Border people which are less than amiable, it must be understood that they were shaped by the kind of continuous ordeal that has passed most of Britain by. That ordeal reached its peak in the sixteenth century, when great numbers of the people inhabiting the frontier territory (the old Border Marches) lived by despoiling each other, when the great Border tribes, both English and Scottish, feuded continuously among themselves, when robbery and blackmail were everyday professions, when raiding, arson, kidnapping, murder and extortion were an important part of the social system.

In Scott's *The Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* the inhabitants are presented in their kinship groupings, their chief economic activity being keeping cattle and their lives are interspersed with raids and fighting on both sides of the Border and between rival groups on the same side. Lamont (1995) writes:

What was the appeal for Scott of these wild narratives? They describe courage and resourcefulness, loyalty to the kinship group and a sense of identity. The activity of these Border reivers is precisely the sort of thing Scott, trained in law in Enlightenment Edinburgh, was professionally committed to curbing. Scott’s enthusiasm may have been a romantic yearning for qualities his modern rationalistic urban world was eliminating. The border reivers who Scott celebrated were in the past ... The whole debate between gain and loss in the historical process was the basic subject of all of his writing.

George MacDonald Fraser (1989) challenges Scott’s romantic notion that the Reivers

“... abhorred and avoided the crime of unnecessary homicide”.
He states:

The Border reivers were aggressive, ruthless, violent people, notoriously quick on the draw, ready and occasionally eager to kill in action, when life or property or honour were at stake ... They lived in a society where deadly family feud was common, and when they were engaged in feud they killed frequently and brutally ...

Fraser described the typical Reiver, thus:

He can be seen for what he very often was, not at all heroic, but a nasty, cruel, mean-spirited ruffian, who preferred the soft mark provided by small farmers, widows, and lonely steadings; who came in overwhelming force, destroyed wantonly, beat up and even killed if he was resisted, and literally stripped his victims of everything they had.

Moffat (2007) shares Fraser's opinion of Scott's romantic view of the Reivers, for example, describing one of the most famous Reivers, Kinmont Willie, as a "... a deeply unsavoury criminal". Kinmont Willie was certainly not the only such Reiver. The night before he was hanged in 1596, Geordie Burn, another notorious Reiver, admitted that "... he had lain with above forty men's wives ... and that he had killed seven Englishmen with his own hand, cruelly murdering them; that he had spent his whole time in whoring, drinking, stealing and taking deep revenge for slight offences".

In comparison to the lives of the Reivers Scott's *The Lay of the Last Minstrel* is set amongst the higher levels of Border feudal society. William of Doleraine's ride in the poem from Branksome to Melrose is an opportunity for Scott to trace the route, each place name evoking a description, and the rallying of the Border clans against an English incursion is a roll-call of Border family names. Thus, Scott brought the names of the Border villages and of Border families to a world-wide audience.

James Hogg, a rather hopeless farmer from the Ettrick valley, came from a very different background to Scott and he was never able, like Scott, to live in a "romance in stone", as Scott did at Abbotsford. Hogg's grandfather, Will Laidlaw, was reputed to be the "... last man of this wild region, who heard, saw, and conversed with the fairies" and his mother, the scolder of Scott, was, as indicated above, "a living miscellany of old songs" and a great chanter of ballads.

As noted above, despite her misgivings about rendering the ballads in print, her son also wrote down, re-worked and published Border tales. Hogg's first major collection *The Mountain Bard* (1807) drew heavily on local traditions, as did much of his later work. He did however agree with his mother that there was an associated cost of this activity since he stated that the ancient minstrelsy "... lost all its interest and romance as soon as it ceased to be chanted to its na-

tive and animated lilt”. Scott abandoned poetry in later life saying Byron “beat me”, but Hogg went on writing songs, ballads and poems for the rest of his life.

Hogg’s advice to young writers was “... to borrow the fire and vigour of an earlier period of society, when a nation is verging from barbarism into civilisation”. The remoteness of Ettrick had entailed, he argued, “... a later and more sudden emergence from barbarity” than had occurred elsewhere. Even today it seems remote and is relatively undeveloped, although there is a lovely small museum dedicated to his memory just a few yards from his grave.

Hogg’s hero was Robert Burns (1759 – 1796), the first Scottish writer to become a national celebrity. He is the best known of the Poets who write in the Scots language¹⁵, although much of his writing is also in English and a light Scots dialect¹⁶, accessible to an audience beyond Scotland. Like those of Burns, Hogg’s stories are hearty, sentimental, tragic and mystical. Crawford (1988) writes:

The key to all Hogg’s work is that he was an inveterate, almost a compulsive mixer of genres – ‘pastoral-comical’ historical-pastoral, tragical-comical-historical-pastoral ... and that the dominant one, though he almost always blended it with others, was Romance ... He was the most Romantic Scottish author of the Romantic age.

Of course, like his hero, Hogg was a rural voice speaking to an urban audience and, being a poor Farmer, he needed literary success, so he was pleased to be known as ‘the Ettrick Shepherd’ as it seemed to echo a phrase used to describe Burns, viz. the ‘Heaven-taught ploughman’. He believed there was nothing to hinder him in emulating Burns, since he argued:

15. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scots_language

16. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Central_Scots

I too was born on the 25th of January, and I have more time to read and compose than any ploughman could have, and can sing more old songs than ever ploughman could in the world.

In fact, he was mistaken (or perhaps it was wishful thinking, part of his identification with Burns) since he did not share his birthday with Burns. Strangely Sir Walter Scott was also uncertain of his birthday.

A shepherd's plaid was Hogg's hallmark costume, in Ettrick as in Princes Street and in London. Regarding Hogg, Scott commented that he "... has the talent sufficient to spoil him for his own trade without having enough to support him by literature". Their relationship was at times difficult, but Scott liked Hogg and supported his literary career. In his *Life of Scott*, Lockhart, Scott's son-in-law (who is always kind to Scott), describes his father-in-law's attitude to Hogg, thus:

Under the garb aspect and bearing of a true peasant ...
Scott found a brother poet, a true son of nature and of genius, hardly conscious of his powers...

The afore-mentioned Jerdan said of Hogg that he combined "... a singular welding together of apt shrewdness and childish simplicity, of sound common sense and poetic imagination".

According to Killick (2016), north of the border the integration of traditional material and modern fiction made arguably the greatest strides in the early part of the century because, he argues, Scottish writers had the desire and the opportunity to engage with questions of oral history, identity and nation in a more comprehensive way than other regions of Britain. He describes how, given "... this peculiarly Scottish use of traditional forms in a regional context", regional narratives, expressing provincial values and traditions against nation-

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al identity and Enlightenment Edinburgh, came to the forefront of Scottish short fiction in the late 1810s and 1820s.

As noted earlier, early in the nineteenth century *Blackwood's Magazine* and its rival, the *Edinburgh Review*, encouraged an interest in Scottish literature and in short fiction. Kearney



James Hogg

(1995) writes regarding the country whose border was just four miles north of Berwick:

In the wake of the Ossianic forgeries of James Macpherson and the novels of Walter Scott ... For many, Scottish Romanticism replaced Scottish Enlightenment.

There was a great demand for Scottish literature and thanks to Scott this demand went far beyond his homeland since, as Hook (1987) argues, Sir Walter had put Scotland “... squarely to the centre

of the romantic map of Europe". By the time of his death *Waverley* had been translated into French, German, Italian, Hungarian, Swedish, Danish and Russian. Crawford (2007) states:

By around 1820 people everywhere wanted to read Scottish work.

Burns, Scott and Hogg, by presenting works with a linguistic variety in dialogue reflecting a multi-lingual nation, were of course significant in the preservation and popularization of the Scots language. The latter in fact complained:

Everyone is imitating "ma style of colloquial oratory, till a' that's specific and original about me's lost in universal plagiarism".

Walter Elliot, a modern Borders Poet, addresses the complexity of Borders' Scots, thus:

Pure Border Scots

In the land o the Borders, ye'll find there are lots
 O fowk whae speak in a pure Border Scots.
 Bit is it? Ah've quaistioned that theory o late;
 It isnae that pure as Ah'll now demonstrate.
 When the Romans left here, the tongue that was spoken
 Was a form o Welsh - an No; Ah'm no joken.
 Welsh lested a while until the time when
 Some Germans sailed owre frae a place, Angeln.
 Of Course, they spoke German tho historians hide
 An caa it "Old English" for the sake o their pride.
 Then oot o the North, a peculiar mix,
 An army composed o the Scots an the Picts
 Conquered at Carham; sae Scots Gaelic was flung
 Intae the mix o the "pure" Border tongue.

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Bit the Scots cam frae Ireland, gaun back a guid while
In big leather boats an hed settled Argyll.
The lands aroond Dublin wi its Viking Remains
Then kindly chipped in an sent us some Danes.
Efter a while, David cam up frae the Sooth
Wi scarcely yin guid Scots word in his mooth,
Accompanied bie Norman-French freends in wee bands,
He settled thaem here an gied them wide lands.
(The Normans were Vikings whae hed lost their wey
When they landit in France an decided tae stey.)
Sae that added French which was spoke wi decorum
Intae oor language - it made quite a jorum.
As oo traded wi Hamburg an Holland an such
This gied us mair German an a wheen words o Dutch.
The Gypsies frae Yetholm then topped up the lot
Bie chucken some Hindi words intae the pot.
The language o pure Border Scots, ye can tell,
Is a source o great pride as Ah speak it masel.
It's maybe no "pure" as Ah've telt ye at length
Tho variety gies it its vigour an strength.

Scott was the first significant Novelist to make any attempt to make use of the vernacular (Blanning 2010). Regarding his enormously successful novel *The Antiquary*, he stated that he had chosen his principal characters from the common people because:

I agree with my friend Wordsworth, that they seldom fail to express themselves in the strongest and most powerful language. This is, I think, peculiarly the case with the peasantry of my own country, a class with whom I have been long familiar. The antique force and simplicity of their language, often tintured with the Oriental eloquence of Scripture, in the mouths of those of an elevated

understanding, give pathos to their grief, and dignity to their resentment.

Not only was there a demand for nostalgic writing, there was a publishing market-place for Hogg and similar writers to exploit. Polsgrove (1974) writes of the 1820s and 1830s, thus:

The concentration of population, a general population increase, improvements in printing production and transportation, arising from increased technological sophistication, and the expansion of the middle class – all these elements combined to give short fiction both readers and avenues to those readers.

The afore-mentioned *Blackwood's Magazine* and the *Edinburgh Review* were important magazines, but there many others as St Clair (2004) points out, thus:

By the end of the Romantic period there were many dozens of periodicals in Great Britain offering to consider short poems and stories and payment could be good.

Similarly, Killick (2016) states:

Short fiction was the beneficiary of a swelling market for fiction ...

Around 1810 the latter argues 'Tales', which were closely linked to the oral tradition as

"... numerous songs appear in traditional stories", became important. Scott published many Tales, including *Tales of my Landlord* 1816-1818 and *Tales of a Grandfather*. Hogg's series of *Tales and Anecdotes of the Pastoral Life* had appeared in the first three issues of *Blackwood's Magazine* in 1817 and in 1820 he published *Winter*

Evening Tales. During this period John Galt (1779-1839), born in Ayrshire, also published humorous chronicles of rural Scottish life, including *The Howdie and Other Tales*. Further, in 1822 Allan Cunningham (1784-1842), from Dumfries, a friend of Scott and Hogg, who was a Poet, Editor, Novelist and Biographer, had some success with his *Traditional Tales of the English and Scottish Peasantry*, having also had his *Traditional Literature Series* published in the *London Magazine* in 1820, which also published work by Hazlitt, Lamb and de Quincey.

Regional Tales were close to folk tales and other oral modes and as in the earlier literary forms it was easy for writers to blur fact and fiction, history and myth and to include the fantastic and the supernatural. Harris (1979) writes of this period:

Two groups of Tales stand out early in the century, both written with a special purpose which gave them an immediate readership. The first is the edifying or instructive Tale including religious, moral, or even economic principles; the second is the regional Tale describing life and manners of a particular people.

Killick (2016) writes of the use of the term ‘Tales’, thus:

... to readers of the times this designation would suggest a short narrative, probably dealing with rustic or provincial life and with daily and domestic reality, celebrating values of simplicity, naturalness and candour, and perhaps featuring an eccentric storyteller as mediator of the simple matter.

He continues by arguing that changes in rural life and the decline of the oral tradition “... created the conditions whereby such Tales could be received nostalgically and unthreatingly”.

Thus Wilson, in deciding to write his *Historical, Traditional and Imaginative Tales* set in the Borders was aware there was a demand for such material, thanks primarily to Scott. In *The Vacant Chair* he defines his area of geographical interest, thus:

You have all heard of the Cheviot mountains. They are a rough, rugged, majestic chain of hills, which a poet might term the Roman wall of Nature; crowned with snow, belted with storms, surrounded by pastures and fruitful fields, and still dividing the northern portion of Great Britain from the southern. With their proud summits piercing the clouds, and their dark rocky declivities frowning upon the glens below, they appear symbolical of the wild and untameable spirits of the Borderers who once inhabited their sides.

He shows his awareness that he was fishing in the same cultural reservoir as Scott, when he writes in his Tale *Polwarth on the Green*:

Nowhere are traditions more general or more interesting than upon the Borders. Every grey ruin has its tale of wonder and of war. The solitary cairn on the hillside speaks of one who died for religion, or for liberty, or belike of both. The very schoolboy passes it with reverence, and can tell the history of him whose memory it perpetuates. The hill on which it stands is a monument of daring deeds, where the sword was raised against oppression, and where heroes sleep. Every castle hath its legends, its tales of terror and of blood, "of goblin, ghost or fairy." The mountain glen, too, hath its records of love and war. There history has let fall its romantic fragments, and the hills enclose them. The forest trees whisper of the past; and, beneath the shadow of their branches, the silent spirit of other years seems to

sleep. The ancient cottage, also, hath its traditions, and recounts “The short and simple annals of the poor”. Every family hath its legends, which record to posterity the actions of their ancestors, when the sword was law, and even the payment of rent upon the Borders was a thing which no man understood; but, as Sir Walter Scott saith, “all that the landlord could gain from those residing upon his estate was their personal service in battle, their assistance in labouring the land retained in his natural possession, some petty quit-rents of a nature resembling the feudal casualties, and perhaps a share in the spoil which they acquired by rapine”. Many of those traditions are calculated to melt the maiden’s heart, to fill age with enthusiasm, and youth with love of country and that he was able to celebrate the same region popularised.

Wilson introduced the Tale by mentioning an earlier song of the same name.

Like Scott he wrote about the exploits of the Reivers and several examples are cited below. For example, in his Tale *Archy Armstrong* he writes:

For thirty years Sandy Armstrong of the Cleughfoot had been one of the most daring and successful freebooters of his clan. His name was a sound of terror on the Borders, and was alike disagreeable to Scotch and English ears; for, like Esau, Sandy’s hand was against every man, and every man’s hand against him. His clan had been long broken and without a leader, and the Armstrongs were regarded as outlaws by both nations. Cleughfoot, in which Sandy resided, was a small square building of prodigious strength, around it was a court-yard, or rather an enclosure for cattle, surrounded by a massy wall, in which was

an iron gate strong as the wall itself. The door of the dwelling was also of iron, and the windows, which were scarce larger than loop-holes, were barred. It was generally known by the name of "Lang Sandy's Keep," and was situated on the side of the Tarras, about ten miles from Langholm. Around it was a desolate morass, the passes of which were known only to Sandy and his few followers, and beyond the morass was a decaying but almost impenetrable forest. Sandy, like his forefathers, knew no law, save

"The good old law—the simple plan—

That they should take who have the power,

And they should keep who can."

He had had seven sons, and of these five had fallen while following him in the foray, the sixth had been devoured by a blood-hound, and he had but one, Archy, his youngest, left, to whom he could bequeath his stronghold, a fleet steed, and his sword. Land he had none, and he knew not its value: he found it more profitable to levy blackmail, to the right and to the left, on Englishman and on Scot; and he laughed at the authority of Elizabeth and of James, and defied the power of the Wardens of their Marches—"Bess may be Queen o' England," said he, "and book-learned Jamie, King o' braid Scotland, but Sandy Armstrong is lord o' the wilds o' Tarras."

The Borders were changing and Sandy does not like the changes. He declares the following to his son:

"Archy," said the freebooter, "this warld is turning upside down, an' honest men hae nae chance in't. We hear o' naething noo but law! law! law!—but the fient a grain o' justice is to be met wi' on the Borders. A man canna take a bit beast or twa in an honest way, or make a bonfire o' an enemy's haystack, but there's naethin' for't but Carlisle and a hempen cravat. But mind, callant, ye ha'e the bluid o' the Armstrongs in your veins, and their hands never earned bread by ony instrument but the sword, and it winna be the son o' Sandy o' Cleughfoot that will disgrace his kith and kin by trudging at a ploughtail, or learning some beggarly handicraft. Swear to me, Archy, that ye will live by the sword like your faithers afore ye—swear to your faither, callant, an' fear neither Jamie Stuart, his twa kingdoms, nor his horsemen—they'll ha'e stout hearts that cross Tarras moss, and there will be few sheep in Liddesdale before the pot at Cleughfoot need nae skimming."

In his Tale *The Whitsome Tragedy* Wilson wrote of the decline of the Reivers thus:

When our forefathers were compelled to give up the ancient practice of crossing the Borders, and of seizing and driving home whatever cattle they could lay their hands upon, without caring or inquiring who might be their owner—in order to supply their necessities, both as regarded providing themselves with cattle and with articles of wearing apparel, they were forced to become buyers or sellers at the annual and other fairs on both sides of the Border. Hence they had, as we still have, the fairs of Stagshawbank, Whitsunbank, St. Ninian's, St. James's, and St. Boswell's; with the fairs of Wooler, Dunse, Chirnside, Swinton, and of many other towns and villages. Of

the latter, several fell into disuse; and that of Whitsome was discontinued. Whitsome, or White's home, is the name of a village and small agricultural parish in the Merse, which is bounded by the parishes of Swinton, Ladykirk, Edrom, and Hutton. Now, as has been stated, Whitsome, in common with many other villages, enjoyed the privilege of having held at it an annual fair. But, though the old practice of lifting cattle, and of every man taking what he could, had been suppressed, the laws were not able to extinguish the ancient Border spirit which produced such doings; and, at the annual fairs, it often broke forth in riot, and terminated in blood. It was in consequence of one of those scenes, and in order to suppress them, that the people of Whitsome were deprived of a fair being held there; the particulars whereof, in the following story, will be unfolded.

Wilson in this Tale tells the sad story of Barbara Moor. He describes her background and the changes in Borders life, thus:

It is necessary, however, for the development of our story, that we here make further mention of her husband and her sons. The elder Moor had been a daring freebooter in his youth; and often in the morning, and even at dead of night, the "fray of support," the cry for help, and the sudden summons for neighbours and kinsmen to rise and ride, were raised wheresoever he rode; and the sleuth-hounds were let loose upon his track. It was his boast that he dared to ride farther to humble an enemy than any other reiver on either side of the Border. If he saw, or if he heard, of a herd of cattle or a flock of sheep to his liking, he immediately "marked it for his own," and seldom failed in securing it; and though the property so obtained was

not purchased with money, it was often procured with a part of his own blood—and with the blood, and not unfrequently the lives, of his friends, followers, and relatives. And when law and justice became stronger than the reiver's right, they by no means tamed his spirit. Though necessity, then, compelled him to be a buyer and seller of cattle, he looked upon the occupation and the necessity as a disgrace, and he sighed for the honoured and happier days of his youth, when the freebooter's might was the freebooter's right. His sons were young men deeply imbued with his spirit; and it was their chiefest pleasure, during the long winter evenings, to sit and listen to him, while he recorded the exploits and the hairbreadth escapes of his early days.

In his Tale *The Wife or the Wuddy Wilson* also writes about the Reivers. The Tale begins as follows:

"There was a criminal in a cart
Agoing to be hanged—
Reprieve to him was granted;
The crowd and cart did stand,
To see if he would marry a wife,
Or, otherwise, choose to die!
'Oh, why should I torment my life?'
The victim did reply;
'The bargain's bad in every part—
But a wife's the worst!—drive on the cart.'"

Honest Sir John Falstaff talketh of "minions of the moon;" and, truth to tell, two or three hundred years ago, nowhere was such an order of knighthood more prevalent than upon the Borders. Not only did the Scottish and English Borderers make their forays across the Tweed and

the ideal line, but rival chieftains, though of the same nation, considered themselves at liberty to make inroads upon the property of each other. The laws of meum and tuum they were unable to comprehend. Theirs was the strong man's world, and with them might was right. But to proceed with our story. About the beginning of the seventeenth century, one of the boldest knights upon the Borders was William Scott, the young laird of Harden. His favourite residence was Oakwood Tower, a place of great strength, situated on the banks of the Ettrick. The motto of his family was "Reparabit cornua Phoebe," which being interpreted by his countrymen, in their vernacular idiom, ran thus—"We'll hae moonlight again." Now, the young laird was one who considered it his chief honour to give effect to both the spirit and the letter of his family motto. Permitting us again to refer to honest Falstaff, it implied that they were "gentlemen of the night;" and he was not one who would loll upon his pillow when his "avocation" called him to the foray.

It was drawing towards midnight, in the month of October, when the leaves in the forest had become brown and yellow, and with a hard sound rustled upon each other, that young Scott called together his retainers, and addressing them, said—"Look ye, friends, is it not a crying sin and a national shame to see things going a-glee as they are doing? There seems hardly such a thing as manhood left upon the Borders. A bit scratch with a pen upon parchment is becoming of more effect than a stroke with the sword. A bairn now stands as good a chance to hold and to have, as an armed man that has a hand to take and to defend. Such a state o' things was only made for

those who are ower lazy to ride by night, and ower cowardly to fight. Never shall it be said that I, William Scott of Harden, was one who either submitted or conformed to it. Give me the good, old, manly law, that 'they shall keep who can,' and wi' my honest sword will I maintain my right against every enemy. Now, there is our natural and lawful adversary, auld Sir Gideon Murray o' Elibank, carries his head as high as though he were first cousin to a king, or the sole lord o' Ettrick Forest. More than once has he slighted me in a way which it wasna for a Scott to bear; and weel do I ken that he has the will, and wants but the power, to harry us o' house and ha'. But, by my troth, he shall pay a dear reckoning for a' the insults he has offered to the Scotts o' Harden. Now, every Murray among them has a weel-stocked mailing, and their kine are weel-favoured; to-night the moon is laughing cannily through the clouds:—therefore, what say ye, neighbours—will ye ride wi' me to Elibank? and, before morning, every man o' them shall have a toom byre."

In his Tale *The Death of the Chevalier de la Beattie* Wilson reveals that he is well aware of the importance of kinship in 'the debateable land'. Sir Anthony D'Arcy, the Warden of the East Marches, killed Sir David Home's brother and Sir David takes revenge by displaying his head at his castle. Wilson writes:

The bloody relic was then borne in triumph to Hume castle and placed upon the battlements. 'There, said Sir David, 'Let the Regent climb when he returns from France for the head of his favourite – it is thus that Home of Wedderburn revenges the murder of his kindred.



Hume Castle

In the Tale *Polwarth on the Green* Margaret is confident that her kinsmen will save her and her sister. Wilson writes:

"I believe, Marion," answered Margaret, "that within the eight days which our uncle has named, we shall either be at liberty, or have ceased to live. It is our lives that he seeks, not that we should be the wives of his sons; rather than be so wed, I will die—so will you. But, if we should die, our deaths would not be unavenged. He would neither enjoy our estates, nor the triumph of his guilt. Ye have heard the names of Patrick and George Hume of Wedderburn spoken of as sounds of terror upon the Borders—their swords have avenged the injured, and released the captive Marion! they will avenge our wrongs—dear sister, be not afraid."

In *The Guidwife of Coldingham* Madge is proud of her familial heritage. Wilson writes:

At this period there dwelt in Coldingham a widow, named Madge Gordon. She was a tall and powerful

woman, and her years might be a little below fifty. Daily she indulged in invectives against the English, and spoke contemptuously of the spirit of her countrymen in submitting to the mandate of the governor of Fast Castle. She had two cows and more than a score of poultry; but she declared that she would spill the milk of the one upon the ground every day, and throw the eggs of the other over the cliffs, rather than that either the one or the other should be taken through the gates of the castle while an English garrison held it.

Now, the maiden name of Madge was Home; and when her pride was touched, it was her habit to run over the genealogical tree of her father's family, which she could illustrate upon her fingers, beginning on all occasions—"I am, and so is every Home in Berwickshire, descended frae the Saxon kings o' England and the first Earls o' Northumberland." Thus did she run on, tracing their descent from Crinan, chief of the Saxons in the north of England, to Maldredus, his son, who married Algatha, daughter of Uthred, prince of Northumberland, and grand-daughter of Ethelrid, king of England; and from Maldredus to his son Cospatrick, of whose power William the Conqueror became jealous, and who was, therefore, forced to fly into Scotland in the year 1071, where Malcolm Canmore bestowed on him the manor of Dunbar, and many baronies in Berwickshire. Thus, did she notice three other Cospatricks, famous and mighty men in their day, each succeeding Cospatrick the son of his predecessor; and after them a Waldreve, and a Patrick, whose son, William, marrying his cousin, he obtained with her the lands of Home, and, assuming the name, they became the

founders of the clan. From the offspring of the cousin, the male of whom took the name of Sir William Home, and from him through eleven other successors, down to George, the fourth Lord Home, who had fallen while repelling the invasion of Somerset a few months before, did Madge trace the roots, shoots, and branches of her family, carrying it back through a period of more than six hundred years; and she glowed, therefore, with true aristocratic indignation at the remark of her daughter to Florence—"What can the like o' you or my mother do?" And she concluded her description of her genealogical tree by saying—"Talk noo the like o' yer mother, hizzy!"

Like Scott, Wilson does not only confine his writings to the lower orders. The example of the royal wedding at Lamberton has already been cited. In his Tale *The Unbidden Guest Or, Jedburgh's Regal Festival* he also writes about a royal wedding, viz. the marriage of Alexander III and Yolande de Dreux, whose father was Robert IV, Count of Dreux, at Jedburgh Abbey in 1285. Yolande was probably no more than 22 years of age, while Alexander was in his 44th year. Wilson is sympathetic to the Scottish King and writes:

Now, the praise of Alexander was echoed in every land. He was as a father to his people, and as a husband to his kingdom. He was wise, just, resolute, merciful. Scotland loved him—all nations honoured him. But Death, that spareth not the prince more than the peasant, and which, to short-sighted mortals, seemeth to strike alike at the righteous and the wicked, had made desolate the hearths of his palaces, and rendered their chambers solitary. Tribulation had fallen heavily on the head of a virtuous King. A granddaughter, the infant child of a foreign prince, was all that was left of his race; and his people de-

sired that he should leave behind him, as inheritor of the crown, one who might inherit also his name and virtues. He was still in the full vigour of his manhood, and the autumn of years was invisible on his brow. No "single silverings" yet marked the raven ringlets which waved down his temples; and, though his years were forty and three, his appearance did not betoken him to be above thirty.

The marriage was one of the shortest in British royal history – and the shortest of any English or Scottish king, lasting less than 5 months. Tragedy struck in March of 1286 when Alexander fell from his horse when riding, against advice, from Edinburgh to join her at Kinghorn Castle.

Like Scott, Wilson was aware of the change in the Borders caused by industrial development: Thus, in his Tale *Reuben Purves or the Speculator* he writes:

But I again digress from the history of Reuben Purves. I have said that he was born in Galashiels; his father was a weaver, and the father brought his son up to his own profession. But although Reuben

"was a wabster guid,
Could stown a clue wi' ony body,'

his apprenticeship (if his instructions from his father could be called one) was scarce expired, when, like Othello, he found "his occupation gone," and the hand-loom was falling into disuse. Arkwright^[xliii], who was long considered a mere bee-headed barber, had—though in a great measure by the aid of others—brought his mechanism to a degree of perfection that not only astonished the world, but held out a more inexhaustible and a richer source of

wealth to Britain than its mines did to Peru. Deep and bitter were the imprecations of many against the power-loom; for it is difficult for any man to see good in that which dashes away his hard-earned morsel from the mouths of his family, and leaves them calling in vain for food. But there were a few spirits who could appreciate the vast discovery, and who in it perceived not only the benefits it would confer on the country, but on the human race. Arkwright, who, though a wonderful man, was not one of deep or accurate knowledge, with a vanity which in him is excusable, imagined that he could carry out the results of his improvements to an extent that would enable the country to pay off the national debt. It was a wild idea; but, extravagant as it was, it must be acknowledged, that the fruits of his discoveries enabled Britain to bear up against its burdens, and maintain its faith in times of severest trial and oppression.

Reuben's father was one of those who complained most bitterly against the modern innovation. He said, "the work could never be like a man's work. It was a ridiculous novelty, and would justly end in the ruin of all engaged in it." It had, indeed, not only reduced his wages the one half, but he had not half his wonted employment, and he saw nothing but folly, ruin, and injustice in the speculation. Reuben, however, pondered more deeply; he entered somewhat into the spirit of the projector. He not only entertained the belief that it would enrich the nation, but he cherished the hope that it would enrich himself. How it was to accomplish his own advancement he did not exactly perceive, but he lived in the idea—he dreamed of

it—nothing could make him divest himself of it; and he was encouraged by his mother saying—

"Weel, Reuben, I canna tell, things may be as ye say— only there is very little appearance o' them at present, when the wages o' you an' your faither put thegither, are hardly the half o' what ane o' ye could hae made. But ae thing is certain—they who look for a silk gown, always get a sleeve o't."

"Nonsense, woman! ye're as bad as him," was the reply of his father: "wherefore would ye encourage the callant in his havers? I wonder, seeing the distress we are a' brought to, he doesna think shame to speak o' such a thing. Mak a fortune by the new-fangled system, indeed!—my truly! if it continue meikle langer, he winna be able to get brose without butter."

"Weel, faither," was the answer of Reuben, "we'll see; but you must perceive that there is no great improvement can take place, let it be what it will, without doing injury to somebody. And it is our duty to watch every opportunity to make the most of it."

"In my belief, the laddy is out o' his head," rejoined the father; "but want will bring him to his senses."

Wilson continues, thus:

Onward! onward! was the ruling principal of Reuben—he had been fortunate in all his speculations, and he trusted to be fortunate still. Never, during all his wanderings, had he lost sight of the important discoveries of Arkwright, and of the improvements which were every

day being made upon them; and while he was convinced that they would become a source of inexhaustible wealth to the nation, he still cherished the hope and the belief that they would enrich himself. He said also—and Mrs. Purves agreed with him—that travelling the country was a most uncomfortable life for a married man. He therefore sold his horse and his covered cart, disposed of his stock at prime cost, and, with his wife and capital, removed to Manchester.

"I was now," said he—alluding to the erection of the mill—"at what I had always considered as the very pinnacle of my ambition—the proprietor of a cotton-mill, and of one, too, that had cost me several thousands in completing it. I had no manner of doubt, but that it would turn out the master-speculation of my existence; for, bless ye, at that period, to have a mill was to have a mine. A spinning-jenny was worth its weight in rubies. There was Arkwright made a fortune like a nobleman's in a jiffy; and Robert Peel, greatly to his credit, from being a weaver lad, I may say, in less than no time, made a fortune that could have bought up half the gentry in the country. Indeed, wealth just poured in upon the mill-owners; and, I must confess, they werena bad times for the like o' me, that bought their calicoes, and got them dressed and printed to sell them out, as ye may judge from my having been able to erect a mill of my own before I had been many years in business. But, I must confess, that the mill ran between me and my wits. All the time it was building, I was out and in frae the town, to see how the workmen were getting on, wet or dry, and, I dare to say, that if I dreamed about it once, during the twelve months it was in hands, I

dreamed about it a thousand times. Many a time Priscilla has said to me—

‘Reuben, I doubt ye are thinking owre meikle about that mill, and really it’s no right—it’s sinfu.’ I fear it is enough to mak the concern no prosper.’

‘My dear,’ I used to say, ‘do ye consider what an immense speculation it is?—it is like death or life to me, and if I didna think o’ it, and look after the workmen to see how they are getting on wi’ it, who, do ye suppose, would? There is nothing like a man looking after his own concerns, and, where there is sae meikle at stake, it is impossible but to think o’t.’

One notes here his reference to Sir Robert Peel a contemporary political figure.

As regards the inspiration that Wilson derived from Scott, Yates (2010) cites Basil Skinner^[xlv], thus:

In the detail of his plots, Wilson every now and then reveals his debt to Scott. The prison interview between Grizel Cochrane^[xlv] and her father recalls that between Effie and Jeannie Deans, and there is an even closer parallel between the cursing of the Laird o’Clennel by Elspeth Faa^[xlv], Queen of the Gypsies, and the similar cursing of the Laird of Ellangowan by Meg Merrilees ... The greatest significance of Wilson’s Tales, however, lies in their continuance of the nostalgic tradition that Scott had developed in his early novels. This had two aspects: firstly, a recourse to domestic life as a source of narrative interest;

and secondly, a compulsion to record a vanished society in a moment of change.



The inscription on the Grizel Cochrane tomb in Ledgerwood Church

Photo by Andrew Ayre

Yates himself reveals that in Wilson's Tale *The Adopted Son* a verse from the ballad *The Battle of Philiphaugh* is included as a footnote and this verse is identical to one printed in Scott's *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. Further, Wilson's Tale *The Wife or the Wuddy* re-tells the story published by Scott which is based on the 17th century tale in which marriage to Meg was offered as an alternative to the gallows for Willie Scott who had attempted to steal cattle. When he eventu-

ally accepts the proposal, the story is that they lived happily ever after. Wilson concludes his Tale thus:

The day that began with preparations for death ended in a joyful bridal. The honour of knighthood was afterwards conferred upon the laird; and Meg bore unto him many sons and daughters, and was, as the reader will be ready to believe, one of the best wives in Scotland; while Simon declared that he never saw a better-looking woman in Et-trick Forest, his own wife and daughters not excepted.

In his version Wilson creates some light relief with the interventions of Simon the Retainer.

Sir Walter Scott is said to have been a descendant of Willie and Hogg tells the same story in his poem *The Fray of Elibank* in which he pokes gentle fun at Scott's ancestor worship. Walter Elliot (2006) states that the story is “totally untrue”. He continues:

In fact, Willie Scott did marry Agnes Murray of Elibank after a lengthy legal argument about the property to be transferred on the marriage. The legal document is nine feet long and was signed in Selkirk.

Scott, as indicated above, had an upper-class background and, according to Hogg, suffered from “a too high devotion to titled rank”, a devotion, he argued, which approached servility. Although he had friends across the social spectrum, in an undemocratic Scotland, Scott was well aware that he had to seek favours from those in authority to advance in life.

Scott had met Burns when he was fifteen and later praised his song-writing as befitting a “high-souled plebeian” and declared that “... the success of Burns had the effect of exciting general emulation among all his class in Scotland that were able to tag a rhyme. Poets

began to chirp like grasshoppers in a sunshine day. The steep rocks poured down poetical goatherds, and the bowels of the earth vomited rhyming colliers”.

Given his own background Wilson must have been particularly inspired by the example of these writers like Burns and Hogg who had attained literary success while coming from humble origins. Hogg, who was not popular with his neighbours in the Ettrick Valley because of his literary ambitions, was also always an outsider in Edinburgh literary society. His ‘low birth’ was at the root of the disparagements to which he was subjected during his lifetime and later. For example, he was called the “pig on a string” by many in the Edinburgh literary elite.

“Often have I been laughed at”, Hogg wrote in his *Memoir of the Author’s Life*, “and I am aware that I shall be laughed at again”. The story is told of him turning up for dinner at Scott’s home. The man his host liked to call ‘the honest grunter’ was shown into the drawing-room where a pregnant Mrs Scott was resting on a sofa. Unsure of the protocol in these surroundings, and deciding to take his cue from the hostess, Hogg flopped onto an adjoining sofa, dirtying the sofa with his dung-spattered boots. In this position, according to Lockhart, Hogg “... afforded plentiful merriment to the more civilised part of the company”. Hogg plaintively stated:

I thought I never could do wrong to copy the lady of the house.

Wordsworth snubbed Hogg at Mount Rydal. De Quincey, Scott and Byron questioned his breeding. To his chagrin, he was also parodied in the *Noctes Ambrosianae*, a fictional symposium in *Blackwood’s Magazine*. The author of the *Noctes* was the afore-mentioned Professor John Wilson, who constructed dialogues between his own alter ego (viz., as previously noted, ‘Christopher North’) and that of Hogg (‘the Shepherd’). The Shepherd is made to look a ‘boozing buffoon’.

He says things like, ‘Hoots, man – I dinna understand you sae weel now,’ and describes Theocritus^[xlvii] as ‘the Allan Ramsay o’ Sicily’. One episode has the Shepherd galloping naked around Selkirkshire on an angry bull.

When a new version of Hogg’s memoir appeared in 1821, Blackwoods carried a review so brutal (he is “the greatest boar on earth”; his existence has been one continued bungle, “Pray who wants to know anything about his life?”) that apparently the Printer refused to print it (Miller 2005). The reviewer – it may have been Professor Wilson – presents Hogg as a liar, fool and plagiarist. The author casts aspersions on Hogg’s grammar: “Give him a sentence, and force him, at the point of a sword, to point out an accusative, and he is a dead man”. At times, Hogg managed to laugh with his tormentors, but he felt – quite rightly – that this sort of thing did him real harm and that the jokes were more than jokes:

I know that I have always been looked on by the learned part of the community as an intruder in the paths of literature . . . The walks of learning are occupied by a powerful aristocracy, who deem that province their own peculiar right; else what would avail all their dear-bought collegiate honours and degrees? No wonder that they should view an intruder, from the humble and despised ranks of the community, with a jealous and indignant eye, and impede his progress by every means in their power.

Publishers and Editors also often treated him shabbily. Some even denied him the authorship of his works, on the grounds that a Shepherd could hardly have written his masterpiece *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824). Incredibly, as shown below, the *Paisley & Renfrewshire Gazette* of 15th November 1884 omitted mention of him in

relation to the literature of the Borders, whilst including Scott and John Mackay Wilson. Of course, supporters of Hogg have had the last laugh given the more recent acclaim for his masterpiece *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824) which was

prompted especially by the admiration of the French Novelist André Gide in the 1940s. Now



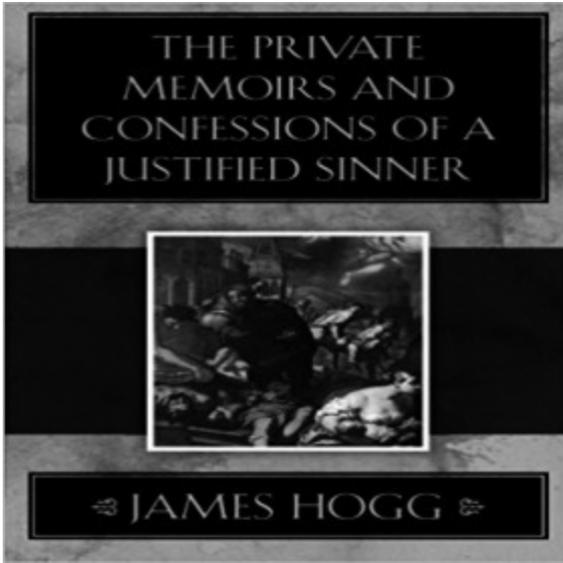
The meeting between Burns and Scott this novel is praised as one of the greatest of all Scottish novels, while the work of his friend and patron, Scott, is largely neglected.

Given the treatment meted out to Hogg, one wonders how the working-class Wilson was in

smally. Next to Scott, John Mackay Wilson—
that gifted but unfortunate genius—has done not
a little to throw a romantic interest over the
Borders—to people them with their old rude in-
habitants, their rough savage men, and depict
with a master's hand the romantic but unlicensed
doings of former days. Between these two, the
Borders have become famous over the world, and
many are the visitors who by their works have
been attracted towards them—who have come to
gaze on spots so memorable, so interesting in their
associations, so fascinating in their history, so
pregnant with all that is captivating and heroic.

From the *Paisley & Renfrewshire Gazette* of 15th November 1884

reality regarded by Professor Wilson (who as noted above helped him) and by the rest of the Edinburgh literary elite, who must have at least been aware of him because of the performances of his plays. Wilson in the relevant letter to an unknown friend, cited above, made no complaint regarding his reception in Edinburgh, quite the contrary.



In the Tale *Ups and Downs; or, David Stuart's Account of his Pilgrimage* he does however describe an incident of social embarrassment in Scotland's capital, thus:

"Ne'er mind the dress,' says he. So, at the hour appointed, I stepped awa ower to Hanover Street, in the New Town, where he lived, and was shown into a fine carpeted room, wi' a great looking-glass, in a gilt frame, ower the chimley-piece—ye could see yoursel' at full length in't the moment you entered the door. I was confounded at the carpets and the glass, and a sofa, nae less; and, thinks I, 'This shows what kind o' bargains ye get frae me.' There were three or four leddies sitting in the room; and 'Mr. Stuart, leddies,' said the flesher; 'Mr. Stuart, Mrs. So-and-so,' said he again—'Miss Murray, Mr. Stuart.' I was like to drap at the impudence o' the creatur—he handed me about as if I had been a bairn at a dancin' school. 'Your servant, led-

dies,' said I; and didna ken where to look, when I got a glimpse o' my face in the glass, and saw it was as red as crimson. But I was mair than ever put about when the tea was brought in, and the creatur says to me, 'Mr. Stuart, will you assist the leddies?' 'Confound him,' thought I, 'has he brought me here to mak' a fule o'me!' I did attempt to hand round the tea and toast, when, wi' downright confusion, I let a cup fall on Miss Murray's gown. I could have died wi' shame. 'Never mind—never mind, sir!' said she; 'there is no harm done;' and she spoke sae proper and sae kindly, I was in love wi' her very voice. But when I got time to observe her face, it was a perfect picture; and through the hale night after, I could do naething but look at and think o' Miss Murray.

It is not known whether Wilson suffered some similar social embarrassment in Edinburgh.

