

## A. J. Aitken

### James Murray, Master of Scots (1996)<sup>1</sup>

Edited by Caroline Macafee, 2015

How to cite this paper (adapt to the desired style): Aitken, A. J. (1996, 2015) 'James Murray, Master of Scots', in †A. J. Aitken, ed. Caroline Macafee, 'Collected Writings on the Scots Language' (2015), [online] Scots Language Centre [http://medio.scotslanguage.com/library/document/aitken/James Murray, master of Scots \(1996\)](http://medio.scotslanguage.com/library/document/aitken/James_Murray_master_of_Scots_(1996)) (accessed DATE). Originally published *Review of Scottish Culture* 9 (1996), 14–34.

[<sup>14</sup>] James Murray is best known as the first and principal editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*. He has been described by a distinguished lexicographer of today as “a lexicographer greater by far than Dr Johnson and greater perhaps than any lexicographer of his own time or since in Britain, the United States or Europe” (Burchfield, 1977). He is also the founder of the modern study of Scots, both historical and descriptive. In this respect, an American scholar investigating a phenomenon of Appalachian dialect which probably originated in Scots, recently said of him, “All paths lead back to Murray.”<sup>2</sup> The same could be said of many other phenomena of Scots speech which we might like to study.

### Life

Murray was born in 1837 in Denholm, Roxburghshire, near Hawick. Both of his parents were local people and staunch members of the local Congregational Church. From them Murray got his strong religious convictions and his almost fanatical sense of duty, probity and perfectionism.

---

<sup>1</sup> [<sup>11</sup>] A slightly revised and expanded version of the first annual Scotch Malt Whisky Society lecture on Scots language, delivered in the Society's premises, The Vaults, 87 Giles Street, Leith, on 3 March, 1992. Thanks are due to the Society and to the English Language Department of the University of Edinburgh, for arranging this lecture, and to Ian Mackenzie of the School of Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh, for help with the illustrations.

Editor's note: originally published in *Review of Scottish Culture* 9 (1996), 14–34. Reproduced by kind permission of the European Ethnological Research Centre, Department of Celtic and Scottish Studies, University of Edinburgh.

Most illustrations are omitted here. These consist of photographs of Murray and his family and colleagues, part of a letter by him, extracts from *The Dialect of the Southern Counties*, and maps. AJA's simplified version of Murray's dialect map is reproduced below. He also included Grant's map of the dialect areas (largely based on Murray's) from *The Scottish National Dictionary* (Introduction, vol. I) and the dialect map from *The Concise Scots Dictionary* (p. xxxi), now the standard version, which is itself a slightly simplified version of Grant's map. The articles from Jamieson and the OED (*kemp* and related articles) are given here as figures (in the original paper, they are shown as illustrations of parts of the printed pages).

The text has been edited for uniformity of style with other Aitken papers and some bibliographical references have been expanded or added. The original page and note numbers are shown in square brackets. The change of bibliographic style means that some of the original notes have been dropped. Since digital publication does not suffer the same constraints of space as hard copy, examples are laid out more expansively, though it will sometimes be obvious that they started off as connected text in the original.

<sup>2</sup> [<sup>2</sup>] An aside by Michael Montgomery during his delivery of 'The Evolution of Verb Concord in Scots' to the Third International Conference on the Languages of Scotland, Edinburgh, 1991. Montgomery concludes his paper (1994: 94): “This [Appalachian] stage [in the history of subject-verb concord] Murray had no knowledge of, but we may believe that he would gladly have added it to a larger description of Scots, and that he would have described this last stage rather accurately, as he did the earlier stages.”

He left school at fourteen and a half and was self-taught thereafter. His career curiously followed that of another son of Denholm, John Leyden, poet, antiquary and orientalist, who died in 1811 and was also self-taught. Leyden was something of a mentor to Murray. Another of the parallels between the two is that both edited the same Middle Scots treatise *The Complaynt of Scotlande* (Leyden ed., 1801; J. Murray ed., 1872).<sup>3</sup>

At the age of seventeen and a half Murray got the post of assistant teacher in a small private school in Hawick, then at the age of twenty in 1857 he was appointed headmaster of another Hawick private school. This was what he called his “great learning time”. He was interested in foreign languages from the age of seven and in his teens he learned languages voraciously: European, Semitic, African, Polynesian, and claimed to know the basics of upwards of 25 of them (J. Murray, 1903).<sup>4</sup> At the same time he was making, as he said, “incursions into nearly all the sciences”, notably geology, botany and entomology. All this despite the fact that he had great difficulty in getting books – he learned according to whichever book came to hand and from the serial encyclopedia, John Cassell’s *Popular Educator*, which he took from the time it began appearing in 1852 when he was fifteen. His first encounter with Anglo-Saxon came in 1857, when he was twenty, in a book picked up on a stall in Leith which, he says, “opened a new world to me”.<sup>5</sup> It was not till 1861, when he was twenty-four, that his better-off antiquarian friends began ensuring him an adequate supply of books by giving or lending them to him from their own libraries.<sup>6</sup>

Almost as soon as he was settled in Hawick Murray was involving himself in local affairs – politically he was what we would now call left of centre – and he was greatly in demand as a speaker, lecturing on whichever subject he happened to be studying at the time. He was a founder member of the Hawick Archaeological Society in 1856 at the age of nineteen, and its secretary till he left Hawick eight years later. He gave an all-time record number of papers to the society, mostly on local antiquities, archaeology and botany, and from 1858 he was also lecturing and writing on<sup>[15]</sup> Scots philology, though most of this was not published.

Murray’s increasing interest in philology was partly stimulated by his attendance in the summer vacation of 1857 in Edinburgh at a course on phonetics and elocution given by Alexander Melville Bell, inventor of the system of phonetic transcription called Visible Speech. Murray became a lifelong friend of the Bell family and Melville Bell’s son, Alexander Graham Bell, was best man at his second wedding. On one of Murray’s visits to the Bells in Edinburgh he showed the boy Graham Bell how to make an electric battery, and in consequence the latter later dubbed him “the grandfather of the telephone” – Graham Bell was of course the inventor of the telephone.

---

<sup>3</sup> [3] It does not appear that Murray was aware of his namesake, Alexander Murray, another Borderer, also self-taught, a Kirkcudbrightshire shepherd who became Professor of Oriental Languages at the University of Edinburgh in 1812, dying in 1813. He was the author of *History of the European Languages* (posthumously published in 1823), unfortunately written just too early to profit from the philological revolution of the nineteenth century.

<sup>4</sup> [4] Unless otherwise noted, quotations of Murray’s own words are from this letter.

<sup>5</sup> [5] This was no doubt Thorpe (1851). It contains the text of Alfred’s translation into Anglo-Saxon of Orosius’ *History*.

<sup>6</sup> [6] After James had spoken up at an antiquarian meeting in Alnwick on the Anglo-Saxon derivations of some local names, Canon William Greenwell [of Durham] introduced himself and learned incidentally of James’ difficulty in obtaining books. “He sent me next day a large boxful from his own Library & that of the Chapter – there were Hooker and Lye & Thorpe & Thwaites, and the Heptateuch, & Durham Gospels – it was glorious! I made MS copies of several whole books” (1903: 14). (Four of the books mentioned are in, or on, Anglo-Saxon.) Subsequently, “James Douglas of Cavers (blessings on his memory) who had presented me with Raske’s Anglo-Saxon Gram., now gave me a splendid copy of the text of the *Codex Argenteus*. I analysed every word in the Gospels, prepared a complete grammar & set of paradigms, which I never published” (1903: 15). (The *Codex Argenteus* of the Gospels in Gothic is the principal surviving text of the fourth century Gothic Bible.)

In 1862 Murray married Maggie Scott, an infant schoolmistress. In 1864 they had a daughter but the baby died at the age of seven months. Maggie, who had always been delicate, was now suffering from consumption; the doctors told Murray that her only chance was to move south to a warmer climate. The furthest Murray could manage was London, where he found a job in a bank in Threadneedle Street.<sup>7</sup> This was a severe blow, because Murray's prospects in Hawick were good and he was in the middle of several exciting antiquarian projects for the Archaeological Society. Unhappily Murray's sacrifice was in vain, for Maggie Murray died in September 1865. Later he wrote, "I was left alone in London doing uncongenial work, which yet I now see was useful for the dictionary."

Of course, if he had not moved to London, he would not have had ready access to all the sources he needed for his study of the history of Scots, for which he needed a library such as that of the British Museum, and he would not have learned about the latest advances in phonetics for his description of Scots pronunciation. And he would almost certainly never have become Editor of the *Oxford English Dictionary*, and there was probably no-one else around who could have<sup>[16]</sup> launched it successfully. The study of Scots and the lexicography of English and of Scots would have been put back a generation or more.

