

Myth and history: a story of 'Ae Fond Kiss' and other family mysteries

By Thomas Fox Averill

My family - wife, Jeffrey Ann Goudie and children Eleanor and Alexander Goudie-Averill - made a pilgrimage to Scotland in May of 2002. We wanted to explore the Goudie family roots in the southernmost reach of the Scottish lowlands: in Port Logan, a fishpond; and near Drummore, a church, Kirkmaiden. Our itinerary also included those places associated with Robert Burns, from Ayr to Edinburgh to Dumfries. I was writing a novel, set in a fictional Kansas town of Scottish immigrants, a love story built with a scaffolding of lines and sentiments gleaned from my re-reading of the National Poet. We yearned to find our place in the Scotland of family - my own ancestors emigrated from Dalbeattie, another Lowland town not far from Dumfries - and to place ourselves in the geographical haunts of Robert Burns.

Jeffrey Ann's family, the Goudies, emigrated to the United States from near Port Logan, on the Galloway coast. They were keepers of a fishpond, the small cottage where they lived now a museum, situated above Maidenhead Bay on the southwestern coast of Scotland. The landscape is rugged, yet lush: the prevailing winds of the Gulf Stream keep the climate temperate, so the Port Logan Botanical Garden is well planted in huge elephant ear ferns and palm trees. Years before, a coastal 'blowhole' was discovered, a rock formation that allowed water in and out, but nothing else of any size. Beginning in 1788, the Laird of Logan, Colonel Andrew McDouall, with the help of explosives, created within the blowhole an accessible 'pond'. Local fishers sold live catch to the Laird, and the pond became his larder. The fish, fed and soon tamed, came to the surface, and were easily netted by the fishpond keeper, who at one time, to our great interest, was one 'Mrs. Goudie', who brought to the manor house whatever fish Laird McDouall desired for his supper - cod, pollock, turbot, or mullet, among others. The Laird completed the Keeper's Cottage and a bathing hut by 1800. When we visited the fishpond, on a grey day in May, the landscape conveyed us into the world of two

hundred years before: the rugged coast, the rocky beach, the whitewashed cottage/museum, the peek into the bathing hut, the wet stairs down from the cottage to the pond. We were thrilled to walk the floors in what had been the home of ancestors.

Or so the family research told us. An article (reprinted from *Land and Water*) by Frank Buckland in the *Wigtownshire Free Press* of 24 November 1870 details a visit he made to Port Logan. He describes the fishpond exactly as we saw it 132 years later:

The Colonel has built some steps so as to get down to the pond from the level of the ground above, and he has also made a path round the edge of the pond.

Standing on the top of the steps I could perceive some dark looking bodies deep down in the water below. As we descended, these bodies began to move, and on arriving at the edge of the pond, I saw a sight which was worth while [sic] coming all the way from London to behold. From almost every side of the pond, and from its deepest bottom, came darting towards us great open-mouthed cod fish. They seemed really to know, personally, Mrs Gawde, [Ann Eliza Goudie] the woman who is appointed as curator of the pond. She threw a mussel without its shell into the middle of the pond, and in a moment the surface seemed literally boiling with struggling fish.

[...]

At last it began to get dark. He [the Colonel] said "Buckland, we must go to dinner, but we will take a codfish with us." Down the steps came Mrs Gawdie with more mussels and a great white iron hook attached to the end of a line. [...] Mrs Gawdie then artfully hooked out one of the biggest cod, the poor thing then took the mussel with a gulp. [...] His former protectress pulled him out of the water in a moment and he heaved a heavy sigh as he flapped his fin for the last time. We had this fish for supper... and a splendid cod it was.

We shared our excitement to be in the home of Jeffrey's ancestors with the woman in charge of the pond - we found her in the gift shop, ordering plastic fish to sell to tourists like ourselves. She didn't recall any Goudies being associated with the place. Jeffrey told her that the research was out in the car, and she'd be

happy to bring it in to share. The woman shook her head, dismissive and disinterested. As I wrote in my journal: 'Made us mad.' We expected, I'm sure, to feel more welcomed and connected to this place of family lore and legend.

When we visited the fishpond five years later, in 2007, we found a friendlier reception from a different museum attendant. Jeffrey had reviewed a 2006 novel, *The Sea Lady*, by British writer Margaret Drabble, and in it found a passage that seemed to describe the fishpond. The woman in the gift shop said she'd been told about the novel, and when Jeffrey recommended it to her, she said she might well read it in the winter, when she had more time. Drabble calls the place the Pool of Brochan. One of Drabble's characters, Humphrey, remembers a trip there, the place 'at once banal and divine'. After he walks down to the pond,

the earth opened. Here man and creature met and knew one another, here land and sea met and interpenetrated. Here the species were friendly one to another, as they had been before the birth of guilt and sin and cruelty.

Humphry remembered 'the old crone who had fed and minded the fish'. Drabble's description of the fishpond and its keeper echoes that of Londoner Frank Buckland from over a century before:

Mother Longbone was sixty, and she had been minding these fish for fifty years, or so she told them. For five-sixths of her life she had been mother to those fish.... The codfish were her chickens. Mother Longbone's chickens. She summoned them with a strange high-pitched crooning wordless song. And they came, and circled and swirled below her, and poked their dumb beseeching grey-lipped mouths up into the air. The green salt water seethed with their plump silver bodies.

It was a show, it was a display, but it was powerful. [...] The old woman, the rocky shore, the curving pool, the imprisoned fish. [...] The sea sucked in and out. The tide entered and withdrew.

Mrs. Longbone handed out to the children little dry harsh-smelling pellets of fish food from a tin box, and told them to cast them upon the waters. [...] The fish rose and snapped and threshed and devoured the pellets.

In Drabble's novel, the deep pool, and what lies in it, becomes mysterious,

perhaps monstrous, 'more terrible than a codfish. It had an open mouth, a dark and open mouth, a mouth that sucked like a maelstrom.'

Finding the Port Logan Fish Pond in a novel gave us one more layer of experience to consider. We fed the fish, too, on each of our pilgrimages, and their size and quickness impressed us. The roiling water lapped over the lips of the pond. The urgency of feeding, the size of the fish, did not seem monstrous or mysterious. They simply led me to think of Ann Eliza Goudie, in charge of it all, strong and capable. As she speared fish, so we speared some image of her doing it, bringing fish and memory and imagination to the surface, which is exactly why we had made the pilgrimage to Scotland.

