

Wee Willie Winkie

Chapter 1

Wee Willie Winkie rins through the toon,
Up stairs an' doon stairs in his nicht-gown,
Tirlin' at the window, crying at the lock,
"Are the weans in their bed, for it's now ten o'clock?"

Robbie came in through the door, and pulled his scarf from around his neck as he breathed in the familiar smell of whisky and beer in the small pub.

'Bonny night out, I don't think' he said to the landlord behind the bar.

'Must be the bleakest for the winter', returned the barman as he drew a couple of drams for customers.

'I'll have Lagavulin s'usual' said Robbie as he headed down to the usual spot where he met his mates.

'Ok, gies a munnit', was the reply.

Robbie settled himself into his place on the bench as Jack continued his story. The others were listening closely. This was a new one.

'Down on the docks this afternoon, we found a dead chappie. It seemed like a usual drowning to us. An AB had fallen off the rigging just as his ship was coming up the Forth, and plummeted into the briny. But, it was nae just an ordinary AB's drowned body floating on the surface, there was no heed. The bos'n hooked him in with a gaff, and we hauled him aboard and covered him up. We sent for Edinburgh's finest when we docked, but as usual they took for ever to get dockside.'

'OK', said Jock, so where did he come from?'

'That we don't know'.

'On my watch,' broke in Taffy, 'there was a wee child recovered from the Forth, also missing his heed. I didna see him, but it seems it was a boy, and naked at that.'

There was a break in the conversation as the landlord brought Rob's scotch.

'Hi, Wullie, did ye hear about the new bodies yet,' Archie asked the landlord, 'there's anither twa met their maker.'

'Nae, I've been tae busy to hear the latest. A dray load of mixed scotches arrived this afternoon, and we've been getting it ready for you lot. I'm trusting ye'll leave some for ithers. I do have ithers customers ye ken.'

'Ye never can tell', said Rob, 'this one sounds like a thirsty one'.

Jack continued, 'Weel, we really don't know too much more, the chappie was taken away to the morgue, and there he'll stay until he's identified, I suppose.'

'And the child, we don't know nothing about him yet ithers,' said Taffy.

To Rob's disappointment, the conversation moved on to how Hearts managed to conquer Hibs that afternoon.

Later, Rob took his leave, wrapped his scarf around him again and slowly walked out the pub door into the Edinburgh gloom, where the icy north wind was still lazily stalking up the street.

'Who was that man', he wondered as he peered ahead in the gloom.

Strange shadows seemed to be moving in time with the breeze as he walked towards Grey Friar's Bobby on the way home.

The Walk and the Meadows further down would be a problem.

Chapter 2

Rob pulled his cap over his ears against the chill, and was about to take the fork leading down Candlemakers Row, when a sound behind caused him to suddenly halt. Footsteps on cobblestone. He quickly turned, then released his breath when he saw that here was nothing approaching but enfolding mist. He lifted his cap and scratched his head. No one else was in sight except for Greyfriar's Bobby.

Rob walked closer and studied the mounted statue of the skye terrier. Its familiar form seemed strangely watchful in the dim glow of gaslight. The real Bobby, as legend tells it, mourned dutifully beside the grave of his dead owner, John Gray, for nigh on fourteen years until he too curled up his toes. Both were buried in Greyfriar's Kirkyard, but the town's folk honored Bobby's faithful memory by erecting this statue at the crossroad. John Gray had been a night watchman for the city police before he'd met his untimely end, and Rob now wished he had someone to watch over him as he walked home through the meadows. He lifted a hand and patted the dog's stone muzzle for good luck. He had an inkling he would be in need of it this night.

'Robbie McKinney.' A shrill voice sliced through the dark. 'Is that ye wandering the streets like a wretched wraith?'

A gust of wind peeled back the fog like a shroud to reveal the outline of a young woman standing on the doorstep of a brick tenement house. Her fine form was silhouetted by the light shining forth from within, a straw broom clasped in one hand and the ends of her shawl in the other.

Rob stumbled over. 'Aye. Right ye are Shona Sinclair.'

The woman shook her head of wild red curls, 'Och now, ye sure look like yer downed a few drams already this nicht. Git in here with ye, and hae some Cullen Skink with me. I'll be bettin' ye could dae with some warmth in yer belly.'

Rob doffed his cap and gave the street a furtive glance before shuffling inside. 'Thon be braw lassie. Mighty glad tae git oot of this breeze. Straight frae the forth it be.'