In 1867, at the age of thirty, Murray married his second wife, Ada, who proved a marvellous support to him for the rest of his life, and was the mother of his eleven surviving children.<sup>8</sup>

As soon as he was settled down in London, Murray took up his studies again at the British Museum in his spare time, and soon also resumed work on his book on Southern Scots. Then in 1868, Melville Bell, who had come to London in 1865, introduced James as someone who knew a lot about Scots dialect to Alexander J. Ellis, another distinguished phonetician, a historian of English pronunciation and a student of modern English dialects. At once Ellis enlisted James as his helper and together they embarked on collecting specimens of dialect speech from anyone they could get hold of who spoke a non-standard dialect. One of the methods they used for doing this was eavesdropping visits to railway stations rather like Shaw's Professor Higgins (K. Murray, 1977: 75).

At this time, English philology was flourishing as never before, with all sorts of exciting work appearing, centred on the Philological Society of London. In 1868 Ellis had James elected a member of the Society and in 1869 James became a member of Council and in 1878 the President. James, a simple bank clerk, was now a member of the coterie of famous scholars who were rapidly advancing the studies of phonetics, of Old and Middle English and of dialectology, and he was its acknowledged expert on Scots. Another member of this group was the ebullient Frederick J. Furnivall, lifelong Secretary of the Philological Society, who had charge of the two million slips that had been collected for the Society's projected, though by the 1870s all but discontinued, New English Dictionary project. Furnivall was also the founder, in 1864, of the Early English Text Society, and he<sup>[17]</sup> soon engaged James in editing Scottish texts for that Society.

In late 1868, Murray completed his book on Southern Scots, but failed to find a publisher. It was rejected by, among others, Robert Chambers. It was eventually published in a slightly revised and updated version in 1873.

In 1870 came another major event in Murray's life, when he accepted the post of assistant master at Mill Hill School, a non-conformist Public School to the north of London. He was offered the post by a fellow-member of the Philological Society, Dr R. F. Weymouth, who had just become the School's Headmaster. Murray evidently revelled in the work of the school, and he was a greatly loved teacher. Though he continued editing for the Early English Text Society,

---

<sup>7</sup> [7] The Chartered Bank of India, Australia and China.

<sup>8</sup> [8] "My present very able, wise and helpful wife, a queen among women" (1903: 17).

some books he had projected failed to materialise (K. Murray, 1977:114–5). Evidently the school took up much more creative energy than the bank had.

Murray's reputation as a scholar was now very high and in 1876 he was approached by the publisher Macmillan to edit a major new dictionary of English. But Murray and Macmillan failed to agree over the scale of the proposed dictionary; Murray's shortest scale was far longer than Macmillan thought financially viable. There was also disagreement over the terms for the use by the proposed Macmillan dictionary of the Philological Society's *New English Dictionary* (NED) collection. This episode, however, served to re-energise the Philological Society's lapsed plans for their own *New English Dictionary*, later to be known as the *Oxford English Dictionary* or OED. Eventually Oxford University Press agreed to publish this, but only if Murray would edit it. So it was that work began on the dictionary in 1879 in Mill Hill in a large corrugated iron shed erected in Murray's garden, which Murray called the Scriptorium – his children called it the Scrippy –, with Murray working half-time on the Dictionary and half-time at the School. In 1885 the demands of the Dictionary compelled a move to Oxford and a change to full-time dictionary work in a new Scriptorium erected in a sunken and consequently damp position in the garden of the new house at Oxford.

Murray's new overseers, Oxford University's Delegates to the Clarendon Press, had no way of knowing that they had in their employ the most productive lexicographer of all time. So in the early years of the dictionary he was constantly pressured to reduce the scale of the Dictionary and at the same time to accelerate production – in the case of a dictionary of this kind, these are in fact mutually conflicting demands. He was also inadequately paid and underfunded and always had money worries. Yet he pushed forward with the Dictionary at the almost incredible average rate of 224 pages per annum, something like a page of three closely printed columns edited, revised and proof-read every single working day, a third as fast again as the fastest of the co-editors who later joined him. He personally edited almost half of the 15,487 pages of the Dictionary, his three co-editors between them editing the other half. This was achieved by regularly working 12 or 13 hours a day, so it is no surprise that all work except the Dictionary ceased.

Murray's only undergraduate degree was an external BA of London University of 1873, taken during his early years at Mill Hill. The first <sup>[18]</sup> of his many honorary degrees was an LLD of Edinburgh University, in 1874, in recognition of his work on Scots. His knighthood came in 1908. When he died in 1915 in his seventy-ninth year he had almost completed the letter T. Thus he failed in his often expressed wish to see the Dictionary completed before he died; this did not come about till 1928. But its completion in under 50 years is a feat of productivity unequalled among national historical dictionaries. Its accomplishment was most of all due to James Murray.

## ***The Dialect of the Southern Counties of Scotland***

### **The History of Scots**

Murray's great treatise on Scots, *The Dialect of the Southern Counties of Scotland*, finally published in 1873, is in four main sections: the first section of 95 pages presents the first ever sustained history of Scots. A vast amount had indeed been written between about 1742 and 1855 on the The Origin of the Scottish Language, a favourite title at the time: whether Scots was derived, as we now believe, from northern Anglo-Saxon, or, on the other hand, from Pictish; and whether Pictish was a 'Gothic', or, as we would now say, Germanic, language, either 'Saxon', that is West Germanic, or 'Scandinavian-Gothic', that is, Scandinavian (see Appendix). The Pictish theories, supported by much misplaced erudition and many astoundingly preposterous

etymologies, had the advantage of giving Scots a separate identity from, and greater antiquity than, English. This stuff Murray regarded as nonsense. “The history of the Lowland Scotch division of the Northern tongue,” he says, “and its relations to the adjacent dialects of England, has been the subject of much wild theory and but little research in the direction whence light was to be obtained.”

Murray’s historical introduction to *The Dialect of the Southern Counties* in effect created the history of Scots, and opened much of the evidence from which we can learn something of its early stages. Among the things this part of Murray’s book provides are these:

1. The chronological framework, and the <sup>[19]</sup> names of the major periods which we still use for classifying the history of Scots: Early Scots, Middle Scots, Modern Scots.
2. A history of the successive names applied by Scots writers to the Lowland language, first *Inglis*, pronounced /'ɪŋlɪz/ or /'ɪŋlɪs/, then *Scottis* or *Scots* – the name *Scots* beginning to take over from *Inglis* only at the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries.
3. The geographical area of Southern Scotland occupied from the early seventh century by the Anglian people of ancient Northumbria who spoke the ancestor language of Murray’s own Southern Scots. As we still do, Murray delineates this area by, in effect, mapping the Anglo-Saxon place-names it contains: names such as *Hawick* and *Denholm*, naturally, and *Ruthwell*, *Coldingham*, *Swinhope*, *Stow*, *Whittingham*, *Athelstaneford*, *Haddington*, *Newbattle*, and very many more.
4. A remarkably durable account of the historical and literary events affecting northern Northumbria in these times. The literary events include the poem in Anglo-Saxon inscribed on the stone cross at Ruthwell in Dumfriesshire. Of this Murray provides the text, a translation and an analysis of the Northumbrian Anglo-Saxon dialect in which it is written.
5. Murray also traces in some detail, and with very full illustration, the internal history of Scots, from the early fragmentary records consisting of Scots words, phrases and place-names included in the Latin charters of the time, down to the Burgh Records of eighteenth century Hawick. He illustrates and explains the striking changes in literary Scots around the time of the Reformation, especially those due to the so-called anglicisation of the language, its assimilation to at first written, later spoken, English. Murray explains this as in part due to the dependence of Scotland on England for the Bible, and the relation of the leaders of the Scottish Reformation with England – less familiar notions than they have now become since Murray. He incorporates into his history several dozen specimens of various lengths from Early and Middle Scots, <sup>[20]</sup> including many favourite passages which recur time and again in subsequent histories of Scots and collections of specimens of earlier Scots.
6. After he reaches the eighteenth century Murray’s history peters out. He takes a couple of pages to castigate the artificiality of most modern written Scots and to regret its “orthographic anarchy”, as he calls it, and how this disguises the distinctive characteristics of Scots as spoken. Then he goes on to describe the modern dialects of Scotland and Northern England. So he has nothing on the Scots versus English language debate of the eighteenth century or the obsession with avoiding Scotticisms and the Scots accent, and the arguments against and for the desirability of preserving the broad Scots tongue.

With hindsight and the help of aids to knowledge that were not available to Murray, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary* and the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*, we can see other flaws in Murray’s history. For example, he overstates what he sees as the moulding influence of

Gaelic on Scots pronunciation and understates the Norse element in Scots. A surprising error is his explanation of the slogan in the Hawick Common Riding song ‘Teribus & Teriodin’ or ‘Teribus ye Teri Odin’. Murray cites this as “a relic of North Anglian heathendom”, an alleged Anglo-Saxon war-cry “Týr haeb ús, ʒe Týr ʒe Ódin” – Tyr, the god of war, keep us, both Tyr and Odin. Among the several reasons why this cannot be right<sup>9</sup> is the fact that while the slogan purports to be in Old English, the names of the gods have their quite different Old Norse forms. I guess that the slogan was concocted by some not very well instructed eighteenth century antiquary. While the younger Murray, a Teri<sup>10</sup> himself, may have been taken in by this, the older Murray of the NED would never have passed it.

