

Wigtown Voices

a collection of old and new poems
from and about Wigtown
written and read by people from the town.

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'Wigtown Voices' is a happy convergence of the old and the new
through the poetry of an historic and still evolving town.

Set in the south west of Scotland, with a backdrop of the
green Galloway Hills and with its harbour at
the mouth of the River Bladnoch, Wigtown
was once the county town for Wigtownshire,
a hub of the Irish Sea trade and a centre for banks and administration.

Now, since 1997, it is Scotland's National Book Town
and so boasts a growing number of book-related businesses.
But it was a provider of fine words long before this.

Following a suggestion by Barbara Holland of the town's
Unit3 Poetry Group to create a rendering of the sounds and
history of the people of Wigtown, a full-house Summer Festival
performance in High Street Number One in August 2000
was presented as a collaborative affair between
Unit3, Cauldron and a gifted Wigtown Community.

The spontaneity and warmth of that performance
and its reception inspired the recording of this poetic presentation of
aspects of rural life, the history of a town, its characters, institutions,
ceremonies and its place in the world from the 19th. century onwards.

The resulting CD (and now in 2023 a digital archive) is an assembly of
entertaining, eccentric and engaging words of poetry
filtered through a medley of dialects
and accents which reflect present day
'Wigtown Voices'

01 THE GUID AULD TOON O' WIGTOWN

Upon a gently sloping hill,
Where Simmer flo'ers their balm distil,
An' wi' sweet scent the breezes fill,
There stan's the toon of Wigtown.

In happy youth, when a' was fair,
Wi' playmates I wad aft repair
To mimic Bruce an' Wallace there,
Upon the hill o' Wigtown.

There may be toons o' larger size,
Wi' grandeur that wad daze yer eyes,
But 'boon them a' I dearly prize
My native toon o' Wigtown.

We may be richt, or may be wrang,
But though abroad we far may gang,
The heart springs hameward wi' a bang,
Though it be only Wigtown.

Whaur will ye get a purer air,
Or scenes mair beautifu' an' fair ?
The invalid may weel repair
For health tae bonnie Wigtown.

The Bladnoch winds her devious way
Through scented mead an'
hawthorn spray,
An' sparkles 'neath the orb o' day
Close to the toon o' Wigtown;

Then hurrying onward to the sea,
She joins her sister, silver Cree,
Till in the Solway lost they be
Below the toon o' Wigtown

The English hills, in outline grey,
Like mastiffs rise above the Bay,
An' Mona's distant heights survey
The Windyhill at Wigtown

An' past this hill King Jamie rade,
When pilgrimage of old he made
And Wallace heaved his trusty blade
To free the toon o' Wigtown.

An' best o' a', on history's page
The tale shall leeve frae age to age
How Martyrs braved the tyrant's rage,
An' suffered death at Wigtown.

She boasts o' mony an honoured son,
Wha laurels in the world ha'e won:
She claps their their heads, and
cries,"Weel done !
Ye worthy bairns o' Wigtown."

Ye gentle zephyrs, saftly blaw,
An' nicht's refreshing dew-draps fa',
On this dear hill, lo'ed best o' a',
That bears the toon o' Wigtown.

Gordon Fraser

02 HELP

It's said 'Let Wigtown Flourish'
Then let me play my part
I am your county buildings
Your centre and your heart

Once proud their noble efforts
As my tower reached the sky
Around my feet their task complete
Gave thanks as they passed by

I've stood a hundred years and more
Fulfilling each request
To shelter and to entertain
And welcome every guest

Councils with their long debates
Courts in session laws dictate
A multitude of saints and sinners
Their glasses raised at Burns' dinners

A plaque within you read with pride
Of Wigtown's soldier son
Who gave his life in battle
And how his cross was won

Through many wars I've played my part
Seen Kings and coronations
Hold high the flag of victory
On other great occasions

I've challenged nature's test of time
Great winds and blinding rain
And sparkled in the summer sun
From every window pane

From lofty heights viewed
shore and ship
That traded round the bay
(The railway stole their thunder
But that was yesterday)

It's self assessment now I fear
My future role in doubt
With water leaking in on me
And windows leaning out

Old age at last is catching up
Let not my mantle fall
Another hundred years I'll serve
If someone heeds my call

So rally round as well you must
You know this cannot be
Within your hands my fate I trust
That's all I ask of thee

To stand once more majestically
Enhancing town and square
A County Buildings worthy of
The folks who kept me there

Jim Todd

03 MARKET DAY

Noise and clamour, salesmen's cries,
Plump old women selling pies,
Boys with barrows, men with carts,
Stalls of coffee, buns and tarts.
Rabbits, turkeys, pheasants, hares,
Oddment stalls and hawkers' wares.
Oysters, lobsters, shrimps and dabs,
Herrings, plaice and pink back crabs.
Men with remedies for ills,
Liquids, powders, tablets, pills,
Cures for ulcers, cures for corns,
Stuff for fertilizing lawns.
Hair-clips, cotton, needles, pins,
Old banjos and violins.

All is bustle, hurry, noise,
Mothers with their little boys,
Some with baskets, some with bags,
Well dressed folk and more in rags.
Bookstalls with brown layers of dust,
Ironware all red with rust.
Lettuce, cabbages, beans and peas,
Raisins, nuts and slabs of cheese.
Goldfish, parrots, small white mice,
Geese and ducks at "market price".
Ladies in enormous hats,
Businessmen in suits and spats.
Tall men, small men, fat and thin,
Some go out but more come in.
All this startling display
May be seen on Market Day.

R. Inman
Wigtown 1905.

04 IN COMMEMORATION OF THE CENTENARY OF THE MARKET CROSS OF WIGTOWN.

Our thoughts now gather round
the spot,
Through hallowed memories dear,
And scenes which almost were forgot
With freshness reappear.

Of Wigtown's Granite Cross we speak,
It's hundredth year declare,
And Centenary honours seek
Upon it to confer.

This Monument no tablet bears
It's object us to show;
Tradition now and then declares
'Twas built for Waterloo.

But when we probe the matter close,
We through Records find
'Twas really as a Market Cross
This structure was designed.

This famous Cross in Main Street
stands,
Majestic and erect,
And Wigtown's sons in distant lands
Still bear it much respect.

Come! let us conjure up some scenes
Connected with this place;
Our memory's latent storehouse teems
With thoughts of bygone days!

