

# Will Ogilvie: Poet of the Romantic Borderland

by William Landles<sup>1</sup>

In a country where the literary achievements of a host of minor bards have been over-shadowed by the genius of Scott and the earthy power of James Hogg, Will Ogilvie holds his own; and there is no doubt that he captured in verse the spirit of the romantic past of the Borderland. I have often felt indeed that the words Scott used in description of his ‘Minstrel’ could well have been applied to the subject of this paper: “The last of all the bards was he, who sang of Border chivalry.”

It is necessary, however, to keep that aspect of his work in perspective, for it has to be said that the poetry of Will Ogilvie is widespread in its scope. Long before he was a Border balladist he had earned fame as a bush balladist in Australia. Between the wars he had considerable vogue as a writer of witty lines for the columns of “Punch” and other periodicals. Then, of course, there is his voluminous sporting verse, largely concerned with horses and hunting.

To get, therefore, a reasonable assessment of the work of Will Ogilvie, we would have to look at all these facets of his poetry, and also to keep in mind that no fewer than forty of his poems were set to music by prominent song composers like C. V. Stanford, Graham Peel and Montague Phillips.<sup>2</sup>

Before going on to consider his work, however, we must give a brief biographical sketch, and say something of Will Ogilvie, the man. For much of the relevant information, I am indebted to Wendy Ogilvie, of Oxford, and George Ogilvie, of Seascale, the daughter and the son of our poet, who have helped me immensely in the preparation of this paper.

Will Ogilvie was a gentleman—or if I may repeat these words with a slightly different accent—Will Ogilvie was a gentle man. He carried with him an air of old world courtesy such as has now virtually disappeared from the scene.

He was not a public figure in the accepted sense of that term. He was shy by nature and shunned public occasions of any sort. When he was about 50, he was invited to open a flower show. Will excused himself by saying he was too old for such a job, they should get someone younger! Well, that old man of 50 lived to be 93! It was really his shyness that caused him to refuse the invitation.

His son George told me that when Will left Australia, the Press gave him a farewell dinner in Sydney,<sup>3</sup> and the speech he made in reply to their eulogies was a complete flop. Even moving a vote of thanks in a semi-private gathering was a burden to him—and he refused all requests by the B.B.C.<sup>4</sup> to take part in broadcasts. He couldn't bear the thought of addressing a large audience, even an unseen audience, and he felt that he would find the broadcasting studios claustrophobic.

He was a different man in his own family circle: George says that the thing to do, if you were under seven, was to “climb on his knee and demand a story. In a trice you found yourself in the land of fairies and elves and other little folk: or if you were a little older—in the land of billabongs and boomerangs, parrots and possums, baking sun and buckjumpers, and the crack of stockwhips. He was a wonderful father.”

He was also, essentially, an outdoor type, who found the utmost pleasure in the hills and dales of his own country.

William Henry Ogilvie then, was born at the farm of Holefield about six miles from Kelso on 21st August, 1869. His father was at the time tenant of the farm which belonged to the Duke of Buccleuch. Will’s grandfather was chamberlain to the Duke and lived at Branxholme. His mother’s parents were killed in a massacre at Cawnpore, in India, while she was just a baby.

As a small child, Will was taught by a governess at home, along with his brothers and sisters. He was the second child and eldest son in a family of eight. They all had what he later described as a very happy country childhood in those far off rural days. For a while he was sent to Yorkshire to be tutored by a clergyman, then after one term at Kelso High School as a day boarder, he went to Fettes College<sup>5</sup> where he studied Latin and Greek, winning the school prize for Latin verse. Interestingly enough, at Fettes he also played rugby for the College 1st XV.<sup>6</sup>