<sup>[21]</sup> Despite these deficiencies, Murray’s history remained the standard authority on the history of the Scots language down to Craigie’s *Chambers’ Encyclopedia* article of 1950, and the histories of Templeton (1973), Murison (1979) and others in the 1970s. Since its first appearance, all writing of any value on the history of Scots has been directly or indirectly based on or shaped by Murray’s history.

## Pronunciation

Although his history has become to some extent outmoded, what Murray calls his photograph of the Teviotdale dialect of Scots in his own day will remain an irreplaceable source of information for all time, more especially because of Murray’s alert mind and keen ear. Thanks to Murray’s knowledge of the work of Melville Bell and Ellis, his description of Teviotdale pronunciation is a great advance in thoroughness, systematic presentation and linguistic and phonetic sophistication over anything then available for either an English dialect or on Scots generally: on the dialects of Scots there was virtually nothing. The core of this part of *The Dialect of the Southern Counties* is the precise and detailed description of each of the sounds making up the dialect’s sound system. Sound system is a very modern concept and term which Murray is among the first, if not the very first, to use.

In treating all of this, as well as using Ellis’s somewhat daunting phonetic alphabet, called ‘palaeotype’, Murray uses a rather less forbidding phonetic spelling of his own. This is based on traditional Scots spelling but much more regular and consistent. The longer quotations in the following pages are in this spelling, but I have rendered the transcriptions in palaeotype into the now more familiar International Phonetic Alphabet.<sup>11</sup>

Quite a number of the pronunciations Murray describes have now changed. For example, he described the pronunciation of the word *tale*, a story that is told, as /tiəl/, quite distinct from the pronunciation of *tail* /tel/, that a dog wags. Other words pronounced with the vowel of /tiəl/ (a story) are /stiən/ and /giə/ (to go), equivalent to /sten/ and /ge:/ in other Scots dialects. Still another /iə/ word is /liəd/ (a load), whereas the contrasting vowel /e/ occurs in *laid* /led/, the past tense of the verb *to lay*. The distinction between these two vowels no longer exists in the dialect of Murray’s area, and /tel/ *tale* and /tel/ *tail* and /led/ (a load) and /led/ *laid* (past tense) are all

---

<sup>9</sup> <sup>[13]</sup> For other reasons, see the etymological note to the entry *Teribus* in *The Scottish National Dictionary* (SND).

<sup>10</sup> <sup>[14]</sup> *Teri*, ‘A native or inhabitant of ... Hawick’ (SND s.v.), from the slogan, still current; “the genuine Teri”, *Hawick Archaeological Society Transactions* (June 1867), 21/1’.

Editor’s note: the reference is to Watson (1867).

<sup>11</sup> Editor’s note: in the original, AJA wrote, “I have rendered the transcriptions in palaeotype into the now more familiar International Phonetic Alphabet and also, in inverted commas immediately following the IPA transcriptions, an ad hoc phonetic spelling of my own.” Useful as the ad hoc spellings may have been for the non-linguist, I have judged them unnecessary and distracting for the anticipated readership of this edition, and have omitted them.

now pronounced with the /e/ vowel only, and the old /iə/ vowel has disappeared. Except when it occurs at the beginning of a word: Murray points out that the *yi* /jɪ/ pronunciation we get in Southern Scots dialects in words like:

*yin* /jɪn/ (the numeral one), in other dialects /en/,  
or *yill* /jɪl/ (ale, the type of beer)

seems to be a continuation of the old /iə/ <sup>[22]</sup> pronunciation. So the distinction between:

*yin* /jɪn/ (one) and *ain* /en/ (own) as in *gang yer ain gait*,  
and between *yill* /jɪl/ (ale) as in *An aye the yill was growin better* and *ail* /eɪ/ (to be ill) as in *What ails you?*

is a continuation of the old /iə/ : /e/ distinction, though only in this position in the word.

This a shortened and simplified version of the story; for the full story you must consult Murray.<sup>12</sup> In his day, for instance, the *yi* /jɪ/ pronunciation was not yet fully established in his dialect: according to him it was a younger speakers' alternative to older speakers' /iə/, so that, for example, for the numeral *one* older speakers were saying /iən/, younger speakers /jɪn/ *yin*.

Murray's dialect was and is a *yuw and mey* /'jʌu ən 'mæi/ dialect, in which

*yoo an me 'll gaun oot an poo a pea* (you and I will go out and pull a pea)

comes out as

*yuw an mey 'll gang oot an puw a pey* /'jʌu ən 'mæi | 'gɑŋ 'ut ŋ 'pʌu ə 'pæi/.

But, as his description makes clear, the part of the system containing these vowels was more complex than it is now. In Murray's day, old people in Teviotdale were still pronouncing the initial *k-* in words like *k'neyfe* (Murray's spelling for *knife*) and the initial *w-* in words like *wrang* (wrong), and the old Scots liquid *l* survived in words like *bailyea*, now *baillie*, and *feverfuilyea*, now *feverfoil*, *feverfew*.

These last are pronunciations that have changed since Murray's time. Others, of course, have not changed or not changed so much. From time to time some of us have thought we had discovered a new feature of Scots pronunciation, only to find it already noted in Murray. For example, in the 1950s Ian Catford discovered that some Scots dialects, some in Ayrshire, for instance, had unusual long vowels in a few words, particularly the long form of the vowel /i/ (1957: 107, note (1) (iv)).<sup>13</sup> For example, in the dialects that do this, the word for inexpensive is *cheap* /tʃi:p/ with a short vowel; but the word for the chirping of a bird is *cheep* /tʃi:p/ with the same vowel long. Another pair like this is *leek* /li:k/ (the vegetable) and *leak* /li:k/ (of water escaping). As usual, this had been spotted by Murray. Two other words with the long vowel in Murray's dialect were *keek* /ki:k/ (to glance) and *sweep* /swi:p/, whereas *seek* and *deep*, for example, had the regular short vowel /sɪk/ and /di:p/. There are several other cases where modern dialectologists have thought they were the first to spot something, only to find later that Murray was before them.<sup>14</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Editor's note: this sound-change, preiotation, is discussed in detail in †Aitken (2002: §22.2).

<sup>13</sup> <sup>[17]</sup> Cf. the Ayrshire wordlists in the *Linguistic Atlas of Scotland*, vol. III (hereafter LAS3).

<sup>14</sup> <sup>[18]</sup> For example, Murray (1873: 238) points out the contrast in Caithness between the (rising) diphthong /ei/ in *made* and *tale* contrasting with the long monophthong /e:/ in *maid* and *tail*, "a very different distinction from that used in the south" (where the first of these pairs has the (falling) diphthong /iə/). Compare LAS3's report of Pultneytown, Wick (list 3.8), and the discussion by Mather (1978: 8–12). But Murray failed to note the Caithness tendency towards lengthened consonant after short vowel (compare Mather, 1978: 14), except in the case of *-n* and *-m* (Murray, 1873: 238 and n. 1).

An important general principle, first observed and formulated by Murray, is the one known to scholars today as the Scottish Vowel-length Rule. According to this rule Scots and Scots-Irish vowels have their lengths determined on different principles from those operating in other anglophone varieties. Thus Murray set out for the first time the essential phonetic and grammatical conditions which determine the relative durations of certain vowels in Scots and Scottish Standard English, such as the short /i/ in *seen* and *need*, the long /i:/ in *seize* and *breathe*, the short /i/ in *greed*, the long /i:/ in *agreed* (1873: 96–8).<sup>15</sup>

Down to the present day every work on almost any aspect of the pronunciation of Scots, including the very latest post-graduate theses, draws on Murray's account of Teviotdale pronunciation.

## [24] Grammar

The account of the pronunciation is the second main part of Murray's book; the third is his description of Southern Scots grammar. I cannot take time to describe the grammars before Murray of English dialects or of Scots as a whole; again there was scarcely anything by way of a grammar of a dialect of Scots. I will merely say that Murray's greatly excels any of these in comprehensiveness, orderly presentation and perceptiveness.<sup>16</sup>

Here is a tiny sample of the innumerable details of general Scots or Teviotdale Scots grammar that Murray brings out. It is well known, and had been observed before Murray, that certain nouns of measure take no ending in the plural in Scots and in English dialects: *twell yeir aald*, *fower pynt*, and so on. Murray, however, points out that this only happens when a numeral or quantifier immediately precedes the noun. So in

*Huw muonie meyle said hey? threy meyle an' a bittock; aeye, threy lang meyles, an the bittock as guid as onie tweae o' them*

or

*hey haes eacres on eacres, aa s' warran' ye, a thoosant eacre,*

the ending 's is added when there is no immediately preceding numeral or quantifier, say in *hey haes eacres on eacres*, but is lost in *a thoosant eacre* when there is a preceding numeral.

