



## THE BOSWELL SOCIETY NEWSLETTER

SUMMER 2025

### To all Members

#### Autumn meeting at Royal Hotel, Cumnock

The Boswell Society Autumn Meeting, which is traditionally held in Ayrshire, has in recent years been held at Caprington Castle, by the kind invitation of William Cuninghame. Previously the meetings (a lunch, in most cases) was held at Auchinleck House, when the Boswell family rented the house from the Landmark Trust for their annual holiday. Before that, the Auchinleck Boswell Society, as it was then known, met annually in the Royal Hotel, Cumnock.

The local organisers of this meeting are now returning to the society roots and have made plans for the 2025 Ayrshire Meeting. This will take place at the **Royal Hotel, The Square, Cumnock, Ayrshire, KA18 1BP**, on **Saturday 11 October 2025** at 6.00 for 6.30pm. The cost will be £29 for a two-course meal, including gratuities.

Payment should be made:

1. by cheque directly to Dane Love at Lochnoran House, Auchinleck, Ayrshire, KA18 3JW.  
Please complete the application form overleaf.

2. by BACS, making the payment to:

TSB bank, 87-37-74

Account no. 06013003

Account Name MR D LOVE

Please let Dane know by email – [dane@dane-love.co.uk](mailto:dane@dane-love.co.uk) - that you have made a transfer to ensure that you are on the list.

The speaker following the meal will be **Dr Simon Taylor** of Glasgow University. He has been involved in doing research on the place names of Ayrshire, and his talk will focus on **The Place Names of Auchinleck**.

The Royal Hotel offers accommodation, and details can be found on their website - <https://royalhotelcumnock.com> . There are other accommodation options available nearby. If you want to find out any more about the evening, please contact Dane Love by email – [dane@dane-love.co.uk](mailto:dane@dane-love.co.uk)

Closing date for applications is **3 October 2025**.

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**Royal Hotel, Cumnock**

**Saturday 11 October 2025 at 6.00 for 6.30pm**

Name(s) .....

would like to attend the lunch at Royal Hotel Cumnock on 11<sup>th</sup> October 2025 and enclose my / our cheque for £29 per person

Cheque £..... payable to **Dane Love** enclosed

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### **Subscriptions**

2025 subscriptions are now due for payment. They remain at £7 per annum for single memberships and £10 for joint memberships. If you have not already paid or have not set up standing order payments, please make your payment in one of the following ways:

1. Send a cheque payable to **The Boswell Society** to Richard Davies, .....

2. If you use online banking, please make a payment to  
The Boswell Society, Sort Code 77 – 22 – 38, Account Number 22909068.

Please consider setting up your payment on an annual basis.

### **Rose Boswell**

The society extends its heartfelt thanks to Rose Boswell who is now passing on the baton of secretarial duties of the Society. Over some two decades, Rose liaised and worked with Joan and David on the preparation of the newsletter and then efficiently organised distribution. Rose was actually a descendant of the English branch, her great-grandfather was Jasper J. Boswell, the compiler of the “Boswell History” published at the turn of the 19th/20th century. She descends from the Bosviles who settled in Yorkshire; it was a younger son of this family, Robert de Bosvile, who went to Scotland in 1165 and who established the Scottish family.

So our thanks and best wishes to Rose in her retirement.

## 1795 The sad family year. By Robert Boswell of Auchinleck

Among numerous family artefacts that have recently come to light, of which I was unaware, are 3 letters from the last 3 months of 1795, from Alexander the twenty year old successor to the lairdship of Auchinleck and his father's 1<sup>st</sup> cousin, and legal executor Robert Boswell W.S.. The death of James Boswell on 19<sup>th</sup> May was followed by the death of Veronica on 26<sup>th</sup> September. Alexander was writing from Leipzig, where he had arrived to study for a year, leaving Veronica (22), drained and in poor health after nursing and losing their father, Euphemia (21), James (17) and Elizabeth (15) in London. Sir William Forbes is always considered the literary executor of James Boswell, which led to the papers he held being found at Fettercairn, however these letters suggest that Sir William was assisting the family left in London in practical ways also, while the family head was in Leipzig, and the other executor, Robert, was in Edinburgh. I have tried to leave odd spelling unaltered and use original punctuation as closely as keyboard allows.