The dwelling held a small, meagre sitting room, but a decent kitchen with an intricately carved table and matching chairs right in the centre, in pride of place. Alec had bought the furniture for his new bride, almost two years ago and Rob knew this as a fact for he had been the one who had felled the tree and hewn the timber. Alec had paid a good price, but so had Rob. He'd lost Shona to the fishmonger. Not that this comely lass had even been aware of it, for Rob had never declared his affection. Too slow on the uptake, it turned out.

Rob took a seat and immediately removed his scarf and undid his jacket. The heat from the wood stove had warmed the room to the temperature of a summer's

day. As Shona ladled out the thick soup, Rob fingered the thistle pattern he'd chiseled into the tabletop. 'Right clever, even if I say so myself,' he thought.

'Alec still doon the docks?' he asked taking the bowl offered to him and feeling a tingle shoot up his arm and pierce his heart like the stab of a dagger, as her fingers brushed his.

'Aye,' she said, meeting his gaze and then quickly glancing away. 'I thought he'd be back by noo. But a fresh catch of haddock must've been netted and he's likely daen an all nighter by the docks tae git first pickings.' She removed her shawl and unfastened the top button of her blouse before taking a seat. 'Nae the first time,' she smiled.

'Dae ye git...lonely...him being away from hame so much?' Rob asked, concentrating on lifting the spoon to his mouth without twitching nervously.

'Och naw. What with the wee bairn to look after.'

Ah, yes, the little lassie who looked so like her ma. 'Such a bonnie creature, yer Kirsty. Does yer ma lend a hand with the wean?'

'Sometimes,' Shona gave a shrug, 'but she can't stay over like she used tae. She has her work cut out for her keepin' an eye on Wee Wullie,' she frowned.

Wee Willie, not to be confused with his father Auld Willie, the pub landlord, was Shona's brother and an odd sort of character. Rob arched an eyebrow. 'What's yer brither been up tae noo?'

Her voice became a whisper. 'Sleepwalkin'.'

'Sleepwalkin'?' He cocked his head.

She nodded, 'Outside. On the streets. Ma says folks keep returning him, saying he's aff his heid. He's been caught rapping at their windows and shouting through their keyholes like a silly galoot.'

Rob quickly leant forward and the legs of his chair screeched on the floorboards like a keening banshee. 'Whit's this about?' he asked staring into her wide hazel eyes.

Shona sighed. 'Wullie's's been bletherin' on about the bairns needing to be in their beds and safely tucked in for the nicht. He seems awfully a-feared.'

Robbie contemplated on this strange behavior, and about the ghastly news told at the pub. 'What would Wullie be fearin, Shona?'

She held up her hands, 'A Bogle?' Then she chuckled. 'I dinnae ken. But ma says she's riddy at him running about the toon in his goonie and all.'

Was Shona aware of the gruesome murders? Rob wondered. Her calm attitude

revealed she probably wasn't, and if she knew what had taken place so close to town, she wouldn't have left her babe's bedside, that was for sure. He peered up at the window. Maybe Wee Willie knew something?

Two disturbing sounds, one followed by the other, instantly drew Rob and Shona from their chairs and into the hallway. The first was the howl of a dog. The second, a human wail. Both were as eerie as the other.

Robbie turned the knob and flung the door open wide. As he and Shona hurried into the street ahead of other concerned townsfolk, the alarming view of Wee Willie kneeling before Greyfriar's Bobby, tearing his nightgown and puking onto the cobblestones was not as horrifying as the sight of the thing that lay between the paws of the dog statue. Even from a distance they could tell that it was the severed head of a small child.

Chapter 3

Hey, Willie Winkie, are ye comin' ben?
The Cat's singin' grey thrums to the sleepin' hen,
The dog's speldert on the floor and disna gie a cheep,
But here's a waukrife laddie that wanna fa' asleep.

Rob swallowed and stepped forwards towards Wee Willie. He wasn't sure what he could say to the lad, but a crowd was gathering in the cold dead street, and Rob knew well that things could go from bad to worse for Wee Willie if the townsfolk decided that he had something to do with the severed head.

"Come noo, lad, git ye up aff th' ground an' we'll git ye ben. Tis tae cauld th' nicht tae bade here,"

Robbie put one hand on the lad's arm to help him up. Wee Willie shaking and sweating, and his eyes, when he looked up at Rob, were dilated and scared.

"Rabbie?" he said, wiping his chin with trembling fingers, "I foun' him... I cannae mind... Rabbie, I dinnae ken..."

"Wullie?"

