

2-6-2015

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Publication Info

Published in *Robert Burns Lives!*, ed. Frank R. Shaw, Issue 210, 2015.

"A Lost Collection of Robert Burns Manuscripts: Sir Alfred Law, Davidson Cook, and the Honresfield Collection," *Robert Burns Lives!*, ed. Frank R. Shaw, no. 210 (February 6, 2015): (c) Patrick Scott, 2015.

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**A “Lost” Collection of Robert Burns Manuscripts:
Sir Alfred Law, Davidson Cook, and the Honresfield Collection**

**by
Patrick Scott**

Earlier this month, I was working with Ross Roy’s reminiscences from his twenty-plus years editing *The Letters of Robert Burns*. Elizabeth Sudduth and I are preparing a selection of Ross’s Burns essays for publication, and the introduction, “Encountering Robert Burns,” brings together sections from the autobiographical oral history interviews that Ross made in the spring of 2012 with shorter passages from other writings, such as his last article for *Robert Burns Lives!* about his grandfather W. Ormiston Roy. One paragraph about editing the Burns letters brought me up short:

The problem is, of course, that over the years letters have disappeared into private hands. There was a collection in the Burns field of manuscript material owned by a man by the name of Law, and since the time Ferguson was working on these in the early nineteen thirties nobody knew where they were. The original man, Law, had died, and you know these are private things, they get passed on to somebody, or he might even have given them away before he died. I tried through his lawyers and the firm that he owned, and no trace of it. They still haven’t turned up. They will, because material like that doesn’t get destroyed, but it can disappear.

Oral histories don’t have footnotes. The Law collection has in fact long been known to Burnsians, most famously for its great treasure, the First Commonplace Book. After a minute or two of bewilderment, I checked Ross’s introduction to the 1985 Letters, and found:

The Honresfield Collection, owned by Sir Alfred Law of Honresfield, when Ferguson collated seventeen letters in it, cannot now be traced (Roy, *Letters*, 1985, I:lxiii; cf. Ferguson, *Letters*, 1931, I: xlv).

Very similar statements will be found running through the notes of James Kinsley’s *Poems and Songs* (1969), in the Robert Burns entry in the *Index of English <sic> Literary Manuscripts* (1986), and in James Mackay’s biography (1992: p. 88). It sounds like a dead end, but in fact a great deal is known about the Burns manuscripts that were in the A.J. Law or “Honresfield” Collection, about Sir Alfred Law himself, and about the role played by the Burns scholar Davidson Cook. Many (indeed most) of the Burns items that are “untraced,” and no longer available to Burns scholars, have in fact been very fully described over the years. It seems worth while putting something on record about this, both to put the mystery in perspective, and perhaps to save other Burnsians

some head-scratching. Behind Ross Roy's seemingly-casual remark lies a fascinating story.

The story starts in the generation before Sir Alfred Law. His two uncles, Alfred and William Law, owned a factory, Durns Mills, in Littleborough, near Rochdale, in Lancashire in the northwest of England. William was born about 1836, and Alfred in 1838. Neither brother was married, or if they were, neither was survived by a wife or children. The firm of A. and J. Law is listed in an 1879 trade directory as "fulling millers" (that is, involved in the thickening and finishing of cloth), who manufactured "flannels, baize, blankets, etc." Honresfield House, just outside Littleborough, where the two brothers lived, was a large, plain two-story red brick structure, which had been built for William in 1879 at a cost of £5068 (Hartwell et al., p. 252).

William Law was the brother who first became prominent as a collector of literary manuscripts. In 1894, he bought two major items: Walter Scott's manuscript for *Rob Roy*, for £600, and Robert Burns's First Commonplace Book, previously owned by John Adam of Greenock, and subsequently by John Duff of Greenock and Thomas Arthur of Ayr. In 1896 he loaned the Commonplace Book, and the manuscript of Burns's song "The Fornicator," for the great Glasgow Burns Exhibition (see *Memorial Catalogue*, 1898, items 1095, and 1098), and he also provided James C. Dick with photographs of another significant Burns item, the four-page list of songs for the third volume of the *Scots Musical Museum* that Burns sent to James Johnson on April 4, 1789 and that Dick reproduced in his *Songs of Robert Burns* (1903). William was a local benefactor, funding a new organ for the Littleborough parish church (*Manchester Courier*, October 4, 1890), and he was a devoted Shakespearean also, donating a new stained glass east window for the church in Stratford-on-Avon (*Leamington Spa Courier*, August 25, 1894; May 11, 1895).

