

Biographical introduction an leet o A. J. Aitken's published warks

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Adam Jack Aitken, Jack Aitken tae his freins, A. J. Aitken tae his readers (an AJA here-efter) was the leadin authority on the Scots langage durin his lifetime.

AJA was born on 19 June 1921 in Edinbro, an brocht up in Lasswade, Midlothian. In 1952 he merriet Norma Ward Manson (later kent as Chandra); they had three sons an a dochter. He dee'd at hame in Edinbro on 11 Februar 1998 o ischaemia, efter haein a hert by-pass operation twinty year afore. Chandra dee'd on 14 December 2013.

Jack was the ae son an eldest bairn oot o three childer o Adam Aitken, a miner, an his first wife Alexandrina Sutherland, wha dee'd whan Jack was aboot nine. He was ill-yaised as a step-bairn, but his meenister, Rev. Oliver Dryer, encouraged him for tae mak the maist o his pairts, an helpit him tae lea hame at the age o saxteen, thegither wi his sister Hope, aged fifteen. He was able tae stick in at his eddication thanks tae a schuil bursary. As the son o a miner, he received ither bursaries that alloo'ed him tae gang tae the University of Edinburgh in 1939.

His studies was interruptit by the war. He ser'd frae 1941–45 as a lance bombardier in the Royal Artillery an tane pairt in the Normandy landins an in the war in Nor Africa, risin tae the rank o sergeant major. He was commendit for bravery by Field-Marshal Montgomery in 1944. AJA's frein, John Millar, than editor o the *Arran Banner*, in an editorial o 21 Februar 1998, mindit on a baur that shaws AJA's characteristic modesty:

... he wanted to stay at an army club in London. They would not allow him to book because he had no documentation from his war service. Then he found a letter of commendation for bravery signed by Montgomery – an incident he'd never once mentioned. They took his booking!

AJA graduatit MA wi First Cless Honours in English Language and Literature in 1947. In 1948 he was appyntit Assistant tae Sir William Craigie, the Editor o *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST) an became Editor o DOST whan Craigie retire't in 1956. He describes his university eddication an the early years o his career in 'Playboy of the West Germanic World' (no published till noo), an mentions forbye some o the context o his ain wark in his tribute tae Angus McIntosh ('Angus McIntosh and Scottish studies', 1981). His 1991 review o wark in the field of Aulder Scots, 'Progress in Older Scots philology' (no reproduced here), includes a contextualised descreeption o his ain contributions.

For the muckler pairt o his career, he combined his wark on DOST wi teachin, as a Lecturer an afterwards Reader in the Department of English Language, University of Edinburgh. In 1986 he began his gey active retirement.

A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue

When he took over editorial responsibility for DOST, AJA took the calculated risk of starting a new reading programme that would double the length of works excerpted for the dictionary. The original corpus was biased towards verse and literary prose, reflecting the availability of published editions, but there was other surviving material that was more representative of the everyday language. As expected, the broadening of the reading programme to include minor literature, official records, family and business papers, etc., was richly productive of new words. AJA's editorship began with the letter J, and the impact of the new reading programme is seen from the third volume on. The excerpting was a voluntary labour for the most part, which AJA never neglected to acknowledge.

The first publisher of DOST was the University of Chicago Press. From the outset, the dictionary had very little surplus, and its publication depended on the generosity of individuals within the press to continue financing publication from year to year. Craigie was already familiar with the hammer and sickle at the dictionary was forged between: on the one hand the need to maintain academic standards, and on the other the practical need for speed and economy. Even before AJA took over, there were complaints from the publishers about the cost of editorial changes at a late stage in production – a complaint often levelled against AJA. From 1950, the University of Edinburgh contributed to editorial costs. The Carnegie Trust was an important source of funding for by now, and other public and private sources continued to be crucial. The seeking of funds for DOST together with *The Scottish National Dictionary* (SND) became the responsibility, from 1952, of a Joint Council of the Scottish Universities, chaired originally and for many years by Angus McIntosh. The two dictionaries were brought together in Edinburgh, taking up a key position in a very productive period for the Scots language at Edinburgh, together with the Linguistic Survey of Scotland and the collecting activities of the School of Scottish Studies. The work of DOST and SND (in its main phase, before the present work of supplementation and revision) won the kind of official support offered to similar national projects in other countries, as AJA pointed out on many occasions. It was possible only because of the superhuman dedication of the editors.