Alexander's first letter was dated October 22<sup>nd</sup> and is reacting to the news of Veronica's death *undoubtedly fallen a victim to the affectionate & unremitting attention which she paid to my Father during his long & fatal illness.* He says his brother's letter had arrived long after it was dated *I had not heard from one of the Family from the time I left London & anxiously wished to have a letter – the first I opened wrung my heart with the painful intelligence.* Further down he talks of the younger sisters *Euphemia has lost a sister; a friend with whom she has passed all her early days & with whom she hoped to pass many more – fallacious hope!- Poor Betsy must have looked forward to her good sense for a mothers care,* the letter closes *I had a letter from Sir W<sup>m</sup> Forbes some days ago in which it gave me consolation to find that it had been found practicable to have the funeral at Auchinleck – as it was the constant wish of poor Veronica who even in the ravings of her diseased imagination talk'd of it.* The letter was sealed with black wax, signifying mourning, the signet ring used stamped an emblem (Pan or cherub like figure?) which I do not recognise – possibly the badge of the institution he was attending, the second letter has the imprint of the Hooded Hawk family crest and the third he reverts to the cherub figure ring, these too on black wax.

The second letter is undated but acknowledges Robert's letter of 18<sup>th</sup> November. Euphemia had informed him of Robert's presence in London as she wrote *the cause of your being there I did not know but I have since read of the Mr Campbell's Death in the English Magazine which was sad indeed.*

This is very likely the death of John Campbell-Hooke, Lyon King-of-Arms (according to Burkes since 1754), under whom Robert served as Lyon Depute. Robert held this colleague and friend in such esteem that his youngest (14<sup>th</sup>) child, born the following November was named John Campbell Boswell. In the Skirving portrait of Robert (now at the Signet Library, Edinburgh) he is painted, probably at the Lyon Court, with the portrait of John Campbell-Hooke behind him. It may be that the death of Campbell-Hooke in office required his Depute to attend the Royal Court in London to register the event and be issued with authority to continue in the interim. It was fully expected that Robert would be appointed to succeed however there was a change of administration and the new government apparently chose one of their supporters to reward with the post. The upheaval at Westminster, which led to an election (mentioned in December letter) may be what is alluded to later in the letter with his mention of terrible accounts from London and Bills which are strong measures. Alexander then shares with Robert his worries about *Poor Phemie's* plans she was forming which he could not deal with from his current abode in Europe which *"would be ruinous to us all. - Her situation is much to be pitied: without a home, & uncertain where she may find one. - Among other things she urged that we should live together – this no doubt is a natural wish & one which if I had a House it would be most unnatural in me to balk – to this I answered that I could have no objection to us living together in Edinburgh but as for London it was entirely out of the question. - I am sure you & best friends could not but form a mean idea of me should I suffer my Sister to hunt about for a residence, were it in my power to prevent it, & I shall as soon as possibility will permit. In the mean while I expressed a wish to poor Phemie that she would find out some way of passing the time till I return, when it may be in my power to make*

her situation more what she would wish. I understand that her aunt M<sup>rs</sup> Montgomerie has kindly invited her to stay a little time with her; which I think she will accept, & will have some little leisure to reflect on what will be most agreeable for her & will be assisted with her Aunts best advice. The letter continues in reply to Robert's asking how he is getting on, *I answer tollerably well, I labour at this untoward tongue as a matter of conscience & necessity. .... The people I have no great affection for – the higher ranks seem vulgar; & the lower insolent.* Then is described the domestic arrangements a warm fire in his room but lack of a “*social fireside*”. He then recounts how a gentleman in Mr Trege's Banking House had recommended the pleasure of a pipe *I could not help wishing to taste this enjoyment too but notwithstanding a most steady perseverance I have been able to contract nothing but a nauseous stench from the most excellent Tobacco.*