Early in 1901, the Law brothers' warehouse and mills suffered extensive damage from fire (and then water), with much of the stock needing to be sold off (*Sunderland Daily Echo*, April 11, 12, etc, 1901). William Law died on July 27 that year, aged 65, leaving an estate of just £20,000, including £10,000 to his nephew Alfred Joseph Law (*Manchester Courier*, Oct. 31, 1901; *Times*, London, November 2, 1913, p. 16). The other uncle, Alfred, survived his brother by a decade, till March, 1913, and he too made the same nephew his primary heir. Alfred Law's estate was much more substantial than William's: he left an estate with net value of £548,812, which, after smaller bequests to another neice, Emma Dixon, and nephew totalling £65,000 and death duties (estate tax) of £90,000, left some £400,000 for Alfred Joseph Law, that is, some £40 million (or \$65 million) in current value (*Manchester Courier*, June 27, p.9).

Alfred Joseph Law was the son of William's and Alfred's brother John, of Dearnley. He had been born in 1860, so was 53 when he inherited both Honresfield House and his uncle William's library. Something of the library's range can be seen in a news story from 1915, about a visit to Honresfield by the Rochdale Literary and Scientific Society to see "the collections formed by the late Mr. William Law, uncle of the present owner." Items on display included a first folio of Shakespeare, two quarto Shakespeare plays,

“manuscripts of Walter Scott novels and some cantos of ‘The Lay of the Last Minstrel,’ Brontë relics, Burns’s commonplace book, and letters by many English authors ” (*Rochdale Observer*, Sept 18, 1915).

But A. J. Law was less interested in literature than politics. He started in local politics in the 1880s, serving on the Littleborough School Board, and as first chairman of the Littleborough Urban District Council. In 1894, he was a Conservative party nominee as a magistrate or Justice of the Peace, using the initial J.P. after his name, and from 1897 to 1908 he was chairman of the local Conservative Association. Shortly before the Great War he was named parliamentary candidate for Rochdale (normally a liberal stronghold), and in the first post-Armistice election, in late 1918, a Conservative landslide, he won the seat, though losing it again inevitably in 1922. He was knighted in 1927, under a Conservative government, for political services, becoming “Sir Alfred Law.” Soon afterwards, in 1929, he returned to parliament, but for a much safer Conservative seat, High Peak in Derbyshire, and he then remained an M.P. till he died ten years later, on July 18, 1939, aged 79. He remained “Governing Director” of Alfred and William Law and Co., till early 1939, and clearly regarded himself as a progressive employer, introducing “a co-partnership plan by which employees became shareholders after a qualifying period” (*Yorkshire Post*, July 19, 1939, p. 5). But the mill wasn’t his only business interest. Other business roles included being chairman of the Rochdale Canal Company and of S.S. Whalley and Co. Ltd., along with several directorships, notably for the London and Lancashire Fire Insurance Co. (*Who’s Who*, 1939). In 1937, he endowed a nursing home “for patients with post-encephalytic Parkinsonism” (*British Medical Journal*, Sept. 18, 1937, p. 603). Even after such philanthropy, and despite the impact of the Depression, Law’s estate was nonetheless probated at £448,802 (*Derbyshire Times*, November 17, 1939).

In many ways, the older Law brothers were fortunate in their chosen heir. Honresfield had one owner continuously from 1913 to 1939, a period during which many other families, houses, and libraries faced unexpected death duties (estate taxes) when recent heirs were killed in the trenches or died young of war injuries. Moreover, A. J. Law was financially secure, lessening the temptation to sell off his uncle’s treasures piecemeal, as often happened to similar collections in the 1920s, during the American boom in auction prices, and (more dispiritingly) in the 1930s, as the Depression began to take hold.

That we still know so much about the Honresfield Collection is owing, not only to A.J. Law himself, but to the Burns scholar who gained his confidence, Davidson Cook. On the face of it, Cook was an unlikely figure to get privileged access at Honresfield. He was not a professional scholar, and not university educated. Nonetheless, Cook did a quite remarkable job, not only for the Honresfield Burns manuscripts, but also for the other major Honresfield collections, of Walter Scott and of the Brontës. Cook himself wrote and published about all three collections, but equally importantly he contacted and networked with other researchers, helping them gain access to the Honresfield

material and collaborating with them on the production of the facsimiles and editions that would provide scholarly access for the future.