Here bonfires blaze on New-Year's Eve,
As flies the dying year;
When midnight comes,
a shout they raise-
The New hail with a cheer.

How often, in our childhood's glee,
We've frolicked round it's base,
Our sole ambition who should be
The foremost in the chase.

In these old days the "Shows" set up
Between the Cross and Square-
The Council did that custom stop,
Removing them elsewhere.

A Puppet Show, close by the Cross,
So fascinated me
I leapt the bounds of Moses' law
And pilfered a bawbee.

One puppet, with a gentle nod,
Was to detect our tricks!
I, troubled with the fear of God,
Was then in a sore fix.

The puppet nodded solemnly,
Convicting me of theft!
The place then grew too hot for me,
I sadder, wiser left.

"Conscience makes cowards of us all,"
A poet great has said;
Well for us, then, if cowards all,
The paths of sin we dread.

But let us not speak in detail,
Lest we should weary you.-
To mention make we must not fail,
Of Wigtown's Cattle Show.

Think of the days of long ago-
Coaches and gigs en route
Thronged all the roads to
Wigtown Show,
And many came on foot.

Now railway train and motor car
And speedy bicycle,
Convey the people from afar,
Our little town to fill.

The town, for the occasion dressed,
Presents a goodly sight;
The fine Square trees, then at their best
Bathed in the sun's fair light.

Could mortal e'er in Wigtown reared
Forget the Cross and Square?
Has naught to such a soul endeared
Those spots to us so fair?

Here we have spent our
childhood days,
And youth's impressive years,
The scene of many wafts and strays,
And penitential tears.

I hope that whilst this life doth last,
And reason sound doth reign,
Those precious memories of the past
May on my heart remain.

Dead is the soul, I ween, to whom
These symbols do not speak!
The Square trees, with their
transient bloom,
We as man's emblem take.

Our pillar, which resists the blast,
Where no decay we trace,
Still marks from generations past
An ancient market-place.

A richer boon, of nobler worth,
May to each soul be known;
Who, prizing not the things on earth,
Builds on the Living Stone.

James Nimmo
Wigtown

05 WHEN WE WERE WEANS IN WIGTOWN

We twa hae jist mine o' startin the skill
Miss Robb took the infants back then
Wae liked her a lot wae her nice
kindly waes
She was jist like a real mither hen

A' the weans had respect for
their teachers then
Stood aside tae let them a' past
If they said 'quiet please',
aye you were quiet
Or they twisted yer lug as they passed

At hame - noo wae didnae hae tellies
We'ed tae amuse wersel - ye see
We skipped and hopped -
played kick the can
The fun we had was free

We yist tae get had o' a big lang rope
Aboot twenty wee weans
wad com doon
We skipped and sang frae
morn till nicht
Music circled richt roon a' the toon

Our first dolls then were a made
oot o' rags
They were a bonnie colours and bricht
We kent them a' by their ain
special name
And we cuddled them a' in at nicht

We also had a real special freen
An he was richt bricht and jolly
We took him wae us everywhar
that we went
A mean noo of coorse wir wee golly

Dick Turner he had the
wee smiddy then
Oh us twa in there ye wid fin
He made for us baith a birlie and cleek
An for hoors ahin this we would rin

He worked awa on the anvil a' day
and got us tae pump up the bellas
Ye'ed a heard the laughin o' us for miles
At the stories he liked tae tell us

The smiddy he used tae ask us
to sweep
An orange ye'd get at the en
ye hunted wee drawers that
he'd hiddin it in
Then he'ed say 'no awa hame hen'

We arrived back hame
as black as craws
We were stripped an' put in the sink
Noo Edie and Madge
would rub and scrub
Till yer skin it had started tae shrink

We used tae get thruppence -
aye noo an agin
The pennies were geen oot gae canny
We jumped on wer scooter and
flew up the street
Tae get sweeties frae Tammy Frullani

We had tae dae a' the messages whiles
Self service! Oh no ther was nane
Ye'ed to tae wait in the queue
wae yer list in yer han
Till the shop keeper ca'd oot yer name

When ye went tae the store
ye'ed tae tak yer green book
Tae mark a' yer messages doon
When yae peid it tae John
on a Friday nicht
Ye wur left wae aboot half a croon

But Oh the excitement eventually came
The folk - an the weans were there tae
Everyone geen a big sigh of relief
AT LAST! it was dividend day!

Some folk peid their monthly rent
in advance
Or maybe a treat - a big chicken
Ithers wa'ad buy the weans
some new shoes
If ye scratched them ye a' got a licken!!!

New shoes they were bocht
an wae got nae choice
Nae trainers ye seen in thae days
Wae said that they fitted us
perfectly weel
But be nicht wae come hame
wi' skint taes

Ma Grannie wad say
as a limped in the door
A ken noo - they dinnae jist fit ye
A never kent ocht like this in ma life
Ye hae feet jist like aul' Tam M' Britney

Every noo and agin
we'ed tae get we'er hair cut
So we a'went tae wha? Jenny Fraser
She was really quite guid
at daen yer hair
An a topper when usin the razor

It took a full nicht tae hae yer hair din
Cos biscuits an' tae yae were sippin
Jenny was bletherin an talkin awa
An yer hair she was aye gaily snippin

We used tae gan for the
butcher meat tae
Fred Norris or auld Wullie Gunnin
The sawdust a' stuck tae the
soles o' yer shoes
Ye could grow a full inch
while jist stannin

Noo washing days we must tell
yee aboot
Wae had nae fancy washing machine
Oot come the gadget -
the wee washing board
An' ye scrubbed til yer claes
were a' clean

Ma sister then fed the claes
tae the mangle
Ma mither wad turn the big wheel
Ye had tae be carefa an' watch
the big roller
Whun the en o' the sheet ye could feel

Yin day we were outside manglin awa
Yer claes never yince did they tangle
But Frances was talkin an' carrien on
An' her finger got rolled in the mangle

Dr Lilico then had tae stitch it a' up
On the erm o' the chair she was leanin
Next time that yer feedin
the mangle wi' claes
Keep yer mind on the job that yer daen

Cattle show was an awfa guid day
in the year
For visitors - aye ye were lookin
We kent what the nicht
afore wa'd be fur
Ye were a' in the kitchen - jist cookin

Ye got up at six o'clock the next day
In the sun - on the step ye wa'd kneel
There were nae floats fillin the streets
o' the toon
Ye watched beasts bein
WALKED tae the field