Wilson admired Burns, Scott and Hogg^[xlviii] and he praised them all in his writings. He must however have been more comfortable with the progressive politics of Burns than with the Tory views of Scott and Hogg. Scott's reactionary views were well known and must have infuriated Wilson, as they did the working-class of Galashiels, who Scott described as “unwashed artificers” who “... are from henceforth to select our legislators”, prior to the Great Reform Act. Earlier he had even applauded the Peterloo massacre, saying the soldiers had acted “without unnecessary violence”.

Hogg, a more moderate Tory stated regarding, his mentor, Scott:

... the Whig ascendancy in the British cabinet killed Sir Walter. Yes I say and aver (sic) it was that which broke his heart and deranged his whole constitution and murdered

him. As I have shown before a dread of revolution had long preyed on his mind; he withstood it to the last; he fled from it but it affected his brain and killed him. From the moment he perceived the veto of a democracy prevailing he lost all hope of the prosperity and ascendancy of the British Empire.

The last time they met was at the Gordon Arms in the Yarrow Valley and Hogg reported that Scott had said:

‘... at present all things are going downhill to destruction and ruin’ ... I say again, and I am certain of it, that the democratic ascendancy, and the grievous and shameful insults that he received from the populous of his own country, broke the heart and killed the greatest man that country ever contained.

Despite their political differences Wilson wrote an article praising Scott on his death in October 1832 and in his Tale *The Adopted Son, A Tale of the Covenanters* he writes of Scott, thus:

Every reader has heard of Melrose Abbey ... and they read, too, of the northern wizard, who shed the halo of his genius over the surrounding scenery.

Wilson is not however averse to criticising Scott however and in the same Tale he writes about the attack by Covenanters on the troops of the Duke of Montrose at Philiphaugh, as follows:

Sir Walter Scott says that “the number of slain in the field did not exceed three or four hundred”. All the authorities I have seen state the number at a thousand. He also accuses Lesly^[xliv] of abusing his victory by slaughtering



The Sign at the Gordon Arms in the Yarrow Valley

many of his accusers in cold blood. Now it is true that a hundred of the Irish adventurers were shot; but this was in pursuance of an act of both parliaments, not from any revenge on the part of General Lesly.

Of course he and Scott's sympathies are for opposing sides in this battle between the Covenanters and Royalists. Although the latter makes clear there was cruelty by both in their conflict, he complained that "... no character had been so foully traduced as the Viscount of Dundee^[1] ... he, who was every inch a soldier and a gentleman still passed among the Scottish vulgar for a ruffian desperado, who rode a goblin horse, was proof against shot, and in league with the Devil". A portrait of 'Bonnie Dundee' was in fact the only picture on display in Scott's Edinburgh house.

Hogg by comparison writes of Scott's hero, thus:

If through all the histories of that suffering period, I had discovered one redeeming quality about Clavers, I would have brought it forward, but I found none.

Similarly, Wilson, who as cited earlier regarded 'Clavers' as "the bloody Claverhouse, comments:

At this period, too, Graham of Claverhouse—whom some have painted as an angel, but whose actions were worthy of a fiend—at the head of his troopers, who were called by the profane, the ruling elders of the Kirk, was carrying death and cold-blooded cruelty throughout the land.

In the same Tale Wilson criticises Charles II, as follows:

The Commonwealth was at an end, and the second Charles had been recalled; but exile had not taught him wisdom, nor the fate of his father discretion. He madly attempted to be the lord and ruler of the people's conscience, as well as King of Britain. He was a libertine with some virtues—a bigot without religion. In the pride, or rather folly of his heart, he attempted to force Prelacy upon the people of Scotland; and he let his bloodhounds loose, to hunt the followers of the Covenant from hill to hill, to murder them on their own hearths, and, with the blood of his victims, to blot out the word conscience from the vocabulary of Scotchmen. The Covenanters sought their God in the desert and on the mountains which He had reared; they worshipped him in the temples which His own hands had framed; and there the persecutor sought them, the destroyer found them, and the sword of the tyrant was bathed in the blood of the worshipper!

Even the family altar was profaned; and to raise the voice of prayer and praise in the cottage to the King of kings, was held to be as treason against him who professed to represent Him on earth.

Wilson returns to criticism of Charles II in his Tale *Sir Patrick Hume: A Tale of the House of Marchmont*. Given that, according to Wilson, Sir Patrick Hume, was “the staunchest Whig in Scotland” there was never any doubt who the author will support in his conflict with “the tyrant Charles” who he states “... lived a libertine and died a Papist”. Wilson informs his readers that Sir Patrick was “... was a lover of freedom, a lover of his country, and a staunch Presbyterian. In those days a love of freedom was a dangerous principle either to avow or to carry into parliament”.

Sir Patrick was involved in the ‘Rye House Plot’ which was a plan to assassinate the King and his brother James. The plan failed and Sir Patrick had to go into hiding. Andrew Ayre (2017) provides a less complimentary view of Hume. He writes:

The value of Hume’s contribution seems debateable. Gilbert Burnet, a chronicler at the time, describes him as ‘a hot and eager man, full of passion and resentment and instead of minding the business then in hand he was always forming schemes ... in which he was so earnest that he fell into perpetual disputes and quarrels’. A second source refers to him as ‘a man incapable alike of leading and of following: conceited, captious and wrong-headed, an endless talker, a sluggard in action and active only against his own allies’.

As regards “the heaven-taught ploughman”, *Willie Wastle’s Account of His Wife*, based on the poem by Burns, is narrated by Willie

and, following a couplet from the poem, Wilson begins the story thus:

“It was a very cruel dune thing in my neebor, Robert Burns, to mak a sang about my wife and me”, said Mr William Wastle, as he sat with a friend over a jug of reeking toddy, in a tavern near the Bridge-end in Dumfries, where he had been attending the cattle market.

In his Tale *Reuben Purves Or, The Speculator*, Wilson refers to Burns thus:

Speculation is the soul of business, it is the mainspring of improvement, it is essential to prosperity. Burns has signified that he could not stoop to crawl into what he considered as the narrow holes of bargain-making; and nine out of every ten persons, who consider themselves high-minded, profess to sympathize with him, and say he was right. But our immortal bard, in so saying, looked only at the odds and ends—the corners and the disjointed extremities of bargain-making, properly so called—and he suffered his pride and his prejudices to blind, in this instance, his mighty spirit, and contract his grasp, so that he saw not the all-powerful, the humanizing, and civilizing influence of the very bargain-making which he despised. True it is, that as a spirit of speculation or bargain-making contracts itself, and every day becomes more and more a thing of farthings and of fractions, it begets a grovelling spirit of meanness, that may eventually end in dishonesty; but as it expands, it exalts the man, imbues his mind with liberality, and benefits society. The spirit of commercial speculation will spread abroad, until it render useless the sword of the hero, cause it to rust in its scabbard, and to be regard-

ed as the barbarous plaything of antiquity. It will go forth as a dove from the ark of society, bearing the olive-branch of peace and of mutual benefits unto all lands, until men shall learn war no more.

In a footnote to the story Wilson mentions Cunningham’s *Life of Burns* (1833). Of course, he would first have had the opportunity to read Burns’ poetry when he was an apprentice Printer since, as noted, his employer published a volume of the poems. In his Tale *The Faa’s Revenge* he writes that the Faa king, listening to the advice of his wife, “only nursed his wrath to keep it warm...”. This of course echoes Burns’ famous opening lines of *Tam O’Shanter*:

When chapman¹⁷ billies leave the street,
And drouthy¹⁸ neibors, neibors, meet;
As market days are wearing late,
And folk begin to tak the gate,
While we sit bousing at the nappy¹⁹,
An’ getting fou²⁰ and unco²¹ happy,
We think na on the lang Scots miles,
The mosses²², waters, slaps and stiles,
That lie between us and our hame²³,
Where sits our sulky, sullen dame,
Gathering her brows like gathering storm,
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.”

17. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chapmen>

18. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/drouthy#Scots>

19. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ale>

20. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Drunk>

21. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/unco#Scots>

22. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wetland>

23. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Home>

In 1832 Wilson wrote an article about James Hogg for the London *Literary Gazette*. The introduction to the article in fact first praises Wilson as follows:

At the time when the Ettrick Shepherd is, happily for his present enjoyment, and, we trust, happily for his permanent interest, exciting so much of the attention and receiving the caresses of all ranks in the London world, the following sketch of him can hardly fail to gratify our readers. We are indebted for it to Mr John Mackay Wilson; himself a young author, and a candidate for some portion of the fame he has so honestly assigned to his fellow-bor-derers, “fast by the river Tweed”.

Of Hogg Wilson wrote that he was “... one of the most extraordinary individuals that have appeared in the literary world” and continued by stating that Hogg was “... a living illustration of the *spiritually visible power* of the mysterious quality we call genius”. In the Tale entitled *Saying and Doings of Peter Paterson* he cites Hogg, thus:

He was wandering alone, upon the shore, at the hour which Hogg calls “between the gloaming and the mirk”.

He referred to the difficulties Hogg faced even at home in Et-trick, thus:

Previous to this, he had composed many songs and bal-lads, which, as is, generally the case obtained him some little respect among the neighbouring peasantry and al-though two of his employers, named Laidlaw, had an al-most paternal care over him, yet the multitude of the wise men of the forest, like the mass of mankind, cared but lit-tle for having a dreaming, listless maker of rhymes in their

employment. Conscious, however, of the power which was possessed by the ardent and despised spirit within him, the Shepherd took his sheep and his manuscripts into Edinburgh together; and his untutored efforts, with all their imperfections upon their head, and those of the printer and the printer's devil added thereto, were printed at his own expense. The germs of the genius since so generally confessed were there visible.—but no man read, bought, or spoke of them ; and all that the poet gained by the publication (if publication it could be called), was having the honour of being made like unto many of his brethren—penniless by the experiment. He returned to the forest with his books, without fame and without money, to encounter the laugh and the jibe of the ignorant, and the reproof of the worldly.

Wilson continued:

After battling through a season of bufferings, disappointments, and misery, tying up his worldly substance in a bundle, and throwing his plaid across his shoulders, with no friend but the staff in his hands, he ‘Despised the shepherd's slothful life,’ and bidding farewell to his native hills, the uneducated son of genius set out upon his pedestrian journey, to become a literary adventurer in the Modern Athens. There he projected the bold and almost ridiculous design of an unlettered self-taught shepherd forsaking the solitude of the wilderness, and becoming editor of a literary periodical in the metropolis of his native country.

He cannot have failed to see parallels with his own travails before his modest success in ‘the modern Athens’.

On 21st October 1834 Wilson wrote to Everett praising the beauty of the Borders and he mentions a plan for a meeting with Hogg during the following spring:

I wish you had been with me the week before last. My eyes looked over and beyond you. I made a tour over and around the Cheviots. You shall see a description of it some day. On the extreme top of the highest mountain, I was enveloped in a thick, tangible cloud, - I could not see three feet before me, you might have cut it with a knife. I got bewildered and in the end when I again got below the clouds, found myself in Scotland when I imagined I had been pursuing the nearest way to Wooler. Before the clouds enveloped me however, I had some glorious views. Beneath me in the middle distance, crowned with sunbeams, while transparent clouds floated below, I beheld the Mount, - Everett's Mount, or if you will have me so to write it Alnwick Mount. To the horizon on the south east Gateshead fell was distinctly visible. To the south west appeared the shadowy forms of the mountains of Cumberland. To the north the Lammermuirs, - to the north west the cleft Eildons - and others of the classic hills of Scotland - You say we shall go to see Hogg, - with all my heart. I will meet you at Wooler - if you choose the spring for our Excursion, - and though a little circuitous, we will go by the Cheviots. The beauty - the magnificence - the variety - the savage sublimity of the scenery will amply repay the toil.

While it seems unlikely that this planned visit took place (surely Wilson would have written about it in the *Advertiser*?), Wilson gives a detailed description of Hogg, thus:

In stature he is about five feet six. His person is round, stout, and fleshy, with a slight inclination towards corpulency. His usual dress is a gray, or rather what is termed a pepper-and-salt coloured coat, composed of cotton and woollen, and made wide and flowing, after the manner of a sportsman's, but longer than such are generally worn; with trousers of the same, and yellow vest, or, upon a gala-day, the gray trousers are exchanged for nankeen^[li]. His face is ruddy, healthy, good-natured, and stamped with unassuming modesty and simplicity ... His eyes are of a bluish gray, laughing and lively. His brow broad, open, and untouched by age, is still smooth; his hair is of a yellowish hue; he is active, strong-built, and athletic, and appears not less than ten years younger than he is in reality.

One wonders therefore whether Wilson had met Hogg, or at least had observed him, when he was based in Edinburgh?

As well as publishing his Tales in his newspaper, Wilson at this stage was also a contributor, as were Scott and Hogg, to some of the then popular "Annuals," his Tale *The Vacant Chair* appearing in one of these publications, viz. *Forget-Me-Not* edited by Fred Shoberl^[lii] and published by Ackermann^[liii] of London. He was paid handsomely for this Tale although payment was not always prompt as Wilson informed Everett in a letter of 1st January 1834, thus:

The Annual humbugs have jerked me this year and not paid me yet.

Shoberl had however been delighted with his Tale and requested more work for future editions. The *Spectator* reviewed *The Vacant Chair* thus:

As a tale writer, John Mackay Wilson “bears away the bell” from all the writers in the annuals.

In a letter to Everett written on 26th November 1832 Wilson informed his friend that he was also working on a novel, thus:

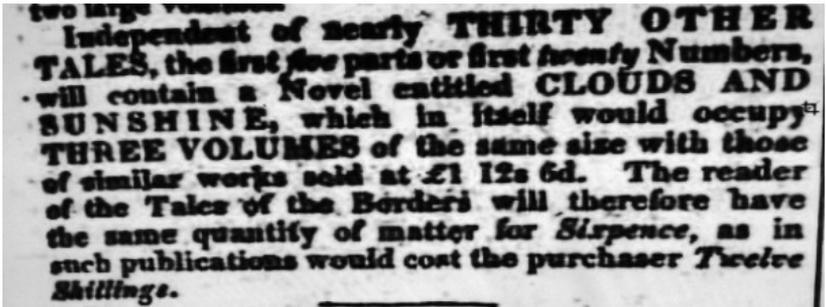
I am at present on the extreme tenter hooks of anxiety; for four weeks I have been expecting a letter every day from my friend Mr Pringle to say how much he has got for my novel. It must sink or swim before the next year. I have three volumes more ready to bring out on the back of it. But if this bargain is not to my satisfaction, I shall print the others here.

The advertisement below includes a reference to a novel entitled *Clouds and Sunshine*, but the novel was not published as stated.

Further, he was still publishing poems not only in the *Advertiser* but elsewhere. The following poem entitled *Midnight* had been published in 1832 in the *Literary Gazette* of London and subsequently in the *Advertiser* of 14th July 1832:

The sea is silent, and the winds of God
 Stir not its waters; on its voiceless waves
 Thick darkness presses as a mighty load,
 Weighing their strength to slumber. O'er earth's graves
 One lonely star is watching; and the wind,
 Benighted on the desert, howls to find
 Its trackless path, as would a dying hound.
 The thick clouds, wearied with their course all day,
 Repose like shrouded ghosts on the black air,
 Or, in the darkness having lost their way,
 Await the dawn! 'Tis midnight reigns around -
 Midnight, when crime and murder quit their lair -
 When maidens dream of music's sweetest sound,

And mother weeping, breathe the yearning prayer.



Independent of nearly **THIRTY OTHER TALES**, the first five parts or first twenty Numbers, will contain a Novel entitled **CLOUDS AND SUNSHINE**, which in itself would occupy **THREE VOLUMES** of the same size with those of similar works sold at £1 12s 6d. The reader of the Tales of the Borders will therefore have the same quantity of matter for Sixpence, as in such publications would cost the purchaser Twelve Shillings.

B. A. 25th October 1834

In editing the newspaper and writing a considerable amount of literature, Wilson was taking on a heavy work-load, despite his concern about his health. In the letter of 26th November, he also informed Everett that he was sensibly intending to reject another opportunity, viz. the Editorship of the previously mentioned, and failing, *Border Magazine*, thus:

The Border Magazine will voluntarily give up the ghost next month. Some wish me to take it up as a purely literary publication, under the title of “Wilson's Border Magazine”. I will think twice - yea thrice about it before I do - for I have not so much time to spare as you would imagine, and after paying publishers and the printer, it would leave very little for me. I think I shan't.

The magazine closed as he predicted. The development of this magazine had been from the beginning a highly ambitious venture. It was published monthly and priced at one shilling and Rennison explained it was to “... consist of original essays on subjects of morals or miscellaneous literature, Tales, Translations from valuable productions in foreign languages, Reviews and a proportionate space will be

devoted to Poetry in its various departments". In the first issue Rennison pledged that while the object was:

... to combine instruction with amusement, that nothing shall find a place in the Border Magazine, which may tend in the smallest degree to injure the purest precepts of morality, or cause the blush of ingenuous shame into the countenance of the most delicate of their readers.

Many of Wilson's poems and lectures were included in the early editions, together with his Tale *The Vacant Chair*. According to Yates (2010), it was Wilson's favourite story and was the only one of his Tales that was printed in America as a separate pamphlet. Everett commented on the failure of the magazine, ignoring the fact that it was Rennison's magazine, thus:

About this time my friend Mr J. M. Wilson commenced a periodical, which he entitled The Border Magazine, and requested me to furnish a few articles. Like other serials of its class, as though that description of periodicals could only take root and flourish in the metropolis, it soon died, and was decently sided away...

(cited in Chew 1875)

Wilson had arranged for some of Everett's work to be published in the magazine. One of the issues included the following by his friend:

PERSONS, PLACES, AND THINGS.—No. 1
 Being Selections from the Diary of a Tourist;
 By the Author of " Edwin",—" The Reign of Terror,"—
 "Letters to Dr. Southey," &c. &c.

The article begins:

1 The eye upon the heart would brood,
—A heart by every scene impressed,
And feelings of an earlier mood,
Would dwell in softness on the breast,
Like lights and shadows on the lake,
Whose waters still remain the same,
Yet seem each transient hue to take,
While pure as when those shadows came.

The short-lived magazine also included a poem entitled *Tradition* by Everett, but the afore-mentioned extracts from *The Mount* were never included in a “a show number like the Athenaeum” as Wilson, as indicated previously, had planned.

Wilson was very unimpressed by a production in Berwick in September 1832 of his historical drama *The Border Patriot* which was produced under the patronage of Sir Francis Blake. He wrote in his newspaper that “... such an exhibition of deplorable bungling we never witnessed ... for to sit and endure the manner of its performance was about as pleasant an operation as to have each particular hair upon the head plucked out singly”. He continued:

The child unborn was just as guilty of writing the one half of the language as it was spoken, as its reputed author. We, however, would not have noticed ‘the lame and impotent conclusions’ which were used when the words of the piece were forgotten, had it not been that on more than one occasion low and vulgar language was substituted in their stead.

At the end of 1833 Wilson published by subscription a volume of his own poems, the principal poem of which was *The Enthusiast*^[liv], a metrical tale in two cantos. The book contains a considerable number of other poems, some are romantic such as *A Women’s*

Love, some are darker such as *The Suicide*, while *Beans & Bacon* is humorous. A copy of an advertisement for the publication is below. The publication was a great success with initial demand exceeding supply. On January 1st 1834 he wrote to Everett, thus:

With this comes the "Enthusiast". I hardly know how I shall get the copies forwarded, as we have no coach direct to Manchester, - but I will try to get the parcel away somehow or other and it must take its chance ... I have been exceedingly fortunate with the publication. The copies which I have sent out on order on Saturday and to-day amount to above sixty pounds - but it puzzles me to know how I am to get the money collected being from nearly three hundred individuals in different parts of the country, but all respectable ...

Despite this success he was anxious to have Everett's opinion and in the same letter he wrote to his friend, thus:

He is a silly man who cannot form an opinion of his own works and to you I do not hesitate to say that I think it a volume of good poetry. But you must judge for yourself, and in the *Eclectic*, *Imperial* and *Manchester* papers, say whatever honesty dictates putting friendship out of the question - I would be ashamed to call myself your friend if I were capable of speaking of your next work when it comes to hand in any other manner ... I am certain of gaining some money by the publication, and I expect a portion of popularity.

Of course, as shown above, Wilson was quite critical of Everett's work in the *Advertiser* shortly afterwards. He continued:

I never see the “Athenaeum” now nor the “London Literary Gazette” here until they are more than two months old, therefore I must apply to my friend Wenett who can see them every week and as I shall send copies to both of them to-day, though they may not reach them for a fortnight, I know thou will feel as much anxiety to know what these Reviewers will say of me as I do myself, - and whether they speak good or evil, cause what they say to be copied into a letter for me and send it by post. I must ask you to do the same with the notices in the Eclectic &c. for I have no means of seeing them.

In February he reported there were “... only a few copies left” (B. A. 22nd February 1834).

On 15th April 1834 Wilson was able to report more good news to Everett, as follows:

Within a few weeks I have received very complimentary letters respecting “The Enthusiast” from H.R. the Duke of Sussex, old Earl Spencer, the Earl of Tankerville, Lord Howick, Sir Rufus Donkin and others.

He continued:

The entire edition of the “Enthusiast” with the exception I believe of about a dozen copies is sold off, but not the one half are yet paid for.

Wilson’s views on poetry and the role of the Poet expressed in *The Enthusiast* are discussed below.

In October of that year Wilson announced in the *Advertiser* that on the 8th of November G. Richardson of Berwick would be publishing the first issue of *Historical, Traditionary and Imaginative*

Tales of the Borders by John MacKay Wilson at a cost of three-half-pence (B. A. 18th October 1834). The Tales were to be published weekly (an example of an advertisement is below) and there also was to be a monthly edition, containing the Tales from the previous month's publications. The monthly edition was to be sold for 6d. Tait (1881) states:

Each weekly number came forth in small quarto size, with a blue cover and the arms of Berwick on the title-page.

The advertisement proclaimed that the monthly editions “in size they will be unified with the

Also just published (Price Five Shillings,)
THE ENTHUSIAST,
A METRICAL TAIE IN TWO CANTOS,
WITH OTHER PIECES, AND A PRELIMINARY
CHAPTER ON POETRY,
BY THE SAME AUTHOR.

Only a few copies of the *Enthusiast* remain on sale, and may be had from the Booksellers in Berwick, or by order from Mr. Wm. Tait, Prince's Street, Edinburgh.

OPINIONS OF THE PRESS.

He displays such an intimate knowledge of what constitutes really true poetry, and can so nicely trace the line of demarcation which separates the essential body of prose from the subtle essence of song, that he must have a thorough conception of his own powers as a Minstrel, and perhaps could best describe them by his own pen. We are sure the public will think well of Mr. *Enthusiast's* work.—*Scotsman*.

The “*Enthusiast*” which is the longest is the best poem in the collection. Among the minor poems “*To Morrow*” is the best. There are many fine thoughts scattered through it. In it our author has evidently had an eye to Young; not in the structure of his blank verse, or the ascetic, gloomy tunc of his feelings, but in his frequent point, and epigram, and antithesis, and more especially in his luxuriance of imagery.—*Sun*.

His versification is smooth and various without being formed upon any one school, and his descriptions of homely affections and rural scenes are true and life-like.

popular editions of Shakespeare, Scott and Byron”, but “... they will be printed in an entirely new and beautiful type”.

A front page of the *Advertiser* is included below to indicate the space and prominence Wilson gave to the advertisement on the front page of the newspaper. Presumably he would not have paid for the advertisement (although later it will be revealed that he told Everett that he had to buy a copy of his own newspaper so one cannot be

certain of this). There would of course have been advertising duty to pay. Extracts from the advertisement are also below.

Wilson states in the advertisement:

A portion of the Tales will illustrate the interesting and historical fragments of the Borders – the object of others will be to exemplify the manners and character of the inhabitants. But while the author's first object will be to render them interesting, in most of them more will be aimed at than mere amusement, and he will endeavour 'to paint a moral while 'he attempts to adorn a Tale'.

He will strive to blend instruction with amusement and to publish a series of stories in which all will find interest and some information, but none offence. The scenes of the Tales will be laid in the counties of Berwick, Northumberland, Roxburgh, Cumberland, Westmoreland, Selkirk, Peebles, Dumfries and East Lothian.

One is reminded of Harris's (1979) statement cited earlier:

Two groups of Tales stand out early in the century, both written with a special purpose which gave them an immediate readership. The first is the edifying or instructive Tale including religious, moral, or even economic principles; the second is the regional Tale describing life and manners of a particular people.

At the beginning of his Tale entitled *The Seeker*, Wilson writes:

Amongst the many thousand readers of these tales, there are, perhaps, few who have not observed that the object of the writer is frequently of a higher kind than that of

merely contributing to their amusement. He would wish ‘to point a moral’, while he endeavours ‘to adorn a tale’.

The moral which Wilson is presenting is revealed at the end of the Tale. The protagonist had doubts about his Christian beliefs but his faith is restored. Wilson writes:

On the bed of sickness, his heart had been humbled; he had, as it were, seen death face to face, and the nearer it approached, the stronger assurances did he feel of the immortality he had dared to doubt. He arose from his bed a new man—hope illumined, and faith began to glow in his bosom. His doubts were vanquished, his fears dispelled. He had sought, and at length found—found the joys and the hopes of the Christian. He regained the esteem of men, and again prospered; and this was the advice of the Seeker to his children—“Avoid trusting to reason when it would flatter you with your own wisdom; for it begetteth doubt—doubt, unbelief—unbelief, despair—and despair, death!”

PRICE THREE HALFPENCE,
OF
**HISTORICAL, TRADITIONAL, AND
IMAGINATIVE
TALES OF THE BORDERS.**
By **JOHN MACKAY WILSON,**
Author of "*The Enthusiast*," &c.

THE TALES OF THE BORDERS will be published in **WEEKLY NUMBERS**, at Three Halfpence each. A Number, containing *sixteen large and closely printed columns*, will be issued every Saturday Morning. The Numbers will be of the same size as the **PENNY MAGAZINE**, but will contain a greater quantity of matter.

For the convenience of those residing in remote districts, where it might be difficult to obtain the Weekly Numbers regularly, the Tales will also be issued in **MONTHLY PARTS** at Sixpence, each Part containing *sixty-four columns*, being nearly equal to the matter in an ordinary volume. The work will extend to ninety-six Numbers, or twenty-four Parts, forming two large volumes.

The edifying aspect of Wilson's Tales continued to be emphasized after his death. Thus, a later edition has the following statement in the Introduction written by Alexander Leighton who was then Editor:

The greatest care was also taken with the moral aspect of the Tales, with the view that parents and guardians might feel a confidence that, in committing them into the hands of their children and wards, they would be imparting the means of instruction, and at the same time securing a guarantee for the growth of moral convictions. By such means, the Tales were kept true to history, legend, morality, and man's nature, and, at the same time, made acceptable to the great class of readers who had declared their predilection in favour of the manner of the early examples.

In the same edition his Tale *The Dominie's Class* is introduced as follows:

This tale was written by Mr Wilson from the circumstance of "The Tales of the Borders" having been adopted as a lesson-book in several schools—Ed.

The first published edition in 1834 contained three tales, viz. *The Vacant Chair*, *Tibby Fowler* and *My black coat; or, The breaking of the bride's china*. As noted above, the former had been previously published and was a typical Wilson Tale since it involved a Border farmhouse and a son who went missing, having been kidnapped and then press ganged. Following adventures abroad he eventually returns home many years later to reclaim his teenage lover and astonish his parents who initially fail to recognise him. Many of the Tales involve a disappearance and then a reunion after a long period of time. Of course, this is a characteristic trope of nineteenth century fiction and one that was especially relevant following the Napoleonic Wars.

When writing to Everett on 21st October 1834 Wilson announced that he was "... to oppose Chambers^[lv] journals in some measure or in other words to publish my *Tales of the Borders* in cheap weekly numbers". According to an article in the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* of 20th August 1901 it was a friend who gave him this idea. The article included this statement:

In the spring of 1834 a friend found Wilson in his home about to burn some manuscripts which had just been rejected by a publisher and on learning of the circumstances suggested their publication in weekly numbers, pointing out the success of Chambers' Journal as a weekly serial.

At this stage he needed another favour from Everett, who was then living in Newcastle upon Tyne:

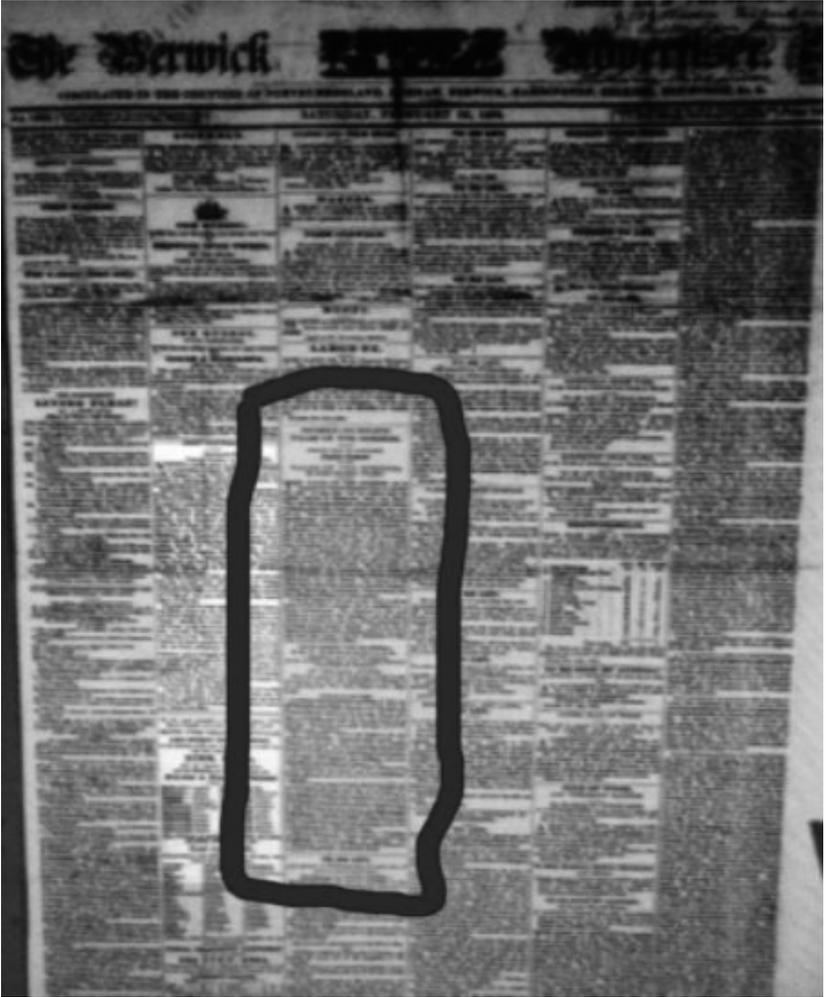
I am about ... to publish my Tales of the Borders in cheap weekly numbers and for this purpose I wish to appoint an Agent in every town on the Borders, and also in all the principal Towns of the Kingdom. I therefore require an agent in Newcastle ... My terms are – three pence a shilling where more than fifty copies are ordered, - where below fifty Two pence. Settlement monthly with an additional discount of Two and a half per cent where payment is made within a month from the date of the Monthly account. From the accounts reaching me from all quarters the speculation promises to be very successful, though at first I shall have some uphill work.

Whether it was due to Everett is not known, but soon Mr Brown of the Central Arcade in Newcastle was one of Wilson's agents.

The first number of the Tales appeared on the 8th of November 1834 as advertised. The second edition began with the Tale entitled *We'll have another*, which was referred to above. Two

“HEALTH AND HOME ARE POWERFUL MAGNETS”.
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thousand copies of the first edition were printed and on 15th November he announced in the *Advertiser*:

A second edition of the first number will be published in two or three weeks, and forwarded to the agents, whose orders, from the great demand, it has been impossible to supply.

(B. A. 15th November 1834)

Soon 4,000 a week were being printed and when the ninth edition was published on the 3rd January 1835 it was stated that the Printers were unable to meet the demand and were at that time printing 5,000 a week. By March 8,000 per edition were being printed and a fourth reprint edition was announced, including an edition to be published in London for the south of England by the publishers Houlston & Sons^[lvi], who were also appointed selling agents.

On 25th April 1835 he reported on the success of his Tales, thus:

The Tales of the Borders are the cheapest *original* work that has ever been offered to the public, and perhaps without a single exception they have been the most successful within three months. Four large editions of the numbers published have been called for and the weekly circulation in the Borders alone already amounts to 9000.

When the twenty-sixth issue, comprising the Tale *The First and Second Marriage*, appeared on 2nd May, the following statement by Wilson was included:

It is now half-a-year since the Tales of the Borders commenced, and their success may excuse the author in saying a few words concerning them. There never was an instance of what is called a provincial publication meeting such a reception from the public; and it is only one or two metropolitan publications that can boast of the same circulation, and that only within the last two or perhaps three years. The Tales of the Borders

were commenced at about two thousand weekly. Many then said that quantity would never sell. But they not only are now nearly two thousand every week, but of many of the earlier numbers more than seventeen thousand have been sold; and from proposals that have been made to the author by London book-sellers, to circulate the work throughout England, Scotland, and Ireland, within a month the weekly circulation will not be below THIRTY THOUSAND.

It is now necessary to turn to a consideration of Wilson's relationship in the Romantic tradition.

Chapter Six: Wilson and the Romantic Imagination

Wilson's highly successful collection of poetry entitled *The Enthusiast* begins with a *Preliminary Chapter on Poetry*. On 1st February 1834 the *Newcastle Courant* published an interesting review of the publication, as follows:

The author of these Poems is Editor of the Berwick Advertiser, into which paper he has infused no small portion of literary spirit, both by original poetry, Border Tales and by judicious selection. He possesses considerable aptitude for versification, and treats his readers with occasional passages of beauty, and even force. The *Enthusiast* is, on the whole, a well-wrought "plain and simple story-told in rhyme". At intervals there appears a too manifest straining after similitudes, though many of them are properly introduced, and happily expressed. Several of the miscellaneous poems are likewise well worthy of perusal; but has not the author allowed his fancy to interfere somewhat with his wonted judgment in the *Preliminary Chapter on Poetry*? With certain exceptions, we are afraid some one, not perhaps chargeable with being eminently hypercritical, might be tempted to pronounce it as too grandiloquent. We think the poems very superior to the introductory portion of the volume.

'Grandiloquent' is certainly a reasonable description of Wilson's view of the role of the Poet, and thus of course of his own role, since he is introducing a publication composed of his poetry. A "true poet", he argues. "... must grapple as with the power of an archangel, and

play with the feebleness of a worm. He must grasp a mountain, and peep into a molehill ... there are a thousand every day occurrences, which, on the majority of mankind, pass unheeded and unfelt, but which rend the inmost strings of his heart, and rage in his bosom like a smothered volcano”. He continues:

The man who speaks exactly as he feels, without fear and without hypocrisy speaks poetry. The poetry of the imagination, is truth hung with drapery; that of the heart, is truth in a state of nakedness. There are many who affirm that it is but another name for fiction;—that poets do not feel what they write. I deny the fact. No man, from the day that the world was created up to the present hour, ever wrote a line of true poetry, without feeling as acutely as he described. I grant the impression of his feelings may pass quickly-away, but for the time being, he feels keenly as reality, every sensation of joy or of pain.

According to Wilson, genius is “... a wild, an unsettled, and a wayward thing”, thus the best Poets are special people. He writes:

Encircled with the consciousness of his own superiority, he stands invulnerable to the cult of wealth and the insinuations of envy; extracting a melancholy pleasure from the cup of his sufferings, and culling flowers of varied fragrance and colouring from the wilderness of his own miseries.

Poets, he states, ... like paintings, to be seen to advantage, ought in general to be viewed from a distance”. Of course, he is here identifying with the then prevalent Romantic cult of the genius. For Wordsworth the Poet is “the hero thinker”. Beethoven is the Roman-

tic genius par excellence since he was lonely, tortured, afflicted, uncompromising and original.

Wilson argues:

There are few subjects so little understood and unduly appreciated as poetry ...

Thus for him many writers are regarded as Poets who do not qualify as genuine Poets. He states:

I believe that out of every hundred verses that are written, ninety-nine will be found guiltless of possessing even the shadow of poetry ...

For example, Wilson states of Drummond of Hawthorndean^[lvii] that he “first introduced sweetness and elegance”, but, according to Wilson, he is “a better versifier than a poet” and he argues that ‘versifiers’ are inferior to Poets, thus:

Poets are only met with occasionally like comets in the heavens, but any man of common capacity may be made a respectable verse maker. Prose and verse do admit of being classed together, but verse no more constitutes poetry, than the effigy of a monarch, upon the coin of a realm, constitutes gold or silver. Remove the impression the piece may bear, and give it a new face, or no face at all, and the intrinsic value of the material remains, though transformed into bullion; and so is it with poetry, for verse

“Is but the guinea's stamp,
The gowd's the gowd for a that.”

One imagines therefore that he was not delighted with the above *Newcastle Courant* reviewer who, as indicated, stated that Wilson “... possesses considerable aptitude for versification”. Wilson describes the power of ‘true poetry’ and thus of the ‘genuine Poet’, as follows:

Poetry is irresistible in its effects, upon the learned and the unlearned,—upon the plodding citizen and the weary clown. Like a sunbeam shot from heaven, it wanders through the earth; or an arrow winged with omnipotence. Before the flash of its spirit, the scholar forgets his pedantry and remembers he is a man,—the man of the world finds the sunshine of childhood descend on his bosom, and the ignorant feel their hearts burn within them.

For Wilson, English poetry began with Chaucer and he discusses the major figures, including of course Shakespeare and Milton. He refers also to Scottish Poets, beginning with a famous local. He writes:

Berwickshire has the honour of having given birth to the first poet who cultivated the Scottish language Thomas Lermont of Earlston, surnamed the Rhymer^[lviii].

Ramsay and Ferguson^[lix] are criticised, but of Burns he states that he was “... almost the father and the founder of Scottish poetry ... He continues:

Burns! whose strains will be sung on the green mountain and in the yellow vale,—till the last sheep shall have nipped the last blade of grass upon the one, and the last sickle, in the hand of the last reaper, shall have cut down the last harvest in the other! As a lyric, a sentimental and

impassionate poet, ages may pass before men “look upon his like again”.

In writing the following lines he must also have been reflecting on his own humble origins and limited time in formal education:

Some entertain the idea that Burns was no scholar, -that his education was that of a mere Scottish peasant. To the name of a scholar, he certainly was not entitled; but his knowledge of book-learning was respectable, his study of nature intense, and his knowledge of poetry intuitive. The genius of Burns was of a kind that could not have been trammelled with classical rules. With more of the scholar, and we would have had less of the poet. His pictures are like groups of animated sculpture; there is a substantial something in his fancies, and his very spirits are flesh and blood.

Wilson continues regarding Burns’ “study of nature” as follows:

His genius was the pure workmanship of Nature, it came unadulterated from her hands, pure as herself.

For Wilson an appreciation of nature is crucial to the Poet. He writes:

Poetry is philosophy on the wings of enthusiasm; and it demands of its votaries that they look upon nature and upon all things, not with the eyes of a botanist, or a finical connoisseur, but with the eyes of a lover adoring his mistress ... the silent poetry of nature ... bids the poet give it a tongue.

In a discussion, which is possibly fictional, which he published in the *Advertiser* in August 1834, he quotes himself expressing the significance of the natural world for his writing, thus:

For my part I feel more renovated, and receive more freshness of ideas and strength of thought by mingling with nature in her solitudes for a single hour, than by perusing the most amusing and instructive author that ever wrote.

(B. A. 30th August 1834)

As a comparison Wilson criticises Addison^[lx] for not having the courage to “... walk out of the drawing room”. Thus, the latter writes poetry which is “... poetry of a form of tea party ... and “... not the song of nature on her native hills ...”.

In Wilson’s Tale *The Poor Scholar*, the central character similarly declares:

"The day dawned," resumed Robert Musgrave, "and I was still wandering—fainting, trembling, cold, and benumbed. I had long had some pretensions to literature. I was born in the midst of poetry. It sang around me from the deathless voices of my native Esk, hymning to its green woods and its massy crags. It looked down upon me from the thunder-belted brows of my native mountains, and drew my soul upwards to itself. It grew with my growth, it became a part of my being, and, in the midst of my debasement, it parted not from me."

Wilson descriptions of scenery are often beautiful. Two poems about the Tweed and prose pieces about the Whiteadder and the Cheviots area have already been cited. More prose pieces are cited

below to further illustrate his ability to write evocatively of the landscape of the Borders.

In his Tale *The Cripple or, Ebenezer the Disowned* he writes:

Near the banks of one of the romantic streams which take their rise among the Cheviots, stood a small and pleasant, and what might be termed respectable or genteel-looking building. It stood like the home of solitude, encircled by mountains from the world. Beneath it, the rivulet wandered over its rugged bed; to the east rose Cheviot, the giant of the hills; to the west, lesser mountains reared their fantastic forms, thinly studded here and there with dwarf allers which the birds of heaven had planted, and their progeny had nestled in their branches; to the north and the south stretched a long and secluded glen, where beauty blushed in the arms of wildness—and thick woods, where the young fir and the oak of the ancient forest grew together, flourished beneath the shelter of the hills. Fertility also smiled by the sides of the rivulet, though the rising and setting sun threw the shadows of barrenness over it. Around the cottage stood a clump of solitary firs, and behind it an enclosure of allers, twisted together, sheltered a garden from the storms that swept down the hills.

In the Tale *The Unbidden Guest Or, Jedburgh's Regal Festival* he describes the Jedburgh area, as follows:

There is no river in this country which presents in its course, scenes more beautifully romantic than the little Jed. Though it exhibits not the dizzy cliffs where the eagles build their nests, the mass of waters, the magnitude and the boldness, which give the character of sublimity to a scene; yet, as it winds its course through undulating

hills where the forest trees entwine their broad branches, or steals along by the foot of the red, rocky precipices, where the wild flowers and the broom blossom from every crevice of their perpendicular sides, and from whose summits the woods bend down, beautiful as rainbows, it presenteth pictures of surpassing loveliness, which the eye delights to dwell upon. It is a fair sight to look down from the tree-clad hills upon the ancient burgh, with the river half circling it, and gardens, orchards, woods, in the beauty of summer blossoming, or the magnificence of their autumnal hues, encompassing it, while the venerable Abbey riseth stately in the midst of all, as a temple in paradise. Such is the character of the scenery around Jedburgh now; and, in former ages, its beauty rendered it a favourite resort of the Scottish Kings.