Surprisingly, despite Cook's many contributions to Burns scholarship, the *Burns Chronicle* never carried an obituary or other tribute. T. Davidson Cook (1874-1941), born at Ballieston, Lanarkshire, spent his whole career working in the clothing stores of various Co-operative Societies, working in Dalziel, Alloa, Glasgow, and Newcastle, before settling in Barnsley, Yorkshire, in 1908, where he would spend the next thirty-one years as drapery manager for the Barnsley British Co-operative Society (*Yorkshire Post*, December 12, 1941, p. 8; *Motherwell Times*, December 19, 1941, p. 8). In his own way, like A.J. Law, Cook lived a life of public service: he was involved in local government as a member of the Barnsley Library and Education Committees, he was president of Barnsley Book Lovers' Club and Barnsley Table Tennis League, and he served as honorary organizer for the local Citizen's Advice Bureau. The two men had two other things in common: neither had been to university, and neither had seen military service during the Great War of 1914-1918. Law, fifty-four when war broke out, would have been too old, and running a blanket factory would have been part of the war effort. Cook, just forty in 1914, though married with two children, was luckier to escape the trenches, especially in the last year, when married men up to age forty-nine were liable to conscription.

It was during the Great War that Cook began writing for the literary periodicals. For instance, he contributed articles to *The Bookman*, a London-based illustrated monthly founded by W. Robertson Nicoll, on Burns and Stothard in 1917, on Burns and Peter Pindar in 1918, and on Burns and Aberdeen in 1920. By 1922, Cook was being described as "that assiduous delver into overlooked corners of Burns tradition" (*Aberdeen Journal*, February 18, 1922, p. 3). In 1922, he had his first great coup, when he recognized some Burns manuscript notes newly published in the Kilmarnock newspaper as being missing sections from Burns's notes in the interleaved *Scots Musical Museum*, and so exonerated Cromek from James C. Dick's accusations of forgery. His article on these annotations, published in the *Burns Chronicle*, issued as a separate pamphlet, and later reprinted alongside Dick's earlier studies, made Cook a name to be reckoned with among Burnsians. We don't know where Cook first came on a reference to the Law manuscripts, but it could well have been from the facsimile "lately in the possession of Mr. William Law, of Littleborough," in Dick's *Songs of Scotland*.

What is certain is that by mid-1925, Cook had been welcomed at Honresfield to examine its treasures, and that he had already begun to write about them. His first article, in the *Bookman* for September 1925, was a general report on "Literary Treasures at Honresfield," followed by an article in November on the Honresfield Brontë manuscripts, and soon after by an essay in the more prestigious monthly *The Nineteenth Century* about the gem of the Brontë collection, the manuscript collection of poems by Emily Brontë that William Law had bought in 1897 from the now-notorious Thomas J. Wise. An American scholar, C. W. Hatfield, had just published an elaborate

edition of Emily's poetry, in 1923; Cook alerted Hatfield to the new discoveries, sharing his own transcripts (and photographs) with him. In due course, it would be Hatfield, not Cook, who would edit a new edition for Columbia University Press, in 1941. It was surely also with Cook's encouragement that Sir Alfred Law allowed high quality photographs to be made of the full manuscript, so that in 1934 facsimiles of all the poems from the E.J.B. notebook could be included in volume 17 of the Shakespeare Head Edition.

Cook was similarly unpossessive about the remarkable collection he found at Honresfield of letters written by Walter Scott. Aside from the manuscript of *Rob Roy* previously mentioned, the Law collection included six bound volumes of Scott manuscript letters, over three hundred letters in all. Cook wrote a couple of articles about specific letter groups, in 1927, but he also contacted the *eminence grise* of Scott scholars, H.J.C.Grierson, Regius Professor of Rhetoric and English Literature at Edinburgh, and persuaded him to head up a new collected edition of Scott's letters. At Cook's urging, in 1928, Law donated the six volumes of Scott letters, with an estimated value of between £10,000 and £15,000, to the still-fledgling National Library of Scotland. The news release about the donation reported that "Sir Alfred has an idea that his uncle, the late Mr. William Law, intended to give or bequeath the letters to the Scottish National Library, and considers there is a moral obligation upon him to carry this into effect" (*Aberdeen Journal*, Nov. 20, 1928; cf. *Yorkshire Post*, Nov. 20; later reports give seven volumes with nearly 400 letters: *Year's Work in English Studies*, 9 [1930]: 364). Incidentally, Cook was also involved in getting another major scholarly resource from private to institutional ownership, the following year, when the collection of 17th and 18th century song music formed by Mr. Frank Kidson (1855-1926), of Leeds, a relative of Cook's, went to the Mitchell Library, Glasgow (*Yorkshire Post*, July 18, 1929).

