



Scottish Poets and Poetry

Walter Wingate (1865-1918)



Walter Wingate in 1894

Introduction

Generations of children have learned to love the poetry of Walter Wingate. They may not have known who he was, but when reminded years later of "Paper Kate" or "The Sair Finger" their faces light up with the remembered pleasure of the gentle humour of his poetry.

The biography below was written by one of Walter Wingate's grandchildren who clearly has a justified admiration for his poetry and of the man. I am grateful to her for allowing me to include this biography and the poems (some of which were previously unpublished) so that they can be read by a wider audience. The graphics on this page are by Walter Wingate himself.

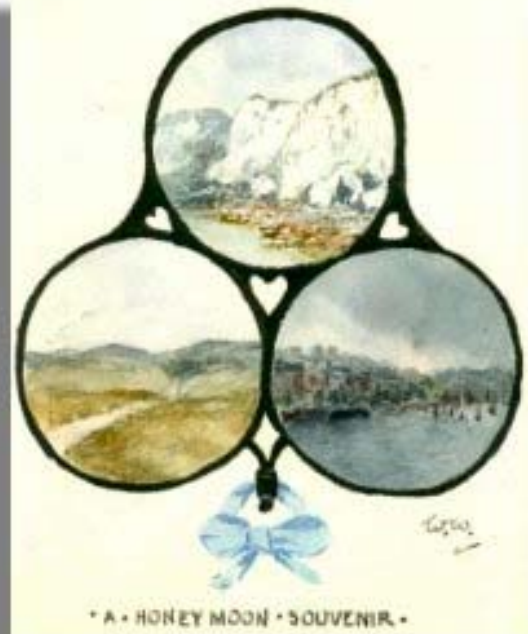
Walter Wingate's Life

Walter Wingate was born on April 15, 1865, in Dalry in Ayrshire, the fourth son of David Wingate — "The

Collier Poet" who had achieved some local fame for his own poems and songs. David Wingate had eleven children by his first wife. Two years after her death, David married one of Robert Burns' grand-daughters, Margaret Thompson.

Walter attended Hutcheson's Grammar School in Hamilton and, at the age of 16, went to Glasgow University where he graduated in the Faculty of Art with honours in mathematics before the age of 20. However, it was his greatest wish to work for the Indian Civil Service. After passing all required academic tests with high distinction, he failed the physical requirements due to poor eyesight. This was a matter of great disappointment to him. He then turned to teaching, obtaining an appointment in St. John's Academy in Hamilton, a position he continued to occupy until his untimely death at the age of 52. By all accounts he was a gentle, kind man and much loved teacher. Years later, a special memorial portrait was dedicated to him at St. John's Academy.

In 1907, Walter married Agnes Thom and they had two sons, David and Duncan. Walter's wife predeceased him by two years. Her sudden death as the result of an operation affected him profoundly and indeed may have hastened his own death as they were deeply attached to each other. When Walter died in 1918, he left two young sons: David Thom Wingate, age 10, and Duncan Wingate, age 8 who were subsequently raised by loving relatives including Walter Buchanan. Also a member of The Glasgow Ballad Club, Walter Buchanan wrote the preface in Wingate's only (to date) published volume of



poetry, "Poems by Walter Wingate", Gowans and Gray, 1919.

Wingate also was a skilled artist and left many watercolour paintings as part of his legacy. Some of these have been used to illustrate this biography.

While both his sons are deceased, Walter Wingate's four grandchildren survive to appreciate his gentle talent and the gifts he left for others to enjoy.

Walter Wingate's Poetry

Wingate's ballads and poems, written in both Doric and English, stayed within accepted poetic form but are expressed in many different styles, although he loved to write in the familiar vernacular. Many of his poems reflect his great love and appreciation of nature, his love of children, and his enjoyment in the familiarity of hearth and home.

He possessed a great sense of humour and a keen sense of observation for the ordinary events in life, many of which are subjects for his poems. For example, here is an extract from "The Sair Finger":

*You've hurt your finger? Puir wee man!
Your pinkie? Deary me!
Noo, juist you haud it that wey till
I get my specs and see!
My, so it is - and there's the skelf!
Noo, dinna greet nae mair.
See there - my needle's gotten't out!
I'm sure that wasna sair?*

Some of his poems could easily be mistaken for another Scots poet, Robert Louis Stevenson. Thus, "Dew" could have come straight from "Child's Garden of Verses":

*A million little gardeners,
Too small for you to see,
Are out tonight and watering
As busy as could be.
And all the daises in the field
Can see them go about,
And shut their little eyelids tight
To keep the water out.*

He was a regular member of The Glasgow Ballad Club and a regular contributor to The Glasgow News and The Glasgow Evening Herald, signing his work with the familiar "WW." Also, some of his lyrics were put to music. Other than the only (to date) published volume of his work, Wingate's poems appear in many Scottish anthologies.

The preface to Walter Wingate's published book was written by Walter Buchanan, (a relative who helped to raise Walter's sons.). He wrote:

"While Wingate was primarily a poet and student, he was by no means a recluse. His interests and accomplishments were many and varied. Nothing delighted him more than long walks in the country, frequently alone, but preferably with congenial companionship. He wooed Nature in all her moods. Mountain and moor, glen and woodland, running stream and hills of sheep were lovingly familiar to him; besides which he had the artist's eye and the scholar's sense of appreciation. His botanical knowledge was encyclopedic, his love of wayside flowers and skilled acquaintance of their habitat throughout the year was a thing to marvel at-the earliest celandine and the latest dyers' weed to him were recurrent joy. He had also a rare skill in the use of watercolour and has left many pictures of artistic value in that medium."