Finally, in *Bill Stanley; or, A Sailor's Story* he describes the Farne Islands (as noted above he also wrote an article in the *Advertiser* about a trip there), thus:

When the Ferns^[lxi] are first seen, what appeared but two, or, at most, three islands, are now found to be a cluster of sixteen or twenty—the ocean-homes of ten thousand times ten thousand sea-fowls; which now may be seen rising in myriads, blackening the air and covering the surface of the islands, as if a thunder-cloud hung over them—anon their snowy wings flash in the sunbeams, countless specks of light begem the seeming cloud, and flickering for a moment, assume the appearance of a magnificent rainbow instinct with motion,—and, again, as if turning from the flashing of their own beautiful plumage, settle like darkness on the rocks. To appreciate the striking

effect of these islands, it is necessary to sail round them, as well as to land upon them. Each appears to be surrounded by a pier or bulwark of nature's masonry. What is termed the Pinnacle Island, is the most impressive. We have been informed that it bears a strong resemblance to St. Helena—the grave of Europe's conqueror. The pinnacles are a mass of perpendicular rocks, representing towers, battlements, and fortifications, apparently as perfect to the eye as if formed by the hands of man, but that their terrible strength seems to frown in mockery on his puny efforts. They, alone, are worth visiting again and again. They make man feel his own insignificance, and the power of the Omnipotent voice that called into existence the mighty ocean and the wonders of its bosom. Burns, on visiting a place in the Highlands, said it was "enough to make a blockhead a poet;" and we say that the man who could visit the Fern Isles without feeling the influence of poetry within him, has a head as stupid as the sea-fowl that inhabit them, and an imagination as impenetrable as the rocks that compose the pinnacles.

The centrality of nature in his work places Wilson (and 'his Scholar') within the Romantic movement epitomised by Wordsworth and his emphasis on the effect of nature upon the artist when he is surrounded by it, preferably alone "wandering lonely as a cloud". In *Lines Written a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey, on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye during a Tour, July 13, 1798*, from *Lyrical Ballads* Wordsworth writes that he:

... well pleases to recognise
 In nature and the language of the sense,
 The anchor of my purest thoughts, the nurse,
 The guide, the guardian of my heart, and soul

Of all my moral being.

The Poet thus celebrates an individual communion with nature that unifies feeling and thinking.

In the same poem Wordsworth reflects on the way that memories of the Wye River valley have sustained him, he writes:

Though absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me,
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart;

This illustrates Wordsworth's theory of poetic composition, 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. The poem concludes with a meditation on the power of nature to prevail against the false and superficial "dreary intercourse of daily life" that Wordsworth associated with city life, especially literary life in London. Nature, Wordsworth argued, teaches the only knowledge important to humanity. The Romantics generally tended to be distrustful of the human world and tended to believe a close connection with nature was mentally and morally healthy.

Wilson is however not an admirer of 'the Lake Poets', viz. Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. In *The Enthusiast* he writes of the group, thus:

It has in great measure brought men back to nature, and given a freshness to poetical phraseology. The sin of its authors exists not in what they intended to do, but in what they have over-done.

Of course, by this stage Wordsworth had moved a long way from his famous praise of the French Revolution:

Bliss it was in that dawn to be alive

But to be young was very heaven.

He was by then a Tory which would not have impressed Wilson.

Wordsworth wrote about everyday matters which were rendered poetical by his treatment of them. His most important legacy was, in fact, his rejection of eighteenth-century poetic diction. Wilson would have been aware that Wordsworth's approach had been much criticised, most significantly by Francis Jeffrey in the *Edinburgh Review*, while Wilson's patron Professor Wilson was also a critic of Wordsworth. These critics focussed on Wordsworth's refusal to write in a 'poetical' style. Jeffrey objected to Wordsworth's manner "... of connecting his most lofty, tender, or impassioned conceptions, with objects and incidents, which the greater part of his readers will probably persist in thinking low, silly, or uninteresting". He wrote that 'new poets' such as Wordsworth were "... furnishing themselves from vulgar ballads and plebeian nurseries", when they ought to be "... borrowing from the more popular passages of their illustrious predecessors".

It was Jeffrey, in fact, who introduced the term 'the Lake Poets'. They were, he said, "... a certain brotherhood of poets, who have haunted for some years about the Lakes of Cumberland". This classification ignored great differences in the poetic styles of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Southey. Jeffrey wrote of Wordsworth's *The Excursion*, thus:

This will never do. It bears no doubt the stamp of the author's heart and fancy; but unfortunately not half so visibly as that of his peculiar system. His former poems were intended to recommend that system, and to bespeak favour for it by their individual merit; — but this, we suspect, must be recommended by the system — and can only expect to succeed where it has been previously established. It is longer, weaker, and tamer, than any of Mr.

Wordsworth's other productions; with less boldness of originality, and less even of that extreme simplicity and lowliness of tone which wavered so prettily, in the Lyrical Ballads, between silliness and pathos. We have imitations of Cowper, and even of Milton here, engrafted on the natural drawl of the Lakers — and all diluted into harmony by that profuse and irrepressible wordiness which deluges all the blank verse of this school of poetry, and lubricates and weakens the whole structure of their style.

The following year Jeffrey declared regarding Wordsworth:

We now see clearly, however, how the case stands; — and, making up our minds, though with the most sincere pain and reluctance, to consider him as finally lost to the good cause of poetry, shall endeavour to be thankful for the occasional gleams of tenderness and beauty which the natural force of his imagination and affections must still shed over all his productions, — and to which we shall ever turn with delight, in spite of the affectation and mysticism and prolixity, with which they are so abundantly contrasted.

There are a number of criticisms of Wordsworth in the *Border Magazine*, most, perhaps all, written by Wilson. The following statement regarding ‘the Lake Poets’ is certainly from the pen of Wilson:

The body of this school was simplicity, its soul was simplicity, and its very existence simplicity. Its founders set out with the resolution of annihilating hackneyed phrases, and to redeem poetry from the error of its ways, to chasten its style, and preserve originality, without rendering its language obscure and enigmatical.

He continues:

Wordsworth disguised half of his godlike imagination in the beggarly garb of silliness; and suffered simplicity to dwindle into conceit ...

Returning to considering Wilson's Tales, the moral of the Tale *The Seeker* has already been described. In *The Enthusiast* Wilson emphasises the importance of religion to artistic endeavour. He writes:

Poetry must heighten, elevate and throw an additional charm over everything it touches. With religion it cannot do this - it cannot be made more sublime than it already is. Religion is the poetry of heaven! ... Where there is no religion there can be no poetry.

He continues:

The mountains, the wilderness, the whirlwind, the thunder, the shouting sea, and the hymn of nature, the glorious rainbow, and the sun in its majesty of light, these are the living, the visible – the terrible – the sublime poetry of nature's God!

Wilson has no doubt who is a key religious writer at this time. He states:

Our most successful religious poet is James Montgomery. Devotion breathes through his pages,—it falls upon his muse like the light of a summer moon on a landscape at midnight,—it imparts a tone to his thoughts, as colours receive their beauty from the sun; it gives a character to all his works, as the love of our Creator lends its loveliness to

the perfection of all his attributes. Where there is no religion, there can be no poetry.

The following quotations illustrate that Wilson's response to the natural world reflects his religious outlook. In the Tale *The Cripple or Ebenezer the Disowned* he writes:

We read of the glories of Eden, and that the earth was cursed because of man's transgression; yet when we look abroad upon the glowing landscape, above us and around us, and behold the pure heavens like a sea of music floating over us, and hear the earth answer it back in varied melody, while mountain, wood and dale, seem dreaming in the sound and stealing into loveliness, we almost wonder that a bad man should exist in the midst of a world that is still so beautiful, and where every object around him is a representative of the wisdom, the goodness, the mercy, the purity, and the omnipotence of his creator. There is a language in the very wild-flowers among our feet that breathes a lesson of virtue. We can appreciate the feeling with which the poet beheld

"The last rose of summer left blooming alone;"

but in the firstlings of the spring, the primrose, the lily, and their early train, there is an appeal that passes beyond our senses. They are like the lisplings and the smiles of infancy—lowly preachers, emblems of our own immortality, and we love them like living things. They speak to us of childhood and scenes of youth, and memory dwells in their very fragrance. Yes, May is a beautiful month—it is a month of fair sights and of sweet sounds. To it belongs the lowly primrose blushing by the brae-side in congregated

beauty, with here and there a cowslip bending over them like a lover among the flowers; the lily hanging its head by the brook that reflects its image, like a bride at the altar, as if conscious of its own loveliness; the hardy daisy on the green sward, like a proud man struggling in penury with the storms of fate. Now, too, the blossoms on a thousand trees unfold their rainbow hues; the tender leaves seem instinct with life, and expand to the sunbeams; and the bright fields, like an emerald sea, wave their first undulations to the breeze. The lark pours down a flood of melody on the nest of its mate, and the linnet trills a lay of love to its partner from the yellow furze. The chaffinch chaunts in the hedge its sweet but unvaried line of music; the thrush hymns his bold roundelay, and the blackbird swells the chorus, while the bird of spring sends its voice from the glens, like a wandering echo lost between love and sadness; and the swallow, newly returned from warmer climes or its winter sleep,

"Titters from the straw-built shed."

The insect tribe leap into being, countless in numbers and matchless in livery, and their low hum swims like the embodiment of a dream in the air. The May-fly invite the angler to the river, while the minnow gambols in the brook; the young salmon sports and sparkles in the stream, and the grey trout glides slowly beneath the shadow of a rock in the deep pool. To enjoy for a single hour in a May morning the luxuries which nature spread around—to wander in its fields and its woods—to feel ourselves a part of God's glad creation—to feel the gowan under our feet,

and health circulating through our veins with the refreshing breeze, is a recipe worth all in the *Materia Medica*^[lxiii].

Wilson's Tale *The Sabbath Wrecks* begins with a similar description of Dunbar:

It was a beautiful Sabbath morning in the autumn of 1577: a few small clouds, tinged with red, sailed slowly through the blue heavens; the sun shone brightly, as if conscious of the glory and goodness of its Maker, diffusing around a holy stillness and tranquillity, characteristic of the day of rest; the majestic Firth flashed back the sunbeams, while, on its bosom, slowly glided the winged granaries of commerce; there, too, lay its islands, glorying in their strength—the May, shrouded in light, appeared as a leviathan sunning in its rays—and the giant Bass, covered with sea-fowl, rose as a proud mountain of alabaster in the midst of the waters. A thousand boats lay along the shores of Dunbar. It was the herring season—and there were many boats from the south and from the north, and also from the coast of Holland.

God the Creator is also referred to in this passage from his Tale *The Bride*, as follows:

Agnes wept as she perused the foreboding lines, which he had marked in what printers call Italics, in the second stanza, by drawing a line under them. She felt interested in the fate of Henry Cranstoun—deeply interested. We believe that, like the gentle Desdemona, she wished that

"Heaven had made her such a man;"

for, though the young writer to the signet spoke not

"Of war, and broils, and battles,"

his tongue was the interpreter of nature—he dwelt as an enthusiast on its beauties, its mysteries, its benevolence, its glorious design, and, through all, he would point

"Through Nature up to Nature's God!"

Similarly, Wilson's Tale *The Sisters A Tale for the Ladies* begins:

There is not a period of deeper luxury and delight than the season when the nightingale raises its charmed voice to welcome and pleiades, of the glorious spring, like the spirit of life riding upon sunbeams, breathes upon the earth. Yielding to its renewing influence, the feelings and the fancies of youth rush back upon our heart, in all their holiness, freshness, and exultation; and we feel ourselves a deathless part of the joyous creation, which is glowing around us in beauty, beneath the smile of its God! Who has seen the foliage of ten thousand trees bursting into leaves, each kissed by a dew drop;—who has beheld a hundred flowers of varied hues, expanding into loveliness, stealing their colours from the rainbowed majesty of the morning sun:—who has listened to melody from the yellow furze;—to music from every bush—heard

"The birds sing love on every spray,"

and gazed on the blue sky of his own beautiful land, swimming like a singing sea around the sun!—who has seen, who has heard these, and not been ready to kneel upon the soil that gave him birth? Who has not then, as all nature lived and breathed, and shouted their hymns of glory

around him, held his breath in quivering delight, and *felt* the presence of his own immortality, and assurance of his soul's eternal duration, and wondered that sin should exist upon a world so beautiful.

The Cripple or, Ebenezer the Disowned provides a further example, thus;

It is like a timid maiden blushing into womanhood, wooing yet shrinking from the admiration which her beauty compels. The buds, the blossoms, the young leaves, the tender flowers, the glittering dew-drops, and the song of birds, burst from the grasp of winter as the God of Nature whispered in the sunbeams – ‘Let there be life’.

One is reminded of Coleridge's exclamation on seeing the Alps at Chamonix:

... who would be, who could be an atheist in this valley of wonders?

Shelley could, although he too was overwhelmed with the same sights and wrote his poem *Ode to Mont Blanc*, which he had climbed, as a result. He states in classic Romantic-style that “... the poem was composed under the immediate impression of the deep and powerful feelings excited by the objects which it attempts to describe; and, as an undisciplined overflowing of the soul, rests its claim to approbation on an attempt to imitate the untameable wildness and inaccessible solemnity from which those feelings sprung”.

Unlike Coleridge, Wordsworth felt no powerful connection to religion that could account for the ‘sense sublime’ he felt in communion with nature until later in life. By comparison, there is no place for doubt of the significance of the Creator in Wilson's writings.

While, of course, the poetry of Wordsworth, Coleridge and Shelley is still celebrated worldwide, sadly the poetry of Wilson, Everett, Montgomery^[lxiii] and of Professor Wilson is largely ignored.

The supernatural is central to much writing of the Romantic period, but unlike, for example, Burns and Hogg, Wilson rarely includes the supernatural in his Tales. In one of his earliest Tales, *My Black Coat Or, The Breaking of the Bride's China*, Wilson informs his readers that superstition belongs in the past. He writes:

Gentle reader, the simple circumstances I am about to relate to you, hang upon what is termed—a bad omen. There are few amongst the uneducated who have not a degree of faith in omens; and even amongst the better educated and well informed there are many who, while they profess to disbelieve them, and, indeed, do disbelieve them, yet feel them in their hours of solitude. I have known individuals who, in the hour of danger, would have braved the cannon's mouth, or defied death to his teeth, who, nevertheless, would have buried their heads in the bedclothes at the howling of a dog at midnight, or spent a sleepless night from hearing the tick, tick, of the spider, or the untiring song of the kitchen-fire musician—the jolly little cricket. The age of omens, however, is drawing to a close; for truth in its progress is trampling delusion of every kind under its feet; yet, after all, though a belief in omens is a superstition, it is one that carries with it a portion of the poetry of our nature. But to proceed with our story.

He makes a similar point in his Tale *The First-Foot*:

Nelly was a very worthy, kind-hearted woman, yea even sensible woman, but a vein of superstition ran though her

sense; she had imbibed a variety of ‘auld warld notions’ in infancy, and, as she grew up, they became part of her creed. She did not exactly believe that ghosts and apparitions existed in her day, but she was perfectly sure that they had existed, and had been seen; she was sure, also, that there was something in dreams, and she was positive there was great deal of luckiness and unluckiness of a first foot; she had remarked it in her own experience thirty times, and, she said, ‘it was of nae use attempting to argue her out o’ what she had observed hersel’.

In the Tale *The Whitsome Tragedy* the warning of the mother is however ignored with dire results. Wilson writes:

“Go upon no such an errand,’ said your mother to both of us; ‘for there is blood upon baith your brows, and there is death in your path.’

“Havers, lassie!’ cried her faither angrily; ‘are ye at your randering again?—what blood do ye see on their brows mair than I do, or what death can ye perceive in their path? All your mother’s Highland kinsfolk were never able to throw their second-sighted glamour into my een, and my own bairn shanna.

“Call it randers, or what ye will,’ answered she; ‘but I see it plain as I see the grey hairs upon your head, that death and lamentation are gathering round my father’s hearth, and are hovering and screaming owre it, like vultures round a desolate place.’

“Her words made my flesh to creep upon my bones; for, both before that, and a hundred times since, I have heard

her say dark and strange things, which sooner or later have owre trully come to pass. However, the foray across to Simprin was delayed till after our marriage; and your mother almost persuaded me to give up all thoughts of it, and instead of my former habits of life, to cultivate the bit ground which my forefaithers had held for two hundred years, for the consideration of an armed man's service. But her brother taunted me, and said I was no better than Samson lying wi' his head on the lap of Delilah, and that I had not only given his sister my heart to keep, but my courage also. A taunt was a thing that I never could endure, and that I never would put up wi' from any man that ever was born—and I hope none of ye ever will, or, as I am your faither! ye should be no longer my sons!

The dire results could of course merely be a consequence of bad luck, but his Tale *The Doom of Soulis* concerns a wizard, viz. the last Lord Soulis, who lived in Hermitage Castle, a few miles to the south of Hawick. This Tale is based on a local legend about Soulis and his meetings with the Devil and is told by a narrator. Wilson writes:

A Gazetter would inform you that Denholm is a village beautifully situated near the banks of the Teviot, about midway between Jedburgh and Hawick, and in the parish of Cavers; and, perhaps, if of modern date, it would add, it has the honour of being the birth-place of Dr. Leyden. However, it was somewhat early on a summer morning a few years ago that a young man, a stranger, with a fishing-rod in his hand, stood in the midst of it, and, turning round—"This then," said he, "is the birth-place of Leyden—the son of genius—the martyr of study—the friend of Scott!"

Few of the villagers were astir; and at the first he met—who carried a spade over his shoulder, and appeared to be a ditcher—he inquired if he could show him the house in which the bard and scholar was born.

"Ou, ay, sir," said the man, "I wat can I—I'll show ye that instantly, and proud to show you it too."

"That is good," thought the stranger; "the prophet is dead, but he yet speaketh—he hath honour in his own country."

The ditcher conducted him across the green, and past the end of a house, which was described as being the school house, and was newly built, and led him towards an humble building, the height of which was but a single story, and which was found occupied by a millwright as a workshop. Yet, again, the stranger rejoiced to find that the occupier venerated his premises for the poet's sake, and that he honoured the genius of him who was born in their precincts.

"Dash it!" [This was a common expression of Leyden's, and, perhaps, was to some degree expressive of his headlong and determined character.] said the stranger, quoting the habitual phrase of poor Leyden. "I shall fish none to-day." And I wonder not at his having so said; for it is not every day that we can stand beneath the thatch-clad roof—or any other roof—where was born one whose name time will bear written in undying characters on its wings, until those wings droop in the darkness of eternity.

The stranger proceeded up the Teviot, oftentimes thinking of Leyden, of all that he had written, and occasionally repeating passages aloud. He almost forgot that he had a rod in his hand—his eyes did anything but follow the fly, and, I need hardly say, his success was not great.

About mid-day, he sat down on the green bank in solitariness, to enjoy a sandwich, and he also placed by his side a small flask containing spirits, which almost every angler, who can afford it, carries with him. But he had not

sat long, when a venerable-looking old man saluted him with—

"Here's a bonny day, sir," The old man stood as he spoke. There was something prepossessing in his appearance. He had a weather-beaten face, with thin white hair; blue eyes, that had lost somewhat of their former lustre; his shoulders were rather bent; and he seemed a man who was certainly neither rich nor affluent, but who was at ease with the world, and the world was at ease with him.

They entered into conversation, and they sat down together. The old man appeared exactly one of those characters whom you will occasionally find fraught with the traditions of the Borders, and still tainted with, and half-believing in, their ancient superstitions. I wish not to infer that superstition was carried to a greater height of absurdity on the Borders than in other parts of England and Scotland, nor even that the inhabitants of the north were as remarkable in early days for their superstitions, as they now are for their intelligence, for every nation had its superstitions, and I am persuaded that most of them might be traced to a common origin. Yet, though the same in origin, they change their likeness with the character of a nation or district. People unconsciously made their superstitions to suit themselves, though their imaginary effects still terrified them. There was, therefore, a something characteristic in the fables of our forefathers, which fables they believed as facts. The cunning deceived the ignorant— the ignorant were willing to deceive themselves; and what we now laugh at as the clever trick of

a *hocus-pocus* man, was, scarce more than a century ago, received as a miracle—as a thing performed by the hand of the "prince of the powers of the air." Religion without knowledge, and still swaddled in darkness, fostered the idle fear: yea, there are few superstitions, though prostituted by wickedness, that did not owe their existence to some glimmering idea of religion. They had not seen the lamp which lightens the soul, and leadeth it to knowledge; but, having perceived its far-off reflection, plunged into the quagmire of error—and hence proceeded superstition. But I digress into a discant on the superstitions of our fathers, nor should I have done so, but that it is impossible to write a Border Tale of the olden time without bringing them forward; and, when I do so, it is not with the intention of instilling into the minds of my readers the old idea of sorcery, witchcraft, and visible spirits, but of showing what was the belief and conduct of our forefathers. Therefore, without further comment, I shall cut short these remarks, and simply observe, that the thoughts of the young stranger still running upon Leyden, he turned to the elder, after they had sat together for some time, and said—"Did you know Dr. Leyden, sir?"

"Ken him!" said the old man; "fifty years ago, I've wrought day's-work beside his father for months together!"

They continued their conversation for some time, and the younger inquired of the elder, if he were acquainted with Leyden's ballad of "Lord Soulis?"

"Why, I hae heard a verse or twa o' the ballant, sir,' said the old man, "but I'm sure everybody kens the story. However, if ye're no perfectly acquaint wi' it, I'm sure I'm willing to let ye hear it wi' great pleasure; and a remarkable story it is—and just as true, sir, ye may tak my word on't, as that I'm raising this bottle to my lips."

So saying, the old man raised the flask to his mouth, and after a regular fisher's draught, added—

"Weel, sir, I'll let ye hear the story about Lord Soulis:—You have no doubt heard of Hermitage Castle, which stands upon the river of that name, at no great distance from Hawick. In the days of the great and good King Robert the Bruce, that castle was inhabited by Lord Soulis. He was a man whose very name spread terror far and wide; for he was a tyrant and a sorcerer. He had a giant's strength, an evil eye, and a demon's heart, and he kept his familiar locked in a chest. Peer and peasant became pale at the name of Lord Soulis. His hand smote down the strong, his eye blasted the healthy; he oppressed the poor, and he robbed the rich. He ruled over his vassals with a rod of iron. From the banks of the Tweed, the Teviot, and the Jed, with their tributaries, to beyond the Lothians, an incessant cry was raised against him to heaven and to the king. But his life was protected by a charm, and mortal weapons could not prevail against him."

The seriousness with which the narrator said this, showed that he gave full credit to the tradition, and believed in Lord Soulis as a sorcerer.

Wilson thus distances himself from the supernatural elements by the use of the narrator.

The narrator continues regarding Lord Soulis, as follows:

"He then leaped upon the grave of the living animal, and, seizing the dog by the neck, he dashed it violently against the wall, towards the left corner where he stood, and, unable to rise, it lay howling long and piteously on the floor. Then did he plunge his knife into the throat of the young bull, and, while its bleatings mingled with the howling of the dying dog, amidst what might be called the blue darkness of the vault, he received the blood in the palms of his hands, and he stalked around the dungeon, sprinkling it in circle, and crying with a loud voice—

"Spirit of darkness! hear me!"

"Again he digged a pit, and, seizing the dying animal, he hurled it into the grave, feet upwards⁵; and again he groaned, while the sweat stood on his brow, 'Come, spirit! come!'

"He took a horse-shoe, which had lain in the vault for years, and which was called, in the family, the *spirit's shoe*, and he nailed it against the door, so that it hung obliquely; and, as he gave the last blow to the nail, again he cried—'Spirit, I obey thee! come!'



Hermitage Castle

"Afterwards, he took his place in the middle of the floor, and nine times he scattered around him a handful of salt, at each time exclaiming—

"Spirit! arise!"

"Then did he strike thrice nine times with his hand upon a chest which stood in the middle of the floor, and by its foot was the pale lamp, and at each blow he cried—

"Arise, spirit! arise!"

"Therefore, when he had done these things, and cried twenty-and-seven times, the lid of the chest began to move, and a fearful figure, with a red cap⁷ upon its head, and which resembled nothing in heaven above, or on earth below, rose, and, with a hollow voice, inquired—

"What want ye, Soulis?"

"Power, spirit! power!" he cried, 'that mine eyes may have their desire, and that every weapon formed by man may fall scatheless on my body, as the spent light of a waning moon!"

"Thy wish is granted, mortal!" groaned the fiend; 'to-morrow eve, young Branxholm's bride shall sit within thy bower, and his sword return bent from thy bosom, as though he had dashed it against a rock. Farewell! invoke me not again for seven years, nor open the door of the vault, but then knock thrice upon the chest, and I will answer thee. Away! Follow thy course of sin, and prosper; but beware of a coming wood^[lxiv]!"

"With a loud and sudden noise, the lid of the massy chest fell, and the spirit disappeared, and from the floor of the vault issued a deep sound, like the reverbing of thunder. Soulis took up the flickering lamp, and, leaving the dying dog still howling in the corner, whence he had driven it, he locked the iron door, and placed the huge key in his bosom".

According to the legend Soulis was finally overcome by his enemies, who wrapped him in sheets of lead before boiling him alive in a cauldron. Wilson in fact begins the Tale with 'a spoiler' by citing Leyden^[lxv], thus:

"They roll'd him up in a sheet of lead—
 A sheet of lead for a funeral pall;
 They plunged him in the caldron red,
 And melted him—lead, and bones, and all."

The narrator explains that Soulis suffered this dreadful death because of a misunderstanding regarding the instructions of the then King:

“It is the curse of kings to be attended
By slaves that take their humour for a warrant;”

and, when the enemies of Soulis heard these words from the lips of the king, they hastened away to put them in execution; and with them they took a wise man, one who was learned in breaking the spells of sorcery, and with him he carried a scroll, on which was written the secret wisdom of Michael the Wizard; and they arrived before Hermitage Castle, while its lord was contending single-handed against the retainers of Branxholm, and their swords were blunted on his buckler, and his body received no wounds. They struck him to the ground with their lances; and they endeavoured to bind his hands and his feet with cords, but his spells snapped them asunder as threads.

“Wrap him in lead,’ cried the wise man, ‘and boil him therewith, according to the command of the king, for water and hempen cords have no power over his sorcery.’

“Many ran towards the castle, and they tore the lead from the turrets,

and they held down the sorcerer, and rolled the sheets around him in many folds, till he was powerless as a child, and the foam fell from his lips in the impotency of his rage. Others procured a caldron, in which it was said many of his incantations were performed, and the cry was raised—

"Boil him on the Nine-stane rig!"

"And they bore him to where the stones of the Druids are to be seen till this day, and the two stones are yet pointed out from which the caldron was suspended. They kindled piles of faggots beneath it, and they bent the living body of Soulis within the lead; and thrust it into the caldron, and, as the flames arose, the flesh and the bones of the wizard were consumed in the boiling lead. Such was the doom of Soulis".

In the Tale *The Laidley Worm of Spindleston Heugh* Wilson also distances himself from the supernatural by making clear that he is recounting a local legend:

"Word went east, and word went west,
 And word is gone over the sea,
 That a Laidley Worm in Spindleston Heugh
 Would ruin the north countrie.
 "All folks believe within the shire
 This story to be true,
 And they all run to Spindleston
 The cave and trough to view.
 "This fact now Duncan Frazier,
 Of Cheviot, sings in rhyme,
 Lest Bamboroughshire-men should forget
 Some part of it in time."—Ancient Ballad

[The popular Ballad of the Laidley (or loathly) Worm of Spindleston Heugh, was composed by Duncan Frazier, the Cheviot bard, more than five hundred years ago, and had rendered the legend familiar far beyond the Borders. The tradition has doubtless been commemorated by the ancient Saxon bards, when old Duncan turned it into

rhyme; and it is under this supposition that the present tale is told, the narrator being understood to be a wandering bard of the Saxon race^{[lxvi].}]

Wilson writes:

“Tell me, old man,” said a Northumbrian chief to a Saxon bard who claimed his hospitality, “tell me a tale of the olden time—a legend of the race of Woden.”

Now, there resided at that time in a dark cave, in the Heugh which is called Spindleston, an enchantress of great power, named Elisa—the worker of wonders. Men said that she could weave ropes of sand, and threads from the motes of the sunbeams. She could call down fire from the clouds, and transform all things by the waving of her magic wand. Around her hung a loose robe, composed of the skins of many beasts. Her feet and her arms were bare, and they were painted with strange figures. On her face, also, was the likeness of the spirits that ministered to her will. She was fearful to look upon. Men fled at her approach. The beasts of the field were scared by her shadow. Round her head was wreathed a crown of fantastic hemlock—round her neck a corset of deadly nightshade. On her left arm coiled a living snake, and it rested its head upon her bosom. In her right hand she held a wand dipped in the poison of all things venomous. Whatsoever it touched died—whatsoever it waved over was transformed. No human foot approached her cave—no mortal dared. The warrior, who feared not a hundred foes, quailed at the sight of Elgiva, the enchantress, the worker of wonders. Unclean reptiles crawled around her cave—the asp, the loathsome toad, and the hissing adder.

Two owls sat in the farthest corner of the cave, and their eyes were as lamps in its darkness. They sat upon skulls of the dead. A tame raven croaked in the midst of it. It was told that the reptiles, the owls, and the raven, were objects of her enchantment—warriors, and the daughters of warriors, transformed by the waving of her wand.

Wilson continues:

"Yea, thy mother," answered the enchantress; "who, when her warrior husband fell, fled to the desert, to the cave, and to the forest, for protection—even for protection from the love and from the wrath of Ethelfrith the fierce, the brother of thy warrior father, whose eyes were as the eagle's, and his arm great of strength. Uncouth is the habit, wild is the figure, and idle the art of thy mother. Broken is her wand which the vulgar feared. That mine eyes might behold my son, this cave became my abode. Superstition walled it round with fire."

"And Agitha?" gasped the warrior.

"Behold!" answered she, "the loathly worm at the feet of thy mother."

The skins of fish of the deep sea were sewed together with cords—they were fashioned into the form of a great serpent.

"Come forth, my daughter!" cried the enchantress. Agitha sprang from her disguise of skins. She sank on the breast of her hero.

The people beheld her from afar. Their shout of joy rang across the sea. It was echoed among the hills. A scream rose from the tower of Ida. From the highest turret Bethoc the queen had sprung. In pieces was her body scattered at the foot of the great cliff. They were gathered together—they were buried in the cave of Elgiva. From her grave crawled an unclean beast, and it crawleth around it for ever.

Ethelfrith died in battle. Woden shut his eyes and saw him not, and he fell. And Elgiva, the enchantress, the worker of wonders, was hailed as Rowena, the mother of Wynde, the subduer of princes; yea, even of Chylde Wynde, the beloved, and the lord of Agitha the Beautiful.

Such was the tale of the Saxon bard.

In his Tale *The Unbidden Guest or Jedburgh's Regal Festival* Wilson does tell a Tale involving the supernatural without a mediating narrator. He however begins with a poem which summarizes the story and thus makes it clear that it is an old legend:

"In the mid revels, the first ominous night
Of their espousals, when the room shone bright
With lighted tapers—the king and the queen leading
The curious measures, lords and ladies treading
The self-same strains—the king looks back by chance,
And spies a strange intruder fill the dance;
Namely, a mere anatomy, quite bare,
His naked limbs both without flesh and hair,
(As we decipher Death,) who stalks about
Keeping true measure till the dance be out."

Heywood's^[lxvii] *Hierarchie of the Blessed Angels*.

Wilson writes:

Thrice a hundred tapers burned suspended from the roof, and on each side of the hall stood twenty men with branches of blazing pine. Now came the morris dance, with the antique dress and strange attitudes of the performers, which was succeeded by a dance of warriors in their coats of mail, and with their swords drawn. After these a masque, prepared by Thomas the Rymer, who sat on the right hand of the King, followed; and the company laughed, wept, and wondered, as the actors performed their parts before them. But now came the royal dance; the music burst into a bolder strain, and lord and lady rose, treading the strange measure down the hall, after the King and his fair Queen. Louder, and yet more loud the music pealed; and, though it was midnight, the multitude without shouted at its enlivening strains. Blithely the dance went on, and the King well nigh forgot the measure as he looked enraptured in the fair face of his beauteous bride.

He turned to take her hand in the dance, and in its stead the bony fingers of a skeleton were extended to him. He shrank back aghast; for royalty shuddereth at the sight of Death as doth a beggar, and, in its presence, feeleth his power to be as the power of him who vainly commanded the waves of the sea to go back. Still the skeleton kept true measure before him—still it extended to him its bony hand. He fell back, in horror, against a pillar where a torch-bearer stood. The lovely Queen shrieked aloud, and fell as dead upon the ground. The music ceased—silence fell on the multitude—they stood still—they gazed on each other. Dismay caused the cold damp of terror to burst from every brow, and timid maidens sought refuge

and hid their faces on the bosom of strangers. But still, visible to all, the spectre stood before the king, its bare ribs rattling as it moved, and its finger pointed towards him. The music, the dancers, became noiseless, as if Death had whispered—“*Hush!—be still!*” For the figure of death stood in the midst of them, as though it mocked them, and no sound was heard save the rattling of the bones, the moving of its teeth, and the motion of its fingers before the king.

The lord abbot gathered courage, he raised his crucifix from his breast, he was about to exorcise the strange spectre, when it bent its grim head before him, and vanished as it came—no man knew whither.

“Let the revels cease!” gasped the terror-stricken king; and they did cease. The day had begun in joy, it was ended in terror. Fear spread over the land, and while the strange tale of the marriage spectre was yet in the mouths of all men, yea before six months had passed, the tidings spread that the good King Alexander, at whom the figure of Death had pointed its finger, was with the dead, and his young queen a widow in a strange land.

The appearance of the spectre became a tale of wonder amongst all men, descending from generation to generation, and unto this day it remains a mystery. But, on the day after the royal festival at Jedburgh, Patrick Douglas, the learned soldier, took the vows, and became a monastic brother at Melrose; and, though he spoke of Jolande in his dreams, he smiled, as if in secret triumph, when the spectre that had appeared to King Alexander was mentioned in his hearing.

Of course, the demise of King Alexander soon after this wedding has already been described.

Given that he was often re-addressing traditional stories it was inevitable that superstition would feature in his *Tales*. He however shared a scepticism regarding superstition with Scott. A. N. Wilson (2002) points out that when the latter refers to the supernatural he usually provides a rational explanation for apparently supernatural events. Gifford (1988) writes of Scott's treatment of the supernatural that he, born of course in enlightenment Edinburgh, had decided that "... such a strong and organic part of Scottish cultural heritage" was "off limits to 'sophisticated' writers and society at large".

The Romantics offered various versions of femininity, masculinity and marriage. In the next chapter Wilson's portrayal of wives in his *Tales* is considered.

Chapter Seven: Wilson's Portrayal of Wives in the Tales

Some significant Romantic writers challenged the prevailing conservative view of the role of women but in his poem *The Triad* Wordsworth, for example, not only supports the dominant gender ideology of his time by emphasizing 'feminine duty' but also adopts the conventional method for defining and constructing women from a male perspective that objectifies through idealization. Wilson similarly provides an idealized view of a number of wives in his writings and he published a tribute entitled *To my Wife* and a 'love poem', both of which are cited below. One can only speculate that he similarly appreciated his wife and her support during the difficult years of his career.

Wilson included the following poem in his Tale *The Solitary of the Cave*:

To My Wife

Call woman—angel, goddess, what you will—
With all that fancy breathes at passion's call,
With all that rapture fondly raves—and still
That one word—WIFE—outvies—contains them all.
It is a word of music which can fill
The soul with melody, when sorrows fall
Round us, like darkness, and her heart alone
Is all that fate has left to call our own. Her bosom is a fount of love
that swells,
Widens, and deepens with its own outpouring,
And, as a desert stream, for ever wells
Around her husband's heart, when cares devouring,
Dry up its very blood, and man rebels
Against his being!—When despair is lowering

And ills sweep round him, like an angry river,
 She is his star, his rock of hope for ever.
 Yes; woman only knows what 'tis to mourn
 She only feels how slow the moments glide
 Ere those her young heart loved in joy return
 And breathe affection, smiling by her side.
 Hers only are the tears that waste and burn—
 The anxious watchings, and affection's tide
 That never, never ebbs!—hers are the cares
 No ear hath heard, and which no bosom shares
 Cares, like her spirit, delicate as light
 Trembling at early dawn from morning stars,
 Cares, all unknown to feeling and to sight
 Of rougher man, whose stormy bosom wars
 With each fierce passion in its fiery might;
 Nor deems how look unkind, or absence, jars
 Affection's silver cords by woman wove,

Whose soul, whose business, and whose life is—LOVE.

In the Tale *The Poacher's Progress* Wilson includes the following poem:

A thousand bards have sung of WOMAN'S LOVE, and,
 although

"nae poet in a sense,
 But just a rhymer like by chance,"

I shall interrupt my story for a minute's space, to sing it also.

Say not it is the flickering flame
 That all have felt—that all must feel—
 Which comes, and goeth as it came—

That fleeteth, changeth, as the wheel
Of caprice or young fancy turns;
Nay, 'tis the strong, the deep emotion
Of the full heart whose deep devotion
Through adverse fate and coldness burns,
That marks a woman's love.

Oh, 'tis a glad, a holy glow—
An angel's dream—a seraph's bliss—
A theft from heavenly joy to know—
To feel, to own, to know but this:
That there is one—a lovely one—
The life, the partner of our being—
Who, all our faults and follies seeing,
Can love, and love but us alone,
With all a woman's love.

Within her bosom is a fire
That burneth with a light divine
Which, when opposing ills conspire
To cloud the soul, will burst—will shine
Within, around—and joyous throw
A ray of hope o'er him she loveth,
Till heaven the kindred flame approveth,
And half the pain of fate—of woe,
Is lost in woman's love.

In his Tales there are many examples of very supportive wives. In the Tale *Reuben Purves or the Speculator* Reuben learns to really appreciate his wife when he believes he is ruined. Wilson writes:

'No, no,' replied she as quietly as ever, 'we arena ruined.'
The back is aye made fit for the burden. The Hand that
sent the misfortune (as we think it) upon us, will enable
us to bear up against it. Now, just ye compose yersel' and

dinna be angry at what I am gaun to say; but we are just as rich now as we were three years ago; and, I am sure, Reuben, we were quite as happy then as we are now. Ye have still a very excellent business, and a fortune far beyond onything that you and I could ever expect to possess when we cam thegither. You have your health and I have mine; and our twa bits o' bairnies are growing up to be a comfort to us baith. They will ne'er feel the loss o' the cotton mill, and you and I ne'er kenned the guid o't. Wherefore, then, should ye grieve? Ye ought rather to be thankfu' that it is nane o' your family that is taen frae ye. And, I have nae doubt, that, although we self-wise and short-sighted mortals canna see it, this visitation will be for the guid o' us a'. It is better that ye should lose the mill than forget your Maker; and, forgie me for saying it, but I feared it was setting your heart upon the things o' this world, to a degree which did not become the faither o' a Christian family. Therefore, let me entreat you to say, 'His will be done,' and to believe that this has fallen upon you for the best. Our loss is not so great but that, if times keep good we may soon owercome it."

I had often experienced the value of my wife, and admired her meek, patient spirit, and affectionate heart; but I never, until this trial came upon me, knew her real worth. She enabled me to begin the world; ay, sir, and this far she has guided me through it. She was better than twelve years older than me—but what of that? She looked as young like at forty as ever I saw another woman do at twenty; and now, when she has been my wife for thirty years, I hardly ken her aulder. A glaikit lassie, under such circumstances, might have wrung her hands, and upbraided me

for allowing the supper and the dance; but Priscilla strove only to comfort me, to imbue my mind with fortitude, and to turn the accident to my eternal advantage. I had long loved and esteemed her, but I now revered her.

I sat and I listened to her, and looked in her face for the space of ten minutes, without speaking a word; and, at last, fairly overpowered wi' her gentleness and her tenderness, I rose and took her hand; and 'Priscilla,' says I, 'for your sake dear, I will think no more about the matter'.

In a number of the Tales the wives seem almost saintly in their willingness to forgive and support their husbands. The examples of Mary in *We'll Have Another*, Jeannie in *Ups and Downs; or, David Stuart's Account of his Pilgrimage* and Nancy in *The Simple Man is the Beggar's Brother* have already been cited. Almost incredibly, in the Tale *The Deserted Wife* the wife forgives her husband for his desertion. Wilson writes:

I had heard nothing about my husband for nearly twenty years. I didna ken whether he was dead or living. But my son took a fancy for the sea; and, before he was twenty-one, he was a ship captain in the American trade. His vessel was lying at New York, when there was a middle-aged broken-down man—one that seemed to be ruined both in health and circumstances—came aboard and begged for the sake o' Heaven that he would gie him a passage to England. My son asked him several questions, and, O sir! Sir!—he discovered that the poor beggar before him was his own faither—his thoughtless faither! He didna chide him, he didna upraid him—for oh, it is a terrible thing for a son to speak like a condemning judge to a faither. I needna tell ye that he brought him hame—that he did every-

thing to restore him to health and happiness—and even brought him as a criminal before me. But I kenned him at the first glance and welcomed him wi' open arms.

"O Isabella! Isabella!" he cried, and fell at my feet.

"Husband! husband!" said I, helping our son to raise him up, "there is joy owre those that repent. Welcome!—welcome!"

He lived for twelve years after this, and he died a sincere penitent, wi' his head upon my bosom, and his hand in my hand, imploring a blessing upon me and his bairns.