The Scott edition had originally been intended to mark the Scott centenary in 1932, but, rather to Grierson's dismay and that of the publishers, it would take five extra years to complete and fill twelve substantial volumes. From its inception to the mid-1930s, Cook worked steadily as Grierson's assistant, traveling widely in the hunt for manuscript letters, despite his full-time job back in Yorkshire with the Barnsley British Co-operative Society. The little book of Walter Scott love poems that Cook edited in 1932 was not an easy publication creamed off from the Honresfield collection; it came from a quite different manuscript that he had discovered by accident in the Victoria and Albert Museum while grinding away on the collected letters.

For the Honresfield Burns manuscripts, Cook produced a very thorough survey, published in three parts in the *Burns Chronicle* in 1926-1928. Cook was rightly proud of this research, and he had the three parts reissued as a separate publication (unfortunately getting Law's middle name wrong on the cover). The list enumerates 29 manuscripts, though several of them include texts of two or more individual poems or songs. With one exception, Cook gives quite extensive and well-researched descriptions of all the manuscripts, with full text of items where he judges the Honresfield manuscript to preserve a unique text or unique passages. In the second

part (1927), he also included a four-page facsimile of the letter that Burns wrote in December 1781 from Irvine to his father back at Lochlea (MS. xi; cf. *Letters*, I: 6-7).

The one exception, given only the briefest description, was, of course, the manuscript of Burns's First Commonplace Book (MS. xxix), perhaps because it had been put into print by its previous owner in 1872, but more probably because Cook recognized it would justify much fuller treatment. Moreover, as news leaked out of its whereabouts, the Burns establishment led by J. C. Ewing, the new editor of the *Burns Chronicle*, had their eyes on the manuscript's philanthropic owner as their next John Gribbel. The final sentence of Cook's final Honresfield article in the *Chronicle* sounds more like Ewing than Cook, first noting that the Second Commonplace Book was at Alloway, and then adding unctuously: "All Scotland may cherish the hope that the companion volume may one day find a permanent home in the place that above all others is meet for such a treasure" (*Chronicle*, 1928, p. 17). Law might be philanthropic, but he wasn't to be pressured. Even so, in due course, once the massive Scott edition was completed, Law allowed Cook and Ewing to produce a large format edition of the Commonplace Book with a transcript and photographic facsimile "from the poet's manuscript in the possession of Sir Alfred Law, M.P." The 1938 Ewing-Cook edition was reprinted in 1965, with an introduction by David Daiches, and remained the standard source until the recent publication of the new Oxford edition edited by Nigel Leask.

Most important, with Burns, as he had done with Scott and the Brontës, Cook happily shared his discoveries with other scholars. The American Burns scholar, J. DeLancey Ferguson, was already at work on the first full scholarly edition of the Burns letters, much to the suspicion of the Burns establishment; Duncan M'Naught had been shocked that Ferguson planned to print the bawdy letters uncensored, and J. C. Ewing, M'Naught's successor as editor, preferred that previously-unpublished Burns letters should appear first in the *Chronicle* rather than in Ferguson's edition. Cook, however, collaborated with Ferguson, who was able to collate almost all the Burns letters at Honresfield from manuscript for himself, as well as using Cook's transcripts.

All this activity by Davidson Cook attracted the interest not only of scholars and enthusiasts, and curators, but also of the book dealers. Here the available facts become more inferential, because the first major dealer to get his foot in the Honresfield library door was Gabriel Wells, of New York, who is reputed never to have issued a catalogue of the books he had for sale (Baker, p. 306). Wells had excellent connections with major private collectors, but more often sold on what he bought to other dealers. In 1928, Wells persuaded Law to sell him the Shakespeare First Folio, which William Law had bought at Sotheby's in 1897 for £415. The movements of Shakespeare folios are better documented than those of any other book; indeed one wishes there was similar information readily available about the movements of the Burns Kilmarnock editions. We don't know what Wells paid Law for the Shakespeare, but he sold it on immediately to the London dealer Maggs, from whom it went to the Swiss collector Martin Bodmer, who traded it as part-payment to the Philadelphia dealer Dr. A.W. Rosenbach; in 1960, it was auctioned in Hamburg, on behalf of a Swedish firm, fetching DM 350,000, then "the

second highest price ever paid at auction for a book,” and since then it has been in a library in Württemberg, Germany (West, pp. 261-264).

