

During the Summer of 1975, Algy Watson, Clerk to the Bailies of Bennachie, wrote to Andrew G Fordyce Junior, then living in Orpington, Kent asking him for reminiscences from his father who had been a quarryman on Bennachie working at the Lintel Quarry until it was no longer worked. The purpose seems to have been to gather reminiscences for the Bailies' archive but also to seek material for the forthcoming publication *The Book of Bennachie* (published 1976). The poem which Mr Fordyce Jr sent in response was in the event not included in the book, but Mr Fordyce Jr writes about his father and the Lintel Quarry in *Bennachie Again* (1983) - p152 *The Mystery of the Lintel Quarry*.

Mr Fordyce replied to Algy Watson's letter sending a handwritten copy of his father's 30-verse poem 'Bennachie' with a covering letter which is transcribed in full below.

04.10.75

Dear Mr Watson

Just home after 5 to 6 weeks away from home. Thank you for your letter asking me to send some of my Fathers poems and also for the news circular. I would love to attend your meeting. Enclosed are four of my father's poems photostated from the originals. Knowing my father as well as you did I'm sure you can picture him so quietly putting his thoughts down on paper.

You stated you may wish to include in your Book of Bennachie my story written in 1956 and published in the Banffshire Annual. Yesterday I wrote to the Editor of the Banffshire Journal telling him of this.

The purpose of writing the story at that time was to put on record for all time some of the interesting things regarding Bennachie which were told to me by my Father. The Maiden Stane story was written with the same purpose in mind. My Father's poems which have been lying unread since Bella's house in Oyne\* was cleared have brought to light a number of details of the area, some of which will have long since passed the knowledge of local people. I feel that Father's poem to his pal Frank Morrison is a real documentary and gives you a real picture of what it was like to climb over the hill in his younger day around 1885. I don't suppose it will be seen again with all the wildlife described until after the next ice age. I like his references to "Beesum Jamie", "The Blacksmith" and the "Boatman's Daughters", but what he does not tell is the story of the journey on the first morning to this particular new building job. He and Frank had to set off at 3 a.m., each carrying their heavy box of mason's tools. They struggled up and over the hill and down to the Don. Too early to waken the boathouse, they stripped off their clothes, rolled them up, put them on top of their boxes, put the boxes on top of their heads and waded waist deep through the cold River Don. How they dried themselves I do not know. Dressed, they set off again, humping their boxes for the remaining miles, and arrived on the job at 10 minutes past six, only to be told by the foreman that 6 o'clock was starting time.

Herewith four selected photostated copies of originals. More material will follow. Thank you for beautiful Forestry Commission pamphlet.

Yours

Andrew G Fordyce Jr.

#### Footnote:

\* The house was then known as Bogiebank but is now believed to be called Ormsary

Mr Fordyce Snr's poem, as his son describes, gives us an insight into the hill in the mid-nineteenth century as well as to life in Aberdeenshire more generally for working men at that time. It is perhaps telling that the poem does not include the description of that first tortuous journey to work recounted by his son in the letter! For the young Andrew and his friend and colleague Frank crossing the hill was simply a part of everyday life – a means of getting from home in Oyne to work in Monymusk – albeit one which (despite the distance and the hour) afforded them great pleasure.

## Bennachie

*By Andrew Galloway Fordyce*

*Dedicated to his "Apprentice, mate and friend", Frank Morrison*

Ye'll min the time my lifelang freen  
    Though noo they're like a fairy dream  
Then we were young an in our teens  
    Noo mony a day's wark in atween

At early mornins we'd nae fear  
    Fra Oyne at three, forth we did steer  
Tae Monymusk oor task wis set  
    A day's wark tae, afore twas nicht

Oh, it was gran', the mornins fine  
    We linket roon the Ben in time  
Tae see the Deer in terror's mien  
    Gang boundin' thro' the brackens green

We sairly grieved to see him flee  
    Frae hairless loons like you an' me  
For neither o' os wid lift a stene  
    Tae scare him frae his bit green

Pittodrie fair, sae snugly there  
    In a' her beauty rich an' rare  
Lay slumberin' near to Bennachie  
    A glorious sicht for you an me

Doon by the Linn, that valley fair  
    Few spots there is that can compare  
Wi thee, in springtime's early morn  
    When dew, the trees an' floo'ers adorn

The rushin' Linn in a' its pride  
    The roarin' torrent fast did glide  
An' doon the rocky step it fell  
    To kiss the floorets in the vale

The sweet refreshin' morning' dew  
Hung on the birks<sup>1</sup> like pearls new  
The perfume, Oh, 'twas rich and rare  
An' scented a' the valley fair

We clim't the braes, and through the howes  
Whar mony a bonnie burnie rows<sup>2</sup>  
Oor young herts dancin' to the scene  
Wi nature tuned in graceful mien

