

Mauchline Where it all Began!

Some 38 members gathered at Mauchline on September 10th 2011 to celebrate our Club's 25th Birthday. We had come together from all over Britain, and it was particularly good to have with us our original founder member and Chairman John Baker and also Alex Wilson, one of our early Committee members who has been the driving force in seeing that Mauchline Ware is appropriately represented in Mauchline with the opening of the Mauchline Ware Museum at Nance Tinnocks,

Ian Lyell of the Mauchline Burns Club led us on a tour of the village which neatly combined key features of Mauchline Ware with that of the life of the Bard. After looking at the sites of the John Davidson and the Wilson and Amphlet factories, we returned to the churchyard to see both the graves of those who played a part in Burns' life and the stones commemorating the Boxworks Smiths.

Back in the Church Hall, we were welcomed by Fiona Lees, the Chief Executive of East Ayrshire Council, and by John Campbell, the Depute Provost. In greeting us, the Depute Provost paid tribute to the strong links which over the years have existed between the Club and Mauchline, its people and local authority. In replying, our Chairman placed on record our gratitude to all the Council staff, past and present, who had supported the activities and enthusiasms of the Club.

We enjoyed a buffet lunch provided by the Council, and then had time to mingle, exchange reminiscences and enjoy the feast of Mauchline Ware which had been prepared for us by Alex Wilson, supplemented by lesser displays contributed by other members, including Burns' books from Elizabeth Savage, paper folders from John Downer, some beautiful black lacquer pieces from Ian Smith, a splendid egg cup stand shown by Jim McGhee and a fine display of tea caddies by Tony Connor as well as interesting pieces brought from the Baird Insitute collection in Cumnock by Stanley Sarsfield from the EAC.. All in all, we were privileged to see one of the most wide-ranging and interesting displays of Mauchline Ware mounted for Club members, and one well worthy of its 25 years.

After lunch the President of the Mauchline Burns Club, Hugh Brown, extended his congratulations and welcome to us. Then our Chairman reflected briefly on what the Club had achieved in its first quarter century, not least the considerable advancement in knowledge about the making and marketing of Mauchline Ware. He also highlighted the fellowship offered to members who chose to participate both in day meetings such as this and in the weekend Conventions. After this year's successful meeting at Lincoln, plans were now in hand for our 18th Convention at Eastbourne in October 2012, as well as a European gathering at Caen in May.

Bravely, Alex Wilson began his talk by circulating amongst us a box of Tunnocks teacakes, the gift of a relative. Then, nothing daunted by the scrunch of silver foil, he gave a masterly overview of the history and development of Mauchline Ware, from the origins of the hidden hinge in Alyth, through the various makers who had contributed to its growth, the Stivens and their associates at Laurencekirk; the Ayrshire snuff box makers; the Smiths, Davidson, Wilson and Amphlet; and Archibald Brown, before calling 'Time' with a blast on his Mauchline late tartan whistle! Not only did he condense the whole complex story into a clear and concise

narrative, but he also illustrated each stage in the development with items from his own and friends' collections.

Ian Lyell then introduced one of his erstwhile colleagues, Rachel Morton Gold, who gave us an illustrated presentation on the work of her great grandfather, Thomas Morton of Muirkirk in Lanarkshire. Originally a railway engine driver, when his daughter was unexpectedly widowed as a young woman, with four children to bring up, he set out to learn the secrets of Mauchline Ware. Having mastered the creation of both Fern Ware and Poker work in Mauchline, he set up a successful cottage industry in Muirkirk, supplying both local customers and exporting to Canada. His skills were used to enhance both furniture and ornaments, and, as Rachel talked, it became clear to many of us, that items we had considered to be late 'Smith' pieces, in fact had their origins with Thomas Morton in Muirkirk. It was a very fitting conclusion to our Jubilee celebrations, that yet another piece of the Mauchline jigsaw had been found and fitted into place.

Finally, our day's celebrations were brought to a conclusion with refreshments at Poosie Nancy's. A final opportunity to share memories and friendship,until the next time.