

# *The Muses Threnodie* (1638) and Perth's Lade:

crosscurrents between text and burgh

David Parkinson (University of Saskatchewan)

Walking Perth's Past

Friends of the Perth and Kinross Archives

Soutar Theatre, A.K. Bell Library, Perth

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What is *The Muses Threnodie*?

A four hundred year old poem about Perth and its vicinity —  
the historical and natural significance of the region.

What does the poem have to do with the Town Lade?

The concept of the poem really takes hold in telling about a walk along this waterway.

What is *Walking Perth's Past*?

A project that aims to connect individuals and neighbourhoods interested in the Lade  
with researchers and artists who have similar interests.

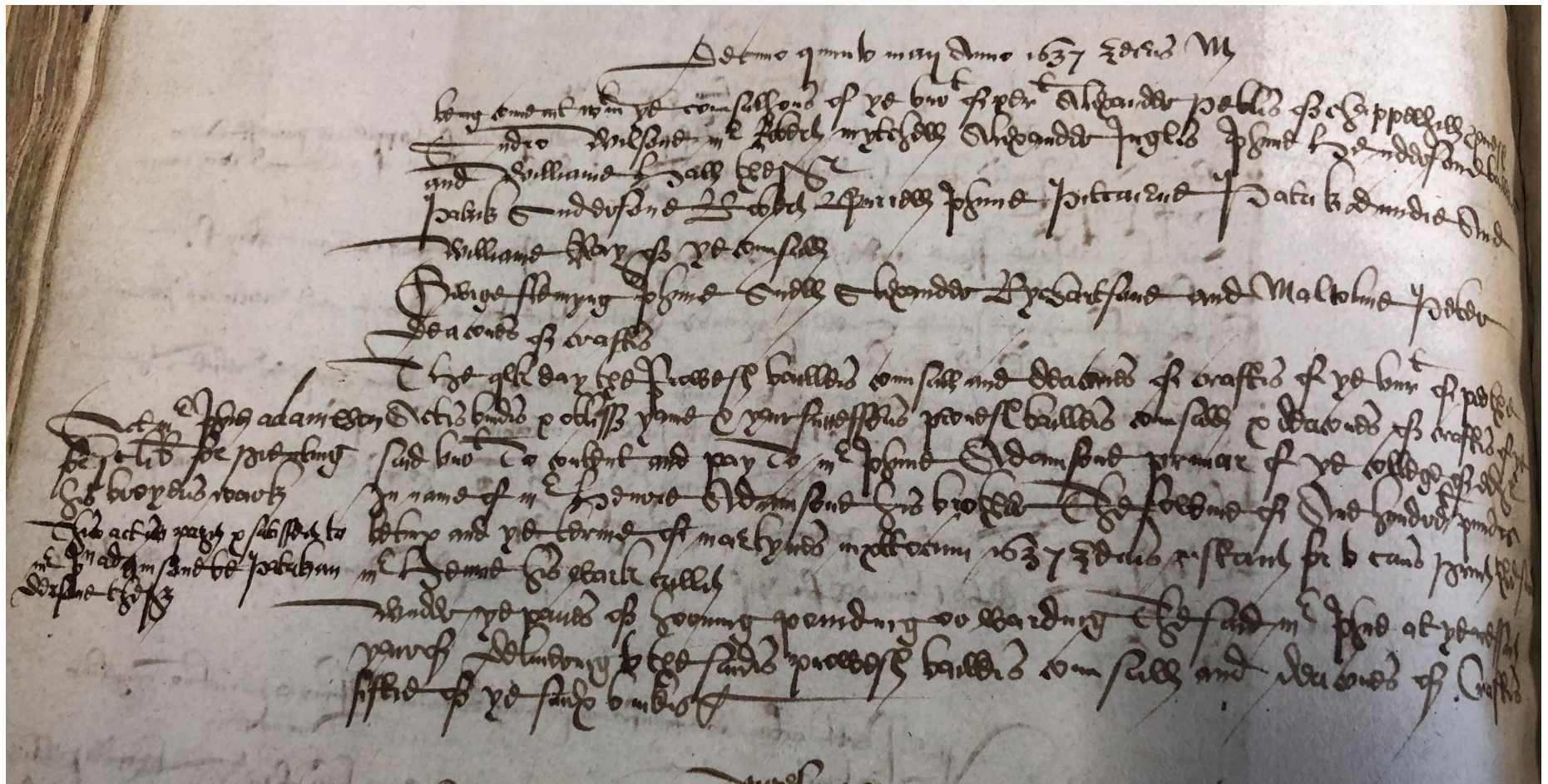
Auspices: British Academy, Usask, Strathmartine

Why here tonight?

The A.K. Bell Library is the public centre  
for study into Perth's history and environment.

How is the Archive important for this poem, the Lade, and this project?

The Perth and Kinross Archive is the documentary cliff-face for anyone longing to make discoveries  
about the past significance of nearby places that are more important than ever.



Perth and Kinross Archives (PKA), MS 359/16/2 (Town Council Minutes), fol. 126v (p. 251).

