The Scottish Fair as seen in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Sources

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Fairs and markets had a very important place in the social structure of historical rural Scotland. Much of the population was virtually fixed, and more or less evenly distributed throughout the countryside, engaged in agriculture, working full-time on the land and producing only marginal surpluses. Local shops did not exist except for the inhabitants of burgh-touns. In consequence many services came to the farmer and his people on the farm-toun. There were itinerant weavers and tailors to make up their homespun cloth into clothes, horners and tinkers to supply spoons and repair and make utensils, and above all the chapmen who carried a wider range of goods, finer cloth for shirts etc., bonnets, combs and haberdashery. The fair, and to a lesser extent the market, was the one opportunity for the farm servant to escape from his monotonous existence and have a holiday.

As it had such an important place in the social fabric of the year, it is not surprising that the fair was a favourite topic for songs, pictures, poems and reminiscences.[1] Throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there appeared poems and songs which are about, or are set in, fairs. From the poet's point of view the fair offered a framework and a sequence of events from anticipation in the morning to the return home at night which gave the poem unity, together with a number of incidents which could be described or referred to, and which would be familiar to all his readers. One of the best is the poem written by James Ballantine to illustrate Walter Geikie's etching 'Grassmarket' in Sir Thomas Dick Lauder's edition of the artist's *Etchings* (Geikie 1841: preface and 6-8). Even that most pious of poets, James Nicholson, in the third edition (1876) of his much rewritten poem 'Kilwuddie' had a Part XII 'Kilwuddie Fair' which, by way of illustrating its enormities, gives a highly colourful picture of a Scottish fair. The section disappears in later editions. A wide range of fairs up and down the country are represented in verse, St Mary's Fair in Wick, Hallow Fair in Edinburgh, Glasgow Fair and the fairs of Falkirk. David Carnegie (1879: 3-5) celebrated 'St Tammas' Market', the fair at Arbroath, and 'New Cumnock Herd Fair' is the subject of a poem by Thomas Murray (1898: 223-4).

There are many songs about fairs, and these emphasise the very real extent to which fairs meant different things to different people. There is a vivid and revealing Gaelic

song among the collections of the School of Scottish Studies (Bruford, ed., 1986, 242-6) which gives an unusual insight as to what a fair meant to a small tenant farmer as the place where he would not be able to avoid his creditors. Drovers are not well represented among the songs. Drovers were outsiders, the middlemen who gathered cattle for the English meat-trade. The hiring function of the fair, however, is well shown, as is the opportunity for courting, and the purchase of fairings for young women, particularly gingerbread and sweetmeats. Dancing and fighting are also to the fore. The annual fair was often the only time of the year when the fighting man could find a larger range of opponents (Alexander 1877: 77-8; Bruford, ed., 1986: 236-9), and fairs offered a wider choice of sexual partners than could be reached on a long summer night. What the fair meant to children has to be approached with caution, not because there are no Scottish children's books on the subject, but because they all derive from the same English exemplar. So details need to be checked against other sources. They are however important, giving some idea of a child's perception of a fair, with a concentration on the gingerbread and the rides.

There are a large number of chapbook ballads on fairs. The commonest is the English song 'Jockey to the Fair'. I have found eight versions in Scottish chapbooks, the earliest being a Falkirk chapbook of 1794 (*Jockey* 1794). There are two other English fair songs which appear a number of times, 'The Humours of Smithfield' which is not about the market but about the dangers of strange young women in London, and 'Bartholomew Fair' which is a lively song with prose passages. The two best Scottish fair songs are 'Hallow Fair' with the first line 'There's fouth of braw Jockies and Jennys', not to be confused with Fergusson's poem of the same name with the first line 'At Hallowmas, when nights grow lang'. 'Hallow Fair' made its first appearance in the 1776 edition of David Herd's *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs*, where it is given as to the tune 'Fy let us a' to the Bridal'(2.169-71). William Stenhouse (1839: vol. 5 entry for 451 in the index) claimed that it was by Robert Fergusson, but gave no reason, and was possibly confusing it with Fergusson's poem. David Herd would have been in a position to know whether the song was by Fergusson, and is usually careful to attribute songs to authors when he knew them. I have not seen it in a chapbook earlier than 1820, but it was popular from then on, appearing in at least six by the middle of the century. 'The Humours of Glasgow Fair', which is to the same tune, was written by John Breckenridge, a handloom weaver, a soldier in the Lanarkshire Militia, and latterly the owner of a small grocery shop in Main Street Parkhead, Glasgow. A copy of the song was obtained by and popularised by 'Livingstone, the famous Scottish vocalist, who sung it into extensive repute'. Breckenridge is said never to have forgiven him (*Humours* [1840?]; Murdoch [1881]: 151-8). A number of other fair songs appeared in chapbooks, some passable, but none of the quality of those two.[2] The Falkirk chapbooks are particularly notable for the number of different fair poems that they contain. Before leaving the subject of songs, mention should be made of 'Aikey Fair' recorded by Hamish Henderson from Jimmy MacBeath in 1952 (Bruford, ed., 1987-8: 314-7), if only because it emphasises

the continuity of Scottish song. It celebrates and comments on, to its own lively tune, the changing face of Aikey Fair, one of the oldest of Scottish fairs, after it had changed from a Wednesday horse market to a Sunday carnival, a change which took place about 1926. It is not only a comparatively recent fair song, but one of the best.