The early 1980s brought financial crisis. The University of Chicago Press pulled out in 1981. Their commitment had already gone on for almost ten years originally envisaged in 1931. After a hiatus, the situation was saved by the intervention of Aberdeen University Press, championed by Colin MacLean as Managing Director (Publishing), who took on DOST, SND and the new *Concise Scots Dictionary*. With the demise in 1993 of Aberdeen University Press, by that time part of Robert Maxwell's doomed publishing empire, the dictionary moved again, to Oxford University Press from vol. VIII on. Alexander Fenton's fund-raising efforts and a gruelling final push by the dictionary staff saw the final volume, vol. XII, published, though a great deal of material intended for a Supplement, in 2002.

AJA has spoken and written extensively on the editorial policies and practices of DOST, including 'Sense-analysis for a historical dictionary' (1973), 'Textual problems and the Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue' (1977) and 'DOST: how we make it and what's in it' (1982). Under his editorship, DOST became more than just an adjunct to *The Oxford English Dictionary* (OED). The slips were now arranged according to their own implicit semantics, rather than being forced into the pre-existing sense analysis of the OED. With its greater coverage of Scottish material DOST has a when words additional to OED as well as additional forms and senses, and many ante-datums. With the four muckler books of material examined, an absolute reliance can be put on first and last recorded dates as time limits.

DOST is forbye kenspeckle for the amunt o secondary research duin by the editors tae provide accurate defineetions o technical an specialised vocabular.

AJA was yin o the first tae appreciate the potential o the computer for research in the Arts. Though computer methods arrived ower late tae be the dock-nail o the collection process for DOST, he biggit up, wi Paul Bratley an Neil Hamilton-Smith, the Older Scots Textual Archive, a computer-readable archive o mair nor a million wirts o Aulder Scots leeterature. Forbye, he was tae the fore in organisin the first conference on computers an leeterary studies.

AJA was michtily respectit internationally as a lexicographer. He spak an screivit on English as weel as Scots lexicography, an actit as adviser or consultant tae a wheen projecks, includin the *Dictionary of Sanskrit on Historical Principles*, the *Middle English Dictionary*, *The Dictionary of Early Modern English Pronunciation*, an *The Dictionary of Old English*. His reputation an achievements as a lexicographer by thairsels wad been eneuch tae win him a place amang the gret names in scholarship.

Teachin an writin on Scots

In a letter o 9 September 1987 AJA telt me:

The achievement of which I have been ... most proud is that I *think* I can claim to have created Scots as a University teaching subject, thanks to the opportunity given me from 1948 onwards by Angus McIntosh. Before then all there was was a series of interpretative and philological commentaries on specific texts of Middle Scots verse ...

The haundoots that AJA made in the 1950s for his coorses on Scots langage was for mony a year the only clear summaries o Scots vocabular, phonology, orthography, gremmar an stylistics, an they circulatit widely amang scholars. Ower time he made a fouth o this material available in prent, an his writins mair or less forms the founs o the subjeck. In teachin coorses on Aulder Scots, AJA made uise o an anthology o verse texts o his ain walin, includin an excellent glossary, which gied byornar detailt information on the stylistic restrictions o parteecular vocabular items. This was intendit for publication, bit for some reason ne'er kythed. AJA providit students wi a representative walin o prose texts an aa.

Mony o his ideas has formed the stertin pynt for PhD topics, an there is hardly an acre o Scots langage research whaur he hasna cut the feerin. His paper on variation (especially orthographic variation) in Aulder Scots has lang been regairdit as the fundamental descreption ('Variation and variety in written Middle Scots', 1971). AJA's interpretation o textual variation was ayways informed by a thorough knowledge o palaeography, an an awareness o the leemitations o prent edeetions.

