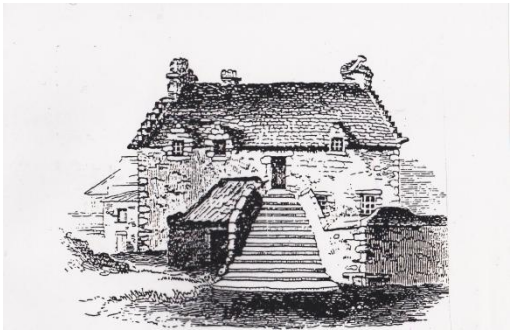


Broughton Tolbooth 1582–1829

BROUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

New Series Number **4** November 2020

Welcome to the November edition of the new format newsletter, we hope you find it interesting. As ever, contributions by members are welcome.We note with regret the recent obituary notice for Isobel Inglis, a long-term member of the Society and wish to convey our condolences to the family.

Contents:

ZOOM

A reminder that we will have a short introductory meeting for all interested members **via Zoom on Monday 16 November at 7.30 pm.**

If you'd like to take part please let Sandra Purves know by email: spurves004@btinternet.com

Some of you will be familiar with Zoom already. If you haven't used it before and want to give it a try just download the (free) App from zoom.com.

Epidemics in history and in John Buchan's writings

An edited version of an article for the John Buchan Journal

Ring a ring o' roses, a pocket full of posies. Atishoo, atishoo! We all fall down.

Traditional rhyme

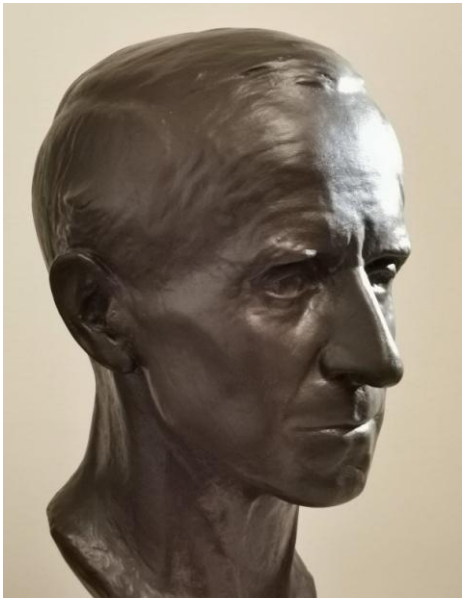
With the Covid-19 pandemic in mind, I wonder how many of us remember chanting these words or something similar when we were small, whirling round in a circle with other children before collapsing in giggles on the floor? Indeed how many of us as adults believed that this innocent sounding rhyme referred to the Great Plague of London or even the Black Death of the 14th C? The implied description of skin markings and popular in the late 18th C and would surely have been more common well before that time in households around the country.

The great pandemic, known as the Black Death, and the later ones too were bubonic plagues, a very infectious disease subsequently found in 1894 to be caused by rat fleas infected with the virus Yersinia pestis. Their constant presence in the life, and death, of the populations of 16th and 17th centuries had a profound influence on writers of the time. For example, the regular occurrence of plague was reflected, both directly and indirectly, in William Shakespeare's writing, not least because of the death of his own son Hamnet at 11 years old, presumed to be from bubonic plague. However, Shakespeare was usually subtle about referring to it. It was a somewhat taboo subject at that time and he would no more

have made a direct reference to 'the plague' than an airline company would show an air disaster movie during a long haul flight. Except, of course, for '*A plague on both your houses!*' in Romeo and Juliet.

During the final year of the WW1 a particularly virulent strain of influenza spread quickly round Europe and the rest of the world and this 1918 flu pandemic acquired the soubriquet 'Spanish Flu'. It did not begin, as its name might imply, in Spain but the first cases and mortality were reported variously in the USA, France, Germany and Britain. The wartime censors suppressed information about the illness so as not to further depress morale. However, this did not apply in neutral Spain, where King Alfonso III was reported as being gravely ill, hence the popular term Spanish flu. Consequently this pandemic resulted in the death of between 17 and 50 million men, women and children, although young men were disproportionately affected. Perhaps because it coincided with the end of the war, which had already caused millions of deaths, the significance of this major flu outbreak was both underestimated and suppressed by the authorities. Therefore you would be hard pressed to find any contemporary references to it in newspapers and other media at the time and certainly not in John Buchan's contemporary Nelson's History of the War. As I have discovered, very little of this major world event has appeared in either factual or fictional form until recently.

