

Dumfriesshire and Galloway Natural History and Antiquarian Society

President's Address

IN THEIR FOOTSTEPS

I have selected three people, whom I admire, in whose footsteps I have trod for various reasons: in the parishes of Mouswald and to a lesser extent Torthorwald; in the world of mental health, especially at the Crichton; and in association with our Society. But that is not to suggest for one minute consider that I am on a par with any of the people themselves, whether it be in terms of lineage, wealth or intellect. I shall not tell you at this stage who all three people are...

MRS ELIZABETH CRICHTON

She is an obvious choice when you consider that for 26 years I was based as Health Board Archivist at Crichton Royal Hospital.

It was a great honour when I was invited to contribute the entry for Elizabeth Crichton in The Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women. The biggest headache was cutting my script down to the allotted 350 words when I had so much to say about this remarkable woman.

Elizabeth Crichton was the daughter of Margaret Dalzell, whose family had connections with Carnwath and Glenae, locally, and Sir Robert Grierson, 5th baronet of Lag and Rockhall. (The family had moved on from the days of their notorious ancestor, Grierson of Lag, persecutor of the Covenanters.) Elizabeth, the 4th daughter (of the family of five sons and five daughters) was born in 1779 and her early years were spent at Rockhall in the parish of Mouswald, which is the parish where my early years were also spent. The Grierson family, as landed gentry, had privileged seating in the parish church.

Elizabeth's father died at the age of 106. He died in 1839 soon after the opening of the Crichton Hospital. The *Standard* report of his funeral records that the 2-mile route from Rockhall to Mouswald Church was lined with people wishing to pay their respects to the grand old man. The Grierson family enclosure is on the s.w. side of Mouswald Church and on our wedding day John and I backed on to it as we posed for our photographs.

In 1810 at the age of 31 Elizabeth married 45-year-old Dr James Crichton, who had returned two years earlier from India, where he had served as physician to the Governor-General (Richard, the brother of the Duke of Wellington) and where he had made his fortune mainly through trading, in silks certainly but also in opium, one suspects.

Elizabeth's new home was Friars' Carse, purchased by Dr Crichton the previous year. The portrait of her which hangs in Crichton Hall would have been painted about this time, whereas the one of Dr Crichton was painted posthumously to hang in the Board Room alongside hers. It may well have been copied from one done in India, perhaps

by Chinnery, who executed a number of portraits at that time. I am indebted to Joanne Turner of Dumfries Museum for assistance in identifying the copy-artist, who was J McLellan Arnott, brother of the local horticulturist.

When Dr Crichton died in 1823 without issue, it was left to five Trustees, head of whom was Elizabeth, to decide how his fortune was to be spent. There was £200,000 to be disbursed, the residue of which was to be devoted to some charitable purpose. Over the next 10 years a considerable sum was expended on various needy causes, like cholera relief, but principally in litigation and sweeteners to silence Dr Crichton's greedy brother, who as well as a sister, had already benefited from the will. Mrs Crichton's initial idea of a university failed because the existing Scottish universities feared competition and probably lobbied the government not to support her scheme. The story is well told in Rene Anderson's book, *The Widow's Might*. Rene, former curator of the Savings Bank Museum, in conversation with me called Elizabeth Crichton, the Merry Widow. Leaping to my heroine's defence, I said that holding house parties was how Victorian people of means socialised.

Mrs Crichton's next scheme, influenced almost certainly by Sir Andrew Halliday, was to relieve the plight of the mentally ill, a scheme which caused her to be pilloried in the local press. Nimbyism was alive and well even then. Her feelings of isolation are to be found in the prayer she composed at the time of the laying of the foundation stone for the First House, Crichton Hall. "I am alone, weak, feeble and friendless." As a widow I grant her the claims of 'alone' and 'friendless' but 'weak' and 'feeble'? Never!