His descreption o the vowel phonology o Aulder Scots will ay be the essential stertin pynt for aa future wark. This was set oot in 'How to pronounce Older Scots' (1977), alang o a discussion o the deafrent models, o varyin degrees o accuracy, that reciters in practice follaes. At the time o his daith, AJA was wirkin on a lang screive on Aulder Scots phonology, includin a detailt hainin o the evidence, maistly frae orthography an rhyme. This was near eneuch complete tae be published posthumously as *The Older Scots Vowels* (†Aitken, 2002). Thegither wi the paper on 'The Scottish Vowel-Length Rule' (1981) (also kent as 'Aitken's

Law'), these writins constitutes, in AJA's ain wirds, "the only succinct, comprehensive and detailed account of the development of the vowel-systems of Scots from those of the poets of the 14th century to those of the present day".¹

Aitken's Law has kittlet up a certain amunt o interest amang theoretical phonologists, acause o its byornar structure: it peens doon environments whaur a soond chynge (shortenin) *disna* kythe. Despite some demurrin (pyntin oot that the realisation o vowel lynth is sensitive tae the follaein environment in RP an aa), Aitken's Law is ay important for its explanatory poo'er. As weel as predictin vowel lynth, it accoonts for the phonemic splits involvin Vowels 1 an 7 (e.g. *fife* versus *five*, an *uise* noun versus *yaize* verb).

AJA's analysis o the history o Scots phonology lies ahint his pronunciation entries for *The Concise Scots Dictionary*. It was forbye an input at an early stage tae the Linguistic Survey of Scotland's phonological investigations. The existence o independent analyses by ither scholars shaws that AJA's reconstruction isna self-evident: it is possible tae reconstruct alternative soond-chynge scenarios. AJA's, hooever, is supportit by his extensive study o the contemporary evidence, as he pynts oot in 'Progress in Older Scots philology' (1991).

AJA wirket closely wi the late George Philp's initiative, Scotsoun, which produced tape recordins (an later CDs) o Scots speak an readins o Scots leetature.² He read Aulder Scots verse on a puckle recordins, an had a pickie-say in a series o modrenised readins o Henryson in association wi the Robert Henryson Society. The Society also commissioned a recordit version o AJA's 'How to pronounce Older Scots' (1996), replacin an earlier tape cassette wi the ilk title, no available ony mair, whaur AJA read passages in his reconstruction o Aulder Scots alang o Mairi Robinson an J. Derrick McClure (1980).

AJA ettlet tae integrate the evidence frae the 17th century forrat intae his accoont o anglicisation an the origins o Scottish English, an was in the process o examinin screivins an texts o the period. His raither sketchy presentation o data in 'The pioneers of anglicised speech in Scotland: a second look' (1997) mints that this was juist a preein o wark that wad been a thorough, detailt examination o the internal history o anglicisation.

AJA's paper 'The language of Older Scots poetry' (1983) is the ainly comprehensive survey o the rynges o Aulder Scots poetic varieties an o the stylistic characteristics o ilkane. 'Oral narrative style in Middle Scots' (1978) is anither important study o the leetery langage o Aulder Scots, an analyses a puckle blauds o prose an verse, includin the weel-kent *Wyf o Awchtermwchty* an an interestin piece o airtless 17th prose. His review airticle, 'A Sixteenth Century Scottish Devotional Anthology' (1957) examines the stylistic features o a byornar survival o pre-Reformation devotional prose.

AJA's papers on Modren Scots is o thair time: the educational an cultural rammies has mued on (though mony o the ilk issues perennially recurs), an the demographic an linguistic structure o the population has chynge. Nanetheless conceps that AJA introduced in thir papers continues tae be uisefu an tae inform thinkin about the state o the langage. In 'Scottish speech: a historical view with special reference to the Standard English of Scotland' (1979), he introduced the disteenction atween covert an overt Scotticisms, an described Scottish code-switchin practicks forbye. The relationship atween Scots an Scottish Staurart English is captured in whit he cried his 5-column model (it stertit aff in his early teachin as a 3-column model), which provides a richt uisefu wey o representin an analysin the linguistic chyces available tae Scottish writers an speakers. He revisitit thir subjects in twa chaipthers in Trudgill's *Language in the British Isles* (1984), 'Scottish accents and dialects' and 'Scots and

¹ Frae a catalogue-style descreption o AJA's planned collection o papers.

² Noo available through the Scots Language Society.

English in Scotland'. Since we have been able to include the 1979 paper in this collection, notes have been added to the two 1984 chapters to make clear that the relevant material is all covered. A.J.A.'s observations are as valuable as a description of the speech continuum at a point in time when external influences were not that pervasive, an educated Scottish speech was perhaps more distinctive.