Not far from the fishpond, on the 2002 trip, we also visited, for the first time, Kirkmaiden church, where the Goudies had worshipped, and where some were buried. Situated on Galloway Peninsula in sight of the Mull of Galloway, the southernmost tip of Scotland, the small stone church traces its history to 1638, when a covenant (a declaration of duties to God and fellow believers) was signed by parishioners. Built over the next several years, the church has been in continuous use ever since. Remote and beautiful, stark and lush at the same time, with views of Drummore Bay and beyond, with its iron and stone fencing, with its slate roof and small bell tower, Kirkmaiden is both aged and timeless. Only a little larger than a one-room schoolhouse, the church holds maybe one hundred people in high-backed pews that nearly buttress the pulpit. Other relatives had visited the site, and we have photographs of various Goudies standing in the pulpit as though ready to hold forth. A picture of our five-year-old son joined those.

We wanted to find and photograph the Goudie tombstone, of Great-great Grandfather George, a fisherman, and Great-great Grandmother Ann Eliza, the 'Mrs. Gawdie', who curated the fishpond. We started through the rows of grave markers; I spotted the tombstone, the broken top half leaning against the bottom half, as we'd seen in pictures. I held back, leaving to our children the joy of discovery. Alex ran to the reddish stone that read: 'Erected in memory of George Goudie, who died at Fishpond 2nd Jan. 1886, aged 72 years. Also his wife Ann Eliza Rainie died 1898, aged 75 years.' So, he was born in 1815, she in 1823, some eight years apart, and she survived him for twelve years. We took our own pictures. Before we left, we had a visit from the sexton of Kirkmaiden, who had seen our rental car parked on the narrow road and dropped by to investigate our

interest in the church. Murray Irving regaled us with more church history. A Kirk Covenant Society helps pay for upkeep, so that the church will survive into the future. On display inside is the old bell, the one that had called our ancestors to worship, replaced in 1885. Also inside, hanging on the wall, was a small wooden plaque, triangular, carved with the words of Patrick Adair, one of the first parishioners:

PADR [for Patrick Adair]
O GOD MAK ME TO
HEIR IN FAITH AND PR
ACKTEIS IN LOVE THY HO
LY WIRD AND COMADEMETIS
THOU ART ONLY MY SVPOIRT
GOD MAK ME THANKFVL 1618.

The vaults of the McDouall family of Logan, fishpond developers and Ann Eliza's employers, are underneath the balcony inside, and the Bible we'd seen, without a cover, was the 'Treacle Bible', a 1574 edition of the 'Bishop's Bible', called 'treacle' because that word was used instead of 'balm' in Jeremiah 8:22, which asks 'Is there no balm in Gilead?'

After extolling the virtues of Kirkmaiden church, he asked where else we were visiting. We mentioned Ayr, and Robert Burns, and he told us, according to my travel journal:

the story of Robert Burns' travels through the area. Said one poem begins with a mention of Kirkmaiden - because of the witches there. Murray said the witches were nothing more than smart women who used their wits well when there weren't many ways for a woman to use her wits. One cursed a preacher by saying he'd never give a sermon at Kirkmaiden, and supposedly when he rose to the pulpit he was speechless. He tried again seven years later & still could not speak from the pulpit.

Burns also wrote about Laird McDouall, who impregnated a local girl and then paid her 3000 pounds to stay quiet. When the girl and her baby died in childbirth, he evidently went to her family to try to gain his money back. Burns wrote of it in "Ae Fond Kiss."

We thanked Murray Irving for his visit. But I wondered about the details, feeling skeptical, like the woman at the Fishpond had been of *our* family lore. History and legend are often strange, if compatible, bedfellows. When we returned to our lodgings in Port Patrick, I read 'Ae Fond Kiss' and found nothing in it to reflect Irving's story of the local girl and her baby.

Later research makes me wonder if Burns traveled to Kirkmaiden at all. The church was not a stop on his Border tour, one of three tours of Scotland he took in 1787 to visit the landmarks and historically important sites of Scottish history (Borders from 5 May to 1 June; West Highland in June; Highlands from 25 August to 16 September). Burns makes no mention in his letters of Drummore, Kirkmaiden, Port Logan, the Mull of Galloway or people or landmarks from the locale. Burns did make a Galloway tour, in 1793, staying three days in July with John Gordon at Kenmure Castle, and he could have travelled the fifty-plus miles to the southwestern tip of Scotland then. Or, he could at some time have made the trip of seventy miles down the Scottish coast from Ayrshire. Murray Irving's story of a Burns visit may be true, or it might simply be the kind of legend that attaches itself to a landscape given the historical and cultural importance of Robert Burns. After all, our pilgrimage had a similar impulse: we wanted to attach ourselves to the landscapes of our families and of Burns. Myth grows out of history, or perhaps imagined history, and what we imagine in a place can become part of that place, whether it is Mrs Goudie spearing fish, or she and her husband being called to worship in a remote place by a bell now on display, its 'clapper tongue' forever silent.

Murray Irving *was* correct in saying Burns wrote a poem that mentions Kirkmaiden. 'Maidenkirk' is in the first stanza of 'On the Late Captain Grose's Peregrinations Thro' Scotland' (1789):

*Hear, Land o' Cakes, and brither Scots,
Frae Maidenkirk to Johnie Groat's;—
If there's a hole in a' your coats,
I rede you tent it:
A chield's amang you takin notes,
And, faith, he'll prent it [...]*

The poem is an appreciation of Captain Frances Grose, who wrote *Antiquities of*

Scotland, and who later requested that Burns write a ghost story set at Kirk Alloway, which had been abandoned since 1690. That long narrative poem, of 'brownies and bogillies', of 'witches and warlocks', the great 'Tam O' Shanter' first appeared in print as a footnote in Volume 2 of Grose's *Antiquities*. Burns obviously appreciated Grose's dedication to the preservation of Scotland landmarks. Burns himself spent years travelling Scotland collecting the music of his country for Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (published between 1787 and 1803). Burns's poem 'Peregrinations', published a year before 'Tam', contains lines that foreshadow the tone and vocabulary of his ghost story, writing that Captain Grose could be found

*By some auld, houlet-haunted biggin,
or kirk deserted by its riggin,
It's ten to ane ye'll find him snug in
Some eldritch part,
Wi' deils, they say, Lord save's! colleaguin
At some black art. Ilk ghaist that haunts auld ha' or chaumer,
Ye gipsy-gang that deal in glamour,
And you, deep-read in hell's black grammar,
Warlocks and witches,
Ye'll quake at his conjuring hammer.
Ye midnight bitches.*

Indeed, Kirkmaiden had its witches, as the sexton had told us.

