

Honorary members of 1846

Patrick Maxwell (c. 1794?-?1857)

Life and work:

We originally traced this honorary member through an 1842 volume of poetry by a British Woman Romantic Poet, Miss Susanna Blamire (1747-94), in the University of California - readable online in a digital library, his Edinburgh address appears at the end of the preface. Since then, research has shown that Maxwell was one of a group of figures, often with Edinburgh connections, introduced to the young Irvine Burns Club by the Fife-born Royal Marine captain Charles Gray, who lived three doors along from him in Edinburgh and who chaired the Annual Dinner in 1846; the other two 1846 honorary members were also friends of Gray. In 1848, Maxwell attended the Dinner, with Gray, though missed the meal due to a train delay. In 1851, Maxwell was intended to be Croupier (Vice-President), but was unable to attend due to ill health.

Patrick Maxwell contributed the Preface, Memoir and Notes to *The Poetical Works of Miss Susanna Blamire, 'The Muse of Cumberland', now for the first time collected by Henry Lonsdale, MD*. Maxwell is described on the title-page as the translator of Mme Dard's *Narrative of the Picard Family and the Wreck of the French Frigate Medusa*. From his preface, we know he was born in India, where his father served in the Indian Army; it is also clear that he was the main editor of the volume. While Romantic verse may not attract most of us today, yet Patrick Maxwell's assiduous visits to Cumberland and his research are clearly proving useful to those who still study that period.

Maxwell's translation of Mme Dard's book appeared earlier, in 1827. The frigate Medusa was wrecked, resulting in huge publicity, off the coast of Mauritania in 1816, and depicted in Gericault's 1819 painting 'The Raft of the Medusa'. Its captain was the inexperienced but politically sound anti-Bonapartist Viscount de Chaumareys - a case of cronyism leading to disaster - worse, after allowing the Medusa to run aground, he then fled the disaster, abandoning the survivors. Britain had just agreed to return Saint-Louis (in Senegal) to France after occupying the city for several years and the Medusa was conveying hundreds of French troops, the new governor and his civil servants to take over the colony. With her family, at age 18, Mme Dard, then Charlotte-Adélaïde Picard, witnessed the confusion that followed the ship running aground and, after a perilous few days aboard a small lifeboat and a long walk in the African desert, eventually reached Saint-Louis where the family settled down. In 1824 she published "*The African cottage or the story of a French family thrown on the western coast of Africa after the frigate Medusa was wrecked*". Although her book provides a firsthand account of France's occupation of West Africa at the very beginning of French colonial expansion, and is therefore a central piece of French colonial history, it was hushed up because it showed the 'civilised' colonists acting more barbarically than the natives they were about to rule. Her book criticised the French Governor for trying to save his own skin and trying to erase evidence of the disgraceful actions of himself and others; it praised the assistance, to them and to other abandoned families, of Major Peddie, the British Governor; it described the summary executions and cannibalism that had ensued; it criticised the French establishment's closing of ranks to avoid disgrace; Mme Dard was showing that the high moral ground was held by the British, not the French. Thereafter the British relished the opportunity to provide unconditional support to the victims of the shipwreck at the very time France attempted to quell their complaints in the eyes of her Government, so soon

after their 1815 defeat. Mme Dard's pro-British attitude was seen as further proof of the seditious nature of her writing. Her book has been ignored for almost 200 years, not because it was written by a woman but because it reflects unfavourably on the historical record of her nation. That our honorary member, Patrick Maxwell, translated the book suggests that he was sympathetic to her indignation regarding the circumstances surrounding the shipwreck - in his translator's note, he comments both on her family's severe and protracted suffering and also on "some pleasing traits of character in the story, and, I am proud to say, some of the brightest of them belong to our own nation".

The above appreciation sadly contains little about the life of Patrick Maxwell, but we hope it helps to give an insight into his world. Perhaps - but we do not know - his translation of the above very topical work had brought him to the attention of the reading public.

For the information about Mme Dard, we acknowledge an article by Jean-Marie Volet (2007) at: http://aflit.arts.uwa.edu.au/colonie_19e_dard_eng.html

who then directed us to the Gutenberg Project's republication of Maxwell's translation as an EBook at:

<http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22792/22792-h/22792-h.htm>

(The story, clearly and simply told, can still move us today and prompt us to think how little times change.)

[The 1841 and 1851 census records show that he and his wife Maria (six years younger) were both born in the East Indies; his status as "Ind." in 1841 shows that they were of independent means.]

(compiled by IJD)

Date of acceptance: 31 January, 1846, written from 5 Archibald Place, Edinburgh

Letter of acceptance:

Dear Sir,

Accept of my best thanks for the kind communication of my being admitted an Honorary Member of The Irvine Burns' Club, which communication reached me to-day. I so assure you I esteem it a great honour, and the no less so from my being proposed by my friend Captain Gray.

I am,

Dear Sir,

Yours very truly,

P Maxwell

Notes:

This letter was addressed to Alex Robertson, Esq., Irvine, the Club Secretary. Captain Gray, President in 1833-34, was President again in 1846.