Let's begin right on this cliff-face. What is this document, and why is it important?

Here are the minutes of meeting of Perth Town Council on 15 May 1637. The part that especially important at present begins with the extra writing in the left margin – the rubric. Here goes:

Act mr John adameson for jc lib for prenting his broperis wark This act is pait & subitted to mr Jn adamsone  
be patrik an|dersone thesaurer

The *quhilk* day the Prowest bailleis counsall and deacones of craftis of þe burcht of perthe Actis bindis &  
oblisses þame & þair successouris prouest bailleis counsall & decones of craftis of ye said burcht To content  
and pay To mr Johne Adamsone primar of þe college of *edinburgh* In name of mr Henrie Adamsone his  
brother The sowme of Ane hundreth pundis betuix and þe terme of martymes [11 November] nixttocum  
1637 3eiris instant for to caus print the said mr Henrie his wark callit [Entry ends thus.]

Sure enough, just after Martinmas, on the 27th of November, Town Council met again to respond to a question about the dedication of the book:

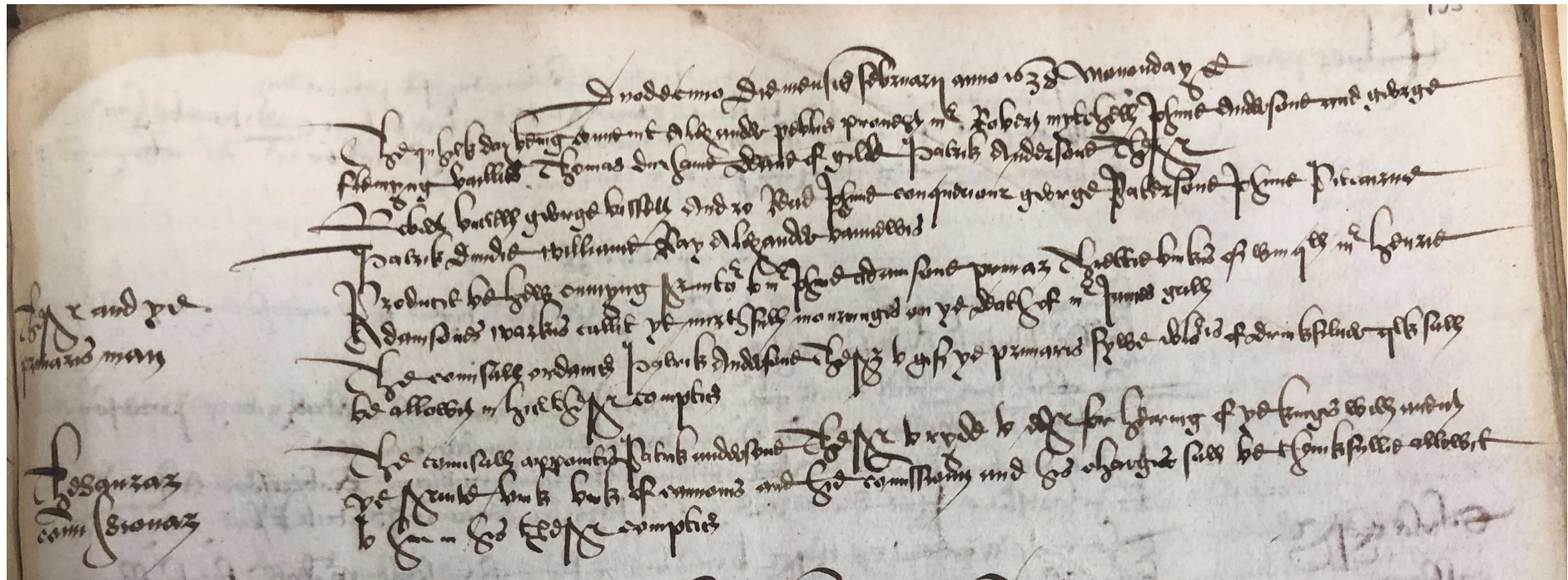
Primar dedicatioun of þe buik

The haill counsall conuenit referis þe dedicatioun of mr henrie Adamsones buik callit gawis teiris to mr  
Johne Adamsone primar himselff quhidder he will dedicat þe same to þe counsall of þis burcht or to þe erll  
of kynnoull

Why does this matter? As will soon become clear, Henry Adamson had died before these negotiations were complete. He did not decide on the final title for his poem, and there are other aspects of the book as published that his brother John is responsible for.

(If you want to learn how to read these documents, go to [scottishhandwriting.com](http://scottishhandwriting.com) by Alison Rosie at the National Records of Scotland. You also need Dictionaries of the Scots Language, [dsl.ac.uk](http://dsl.ac.uk).)





PKA 359/16/2, fol. 133r.

It looks as if the book was printed between November 1637 and February 1638. John Adamson was almost certainly its editor. Here is the next piece of evidence in the Town Council records:

Duo decimo die mensis februarij anno 1638 Mononday [notarial sign]

...

