



Irvine Burns Club Schools Programme 2012 Our invitation to Primary Schools

Join our sixth annual series of visits to Wellwood in 2012 (each visit from 9.30 am until noon).

The format will be similar to that of 2011, now with the sound enhancements to our upstairs presentation and with the new commentary, accessible to juniors, in the audio-visual presentation in the Burns Room downstairs.

Each pupil is given a clipboard, paper and pencil to take notes to help them with a Quiz, one of the materials available to teachers for follow-up work back at school. The winner in each visiting group will receive a small prize (certificate and Club pin).



climbing the stairs to the Music Room



9.30 -10.00: Presentation in the Music Room

This presentation is designed to be flexible, to allow our presenters to adapt it to their audience, as children's questions often lead in directions not on the original agenda. It aims to give the children a good idea of what life was like for the boy who became such a great poet and songwriter.



This session takes them from Robert's birth in Alloway to his homes at Mount Oliphant farm and at Lochlie farm near Tarbolton.



10.00 - 10.25 Burns' time in Irvine – in the Burns Room



Robert's nine months or so in Irvine is well represented by the Odlings' murals on three walls of the Burns Room. The various scenes are spot-lit in turn and the commentary, adapted for our younger visitors, is synchronized with the lighting. Among the scenes represented are his attempts to learn the trade of Flax Dressing, his discovery of the works of Fergusson, his illness when in Irvine and his friendship with Captain Richard Brown. The children also enjoy a short demonstration of the process of Flax Dressing.

(below) heckling flax - a demonstration



10.25-10.50: Visit to Directors' Room



The impressive frieze, with the names of the twelve founder members and the presidents of the Club since 1826, is the first point of interest and then we move on to some of the Club artefacts. "The Glasgow Mercury" newspaper of January 1783, with its reference to an award of £3 premium paid to "Robert Burns - Lochlee*, Tarbolton", is an appropriate start. This newspaper also refers to Surgeon Fleeming of Irvine, which leads on to that surgeon's day book. Found in the loft of his house by Charles Balcombe, a pharmacist and manager of Boots the Chemist in the town, the book's importance became clear – it records Fleeming's five visits in eight days to attend to Burns during his illness.

*(*one of three different spellings of the name of this farm)*

Our emphasis on the need to handle such old books, wearing special gloves, usually stimulates an interesting question/answer session. We then move to a facsimile edition of the Kilmarnock edition before showing the real thing to the children. We also show them our Edinburgh edition, before examination of one of our six original manuscripts for the Kilmarnock edition. This never fails to stimulate not a few interesting questions from the children and their teachers.



(above) children with our Kilmarnock edition



Where time allows, we mention some of our paintings, such as C M Hardie's painting of Burns among the "literati" in Edinburgh. This visit follows closely the presentations made by the late David Smith, the Club curator for many years.

10.50-11.15: Break

During this time, when the children receive bottled water, they can view the Odings' mural on the life of Burns, displayed at Alloway until its recent redevelopment. Also, they are tasked to find, from among the Honorary Members letters displayed here, the letter from an Ayrshire man who made a discovery, which was developed into a lifesaver of many millions of people. Sir Alexander Fleming's letter of acceptance is among many on display from our exhibition of letters, selected from over 300 Honorary Members of the Club since 1827. We also feature the Club's beautiful bronze (sculpted by Allan Herriot) of Burns' imaginary meeting with Wallace, on the middle landing of the stairway – it excites the children every bit as much as it does our members.



11.15-12.00: Continuation of the presentation in the Music Room

We continue with the life and work of the Bard, from Mossgiel (Mauchline) to Edinburgh, his tours, and then on to Ellisland and Dumfries. A good proportion of the last session is spent on Robert's collection of old songs, his own songwriting and his collaboration with Thomson and Johnson in publication of these works. We ask the children to "find the missing" third verse of "Up in the Morning Early" and again the writer of the best of these verses from each group is given a prize by the Club. The addition of sound to the presentation has made the explanation of this competition much clearer.

Robert's life with Jean Armour and their growing family is obviously of great interest and the children seem to enjoy tales of their "marriage of attestation" and the cutty stool in Mauchline Kirk. Time is spent on other aspects of Robert's story, such as his work as an Exciseman, his health problems, and of course his most famous poem "Tam o' Shanter", which many class groups study around the times of their visits.

Questions are always interesting, and often entertaining – and sometimes tricky. Among the entertaining ones – "What team did Robert support?" Among the difficult – "You said that Robert and his father-in-law did not get on very well. Did Mr Armour attend Robert's funeral?"

Materials for follow-up work

When each visit ends, teachers are given materials (Appendix 2 – Appendix 8) for follow up work in class.

"Cheerio, Cheerio, Cheerio!"

Appendices:

- 1 Programme of visits to Wellwood 2011
- 2 Schools' Quiz
- 3 "Find the missing verse"
- 4 Word Search
- 5 Match Scots and English words
- 6 Try to complete lines of poetry
- 7 A Rose
- 8 A Mouse

a group leaving Wellwood – after a much-enjoyed visit



To book your visit, contact Irvine Burns Club Director Michael Murray at