We always got a new frock fur that day
Put it on - jist afore ye wa'd go
We stood there a' washed
an' gleemin like shillins
Aye - we're dressed for the cattle show

Noo seterday nicht ye got seerup o' figs
Or maybe the caul senna tee
Yer stamuch wis sair for mony an' hoor
Till at last tae the toilet ye'ed flee

Noo talkin aboot toilets -
they wernae upstairs
Oot tae the back yard - ye wa'd tread
Wi' a torch an' the Beano clutched
ticht in yer han
Ye wa'd sit fur an hoor an jist read

Noo Christmas day was
anither guid time
Its a time we hae never forgotten
The thing that excited us maist
the next day
Was the orange in the
tae o' wuir stockin

We opened the percels - the femily a' there
The smell in the hoose we were lovin
We kent within maybe jist twa or three hoors
That we'ed sample the hen in the oven

We had a black range in the kitchin ye ken
A'gleemin - an o' it was smashin
The smell o' the pancakes and scones that were made
Ma mooth watered - ma teeth they were nashin

The pancakes we ate as the girdle they left
No' often did THEY reach the tin
The seerup an butter, a' melted the gither
An' used tae rin a' doon yer chin

Theres nae doot aboot it as weans we were happy
Its been great tae gan thru a' these scenes
An' maybe someday we'll come back and tell ye
What happened tae us in wur teens.

Nancy Burgess, Nov. 1993, Botany

06 WIGTOWN CATTLE SHOW

The fifth of August will soon be here
And everyone should know
That they could spend a happy day
At Wigtown Cattle Show.
The people come from far and near
To see the great display,
Of horses, sheep, and cattle here,
The pride of Galloway.

The Clydesdale horse still has his place
In splendour on parade.
The Ayrshire cattle walk with grace,
The finest ever bred.
And our lovely Galloways
With their shaggy coats
and silken sheen,
And every kind of breed of sheep,
The like could ne'er be seen.

There's also sports of every kind
Throughout the afternoon,
To suit young and old alike
And lots you've never seen.
And the Galloway lads and lassies
Come dressed up in their best,
With sweet smiles upon their faces,
And with fresh Galloway air
they're blessed.

Janet Lynch

07 THE TREES THAT GREW IN WIGTOWN SQUARE

Remarkin' aboot this historic event
Some frien's ha'e impressed me
tae write a lament
For noo they ha'e vanished --
we'll see them nae mair
The Trees that sae lang
decorated The Square.

I wad fain frae expressions,
distastefu' or rude
But Wigtown is noo like a form
in the nude
Disrobed in appearance,
pathetic an' bare
For they hid a' the ruins -
The Trees in The Square

When the exile returns tae
his auld native Toon
Can ye picture him noo,
will he stand up and froon?
In silent remembrance will he
vacantly stare?
And reflect on their glory
the Trees in the Square

In the heat o' the Summer
we'll yearn for their shade
And often remember
that cool colonnade
But alas! We maun jist grin and bear
For there's nocht tae protect us,
nae Trees in The Square.

The craws were a nuisance,
at times they were pests
But it seems they had nae
Tenant's Rights wi' their nests
We had seen them
prospectin' and mony a pair
Had planned tae complete
their romance in The Square.

The boys in the Autumn will lang
for the Trees
Where they tore a' their troosers,
and sometimes their knees;
When it's time for the conkers
they will likely despair,
As they mind o' the chestnuts
that grew in The Square.

When the watter is din and
the well has gin dry,
An' ye look up abin -
no' a cloud in the sky
Ye can aye get a drink
(though I wadna' tell where)
But ye canna' bring back
the fine Trees tae The Square.

But soon in the future
we're hopin' tae see
That transfiguration, whatever it be,
Then at first, in a whisper, it will be,
"I declare
That the shrubs are as nice as
The Trees in The Square. "

Thomas Grierson
Wigtown.

08 BOB THE BANTIE

When the winter's breath blew
sharp an' snell,
An saft the fleecy snaw-flakes fell,
We lost a pet the bairns lo'ed well
Wee Bob the Bantie

Wi' feathers white as driven snaw,
An' form erect, though unco sma',
A trigger fowl ye never saw
Than Bob the Bantie.

He seemed without a single flaw,
An' hoo he'd streek his neck an' craw
I liked the cock-a-leerie-law
O' Bob the Bantie.

Escorting oot his numerous harem,
Should ony envious neebor dare 'em
His feathers aff his back he'd tear 'em
Oor bauld wee Bantie.

Through eight lang years
he ran his race;
But age soon made him slacken pace,
An' dwining symptoms we could trace
On Bob the Bantie.

He seemed quite traicky, dull, an' sad,
An' nocht we did could mak' him glad;
His case, in trowth, was very bad
Puir Bob the Bantie!

Gordon Fraser

09 THE KITTEN'S TALE

A dog always welcome
No never a cat
But bless her she came
And she changed all that

The first that we knew
Of her presence at all
Was her tail disappearing
In the old garden wall

Then testing our wits
A plan was in place
With the saucer of milk
Came her tiny black face

How nature had moulded
We marvelled how wise
Like jewels set in velvet
Those green watching eyes

That peered from the darkness
Held rigid with fear
We cautiously tempted
Lest she disappear

With patience rewarded
A joy from the start
This bundle of mischief
Won over our hearts

Her short life was ended
When crossing the street
This still little bundle
That lies at our feet

She arrived uninvited
And without even trying
Has now gone away
And left us all crying

Jim Todd

10 LANDSCAPE

The wintry flight from Glasgow
(Vapour trail pink from the rising sun)
Looks down on Wigtown Bay

At the string-like dykes
Holding fast the hills.
Like fishes caught in a net.

Looks down on shoals of playful drumlins
Tails pointing
Towards the last ice-sheet
That abandoned them.

And Cairnsmore, the great hill of the Celts.
Brooding like some beached whale
From across the estuary.
At Wigtown's towers of Church and State.
To the broad square
Where once the rooks caused such havoc
And controversy

Then on across the Machars
Where the soil is thin
And the graywakes
Struggle to the surface.
Where sheep, gorse tangled,
Browsing
Leave great clots of wool
On golden spines.

But now the sun is over Cairnsmore
Flooding the bay with light
River and sea meet in mutual accord
And the day begins.

