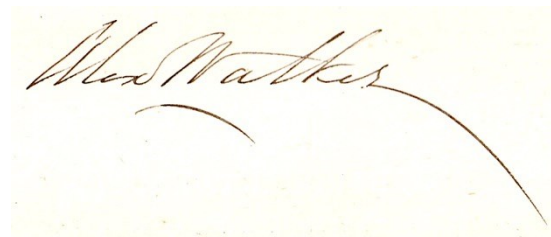


Insertions in a copy of Robertson's 'A Handbook to the Coinage of Scotland'

David Rampling

My copy of this 'handbook'¹ bears an owner's signature, 'Alex Walker', on the back of its title page. Two neatly pasted documents, inside the front and rear covers, prompt this notice. Neither of these insertions bear Walker's name, but their context and other circumstantial evidence support an intimate association. The two documents are (i) a newspaper article on the Scottish coinage, and (ii) a letter from R. W. Cochran-Patrick.



The article



Alexander Walker LL.D.
Painted by Alphonse Legros (1837-1911)
Aberdeen Art Gallery & Museum

Dr. Alexander Walker LL.D. (1825-1903), was a respected Aberdonian devoted to public service. He authored more than thirty articles reflecting his love of art, literature, education, history and philanthropy. An obituary notice records that "his intellect was powerful and acute...his activities...so varied...never were permitted to interfere with his scholarly leisure, and the antiquarian pursuits in which he delighted"² Elsewhere we are informed that he "wielded a facile and graphic pen, and was a voluminous contributor to the press".³ These snippets of personal profile, seem in keeping with the arresting sentence with which Walker introduced an article on "The Coinage of Scotland", published anonymously in Aberdeen's 'The Daily Free Press' in 1888⁴:

"Of all the subjects that engage the attention of Dr. Dryasdust there is probably none so generally interesting as old coins". So begins his essay of approximately three and a half thousand words, giving an engaging account of the history of the Scottish coinage.

¹ J. D. Robertson, 'A Handbook to the Coinage of Scotland', George Bell and Sons, London, 1878.

² Anon., 'Alexander Walker, LL.D. – Ave et Vale!', *Aberdeen Journal*, 14 February, 1903.

³ The Rev. James Smith, 'Genealogies of an Aberdeen Family 1540-1913', Printed for the University, Aberdeen, 1913, pp.51-53.

⁴ *The Daily Free Press*, Aberdeen, Saturday 7 April, 1888. This newspaper can apparently be accessed by subscription at: <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/>

The anonymity of authorship was shared by a number of his publications,⁵ and in the case of the Daily Free Press article, may have been conveniently prudent as Walker possessed a collection of coins. These were dispersed at auction in 1903 shortly after his death.⁶ The newspaper article appeared in the year following the publication of Edward Burns's three volume *magnum opus*, 'The Coinage of Scotland'. Its details of chronology, issues and dies, whilst of great value to students of the Scottish coinage, would have escaped the notice or interest of the casual observer. Walker's newspaper article provided a comprehensible condensation for the readership of the local press. Other summaries had been published previously, but appeared in journals targeting more specific readerships.⁷

A sense of Walker's prose may be gleaned from the quotations that follow. Like many since, Dr Walker was in awe of Edward Burns: "...it has been left to Mr Burns to face the Herculean task of giving a complete and systematic view...with what laboriously minute and painstaking care he has used his materials; how he builds up fact upon fact until his argument reaches a conclusion firm as a rock; how full and precise are his descriptions, and clear and comprehensive his classifications...".

Within the compass of his essay, Walker details a chronology of the coinage drawing on diverse references, beginning with the "corrupt passage of Caesar's Commentaries, which has been made to read that the early Britons had neither gold or silver money". Finds of coins within Scotland, enliven his narrative. The 1861 discovery at Birkhill, near Dumfries, of an ancient British coin, indicated "that ancient British coins had penetrated" Scotland.

A paragraph summarises the various misattributions by earlier authors corrected by Burns, triumphantly states that the "Scottish coinage, as we now know it did not commence earlier than the reign of David the First". In deference to this special status, Walker details a brief classification of David's sterlings.

The resemblances and differences between the coinages of Scotland and England are traced across the reigns, as are their relative values.

Throughout his essay Walker seeks to integrate history and the currency. Referring to the ten thousand marks that was paid to Richard I for release from the Treaty of Falaise with restoration of Scottish independence, Walker comments: "This heavy sum does not seem to have overtaxed the resources of Scotland at the time, though, no doubt, it swept much of the money then current out of the country, a sufficient reason for the very great rarity of sterlings of the earlier coinage of William the Lion... Ten thousand marks is 1,600,000 pence, and we know that then a fowl could be bought for one halfpenny and a ram for eight pence."