When he was a boy, Murray spotted that certain nouns with irregular plurals like *schuin*, *feit*, *kye* had a second plural with the regular ending 's added on, so *schuins*, *feits*, *kyes*. Murray called this a distributive plural. He first noticed it when he was boarding on one occasion in another village near Denholm and he and some other boys arrived at their lodging with muddy boots, and their landlady said to them:

*Nuw screape yer feits weil, an' pyt off aa o' yer schuins i' the passage.*

<sup>15</sup> [<sup>19</sup>] However, not all the effects of the Rule were observed by Murray. *Inter alia*, he failed to point out, though his description of the relevant sounds implies this, that the two diphthongs, /ɔi/ in, say, *Fife*, *line*, *tide*, and /ae/ in, say, *five*, *fire*, *tied*, must originally have had their incidences determined by the Rule, /ɔi/ in short vowel conditions, /ae/ in those for long vowels. There is an accessible description of the Scottish Vowel-length Rule, s.v., in McArthur ed. (1992).

Editor's note: the Scottish Vowel-length Rule is discussed in detail in Aitken (1981, 2015) and †Aitken (2002: §21).

<sup>16</sup> [<sup>20</sup>] There are some superficial remarks on the grammar of Scots in some of the works mentioned in the Appendix, and in some of the 18th century and later lists of 'Scotticisms', most notably Elphinston (1787, vol. 2). Among the grammars of English dialects before Murray's are Peacock (1862–63), Barnes (1863), and Atkinson (1867: Appendix), the two last frequently cited by Murray (1873).

“With all diffidence as became one of the culprits,” said Murray, “I ventured to remark on the oddness of such a form as *schuins*, but was rather testily told,

*Gin ye had them tui clean, ye wad ken the difference atween ae bodie’s schuin an’ aa o’ yer schuins’* (1873: 161, note 2).

He noticed all sorts of other subtleties of usage. For example, the verb paradigm of the future:

Affirmative: *Aa’ll syng*                      Neutral Negative: *Aa’ll no syng*  
Emphatic: *Aa wull syng*                  Emphatic Negative: *Aa wanna syng* (1873: 224)

or the degrees of negative emphasis in:

*He canna*                      *He no can*                      *He nane can,*

which Murray compares to the French:

*Il ne peut*                      *Il ne peut pas*                      *Il ne peut point* (1873: 228).

He describes usages that he believed were on the way to becoming obsolete, like the negatives *Aa syng na* and *Aa no syng*<sup>17</sup> (for ‘I don’t sing’) and the verb *sal* and its reduced form *’se*, which was obsolete in the first person, where *Aa’ll gang* had replaced *Aa’se gang*, but was still in use in other persons to express intention by the speaker: *Ye’se get yer fairin* (you’ll get what’s coming to you) (1873: 220).

Murray seems to have been the first to draw attention to the Medieval and Modern Northern English and Scots present tense rule. According to this rule, a present tense verb takes the *-s* ending in all persons and numbers except when the subject is an adjacent personal pronoun. So in

*Ye sey quhat they mein* (You see what they mean)

the verbs take no ending because the subjects are adjacent personal pronouns, namely *ye* and *they*; but in

*Yuw eanes seyes quhat thyr meins* (You ones see what these mean)

we get the *-s* ending because *Yuw eanes* and *thyr* are not personal pronouns (1873: 211–4). According to Murray, with respect to this rule Walter Scott committed a grammatical blunder in his proverb:

*Them that sells the guid, guide the purse,*

which should of course be:

*Them that sells the guid, guides the purse* (1873: 75).

And an even worse blunder of a similar sort is committed by Burns in:

*Scots wha hae,*

which would in spoken Scots be:

*Scots at hes – Scots at hes wi Wallace bled, Scots at Bruce hes aften led* (1873: 71 and n. 1).

Like his description of the pronunciation, Murray’s grammar remains for all time a permanent record or photograph of the grammar of one dialect at a particular date – about 1855, I suppose. But as a general grammar of Scots it stands up to this day as an astonishingly informative, fully

---

<sup>17</sup> [24] “Older, but now uncommon” (1873: 222, note 1). Mather records the latter usage as surviving in Berwickshire to the 1970s (1973: 64).

exemplified, often entertaining survey, which is also, barring two or three minor omissions, remarkably complete. The nearest comparable published work is the grammar in Grant and Dixon (1921). But that is de-localised and out of time and mainly dependent on published sources. Murray's remains to this day as the completest localised and dated grammar of spoken Scots that we have in published form.

[26] **Dialect Geography**

As we have seen, Murray had a thorough and deep knowledge of his own Southern Scots dialect. His knowledge of other dialects of Scots was much more sketchy. Still, he had learned something, both from his own speirings of informants and from other dialectologists, especially Melville Bell. This enabled him to offer an outline of some of the more prominent characteristics of all the mainland Scots dialects, with only a couple of inaccuracies, and also some phonetically transcribed specimen passages of the three main dialects (1873: 237 ff.). He was also inspired to produce a map which purports to delineate the areas occupied by these three main dialects and to subdivide two of them further into seven subdialects. All of this is for mainland Scotland; evidently he did not feel he knew enough about Orkney and Shetland to include them. Needless to say, neither Murray's outline of dialect characteristics nor his dialect map had been attempted before.

Some of the Southern Scots and Northern English dialect boundaries had been worked out with some precision by Murray and others, including the boundary of *yuw* and *mey*. But I am afraid that, in general, Murray's dialect boundaries are partly based on existing physical or political boundaries, rather than dialectological ones, which he knew only roughly, and some of which he ignores. For instance, he did not take into account, though he knew about it, the important dialect boundary between *twa* and *tweae* (two), *quhaa* and *quheae* (who), *awaa* and *aweae* (away), *quhaar* and *quheare* (where) (I am using Murray's spellings: more usual spellings would be *twa* or *twaw* and *tweae* or *tway*, *wha* or *whaw*, etc.). In the 1950s this boundary ran from Fisherrow, near Musselburgh, across country to Gatehouse-of-Fleet, cutting directly across at least two of Murray's subdialects.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, as a basis for general discussion of the distribution of Scots dialect phenomena, Murray's map works reasonably well. No-one has yet tried seriously to verify its accuracy in dialectological terms, but I daresay if they did, they would find it broadly right – the odd case like *twa* and *tweae* excepted. With only two or three significant modifications, subsequent dialect maps of Scots closely follow Murray.<sup>19</sup>

If we place Murray's 1873 map of the Scots dialects alongside that of Grant in vol. I of the *Scottish National Dictionary* (1934: xv), we can see that Grant follows very closely both the outlines of Murray's map and his dialect divisions, with only these alterations:

1. Murray has a dialect district covering west Angus, east Perthshire, north-west Fife and Stirlingshire, which he calls Highland Border dialect. Grant abolishes this as a separate dialect and simply includes it within his own East Mid Scots (a) dialect-division.
2. Murray does not recognise the Forth as a dialect-boundary, but Grant does.

---

<sup>18</sup> Editor's note: see Map 3 in McIntosh (1952).

<sup>19</sup> Editor's note: Johnston (1997) revises the dialect map on the basis of LAS3. Vagueness in Murray and gaps in coverage in LAS3 mean that a direct comparison with Murray's mapping is not possible, but there is an apparent encroachment of the Central dialects on the Southern and South-West areas (in CSD terminology).

3. As we might expect, Grant moves the southern end of his Highland border of Scots dialect speech with Gaelic and/or Highland English slightly to the west of Murray's boundary; otherwise, Grant's Highland line is virtually as set out by Murray.<sup>20</sup>

The map of Scots dialect divisions in the *Concise Scots Dictionary* (1985) (CSD) is a cartographically simplified version of Grant's 1934 map, with altered nomenclature, but otherwise identical. So, except for the changes I have specified, Grant and CSD exactly follow Murray. We are still seeing the layout of Scots dialects through Murray's eyes.

### **The Highland Line**

If Murray's dialect divisions depend to some extent on arbitrary guess-work, the same is not true of his other venture into linguistic geography, his establishment of the Gaelic-English or -Scots boundary of his own time.

In 1869 the Philological Society petitioned the government to include in the 1871 Census a question on the speaking of Gaelic, Irish, Welsh and Channel Islands French. This was ignored, though taken up in 1881. So it was suggested to Murray that he conduct his own survey of what he called the Present Limits of the Celtic in Scotland (1873: 231 ff.). Though this was not the first such survey, it was the first of which we have a clear account of the method – postal inquiry from a selected list of informants – and the criteria – to find every district in which any native Gaelic was still spoken. As well as plotting his Gaelic frontier line on his Dialect Map, Murray summarises the statements of his informants. In his time Tomintoul, Strathdon, Braemar, Crathie, Glen<sup>[28]</sup> Shee, Dunkeld, Comrie, Callendar, Aberfoyle and Arrochar were all on the Gaelic frontier, and Campbeltown and Inverness were still mainly Gaelic speaking. Of the ancient myth which has existed from at least the early eighteenth century to the present day, about the alleged excellence of Inverness English, he comments drily: "Extraordinary ideas are current as to the purity of Inverness English, the most that can be said for which is, that it is Book English and not Lowland Scotch" (1873: 234 note 1). Since William Grant's revision of Murray's Gaelic Boundary Line leaves it pretty intact except at its southern end, we still follow it in our most widely accessible map of Scots – that of the *Concise Scots Dictionary*.