When Will reached the age of nineteen he was sent to Australia, to friends of the family who had a large sheep station, the Scotts of Belalie.<sup>7</sup> At that time, aspiring farmers were encouraged to emigrate to this young colony where the wool trade was booming, and large tracts of bushland were being fenced off into sheep stations. He seems to have been quickly accepted by the bushmen when they found that he could ride horses with the best of them, wild horses at that, or buckjumpers as the drovers called them; ride them too with an English hunting saddle with no thigh pads to increase the grip. Well then, for twelve years he “was knocking round the bush at Belalie station on the Warrego,<sup>8</sup> and at Maaoupe station in South Australia, as station-hand, drover and horsebreaker.” He returned to Scotland in 1901 and lived in Edinburgh for a short time, writing and leading a somewhat Bohemian kind of existence. At this period he was offered, and accepted, a post in America by a friend of the family, a man named Clay<sup>9</sup> who came from Kelso but who emigrated to the U.S.A. and made a fortune in cattle. This man instituted a chair in the State College of Iowa, the chair of Agricultural Journalism, and asked Will to be the first to fill it. This he did, building the post up from scratch as it were, but he soon realised that America had not the appeal for him that Australia had and, indeed, that neither could hold his affection as did his native Borderland, so after two years he came back home and here until the end of his days.

In 1908 Will married Madge, the daughter of Tom Scott Anderson, of Ettrick Shaws, and settled down to earn his living by his pen. He kept on writing non-stop, as

his son says, from 18 to 80 “Love lyrics for the Victorians, ballads of the Bush for the Australians”. He wrote in the rhythm of galloping hoofs for the horsemen. For the Borderers he wrote of “the silken shawl of mist on Cheviot’s shoulder,” “The Barefoot Maid” and “The Comfort of the Hills.”

Heart! If you’ve a sorrow  
Take it the hills!  
Lay it where the sunshine  
Cups of colour spills.  
Bury it in bracken  
Waving green and high;  
O'er it let the heather's  
Peaceful purple lie.  
Trust it to the healing  
Heaven itself distils;  
Heart! If you’ve a sorrow,  
Take it to the hills!

In all he published twenty books of poems and at least twenty-six of his songs were set for solo singing. In his closing years his memory failed, and he was just a pleasant old man who spent his time sitting by the fire at Kirklea,<sup>10</sup> poking it now and again with his stick; or, when the weather fine, wandering the garden in his bushranger hat with his crook, his thoughts no doubt far away in dreams of half-remembered yesterdays. It was my privilege to be at Kirklea, his Ashkirk home, with my family on the occasion of Will’s ninetieth birthday. Walking in the garden that week-end, will stopped and said to his wife: “Do you know what I’m thinking about?” She knew all right, she knew when those pensive moods took him that his thoughts were “at the foot of Bowmont Water, Bowmont Water far away,” as indeed, they had been when he wrote that fine poem in Australia. It appeared in the first book of poems he ever published in 1898,<sup>11</sup> and serves to show that his love for the Borders didn't wane while he was far away on the other side of the world.

O we think we're happy roving,  
But the stars that crown the night,  
They are only ours for loving  
When the moon is lost to sight.  
And my hopes are fleeting forward  
With the ships that sail the sea,  
And my eyes are to the Nor'ward  
As an exile's well may be.  
And my heart a shrine has sought her  
Where the lights and shadows play.  
At the foot of Bowmont Water,  
Bowmont Water far away.

Thinking of his Australian days, it is well to consider that aspect of his work further, for there can be no doubt that he served his literary apprenticeship “Down Under” and achieved national status there as a balladist comparable to the big names of that land in that day—Henry Lawson, “Banjo” Paterson and Adam Lindsay Gordon.

It has regrettably to be said that Scotland hasn't done too well by our poet: he is not nearly well enough known even here in the Borders, but ever since his first book, “Fair Girls and Gray Horses,” was published in 1898 out there in Sydney, succeeding editions have been called for, the last one coming out in 1958 (sixty years after the first edition) and George Ogilvie tells me that royalties are still coming in from the sale of this book.