Murray Irving's story of the local girl impregnated by Laird McDouall is more complicated. Though not associated with the poem 'Ae Fond Kiss', as Irving suggested, the story was well known to Burns. The local girl was, in fact, Margaret 'Peggy' Kennedy, sister of the wife of Gavin Hamilton, Burns's landlord and friend. Burns first met Peggy in 1785, when she was eighteen years old. He was charmed by her beauty, writing in a letter to her:

Permit me to present you with the enclosed song as a small though grateful tribute for the honour of your acquaintance. I have in these verses attempted some faint sketch of your portrait in the unembellished simple manner of descriptive truth.

[...] Poets, Madam, of all mankind, feel most forcibly the powers of beauty,—as,

if they are really poets of nature's making, their feelings must be finer and their taste more delicate than most of the world. [...] Madam, I am, as in many other things, indebted to Mr. Hamilton's kindness in introducing me to you. Your lovers may view you with a wish—I look on you with pleasure; their hearts in your presence may glow with desire—mine rises with admiration.

That the arrows of misfortune, however they should, as incident to humanity, glance a slight wound, may never reach your heart; that the snares of villainy may never beset you in the road of life; that innocence may hand you by the path of honour to the dwelling of peace—is the sincere wish of him who has the honour to be, etc. R. B.

The song Burns included was 'Young Peggy Blooms', later published in the *Scots Musical Museum* in 1787. The first two stanzas are descriptive:

*Young Peggy blooms our boniest lass,
Her blush is like the morning,
The rosy dawn, the springing grass,
With early gems adorning.*

Burns moves on to her eyes, her lips, her smile. But in the last two stanzas, he moves into speculation. What of Winter? What of Envy? What if Fortune were her foe? What of those 'arrows of misfortune', as he writes in his letter to her. In its final stanza, the poem seems prescient: 'Ye Pow'rs of Honour, Love, and Truth, / From ev'ry ill defend her!'

Margaret Kennedy had already met Andrew McDouall of Logan (1758-1834) the year before, in 1784. He would have been twenty-six years old. Burns was twenty-five. By 1786, McDouall had, according to his biographical note in *The History of Parliament*, become 'notorious as the seducer of "bonnie Peggy Kennedy".' In 1788, Burns mentions her by her initial in a letter to a Miss Chalmers:

Poor Miss K. is ailing a good deal this winter, and begged me to remember her to you the first time I wrote to you. Surely woman, amiable woman, is often made in vain. [She is] almost wholly at the mercy of the caprice, malevolence, stupidity, or wickedness of an animal at all times comparatively unfeeling, and often brutal. R.B.

In 1791, given the young Miss K.'s plight, Burns is said to have had her in mind when he wrote of false love in what are three versions of 'Banks O' Doon', these parts of the second being my favourites:

*Ye flowery banks o' bonnie Doon,
How can ye blume sae fair;
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu' o' care!
Thou'll break my heart, thou bonie bird,
That sings upon the bough!
Thou minds me o' the happy days
When my fause Luve was true.
[...]
Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,
Frae aff its thorny tree;
But my fause Luver staw my rose,
And left the thorn wi' me.
Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,
Upon a morn in June;
And sae I flourished on the morn,
And sae was pu'd or noon.*

In 1794, Margaret Kennedy gave birth to a daughter, Helen, but Andrew McDouall refused her request to say they'd privately married; he denied his paternity. She raised an action against him, but died the following year before the matter was adjudicated. McDouall maintained his reputation as a 'Lothario'. In 1798, three years after Margaret Kennedy's death, and even after Robert Burns's death, a Consistorial Court declared the marriage to be legal, and the child legitimate. Helen's legitimacy was reversed by a Court of Session, but three thousand pounds was awarded to the deceased Margaret, with provision for the child. So, Murray Irving had some details historically correct, others not. Such is the oral tradition, with its penchant for conflation, for the dramatic and the succinct. At Kirkmaiden the sexton worked at the church where the Laird is buried. A plaque on the wall of the McDouall family vault reads: 'Col. Andrew McDouall, Of Logan; Born 7th December 1758, Died 3rd May 1834'. Our Goudie ancestors, who worshipped in the church, would no doubt have seen that plaque

memorialising a man who died when George Goudie was nineteen years old, and Ann Eliza Goudie eleven, a man whose son would one day become their employer. They might have known the story of Andrew and Margaret, too, most likely in more detail, and perhaps with more of the whisper of scandals past. I like to think they had opinions, and wish I could hear them mouthing their secrets from the walls of Kirkmaiden church.

'Ae fond kiss and then we sever, / Ae fareweel, alas, for ever!' Those first lines of the poem that Murray Irving told us was inspired by the McDouall/Kennedy story, were written the same year, 1791, as 'The Banks of Doon', the poem that *was* in fact inspired by the affair. Like 'Banks', 'Ae Fond Kiss' is about parting and loss, but it doesn't have the lament of falseness or betrayal. It is a heartfelt celebration, and an acceptance. The second of the three stanzas captures this tone:

*I'll never blame my partial fancy,
Naething could resist my Nancy:
But to see her was to love her;
Love but her, and love for ever.
Had we never lov'd so kindly,
Had we never lov'd so blindly,
Never met—or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken hearted.*

Burns enclosed 'Ae Fond Kiss' in a letter dated 27 December 1791 to Agnes Maclehose, the 'Nancy' of the poem, whom he met in Edinburgh upon the publication of his poems in 1786. They had a lively correspondence, taking Arcadian names (Arcadia is, after all, the realm of Pan), he with the pseudonym Sylvander to her pseudonymous Clarinda. The poem marks the occasion of their final meeting after five years of what most consider to have been a platonic love. She was off to Jamaica to reunite with her estranged husband. The poem could well mark any parting of lovers, which accounts for its popularity: it is the most sung of all of Robert Burns's poems. Such familiarity might account for Sexton Murray Irving's association of poem to local story. And, in writing 'Ae Fond Kiss', who knows what thoughts, feelings, empathies, what real or imagined love stories Burns called upon. Such is the moment of creativity, which brings together the entirety of the poet for embodiment on the page.