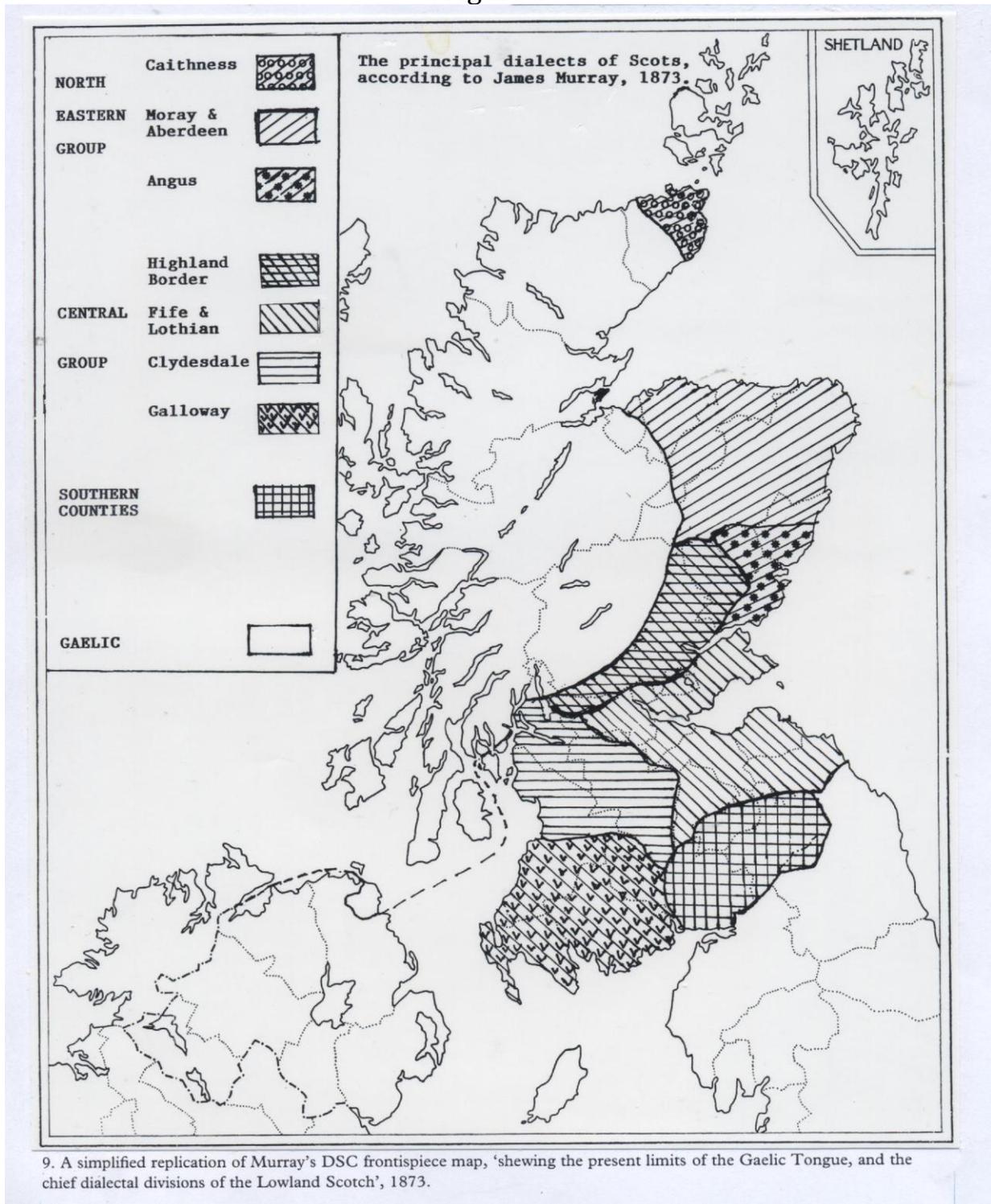
### ***The Dialect of the Southern Counties: summing up***

Altogether, *The Dialect of the Southern Counties of Scotland* is a remarkable package and a truly epoch-making work. It provides the first ever history of Scots and this remained serviceable for over 80 years and a basis for all subsequent work. It provides also a description of the pronunciation of an interesting dialect and a brilliant account of the grammar of that dialect. And the chronological framework which we still use for the history of Scots and the geographical framework we use for discussing its dialects are also of Murray's creation.

---

<sup>20</sup> Editor's note: Speitel (1981) discusses the Highland Line and compares various mappings. He uses word form data from the Linguistic Survey of Scotland's first postal questionnaire to define an area in which a Scots system (as opposed to isolated lexical items) is found. This line is considerably further to the east in many places than previous mappings.

Figure 1 [9]



## Other Writings

Out of all the other work accomplished by Murray between 1868 and 1878<sup>21</sup> I mention only his masterly twelve-page article on the English Language for the Ninth edition of the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. This article, which appeared in 1878, having taken him two months to write, was almost certainly the best piece on its subject so far, and he was justifiably proud of it.<sup>22</sup> The article on Scottish Language which he had intended to complement it never got written<sup>23</sup> because when the time came for this he was by then too immersed in work on the Dictionary (the S volume of the *Encyclopaedia* was published in 1886).

Until 1879 all of Murray's scholarly work had been carried out in his spare time. From 1879, when he was 42, he was at last able to work part-time, and from 1885 full-time, on the *New English Dictionary*, later known as the *Oxford English Dictionary* or OED. For the 36 years that remained to him after 1879 the Dictionary was virtually Murray's sole scholarly activity. So that, you might think, was the end of his work for Scots. Well, of course, not at all: OED embodies, among much else of course, a massive and crucial contribution to the study of Scots.

When I lecture or write on the history of the lexicography of Scots, I am given to saying that from the sixteenth century Scots has had its own separate tradition of lexicography, largely independent of that of English – except that the two traditions temporarily merged in OED and in Joseph Wright's *English Dialect Dictionary* (1898–1905) (EDD). Both these dictionaries treat Modern Scots quite fully, except that OED confines itself to printed sources and leaves fuller documentation of many words to EDD. Older Scots OED treats even more fully, to the full extent that its quite abundant evidence permits.<sup>24</sup>

OED's predecessor as a historical dictionary of Scots was John Jamieson's *Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, first published in two volumes in 1808, with a *Supplement* of two further volumes in 1825; later these were combined into a single alphabetical series, with additions, by John Longmuir and David Donaldson, in a four-volume edition of 1879–82; and in 1887 Donaldson added a further volume of *Supplement*. However, OED's hundred or more readers of Scottish texts not only examined many more than the 1000-odd texts read by Jamieson and Donaldson but seem to have done so more thoroughly.

To illustrate the consequent improvement in the treatment of Scots over Jamieson, let us take one of the 7,207 pages of OED personally edited by James Murray, namely page 670 of the I to K section of OED, originally issued in 1901, and let us compare Murray's treatment of the noun and verb *Kemp*, which appear on this page (see Figure 3), with their treatment by Jamieson (nothing is added by Donaldson) (see Figure 2). Of the noun *Kemp*, defined as 'a champion', Murray has the same number of Scots examples as Jamieson, but as many again of non-Scots examples. Murray rejects Jamieson's fragmented treatment of the main sense and adds a sense missing from Jamieson. Of the verb *Kemp*, defined as 'to contend', which unlike the noun is exclusively Scottish and Northern in its early provenance, a fact brought out by Murray but not

<sup>21</sup> <sup>[32]</sup> This consisted chiefly of editions for Furnivall's E.E.T.S.: Sir David Lyndesay, *Minor Poems* (1871); *The Complaynt of Scotlande* (1872–3); *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (1875).

<sup>22</sup> <sup>[33]</sup> It was, he claimed, "the most succinct account yet presented to Englishmen [*sic*] of the changes through which their language has passed, the causes of these changes, and the temporary phases of the continuous whole" (Murray, 1879: 566).

<sup>23</sup> <sup>[34]</sup> No article on 'Scottish Language' has ever appeared in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

Editor's note: there is now (2015) such an entry.

<sup>24</sup> <sup>[35]</sup> Some have supposed that the prominence of the Scots element in OED is due to favoured treatment, since two of its four editors, Murray and Craigie, were patriotic Scots. More likely it just results from the fact that Scots is recorded for so much longer and so much more copiously than any other modern anglophone variety except Standard English.

by Jamieson, Murray has two <sup>[29]</sup> distinct senses illustrated by six examples (four of them Scottish) as against one sense with two examples in Jamieson. So Murray is much fuller than Jamieson. For these words Jamieson has a confused and partly irrelevant etymology. Murray, on the other hand, provides, as is normal for OED, a clear and complete etymology as far back as Primitive Germanic, demonstrating that though the noun and the verb *Kemp* ultimately derive via Common Germanic from the same Latin word *campus* a field of battle, they do so by somewhat different derivational paths (the noun is via Old English, the verb may well be immediately from Old Norse). Etymological refinement at this level was, of course, far beyond the philological capacity of Jamieson's time.

