

## Robert Burns Public Memorials – Missing, Destroyed or Undiscovered.

During the period following Burns's death in 1796 and up until the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of his birth in 1909, many hundreds of public memorial were erected in his honour. These ranged from life-sized and heroic sized statuary to purpose built architectural monuments, some designed to hold relics to the Bard, all of which acted as perpetual reminders of Burns's status as a poet whilst also keeping his memory alive for all who viewed these memorials. Although the online memorial database covers the major larger statuary and monuments erected worldwide in memory of Robert Burns from 1796 to 1909, during the course of the research into these memorials and the smaller busts, plaques etc., it has not been possible to locate information which related to all aspects of the instigation, planning, funding and (where applicable) unveiling of some of the statuary and smaller memorials. Some of the larger statues carved in commemoration of Burns have also been lost or destroyed over the years, and records on these memorials are scant or non-existent. The purpose of this essay and the appendix is to highlight those memorials to Burns which have been uncovered during the research and to provide a level of background information to which it is hoped, further details and images may be added in the future.

The materials used in the construction of memorials of Robert Burns, and those relating to characters from his poetry, vary dependent on the type of memorial, its geographic location and the sculptor. Statuary designed by the sculptor, James Thom, was largely carved using stone which when exposed to the elements degrades badly over time, which is evident in his statuary of 'Tam O' Shanter and Souter Johnie' currently sited in the Botanic Gardens in Liverpool. The images<sup>1</sup> below illustrate the extent of the damage caused by their being sited in the open air, subjected to the vagaries of the weather but also to serious damage by vandals, all of which have contributed to their



<sup>1</sup> Images courtesy of 'Friends of Liverpool Monuments Civic Society' website, [www.liverpoolmonuments.co.uk/sculpture/botanic02.html](http://www.liverpoolmonuments.co.uk/sculpture/botanic02.html).

current state of disrepair. Identifying which of the degraded Liverpool statues is Tam and which is Johnie requires a degree of detective work, but comparing them with images of one of the surviving sets of Thom's Tam & Johnie statues, situated at the Burns Monument in Alloway reveals that the image on the right is Tam and the one on the left is Johnie. Another set of Thom's Tam and Johnie, which are in slightly better condition than those in Liverpool can be found in the grounds of Beauport Park in Hastings, Essex. In the case of another of Thom's set of four renditions of 'Tam O' Shanter' which was situated in Fairmount Park, Philadelphia, Thomas Keith explains that having survived eight-five years outdoors in the park, the statues were completely destroyed in 1961 when a car veered off an adjacent road and smashed into the figures.<sup>2</sup> Keith also recounts the fates of a further two sets of Thom's 'Tam O' Shanter' related statuary, one set consisting of Tam and Souter Johnie were being toured around America, but the ship carrying them sank in the Chesapeake Bay taking with it the two statues to a watery grave.<sup>3</sup> Another set of Tam and Souter Johnie by James Thom was situated at the mansion of the Colt family in Patterson, New Jersey, where it remained for approximately seventy-five years.<sup>4</sup> The family then donated the statues to the Patterson Public Library which subsequently burned down, the Thom statues being destroyed in the process.<sup>5</sup> Mention of other statuary sculpted by James Thom include references to an 'imposing statue' of Robert Burns, however this statue has never been traced and it is possible that Thom had not progressed the work beyond the model stage before his death in 1850.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to memorials to Robert Burns and Burns related statuary being destroyed either through exposure to the elements or at the hands of vandals; certain memorials to the Bard have disappeared over the decades. One particular statue of Highland Mary sculpted by Benjamin E Spence was displayed in the Library on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, New York possibly in the later decades of the nineteenth century. However, at some point towards the end of the nineteenth century or the early decades of the twentieth century this statue of Highland Mary simply vanished from the Library on

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<sup>2</sup> T. Keith, 'Burns Statues in North America a Survey', in G. Ross Roy (ed.) *Robert Burns and America - A Symposium* (South Carolina, 2001), p. 24.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Ibid

<sup>5</sup> Ibid

<sup>6</sup> 'Thom, The Sculptor' in *The Critic* (June, 1850), p. 287

5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, New York. All that remains is a reference card and this postcard containing an image of the statue, the whereabouts of the statue remains a mystery to this present day.<sup>7</sup>