Barbara Holland.
February 2000

11 YESTERDAY

Yesterday I was but Ninety-four:
Today I am really Ninety-five.
What do you think was my waking thought?
"How lucky I am to be alive!"

March with fierce blast and leaking roof
Played havoc with my frail resistance:
Soon it became increasing clear
That I would need some skilled assistance.

Doctors and nurses with umpteen pills
Have sought to rid me of my ills.
All but one they have put to rout-
Pernicious, persistent, painful gout.

But why should I on sufferings dwell
When I have a different tale to tell-
A tale of countless blessings given
By Him who rules in earth and heaven.

I've tried to make the way of life plain:
Methinks I have not toiled in vain!
I've lived to see my dreams come true,
My plans conceived and carried through.

Through length of days I have come to know
How wisely I have been guided
By having things desired denied
And much better things provided.

Dear Lord, let me keep travelling on
Still guided by Thy powerful Hand,
Till I meet my loved ones dwelling
In that far-off, bright and better land.

Gavin Lawson
8th January 1977

12 STANZAS WRITTEN ON VISITING THE CHURCHYARD OF WIGTOWN

The sun illumines Cairnsmore's side,
Amid the calm of closing day,
Where I behold the rising tide
Upon the strand of Wigtown Bay.

How beautiful the winding shores
And fruitful fields by banks of Cree,
Enriched and full of golden stores,
While peaceful lies the shining sea!

I view, upon the further strand,
The rocks above the smuggler's cave;
And lovely look the sea and land
When sunset gilds the rippling wave !

The moon now sheds her soft'ning light
On lofty hill and stooky plain;
And, gazing on the landscape bright,
I stand beside a hallowed fane.

With solemn step I lightly tread
Among the tombstones placed around,
And read the records of the dead
Within that sloping burial ground.

I muse among the silent graves,
Where rich and poor together lie;
While autumn's passing
night wind waves
The grass, where friends oft
weep and sigh.

Within that hallowed house of God
Is heard the sound of praise and pray'r;
But those who sleep beneath the sod
No more in holy worship share.

Beneath an old rude sculptured stone
The ashes of two martyrs rest;
Now honoured with a heavenly crown,
Whom hatred can no more molest.

They braved the persecutor's rage,
Supported by the love of truth;
And nobly died, - one ripe in age,
The other 'mid the bloom of youth.

While slow but sure the waters rose,
Unmoved and firm they fearless stood;
And 'mid a crowd of of cruel foes,
Rejoicing sank beneath the flood.

Those patriots - faithful, worthy, brave -
Who scorned a wicked tyrant's rage,
And suffered by the flame or wave,
Shall honoured be from age to age!

A lofty pillar standing high,
Records these female martyrs' fame:
And long their worth and constancy
Shall love and veneration claim.

We mark with fear the warrior's path
Upon the bloody battlefield;
When, in his fierce and fiery wrath,
He makes the trembling foeman yield.

But nobler far than victory' deed
Is women, braving pain and death;
Who shall recieve a glorious meed.
Attesting truth with dying breath.

Theta

13 THE KILLING TIMES 1685

Put the snib on the door,
And put oot the licht.
The Troopers are oot
in the Moss the nicht,
The Troopers are oot in the Moss.

The Ministers awa'
An' you're no' tae tell
That he's been here
An' his freens as well,
That we sang the Psalms
An' prayed tae the Lord
The Troopers are oot in the Moss.

My guid man was oot at Drumclog.
His faith in the Covenant strong
Now they're hunting him doon
lak' a dog.
I'm feart that they'll catch him ere lang
Lagg's Troopers oot there in the Moss.

When we worshipped the Lord
In the bonny, green glen
We were safe from the World
And the cruelty of men.
Now there's few of us left
An' we're feart of arrest
But we'll bide by the Covenant
An' no take the Test.

If the jingle of harness
Is heard doon the brae
We'll tak' tae the hills
An' just slip away

Tho' Clavers' Moss troopers
Are scouring the glen
There are ways through the heather
That only we ken
We'll be safe in the arms of the Lord

The Lord is our Shepherd
His praises we sing
We'll bow tae nae other
Nae Bishop. Nae King!

Barbara Holland

14 AULD DROUTHY GREEN

Oh! woe tae the wearisome drapple o' drink
That hurries it's victims tae ruin's grim brink;
O' a' the poor victims that ever I've seen,
Nane waukened my sorrow like Auld Drouthy Green.

'Tis the weary auld story that aft has been told
Screw yer face first at drink, an' then tak' it quite bold,
An' ye fin' that a viper ye took for a frien',
An' yer coorse is still doonward like Auld Drouthy Green.

I usena' the adjective tae her disgrace,
An' much I wad dae tae improve her sad case;
But the body hersel', wi' the tears in her e'en,
Adopted the title o' Auld "Drouthy" Green.

She yinst had a hoose that was fu'some an' braw,
But when the drink entered it dwindled awa';
An' noo her bit hame that was cheerie an' bien
Has gone tae the dogs wi' poor Auld Drouthy Green.

She seems quite content tae stan' by an auld tub,
An' the claes o' a neebour tae wash an' tae scrub;
But her liking for drink is sae awfully keen
That it swallows the earnings o' Auld Drouthy Green.

Sae helpless a victim she lies on the street,
By turns she will lauch, an by turns she will greet,
Till the 'bobbies' come up, then in state like a queen
Tae jail on a barrow rides Auld Drouthy Green.

It grieves me tae think that there's folk that will gae
The drink to the cratur that mak's her sae wae;
What like is their heart? it is hardened, I ween,
Else they wadna' sink deeper poor Auld Drouthy Green.

Auld "Drouthy's" a warning tae baith great and sma'
Frae drink's fell delusion tae keep far awa',
An' never tae tamper wi' what wad demean
An' mak' them the equals o' Auld Drouthy Green.

Oh! sister, awake tae a sense o' yer shame;
Tak' up, and ye'll soon get anither bit hame,
An' there's Yin wha' will aye prove the Magdalene's frien',
An' rescue frae vice e'en poor Auld Drouthy Green.

Gordon Fraser

15 THE AULD WIVES' FRICHT.

There was a man ca'd Bailie Smith,
An' my informant saith
That though he leeved on
Wigtown Hill,
He died for want o' breath.

He jogged through life without a wife
To ease his care an' toil;
But ancient Jean his hoose kept clean,
An' made his pot to boil.