With the exception of the hiring of hands, the songs hardly give any detail of the business side of a fair, the real reason for its existence, the sale of agricultural commodities, grain, cattle and horses. Better in this respect are the accounts of fairs by local historians and a certain amount of useful if generalised information is offered there. Even these however are retrospective and emphasise the picturesque, and perhaps they are a little sentimentalised as well. One poem that seems to combine comprehensiveness in its picture of a fair, together with an antiquary's interest, is James Traill Calder's 'St. Mary's Fair; or The Marymas of Dunnet in the Olden Time' which takes up twenty-six pages and a hundred eight-line stanzas to describe the fair at Wick (Calder 1855: 18-43).

There was also a Scottish tradition of fair paintings. The earliest seems to have been the delightful watercolour of Hallow Fair executed in 1750 by the English artist Paul Sandby and now in the National Gallery of Scotland. David Allan is known to have drawn Rutherglen Fair in 1764, before he went to Italy (Skinner 1973: 27). From then on there was a constant stream of Scottish fair painting until the end of the nineteenth century. None of them shows more than part of a fair as studies of David Wilkie's great painting 'Pitlessie Fair' indicates (Andrews and Megaw 1966: 177-180). The only one that even attempts to do so is a lithograph of 'Glasgow Fair, Taken from the Roof of the Court House' published in the *Northern Looking Glass* 23rd July 1825 by the Glasgow lithographer John Watson. The pictures, though to be used with caution, are helpful in explaining and confirming details. This is particularly true of the paintings, drawings and etchings of Walter Geikie.

Fairs provided markets for livestock and manufactured goods, acted as a labour exchange, provided relaxation and a chance to buy manufactured goods, cloth, haberdashery, spectacles, bonnets, combs, pins, all the necessary small luxuries of life. They served also as a meeting place, a place to hear the latest ballad, to buy a pocket Bible or a small book of songs or prose. Chapmen performed an important function in regard to fairs. They attended them assiduously. After all, they represented the greatest accumulation of their customers to come together during the year. When not at a fair a chapman would go round a circuit, passing from place to place in regular order calling at farm touns and houses where he was known and welcomed. He had to rely on his welcome for somewhere to sleep and something to eat, as the places he went to rarely had inns or surplus food to purchase. The better-off chapmen had packhorses or even wagons, but the majority carried their packs on their backs, and, in some trades, particularly if they were carrying cloth, the packs could be very unwieldy, very heavy, and sometimes even dangerous. Also they often had to walk more than twice the apparent distance between any two places because they had to turn out of their way to each dwelling in turn, and then probably have to return to the road to turn off again at the

next house. So anything such as a fair that would concentrate their customers was no doubt very welcome.

Roger Leitch in his pioneering article 'Here chapmen billies tak their stand' (1990) gives a summary of the legal information about the participation and role of chapmen in the organisation of fairs in Scotland. There are also details in the records of Scottish chapmen societies. Fairs had their own courts of summary justice, the famous 'piepowder courts'. The judge, where there was a chapmen society involved, was the 'Lord' of the society. Each of the stall holders had to surrender a poind or pund on arrival, usually a piece of their trade goods, but sometimes a pocket Bible or other personal possession. This would normally be returned at the end of the fair, but was a guarantee of good behaviour and in extreme cases could be detained, or even forfeited. ' "My Lord" went about the stalls, at the opening of the fair, and uplifted from each member thirty shillings Scots, or the value in goods, as a 'paund' or pledge for appearance in Court next day to answer whatever charge might be preferred against him: which paund was forfeited by absence "in the hour of cause".' (Fittis 1874: 17) The chapmen were jointly responsible to the local magistrates for the management and good order of the fair. At the Lammas Fair in St Andrews, one of the oldest surviving street fairs in Britain, there is an annual on-site meeting at the end of the fair between a representative of the showman's guild and local authority officials to assess compensation for damage to kerbs, pavements etc. caused by the fair.

The chapmen marked out their stands at dawn on the fair day. The Laws and Acts of the Chapmen of Perthshire lay down 'That none offer to mark any Stands before the Market day, and he who marks first is to mark ane deal length, which is three elns long [i.e. eighteen feet]; and none is to mark above an deal length for himself or any comrade; and this foresaid deal is to be marked for my Lord's use, and that in the middle place of the market, and if it is neglected he is to take it where his pleasure is.' 'The fixing of stall-stances was a matter of much solemnity, being effected on the day previous to the fair, under the supervision of the town-sergeants, who drew the dues thereof for the Magistrates. Every station was chalked out on the causeway by its intended occupant, who then spat upon a stone within the diagram as an earnest of possession.' These contradictory accounts come from the same article and refer to the differing circumstances in a small place, and where the whole matter was in the hands of the local magistrates (Fittis 1874: 7, 14).