Another book of his poems published around that time, a book entitled “Saddle for a Throne,” was given such V.I.P. treatment by its Australian publisher<sup>12</sup> that he came himself by plane to spend three or four hours at Ashkirk with Will in order to finalise certain details, and he left via Turnhouse that same evening on his journey back to Australia.

Will Ogilvie's Australian poetry is in the tradition of the Bush balladists. It presents quite a contrast in style to the style of his Border verse and one cannot but wonder at the poet's versatility. If you are interested a little in the matter of poetic influence you may trace here something of Kipling. What Kipling was to the old Indian Empire, and what Robert Service was to the Yukon, Will Ogilvie was to the Australian Bush.

These verses are not typical of the Ogilvie we know, but they are typical of the Ogilvie they still know and read in Australia today.

“His Epitaph” tells of a simple grave on an old Bush racecourse; just a white rail, weather worn and thin, and on it the rough-hewn legend: “He Alwas Rod to Win.”

Some brave, brown-handed comrade who has learned the rider's worth  
Has carved those rough words o'er him for the eyes of all the earth;  
And though few may chance to pass him as he lies in simple state,  
Those few will hold him honoured by the friendship of his mate,  
And when, in Life's keen struggle, we shall fight for inside place,  
When they crowd us at the corner and we drop from out the race,  
When the ringing hoofs go forward and the cheering greets the best,  
And the prize for the winner and the red spurs for the rest,  
May we find some true-heart comrade, when they've filled the last clods in  
Who will carve these words above us—HE ALWAS ROD TO WIN. <sup>13</sup>

You might think that roughing it in sheep-station life in the Bush was an unusual kind of preparation for his career as poet and journalist, but it was the sort of background many an armchair writer would have given a great deal to have had.

Thinking of the appeal of Australia in retrospect, Will wrote: “It is early morning on the plains below the Queensland border, after the warm semi-tropical night. In the east there is a ruby flush in the sky, every moment widening the day. The long barley grass dripping with dew, brushes boot and stirrup, and the scent of the eucalyptus steals to the very heart. The quaint twisted stems of the gum trees look even quainter, more bizarre than ever in the dim light, and there is no beauty, as the Englishman’s eye is trained to beauty, but only this strange, weird, bewitching charm that is hard to express. Suddenly from the vine trees, a burst of warbling melody—the magpies calling to the dawn, and round and round your horse’s feet flutters the black wagtail, the ‘shepherd’s companion’ of the Bush, flying on ahead, then waiting or fluttering back as though to lead you on to the unexplored beauties of the plains.”

True, he learned a lot about droving, but he learned a lot too about observation and about writing, during those Australian years. Some idea of the dimensions of a sheep ranch out there when the country was still young and undeveloped, may be gathered again from Will’s own words from “My Life in the Open.”

“The writer has helped to muster 30,000 shorn wethers and to drive them ten miles to the drafting yards. The dust set whirling by so many thousand sheep can be better imagined than described, and the great flock moved slowly forward through a heavy yellow twilight with a fence upon one side and the horsemen and sixteen good sheepdogs on the other. When the last of the mob went leaping through the gateway of the paddock, the leaders were being steadied up to the second gate four miles away.”

“This is all fenced country, but the paddocks are of course of exceptional extent. The writer has been in one field which was a square of fifteen miles on every fence, and has frequently mustered sheep in another in which each of the fences measured twelve miles, and has ridden round a third enclosed by a fence which was sixty-four miles long.”

The Australian Bush of Will’s day was a land of extremes. There were the extreme droughts when countless animals would perish for want of water: and there were the extreme rains which sent the great rivers down in roaring flood, turning the river roads along which the sheep and cattle were driven from one station to another, into veritable swamps and quagmires. Will’s Australian poems are descriptive of the hard life of the drover, the squatter and the swagman. Remembering him as we knew him it is hard to imagine how he fitted in to this kind of life, but there is no doubt that he was equal to its demands and reflecting on his experiences there he could say:

“Looking back dispassionately upon dusty days and starry nights spent upon the river roads, allowing for all their sin and sorrow, their hours of anxiety and sleepless care, I can yet say with the utmost truth that there is a charm about them for which one looks in vain in the narrow streets and roads of civilization: and the heart of a rover

turns incessantly to the ripple of the horse-bells, and the gleam of the red camp-fires, and to the toiling overlanders who ride with oath and jest upon the Open Road.”