When he was dead, his corpse was laid
In coffin ben the room;
An' twa-three neebour wives cam' in
To cheer Jean's waefu' gloom.

Such frien'ly feelings to requite,
Jean spread the festive board
Wi' dainties which the Bailie's press
In ample measure stored.

An' doucely noo they sit them doon
An' sip the wee drap scad;
Nae indication did they gie
That oucht had made them sad.

The gossip o' the country roun'
Got ventilation due;
While Jean still presses on them a'
Their teacups to renew.

Eh! what was that that gied a rap?
Oh! Jean, what gars ye start?
What mak's the auld wives
look sae wan,
An' terror seize their heart?

Within the chamber o' the dead,
Though bolted was the door,
It seemed some hard an' horny feet
Were pattering on the floor.

What thochts passed through
the auld wives' minds
I'se no pretend to tell;
But wi' a speed beyond their years
They fled the hoose pell-mell.

The ootside air their courage braced,
An', after short debate,
They a' resolved straight back to gang,
An' prove their utmost fate.

Yin bolder than her frien's agreed
The bedroom to assail,
Provided at her back the rest
Should stand, nor quake nor quail.

So on they moved richt cautiously,
As if they walked on ice;
Nor word was said,
nor soun' was made—
They a' were quate as mice.

Inside they heard the pattering noise
Of active, restless feet;
Oh ! what if something past the door
Uncanny should them meet?

Then catchin' yin anither's claes,
An' huddlin' close thegither,
They crept alang wi' bated breath,
An' mony a fear an' swither.

"Noo, wull I dae't?" the leader sighs,
Wi' han' upon the door;
The patterin' answered—
back they rushed,
As they had rushed before.

Again the captain slowly moves
The handle o' the door;
Sae deep the silence, you micht hear
A pin fall on the floor.

When half-way opened was the door,
Quick roon its edge appeared
Twa fiery een, twa sword-like horns,
An' shaggy, grizzly beard.

Lood screamed the crones
in horror's plicht,
An' motionless they stood.
"Auld Nick!" quo' Jean,
when she could speak,
"Or else his hellish brood!"

Yae canny auld wife's pawky sense
Here stood her in guid place:
"Fie! don't misca' him wi' sic names
Juist fair afore his face."

It took some time ere they cam' to,
Sae sair had they been frichtened;
But bit by bit, an' by degrees,
They slowly were enlichtened.

When fairly back their senses cam'~
The mystery was explained—
A goat the window open found,
And easy access gained.

And on the Bailie's coffin-lid
His horny cloots did patter;
And this the cause was o' the fricht,
An a' the auld wives' clatter.

Gordon Fraser

16 THE JUDGEMENT

Take me as you find me
Be friendly if you can
I neither blame nor credit take
For being what I am

The dies were cast when time began
Each trait and trend of nature
That shaped and moulded every man
To each his own in stature

So temper judgement's harsh account
With mercy's caring hand
Assess you must the verdict just
Lest I lose faith in man

Jim Todd

17 SAME OLD STORY

It was down by the gate
With my dog fairly late
Love's old story unfolded before me
Back the memories came
And the words were the same
Like, come on pet
you cannae ignore me

But she says that's no nice
And I have told you twice
I have promised my granny I wouldnae
And I've swore and agreed
On the book to take heed
So to go against that I just couldnae

Well she worries yae ken
And her lectures on men
Has you all classed as lecherous vermin
Though I've said have no fear
I have got it up here
She would still rant away
with her sermon

It's no matter where, wean
I'm that vexed you're so vain
And so innocent more by the minute
If you'd just realise
Hell the mair that he tries
The mair likely you'll wish
he would find it

Oh he'll give you abuse
And make every excuse
Wae the threat that he'll clear off
and lae you
But a ken for a fact
Rest assured he'll be back
With the present that
he'd love to gie you

Then the terrible strain
That's affecting his brain
With the times he is being rejected
Believe me you'll feel
His bit problem full weel
There'll be more than his brains
been affected

So as old granny says
If I don't mend my ways
And pay heed to her care and her lovin
I might just not escape
End up all oot o' shape
Wae an unwanted bun in the oven

As the moon was descending
Love's old story was ending
And my wee dog is shaking his head
like it's heard it before
From that mongrel next door
I'll be glad to get home to my bed

Jim Todd

18 THE LAST FAREWELL

Cold platform dark with mist and rain
The smoking steaming morning train
Stood waiting blasting hissing power
The dreaded wait, the final hour

Called away and only he
Was acting out so gallantly
They had both watched and seen him grow
With all the loving care they knew

He kissed their cheeks a last goodbye.
A soldier son. God how they cried.
He left for war for victories gain
There was no victor only pain

As gains for some are others losses
There's little joy in fields of crosses
When guns are silent battles cease
Who think of them that lie at peace

Alone the heart's full wracked with grief
From life's misfortunes no relief
Lost fathers sons and futures bright
Bring silent tears to lonely nights

Jim Todd

19 THE BOMB

When the world began
And god made man
A path through life he laid
Before his eyes a paradise .
For creatures all he made

But genius man
Betrayed his plan
By selfish greed's construction
Contrived then made the ultimate
Hell bent on self destruction

The watching crowd
A mushroom shroud
In harmony elated
Their every breath rejoicing death
The world stood back and waited

But not for long from out the dawn
Like a silent bird it came
Nowhere to hide a city died
To man's eternal shame

No sun they said with staring eyes
Seeking the friendly hand
It fell this day I see no sky
To light this darkened land

Ashes and ruins all around
Nothing stirs in the gloom or sings
No breeze to dust the silent ground
Or bird on floating wings

A nightmare dream
Please god awake
Pray that's where this all began
Be still now in your deep of death
This is the work of man

It was a dream craved by the few
A dream of super power
That made this hell on earth for you
And man his darkest hour

Too late no way to right this wrong
No prayer will ease this sorrow
Uncertain now we all must pay
Like them who knows tomorrow

Jim Todd

20 THE BONNIE LASS O' BLADNOCH SIDE.

In a lonely little cot in a deep sequestered spot,
Where the Bladnoch, through sweet meadows, pours its gently flowing tide,
Where sweet nature's gladsome voice makes the hills and dales rejoice,
Lives my bonnie, bonnie Lass o' Bladnoch side.