It is not to be thought that Scottish fairs were like the great cities of booths that sprang up for St Giles Fair in Oxford or Sturbridge Fair in Cambridge, with their regular streets. A pedlar might sell from his pack with the goods spread out on the ground as they would normally do in any farm-toun or clachan that they visited. The china merchant in Wilkie's 'Pitlessie Fair' is doing that. They were more likely to set up a stall, a crame, for the time, or lay out their goods in a room in a public house. The crames were made of deals covered with tarpaulins or blankets – 'Weel theacket wi blankets an mats' as it says in John Breckenridge's 'Humours of Glasgow Fair'. The

blankets are clearly in evidence in some of the pictures. One of the booths in Alexander Carse's 'Oldhamstocks Fair 1796' (National Gallery of Scotland) is clearly covered in blanket. The pictures show too the different structures of the chapmen's stalls and gingerbread stalls, the drink tents with their individual signs which are mentioned in 'The Humours of Glasgow Fair' and in 'Hallow Fair', and the large square tents used for the shows, which had canvas pictures of the attractions within over a raised platform at the front on which stood the drummer, the showman etc., and with steps up which the patrons walked to enter the show tent proper (Fig. 6). The dues payable at a fair varied according to how one set out one's goods. Covered stalls attracted higher dues than a simple trestle table. Another form of stall well-attested from the paintings is selling from a wheelbarrow (a hirlbarrow) with deals on top. Most shown are selling apples; a woman in Paul Sandby's watercolour is selling apples to two boys from a wheelbarrow spread with a white cloth and a man is trying to sell 'Apples 5 a ha'penny' from a wooden tray fastened to a wheelbarrow in one of Walter Geikie's etchings [ca 1840]. In Walter Geikie's painting 'Hallow Fair in the Grassmarket' (Hopetoun House) a man is selling pottery from a specially adapted wheelbarrow filled with straw.

The Fife Chapmen's records give the plans of a number of the fairs. At Anstruther Fair in Easter Fife on 1 November 1744 there were eleven booths; four of them were in dual occupation, so that there is a total of fifteen chapmen represented. The following year there were nine stalls, occupied by a total of twelve chapmen. It is probable that there would have been a number of other chapmen at the fair, no doubt selling from their packs. Crail Fair on 16 March 1744 had only six stands. Of these no less than five were in joint occupation, making a total of eleven chapman crameing. Some of the same individuals who had separate stands at Anstruther in the same year are here found sharing, which tends to confirm what one would have suspected anyway that the stands were supplied locally. No doubt the local magistrates might take a part, and perhaps provided material for the stalls, which would be stored from one year to another. We hear of a local joiner who made money by letting out deals and 'trees' for stalls, and H. Grey Graham states that Communion tables and forms were let out for fairs and weddings at Colinton till 1678 and at Currie to 1726. This may well have been the normal practice.

William Alexander wrote both about country fairs in Aberdeenshire in general and about Aikey Fair in particular:

> At the last century fair, the business transacted was of an exceedingly miscellaneous kind. Live stock was by no means the most important feature. All sorts of household furnishings – including chairs, stools, wooden ladles, 'caups', and barrels and brewing 'bowies', rough wicker 'creels', and such like, were exhibited in quantity by the wrights and coopers and other artificers, so as the more strictly agricultural class might supply their needs in such matters. Even ploughs and harrows were taken to the fair for sale. On the other hand those who tilled the soil had the wool of their small stocks of native sheep spun into yarn at home, and then converted into webs of 'fingrams' by the weaver, to be taken to the fair and offered

to such as would buy; their customers, to a large extent, were itinerant 'merchants' who picked up the fingrams at the annual fairs in Aberdeenshire, and then found a market for them in other parts of Scotland, or by getting them exported abroad. And after the decline of the trade in fingrams, when spinning worsted and knitting stockings for 'the factory merchant' mainly engaged the attention of women in the country, dealers in soft goods in Aberdeen and the other country towns, found it worth while to shut shop for a day or two on the occurrence of some of the principal annual fairs, in order that they might cultivate business by exhibiting prints and fabrics there alongside the stocks of the regular packmen . . .

The traffic at Aikey Fair, as at other annual fairs of the period, included cattle, horses, sheep, merchandise, and chap-book literature of no very pretentious character. There was always a wonderful supply of 'carvy' and coriander sweeties wherewith the lads might treat the lasses. The shows and amusements at the fair were of a very simple kind. The pipers from the country around assembled, and often a dance would be improvised on the green-sward. As time wore on there appeared the 'slicht o' han' men' to divide the attention of the idle and curious . . .