In general, OED more than doubles the exemplification of Scots in Jamieson, providing a fuller account of the meanings and the chronologies of words, more succinct and more accurate definitions, less fragmented sense-analysis and incomparably sounder and more complete etymologies.

Figure 2 <sup>[12]</sup>: Part of the *Kemp* entries in Jamieson (1808, 1825)

To KEMP, *v. n.* To strive, to contend in whatever way, S.

And preualy we smyte the cabill in twane,  
Sine *kempand* with airis in all our mane,  
Vp welteris watir of the salt sey flude.

*Doug. Virgil*, 90, 54.

The term, as Rudd. observes, is now mostly used for the striving of reapers on the harvest field

“The inhabitants – can now laugh at the superstition and credulity of their ancestors, who, it is said, could swallow down the absurd nonsense of a boon of shearers, i.e., reapers, being turned into large gray stones, on account of their *kemping*, i.e., striving. P. Mouswald, Dumfr. Statist. Acc., vii. 303.

A.-S. *camp-ian*, to strive; Teut. *kamp-en*, Germ. *kampf-en*, *dimicare*. For it has originally denoted the strife of battle. Su.-G. *kaemp-a*, Alem. *chemf-an*, L. B. *camp-ire* *certare*. Pezron mentions C. B. *campa* as used in the same sense.

KEMP, *s. 1.* A champion, one who strives in fight, or wrestling.

Quhen this was said, he has but made abade  
Tua *kempis* burdouns brocht, and before thayme laid.

*Doug. Virgil*, 140, 55.

Figure 3 <sup>[13]</sup>: The corresponding part of Murray's *Kemp* entries in OED, 1901

**Kemp**, *sb.*<sup>5</sup> *Sc.* [f. KEMP *v.*] A contest, *esp.* of reapers when kemping.  
**1786** *Har'st Rig* in Chambers *Pop. Hum. Scot. Poems* (1862) so The master .. cries with haste, 'Come, lads, forbear, This kemp let be'. **1844** RICHARDSON *Borderer's Table Bk.* VII 372 The stormy *Kemp*, or emulous struggle for the honour of the ridge-end. **1870** HUNTER *Stud.* Pref. (E. D. D.) What ever lesson we began to, we gaed at it just like a kemp on the hairst rig.  
**Kemp** (*kemp*), *v.* *Sc.* and *north. dial.* [ME. *kempen* = MDu. *kempen*, *kimpen*, LG. *kämpfen*, OHG. *chemfan* (MHG. *kempfen*, G. *kämpfen*), ON. *keppa* (: - \**kempa*; Sw. *kämpa*, Da. *kæmpe*) :- OTeut. \**kampjan*, f. *kamp-* : see CAMP *sb.*<sup>1</sup> and KEMP *sb.*<sup>1</sup>] *intr.* **a.** To fight or contend in battle *with* another. **b.** To contend or strive in doing a piece of work ; said *esp.* of a set of reapers striving to finish their 'rig' first.  
**a.** ?**1400** *Morte Arth.* 2634 There is no kyng undire Criste may kemppe with hym one! **1893** *Northumbld Gloss.* s.v. *Kemps*, They are called by children *kemps.*.. and are used to *kemp* or fight with.  
**b.** **1513** Douglas *Aeneis* III. x. 20 We .. kempand with airis in all our mane, Wp welteris watter of the salt se flude. **1685** *Lintoun Green* (1817) 95 (E. D. D.) [She] could .. kemp wi' Kate or Wull, On harvest day. **1786** *Har'st Rig* in Chambers *Pop. Hum. Scot. Poems* (1862) 48 This sets the lave a-working fast – They kemp at length. **1881** CARLYLE in *Mrs. C.'s Lett.* (1883) II. 192 His reapers had taken to 'ekmp' and spoiled him much stuff.  
**Kemper.** *Sc* or *arch.* [f. KEMP *v.* + -ER<sup>1</sup>; cf. MDu. *kemper*, MHG. *kempfer*, G. *kämpfer*, Da. *kæmper.*] **a.** *Sc.* One who kemps or strives for victory, *esp.* in reaping. **b.** *arch.* = KEMP *sb.*<sup>1</sup>

The next stage in the historical lexicography of English after OED, from the 1920s onwards, consists of the so-called 'period dictionaries of English', which include the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST) and the *Scottish National Dictionary* (SND), and also the University of Michigan's *Middle English Dictionary* (MED). All of these dictionaries follow the same broad plan and methodology as OED and are similarly laid out. So in this way they too depend on James Murray's creativity. Also OED provides a rough template or draft for many entries in the period dictionaries, especially the dictionaries of the earlier periods – MED and DOST. When the same words occur, as they mostly do, both in OED and in the period dictionaries, these latter have the advantage of having the broad sense-divisions already worked out by OED and the etymologies already elucidated, usually correctly. So the editors of these dictionaries regularly work with the corresponding page of OED open on their desks in front of them. In this way, too, OED's editors have contributed greatly to the subsequent lexicography of English and of Scots – most of all James Murray. Of course the period dictionaries in their turn make improvements in accuracy and fullness over OED in much the same ways and for the same reasons as OED had improved over Jamieson. But they almost certainly would not have come into existence at all without OED as their model and launching-pad.

## Opinions and Attitudes

Murray was not a linguistic nationalist. He repeatedly asserts that Scots and Northern English as far south as the Humber are one and the same language and had been linguistically identical down to the fifteenth century. The nearest he gets to calling Scots a language, rather than the northern part of the Northern English dialect, is a statement, in the Introduction to Murray ed. (1872–73: xcvi), that while in the fifteenth century "the Northern dialect in the English of its domain ... sank into the position of local *patois*, ... on Scottish ground it was destined to prolong its literary career for two centuries more, and indeed to receive an independent culture almost justifying us in regarding it, from the literary side, as a distinct language." A more characteristic position is that which Murray adopts <sup>[30]</sup> when talking of the need for a revised version of

Jamieson, or rather, “a dictionary founded upon Jamieson’s but embracing the Northern dialect as a whole and not merely that fragment of it used in Scotland, concerning the character and relations of which Jamieson did so much to create a false notion by calling it the ‘Scottish Language’” (1873: 90–91). On the other hand, you will have noticed that Murray’s work on Scots and Scots dialects is concerned chiefly with events and phenomena north of the Border. His dialect map is a map of Scotland and he had intended writing an article entitled ‘Scottish Language’ not ‘Scottish Dialect’ for the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*.

He was free from the linguistic snobbery that singles out one kind of speech for approval and another for denigration. (He was less exceptional in this in his own time than he would have been, say, in the first half of the twentieth century.) In an address he gave in 1869, talking of dialects and languages generally, he asserts that “there is no reason why the dialects should be ostracised or looked on as inferior to their more favoured sisters, which accident has selected for the language of books.” They are, he says, (here I am summarising) equally important philologically and historically and equally deserving of reverence as our ancestral tongue (1869: 30/1). Murray was a linguistic egalitarian, but not a linguistic nationalist.

He cherished what he called natural dialect – the conservative dialect of local speech – uncorrupted by influence from the literary standard. Among the unpublished writings of his youth was a “Scotch grammar ... showing,” he says, “that all the things people call bad grammar because they would be so in English, were good grammar in Scotch” (1903: 14). He quotes with approval another linguist of his time: “Language is a natural production ... and no natural development can be called a corruption. The only corrupters of dialect that I know of are the literary men who ‘improve nature’ by writing them, not as they are, but according to their notion of what they ought to be” (Prince L. L. Bonaparte, quoted in J. Murray, 1873: 75 note 1). Murray’s favourite example of literary corruption of dialect is, as we have seen, *Scots wha hae*, “which,” says Murray, “is fancy Scotch, that is, it is merely the English ‘Scots who have’ spelled as Scotch. ... The vernacular is ... ‘Scots at hes’, which Burns evidently considered ungrammatical ... Much of the contemporary Scotch is of this character” (1873: 71 note 1).

The study of socially determined linguistic variation was in Murray’s time far in the future. Even so, he was not without what we might now call sociolinguistic awareness. At one point he discusses a pronunciation in what he calls ‘country schools’ (perhaps he means boarding schools). This concerns the rendering of the diphthong /əi/ in words such as *time*, *guile*, *pipe*. Some speakers in these schools, he tells us, pronounce this sound not as /əi/ but as /æ/, as a would-be English or quasi-English rather than Scottish pronunciation. He goes on, “Others who have learned that this is ‘too broad’, give *tæyme*, *gæyle*, *pæype*, the next closer diphthong” (1873: 116). We today would call this a ‘Morningside’ pronunciation, but Murray merely reports the facts without any indication of value judgement. However, when he comes to mention the English linking-*r* as in *drawring-room* and *Sarahr-Ann*, there is just a hint of both <sup>[31]</sup> censure and social evaluation. “These [pronunciations with linking-*r*],” he says, “are phrases which even educated men are not ashamed, or not conscious, of uttering” (1873: 120).