She did have the support of her brother, Colonel William Grierson and her neighbour, Admiral Johnston of Cowhill, to enable her to persist with her scheme. Crichton Institution for Lunatics - the word 'lunatic' was acceptable then - opened on 3rd June 1839. The following day patients began to be transferred from the Lunatic wing of Dumfries and Galloway Royal Infirmary. Her asylum acquired Royal status the following year when the Crichton Act of 1840 received the signature of Queen Victoria. This was the policy adopted to ensure the continuance after her death of the enlightened policies embodied in the caring regime at Crichton.

Enlightened she may have been but she was still a woman of her time who believed in class distinction. There were 7 categories of patient in the asylum. The families of the well-to-do would never have paid to use the facilities had it been otherwise.

Crichton Royal Institution, as it was known until 1950, was to be 'the best in Europe' said Mrs Crichton because it had to be worthy of her husband's memory. I would say that it was equal to the best. However, a group of Canadians in the 1890s inspected asylums in Europe and Britain and did, indeed, confer that accolade on the hospital. She remains the greatest benefactress to psychiatry that this country - and maybe even Europe - has known. It pleases me that I have walked in her footsteps in Crichton Hall and in the grounds.

Elizabeth Crichton died in 1862. She was a widow for almost 40 years. Her university dream came true 170 years after her initial proposal.

Towards the end of the 20th Century I was asked to become involved in plans to create a bronze statue in her honour. I compiled a list of adjectives used by people who had known her. It seems fitting to conclude this section with a description, penned in 1936, by her godson, Sir James Crichton Browne, son of her first and admirable physician superintendent, Dr W.A.F. Browne, and an eminent psychiatrist in his own right:

"I well recollect Mrs Crichton...a prim little lady in a black gown with a frilled widow's cap, of a somewhat sombre manner, as was the fashion of the time, (Merry Widow?) but genial and kindly withal, highly intelligent and well-informed, and with a sweet voice in which traces of the Scottish dialect and cadence still lingered. I recall her visits to the Crichton Royal Institution in her yellow and black C-spring coach (well, maybe The Merry Widow!) for monthly meetings or conferences with my father or to make calls on lady patients in whom she was specially interested. I recall picnics she arranged at Friars' Carse when parties of patients were hospitably entertained...It is to Mrs Crichton's inception that we owe that magnificent establishment that now shelters nearly a thousand patients and all its beneficent operations through a hundred years. She did a noble work."

JG

On 21st June 1813 a little boy was born in Collin (not far from Mrs Crichton's childhood home) in the parish of Torthorwald, a parish with which I had many comings and goings for about 24 years. At the age of three that child's father, a mason, and his young sister died of tuberculosis or consumption, as it was generally called in those days.

He was brought up by his mother Mary, a very religious and strict woman. Poverty and hardship ruled their lives as they moved around the parish. However, they had the support of his maternal grandparents. Mary worked on farms often with the boy as a help-mate, who would also run errands - anything to keep body and soul together. Fortunately his education at Collin and Torthorwald Schools was not neglected and his mother ensured that Christian teaching and Bible studies were to the fore. Life in this rural parish also imbued him with a love of the natural world.

That child was JAMES GILCHRIST, later to be a founder member of this Society in 1862. His mother, a distant relative of Mr John Craik, writing master at Dumfries Academy, ensured that her son, who showed an aptitude for learning, received a good education. James walked to Dumfries and back daily. He recognised the debt he owed to his mother and in her latter years she had her own cottage at Collin, where she died in 1871 at the age of 81.

After leaving school he became apprenticed reluctantly to a draper. Eager to advance his knowledge he studied English and Latin after work. At the age of 20 he took up a post as a tutor in Birkenhead. At the age of 30 he embarked on an Arts course at Glasgow University and thereafter went to study Divinity in Edinburgh. Still obliged to live a frugal existence, he covered the distance from home to these cities on foot. This was not the hardship that we might consider it, because he loved the open air and

it gave him an opportunity to study flora and fauna. He also enjoyed climbing and skating.