There is another example of a forgiving wife in *The Poacher's Progress*:

But seven years passed, and Adam Black returned from being a convict in the hulks to his family. When he entered the cottage, Janet sprang up and received him with open arms. She had wept over his punishment, but she had trusted that it would effect a reformation of his propensities. When she had called her children around him, and desired him to look now upon one, and now upon another, to observe how they had grown, and to tell him how they had wrought for her, and how one had become a scholar, and all could read, she again flung her arms around his neck, and said—

"And now, dear Adam, we shall a' be happy—for, after a', yours wasna a crime that we need hang our heads about—it was only what hundreds do daily—though it maybe wasna richt. But ye winna be looked down upon on account o't—for it wasna like stealing—and I'm sure

I'll be able to get ye wark, for a' the gentry round hae been kind to us."

"Work!—ha!" muttered Adam sullenly; and he coldly acknowledged the tenderness of his wife.

She saw, she felt, that he cared not for her, and his indifference went to her heart. Yet she fondly trusted, by her affection, to win back his, and to lead him also to habits of industry. But her hope was vain. To be doomed to wear the felon's chain, and to mingle with convicts for years, may be a punishment, and it may make men worse than they were before the law condemned them; but that it can reform them is all but impossible. It had wrought no reformation on Adam Black, but it had rendered him more callous and more desperate; it had caused him to associate with wretches who made him acquainted with crimes of which he had never dreamed, and their habits gradually became his habits, and their thoughts his thoughts. He had been sent amongst felons for killing a pheasant, and he returned from amongst them capable of murdering a fellow-being.

Wilson continues regarding the wife's willingness to forgive, thus:

He to whom she had given her young affections, and from whom, unworthy as he was, her heart had never swerved, had looked upon her with coldness, he had spoken to her with anger and contempt—and these are hard things for a wife to bear. She had endured sorrow, she had suffered shame, for his sake, yet she felt his present treatment worse than all. Yet affection, and a desire for her husband's

reformation and safety, prevailed over every other feeling, and she rose, her countenance expressive of anxious and imploring tenderness, and laid her hand on his, and said earnestly—

"Dear Adam!"

"Dear devil!" rejoined the monster, dashing away her hand, "has the woman parted with the little sense she ever had! See that the girl cook those birds right, and let me have none of your preaching."

She sat down in silence, and endeavoured, as she best could, to conceal the agony of a blighted heart.

He returned to his old courses—drinking by day, and poaching by night; and wasting not only the money which the game he destroyed produced, but the earnings also of his wife and family.

There is yet another example of a patient wife in the Tale *The Solitary of the Cave*. Wilson writes:

My Catherine was now a mother, and longer to conceal from her the wretchedness that surrounded us, and was now ready to overwhelm us, was impossible; yet I lacked the courage, the manliness to acquaint her with it, or prepare her for the coming storm.

But she had penetrated my soul—she had read our condition; and, while I sat by her side buried in gloom, and my soul groaning in agony, she took my hand in hers, and said—

'Come, dear Edward, conceal nothing from me. If I cannot remove your sorrows, let me share them. I have borne much, but, for you, I can bear more.'

'What mean ye, Catherine?' I inquired, in a tone of petulance.

'My dear husband,' replied she, with her wonted affection, 'think not I am ignorant of the sorrow that preys upon your heart. But brood not on poverty as an affliction. You may regain affluence, or you may not; it can neither add to nor diminish my happiness but as it affects you. Only smile upon me, and I will welcome penury. Why think of degradation or of suffering? Nothing is degrading that is virtuous and honest; and where honesty and virtue are, there alone is true nobility, though their owner be a hewer of wood. Believe not that poverty is the foe of affection. The assertion is the oft-repeated, but idle falsehood of those who never loved. I have seen mutual love, joined with content, within the clay walls of humble cotters, rendering their scanty and coarse morsel sweeter than the savoury dainties of the rich; and affection increased, and esteem rose, from the knowledge that they endured privation together, and for each other. No, Edward,' she added, hiding her face upon my shoulder, 'think not of suffering. We are young, the world is wide, and Heaven is bountiful. Leave riches to those who envy them, and affection will render the morsel of our industry delicious.'

My first impulse was to press her to my bosom; but pride and shame mastered me, and, with a troubled voice, I exclaimed—'Catherine!'

'O Edward!' she continued, and her tears burst forth, 'let us study to understand each other—if I am worthy of being your wife, I am worthy of your confidence.'

I could not reply. I was dumb in admiration, in reverence of virtue and affection of which I felt myself unworthy. A load seemed to fall from my heart, I pressed her lips to mine.

'Cannot Edward be as happy as his Catherine,' she continued; 'we have, at least, enough for the present, and, with frugality, we have enough for years. Come, love, wherefore will you be unhappy? Be you our pursuer.' And, endeavouring to smile, she gently placed her purse in my hands.

'Good Heavens!' I exclaimed, striking my forehead, and the purse dropped upon the floor; 'am I reduced to this? Never, Catherine!—never! Let me perish in my penury; but crush me not beneath the weight of my own meanness! Death!—what must you think of me?'

'Think of you?' she replied, with a smile, in which affection, playfulness, and sorrow met—'I did not think that you would refuse to be your poor wife's banker.'

'Ah, Catherine!' cried I, 'would that I had half your virtue—half your generosity.'

'The half?' she answered laughingly—'have you not the whole? Did I not give you hand and heart—faults and virtues?—and you, cruel man, have lost the half already! Ungenerous Edward!'

'Oh!' exclaimed I, 'may Heaven render me worthy of such a wife!'

'Come, then,' returned she, 'smile upon your Catherine—*it is all over now!*'

'What is all over, love?' inquired I.

'Oh, nothing, nothing,' continued she, smiling—'merely the difficulty a young husband has in making his wife acquainted with the state of the firm in which she has become a partner.'

'And,' added I, bitterly, 'you find it bankrupt.'

'Nay, nay,' rejoined she, cheerfully, 'not bankrupt; rather say, beginning the world with a small capital. Come, now, dearest, smile, and say you will be cashier to the firm of Fleming & Co.'

'Catherine!—O Catherine!' I exclaimed, and tears filled my eyes.

'Edward!—O Edward!' returned she, laughing, and mimicking my emotion; 'good by, dear—good by!' And, picking up the purse, she dropped it on my knee, and tripped out of the room, adding gaily—

'For still the house affairs would call her hence.'

The latter is one of a number of Tales in which Wilson writes of the evils of gambling. *The Prodigal Son* is another and here there is another faithful, patient wife. Wilson writes:

I might describe to you how poor Eleanor was sitting in their little parlour, with her boy upon a stool by her side, and her little girl on her knee, telling them fondly that their father would be home soon, and anon singing to them the simple nursery rhyme—

‘Hush, my babe, baby buntin,
Your father’s at the hunting, &c.

when the door opened, and the guilty father entered, his hair clotted, his eyes rolling with the wildness of despair, and the cold sweat raining down his pale cheeks.

‘Eleanor! Eleanor!’ he cried, as he flung himself upon a sofa.

She placed her little daughter on the floor; she flew towards him, ‘My Edward!—oh, my Edward!’ she cried, ‘what is it love? Something troubles you.’

‘Curse me, Eleanor,’ exclaimed the wretched prodigal, turning his face from her; ‘I have ruined you, I have ruined my children, I am lost for ever.’

‘No, my husband,’ exclaimed the best of wives, ‘your Eleanor will not curse you. Tell me the worst and I will bear it, cheerfully bear it, for my Edward’s sake.’

‘You will not—you cannot,’ cried he; ‘I have sinned against you as never man sinned against woman. Oh! if you would spit upon the very ground where I tread, I would feel it as an alleviation of my sufferings, but your sympathy, your affection, makes my very soul destroy it—

self. Eleanor! Eleanor! If you have mercy hate me, tell me, shew me that you do.’

‘O Edward! said she imploringly, ‘was it thus when your Eleanor spurned every offer for your sake, when you pledged to her everlasting love? She has none but you, and can you speak thus? O husband, if you will forsake *me*, forsake not my poor children. Tell me, only tell me the worst, and I will rejoice to endure it with my Edward.’

‘Then,’ cried Fenwick, ‘if you will add to my misery by professing love to a wretch like me, know you are a beggar, and I have made you one. Now, can you share beggary with me?’

She repeated the word ‘Beggary!’ she clasped her hands together, for a few moments she stood in silent anguish, her bosom heaved, the tears gushed forth, she flung her arms around her husband’s neck, ‘Yes,’ she cried, ‘I can meet even beggary with my Edward.’

‘O Heaven!’ cried the prodigal, ‘would that the earth would swallow me. I cannot stand this.’

I will not dwell upon the endeavours of the fond, forgiving wife, to soothe and to comfort her unworthy husband; nor yet will I describe to you the anguish of the prodigal’s father and of his mother, when they heard the extent of his folly and of his guilt. Already he had cost the old man much, and, with a heavy and sorrowful heart, he proceeded to his son’s house, to comfort his daughter-in-law. When he entered, she was endeavouring to cheer her husband with a tune on the harpsichord—though Heav-

en knows, there was no music in her breast, save that of love—enduring love.

‘Well, Edward,’ said the old man, as he took a seat, ‘what is this thou hast done now?’

The prodigal was silent.

‘Edward,’ continued the grey-haired parent, ‘I have had deaths in my family—many deaths, and thou knowest it— but I never had to blush for a child but thee. I have felt sorrow, but thou hast added shame to sorrow’—

‘O father,’ cried Eleanor, imploringly, ‘do not upbraid my poor husband.’

The old man wept, he pressed her hand, and, with a groan, said, ‘I am ashamed that thou shouldst call me father, sweetest; but, if thou canst forgive him, I should. He is all that is left me—all that the hand of death has spared me in this world. Yet, Eleanor, his conduct is a living death to me—it is worse than all that I have suffered. When affliction pressed heavily upon me, and, year after year, I followed my dear children to the grave, my neighbours sympathised with me; they mingled their tears with mine; but now, child—oh, now, I am ashamed to hold up my head amongst them! O Edward, man! if thou hast no regard for thy father or thy heart-broken mother, hast thou no affection for thy poor wife?—canst thou bring her and thy helpless children to ruin? But that, I may say, thou hast done already! Son! son! if thou wilt murder thy parents, hast thou no mercy for thine own flesh and blood?—wilt thou destroy thine own offspring? O Edward! if there be

any sin that I will repent upon my deathbed, it will be that I have been a too-indulgent father to thee— that I am the author of thy crimes!’

‘No, father! no!’ cried the prodigal; ‘my sins are my own! I am their author, and my soul carries its own punishment! Spurn me! cast me off!—disown me for ever!— it is all I ask of you! You despise me—hate me too, and I will be less miserable.

Despite his mis-deeds this husband is also forgiven. Wilson writes:

Edward Fenwick had ruined his wife and family—he had brought ruin upon his father, and was himself a fugitive. He was pursued by the law—he fled from them; and he would have fled from their remembrance, if he could. It was now, sir, that the wrath of Heaven was showered upon the head, and began to touch the heart of the prodigal. Like Cain, he was a fugitive and a vagabond on the face of the earth. For many months he wandered in a distant part of the country; his body was emaciated and clothed with rags, and hunger preyed upon his very heart-strings. It is a vulgar thing, sir, to talk of hunger—but they who have never felt it, know not what it means. He was fainting by the wayside, his teeth were grating together, the tears were rolling down his cheeks. ‘The servants of my father’s house,’ he cried, ‘have bread enough, and to spare, while I perish with hunger;’ and, continuing the language of the prodigal in the Scriptures, he said—‘I will arise and go unto my father, and say, I have sinned against Heaven, and in thy sight.’

Yes, sir,' said the younger lady, 'the situation is, indeed, beautiful; but I have seen it when the water, and the mountains around it, could impart no charm to its dwellers. Providence has, indeed, been kind to us; and our lodgings have seldom been empty; but, sir, when we entered it, it was a sad house indeed. My poor mother-in-law and myself had experienced many sorrows; yet my poor fatherless children—for I might call them fatherless,' and she wept as she spoke, 'with their innocent prattle, soothed our affliction. But my little Eleanor, who was loved by every one, began to droop day by day. It was a whiter night—the snow was on the ground—I heard my little darling give a deep sigh upon my bosom. I started up. I called to my poor mother. She brought a light to the bedside, and I found my sweet child dead upon my breast. It was a long and sad night, as we sat by the dead body of my Eleanor, with no one near us, and, after she was buried, my poor Edward there, as he sat by our side at night, would draw forward to his knee the stool on which his sister sat, while his grandmother would glance at him fondly, and push aside the stool with her foot, that I might not see it; but I saw it all.'

The twilight had deepened in the little parlour, and its inmates could not perfectly distinguish the features of each other; but, as the lady spoke, the soul of Edward Fenwick glowed within him; his heart throbbed; his breathing became thick; the sweat burst upon his brow. 'Pardon me, lady,' he cried in agony, 'but oh! tell me your name?'

'Fenwick, sir,' replied she.

‘Eleanor, my injured Eleanor!’ he exclaimed, flinging himself at her feet; ‘I am Edward, your guilty husband. – ‘Mother! can you forgive me? My son! my son! intercede for your guilty father?’

Ah, sir, there needed no intercession; their arms were around his neck; the prodigal was forgiven. ‘Behold,’ continued the narrator, ‘yonder, from the cottage, comes the mother, the wife, and the son of whom I have spoken. I will introduce you to them; you shall witness the happiness and penitence of the prodigal; you must stop with me to-night. Start not, sir, I am Edward Fenwick, the Prodigal Son!’

In the Tale *The Sabbath Wrecks* the wife is not merely supportive, but is a heroine who rescues her husband after he ignores her warning and goes to sea. Wilson writes:

He went to one boat, which was the property of members of his own congregation, and there he found Agnes Crawford, the daughter of one of his elders, hanging upon the neck of her husband, and their three children also clung around him, and they entreated him not to be guilty of breaking the Sabbath for the sake of perishing gain. But he regarded not their voice; and he kissed his wife and his children, while he laughed at their idle fears. Mr. Simpson beheld the scene with emotion, and approaching the group—“John Crawford,” he exclaimed, addressing the husband, “you may profess to mock, to laugh to scorn the words of a feeble woman; but see that they return not like a consuming fire into your bosom when hope has departed. Is not the Lord of the Sabbath the Creator of the sea as well as of the dry land? Know ye not that ye are now brav-

ing the wrath of him before whom the mighty ocean is a drop, and all space but a span? Will ye, then, glory in insulting his ordinances, and delight in profaning the day of holiness? Will ye draw down everlasting darkness on the Sabbath of your soul? When ye were but a youth, ye have listened to the words of John Knox—the great apostle of our country—ye have trembled beneath their power, and the conviction that they carried with them; and when ye think of those convictions, and contrast them with your conduct this day, does not the word *apostate* burn in your heart? John Crawford, some of your blood have embraced the stake for the sake of the truth, and will ye profane the Sabbath which they sanctified? The Scotsman who openly glories in such a sin, forfeits his claim to the name of one, and publishes to the world that he has no part nor communion with the land that gave him birth. John Crawford, hearken unto my voice, to the voice of your wife, and that of your bairns (whose bringing up is a credit to their mother), and be not guilty of this gross sin." But the fisherman, while he regarded not the supplications of his wife, became sullen at the words of the preacher; and, springing into the boat, seized an oar, and, with his comrades, began to pull from the shore.

He continues:

The spectators were busied carrying the dead, as they were driven on shore, beyond the reach of tide-mark. They had continued their melancholy task for near an hour, when a voice exclaimed—"See! see!—one still lives, and struggles to make the shore!"

All rushed to the spot from whence the voice proceeded, and a young man was perceived, with more than mortal strength, yet labouring in the whirling waves. His countenance was black with despair. His heart panted with suffocating pangs. His limbs buffeted the billows in the strong agony of death, and he strained, with desperate eagerness, towards the projecting point of a black rock. It was now within his grasp, but, in its stead, he clutched the deceitful wave that laughed at his deliverance. He was whirled around it, dashed on it with violence, and again swept back by the relentless surge. He threw out his arms at random, and his deep groans and panting breath were heard through the sea's hoarse voice. He again reached the rock—he grasped, he clung to its tangled sides. A murmur moaned through the multitude. They gazed one upon another. His glazed eyes frowned darkly upon them. Supplication and scorn were mingled in his look. His lips moved, but his tongue uttered no sound. He only gasped to speak—to implore assistance. His strength gave way—the waters rushed around the rock as a whirlpool. He was again uplifted upon the white bosom of the foam, and tossed within a few yards of the wailing but unavailing crowd.

"It is John Crawford!" exclaimed those who were enabled to recognise his features. A loud shriek followed the mention of his name—a female rushed through the crowd, and the next moment the delicate form of Agnes Crawford was seen floating on the wild sea. In an instant, a hundred plunged to her rescue; but, before the scream of horror and surprise raised by the spectators when they beheld her devoted but desperate purpose, had subsided, she

was beyond the reach of all who feared death. Although no feminine amusement, Agnes, from a child, had delighted in buffeting the waters as though she felt at home upon their bosom; and now the strength of inspiration seemed to thrill through her frame. She was hidden from the gaze of the marvelling spectators, and a deep groan crept along the shore. She again appeared, and her fair hand grasped the shoulder of the drowning man! A shout of wild joy rang back on the deserted town. Her father, who was amongst the multitude, fell upon his knees. He clasped his hands together—"Merciful Heaven!" he exclaimed, "Thou who stillest the tempest, and holdest the waters in the hollow of thy hand, protect—protect my child!"

The waters rioted with redoubled fury. Her strength seemed failing, but a smile of hope still lighted up her features, and her hand yet grasped her apparently lifeless burden. Despair again brooded on the countenances of her friends. For a moment, she disappeared amongst the waves; but the next, Agnes Crawford lay senseless on the beach, her arm resting on the bosom of him she had snatched from a watery grave—on the bosom of her husband.

They were borne to their own house, where, in a few minutes, she recovered; but her husband manifested no sign of vitality. All the means within their power, and that they knew, were resorted to, in order to effect his resuscitation. Long and anxiously she wept over him, rubbing his temples and his bosom, and, at length, beneath her hand his breast first began to heave with the returning pulsation of his heart.

"He lives!—he breathes!" she exclaimed; and she sank back in a state of unconsciousness, and was carried from the room. The preacher attended by the bedside, where the unconscious fisherman lay, directing and assisting in the operations necessary for restoring animation.

In a few hours the fisherman awoke from his troubled sleep, which many expected would have been the sleep of death. He raised himself in the bed—he looked around wistfully. Agnes, who had recovered, and returned to the room, fell upon his bosom. "My Agnes!—my poor Agnes!" he cried, gazing wistfully in her face—"but, where—where am I?—and my bairnies, where are they?"

"Here, faither, here!" cried the children, stretching out their little arms to embrace him.

Again he looked anxiously around. A recollection of the past, and a consciousness of the present, fell upon his mind. "Thank God!" he exclaimed, and burst into tears; and when his troubled soul and his agitated bosom had found in them relief, he inquired, eagerly—"But, oh, tell me, how was I saved?"

"John," said the aged elder, the father of Agnes, "ye was saved by the merciful and sustaining power o' that Providence which ye this morning set at nought. But I rejoice to find that your heart is not hardened, and that the awful visitation which has this day filled our coast with widows and with orphans, has not fallen upon you in vain; for ye acknowledge your guilt, and are grateful for your deliverance. Your being saved is naething short o' a miracle. We a' beheld how long and how desperately ye struggled wi'

the raging waves. A scream burst upon my ear—a woman rushed through the crowd—and then, John!—oh, then!"——But here the feelings of the old man overpowered him. He sobbed aloud, and pausing for a few moments, added—"Tell him, some o' ye."

The preacher took up the tale. "Hearken unto me, John Crawford," said he. "Ye have reason, this day, to sorrow, and to rejoice, and to be grateful beyond measure. In the morning, ye mocked my counsel and set at nought my reproof; and as ye sowed so have ye reaped. But, as your faither-in-law has told ye, when your face was recognised from the shore, and your name mentioned, a woman screamed—she rushed through the multitude—she plunged into the boiling sea, and in an instant she was beyond the reach of help!"

"Speak!—speak on!" cried the fisherman eagerly; and he placed his hands on his heaving bosom, and gazed anxiously, now towards the preacher, and again towards his Agnes, who wept upon his shoulder.

"The Providence that had till then sustained you, while your fellow creatures perished around you," added the clergyman, "supported her. She reached you—she grasped your arm. After long struggling, she brought you within a few yards of the shore; a wave overwhelmed you both and cast you upon the beach, with her arm—the arm of your wife that saved you—upon your bosom!"

"Gracious Heaven!" exclaimed the fisherman, pressing his wife to his bosom—"my ain Agnes!—was it you?—was it

you?—my wife!—my saviour!" And he wept aloud, and his children wept also.

But the feelings of the wife and the mother were too strong for words. I will not dwell upon the joy and gratitude of the family to whom the husband and the father had been restored as from the dead. It found a sorrowful contrast in the voice of lamentation and of mourning, which echoed along the coast like the peal of an alarm-bell. The dead were laid in heaps upon the beach, and, on the following day, widows, orphans, parents, and brothers, came from all the fishing towns along the coast, to seek their dead amongst the drowned that had been gathered together; or, if they found them not, they wandered along the shore to seek for them where the sea might have cast them forth. Such is the tale of the Sabbath wrecks—of the lost drave of Dunbar.

What do these poems and this extolling of fictional wives say about the relationship between Wilson and Sarah? Was their marriage one of mutual devotion? Did Sarah have to forgive transgressions by her husband, including perhaps excessive drinking? One can only speculate. As is revealed in the final chapter Wilson's early death left Sarah with only potential earnings from sales of the *Tales* to live on. The positive view of wives and thus of his widow provided in the *Tales* can only have encouraged readers to support her by purchasing her late husband's work.

It is now necessary to consider Wilson's political views as revealed by his editorship of the *Advertiser*.

Chapter Eight: Wilson and Parliamentary Reform

Wilson assumed the editorial post at a key moment in the reform process, i.e. at the stage described above when a third version of the proposed reforms had been passed by the Commons and was being considered by the Lords, who of course had refused to pass the previous bills. As noted above, he immediately increased the intensity of pro-reform rhetoric. Success was essential, he argued, as, while there would be no civil war, as some claimed, if the bill failed, there would be serious consequences for the country. He stated:

That there would be partial riots, and the shedding of blood, and the destruction of property, cannot be doubted.

(B. A. 31st March 1832)

Wilson then questioned the Whig Cabinet's commitment to the reform process as follows:

The majority of them – perhaps – all of them have the hearts of reformers, but they have the consciences of Tories.

(B. A. 14th April 1832)

As regards Earl Grey, he stated:

His Lordship has but one fault – he has not the firmness of action that he has of principle.

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(B. A. 7th April 1832)

He then expressed the hope that Grey was “... honest enough to redeem his pledge to the country”.

The following week he expanded on this theme:

Earl Grey is a reformer from principle – from long and deep-rooted conviction; but he is not a reformer from feeling – he is not a reformer from his sympathies with the nation. He has too much of the would be dignity of the aristocrat; he has too many of his prejudices, to enter with his soul upon the task in which he is engaged and for one hour to forget that he is a Peer, and to act only as a man, and the Minister of England. By saying this we do not mean to question the earnest sincerity of his desire to carry the measure ... But while his principles, his inclination and his duty urge him one way, the prejudices of his station drag him another. And when he would put forth his hand to act, vague and fearful dreams of his order flit before his mind, and paralyse his arm, like troubled thoughts of a seer agitating his frame, He may still conquer, but if he does, it will be as Wellington did at Waterloo – by accident.

(B. A. 14th April 1832)

Wilson continued on the same theme in an editorial the next week, urging the reformers to be resolute:

Reform can have no half-friends – he who is not for it is against it; and they who profess for it a measure of wavering and limited friendship, are more dangerous than its avowed enemies.

(B. A. 21st April 1832)

In the 28th April edition he stridently declared:

The phrases being too much of a reformer or, too zealous for reform, we do not understand ... every friend of reform, from the hard-working mechanic to the humble peasant up to the Premier, has to act as though the whole weight and responsibility of the measure lay on his own shoulders. Believing as we do that a reform in the representation of the people is as necessary for the salvation, the peace, and the well-being of our country as the food we eat for the existence of our bodies, we should hold ourselves traitors to the land of our birth did we withhold any means within our power, whereby its necessity might be urged, and its success promoted.

As this stage he had key 'avowed enemies' in his sights:

Whatever be the law of the legislature or of usage regarding the political power of the Bishops, we know that it is contrary to the spirit and law of the gospel, that its self-denying servants should mingle in the earthly debate of nobles. Not leaving unto Caesar the things that are Caesar's; and we cannot but regard the union of church and state as a disgraceful intercourse.

(B. A. 21st April 1832)

As revealed earlier, anger of the role of the Bishops in the debate was widespread following the anti-reform votes of Bishops in the Lords.

The third version of the reform bill had been passed in the House of Commons by even larger majorities than the earlier versions had enjoyed, but despite Grey's success in persuading some Tory Peers to support the bill this time, it was again blocked in the upper house. Grey had believed that the King would agree to ennoble sufficient Liberal supporters to pass the bill, but when the King refused to implement this action, the Whig government resigned.

Wellington was asked by the King to return to power amongst considerable unrest and even a threat to undermine the Bank of England under the slogan 'To stop the Duke, go for gold'. £1.8 million was withdrawn from the Bank of England in the first days of the run (out of about £7 million worth of gold in the Bank's possession). The National Political Union and other organisations sent petitions to the House of Commons, demanding that MPs withhold supply¹ (i.e. cut off funding to the government) until the House of Lords acquiesced. This highly unsettled period became known as the 'Days of May' and there was so great a level of political agitation that some feared revolution. William Cobbett reported that:

Every man you met seemed to be convulsed with rage.

Some demonstrations even called for the abolition of the nobility and of the monarchy.

Wilson was concerned that the King was being advised by the wrong people and wrote of the "... blackness of the secret and deep perfidy which poisoned the Royal ear and alarmed the royal breast" (B. A. 26th May 1832). He was thus relieved when he was able to report that, since Wellington was unable to form a government despite promising moderate reform, "... the King yielded to the wisdom and necessity of again sending for Earl Grey ... and we did rejoice when even the prince of corrupt practices [Wellington] confessed that

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Loss_of_supply

William the Fourth was still a reformer in his heart, and determined to grant reform to his people” (B. A. 19th May 1832). Throughout his editorship Wilson remained suspicious of the King’s advisers, writing the following year that the King is “... daily, continually and only surrounded by Lords and by Ladies, who are practising every way to overthrow his present government and restore the days of Toryism, corruption and extravagance ... our hopes are not strengthened by reflecting upon who are the men whom the King delights to honour” (B. A. 22nd June 1833).

In 1835 when Melbourne, who succeeded Grey as leader of the Whigs, was returning as Prime Minister, after also having briefly been forced by the King to step aside, Wilson stated:

Before he again forms a government it is necessary that he should have the assurance of his Sovereign – as a Sovereign and as a man – that he shall not again be used as a mere cat’s paw by the court or anti-reform faction to serve their purpose, and that he shall not again be dismissed whenever they may imagine that it will suit the convenience of themselves again to attempt to resume the reins of power.

(B. A. 18th April 1835)

Of Melbourne’s previous period as Prime Minister, he declared:

... we say that it has been abundantly evident that he was called to the premiership, merely to suit the convenience of the court intriguing and back stairs party, and he was kicked from office, as the saying goes, without ‘rhyme or reason’, when their friends thought that they perceived

an opportunity of once more returning to their feasts of loaves and fishes.

At this stage Wilson expressed some concern for his position given his criticism of the King, thus:

We know very well that this is what is called a delicate subject to write about and that a very few years ago, it would have been a dangerous one – and perhaps it is not a safe one to say much upon even yet – but it is the duty of a public Journalist to keep his readers alive to their duty and to a knowledge of all that concerns them.

(B. A. 18th July 1835)

He was however writing when criticism of the monarchy was in fact common-place. For example, when George IV died, a *Times* editorial stated that his character “... rose little higher than animal intelligence”. It was thus no wonder perhaps that the new King, the late King’s brother, although considerably exaggerating the power of the newspapers, complained to Earl Grey that “... a poisonous press, almost unchecked, guides, excites and at the same time controls public opinion”. Unlike the Editor of the *Times*, Wilson had in fact actually praised the late King in a poem entitled *A Poem on the Death of our Lamented Late Sovereign*, extracts from which were published in the *Advertiser* on July 24th 1830.

Despite his misgivings Wilson continued to criticise ‘a court cabal’, writing:

Now we are no particular observers of the records of Court movements and Court parties; we care as little for them as they who move in them care for us, of whom they never heard; yet we have not been able to avoid observing

that amongst all the guests at the Royal table every week never have we found the name of one of His Majesty's principal Ministers – never have we read of them as sleeping, or being invited to sleep in any of the Royal palaces. There the dinner guests and the sleeping guests have ever been Conservatives^[lxviii]. There is always a good deal of truth in proverbs and one of them says that 'We always judge of people by the company they keep', and taking that criticism, we are forced to believe that the Royal household is composed of Tories.

(B. A. 18th July 1835)

He concluded with his view of the role of the Monarch, thus:

As an individual he may belong to a party, as a King he belongs to the country.

Wilson is critical of earlier English Kings in his fiction. It was shown above that in two of his Tales Wilson is critical of Charles II, while in another he is sympathetic to the Scottish King Alexander III. In his Tale entitled *Squire Ben* he suggests that on one occasion there was not unanimous support for George III in London:

He was returning from the House of Lords; crowds were following the royal procession, and thousands of spectators lined Parliament Street, some showing their loyalty by shouts and the waving of hats and of handkerchiefs, and others manifesting their discontent in sullen silence, or half-suppressed murmurs.

Jess, Ben’s future wife, subsequently obtains a pardon for the narrator. Wilson does not explain how she managed to persuade the King merely stating that:

I need not dwell upon particulars ...

Further, in his Tale *Archy Armstrong* he is being sarcastic about another King when he writes:

Scarcely had his majesty recovered from his demonstration of bravery ...

This is after James I (or James VI of Scotland) was startled by the blast of a cannon which he had fired.

Wellington, the King’s favourite, having failed to form a government, the King finally reluctantly consented to Grey’s request to create sufficient Peers to enable the passage of the Bill. Given this development, enough opposing Peers relented and by agreeing to abstain from further votes, they allowed the legislation to pass in the House of Lords on 4th June 1832. Thus the King did not need to create new Peers and the bill finally received the Royal Assent² on 7th June 1832, thereby becoming law. The Act applied only in England and Wales; the Irish Reform Act 1832³ brought similar changes to Ireland and the Scottish Reform Act 1832⁴ to north of the border.

Wellington complained that “the government of England is destroyed” and Wordsworth charged the government with “... committing a greater political crime than any committed in history”, but the reform was a triumph for Grey who had defeated both the reactionaries and the Radicals and had restored faith in representative government and had strengthened the House of Commons in rela-

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Assent

3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_Reform_Act_1832

4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Reform_Act_1832

tion to the Lords. He is commemorated for his efforts by the famous statue in Newcastle upon Tyne (see below). Of course, he is also famous for the tea specially blended for him and for his long-lasting affair with the Duchess of Devonshire, by whom he had a child. Canadine (2017) sums up the success of Grey and his colleagues thus:

The Whigs' achievement in constitutional reform was as genuine as their wish to stave off revolution, and they achieved both objectives by carrying what seemed to be a carefully judged and brilliantly calculated measure, which was both the most that Parliament would grudgingly tolerate and the least that the people would be prepared to accept.

Despite Wellington's gloomy pronouncement not a great deal had changed. The landed aristocracy remained in control of Parliament and the power of the middle classes remained limited. As Wilson shrewdly observed:

We have entrusted the keeping of our rights to a government or constitution, in which the aristocracy and democracy are blended.

(B. A 6th September 1834)

Britain was not a democracy in the modern sense but politicians now had to pay more attention to public opinion and the parties had to develop organisations to mobilise voters. Wilson was delighted about the enhanced role of public opinion and stated:

A British government is no longer a self-acting body ... without the lever of public opinion to give it motion it is inanimate – an inert mass.

(B. A. 19th July 1834)

He had earlier declared that “... the people discovered also, that, without them at its back, with right good will to help it forward, government is a mere shadow, or a feeble tyranny” (B. A. 2nd June 1832). Later he argued:

The governed now look to the conduct of their governors and they know that they have a right to do so.

(B. A. 30th August 1834)

John Bright argued thirty years later:

It was not a good bill but it was a great bill when it was passed.

The act had merely extended the vote to 7% of the adult male population, increasing the size of the electorate by approximately half a million voters. The working class, women and Jews remained without the vote. The exclusion of the working class led to the development of Chartism as the vehicle for the campaign for universal suffrage. The Chartists argued that working people had been manipulated and misled by middle class reformers in order to provide the groundswell for reform and had been abandoned when the bill was passed. E. P. Thompson (1963) argued that following the 1832 reform the British middle-class were “... more conservative, more wary of the large idealistic causes (except, perhaps, those of other nations), more narrowly self-interested than in any other industrialised nation”.

The 56 smallest Boroughs were abolished and the next 30 smallest boroughs each lost one of their two MPs. 65 new county seats and 65 new borough seats were created in England and Wales. 41

Large English towns, including Manchester, Bradford and Birmingham, obtained representation for the first time, but there was a lack of balance between the north and the south of England, with the former still under-represented. Differences in the size of constituencies remained and the average size of the English borough electorate was under 900, those under 900 returning almost half of the 658 MPs. Many constituencies remained in the gift of the great landowners, including Newark, where a young William Ewart Gladstone was returned in 1832.

The power of the rural landlords in fact increased as there were more county seats and the previous 40-shilling freeholder qualification was retained, while the vote was given to prosperous tenants and leaseholders who could be influenced in their electoral behaviour by the land-owners. The rural districts in fact remained largely under the control of the squires until county councils were created in 1888.

In borough constituencies all male householders living in properties worth at least £10 a year were given the right to vote, a measure which introduced to the boroughs a standardised form of franchise for the first time. Existing borough electors retained a lifetime right to vote, however they had qualified, provided their qualification existed on the last day of July in the year for which they claimed, and provided they had resided for six months in, or within seven miles of, the borough in which they were electors. In those boroughs, like Berwick, which had Freeman electors, voting rights were also to be enjoyed by future Freemen. Sons of Burgesses were admitted at 21, while others joined by being apprentices to Burgesses for 7 years.

The act introduced a system of voter registration⁵ to be administered by the Overseers of the Poor⁶ in every parish and township. A system of special courts was established to review disputes relating

5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Voter_registration

6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Overseer_of_the_Poor

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to voter qualifications. The act also authorised the use of multiple polling



Grey's Monument in Newcastle upon Tyne

The Inscription reads as follows:

THIS COLUMN WAS ERECTED IN 1838

TO COMMEMORATE

THE SERVICES RENDERED TO HIS COUNTRY BY

CHARLES EARL GREY K.G.

WHO, DURING AN ACTIVE POLITICAL CAREER OF

NEARLY HALF A CENTURY

WAS THE CONSTANT ADVOCATE OF PEACE

AND THE FEARLESS AND CONSISTENT CHAMPION OF

CIVIL AND RELIGIOUS LIBERTY.
 HE FIRST DIRECTED HIS EFFORTS TO THE AMEND-
 MENT
 OF THE REPRESENTATION OF THE PEOPLE IN 1792,
 AND WAS THE MINISTER
 BY WHOSE ADVICE, AND UNDER WHOSE GUIDANCE,
 THE GREAT MEASURE OF PARLIAMENTARY REFORM
 WAS AFTER AN ARDUOUS AND PROTRACTED STRUG-
 GLE
 SAFELY AND TRIUMPHANTLY ACHIEVED
 IN THE YEAR 1832.

places within the same constituency and limited the duration of polling to two days (formerly, polls could remain open for up to forty days).

Following the passing of the reform act Berwick retained its entitlement to two MPs and there were then, of course, two types of voters, i.e. resident Freemen and '£10 voters'. In 1832 the constituency was extended to include Tweedmouth and Spittal, the total population in 1835 being approximately 13,000. Despite the addition of these areas, the size of the electorate declined after 1832 and did not rise above the pre-1832 figure until the second Reform Act in 1867, with the average size of the electorate being approximately 700, representing approximately 5% of the population. One reason for this decline was of course the abolition of the non-resident vote, another was that many of the ten-pound householders enfranchised after 1832 were already entitled to vote through the possession of the Freeman franchise (Wickham 2002).

At this stage Wilson was not concerned with the limitations of the act and he responded to the news of its passage thus:

Let the Isles rejoice! – Let the nations be glad! – the people have conquered! – the bill is passed! ...

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(B. A. 9th June 1832)

He continued:

His majesty it was anticipated, would give his Royal Assent to the measure in person. We hope he has such a mark of personal attachment to their great measure, the people had a right to expect from William the reformer.

Apparently forgetting his earlier criticisms of the government, and of Grey in particular, he stated:

To the Ministry is owing the remembrance of ages, but chiefly to the venerable old Premier is the sum of all gratitude due.

The following month he went further:

No man ever held a prouder, a more elevated position in his country than that which Earl Grey now occupies. He stands in the midst of immortality ... the beloved of millions.

(B. A. 14th July 1832)

Prior to this praising of Grey, he had however earlier returned to criticism of the Monarch when in fact he failed to attend Parliament for the ceremony of Royal Assent of the Bill, thus:

We regret that it was so – Britain and Ireland regret it; it deepens and casts an unpleasant remembrance into the general joy; its effect is like a sad face in the midst of good company; - for the people were anxious to hail their sovereign as a reformer in heart and in soul.

(B. A. 6th June 1832)

Wilson was delighted to report on the Berwick Reform Jubilee which was held on Wednesday 8th August 1832 to celebrate the passage of the legislation. The entire day was observed as a holiday, with processions in the afternoon and illuminations in the evening and no doubt he participated fully in the activities.

By the end of July 1832 however Wilson had stated:

The reform is not passed – *it is to be begun!*

(B. A. 28th July 1832)

The previous week he had similarly declared that Grey's task was not complete:

His consistency, and the great work of reform have enthroned him in the hearts of his countrymen, but it is a throne which can only be retained by his continuing to be the champion of popular causes.

(B. A. 14th July 1832)

For Wilson the task for reformers in the future was to utilise the electoral system to ensure the implementation of progressive policies, otherwise, he argued, the Tories "... will wound you even unto death with the weapon of war which ye have now triumphantly won" (B. A. 6th June 1832). Householders and Freemen, he argued, must aid "... the renovation of this country. Let them contemplate the mass of evils which for more than half a century Tory governments have been accumulating and pressing upon the industry and energies of the nation, till public confidence and credit broke down,

and the wheels of trade and commerce stood still” (B. A. 28th July 1832).

Grey’s period of office finally ended in 1834 with the controversy over the Irish policies of the Whigs. The proposed reforms of the Irish Church led to the resignation of four of his colleagues. Then after further conflict over the renewal of the Irish Coercion Act, when in July 1834 his close colleague, the Chancellor Lord Althorp resigned, Grey decided to retire and he lived happily at Howick for eleven more years.

William Lamb, second Viscount Melbourne, then became PM. One colleague thought him “... lax in morals, indifferent in religion and very loose and pliant in politics”. Melbourne was certainly notoriously laid-back. When first asked to become Prime Minister he declared it “a damned bore” and apparently his main concern was that the post might involve “too much work”. Having accepted the responsibility he would often refuse to allow his cabinet colleagues to leave the room, insisting “I’m damned if I know what we agreed on. We must all say the same thing”.

When Melbourne assumed the office, Wilson stated that he knew ‘little of him’ but it was clear that what he did know he did not like. He wrote:

We have never been able to forget that somewhat more than two years ago, in defending the reform bill, he said *‘He did not expect it would do much good, but it would quiet – it would pacify the people.’* Now if the reform bill was to do nothing but to quiet the people – if it was to be merely a sop thrown down to them – to amuse them – to pacify them – to cheat them – why then the measure was arrant mockery – it was a bone not worth a beggar’s acceptance. The declaration of his Lordship showed his ignorance of

the nature of reform ... we trust his Lordship has better knowledge of the subject now.

(B. A. 19th July 1834)

By August 1834, however, he preferred Melbourne to Grey and wrote as follows:

Much as we admire and esteem Earl Grey, and grateful as we are to him for what he has performed, we must acknowledge that the Ministry is much improved since his retirement. There is more straight-forwardness and manliness in their actions and declarations. Lord Melbourne bears himself bravely, and very far exceeds the expectations we had formed of him. There is an uprightness, a firmness, a plainness and a decision about what he says, to which we have not been accustomed to in a minister. It required such a man to deal with the Lords, conciliation was out of the question.

(B. A. 16th August 1834)

As regards Grey, he had previously stated:

His name and his fame are a portion of that country's history. They will be recorded on its brightest and most sacred pages.

(B. A. 2nd August 1834)

He continued however by stating that "... latterly a degree of timidity and a useless desire of conciliation marked his policy".

When it was announced that Grey would pass through Berwick in September of that year, Wilson told a meeting called to discuss how to welcome the former Premier that a mere address to Grey was not enough. He proposed the following resolution which was passed:

I propose therefore – ‘that it is resolved by this meeting, that the inhabitants and trades of the town, shall form a procession to go out and welcome Earl Grey on his entering the town, and that they escort him from what is opposite what is called the Field Grieve’s house.

(B. A. 13th September 1834)

Alderman How praised Grey and supported Wilson’s suggestion which was adopted.

Of course Wilson wrote about the visit. He stated:

Throughout, the scene was the most striking and imposing we ever witnessed in Berwick...

(B. A. 27th September 1834)

In the same article he estimated that the crowd listening to Grey’s speech was between 10,000 and 12,000 people.

After revealing that Grey looked old, Wilson commented on the speech, as follows:

The speech was delivered in his best style, but there was nothing very important, or very striking in the sentiments, nor generally speaking, did we think them particularly necessary or applicable to the audience he was addressing. It brought to our mind the idea of an affectionate teacher

addressing his pupils upon common truths, who was glad to find them good boys, and hoped they would continue such.