Solid information is also available about the fate of at least some of the Honresfield Brontë manuscripts. In March 1933, a group of them (though not the Emily Brontë “E.J.B.” poems manuscript) was auctioned at Hodgson’s, in London, listed as “The Property of a Collector” rather than with Law’s name attached (Alexander and Smith, 291; see also *Book Prices Current*, 1933, 119-121). In the early thirties, auction prices had fallen, and only about half of the items sold. In the 1940s, one scholar found their subsequent movements “already well-nigh untraceable” (Christian, p. 179), but some have since resurfaced, and a number of them were either bought for or subsequently donated to the Brontë Parsonage Museum in Haworth, so remaining available (Rosenblum and White). Nonetheless, Christine Alexander concluded that for Brontë scholars the disappearance of the Law manuscripts remains a “major stumbling-block,” and reported that “repeated pleas” to Law descendants “have gone unanswered” (Alexander, *Manuscripts*, xviii-xix).

Two of the Burns items illustrate how items can disappear and then reappear. In Davidson Cook’s *Chronicle* listing, Honresfield MS. xxviii is described as inserted into the copy of *The Caledonian Pocket Companion* that William Law had loaned for exhibition in 1896. Cook thought that the manuscript (which included the song “To daunton me,” and instructions to James Johnson about an extra verse for “Here awa, there awa”) didn’t really belong with the book (*Chronicle*, 1928, p. 15). Cook also, some years later, wrote a separate article about the item. Because of the instructions to Johnson, Ferguson treated the manuscript as a letter (Letter 111), dating it as May or June 1787, and when his edition came out, in 1931, his location note shows it was no longer at Honresfield, reading “Transcribed by permission of Mr. Gabriel Wells, New York” (Ferguson, I: 94). Wells did not apparently sell the item, but some years after his death in 1946, his unsold stock was for the first time cataloged, in four batches, with a fifth list for the leftovers, reproduced from typescript. In that fifth list, item 85 is “*The Caledonian Pocket Companion* ... ROBERT BURNS’ COPY. Of the greatest importance,” priced at \$750 (Boesen, item 85):

85. (BURNS, ROBERT). *The Caledonian Pocket Companion...* by James Oswald.
12 vols., bound in one, 8vo, old calf. London, (c1750). \$750.00
ROBERT BURNS' COPY. Of the greatest importance, as it was one of the principal sources of the music for which Burns supplied the lyrics for his contributions to "The Scots Musical Museum," where so many of his best songs first appeared. Throughout the volume, in pencil and ink, in the autograph of Burns, are his markings and comments on the tunes. Details on request.

The catalogue doesn’t mention the manuscript, or say if it was still in the book. Kinsley refers to the existence of the manuscript, with a reference to Ferguson, but doesn’t give a location or any information that wouldn’t have been in Cook or Ferguson (Kinsley I: 398; cf. Smith and Boumelha, p. 178, BuR 1086). Ross Roy redated and renumbered the letter (October or November 1787, Letter 147A), but once his updated location note

has been found, the subsequent whereabouts of the book, and of the manuscript, becomes clear: “Here collated with the original manuscript in the Birthplace Museum, Alloway. It is a half-sheet which is laid into a copy of James Oswald’s *The Caledonian Pocket Companion*” (Roy, *Letters*, I: 169). And what was once lost without trace is now more visible than ever before: both the book cover and Burns’s manuscript can now be viewed on the Burns Birthplace Museum’s website (object no. 3.3010: http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object_detail/3.3010).