'Ae Fond Kiss' also has an oblique relationship to my grandmother, Elizabeth Carson Averill, born in 1890, whose father, Thomas Carson, came to Massachusetts in 1877 from Dalbeattie, in southern Scotland, not far from Dumfries, where Burns spent the last years of his life, and quite near where he travelled on his Galloway tour. When she was five years old, my grandmother's family moved from her birthplace in Quincy, Massachusetts, to Barre, Vermont, a town Scottish enough to erect a statue of Robert Burns that still stands in front of the Spaulding Academy, where she graduated from high school in 1910. She married Harry Averill, a Spaulding graduate from the same year, in 1918. He was on leave from service in the First World War, and she was living in Montreal with her sister. After the war, they followed Harry's father to California.

Theirs was not a happy marriage, and when my father was just two years old, in 1926, Harry left the family. With two boys to care for, Elizabeth became postmistress of Dixon, California, a town in the Sacramento Valley. Harry was in and out of Veterans hospitals, with what was then known as 'shell shock'. He struggled with alcoholism. In 1936, Elizabeth sued to become his guardian, and he was deemed 'an incompetent person'. She oversaw his care and his checks from the armed services until his death in 1950. The two of them were separated, or, as Burns would say, 'severed'.

I was surprised, then, while sorting family papers, by a discovery in my grandmother's box. A three-inch by four-inch slip of ordinary paper, yellow and brittle with age, fluttered to the floor. On one side of this little note, in her handwriting, are these words, in pencil: *To see her is to love her, / And love but her forever; / For Nature made her what she is, / And ne'er made sic anither! Robert Burns.* The other side of the note bears a postmark, the circle with 'San Francisco, Calif. M. D.' And the date in the middle of the circle, 'May 2, 1939.'

The lines from Burns echo those in 'Ae Fond Kiss' - 'But to see her was to love her; / Love but her, and love for ever.' But they're from the second stanza of 'Saw Ye Bonie Lesley', which Burns wrote in 1792, a year after 'Ae Fond Kiss'. Here are some stanzas of the poem:

*O saw ye bonie Lesley,
As she gaed o'er the Border?
She's gane, like Alexander,
To spread her conquests farther.*

*To see her is to love her,
And love but her for ever;
For Nature made her what she is,
And never made anither!*

[...]

*The deil he could na scaith thee,
Or aught that wad belang thee;
He'd look into thy bonie face,
And say—"I canna wrang thee!"
The Powers aboon will tent thee,
Misfortune sha'na steer thee;
Thou'rt like themselves sae lovely,
That ill they'll ne'er let near thee.*

Such lines echo Burns's desire in 'Young Peggy Blooms', that women not be wounded by the 'snares of villainy'. His own intentions are clear. Upon meeting Miss Lesley Baillie, and accompanying her, with her father and sister on horseback for part of their journey to England, he was taken with her and inspired to write a ballad to her. He wrote in a letter to a Mrs. Dunlop, dated August 22, 1792.

... do you know that I am almost in love with an acquaintance of yours?—Almost! said I—I am in love, souse! over head and ears, deep as the most unfathomable abyss of the boundless ocean; but the word Love, owing to the intermingledoms of the good and the bad, the pure and the impure, in this world, being rather an equivocal term for expressing one's sentiments and sensations, I must do justice to the sacred purity of my attachment. [...]—such, so delighting and so pure, were the emotions of my soul on meeting the other day with, your neighbour at Mayfield. Mr. B., with his two daughters. [...]Twas about nine, I think, when I left them, and, riding home, I composed [a] [...] ballad.

'Ye Bonie Lesley' was to be sung to the tune of 'The Collier's Bonnie Lassie'. My grandmother, who had taught music and was familiar with the songs of Robert Burns, may have had this one in her repertoire. I doubt she knew the history of Burns's muse and the writing of the piece, but I know she would have cherished

the loving sentiments expressed on that little slip of paper. She was estranged from a husband who had physically abused her, and would also have wished for the lines of protection: 'The Powers *aboon will tent* thee, / Misfortune sha'na steer thee'. In early May of 1939, her firstborn son Weston was nineteen, just days away from twenty years old. He had already left home to attend the California Maritime Academy at Tiburon, just north of San Francisco. He graduated from CMA in 1939 and joined the Merchant Marine. He would spend his life at sea, in maritime shipping and commerce. Her second son Stuart, my father, was fourteen, just short of fifteen years old, and in high school, a serious student already planning for a university education. He would become a doctor, then a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. As my cousin Jane Averill wrote in an email, 'Our fathers reacted so differently to their circumstances - one to go to sea to find answers and one to look inward to find them.'

I've double-checked the handwriting to be sure the note was not written by her husband Harry. I doubt that he had her knowledge or interest in Burns, anyway, being English in his background. I've seen the hand of both my Uncle Weston and my father, and neither matches. So, it's her handwriting, and her access, I assume, to postmarks. I've wondered if it was a late May Day bouquet to herself, to write down Burns's generous words and to stamp them. Or was it a May Day of the other kind, an SOS, an emergency? Or was it a moment of pride, affirming to herself that she was like no other ('And ne'er made sic anither!'). Or, as my wife Jeffrey speculates, was she memorialising a sentiment she felt for or from another? Or did she write the words years before, and postmark them at some point? Or did she have the postmarked slip of paper, and pencilled the words on the back later? I can never know, so the note will remain a mystery, a part of family history, lore and mythology that is both known and unknowable. Like a poem, which always remains open to interpretation, and which opens up gradually as it is re-engaged, the note might someday reveal itself, its meaning coming to the surface for me to spear like one of Mrs Gawdie's cod.