⁵ J. Kennedy, W. A. Smith and A. F. Johnson, 'Dictionary of Anonymous and Pseudonymous English Literature', Haskell House Publishers Ltd., New York, 1971

⁶ See: Harrington E. Manville and Terence J. Robertson, 'British Numismatic Auction Catalogues 1710-1984', A. H. Baldwin & Sons Ltd. and Spink & Son Ltd., London, 1986, p. 201, no. 24.

⁷ See: Anon., 'On the Coins and Medals of Scotland', *The Edinburgh Magazine or Literary Miscellany*, (March 1785) pp. 238-241, and (April 1785) pp. 265- 270., and T. C. Jun., Letter to the Editor, *British Lady's Magazine, and Monthly Miscellany* (November 1816) pp. 291-301.

Walker took an interest in contemporary archaeology, commenting on Burns's ratio of 30 to 1 of Edwardian to Scottish sterling finds, as "written before the great find at Ross's Court in Aberdeen, in which the proportion of English to Scottish coins was much higher still."⁸

Coin portraiture didn't escape his notice. "The head of Robert Bruce in Mr Currie's statue at Stirling was modelled from the head on a coin of the Ayr find..."

The gold and silver coinages of subsequent monarchs are succinctly described, with inaugural developments noted: the thistle as first appearing on coins of James III, the dates on the Ducats of James V, "our familiar friend the 'Bawbee'" also under James V, and the mill and screw production of Mary's testoons of 1553. The novelty of Scottish coin names are noted: the Crookston Dollars of Mary, and the plethora of denominations under James VI.

"The historical interest of the Scottish coinage now flags", wrote Walker, but his article ends on an upbeat with a paragraph on the mint of his home town. The final sentence barely conceals a proud sentiment: "Some of the rarest Scottish coins bear the name of the Aberdeen Mint."

The letter

Robert William Cochran-Patrick (1842-1897), a well-to-do Scottish landowner, spent much of his adult life in England as a Member of Parliament. Here he developed his antiquarian interests. He amassed a fine collection of coins and wrote extensively on numismatic and related subjects. His 'Records of the Coinage of Scotland' published in 1878 remains a seminal text, as does his 'Catalogue of the Medals of Scotland' published in 1884

Cochran-Patrick was in frequent contact with Edward Burns who mentored much of his collecting. Many of the letters to him from Burns survive,⁹ but I am unaware of letters written by Cochran-Patrick; hence the interest of the inserted letter.



Beginning, "Dear Sir", devoid of an envelope, but placed as it is, the recipient was almost certainly Alexander Walker, an assumption supported by its subject matter. The letter in neat cursive script on either side of a folded card bearing Cochran-Patrick's monogram, is dated 17th February 1877, and originates from '16 Robertson Terrace, Hastings'.¹⁰ The letter is apparently a reply to a query about Maundy money, but on its second page Cochran-Patrick seeks Walker's assistance:

⁸ The find formed the basis of a note by Dr. Walker in *Scottish Notes and Queries*, June 1888. See: N. J. Mayhew, 'The Aberdeen Upperkirkgate Hoard of 1886', *BNJ* (1975) 45, pp. 33-50.

⁹ Lord Stewartby, 'The Wingate Sale 1875' *BNJ* (1992), 62, pp. 175-184. See also: <https://discovery.nationalarchives.gov.uk/details/r/N13889957>

¹⁰ This address is associated with another creative writer, Beatrix Potter who, at a later date, wrote 'The Tale of two Bad Mice' and 'The Pie and the Patty Pan' from this same establishment. See: <https://openplaques.org/plaques/54222>

RP

16 Robertson Terrace
Hastings.
17th Feb^r 1877.

I am now endeavouring to collect some information regarding Scottish Medals & would be extremely obliged by any assistance in that respect. I have already the Provincial Tokens relating to Aberdeen: but there are often local medals of interest relating to individuals or events and it is impossible for any one not conversant with the District to come across.

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I remain

Yours truly
R. Robertson

Whether Walker was able to oblige his correspondent is unknown. He is not specifically acknowledged in the Preface to a 'Catalogue of the Medals of Scotland', but may have been one of the "many others" to whom Cochran Patrick expressed his thanks.

A serendipitous association will draw this brief essay to a close. Alphonse Legros, the artist responsible for the portrait of Alexander Walker, was also a highly respected medallist. One of his medals, that of Thomas Carlyle, features in Cochran-Patrick's book.¹¹ Legros was responsible for a school of British medallists, his influence fully documented by Philip Attwood in the pages of the *British Numismatic Journal*.¹²



¹¹ *Catalogue of the Medals of Scotland*, p. 129, no. 92, Pl. XXIX, Fig. 3.

¹² Philip Attwood, 'The Slade Girls', *BNJ* (1986) 56, pp. 148-177.