The merchandise sold in Aikey Fair about 1800 consisted chiefly of webs of sacking, bed tick, a variety of prints often of gaudy colours, cottons in the shape of moleskins and corduroys, of which the outer garments of working men were then mostly made; wool and yarn were also sold in large quantities. On the day before the fair there used to be a large wholesale business done in woollen cloths among merchants and others. About the period indicated there were, as now, tents in the fair for supplying refreshments. Such a thing as whisky for sale was unknown, the liquor being confined to home-brewed ale, which was much drunk, though it was rare to see any one tipsy. (Alexander 1877: 78, 81-2)

Fairs and markets were the only regular breaks in the monotony of the countryman's year, together with those 'Holy fairs', the annual communions of the Church of Scotland. As such they were greatly looked forward to as holiday and an opportunity for courting, as in Breckenridge's 'The Humours of Glasgow Fair':

O, the sun frae the eastward was peeping,
And braid through the winnocks did stare,
When Willie cried, Tam, are you sleeping,
Mak haste, man, and rise to the fair;
For the lads and the lasses are thranging,
And a'body's now in a steer;
Fye haste ye, and let us be ganging,
Or, faith, we'll be langsome, I fear.

Then Tam he got up in a hurry,
And wow but he made himself snod,
For a pint o' milk brose he did worry,
To mak him more tough for the road.
On his head his blue bonnet he slippet,
His whip o'er his shouther he flang,
And a clumsy oak cudgel he grippet,
On purpose the loons for to bang.

Now Willock had trysted wi' Jenny,
For she was a braw canty queen,
Word gade she had a gay penny,
For whilk Willie fondly did grean.
Now Tam he was blaming the liquor,
Yae night he had got himsel' fou,
And trysted gleed Maggy MacVicar,
And, faith, he thought shame for to rue.

For the younger labourers the 'hiring fair' was the one time at which they could regularly change masters if they were not happy with their lot. Labourers did sometimes walk out, and there were regular movements of migrant workers, particularly at harvest time when larger work forces were temporarily welcome on small farms, and where, when the harvest was over, they would move on to the next. The labourer who had to rely on such seasonal work could, like Somerville the soldier, take a job breaking stones for road metal during the winter, but farm servants in regular work would tend to stay on the one farm until the next hiring fair brought an opportunity to at least ensure regular food and lodging for another year.

To hire or to be hired – or spend the day
In gaping at the wonders of the town –
To look at all things curious, grand, and gay –
Or buy for wife or sweetheart a new gown –
Or wander on the causeway, up and down,
To find a place among the farmer carles;
Then, for a little happy time, to drown
All thought, by drinking half their fee and arles,
Until their tongues grow thick and noisy in their parles.

Such are their errands;– while the young ones buy
'A pair of whips,' to drive the kine along,
When they the weary herding trade shall try,
Or learn to smack the horses with the thong.
Perchance one spends his penny for a song,
Or 'wares' his long-kept two-pence at the *shows*,
Or, bustling hopeful through the merry throng,
At gingerbread an oaken cudgel throws,
Where, missing oft his aim, is vexed you may suppose.

Hey for the market! All is life and crowd,
And joy and bustle; and the busy hum
Is like a huge beehive, whene'er the cloud
Of flying emigrants from home first come.
There walk the Limekiln lads, with fife and drum;
Here fiddles, bagpipes, ballad-singers roar –
And auctioneers, that bawl themselves quite dumb,

To sell knives, razors, combs, and cloths in store,
Till, having quenched their throats, they cry and shout the more.[3]

The amount of noise made by such a fair is difficult to realise, and examples of Scottish stall-holders' patter are seldom recorded, though they can still be heard where similar markets survive to this day. Here is a solitary example from a joke book of the early nineteenth century (*Odds and Ends* [1840?]):–

> Here's the real good napkins; they'll neither tear, wear, ruffle, nor rive; throw in the washing, nor go back in the pressing. All the water between the rocks of Gibraltar and the Cape of Good Hope will not alter the colour of them. They were woven seven miles below ground by the light of diamonds: and the people never saw day-light but once in seven years. They were not woven by a brosy clumsy apprentice boy, but by a right and tight good tradesman, who got two eggs, and a cup of tea, and a glass of whisky to his breakfast; and every thread is as long and strong as would hang a bull, or draw a man-of-war ship into harbour.

An account of Paldy Fair, in the parish of Fordoun in Kincardineshire is given by Charles A. Mollyson in *The Parish of Fordoun* (1893: 77-81). Paldy Fair, held in conjunction with sheep, cattle and horse markets, was very ancient. The fair was on the first Wednesday, Thursday and Friday after the first Tuesday in July of Old Style.