Murray’s own speech in later life is variously described by English people as an Anglo-Scots nasal accent or a careful, slightly hesitant, somewhat affected Scotch pronunciation (K. Murray, 1977: 109, 298). He is said to have been very formal in manner but at the same time apt to fun and even mischief with family and friends. He never lost his love of the countryside, especially the Border countryside. He was severe on slack or fitful work by his assistants and even his colleagues: once or twice he came down on Craigie over some of Craigie’s material. No doubt he was what we would call straight-laced. He was fiercely opposed to gambling and was all his life a Total Abstinence and a very active member of the Temperance Movement.

His two greatest supports in his life, he tells us, were his wife Ada and his strong religious faith. He states what we might regard as his credo in the 1903 autobiographical letter: “So I work

on in the firm belief (at most times) that I am doing what God has fitted me for, & so made my duty; & a hope that He will strengthen me to see the end of it.”

Finally, here is a personal reminiscence from the Linguistic Survey of Scotland’s archives, from a Denholm man (Tom Bowman) in the 1950s, recorded by Mr James Y. Mather of the Survey [the spelling of the transcription is A.J.A.’s]:

Well, on that occasion when I saw Jim – Sir James Murray – mind, a dinna ken whether ey’d (he’d) been knighted then or no. But on that occasion e seemed tui mey tui be quite a dapper kind i (of) man. E wis dressed wi a moarneen coat, tile hat, imberelly, an a says e hid (had) a – a say ey hid a kind i rough beard, raither gingery coloured as a remember. An a says a smert walkin man. An ma faither uised tui tell is (us), when they were laddies bein brocht up, ey (he) hadna been awfa – ey’d lived no sae verra fer off them, an e said, i the moarneens they uised tui come oot the hoose. An which o them it was – they were hrey (three) o them – ey uist tui say e wis (was) stuiden (stood, standing) at the heid o the gairdeen an e uid away ui (and he would (come) away with) “My name is Norval. On the Grampian Hills my father feeds his flocks.”

(Interviewer: Did e learn that at the schuil?)

A dinna ken a dinna ken, bit that wis ma faither at pickeet that up hrae (frae, from) im.

## Appendix: Early theories of the origin of Scots

Before Murray, there were several competing theories of the origin of Scots. The most generally favoured and long-standing was that which remains orthodox today, that Scots derives primarily and predominantly from the Old Northumbrian dialect of Anglo-Saxon, first introduced into what is now Southern Scotland by the Anglian people of ancient Bernicia during and after the seventh century. Among those who made explicit their adherence to this opinion in the century before Murray were Sir John Sinclair (1782: 4 f.);<sup>25</sup> George Chalmers, author of *Caledonia*, e.g. in ‘Of the several People of Scotland’ (1806: 114 f.); and the philologists K. J. Clement (1849) and A. Z. Collin (in a little-known work of 1862). Murray himself is reported to have lectured to the Hawick Archaeological Society in 1859 on ‘The Origin and History of the Scottish Language’ (K. Murray: 1977: 49); the text of this I have not seen. He lectured to the Society on ‘The Origin and Early History of the Scottish Dialects’ in 1869 (J. Murray, 1869).

Another theory, however, derived Scots from the language of the ancient Picts, held to have spoken a Germanic dialect and to have been settled in Eastern and Northern Scotland many centuries before the seventh century arrival of the Angles in the South: “the Picts; an ancient people, descended of the Danes, or Germans, that inhabited that part of Germany called Chersonesis Cimbrica, ...; and of the Scots by their mothers ... It is from their converse we learned the Danish dialect we now speak; and from them we have the auburn tincture of hair, for the Scots were naturally black” (Christopher Irvine, 1682, s.v. *Picti*). The ultimate source of this theory, which was also that espoused by Jonathan Oldbuck (Scott’s *The Antiquary*, chapter 6), was a conjecture by the first century Roman historian Tacitus from some physical traits of the ancient Caledonians, later identified with the Picts, that they were of Germanic stock.

---

<sup>25</sup> Editor’s note: AJA’s draft also refers at this point to Alexander Geddes, ‘Three Scottish Poems, with a previous Dissertation on the Scots-Saxon Dialect’ (*Archaeologia Scotica* I, 1792: 404 f.); and John Leyden ed., *Complaynt of Scotland* (1801: 347).

[32] In his ‘An Enquiry into the ancient Languages of Great Britain’ (1742, first printed (? in 1782) in *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica*), Sir John Clerk (1790: III ii, pp. 362 f.) argued that the principal language of Eastern and Northern Britain from Roman times onwards was the “Saxon language, Suevian, Teutonick or German”. Among the speakers of this language were the Picts, “which is the only way to account for its having been the ancient language of the Scots kings and their Parliaments”. Clerk’s theory of a pre-Anglo-Saxon Teutonic language of Britain spoken, among others, by the Picts, and inherited from them by the Lowland Scots, was somewhat hesitantly accepted by James Sibbald in ‘Observations on the origin of the terms Picti, Caledonii, and Scotti’ (1802, vol. IV), and also by Sir Walter Scott in the preface to his edition of *The Romance of Sir Tristrem* (1804, 1811).<sup>26</sup>

Another variant of the theory of the Pictish origin of Scots was founded on the statement of the venerable Bede, in his account of the arrival of the Picts in Britain, that they came “as is reported”, from Scythia. Bede’s ‘Scythia’ was identified by post-medieval Scottish historians with “that part of Grete Alamanze callit now Denmark (bot sum tyme namyt the nerrest Cithia)” (Hector Boece *Historia Gentis Scotorum* (1527) Liber Primus, quoted from an early translation), and by seventeenth and eighteenth century antiquaries, in some cases with supporting argument based on passing remarks by various classical authors, with “Scandia, call’d in times past Scythia” (*History of the Picts*, ? by Sir James Balfour (c.1598–1657), in *Miscellanea Pictica*, 1818: 12). According to this theory Pictish, the supposed ancestor of Scots, was not simply a ‘Gothic’ or Germanic language, but one of Scandinavian origin akin to Norwegian, Danish and Swedish. The first extended exposition of this theory known to me is that by Sir Robert Sibbald in his *History ... of Fife and Kinross*. In the course of this, having listed some fifty-odd ‘monosyllable words’ “which we pronounce as the Goths do”, Sibbald claims: “These words, with the other remains of that language we call broad Scots, which is yet used by the vulgar, abundantly prove, that the Picts were a Gothic nation, and their language was a dialect of the Gothic, distinct from the Saxon, which is the mother of [southern English]” (1710:15). Sibbald’s ‘Gothic’, however, was not simply Germanic, but *North-Germanic*: for example, “the Picts ... were of a Gothish extract, and came from Norway and places upon the Baltic, to our isles and continent” (1710: 18).

A still more pugnacious advocate of the ‘Scandinavian Gothic’ theory of the origin of the Picts and thus of the later Scots language was the late-eighteenth-century antiquary John Pinkerton: “All writers after Beda bring the Picts from Scythia, or Scandinavia, into the north of Scotland; and so downward,” and “the Pictish, or a dialect of the Gothic, remained the vulgar language of two-thirds of Scotland from the earliest times till the Scottish poets first used it in writing” (1786: xxxvi, lxxv).<sup>27</sup> He describes ‘Pikish’ as “one of the branches of the ancient Scandinavian dialect”, whereas Anglo-Saxon “is really German-Gothic” (1789: 352, 356). In ‘A Dissertation on the Origin of the Scottish Language’ (1808), the lexicographer John Jamieson argues the same case, supported with a much more copious body of philological ‘evidence’, such as etymologies of place-names, personal names and generic words, mostly, alas, erroneous. James Paterson (1855, 1858: especially ‘Origin of the Scottish Language’, 93 f.), attempted to reconcile these theories with the quite contrary belief, also of long standing, that the Picts were a Celtic, not Germanic, people. According to Paterson, the Picts were originally Celts “of the Cimbric race” “but early mixed by Norwegian settlers” and the language of this “mixed race”,

<sup>26</sup> Editor’s note: AJA’s draft adds at this point: In *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 5 (1862–64, 24 March 1863: 65 f.), the Hon. Lord Neaves, while professing ignorance of the pre-medieval history of Scots, also indicates his inclination to favour the theory of separate Teutonic origin.

<sup>27</sup> Editor’s note: AJA’s draft adds at this point: “The Piks,” he believed, “proceeded from Norway to the north of Britain, about three centuries before Christ” (1787: 150).

the Scandinavian element gradually predominating, “fermented” “into what is now the Scottish vernacular”.

These speculations made up the “wild theory” alluded to by Murray. They were finally laid to rest by his own cogent and accurately evidenced demonstration of the predominantly Anglo-Saxon derivation of Scots.