He continued:

We think the necessity of forbearance and extreme moderation in pushing forward reform was too much dwelt upon, and what was calculated to produce an effect the opposite of what was intended.

In the evening of the visit there was a dinner held in the King's Arms (Grey had left the town by then) during which Mr Thomas Chartres (soon to be appointed Mayor) toasted the liberty of the press and the work of John Mackay Wilson. The latter reported that:

The chairman regretted that he could not give a toast which was usually given, - the Mayor and Corporation, from their having taken no part as a body in the proceedings of the day - and he begged to give the health of Dr How and other burgesses present.

Obviously that it was not an official Corporation event reflected the division within that body between pro- and anti-reformers even two years after the passage of the legislation.

Wilson was obviously unimpressed with Grey's speech but he did publish his brother's *Sonnets to Earl Grey* in the same edition. As regards the festival held in Grey's honour in Edinburgh, Wilson asked "... where was Professor Wilson, - where was James Hogg?". In fact, both were anti-reformers and thus would probably have felt unable to attend such an event.

Nationally, both pro-reformers and anti-reformers saw the fire in the parliament building in October 1834 as symbolic. Wilson com-

mented that “... we see no great cause for lamentation. A conflagration has rendered new houses of parliament necessary, - the representatives of the people should have done so long ago ... they were in every way unworthy of the nation” (B. A. 25th October 1834). Of St Stephen’s Chapel, where MPs sat, he stated quite correctly that:

It was confined, ill-ventilated and unhealthy, and not capable of affording comfortable accommodation to more than half of the people’s representatives.

According to Wilson the fire was not a “national calamity” but a “national benefit”.

Post-reform the first requirement for Wilson was for a House of Commons dominated by reformers to be returned at the 1832 general election which Grey called to take advantage of the popularity of the Great Reform Act. This time there were two reform candidates in Berwick as the sitting MPs, Beresford and Blake, were challenged by Rufane Shaw Donkin, a Whig. Donkin came from a military family and was the eldest son of General⁷ Robert Donkin. He had become a distinguished soldier himself in 1821, being appointed a Lieutenant-General⁸ and a Knight Grand Cross of the Royal Guelphic Order⁹.

Wilson had wanted Berwick to lose its reputation for corruption in the post-reform situation. He wrote:

Formerly when speaking of this borough it has been written against it – Here the interest of the treasury generally prevails.

7. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/General>

8. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lieutenant-general>

9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Knight_Grand_Cross_of_the_Royal_Guelphic_Order

He continued that, instead, he wanted the phrase “... here political honesty always prevails” to be predominant (B. A. 28th July 1832).

He continued on this theme in September 1832 as follows:

Will you permit the name of your native place to be obnoxious to the

very nostrils of honest men? - Will you have it written in corruption,

and hackneyed round the land as a standing and evil jest with Gatton^[lxix] and Grampound^[lxx]?

(B. A. 15th September 1832)

For Wilson it was only the Tories who were corrupt and he criticised Tory corruption, thus:

The gold of the Conservative club is sent throughout the country, that the electors of Britain may be purchased...

(B. A. 29th October 1832)

Donkin and Blake would, he had declared, be spending much less money in the election than Beresford and he stated that “...it is our conviction, neither of the reform candidates will leave the town after the election five hundred pounds poorer than they last week entered it” (B. A. 15th September 1832).

The result of the 1832 General Election in Berwick was:

Rufane Shaw Donkin 371

Francis Blake 367

Marcus Beresford 345

Wilson was delighted that the Tory was defeated, telling the electors that “... you have elected the members to serve in Parliament whose desire is to serve the country, not themselves, and who are determined to apply the axe to corruption, and the pruning knives to all the parts of our institutions that have shot into rankness” (B. A. 15th December 1832). Beresford, who had had previously won three elections since 1826, and had been active in supporting Berwick interests, had suffered because the support of the new £10 voters almost all went to the candidates who had supported reform (Wickham 2002).

According to Wickham (2002) men in manufacture, agriculture and retail were firmly behind Blake and Donkin. He points to the significance of the opposition of Publicans and Brewers to the Tory Beer Act of 1830, which had introduced free trade in the sale of beer as a significant factor in encouraging those in the beer trade to support the Whigs. He comments:

While all groups favoured the two Reform candidates, the group most in favour of change was the drink interest, which cast 83.3 per cent of its votes for Sir Francis Blake and Sir Rufane Donkin.

Despite Wilson’s claim of limited expenditure by Donkin and Blake, in fact it was reported that both Whig and Tory candidates gave a considerable amount of money to the electors, especially towards the close of the poll on the second day of voting, when “...large sums were asked and given for votes”. For example, the Tory *Newcastle Journal* alleged that one man had received £15 for his vote. This newspaper also insisted that Donkin’s election had cost him £1,500. It was in fact impossible to be elected in a contested election without considerable expenditure, thus in the election of 1835 Donkin spent “immense sums”, Bradshaw, the Tory candidate, “pulled out” a small

amount, while Blake, who blamed his defeat on bribery by Bradshaw, was “cleaned out” (Wickham 2002).

Donkin himself was defeated at Berwick in 1837, paying the price for not supporting the interests of the Freemen as he had promised and even though he had given “... large sums as much as £25 for votes”. As Surveyor General of the Ordinance he had also been able to offer posts in the Customs, Excise and Navy. One elector apparently wanted his son’s post in the customs “signed, sealed and delivered” before pledging his vote (*Berwick and Kelso Warder* March 1837).

Donkin had a number of interests outside politics. He was one of the original fellows of the Royal Geographical Society¹⁰ and was a member of many other learned bodies. He was elected as MP for Sandwich in 1839 and held that seat until he committed suicide at Southampton in 1841. At that time he was a senior officer in the 11th Regiment of Foot¹¹.

Wilson must have been aware of the notorious 1826 election in the neighbouring Northumberland constituency when the contest was a bitter four-way affair and became famous for being costly for the Tory *and* Whig candidates. Lord Howick, the Whig candidate and son of Earl Grey, hated the independent Whig Beaumont, who was more radical than him. When Beaumont called Howick supporter, John George Lambton, a liar they fought a bloodless duel on the beach at Bamburgh Castle. Howick withdrew on the twelfth day of the contest and was swiftly gifted the ‘rotten borough’ of Winchelsea. The two Tories triumphed. Beaumont had spent £40000 (approximately £4 million in current value), Howick £20,000 (£2 million) and the Tories £30,000 each (£3 million). Beaumont reputedly spent £11,000 in public houses in Alnwick

10. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Royal_Geographical_Society

11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/11th_Regiment_of_Foot

Ward alone, and more than £5,000 on similar entertainment in Newcastle, where many of the county electors lived.

Wilson was disappointed that, in the post-reform context, bribery remained rife. In March 1834 he had declared:

The reform bill though a great and a good measure, is sadly deficient in many of its parts ... to be complete it must also render elections pure and honest.

(B. A. 29th March 1834)

He continued on this theme early in the following year, thus:

... the needy wretches who only regard their votes as articles for sale, and who dispose of them to the highest bidder, are finding a market for their shameful merchandise.

(B. A. 3rd January 1835)

He stated later that month, thus:

The reform bill destroyed many rotten boroughs and to a considerable extent it purified others, but it did not root up and destroy the ‘seeds of rottenness’. A portion of them were still left to germinate in the midst of their abominations and to infect the healthy plants that were placed amongst them.

(B. A. 31st January 1835)

Wilson was delighted when action against corruption was taken by the Whig government. Thus, he wrote:

No proceedings of the reformed Parliament has given us as much pleasure as the determination they have evinced to punish the corrupt slaves of Liverpool and Warwick.

(B. A. 8th March 1834)

He continued:

... the falsely called Freemen of these places, show that they are rotten, body and soul and all-steeped, saturated in bare-faced bribery.

Wilson called for sterner action, asking for punishment for those who gave bribes in addition to those who accepted them, writing "... those who gave them or caused them to be given, should also be forever disqualified from sitting in either house of parliament" (B. A. 15th March 1834).

Because of the reform he concluded quite correctly that, as noted above, in the counties landlords had maintained their power. He also pointed out that in fact some landlords had increased their power by taking advantage of the reform by implementing the following practice:

A landlord, if he is so minded, can command as many votes as his estate is capable of being divided into ten pound fractions upon paper. There perhaps is not a county in all England or Scotland, in which this scandalous, infamous and guilty practice has not been resorted to. In some counties, it has been carried to the most daring extent and fictitious paper votes have obtained majorities.

(B. A. 31st January 1835)

He continued by stating that the Reform Act was a “dead letter” because “... enemies of the bill are rendering it to no effect ... a few men exercise the same control as a puppet showman does over his pictures and the votes are given mechanically – slavishly – in whatever way the owners of the puppets pull the strings”. The previous week he had concluded:

Corruption has been open, gross and disgusting. Intimidation has walked abroad, unashamed, glorying in its strength.

(B. A. 24th January 1835)

He was correct, but he provided only evidence of Tory corruption, while corruption was practised in fact by both parties after the Great Reform Act, as it had been prior to its enactment. Gash (1977) writes,

Those candidates and agents who hoped that the Reform Act would put an end to electoral corruption were soon disillusioned. The electors in general still attached a financial value to their vote and exerted an irresistible influence on the candidates to continue the old methods.

Similarly, Hanham (1972) comments:

Many electors, accustomed to electoral corruption before 1832, expected it to continue, and would not vote unless they were given drink or money or both. Others quite openly offered themselves to the highest bidder – with increased party activity and more contested elections – corruption actually increased.

According to O'Leary (1962), the "normal" price of a vote during the elections after reform ranged from £1 to £10 in most boroughs and post-reform Berwick conformed to this pattern, although during the 1832 general election the *Newcastle Journal* alleged that one man had received £15 for his vote and at the same election another voter demanded £50 to vote for Beresford, but when he was offered only £35 by the Tory agent, William McGall, he refused it. The same voter later agreed to accept £35, but by then Beresford had effectively lost the contest and the vote was of no use. In 1852 Berwick votes were being sold for between £1 and £6; while at the 1859 by-election they fetched between £2 and £5 (Wickham 2002).

Following the election petition of 1852 which resulted in the election of that year being declared void, Thomas Phinn, the Liberal member for Bath, said in the Commons that it was the opinion of people acquainted with elections in Berwick that it is "...of no use going down to Berwick unless you are prepared to pay the freemen all round". He also said he believed that corruption in Berwick was quite as notorious as that of Sudbury (where in 1835 it was estimated that the total amount spent on bribery averaged over £30 per voter) and St. Albans, two towns which had been dis-enfranchised after a Royal Commission had found evidence of gross bribery and corruption. In fact, in 1826, following the challenge to the 1826 election, Grey had confided to his son-in-law, Howick, that he "... had rather hoped that a complete exposure of the infamous corruption of ... [Berwick] might have led to its disfranchisement" (the Grey Papers).

Treating also continued at the inns where the candidates had their committee rooms, viz. the two coaching inns, the King's Arms and the Hen and Chickens. Throughout the election these public houses would be kept open, so that voters could obtain any refreshment they desired. As usual in 1837 the then Editor of the *Berwick Advertiser* pointed the finger at the Tories, stating:

How far these rumours of Tory treating are correct we cannot pretend to say, yet we are inclined to believe they are not altogether without foundation: the old freemen who are seen rolling about the streets throughout the day and by whose well-known and melodious voices the slumbers of the peaceful and sober inhabitants of the borough are not infrequently disturbed - must be kept moist at some one's expence [Sic] . . .

Two weeks later the same newspaper reported that several drunken voters, having voted, "... had to be rather ceremoniously handed to the door by the officers, bellowing 'Holmes and Hodgson for ever!'" These were of course the names of the Tory candidates. In 1852 the *Berwick and Kelso Warder* however reported on Whig treating by one individual to encourage support for the Whig candidate, thus:

... who proves his attachment to tee-totalism by filling every elector he can clutch beastly drunk, and has then the blasphemous audacity to attempt the administration of an oath to his inebriated victims that they will vote for Stapleton, no matter how sacred may be their pledges to either of the other three candidates . . .

(*Berwick and Kelso Warder* 21st May 1852)

Rather than their tarnished image improving under the new electoral system, the notoriety of the electors of Berwick's actually seems, in fact, to have increased in the years after 1832. Consequently, there were petitions in 1837, 1852, 1857, 1859 (twice), 1863 and 1880. One of these (1852) led to a re-election, whilst in the closely fought by-election of August 1859 a dispute resulted in a Royal Commission "... to inquire into the corrupt practices at Berwick-up-

on-Tweed". The Commission discovered the amounts expended at some of Berwick's earlier elections. In 1841, for instance, Matthew Forster spent £2,500, "... owing, he said, to the means resorted to by his opponent" and in 1837 Richard Hodgson spent almost as much and admitted that his election in 1841 was also an expensive one. Finally, at the notorious 1852 Berwick election Forster spent £2,000, while John Stapleton, his fellow Liberal, spent £2,900 (Wickham 2002). Unlike Sudbury, St. Albans, Great Yarmouth, Lancaster, Reigate, Totnes, Beverley, Bridgwater, Cashel, Sligo, Macclesfield and Sandwich, Berwick was not however dis-enfranchised.

According to Wilson, intimidation and corruption were the reasons that the Tories improved their position nationally in the 1835 general election. He stated:

The Tories through intimidation and the old practices of corruption, have succeeded in returning more of their party.

(B. A. 3rd January 1835)

Later that month he wrote:

The Tory landlord is exercising his influence over the tenant – the employer over his servants – they are dictating to them how they must vote – even the tradesman and the shopkeeper are threatened ...

(B. A. 31st January 1835)

Interestingly, in his Tale *The Persecuted Elector or, Passages from the Life of Simon Gourlay* Wilson writes of the electoral dilemma of his central character, thus:

So the lad ran wi' the note to the inn, and did as I ordered him. But, oh! I had an awfu' nicht wi' Mrs. Gourlay. There wasna an ill name that she could get her tongue about that she didna ca' me. 'Silly Simon!' and 'Simple Simon!' were the gentlest terms that she used. I was ashamed to show my face at the door, for I was the toun's talk. But, still, notwithstanding a' the persecution I was sufferin', I was in a swither hoo to act, for I was determined, if possible, to abide by my worthy faither's advice, an' vote wi' the winning side. However, it was hard to say which would be the winning side; for, though Mr. Wood was a great favourite wi' a majority o' the working-classes, and even wi' a number o' the council, an' though he was very liberal an' lavish wi' his money, as I have said, yet there was a great number o' respectable folk took a very warm interest for Captain Oliver. There were a vast o' my best customers on baith sides, and it was really a very delicate matter for me to decide hoo to act—for ye will observe, I am the last man in the world that would offend onybody, and especially a person that I'm obliged to. Well, just while I was pondering the matter, and considering in which way my worthy faither would have acted under similar circumstances, I received a letter in the name o' three or four led-dies, from whom I had, first and last, received a great deal o' siller—and who, at the same time, were gey deeply in my books—and they plainly informed, that, unless I voted for Captain Oliver, they never, while they lived, would buy a sixpence worth o' goods in my shop again. I thought it was very hard for a respectable merchant and a toun-councillor to be so persecuted and beset; and just while I was sitting very sair perplexed, in comes the postman wi' another letter. It was frae a Glasgow manufacturer that

I had lang had dealings wi'; and he trusted that I would oblige him by voting for his friend, Mr. Wood; or, if not, that I would make it convenient to pay off his bill within three days, or that he would find it necessary to adopt means to obtain payment.

In addition to turning a blind eye to Whig bribery and treating, Wilson also ignored anti-Tory physical intimidation. Earlier the public nature of voting and the attendance of non-electors at the vote were described. As the popular candidates were invariably Whigs (later Liberals), this meant that voting could be an intimidating experience for those who voted Tory.

With the creation of a Tory newspaper in the town in 1835 accounts of such intimidation were subsequently published. The *Berwick and Kelso Warder* disclosed that physical threats were sometimes used by gangs of hired bullies. This happened at the notoriously corrupt Berwick election of 1859, when Ironworkers from Tweedmouth and Spittal gathered round one of the polling booths, hissing the Conservative voters and cheering the Liberals. After a while the Ironworkers began to hustle and manhandle the Conservatives to prevent them from reaching the booth.

In 1863 it was alleged that "a number of roughs, strangers to the place" were brought into town to intimidate Conservatives on the hustings and in 1865 a large group of Scotsmen "kept up a perpetual howling" at those who recorded their votes for the Conservatives; while intimidation among neighbours allegedly "... prevented many respectable people from voting as they desired". Such was the situation in Tweedmouth and Spittal that the *Warder* maintained "... a man can hardly venture to vote for a Conservative without exposing his life, and certainly his property, to danger of attack and destruction!" (*Berwick and Kelso Warder* 26th June 1863).

Initially, the solution to the problem of corruption for Wilson was the abolition of canvassing, i.e. the period during which the candidates solicited the votes of electors. He wrote:

... we hate canvassing because it is the parent of bribery, and if there were no canvassing bribery would not exist and we hate it because from it springs all intimidation, all undue influence, all persecution on account of principles, all political bickering between friends and neighbours ... Some say, and we have said, ‘Down with the Tories’ – but put down canvassing and you will hear no more of the Tories. Let electors unite together and form themselves into a society, or societies, and let the governing principle of such a society be, that they will give a vote to no man, nor make any promise until they go to the hustings.

Render it a punishable offence for any individual to solicit a vote either for himself or another person.

(B. A. 31st January 1835)

He continued:

If there is to be any canvassing at all, it ought naturally to be that the *elector* should solicit the *elect*.

Similarly, in 1832 Thomas Babington Macaulay (himself an MP for a rotten borough) wrote:

The practice of begging for votes is, as it seems to me, absurd,

pernicious, and altogether at variance with the true principles of

representative government. The suffrage of an elector ought not to be asked or to be given as a personal favour. It is as much for the interest of constituents to choose well as it can be for the interest of a candidate to be chosen. To request an honest man to vote according to his conscience is superfluous. To request him to vote against his conscience is an insult. The practice of canvassing is quite reasonable under a system under which men are sent to Parliament to serve themselves. It is the height of absurdity under a system under which men are sent to Parliament to serve the public.

By 1834 Wilson supported triennial Parliaments arguing that even a reformed Parliament "... will not for seven years maintain the uprightness and fidelity with which it began its career" (B. A. 20th October 1832). Significantly by then he was also advocating a secret ballot:

The ballot strikes at all the evils of the present system – it is the shield of principle. It will protect the honest, it will be a defence around those who are persecuted – it will render useless the arts of corruption – it will destroy the unhallowed power of the political persecutor, and if it does not altogether deter the guilty, it will render them less guilty in action, than they are now.

(B. A. 7th February 1835)

While Wilson thought £10 was too high a qualification for voting, he believed universal suffrage could not be introduced "... until diffusion of knowledge has made greater progress" (B. A. 29th De-

ember 1832). Wilson had a high regard for education. When he asked why there was no rural unrest in Scotland, he had the answer:

Every sound thinker will at once give credit to that education - literary and religious, which is afforded to the lower classes.

(B. A. 30th August 1834)

According to Wilson all men should seek political enlightenment. He stated:

We have no liking for political wranglers who carry their politics in every society, and who would vilify or persecute all who may differ from them in their principles, but we have as little liking for the good easy man, who contentedly tells you that he ‘never troubles his head about politics’ and who wisely adds that ‘he thinks the less they are meddled with the better’ ...

Wilson instead argued that “... political knowledge is interesting to every one and it is the duty of every one to endeavour to acquire it”.

Newspapers potentially had a key role in this diffusion of knowledge. Thus, earlier, echoing Godwin and Wage cited earlier, he had stated:

The invention of printing is perhaps the greatest blessing that art has conferred upon mankind, but in proportion as it is the greatest benefit they have enjoyed, so above all others has it been greatly abused. A people possessing the freedom of the press can never become the slaves of their own rulers ... it is the watchman of the nation and the

guardian of the nation's rights ... the newspaper press exercises the most powerful influence upon political opinions, therefore knowledge and downright honesty ought to be the chief objects of the conduct of every journal. This however is not the case.

(B. A. 28th September 1833)

The following year he wrote:

... a wider diffusion of political information, divested of party prejudices, is indispensably necessary. We do not regard newspapers however as the proper vehicles by which such information is to be conveyed – they may assist, but it ought to form a part of the education of our youth, that they may become ‘men who know their rights and knowing dare maintain’.

(B. A. 30th August 1834)

The problem for Wilson was of course the rhetoric of the Radical and Tory press, the latter merely being “... hired hack and mere lick-spittle of the aristocratic or Tory faction” (B. A. 28th September 1833). Later he stated that he preferred the term ‘oligarchical press’ to ‘High Tory or Conservative press’ (B. A. 15th August 1835).

As noted above, the Reform Act had introduced a registration process for electors and a system of Registration Courts to adjudicate appeals where the entitlement to vote was challenged. Although registration preceded the election proper, it was a vital stage in the electoral process, for unless an elector's name was entered in the electoral register he was not entitled to vote. The task of compiling the register fell to the Parochial Overseer, who was the only official who knew

which properties were occupied and which householders had paid their rates. The Overseer's list was then sent to the Town Clerk who published it together with the list of Freeman voters.

Unfortunately the registration process was time-consuming and cost money (initially one shilling per year in a borough and only once in the counties) and many potential voters were reluctant to go to the trouble of making a claim. It has been estimated that somewhere between one-quarter and three eighths of those claimants who met all the necessary qualifications neglected to register their entitlement in 1832 (Wickham 2002). Further, any unqualified electors could be identified and objected to. Since the person challenging a claim did not have to specify the reason for his objection, it was up to the claimant to prove his qualification. This was done before a Revising Barrister in the registration court.

Thus, after the 1832 Reform Act the registration courts became the first battleground in the electoral process, with parties' agents promoting the claims of their supporters and objecting to those of their opponents. In Berwick some of the tactics employed by zealous party agents included sending written objections to electors' claims after they had refused to vote for a particular candidate and falsely persuading electors that they would have to pay extra taxes if they appeared in court to support their claims. Considering there was no provision for costs to be awarded to compensate a claimant for the time and expense involved in defending his claim, it is not surprising that many claims were undefended (Wickham 2002). The power to award costs against unfounded objections was not introduced until 1843.

Wilson argued quite correctly that a simple mistake by an elector or a Registration Clerk could lead to the loss of a vote and that the system had led to an expensive process involving many claims which were “... absurd, vexatious and mischievous ...” (B. A. 14th February 1835). Further, he complained that many of the objections were mo-

tivated by party interest and that the Tories were benefitting from the process. He wrote:

In a great number of the instances where the Tories have been successful at the late elections, they owe it entirely to the attention which they paid to the registration of voters, to the care which they took that none of their party be left out and that no claim against them should be admitted which they could by any possibility cause to be withheld.

In September 1834 he had declared regarding the same theme, that:

In several parts of the country, the Tories in fact have objected by wholesale, both as regards the number of voters and objections. They stopped, not to consider whether any specific objection would apply, but they hurled a multitude promiscuously, hoping that some of them might suit their purpose, or if not they would at least harass and torment the new made voter, and put him to such a degree of trouble in order to assert his claim, that in some instances he would give it up in disgust, and in others he would find it unable to give the attendance upon the sitting of the sheriff or the barrister which had become necessary to establish it.

(B. A. 22nd September 1832)

As regards the 1832 election it was in fact Beresford, who was the Tory candidate, who had blamed his defeat at Berwick on the Revising Barrister, who had rejected the claims of some of his Freeman supporters. Wilson was correct however that it was the Tories who were more adept at benefitting from the registration system in

the years after the 1832 election. The importance of the registration courts was acknowledged by Sir Robert Peel in 1839 when he stated:

The Reform Bill has made a change in the position of parties

and in the practical working of public affairs, which the authors did not anticipate. There is a perfectly new element of political power -

namely, the registration of voters, a more powerful one than either the

Sovereign or the House of Commons. That party is strongest in point

of fact which has the existing registration in its favour ...
We shall

soon have, I have no doubt, a regular systematic organisation of it.

Where this is to end, I know not, but substantial power will be in the

Registry Courts and there the contest will be determined.

Wilson was concerned that potential Whig electors were not registering. Some were unwilling to pay the registration fee, others were concerned that they would suffer if they voted in a particular way or would feel compelled to vote against their principles. Wilson commended the Conservatives for their zeal in getting their supporters registered and exhorted the Whigs to oppose their opponents in this process, warning:

It is an error of reformers that they trust too much in the justice of their cause, and the dissemination of knowledge, to the neglect of union and individual exertion.

(B. A. 16th May 1835)

Throughout the spring and summer of 1835 the *Advertiser* published articles on the franchise, urging Whig voters to register as electors. Wilson was scornful of the Tories, thus:

The Reform Bill placed them in the situation of vicious dogs, the teeth of which were drawn – with perhaps the exception of a few stumps, but though thus rendered unable to bite, latterly they have hardly ventured to bark, and their former fierce and loud attacks upon reform have died into a mournful whine.

(B. A. 1st August 1835)

He warned again that they had however adapted to the new circumstances and were utilising the franchise for their benefit.

Regarding the potential electors, Wilson had earlier stated:

To see that their names are duly registered is a duty, yes a sacred and imperious one too, which they give to their country, and which they are bound faithfully to discharge. The elective franchise is one of the most important trusts that can be confided to a free citizen and he is guilty of a criminal act who either uses it corruptly, or who by omitting to have his name registered, disqualifies himself from its exercise.

(B. A. 11th July 1835)

He continued:

Some argue that men of business should avoid politics:

The man who so acts is not fit to breathe the atmosphere of a free country. He should have been born to kiss the sandal of an Eastern despot ... he should be left to crawl like a worm through the slums of his own insignificance. Others have not paid rates or are too late.

Wilson believed that the Whigs should form a Political Union to encourage the registration of their voters and supervise the selection of candidates. He emphasised that the purpose of such an organisation would be “... to preserve the independence and purity of elections ... their object should be to secure the free and unbought return of faithful representation – to diffuse useful political knowledge around their neighbourhoods – to preserve the rights they have obtained and render them efficacious – by every effort in their power to promote the objects of really cheap and good government – to protect electors from intimidation and corruption, and to bring the offenders to punishment” (B. A. 2nd February 2013). He continued:

Were for example such a society established in Berwick ... its object would be, not to interfere with government. But to preserve the independence of the Borough – to eradicate the practices of corruption – to have honest men cheaply returned to Parliament – to be certain before they were sent that they would do their duty – and to circulate political information more generally.

The emphasis on not ‘interfering with government’ was Wilson’s attempt to show the difference in his proposal from that which concerned John Langhorn, Berwick’s Mayor, in 1831, who in November

of that year wrote to Viscount Melbourne, then Home Secretary, as follows:

“My Lord I have the honor to send yr Lordship the enclosures accompanying this Letter, not as anything affecting this place”, for here we really have no Political Associations & in my official capacity I am perfectly at ease as to the good Government of our Good Town:— — — —but in receiving, at this very moment, the Communication which I have the honour to enclose, I am induced at once to enclose it to your Lordship for the purpose of shewing that there seems to be a Design on the part of most unworthy persons to rouse the lower Classes of Society to give Disturbance to His Majesty’s Government. — — — —
—Attached, as I most sincerely am in my own person to His Majesty’s Ministry, I am anxious to seize any opportunity in my power to render them my best Services & with the Feeling of doing towards them, what is nothing more than my Duty, I hope I may be excused in thus intruding upon your Lordship.

(cited in Bowen and Ward 2008)

Langhorn’s concerns had been raised when on the 11th of November he had received a message from Mr C. Cuthbertson who had in turn been given a circular letter by one Richard Richardson. The letter which caused this concern included the following statement:

To the Council of the Political Union of Berwick upon Tweed.

Manchester, November 10, 1831.

FELLOW COUNTRYMEN, We, the POLITICAL UNION OF THE WORKING CLASSES of Manchester, request a deputy or deputies from your body, to attend a Delegate Meeting, to be held on Wednesday next, the 16th of November, at the King William the Fourth, Great Ancoats-street, precisely at twelve o'clock. We consider the time to be arrived when the People of England should make known their sentiments towards their oppressive rulers, in one united voice. We therefore earnestly request your attendance by delegate, to cooperate with us, and the surrounding towns, at this critical period; and upon a matter which we consider of vital importance to our liberties, and the liberties of Europe.

(cited in Bowen and Ward 2008)

There is, in fact, no evidence that a representative from Berwick went to the Delegate Meeting (Bowen and Ward 2008).

Anyway, Wilson was clear that his proposed organisation was “for the preservation of their political rights” and not for “political agitation” (B. A. 16th May 1835). At the beginning of August 1834 Wilson was delighted to report that the “cause of reform” had been strengthened by a more active Whig approach to registration, thanks to the creation of reform associations through-out the country and, of course, he was especially pleased to report that such an association was being formed in Berwick.

During the general election campaign of 1835 Wilson urged the electors of Berwick to register and to support the two Whig candidates, viz. Blake and Donkin. Regarding the former he had stated:

There is not a member of the House of Commons, we will not except one, that has done his duty more faithfully than he has.

(B. A. 29th November 1834)

About Donkin, who, he said “... was a reformer elevated to the service of the Crown”, Wilson commented that “... Sir Rufus has been a most faithful representative and was an independent supporter of the late Ministry”. Of their proposed Tory opponent Wilson stated:

It is not enough to defeat him now, you must give Mr William Holmes^[lxxi] such a defeat that neither he nor his friends will again venture to trouble you at an election.

Wilson warned however against Tory corruption alleging Holmes “... had been prepared to bait his hooks with all the gold of the Carlton^[lxxii] club...”.

As it happens Holmes did not stand in 1835: James Bradshaw (? – 1847) was in fact the Tory candidate. He was the second son of Robert Haldane Bradshaw. Father and son had both served as MPs for the pocket borough of Brackley which was controlled by the Duke of Bridgewater. The father was Superintendent of the influential Bridgewater Trust and Robert was his deputy. The latter was also a Director of the Liverpool and Manchester Railway.

Despite Wilson’s best efforts, and those of the above-mentioned Whig organisation, Sir Francis Blake was defeated in 1835 as the electors returned to electing a Whig and a Tory. Blake refused to attend the declaration, but sent a letter berating those electors who, despite professing Liberal principles, had forsaken him at the poll. Nationally in this election many of those in rural areas who had supported reform returned to their previous, perhaps more natural, home with the Tories and the new voters failed to compensate for this loss. In 1837 the Conservatives won both seats, with Holmes and Richard Hodgson being the successful candidates.

Wilson wrote of Blake’s defeat:

Such is the gratitude of the world – such the reward of public virtue. As he truly and feelingly expressed it - ‘He has not forsaken the electors of Berwick, but they have forsaken him’ – some of them have forgotten their first friend.

(B. A. 10th January 1835)

Blake had also contested Berwickshire unsuccessfully at the 1835 election but did not stand for Parliament again. He later published two radical pamphlets: *Peers All Alike* (1838), advocating an elected Upper Chamber; and *The House of Lords, the People’s Charter and the Corn Laws* (1839). He died without legitimate issue in August 1860 at his London house in Sloane Street. Given the aforementioned number of his illegitimate children it was not surprising that much legal wrangling over his estate followed.

The Representation of the People Act, 1867, extended the franchise to rate-paying householders and the Redistribution Act of 1885 expanded the constituency to take in Alnwick, Belford, Glendale and Rothbury, but the number of members returned was then reduced to one. The last two sitting members of the old borough constituency were Captain David Milne Home and Hubert E H Jerningham.

In 1834 Wilson had summarized his views about the further need for electoral reform, thus:

There is still too much of the leaven of the upper house – parliaments are too long – electors ought to be protected from the temptations of bribery and the influence of temptation, and this can only be accomplished by a vote by ballot; in the smaller boroughs the qualification is still too high, - and still it is property rather than men that is represented. Property is important, but men are more

important than property; and if parliament is to be the guardian of the rights, lives and liberties of the people, then assuredly it ought to be the possession of those rights and liberties which should qualify their possessors to vote for the election of their guardians. The time, however, has not yet arrived when it would be either safe or judicious to adopt that principle to its full extent; - and in the last place to have a really hard-working and useful parliament we require paid representatives.

(B. A. 6th September 1834)

Earlier he had written:

The country has got a *speech-making* parliament, but it has not got a *working* parliament ... we need a paid parliament ... Until we have a paid, a working, and a really responsible parliament, and until the House of Lords be so reformed as to co-operate with the House of Commons so constituted, we expect very little public benefit from the one or the other ... A man may possess the wisdom of Solomon – the patriotism of Hampden^[lxxiii] – the political sagacity of Adam Smith^[lxxiv] – but unless he possess money or acres, not one constituency pot of 20 will look at him.

(B. A. 26th July 1834)

Wilson's views were ahead of their time. The secret ballot was not introduced until the Ballot Act 1872. Salaries for MPs were introduced by the 1911 Parliament Act. The length of a Parliament was reduced to five years by the Reform Act 1918. The latter act also abolished property qualifications for men and introduced limited fe-

male suffrage for women over the age of 30. The Reform Act 1928¹² widened suffrage by giving women electoral equality with men. Of course, Blake’s proposal for an elected upper house has never come to fruition.

It is now necessary to consider Wilson’s views of the political parties and trade unions.

12. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_Act_1928

Chapter Nine: Wilson on the Political Parties and Trade Unions

While of course the subject of reform dominated the newspaper at this time Wilson did not neglect its tradition of criticising ‘despots’. For example, he wrote of Lord Durham’s mission to St Petersburg in 1832, thus:

Ardently attached to liberty, stern and inflexible of purpose, he will not fawn and cringe to the autocrat, as some of his predecessors may have done, but he will stand before him as a man – as an upright, a determined Englishman.

(B. A. 6th July 1832)

By 1834 he believed that the ‘despots’ were in retreat and he commented about them, as follows:

The old, selfish, tyrannous and debasing creed of sovereignty is shrinking into regions cold and barbarous, as its own principle.

(B. A. 15th November 1834)

In comparison, unlike the members of the Whig government, he admired the USA, stating:

The young but already powerful and stupendous republic of America set the example to the world. From them the nations caught the cry of freedom – from them originated

the spark of liberty which bursting into an ungovernable flame, consumed thrones and destroyed dynasties.

(B. A. 15th November 1834)

In his Tale *Sayings and Doings of Peter Paterson* he refers to America as “... the paradise of the unfortunate ...”.

The focus in this study is however on Wilson’s views regarding the state of Britain during his editorship. He defined himself as a ‘reformer’ and stressed his desire for gradual reform, thus differentiating himself from the Radicals. He wrote:

Hasty violent, extreme measures – measures of which we see the object but not the consequences, are at variance with every principle of good and safe government.

(B. A. 20th September 1834)

It would probably have displeased him if it was pointed out to him that his approach echoed that of the Tory *Blackwoods Magazine*, its view of radicalism being expressed in 1820 as follows:

Radicalism is subversion, total excision and overthrow, the substitution not of one order of polity by another, but the utter destruction of the present state of things.

Earlier he had declared:

We are no revolutionaries, - we wish not even odious abuses to be reformed rashly, - we revere all that is valuable in our constitution, - we prize all that is excellent in its laws. But gracious heaven! Are men – are laws – are our institutions to remain the same and the same for ever? Can there be no improvement? Were our ancestors pos-

sessed of absolute wisdom? Has the mind of man become a dead and a torpid thing? Has society reached the acme of perfection and of happiness? ... Are we placed like horses in a ring, treading for ever the same eternal round, and admiring the post or pillar our ancestors have commanded us to pace about?

(B. A. 19th July 1834)

He did want to destroy Britain's institutions but rather he wished to conserve what was best in Britain's constitution and system of government since a 'true radical' like, of course, himself, loves his country and its institutions. Thus, he asked:

Who are the destructives? We maintain that the reformers are the only true conservatives, the enemies of reform the only destructives.

(B. A. 10th January 1835)

One notes however that in his Tale *The Leveller*, Wilson writes:

The story of James Nicholson – supporter of Napoleon.

Many looked upon the Leveller as the enemy of his country, and as wishing the destruction of its institutions: I always regarded them with a more favourable eye.

Wilson was angered by the critics of reformers associating them with republicanism, stating:

Radicalism and republicanism are confounded together, but east and west, north and south, light and darkness, are not more distinct. Republicans and destructives have no

right to themselves the appellation of radicals, and none but the enemies of real radicalism will call them such.

(B. A 28th March 1835)

He informed Everett in a letter written on 15th April 1834 that the achievement of the necessary reform he envisaged was to be a protracted task, stating:

I am afraid it will take fifty years to come, thoroughly to cure poor old England.

As a result of the Great Reform Act the government, he argued, must march at the front of public opinion. He defined that opinion in a particular way, thus:

When we use the term public opinion, we do not mean the sweeping, reckless, and revolutionary principles promulgated by violent and desperate men, whose idol is the shout of the unthinking multitude; but by public opinion we mean the matured conviction which the great body of the people of this country entertain for a purifying and perfect reform in every department of our national institutions, and of the necessity which exists for obtaining an alleviation from the pressure of our national and local burdens.

(B. A 1st March 1834)

Throughout his editorship Wilson was a persistent critic of the Tories who he argued were “... a century behind the age – they have been born too late ...” (B. A 18th April 1835). He had however written a poem in 1827 in memory of the Tory George Canning (1770

–1827) who had served in various senior cabinet positions before becoming Prime Minister in the final four months of his life. His policies as Foreign Secretary were opposed by the King and the ultra-Tories, while Wellington and Peel had refused to serve under him, but found favour with the Whigs and progressives like Wilson. Temperley (1925) summarized these policies, which formed the basis of British foreign policy for decades, thus:

... non-intervention; no European police system; every nation for itself, and God for us all; balance of power; respect for facts, not for abstract theories; respect for treaty rights, but caution in extending them ... a republic is as good a member of the comity of nations as a monarch. 'England not Europe.' 'Our foreign policy cannot be conducted against the will of the nation.' 'Europe's domain extends to the shores of the Atlantic, England's begins there.'

The first Editor of the *Advertiser* had also praised Canning and Byron described him as “a genius”. Canning’s tenure of just 119 days in office is the shortest tenure¹ of any British Prime Minister.

Wilson proclaimed in 1835 that Wellington, the Tory Party’s leader for most of his editorship, was “... ignorant of the spirit of the age...” (B. A. 28th February 1835). He continued thus:

It is not because we consider him a profligate one, but as one who is bigoted and arbitrary – a mere aristocrat and an enemy of the rights of man but from whence comes the pension list – from whence the enormous expenditure and taxation under which we groan.

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Records_of_Prime_Ministers_of_the_United_Kingdom#Period_of_service

For Wilson his status as the victor at Waterloo was always Wellington’s only saving grace, but, as indicated earlier, he regarded that success as ‘accidental’.

In November 1834 the Melbourne administration was dismissed by the King because of his concerns about the reform of the established church in Ireland and the King appointed Peel, who became the last PM appointed by a Monarch against the wishes of MPs (the Tories had a minority of MPs at this stage). Wilson then turned on a familiar target, stating “... we do believe that what is called the court is at the bottom of it all ...”.



2

George Canning

He continued:

We are sick of the twaddle about interfering with the royal prerogative when the rights and liberties of the people are in jeopardy. If they may not dictate to the sovereign, is it

too much that they should respectively remonstrate with the man?

(B. A. 29th November 1834)

At the beginning of the following month he wrote:

Even his majesty must be sensible that the choice he has made is far from being in accordance with the wants or wishes of the people.

(B. A. 6th December 1834)

The King had in fact preferred to appoint Wellington once more, but he declined to become Prime Minister because he thought membership of the Commons had become essential for the post. The King had only then reluctantly agreed to appoint Peel who was in Italy. For three weeks in November and December 1834 Wellington acted as interim leader, taking the responsibilities of Prime Minister and of most of the other key ministries.

Unaware that it was temporary, Wilson attacked Wellington's assumption of office, thus:

Arthur, Duke of Wellington, is Prime Minister of Britain! ... the 'Dear Duke', who is the avowed and inveterate enemy of reform, - 'the Duke' whom the Tories hero worship, - whom foreign despots love and cherish as a man according to their own heart, - 'the Duke' whose desire of power is as insatiate as the grave, and strong as his hatred of popular rights, ... He will choose men who are the Conservatives of abuses in church and state, who like himself are enemies of reform, and who like himself hate and will endeavour to crush the political power of the people ...

(B. A. 15th November 1834)

Wilson continued on the same theme two weeks later:

This is incorrigible monopoly with a vengeance. Why you are a sort of deputy-king, and an absolute one too ... to be serious, we believe that your highness's political ignorance is even greater than your ambition.

(B. A. 29th November 1834)

He did not believe that Wellington had changed his view on reform and had written previously:

Only be not deceived, remember that in the Duke of Wellington you have a most crafty and powerful man to deal with, and to satiate his lust of place and power we have no doubt, nay we firmly believe, he will adopt the language of the reformer, but if he do, it will only be to deceive, and his promises will be like the golden fruit said to be found on the plains of Sodom and Gomorrah, and which become ashes in the mouth. Trust him not!

(B. A. 15th November 1834)

Addressing the inhabitants of Berwick, Berwickshire and Northumberland, Wilson declared that they should:

Act at once! ... let public meetings be held at once, - and let committees be appointed to watch over whatever events may arise, - and if a dissolution of parliament do take place, be prepared to meet it. We do not like agitation, but at a moment like this, agitation is a duty.

(B. A. 22nd November 1834)

Wilson also attended two public meetings to protest against Wellington's assumption of the Premiership and each time proposed the resolutions which were adopted (B. A. 6th and 13th December 1834). In Peel's first Cabinet Wellington became Foreign Secretary³.

Wilson regarded Peel as an "accomplished actor" (B. A. March 1835) and, like Wellington, "an enemy of the people" (B. A. 14th March 1835). Prior to the declaration of the result of the 1835 general election, he commented:

What cunning and sophistry could do to deceive Sir Robert Peel has done...

(B. A. 3rd January 1835)

Further, in 1835, when Peel threatened a critic with a challenge to a duel, Wilson wrote:

If he cannot pass a law to crush the freedom of debate, he seems determined to do it by a piece of cold lead.