"Shona!" Wullie's eyes started in his face, "What are ye doin' oot here? Where's Kirsty? Tis nae safe! Tis t' bairns,"

Willie looked around wildly at the shocked townsfolk.

"Gang hame a' o' ye, tis efter th'bairns!"

"Whit's?"

"I dinnae ken..." Willie's eyes clouded for a moment as he thought, "Tis nae safe! Tis efter th'bairns!"

"Wullie," said Shona sadly, "Best we git ye hame-"

A woman screamed.

"*Wee Aengus!*"

"Whit?" Robbie spun back to the severed head. It was blue and mottled with cold, and he been avoiding looking at it, so small and grotesque as it was, there by the dog's feet. "Naw, tis nae..."

But it was wee Aengus, the baker's son. Not yet six years old. His little face almost unrecognisable and yet somehow... Robbie turned away. If this was the lad recovered from the Forth... He grabbed Willie's arm again as the crowd surged round them, confused and horrified.

"Tis efter their heeds? Whit about th'body? There was a body doon by the docks- a man- Wullie, whit dae ye ken?"

Willie frowned.

"Naw," he said, "Tis nae th'identical. I dinnae ken about a man. Tis efter th'bairns."

Robbie spoke to an extremely unhappy policeman while Shona dragged Willie through the crowd towards her home. Their Ma, Moira, came panting, out of breath across the square to join them.

The policeman had a bobbing Adam's apple which seemed to accentuate not his age, but his extreme youth. He had an alarming desire to arrest Willie on the spot. Robbie carefully pointed out the un-wisdom of such a move and was rewarded by the look of relief in the policeman's panicked eyes. They would deal with the head first, and come by later to question Willie, but in the meantime... Robbie promised that Willie would stay at Shona's until the police could question him.

Robbie made his way back to the warmth of Shona's sitting room, and found Moira tucking a blanket around the shivering Willie, while Shona put the kettle on.

"He says it talks tae him, taunts him," said Shona quietly, "He says th' bairns are safe if they're sleeping. He says they kin see it... an' if they dae, it steals their heeds..."

"But doon at the docks-"

Shona shook her head.

"He says he doesn't ken about th' jimmy at th' docks. It ainlie wants bairns."

Robbie took the cup she was holding out and found himself caught in a prayer. He didn't believe that Willie was possessed... but he didn't not believe it. And if what Willie said was true, there was something unnatural out there decapitating children in the night. And if Willie was right, and whatever it was was only after children... then there was a second something out there that had decapitated a man... a sliver of cold slipped through Robbie's spine, along with the uncomfortable sinking feeling that this was only the beginning.

Chapter 4

Fae o'er th' bay by North Berwick I've run
To fin' th' three wi' ruby cheeks 'n' wakeful nights
and Feast oan th' fear 'n' slake mah thirst
This is th' nightwatchman's claim

(The lost verse from Wee Willie Winkie. Author unknown)

Constable Adam Gray knew the tales attached to his Great Grandfather, John Gray, and was only too happy to groom and perpetuate the story over a few pints in the local, of an honest man and his loyal dog watching over a close community. The family history told a completely different story however, and it went back a lot further than anybody outside of immediate kin could possibly know.

It wasn't only policing which ran through the veins of the Gray family men, it was also a pedigree – No; a curse, of servitude. It began during the Witch trials in North Berwick and has continued through the male lineage of his family, up and to this day. To protect the family from plague, pestilence and poverty, Adam's early forebears had promised a first born son as a 'familiar' to a most evil witch – Issobell Gowdie.

Issobell had spent the early part of her life in the small village of Auldearne where she had worked as a shop assistant. Being a headstrong and restless young lady, she had sought excitement in many ways and places. She was still only a young woman when she first met the Devil in an old church on the outskirts of the village. He baptised her into his service that same day, in exchange for some very exciting powers, the ability to remain young and voluptuous, and a sort of immortality. All she had to do was provide the Devil with occasional souls and goodly lashings of fear.

Auldearne was a tiny hamlet really and could not provide the three souls required by the Devil without raising too much suspicion. It was also difficult for Issobell to maintain the necessary amount of fear to slake the appetite of her master. She travelled to Inverness and worked the larger population for a number of years before eventually arriving in Edinburgh. It was rumoured that she had travelled the distance by flying astride a broom – a trick she had learned from the fairies. There were stories of villagers seeing her pass overhead chanting over and again, 'Horse 'n' haddock, in th' devil's name' as she floated across the starlit sky.