> At fairs in country towns and villages some of those travelling gaudy painted caravans, hailing from the great centres of the south, usually put in appearance, with their company of players or acrobatic performers, or their curious collection of exhibits – giants and dwarfs, or mayhap of some extraordinary woman, 'who could lift a stithy [anvil] with the hair of her head, and take her supper of real fire, composed of pitch, tar, rosin, and brimstone!' But at Paldy Fair those wonderful institutions were generally conspicuous by their absence. For one thing the access was difficult. It must not, however, be supposed that there was awanting sufficient variety of talent to entertain and amuse the heterogenous crowd assembled on the moor. There were the vintners' tents, set up with the regularity of a military encampment, with blazing fires behind, and broth pots suspended from tripods, with smiling damsels ready to ladle out the boiling contents, or measure out a gill or half-mutchkin according as tastes required. There was poet John Milne, of Livet Glen, like Homer of old, and Blind Harry of more modern days, reciting his own compositions and extolling the occupation of the ploughman as superior to that of every other craft or calling. There was Singing Willie, too, with his tasselled, knotted, and gnarled, and altogether curiously-fashioned walking-stick, drawling out his effusions with nasal twang, and trying to provoke mirth by piecing in, occasionally, allusions to local incidents. ... Robbie Stracathro, broad and short, in weather-beaten habiliments, was also there, piping such music as he could through his tin whistle. ... There were blind fiddlers, and pipers, clad in the garb of Rob Roy. There were vendors of Belfast Almanacs – then, be it remarked, an essential article in every country household. There were shooting galleries, with glib tongues doing their best to tempt the onlooker, as if the bag of hazel nuts in store for the prizeman was not in itself sufficient allurement. Add to this catalogue the usual sprinkling of legless and otherwise defective and

> mis-shapen specimens, who by hook or crook had got themselves transported thither – some in their carriage drawn by a couple of panting dogs – and you have a tolerably accurate summary of the foreign elements mingled in the composition of Paldy Fair Market. Hither dealers in sheep, cattle, or horses, congregated from every parish in the county, as also from Forfarshire, and across the hills from the upper regions of Deeside. ... Young men resorted hither to engage for harvest work. Shoemakers, saddlers and other craftsmen turned out to collect accounts, while dealers in turnip seeds and other specialties appeared to solicit fresh orders.

The lighter diversions of fairs are touched upon by the adult sources mentioned above. In addition I have found two Scottish children's books which deal with the subject. Like most children's books of the period they moralise it too, but they are a valuable source of information. One is called *Fun upon fun; or The Humours of a Fair.* published in Glasgow by J. Lumsden and Son. [Price Twopence]. It is undated but 'copies examined have watermark dates 1816 and 182[ ], the latter possibly to be read as 1820'. The second and infinitely less common is *The humours of the fair; or a description of the early amusements in life; in which you may see all the fun of the fair; and at home be as happy as if you were there.* This was published in Edinburgh in 1819. Both have virtually the same text, which is a condensed version of that of an English children's book of the eighteenth century *The Fairing; or, a Golden Toy; for children of all sizes and denominations. In which they may see all the fun of the fair, and at home be as happy as if they were there.* This was published by John Newbery of London at least as early as 1764. It has been attributed to Newbery himself. The Scottish editions leave out some of the moralising, and the stories of Cinderella and Puss in Boots which form part of the London edition, while retaining the parts which describe the fair. The information about children's amusements at fairs is English but for it to have had currency in Scotland, and the Lumsden chapbook has survived in many copies, it must have been close to a Scottish child's perception of a fair. Some cannot be authenticated; there is a clown called 'Joe Pudding, with the gridiron on his back' who is shown playing a post horn and accompanied by a drummer, and there is a showman with a small monkey. Well-authenticated is Gaffer Gingerbread's stall, and little Giles behind it.

> Here's gingerbread, gingerbread here of the best,
> Come buy all I have and I'll give you the rest.

> The only man in the world for gingerbread. What do you buy? says the old gentleman? Please to buy a gingerbread wife, sir, here's a very delicate one. Indeed there's too much gold upon the nose; but that is no objection to those who marry their wives by weight. Will you please have a gingerbread husband, madam? I assure you you may have a worse. Or buy a watch madam. Here are watches for belles, beaux, bucks and blockheads, who squander away their time, and then cry for it. Observe the motto on the dial-plate of this watch, madam, you never saw a finer dial-plate in your life, or a motto that deserves so much of your serious consideration–

When time is gone,
Eternity comes on.

Besides it is only a penny, with all the gold about it.

Gingerbread is important in Scottish fairs. The poems, accounts and songs do not mention it being gilded, and it will be remembered that the source of the Scottish children's books on fairs was English, and therefore it is important to make sure that details are confirmed. Here the paintings of James Howe come to our aid. John Howe's 'Skirling Fair (Cattle) 1829', which shows the cattle market below Galalaw has a gingerbread stall in the foreground which shows both gilded and ungilded gingerbread. Another stall with gilded gingerbread occurs in the same artist's 'Skirling Fair (Stallions) 1829' (Cameron 1986: between 38 and 39).