(B. A. 28th March 1835)

Prior to Peel accepting the post of Prime Minister in December 1834, Wilson had predicted as follows:

But we have a better opinion of Sir Robert Peel; we think he has some regard for political consistency – some respect for political honesty, and he will not for the sake of office profess to be a church and state and corporation reformer ... We are willing to believe he has decency enough not to do so, and we think he has enough of common

3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Secretary_of_State_for_Foreign_Affairs

sense and discrimination to induce him to refuse office at the present crisis.

(B. A. 6th December 1834)

This prediction was of course wrong and when Peel became Prime Minister he commented:

The Premier is the avowed, the staunch, and the long-tried enemy of reform. He is at once the ablest and the most crafty opponent of the people's rights.

(B. A. 13th December 1834)

Peel fought the 1835 election on the basis of the 'Tamworth Manifesto' in which he promised a respectful approach to traditional politics, combined with measured, controlled reform, thus professing to be a 'state reformer'. He thereby signalled a significant shift from staunch, reactionary 'Tory' to progressive 'Conservative' politics. Crucially, he pledged to accept the 1832 Reform Act which he urged the Tory Party to accept as 'a final, an irrevocable settlement'.

Of this manifesto Wilson stated:

It will dissatisfy the real Tories, and it will not satisfy a single reformer in the country.

(B. A. 27th December 1834)

He continued:

There is a tone of despondency – a consciousness of weakness throughout the whole address, notwithstanding its cunning and its show of candour, and it concludes with

a humble supplication, somewhat in the – *‘and your petitioner shall ever pray’* sort of style.

In December 1834 Wilson had published an imagined conversation between Peel and Wellington to illustrate what he argued was their ‘cunning and duplicity’. The following is an extract:

Duke – All is cut and dry for you to pick and choose upon. You can be Chancellor of the Exchequer, or Premier and Chancellor, anyway you like—but it will be better that I keep a little in the background—you understand me.

Sir R —Perfectly your grace. But providing we do form a cabinet and I accept the offices you mention, how are we to get on? What course of policy has your grace chalked out? Depend upon it, though I am neither a prophet nor the son of a prophet, but of a very honest, fortunate, and patriotic proprietor of Spinning-jennies, our old and favourite song of reform won’t do. We must change our tune, or it is no go.

Duke, —Tush man! I know it. Do you suppose that I who first discovered the Prussians emerging from the wood at Waterloo, when blockheads imagined them to be Grouchy’s army of reserve, I say do ye imagine that I had not penetration to see with half an eye, that the old song of No Reform” won’t take at all, —for the present we must “whistle o’er the lave^[lxxv] o’r” between ourselves, and strike another air for the public ear.

Sir R. —Does your Grace mean that we should profess ourselves to be reformers?

Duke—Most certainly. There is nothing else for it.

(B. A. 13th December 1834)

Thus, for Wilson, Wellington and Peel were merely paying lip-service to reform to strengthen an ‘oligarchy’. He summed up this ‘conversation’, as follows:

The main point to keep in view is, never for an instance believe that the Wellington and Peel men are honest reformers, or that it will be safe to trust them.

Wilson stated of the new government under Peel:

They are rank Tories to almost to a man. *Peel*, them as you may, they are Tories inside and outside, and some of them the worst of all Tories for their principles, such as they are, are as slippery as an eel newly taken from the water ...

(B. A. 20th December 1834)

When Peel’s government fell, however, he commented that Peel had tried to govern

“... skilfully, bravely ... but he was surrounded by men unworthy of himself” (B. A. 11th April 1835). He later damned Peel with faint praise, thus:

He is assuredly a man of great abilities, though these abilities are all of a showy and shallow kind. He is a perfect tactician ... but as destitute of profundities as of modesty.

(B. A. 30th May 1835)

While he was obviously sympathetic to the Whigs, he stated in 1833:

Now we are no Whigs, but we are friends of truth and advocates of reform ...

(B. A. 31st August 1833)

The following year when announcing the change in the newspaper's political coverage discussed earlier, he similarly wrote:

Attached to no political party, we shall honestly and fearlessly advocate the reformation of every abuse in church and state. We shall advocate cheap government and a reform to the institutions of our country, that they may be preserved and not destroyed.

(B. A. 15th February 1834)

Later that year he compared the Tories and Whigs as follows:

The Tory would move like a snail, denying he moves at all, and his movements are so slow, that we only know by the *slime* he has left behind him; the Whig creeps like a tortoise, slowly and surely, and looking about him, but making much greater progress than the Tory ...

(B. A. 26th July 1834)

He may not have been affiliated to any party, but Wilson supported the key Whig policies of peace, retrenchment and reform and he was disappointed with the various Whig governments he observed regarding their 'tortoise' approach to retrenchment. They had made, he argued "... tolerable progress, though not as much as the na-

tion desired, and had a right to expect from them” (B. A. 4th August 1832). For example, in 1835 he asked:

For what reason are the people asked to uphold an immense standing army after twenty years of peace?

(B. A. 6th June 1835)

Earlier he had made a suggestion regarding retrenchment, as follows:

We have a pension list exceeding half a million for services some of them nameless and most of them worthless, and independent of our half-pay or non-effective army, we have an army of about 77 thousand rank and file, which costs more than five millions a year, we see but little use for such a numerous army ... why not employ them at public works?

(B. A. 1st November 1834)

For Wilson the most obvious essential employment for these men was the construction of railways. No doubt a century later the influential Economist John Maynard Keynes would have approved of this proposal.

Criticism of the pension list was in fact a persistent theme of his editorship. He argued that to “... cleanse and purify the pension list was a duty which ministers owed to the country ...”. The Whigs, he argued, had too often accepted that recipients awarded pensions by the Tories had “... a legal right to them and must be paid” (B. A. 1st March 1834). Wilson furiously responded to this view, as follows:

... what Secret Service – ‘what deed without a name’ has Lady this, Miss That, or Madam Such a One performed, that the public must not break faith with them? ... with the tribe of state paupers we would wage a war of extermination.

(B. A. 3rd May 1834)

Similarly, he had earlier commented on a particular award, thus:

This Lord Dunglass is ... the son of the Earl of Home, but what service either of them have rendered to their country that the former should be rewarded with a pension of £300 a year, it would puzzle a wise person to tell.

(B. A. 18th May 1833)

In 1833 Wilson had earlier campaigned unsuccessfully against the appointment by the Crown of a Governor for Berwick (the Military Governor of the Garrison of Berwick-upon-Tweed) and was delighted when a petition was adopted at a public meeting in the town which demanded the abolition of the Governor’s salary and “... all other useless sinecures and unmerited pensions” (B. A. 9th February 1833). He was disappointed when the position was not abolished. Sir James Bathurst⁴ was appointed Governor and he was in fact the last holder of the position.

The following year Wilson returned to the attack on government appointments thus:

Now taking the qualifications of those who generally compose these boards, we would simply call them instead of Boards of Commissioners – Boards of Humbugs! – or

4. https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=James_Bathurst&action=edit&redlink=1

boards of Sinecurists! Knowledge is out of the question as a qualification for a commissioner, and a political subserviency, or influence with a Minister is all that is necessary.

(B. A. 1st November 1834)

Government, he continued, should learn from business as it was “... also notorious that in almost every department business is transacted in an antiquated, complex and bungling manner: Learn from business”.

Wilson was not alone in being disappointed with the limited approach of the Whigs to retrenchment. For him however they remained the only hope of a reduction in the number of sinecures, as he believed the Tories could not be expected to tackle the issue. He stated:

Almost all the sinecures of the country are in their hands, and they will not take the bread from their open mouths.

(B. A. 8th September 1832)

In 1834 he was very critical of the Berwick Town Clerk who had applauded Tory efforts to reduce expenditure (B. A. 12th April 1834).

A persistent theme of Wilson’s editorship was that ‘the burden of taxation’ on the people was too great. Thus, he wrote:

... instead of taxes being applied to their legitimate objects for public protection and the public weal, they were accumulated till the nation groaned, - to uphold and to augment the dangerous influence of the crown, - to corrupt a pensioned aristocracy, and to purchase a servile house

of commons ... taxes were multiplied on taxes to uphold an overgrown army – to support pampered functionaries, extravagant and often useless establishments, with all the ruinous machinery of corruption. Nor were the legitimate objects of taxation abused for these vile purposes only, but taxes were heaped on taxes in a tenfold degree, for the most unlawful, the most unrighteous of all objects – war!, with its ruin, its blood and its guilt!

(B. A. 4th October 1834)

He argued in the same article that the country's finances were in crisis as taxes had been "... squandered in war, and lavished on corruption, and it now requires 28 millions to pay the mortgagees the yearly interest of their money which has been spent". The solution for Wilson was not to renege on the debt nor to immediately 'pay it off tomorrow'. Rather it was necessary to reform the taxation system to ensure economic progress:

We know that perfect equality is impossible, but under the present system it is chiefly on labour, industry and enterprise, that the burden of taxation falls.

(B. A. 18th October 1834)

Redistribution of the burden was required as "... scarce a tenth part of the taxes is paid by the wealthy ... that is an evil requiring a remedy" (B. A. 1st November 1834). His solution was to tax property. The previous month he had stated:

An assessment on property is also the most just of taxes, in as much as the national debt has accumulated to its present amount not to protect *industry* but to preserve *prop-*

erty. And therefore ought property pay more than industry. A graduated property tax, equal as possible, would be the best of all taxes.

(B. A. 4th October 1884)

In Wilson's tale *Roger Goldie's Narrative, A Tale of the False Alarm*^[lxxvi], he begins by describing the incident and then makes the point that the property-owners have the most to lose from French invasion and that they therefore benefit most from defence expenditure. He writes:

Ye have heard of the false alarm, (said Roger Goldie,) which, for the space of well nigh four and twenty hours, filled the counties upon the Border with exceeding great consternation, and at the same time called forth an example of general and devoted heroism, and love of country, such as is nowhere recorded in the annals of any nation upon the face of the globe. Good cause have I to remember it; and were I to live a thousand years, it never would be effaced from my recollection. What first gave rise to the alarm, I have not been able clearly to ascertain unto this day. There was a house-heating up beside Preston, with feasting and dancing; and a great light, like that of a flambeau, proceeded from the onstead. Now, some say that the man that kept the beacon on Hownamlaw, mistook the light for the signal on Dunselaw; and the man at Dunselaw, in his turn, seeing Hownam flare up, lighted his fires also, and speedily the red burning alphabet of war blazed on every hill top—a spirit seemed to fly from mountain to mountain, touching their summits with fire, and writing in the flame the word—invasion!

Others say that it arose from the individual who kept watch at Hume Castle being deceived by an accidental fire over in Northumberland; and a very general supposition is, that it arose from a feint on the part of a great sea-admiral, which he made in order to try the courage and loyalty of the nation. To the last report, however, I attach no credit. The fable informs us, that the shepherd laddie lost his sheep, because he cried, "The wolf!" when there was no wolf at hand; and it would have been policy similar to his, to have cried, "An invasion!" when there was no invasion. Neither nations nor individuals like such practical jokes. It is also certain that the alarm was not first given by the beacons on the sea-coast; and there can be no doubt that the mistake originated either at Hownamlaw or Hume Castle.

Wilson continues:

I recollect it was in the beginning of February 1804. I occupied a house then about half a mile out of Dunse, and lived comfortably, and I will say contentedly, on the interest of sixteen hundred pounds which I had invested in the funds; and it required but little discrimination to foresee, that, if the French fairly got a footing in our country, funded property would not be worth an old song. I could at all times have risked my life in defence of my native land, for the love I bore it; though you will perceive that I had a double motive to do so; and the more particularly, as, out of the interest of my funded capital, I maintained in competence an affectionate wife and a dutiful son—our only child. The name of my wife was Agnes, and the name of my son—who, at the time of the alarm, was sixteen—was Robert. Upon their account it often caused

me great uneasiness, when I read and heard of the victories and the threatenings of the terrible Corsican. I sometimes dreamed that he had marched a mighty army on a bridge of boats across the straits of Dover, and that he had not only seized my sixteen hundred pounds, but drawn my son, my only son, Robie, as a conscript, to fight against his own natural and lawful country, and, perhaps, to shoot his father! I therefore, as in duty bound, as a true and loyal subject, had enrolled myself in the Dunse volunteers. Some joined the volunteers to escape being drawn for the militia, but I could give my solemn affidavit, that I had no motive but the defence of my country—and my property, which, as I have said, was a double inducement.

In another Tale he takes the opportunity to support a key policy which the *Advertiser* from its establishment always supported. In *The Red Hall; or Berwick in 1296* (note the capitals are his and that he once more expresses sympathy for Alexander 111 of Scotland), he writes:

Somewhat more than five hundred years ago, and Berwick was the most wealthy and flourishing city in Great Britain. Its commerce was the most extensive, its merchants the most enterprising and successful. London in some measure strove to be its rival, but it possessed not a tenth of the natural advantages, and Berwick continue to bear the palm alone – being styled the Alexandria of the nations, the emporium of commerce, and one of the first commercial cities of the world. The state of prosperity it owed almost solely to Alexander 111, who did more for Berwick than any sovereign that has since claimed allegiance. He brought over a colony of wealthy Flemings, for whom he erected an immense building, called the Red

Hall (situated where the Woolmarket now stands) and which served at once as dwelling houses, factories and a fortress. The terms upon which he granted a charter to this company of merchants were that they should defend, even unto death, their Red Hall against every attack of an enemy, and of the English in particular. Wool was the staple commodity of their commerce, but they also traded extensively in silks and in foreign manufactures. The people of Berwick understood FREE TRADE in these days.

Free trade was of course a policy associated with the Whigs and was opposed by many within the Guild in Berwick, because its adoption as a policy could threaten their rights and privileges.

Excise Duty was another target for criticism by Wilson because of the burden it imposed on the middle and lower classes. He wrote:

It is beyond all others the most expensive in its collection,
- it is the most injurious, the most unequal.

(B. A. 11th May 1833)

Further, he was concerned about the effect of this taxation on economic activity, thus he wrote:

The most injudicious of our excise laws, however, are the taxes on our manufacturers ... they injure commerce by preventing or limiting the exportation of the taxed manufactures, and they injure the workman by limiting his labour. These taxes also fall exclusively on the productive classes.

(B. A. 18th October 1834)

While he supported a tax on property, he opposed income tax as “... the most tyrannous, inquisitorial, and ruinous, and beyond every other proves the most unequal”.

Earlier in 1834 Wilson had discussed the taxation of alcohol in social class terms, as follows:

Sir William Ingilby in bringing forward the motion, talked a great deal of nonsense in a most nonsensical way and made evident what we said last week, that it was a mere landlord's motion. Had the motion been successful and the mover obtained his will, the price of ale or beer instead of being reduced, would have been raised! He proposed to take off the malt duty and again to lay on the beer duty, which in plain English was the same as saying—“Gentlemen, I propose to put a shilling in the pockets of the landlords and all rich men who brew their own beer, and to take it out of the pockets of the middle classes, the mechanic and the labourer, who use the beer made by the common brewer”. To say the least of it, this was the most barefaced, dishonest and infamous proposition ... But his idea of imposing an additional duty on aristocratic wines, was not bad one; and we especially admire his tax upon titles. He proposed that a duke should pay fifty or a hundred pounds a year for the distinction which his title conferred him, and downward in proportion to knight inclusive. This was good idea and one which should not be lost sight of. But instead of fifty or a hundred for a duke, say five hundred. We would then give the lie to Dryden's line, that “Honour's but an empty bubble,” we would have the demi-gods of the earth to pay for their consequence. Many a poor simpleton would think himself rendered immortal, if a thing bearing a lordly title shook hands with

him. Sir William Ingilby proposed that ladies should be exempted from his tax, — we are not so gallant as the knight of Lincoln. If ladies will assume the consequence which titles confer let them pay for them. But we would exempt men who obtain titles as a reward of their public service.

(B. A. 8th March 1834)

By early 1834 Grey's government had repealed 14 taxes, reduced 8 and were repealing the house tax, but this was not enough for Wilson. He declared:

They have been too timid, too conciliating.

(B. A. 12th April 1834)

Similarly, when Peel had briefly been Prime Minister he argued that many Whigs were not doing enough to bring down the government, stating:

We are sorry, extremely sorry, to find that there are so many rats — so many milk and water men, amongst the professed reformers in the present House of Commons, although, thank heaven, the people have a majority to beat Ministers without them.

(B. A. 7th March 1835)

Nor was he unwilling to criticise even the most determined reformer in the various Whig administrations, viz. Lord Durham. Of the latter's speech during the Durham Festival week in November 1834, he wrote:

Lord Durham declared himself the advocate of triennial parliaments, of household suffrage and vote by ballot. Good, but his Lordship said nothing of any measure that would promote the industry and prosperity of the country. He spoke of the working classes, but he spoke of no measure by which the condition of those classes may be improved. He said nothing of the necessity of a reduction in rents that our farmers may live, and the working classes who he praised may have bread to eat; nor did he say anything of free trade, by which the wealth of the country might be advanced, nor of any measure for removing the restrictions by which industry is oppressed. Several of the theoretical measures we have alluded to are highly necessary, but practical measures which would give relief to trade and to enterprise, are yet more necessary and important. The one appeals to principles and political privileges, the other applies immediately to the pocket.

(B. A. 8th November 1834)

The campaign for a repeal of the corn laws^[lxxvii] was a concern for Wilson, who, of course, edited a newspaper sold to many in the agricultural industry and thus he stated “... we consider the cry for ‘no corn laws’ or for ‘a total repeal of the corn laws’ as a wild and ignorant clamour ... thousands would be thrown out of their employment and the British farmers would be ruined” (B. A. 1st February 1834). He argued however that limited reform was needed and he defined what he regarded as necessary, thus:

Such an alteration of the corn laws as will produce a reduction in rents will be necessary.

(B. A. 1st March 1834)

He continued regarding the existing legislation:

It has not kept up the price of bread, but it has kept up the price of land, and instead of protecting the tenantry it has recoiled as a tax upon them – as a tax upon their seed, a tax upon their food for their cattle, a tax upon the head of the household, in short one of the heaviest taxes which they are called upon to pay.

Reform was necessary so that landlords would reduce rents. He wrote:

The present bill neither protects the corn grower nor the bread-eater, but it is an aristocratic bill for the benefit of the owners of the soil ... The farmer must be protected.

Wilson's concern for the lower classes did not lead him to support trade unions. In fact, he railed against trade unionism on a number of occasions. Thus, he wrote:

It is ignorance that goads the incendiary to his midnight work of destruction – it is ignorance that deludes our operatives into unions destructive of their own interest – destructive of the interests of their employers, and injurious to their country; it is ignorance that causes them to hallow at the mad declamation of the demagogue, and that makes them esteem violent principles as the most sound; and bold assertions as wisdom and honesty.

(B. A. 8th February 1834)

He continued on the same theme in April of that year, as follows:

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They are tyrannous in their character and ruinous in their consequences. We do not deny the right of every workman to obtain the best price for his labour that he can – on the contrary we say it is his duty to seek to obtain it. Neither do we say that it is unlawful for him to combine with others to accomplish such an object ... if the unionist would reflect upon his attempts, he would find that he is entering into a conspiracy against industry – that he is injuring himself – injuring his family – and that he must feel – but he is also injuring his employer, injuring his country and benefitting the foreigner.

(B. A. 5th April 1834)

He continued by explaining that industrial action was misguided, as follows:

A strike injures supply but does not increase demand ... unless the demand be increased their wages cannot be permanently augmented.

Later that month he wrote:

We now denounce trade unions as the madness of the multitude ... they are founded on ignorance and delusion, they are held together by tyranny and oppression, and their consequences are misery and ruin...

(B. A. 28th April 1834)

He accepted there was injustice and stated that he was “... the friend and advocate of the workman, but the declared enemy of trade unions... since they are ruining the country – and promoting the

prosperity of foreign and rival firms” (B. A. 28th April 1834). Although he claimed they were “... spreading their influence far and wide”, he was pleased that there was little evidence of trade union activity in the Berwick area.

In a bid to suppress trade unions, in 1834 Melbourne's government introduced legislation against 'illegal oaths'. As a result, the Grand National Consolidated Trades' Union failed. In March of the same year, six labourers were transported to Australia for seven years for attempting to provide a fund for workers in need. They became known as the 'Tolpuddle Martyrs'. While there were numerous reports of these developments in the *Advertiser*, Wilson made no editorial comment on these developments.



Keir Hardie

Given his opposition to trade unions he probably would not have been delighted by this comment from the famous Trade Unionist and founder of the Labour Party Keir Hardie:

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I think my mother's songs made the strongest impression on me, combined with the tales and romances of my grandmother. The first book I remember reading was “Wilson's Tales of the Borders” and these took a hold of my imagination and created within me a love of the tales and traditions of Scotland and of other countries which abide with me still.

(from the *Weekly Chronicle* 29TH May 1934)

Hardie read *Tales of the Borders* before he was aged 16. Of course, Hardie would probably not have enjoyed the Tales so much if he had known of the author's views on trade unions!

It is now necessary to turn to Wilson's views on church and social reform.

Chapter Ten: Wilson on Church and Social Reform

Through-out his editorship Wilson criticised Whig policies about Ireland as being too repressive. For example, he regarded the Whig bill intended to subdue unrest in Ireland in 1834 as the “... most unconstitutional, the most severe, the most arbitrary – in one word the most revolting that was ever brought before a British Parliament” (B. A. 2nd March 1833).

As noted earlier the bill was controversial within the Whig cabinet and as indicated above it was the Whig approach to Irish church reform that ended Grey’s term as Prime Minister. Wilson strongly supported the church reform plans. He wrote:

For the first time Ireland is about to be treated as an essential part of the British Empire and not as a province held in subjugation by the sword. No longer shall we hear of sinecure parishes where the clergymen reside abroad and where there is no church and no congregation, but where there is a salary without a duty to perform, a living without a cure ... It is the church of the law not of the people ...

(B. A. 4th July 1835)

Earlier he had declared:

The Irish cannot be made Protestant by act of parliament.

(B. A. 31st May 1834).

Wilson argued that the Irish Catholic Church should be the established church although he believed there “... never was a religion so erroneous in any civilised country”. Here the Presbyterian Wilson

and the Episcopalian Sir Walter Scott would have seen eye to eye, the latter having stated:

I hold popery to be such a mean and depriving superstition ...

Wilson consistently opposed tithes (a tax for the support of the Church and clergy) not only in Ireland, but also in England. The original purpose of tithes, he wrote, was to help the poor

“... but misapplied as they are to uphold a luxurious, an overgrown and dangerously political hierarchy, they become an evil which first in the list of abuses requires to be abolished. We can conceive of nothing more unjust than one man should be compelled to pay for the religious opinions, or the religious government of another ... the times have changed, the greater portion of professing Christians do not belong to the established church, and why should the greater give to the lesser? (B. A. 21st July 1832). The previous year he had complained that “...the clergy of England have instituted five thousand suits for the recovery of tithes within the last three weeks – can midsummer madness rival this? (B. A. 24th August 1833).

He was critical of the Anglican Church, but he did not argue for dis-establishment, as he believed that such a demand would allow the Tories to cry “The church is in danger”. Wilson, however, wished for an end to the political role of its Bishops (who of course were a familiar target of his). He stated:

We say reform – thoroughly reform the established churches, that they may be rendered more efficient, but destroy them not. The master evil of the English church is its political prelates. It is most unsavoury to see the chief pastors of Christian flocks leaving their sheep in the wilderness and acting as political wranglers of political in-

triguers. The sanctity of the preacher's character is lost in the degradation of the political partisan.

(B. A. 1st February 1834)

Later in the year he wrote:

As Christian *Bishops*, we hear of them but seldom ... but we know them better as *political barons*. The sanctity of the bishops is lost in the virulence and bigotry of the illiberal politician.

(B. A. 9th September 1834)

He also argued that "... a reform in the revenues of the church is necessary". Thus, previously he had criticised the incomes of the Anglican Bishops:

It is worse than disgraceful that a bishop should be in the annual receipt of thousands, and some of the them ten-fold again – that a dean or an arch-dean should roll in wealth or a prebendary should fatten himself in his golden stall, receiving his two thousand a year for the slight services of a few weeks, while the humble curate, whose talents and whose education are equal to theirs, has to preach twice a week, to officiate at marriages, at baptisms and burials, to keep up the appearance of a gentleman, and to open his slender purse to calls of charity to which a clergyman above all other men is peculiarly exposed, and all for and out of a pittance not exceeding the income of a journeyman mechanic in any of our principal towns ... We would wish to see them paid and well paid too ... but not as earthly princes.

(B. A. 1st February 1834)

He also criticised the exercise of patronage within the Church of Scotland and he summed up his view of the established churches in Scotland and England, as follows:

In a word we wish to see the church establishment of the two kingdoms purified, rendered more useful, more invulnerable and more secure.

Of course, Wilson as a Presbyterian supported the 1834 bill to allow the admission of Non-Conformists to Cambridge University and regarded the Tories as “... the avowed and implacable enemy of the dissenters” (B. A. 21st June 1834). Although the Test and Corporation acts had been repealed, he had earlier declared:

The dissenter is not free – he is merely *tolerated*. He is not free, and every year the church-rates place a certificate of bondage in his pocket.

(15th March 1834)

As regards the position of Jews in British society he stated:

Many affect to despise the Jews – some even hate them – but they are a people to whom every Christian owes a debt of gratitude, and that gratitude ought to be manifested by conferring on them the rights of citizens.

(B. A. 21st June 1834)

As regards social reform, the 1830s was a period when the role of the state changed. Cannadine (2017) states:

The era of the fiscal military state, epitomised by the Duke of Wellington, where the purpose of government was primarily to raise money and wage war, was passing; the age of improvement, which meant legislative engagement with contemporary issues, was beginning.

The Factory Act of 1833, which Wilson supported, placed limits on the use of child labour in the textile industry and established an inspectorate to enforce the law. This legislation established a precedent for later government interventions in business activity.

The first major task of Melbourne's government in 1834 was reform of the Poor Law. A Royal Commission had concluded that too much money was being spent subsidizing the poor; the parish-based structure of 'outdoor relief', financed by locally levied rates, was wasteful and inefficient, while those eligible for relief were paid too generously, which meant, it was argued, that they had no incentive to seek employment.

The 1834 Poor Amendment Act's key principle was therefore that those unwilling or unable to work should not be subsidized to the extent that they were better off than those who were in employment. 'Outdoor relief' was effectively abolished and in future the relief of poverty would mainly be carried out in the workhouse where, on the basis of the principle of 'less eligibility', conditions would be worse than outside.

Wilson regarded the existing arrangements for the poor as unacceptable, stating:

They are a curse which the feudal system has bequeathed to posterity.

(B. A. 15th February 1834)

He continued:

They are operating as a moral pestilence upon the independent spirit of the peasantry of the country; yes they are a spreading and a contagious evil which is threatening its ruin. They are a drag upon enterprise – they are a load which is bowing down industry to the earth, and depriving it of a just remuneration for its toils and the outlay of capital

He returned to the same theme in May 1834, writing that these laws “... have been the fruitful source of demoralisation – they have become a moral pestilence in the land – they have debased the manly spirit of the peasantry – they have been a premium in vice – a curse upon the nation” (B. A. 10th May 1834). Wilson argued that reform was essential, thus:

It is utterly impossible that the country can enjoy prosperity while such a state of things continue, but if persisted in, it would end in ruin to the rate-payer, and the farmer in particular, it would crush the efforts of the independent labourer, and cause pauperism and its attendant crime to lay waste the energies of the country...

(B. A. 15th February 1834)

In the reformed system the administration of the workhouse was to be overseen by locally elected Poor Law Guardians, who would have a strong incentive to keep costs down since they would depend on ratepayers’ votes for re-election and a new central body was to be established to supervise the whole system. Some Poor Law authorities hoped to run workhouses at a profit by utilising the free labour of their inmates. In May 1834 Wilson stated:

It is only in the workhouse that paupers can be made profitable, and all who can work must be put to some employment, nor ought any who are able to earn a shilling be allowed to eat the bread of idleness ... the worthless and the idle, who have devoured the poor-rates as locusts, finding their existing indulgences cut off; and its discipline, to them at least rigorous, will leave it and cease to be a burden on the industrious.

(B. A. 24th May 1834)

In his Tale *The Henpecked Man* he, however, describes a situation in which outdoor relief is insufficient. He writes:

‘But there is ae thing that grieves me beyond a’ that I hae mentioned to ye. Ye ken my mither, puir auld body, is a widow now. She is in the seventy-sixth year o’ her age, and very frail. She has naebody to look after her but me—naebody that has a natural right to do it; for I never had ony brothers, as ye ken; and, as for my twa sisters, I daresay they have just a sair aneugh fecht wi’ their ain families, and as they are at a distance, I dinna ken how they are situated wi’ their guidmen—though I maun say for them, they send her a stane o’ oatmeal, an ounce o’ tobacco, or a pickle tea and sugar, now and then, which is very likely as often as they hae it in their power; and that is a great deal mair than I’m allowed to do for her—me that has a right to protect and maintain her. A’ that she has to support her is fifteenpence a-week aff the parish o’ Mertoun. O Robin, man!—Robin, man!—my heart rugs within me, when I talk to you about this. A’ that I hae endured is naething to it! To see my puir auld mither in a state o’ starvation, and no to be allowed to gie her a saxpence! O Robin,

man!—Robin, man!—is it no awfu? When she was first left destitute, and a widow, I tried to break the maiter to Tibby, and to reason wi' her.

'O Tibby, woman!' said I, 'I'm very distressed. Here's my faither laid in the grave, and I dinna see what's to come o' my mither, puir body—she is auld, and she is frail—she has naebody to look after or provide for her but me.'

""You!' cried Tibby—'you! I wush ye wad mind what ye are talkin about! Ye have as many dougs, I can tell ye, as ye hae banes to pike! Let your mither do as ither widows hae done afore her—let the parish look after her.'

'O Tibby, woman!' said I; 'but if ye'll only consider—the parish money is very sma', and, puir body, it will mak her heart sair to receive a penny o't; for she weel kens that my faither would rather hae dee'd in a ditch than been behauden to either a parish or an individual for a saxpence.'

Anyway, for Wilson in 1834 Britain, the proposed reform would have a further advantage:

It will also prevent abuse where mothers with illegitimate children are sought out ... These degraded beings were sought after as though they had been heiresses, and the monsters (for we cannot call them a milder name) who became their husbands were set down by their companions - as independent men - who needed not to care whether they worked or not.

(B. A. 24th May 1834)

His only criticism of the proposed legislation was that the Poor Law Central Board was not sufficiently responsible to Parliament, but he also proposed a further reform in agricultural areas, as follows:

Before the weight of pauperism can be subdued in agricultural districts, the system of allotting small portions of land to the peasantry must be generally introduced and encouraged.

As regards the Berwick area, he concluded:

We believe that the new act will be productive of great good and will tend to the thorough reformation of parochial abuses, but here its influence will be little felt, for in this town and in this neighbourhood we have comparatively nothing of the evils of pauperism and the abuse of the system.

(B. A 1st November 1834)

He reported that in the town itself the sum levied for the support of the poor had in fact been reduced in recent years.

This reform was hugely unpopular amongst the poorer sections of society. Large numbers of men and women feared incarceration in the new work-houses, which Wilson regarded as superior to the houses of the poor. Many members of the middle classes argued against the reform on Christian or humanitarian grounds. For example, the Tory newspaper the *Leeds Intelligencer* attacked the new law "... as a monstrosity in legislation calculated to disgust as well as astonish". The *Northern Star* denounced the act as aimed at placing "... the whole of the labouring population at the utter mercy and disposal of the monied or property owning classes." The *London Mercury*

denied “... the existence of any class of idlers, out of the ranks of the aristocracy, and of the middle orders”. Newspapers which supported the act, such as the *Manchester Guardian*, were in the minority. Soon many horror stories of life in the work-houses were publicised. One notes in Wilson’s Tale *Squire Ben* the central character states:

The first thing I remember was hating the workhouse ...

Wilson also campaigned for penal reform. For example, in 1834 he stated:

Death is still recorded for crimes which bear no proportion to the sentence inflicted, and frequently it is still resorted to for crimes for which lesser and adequate punishments might be devised.

(B. A 5th April 1834)

In fact, during this period a series of acts abolished the death penalty for most cases of burglary, robbery, forgery and arson, and for all non-violent crimes except treason.

There were, however, limits to Wilson’s liberalism as regards criminals. In 1833, for example, he was delighted when people convicted of certain offences were to be deported rather than sent to work in dockyards as, he argued, “... to be sent to hulks was no punishment” (B. A 20th April 1833). Of imprisonment for debt however Wilson stated:

The cruelty of the law which enforces imprisonment for debt, can only be surpassed by its absurdity ... We rejoice that the odious law is about to be abolished.

(B. A 14th March 1835)

It is necessary now to turn to Wilson's views on municipal reform.

Chapter Eleven: Wilson and the 1835 Municipal Corporations Act

As has been shown Wilson was outspoken on national and international politics but, prior to 1835, in his editorials he avoided commenting on the local administration and local disputes, apart from on two occasions, viz. as indicated above he criticised the Town Clerk in relation to Tory spending policy and on another occasion, while praising the majority of the Corporation who had agreed to reduce the rent of some tenants, he criticised "... a few of the lower burgesses who opposed this" (B. A. 29th March 1834).

In 1831, the year before Wilson's assumption of the Editor's post, the 8th October edition of the *Advertiser* was withdrawn shortly after its issue because of concern about the Editor's reporting of a Guild matter. Catherine Richardson apologised personally in her newspaper for publishing this report. This was almost certainly to do with accusations made by William Hopper Thompkins against the then Mayor at the Guild meetings at this time. Wilson may have decided to avoid a similar development on assuming his editorship. It is also possible that Catherine Richardson may have advised him to avoid commenting on local matters or (although as will be shown later Wilson was delighted with the freedom she allowed him) even instructed him not to do so.

In 1834 Wilson stated:

Nothing can be more creditable to this town and neighbourhood than the utter absence of personal ill-feeling between reformers and conservatives. While in many places they are at 'daggers drawn', and principle is emerging into private hatred, here, while every man is doing his utmost

for the causes he espouses, personal good feelings and good humour remain unbroken with men of all parties.

(B. A. 6th December 1834)

He was however well aware that there had been serious personal and political conflicts in the town. The most public indications of such conflicts had been the earlier challenges to the general election results. As noted previously, there had been a challenge to the election result in 1826 and an attempted challenge to the 1830 result. Further, as is discussed below, there was serious conflict associated with the conduct of the Vestry in 1829 and 1830 and considerable conflict, including violence and litigation, in relation to the position of Mayor in the early 1830s.

The Freeman have never been a monolithic group. Brenchley (1997), in his excellent study of Berwick in the eighteenth century, describes three competing Freeman groupings, viz.:

An Establishment group based in and around the Magistracy. This group had links with the government and thus was able to exercise power via patronage.

A Presbyterian Group which defended the interests of Dissenters.

A Populist group of men outside the other groups.

In the 1820s and early 1830s, although the majority of Freeman voted Tory, there was always substantial support for Blake, who was first elected at Berwick in 1820. Further, there were both pro- and anti-reform petitions supported by factions of Freeman prior to the Great Reform Act. Even when two years had passed from the passage of the reform into law it was revealed above that it was still not possi-

ble for the Corporation to officially welcome Grey, a Northumbrian from a few miles down the road, to the town.

That Wilson was knowledgeable of local politics, even before he returned to Berwick in 1832, was revealed in a letter to William Hopper Thompkins in July 1829. He wrote:

I sincerely rejoiced at my friend Dr Howe's success. He is a man of genius, and worthy of reward. But, candidly, he must not bury talents like his in Borough politics. Who will thank him? ... I am glad to hear of certain success at the approaching contest. Then I will a second time play laureate to the worshipful the Mayor of my native place. It rejoiced me to hear that monied ignorance is losing ground among you.

The ‘Doctor Howe’ referred to here was, in fact, Dr William Dunbar *How* (previously mentioned as Alderman How), who was Mayor of Berwick for the period 1828-29. Who was William Hopper Thompkins? According to Escott (2009), Thompkins was originally a Commercial Traveller in Kennington. At some stage he moved to Berwick to become a Currier^[lxxviii] in the family business. At the 1820 election he had brought a decisive number of out-voters to the town to support Blake in that election. It is not clear why by 1826 Hopper Thompkins had turned against Blake, but it is quite possible that it was because of opposition in the town to a Beresford-Blake coalition to ensure both were returned at the 1826 election. Escott writes regarding that election:

Noting growing public anger at the ill-disguised attempt to unseat Blake, the *Berwick Advertiser* conceded that a Beresford-Blake coalition was ‘probably attempted’ and might explain the reluctance of some of Blake’s ‘promised freemen’ to vote ...

By the 1830 election Wilson's friends, Thompkins and How, were on opposing sides, since the latter supported Blake in the 1830 election and Thompkins supported the third candidate, Gye, who as indicated previously eventually withdrew, having suggested to Thompkins during his campaign that he should try to reconcile his differences with "his former friends". In 1826 How had also been an opponent of Blake and had attempted, along with Blake's former Lawyer and former Mayor of Berwick, A.T. Steavenson (a close ally of Hopper Thompkins), to prevent the petition which had led to Blake's re-election in 1827 being dispatched.

It is not clear which side Wilson took in private in these disagreements, but he was a passionate advocate for Blake in his newspaper columns when he became Editor and, as indicated above, was supported by How at the meeting at which Earl Grey's visit to Berwick was discussed. It is interesting that in the letter Wilson wrote to Hopper Thompkins, cited above, he also supported the establishment of an alternative Whig newspaper in Berwick:

I understand a new paper is about being commenced, with which I hear you are connected. There is room and necessity for such an undertaking, Heaven knows; but, to ensure its success, it must be begun with spirit, conducted with spirit, order, and impartiality—and above all, ability. I have no question of its success—but it must scarcely be expected to pay for the first twelve months. The field is spacious, the game plentiful, and will soon repay the sportsman.

(cited in the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* 9 April 1889)

He added a comment about the plan at the end as follows:

PS By the way, the name of the Berwick Liberal is decidedly a bad one. Let me know before you fix on another.

One can only speculate on the reason for such opposition to the *Advertiser* at this stage, but it could also have been in relation to the above-mentioned Blake-Beresford coalition which the newspaper supported.

Escott (2009) writes that in the late 1820s “... the struggle for power was transferred to the guild and vestry”, from the electoral process. The Parish Vestry, the sole rating authority until the Guild was forced to levy charges in 1828, had become an important political forum, involving all inhabitant rate-paying householders. In 1830 the Guild was in conflict with the church regarding the former’s claim that it was entitled to nominate two of the Churchwardens and the Parish Clerk. The dispute came to a head when the Guild’s nominee, the afore-mentioned Hopper Thompkins, the Guild’s spokesperson at the Vestry, and others, were refused entry to a meeting at the church in February 1830. The outcome was a serious disturbance and the arrest of Thompkins and several of his supporters.

Reporting on the incident the Editor of the *Advertiser* was critical of Thompkins and it was also critical of the Guild for nominating him as their representative in the church. The article also mentioned, without elaboration, “... atrocious calumnies which were last year circulated and have been constantly repeated since” (B. A. 27th February 1830). Again, this statement is almost certainly to do with Thompkin’s allegations against the then Mayor. Initially the Guild supported Thompkins by 140 votes to 67, but subsequently a further meeting withdrew that support by 170 to 143 votes. All those charged were eventually fined, the most severe fine, of £50, being imposed on Thompkins. Undeterred, in October 1830 Thompkins asked the Guild to reduce the Vicar’s salary but was defeated.

There had also been a disturbance at the 1829 mayoral election when Thompkins failed in his bid to become Mayor although, given the optimism Wilson expressed in his letter to him cited above, he had obviously hoped to win. This was a key post in the town. Some eight to ten per cent of the borough's adult males collectively constituted the Corporation or Guild and were entitled (with their widows) to shares in its considerable income. The *Newcastle Courant* of 10th October 1829 reported on this mayoral election day, thus:

Considerable disorder prevailed during the day, and though about thirty special constables were added to the ordinary police, it was not without great difficulty that the peace was preserved in the Guildhall. Whether "the war" is at an end or not, time will show.

'The war' was not over. By 1830 Thompkins, Steavenson and others had formed an Anti-Corporation Party and the former stood in the mayoral election in October 1830, campaigning to reform Berwick "... by dis-enfranchising all non-resident burgesses and all resident ones who did not pay rates and taxes". He lost again and the *Advertiser* described the subsequent disturbance as follows:

The court-room presented a most disgraceful scene, which every hour became worse as some bullies attached to Mr Thompkins became more and more intoxicated and turbulent. They paraded about the court-room, mounted the table, gesticulated and speechified and shook their fists, even in the face of the Mayor himself. It was 11 p.m. before order was restored. Even so, the night's proceedings were not over. Major Ourde was accompanied to his residence by his supporters, and Thompkins, not to be outdone, formed his followers into a procession, marched at

their head to his house and ended by lavishing upon them a further lengthy harangue from a first floor window.

(B. A. 2nd October 1830)

Thompkins and nine others were charged with various offences including riot and assault.

Thompkins continued to dispute his right to be Mayor by issuing warrants against Mayor Ourde and was still pursuing legal redress in relation to the conduct of the Guild in 1834. His ally, Steavenson, took further legal action against the corporation in 1835. Thompkins again competed in the mayoral election of that year and was defeated. He then stood as a Radical candidate in the municipal election of 1835 when he was also defeated.

Given the bitterness of these disputes and the readiness of some people in Berwick to use the courts and other means to challenge opponents during this period, it was wise for the Editor of the local newspaper to be wary of local political comment, whether it was Wilson's or his Proprietor's decision. That defending oneself against legal action was expensive was illustrated by the request in 1834 by the former Mayor, John Longhorn, that the Freeman pay his legal expenses of £1158-18-4 accrued in relation to two warrants issued by Thompkins. The request was rejected by the Guild by 182 to 166 votes.