Despite these pursuits he fell victim to a period of ill-health, particularly dyspepsia, no doubt engendered by the rigours of his early years and long hours of night-time study, and this weakness was to remain with him for life. When he returned to his studies it was medicine that attracted him. He graduated M.D. in 1850 from Edinburgh University at the age of 37. Recognising his straitened circumstances, some of his professors gave him free entry to their classes. Such were the strict principles of the man that in 1854 he attempted to repay his debts. When they refused to accept such payment he then gave the money to a good cause.

It so happened that one of those professors, John Hutton Balfour, was the brother-in-law of Dr Browne, Physician Superintendent at Crichton Royal Institution, and he recommended Dr Gilchrist as medical assistant at the hospital in 1850. At that time there were two houses on the site because the Southern Counties Asylum, built to accommodate the pauper patients, had opened in 1849. This left CRI exclusively for the fee-paying patients. He was in his element because Dr Browne encouraged all manner of activities for the patients, a field in which Dr Gilchrist was adept: music, singing, lectures in Botany and Geology, field trips all gave scope for his special interests.

It is worth interjecting an excerpt from a letter of 1855 or 56 to Admiral Johnston of Cowhill from Elizabeth Crichton which reveals her attitude to the pauper patients and their accommodation.

We all know many poor ladies and gentlemen in reduced circumstances and I look upon such as much greater objects of compassion than the regular pauper who is sent in by his Parish and for whom we landed proprietors are obliged to pay...I am only afraid that there will be too little money to add anything additional to the old Asylum (CRI) and I find it will never do to add anything additional to the Pauper Asylum (SCA). We have given them a beautiful house solely for their own use and it must not be added to.

In 1853 Dr Gilchrist was appointed Physician Superintendent at Montrose Royal Asylum, dating from 1781 and the oldest in Scotland. It is interesting to note the

strong links over the years between Montrose and Dumfries because Dr Browne served there before Mrs Crichton went up - in her yellow and black C-spring carriage of course - to interview him for her new asylum.

While at Montrose Dr Gilchrist supervised the building of a new replacement asylum at Sunnyside, which I visited in the 1980s to view the museum that had been created there. (Alas, it like the one at Crichton, closed.) The Montrose Review said of Dr Gilchrist: "One more unselfish in his aims, more ready to make sacrifices for others, more honourable in his dealings, more true in his attachments, more gentle and courteous in his intercourse with those around him, it would indeed be difficult to find.

In 1857 the senior physician's post at Crichton became vacant. Dr Browne, newly appointed Commissioner of Lunacy for Scotland with a remit to inspect asylums, recommended Dr Gilchrist as his successor. The annual hospital report of 1857 stated: "The appointment of Dr Gilchrist implies a change in the man rather than the system. He will come as a former friend." Dr Gilchrist continued the policy of encouraging patients to pursue interesting activities. He enjoyed taking them on field trips to study Botany and Geology in particular. Mr Truckell's father told how they could be seen poking in hedgerows, etc., and folk would say: "There goes Dr Gilchrist and his lunatics." The inference was that Dr Gilchrist's eccentricities were veering almost on lunatic proportions. Of all the superintendents at Crichton he and Dr Browne knew well and were the most comfortable in the company of patients.

Dr Gilchrist had a tendency to run the hospital in a regimented fashion. A book exists which contains his directives. For example, one told exactly how to cut a loaf!

There was one aspect of Dr Gilchrist's regime which came in for criticism, namely his use of restraint and seclusion, a register of which practices became compulsory after the passing of the Lunacy Act of 1857. The visiting Commissioner (one being, it will be remembered, Dr Browne) would record displeasure at such practices after each of the twice-yearly inspections of the asylum. Always mindful of costs Dr Gilchrist faced the problem of an increasing number of admissions because following the Lunacy Act the mentally ill had a statutory right to enter the asylum. His argument was that one attendant could man a gallery at night if an unruly patient were restrained in a locked bed; but unrestrained it might take four attendants to keep him under control.