His description of attitudes to Scots in terms of Guid Scots v. Bad Scots ('The good old Scots tongue: Does Scots have an identity?', 1981; 'Bad Scots: Some superstitions about Scots speech', 1982) has been influential, as has his suggestion that the model of Guid Scots that cretics and activists alike had in mind was an Ideal Scots far from the spoken leid (though this attitude has mellowed since).

In his article 'The extinction of Scotland in popular dictionaries of English' (1987), on the neglect of Scottish material in English dictionaries, A.J.A. examined the coverage of Scots and Scottish English words and idioms in five popular one-volume dictionaries, providing a very useful check list, classified into categories such as covert Scotticisms, items associated with distinctively Scottish institutions, and words well known through the works of Robbie Burns.

He turned his attention also to the vexed issue of the status of Modern Scots as a leid ('New Scots: the problems', 1980; 'The good old Scots tongue: Does Scots have an identity?', 1981). He was always a realist, and he was not convinced that Scots could claim the status of a leid in the present day. His concern was less for the leid as an abstraction and more for the speakers, especially children in school that might suffer from linguistic prejudice ('The Scots Language and the Teacher of English in Scotland', 1976).

Leadership

A.J.A. made it his business to keep up to date with all aspects of scholarship in the Scots language. He was, in effect, a *yin-man* Scots Language Resource Centre, providing information and contacts on request, and also sometimes producing bibliographies and reviews of work in the subject, and identifying areas for future research. He played a part in organising many conferences, and an editorial role in a number of collections of papers, including conference proceedings. Among the bodies that drew on his expertise was the Scottish Early Music Consort, that he advised on the pronunciation of Auld Scots songs.

A.J.A. was involved in all major efforts on behalf of the leid or rather, as he always emphasised, its speakers. In the 1950s he gave strong support to David Abercrombie's campaign to break the monopoly of RP voices on the BBC (he had a number of letters on this subject published in *The Scotsman* – some of them are reproduced in the present edition). The battle to hear Scottish accents won, he went on in the 1990s to lead a delegation from the Scots Language Society for the Scots leid to be heard on Scottish radio.

Always generous with his time, A.J.A. served on a number of committees. He was Chairman of the Language Committee of the Association for Scottish Literary Studies 1971–76; Chairman of the Forum for Research on the Languages of Scotland 1978–81 and Honorary President from 1994; Vice-President of the Scottish Text Society from 1985; Honorary President of the Scots Language Society from 1994; Honorary Vice-President of the Scottish National Dictionary Association from 1995; and Honorary Vice-President of the Robert Henryson Society from 1996.

In 1981 the British Academy awarded him the Biennial Sir Israel Gollancz Prize. In 1983 he was awarded a DLitt by the University of Edinburgh, and was appointed Honorary Professor in

1984. In 1987, he was presentit wi a Festschrift: *The Nuttis Schell* (Macafee and Macleod eds.).

The present collection

In his retirement AJA ettlet for tae produce a volume o his papers on Aulder Scots an Scots phonology. A puckle lines that he draftit for a Foreword indicates his intentions:

All of the articles that follow treat of the ‘internal’ history of Older Scots. All but one have appeared in widely scattered earlier publications, several of which are no longer easy to obtain. Some have been quite extensively referred to by other scholars. For these reasons, reprinting them seems justified. I have left the original texts intact, but added afterthoughts (Addenda), occasioned by more recent works by others.

The papers referred tae is ‘Progress in Older Scots philology’, ‘How to pronounce Older Scots’, ‘The Scottish Vowel-length Rule’, ‘Variation and variety in written Middle Scots’, ‘The language of Older Scots poetry’ an ‘Oral narrative style in Middle Scots’. The unpublished item was *The Older Scots Vowels*, separately published as a beuk by the Scottish Text Society in 2002.

A fu list o AJA’s publications, sae faur as can be ascertained, is gien ablow. The present walin o papers gies a representative view o his wark. The maist o the important papers that arena reproduced here is aaredies available online, albeit ahint pey waas. Addeitionally, ‘The lexicography of Scots two hundred years since: Ruddiman and his successors’ (1989) has been separately pitten online, on a wabsteid creatit for the purpose o meetin the publisher’s self-archivin proveesions, <http://carolinemacafee.wix.com/ajaonscotslanguage> (accessed 29 April 2015).