Looking at JB's fiction as a whole, there are a few novels which stand out as including significant mention of infectious diseases, either as a driving force in the story or incidental references which act as subplots. The main ones are Witchwood published in 1927 and Sick Heart River published posthumously in 1941. Why these novels and how do the diseases come to the aid of the stories?



Bust of John Buchan

Witchwood, was set in the 17th C at the time of the Covenanters in Scotland's battle for the Christian soul. In the Scottish Borders village of Woodilee (modelled on Broughton where he spent much of his childhood holidays) David Sempill, the new minister, is soon thrust into a maelstrom of competing interpretations of biblical scripture. This brings him into conflict with the local church elders and Kirk authorities, particularly when he is found to be siding with representatives of the 'other side', Royalist followers of Montrose and King Charles I.

In Chapter 18, conveniently entitled 'The Plague', we are presented with some serious and atmospheric descriptions of how the illness affected the community of Woodilee. This plague or pest, part of a sequence of lesser bubonic plagues which enveloped Europe in the Middle Ages, almost develops as a separate character in the book, as Buchan gradually builds up the background to the disease. 'A curious languor fell upon Woodilee. It seemed as if the same apprehension were felt by the natural world.' Soon we have the first death, of a young boy. 'In the morning his face and throat were swollen, his eyes were sightless, and he struggled terribly for breath. Before noon he was dead.'

There are three types of bubonic plague,

which all have some common symptoms, including fever and delirium. In Witchwood, Buchan states that of 59 cases all died, as there was no effective treatment, such as antibiotics, available at that time. It is difficult to identify for certain which version the inhabitants of Woodilee had contracted but pneumonic plague seems most likely. For some reason, not identified in the novel, other surrounding communities escaped the infection, so Woodilee's residents went into lockdown, as we now say, often causing whole families to die from the disease. Nobody dared visit the village from outside this community, so no help could be sought or given by others. Some of you may recall how the Derbyshire village of Eyam in the 17thC, under the direction of their vicar, cut themselves off from outside communities as a way of containing the infection.

In the novel Rev Sempill, with some assistance from two others, tirelessly helps the sick and eventually persuades each family to give up their dead for burial, to get the survivors into fresh air and sometimes to bring them food and water, for which they got little or no thanks. How they themselves did not contract the plague is a mystery best left unanswered.

Sick Heart River was Buchan's last novel and has often been seen as heralding Buchan's own death, particularly as Sir Edward Leithen, the novel's protagonist, is thought to be largely based on Buchan himself. Leithen is suffering from terminal pulmonary tuberculosis (TB) caused by the bacterium Mycobacterium tuberculosis and commonly known as consumption, believed to have been brought on by his being gassed in the trenches in WW1. He exhibited most of the signs of classic pulmonary TB: loss of weight and appetite, night sweats and fatigue: he is given a year to live. TB was, and still is in some places, a scourge of this and many other countries until the discovery of antibiotics. There are fewer than 20,000 cases reported in the UK each year but it is not easily passed on to others unless prolonged contact is involved, such as with family members.

When I first came to Edinburgh in the 1960s, my work as a respiratory physiologist brought me into immediate contact with chest physicians who were still dealing with the aftermath of TB and we had mobile mass chest X-Ray units testing the general public for signs of the disease: like current drive-through testing for Covid-19 but with fewer health precautions. One of those physicians was Professor Sir John Crofton, based at Edinburgh's City Hospital, where my then boss also ran clinics. (Incidentally, Prof Anthony Seaton, our intended speakers for March, also ran similar clinics there in the 1980s) Sir John had been one of the key physicians who had established the use of multiple drugs to tackle TB, resulting in almost complete eradication in Edinburgh, and he subsequently travelled around the UK and beyond to spread the message more widely of its effectiveness.

In Leithen's day, pre WW11, TB was still affecting many people and, as we discover later in the story, a whole tribe of Hare Indian (First Nation, as we now know them) people of the Canadian NW Territories. While searching for a lost French Canadian, the initial motive for his quest, Leithen learns from his Hare guide that 'it had been foretold that many of the Hare people would presently die'. To cut to the chase, after months scouring the wilds of Canada with some local guides, Leithen returns to his starting point, where the Hares live, to find them in a poor state, while he has apparently partially recovered from the worst of his own condition.