At the age of 62 he married Mary Craik, the niece of his old writing master in 1875. They had two sons. One became a doctor and the other a talented musician. Sadly Mary died after only 6 years of marriage. In 1883 he married Agnes McGowan, sister of James McGowan of Ellangowan, who proved to be a devoted wife and step-mother.

During his period of office the Board purchased a further 100 acres, which included Brownhall Farm to add to the original 40-acre site and both the Southern Counties Asylum (despite Mrs Crichton's misgivings) and Crichton Royal Institution were

extended. In 1874 he donated a fountain which stood on the south side of the recently-extended Crichton Hall.

Dr Browne had created a museum in Crichton Hall. Dr Gilchrist went on to create one in Crichton House, the Superintendent's residence, now Campbell House. Patients were invited to social occasions in his house, where he ran the Omnium Gatherum Society. He offered the hand of friendship to the widow of Hugh Millar of Cromarty, a man with interests similar to his own. Miller had committed suicide. Lydia Miller developed mental problems, from which she eventually recovered. She was the type of patient who responded well to the entertainment provided at Crichton House. Another patient in his time was Angus MacKay, Queen Victoria's London piper, who escaped in 1859 and drowned in the Nith. Last year on the 150th anniversary of his death I was involved in commemorating the event and a Memorial will be unveiled at Glencaple funded by pipers of the world in due course.

From this Society's point of view Dr Gilchrist's greatest claim to fame was as a founder of the Society in 1862. Sir William Jardine of Applegarth was President; he and Dr Grierson of Thornhill were Vice-presidents. Dr Gilchrist served as President 1874-1878 and contributed 24 papers or notes to the Transactions. A list of his lichen collection, held at Dumfries Museum, was published in 1976/77, volume 52.

Never robust, Dr Gilchrist was obliged to retire in 1879. Linwood, Lovers' Walk, was his home when he died in December 1885 some 9 months after his old friend, Dr Browne. He was buried in Torthorwald Churchyard.

Dr Gilchrist's bad press with the Board of Lunacy probably explained why his name was not commemorated on site. Even his fountain had been declared unsafe and was removed. In the 1990s when the Crichton Development Company began to create a conference room in the former gymnasium of Easterbrook Hall I was asked to submit ideas for a name. Hence the Gilchrist Room because I have always had a soft spot for the man.

Footnote: The cairn in memory of Angus MacKay was erected and unveiled at Glencaple in late 2010.

R.C. REID

Robert Corsane Reid, generally referred to as R.C. Reid, was born on 7th November 1882. Generations of the Corsanes served in local government. The last male of the line died at Meikle Knox in 1777. R.C. Reid was the second of three sons born to John James Reid, advocate and Queen's Remembrancer for Scotland (the Queen in this case was Queen Victoria). His father represented the Queen's interests from 1881 to 1889. His mother was Katherine Glen Borron Dickson.

His paternal grandfather was Sir James J. Reid, a member of the Supreme Court of Justice in the Ionian Islands when they belonged to Britain. The family home, Mouswald Place, came into the possession of the Reids through his grandmother, Mary Threshie, who also owned the farms of Cleuchbrae and Mouswald Banks. R.C. Reid in his MS on the family wrote: "Sir James considerably extended the old farmhouse into a mansion, not in the best of taste." At the time of indexing that paper

he added: "Mouswald Place was sold by me after the First War. In the Second War it was taken over by the Army and is now a shambles."

R. C. Reid was educated at Cheltenham. He had an unfortunate injury to a leg when young and then a shooting accident led to a life-long lameness, which put paid to his ambitions of taking up a career as an archaeologist. After graduating from Trinity College, Cambridge in 1905, not surprisingly considering his background, he was called to the Bar. He became a member of the Inner Temple. He served as private secretary to the Lord Privy Seal and then to the Lord Chancellor. From 1910-1920 he was secretary to H.M. Visitors in Lunacy, one of the threads that run through this evening's talk.