Slightly more mystery attaches to Cook’s MS. xii. This was, Cook wrote, “a beautiful holograph of ‘The Fornicator’; six stanzas, of which the first four have been printed in *The Merry Muses of Caledonia*, the *Songs and Ballads of Robert Burns* (1823, p. 265) and the Aldine Edition ... (1893, vol. i., p. 59)” (*Chronicle*, 1928, p. 11). This was another item that William Law had loaned for the 1896 Glasgow exhibition (*Memorial Catalogue*, item 1098). Cook does not print the manuscript text, even for the additional stanzas: he was after all publishing in the *Burns Chronicle* in the 1920s. Kinsley’s source-note includes “MS. not traced” (Kinsley, I: 101 n), and Kinsley relies for his text on a transcript attributed to Prof. Robert Dewar of Reading University, from whom he had taken over the Clarendon edition in the late 1950s, and who had started work on it in 1930; the Roy Collection includes Dewar’s marked copy of Cook’s pamphlet on the Honresfield Burns manuscripts, and it seems more likely that the transcription was made by Cook than by Dewar himself. However, fifteen years after Kinsley, Smith and Broumelha give entries for two separate manuscripts of “The Fornicator”: the Law manuscript as BuR 314, listed as “unlocated,” but also a second manuscript, BuR 313, described as “Autograph fair copy, indicating the tune ‘Clout the Caldron’,” which they track back to the early 1930s through the auction records, to a Hodgson auction (July 6, 1933, lot 187), then after the War at Sotheby’s (May 21, 1949, lot 541), before its acquisition for the University of Texas (*Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, vol.III, part 1, p. 123). The Harry Ransom Center catalogue lists BUR 313 as “Autograph fair copy, 2 pp., undated” (<http://norman.hrc.utexas.edu/fasearch/findingAid.cfm?eadid=00860>). However, under their entry for the Law manuscript, BuR 314, Smith and Broumelha also include the conjecture that it is “possibly identical with BuR 313 above,” i.e. with the Texas manuscript, as indeed the sale through Hodgson makes likely.

There may well be a few more stories like these two that could be reconstructed about individual Burns manuscripts, but it does not seem that even in 1933 Sir Alfred Law sold off Burns manuscripts on the same scale as he did Brontë manuscripts. Few libraries have complete runs of all the older auction house catalogues or of the catalogues issued by individual book dealers that one needs to have at hand for such reconstruction, and as the story of the *Caledonian Pocket Companion* shows, sales between individuals don’t usually leave a published record. In any case, it appears that the majority of the Burns manuscripts stayed in the Honresfield library throughout the 1930s, till Law’s death.

Like the two uncles from whom he had inherited the house and library, Sir Alfred Law never married. At the time he died, in November 1939, other things must have been

more important for his executors than sorting out the library at Honresfield. While the Texas-based Brontë scholar Fannie Ratchford asserted that by 1941 the library had already been “dispersed” (see Ratchford, p. 266), it seems that some collections, including the manuscript of Scott’s *Rob Roy*, were still in the house in 1948, after the end of the War (Parker, p. xvi). They must have been removed sometime in the late 1940s or early 1950s, because in 1959, Honresfield House became a residential care home, part of the group of homes for the disabled founded by Group Captain Leonard Cheshire, V.C.

One clue as to the date may be the appearance at auction in 1952 of another significant Burns item, a manuscript of “Auld lang syne,” lines 9-24, i.e. the verses without the opening or refrain (Sotheby’s, June 24, 1952, p. 50). This was bought for the Burns Birthplace Museum and is duly noted by Kinsley, as the “Alloway MS.” (Kinsley I: 443-444) and by Smith and Broumelha (BuR 48: *Index of English Literary Manuscripts*, vol.III, part 1, p. 104). A digital image is available on the Birthplace web-site, at http://www.burnsmuseum.org.uk/collections/object_detail/3.6172. Neither Kinsley, nor Smith and Broumelha, however, list or otherwise refer to the manuscript of “Auld lang syne,” with the same verses, that was listed by Davidson Cook as Honresfield MS. x(b) (*Chronicle*, 1927, p. 24); Cook did not transcribe or facsimile it, just listed the first line of each verse. The logical inference is that the manuscript at Alloway is the one formerly in the Law collection. The Law/Honresfield manuscript had four pages (i.e. one large sheet folded once), and “Auld lang syne” only took up one page, p. 4. Cook focuses much more attention on the other item in the manuscript, MS. x (a), which was the unique autograph source for Burns’s early song “On Cessnock banks” (Kinsley I: 17; IELM, BuR 937). Cook had printed a complete transcript of this second item. Neither Kinsley nor Smith and Broumelha recorded any location for the “Cessnock banks” manuscript, and Kinsley used Cook’s published transcript for the Oxford edition text (Kinsley I: 17; IELM, BuR 937). “Cessnock banks” certainly isn’t listed on the Birthplace web-site, like “Auld lang syne.” Puzzled, I looked at again at the “Auld lang syne” image, and realized it showed only the front, without the verso. Through the kindness of Dr. David Hopes of the Birthplace Museum, I got an image of the verso, but instead of showing, as I had hoped, part of “Cessnock banks,” it carried only the annotation, in a later hand, “a Scotch [perhaps Scottish] song / in the hand writing of / Burns.” But the on-line images showed that the manuscript had been repeatedly folded, unfolded, and refolded over the years; it was much worn and had been repaired on the right margin of the page with “Auld lang syne,” so that the right hand half of the final stanza (ll. 21-24) was missing. Perhaps “Cessnock banks” had been written on pp. 1-2 only, and accidentally with wear, or more deliberately before the 1952 sale, the two leaves had been separated. Since the Law manuscript version of “Cessnock banks” has thirteen verses, totaling fifty-two lines, this means that Burns had written 26 lines of verse to a page. Page 4, with “Auld lang syne,” carried 16 lines, or perhaps (if Burns wrote the opening words of the refrain under for each stanza) 20 lines. If the Alloway manuscript is *not* the Honresfield one, however, then there is an important manuscript of “Auld lang syne” from which any textual variants have never been recorded.