The Hare community are suffering terribly, won't hunt or eat and have sunk into a torpid state. As he gradually recovers his strength and resolve to live, Leithen decides that he should do all he can to help them recover

even though he is advised that this will probably kill him owing to his existing tuberculous state. However, back at the village, as the appointed leader of the small group of helpers, Leithen manages to stiffen the Hares' resolve, feed them and encourage them to take responsibility for their lives again. He becomes a hero in their eyes but pays the ultimate price, dying shortly after the recovery of the others has been established. We see here a parallel with the minister's assistance to the parishioners of Woodilee, where everyone had lost even the will to live and very few did recover. In this case Leithen sees it as a form of personal redemption to save others who mean nothing to him individually and he dies almost in a state of bliss, having fought his own tough battles including other men's psychological and philosophical problems and, most of all, his own health.

In both these stories the burden of ill health and death was ever present in society as medical treatment such as antibiotics and vaccines were not yet available. In their stead superstition and religious faith battled in people's minds to provide an explanation for what was happening to them. Yet even today, in the midst of the present Covid-19 pandemic, we are still vulnerable to new and unknown viruses and bacteria. Misinformation and superstition, fuelled by social media platforms, can still unsettle millions of otherwise rational minds.

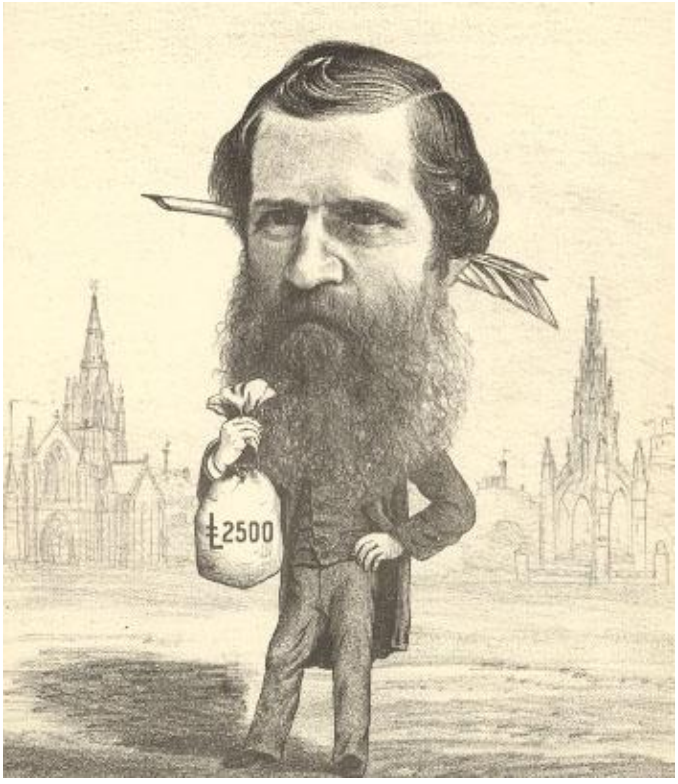
Richard Love

Lockdown graveyard walks

Like many others I have been walking about the local area more than usual this summer and have taken to haunting local graveyards, Warriston being my favourite. I live only slightly out of the Broughton area, in Goldenacre, so this is my nearest, nearer even than Tesco.

I always look for gravestones with connections to my native Orkney, and usually succeed, as we get everywhere. Warriston has one splendid example, this large memorial to Sir James Marwick and family over the page.

I already knew a bit about him and had a copy of his autobiography. Actually he was born in Leith not Orkney, but was raised in Kirkwall by his grandparents. He graduated from Edinburgh University in law, practised in Dundee, then became a councillor and then Town Clerk of Edinburgh. In a Premier League-type manoeuvre, he was poached by Glasgow Council, who offered him three times his Edinburgh salary to do the same job in Glasgow, where he was Town Clerk for 31 years, being knighted there by Queen Victoria in 1888. He remains the only person ever to have been Town Clerk of both Edinburgh and Glasgow. He died in 1908 at the age of 82.



