

TAM O' SHANTER

A TRANSLATION
INTO ENGLISH IN VERSE

(for everyone who struggles to understand the old Scottish words)

By
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DEDICATED TO

my good friends

BOB STEWART

(Past President of the Robert Burns World Federation)

and

ERIC SUMMERS

(Former Rector of Webster's High School, Kirriemuir)

for their unfailing support and encouragement throughout the process of compiling this book and for inspiring me to think, double-check, amend, and think again before finally putting it to bed.

FOREWORD

This fine translation of Burn's famous poem is a labour of love. It is by a man whose association with Tam is almost as close as Souter Johnnie's. I must have heard Jim Smith recite Burns' masterpiece at least thirty times, a small fraction of the total number of performances he has given. And performance it always is, for Jim quaffs the ale, puts his arm round some unsuspecting female in the audience, teases some grey beard when describing the knife that a son used to murder his father, has a "volunteer" dress up as the devil, and gallops round the hall on his very own Meg. His is one the great Tams and one never tires of seeing and hearing it again.

But, in truth, there is vocabulary in Tam O'Shanter which can puzzle the modern reader or listener, and elements in the story which can leave someone completely unfamiliar with the Scots language very confused. Jim, I know, will never abandon the original, but here he has produced a carefully-crafted English translation which will greatly increase its accessibility – and enjoyment – for those who live furth of Scotland and - whisper it – maybe also for quite a few who still live in their native land. It will certainly be very helpful for school teachers.

Jim has worked hard on this project, determined to stay as close as possible to the original, always retaining the Bard's words when they are well-known and keeping Burns' rhythm, metre, similes and storyline. The delightful vignettes of jolly pub evenings, the sometimes harsh side of rural life, and the ups and downs of domestic relationships are still there; so too are the humour, excitement and sheer energy of this timeless, epic poem.

Jim is a Glaswegian, long resident in Kirriemuir, after an RN career which took him around the globe. He is a stalwart of the local Speakers Club (and a past winner of its national speechmaking competition), a founder member of the Kirriemuir Literary Society, the organiser of enormously popular tea-dancing afternoons and, perhaps inspired by Burns, Jim is himself a published poet who has written poetry since he was a boy.

Indeed, a man of many parts, but a word too about his wife, Muriel. No Kate she, left at home nursing her wrath. She accompanies Jim on all his many outings, his very best critic and support, and she is a fine public speaker in her own right. She will have been through this translation with a fine-tooth comb, we may be sure.

Enough! It is time to visit Ayr, just as market day is coming to its close....

*Eric Summers
Rector (rtd)
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