Next he returns to the theme of the German language in more charitable terms *it must be owned there is also much harmony in many of their words, & must be observed much to the honour of the present age that it has produced all their best authors. There is scarcely a great German writer who was not alive twenty years ago so it may be considered as their Augustine age, for now Frederic the great were he alive could not say as he once did that “he did not know any Germans of Genius”.* Alexander then tells Robert *I would gladly exchange this my sombre stove for your Social Fire and as I shall not exceed my proposed time of staying in Germany I may perhaps have that pleasure next Winter. -- There is a French report in Town today that they have had some success against the Austrians but it is only given on the authority of a French Paper as yet : There have great reinforcements poured in from Holland which must have strengthen'd the Republican Army very much. The Accounts from London are terrible. The present Bills are certainly strong measures but I fear necessary. -- I wrote to Andrew Gibb a long time ago but have not received any Answer. My letter did not regard business so it does not signify that it is lost which is possible. -- I hope he gives you regular information how he goes on as I desired him to do before I left Scotland. The Key of Charter Chests is sealed up & lies at Auchinleck. I beg you will present my best Compliments to all your Family. I remain Your Obligated and Affectionate Alexander Boswell.*

Andrew Gibb was the factor on the estate with great responsibility following the recent death of the Laird, and the family in London for much of the year for several previous years, perhaps only being in Scotland when the Law Courts did not sit and the two boys were on holiday from Westminster School.

The third of these three letters bears the date December 27<sup>th</sup> in answer to a letter received a few days before *I am sorry that you met with such an accident in the City of Auchinleck, it is consolation however that you was able to bestride your Charger again and pursue your journey. -- I lament that you had such doleful work of it, & I hope that when you again honour your Birth-place with a visit you will hear some human voice break the Reign of Silence tho' I doubt if you could collect a set of countenances which would afford more amusement to an observer than the dumb society who smiled, squinted & grin'd at you in the library.* Alexander's bond with his cousin is such that he is free to engage in a bit of ironic humour as well as some youthful mockery at the ancestral portraits ! (A 70 mile trip to conduct administrative duties with Andrew Gibb must have involved at least one night overstay and Robert no doubt appreciated the opportunity to spend his evening in his uncle Alexander's famed library.) He proceeds *I am surprised to hear of Snow in Great Britain when we have none here; during a trip which I took to Dresden there was a fall but none since, however I am told that when it does come we shall have enough of it. -- Then, after comments on various german customs and use of language I am at present reading the works of Gessner which are Pastorals & the scenes are taken from his Native Country Switzerland. I have taken the liberty of sending you a translation of one of his Idyls as it will help to fill this enormous sheet better than any nonsense of mine.* This he does filling nearly a quarter of the space with his translation and he further analyses some of the words and phrases and expresses his enthusiasm for Gessner, continuing *By the way do you consider measure necessary to make a poem ? -- Gessners are called Poems and have not a measured line in the whole except a few songs.*

Alexander asks Robert, who is already well known as a poet, and his own interest in poetry grew as he became a noted poet and collector of scots poetry, which he established the Printing

Press on the Auchinleck Estate to publish. Back in Ayrshire he would lead the campaign for a memorial to Robert Burns (who was to die in the following year, 1796). He briefly comments on his business affairs being in good hands but continues *Notwithstanding the wondrous opportunities I have of learning something, I feel often a childish hankering to return to the apron strings of my Mother Country like many youths who are sent to School.* He next discloses his lack of confidence in conversation *not only what to say but how to say it* this he illustrates *There is a little crook – backed lawyer who is frequently my next neighbour at Dinner with whom I carry on most elaborate conversations.* Some of which he describes to Robert. He then asks for news of home and family *When you have leisure I shall be much obliged to you if you will send me a few lines to let me know what goes on in Edin' . In the account of the meeting of the Whig Club given in the Morning Chronicle. Something is hinted at as having happened at Edin' & that Harry Erskine had been insulted by the Faculty of Advocates.* Alexander expresses his gladness to hear that all Robert's family are well and enquires for his 2<sup>nd</sup> cousin, Robert's eldest son William, (who would be 17 in January) *I fancy that William is by this time received again amongst the inhabitants of the Corner House , it will give me great pleasure to get a Letter from him.* Less than

four years later (23<sup>rd</sup> December 1799) his sister Betsy (then 19) would marry William at Auchinleck, the letter continues *I had the pleasure to get a letter from Lady Auchinleck some time ago* (the widow of Lord Auchinleck, who snubbed his son James on the day of his marriage to Margaret in 1769, by marrying his 1<sup>st</sup> cousin Elizabeth Boswell of Balmuto, she lived to 1798)