Let the miser hoard his treasure, and the worldling live in pleasure;
Let the soldier seek for glory, and the courtier strut in pride;
Gi'e to me the walk at e'en, near Lindarroch's wood sae green,
Wi' my bonnie, bonnie Lass o' Bladnoch side.

When the glorious orb of day veils his deep impurpled ray,
And his glowing beams in splendour down Kirvennie's summit glide,
Oh, 'tis then I stray from men, tae renew the tale again
Wi' my bonnie, bonnie Lass o' Bladnoch side.

Pure the orient pearls of morn that the heather-bells adorn,
And the lily that sae modestly its native grace wad hide;
And they seem to say to me, "Like yer ain true love we be'
That's the bonnie, bonnie Lass o' Bladnoch side.

She is guileless as she's fair, passing rich in virtues rare;
And in one short month she'll stand my sweet and ever beauteous bride;
Then my earthly cup below wi' true bliss will overflow:
Oh, my bonnie, bonnie Lass o' Bladnoch side !

Gordon Fraser

21 HOW I WON MY NANCY

Wad ye a' like tae ken hoo
I managed tae fen,
Tae coort an' tae marry
my sonsie bit wife,
Wha proves sic a boon,
she's the brag o' the toon
My joy an' my very best treasure in life?

I'm a saft bashfu' man,
but I'll do what I can
Tae let ye ken a',
since ye're a' decent folk;
But min' I expect that ye'll never neglect
Tae be carefu' tae aye
"keep the cat in the poke."

Weel, at Kirk or at fair,
when I saw Nancy there,
My face, I declare, wad get a' in a lowe;
An' I felt unco queer,
an' was feared the folk near
Wad notice me looking
an' acting the gow.

O my! when she'd chance tae
bestow me a glance
O' her bonnie bit faceock
an' sparkling black e'e
It wad knock me clean gyte;
alas! hapless wight!
Thinks I, I'm noo
fast bound in Love's slavery!

Such torture o' mind I was not
much inclined
Tae endure lang in search
o' a canty bit wife;
I determined tae try,
though I'm awfully shy,
If Nancy wad marry me
fairly for life.

Sae I plucked up the courage
for courtship an' marriage,
An' meeting wi' Nancy,
my love I declared,
An' I humm'd an' I ha'd
till I'm sure she was stawed,
An' wi' perfect surprise in my face
there she stared.

But at last she cam' to,
an' withoot much ado,
In a womanly style
she professed love for love;
Noo that wasna amiss,
an"twas sealed wi' a kiss,
An' we vowed love perpetual
which death couldna move.

Noo full twenty years,
wi' their hopes an' their fears,
Ha'e passed ower oor heads
since we wed man an' wife,
But oor love hasna fled
wi' the years that ha'e sped,
For it's fresh still as ever
tae help us through life.

In oor wardly concerns,
wi' oor sax healthy bairns,
We manage tae thrive,
an' ha'e comforts no few;
Sae the day that my Nancy first
stuck tae my fancy
I never can ha'e ony reason tae rue.

Gordon Fraser

22 TILDA M'GRAW

I said the moss-rose when it's freshened wi' dew,
An' loads wi' sweet perfume the breezes that blaw,
Was an emblem o' beauty frae nature sae true
O' my ain bloomin' lassie, dear Tilda M'Graw.

Her teeth I compared tea a flock o' wee sheep
Wi' fleeces that rival the pure driven snaw;
An' aye through her ruby-red lips they would peep,
An' set aff the charms o' my Tilda M'Graw.

Her saft dimpled cheeks sae transparently fair,
Their fresh glowin' hue that nae artist could draw,
Her pale marble forehead, an' bricht gowen hair,
Were sung in my praises o' Tilda M'Graw

I said that without her I could only pine,
An' doon tae a shadow my body would fa',
But that, if her hand an' her heart were but mine,
I'd prove a kind husband tae Tilda M'Graw.

She blushed at her praises, frae honesty's heart,
Wi' a wee modest smile in my arms she did fa',
An' whispered, "Dear Geordie, frae you I'll ne'er part,
An' I hope a guid wife ye'll fin' Tilda M'Graw."

The decent auld parents seemed pleased wi' my call,
For, ye see, they had dochtors for gie'in' awa';
An' the lassies themsel's were like sweet heather-bells
'Twas nae wonder I sighed for sweet Tilda M'Graw.

But I needna be lang wi' my rambling bit sang;
Suffice it tae say, ere a month rowed awa',
The hail gate-en' rang wi' "Hurrahs" lood and lang
At the wedding o' me an' my Tilda M'Graw.

When the Greeks an' the Trojans got intae a war,
Auld Homer the poet the ships numbered a';
Sae I think I'll narrate a' the folks sma' an' great
That cam' tae the weddin' o' Tilda M'Graw.

There was Dixon the parson an' Mysie his wife,
An' Geordie M'Clink an' his spouse frae Taha';
Big Jean frae Barness, an' her wee sister Jess
Wha honoured the nuptials o' Tilda M'Graw.

There was Andy M'Minn frae the farm o' Drumjin,
An' wee drouthy Tam frae the Back o' the Wa';
Jean Clune frae the brig, loookin' gaudy an' trig
A cousin, I think, o' my Tilda M'Graw.

Lang Sandy M'Lean, wha seemed a' skin an' bane;
Frae Sorbie a couple o' hizzies sae braw;
An' Saunners M'Tier frae the farm o' Balsier
A' folk that respected douce Tilda M'Graw.

Tam Broon an' his Jenny cam' roun' frae Kirvennie,
Frae Kirkland there cam' douce auld Andy M'Gaw;
An' Tibbie M'Clurg a' the way cam' frae Borgue
For Tibbie was auntie tae Tilda M'Graw.

Then wee Hughie Little frae Brig o' the Spittle;
A big buirdly cheil' frae the Clatteringshaw;
Pate Steele frae Moorpark, an' his sweetheart Jean Clark,
Cam' swellin' the weddin' o' Tilda M'Graw.

The Misses Colquhoun frae the farm o' Baldoon;
Kirkinner some dizzen sent trippin' awa';
The Blains frae Westmains, an' auld Cook frae the Crook,
A' witnessed the weddin' o' Tilda M'Graw.

Frae Wigtown there cam' a hale 'busfu' o' folk,
Ca'd Simson, an' Murray, M'Gown, Kean, an' Shaw,
M'Kie, an' M'Haffie, Stewart, Baxter, and Guffie,
Tae witness the splicing o' Tilda M'Graw.