He himself knew what it was to rough it. The life was hard: and the comforts few. He records that on one occasion he rode forty miles on horseback to get a doctor for a sick child. Having got to the doctor’s house he gave him directions to the home of the sick bairn, stayed overnight to rest his horse and rode back again the following morning. Those were days before radio, and before the flying doctor!

The poetry he produced in those early days is of the stuff of the ballad that can be read round the hearthside, and if necessary handed down as our old Border ballads were, by oral tradition. This is a test that would find much modern poetry “weighed in the balances and found wanting.”

There can be no doubt that Australia claimed Ogilvie in his youth, and indeed a modern Australian literary critic says that “Australia got the best of him,” an assertion that might be disputed by many of my readers. Something of that country’s influence on Will is seen in the following lines from “The Australian”:

I have woven a verse from the glory  
Australia sheds on her plains:  
I have stolen her heart for a story  
And crossed it with rowel and reins.  
I have gathered a song for the starlight  
On camps where her cattlemen lie,  
With shining spurred feet in the firelight  
And swarthy bare brows to the sky

I have stood by her shoulder in battle,  
Crossed swords with the floodfall and drought,  
Laughed in with her overland cattle,  
And sung with her camps going out.  
Her mystical spell is around me,  
Above me her blue banner reels,  
And her beauty has bought me and bound me  
A slave to her chariot wheels.

But his slavery to Australia was short lived, and the call, which, according to Roger Quin,<sup>14</sup> none can gainsay, reached Will and he came home to the place he loved best, and quickly settled down to the life of a free-lance writer. He lived by his pen, and soon the ballads of the Bush were replaced by the poems and songs of the Borderland.

Were I asked to enclose in an endless cord  
The fields to my heart most dear,

Where the happiest memories still lie stored  
And the best-loved ghosts appear:  
I would carry that cord from Yeavinging Bell  
Over glidder and bank and glen,  
By Colledge Water and Carter Fell  
To the crest of Ettrick Pen:  
And from Ettrickhead to Fairnilee  
And across the Tweed to the Eildons three,  
And on by level and linn and lea  
To within a league of the grey North Sea,  
And to Yeavinging Bell again.

His son George describes something of his father's way of working: "Every day as soon as he had finished breakfast and read prayers, he sat down with pad and pencil. He usually started with a couplet; just two rhyming lines of carefully chosen words expressing some thought which had taken his fancy." Sometimes he would carry straight on and finish the poem, but more often he would go out and have a walk in the garden before returning to complete what he had started. Once the thing was finalised to his satisfaction, he would write out a fair copy in his bold, clear handwriting. He never used a typewriter, and so legible was his script that his work was never refused on that score. As soon as the poem appeared in print, he would cut it out and paste it in a book, then destroy the original—so there were few manuscripts to be found in his own writing. The Edinburgh manuscript museum has recently purchased photo-copies of some of Will's originals from a Sydney museum.

Well, it was about this time that Will wrote his long and delectable riding ballad "Whaup o' the Rede" (1909). It is a thousand pities that this ballad is not more widely known and read. Some years ago I asked a few young people of my acquaintance to read it and they were surprised and delighted when they did so. I also brought it to the notice of the B.B.C. who thought it too long and a bit old fashioned. I invite you to compare it with the new fashion in poetry.

