

## *The Burial of the Laird of Abbotshaugh*

---

John W Reddoch

In the second Volume of his Antiquarian Notes and Queries published in 1910, James Love included an account of a famous Falkirk legend written by John Wood Reddoch in the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The story concerned the difficulties encountered by the gallant men charged with the task of ensuring the burial of the last Laird of Abbotshaugh in 1737! John Wood Reddoch was a well known literary figure in Falkirk, where he worked for Russel and Aitken the Writers. Among his famous correspondents was no less a man than Sir Walter Scott. The story, which is written in 'braid Scots' is prefaced by some background material gathered by James Love himself.

This laird of Abbotshaugh who was so difficult to bury was surnamed Guidlat, if we are not mistaken. Some years ago we made some investigations regarding him and his affairs but discovered nothing of any importance. His house and lands were situated on the banks of the Carron and must not be confounded by our readers with the house now known as Abbotshaugh and presently occupied by Mr Frank Muirhead. While not prepared to admit that it took three days to bury the Laird, colour is given by the mortcloth book of the parish to lead us to believe that two attempts were made to get him underground. In the mortcloth book for 1737 there is the following entry under date 7<sup>th</sup> November –

*"The laird of Abbotshaugh, Littre, best Mortcloth and Bells £14."*

So far as we can gather, the usual charge was £7, consequently we are led to infer that the littre, mortcloth and bells had been twice used. The story runs that:

*"having no heirs, he had left orders that the people who assembled to his burial should be sumptuously entertained"*

- which injunction was obeyed to the letter. The resting place of the Laird is immediately to the south of the east entrance to the churchyard.

*"It is now some thirty years or bygane," said Laird Jamieson, as he lunted his pipe in the chimney neuk, and sent volumes of vapour rolling up the lum. "It's now some thirty years sin' the great Bruce the Abyssinian, him that was o' Kinnaird there, I'se warrant ye've a' heard o' him, fell down the grand stair and brak' his neck, and nae wonder o't, for he was a great muckle ox o' a man. His weight wad hae killed a dozen o' ordinary men; but that matters mae - - he was dead but to be buried, and the kintra rang far and near with the news o' the great grandeur and the braw braveries that were to be at his yirdin."*

*“Mony a mony a ane ran to see the burial and ye’ll no’ hinder me frae rinnin’ among the lave; and I mind – od, I mind as weel as an’t were but yesterday – o’ stannin’ on a brae-head, and seeing the cavalcade comin’ winding o’er its marrow – and a braw sight and an unco ane it was. There was a black hearse, and the braw feathers noddin’ and babbin’ as brisk and as blithe as gin they had been plumed in a bannet at a bridal; and raws o’ his colliers ranged on ilka side. And decent and trig they were - - na, ye wud hae been surprised to see how majestic the bodies looket. Then cam’ the saucy kintra lairds, his tenants, and gaucy and grand some o’ them were on their braw nicheering naigs; then there were the strings o’ carriages – some o’ them, they said, were toom, and only sent for show; and last o’ a’ cam’ the mob, a’ justlin’ and squeezing, and crackin’ jokes and laughin’, as merrily as an they had been rinnin’ after a carter’s parade on a simmer fair day in Fa’kirk.*

*“Aweel, to Larbert they cam’ at last, and just as I’m turning to come awa’ hame, after I had seen him carried in shouther high, and laid I’ the mools – unco dull and dowie I was – for there’s something solemn and imposing in the appearance o’ men met to lay a brither in the yird – mair especially when it happens to be ane that’s made siccan a steer i’ the world as he did – and I’m just thinking to myself how lang it might be sin’ I had seen him follow his Lady to the same grave, and wait till the last turf was laid – and then in the deepest hollow o’ his awesome voice say, ‘Mary Dundas! Mary Dundas! Mary Dundas! a long farewell!’ when what suld I meet but an auld comrade ye a’ ken fu’ weel.*

*‘Jock,’ quo’ he to me, ‘gin ye’ll gang in w’ me to Lucky Brown’s, od! we’s hae a drap o’ the dragie.’*