The 1835 election in which Thompkins participated was the consequence of a Whig reform which was arguably more significant than the Great Reform Act. After the passing of the 1832 Act the next logical step in the reform of the constitution was municipal reform. With such reform on the government's agenda Wilson could not continue to avoid discussing the administration of Freeman boroughs and of Berwick in particular.

Why was such reform necessary? Many towns and cities were unincorporated (which meant they had no charter giving them independent rights), including the rapidly growing cities of Birmingham, Manchester and Sheffield, and were under the control of local magistrates. Many believed that the large towns were becoming increasingly ungovernable because of their undisciplined populations.

Corporate towns, like Berwick, were run by corporations created by Royal Charters in an ad hoc manner and thus there were great variations in how the corporations were chosen and how they functioned. The Royal Commission established to consider their future found much evidence of corruption, with many corporation members becoming rich at the expense of the inhabitants in the towns. The Commission's report stated that borough funds were:

... frequently expended in feasting, and in paying the salaries of unimportant officers rather than on the good government of the borough. In some places funds had been expended on public works without adequate supervision, and large avoidable debts had accrued. This often arose from contracts being given to members of the corporation or their friends or relations. Municipal property was also treated as if it were only for the use of the corporation and not the general population.

Following the charter granted by James I, Berwick's municipal affairs were controlled by the Freeman. The Corporation was described as the Mayor, Bailiffs and Burgesses assembled as the Guild to manage the affairs of the Corporation, make bye-laws and dispose of their property. The Berwick Corporation also administered policing and the administration of justice.

As noted above, the Freeman's rights and privileges had been initially threatened in 1830 when the Whigs were planning electoral reform and they were again under review when the Melbourne admin-

istration introduced the Municipal Reform Bill. Although the Bill proposed to preserve the pecuniary and personal rights and privileges of all existing Freemen for their lifetime, all the traditional ways of obtaining the freedom of a corporation were to be abolished. Thus all of the Freemen's rights and privileges, including the parliamentary franchise, would terminate on the death of the existing Freemen, since there would no longer be any Freemen to exercise them.

Wilson criticized the status quo, thus:

We believe church-rates to be an odious imposition, and dissenters feel them to be so; but at the same time they know that they will and must be steadily abolished; and though they are an evil, they know they are but a minor evil when compared with the monstrous abuses in our Municipal Corporations. They are the great bulwark of corruption, by which all other abuses have been defended and maintained.

(B. A. 30th May 1835)

He was delighted with the government proposals for local government reform, writing:

It is a measure which does lasting honour to the government that has planned, proposed and brought it forward. It is just, and liberal to the utmost extent we could desire, and we must confess that in points of liberality it far exceeds what we expected ... The most important clause in the bill is that which confers corporate rights upon *all* rate-payers.

(B. A. 13th June 1835)

If the proposed reform were to be implemented, he argued “... Toryism will be driven from its great stronghold...” (B. A. 30th May 1835).

Wilson was of course aware that this was a controversial subject locally, stating:

... we well know it be a sore subject and calculated to make enemies. But as public journalists, whose chief boast is honesty, we must serve the truth, offend whom we may.

(B. A. 27th June 1835)

He had earlier attempted to re-assure the Freemen, stating that given “... the character of the present government, burgesses have nothing to fear that the measure which is here hinted at will be one of spoliation, or that it will deprive them of a single privilege to which they have a just or legal claim” (B. A. 8th February 1834).

The following statement by Wilson could not however have been easy reading for Berwick’s Freemen:

Was it that certain individuals in those towns should enjoy certain privileges from which their fellow citizens were excluded? Was it that certain of them should feed cows upon a common, or put in their own pockets the profits of portions of ground? If such had been the case they would have at once unjust and unnecessary institutions ... corporation property is *trust* property, it is public property and should not be devoted to any private enterprise.

(B. A. 27th June 1835)

Similarly, the following statement must have caused consternation in Freemen circles:

“HEALTH AND HOME ARE POWERFUL MAGNETS”.
AN EXILE RETURNS TO BERWICK.

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Corporations as they now exist, are the last rotten pillow that political corruption has to lean its head upon; like a nurse that has fattened them by the mark of her bosom ... she *solicits* Berwick upon Tweed ...

(B. A. 8th August 1835)

In June 1835 he had reviewed the history of the corporations and concluded:

... gradually they fell into corruption and instead of being a protection to the liberty of the people they became instruments of corruption in the hands of Kings, courtiers and plunderers of the public purse while the spirit of the age and of improvement went forward, corporations went backward. Instead of being stimulants and encouragements to trade and industry as they were designed to be, they became drags and burdens on them, and a tax upon a spirit of enterprise ... they have been frittered into things of personal advantage. These who are now burgesses talk of their *rights* being invaded. We deny that any *right* is invaded, but the people have cause to complain and they do complain that their rights have been usurped and withheld from them.

(B. A. 27th June 1835)

Earlier Wilson had stated:

Corporation reform will break down one of the remaining props of corruption ... Property will benefit corporations, not being for the use of and benefit of individuals.

(B. A. 8th February 1834)

He was pleased that the government had acted to prevent 'subversion of the reform' and wrote:

Several clauses have been added to it which render null and void the attempt made by the burgesses in some places to dispose of the corporation property, and by applying the money to their own uses to defeat the provisions of the bill. These clauses are important and necessary amendments ...

(B. A 18th July 1835)

When the Leader of the House of Commons, Lord John Russell signified his intention to alter the bill to secure to Apprentices all the rights and privileges which they would have enjoyed had the reform bill not been brought forward, Wilson supported this amendment, but not the following proposal:

... that the right to common lands exemption to tolls and other privileges, shall be continued to all the sons of Burgesses now born. They will not be entitled to vote in virtue of being the sons of the present Freemen, for the members of Parliament for the borough, but the property of the borough during their lives will be divided amongst them.

(B. A. 4th July 1835)

He continued:

We do not believe that any non-Burgess could entertain the insane idea that Corporation reform would entitle him to apply a single penny of borough property to his own private advantage, as the present corporation in this and other boroughs now do, but neither could he suppose that he would be taxed to enable the sons of these now Freemen to divide the borough funds amongst themselves ... On this town, perhaps more than any other, it will bear most heavily, and will have the effect of causing a borough rate to be levied on the inhabitants of from two to three shillings in the pound ... The effect of the act will be that the public will be taxed in order that existing abuses may be perpetuated.

The Bill received its second reading in June 1835 and was passed by the Commons for consideration by the upper house in August. Wilson was furious with the negative response the bill received in the Lords, and, echoing his criticisms of the same body regarding the Great Reform Act, he commented thus:

We can hardly find words to express the contempt we feel for the scenes that have been exhibited in the House of our *hereditary* Senators within the last few days. Since ever we could think, we have thought it a ridiculous, an absurd, a monstrous thing, that any man should be made a maker of laws merely because his father was a law maker.

(B. A. 8th August 1835)

He wanted a different type of member of the second chamber;

In a word, it requires that they should be men possessed of the highest intellect and the strongest integrity to be found amongst his Majesty's subjects.

By their actions, he argued, the Tory Lords were once again raising the question of their future position:

We think with Lord Melbourne, that they are pursuing a course which is calculated to endanger their very existence as a legislative body ...

He continued on the same theme the following week, thus:

They have caused a bigoted and blinded oligarchy to lift up its hand against itself ... they have caused the people to enquire into their property qualifications, and each man to ask the question of his neighbour – ‘how long shall we permit a pauper aristocracy to rule over us’? ... The Lords will do well to consider the temper of the times in which they live.

(B. A. 15th August 1835)

Earlier he had stated that the Lords are like “... an armed and determined phalanx against the spirit of the age” (B. A. 21st June 1834) and he concluded the article of 15th August by declaring that they “... have hastened the time when the cleansing of their Aegean stable will take place”.

Town Clerks from a number of the corporations gave evidence at the House of Lords opposing the reform. The Town Clerk of Berwick attended as part of a deputation of Freemen from the town. Wilson ridiculed the evidence presented by the Town Clerks, as follows:

The evidence farce, in which the Town Clerks were to be the principal actors was so stupid, so absurd and ridiculous, that even their Lordships found it would be impossible to yawn over it longer than last Saturday, and therefore gave it up ... Almost every town in ‘fair England’ has uplifted its voice; ‘and the Scottish lion has shook its mane’, and although the Isle has not been ‘frighted from its propriety’, the Peers have been scared from pursuing their course of folly; that is, they have abandoned the precious evidence of the immaculate Town Clerks, which was equal to requesting the affectionate and dependent son – and who was a sharer in his father’s guilt – to give that father a bad character. Henceforth the evidence of the Town Clerks of 1835 will be a byword and a standing jest. ‘A Town Clerk’s’ evidence will supersede the saying ‘set a thief to catch a thief’.

(B. A. 15th August 1835)

He was delighted to report on an event in Berwick on the afternoon of 8th August 1834. A petition supporting the government’s reform was circulated and 550 signatures were gathered in five hours. He expressed his contempt for those who opposed the petition, thus:

It was laughable, it was more than laughable to see some of the neediest of the burgesses – the street-walkers - watching the shops where lay the petition for signature, making their sorry observations and glancing on every one that entered which seemed to say ‘would that our eyes were daggers.’ We also heard of two or three cases of petty tyranny towards respectable men, in consequence of their

having signed the petition; but if we hear of it again, let the contemptible authors of the tyranny beware.

During the same month an advertisement in the newspaper expressed thanks to John Langhorn, the former Mayor, for his efforts in the formation of a Municipal Corporation Reform Committee.

Through-out August Wilson continued to criticise the Lords in the strongest terms, for example:

Seldom, perhaps never, have the feelings of the people been so grossly outraged. Wellington's memorable declaration that 'there should be no reform' was hardly a match for the doings of their worships within the last few days ... They have not only destroyed the Bill, but they have rendered it odious and pernicious ... Firstly, all the public property which Burgesses have been permitted to apply to their private use, is to be conferred by Act of Parliament upon them and their heirs for ever. But this is not all, for all the political and municipal rights now enjoyed and abused by Freemen of boroughs, are to be held by them, and to descend to their children's children. Even to the last generation. Their Lordships have shown their loving kindness and gratitude towards the Corporations for the support they exercised in the House of Commons ... We are thus to have a political and municipal oligarchy in every Borough in the Kingdom ... But this is not all, for the present race of worthy Aldermen are to continue Aldermen for the period of their natural lives, and worse and worse, five-sixths of all ratepayers in every town are to be excluded from being eligible to be chosen Town Councilors, and the aristocratic sixth part, whose wealth is to give them wisdom, are alone to be the town rulers and to have the management of its affairs. A more outrageous, a more

disgusting insult was never offered to the common sense and feeling of the country.

(B. A. 22nd August 1835)

Wilson was opposed at this stage to flooding the House of Lords with pro-reform Peers to enable the bill to be passed, stating:

We have too many – far too many, already.

(B. A. 29th August 1835)

Instead the MPs should impose a financial penalty, arguing:

To withhold the alms of the state paupers would have an excellent effect.

He cautioned against abolition of the upper house arguing that a reformed house is “... a wise, useful, and necessary branch of legislature, and while they are a check upon aggression on the part of the crown on the one hand, they secure deliberation and prevent rashness on the other” (B. A. 6th September 1834). The country, he argued, was not yet ready for elected peers, but earlier he had supported “... the creation for life of such a number of peers, as would ensure a majority in all the important measures which must be brought before them” (B. A. 21st June 1834). Once again Wilson was ahead of his time as Life Peers could be created only after the Life Peerage Act 1958.

The Tories regarded the Bill as an underhand attempt by the Whigs to remove the Freeman’s franchise which they had failed to achieve in 1832. As it was, the government accepted amendments from Tory Peers with regard to the Freeman’s property and electoral rights, thus ensuring the continuation of the Freeman parliamentary franchise, though in future Freeman could no longer be created by gift or purchase. Wilson was angry, stating of the government:

When justice, when their own principles were urging them on – yes when the nation was urging them on, and rendering them the assurance of its irresistible support, they have winked at justice, they have trimmed their principles, they have shrunk from the support of the nation, and fawned, yielded and bowed their heads to the dictation of the hundred coronets ... and so far as we have been able to overtake the public opinion, we may say, without exception, it is condemnatory of every amendment made by the Lords.

(B. A. 5th September 1835)

Wilson expressed his view of the consequences of the amended bill in what was almost certainly his final editorial, thus:

It will perpetuate party strife and a pauper oligarchy in every Borough in the Kingdom – it will sanction abuses by Act of Parliament, which hitherto have only been permitted by torturing into misconstruction the provisions of Royal Charters. Above all it insults honest poverty and worships wealth ... The representatives of the people have stooped ‘so low to take up so little’ ...

(B. A. 12th September 1835)

He however concluded by stating that “... we do not mean to deny that it is not an improvement of the old system, and that it utterly roots up so many of the worst abuses ... but he believed that it would ... prove an excellent engine in the hands of the Tories”.

The Municipal Corporations Act eradicated all the old town corporations, ending a system of local government that in some places had been around for hundreds of years. The Act established

a uniform system of municipal boroughs¹ divided into wards. The reformed boroughs were obliged to publish their financial accounts and were liable to audit. Each borough was to appoint a salaried Town Clerk and Treasurer who were not to be members of the council. Councils were required to form a police force and, if they so wished, could undertake social improvements such as proper drainage and street cleaning. The Act however did not compel the new councils to make social improvements; consequently, by 1848 only twenty-nine boroughs had taken any action in terms of public health.

All town halls and other corporate property had to be transferred to the new councils, but with exceptions or compensation for anything that belonged to private institutions or individuals, such as independent charities and Freemen. The legal disputes from this often rumbled on for years, leading to costly court cases and numerous appeals to parliament.

The Act allowed unincorporated towns to petition for incorporation. The industrial towns of the Midlands and the North quickly took advantage of this, with Birmingham and Manchester becoming boroughs as soon as 1838. Many towns however failed to apply for incorporation because the procedure was complicated and expensive. In 1848 there were still sixty-two large towns without councils. The Burgh Reform Act 1833² had already been enacted in Scotland³. Similar legislation was not however introduced in Ireland⁴ until the Municipal Reform Act 1840⁵.

The new corporations had annual elections, with a third of the councillors up for election each year and the elected councillors were

1. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipal_borough

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Burgh_Reform_Act_1833

3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland>

4. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ireland>

5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Municipal_Reform_Act_1840

to choose Aldermen who would form one-quarter of the council. The Councillors themselves elected the Mayor. Freeman's rights to admission, except by gift or purchase, and the rights of property, other than corporate borough property, were unaffected by the Act. Unlike the parliamentary household vote – only given to those occupying property worth at least £10 a year in rental value – the new municipal franchise had no minimum property requirement. Every male ratepayer who had lived in the town for three years would be able to take part.

Barely three weeks after the Act's passage, especially appointed Revising Barristers started setting up registration courts to decide who would be able to vote. The Act mainly benefited the middle classes since very few working men were wealthy enough to be ratepayers and the number of town council electors often turned out to be much smaller than had been expected – in some boroughs it was even less than the number who qualified for the parliamentary vote. The reason for this, which soon became apparent at the first October registration, was the registration requirement for municipal voters to have been resident for 3 years and to have paid all their local rates up to the last 6 months – in effect 2 ½ years of rate paying. Parliamentary electors, by contrast, only had to have been resident for the last 6 months and to have paid a minimum of 2 ½ months' rates. This difference in rating and residency requirements meant that those who moved around a lot, missed the odd rate payment, or paid their rates to a landlord rather than directly, failed to qualify as council voters. As a result, the municipal and parliamentary franchises turned out to be remarkably similar in practice.

Cannadine (2017) concludes regarding municipal reform:

As such, the measure reflected the Whig government's genuine concern for strengthening local communities and fostering responsible citizenship, along with a more parti-

**“HEALTH AND HOME ARE POWERFUL MAGNETS”.
AN EXILE RETURNS TO BERWICK.**

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san hostility to traditional strongholds of Tory power and influence.

For many local reformers the creation of elected town councils in 1835 amounted to a far more significant event than the 1832 Reform Act. Annual elections, in particular, made municipal reform a more relevant and popular measure than parliamentary reform.

It is now necessary to discuss Wilson's sudden death and his legacy.

Chapter Twelve: Wilson's Legacy

Wilson's 73rd Tale, *The Minister's Daughter*, had included the statement "concluded next week", but Wilson did not live to see it published since he died on October 2nd, 1835. His customary political article had not appeared on the 19th of September and a number of newspapers reported that he had been taken ill two weeks before his death, as follows:

About a fortnight before this unfortunate result Mr. Wilson burst a blood-vessel, and from that period gradually sunk under the effects of that accident, although his medical attendants and friends by no means imagined his end to be so near.

One newspaper reported that his last words were:

The hour of my departure's come,
I hear the voice that calls me home;
At last, O Lord, let troubles cease,
And let thy servant die in peace.

On 3rd October 1835, his death was announced in the *Advertiser*. This obituary suggested he had been ill for longer than the other newspapers cited above had reported and it is presumably more accurate. It reads as follows:

This morning, in the 31st year of his age, and after an illness of three weeks, Mr John M Wilson, during several years editor of this journal, and author of various compositions in prose and poetry, which are familiar to the public. Mr W. acquired the status in society which he oc-

cupied at the time of his decease by dint of his own exertions; and thus added another to the honourable examples of persons who have overcome difficulties, and bettered their condition in the world. His efforts in the cause of Reform will be remembered long. To facilitate the progress of liberal opinions on subjects both of general and local interest was the constant aim of his editorial labours; and to every movement in this quarter, which identified itself with the liberties and comforts of the people, he lent a strong impulse by his presence and powerful appeals.

The newspaper also published the following unattributed poem (as noted above his brother James often published poems in the paper so perhaps he wrote it):

ON THE DEATH OF JOHN M. WILSON

Again the death-bell strikes mine ear;

It sounds so sad and slow,

Methinks in each deep toll I hear

The voice of mortal woe.

But oh! If thus that sound has power

The careless heart to wound,

How must the new-made widow's soul

Shrink from its dismal sound!

The Border star is set to-day,

Gone down, alas! at noon;

And all are sad – the very sky

Has wrapp'd itself in gloom.

Long time the tree in weakness stood

And bow'd to every blast;

But yet it broke not, and in strength

It rear'd its head at last:

I mark'd its beauty, and its height
 Aspiring to the sky.
 And thought, the time will come when thou
 Must lay thy glory by.
 Even while I gaz'd the storm came on,
 The lightnings flashe'd around –
 Its beauty blasted, broke its boughs,
 And bent it to the ground.
 The whirlwind next, with raging force
 And death-like fury came;
 It pass'd and left the stately tree
 Uprooted on the plain.
 Low lies the pride of Tweedmouth now,
 The Borders well may mourn;
 Their champion's gone where many go, -
 Whence none can e'er return.
 In your churchyard another grave
 Is added to the throng –
 Say, who beneath that new - turned sod
 Now dwells the dead among?
 Of birth obscure – yet one for whom
 Now many a stranger weeps;
 For know, that under that cold turf
 JOHN MACKAY WILSON sleeps.

Similarly, J. Proudfoot wrote his *Lament to John Mackay Wilson* a few days after his death. The following is an extract:

Alas! he is gone in the zenith of the glory -
 His genius was fertile, his loss we deplore:
 He gladden'd the hearth with traditional story
 Alike cheer'd the castle, and the cot on the moor.

This poem was later set to music by Mr A. Paterson, Precentor of Golden Square Chapel.

One can only speculate as to the cause of such a sudden death. As shown earlier, Wilson informed Everett in 1832 that his health was concerning him and he may always have had health problems. The work-load he assumed from March 1832 until his death might well have killed many men.

It was also suggested here that he might have had a problem with alcohol which could have damaged his health. Andrew Ayre (2018) believes he may have used opiates to enable him to work so hard. This is certainly possible and interestingly Tait (1881) in his biographical notes regarding Wilson states:

... the strain during the summer of 1835 was too much. Artificial aids to exertion might sustain the powers for a time; but the collapse was all the more certain to appear.

Opiates were legal and used by many creative people. Scott used laudanum and opium (further, according to James Hogg, not the most reliable witness, Lady Scott was addicted to opium near the end of her life). On 18th April 1819, around the time of writing *The Bride of Lammermoor*, Scott stated:

Conceive my having taken, in the course of six or seven hours, six grams of opium, three of hyoscyamus, near 200 drops of laudanum – and all without any sensible relief of the agony under which I laboured.

Famously when de Quincey used opium he experienced “night-marish visions” and Samuel Taylor Coleridge wrote of the “caverns measureless to man¹”, during his experiences of opium usage.

The publication of *The Minister's Daughter*, which was advertised in the *Advertiser* on both October 3rd and 10th, was organised

1. [https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/27/samuel-taylor-coleridge-kubla-](https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/jan/27/samuel-taylor-coleridge-kubla-khan)

by Rev. J. K. Campbell, then of the Tweedmouth Church of Scotland, who included the following announcement in the forty-ninth edition of the Tales:

It is our painful duty to send around the land the tidings of the lamented death of Mr JOHN MACKAY WILSON, the author of these Tales. This event has come upon us at an hour when, in truth, 'we looked not for it'. That grim messenger, whose afflicting visits he has so often affectingly described, has borne his irresistible demand upon him – thrown the gloom of desolation over the bright scene that was expanding before his eyes – and left, in darkness and in sorrow, his bereaved and afflicted friends.

The event which we thus deplore, took place on the morning of the 2nd instant. Thirty-one short years only had rolled over him in this vale of tears. His sun had not yet gained its meridian splendour, when the dark cloud of death overshadowed him, and has left us to look after him in sadness across that bourn no traveller ever returns.

Perhaps Wilson had written the eulogy he would have preferred for himself in one of his 'conversations' published the previous year. He had quoted himself thus:

Sir, I can bring no academic honours as a qualification to the task, - nor yet do I bring grey hairs as an insignia of wisdom, - but this I can say without vanity, that I bring a desire to do good, and I bring much reading, anxious thoughts and research, and some observation.

(B. A. 4th October 1834)

Wilson, who left a wife but no children, was buried in Tweedmouth. According to Bellas Knowles (cited in the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* of 5th January 1909), at the graveside ceremony an irate young woman flung an issue of the *Tales* at Wilson's coffin and shouted “Here. Tak yer lees wi ye”. It is thought that she believed her father to have been the subject of one of his *Tales* (Yates 2010). Sheldon^[lxxix] in his “History of Berwick (1849),” later stated:

Far away from the noise, the fret, and bustle of large towns, repose the remains of Berwick's poet, John Mackay Wilson. Earth lie thou lightly on him, and happy be his rest.

But where does he lie? The *Berwick Advertiser* of 27th May 1937 included the following report:

Some doubt has arisen as to where in the churchyard the remains of the talented author rest. Until recently it was believed they lay under the memorial stone to his memory. Now, however, an ex-verger of Tweedmouth Church has stated that about ten years ago the monument was removed to another part of the burial ground to about 30 yards from the grave.

The *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* of 25th May 1937 carried the same story.

For almost a 100 years concerns have been expressed about the poor state of repair of the grave and the Wilson memorial. In 1926 a John Mackay Wilson Association was established and its members took it upon themselves to ensure that the grave was not neglected

and a tree was removed as part of an improvement programme. The Association added the inscription “Poet and Author of the *Tales of the Borders*” to the memorial.

A small service was held at the graveside on the anniversary of his birth in 1927 when a wreath was laid. Similar ceremonies were subsequently conducted annually for some time and on the anniversary of his death in 1935, following a service, the then owner of the *Berwick Advertiser*, Major H. R. Smail, made a speech and laid a wreath, as did the then Editor, J. M. Friar. Earlier it had been suggested that a memorial to Wilson should be erected in Tweedmouth itself, but no such memorial exists. In 1905, however, a brass plaque by Gosselin of London was displayed in the Scottish church in Tweedmouth and is now in the possession of the Wilson Tales Project..

Wilson brought considerable energy, imagination and writing talent to the *Advertiser* and improved the content of the newspaper considerably in his short time as Editor. As has been



The Wilson Memorial in Tweedmouth Church Cemetery

shown, he broadened the coverage by introducing features on literary figures and items of general interest. Further, coverage of local news was expanded and he tried to attract female readers by articles on fashion. Cowan (1946) in his extensive survey of Scottish newspapers,

states of Wilson:

It is safe to say that here was a combination of force, industry and imagination unmatched among Scottish journalists of that day.

On 26th November 1832 Wilson had written to Everett boasting of success at the newspaper, as follows:

As I understand you still get the paper, you must tell me how you like it, and wherein you think it might be improved. It was in a miserable condition when I took it in hand. Talent or spirit it never had, and its sale was rapidly decreasing. Within a fortnight I obtained them about a hundred additional subscribers, - its circulation rose higher than it ever was during the five and twenty years of its existence and it continues weekly to increase. In fact, when I took the helm of their wreck, I found her timbers rotten and floundering among rocks, - refitted her and steered her into the haven of profit and popularity.

On 6th July 1833 he reported to his readers that there was a “steadily increasing circulation” and was of course pleased that advertising duty was then to be reduced as he believed that this would aid sales further. In a letter to Everett written on 15th April 1834 Wilson stated:

Nevertheless, the Advertiser goes on increasing in prosperity and popularity, and I have the satisfaction of enjoying the favour of all classes for twenty miles round ...

As noted earlier, circulation does not equal readership and the editorship gave Wilson a significant platform for his political views which have been much quoted here. His rhetoric is impressive. Further, his analysis is generally stimulating and learned. From his editorial work one obtains a picture of a divided Berwick and a divided country. The Great Reform Act healed these divisions briefly, then, as is seen, for example, with the subsequent evolution of Wilson's ideas, dissatisfaction developed once more.

As was pointed out, his ideas were ahead of his time. One wonders how his ideas would have developed had he lived longer. Might he eventually have been sympathetic to the Chartists? As has been shown, he was certainly already much frustrated by the impact of the Great Reform Act. This is just one of the many questions about Wilson which must remain unanswered.

To increase the circulation in the context of competition from two Kelso newspapers, the newest one also being a Whig-supporting newspaper, was a considerable achievement. Yet he never seems to have felt appreciated and properly rewarded by Catherine Richardson as the following extract from the letter written to Everett on 26th November 1832 illustrates:

For this service you will no doubt think the proprietors are generous and grateful. If they are they have neither shown it nor said it. They fear me rather than love me. You may ask how can this be? - With the public they have become as nobody, and in town and country it is called Mackay Wilson's paper. Now my salary mainly was to rest on the success of the paper at the end of twelve months - there is but three months of the twelve to run, and they

have never hinted directly or indirectly at that part of our bargain. However I shall say nothing till the three months be out; but I would have been more satisfied with some token of generosity on their side. Indeed I have never had a single paper since I became Editor without paying seven pence for it, the same as another subscriber! In the entire management of it however they have never ventured to interfere with me in the slightest! - I have urged them to get me new types, and make it the one half larger but as it is it is bringing them in a handsome profit at a cheap rate and they cannot find it in their hearts to expend a shilling on it. If this narrow spirit continues - they and I must shake hands, - the old types and the older press are theirs, but the readers are mine, and if they encourage me not according to my exertions, next year I would feel it my duty to become printer and Editor of an opposition journal, - for no one shall grow fat on the sweat of my brains, unless I am an equitable sharer in the profits.

As previously indicated Wilson was aware of a plan to establish a rival ‘Liberal’ newspaper in Berwick in 1829. It is not known how advanced this plan was. To consider an attempt to launch another, presumably anti-Tory, newspaper in Berwick in the 1832 competitive context was ambitious, but Wilson had always shown great determination in his career. As is discussed below, a Tory newspaper was launched in Berwick in 1835.

He felt insecure in the Editor’s role as the following quotation from a letter to Everett written on 15th April 1834 reveals:

My situation as Editor here obtains for me a large portion of respect and a considerable share of flattery. It is however no sinecure, and were the duties not such as I delight in, they would be laborious. The recent improvements re-

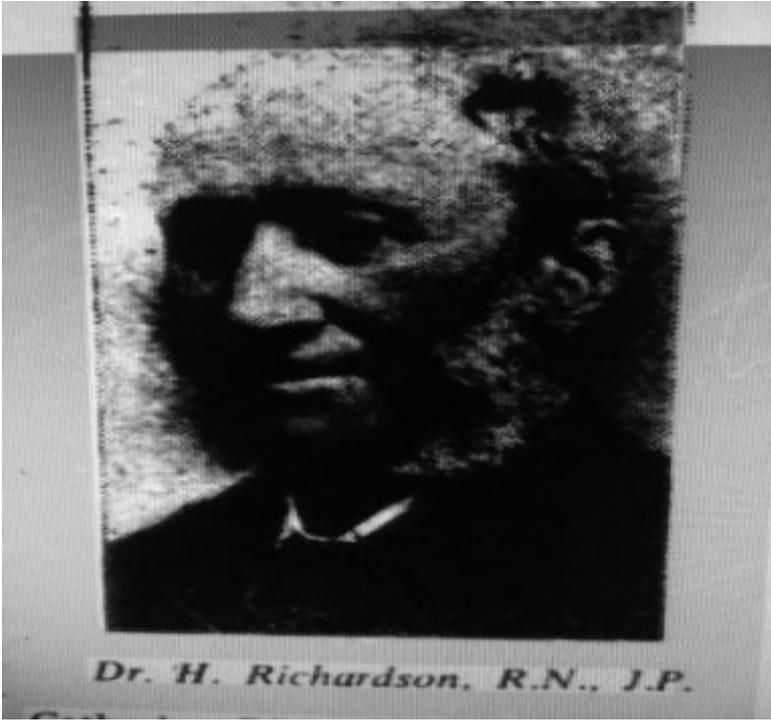
quire more labour, and have increased the circulation, but they have not increased my salary, nor have I asked an increase or intend to ask it. I believe I am the worst paid of any Editor in Britain - but I do not think I cut the shabbiest appearance. The salary, however, such as it is, places a person of my habits and 'family' in a state of comfort - above want and in comparative independence. Yet in some things I feel the will without the means. Now, the actual proprietor of the paper, is a youth about sixteen years of age, who is now at the High School or College in Edinburgh receiving an education that may qualify him to be his own Editor. It is no secret that he when old enough is to take the management of the Advertiser upon himself. The public laugh at this and say the paper would not stand a quarter of a year without me. I certainly saved it from the very verge of ruin, and made it one of the best paying provincial papers in the country - But the young gentleman may be clever and please the public as well as me; and if in a year or two, he and his friends think him qualified to conduct the paper, they will be right in doing so. But I would be what I am not were I to toil for them until they might say to me, "we thank you for your faithful services and Master Henry will henceforth conduct the Advertiser himself." No. I have now entered on my third year, and if it please Heaven to spare me, and nothing better offer in the interim, I will continue Editor for another year, - but not longer.

At this time of course, Catherine Richardson, not the young Henry, was the Proprietor, but Wilson was correct about the plan for Henry eventually to be Editor. Henry did study in Edinburgh at the High School and the College of Edinburgh with that intention in

mind and he did become Editor in 1837, taking over from Alexander Peterkin Junior^[lxxx]. After two years, however, he returned to Edinburgh to study medicine. Henry graduated in 1841 and became a Doctor in the Navy. He was succeeded in the editorial chair by Alexander Russell who held the post until 1842 and later became a successful Editor of the *Scotsman*. Andrew Robson, the son of Catherine's first husband, who had been an apprentice of her second husband, became owner on Catherine's death, while Henry succeeded him on his death in 1861. In 1868 Henry Richardson Smail, a nephew of Henry Richardson, became Manager and Publisher.

One suspects that Wilson's expectations of income were inflated when he travelled to Berwick (his salary is not known, Russell earned £70 a year). Elliott (1978), who charts one exemplar of an occupation's shift to a profession, as being the ability of employees to make a living from it alone, posits that at the beginning of the nineteenth century only a few high-profile editors could make a living from their newspaper work alone. As noted earlier the first Editor was also a school Head-Master. Delano (2000) recalls Mencken's description of journalism at the beginning of the nineteenth century as "... a craft to be mastered in four days and abandoned at the first sign of a better job".

Anyway, Wilson was so unhappy and insecure that in a letter to
Everett written on 15th April



1834 he revealed he had considered legal work as an alternative, stating:

I have long been desirous of fighting my way to the bar. But the path is beset with difficulties. I would have three, if not five years of privation and expense before me and my wife, and after all I might remain for five years more a briefless barrister. After weighing well the subject, therefore, I have almost abandoned the idea.

In the same letter, he explained that emigration was attractive (once again also illustrating his confidence in his abilities), thus:

You are aware that the newspapers in the Canadas are absolutely trash and in the United States they are little more than respectable. With the recommendations that I could take with me, I do not think I would be long in finding an Editorship, and if I once had one, I should take care to be but a short time in being both proprietor and Editor of an American newspaper. As either the Canadas or the States are now peopled, this would not be lowering myself; and in point of talent I would not have the competition to contend with that I have in this country. Neither is patronage there an overshadowing need. If therefore, nothing better cast up between this and this time twelve months, and I enjoy the blessing of health till then I believe I shall try my fortune beyond the Atlantic.

Of course, that year the publishing of his *Tales* made such a drastic move unnecessary.



Wilson must have been aware that a second Berwick newspaper was planned in 1835 and this plan came to fruition, although he did not live to see it. In November 1835 the *Berwick and Kelso Warder* (which was quoted above) was established. In its first edition the intentions of its owners were announced as follows:

The *Berwick and Kelso Warder* will be established as a Loyal and Constitutional Organ of Public Opinion, in Berwickshire, Roxburghshire, Selkirkshire, the Lothians, North Durham and the northern part of Northumberland and generally along the Scottish and English Borders. Its conductors, which boldly stand forward as the Advocates of Liberal and Enlightened Conservative Principles ...

Rather generously the *Advertiser* included a number of advertisements for its rival prior to its first publication. In a region dominated by the Whig press, its debut was warmly received by the Tory *Newcastle Journal*, thus:

A new Paper, on constitutional principles, entitled the
"Berwick

and Kelso *Warder*", has just started, under high auspices,
at Berwick upon-Tweed. We hope for a long and a prosperous career for our able and respected contemporary.

The *Warder* was printed and published by George Macaskie in Sandgate in Berwick and represented the agricultural interest of the region and the established church, as opposed to the *Advertiser* which as noted championed the Non-Conformist cause. Its first Editor was strident in his attack on prominent Whigs and the newspaper was described by an opponent as "a pot of kitchen grease" (cited in Cowan 1946). The *Berwick Advertiser* sold 29,000 and the *Warder* 27,500 in 1837. In 1808 Berwick had had one weekly newspaper, the *British Gazette and Berwick Advertiser*, sixty-two years later the town boasted four weeklies, although only the *Advertiser* survives today.

As has been shown, in choosing to write stories set in the Borders he was tapping into a market for nostalgic fiction largely created by Sir Walter Scott in a context of rapid societal change. In many respects his career mirrored that of Scott. Following in the latter's footsteps, Wilson also wrote non-fiction work, poems, plays, tales and even a novel. Like Scott he utilised the linguistic variety of the Borders in his work. Of course, he was not as prolific as Scott, but he was a busy Editor when he was writing his *Tales of the Borders* and he died at about the age when Scott began writing for publication. Scott was always also a part-time writer, but his was an easier job which he was often criticised for neglecting in order to write. A further similarity

is that both writers had to contend with illness during their writing careers.

Wilson entitled his Tales as *Historical, Traditional and Imaginative Tales of the Borders*. Like Scott he wanted his readers to accept his versions of history as accurate and reflecting historical study. One notes, for example, his comment about the Setons cited above and, in his Tale *The Order of the Garter; A Story of Wark Castle*, he cites the historian Froissart^[lxxxix]. Scott also used this source. Like Scott, Wilson was not however averse to amending history when it suited his aims. As Yates (2010) points out:

The order of the Garter is an honour presented by the monarch as a reward for military merit. According to legend, the award was created by King Edward 111 when he retrieved a garter dropped by the Countess of Salisbury and, though Wark Castle was once owned by the Salisbury family, there is nothing to suggest that this was the actual scene of the incident.

Scott only wrote one nineteenth century novel, viz. *St. Ronan's Well*. The novel concerns the rivalry of two men: Valentine Bulmer, the Earl of Etherington, and his half-brother Francis Tyrrel. Both wish to marry Miss Clara Mowbray, who is the sister of John, the Laird of Saint Ronan's. Saint Ronan's Well is a spa at Innerleithen², a town near Peebles³.

Wilson in comparison wrote a number of Tales set in post-Napoleonic War Britain. *The Soldier's Return*, for example, is almost contemporary. Further, he refers to contemporary characters in his work. It has already been noted that he mentions Sir Robert Peel in his Tale *Reuben Purves or the Speculator*. In his Tale *The Irish Reaper*⁴

2. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Innerleithen>

3. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Peebles>

he refers to the highly significant and controversial Irish politician Daniel O’Connell (1775-1847)^[lxxxii] who he frequently criticised in the *Advertiser*, thus:

O’Connell had sailed from Liverpool on the previous day, and his countrymen were discussing his political merits.

"Why, bad luck to ye," exclaimed our hero with the great coat, in answer to one who had held forth in praise of the counsellor; "and is it you, Mick Behan, that says every man in Ireland should pay the O’Connell rint?—but I’ll tell you a bit of a parable, as father O’Shee says, and a parable too, of my own natural mother’s making. ‘Larry,’ says she to me, ‘Larry M’Carthy, don’t be after planting those big potatoes for seed; ‘for they’ve a hole in their heart a little Christian might slape in!’"

It is not known how Wilson obtained information for his ‘traditional’ or ‘imaginative’ Tales beyond the background reading he quotes. His Tale *The Deserted Tale* begins, thus:

The following tale was communicated to me in Dumfriesshire, in the year 1827, by an old and respectable lady

...

The Tale *The First and Second Marriage* begins similarly, as follows:

“I beg your pardon, sir,” said a venerable-looking, white-headed man, accosting me one day, about six weeks ago, as I was walking along near the banks of the Whiteadder; ‘ye are the author of the ‘Border Tales,’ sir - are ye not?’”

Not being aware of anything in the “Tales of the Borders” of which I need to be ashamed, and moreover being accustomed to meet with such salutations, after glancing at the stranger, with the intention, I believe, of taking the measure of his mind, or scrutinizing his motive in asking the question, I answered - “I am, sir.”

“Then, sir” said he, “I can tell ye a true story, and one that happened upon the Borders here within my recollection, and which was also within my own knowledge, which I think would make a capital tale.”

Was Wilson told these stories as he describes or is he merely using a device to claim authenticity? One can only speculate once more. In his Tale *Tibbie Fowler* he actually discourages such enquiries, thus:

The locality of the song was known to many; and if any should be inclined to inquire how he became acquainted with the other particulars of our story, we have only to reply, that that belongs to a class of questions to which we do not return an answer. There is no necessity for a writer of tales taking for his motto *vitam impendere vero*^[lxxxiii].

Wilson had originally intended to publish 96 editions of his Tales but, as indicated, he died as the 49th edition was about to be published. That edition included the following appeal on behalf of his widow who had “shared his sorrows through many a changing year”:

He has left a widow respectable and respected; and, from what we have said of his struggles through many a dark year, she is left to depend on the profits of his works for

the comforts necessary for her, till she sink to rest with him in the grave. Nor are her prospects dark if those who cheered him on in his literary labours still stand by her. His materials are not yet exhausted, and “tales yet untold” are in reserve to keep alive his memory and soothe as far as earthly comforts can her widowed heart ... Under the management of Mr James Wilson, her brother-in-law, and Mr Sutherland of 12 Calton Street, Edinburgh, who is now publisher, we trust to see her reap the full reward of his genius and toil whose last hours she sweetened.

The afore-mentioned James Sinclair, by then a Berwick Solicitor, persuaded Dr Carr, the author of *The History of Coldingham Abbey*, to contribute to the next issue and on 10th October, only a week after Wilson’s death, the following advertisement was published in the Advertiser and elsewhere:

... the Border Tales for the future will be published for behoof of the Widow of John Mackay Wilson, Berwick, by John Sutherland, 12 Calton Street, Edinburgh. From the Steam-Press of Peter Brown, Printers, Edinburgh. Stereotyped by D Stevenson.

Sutherland was a Bookseller who operated a circulating library and also acted as an Agent for the state lottery.

The *Newcastle Courant* of 21st September 1835 was generous in its editorialising about the Tales and the predicament of his widow, thus:

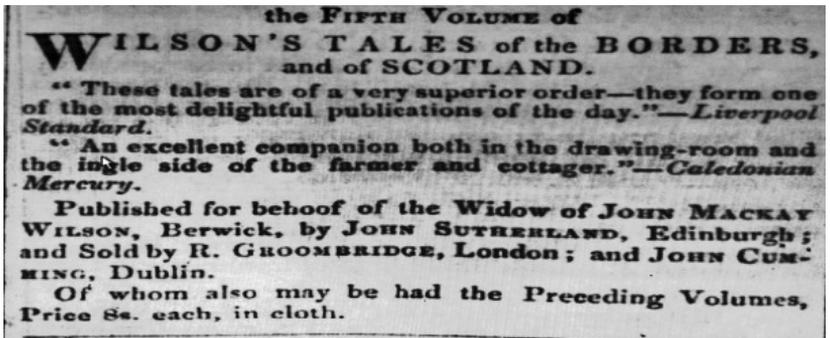
WILSON'S TALES OF THE BORDERS. To an imagination so lively, and powers so versatile, as those possessed by the late John Mackay Wilson, the long history of the English and Scottish borders presented a fertile field from

which to gather a series of Tales, such as those now in course of publication. Probably most of our readers have seen occasional numbers of the work; and so feel pretty well assured, the more they see the more they will be gratified. We know of no other publication in this district which, from its cheapness and agreeable a reading, is better adapted to be taken by a few neighbours, and circulated weekly among them. Old and young would alike derive pleasure from its pages, at the same time that they would steer clear of the pernicious effects which many other books that are pleasant reading have a direct or remote tendency to produce. Let it be remembered, too, that in purchasing these Tales, they are engaged in a work of charity-in the support of the widow of the author, whose premature death left her only the memory of his merits as her consolation, and these Tales as her only legacy.

