

Parting Glass (Trekker Armstrong)

So how does the song Parting Glass relate to Burns and the Armstrong Reivers

"The Parting Glass" is a traditional Scottish song, often sung at the end of a gathering of friends. It has also long been sung in Ireland, enjoying considerable popularity to this day, and strongly influencing the style in which it is often now sung.

It was purportedly the most popular parting song sung in Scotland before Robert Burns wrote "Auld Lang Syne".

So, what is another name for a Parting Glass. The "parting glass", or "stirrup cup", was the final hospitality offered to a departing guest. Once they had mounted, they were presented one final drink to fortify them for their travels. This custom was practised in several countries.

I guess we now know where "one for the road" originated from.

The earliest known printed version of the song was as a broadside in the 1770s and it first appeared in book form in *Ancient and Modern Scottish Songs, Heroic Ballads*. An early version is sometimes attributed to Sir Alex Boswell. The text is doubtless older, as it was recorded in the Skene Manuscript, a collection of Scottish airs written at various dates between 1615 and 1635.

It was known at least as early as 1605, when a portion of the first stanza was written in a farewell letter, as a poem now known as "Armstrong's Goodnight", by one of the Border Reivers executed that year for the murder of a Warden of the Scottish March.

Sir John Carmichael was murdered by a body of the Armstrongs Reivers on June 16, 1600, who ambushed and shot him as he rode to Langholm to attend a warden court. For this murder Thomas Armstrong, nephew of Kinmont Willie was executed in the following November, and Alexander Armstrong in February 1606.

According to Sir Walter Scott, tradition affirms the well-known ballad, 'Armstrong's Good Night,' to have been composed by Thomas Armstrong, before his execution.

I first came across the poem "Armstrong's Goodnight" having purchased an 1830 publication by Sir Walter Scott of the *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*. This three-

volume set was an anthology of Border ballads that was first published in 1802 but was expanded in several later editions.

For Walter Scott, as his son-in-law J. G. Lockhart later wrote, compiling *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* was "a labour of love truly, if ever such there was". His passion for ballads went back to early childhood where as a ten-year-old he began collecting the broadsheet ballads that were still being sold on the streets.

In late 1799, impressed by the elegant work of the Kelso printer James Ballantyne, an old schoolfellow of his, the idea occurred to him of putting together a selection of ballads to be printed by him. This would satisfy his patriotic feelings in various ways, not just displaying the typographical prowess of a little-known Border town, but also preserving the folk-poetry of his beloved Scotland for the admiration of the world at large.

Excerpt from *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border*

The following verses are said to have been composed by one of the ARMSTRONGS, executed for the murder of Sir JOHN CARMICHAEL of Edrom, warden of the middle marches. The tune is popular in Scotland; but whether these are the original words, will admit of a doubt.

ARMSTRONG'S GOODNIGHT

This night is my departing night, For here nae langer must I stay;
There's neither friend nor foe o' mine,
But wishes me away.

What I have done thro' lack of wit,
I never, never, can recall; I hope ye're a' my friends as yet;
Goodnight and joy be with you all!

Principal references and extracts from Wikipedia and *Minstrelsy of the Scottish Border* (3rd Edition Volume 1)