It is perhaps 'The Whaup', more than anything else that Will wrote which establishes his great love for the Borderland. In the foreword to the book the author refers to it as "a simple arid rugged song in simple words". But all who are familiar with it will know that while simplicity may be a suitable word for the style and the construction, the language is delectable and the powers of description those of a man in love with his subject.

He says that the book was written "from the fulness of a heart that loves every leaf and grass blade on the Borders, and it is written for those understanding people whose heritage is the memory and legend that wraps romance around the Marches."<sup>15</sup>

"If it brings to them anything of the freshness of those glorious hills among which its scenes are laid, anything of the spirit of those stirring days in which our

forefathers fought and rode, anything of the lights and shadows that roll unceasingly across the slopes of Cheviot and down the Ettrick valley, it has not been written in vain.”

It follows in the order of the “Lay of the Last Minstrel” and “Marmion”. The story is a traditional one of a raid by the Scotts of Harden into the territory of the English Nevilles. After a fierce skirmish, a young child, a baby boy is found among the spoils the Scotts have taken. He is brought back to Kirkhope, and adopted by the “Flower of Yarrow” who brings the child up as her own. As he grows to manhood it is evident that there is more of the minstrel in him than the warrior, and the songs he sings are as gentle as the poet who created them:

“I have given thee a rose  
Lady, O my lady!  
Let thy heart around it close:  
Other hands may bring thee flowers,  
Grown in richer garden bowers,  
None so sweet as this sweet hour’s  
Lady O my lady!”

But the lady in question is for none of this sloppy stuff:

“Love always love, the maiden cried,  
Tis a paltry word in a world so wide;  
Ah, if I were a Scott I would tune the strings  
To a bolder note and to braver things.”

Then stung by the scornful words “the Whaup” takes his harp and renders something more to the lady’s liking:

Ho for the blades of Harden!  
Ho for the driven kye!  
The broken gate and the lance’s hate  
And a banner red on the sky!  
The rough road runs by the Carter:  
The white foam creams on the rein;  
Ho for the blades of Harden!  
“There will be moonlight again!”

Most of Will Ogilvie’s Border poetry appeared about this time in his career—“The Land We Love” coming out in 1910 and being largely devoted to his Border verse.

Through every line of them shines a deepening love for the land of his birth.

There’s a spell in this land of the marches  
In this Border that gave us our birth,  
In this spot where the Heaven’s wide arch is  
Spread blue o’er the best of the earth.

'Tis the shrine where our hearts keep returning  
Wherever our feet may be led;  
All our love on that altar lies burning  
All our song-wreaths around it are spread.

But there is another aspect of his work which has to be taken into account and that is the great volume of verse which sprang from his love of horses. He was the bard of the Buccleuch Hunt and, his four books, "Gallopings Shoes," "Scattered Scarlet," "Over the Grass" and "A Handful of Leather," all of which appeared in the Twenties, to be followed in 1932 by his "Collected Sporting Verse," literally breathe his pleasure while out in the open on horseback.

Miss Wendy Ogilvie says of her father: "In practical matters, he was never any good with his hands in mechanical things. In all his long life he never learned which way to turn a screw, and to see him wielding a hammer was a pathetic sight. He cut the grass at Kirklea with a little pull-push hand mower, but he couldn't oil it or set the blades. When it would longer work he got another." But then she adds: "He had sensitive hands which was the secret of his success with horses."

During the 1914–18 War this skill was put to good use when he was offered a job after his own heart at a Remount Depot run by the artist G. D. Armour in Wiltshire. Here, raw horses from Canada were broken-in for use by the British Army, and Will was absolutely in his element. This association also led to the artist and the poet collaborating in the verse/illustration field, contributing every week to the pages of "Punch" which was then in its heyday.

Now I should like to say a little about the poetry of Will Ogilvie, and at the risk of being called presumptuous, about poetry in general. First of all we have to recognise that there are different kinds of poetry. I suppose for most of us our first awareness of it was found in the nursery rhymes of our childhood. For me, next came Edward Lear and Eugene Field, and then, thanks to Robert Wood, then headmaster of Wilton School, Will Ogilvie. Mr Wood gave us "The Raiders," etc. just as they appeared in the "Scotsman": the strong rhythmic stanzas making an immediate appeal to most of us.