Thesaurer and þe primaris man

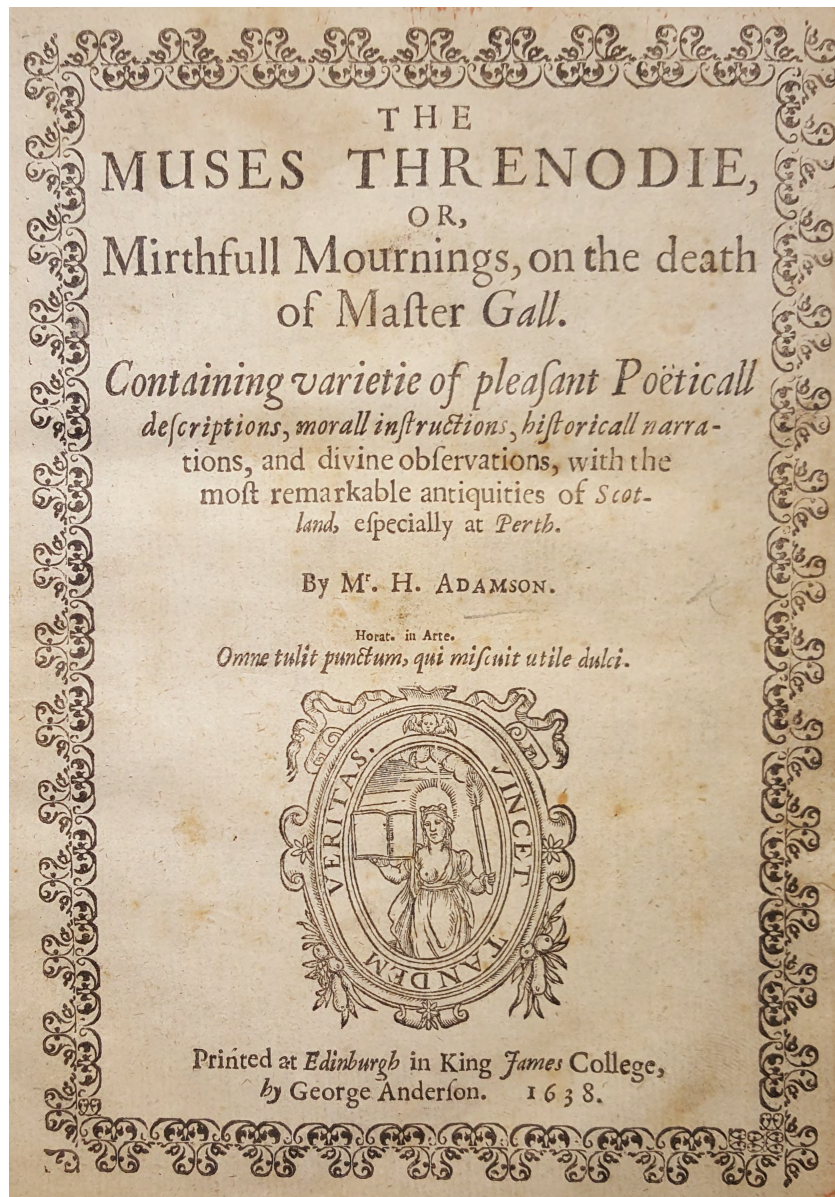
Producit be hew cumyng seruitour to mr Johne adamsone primar Threttie bukis of *wmquhill* mr henrie Adamsones warkis callit þe mirthfull mourningis on þe death of mr James gall

The counsall ordanis Patrik Andersone Thesaurer to gif þe primaris fywe dolouris of Drinksiluer *quhilk* sall be allowit in his thesaurer comptis

Thesaurar

The counsall appointis Patrik andersone Thesaurar to ryde to *edinburgh* for hearing of þe kingis will anent þe seruice buik buik of cannonis and his comissioun and his chargis sall be thankfullie allowit to him in his thesaurer compties

Town Council received their thirty copies of the book virtually in the same week that the Scottish National Covenant was attracting its first signatories in Greyfriars Kirk, Edinburgh. The publication of *þe mirthfull mournings* intersects with the declaration of resistance to royal policies regarding religious observance. It is an open question whether Henry Adamson's poem anticipates such resistance.



British Library, C.39.c.10, title page

Let's look at the book Perth Town Council paid for.

On its title page, the *work* has acquired the title *The Muses Threnodie, or Mirthfull Mournings, on the death of Master Gall*.


The subtitle repays attention:

Containing varietie of pleasant Poëticall descriptions, morall instructions, historicall narrations, and divine observations, with the most remarkable antiquities of *Scotland*, especially at *Perth*.

This book promises to offer a *varietie* of various kinds of writing and information, compiled with Perth as its focus.