Gingerbread was sold as fairings to be given to one's sweetheart. It was also placed on stakes to be won by being knocked off with batons in the game called Rowly Powly, a game which seems to have been universal at Scottish fairs. One source mentions balls, but it usually seems to have been played with batons.

There showmen bawled, and dice were thrown,
An' rowly-powly cried, 'Come on,
'Now, fire away; faint heart ne'er won
'A lady fair;
'Three penny cakes for price o' one!
'What want ye mair?'[4]

Before they got out o the bustle,
Poor Tam got his fairing, I trow
For a stick at the gin'bread play'd whistle,
And knock'd him down like a cow.[5]

Walter Geikie shows them at it in his etching 'Rowly powly' (Geikie 1841: No. LVIII; Fig. 1). James Traill Calder (1855: 25) describes a curious game played with gingerbread in Caithness:

Behind the tents, along the daisied green,
That smooth as velvet to the north doth spread,
Some scores of lads and boys – a novel scene –
Are busy breaking ginger-bread;
This cake, with glue as if it baked had been,
Defies a stroke that would have split your head;
While at the first blow *that* is seen to break,
And so the owner forfeits all his cake.

To this Calder gives a note (p. 43):

A cake seemingly TOUGH being purchased, the owner bawled aloud, 'Wha'll strick at the cake?' until some one tendered a halfpenny or penny, according to the half price of the cake,

Fig. 1. Rowly powly. Etching by Walter Geikie (1841: No. LVIII).

for one blow of a stick, which was frequently prepared for the occasion, by being made sharp on one side, or by having even the blade of an old knife inserted and kept from view. As a match to this FRAUD, the knowing ones often PREPARED the cakes in various ways, especially by sewing them with worsted thread. When this could not be done, they were almost always lubricated with saliva, which was considered a toughening process. If any portion of the cake broke upon being struck, the owner forfeited the cake; but if not, and it could be suspended by the four corners, without falling separate, the owner retained it; and cakes frequently held together after repeated blows. We have seen 'the Marymas' become an almost general battle, from an altercation about 'sewed cakes,' or sticks with knife blades; and, we believe, that on one occasion at least, BROKEN HEADS became a subject of judicial investigation.

As time went on other sweetmeats superseded gingerbread in the favour of young women.

> Then on the street are rows of *sweety stands*,
> Ycovered o'er with blankets fine to see,
> Whose dainty fair brings water from the glands
> Of luckless wight who has not one bawbee.
> And there are dames, of high and low degree,
> All trimly dressed in fashions newest ware,
> Who walk in groups to show their bravitie,
> And on each leman look with smile so rare
> That he perdie must fill their mickle pouch with *fare*.[6]

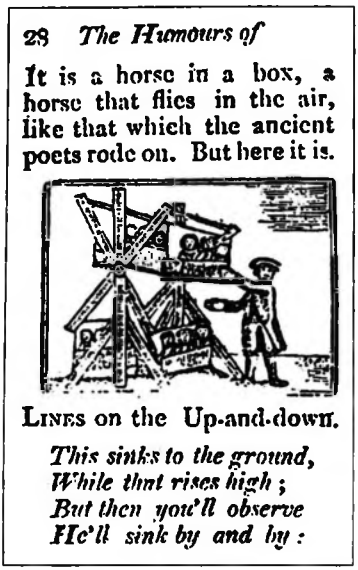

Fig. 2. A page from the chapbook *The Humours of a Fair* (1819), showing the 'up-and-down' (Hall.197.b.5[7]). Photograph by permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland.

The fairground rides shown in *The Humours of a Fair* are the 'up-and-down' and the roundabout. The up-and-down was a sort of primitive ferris wheel. The illustration (Fig. 2) shows a four armed wheel each arm supporting a box with three children in it. The means of propulsion is not shown, and though the text mentions a horse in a box the reference is obscure. The roundabout illustration is equally vague, but here there is an excellent etching by Walter Geikie 'Scene at all hallow fair' (Geikie 1841: No. LX; Fig. 3), which shows that the roundabout was propelled by small boys pushing on bars on the inside of the roundabout. They were no doubt paid in free rides as some of my schoolfellows were when they helped out at a fair.

> And there are *shows* and wonders in the Links –
> Dwarfs, giants, monsters, Punch in all his pride,
> And old Dame Fortune's *wheel*, where the sly minx
> Makes the good pennies from the pouches glide;
> And *rowley-powleys*, where the balls oft slide
> Between the pins, and cheat the gamesters aim;
> *Thimble-and-shot* and *garters*, which deride

The keenest eye; with all the kinds of game
Which wretches have devised to cheat withouten shame.[7]

The other shows in *Humours of the Fair* include a wheel of fortune, with a showman playing with children for oranges. Geikie's etching 'Fair gamblers' (Geikie 1841: No. LIX; Fig. 4), however, shows only adults round the wheel of fortune. The three cup trick 'thimble rigging' is there. 'A Juggler with his cup and balls. Quick, presto, Be gone. This conjuring cur played a great many tricks; as putting down three empty cups, as he pretended, and commanding a ball to fly under each of the cups.' Other shows include monkeys holding a tea-party, the 'learned dog' – 'He spelt all our names from the letters before him, told us the time of day, and also told us our fortunes' – and a Punch and Judy.

