

These ten years of the Journal of James Robertson were transcribed by the late Dr J.B. Loudon. What follows are his words and work. Another 20 years of the Journal during the time that Robertson lived in Orkney remain to be transcribed and annotated.

### INTRODUCTION

James Robertson was born in 1799 and died in 1876. He was the second child, and the second of the four sons, of Duncan Robertson, tenant farmer at Milton of Invervack, which is in the parish of Blair Atholl and Struan in Perthshire. His mother was Margaret Robertson, eldest daughter of James Robertson of Kindrochit, a small landed estate two or three miles north of Invervack and in the same parish.

He was forty two years old when he was appointed Sheriff Substitute of North Argyll in March 1842 and came to live in Tobermory on the Island of Mull. He remained there until March 1846 when he was appointed Sheriff Substitute of Orkney.

Sheriff Robertson, or JR as he called himself, wrote the first entry in what he himself always referred to as his Journal on Tuesday 15 November 1842. From that day, almost without fail, he wrote a daily entry until November 1875, a short time before he died in Orkney at the age of 76 in January 1876. The Journal survives as five leather bound volumes. The first volume opens with an entry for Tuesday 15 November 1842 and ends on 31 January 1847.

'The Mull Journal' proper consists of about four fifths of the first volume, and runs from November 1842 until he left Argyll for Edinburgh in March 1846. The remaining one fifth of the first volume deals with his first ten months in Orkney and forms no part of this transcription. But it seemed appropriate to include the entries describing the week he spent in Edinburgh before leaving for what he termed 'the far north'; the transcription ends with his embarkation for Orkney from

Granton early on the morning of 13 March 1846 and his arrival at Kirkwall on the following day.

James Robertson's time on Mull was clearly marked off from those parts of his life which went before and came after, though he probably did not see it quite like that himself. For us, reading what he wrote more than 150 years ago, it is possible to separate the Mull Journal from what came later and make it into a clear and distinct entity.

Much of the Mull Journal is at first sight distinctly boring. This reflects the extent to which JR was bored, lonely, idle and underemployed.

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#### THE MANUSCRIPT.

The first Volume of the Journal contains about 200,000 words written on about 500 pages. The daily entries vary from not much more than 10 words to over 1000; they are written on unruled and unnumbered pages, each of which has a printed very fine line giving a one and a half inch left hand margin. The pages are not numbered. The first 12 pages are ruled and have a finger index, with the alphabet in two red capital letters per page; the initials I, Q and X are omitted and Mc has been added between M and N.

The first Volume is a book measuring about nine and a half inches high, six inches wide and one and a half inches thick. It is bound in heavy boards, with reddish brown reversed calf on the spine and at the four corners. The spine has five bands but is unlettered. There is no indication of where the first Volume was made or purchased, but the paper is watermarked 'J Whatman 1838' and there is evidence that the book was bought in that year.

The second Volume is very similar to the first but is slightly larger, measuring about ten and a quarter inches high, eight and a half inches wide and just over one and a half inches thick. It is bound in heavy boards, with dark red leather on the spine and at the four corners. The spine has six slightly

incised bands but is unlettered. The first front endpaper has a label which reads as follows: 'Manufactured by Cowan & Co, Edinburgh; 3 quires Large Y N Post, March 1846'. There is no indication of where the book was purchased; the paper is laid and has no watermarks.

Entries which begin at the top of a page consist of the day, date, month and year; the same is true of the first day of each month, whether it occurs at the top of a page or somewhere else on the page. Otherwise each entry is headed with no more than the day and date. In all cases the heading is written centrally at the start of the entry. Below it the first line of the entry almost invariably consists of a record of the day's wind direction and weather. The remainder of the day's entry, be it however short or long, begins on the second line.

More often than not JR wrote up his Journal for each day late that night or on the following morning, but he often left the task until later, usually the following day. Sometimes he wrote up a number of days at one time, from memory or notes or a combination of the two. He used a simple code to distinguish these two varieties of entry.

When he wrote up an entry on the day to which it refers he made the mark of a cross before the date which could be shown thus: 'x'; when he wrote up the entry later he made the mark of a circle which could be shown thus: 'o'.

This was his invariable practice but it seems pointless to attempt to reproduce his code except in a few very special instances. Sometimes he wrote up the first part of an entry on the day in question, completed the entry on a later occasion, and for some reason thought it important to record that fact. A good, very simple and even trivial example is the entry for Thursday 17 January 1850. The original entry reads:

*x Thursday 17*

*E by S. Rain & sleet in morning. Fine afternoon.  
Pipes free. Court day. Case of dog killing Sheep  
at Stove in Sanday.*

*Judl Declarations of Parties in aliment case of Thomson agt John Halcrow - a very handsome couple - he 27 she 28 years of age - Patton & Ranken agents. We are going to dine wt the Spences at Eastbank. o Dined at Eastbank wt the Heddles, Scarths, Logies & Bains. A very good party - playing at Bagatelle & very merry which I did not anticipate - home at 12.*

The transcription is as follows:

*Thursday 17 January 1850*

*E by S. Rain and sleet in morning. Fine afternoon. Pipes free.*

*Court day. Case of dog killing sheep at Stove in Sanday.*

*Judicial Declarations of Parties in aliment case of Thomson v John Halcrow. A very handsome couple, he 27, she 28 years of age; Patton and Ranken agents.*

*We are going to dine with the Spences at Eastbank. o Dined at Eastbank with the Heddles, Scarths, Logies and Bains. A very good party; playing at Bagatelle and very merry which I did not anticipate. Home at 12.*

### Correspondence.

James Robertson's Journal had its origins, as he himself describes, in his need to keep a note of the letters he wrote. His summaries of his letters remain an important element in the text. He uses a simple device to make it easy to find the names of those to whom he has written; he puts their names projecting into the left hand margin of each page so that they are easily visible and instantly distinguishable from the remainder of the text. He also usually writes their names slightly larger and with more emphasis than the text. These devices are easy to write but exceedingly tedious to reproduce. I have therefore adopted my own convention to make the names reasonably different from the rest of the text. This is by putting his summary of each letter on a separate line or

a separate paragraph, depending on its length. In addition, where JR puts names in the left margin to indicate persons to whom he has written, sometimes with the words 'wrote to' or 'also wrote' in the preceding main text, I have decided to use the two words 'Wrote to' in every case without exception at the beginning of a new line or section of text so that those two words stand out, at least to some extent in the same way, though admittedly not as effectively, as JR's own way of using the margin as what may be called a 'letter marker'.

In the Journal Manuscript he uses no similar device to mark the Letters he received. He refers to some of them in the text but quite often he is found writing a reply to a letter which has not been mentioned before.

### Abbreviations.

JR used 'w<sup>t</sup>' for 'with', 'Ed<sup>r</sup>' for Edinburgh, 'L<sup>r</sup>' for 'Letter', 'Vice Adm<sup>l</sup> Sub<sup>te</sup>' for 'Vice Admiral Substitute', 'Evg' for 'Evening', '@' for 'about', 'thro' for 'through', 'ackg rect' for 'acknowledging receipt' and a large number of other abbreviations and contractions, some of them more or less standardised, some his own invention or habit, others improvised as he wrote. In almost all these cases the abbreviations have been ignored and the words transcribed in full; the only exceptions have been when it seems important to convey the flavour of the entry and when this is better done by an exact reproduction of the original script.

In some cases JR always uses a full stop after initials; for example he always writes 'W.S.' for 'Writer to the Signet', 'S.S.C.' for 'Solicitor before the Supreme Court' and sometimes uses 'V.A.S.' for 'Vice Admiral Substitute'; in all cases I have omitted the full stops because they take up too much room in a transcription made on a machine.

Where JR uses 'ag<sup>t</sup>', 'agst' or 'æ' in referring to legal cases, as for example, 'Heddle agst Tankerness' or 'Heddle æ Tankerness', I have decided in all cases to use instead the standard modern abbreviation 'v.' for 'versus', so that both the examples given would be transcribed as 'Heddle v. Tankerness'.

Difficulties arise with abbreviations for a number of legal terms, some of which I am not yet able to identify. It is easy

to see that 'Exn' is 'Examination' and 'Wss' is 'Witness', especially when seen in context. I have learnt that 'Intertor' is short for 'Interlocutor' and 'Seqn' is short for 'Sequestration' but there are others which remain mysterious to me.

#### Ampersands.

JR uses his own version of ampersands throughout his Journal. All have been replaced by the word 'and' except in the names of firms and references to Acts of Parliament and the like. In addition, JR repeatedly uses his own version of '&c' or 'etc'; these occur very frequently in his summaries of his personal letters to members of his family and to friends. In all cases these are reproduced as '&c' in the transcription.

#### Brackets.

Square brackets are invariably editorial; in all cases round brackets are JR's.

#### Names.

JR habitually uses initials, contractions or special abbreviations for some names and for the names of certain persons, such as 'Dond Edr' or 'Dond London' for his brother Donald, depending on whether he was in Edinburgh or London; 'Wm Toby' for his brother William in Tobermory; 'Jas Edra' for 'James Stewart Robertson of Edradynate'; 'W H F' for 'William Fotheringhame'; 'Tanks' for 'Tankerness'; 'A R I' for 'Alexander Robertson Irvine', usually known as 'Sandy Irvine'; 'John Banchor' for JR's brother John who was a tenant of a farm at Banchor, near Kingussie; 'John R.' for his brother-in-law 'John Robertson' who lived in Glasgow; 'Wm B.' for 'William Balfour'.

'B of T' may either be Baikie of Tankerness [who is mostly referred to as Tankerness] or, more usually, Balfour of Trenabie; one is much more dependent on the context in distinguishing between their wives, since Mrs B of T is sometimes used quite ambiguously.

In some cases these abbreviations have been ignored and 'Wm B', for example, is always reproduced as 'Wm Balfour' or 'William Balfour'. In other cases, such as 'Jas Edra' or 'A R

I', the flavour of the relationship is better conveyed by using JR's abbreviations.