*I thank you for letting me know that Mr J\*\* Boswell is again able to move about without Crutches* (the two letters \*\* are probably “n.o.signifying John, there is no John in close family, Lady Auchinleck's nephew John was only 10 and unlikely to be titled Mr so this must be an acquaintance from another line) *You are no doubt surprised at the great Success of the Austrians who have been some time in possession of Coblenz & have now taken Treves as was said yesterday Their success has been sudden, unexpected and rapid. Since I wrote that yesterday I have discovered that my intelligence had made a blunder, having mistaken the French word for a Truce (which has been agreed on) for Treves.* *I hope that you will not display my letters to any person otherwise.* Whether he fears he is disclosing militarily sensitive information that should not be widely known, I wonder. He further comments on current affairs *Notwithstanding the impossibility of my having a Vote at the Next Election I have been hunted out by an application even at this distant place which makes me think that a warm contest is expected in Ayrshire.* The letter closes with the normal family greetings but there is a P.S. squeezed into a corner in smaller and less legible script *I have just received intelligence from London that Euphemia is to leave London in a few days after the date, which I am sincerely glad of. I hope Sir W<sup>m</sup> Forbes will interfere a great deal with regard to my Brother James as I fear poor fellow he will not find things as comfortable as we could wish. I am sorry that a person whose kindness & (here legibility deteriorates and is uncertain) protection is so necessary should hesitate to afford it. I doubt not but Mr D. Boswell will act with all the ????? of prudence but no more.* This probably refers to their uncle Thomas David and 17 year old James making a decision over his future course in life.

These three letters give us some insight to the changes in the family situation following the death of James. Alexander's interest in poetry and the political situation is already evident, as his interest in the estate which he now inherited. An estate he had been more a visitor to than a resident. Most of his life his home must have been in Edinburgh and London, for the first half his father and grandfather were to some degree alienated and after James inherited the estate his career and interests were mainly elsewhere, and the family might only have visited the estate during the harvest months. Alexander may have based his life in Ayrshire more than any Laird since the 6<sup>th</sup> Laird, David, over eight decades before.

**Footnote** – John Hooke Campbell, changed his name for some reason to Campbell-Hooke, he was descended from the 3<sup>rd</sup> son of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Earl of Argyll (who was among the slain at Flodden), whose marriage to Muriel Calder heiress of the Thanes of Caldor or Cawdor brought Cawdor Castle and lands into the Campbell family. Their great-grandson Sir John Campbell of Cawdor married Jean Campbell of the Glenorchy branch, (whose great-great grandfather Sir Duncan also fell at

Flodden) Sir John's mother Mary Keith was daughter of the 4<sup>th</sup> Earl Marischal (whose great grandfather Robert, Lord Keith was another casualty at Flodden). Hooke-Campbell had a seat in Pembrokeshire as both the previous generations acquired estates there by marriage, his father had served as a Lord of the Admiralty and, later of the Treasury. Campbell-Hooke did not live to see his brother's son elevated, in 1796, to the title "Baron Cawdor, of Castlemartin, co. Pembroke". However in 1789 the son of his sister Anne wife of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baron Fortescue (who had died in 1785) had been created "1<sup>st</sup> Earl Fortescue and Viscount Ebrington". The Fortescues have been prominent North Devon landowners since 1454. The younger brother of the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl was Matthew Fortescue R.N., whose grandson Archer Fortescue married Anne Irvine a granddaughter of Claude Irvine Boswell, Lord Balmuto. Their descendants are the Irvine-Fortescues of Kingcausie. John Campbell Hooke also had a North Devon connection by his marriage to Eustacia Basset of Heanton Court, the Bassets another prominent family from at least Tudor times to Georgian. Both Devon families held land s within 12 miles of this writer.

Robert Boswell of Auchinleck.