It was in Edinburgh that she came upon the Gray family. Mr James Gray, head of the family, was not the most honest sheriff Edinburgh had working at the time, but he did not deserve the misfortunes promised to befall him and his family should he not satisfy Issobell's request. The less than farsighted public servant was easily

persuaded to promise a son to work as her familiar for all time. She quickly directed her new familiar to hunt on her behalf and gather only the souls of children to appease the Devil's hunger. The bodies, she ordered, were to be decapitated and their heads left on prominent display to maintain the necessary flow of fear demanded by her master. She then had her familiar, the young James Gray, propagate the tales of soul stealing demons preying on children, snatching them from their beds should they dare to be awake after moonrise! James and his macabre tales became well known in the local bars and they gained credence rapidly, after he took on the role of Sheriff from his departed father and lead investigations over coming years into his discovery of headless children in the surrounding villages.

James always believed that his horror of servitude would be over when his immortal soul relinquished its hold on his pathetic body. He had hoped that he could serve his time in purgatory after his death and eventually work his way into heavenly peace. That was until Issobell revealed to him on his deathbed, that his soul would always belong to her and that his first born son and his son's first son and so down the line, would remain in her service until the curse of familiar, could be lifted by a means he believed to be beyond mortal ken.

So here was Adam, the latest incumbent of the curse and current familiar to Issobell Gowdie, still young and beautiful and most definitely 'Queen of the Witches'. She was very pissed off with Adam at the moment. He had been stupid to think she would be satisfied with his first offering of a drunken sailor, whom he had found and decapitated down by the docks. She was not even close to being approachable even after the death of the first child. He hoped desperately that by placing the head on the statue of Greyfriars Bobby, he could spark the extra fear that might ease her disappointment with him.

Even if she was placated, he knew there would need to be another two wee ones taken and their heads left on prominent display if he was to avoid a punishment too horrid to even contemplate. If only there was some way to break this damn curse he thought morosely; a way to destroy Issobell and free him and save the children from this recurring fate. Maybe the answer lay with that idiot; the young Willie? His father had told him to keep a close eye on him, when both he and Willie were bairns. He would have to speak to him soon and privately; Issobell would not wait long for another body.

Chapter 5

Wee Willie Winkie rins through the toon,
Up stairs an' doon stairs in his nicht-gown,
Cradli' the bairns, a'kissin their dreams,
Och, Wee Willie Winkie is nought what 'e seems.

A nasty swelling crowd soon developed around the crime scene, milling and jostling, all elbows and mutterings. Thankfully, just as quickly, other policemen had answered the call and were collectively stamping their authority. Constable Adam Gray bent over and quickly flicked the small horrid head into a clear plastic forensic bag. Standing, he elaborately stretched his back and vacantly held the damning bag at his side for all to see. The teeming horde of sightseers got the full spectacle.

“Come, see and fear,” Adam thought hopefully. “Come, see and fear.”

Over the heads of the macabre crowd he had seen Robbie and Willie head in to Shona Sinclair's meagre house in the near distance. Robbie, with his stoic and purpose driven stride and Willie, all wild-eyed and hair-brained. Robbie was leading, dragging Willie by the hand but Willie wasn't protesting. Occasionally, Willie's erratic glance had landed on Adam and there was fear there and a sort of knowing as if Willie could see inside him, see the evil, smell the rottenness. Adam knew that Willie was going to be trouble.

“Trust the innocent and feeble minded to muck things up,” he thought unenthusiastically.

He needed to catch up with Willie, sooner rather than later and find out what he knows, but he also had the small task of delivering two more little souls to consider, and of course, his own well-being. The witch wasn't a patient master.

Under the close supervision of the police the unruly crowd was soon dispersing. Adam gently elbowed his way through the buzzing throng in pursuit of Robbie but more particularly, Willie. Willie might well be a half-wit but he knew something. Adam just sensed it.

His knuckles rapped quickly on the rough-hewn door and standing to attention he waited for it to open.

Shona opened it and with a certain wild confidence stood in the center of the doorway barring his passage. With aplomb she slowly looked him up and down, summing up his uniform and, finally, after noticing his nametag, announced.

“Tis that young fella you was telling me about. Constable Adam Gray.”

“Aye,” returned a man’s voice from the back room.

“Och aye,” she returned.

“Best show him in.”

“Aye?” she queried.

“Ochs aye.”

With a swish she showed him in and sat him down at the table.

“Dram?” she questioned reaching for a small thick tumbler.

“No. Not saying I wouldn’t but best not on duty.”