Postcard depicting statue of Highland Mary, New York

Another memorial created in America in memory of Burns, which also appears to have gone missing, is the bas-relief sculpture of Robert Burns and Highland Mary, designed and sculpted by Hugh Cairns.<sup>9</sup> This memorial was commissioned by the Caledonian Club in Boston but where it was erected, if indeed it was erected, is unknown and its current location or condition is also unknown. Evidence of a 'statue' of Robert Burns by Hugh Cairns is cited in the memorial catalogue of the Burns Exhibition which took place in the Royal Glasgow Institute of the Arts between 15<sup>th</sup> July and 31<sup>st</sup> October 1896.<sup>10</sup> Within the items listed as being exhibited in Gallery III during the exhibition, the catalogue includes item number 231 with the description 'Lent by Hugh Cairns ... Statue of Burns, executed by Hugh Cairns for the Caledonian Club, Boston, U.S.A.'. <sup>11</sup> However, it would appear that the actual sculpture itself was not on display as underneath the item listing the word '*Photograph*'

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<sup>7</sup> Further information relating to the statue of Highland Mary by Benjamin E. Spence once held in the Library on 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, New York supplied courtesy of Thomas Keith.

<sup>8</sup> Image courtesy of Thomas Keith.

<sup>9</sup> J.A. Mackay, 'The World-wide memorials to Robert Burns' in the *Burns Chronicle* (1989), pp. 77 – 82.

<sup>10</sup> *Memorial Catalogue of the Burns Exhibition: Held in the Institute of Fine Arts, 175 Sauchiehall Street, Glasgow From 15<sup>th</sup> July till 31<sup>st</sup> October 1896* (Glasgow, 1896).

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34.

appears in italics.<sup>12</sup> Unfortunately no trace of this photograph has been found, but an image of a postcard illustrating another later memorial to Robert Burns by Cairns has been uncovered, and this is of a bas-relief model of Burns and Highland Mary. It is not possible to ascertain from the image of this postcard the actual scale of the sculpture, which is dated 1903, but it would appear that Cairns produced a very detailed representation of Burns and Highland Mary, the features of both finely carved, swathed in plaids with thistles carved at Burns's feet.



Postcard depicting bas-relief model of Burns and Highland Mary by Hugh Cairns

Regrettably, apart from this postcard the actual whereabouts of this sculpture by Cairns has not been found, nor have any details been sourced revealing who commissioned and funded the piece. Attempts to confirm the existence of the Caledonian Club of Boston M.A., the commissioners of the statue of Burns from Cairns, suggest that this society is no longer active but a further, brief mention of a Burns statue sculpted by Hugh Cairns has been found suggesting that the Scottish entertainer, Sir Harry Lauder, owned a statuette of Burns by Cairns but this has been dated much later than 1896, having been given an approximate date of 1910.<sup>14</sup> It may be possible that further research into this statuette of Burns by Cairns may reveal whether or not it is a copy of the statue mentioned in the Burns Exhibition memorial catalogue in 1896.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid, p. 34

<sup>13</sup> Postcard courtesy of Thomas Keith.

<sup>14</sup> [www.jimvallance.com/02-family-folder/harry-lauder-folder/lauder-pages/harry-lauder-homes-at-home/pg-lauder-at-home.html](http://www.jimvallance.com/02-family-folder/harry-lauder-folder/lauder-pages/harry-lauder-homes-at-home/pg-lauder-at-home.html), accessed 30<sup>th</sup> March 2011.

Some smaller memorials erected in Burns's name have been moved over the years, as is the case with the small bust of the poet which was originally sited upon the frontage of a shop in the High Street, Maybole. This bust, thought to have been carved by the mason sculptor James Thom, was placed on the apex of the roof frontage of this building as it is close to the part of the street in Maybole where Burns's mother, Agnes Brown and his father, William Burnes met circa 1757.<sup>15</sup> This particular part of Maybole High Street, where the bust of Burns was sited, is believed to mark the place of the fair booth where William Burnes and Agnes Brown began their relationship.<sup>16</sup> The bust of Burns is thought to have been placed on this building in the late 1820s but during some renovation work, carried out around five years ago, workman discovered that the bust was coming adrift from the stonework and the bust was removed from the building. According to the butcher who is currently working out of these premises, the owner of the building took the bust of Burns home, but unfortunately, during the course of the project research it has not been possible to contact the owner to ascertain whether or not the bust is still in his possession, and furthermore to find out if it bears any markings which would confirm James Thom as the sculptor.