What feasting an' laughin', what giff-gaff an' chaffin';
Dull care that same evening through fricht ran awa';
An' a' the guests tried, an' wi' each ither vied,
Tae shower greatest honours on Tilda M'Graw.

There was singing an' dancing, an' jumping an' prancing;
A flute quite melodious wee Tamson did blaw;
An' spruce Jamie Riddle played weel on his fiddle;
Oh! blithe was the wedding o' Tilda M'Graw.

Young men, the best wish that my heart can express,
The best earthly guid tae yer lot that can fa',
Is that sune ye may woo wi, triumphant success
A douce, decent partner like Tilda M'Graw.

Gordon Fraser

23 THE LASS WI' THE DOLMAN

Ye ladies that float in yer dresses
sae braw,
An' think ye're perfection
withoot fault or flaw,
Yer fame for attraction for ever is gone
When my Tibbie appears
wi' her Dolman on

Oh! sweetly tae me
comes the calm simmer nicht,
When my ain bonnie lassie
emerges in sicht;
Ye'd think in her face
beauty's graces a' shone,
An' she trips it sae neat
wi' her Dolman on.

A prood lad am I when
she offers tae go
Wi' me in her best tae a concert
or show:
Ah! don't the folks glower
at my brave Amazon,
As she struts it sae gran'
wi' her Dolman on.

We yinst cut a shine
at oor great cattle show,
An' Tibbie was talked o',
and sae was her beau;
But, alas! the wat grun'
was as saft as a scone,
An' doon slid my lass
wi' her Dolman on.

She scarcely had time
to start up on her feet,
When the red feather mounting
her head-gear sae neat
Gart the big Elrig bull
rin at Tibbie, ochone!
An' aff she flew hame
wi' her Dolman on.

I felt disconcerted,
an' thoucht I looked green;
Thinks I, what a spectacle
Tibbie has beenl
Sae quickly I vanished,
reflecting upon
My ill starred bit lass
wi' her Dolman on.

Yae nicht tae a concert my lassie I took,
At Tibbie the ladies gied mony a look;
For mysel', I was dressed
like a great Spanish Don:
Tib looked like Queen Vic.
wi' her Dolman on.

Tae a show o' wild beasts
that appeared the next nicht
I took my dear lassie to
witness the sicht,
But an' auld caged up lion
they ca'd Caledon
Made glam at puir Tib
wi' her Dolman on.

But for a' her misfortunes,
I ne'er was inclined
Tae let her dear image fade
oot o' my mind,
An' sae ere a twal' month coortship
had gone
I married the lass
wi' the Dolman on.

Gordon Fraser

24 THE WIGTOWN TREE

I see Wigtown as a tree,
Wizened like an oak,
With each ring a new year,
And with branches stretching out,
Towards the taller, younger trees,

Whereas other tree towns,
May be cut down to splinters,
The Wigtown tree grows stronger
At the challenge,

Though this tree needs no fame
to flourish,
When the surface of its bark,
Is flocked to,
It welcomes it,
Like a forest must welcome a fire.

And although the flames spread up the tree and
The fire of tourism engulfs its leaves still,
The heat never penetrates its hardened rings
Of History,

Wigtown simply flourishes,
In its fresh compost,
And grows strong with pride,

Wigtown is not the buildings, nor the people,
Nor the fame,
Wigtown is a strength of memory,
A tree so tall it cannot be scaled,
Nor stripped of honour like a tree
Be stripped of bark,

Forever the roots of Wigtown
will spread through soil,
stone and heart and never die.

Ruth Swift Wood

POETS AND PERFORMERS

GORDON FRASER. 1836 - 1890.

"Druggist, printer and entrepreneur in Wigtown, is one of the significant minor writers of the area, thanks to whose industry and amused eye for the eccentricities of small town life, we have a well-documented picture of the characters and institutions of Wigtownshire during the 19th Century."- (Dumfries and Galloway - a literary guide. Julia Muir Watt, published by Dumfries & Galloway Libraries, 2000.)

His memorial in the churchyard reads:- "Erected by a few friends in memory of Gordon Fraser, druggist, Wigtown. Author of "Sketches and Anecdotes of Wigtown and Whithorn", "Fraser's Poems" and other works. Born Wigtown Dec. 1836 died Feb. 1890.

"O bury me at Wigtown
An' ower me raise a modest stane
To tell the folks when I am gone
The cauld mools wrap the banes o' ane*
Who wrote an' sang o' Wigtown."

*mools - mould - the earth of the grave "to rake i' the mools - to lay in the dust.

THOMAS GRIERSON

Mr. Thomas Grierson, Bachelor, was a solicitor in Wigtown and his office was next to what is now the Old Bank Bookshop. Mr. Grierson was mainly dressed in the clothes for his profession; black jacket, pinstripe trousers, white shirt, stiff collar, bowler, grey spats and black shoes. His business was taken over by Miss Helen Nicholson.

GAVIN LAWSON

In 1910 Gavin Lawson came to Wigtown from Glasgow to take up the post of Minister of the High Church. During the First World War he enlisted as a combatant with the Gordon Highlanders serving for a time in the area of the Somme. Following military service he returned as minister and in the 1920's he married a Wigtown woman, Joan Broadfoot Coid. In 1938 he retired from the ministry, 3 years after the death of his wife.

During his retirement Mr. Lawson served on the Town Council and for many years was the Church Representative on Wigtownshire Education Committee. He also remarried and spent many hours cultivating his beloved garden at the Laigh House. It was also during this period that he found time to write a

number of poems, chiefly reflecting on the beauties of nature.
Predeceased by his second wife he spent his declining years at the home of Mrs. McColm, his sister-in-law from his first marriage. He died in 1977 at the ripe old age of 96.

JANET LYNCH

Janet Lynch was a member of a well known South Machars village of Barrachan. She helped on the farm till the death of her parents when she moved into Bladnoch village to a house called Gledmein, and took employment as a cook at the County Hotel in Wigtown. She took a keen interest in the Wigtown show, at which her father had been a regular exhibitor. She eventually moved to a house on the Moss of Cree where she died.
Over the years she wrote a numerous poems, some of which were published in the Galloway Gazette. She also published a book of poems in the 1960's. Every year she wrote a poem celebrating the Wigtown Show, the highlight of the year.

