

Burns song sold at auction

A folk song handwritten by Robert Burns more than 230 years ago has fetched over £16,000 at auction.

Burns sent the ballad “Geordie” to Edinburgh music collector James Johnson for inclusion in his 1792 volume the Scots Musical Museum.

The manuscript, written on a single page, passed down to Johnson’s daughter, who knew Burns when she was a child, and later to her son.

The rare document emerged for sale in Christie’s online auction of fine printed books and manuscripts in the US, where it fetched £16,200.

Heather Weintraub, Christies’ specialist, said: “Burns manuscripts of this caliber are rare at auction. Folk songs were so important to his poetic voice.”

Geordie is the story of the eponymous hero destined for execution in Edinburgh, whose lover pleads to the king for his life.

The story has both English and Scottish roots, with various outcomes. In Burns’ version, Geordie’s life is spared.

Burns had met Johnson, who was collecting songs for publication, while visiting Edinburgh in the late 1780s. Burns would send him over 150 original songs as well as traditional songs he collected and re-worked.

The “Geordie” manuscript was accompanied by a letter from Johnson’s daughter “C.L. McPherson” to her son William,

explaining the song's provenance, sent from Edinburgh on 11 March 1859.

About the manuscript, she wrote: "Sent by Robert Burns to my father, and first printed in the musical work edited by him and entitled Johnson's Scots Musical Museum."

Geordie — An old ballad — Same tune.

There was a battle in the north,
And nobles there was many,
And they ha'e kill'd Sir Charles Hay,
And they laid the wyte on Geordie.

O he has written a lang letter,
He sent it to his lady,
Ye maun cum up to Unbrough town
To see what word's o' Geordie.

Then first she look'd the letter on,
She was bairn red & rosy;
But she had na read a word but twa,
Till she wallow'd like a lily.

Yae get to me my guid grey steed,
My menzie a' gae wi' me;
For I shall neither eat nor drink
Till Unbrough town shall see me.

And she has mountit her guid grey steed,
Her menzie a' gae wi' her,
And she did neither eat nor drink
Till Unbrough town did see her.

And first appear'd the fatal block,
And syne the air to head him;
And Geordie cumm'd down the stair,
And bands o' air upon him.

But tho' he was chain'd in fetters strang,
O' air & steel sae heavy,
There was na one in a' the court,
Sae bra' a man as Geordie.

O she's down on her bended knee,
I wat she's pale & weary,

Saltire News and Sport Ltd

Geordie, a ballad, Robert Burns, 1790s.jpg

A HANDWRITTEN MANUSCRIPT OF "GEORDIE", A BALLAD WRITTEN BY ROBERT BURNS AND SENT TO MUSIC COLLECTOR JAMES JOHNSON FOR INCLUSION IN HIS SCOTS MUSICAL MUSEUM PUBLISHED IN 1792. THE MANUSCRIPT, ACCOMPANIED BY A LETTER FROM JOHNSON'S DAUGHTER IN 1859, FETCHED OVER £16,000 AT AUCTION. SEE STORY FROM GEORGE MAIR, SALTIRE NEWS, 07703 172 263

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