# The Inventarie of the *Gabions*, in M. George *his* Cabinet.

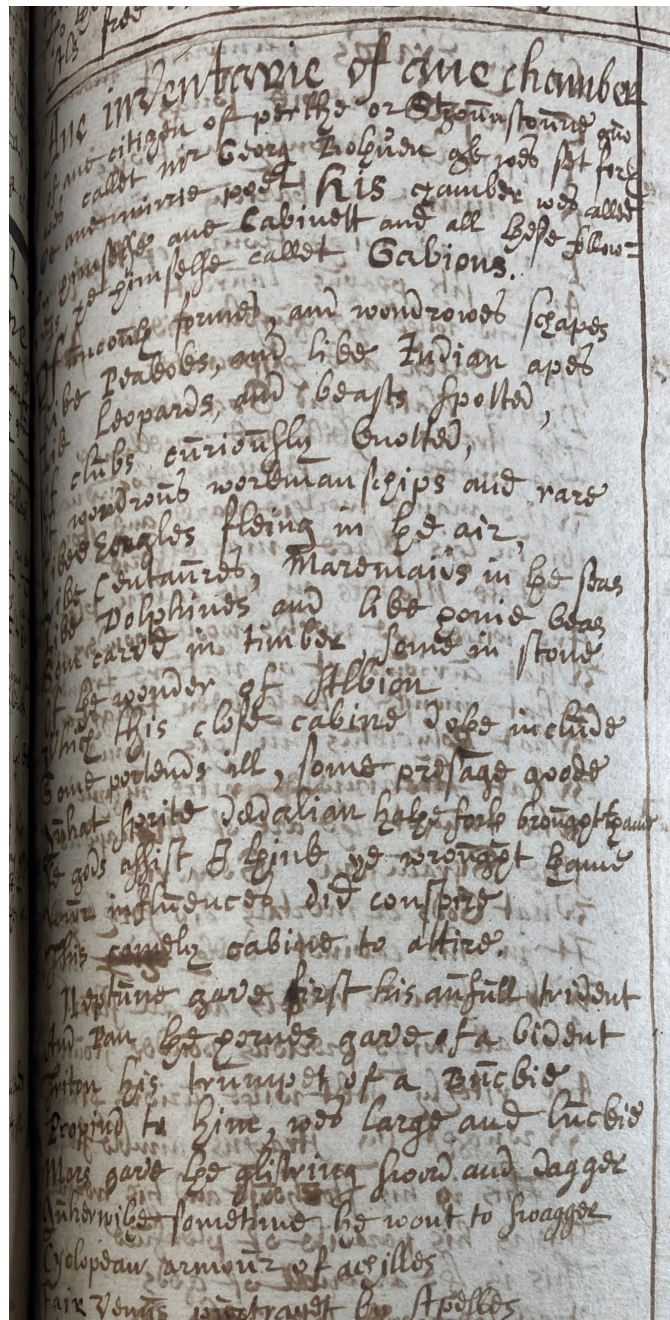
 F uncouth formes, and wondrous shapes,  
 Like Peacocks, and like *Indian* apes,  
 Like Leopards, and beasts spotted,  
 Of clubs curiously knoted,  
 Of wondrous workmanships, and rare,  
 Like Eagles flying in the air,  
 Like Centaurs, Maremaids in the Seas,  
 Like Dolphins, and like honic bees,  
 Some carv'd in timber, some in stone,  
 Of the wonder of *Albion*;  
 Which this close cabine doth include;  
 Some portends ill, some presage good:  
 What sprite *Dædalian* hath forth brought them,  
 Yee Gods assist, I thinke yee wrought them,  
 Your influences did conspire  
 This comelie cabine to attire  
*Neptune* gave first his awfull trident,  
 And *Pan* the hornes gave of a bident,  
*Triton* his trumpet of a buckie,  
 Propin'd to him, was large and luckie:  
*Mars* gave the glistring sword and dagger,  
 Wherewith some time he went to swagger,  
*Cyclopean* armour of *Achilles*,  
 Fair *Venus* purtrayed by *Apelles*,

The

BL, C.39.c.10, sig. π4r.

Rather than a formal overview, however, the first substantial piece in the volume turns out to be the *Inventarie* of the items in the *cabinet* or private museum collected by the Perth surgeon George Ruthven.

In the title, these items are called *Gabions*. What does this word mean? Why does it matter?



Wellington, New Zealand, Alexander Turnbull Library, MS Y-6821  
(The Bonar Commonplace Book, 1606–1679), p. 270a.

There's a little evidence that *Inventarie* appealed to readers – schoolteachers at least.

This image shows the text of the *Inventarie* as transcribed by John Bonar junior, schoolmaster of Maybole, in a massive manuscript collection of literary and historical texts that he and his father, John Bonar senior, schoolmaster of Ayr, compiled over several decades in the seventeenth century.

Bonar's rubric deserves attention:

Ane inventarie of ane chamber of ane citizen of perthe or Stjounstoune quho wes callet Mr George Rothuen quhilk wes set forth be ane mirrie poet His chamber wes called by himselfe ane *Cabinett* and all these followings he himselfe callet *Gabions*.

Almost certainly Bonar copied his text out of the 1638 print. Copying from print is still a common practice in seventeenth-century Scotland. He has identified *Mr George Rothuen*, his *Cabinett*, and his *Gabions*. Bonar does not record the name of the poet; perhaps that information was unimportant to him.