As far as the Burns manuscripts were concerned, when James Kinsley and Ross Roy were working on their Burns editions, the Honresfield manuscripts had indeed vanished without trace. The disappearance posed (and poses) less of a problem for the letters than for the poems and songs. While Ross Roy would have preferred to recollate the Honresfield letters against manuscript for himself, he could rely with reasonable confidence on the Ferguson text, for which in almost every instance Ferguson had done his own collations. Cook had listed nineteen letters at Honresfield: Ferguson had collated seventeen of these for himself, plus the “letter” in the *Caledonian Pocket Companion* that he treats not as a Honresfield item, but as in the possession of Gabriel Wells. There was only one letter for which he had had to rely on Cook to check the manuscript for him, Burns’s letter to Cleghorn [January 1, 1792], for which his source-note reads “Here corrected by Mr. Davidson Cook from the original MS. formerly in the Honresfield Collection,” which suggests that by 1931 the Cleghorn letter had already moved elsewhere (Cook MS. xiv: Ferguson II: 103 [letter 488]; cf. Roy, II: 126-127 and n.). “Corrected” is important: Ferguson had used as his basis the text of the letter in Scott Douglas (VI: 101), expanding the two lines from Burns’s song “There was twa wives” given by Scott Douglas by substituting the six lines (out of sixteen in the letter manuscript) printed by Cook in the 1928 *Burns Chronicle* (p. 12: the *Chronicle* in the 1920s would not have admitted the second stanza, any more than it would have published a transcription of “The Fornicator” manuscript). Cook corrected Ferguson’s text from the manuscript, without adding in the remaining ten lines. Despite this example, overall, for the letters in the Law Collection, even if scholars since Ferguson haven’t seen the original manuscripts, there are full and trustworthy texts available.

In editing Burns’s poems and songs, Kinsley faced evidence that was less complete, and for which he had to rely more heavily on Cook. The situation was, however, not as dire as one might imagine if one looked only at those endless footnotes about manuscripts that can no longer be located. By my count, there were forty-four manuscript poems in Burns’s hand in the Honresfield collection. Twenty-five of these were poems in the First Commonplace Book, itself unlocated by Kinsley, but for which he could reasonably use the 1938 Ewing-Cook facsimile and transcript: indeed, in his list of sources, Kinsley includes the Commonplace Book under Manuscripts, but only references the facsimile as his source (Kinsley III: 968). Of the nineteen autograph manuscript poems not in the Commonplace Book, one, “Keen blows the wind o’er Dornocht-head” (Cook MS. xxi), was a song for which Burns explicitly disclaimed authorship (*Letters*, II: 316). Which makes eighteen. Then, by the time Kinsley was at work, three manuscript items had found their way to the Burns Birthplace Museum: the extra stanzas for two songs that were in the *Caledonian Pocket Companion*, and, if my conjecture is right, the manuscript of “Auld lang syne.” Which leaves fifteen.

For ten of these fifteen, Davidson Cook had printed full transcriptions in the *Burns Chronicle*. Though the *Chronicle* under Ewing would not have welcomed the two more bawdy or scatological poems for which the Law collection held the unique holograph manuscripts, Cook (or perhaps Dewar himself) made full transcripts of both, and Kinsley used both transcripts. Cook was dead long before Kinsley took over the edition, and

Kinsley's acknowledgements and textual introduction (Kinsley I: viii-x; III: 963-994) contain no indication that he had had direct access to Davidson Cook's own papers (or of their whereabouts), so if Cook rather than Dewar made the two transcripts, he had shared them with Dewar. For "The Fornicator's Song," only the first thirty-two of forty-eight lines had been included in the 1799 *Merry Muses*; Kinsley provides the first full text in any edition of Burns's poetry, for which his source-note credits a transcript by Dewar (see Kinsley, I: 101 n); an editor working now would of course be able to check the Cook-Dewar-Kinsley text against the original manuscript at Texas. For "There was twa wives," where the unique source is the Cleghorn letter mentioned above, the Kinsley edition provides the first printing in a Burns edition of the full sixteen-line version, which it credits to Cook (Kinsley, II: 595; MS. listed as BuR 1050, but still unlocated, in *IELM*, p. 175; but cf. also Barke and Goodsir Smith, p. 72).