A few Burns memorials erected in the early twentieth century were temporary in nature and were usually part of larger international or imperial expositions and exhibitions. The replica of the Alloway cottage where Robert Burns was born in 1759 was first erected and exhibited at the Louisiana Purchase Exposition, more commonly known as the World's Fair, which took place in St Louis in 1904.<sup>17</sup> This was an exposition on a mammoth scale which covered an area of over 1,200 acres in St Louis and was declared to be 'the greatest World's Fair in history ... [acting] as a social awakening of the West to the appreciation of its powers, and of the nations of the world to the meanings and powers of democracy at work and at play.'<sup>18</sup> The fair included exhibitions of architecture, art, sculpture, industry, manufacturing, engineering and many other cultural aspects, not only from America but from around the world. Goodwillie states that the replica of Burns's cottage was originally intended to be a permanent memorial but for reasons which are unclear it was moved to Portland, Oregon in 1905 to be exhibited at the next World's Fair.<sup>19</sup> Following this fair it appears that this replica of Burns's cottage was dismantled, as no record of it being exhibited further in America has been found. However, a replica of the Bard's birthplace cottage was

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<sup>15</sup> James T. Gray, *Maybole Carrick's Capital* (Alloway, 1982), p. 288.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>17</sup> It is thought that the construction of this replica of Burns's birthplace cottage gave the Atlanta Burns Club the idea of building a permanent replica cottage in Atlanta with the objective that an addition to being a memorial to Burns, it would also act as the Club's headquarters.

<sup>18</sup> 'The World's Fair at St Louis' in *Review of Reviews*, Vol 28 (August, 1903), p. 171.

<sup>19</sup> Edward Goodwillie, *The World's Memorials of Robert Burns* (Detroit, 1911), p. 137.

exhibited at the Imperial International Exhibition which took place in London in 1909. Comparing the two images of the replica cottage in Portland (also of St Louis) and the replica erected at the Imperial Exhibition in London, it is difficult to tell whether these are one in the same model but it does reinforce the continuing popularity for commemorating Robert Burns, particularly in an imperial and international context, although in a portable and temporary way.



Image of the replica of Burns Cottage, Portland, Oregon, 1905.

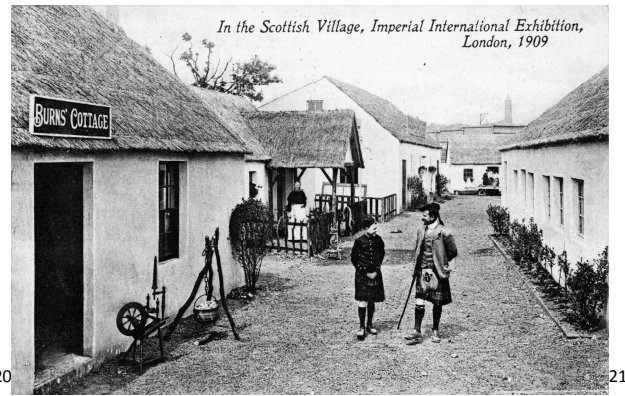


Image of the replica of Burns Cottage, Imperial International Exhibition, London, 1909.

In addition to those mentioned in this essay and the appendix, many hundreds more memorials to Robert Burns which were created or erected between 1796 and 1909, are scattered throughout the world. Due to the passage of time, change of ownership, the vagaries of the weather, deliberate vandalism or random accidents, some of these memorials are no longer in existence or in the public domain. Some Burns related statuary has remained incognito for many years, before being 'discovered' at a later juncture as in the case of the statues of Tam O' Shanter and Souter Johnie sculpted by the mason sculptor Robert Forrest in the 1820s and 1830s. These had previously sat in the gardens of Kirklands, a mansion house built in 1832 near Saline in Fife, but were acquired for exhibit by Fife Museums in 2010.<sup>22</sup> It is highly possible, especially when taking into account the surge in popularity of sculpture during the Victorian period, that statues, busts and statuettes of Burns or of characters taken from his poetry, lie un-noticed in formal gardens, are gathering dust in the attics of stately homes or are simply in the hands of private Burns enthusiasts.

<sup>20</sup> Image courtesy of Thomas Keith.

<sup>21</sup> Postcard courtesy of Thomas Keith.

<sup>22</sup> The Courier, 13<sup>th</sup> September 2010.