Serious eye trouble caused him to leave the Bar and take up farming at Cleuchbrae, Mouswald, a property which he had loaned to his uncle, Robert Threshie Reid Q.C., Earl Loreburn of Dumfries, while serving as M.P. for Dumfries Burghs. It is questionable whether his heart was in farming because in 1925 Cleuchbrae Farm was rented to the Muir family, who have owned it since the 1970s.

R.C. Reid's personal misfortune proved to be of great benefit to S.W. Scotland. He moved into public life firstly as Sheriff-Substitute in 1927. In 1929 he became County Councillor for Mouswald and Torthorwald, a seat he held until 1958. His interests there lay in Education, Finance, Planning, Libraries. I quote from his obituary in the Transactions: "Eloquent and persuasive in debate, always well-informed he was a doughty fighter for the causes dear to him. His strong determination, coupled with a charm of manner and the great gift of humour helped him to win his case."

For instance, despite fierce opposition, he championed the cause of establishing Gracefield Arts Centre and was deservedly the Management Committee's first Chairman, a post he held until his death in 1963. Fittingly the Centre possesses the sculptured head of R.C. Reid by the highly talented Benno Schotz. I quote Dawn Henderby of Gracefield: "The Gracefield collection would not be what it is but for Dr R.C Reid. He is a hugely important figure. I've heard anecdotally that if the committee rejected a potential purchase but he liked it, he'd buy it out of his own pocket anyway and present it to the collection. - not usually a good accession policy but thankfully he had a good eye and I've yet to come across anything that he gave that I don't like."

Such was the esteem in which he was held that in June 1958 Glasgow University conferred the honorary degree of Doctor of Laws on R.C. Reid. He was also a Fellow of the Society of Antiquities and a fellow of our own Society

As a councillor with an interest in improving the Museum he saw the potential in the young Alfie Truckell, a junior clerk in the Town Clerk's office and recommended him for the Curatorship of Dumfries Museum. With his help and guidance Alfie arrived at a level of expertise, which brought his knowledge and achievements to the attention of academe world-wide. A letter came to Dr R.C. Reid from Professor Croft Dickinson of the Department of Scottish History at Edinburgh University. He intimated that there was a possibility that Alfie's name might be put forward for an honorary degree of M.A. Dr Reid, on being invited to prepare a eulogy, certainly rose

splendidly to the task. The end result, as many of us know, is that the degree was conferred on 5th July 1962.

The record of this correspondence conveys the mutual respect in which Dr Reid and Alfie held each other. A touching response from Alfie is lodged in the Ewart Library.

*My dear Dr Reid,
Needless to say, I was completely surprised when
the post this morning brought a card from Edinburgh
University with the offer of an Honorary M.A.
Naturally I suspected you from the start and soon
found...that you had indeed had a finger in the pie. I
cannot adequately express my thanks to you, who
have been for fourteen years so much of a friendly
guardian and guide to me - except by trying harder
to be worthy of you.*

A man with a passion for archaeology, archival research, history and genealogy was bound to be drawn to our Society. R.C. served as Secretary with Mr Truckell 1930 to 1940 and with S. Marks 1940-44; as Editor of volumes 4-6 and 22-29; and as President from 1933 to 1944. He contributed a huge number of papers to the Transactions and his self-indexed manuscripts, 196 volumes in all, proved to be a daunting prospect for me to cover in 3 weeks - especially when I had planned to spend all of this year on the task. He explored in depth the genealogy of some 200 families to name but a few: Armstrongs, Douglases, Dunbars, Gordons, McCullochs, Griersons, Charterises, Maxwells and of course Threshies. He has explored St. Ninian, writs, charters, titles, inventories to various family papers, protocol books, public archives, sasines, deeds, murders, witchcraft and even the wardrobe account book of Edward I..