Certainly, like Miss Leslie Baille, who inspired the lines in 'Saw Ye Bonie Lesley', like Margaret Kennedy, who inspired the lines in 'The Banks O' Doon' - 'Aft hae I rov'd by bonie Doon, / To see the woodbine twine; / And ilka bird sang o' its Luve, / And sae did I o' mine' - like Agnes Maclehose, the 'Nancy' of 'Ae Fond Kiss', the 'first and fairest', the 'best and dearest', my grandmother deserved such sentiment. She found it in Burns, in Scotland, in music and poetry. I did, too, on

the pilgrimages made to attach myself and my family to Scotland and to Robert Burns. I travelled to more completely understand the Burns I'd used as a scaffolding for my novel, *The Slow Air of Ewan MacPherson*. But I found a Scotland built with the scaffolding of Robert Burns himself. Such is his reach, everywhere, that he would be imprinted on the landscapes of Logan, and Kirkmaiden, and Galloway, and on the hearts of all of us who pilgrimage to reconnect our lives and our imaginations with the myths, histories, and mysteries of place and past.

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hundred years before: the rugged coast, the rocky beach, the whitewashed cottage/museum, the peek into the bathing hut, the wet stairs down from the cottage to the pond. We were thrilled to walk the floors in what had been the home of ancestors.

Or so the family research told us. An article (reprinted from *Land and Water*) by Frank Buckland in the *Wigtownshire Free Press* of 24 November 1870 details a visit he made to Port Logan. He describes the fishpond exactly as we saw it 132 years later:

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Standing on the top of the steps I could perceive some dark looking bodies deep down in the water below. As we descended, these bodies began to move, and on arriving at the edge of the pond, I saw a sight which was worth while [sic] coming all the way from London to behold. From almost every side of the pond, and from its deepest bottom, came darting towards us great open-mouthed cod fish. They seemed really to know, personally, Mrs Gawde, [Ann Eliza Goudie] the woman who is appointed as curator of the pond. She threw a mussel without its shell into the middle of the pond, and in a moment the surface seemed literally boiling with struggling fish.

[...]

At last it began to get dark. He [the Colonel] said "Buckland, we must go to dinner, but we will take a codfish with us." Down the steps came Mrs Gawdie with more mussels and a great white iron hook attached to the end of a line. [...] Mrs Gawdie then artfully hooked out one of the biggest cod, the poor thing then took the mussel with a gulp. [...] His former protectress pulled him out of the water in a moment and he heaved a heavy sigh as he flapped his fin for the last time. We had this fish for supper... and a splendid cod it was.

We shared our excitement to be in the home of Jeffrey's ancestors with the woman in charge of the pond - we found her in the gift shop, ordering plastic fish to sell to tourists like ourselves. She didn't recall any Goudies being associated with the place. Jeffrey told her that the research was out in the car, and she'd be

happy to bring it in to share. The woman shook her head, dismissive and disinterested. As I wrote in my journal: 'Made us mad.' We expected, I'm sure, to feel more welcomed and connected to this place of family lore and legend.

When we visited the fishpond five years later, in 2007, we found a friendlier reception from a different museum attendant. Jeffrey had reviewed a 2006 novel, *The Sea Lady*, by British writer Margaret Drabble, and in it found a passage that seemed to describe the fishpond. The woman in the gift shop said she'd been told about the novel, and when Jeffrey recommended it to her, she said she might well read it in the winter, when she had more time. Drabble calls the place the Pool of Brochan. One of Drabble's characters, Humphrey, remembers a trip there, the place 'at once banal and divine'. After he walks down to the pond,

the earth opened. Here man and creature met and knew one another, here land and sea met and interpenetrated. Here the species were friendly one to another, as they had been before the birth of guilt and sin and cruelty.

Humphry remembered 'the old crone who had fed and minded the fish'. Drabble's description of the fishpond and its keeper echoes that of Londoner Frank Buckland from over a century before:

Mother Longbone was sixty, and she had been minding these fish for fifty years, or so she told them. For five-sixths of her life she had been mother to those fish.... The codfish were her chickens. Mother Longbone's chickens. She summoned them with a strange high-pitched crooning wordless song. And they came, and circled and swirled below her, and poked their dumb beseeching grey-lipped mouths up into the air. The green salt water seethed with their plump silver bodies.

It was a show, it was a display, but it was powerful. [...] The old woman, the rocky shore, the curving pool, the imprisoned fish. [...] The sea sucked in and out. The tide entered and withdrew.

Mrs. Longbone handed out to the children little dry harsh-smelling pellets of fish food from a tin box, and told them to cast them upon the waters. [...] The fish rose and snapped and threshed and devoured the pellets.

In Drabble's novel, the deep pool, and what lies in it, becomes mysterious,

perhaps monstrous, 'more terrible than a codfish. It had an open mouth, a dark and open mouth, a mouth that sucked like a maelstrom.'

Finding the Port Logan Fish Pond in a novel gave us one more layer of experience to consider. We fed the fish, too, on each of our pilgrimages, and their size and quickness impressed us. The roiling water lapped over the lips of the pond. The urgency of feeding, the size of the fish, did not seem monstrous or mysterious. They simply led me to think of Ann Eliza Goudie, in charge of it all, strong and capable. As she speared fish, so we speared some image of her doing it, bringing fish and memory and imagination to the surface, which is exactly why we had made the pilgrimage to Scotland.

Not far from the fishpond, on the 2002 trip, we also visited, for the first time, Kirkmaiden church, where the Goudies had worshipped, and where some were buried. Situated on Galloway Peninsula in sight of the Mull of Galloway, the southernmost tip of Scotland, the small stone church traces its history to 1638, when a covenant (a declaration of duties to God and fellow believers) was signed by parishioners. Built over the next several years, the church has been in continuous use ever since. Remote and beautiful, stark and lush at the same time, with views of Drummore Bay and beyond, with its iron and stone fencing, with its slate roof and small bell tower, Kirkmaiden is both aged and timeless. Only a little larger than a one-room schoolhouse, the church holds maybe one hundred people in high-backed pews that nearly buttress the pulpit. Other relatives had visited the site, and we have photographs of various Goudies standing in the pulpit as though ready to hold forth. A picture of our five-year-old son joined those.