We are pleased tae be able for tae present the reader wi a nummer o previously unpublished papers: ‘Sources of the Vocabulary of Older Scots’ (which is weel kent tae an aulder generation o scholars as a haundoot, but hasna appeared in prent), ‘Address and Toast to the Immortal Memory of Robert Burns’, an the autobiographical ‘The playboy of the West Germanic world’. Some mair unpublisht material, maistly cut oot o publisht papers for reasons o linth, will be fun in the notes an appendices tae some of the papers here. We hae includit forbye twa-three minor screivins that is itherwise haurd tae fin, sic as letters tae the press.

AJA had begoud tae gang ower some o the papers he had walit hissel, though juist in a preliminary wey. Thir revisions an addeetions, wi antrin typographic corrections, is incorporatit in the versions published here. Minor chynges is made silently, wi mair substantial yins pyntit oot in notes. Stylistic chynges, e.g. tae spellins, abbreviations an the format o references an notes, has been made here tae harmonise the different papers. AJA whiles referred tae the leid as ‘Scottish’, follaein Craigie (as in the title o the *Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue*): this has been chynged tae ‘Scots’.

In *The Older Scots Vowels* AJA made a wheen refinements tae his reconstruction o Aulder Scots phonology. It was accordinly possible tae revise ‘How to pronounce Older Scots’ in line wi his ain later writins, in Macafee an †Aitken (2003), which is includit here in the same downloadable file as ‘How to pronounce Older Scots’. AJA also ettlet tae revise ‘The Scottish

Vowel-length Rule' follaein the publication o *The Linguistic Atlas of Scotland* vol. III, an did mak some reveesions, bit a full-scale re-writin bude tae be left tae some ither haun.

The impetus for the present collection cam frae Prof. Priscilla Bawcutt: at her suggestion the Scottish Text Society proposed a volume o AJA's collectit papers, later decidin on an e-book. As AJA's literary executors, Iseabail Macleod an masel are verra conscious o the gret honour that the STS did tae Jack Aitken's memory wi this proposal. Hooever, efter conseederation, we feel that, while the capabilities o a publishin hoose wad mak the wark easier tae fin athin an academic environment, this means o publication wad also pit it ahint a pey waa, which wad be an obstacle for the mony fowk wi an interest in the leid that disna hae access tae the subscription resources o a university leebrary. We are accordinly verra gratefu tae the Scots Language Centre for agreein tae host the papers on their wabsteid, an tae Michael Hance an Chris Third o the Centre for makin this online publication possible.

We wad like tae record oor muckle thanks forbye tae the various publishers that has allooed copyricht material tae be reproduced here, athout charge; an likewise editors Prof. Michael Benskin an Prof. P. G. J. van Sterkenburg, an Dr Christine Robinson on behauf o Scottish Language Dictionaries, that has freely gien their permission an encouraged the projeck. Oor thanks gangs an aa tae aabody that contributit photies tae the wabsteid 'A. J. Aitken on the Scots Language' an tae Michael Montgomery an his colleague Paul Reed for the audio there.

As editor o the collectit papers in their present form, Ah wad like to express ma ain gratitude tae Iseabail Macleod for her support an advice, an for comments on the editorial maitter. Ony errors introduced intae this edeetion is ma sole responsibeelity.

A. J. Aitken: publications

A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue (1937–2002) eds. William Craigie *et al.*, 12 vols. (Oxford University Press). [Online] 'Dictionary of the Scots Language' <http://www.dsl.ac.uk/> (accessed 27 April 2015). Aitken worked on vol. II letter G as assistant editor and vols. III–VI as sole or joint editor.

1953

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Paper 1: Biographical introduction and list of A. J. Aitken's published works

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A personal website <http://carolinemacafee.wix.com/ajaonscotslanguage> has been created to 'self-archive' one of AJA's papers that could not be included in 'Collected Writings on the Scots Language'. The site also has a selection of photographs and a link to an audio recording of 'Progress in Older Scots philology' (as of 29 April 2015).