

Studies in Scottish Literature

Volume 1 | Issue 4

Article 1

4-1-1964

Front Matter

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Recommended Citation

(2013) "Front Matter," *Studies in Scottish Literature*: Vol. 1: Iss. 4, 211–215.

Available at: <https://scholarcommons.sc.edu/ssl/vol1/iss4/1>

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STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

VOLUME I NUMBER 4 APRIL 1964

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STUDIES IN SCOTTISH LITERATURE

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*PUBLISHED BY TEXAS TECHNOLOGICAL COLLEGE
AND PRINTED BY THE TEXAS TECH PRESS
LUBBOCK, TEXAS, U.S.A.*

EDITORIAL

In this day of specialization dictionaries play a particularly important role. There is a dictionary for almost anything—slang, underworld talk, even “beatnick” jargon has been considered worthy of a small dictionary. And yet there is still no adequate dictionary of Scots.

Scottish dictionaries have already been published, of course, notably John Jamieson’s *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language* (1808, 1825; and revised reprints). But the idea of what a dictionary should be changes with the times, and the *Oxford English Dictionary* altered the entire concept of dictionaries. It was, in fact, at the suggestion of the co-editor of the *OED*, Sir William Craigie, that work was begun under Craigie’s own editorship on the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, a record of the Scottish language down to the Union of Parliaments (1707). The *DOST* is part of Craigie’s plan to supplement the *OED* with a series of dictionaries for each of the main periods in English and Scots. In addition to the *DOST* the *Scottish National Dictionary*, under the editorship of William Grant, was commenced to cover the period 1700 to date. The first part of both dictionaries appeared in 1931, both are now up to the letter *M*, or about half completed. The expected date of their completion is 1973.

Since their inception the cost of producing these works has soared with no corresponding increase in revenue from their sale. The *DOST* and the *SND* are sold as sets at the price current when the purchase is agreed upon; ironically the early enthusiasm shown by libraries and individuals in subscribing to the dictionaries now means that later parts must be furnished at a fraction of their actual cost, although many of these subscribers have made voluntary additional contributions to help defray the increased cost of publication. Adjustments have, of course, been made in the price to new subscribers based on current costs, but past events give little hope that these costs will prevail when the final volumes go to press. At present, for instance, the *SND* requires an additional £30,000 to complete its work.

Since 1952 the Scottish Dictionaries Joint Council, consisting of the Scottish universities, the Cargenie Trust for the Universities of Scotland, and the Scottish National Dictionary Association, has co-ordinated the

work of the dictionaries under the able editorship of A. J. Aitken of the *DOST* and D. D. Murison of the *SND*. Premises on George Square are supplied by the University of Edinburgh, appropriately beside the School of Scottish Studies. Continuing contributions are made by these bodies; in addition there have been sizeable donations in the past by the Rockefeller Foundation, the Chicago University Press, the Burns Federation, the Educational Institute of Scotland, as well as certain Scottish burghs.

But this is not nearly enough. Hundreds of dedicated voluntary workers have collected about 2 million quotations for use in the dictionaries. Trained professional workers are needed to use this material, getting it ready for publication. Grants and subscriptions are urgently required. Our readers should do all in their power to enable both these great dictionaries to meet their target date for completion.

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