We wanted to find and photograph the Goudie tombstone, of Great-great Grandfather George, a fisherman, and Great-great Grandmother Ann Eliza, the 'Mrs. Gawdie', who curated the fishpond. We started through the rows of grave markers; I spotted the tombstone, the broken top half leaning against the bottom half, as we'd seen in pictures. I held back, leaving to our children the joy of discovery. Alex ran to the reddish stone that read: 'Erected in memory of George Goudie, who died at Fishpond 2nd Jan. 1886, aged 72 years. Also his wife Ann Eliza Rainie died 1898, aged 75 years.' So, he was born in 1815, she in 1823, some eight years apart, and she survived him for twelve years. We took our own pictures. Before we left, we had a visit from the sexton of Kirkmaiden, who had seen our rental car parked on the narrow road and dropped by to investigate our

interest in the church. Murray Irving regaled us with more church history. A Kirk Covenant Society helps pay for upkeep, so that the church will survive into the future. On display inside is the old bell, the one that had called our ancestors to worship, replaced in 1885. Also inside, hanging on the wall, was a small wooden plaque, triangular, carved with the words of Patrick Adair, one of the first parishioners:

PADR [for Patrick Adair]
O GOD MAK ME TO
HEIR IN FAITH AND PR
ACKTEIS IN LOVE THY HO
LY WIRD AND COMADEMETIS
THOU ART ONLY MY SVPOIRT
GOD MAK ME THANKFVL 1618.

The vaults of the McDouall family of Logan, fishpond developers and Ann Eliza's employers, are underneath the balcony inside, and the Bible we'd seen, without a cover, was the 'Treacle Bible', a 1574 edition of the 'Bishop's Bible', called 'treacle' because that word was used instead of 'balm' in Jeremiah 8:22, which asks 'Is there no balm in Gilead?'

After extolling the virtues of Kirkmaiden church, he asked where else we were visiting. We mentioned Ayr, and Robert Burns, and he told us, according to my travel journal:

the story of Robert Burns' travels through the area. Said one poem begins with a mention of Kirkmaiden - because of the witches there. Murray said the witches were nothing more than smart women who used their wits well when there weren't many ways for a woman to use her wits. One cursed a preacher by saying he'd never give a sermon at Kirkmaiden, and supposedly when he rose to the pulpit he was speechless. He tried again seven years later & still could not speak from the pulpit.

Burns also wrote about Laird McDouall, who impregnated a local girl and then paid her 3000 pounds to stay quiet. When the girl and her baby died in childbirth, he evidently went to her family to try to gain his money back. Burns wrote of it in "Ae Fond Kiss."

We thanked Murray Irving for his visit. But I wondered about the details, feeling skeptical, like the woman at the Fishpond had been of *our* family lore. History and legend are often strange, if compatible, bedfellows. When we returned to our lodgings in Port Patrick, I read 'Ae Fond Kiss' and found nothing in it to reflect Irving's story of the local girl and her baby.

Later research makes me wonder if Burns traveled to Kirkmaiden at all. The church was not a stop on his Border tour, one of three tours of Scotland he took in 1787 to visit the landmarks and historically important sites of Scottish history (Borders from 5 May to 1 June; West Highland in June; Highlands from 25 August to 16 September). Burns makes no mention in his letters of Drummore, Kirkmaiden, Port Logan, the Mull of Galloway or people or landmarks from the locale. Burns did make a Galloway tour, in 1793, staying three days in July with John Gordon at Kenmure Castle, and he could have travelled the fifty-plus miles to the southwestern tip of Scotland then. Or, he could at some time have made the trip of seventy miles down the Scottish coast from Ayrshire. Murray Irving's story of a Burns visit may be true, or it might simply be the kind of legend that attaches itself to a landscape given the historical and cultural importance of Robert Burns. After all, our pilgrimage had a similar impulse: we wanted to attach ourselves to the landscapes of our families and of Burns. Myth grows out of history, or perhaps imagined history, and what we imagine in a place can become part of that place, whether it is Mrs Goudie spearing fish, or she and her husband being called to worship in a remote place by a bell now on display, its 'clapper tongue' forever silent.

Murray Irving *was* correct in saying Burns wrote a poem that mentions Kirkmaiden. 'Maidenkirk' is in the first stanza of 'On the Late Captain Grose's Peregrinations Thro' Scotland' (1789):

*Hear, Land o' Cakes, and brither Scots,
Frae Maidenkirk to Johnie Groat's;—
If there's a hole in a' your coats,
I rede you tent it:
A chield's amang you takin notes,
And, faith, he'll prent it [...]*

The poem is an appreciation of Captain Frances Grose, who wrote *Antiquities of*

Scotland, and who later requested that Burns write a ghost story set at Kirk Alloway, which had been abandoned since 1690. That long narrative poem, of 'brownies and bogillies', of 'witches and warlocks', the great 'Tam O' Shanter' first appeared in print as a footnote in Volume 2 of Grose's *Antiquities*. Burns obviously appreciated Grose's dedication to the preservation of Scotland landmarks. Burns himself spent years travelling Scotland collecting the music of his country for Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum* (published between 1787 and 1803). Burns's poem 'Peregrinations', published a year before 'Tam', contains lines that foreshadow the tone and vocabulary of his ghost story, writing that Captain Grose could be found

*By some auld, houlet-haunted biggin,
or kirk deserted by its riggin,
It's ten to ane ye'll find him snug in
Some eldritch part,
Wi' deils, they say, Lord save's! colleaguin
At some black art. Ilk ghaist that haunts auld ha' or chaumer,
Ye gipsy-gang that deal in glamour,
And you, deep-read in hell's black grammar,
Warlocks and witches,
Ye'll quake at his conjuring hammer.
Ye midnight bitches.*

Indeed, Kirkmaiden had its witches, as the sexton had told us.

Murray Irving's story of the local girl impregnated by Laird McDouall is more complicated. Though not associated with the poem 'Ae Fond Kiss', as Irving suggested, the story was well known to Burns. The local girl was, in fact, Margaret 'Peggy' Kennedy, sister of the wife of Gavin Hamilton, Burns's landlord and friend. Burns first met Peggy in 1785, when she was eighteen years old. He was charmed by her beauty, writing in a letter to her:

Permit me to present you with the enclosed song as a small though grateful tribute for the honour of your acquaintance. I have in these verses attempted some faint sketch of your portrait in the unembellished simple manner of descriptive truth.