Garters is explained by Calder (1855: 26):

A country bumpkin here his luck will try
At 'loop the garter,' with a dexterous rogue;
He wins two shillings, and triumphantly
He stakes a crown, and *loses* it, poor dog!

His note on ' "Loop the garter," or "prick the loop".' runs thus: 'The manner in which this piece of chicanery was played off was by involving the loops or folds of a long piece of selvedge, of which the owner held both ends, so as to render it difficult for the novice to insert the point of a wooden pin or large bodkin into the middle loop; in most cases the simple experimenter found his point outside the loop, and his stake lost.'

The shows were some of the most spectacular features of fairs as can be seen from some of the fair pictures.

Yonder's a strolling show; outside of it,
Upon a platform raised some little space,
A mountebank is playing off his wit
In comic garb, with still more comic face;
Below, the crowd stand laughing like to split
At his long nose, his drollery, and grimace;
And, now and then, with limbs grotesque and sturdy,
He flings and capers to a hurdy-gurdy.

The charge is only twopence – in we go
And see a giantess of marvellous size;
But, there's a pony jet black as a crow,
That doth the rustic crowd still more surprise:
'Tom,' says the master, 'what's the hour d'ye know?'
When on a watch Tom fixes both his eyes,
Then gives a dozen stamps, which tell the folk –
Agape with wonder – that 'tis twelve o'clock.

The showman next bids the sagacious brute
Minutely all the company survey,
And single out the man beyond dispute,
Who kissed his neighbour's wife the other day;
Tom slowly goes around, uplifts his foot,
And slily touches haveral Hugh Macreay,
Who, midst a roar of laughter, swears that he
'Did no such thing – 'tis a confounded lee.'[8]

The tents were rectangular and well made, so as to make it difficult for small boys to put their heads under the brailings, the floor being raised several feet above the ground. There was an open platform at the front with steps through which the spectators entered after paying their admission money. On the platform stood the showman and from it he delivered his patter, together with a horn player or a drummer, a clown and other performers. Over the top of the front of the show was a framework of poles on which were supported painted cloths. In the 'Grassmarket at Hallowfair' aquatint by C. H. Robertson of about 1820 in Edinburgh City Library (Figs 5 and 6) and James Howe's painting of 'Hallows Fair in the Grassmarket' in Edinburgh City Art Centre two such booths are clearly shown. In the Howe painting there is a drummer in elaborate uniform on the platform, the Robertson print has a man with a horn and a woman in full dress with ostrich plumes playing a drum, and a pantaloon and a straight comedian as well as the showman. The painted cloths show two stilt walkers and a fat lady. A painting of a fair by Walter Geikie in Edinburgh City Art Centre shows one of these booths from behind, allowing the construction of the walls and the struts that held up the panels over the platform to be seen. A painting by Jane Stewart Smith (1839-1925) in Edinburgh City Art Centre gives a vivid impression of the shows at All Hallows Fair in the Grassmarket after nightfall with their flares and flambeaux. It is one of a series of paintings of Edinburgh scenes that she executed about 1880.

As in modern fairs, there were refreshment tents, and these were run by local hostelries, so that there were a great many rival establishments offering food and particularly drink. In those circumstances it is not at all surprising that most of the participants in the fair returned home a little worse for wear. For the young people the fair would often end in a dance, in a tent set up for the purpose, or on the greensward as at Aikey Fair (Alexander 1977: 81), or at a particular establishment as in 'The Humours of Glasgow Fair' where the dance was held at 'Luckie Gunn's' who was selling ale and whisky 'and baps in great bourocks':–

Blind Aleck the fiddler was trysted,
And he was to handle the bow,
On a big barrel head he was hoisted,
To keep himsel' out o' the row.

. . .

Fig. 3. Scene at all hallow fair (Edinburgh). Etching by Walter Geikie (1841: No. LX).

Fig. 4. Fair gamblers. Etching by Walter Geikie (1841: No. LIX).