In all these cases first names, christian names and nicknames have been included in the Index. Similarly the place names by which individuals were known are given separately in the Index. Thus James Baikie of Tankerness is indexed under Baikie and under Tankerness, while his wife is indexed under Baikie as Mrs Eleanor Baikie of Tankerness, under Tankerness as Lady Tankerness and under Wemyss as the former Eleanor Wemyss. Heddle may also appear in the text as Melsetter and David Balfour as Trenaby.

Some individuals who appear in the 1851 Census are entered under their name or names together with those other individuals who are shown as members of their household on Census night.

Certain individuals who figure prominently in the Journal are provided with biographical notes in the Index. Some of these are derived from or based on entries in the Dictionary of National Biography and similar sources; others have been compiled either from information provided in the Journal or found elsewhere.

### Footnotes and Observations.

#### Dates.

1 as JR did them 2 as I do them 3 date references in footnotes etc

#### Spellings.

when to correct and when not to correct and need to use footnote sometimes to make sure reader realises the spelling was his and not an error of mine. His variations in the spellings of some words, especially personal and place names, may be of interest; for example, he always spells 'Finstown' as 'Phinstown' and 'South Ronaldsay' as 'So Ronaldshay. But one or two of his idiosyncrasies have been silently corrected - e.g. favor, favorable and accross. See also the Index entries for Gold/Gould; Berstane/Birstane/Birston; Greenbank/Grainbank; Grahames Hall

Capitals.

His usage has mostly been followed in order to give an air of authenticity and flavour, and because they sometimes indicate the importance of a word or concept. For example, he always writes 'Evening' but almost always writes 'morning; he always writes 'Court day' and hardly ever 'Court Day'.

His use of capitals in summaries of letters is hard to reproduce because he uses them as indicators of new topics as if following a full stop when they in fact follow a gap; here I have mostly, but not always, put in a semi-colon and removed the capital . Here is an example from 470426; the original reads as follows:

*Chas Neaves Edr 10 @ destitution - we have little or none -  
Ackg £20 for occasional poor  
Donald Edr 8 @ The Duke & his people - Damages - My mother's  
Removal - Trip to Flaws &c*

My transcription of these two sentences reads as follows:

*Wrote 10 [pages] to Charles Neaves [in] Edinburgh about  
destitution; we have little or none; acknowledging £20 for  
occasional poor.  
Wrote 8 [pages] to Donald [in] Edinburgh about The Duke and  
his people; damages; my mother's removal; trip to Flaws &c.*

JR used gaps and dashes in his text, some of which are important as revealing his attitudes or feelings about a particular topic, especially when seen in the context of the style of his handwriting at that time, which is may be large or small, hurried or measured, depending on a variety of circumstances which can only be guessed at. The temptation to reproduce these gaps and dashes has been resisted, because cold typescript or print cannot recreate the impression they make on the reader of the original manuscript.

An example may be given from 25 April 1847, otherwise 470425.

The Original reads:

*Mr John Pollexfen came yesterday by the Steamer & was in church - He is a thin tall & Gentlemanlike man - a clergyman of the English Church - & about 30.*

The Transcript reads:

*Mr John Pollexfen came yesterday by the Steamer and was in church. He is a thin, tall and gentlemanlike man, a clergyman of the English Church and about 30.*

JR also used gaps and dashes to indicate complete changes of topic. These have been used as the basis for creating paragraphs which JR did not himself employ. Break up of text into topic paragraphs to eliminate his use of big gaps and dashes the visual effects of which when in MS are very hard to reproduce in print.

The entry for Tuesday 1 June 1847 appears as follows in the Original:

*S. Fine warm day. Light breeze. Breakfasted at seven and left for Stromness exactly at half past 7 in Magnus Heddles Gig, Robert Muir driver & with a new & good pony called "Jolly". Rob watered the pony at Phinstown, & I walked on to Stennis - Arrived at Stromness soon after 10. Held a Meeting of the Local Destitution Committee which was attended by the Revd Mr Stobbs, Drs Hamilton & Garson, Messrs Ross, Wyllie, John Robertson, Clouston, Brown & two or three more whose names I do not know. - Their report was satisfactory - Held Court - 8 cases in Roll. Interlude of Harvey agt Ross. Took precognition in Theft of Coals Flotta case - Lunched, & came away soon after 2. Arrived at home  $\frac{1}{4}$  before 5.*

In the Transcript it is spread out as follows:

*S. Fine warm day. Light breeze. Breakfasted at seven and left for Stromness exactly at half past 7 in Magnus Heddle's Gig, Robert Muir driver, and with a new and good pony called 'Jolly'. Rob watered the pony at Phinstown and I walked on to Stennis.*

*Arrived at Stromness soon after 10. Held a Meeting of the Local Destitution Committee which was attended by the Revd Mr Stobbs, Drs Hamilton and Garson, Messrs Ross, Wyllie, John Robertson, Clouston, Brown and two or three more whose names I do not know. Their report was satisfactory.*

*Held Court; 8 cases in Roll.*

*Interlude of Harvey v. Ross.*

*Took precognition in Theft of Coals Flotta case.*

*Lunched and came away soon after 2. Arrived at home a quarter before 5.*