Marwick going west for his increased salary of £2500. Picture Glasgow Museums

His autobiography has some details of his early life. Highlights include his journey down to Leith from Kirkwall by sea in 1842

'*During the course of the night I was wakened by a sea flooding the deck and pouring into the cabin. Looking out of my berth I saw my shoes washed from side to side of the little cabin*'

He landed safely and went to his uncle's lodgings at the 'corner house of Broughton Street and Picardy Place'.He was in Edinburgh, with his sister, when Queen Victoria made her famous, or notorious, first visit here with Prince Albert, also in 1842. He tells how the Town Council resolved to receive Her Majesty and the Prince in state, and platforms were erected along Granton Road to Inverleith Row with a huge ceremonial gateway arch erected at the bottom of what is now Dundas Street. (then Pitt St) where a ceremonial presentation of the keys of the City would be made by the Lord Provost. They had been expected to arrive at Granton on the afternoon of 31st August, but due to delays in departure from Woolwich, did not arrive until about 8 the next morning. At some point the previous day the Council, all gowned-up in their finery, had given up and gone to bed. However since Queen Victoria felt seasick on arrival and just wanted to go straight to Dalkeith Palace (where they were to stay – Holyrood Palace was at this time in no fit state to receive anyone) she summoned up her escort of Dragoons and galloped straight up through the deserted streets, past the empty stands, and under the specially prepared arch without stopping. Marwick and his sister had gone out after breakfast that morning to try and find out when the Queen was expected, and were astounded when they heard guns salute from the Castle, reached Hanover Street and then actually saw the Royal Party ride past in their carriages with their cavalry escort. This of course was more than the Edinburgh Town Councillors did. The Lord Provost, Sir James Forrest, got the blame for this fiasco, rather unfairly probably, but never really lived it down in the popular imagination.

Another famous occasion he was an eye-witness of was the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843, and he was actually standing across George Street opposite St Andrew's Church when the seceding ministers streamed out of the main door and marched down the hill to Tanfield Hall.

Later when he was Town Clerk of Edinburgh he met the Queen and Prince Albert at the laying of the foundation stone for the new Post Office in Waterloo Place and for the Museum of Science and Art (as it was originally known), in Chambers Street on 22nd October 1861. He says that the Prince did not appear to be in the best of health ('he shivered twice or thrice'). This was the last occasion Prince Albert visited Edinburgh, he died on 14 December 1861.

Marwick remarks that earlier in the same month he went to hear Charles Dickens give readings to a crowded audience, his last visit to Edinburgh for this purpose. Unfortunately he does not describe the occasion any further, except that he enjoyed it.

I have unearthed (figuratively speaking)

The Marwick family memorial stone

several other Orcadians, but none yet with as much local as well as Orcadian interest.

Jim Eunson

"Walter Scott's Flitting to Abbotsford"

This is the title of a poem published in 1888 by the German poet and novelist Theodor Fontane. In May 1812 Scott moved from Ashiestiel House -- 5 miles from Galashiels, 12 miles from Melrose -- to the nearby small farm, Cartley Hole, which he'd purchased and 1811 and was to transform into Abbotsford.

Fontane

Scott had been renting Ashiestiel House since 1804 and moved out reluctantly when the lease expired. There, he had written the narrative poems such as The *Lady of the Lake* and *Marmion* that made him famous. He was on the brink of writing the first of his historical novels with *Waverley* appearing in 1814. Scott describes the scene of the flitting in a letter: "The neighbours have been much delighted with the procession of my furniture, in which old swords, bows, targets and lances made very conspicuous show. A family of turkeys was accommodated within the helmet of some preux chevalier of ancient Border fame; and the very cows, for aught I know, were bearing banners and muskets […] this caravan, attended by a dozen of ragged rosy peasant children, carrying fishing-rods and spears, and leading poneys, greyhounds, and spaniels, would, as it crossed the Tweed, have furnished no bad subject for the pencil...". Fontane would have known this description from J. G. Lockhart's biography.

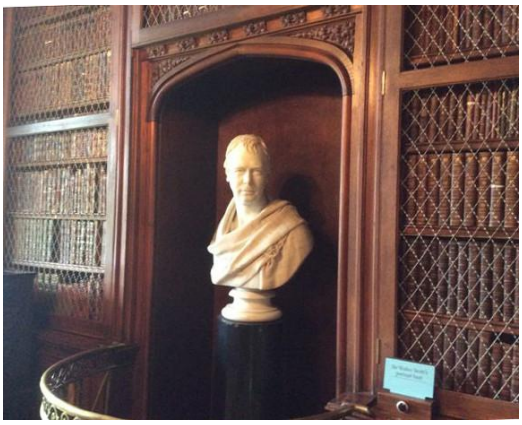
In the first verse of the poem, he has the removal depart from Edinburgh which his readers would have heard of; there's a procession of 23 carts (in fact there were 24) with mastiffs and parrots on board, which there weren't. Scott was fond of dogs and though he didn't actually own the alliterative

