

CORRESPONDENCE

(To the Editors of the Journal of the Institute of Actuaries)

DEAR SIRs,

In view of the impending two hundredth anniversary of the birth of the Scottish poet Robert Burns (25 January 1959), the following may be of some interest to members of the Institute.

The first biography of Burns, which was written by Dr James Currie of Liverpool in 1800, contains copies of a large number of letters written by the poet. The first of these letters, dated 15 January 1783, is addressed to 'Mr John Murdoch, Schoolmaster, Staples (*sic*) Inn Buildings, London'.

Murdoch was engaged by Burns's father and some other heads of families to teach English grammar and literature to their sons. It was he who interested Burns in studying French, which explains the occasional French expressions which appear in some of his poems. Murdoch was later a schoolmaster in the town of Ayr from where he evidently moved to London—and Staple Inn.

In his *Life of Burns* Dr Currie refers to the large number of Scotsmen who emigrated to foreign countries. (Burns, at one time, contemplated emigrating to Jamaica.) He estimates the number of such expatriates at that time at 150,000. In support of that estimate he refers to Sir John Sinclair's survey of Scotland and says:

'The extent of the emigration of the Scots may be calculated with some degree of confidence from the proportionate number of the two sexes in Scotland; a point that may be established pretty exactly by an examination of the invaluable Statistics already mentioned. If we suppose that there is an equal number of male and female natives of Scotland alive *somewhere or other*, the excess by which the females exceed the males in their own country, may be considered to be equal to the number of Scotchmen living out of Scotland. But though the males born in Scotland be admitted to be as 13 to 12, and though some of the females emigrate as well as the males, this mode of calculation would probably make the number of expatriated Scotchmen at any time alive, greater than the truth. The unhealthy climates into which they emigrate, the hazardous services in which so many of them engage, render the mean life of those who leave Scotland (to speak in the language of calculators) not perhaps of half the value of the mean life of those who remain.'

Yours faithfully,
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