[...] Poets, Madam, of all mankind, feel most forcibly the powers of beauty,—as,

if they are really poets of nature's making, their feelings must be finer and their taste more delicate than most of the world. [...] Madam, I am, as in many other things, indebted to Mr. Hamilton's kindness in introducing me to you. Your lovers may view you with a wish—I look on you with pleasure; their hearts in your presence may glow with desire—mine rises with admiration.

That the arrows of misfortune, however they should, as incident to humanity, glance a slight wound, may never reach your heart; that the snares of villainy may never beset you in the road of life; that innocence may hand you by the path of honour to the dwelling of peace—is the sincere wish of him who has the honour to be, etc. R. B.

The song Burns included was 'Young Peggy Blooms', later published in the *Scots Musical Museum* in 1787. The first two stanzas are descriptive:

*Young Peggy blooms our boniest lass,
Her blush is like the morning,
The rosy dawn, the springing grass,
With early gems adorning.*

Burns moves on to her eyes, her lips, her smile. But in the last two stanzas, he moves into speculation. What of Winter? What of Envy? What if Fortune were her foe? What of those 'arrows of misfortune', as he writes in his letter to her. In its final stanza, the poem seems prescient: 'Ye Pow'rs of Honour, Love, and Truth, / From ev'ry ill defend her!'

Margaret Kennedy had already met Andrew McDouall of Logan (1758-1834) the year before, in 1784. He would have been twenty-six years old. Burns was twenty-five. By 1786, McDouall had, according to his biographical note in *The History of Parliament*, become 'notorious as the seducer of "bonnie Peggy Kennedy".' In 1788, Burns mentions her by her initial in a letter to a Miss Chalmers:

Poor Miss K. is ailing a good deal this winter, and begged me to remember her to you the first time I wrote to you. Surely woman, amiable woman, is often made in vain. [She is] almost wholly at the mercy of the caprice, malevolence, stupidity, or wickedness of an animal at all times comparatively unfeeling, and often brutal. R.B.

In 1791, given the young Miss K.'s plight, Burns is said to have had her in mind when he wrote of false love in what are three versions of 'Banks O' Doon', these parts of the second being my favourites:

*Ye flowery banks o' bonnie Doon,
How can ye blume sae fair;
How can ye chant, ye little birds,
And I sae fu' o' care!
Thou'll break my heart, thou bonie bird,
That sings upon the bough!
Thou minds me o' the happy days
When my fause Luvie was true.
[...]
Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,
Frae aff its thorny tree;
But my fause Luvie staw my rose,
And left the thorn wi' me.
Wi' lightsome heart I pu'd a rose,
Upon a morn in June;
And sae I flourished on the morn,
And sae was pu'd or noon.*

In 1794, Margaret Kennedy gave birth to a daughter, Helen, but Andrew McDouall refused her request to say they'd privately married; he denied his paternity. She raised an action against him, but died the following year before the matter was adjudicated. McDouall maintained his reputation as a 'Lothario'. In 1798, three years after Margaret Kennedy's death, and even after Robert Burns's death, a Consistorial Court declared the marriage to be legal, and the child legitimate. Helen's legitimacy was reversed by a Court of Session, but three thousand pounds was awarded to the deceased Margaret, with provision for the child. So, Murray Irving had some details historically correct, others not. Such is the oral tradition, with its penchant for conflation, for the dramatic and the succinct. At Kirkmaiden the sexton worked at the church where the Laird is buried. A plaque on the wall of the McDouall family vault reads: 'Col. Andrew McDouall, Of Logan; Born 7th December 1758, Died 3rd May 1834'. Our Goudie ancestors, who worshipped in the church, would no doubt have seen that plaque

memorialising a man who died when George Goudie was nineteen years old, and Ann Eliza Goudie eleven, a man whose son would one day become their employer. They might have known the story of Andrew and Margaret, too, most likely in more detail, and perhaps with more of the whisper of scandals past. I like to think they had opinions, and wish I could hear them mouthing their secrets from the walls of Kirkmaiden church.

'Ae fond kiss and then we sever, / Ae fareweel, alas, for ever!' Those first lines of the poem that Murray Irving told us was inspired by the McDouall/Kennedy story, were written the same year, 1791, as 'The Banks of Doon', the poem that *was* in fact inspired by the affair. Like 'Banks', 'Ae Fond Kiss' is about parting and loss, but it doesn't have the lament of falseness or betrayal. It is a heartfelt celebration, and an acceptance. The second of the three stanzas captures this tone:

*I'll never blame my partial fancy,
Naething could resist my Nancy:
But to see her was to love her;
Love but her, and love for ever.
Had we never lov'd so kindly,
Had we never lov'd so blindly,
Never met—or never parted,
We had ne'er been broken hearted.*

Burns enclosed 'Ae Fond Kiss' in a letter dated 27 December 1791 to Agnes Maclehose, the 'Nancy' of the poem, whom he met in Edinburgh upon the publication of his poems in 1786. They had a lively correspondence, taking Arcadian names (Arcadia is, after all, the realm of Pan), he with the pseudonym Sylvander to her pseudonymous Clarinda. The poem marks the occasion of their final meeting after five years of what most consider to have been a platonic love. She was off to Jamaica to reunite with her estranged husband. The poem could well mark any parting of lovers, which accounts for its popularity: it is the most sung of all of Robert Burns's poems. Such familiarity might account for Sexton Murray Irving's association of poem to local story. And, in writing 'Ae Fond Kiss', who knows what thoughts, feelings, empathies, what real or imagined love stories Burns called upon. Such is the moment of creativity, which brings together the entirety of the poet for embodiment on the page.

'Ae Fond Kiss' also has an oblique relationship to my grandmother, Elizabeth Carson Averill, born in 1890, whose father, Thomas Carson, came to Massachusetts in 1877 from Dalbeattie, in southern Scotland, not far from Dumfries, where Burns spent the last years of his life, and quite near where he travelled on his Galloway tour. When she was five years old, my grandmother's family moved from her birthplace in Quincy, Massachusetts, to Barre, Vermont, a town Scottish enough to erect a statue of Robert Burns that still stands in front of the Spaulding Academy, where she graduated from high school in 1910. She married Harry Averill, a Spaulding graduate from the same year, in 1918. He was on leave from service in the First World War, and she was living in Montreal with her sister. After the war, they followed Harry's father to California.