What achieves most recognition in the world of poetry today is as much as of contrast with Will's work as we could possibly imagine. It is not now fashionable to use rhyme and rhythm: neither is it fashionable to say what you mean, but as in other art disciplines to convey your meaning more by impressions, presented obliquely at that, and not, it seems, coming to any recognisable conclusions. On this subject it is interesting to quote what Hugh MacDiarmid said about Will Ogilvie in a magazine article, discussing the traditional character of Will's poetry:—

"It may be worthwhile to cultivate a blue rose or a black pansy, but even if these are achieved, they will not supersede the common daisy and it is the recurrence of the familiar beauties of Nature, each in its true season that is far more to be prized than

any novelty. Fashions come and fashions go, but Mr Ogilvie's love for Scotland and the joys of the open air give his work a basis beyond all changes of fashion." Knowing the nature of MacDiarmid's own work, and the devastation he often meted out to lesser breeds, I consider that to be a sincere and generous tribute, to a writer who adopted a style entirely different to his own.

Will Ogilvie had his own views on the subject of modern poetry. When sending the manuscript of one of his last books, "From Sunset to Dawn," published in 1947, he wrote to the publishers Angus and Robertson Ltd., Sydney:—

"Poetry seems to be finding its feet (apt phrase) in Australia, but it is a different kind of stuff to that which Lawson,<sup>16</sup> 'Banjo',<sup>17</sup> and I used to contribute to 'The Bulletin' in the '90's. It is probably something much more valuable—I don't know. Like a lot that is done over here, it seems to have little sense in it, and no music, and is too often just rather indifferent prose cut into short lines."

Sir Arthur Quiller Couch said in the foreword to one edition of his "Oxford Book of English Poetry"—"Be it allowed that these present times are dark, yet what are our poets for if they cannot hearten the crew with auspices of daylight?" That is the kind of poetry Will wrote! There was nothing obscure about it and it sang. I have been heartened to hear from a friend who is an art teacher that many painters are turning now from the innovatory kind of work that has attracted them in recent years and that they are reverting to the more traditional approach where craftsmanship is not obscured by invention. I sincerely hope that this trend might also be reflected in the sphere of poetry.

We have said a good deal about rhythm and rhyme in relation to Will's verse, but I feel that perhaps the most powerful element in his writing is the imagery he uses to such good effect. He saw more in the things of Nature than most of us see. And he had the ability to communicate to us what he saw. As a writer of verse, he was a superb craftsman, never putting a foot wrong either in construction or vocabulary, but like few verse-makers his lines were full of cameos that could only be classified as poetry. To you and me, the wind, for example, well, the wind just blows: but to Will, the wind is:—

"The ghost shadows going down the glen on stealthy feet"<sup>18</sup>

"A wind from Lammermoor, with the tramp of trooping horses"

"The wind your organ music it murmurs through the wheat"

"The night wind whimpered on the crags"

"Oh a wind came from Westward blowing fetterless and free with a wail of weeping women and their children at their knee."<sup>19</sup>

Next time you are unable to sleep for the souging of the wind, let your imagination go and see if you can better Will. To him, the very winds were evocative of life in its myriad aspects. Or take the kind of weather we have recently experienced:—

“A snowstorm drifting down the Bowmont vale,  
A little hour ago made Cheviot white:  
And left him glistening in his silver mail,  
The day’s last champion in the lists with night.”<sup>20</sup>

Or: “The snow’s own sunlit diamonds—  
December in her diamonds, the fairest of the fair,”<sup>21</sup>

Or: “The snow, a white flower flung at the feet of the world.”<sup>22</sup>

And think of how he sees in each river its own peculiar character: of Teviot, he says:

“This, the Border’s hoyden daughter  
Laughter through the lowland spills”

and in a delightful piece of alliteration equal to anything Edgar Allan Poe achieved in his “Raven.”:—

“Silver shines her sunlit shoulder  
Silver sounds her cymbal call.”