I am unable to describe his archaeological writings or his field trips because they are too involved for a talk of this nature: but I would recommend that you look at his writings to understand the depth of his commitment to research into S.W. Scotland and to our society because he contributed about 140 papers to the Transactions. I don't pretend to have worked my way through all his papers and manuscripts but I have read what I could. Unusually, I wish to mention two **natural history** papers. In 'The Logan Whale,' one of his papers in the 1946-47 'Transactions', his sense of humour shines through. The other item is an ornithological note of 1917-1918 on *Platycercus Eximius*, the Rosehill Parrakeet.

I quote: "The appearance of a pair of Parrakeets, indigenous to Australia, flying at liberty on a Scottish moor is sufficiently uncommon to merit brief notice. In August, 1913, these birds were observed by the tenant of the Birset, parish of Mouswald, sitting on a moor gate."

This instantly caught my attention: firstly because of my interest in ornithology; and secondly because when I was very young I lived at the Birset, which sits high above and about one mile from Cleuchbrae on the eastern edge of Mouswald parish. One bird was caught and kept by the local blacksmith and the other was shot in Rockhall woods. It was stuffed and ended up in Brocklehurst mansion.

In 1907 Reid had married Helen Mary Tobin, daughter of Henry Murray Tobin of the Indian Civil Service. Dr Reid remained a fairly detached figure within the parish of Mouswald. However, his wife participated in some of the community events and served as President of the WRI. At Cleuchbrae she was a charming hostess to a succession of notable academic and eminent figures and to an ardent stream of less well-known researchers who found their way to her door.

Cleuchbrae was a very desirable property in my youth. Dr Reid loved his garden. I was green with envy at their immaculately kept tennis court in the front garden, which obviously was of benefit to his two daughters, who attained a high standard in the sport with one becoming a tennis coach. Tennis parties were very much a major form of entertainment at Cleuchbrae in summer time.

For the last two years or so Dr Reid's health gave cause for concern from time to time. His handwriting betrays his frailty. He died on 21st April 1963 and was cremated in Carlisle 3 days later. A church service was held in Mouswald Church subsequently.

I have in my possession a treasured item, penned by him for the Rededication of Mouswald Kirk in October 1929. The pulpit was a gift from his mother. Two pieces of information therein link the church with Mrs Crichton and the Grierson family. "The ancient font has been kindly returned from Friars' Carse." Also "In 1816 our aged Kirk was swept away. It had a gallery at the north end that belonged to Rockhall. Of the Kirk that succeeded it...only the shell is retained in the restored structure which today, 29th October 1929 is to be rededicated to public worship." That is the church where I worshipped for 24 years.

For the last three years as president of the Society I have again had a connection with Dr Reid and Mouswald Parish in that I have been one of three people vetting applications for research funding from the Mouswald Trust, the conditions of which reflect his chief interests: the advancement of the knowledge of the Roman and Romano-British sites covering the period between 1000BC and 1000AD within the Solway area of Scotland and England.

In reading Dr Reid's Presidential Address it seems that some things never change and members of the Council will recognise issues that have concerned us again and again. He said: "In a Society such as ours, a very watchful eye must be kept on two factors, our membership and our Transactions. If the steady stream of recruits to replace

casualties fails us, the whole existence of the Society is imperilled. It is therefore imperative to maintain our membership and it is the duty of every member to secure new recruits...It has always been surprising to me that so few of the teachers in our secondary schools have shown an interest in our activities. They may perhaps be alarmed with our appellation. But antiquarians are not old fogies and both history and pre-history should make some appeal to a secondary school teacher."

Remarkably I can now reveal that Dr R.C. Reid has been present tonight...(It was the bronze head, loaned to me for the occasion.)

Morag Williams