Ashiestiel House

mastiffs of Fontane's account, he might have. The next three stanzas purport to describe the contents of the first three carts, before the task seems to escape the poet's ordering hand and a jumbled list of historical objects are piled upon each other, bound only by at times humorous rhymes. Fontane fills the carts with things from books that were yet to be written. The first, drawing on *Tales of a Grandfather*, has memorabilia from 14th-century Scotland associated with Robert the Bruce, the next lists items linked to *Ivanhoe*, including Blondel's harp -- in need of restringing --, Saladin's sabre and Robin Hood's bow. The source of the alleged contents of the third cart is *Quentin Durward* (set on the continent, it was a favourite of Fontane's).

In the fifth and longest stanza, in the course of 20 lines Fontane assembles a non-chronological assortment of historical objects from the 12th to the 18th centuries. He attaches most of these to historical figures. Their names feature in positions of emphasis at or near the end of lines, often as rhyme words, like Maud and Laud, Knox and Fox. So it's the people that matter but the objects invest them with physical presence in the here and now. There seems to be no logic to the ordering of the references, other than perhaps the demands of the rhyme and rhythm. Seven of the lines arguably pertain to

Mary Queen of Scots and these, taken together with allusions to Queen Maud, the White Lady and Lady Jane Grey, reflect the focus in Fontane's work more generally on women's lives and fates.

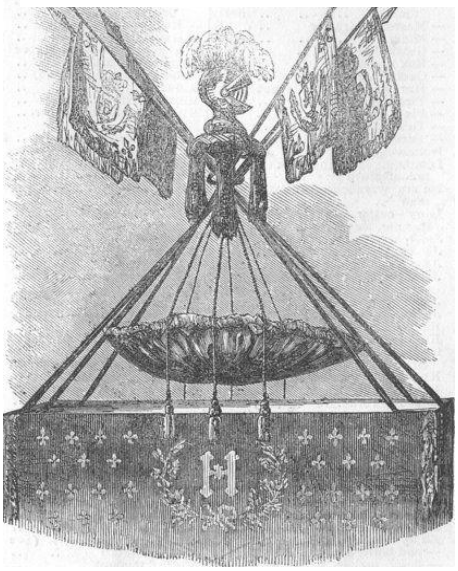


Bust of Scott at Abbotsford

I haven't been able to identify all the sources. Among the objects are the block used for Mary Queen of Scots' execution and, more puzzlingly, the tortoiseshell cradle Fontane says she lay in once only, the day she was christened. I'd be grateful to anyone who can throw light on this. The only royal tortoiseshell cradle I've found belonged to Henri IV of France whose baptism in 1553 postdates hers by 11 years. A lace ruff each from Darnley and Bothwell keep company with a dragoon's saddle from the Battle of Prestonpans, Cromwell's pistol, bullet and all, and John Knox's pulpit and hourglass. All these named objects are not to be found at Abbotsford, despite the fact that Fontane had been there himself and written up his visit in his 1860 travelogue, Jenseit des Tweed (Beyond the Tweed). Kirsty Archer-Thompson, the Collections Interpretation Manager at Abbotsford, commented on the things in the poem: "what is striking is that all this material is precisely the sort of thing Scott would have collected: Fontane has hit the nail on the head and distilled Scott's antiquarian enthusiasms perfectly. It's very clever."

In the sixth stanza, which follows the precarious jumble of the fifth, Fontane places Scott himself on the final wagon, a benign god-like figure, beaming and dreaming in the effulgence of the sun. He's seated and at rest, looking inward into the world of his imagination, creating order. In the second half of the stanza seven of the Waverley novels are named, the completed works of which the contents of the wagons are to be parts. The poem concludes by addressing Scott, urging him to wave the magic wand that will transform the inanimate objects of his props store into the treasure of the great works to come. The magic wand is, of course, an allusion to Scott's nickname, The Wizard of the North. "Walter Scotts Einzug in Abbotsford", Fontane's Abbotsford poem, is about poetic creation and the power of the writer's imagination to create order out of chaos, to transfigure the concrete objects of history and reality into literary works. The detail in the poem departs from the facts of the day but its spirit shows a deep and affectionate grasp of Scott the man and the writer. As with Scott's own works the poem presents history as art and art as history.

Henri IV's cradle



Helen Rorrison

Correction – last issue. The photograph from Sandra Purves of the James Grieve apple tree was in Muiravonside Country Park, not by the Union Canal.