Of Tweed he writes:

“With laughter o’er the pebbles,  
With love words through the grass”

And Ettrick:

“An azure cloaked lover that rides through my dreams”

And Colledge Water:

“The secret ways of the hills are mine”

as anyone who has climbed up the sides of the Hen Hole will agree.

But what of Till?

“My tawny waves are muffled drums  
That beat beside the warrior in his grave.  
My step is slow and measured as becomes  
A mourner of the brave.”

It was surely his consuming love for the Border country that made such a keen observer of its natural scene, and such a devoted chronicler of its beauties.

There is yet another aspect of his writing that we have not considered, however, and that the fact that he was exceedingly fond of playing with words, and with contriving light-hearted rhymes which graced the columns of the “Evening News” between the Wars. He did not sign these offerings but used the simple non-de-plume “O”. Maybe you would like a sample; they are quite brief as a rule:—

Although my endings fit well, I can't write verse a bit well  
I'm not an Edith Sitwell, a Yeats or de la Mare.<sup>23</sup>  
The critics, and no wonder, pull all my work asunder  
And since it's full of blunder, I'm with the critics there.

The Muse, though long I've sought her, just holds me up for slaughter;  
I'm not a John Drinkwater, a Davies or a Noyes.<sup>24</sup>  
On metric fields I shy browse, I write no odes to eyebrows,  
I'm no use to the highbrows, I've neither power nor poise.

But though my hair grows whiter I still remain a fighter,  
And hope to be a writer before I die, and then  
Let others for their cheering find on my tomb appearing  
"By constant persevering, he learned to push a pen!"

"On my tomb appearing!" That raises a question. Where is Will H. Ogilvie's grave? The answer is that following cremation his ashes were scattered where perhaps you might expect them to be scattered—on the hill road to Robertson, a fitting conclusion to a life which bubbled over with love for the heathery slopes of the Ale watergate.

I think it is rather regrettable that Will received so little recognition in the land of his birth. With such a volume of work to his name there are fields to browse in for all of us. True his books are largely out of print—but many of them are in the reference room at the library, and several also in the lending department, and if we keep asking for them perhaps the staff there will be on the look out to add to the titles they already have.

When Will was nearly 90, Jim Corrie, some time editor of the "Southern Reporter," and I set a project in motion to try to obtain an honour for the aged poet. I drafted a letter and took it for signature to among others Hugh MacDiarmid, Norman McCaig, Sydney Goodsir Smith, Compton Mackenzie and Moray McLaren.<sup>25</sup> None refused, all were enthusiastic. The letter was sent to the Secretary of State for Scotland (then John Maclay)<sup>26</sup> who acknowledged it and said representations would be made. Approaches were also made to Harold MacMillan:<sup>27</sup> I personally wrote to the Duchess of Gloucester who as a child had been in Mrs Ogilvie's Girl Guide company. All were sympathetic, but nothing came of it. The O.B.E.'s<sup>28</sup> went to the Beatles.<sup>29</sup>

But the best way to honour Will's memory is to read and to memorise his verse, and to be thankful that we had among us one who could so melodiously sing the praises of the Borderland.

The wolds of wild Northumberland, that skirt the Roman Wall  
The towering hills of Cumberland that call, and call, and call;  
The corries dark of Cheviot, the heathered slopes of Rede  
The grassy haughs of Teviot, the silver bends of Tweed.

The spell of Yarrow's mystery, the charm of Ettrick's glen  
The Peel towers with their history of bold and bucklered men;  
This country to the core of it, is dear and doubly dear  
The legends and the lore of it, the raider and the spear.

