



Broughton Tolbooth 1582–1829

BROUGHTON HISTORY SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

New Series Number **13**

November 2022

Welcome to the October/November issue of the Newsletter. Just room for a quick reminder that the next talk will be on Bridgescapes by Bruce Keith. (This talk has been postponed a couple of times because of lockdown) The venue will be the Nelson Room, McDonald Road Library, and it will be at 6.30 pm on Monday 7 November.

Talk October 3 2022 to BHS by James Simpson on the Botanic Cottage and Indian Botanic Garden

James Simpson is well known to members of the Broughton History Society, some of whom are also members of the Friends of Hopetoun Crescent Garden, which has strong links with the Botanic. James introduced the subject by telling us about John Hope, the first Regius Keeper of the Botanic when it had moved to Leith Walk in the 1760s, and his Head Gardener, John Williamson, a part time exciseman, who was murdered on Princes Street while carrying out his duties one evening.



Hope and Williamson shown in a John Kay image

The cottage itself, which fronted Leith Walk, where Haddington Place now is, was designed by John Adam. Plans had been put forward to demolish the cottage about 20 years ago but when it was realised that the by now derelict building had a considerable historic significance, local residents in and around Hopetoun Crescent, notably Andrew Johnson (recently deceased) and Eileen Dickie, along with Jane Corrie of the RBGE started promoting a campaign to save the building.

Eventually Stephen Blackmore, the then Regius Keeper, agreed to set up a charitable trust with Lord Hope, a distant relation of the earlier John Hope, as chair. Leaflets were produced and it was suggested that the cottage should be taken apart stone by stone and stored for future reconstruction, to not universal approval. However, the demolition company offered to dismantle all the stones and timber as part of their work, although there was neither funding available nor a site to reconstruct it. However, Professor Blackmore secured funding through the RBGE and elsewhere and the cottage was eventually rebuilt near the north boundary of the

Botanics, and reopened in 2014. James Simpson was the conservation architect involved in the design for the reconstruction process.

James showed several slides of the old building and its new version during the rebuilding process, which as far as possible employed traditional building methods used in the original building, such as lath and plaster work.

For the second part of his talk he focused on the development of the Indian Botanic Gardens in Calcutta (Kolkata). William Roxburgh, who had studied botany under John Hope in Edinburgh, possibly in the Botanic Cottage itself, was employed by the East India Company initially in Madras (Chennai). Roxburgh became its first superintendent when the garden was built in the 1790s. This Botanic House survives, but in a poor state, in what is now properly entitled the A J C Bose Indian Botanic Garden, the premier botanical garden in the Far East.

Part of the success of its construction was the use of a lime based concrete roof and the use of Burma teak. It overlooks the Hooghly River. Nilina Deb Lal, a female Indian architect, who did a PhD in Edinburgh on 19th C Indian buildings, noted that this building had been constructed with cast iron beams with lime concrete on top. The upper floor was also made of cast iron, as were some circular stairs, which were manufactured in Glasgow, like much ironwork of the period – and similar to ones in Kew.

There is currently some difficulty in getting funding to restore this William Roxburgh House and Herbarium building in Calcutta, so a Roxburgh International Trust has been set up to help seek support. William Roxburgh, considered the grandfather of Indian Botany, to whom a monument has been erected, died in 1822, the year that the Botanics moved from Leith Walk to Inverleith

Richard Love



This shows something of the former grandeur and parlous state of the building.

**Talk September 12 by David Purdie on
James Boswell and Samuel Johnson**

The new venue for the Society, the Nelson Room at Macdonald Library at has proved to be a popular venue with good acoustics. Many of our members would have been familiar with our September speaker from his erudite lectures on Sir Walter Scott or the Scottish Enlightenment on which he is an authority. So it was with

immense pleasure that we welcomed Professor David Purdie back in person to talk to us about two remarkable and contrasting characters of the Scottish Enlightenment scene, namely James Boswell and Samuel Johnson. While Boswell was of course Scottish Samuel Johnson was very much not. Purdie's wealth of knowledge and wonderful imagery presented us with another facet of this interesting period in Scottish history and gave us a deeper understanding of these two men's contribution to literature.

James Boswell's early life was one of privilege, his father Alexander was a High Court Judge in Edinburgh with the family estate in Auchinleck in Ayrshire. Although he studied law in Edinburgh, it was his love of writing that was to be his passion, and which eventually would proclaim him as one of the finest biographers of all time. We wandered through the lives of both, looking at the distinct anomalies in their upbringing, appearance and ages. Boswell was dapper and neat in appearance whereas Johnson was "a bear of a man." When Boswell met



**This is a Rowlandson depiction of Johnson and Boswell in
Edinburgh, at the start of their journey**

Johnson for the first time in 1762, he was only 23 years old and Johnson 52, yet they found a common ground in which to develop a rich friendship over many years, that being the world of literature.

When Boswell first met Johnson, the two developed an immediate friendship and it was at a favourite supper house that hours were spent with friends such as Oliver Goldsmith, Joshua Reynolds, David Garrick, Charles Burney and others with famous paintings depicting these particular social occasions (see below).

A brief time later Boswell undertook law studies abroad and his Grand Tour of Europe followed where he met Voltaire and Rousseau. On his return to London, he resumed his friendship with Johnson before returning to Edinburgh to finish his law degree. So the friendship became one mainly of correspondence and an annual meeting in London. The private papers Boswell kept of their correspondence and with other eminent men of this period would form the basis for his subsequent biography of Johnson. It is in this written

record that Boswell's facility with prose is displayed which together with his remarkable power of observations give him his status as a literary genius and critic.

Johnson on the other hand was of a less privileged background, the son of a bookseller, and not a very attractive man in appearance. Burly in stature with a shabby overcoat and dirty grey wig, which was in stark contrast to the thinner, refined, and fashionable Boswell, so cartoonists such as Rowlandson had a field day in depicting this unlikely pair. Johnson's gigantic body and face scarred by a disease, plus strange mannerisms and tics presented a very odd companion for a young Boswell. However, it was Johnson's essays and contributions to poetry and literature that intrigued Boswell. Similarly, Johnson's Christian background which provided the material for his essays on moral topics, including his opposition to slavery.

Purdie also discussed Johnson and Boswell's travels through the Highlands of Scotland with images of their journey and places visited. This journey resulted in Johnson's publication "A Journey to the Western Islands of Scotland" in 1775. However, Johnson died in 1784 and Boswell then concentrated in completing the biography of his friend but decided to write "The Journal of a Tour to the Hebrides with Samuel Johnson" as its first instalment (a sort of teaser) to his

later work "The Life of Samuel Johnson" which was published in 1791. This remarkable book has been acclaimed as the finest piece of writing about another human being and revolutionised the writing of biographies.

Such was the cameo of these somewhat odd personages.

The old man with ill-fitting clothes and pock-marked face (Johnson) in the company of an intelligent, fashionable, young yet ardent follower (Boswell), and them sitting together and enjoying debating with other enthusiastic admirers.



This picture shows such a gathering, with Boswell on the left, then Johnson with Edmund Burke, Charles Burney, David Garrick, Oliver Goldsmith, Pasquale Paoli, Sir Joshua Reynolds, Thomas Warton also present, their signatures at the bottom

© National Portrait Gallery

Jenny Bruce.