Brude Hyara in the Lume  
 Hote *Vulcan* with his crooked heele  
 Bestow'd on him a tempred steele,  
*Cyclopes* were the brethren Allans,  
 Who swore they swet more then ten gallons  
 In framing it upon their forge,  
 And tempring it for *Master George*:  
 But *Æsculapius* taught the lesson  
 How he should us'd in goodly fashon,  
 And bad extinguisht in his ale,  
 When that he thought it pure and stale,  
 With a pugill of polypodium:  
 And *Ceres* brought a manufodium:  
 And will'd him tost it at his fire  
 And of such bread never to tyre;  
 Then *Podalirius* did conclude  
 That for his melt was soverainge good.  
 ... did bestow

BL, C.39.c.10, sig. π4v.

The maker and keeper of this *cabinet* turns out to be an eccentric character, proud of his knowledge and taking delight in embroidering fact with fancy.

John and Andrew Allan were notable blacksmiths in Perth. They held property near Blackfriars, backing onto the Town Lade, the millstream that for centuries powered several mills on its course from the Almond to the Tay. The Account Books of the King James Hospital contain evidence that both these Allans were dead by 1631.

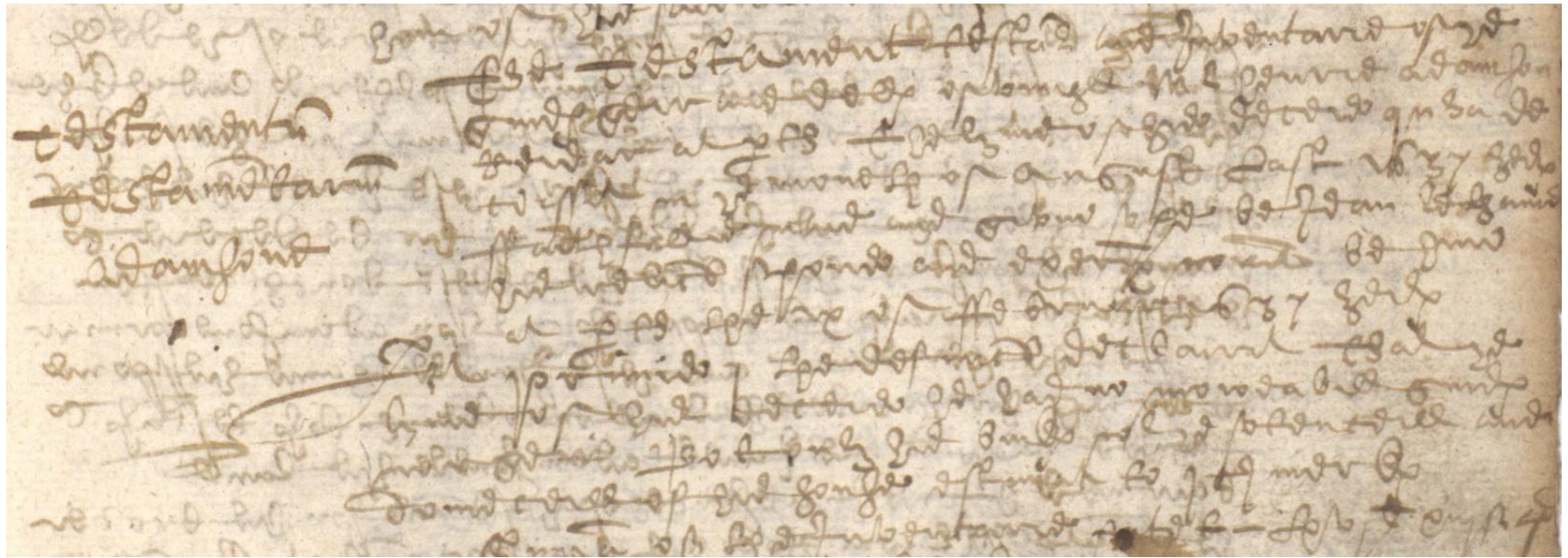
Yea more I do protest, against my will  
 These lines were rest from under my rude quill:  
 I never did intend so great a height  
 That they should touch the presse, or come to light:  
 But now, sith more there is then my designe,  
 I forced am my just defence to bring  
 Gainst my traducers, who maliciouslie,  
 With banefull envie's tooth have snatch'd at me.  
 But I appeale to all judicious learning,  
 Whose wits are exercised in discerning,  
 If I your approbation do finde,  
 I care nought these Ardelio's catching Winde;  
 Nor other Patrons do I seek but you  
 To take of this small piece a litle view,  
 And give just censure joyn'd with your protection,  
 More worth then Zoilus hate Gnatho's affection;  
 Your favours shall me shelter and defend  
 Against all envies rage to live to end;  
 Trusting in God to keepe my conscience pure,  
 Whose favour most of all shall me secure.

Farewell.

