

I Shall Leave Tonight From Euston

- A Poem with a Story

In December 1989, I compiled and published a book *Tunskeen and 25 Years More*, a sort of 'best of' compilation of articles, poems and artwork from the MBA's first 25 years or so of Journals and Newsletters. It was 'on the shelves of the MBA's book store' throughout the MBA's 25th Anniversary Year and into 1991. It is no longer available unless you chance upon a pre-owned copy, try Abe Books, Amazon or Ebay if interested.

I included the poem *I shall leave tonight from Euston* which I found typed out in the MBA records, adding that the anonymous poem was found at Ryvoan bothy during the Second World War.

The poem then appeared in MBA Newsletter No. 120, March 1997, with the explanation:

The poem reproduced here appeared in the December 1996 issue of the Scots Magazine. The reader who submitted it explained: 'About 20 years ago, my wife, daughters and I visited the Ryvoan bothy in the Cairngorms. I copied these lovely words down from a piece of paper pinned to the outside of the bothy door'. He went on to query if anyone knew where the poem came from and who the poet was.'

In the days before the internet was near universal, the MBA needed to make information about the organisation, its bothies and its workparties available to members and so in 2001, the first edition of the **Members Handbook** was published and the introduction to this Handbook was accompanied by *I shall leave tonight from Euston*, attributed : 'Anon - written on the old door of Ryvoan bothy and fortunately copied down before it was burnt'.

The poem, a poem with a story of its own it seems, reads (or I think the correct word is 'scans'):

*I shall leave tonight from Euston
By the seven-thirty train,
And from Perth in the early morning
I shall see the hills again.
From the top of Ben Macdhui
I shall watch the gathering storm,
I shall see the crisp snow lying
At the back of Cairngorm.
I shall feel the mist from Bhrotain
And pass by the Lairig Ghru
To look on dark Loch Einich
From the heights of Sgoran Dubh.
From the broken Barns of Bynack
I shall see the sunrise gleam
On the forehead of Ben Rinnes,
And Strathspey awake from dream.
And again in the dusk of evening
I shall find once more alone
The dark waters of the Green Loch
And the pass beyond Ryvoan.
For tonight I leave from Euston
And leave the world behind;
Who has the hills as a lover
Will find them wondrous kind.*

I Shall Leave Tonight From Euston

Robin R Mackenzie

I was delighted to see quoted in full in the MBA Handbook the wee poem entitled 'I shall leave tonight from Euston'. I was even more delighted to note that the apocryphal yarn of my father, G R Mackenzie, about the provenance of the poem is alive and well, which reinforces the view he secretly held that facts in the story-telling are subordinate to the poetic truth. He'd be delighted to think that his embellished yarn has survived better than he could have imagined!

But the attached letter (below) from The Scotsman of 1971 (the year of my father's death) sets the record straight and also gives some long-deserved credit to Mrs Lawrence who actually wrote the thing. I've no idea who James D MacEwan is or was but I know that my father was delighted enough with it to include the cutting amongst his private papers.



Ryvoan 1932 from Newsletter 168, Summer 2009

The Paths beyond Ryvoan

Edinburgh, January 18, 1971

Sir – Alison Lambie's sensitive evocation of the spirit of Ryvoan Bothy will find a ready response in the hearts especially of those who, in the years before the Cairngorms were opened up to the tourists, fell under the spell of that incomparable howff - in the years, too, before time which erodes, and vandals, who uproot, might end the usefulness, though impotent, to impair the allurements, which it exercised.

Yet her very persuasiveness may, inadvertently, help to resuscitate a part of the Ryvoan myth, which I thought some correspondence in The Scotsman in November 1953 - January 1954, had finally dispelled.

The poem she refers to - The Night Train - was not found 'pinned anonymously to the door of Corroir bothy about 18 years ago'. But a little before that time it had, I believe, been discovered by the great Cairngorm mountaineer, George MacKenzie of Forbes, inscribed, with a piece of charred heather stalk, on the back of the door of Ryvoan bothy. This romantic, though apocryphal, genesis, was given wide currency largely, I believe, because Charles Cromar, then warden of Glenmore Lodge - believing it to be true - used to quote it to great effect, by way of introduction to the showing of his slides to students.

Later however, it transpired that it had been published, earlier than its discovery on the door of Ryvoan bothy, in a newspaper, where it was signed 'A.M.L.' The initials belonged to a Mrs Lawrence. As a girl, she had spent many happy holidays at Nethybridge, and often visited Ryvoan, approaching it, not 'through the

last scattered pines of Rothiemurchus Forest,' but by the way of the path along the Nethy and past Forest Lodge. Her version of the poem refers to 'the lone, clear waters of the Green Loch' and anyone familiar with the emerald transparency of that magical tarn, will admit the greater felicity of the poet's own epithet than the 'dark' of Mrs Lambie's version.