Alex Smart (1798-1866)

Life and work:

Alex Smart was a printer and song-writer in Edinburgh - like the previous honorary member Patrick Maxwell and the following member Thomas Latto, a figure in the capital's literary world of the time - but we have few details of his life. One common link is Lord Jeffrey, the

Lord Advocate with a great interest in literature - he was a friend of Thomas Latto, his contemporary correspondence contains a letter to an Alexander Smart, and in c.1842-44 both he and Smart were in correspondence (now catalogued by Glasgow University) with the Glasgow bookseller and publisher David Robertson, regarding, and contributing to, his 1846 volume of *Songs for the Nursery* (an additional volume to five already published of new Scottish work under the title *Whistle-Binkie*).

Typical titles of the songs (apparently by him) are "O this is no my ain bairn", "The roarin' wee lassie", and "Wee Nanny".

Like Patrick Maxwell (q.v.), Alex Smart was familiar with Irvine Burns Club - our minutes book contains "Lines written for the 20th anniversary of the Club" in 1846.

Date of acceptance: 1 February, 1846, written from Edinburgh

Letter of acceptance:

Sir

I had the gratification of receiving your polite note yesterday, intimating that the Irvine Burns Club, at their Anniversary meeting, had done me the honour of electing me an Honorary Member.

Allow me Sir through you to express my warm acknowledgement of such a compliment. To be enrolled in a club of gentlemen who do themselves so much honour in honouring the name of our immortal Bard is a compliment of which one may be proud.

I have the honour to be

Sir

Your obliged humble servant

Alex Smart

Notes:

This letter was addressed to Alex Robertson, Esq., Irvine, Club Secretary.

Thomas C Latto (1818-1894)

Life and work:

Thomas C Latto was a song-writer of considerable popularity. Born in Fife, and after five years at St Andrews University, he joined an Edinburgh law office ('writing chambers') at the age of 20. Subsequently he became advocate's clerk to William E Aytoun (honorary member, 1854), Professor of Rhetoric in the University of Edinburgh, then managing clerk in a law office in Dundee, and later entered business as a commission-agent in Glasgow.

Literature interested him more than law. His poems appeared in local publications, he became widely known, and he was one of the group of contributors who made *Blackwood's Magazine* famous. His friends included 'Christopher North' (Professor Wilson, possibly a hon. member in 1830), Hew (or Hugh) Ainslie (see below), the Ettrick Shepherd James Hogg, Lord Macaulay (hon. member, 1854), Lord Jeffrey (see entry on Alex Smart), and Henry Glassford Bell (hon. member, 1863). In 1847, shortly after the two letters to Irvine Burns Club, he published his first volume of poems, *The Minister's Kailyard*, containing such popular items as *The Kiss Ahint The Door* and *When We Were At The Schule*.

Latto emigrated to the USA in 1851, engaging in mercantile concerns in New York, while for a time editing *The Scottish-American Journal* and later contributing to *The Times* and other Brooklyn papers. He made friends with the Scottish-American poet Hew Ainslie (26 years older; born in Ayrshire), who had emigrated in 1822. Latto's last literary work was an edition of Ainslie's book *A Pilgrimage to the Land of Burns* (first published in 1820), and prefacing them with his Memoir of the author.

His New York Times obituary (14.5.1894) describes him as "the best known Scottish poet in this country" and records that: "While as enthusiastic about Scotland as a Scot can be, he was none the less patriotic as an American citizen". Clearly, though nominated as an honorary member while still making his name in Scotland, he augmented his reputation throughout his life.

Date of acceptance: 3 March, 1846, written from 29 Charlotte Square, Edinburgh

Letter of acceptance:

Sir,

I am ashamed to see from the date of your letter announcing my Election as a Member of your Burns Club, how negligent I have been. The truth is I was harassed with business at the moment I received it, & the note slipped aside. However I am not the less sensible of the honour done me. I assure you I feel very proud of it. Next demonstration I trust to appear in person, a pleasure which was denied me on the last occasion. I have the honor to be

Sir

Your very humble Serv^t,

Thomas C Latto

Notes:

The author's custom of writing the paired letters 'ss' in the old-fashioned way is an attractive feature of the first letter.

Another letter from Thomas C Latto, on 29 December, 1846:

Sir,

I venture to send you the prefixed song, which I should be particularly gratified to find sung in honour of the amiable subject of it, & in his personal presence at the Irvine Burns Club festivity next month in honour of the immortal Burns. I should have had much pleasure in attending myself to croak it, but fear that will not be in my power. If you know of any skilful musician who intends to be present, it will oblige me much. Could you prevail on him to undertake it. It will require skill to adapt the second verse of each stanza to the the air I have prefixed. I know of no other one that will suit - the measure is so very peculiar. The Capt is quite in the dark as to the plot, so I hope you won't let the cat out of the bag. If you are musical, I think you will find that the tail piece I have added by way of Chorus chimes in well at the end of the Air "Oft in the Stilly Night".

Shd none be able to sing it to that air, please let me know & I shall try to get our Minstrel P Macleod to ferret out or construct a melody for it. Wishing you a large & happy gathering of the Burns Club & admirers of the great ploughman in Jan^y - I remain

Sir

Your very obed^t Serv^t

Thomas C Latto.

Hon. Member

P.S. Perhaps I ought to have mentioned that "Lauriston" is the suburb of Edin. where the Bard resides.

Notes:

The song mentioned in the letter is missing.

Captain Gray, President in 1833-34, was President again in 1846.

His reference in the PS to 'the Bard' is to Captain Charles Gray, known for his poems and songs, then living at 11 Archibald Place, just off Lauriston Place.