

GEORGE BEATTIE POET TRAGIC SUICIDE OR MURDER VICTIM?

George Beattie, born in the humble Whitehill Croft on the Kirkside Estate, St Cyrus, was a likeable fellow. He was the son of William Beattie and Elizabeth Scott and went on to train as a solicitor in Montrose.

Beattie had dabbled in poetry from his youth; at the age of 14, had written *The Murder'd Minstrel*, in the style of an old Scots ballad, about a poor troubadour who upsets a lady in her fine house. The lady orders her soldiers to kill him, but later finds herself haunted by his ghost. In 1815, Beattie wrote "John o' Arnha", a comic epic inspired by local worthy, John Findlay, known for his boorish personality and his empty boasts. Beattie was, by this time, a successful, popular man with a great wit and literary talent.



William McCombie's Gravestone, Tough Kirkyard

But, in 1821, Beattie's 35th year, he met the woman who was to be his downfall. The journey from happy-go-lucky poet to deeply depressed and suicidal wreck, was a mere two and a half years. The lady's name was Miss Gibson; she was 23, tall, pale-skinned, with light brown hair and hazel eyes. Her parents, Robert and Isabelle, lived at Stone of Morphie. Miss Gibson, having the distinctly male forename of William, lead Beattie a merry dance.

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By 1822, she was requesting his company at every opportunity, even having private trysts at the empty House of Kinnaber, which her father owned. Soon George was head over heels in love and, as far as he was concerned, destined to marry the coquettish maiden.

In 1823, the rival attraction of a huge inheritance from Miss Gibson's maternal uncle, William Mitchell, a slave owner in the West Indies, threatened to tear their relationship apart. Within a year, Miss Gibson was demanding Beattie break their engagement, accusing him of neglecting her and being too enamoured of her promised fortune. She started being seen with a William Smart, who turned out to be a gold-digger, hell-bent on getting Miss Gibson's money. Beattie was devastated, sinking into the deepest depression. Ultimately, he decided he could not live without Miss Gibson. He was found dead by his own hand in the Auld Nether Kirkyard on 30 September 1823.

When Miss Gibson married Smart, she soon realised her mistake. She would die 16 years later, utterly neglected by her husband and tormented by George's ghost, in an eerie parallel of the murdered minstrel and the haughty lady.

Beattie left his property to his brother David and sister Catherine. His talent was largely forgotten due to his death by suicide, but fast forward 190 years to Arbroath native, Barry Graham, who painstakingly researched the story of George Beattie's ill-fated affair. He published George's final papers, casting Beattie as the melancholy hero destroyed by the greed of others. Beattie's grave has a large marble monument in the old kirkyard of Montrose, his works are freely available and demonstrate his genius with words, cut short by a faithless female. Barry Graham is keen to publicise Beattie's story, reminding people of this poet, lost in time.