



13 January 2023

### **'Saved' manuscripts join collection at Robert Burns Birthplace Museum**

- *12 original Burns manuscripts have been added to the National Trust for Scotland's Robert Burns collection in Alloway following fundraising campaign*
- *Alongside the National Library of Scotland, the conservation charity also became the joint owner of the Burns First Commonplace Book*
- *The Burns First Commonplace Book will be on public display in Scotland for the first time since 1896*
- *'Homecoming' exhibition runs from 13 January – 12 March at the conservation charity's Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway*

Twelve original manuscripts written by Robert Burns, which have just come into the care of conservation charity the National Trust for Scotland, will go on display this January as part of a new exhibition entitled *Homecoming*.

The important pieces include letters, poems 'Donocht Head' and 'Queen of the Lothian' and songs 'As I was walking up the street' and 'O wat ye wha's in yon town' giving further insight into the creative process of Scotland's most famous poet.

They were donated to the National Trust for Scotland from the Blavatnik Honresfield Library by the Friends of the National Libraries in 2022 following a successful campaign to raise funds to secure these, and other important literary pieces, including works by Sir Walter Scott and the Brontës, for the public which were part of a private collection that was put up for sale in 2021.

The manuscripts join more than 5000 Burns-related items which are in the care of the National Trust for Scotland at the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum in Alloway. The site includes an award-winning museum experience, as well as the cottage where Burns was born in 1759.

Also part of the exhibition is the Burns First Commonplace Book which was given jointly to the National Library of Scotland and the National Trust for Scotland from the Blavatnik Honresfield Library by the Friends of the National Libraries in 2022. The book was last displayed in Scotland in 1896 at the major Burns exhibition held in Glasgow and provides an invaluable record of his development as a man and poet.

National Trust for Scotland Chief Executive Philip Long OBE said: "Securing this outstanding collection for the public was an excellent example of our sector working

together to raise the funds and support needed to save them for our cultural heritage and ensure that they would be protected for and enjoyed by future generations. We are incredibly grateful to everyone who helped make this possible.

“Burns was inspired by nature, beauty and heritage and his work is of deep significance to Scotland. As the custodians of the place where Burns was born, and many of his most important works, the National Trust for Scotland is honoured to add these important pieces to our collection and to share these with the public through our new exhibition.”

National Librarian and Chief Executive of the National Library of Scotland, Amina Shah, said: “It’s fantastic to finally offer members of the public the opportunity to see these priceless items up close, after they were hidden away for so long. This is why we, alongside National Trust for Scotland and other organisations, worked so hard to acquire these items when they came up for sale – it was unthinkable that they would once again end up in private hands. It’s also fitting that the First Commonplace Book makes its first appearance at Burns’s birthplace – it will feel like a true homecoming.”

*Homecoming* is open daily at the Robert Burns Birthplace until 12 March. Entry is free.

To mark Burns’ Night at the place where Burns was born, the Robert Burns Birthplace Museum is hosting a Burns Birthday Bash family weekend on 21 and 22 Jan and a Blazing Burns Night Spectacular ceilidh and fire performance on 21 Jan. Find out more at: <https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/robert-burns-birthplace-museum>

**ENDS**

**Notes to editors**

### **About the Blavatnik Honresfield Collection**

The collection, originally named the Honresfield library collection, which takes its name from Honresfield House in Greater Manchester, the home of the original owners, was one of the most historically important private literary collections accumulated during the late 19th and early 20th century. It was brought together by two brothers, Alfred and William Law, who were hugely successful, self-made Victorian industrialists with a passion for literary history and book collecting. After their deaths in the early 20th century, the library was inherited by their nephew, Sir Alfred Law who died in 1939. The collection includes manuscripts by the Brontës, Jane Austen, Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott.

The campaign to save the Honresfield Collection from being sold privately by auction house Sotheby’s in London ran in 2021. Led by the Friends of the National Libraries, £15 million was raised to acquire the Honresfield Library for the nation. Alongside other consortium partners, the National Trust for Scotland contributed towards the appeal thanks to support received from the charity’s members and donors.

Every manuscript and printed book acquired has been donated to nearly 70 libraries and writers' houses across the UK so that they are accessible to everyone.

The 12 manuscripts are now wholly owned by the National Trust for Scotland. The Commonplace Book is jointly owned by the Trust and the National Library of Scotland.

### **About the National Trust for Scotland**

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022 the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.

### **The Burns 'Homecoming' collection includes:**

#### **Letters**

- Robert Burns to John Tennant, 13 September 1784
- Burns to James Johnson on forthcoming publications, 19 June 1789
- Burns to Mrs Miller with a poem [not present], 2 November 1789
- Burns to John Edgar on wine accounts, 25 April 1795

#### **Poems, songs etc**

- Poem: 'Donocht Head'

- Poem: 'Queen of the Lothian'
- Poem: draft fragments of 'Brigs of Ayr'
- Poem: 'Broom Besoms'
- Song: 'O wat ye wha's in yon town'
- Song: 'As I was walking up the street'
- List of songs for the 3rd vol. of the 'Musical Museum'
- 'Sweet fa's the eve on Craigieburn'

### ***The Burns First Commonplace Book***

The practice of collecting material with a common theme into a 'commonplace book' was most popular among the aristocracy. Commonplace books were a means of communicating people's opinions, education and culture and they can provide invaluable insight into the owner's beliefs and personality, or in some cases, the personality that they wanted to project to the world. Burns produced three commonplace books during his lifetime, the First or 'Ayrshire' Commonplace Book (1783-5), the Edinburgh Journal (1787-90), and the Glenriddell Manuscripts (1791-3). The manuscript was assembled by Burns between 1783 and 1785 and provides an invaluable record of his development as a man and poet, offering a unique insight into his thoughts, influences, and creative processes. It was collated when Burns was still a young unpublished poet living in Ayrshire and contains early drafts of some songs, prose and poetry, alongside his observations of the world and expressions of his hopes and ambitions.