Let others love the laziness of gentle southern rills  
For me the tumbled craziness of brown burns from the hills;  
The scattered homesteads, each of them, the shepherd's cots far flung  
The strong men and the speech of them, lilting Border tongue.

—————:—————

The Patriarch of our Borderland is no longer with us, but the sweet songs and poems he penned will ever remain with us in his beloved Land of the Marches.

© 1979 William Landles, Scottish Borders, Scotland.

Reprinted with the permission of the Landles estate. First appeared in the *Hawick Archaeological Transactions* 1979, pp. 25–34. Reproduced in February 2019. Stored at the Will H. Ogilvie Memorial Trust website.

William LANDLES, not be confused with the sculptor relative Bill LANDLES, was a great writer and poet and wrote 'Thought for the week' for the *Hawick News* for over forty years.

## End notes

---

- 1 The author is William LANDLES, as different to relative Bill LANDLES, sculptor.
- 2 Charles Villiers STANFORD (1852–1924) was an Irish composer and conductor.  
Gerald Graham PEEL (1877–1937) was an English composer.  
Montague PHILLIPS (1885–1969) was a British composer.
- 3 Monday, 28 January 1901.
- 4 British Broadcasting Corporation.
- 5 Fettes College, Edinburgh.
- 6 Rugby was a very important sport to those of the Hawick area where this article was written.
- 7 North-western section of the Colony of New South Wales.
- 8 Warrego River, going from Queensland, through New South Wales.
- 9 John CLAY.
- 10 Residence near Ashkirk, Selkirk, Scottish Borders.
- 11 *Fair girls and gray horses*, published by The Bulletin Company, Sydney, Australia.
- 12 Bushman and businessman, R. M. WILLIAMS.
- 13 From the poem 'His epitaph' in Will's anthology, *Fair girls and gray horses* (1898).
- 14 Roger QUIN (b. 1850 Dumfries) was from Galashiels, Scottish Borders.
- 15 The Scottish Marches was the cross-border area used by English and Scottish raiders.
- 16 Australian poet Henry LAWSON.
- 17 Australian poet Andrew Barton 'Banjo' PATERSON.
- 18 From the poem 'There's a clean wind blowing' in Will's anthology, *The overlander, and other verses* (1913).
- 19 From the poem 'A wind from the west' in Will's anthology, *Fair girls and gray horses* (1898).
- 20 From the poem 'Sunset' in Will's anthology, *My life in the open* (1910).
- 21 From the poem 'December's diamonds' in Will's anthology, *My life in the open* (1910).
- 22 From the poem 'The snow' in Will's anthology, *My life in the open* (1910).
- 23 Edith Louisa SITWELL (1887–1964) was an English poet.  
William Butler YEATS (1865–1939) was an Irish poet.  
Walter John de la MARE (1873–1956) was an English poet.
- 24 John DRINKWATER (1882–1937) was an English poet and dramatist.  
William Henry DAVIES (1871–1940) was a Welsh poet and writer.  
Alfred NOYES (1880–1958) was an English poet, balladist, and short-story writer.
- 25 Christopher Murray GRIEVE (1892–1978), known as Hugh MacDIARMID, was a Scottish poet, journalist, and political figure.  
Norman Alexander MacCAIG (1910–1996) was a Scottish poet.  
Sydney Goodsir SMITH (1915–1975) was a New Zealand-born Scottish poet, artist, and novelist.  
Compton MACKENZIE (1883–1972) was an English-born Scottish writer.  
Moray David Shaw McLAREN (1901–1971) was a Scottish broadcaster.
- 26 John Scott MACLAY (1905–1992) was a Scottish politician.
- 27 Maurice Harold MACMILLAN (1894–1986) was Prime Minister of the United Kingdom from 1957 to 1963.
- 28 Orders of the British Empire.
- 29 Beatles were an English rock band formed in 1960 (members John LENNON, Paul McCARTNEY, George HARRISON and Ringo STARR).