The comic *Inventarie* ends, and the layout of text on the page changes. A new mood takes hold. This *Apologie* is spoken in the character of George Ruthven, who is mourning the death of his friend Master James Gall; these two will emerge as the book's main characters. However, the sentiments being expressed turn out to be those of the author, Henry Adamson, reader at St John's Church in Perth. News of his poem has stirred up accusations that he has written about the past in order to criticise '*the present times, | Places, and persons of most auncient stemmes*'. Adamson replies.

It is illuminating to set these lines alongside the archival evidence of preparations for the publication of *The Muses Threnodie*.





Edinburgh, National Archives of Scotland, CC20/4/9 (St Andrews Commissary Court), page 545; Henry Adamson's Testament and Inventarie, prepared 9 February 1637, registered 23 October 1637.

... ye tyme of his deceis he had no moweabill guides nor geir Bot only his buiks with ye vtenceill and domeceill of his house ...

As published, *The Muses Threnodie* has as much to do with Henry Adamson's death as James Gall's – or perhaps more. By October 1637, Adamson's testament was registered at St Andrews Commissary Court. It includes an Inventarie that contrasts with the one at the start of his book as it would be published just a few months later: no exhaustive list of belongings, only this note.

But O! ye fields my native *Perth* neerby,  
 Prayes you to speak, and truely testifie,  
 What matchlesse skill we prov'd in all these places,  
 Within the compasse of three thousand paces,  
 On either side; while as we went a shooting,  
 And strongly strove who should bring home the booting,  
 Alongst the flowrie banks of *Tay* to *Amound*,  
 Ay when I hit the mark I cast a gamound;  
 And there we view the place where some time stood  
 The ancient *Bertha*, now ov'rflow'd with flood  
 Of mightie waters, and that Princely hold  
 VVhere dwelt King *William*, by the streame down rold,

BL, C.39.c.10, sig. A3r (p. 5).

The poem proper, about 2500 lines long, in nine sections called Muses, which vary in length from 460 lines (the fifth Muse, with its climactic account of the 1559 riots that resulted in the destruction of Perth's religious houses, culminating in the demolition of its Charterhouse) to the mere 26 lines of the terse final section, the ninth Muse describing the death of Master James Gall.

The first Muse begins in an effusion of grief over Gall's death, in which the mourner, George Ruthven, invites the various pieces of equipment he and Gall have used in their various sports and pastimes – bows, golfclubs, curling rocks – to join with him in singing a *requiem*. Naming the pieces of sports gear gets George thinking about the contests he once had with Master James, and especially their bouts of archery. These thoughts direct his memory outdoors.

The procedure for most of the poem has just clicked in place. Travel to sites with historical or natural significance leads to an exchange of stories about those locations.

Let's look more closely at the development of perception and thought as the two wayfarers, Master Gall and *Monsier* Gall, follow their spontaneous itinerary.



Was utterly defac'd, and overthrown,  
That now the place thereof scarce can be known.

Then through these haughs of faire and fertile ground,  
Which with fruit trees, with cornes, and flocks abound,  
Meandring rivers, sweet flowres, heavenly honey,  
More for our pastime then to conquest money  
We went a shooting, both through plaine and park,  
And never stay'd till wee came to *Lomsworke*:  
Built by our mightie Kings for to preserve us,  
That thenceforth waters should not drown, but serve us;  
Yet condescending it admits one rill  
Which all these plaines with cristall brooks doth fill,  
And by a conduit large three miles in length  
Serves to make Perth impregnable for strength  
At all occasions; when her clowfes fall,  
Making the water mount up to her wall.

*Bowſie, or  
Balhousie.*

When we had viewd this mightie work at randon,  
We thought it best these fields for to abandon,  
And turning home-wards, spar'd nor dyke nor fowſie  
Untill we come unto the boot of *Bowſie*,  
Alongſt this aqueduct, and there our ſtation,  
We made, and viewd *Balhousies* ſituation,  
O'reluding all that ſpacious pleaſant valley,  
VVith flowres damasked, leuell as an alley  
Betwixt and Perth, thither did we repair  
(For why the ſeaſon was exceeding fair)  
Then all alongſt this valley did we hye,  
And there the place we clearlie did eſpye.

*The battell  
of the north*

The precinct, ſituation and the ſtead,  
VVhere ended was that cruell bloodie lead

Between

Edinburgh, National Library of Scotland  
H.29.b.1, sig. A3v (p. 6)

Master Gall and *Monsier* George walk west along the Almond until they come to Lowswark. They stop here and consider its history but even more its importance for the life and wellbeing of the community. They aren't playing with bows and arrows any more. Instead, the route the water takes draws them on.

Walking along the Lade gives Gall and George the scope and momentum to re-imagine the past, in this case the battle of the Clans, 1396.





Roy, *Military Survey of Scotland*, 1747–1755 (detail)

It could be valuable to glimpse how perceptions of the Lade changed over time. Such changes might be traced on maps of the district.

Here's how the Lade was indicated a century later, in an important military map of the district.