“I think Willie could use one,” she answered pouring a small tot and leaving it bare on the table.

“Ochs aye,” he replied to her retreating back.

Robbie and Willie eased into the room. Squeezing them together like thieves the atmosphere had drawn closer, tighter and when both men sat down it was as if all three had drawn into a whispering conspiring bubble.

“Well, Willie,” Adam leant further in. What’s this I hear about you going on bout bogles and such? Dangerous talk at these times, what with two nasty crimes and all, dangerous scary talk. You’ve got the whole place in an uproar.”

Before Robbie could offer a moderating hand Willie burst out.

“He’s after the bairns. He’s after the bairns.”

“Who’s after the bairns Willie,” Adam soothed, trying to glean some elusive snippets.

“He’s after the bairns,” Willie whispered desperately while flicking his eyes around warily. He nodded his head a couple of times and with a finger pressed to his lips remained quiet.

Adam leant back and with his eyes resting gently on Willie spoke to Robbie.

“Tis no help at all.”

“Aye,” Robbie replied sadly while looking over at the fearful Willie. “Sometimes I don’t think he’s right in the head but he means no harm.”

Adam held his judgment. His perception was stronger than Robbie's and there was no complicating ties blurring his perspective. He felt sure Willie knew something, and Willie was probably better off not knowing it. He needed to get Willie one on one and gently prise that information out of him. A plan formed.

"Willie," he commanded sternly. "Where are you standing with the Lord? You doing you prayers and fronting up to the church."

Willie looked up fearfully.

"Every Sunday up the Kirk," he offered hopefully. "For prayers, I pray 'em when I need 'em."

Well," Adam drawled slowly. "A fella with a lot on his mind and a heavy heart may need to get up the Kirk more often. That's what I do when things look gloomy."

Willie looked slightly convinced.

"Things look gloomy for you as well," he asked.

"Most of the time, most of the time," Adam confessed. "Matter of fact, I'll be up the Kirk tomorrow night. I'll be more than pleased with your company. A heavy heart needs the God's hand Willie."

Robbie silently agreed. He could see Adam trying to win Willie over, maybe sneak into his confidence a little.

Willie brightened somewhat.

"Tomorrow night it is. Up the Kirk."

Adam reached over and shook Willie's limp hand. "A promise is a promise Willie. Tomorrow night it is."

A skittish silver moon faintly glinted the lancet windows of the Kirk but didn't offer solace; however, there was the warming light of candles shining through the door.

Adam boldly made his way to the entrance to the old church hoping Willie would keep up his end of the bargain. Tonight, he would get some answers, maybe even a solution to his problem.

As he made his way to the entrance he felt something was amiss and he cast his practiced eyes about, trying to define what it was. "The Bobby" he thought, looking over at the old faithful statue. It wasn't there. "Bloody vandals!" he thought nastily. "Is nothing sacred?" Momentarily he stopped, flipped out his notebook and scribbled a few lines, all the while cursing and swearing under his breath. Vandals were his pet hate. Bloody pointless activity as far as he was concerned. Absolutely bloody pointless! With a practiced snap of his notebook he flipped it closed and without error, placed it back in his top pocket.

Striding to the entrance he tried to put this stupid act out of his mind and get back to the real reason for his visit to the Kirk.

He peered through the door and saw the place was deserted. "Unusual" he thought obliquely, looking about. "Not a living soul".

"Willie?" he peeped, feeling the pressure of the ancient building pressing on his confidence. A deserted church carries its own special weight. Clearing his throat, he called, "Willie! Lad, make yourself known!"

Nothing.

Adam was perplexed. He was sure Willie would come; almost would have a wager on it, if he was a betting man. One more "Willie!" and look around confirmed his unhappy suspicions. Willie hadn't come.

As he turned his back and headed towards the door he heard an unusual sound. A clicking, like two stones banging together, but there was a rhythm; a pattern to this sound. It sounded like small feet running, and it was running down the center aisle right towards his back. Quickly he heeled around. Standing at this feet, was the statue of the Bobby. It was wagging his tail and licking his foot.

Adam was stunned into immobility. The dog was still clearly a statue but it was moving, in fact, behaving in a very dog-like manner. All his police training had never prepared him for something like this.

Just as he was starting to come to terms with this unnatural situation the dog began to transform and slowly unfold and unwind into a human form and finally into Willie. "What the...." Adam thought, stepping back.

Willie smiled evilly and winked.

"Willie?" Adam's voice squeaked.