The advertised appeals on behalf of the widow continued for a number of years and two examples are presented below.

Now ready, price 8s. in cloth, lettered, the Second Volume of
WILSON'S TALES of the BORDERS and of SCOTLAND.
 "To the lover of legendary lore and to the antiquarian, these Tales afford a fund of amusement and information which has been seldom equalled. They embody many of the reminiscences of by-gone times, wherein the magic stories of the belted knight and of the lover are admirably entwined. The style is plain, and when jocularly is required, to the point. Those who admire the productions of the 'Great Minstrel,' cannot fail to place these tales side by side with the productions of the 'Great Unknown.'"—*Kelso Chronicle.*
 Published for behoof of the Widow of John Mackay Wilson, Berwick, by John Sutherland, 12, Calton-street, Edinburgh; and sold by R. Groombridge, Paternoster-row, London.
 Of whom also may be had the First Volume, price 8s. in cloth.

From the *Globe* 20th October 1836



From the *Stirling Observer* 24th October 1838

For a short time after John Mackay Wilson's death, as noted above, his brother James, then a Printer, was involved in the production of the Tales. Following James' untimely death, the publisher, John Sutherland, who had secured the copyright, became solely responsible for the future development of the business. As part of the agreement Sarah Wilson was to be provided with an annuity.

In the 49th edition of the Tales and in the extract below from the *Caledonian Mercury* of 16th October 1837 it was suggested that Wilson left a considerable amount of material. Tait (1881) however states:

There was not a leaf of manuscript to be found.

Thus, if publication of the Tales was to continue then other writers needed to be recruited^[lxxxiv]. Sutherland appointed Alexander Leighton (1800-1874) as Editor and story-writer. He was from Dundee and had studied medicine at Edinburgh University and had worked at a law office in Edinburgh before turning to literature^[lxxxv].

Leighton considerably expanded the work, adding many more tales from other sources, including from Hugh Miller⁵, Thomas Gillespie⁶, Alexander Bethune⁷ and his brother John⁸ and John

5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hugh_Miller

Howell⁹. For example, the *Newcastle Daily Chronicle* of 25th May 1863 included the following advertisement for Wilson's Tales:

Ainsworth and Ward and Lock, London 1 shilling per volume, 280 pages in each volume.1863

Tales of the Borders. VoL 1. London: Ward and Lock. The Tales of the Borders had an

unprecedented circulation when first published. Deficient in elaborate finish and highly-wrought plots, they yet maintain their place in the affections of the generation now growing old, that made acquaintance with them in their early form. Stray volumes of these tales have for twenty years added to the pleasures of youth, and it will therefore a cause of gladness for that class of readers to meet with a re-publication of the whole work in shilling volumes. Ten of the tales appear in this first volume. Among them are Hugh Miller's "Recollections of Ferguson," and two of Gillespie's Professor's Tales. Writers whose names afterwards became famous, co-operated with the enterprising editor, the late John Mackay Wilson, in this still stupendous and then unique work. In the words of the modest preface—" The only condition by which the natural promptings might have been restrained

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6. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Thomas_Gillespie_\(minister,_1777%E2%80%931844\)&action=edit&redlink=1](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Thomas_Gillespie_(minister,_1777%E2%80%931844)&action=edit&redlink=1)
 7. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alexander_Bethune_\(poet\)&action=edit&redlink=1](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Alexander_Bethune_(poet)&action=edit&redlink=1)
 8. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Bethune_\(poet\)&action=edit&redlink=1](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Bethune_(poet)&action=edit&redlink=1)
 9. [https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Howell_\(inventor\)&action=edit&redlink=1](https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=John_Howell_(inventor)&action=edit&redlink=1)

was that the contributions should be genuine stories, with such an objectiveness as would portray, graphically and naturally, the men and women of the times acting on the stage whereon they were destined to perform their strange parts, and would exclude all false colourings of sentimental fiction belonging to mere subjective moods of the writer's fancy feeling. The greatest care was also taken with the moral aspect of the tales, with the view that parents and guardians might feel a confidence that, in committing them into the hands of their children and wards, they would be imparting the means of instruction, and, at the same time, securing a guarantee for the growth of moral convictions”.

The Tales soon changed in character when Leighton took over the editorship. For example, the stories were no longer confined to the Border region, but were derived from all over Scotland and also from around the British Empire. The *Tales of Grace Cameron*, for example, was set in the West Highlands, while *The Widow of Dunskaith* was set in Cromarty. Tait (1881) comments:

... there can be no doubt that, though the work proceeded as before, and probably maintained its popularity, its character and aims gradually diverged from the original intention; and from Tales having only a remote connection with the Borders, the transition was easy to many in which violence was done to the sequence and consistency of the story, by introducing something which might justify its appearance in a series of Border Tales. Many of the best stories consequently make no pretension to conformity with the title under which they appear. Indeed it may be said that towards its close the publication assumed more the character of a weekly novelette, in which,

however, the moral tone and excellence were always well sustained ... producing what undoubtedly is the most interesting collection of Tales and Romances descriptive of Scottish life and character which we possess. What was thus a loss to the Borders was a corresponding gain to Scottish literature generally; and the popularity which the "Tales of the Borders" have so long maintained is doubtless due to what we may call the national rather than the local character they ultimately assumed.

Sutherland was over-confident about his ability to make the production of the Tales a success. Tait (1881) writes:

Sutherland was so sanguine about the Tales of the Borders, that he went to the expense of having all the numbers stereotyped; and the plates became so bulky, that he was compelled to erect a small building behind the shop for their preservation.

His business eventually ran into difficulties. Tait continues, thus:

The stereotype plates and copyright were sold, and the Border tales thus found their way into the hands of Messrs Ainsworth^[lxxxvi] publishers, Manchester, who more than once issued full sets, printed from the plates, with the original plates deleted.

The Tales continued to be enormously popular in the 19th Century with around a dozen editions or selections. In publishing his own edition in 1881, Tait makes the following claim:

... no book has been produced in recent times which has been at once so popular with all classes of the community,

and which so thoroughly identified itself with the thoughts and feelings of its readers. By the high moral tone and varied interest, it found its way to the hearts and homes of Scotsmen in all parts of the world. For years it formed the staple source of amusement around many a cotter's fireside; its weekly issues were waited on with impatience and read with avidity; and even yet after the lapse of nearly fifty years, there is probably no work to which a Scotchman will turn more readily, to while away a leisure hour, than the old but ever-new 'Tales of the Borders'.

Of course, tastes change. Wilson's views on poetry as expressed in *The Enthusiast* were not original or especially stimulating and his writing style in poetry and in prose was of its time. As indicated earlier, the poetry is no longer popular and thus *The Enthusiast* is long out of print. The language of the Tales now seems similarly old-fashioned and the stories often involve unlikely plot twists which are not to the taste of modern readers. One notes that even the advertisement from 1863, cited previously, states that the Tales are "Deficient in elaborate finish and highly-wrought plots". Andrew Ayre points out that prior the Wilson's Tales Project's publication of *Revival Editions* (see below) the last publication of Wilson's Tales was in 1947 and he writes of that publication as follows:

Even by 1947, the introduction to the Ettrick Press' publication noted that "it is perhaps less true today than it was 20 years ago that the library of every country cottage consisted of the Bible, Burns, the Scotts Worthies and the Tales of the Borders, but it is still true enough to possess significance and deserve note".

Old-fashioned in writing style or not, the present writer believes that Berwick upon Tweed should make more of its native author.

There are some hopeful developments in this regard, most notably a recent revival in interest in Wilson has been triggered by the launch of The Wilson's Tales Project in his home town in 2013. The Project aims to raise the profile of Wilson and the Tales and encourage interest in him and them. The Tales are being re-published by the Project in annual *Revival Editions* with volunteers re-writing the Tales in a more contemporary style and researching their backgrounds. The Project also organises live events for the Tales to be re-told through different media, which has included story-telling, plays adapted from the Tales and even 6 short films. Thus the Project has become something of an artist's platform for local people to apply their own interpretation of the Tales and develop acting, filming or directing skills in the process. It is also hoped that there will be a permanent John Mackay Wilson Museum in due course following the success of a "pop up" museum in 2017.

Despite coming from humble origins and leaving school at a young age Wilson achieved a great deal in his short life. His determination to succeed and his work-ethic were impressive. As Rev. Campbell states in the introduction to the *Tales of the Borders, Number 48*:

Despair seemed an entire stranger to him; and the strength of his own mind stayed him amid darkness and amid tempests.

In all his work his standard of literacy is excellent and he displays a remarkable knowledge of literature, politics and history.

In pursuing a literary career he was confident of his own abilities and not shy in promoting his wares, as when, for example, in 1829 he wrote to the *Advertiser* regarding his poems. As he states at the beginning of his Tale *The Fair*:

If a man does not speak well of his own wares, whom does he expect to do it for him, when every person is busy selling wares of his own? You know the saying “He’s a silly gardener that lichtlies his own leeks”.

He makes the same point, using the same expression (meaning to disparage) in his Tale *Reuben Purves or the Speculator*:

Let not the reader despise Reuben, because he practised and understood the mysteries of puffing. There is nothing done in this world without it. No gardener ever “lichtlied “his own leeks”. All men practise it, from the maker of books to the maker of shoe-blackening, or the vendor of matches. From the grandiloquent advertisement of a metropolitan auctioneer, down to the “only true and particular account” of an execution, bawled by a flying stationer on the streets, the spirit of puffing, in its various degrees, is to be found. Therefore we blame not Reuben—he only did what other people did, though, perhaps, after a different fashion, and with better success. It gave a promise of his success as a tradesman. He said he ventured on it as a speculation, and finding it to suit his purpose, he continued it. In truth, scarce had the herald made the proclamation which I have quoted, until Reuben’s cart was literally besieged. His customers said, “it went like a cried fair”—“there was nae getting forward to it.”

It is a shame that Wilson was not able to “puff” his own “leeks” for longer. “Health and home are powerful magnets” and the exile returned home, but success came too little, too late.

Endnotes

[i] One notes that the narrator of Wilson's Tale *The Black Coat* says his father is from Dunse (the Scots name for the town).

[ii] This is not the magazine in which Wilson was involved which is referred to later in the study. This is a later, more successful, magazine.

[iii] Circulating libraries were small libraries which lent books to subscribers for a fee. Could John Wilson have been a relative who let the young Wilson read the library books for free? One can only speculate, but to pay to use such a library at this time was quite expensive (Hunt 1975).

[iv] In Hilson's (1918) listing of Berwick upon Tweed typography "*A Glance at Hinduism* is dated 1824. This may refer to a re-issue. No publisher is indicated by Hilson.

[v] The song was well known song in Wilson's time having been first published by David Herd in 1776. As Yates (2010) points out, Wilson moved the location to suit his purposes.

[vi] Sarah Siddons (1775 - 1831) was a Welsh-born Actress who was regarded as the best-known tragedienne¹ of her time. She was born into a theatrical family as the el-

1. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tragedy>

dest daughter of Roger Kemble, Actor-Manager of a touring troupe. Siddons was most famous for her portrayal of Lady Macbeth², a character she made her own, as well as for fainting at the sight of the Elgin Marbles.

[vii] John Philip Kemble (1757 – 1823) was an English Actor. Sarah Siddons was his sister and they achieved fame together on the stage of the Theatre Royal, Drury Lane.

[viii] Thomas Potter Cooke (1786 – 1864) was an English Actor and Stage Manager.

[ix] John Bannister (1760 – 1836) was an English actor and Theatre Manager.

[x] James Sinclair later painted Wilson’s portrait (one of the two paintings is in the Berwick Museum and Art Gallery, the other is in the Scottish National Portrait Gallery). According to the 1841 Census, Sinclair lived with his wife Margaret and their five children at Ravensdowne in Berwick where he was born.

[xi] In fact, the play was entitled *The Gowrie Conspiracy*. Ruthven, 3rd Earl of Gowrie (c. 1577 – 1600) was a Scottish nobleman who succeeded his brother, James, the 2nd Earl, as Earl of Gowrie³ following James' death in 1586. John died in 1600 in mysterious circumstances. His death is referred to as the "Gowrie Conspiracy".

2. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lady_Macbeth

3. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earl_of_Gowrie

[xii] Margaret of Anjou (French: Marguerite; 1430 – 1482) was the Queen of England⁴ by marriage to King Henry VI⁵ from 1445 to 1461 and again from 1470 to 1471. Born in the Duchy of Lorraine⁶ into the House of Valois-Anjou⁷, Margaret was the second eldest daughter of René, King of Naples⁸, and Isabella, Duchess of Lorraine⁹. She was one of the principal figures in the Wars of the Roses¹⁰ and at times personally led the Lancastrian faction¹¹.

[xiii] “A jade” is an old horse and “withers” refers to the high part of a horse’s back. Thus, literally the phrase means something like “the old nags will wince with pain” (because of an ill-fitting saddle?). This is a reference to *Hamlet*: “Let the galled jade wince; our withers are unwrung”.

[xiv] Encompassing.

[xv] He does in fact seem to have been quite modest about reporting on his activity in the town, which for the researcher is unfortunate. For example, in the *Advertiser* of 4th October 1834 it was reported that Wilson was to deliver a lecture on politics in Berwick within a month. No

4. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_English_consorts

5. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/King_Henry_VI

6. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Duchy_of_Lorraine

7. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Valois-Anjou

8. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ren%C3%A9,_King_of_Naples

9. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isabella,_Duchess_of_Lorraine

10. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wars_of_the_Roses

11. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Lancaster

report of this lecture appeared in the newspaper. The occasions when he did report such activity are cited here.

[xvi] James Montgomery (1771 – 1854) was a Scottish Hymnodist¹², Poet¹³ and Editor. He was concerned with humanitarian causes such as the abolition of slavery and the exploitation of child chimney sweeps. He was imprisoned twice on charges of sedition. Montgomery himself expected that his name would live on, if at all, in his hymns. Some of these, such as "Hail to the Lord's Anointed", "Prayer is the Soul's Sincere Desire", "Stand up and bless the Lord" and the carol "Angels from the Realms of Glory"¹⁴, are still sung. His song, "The Lord Is My Shepherd" is a popular hymn with many denominations and is based on Psalm 23¹⁵.

[xvii] George Gilfillan (1813 – 1878) was a Scottish Author and Poet. He was also an Editor and Commentator.

[xviii] Everett was expelled from the Wesleyan conference in August 1849. For many years he had been opposed to the policy and working of that body and had published anonymously several volumes of criticisms of the Preachers and had made serious charges against the leading men of the conference, reflecting both on their public actions and personal character. Everett then took the lead in an agitation against the conference which shook the entire Wesleyan community and resulted in the loss of over two

12. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hymnodist>

13. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poet>

14. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angels_from_the_Realms_of_Glory

15. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Psalm_23

hundred thousand members and adherents. Some of the seceders joined others who had previously left the 'old body' and formed a new sect, which they styled the 'United Methodist Free Church'¹⁶. Everett was elected the first president of their assembly. He died in Sunderland on 10th May 1872.

[xix] Wilson was almost certainly referring to Alexander Kilham from Ashton-under-Lyne, by then deceased, who had wanted to have the full right to choose who could administer communion and whose views had caused disruption within Methodism. A breakaway group known as the Methodist New Connexion (MNC) had been founded. Although this body was in the minority within Methodism, the new group was strong in industrial Lancashire and Yorkshire.

[xx] Bunting was the most prominent Methodist after Wesley's death in 1791. He was a popular preacher in numerous cities and held many senior positions in the movement. He and his allies centralized power by making the conference the final arbiter of Methodism and giving it the power to re-assign Preachers and select District Superintendents. In 1835 he was appointed President of the first Wesleyan theological college at Hoxton¹⁷, the establishment of which Everett opposed.

[xxi] It is difficult for the cynical present writer at this point not to think of Oscar Wilde's comment:

16. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_Methodist_Free_Church

17. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoxton>

One must have a heart of stone to read of the death of little Nell
without laughing.

[xxii] This is almost certainly a reference to Thomas Pringle (1789 – 1834) a Scottish Writer, Poet and Abolitionist¹⁸. He was from Kelso. Wilson also supported abolition, writing in the *Advertiser* he stated:

It was a disgrace upon our national character – a crime that cried to Heaven ...

(B. A. 19th April 1834)

He argued that the Planters had been over-compensated for the loss of their slaves. In the Tale entitled *Saying and Doings of Peter Paterson* Wilson portrays the slave-owner as a brutal man. Everett was also an abolitionist and similarly wrote poetry describing the horror of slavery.

[xxiii] William Jerdan (1782-1869), from Kelso, was Editor and one-third owner of the *Literary Gazette* where Wilson worked for a time.

[xxiv] Minerva Press was a publishing house¹⁹ noted for creating a lucrative market in sentimental and Gothic fiction²⁰ in the late 18th century and early 19th century. It was established by William Lane²¹ at No 33 Leadenhall Street²², London²³, when he moved his circulating li-

18. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abolitionism_in_the_United_Kingdom

19. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Publishing>

20. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gothic_fiction

21. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Lane_\(bookseller\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Lane_(bookseller))

22. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leadenhall_Street

brary²⁴ there in about 1790. Among his stable of writers were many female authors.

[xxv] Richard Bentley (1794 - 1871) was a 19th- century English Publisher born into a publishing family. He started a firm with his brother in 1819. Ten years later he went into partnership with the publisher Henry Colburn²⁵. Although the business was often successful, publishing the famous *Standard Novels* series, they ended their partnership in acrimony three years later. Bentley continued alone profitably in the 1830s and early 1840s, establishing the well-known periodical *Bentley's Miscellany*²⁶. However, the periodical went into decline after its editor, Charles Dickens²⁷, left. Bentley's business started to falter after 1843 and he sold many of his copyrights. Only 15 years later did it begin to recover.

[xxvi] The Roman Catholic Relief Bill had become law in March 1829 despite much Tory opposition.

[xxvii] By convention a general election always followed the death of the Monarch.

[xxviii] It was only in 1885 that the list of government ministers printed in Hansard, the official record of parliamentary debates, first used the title Prime Minister and the

23. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/London>

24. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Circulating_library

25. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Henry_Colburn

26. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bentley%27s_Miscellany

27. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_Dickens

first statutory reference to the Prime Minister only came in the Chequers Estate Act of 1917.

[xxix] Radicals were more radical than the Whigs but were not organised as a political party.

[xxx] Bentham defined as the "fundamental axiom" of his philosophy the principle that "it is the greatest happiness of the greatest number that is the measure of right and wrong". In addition to parliamentary reform he campaigned for individual²⁸ and economic freedoms²⁹, the separation of church and state³⁰, freedom of expression³¹, equal rights for women, the right to divorce and the decriminalising of homosexual acts. He also called for the abolition of slavery³², of the death penalty³³, and of physical punishment³⁴, including that of children. He has also become known as an early advocate of animal rights³⁵.

[xxxi] At one stage in the long parliamentary proceedings associated with the reform bill Brougham got down on his knees to beg his colleagues to support the bill. Unfortunately, he was unable to stand up again, probably because of consuming too much port, and he had to be helped up by his colleagues.

28. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individual_freedom

29. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Economic_freedom

30. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Separation_of_church_and_state

31. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Freedom_of_expression

32. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abolitionism>

33. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Death_penalty

34. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Physical_punishment

35. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Animal_rights

[xxxii] A small pamphlet containing tales, ballads, or tracts, sold by pedlars.

[xxxiii] The Corporation Act of 1661 excluded from membership of town corporations all those who were not prepared to take the sacrament according to the rites of the Church of England³⁶. The Test Act passed in 1673 imposed the same test upon holders of civil or military office. Roman Catholics³⁷, Protestant Dissenters³⁸ and followers of the Jewish³⁹ faith were therefore excluded from public office. Religious groups including Unitarians⁴⁰, Wesleyan Methodists⁴¹, Primitive Methodists⁴² and the Society of Friends⁴³ campaigned for a change in the law. In 1828 both the Test and Corporation Acts were repealed by Parliament. Roman Catholics⁴⁴ were prevented from holding public office until the passing of the Catholic Emancipation Act⁴⁵ of 1829. This act, as noted above, split the Tories and provided the Whigs with the opportunity to govern. Jewish⁴⁶ emancipation took longer and was not fully achieved until 1890.

36. <http://spartacus-educational.com/REEngland.htm>

37. <http://spartacus-educational.com/TUDcatholics.htm>

38. <http://spartacus-educational.com/REnonconformists.htm>

39. <http://spartacus-educational.com/REjewish.htm>

40. <http://spartacus-educational.com/PRunitarian.htm>

41. <http://spartacus-educational.com/REmethodism.htm>

42. <http://spartacus-educational.com/REprimitive.htm>

43. <http://spartacus-educational.com/REquakers.htm>

44. <http://spartacus-educational.com/REcatholic.htm>

45. <http://spartacus-educational.com/PRcatholic.htm>

46. <http://spartacus-educational.com/REjewish.htm>

[xxxiv] For example, when the House of Lords rejected the bill in October 1831 many London newspapers, including the *Times*, were published with black borders as a sign of mourning.

[xxxv] Parcels of land.

[xxxvi] A Painter from Berwick upon Tweed.

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[xxxvii] Hugh Miller (1802 – 1856) was a self-taught Scottish Geologist and Writer, Folklorist⁴⁷ and an evangelical Christian⁴⁸.

[xxxviii] James Hannay FRSE⁴⁹ (1827 – 1873), was a Scottish Novelist⁵⁰, Journalist and Diplomat.

[xxxix] Thomas Penson De Quincey (1785 – 1859) was an English essayist, best known for his *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*⁵¹ (1821). Many scholars suggest that in publishing this work De Quincey inaugurated the tradition of addiction literature in the West.

[xl] This description of the *Spectator's* political outlook will surprise modern readers. Certainly under R. S Rintoul the magazine came out strongly for the Great Reform

47. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Folklorist>

48. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Evangelical_Christian

49. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/FRSE>

50. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Scottish_novelists

51. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Confessions_of_an_English_Opium-Eater

Act of 1832⁵², coining the popular slogan, "The Bill, the whole Bill and nothing but the Bill", in its support. It also objected to the appointment of the Duke of Wellington⁵³ as Prime Minister, condemning him as "a Field Marshal whose political career proves him to be utterly destitute of political principle – whose military career affords ample evidence of his stern and remorseless temperament".

[xli] In his poem "*Thy will be done*", subtitled, "*written during the prevalence of cholera in Berwick*", Wilson writes:

*"Death like a silent spirit roams
Around from door to door!
No warning voice proclaims- he comes! –
He glanceth – and 'tis o'er!"*

He then tries to make sense of the random choice of victims and asks God to *spare us from thy wrath*".

(from the B. A. 20th October 1832)

[xlii] A Sword.

[xliii] Sir Richard Arkwright (1732 – 1792) was an English Inventor and a leading Entrepreneur during the early Industrial Revolution⁵⁴. Although his patents were eventually overturned, he is credited with inventing the spinning frame⁵⁵, which following the transition to water power⁵⁶ was renamed the water frame⁵⁷. He also patented

52. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reform_Act_1832

53. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Arthur_Wellesley,_1st_Duke_of_Wellington

54. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industrial_Revolution

55. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Spinning_frame

56. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydropower>

57. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Water_frame

a rotary carding⁵⁸ engine that transformed raw cotton into cotton lap. Arkwright's achievement was to combine power, machinery, semi-skilled labour and the new raw material of cotton to create mass-produced yarn⁵⁹. His skills of organization made him, more than anyone else, the creator of the modern factory system⁶⁰, especially in his mill at Cromford⁶¹, Derbyshire⁶², now preserved as part of the Derwent Valley Mills⁶³ World Heritage Site.

[xliv] An extract from a paper delivered at a study-conference in Melrose on 14th November, 1971. Effie & Jeannie Deans are characters in Scott's' novel *The Heart of Midlothian*, while the Laird of Ellangowan and Meg Merrilles appear in his novel *Guy Mannering*.

[xlv] *Grizel Cochrane. A Tale of Tweedmouth Muir* by John Mackay Wilson.

[xlvi] *The Faa's Revenge* by John Mackay Wilson.

[xlvii] The creator of ancient Greek bucolic poetry.

[xlviii] There had previously been an anonymous article praising Hogg in the *Advertiser* in 1929. In that year the newspaper had also printed an article by Hogg on the ef-

58. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Carding>

59. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yarn>

60. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Factory_system

61. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cromford>

62. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derbyshire>

63. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Derwent_Valley_Mills

fects of mole-catching in which Hogg criticised the third Duke of Buccleuch for introducing moles to Scotland.

[xlix] In fact, David **Leslie**, 1st Lord Newark (c. 1600–1682). He fought for the Swedish army of Gustavus Adolphus⁶⁴ during the Thirty Years' War⁶⁵. He returned to Scotland just before the end of the Bishops' War⁶⁶ and participated in the English Civil War⁶⁷ and Scottish Civil Wars⁶⁸.

[l] John Graham of Claverhouse, 1st Viscount Dundee (c.1648 – 1689), known as the 7th Laird of Claverhouse until raised to the Viscounty⁶⁹ in 1688, was a Scottish soldier and nobleman, a Tory⁷⁰ and an Episcopalian⁷¹.

[li] A yellowish cotton cloth.

[lii] Frederic Shoberl (1775–1853), also known as Frederick Schoberl, was a Journalist, Editor, Translator, Writer and Illustrator. Shoberl edited *Forget-Me-Not*⁷², the first literary annual⁷³, begun at Christmas in 1823 and he also translated *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*⁷⁴.

64. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gustavus_Adolphus_of_Sweden

65. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland_and_the_Thirty_Years%27_War

66. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishops%27_War

67. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Civil_War

68. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scotland_in_the_Wars_of_the_Three_Kingdoms

69. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Viscount>

70. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tory>

71. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Episcopal_Church

72. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forget-Me-Not_\(annual\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Forget-Me-Not_(annual))

73. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Literary_annual

[liii] Rudolph Ackermann (1764-1834) was an Anglo-German Bookseller, Inventor, Lithographer⁷⁵ and Publisher.

[liv] Hilson’s listing of Berwick upon Tweed typography includes the following reference which is reproduced below as it appears in that publication:

Wilson (John Mackay). *The Enthusiast, and Miscellaneous Pieces*. 12mo. i+166 pp. Table of Contents, 2 pp. Advertiser Office, Berwick. [John Jackson, Forge Cottages, Spittal

[lv] The *Chambers Edinburgh Journal* was a weekly magazine⁷⁶ priced at one penny which was started by William Chambers⁷⁷ on 4th February 1832. Topics covered included history, religion, language, and science. William was soon joined as joint editor by his brother Robert⁷⁸, who wrote many of the articles for the early issues, and within a few years the journal had a circulation of 84,000. In 1854 the title was changed to *Chambers’s Journal of Popular Literature, Science, and Art* and was changed again to *Chambers’s Journal* at the end of 1897. The journal was produced in Edinburgh until the late 1850s, by which time the author James Payn⁷⁹ had taken over as editor, and pro-

74. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Hunchback_of_Notre_Dame

75. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lithography>

76. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Magazine>

77. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Chambers_\(publisher\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Chambers_(publisher))

78. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Chambers_\(journalist\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Chambers_(journalist))

79. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/James_Payn

duction was moved to London. The journal continued to be published until 1956.

[lvi] This publishing firm originated in Shropshire, publishing religious books, *The Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* in 1806, and numerous children's books. In 1826 a branch was established in London and this branch produced a plethora of religious works as well as *The Family Doctor - A Complete Encyclopaedia of Domestic Medicine* (1859) and *The Cricket Bat and How to Use It* (1863).

[lvii] William Drummond (1585 – 1649), called "of Hawthornden", was a Scottish Poet. He is depicted on the Scott Monument in Edinburgh.

[lviii] Sir Thomas de Ercildoun, better remembered as Thomas the Rhymer (c. 1220 – 1298), also known as Thomas of Learmont or True Thomas, was a Scottish laird⁸⁰ and reputed prophet⁸¹ from Earlston⁸² (then called "Erceldoune") in the Borders⁸³. Thomas' gift of prophecy is linked to his poetic ability. He is often cited as the author of the English *Sir Tristrem*⁸⁴, a version of the Tristram⁸⁵ legend, and some lines in Robert Mannyng⁸⁶'s *Chronicle*⁸⁷ may be the source of this association. He ap-

80. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laird>

81. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prophet>

82. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Earlston>

83. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Borders

84. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Tristrem

85. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tristan>

86. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Mannyng

87. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mannyng%27s_Chronicle

pears as the protagonist in the Tale about Thomas the Rhymer carried off by the "Queen of Elfland"⁸⁸ and returned having gained the gift of prophecy, as well as the inability to tell a lie. The Tale survives in a medieval verse romance in five manuscripts, as well as in the popular ballad⁸⁹ *Thomas Rhymer*. The ballad also occurs as *Thomas off Ersseldoune* in the Lincoln Thornton Manuscript⁹⁰. The original romance ca. 1400 was probably condensed into ballad form ca. 1700, though there are dissenting views on this. Walter Scott⁹¹ expanded the ballad into three parts, adding a sequel which incorporated the prophecies ascribed to Thomas, and an epilogue where Thomas is summoned back to Elfland after the appearance of a sign, in the form of the milk-white hart⁹² and hind⁹³. Numerous prose retellings of the tale of Thomas the Rhymer have been undertaken and included in fairy tale or folk-tale anthologies; these often incorporate the return to Fairyland episode that Scott said he learned from local legend.

[lix] Robert Fergusson (1750 – 1774) was a Scottish poet. After attending the University of St Andrews⁹⁴, Fergusson led a bohemian⁹⁵ life in Edinburgh⁹⁶, the city of his birth, then at the height of intellectual and cultural ferment as

88. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Queen_of_Elphame

89. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ballad>

90. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Lincoln_Thornton_Manuscript

91. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Scott

92. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hart_\(deer\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hart_(deer))

93. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/hind#Noun>

94. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/University_of_St_Andrews

95. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bohemianism>

96. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Edinburgh>

part of the Scottish enlightenment⁹⁷. Many of his extant poems were printed from 1771 onwards in Walter Riddiman⁹⁸'s *Weekly Magazine*, and a collected works was first published early in 1773. Despite a short life, his career was highly influential, especially through its impact on Robert Burns⁹⁹.

[lx] Joseph Addison (1 May 1672 – 17 June 1719) was an English Essayist, Poet, Playwright and Politician. His name is usually remembered alongside that of his long-standing friend, Richard Steele¹⁰⁰, with whom he founded *The Spectator*¹⁰¹ magazine.

[lxi] The Farne Islands, also known as Fearne, Fern or the Staples.

[lxii] *Materia medica* (English: medical material/substance) is a Latin¹⁰² term for the body of collected knowledge about the therapeutic properties of any substance used for healing (i.e., medicines¹⁰³). The term derives from the title of a work by the Ancient Greek physician Pedanius Dioscorides¹⁰⁴ in the 1st century AD, *De materia medica*¹⁰⁵, 'On medical material'. The term *materia medica* was used from the period of the Roman Empire¹⁰⁶ until

97. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_enlightenment

98. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walter_Ruddiman

99. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Burns

100. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Richard_Steele

101. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Spectator_\(1711\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Spectator_(1711))

102. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Latin>

103. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Medicine>

104. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pedanius_Dioscorides

105. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Materia_Medica_\(Dioscorides\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/De_Materia_Medica_(Dioscorides))

the 20th century, but has now been generally replaced in medical education contexts by the term pharmacology.

[lxiii] The memory of Montgomery is however much celebrated. In 1861, a monument designed by John Bell (1811–1895) was erected over his grave in the Sheffield cemetery at a cost of £1000, raised by public subscription on the initiative of the Sheffield Sunday School Union, of which he was among the founding members. On its granite pedestal is inscribed: "Here lies interred, beloved by all who knew him, the Christian poet, patriot, and philanthropist. Wherever poetry is read, or Christian hymns sung, in the English language, 'he being dead, yet speaketh' by the genius, piety and taste embodied in his writings." There are also extracts from his poems "Prayer" and "The Grave". After it fell into disrepair the statue was moved to the precinct of Sheffield Cathedral in 1971, where there is also a memorial window.

Elsewhere in Sheffield there are various streets named after Montgomery and a Grade II-listed drinking fountain on Broad Lane. The meeting hall of the Sunday Schools Union (now known as The Montgomery), in Surrey Street, was named in his honour in 1886; it houses a 420-seat theatre which also bears his name. Elsewhere, Wath-upon-Deerne, flattered by being called "the queen of villages" in his work, has repaid the compliment by naming after him a community hall, a street and a square.

[lxiv] The "coming wood" is a reference to Shakespeare's Macbeth:

"Till Birnam Wood shall come to Dunsinane."

[lxv] John Leyden (1775 – 1811) was the brilliant son of a Shepherd from Hawick who, among a number of achievements in his short life, helped Sir Walter Scott collect Border Ballads. Scott tells how, on one occasion, Leyden walked 40 miles to get the last two verses of a ballad, and returned at midnight, singing it all the way, to the wonder and consternation of the Author and his household.

[lxvi] Yates (2010) writes:

It was, like the poems of Ossian, a fake, written by the Reverend Robert Lambe (1712 – 95) of Norham. Did Wilson know this? Perhaps not, because he continues to perpetuate the supposed myth in a footnote to the story.

[lxvii] Thomas Heywood (early 1570s – 1641) was a prominent English¹⁰⁷ Playwright, Actor, and Author. His main contributions were to late Elizabethan¹⁰⁸ and early Jacobean theatre¹⁰⁹. He is best known for his masterpiece *A Woman Killed with Kindness*¹¹⁰, a domestic tragedy¹¹¹, which was first performed in 1603¹¹² at the Rose Theatre¹¹³ by the Worcester's Men¹¹⁴ company. He was a pro-

107. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/England>

108. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Elizabethan_theatre

109. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacobean_theatre

110. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Woman_Killed_with_Kindness

111. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Domestic_tragedy

112. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1603_in_literature

113. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rose_\(theatre\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Rose_(theatre))

114. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Worcester%27s_Men

lific writer, claiming to have had "an entire hand or at least a maine finger in two hundred and twenty plays", although only a fraction of his work has survived.

[lxviii] The new name the Tories adopted in 1834.

[lix] Gatton, with a population of 145, had only seven electors and was owned by Lord Monson, who sold it for £1,200 on condition that the member voted Tory. It was dis-enfranchised under Schedule A of the 1832 Reform Act.

[lxx] Grampound, whose electors boasted that they received 300 guineas each for their votes, was dis-enfranchised in 1821 and its two seats were transferred to Yorkshire.

[lxxi] William ("Billy") Holmes (1779 – 1851) served as Tory Party manager and Chief Whip¹¹⁵ in the House of Commons¹¹⁶ from 1802 until his seat (for the rotten borough¹¹⁷ of Haslemere¹¹⁸) was abolished by the Great Reform Act¹¹⁹. He had also previously represented several other constituencies. After the Reform Act he was out of the Commons for five years, but returned in 1837 as MP for Berwick.¹²⁰ He had been fortunate to survive when, as described here, Huskisson had been killed by Stephen-

115. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chief_Whip

116. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/British_House_of_Commons

117. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rotten_borough

118. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haslemere_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Haslemere_(UK_Parliament_constituency))

119. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Great_Reform_Act

120. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berwick-upon-Tweed_\(UK_Parliament_constituency\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Berwick-upon-Tweed_(UK_Parliament_constituency))

son's Rocket in September 1830. He was apparently known for his indiscretions and foul mouth. He was a Tory MP for 28 years.

[lxxii] Initially in 1832 based in Carlton Terrace in London, and headed by Billy Holmes, the club was the organising base for Tory registration drives and for the selection of members. William Ewart Gladstone joined the club as a young Tory MP in 1833.

[lxxiii] John Hampden (ca. 1595 – 1643) was an English¹²¹ politician¹²² who was one of the leading parliamentarians¹²³ involved in challenging the authority of Charles I¹²⁴ in the run-up to the English Civil War¹²⁵. He became a national figure when he stood trial in 1637 for his refusal to be taxed for ship money¹²⁶ and was one of the five Members¹²⁷ whose attempted unconstitutional arrest by King Charles I in the House of Commons of England¹²⁸ in 1642 sparked the Civil War.

[lxxiv] Adam Smith FRSA¹²⁹ (1723 - 1790), a key figure of the Scottish Enlightenment¹³⁰, was a Scottish Econo-

121. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_England

122. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Politician>

123. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roundhead>

124. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charles_I_of_England

125. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/English_Civil_War

126. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ship_money

127. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Five_Members

128. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Commons_of_England

129. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fellow_of_the_Royal_Society_of_Arts

130. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Scottish_Enlightenment

mist, Philosopher, Political Economist and Author. Smith is best known for two classic works: *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*¹³¹ (1776) and *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*¹³² (1759). The former is considered the first modern work of economics.

[lxxv] What is left over, the rest, the remainder, the others, of persons or things. The phrase comes from Robert Burns.

[lxxvi] This was a real event. On the evening of January 31, 1804, the watch on Hume Castle observed what they believed to be signs of a French invasion. They at once fired their beacon and the signal was repeated from hill to hill through Teviotdale, Liddesdale, and Tweeddale. The defence forces were mobilized for what turned out to be a false alarm.

[lxxvii] Brought in by Liverpool’s administration in 1815 the laws banned the import of corn until such time as the price of British corn reached eighty shillings per quarter. The aim was to protect British farmers, but the consequent hike in corn prices led to public hostility.

[lxxviii] A Currier is a specialist in the leather¹³³ processing industry¹³⁴. After the tanning¹³⁵ process, the Currier applies techniques of dressing, finishing and colouring to

131. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Wealth_of_Nations

132. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Theory_of_Moral_Sentiments

133. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leather>

134. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Industry>

135. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanning_\(leather\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tanning_(leather))

the tanned hide to make it strong, flexible and waterproof. The leather is stretched and burnished to produce a uniform thickness and suppleness and dyeing and other chemical finishes give the leather its desired colour. After currying, the leather is then ready to pass to the fashioning trades such as saddlery¹³⁶, bridlery, shoemaking and glovemaking.

[lxxix] Sheldon himself published a ballad collection, viz. *The Minstrelsy of the English Border* in 1847.

[lxxx] According to Yates (2010), Alexander Peterkin Senior, once Sheriff-Substitute of Orkney and latterly Editor of the *Kelso Chronicle*, was a contributor to the Tales produced after Wilson's death. Alexander Peterkin Junior was his eldest son.

[lxxxi] Jean Froissart (c. 1337 – c. 1405) was a French-speaking medieval Author and court Historian from the Low Countries¹³⁷, who wrote *Chronicles and Meliador*, a long Arthurian romance, and a large body of poetry¹³⁸, both short lyrical forms, as well as longer narrative poems. For centuries Froissart's *Chronicles*¹³⁹ have been recognised as the chief expression of the chivalric revival of the 14th century Kingdom of England¹⁴⁰ and Kingdom of

136. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saddlery>

137. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Low_Countries

138. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poetry>

139. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Froissart%27s_Chronicles

140. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_England

France¹⁴¹. His history is also an important source for the first half of the Hundred Years' War¹⁴².

[lxxxii] Daniel O'Connell, often referred to as The Liberator or The Emancipator, was an Irish political leader in the first half of the 19th century. Throughout his career in Irish politics, O'Connell was able to gain a large following among the Irish masses in support of him and his Catholic Association¹⁴³. O'Connell's main strategy was one of political reformism¹⁴⁴, working within the parliamentary structures of the British state in Ireland and forming an alliance of convenience with the Whigs¹⁴⁵. More radical elements broke with O'Connell to found the Young Ireland¹⁴⁶ movement.

[lxxxiii] To stake one's life for the truth. Famously formulated by the 1st-2nd-century Roman poet Juvenal¹⁴⁷.

[lxxxiv] Even during his lifetime were all the Tales written by Wilson? Yates (2010) writes:

According to James Tait, a former editor of the *Kelso Chronicle*, 'during the first eleven months, the Tales were written almost wholly by John Mackay Wilson.' Tait, so far as I can see, is the only person to suggest that Wilson

141. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kingdom_of_France

142. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hundred_Years%27_War

143. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Catholic_Association

144. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reformism>

145. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whigs_\(British_political_party\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Whigs_(British_political_party))

146. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Young_Ireland

147. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juvenal>

may not have written all the Tales that were printed prior to his death.

Interestingly the *Berwickshire News and General Advertiser* of 22nd October 1935 reported:

Mr A. Crombie in the Scotsman claimed that John Thompson of Belford, a friend of Grace Darling, wrote some of these Tales. Quite likely my uncle's contributions were licked into better shape by Wilson, but I very much doubt that if the groundwork of many of the Tales were Wilson's work.

No evidence was produced to support this claim.

[lxxxv] As regards other literary efforts, in 1860–1 Leighton published two series of *Curious Storied Traditions of Scottish Life*, in 1864 *Mysterious Legends of Edinburgh*, in 1865 *Shellburn*, a novel, and in 1867 *Romance of the Old Town of Edinburgh*. Other works were *Men and Women of History*, *Jephthah's Daughter*, *A Dictionary of Religions*, and a Latin metrical version of Robert Burns' songs¹⁴⁸.

[lxxxvi] William Harrison Ainsworth (1805 – 1882) was an English historical Novelist from Manchester¹⁴⁹. He trained as a lawyer, but the legal profession held no attraction for him. While completing his legal studies in London he met the publisher John Ebers¹⁵⁰ who introduced him to literary and dramatic circles, and to his daugh-

148. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Robert_Burns%27s_songs

149. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Manchester>

150. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/John_Ebers

ter, who became Ainsworth's wife. He was encouraged by Ebers to sell his partnership in the Ainsworth law firm in order to start a publishing business. Ainsworth followed this advice and the business had early success. He published a few popular works, including *The French Cook*, an annual magazine called *Mayfair*, and some others. By 1829, Ebers took over Ainsworth's publishing business and soon after Ainsworth gave up on publishing and resumed working in the law. His first success as a writer came with *Rookwood*¹⁵¹ in 1834, which features Dick Turpin¹⁵² as its leading character. A stream of 39 novels followed, the last of which appeared in 1881.

151. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rookwood_\(novel\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Rookwood_(novel))

152. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dick_Turpin

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