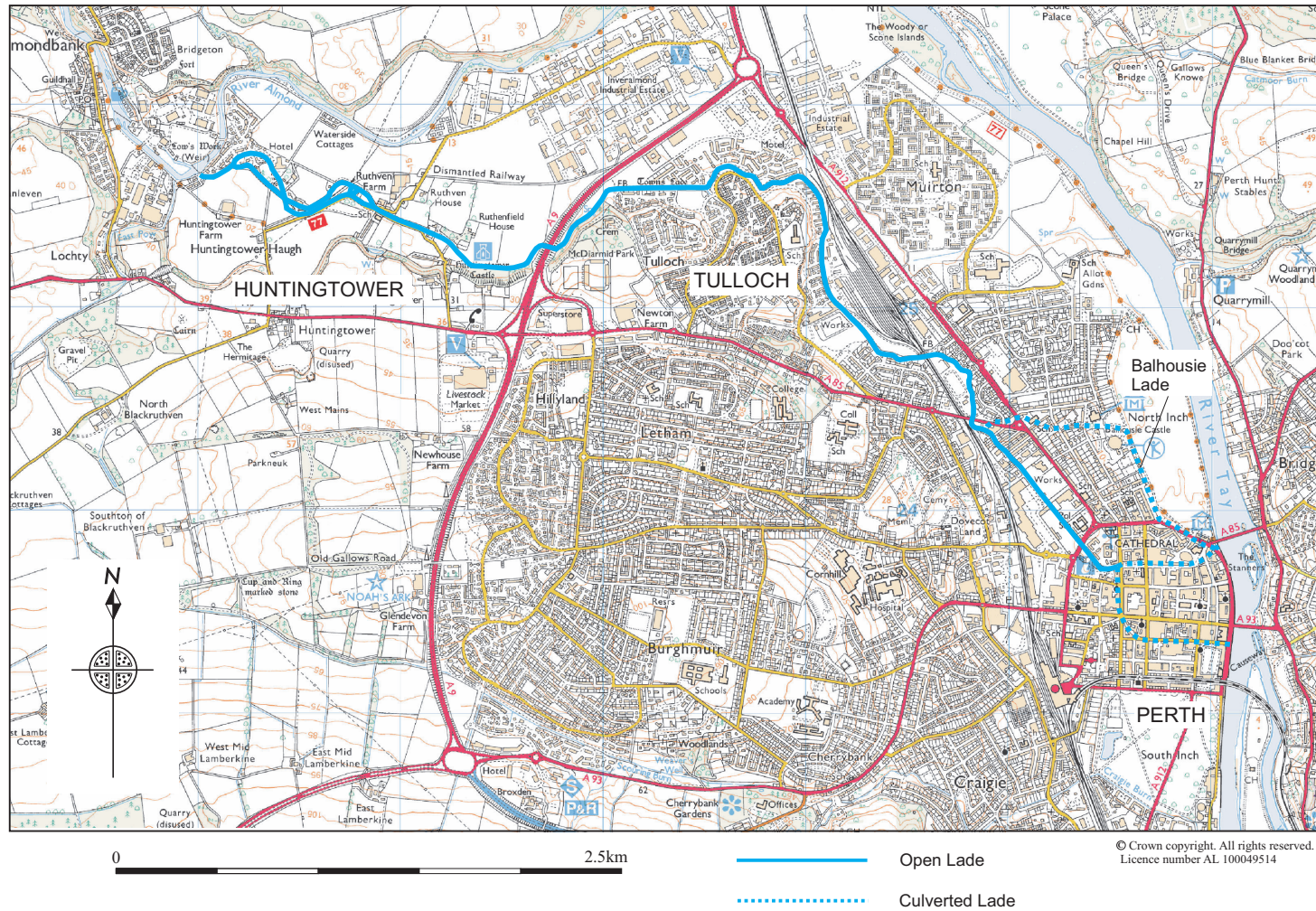
Adair, Mapp of Straithern, Stormount, and Cars of Gourie, 1720? (detail)

Here's how the district was mapped in the 1680s and 1720s. What differences do you notice between Adair's survey and Roy's a few decades later?