## References

- Aitken, A. J. (1981, 2015) ‘The Scottish Vowel-length Rule’ in Benskin and Samuels, eds., 131–157. Reproduced in †Aitken ed. Macafee (2015), [online] [http://medio.scotslanguage.com/library/document/aitken/The\\_Scottish\\_Vowel\\_length\\_Rule\\_\(1981\)](http://medio.scotslanguage.com/library/document/aitken/The_Scottish_Vowel_length_Rule_(1981)) (accessed 27 April 2015).
- Aitken, A. J., ed. (1973) *Lowland Scots* (Association for Scottish Literary Studies, Occasional Papers No. 2)
- †Aitken, A. J., ed. Caroline Macafee (2002) *The Older Scots Vowels* (Edinburgh: Scottish Text Society)
- †Aitken, A. J., ed. Caroline Macafee (2015) ‘Collected Writings on the Scots Language’, [online] Scots Language Centre <http://www.scotslanguage.com/aitken-papers> (accessed 27 April 2015)
- Atkinson, J. C. (1867) *Glossary of the Cleveland Dialect* (London: Philological Society)
- Barnes, William (1863) *A Grammar and Glossary of the Dorset Dialect* (London: Philological Society)
- Benskin, Michael and M. L. Samuels, eds. (1981) *So Meny People, Longages and Tonges: Philological Essays in Scots and Mediaeval English Presented to Angus McIntosh* (Edinburgh: Middle English Dialect Project)
- Burchfield, Robert (1977) ‘Preface’ in K. M. E. Murray (1977)
- Cassell, John, ed. (1852–) *The Popular Educator: A Complete Cyclopaedia of Educational Knowledge* (London: Cassell & Co.)
- Catford, J. C. [Ian Catford] (1957) ‘The Linguistic Survey of Scotland’, *Orbis* 6, 105–121
- Chalmers, George (1806) ‘Of the several people of Scotland’ in George Chalmers, ed., *The Poetical Works of Sir David Lyndsay*, vol. I (London: Longman)
- Clement, K. J. (1849) ‘Über Wesen und Abkunft der breitschottischen Sprache’, *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 6, 47–60, 165–173, 297–320
- Clerk, John (1790) ‘An enquiry into the ancient languages of Great Britain’ in *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica* (London: J. Nichols), III ii, 362 f.
- Collin, August Zacharias (1862) *An Essay on the Scoto-English Dialect. Part 1 An Academical Dissertation along with some French and German Theses* (Lund: Berlings)
- The Concise Scots Dictionary* (CSD) (1985) ed.-in-chief Mairi Robinson (Aberdeen University Press, now published Edinburgh University Press)
- Craigie, William (1950) ‘Scottish language’ in *Chambers’ Encyclopedia*, new edition (London: George Newnes). Revised by A. J. Aitken (1962).
- A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST) (1937–2002) eds. William Craigie *et al.*, 12 vols. (Oxford University Press). [Online] <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/> (accessed 7 February 2014).
- Elphinston, James (1787) ‘Systematizing Scotticism, and Evvery Deviacion from English Purity’ in James Elphinston, *Propriety Ascertained in her Picture*, vol. 2 (London)
- The English Dialect Dictionary* (EDD) (1898–1905) ed. Joseph Wright, 6 vols. (London: Frowde)

- Geddes, Alexander (1792) 'Three Scottish poems, with a previous dissertation on the Scots-Saxon dialect', *Archaeologia Scotica: Transactions of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* vol. I (Edinburgh), 402–468
- Grant, William (1934) 'Introduction' in *The Scottish National Dictionary* vol. I. Online see 'About Scots'.
- Grant, William and J. Main Dixon (1921) *Manual of Modern Scots* (Cambridge University Press)
- Irvine, Christopher (1682) *Historiae Scoticae Nomenclatura* (Edinburgh)
- Jamieson, John (1808) 'A dissertation on the origin of the Scottish language', Preface to John Jamieson (1808, 1825)
- Jamieson, John (1808, 1825) *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: W. Creech); *Supplement*, 2 vols. (Edinburgh: W. & C. Tait)
- Jamieson, John, rev. John Longmuir and David Donaldson (1879–1887) *An Etymological Dictionary of the Scottish Language*, 4 vols. and *Supplement* (Paisley: Alexander Gardner)
- Johnston, Paul (1997) 'Regional variation' in Charles Jones, ed., *The Edinburgh History of the Scots Language* (Edinburgh University Press), 443–513
- Leyden, John, ed. (1801) *The Complaynt of Scotland* (Edinburgh: A. Constable)
- The Linguistic Atlas of Scotland*, vol. III (LAS3) (1986) eds. James Y. Mather and H.-H. Speitel (London: Croom Helm)
- McArthur, Tom, ed. (1992) *Oxford Companion to the English Language* (Oxford University Press)
- McIntosh, Angus (1952) *Introduction to a Survey of Scottish Dialects* (Edinburgh: Thomas Nelson & Sons for the University of Edinburgh)
- Mather, James (1973) 'The Scots we speak today', in Aitken, ed., 56–68
- Mather, James (1978) 'The dialect of Caithness', *Scottish Literary Journal, Supplement* 6, 1–16
- Middle English Dictionary* (1952–2001), eds. Hans Kurath *et al.*, 12 vols. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: University of Michigan Press). [Online] <http://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/med/> (accessed 1 May 2015).
- Miscellanea Pictica* (1818) (Edinburgh: D. Webster)
- Montgomery, Michael (1994) 'The evolution of verb concord in Scots' in Alexander Fenton and Donald A. MacDonald, eds., *Studies in Scots and Gaelic* (Edinburgh: Canongate Academic), 81–95
- Murison, David (1979) 'The historical background', in A. J. Aitken and Tom McArthur, eds., *Languages of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Chambers), 2–13
- Murray, †Alexander (1823) *History of the European Languages* (Edinburgh)
- Murray, James (1869) 'The origin and early history of the Scottish dialects, with special reference to the dialect of Teviotdale', *Hawick Archaeological Society Transactions*, 23 ff.
- Murray, James (1873) *The Dialect of the Southern Counties of Scotland* (London: Philological Society)
- Murray, James (1878) 'English language' in *Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 9th edn. (Edinburgh: Adam and Charles Black, 1875–1889)
- Murray, James (1879) 'Eighth annual address of the President to the Philological Society, delivered at the Anniversary Meeting, Friday, 16th of May, 1879', *Transactions of the Philological Society* 17:1, 561–624
- Murray, James (1903) Autobiographical letter, 15 December 1903, in G. F. Timpson, ed., *Sir James A. H. Murray: A Self-portrait* (Gloucester: John Bellows, 1957)
- Murray, James, ed. (1871) *Sir David Lyndesay, Minor Poems* (London: Early English Text Society)
- Murray, James, ed. (1872) *The Complaynt of Scotlande* (London: Early English Text Society)

- Murray, James, ed. (1875) *The Romance and Prophecies of Thomas of Erceldoune* (London: Early English Text Society)
- Murray, K. M. Elisabeth (1977) *Caught in the Web of Words: James A. H. Murray and the Oxford English Dictionary* (Yale University Press)
- Neaves, Hon. Lord (1862–1864) ‘Some remarks on the Scottish language, particularly as employed by the earlier Scottish poets’, *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 5, 65–78
- The Oxford English Dictionary* (1<sup>st</sup> edn. 1884–1928) eds. James Murray *et al.*, 12 vols. (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1989) eds. John Simpson and Edmund Weiner, 20 vols. (Oxford University Press). [Online] <http://www.oed.com/> (accessed 7 February 2014).
- Paterson, James (1855, 1858) *Origin of the Scots and the Scottish Language* (Edinburgh: Menzies)
- Peacock, Robert (1862–1863) ‘Characteristics and grammar of Northumbrian’, *Transactions of the Philological Society*, 232–263
- Pinkerton, John (1786) ‘Essay on the origin of Scottish poetry’ in John Pinkerton, ed., *Ancient Scottish Poems*, vol. I (London: C. Dilly)
- Pinkerton, John (1787) *A Dissertation on the Origin and Progress of the Scythians or Goths* (London: George Nicol)
- Pinkerton, John (1789) *An Enquiry into the History of Scotland* (London: : George Nicol)
- Scott, Walter, ed. (1804, 1811) *The Romance of Sir Tristrem* (Edinburgh: A. Constable)
- The Scottish National Dictionary* (SND) (1931–1975) eds. William Grant *et al.*, 10 vols. (Edinburgh: Scottish National Dictionary Association). [Online] ‘Dictionary of the Scots Language’ <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/> (accessed 17 March 2014).
- Sibbald, James (1802) ‘Observations on the origin of the terms Picti, Caledonii, and Scotti’ preface to James Sibbald, *Chronicle of Scottish Poetry*, vol. IV (Edinburgh)
- Sibbald, Robert (1710) *The History, Ancient and Modern, of the Sheriffdoms of Fife and Kinross ...* (Edinburgh)
- Sinclair, John (1782) *Observations on the Scottish Dialect* (London)
- Speitel, H.-H. (1981) ‘The geographical position of the Scots dialect in relation to the Highlands of Scotland’ in Benskin and Samuels, eds., 107–129
- Templeton, Janet (1973) ‘Scots: an outline history’ in Aitken, ed., 4–19
- Thorpe, B. (1851) *The Life of Alfred the Great, translated from the German* [of R. Pauli’s *König Alfred*, Berlin] (London: Bohn Library)
- Watson, David (1867) ‘Notes on Hawick Common-riding’, *Transactions of the Hawick Archaeological Society* (June Meeting), 18–21