JAMES NIMMO

James Nimmo came from an old Wigtown family who practised as drapers and tailors at premises in North Main Street, now occupied by a large bookshop. At the outbreak of the first World War he produced a collection of poems on a patriotic theme. In 1916 he wrote "The Mercat Cross Centenary" celebrating what was, and still is, an important monument in the town square.

THETA

Nothing is really known of the authoress of 'Stanzas Written On Visiting The Churchyard At Wigtown'. A mention of the Windy Hill monument in the poem dates it after 1858.

NANCY BURGESS

I was born in Wigtown at No.4 Bank Street. I had a very happy childhood and one of my memories is of building houses with the leaves of the trees that were round the square. The rest of my early years are really explained in the poem 'when we were weans in Wigtown'. One thing I never experienced as a child or teenager was boredom! I felt that in Wigtown I had a very busy and interesting life.

JIMMY COATES

Jimmy Coates is a native of Wigtown, and was Janitor for many years at Wigtown Primary School. He is a lover of Scottish songs and is in great demand as a singer at Burns Suppers.

At the Riding of the Marches he was Ensign in 1953 and Cornet the following year. Always a lover of horses, he still has a horse which he keeps in a nearby field. Mrs Annie Robb on her 90th birthday accompanied Jimmy on the piano as he sang 'The Star of Rabbie Burns'. She gave him the poem 'Market Day' which she had cut out of the local paper.

BARBARA HOLLAND

- born in Ayr, resident in Wigtown for some years. Chairperson of Unit3 Poetry Group.
I didn't start writing poetry until I moved to Wigtown. 'Landscape' was inspired by the view, early one morning, from my bedroom window, of a plane's vapour trails over the bay. 'Killing Times' came from my long-standing interest in the Covenanters.

JACK HUNTER

Native of Wigtown. Retired schoolteacher living in Stranraer and pursuing interest in local literature, history and antiquities.

SANDRA LOGAN

I've been a Primary School teacher for 19 years. I first became interested in drama when I was a student. I enjoy reading many different types of text, but especially enjoy reading short stories and poetry.
As a hobby, I'm still interested in drama and sometimes perform at the Swallow Theatre. It's great to be able to recite or read aloud with expression, and I get to practise this when reading to pupils when I'm at work or storytelling with my own two children at home.

RENA MCLEARY

- born in Wigtown. Early childhood spent happily playing games outdoors. No computer toys in the 1940's, but no lack of imagination in devising games with friends.
Youth spent between activities in Town Hall, Wigtown Players and Church Hall. Badminton Club and dancing at weekends.
Married in 1973 and moved to Newton Stewart, but still keep contact with Wigtown.

JIM MCCOLM

A native of Wigtown, Jim was educated at the local Primary School and the Douglas Ewart High School in Newton Stewart. With the exception of 5 years

spent at Glasgow University, he has lived all his life in the town. He works as a Geography and Guidance teacher at the Douglas Ewart and is married with two children.
He is active in church and community affairs, serving as an elder and BB leader and also as a member of Wigtown and District Community Council.

KAREN MCCOLM

Karen's school education has followed the same path as her father's. She is currently a 6th year pupil at the Douglas Ewart and is involved in assisting with the BB Anchor Boys. She also has a part time job in the Florentine Cafe and occasionally helps out in a local bookshop.

STUART MCCOLM

Stuart is a third year pupil at the Douglas Ewart. He also assists with Anchor Boys and plays euphonium with Creetown Silver Band. He is a member of Wigtown and Bladnoch Golf Club and plays rugby both at school and with Newton Stewart under15s.

INA MUNRO

When I, who used to be a librarian, heard that Wigtown was appointed Scotland's National Booktown, I came to look. I decided to stay and be a part of it. My (books and foods) shop "Cauldron" was opened one year later, on the day of the first official Book Town Festival, in May 1998, by Edwin Morgan who is now Poet Laureate of my home town Glasgow. Wigtown is my new home. Unit3 Poetry Group is a major part of my cultural sustenance. All good things and friends on my doorstep. So I'm lucky.

JOHN STEWART NIMMO

Wigtown born and bred, I can remember playing on the steps of the Market Cross. The poem 'In celebration of the Centenary of the Market Cross in Wigtown' - by James Nimmo, brings back many happy memories of a childhood spent in Wigtown, where activities such as playing on Monument Hill or down in the 'Rockies' occupy a very special place in my heart.
Many of the verses of my great-grandfather's poem will ring true to the sons and daughters of Wigtown wherever they may be in the world. The County Town of Wigtown has seen many changes since the poem was first written, particularly in recent years. However the sentiments expressed within its many verses are still very relevant today.

JOANNA PEARSON

My name is Joanna Pearson. I am eight years old and live in Wigtown.
My hobbies are swimming and going to Brownies. I can also play the piano. Sometimes I enjoy reading and poems.
I am in Primary 5 at Wigtown School. I am good at all sorts of sports. I like running and keeping fit.
I have a sister called Lynsey and a brother called John.

MARY STEWART

My name is Mary Stewart. I was born in Wigtown in the room above the shop now known as "Box of Frogs". My family previously owned the property which was then known as "The Boot Shop" and had been in business for almost 80 years. The Stewarts also sold the Sunday newspapers and during the 2nd World War I used to deliver them - aided by our dog Nero who had a cart and reins made for him by the local saddler and joiner because I was too small to carry them.. I worked for over 35 years as a Secretary at the local high school in Newton Stewart and retired in 1987 because of ill health.

JAMES TODD

I was born on the outskirts of Wigtown and my family moved into the town shortly afterwards - that was in the late Twenties - to a house overlooking the Wigtown Bay, in which I have now lived for seventy odd years, and I am proud to say I am the longest sitting tenant in town. So I suppose I can say I am a fully paid up Wigtonian.
I have always liked poetry, so I put pen to paper about some of my celebrations through life, some good, others not so good.
Hope you find them worth reading and listening to.

RUTH SWIFT WOOD

I was born in West Yorkshire and soon hope to return there. I've always loved the countryside. I've lived here nearly seven years and I'm definitely not Wigtownian, but I do appreciate the poetry. Right now I'm a fourth year in the Douglas Ewart, I love Art, English and Computing and I play in a band, we don't have a name yet. I play anything. I'm useless at most stuff and I quit the Guides, it was too much like hard work. One day I will leave this country, explore the world and write very interesting stories, but for now I read poetry, which is good. My ambition in life is to own a monkey.

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Wigtown Voices

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