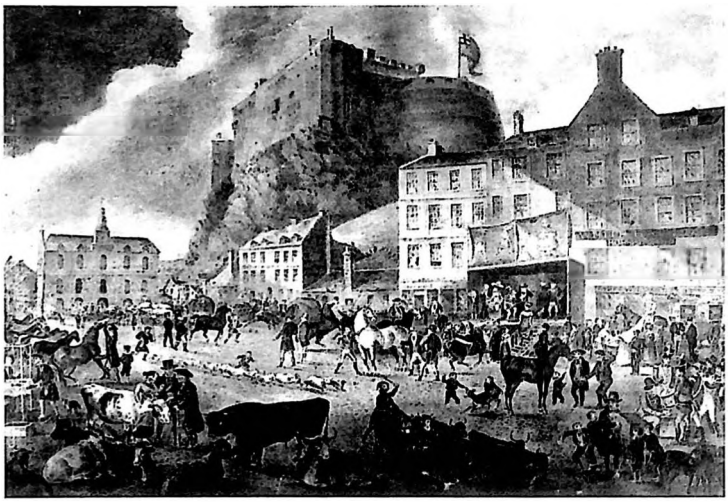

Fig. 5. Grassmarket at Hallowfair. Colour aquatint by C. H. Robertson (c. 1820) in Edinburgh City Library.

Now they ate and they drank till their bellies
Were bent like the head of a drum,
Syne they raise and they caper'd like fillies,
Whene'er that the fiddle play'd bum.
Wi' dancing they now were grown weary,
And scarcely were able to stan',
So they took to the road a' fu' cheery,
As day was beginning to dawn.

And then at last, tired and happy, and perhaps not fou, but having taken plenty, they would wend their way home:–

But now the country folks begin to wend
Home to their lisping children and their wife;
While yet a few remain behind to spend
Their coin on liquor, while the coin is rife;
And there are staggerings, bickerings, noise and strife,
And many a glowing breast and blustering brawl;
And yet, I ween, the child with *penny fife*,
A *crow-mill*, or a box for trinkets small, –
Though many a heart is glad, – he's happier than them all.[9]

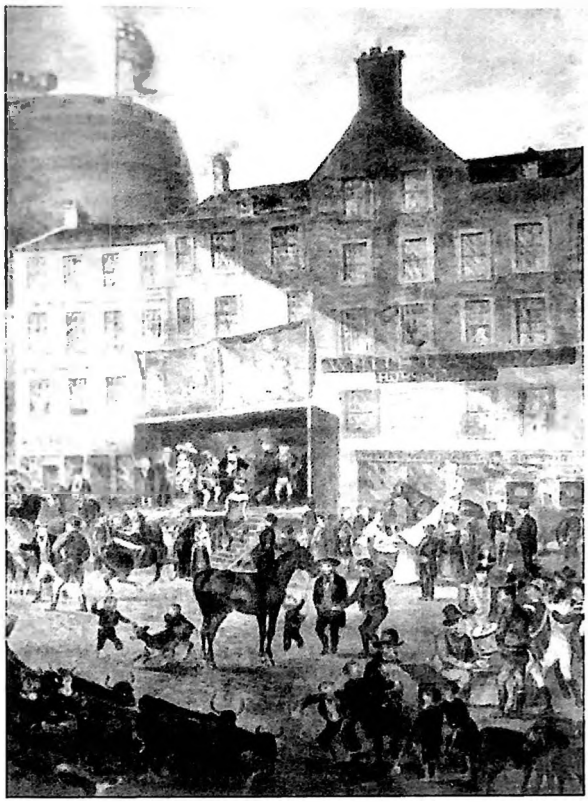

Fig. 6. Detail from Fig. 5, showing the booth.

NOTES

I explored this topic in an earlier form of this paper entitled 'The Picture of the Scottish Fair in Eighteenth- and Nineteenth-Century Literature and Art' at the School of Scottish Studies Cosmos Project 5th annual conference on 'Fairs and Festivals' in 1996.

For this paper I searched for fair chapbooks in the National Library of Scotland. An index of all Scottish chapbooks has long been needed. The project of the joint School of Scottish

Studies of the Universities of Glasgow and Strathclyde, which, with funding from the British Academy, is making a start on an index of Scottish chapbooks in Glasgow University Library and the Mitchell Library, will eventually fulfil this need. In the meanwhile it may be useful to scholars looking for fair songs to give shelfmarks which may make it easier to find examples of each of the fair songs that I found. 'A trip to the fair' in *Days* (APS.1.79.198); 'Humours of Falkirk Fair' in *Flora* (Hall.197.b[14]); 'A New Song Hallow Fair' in *Hallow* (Hall.197.b[37]); 'The Merry Fairs of Falkirk' in *Merry* (L.C.2872[5]); 'A Description of a Fair' in *Roger* (L.C.2836[7]); 'The Rigs o' Hallow Fair' in *Sweet* (L.C.2823[16]); 'Falkirk Stump Fairs' in *Three* (L.C.2823[49]); 'Cawder Fair' in *Trade* (L.C.2842[9]); 'Falkirk Fair' (basically Breckenridge's 'Humours of Glasgow Fair' with two extra verses) in *Two* (L.C.282.A).

3 Bowick 1880: 68-69.

4 Carnegie 1879: 4.

5 *Humours* [1840?].

6 Bowick 1880: 69-70.

7 Bowick 1880: 70.

8 Calder 1855: 25.

9 Bowick 1880: 70.

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