During the Summer of 1975, Algy Watson, Clerk to the Bailies of Bennachie, wrote to Andrew G Fordyce Junior, then living in Orpington, Kent asking him for reminiscences from his father who had been a quarryman on Bennachie working at the Lintel Quarry until it was no longer worked. The purpose seems to have been to gather reminiscences for the Bailies’ archive but also to seek material for the forthcoming publication *The Book of Bennachie* (published 1976). The poem which Mr Fordyce Jr sent in response was not included in the book, but Mr Fordyce Jr writes about his father and the Lintel Quarry in *Bennachie Again* (1983) - p152 *The Mystery of the Lintel Quarry*.

Mr Fordyce replied to Algy Watson’s letter sending a handwritten copy of his father’s 30-verse poem ‘Bennachie’ with a covering letter which is transcribed in full below.

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**Footnote:**

* The house was then known as Bogiebank but is now believed to be called Ormsary
Mr Fordyce Snr’s poem, as his son describes, gives us an insight into the hill in the mid-nineteenth century as well as to life in Aberdeenshire more generally for working men at that time. It is perhaps telling that the poem does not include the description of that first tortuous journey to work recounted by his son in the letter! For the young Andrew and his friend and colleague Frank crossing the hill was simply a part of everyday life – a means of getting from home in Oyne to work in Monymusk – albeit one which (despite the distance and the hour) afforded them great pleasure.

**Bennachie**

*By Andrew Galloway Fordyce*

*Dedicated to his “Apprentice, mate and friend”, Frank Morrison*

Ye’ll min the time my lifelang freen  
Though noo they’re like a fairy dream  
Then we were young an our teens  
Noo mony a day’s wark in atween

At early mornins we’d nae fear  
Fra Oyne at three, forth we did steer  
Tae Monymusk oor task wis set  
A day’s wark tae, afore twas nicht

Oh, it was gran’, the mornins fine  
We linket roon the Ben in time  
Tae see the Deer in terror’s mien  
Gang boundin’ thro’ the brackens green

We sairly grieved to see him flee  
Frae hairmless loons like you an’ me  
For neither o’ os wid lift a stene  
Tae scare him frae his bit green

Pittodrie fair, sae snugly there  
In a’ her beauty rich an’ rare  
Lay slumberin’ near to Bennachie  
A glorious sicht for you an’ me

Doon by the Linn, that valley fair  
Few spots there is that can compare  
Wi thee, in springtime’s early morn  
When dew, the trees an’ floo’ers adorn

The rushin’ Linn in a’ its pride  
The roarin’ torrent fast did glide  
An’ doon the rocky step it fell  
To kiss the floo’ers in the vale
The sweet refreshin’ morning’ dew
Hung on the birms\(^1\) like pearls new
The perfume, Oh, ‘twas rich and rare
An’ scented a’ the valley fair

We clim’ the braes, and through the howes
Whar mony a bonnie burnie rows\(^2\)
Oor young herts dancin’ to the scene
Wi nature tuned in graceful mien

The rabbits young and auld were there
A feastin’ on the rich green fare
The pheasant too, an’ Cushie Doo
Foun’ early worms to taste their moo

There we could hear the Muir Cock’s call
Come sounding o’er the Firs sae tall
The echo gently rose an’ fell
An’ broke the stillness o’ the vale

The early birds did pipe their sang
In joyful notes the wids amang
While ither s i’ the lift abean\(^3\)
Pour’d forth their lays\(^4\) to sky serene

Their tuneful lays oor heirts did cheer
An’ made us feel to Heaven sae near
The hallowed influence of the place
Did fill oor heirt an’ soul wi’ grace

The happy hames, sae couthy\(^5\) set
Amang the wids a restfu’ place
The sunrays roon the hillside crept
The inmates still in dreamland slept

We couldna tether time nor tide
Tho’ sair we wished tae langer bide
An feast oor e’en on sic a scene
They haunt me still in mony a dream

We leave Pittodrie’s wids ahin
Tae climb the Hill and change the scene
We reach the grove o’ Spruces fine
Their branches overhead did twine

The sandhole wi’ the trees abeen
Whare beesom Jamie made his hame
His leefu lene\(^6\) the sheltered spot
He lived contented wi’ his lot
Then by Dalfling, they’re nae astir
   We hear the Muir Cock’s distant birr
We pass the steep and rocky ghyll
   Whar the young Bride an’ Bridegroom fell

“Alas”, their joyous wedding day
   Was turned to grief without delay
The Bonnie Bride a corpse she lay
   Before the sunset of that day

I will not linger on this scene
   Sae sad for oor young heirts to dream
Then by the Greens we hurried on
   Past Blairdaff Kirk amang the Breen

The Rothens Smidy there we see
   The Blacksmith had nae buckelt tee
There Upper Coolie still asleep
   We scampert on wi’ nim’le feet

There noo we reach the wimplin Don
   The Boathouse then we baith did storm
To chum the Boaties Dochters fair
   To row us o’er wi’ muckle care

An’ mony a tulzie wi’ the pair
   We had aboot the boatie fair
Wi’ us they did nae aye agree
   Tae row us o’er the river free

Then thro’ the wids by Paradise
   Tae Monymusk the village nice
Whar “Malcolm Conmore” wi’ his spear
   Showed where to build that ancient spire

For real kind heirts an’ couthy folk
   A’ come o’gweed auld fashioned stock
Which live forever in yer min’
   In Monymusk they’re just that kin’

For dancin’, humour, spor t an’ fun
   In Monymusk they waurna glum
The youngsters did the rant begin
   The auld folks kept it up with vim

We’ll nae forget those happy nichts
   We spent in dancin’, fun an’ mirth
Tho’ aften past the hoor o’ twal
   We niver thocht the nicht wis aul’
Oor heids may aften empty feel
   Still throu’ the memory dear that steals –
That vision, aye in pleasant times
   The heirt it hankers back at times

Sae noo ma Freen I hope ye’ll see
   In a’ that I hae penned to thee
These sights o’ sunny “auld lang syne”
   They aye keep turnin’ in my min’

When this oor life we build like rubble
   An’ time on earth is past a’ trouble
May it nae burn like flimsy stubble
   Or we shall rue that awfu’ muddle

Footnotes

Some of the words in the poem are not in common use today. The Dictionary of the Scots Language (DSL) offers the following definitions. Where DSL offers no definition, other sources (Scots On-Line, and The Scots School Dictionary) have been consulted and suggestions from here and elsewhere are shown in bold. We would be interested in definitions from native speakers from the North-East.

1 Birches
2 Rolls
3 Above
4 DSL provides no plausible definition. Based on the sense of the stanza, could the translation be ‘song’?
5 A slightly different usage from that with which we are familiar. Scots On-Line offers this definition: Comfortable, snug, neat. Pleasant, agreeable. This is consistent with (but more succinct than) DSL.
6 DSL offers nothing here. Scots On-Line suggests ‘all alone’ but this doesn’t entirely fit in with the sense of the poem. It may simply be ‘Leafy Lane’.
7 DSL offers no plausible definition. We wonder if the meaning is ‘broom’.
8 DSL does not help here but the obvious English Equivalent is ‘buckled’ — perhaps indicating starting work? This is consistent with at least one use by R L Stevenson in his Novella Thrawn Janet
9 Meandering
10 Quarrel

* Malcolm Canmore. King Malcolm III of Scotland who founded a priory in the area now known as Monymusk and camped there before a battle in 1090. He blessed the Kirk before the battle and later returned there with his wife Queen Margaret, founding the tower in thanks for his victory.