*So, ye ken, I liket the ploy owre weel to refuse – and, to mak’ a lang tale short – we’re sitting fu’snug in the chimney neuk, wi’ a drap dram afore us, and we’re cracking about a’ the grand burials that had been I’ man’s remembrance I’ our kintra side – but this ane dang them a’ either afore or sin’ syne, even the great Lord Bide’s, that bade in [Callendar House](#) there and was buried in Falkirk wi’ sic pomp, was jimply the marrow. I’ll no’ say neither but that Lord Dundas’s that was him of [Kerse’s House](#), might be as braw, wi’ their Scutcheons and their Heralds and sic like trumpetic, and there might be mae onlookers an a’, for an unco mob was there, but it didna raise the sough I’ the land that Bruce’s did. It was that year (continued the Laird) gif I binna mistaken that the radical story was: I was very nealy hobbled there mysel’, mair by token – but let that flee stick to the wa’ – Kings are kittle cattle, and I’ve nae notion o’ heading or hanging; and gin ye mind it was that same year Bainsford Brig brak’ wi’ the caravan o’ wild beasts. Mony a ane thought it a ferlie that the navigation o’ the [Great Canal](#) should be stopped wi’ an elephant and a rhinoceros – buut I’m aff my subject, like the drucken wife of Beith when she coupet aff the black stool. Sae, ye see, the time we’re crackin’, wha suld come in but auld Davuck Wilson, a dainty body, but, oh! he likes a toothfu’ weel like mysel’, and he said the gude auld fashion was a’ worn awa’ at burials now, when folks used to get the piper that played the Coronach to keep them jigging till midnight, and then gaed them hame, as Robbie Burns says,*

*“O’er a’ the ills i’ life victorious”*

-- but, quo' he, I'se tell ye of a burial that happened maybe a hunder or a hunder and fifty years syne (I'se warrant it's that noo) doon by there at Abeshaw (Abbotshaugh); the corpse was ta'en to [Fa'kirk Kirkyaird](#), and folk said aye it took three days to bury "The Last Laird o' Abe' 'Shaw"

"It was an unco coarse day, and ye ken I' thae days they skinned wine like dub water, so ye'll no' hinder them frae getting a tun that big nae door o' the house wad lket it in, sae they sticked it in an auld Thorn tree out bye afore the door, and gentle and semple got a decent service; the Lairds cam' first and got a drap frae the barrel; syne the Commonality got their sairings; then the Gentiles they behoved to drap a' into the house, and the puir folk into the Barn, and the gude red wine graed round in pint stoups, and a blithe gaedoun they had o't; they never devaulved till they were a' gay and tosey; the Short-kakes and Buns were gaun about in dunts, and some hae been graceless enough to uphaud that neither Minister nor Elder could say the grace out for hiccupping. Buut, be that as it will, the puir folk moved aff to the Kirk-yaird, lippening to the gentry to bring the corps; some ane o' the gentry looks out o' the window, and he sees the last o' the Blue Bannets (they were a' blue bannets i' thae days) moving o'er the hill, he alarms his neighbours, and they aff and awa', ettling the corp to be wi' the puir folk. It was awfu' day, and mony a gude brade bannet gaed sailing doon the Carron water, when the win' blew them aff; and the carse-dykes, they were big and wide then be's they're now, floated a gey when o' them; sae, when they met in Fa'kirk Kirk-yaird, there was nae half a dozen covered haids amang them – and what was waur, the Corpse was left at the 'Shaw; sair chawed and nettled they were at siccan an awfu' mistak'; and they made a paction to gang back neist day and bury the body – neist day cam', and fand them a' there sure enough 'but it fand the draps o' the draigie there too, and the carles took sic a liking to the dribbles o' drams and the lumps o' loaves, that they were a', e'er they steered, as sair, dung-up as the day before. Howsomever, they yoked a sled (there were nae carts then), and harled the corp to Fa'kirk, but when they cam' there some ill-deedy wags had filled up the grave. Aweel, they were na lang o' howkin't again; but in the meantime ye'll no' hinder the beast to turn and gae back wi' the corp to Abe'shaw. And siccan an uproar and outcry they raised about that.

Howsomever, i' the third day they got it fairly yirded. The twa-three bannets that had been saved frae the spate the first day had been buried the second, and a hantle o' the lang white staffs they a' carried, but they recovered them by the opening o' the grave the third day; and frae that day to this it has been a common saying that it took three days to bury the last Laird o' Abe' schwa."