Theirs was not a happy marriage, and when my father was just two years old, in 1926, Harry left the family. With two boys to care for, Elizabeth became postmistress of Dixon, California, a town in the Sacramento Valley. Harry was in and out of Veterans hospitals, with what was then known as 'shell shock'. He struggled with alcoholism. In 1936, Elizabeth sued to become his guardian, and he was deemed 'an incompetent person'. She oversaw his care and his checks from the armed services until his death in 1950. The two of them were separated, or, as Burns would say, 'severed'.

I was surprised, then, while sorting family papers, by a discovery in my grandmother's box. A three-inch by four-inch slip of ordinary paper, yellow and brittle with age, fluttered to the floor. On one side of this little note, in her handwriting, are these words, in pencil: *To see her is to love her, / And love but her forever; / For Nature made her what she is, / And ne'er made sic anither! Robert Burns.* The other side of the note bears a postmark, the circle with 'San Francisco, Calif. M. D.' And the date in the middle of the circle, 'May 2, 1939.'

The lines from Burns echo those in 'Ae Fond Kiss' - 'But to see her was to love her; / Love but her, and love for ever.' But they're from the second stanza of 'Saw Ye Bonie Lesley', which Burns wrote in 1792, a year after 'Ae Fond Kiss'. Here are some stanzas of the poem:

*O saw ye bonie Lesley,
As she gaed o'er the Border?
She's gane, like Alexander,
To spread her conquests farther.*

*To see her is to love her,
And love but her for ever;
For Nature made her what she is,
And never made anither!*

[...]

*The deil he could na scaith thee,
Or aught that wad belang thee;
He'd look into thy bonie face,
And say—"I canna wrang thee!"
The Powers aboon will tent thee,
Misfortune sha'na steer thee;
Thou'rt like themselves sae lovely,
That ill they'll ne'er let near thee.*

Such lines echo Burns's desire in 'Young Peggy Blooms', that women not be wounded by the 'snares of villainy'. His own intentions are clear. Upon meeting Miss Lesley Baillie, and accompanying her, with her father and sister on horseback for part of their journey to England, he was taken with her and inspired to write a ballad to her. He wrote in a letter to a Mrs. Dunlop, dated August 22, 1792.

... do you know that I am almost in love with an acquaintance of yours?—Almost! said I—I am in love, souse! over head and ears, deep as the most unfathomable abyss of the boundless ocean; but the word Love, owing to the intermingledoms of the good and the bad, the pure and the impure, in this world, being rather an equivocal term for expressing one's sentiments and sensations, I must do justice to the sacred purity of my attachment. [...]—such, so delighting and so pure, were the emotions of my soul on meeting the other day with, your neighbour at Mayfield. Mr. B., with his two daughters. [...]Twas about nine, I think, when I left them, and, riding home, I composed [a] [...] ballad.

'Ye Bonie Lesley' was to be sung to the tune of 'The Collier's Bonnie Lassie'. My grandmother, who had taught music and was familiar with the songs of Robert Burns, may have had this one in her repertoire. I doubt she knew the history of Burns's muse and the writing of the piece, but I know she would have cherished

the loving sentiments expressed on that little slip of paper. She was estranged from a husband who had physically abused her, and would also have wished for the lines of protection: 'The Powers *aboone* will tent thee, / Misfortune sha'na steer thee'. In early May of 1939, her firstborn son Weston was nineteen, just days away from twenty years old. He had already left home to attend the California Maritime Academy at Tiburon, just north of San Francisco. He graduated from CMA in 1939 and joined the Merchant Marine. He would spend his life at sea, in maritime shipping and commerce. Her second son Stuart, my father, was fourteen, just short of fifteen years old, and in high school, a serious student already planning for a university education. He would become a doctor, then a psychiatrist and psychoanalyst. As my cousin Jane Averill wrote in an email, 'Our fathers reacted so differently to their circumstances - one to go to sea to find answers and one to look inward to find them.'

I've double-checked the handwriting to be sure the note was not written by her husband Harry. I doubt that he had her knowledge or interest in Burns, anyway, being English in his background. I've seen the hand of both my Uncle Weston and my father, and neither matches. So, it's her handwriting, and her access, I assume, to postmarks. I've wondered if it was a late May Day bouquet to herself, to write down Burns's generous words and to stamp them. Or was it a May Day of the other kind, an SOS, an emergency? Or was it a moment of pride, affirming to herself that she was like no other ('And ne'er made sic anither!'). Or, as my wife Jeffrey speculates, was she memorialising a sentiment she felt for or from another? Or did she write the words years before, and postmark them at some point? Or did she have the postmarked slip of paper, and pencilled the words on the back later? I can never know, so the note will remain a mystery, a part of family history, lore and mythology that is both known and unknowable. Like a poem, which always remains open to interpretation, and which opens up gradually as it is re-engaged, the note might someday reveal itself, its meaning coming to the surface for me to spear like one of Mrs Gawdie's cod.

Certainly, like Miss Leslie Baille, who inspired the lines in 'Saw Ye Bonie Lesley', like Margaret Kennedy, who inspired the lines in 'The Banks O' Doon' - 'Aft hae I rov'd by bonie Doon, / To see the woodbine twine; / And ilka bird sang o' its Luvie, / And sae did I o' mine' - like Agnes Maclehose, the 'Nancy' of 'Ae Fond Kiss', the 'first and fairest', the 'best and dearest', my grandmother deserved such sentiment. She found it in Burns, in Scotland, in music and poetry. I did, too, on

the pilgrimages made to attach myself and my family to Scotland and to Robert Burns. I travelled to more completely understand the Burns I'd used as a scaffolding for my novel, *The Slow Air of Ewan MacPherson*. But I found a Scotland built with the scaffolding of Robert Burns himself. Such is his reach, everywhere, that he would be imprinted on the landscapes of Logan, and Kirkmaiden, and Galloway, and on the hearts of all of us who pilgrimage to reconnect our lives and our imaginations with the myths, histories, and mysteries of place and past.

(c) The Bottle Imp