In summary, of the forty-four poetic manuscripts at Honresfield, Kinsley had reasonably full evidence from facsimile or transcription for forty-one. What about the other three? These were the manuscripts in Burns's hand of the song "O wat ye wha's in yon town" (Cook MS. xxii; Kinsley, II: 772), the song "Sweet fa's the e'en on Craigieburn" (Cook MS. xxiii; Kinsley, II: 763), and two stanzas from "Address to the Toothach" (Cook MS. ii(b); Kinsley, II: 791-792). For these, Cook had listed the items but had not printed transcripts. Kinsley's textual notes for the three items include no mention of the Law/Honresfield manuscripts, even to note their unavailability. The "Address to the Toothach" was not published in Burns's lifetime, but there are early printed texts of both songs, in Johnson's *Scots Musical Museum*, 5 (1796), song 458, and Thomson's *Select Collection*, I, set 2 (1798), song 32, respectively, and an editor working now might well not share Kinsley's preference for manuscript over published texts. We can't know why Cook shortchanged these three manuscripts, but the inference must surely be that they were fair copies in which he had found no, or no significant, textual variants from the published texts.

Of course, in an ideal world, every manuscript of a major author would be readily and permanently accessible to every interested scholar. Since the 1930s, not only successive Burns scholars, but those doing research on Emily Brontë or Walter Scott, have lamented the disappearance of the Law manuscripts from Honresfield. As the survey above indicates, the situation is not as bleak as it might seem, largely because of the remarkable work in the 1920s by Davidson Cook. But in fact there is published evidence that key portions of the Law collection survive and are still in family ownership. The 1995 Oxford edition of Emily Brontë's poems had to rely for the Honresfield manuscript (the "E.J.B." notebook) on the Shakespeare Head facsimile, along with photographs from the notebook in the Brontë Parsonage Museum, Haworth (Roper and Chitham, p. 14; and cf. Alexander and Smith, pp. 291, 315). For the major Scott edition, however (the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverley Novels), the general editor, Prof. David Hewitt, had been able, after a twenty-year search, to get in contact with Law's heirs and make special arrangements to study Scott's original manuscript of *Rob Roy*, "the last of Scott's major manuscripts to be privately owned." When the *Rob Roy* volume was published, in 2008, Hewitt acknowledged the generosity in allowing this of "the late

David Law Dixon” (Hewitt, p. ix). His account of the manuscript’s provenance recounts that, when he was at work on the volume, the manuscript “had passed by inheritance to the late David Law Dixon” (Hewitt, p. 357: cf. the bequest to “Emma Dixon” in the older Alfred Law’s will in 1913, noted above). Nigel Leask, Pauline Mackay, and the Glasgow team did not have similar access for their recent edition of the First Commonplace Book, but they were able in 2011, with the permission of the present owner, to have their new transcription from the Ewing-Cook facsimile checked on some important points against the original manuscript by Professor Hewitt (Leask, p. 39).

For the present, however, most scholarship must continue to rely gratefully on the work of Davidson Cook, which makes one wonder: what happened to Cook’s papers, photographs, and transcripts, after his death in 1941? There are typescript copies of his Brontë transcripts at Haworth (Roper, p. 14 n.1), and in 2012 a further batch of his Brontë transcripts, both typed and manuscript, was put up for sale by a North Yorkshire auction house, estimated at £80 to £120, and selling for £220 (Tennant’s, September 5, 2012, lot 59). Following his retirement in 1939, Cook had moved back from Barnsley to the Glasgow area. What Ross Roy said about the Law manuscripts would also apply to Davidson Cook’s papers: “these are private things, they get passed on to somebody, or he might even have given them away before he died.” My instinct is that Cook himself would have arranged for the preservation of his Burns materials in Scotland, rather than in Yorkshire. I, and many other Burnsians, would be glad to hear where they are now.

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