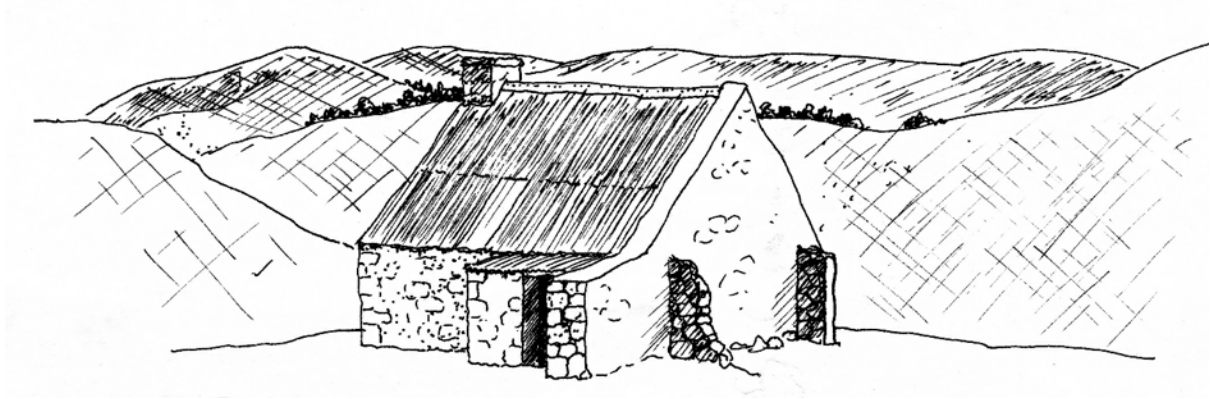
Mrs Lawrence's authorship of the poem admits no possible challenge. In the early 50s, she lived at Burgh-on-Sands, on the south Solway coast. There I was privileged to visit her and hear, from her own lips, her account of how the poem came to be written. Modest about its literary qualities, she had, by then, been long severed from Ryvoan, but the earlier, girlish passions still burned unquenched.

One day, about the same time, in the corrie behind Mam Suim - the heather aflame with autumn purple - I came upon a shepherd rounding up his flock. He'd told me that he had been born at Ryvoan bothy, about the turn of the century, while it was still a shepherd's cottage. School was seven miles away in Aviemore; and he lamented that snow drifts, and summer herding, had played havoc with his formal education. But who could claim to be seriously uneducated who had been nurtured in that rough Eden. He still recalled with pride how he had tended the small garden to the south-east of the cottage.

One must hope that Mrs Lambie's appeal may fall upon ears alive to the value, and prepared to do something to preserve, the fabric of this unique, and once delectable bothy.

I am etc.

James D MacEwan



Ryvoan bothy, by Alistair Dickson

A footnote to this article (in Newsletter 136) from Colin Scales (then MBA Chairman but MBA Treasurer and a student back in 1971) added: *This letter and an article in The Scots Magazine resulted in my college pigeon hole being jammed for weeks after with postal orders (typically for 2/6) (12.5p in decimal coinage) from old ladies with fond memories of Ryvoan (whatever went on there in the 1920s?). This was all the excuse Bernard Heath needed to tackle the renovation.*

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Earlier than all of this, a poem from Tim Harrison accompanied a drawing of the former Glen Duror bothy (a victim of old age and now replaced by Taigh Seumas a'Ghlinne bothy) in the December 1987 Journal & Newsletter No. 84:

*Tomorrow, I will leave*

*I looked on the high hills, fond tears in my eyes  
As low-slanting evening sun kissed the whispering birches.  
Tomorrow, I will leave the Braigh Riabhach's high corries  
Cut bone-deep in the flesh of the living granite,  
Rich with the secrets of this sleepless giant.  
Tomorrow I will leave insect-humming Rothiemurchus  
Sparkling with birdsong in its resiny solitude,  
Where quick fish hear the cold stream talking.  
Tomorrow I will choke in the heartless crush of the city  
And wish I wasn't home.*

I have no idea if Tim was inspired by Mrs Lawrence's poem but chose to tell of the other end of such a trip to the Cairngorm hills or whether he drew on his own thoughts.

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Many poems have appeared on the pages of MBA publications. Any interested volunteer willing to put together a compilation of a selection of these in an article on this website will get, I'm sure, the support of Andy Mayhew, Newsletter and Website Editor.

Richard Genner, June 2022