The rabbits young and auld were there  
A feastin' on the rich green fare  
The pheasant too, an' Cushie Doo  
Foun' early worms to taste their moo

There we could hear the Muir Cock's call  
Come sounding o'er the Firs sae tall  
The echo gently rose an' fell  
An' broke the stillness o' the vale

The early birds did pipe their sang  
In joyful notes the wids amang  
While ithers i' the lift abean<sup>3</sup>  
Poured forth their lays<sup>4</sup> to sky serene

Their tuneful lays oor heirts did cheer  
An' made us feel to Heaven sae near  
The hallowed influence of the place  
Did fill oor heirt an' soul wi' grace

The happy hames, sae couthy<sup>5</sup> set  
Amang the wids a restfu' place  
The sunrays roon the hillside crept  
The inmates still in dreamland slept

We couldna tether time nor tide  
Tho' sair we wished tae langer bide  
An feast oor een on sic a scene  
They haunt me still in mony a dream

We leave Pittodrie's wids ahin  
Tae climb the Hill and change the scene  
We reach the grove o' Spruces fine  
Their branches overhead did twine

The sandhole wi' the trees abeen  
Whare beesom Jamie made his hame  
His leefu lene<sup>6</sup> the sheltered spot  
He lived contented wi' his lot

Then by Dalfling, they're nae astir  
We hear the Muir Cock's distant berr  
We pass the steep and rocky ghyll  
Whar the young Bride an' Bridegroom fell

"Alas", their joyous wedding day  
Was turned to grief without delay  
The Bonnie Bride a corpse she lay  
Before the sunset of that day

I will not linger on this scene  
Sae sad for oor young heirts to dream  
Then by the Greens we hurried on  
Past Blairdaff Kirk among the Breen<sup>7</sup>

The Rothens Smidy there we see  
The Blacksmith had nae bucket<sup>8</sup> tee  
There Upper Coolie still asleep  
We scampert on wi' nim'le feet

There noo we reach the wimplin<sup>9</sup> Don  
The Boathouse then we baith did storm  
To chum the Boaties Dochters fair  
To row us o'er wi' muckle care

An' mony a tulzie<sup>10</sup> wi' the pair  
We had about the boatie fair  
Wi' us they did nae aye agree  
Tae row us o'er the river free

Then thro' the wids by Paradise  
Tae Monymusk the village nice  
Whar "Malcolm Conmore"<sup>\*</sup> wi' his spear  
Showed where to build that ancient spire

For real kind heirts an' couthy folk  
A' come o' gweed auld fashioned stock  
Which live forever in yer min'  
In Monymusk they're just that kin'

For dancin', humour, spor t an' fun  
In Monymusk they waurna glum  
The youngsters did the rant begin  
The auld folks kept it up with vim

We'll nae forget those happy nichts  
We spent in dancin', fun an' mirth  
Tho' aften past the hoor o' twal  
We niver thocht the nicht wis aul'

Oor heids may aften empty feel  
Still thro' the memory dear that steals –  
That vision, aye in pleasant times  
The heirt it hankers back at times

Sae noo ma Freen I hope ye'll see  
In a' that I hae penned to thee  
These sights o' sunny "auld lang syne"  
They aye keep turnin' in my min'

When this oor life we build like rubble  
An' time on earth is past a' trouble  
May it nae burn like flimsy stubble  
Or we shall rue that awfu' muddle

### **Footnotes**

Some of the words in the poem are not in common use today. The Dictionary of the Scots Language (DSL) offers the following definitions. Where DSL offers no definition, other sources (Scots On-Line, and The Scots School Dictionary) have been consulted and suggestions from here and elsewhere are shown **in bold**. We would be interested in definitions from native speakers from the North-East.

- 1 Birches
  - 2 Rolls
  - 3 Above
  - 4 DSL provides no plausible definition. **Based on the sense of the stanza, could the translation be 'song'?**
  - 5 A slightly different useage from that with which we are familiar. Scots On-Line offers this definition: Comfortable, snug, neat. Pleasant, agreeable. This is consistent with (but more succinct than) DSL.
  - 6 DSL offers nothing here. Scots On-Line suggests 'all alone' but this doesn't entirely fit in with the sense of the poem. **It may simply be 'Leafy Lane'.**
  - 7 DSL offers no plausible definition. **We wonder if the meaning is 'broom'.**
  - 8 DSL does not help here but **the obvious English Equivalent is 'buckled' – perhaps indicating starting work?** This is consistent with at least one use by R L Stevenson in his Novella *Thrawn Janet*
  - 9 Meandering
  - 10 Quarrel
- \* Malcolm Canmore. King Malcolm III of Scotland who founded a priory in the area now known as Monymusk and camped there before a battle in 1090. He blessed the Kirk before the battle and later returned there with his wife Queen Margaret, founding the tower in thanks for his victory.