Willie folded into himself, and another transformation began. A mist emanated, clouding the writhing form, but slowly, ever so slowly, a new body materialized. Adam stepped back in horror. He knew what was coming.

"I've always had to keep my eye on you Grays" crackled a shrill female voice. "Right through the ages." Issobel Gowdie clicked her tongue in mock disappointment. "Now, what should I do about that?"

Chapter 6

‘Friends, Adam was now at a complete loss.’ Issobel was chuckling over the events of that evening with her friends at the Alloway, ‘He headed out of the Kirk faster than I’ve seen any human move.’

They were meeting at Alloway Auld Kirk which had become the headquarters of Scottish Witches and Warlocks since Robbie Burns’ poem ‘Tam O’Shanter’ was written in 1790. The poem helped get ghosts and horror onto the forefront of human thought.

‘But, I’ve now got to go and get Adam back on the straight and narrow, and ensure that he meets my set quota on a regular annual basis. I managed to engineer a car accident last week where a bairn was decapitated, just to make up that third head for our Master, but I have no intention of doing all the work myself. What’s the use of a familiar if they don’t cooperate?’

‘Anyway, I put the terrier back on his pedestal, and then shuffled Wee Willie back to Shona. She found him on her doorstep; both totally panicked, but much relieved. After completing those demands on me, which silly Adam Gray couldn’t do, I settled back to my usual perch within Grey Friars Bobby’s statue.

‘As you know, sitting inside his sculpture is a favourite haunt of mine. From there I’m able to inject incipient fear into many.

‘My favourite was JK Rowling who walked past me on her way to The Elephant House café on George IV Bridge. There she would spend a whole day over a cup of coffee designing fear into her readers through her Potter characters; particularly in the latter books. I count that as a success.

‘Ian Rankin was another of my successes. His Inspector Rebus stories are full of fear, often of the arch criminal. I particularly liked his early story where a number of children’s coffins were found on the slopes of Arthur’s Seat. I doubt Rankin could have done without my assistance. Dead bairns are a speciality of mine.

‘Going back further, Robert Louis Stevenson got some of his best ideas as he walked past Bobbie, particularly his ‘Dr Jeckyll and Mr Hyde’ story of 1886. Originally, I was able to get some ideas to Stevenson through the real dog, but when Bobbie died in 1872, I thought I was lost, but his statue went up the next year, and that became a much more convenient method of getting ideas into Stevenson, as I didn’t have to get the dog to move out from his spot in the graveyard onto George IV Bridge to eyeball Stevenson. The statue was placed just in the right place for my purposes. Not that I had anything to do with it!

‘Anyway, how are the rest of you getting on? Are you ghouls meeting your quotas with the assistance of your familiars, or have you got to go out like me and fill

your own quotas? What about you Berwick witches and warlocks, you should have had time to get your act into gear; you were convicted in 1563, whereas my trial was in 1662, so you've got a hundred years start on me.'

The seven Berwick members, including Geillis Duncan, excitedly related their methods of meeting the Devil's requirements since their last coven. They all agreed however that things were getting tighter as police methods changed and the population became more sceptical.

But continual dissention among humans was managing to help them to meet some of the quota set by the Devil. Robbie Burns 1784 poem about 'man's inhumanity to man', although intended by him to be a condemnation of inappropriate acts by humankind to their fellows, had become a catchcry to their group.

*Many and sharp the num'rous ills
Inwoven with our frame!
More pointed still we make ourselves
Regret, remorse, and shame!
And man, whose heav'n-erected face
The smiles of love adorn, -
Man's inhumanity to man
Makes countless thousands mourn!*

Robbie was a favourite of theirs, especially his poem 'Tam O'Shanter'. Alloway Auld Church, where they were gathered, attracted tourists from around the world wanting to be scared witless with performances and stories about witches. Especially when they grabbed and removed the tail of Tam's horse Meg, just as she galloped across Brig o' Doon in the middle of the night during a snowstorm with Tam on her back.

What tourists remembered best were the words about the brightly lighted church where strange creatures were dancing furiously:

*Warlocks and witches in a dance;
Nae cotillion brent-new frae France,
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys, and reels,
Put life and mettle in their heels.*

What was best for the witches themselves was that their requirement to instil fear was being half done by the entrepreneurs who were getting rich by performing part of

the witches duties for them, though they always assisted, just to heighten the experience. But that was easy.

What was still required was the demand that they fill their individual quotas of severed heads, with or without the assistance of familiars. Simple.

As Issobel reminded everyone, 'We're still out there'.