Illus 1

Route of the Lade

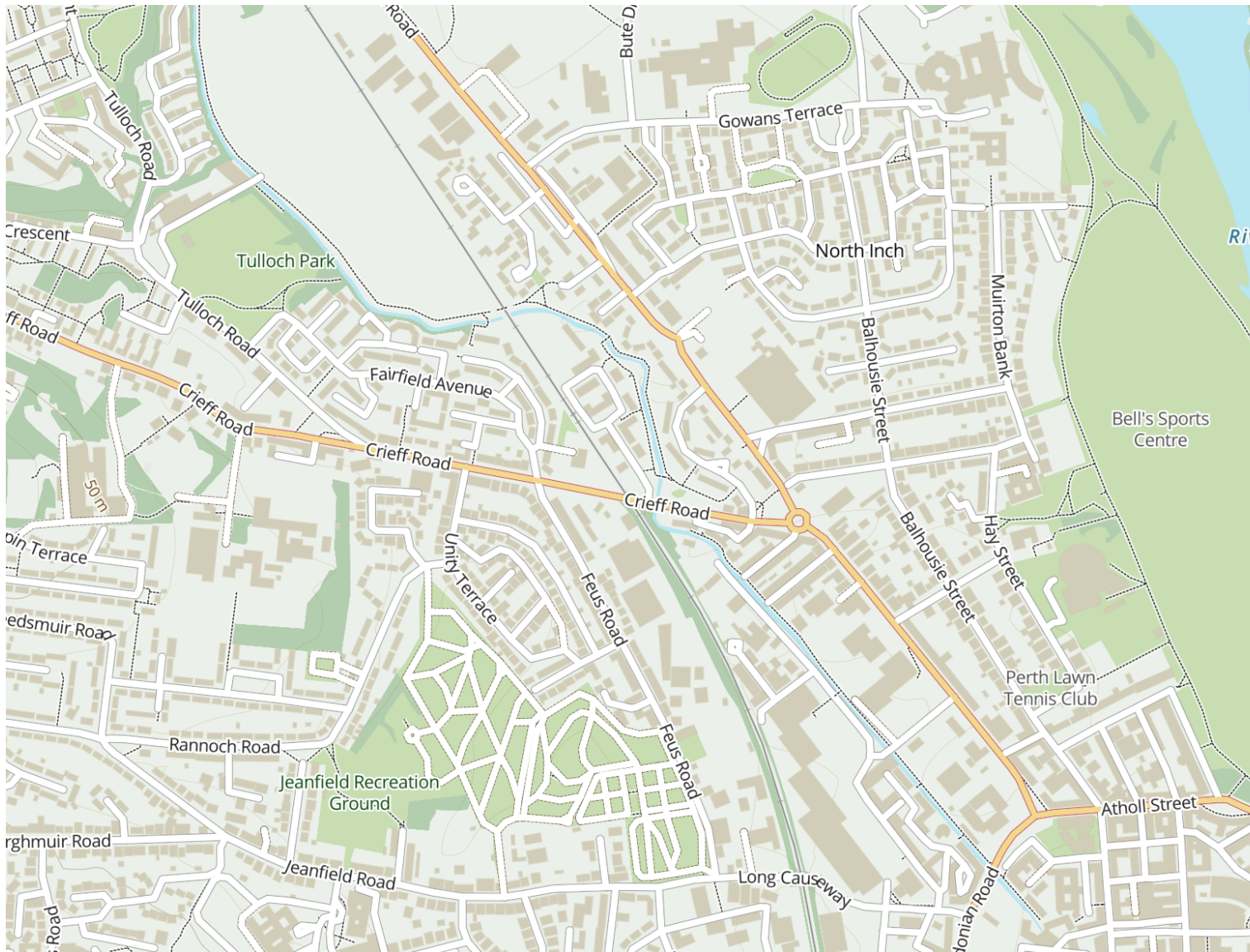


Barton, and Perry, Lade route (overlay on OS map)

Now let's jump almost two centuries and consider how the Lade was traced in a 2011 survey by Alder Archaeology.

What is the experience of walking along it like now? How many different thoughts and feelings does the Lade evoke amongst those who live near it, traverse its paths on the way to work or school, or use it in other ways?





Ordnance Survey, Grid Ref. NO 11276 23507.

When we turn to the way the district is indicated on the most recent OS map online, what has happened to the Lade?



Barton and Perry, Low's Work.

Let's turn back to the 2011 survey of the Lade.

The source of the Lade, on the River Almond, is a sluice on the south end of a weir, originally medieval construction, rebuilt in 1622 and again in the nineteenth century. The previous winter, heavy flooding had taken place. Subsequently, the weir was fully in view.





Carron, Take a Hike



It amazes me that this ancient, damaged construction marks the source of a human-made waterway that for many of its stretches continues to give those who traverse its path access to natural vitality and variety, and maybe stir some glimpses of its past.

To me, this is rather similar to the experience of reading *The Muses Threnodie*. With one important addition: Henry Adamson's poem, as edited by his brother John and sponsored by Perth Town Council, reminds the reader about the importance of the local landscape and its historical associations for remembering people who went before.



Giles, Lowswark SE to NW.

Lowswark in July 2023



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I'm just a visitor from far away. There is so much about the Lade, and Lowswark, that is yet for me to learn. There is so much knowledge and experience in this room, and in this city at large, about these amazing, monumental locations.

*The Muses Threnodie*, Perth and Kinross Archive, and the Perth Lade can make it possible to gain further insight into ways previous generations perceived and interacted with their locality.

I wonder what we can learn from their environmentally situated historical knowledge.

The project Walking Perth's Past identifies, supports and celebrates the ways science, history and culture have intersected in this remarkable city. We want to work with local neighbourhoods and organisations to stage events and carry out activities, toward an expanded range of learning and enjoyment for the fullest possible diversity of Perth's residents.

I'd be very interested to hear and respond to your thoughts about all this!