THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PLAYERS :

IN THE NATURE OF AN EXPERIMENT

1913-1934

TWO VOLUMES : VOLUME ONE

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ABSTRACT

This thesis tries to provide a historical examination of the Scottish National Players, from the first proposals in 1913 until the disbandment of the Scottish National Theatre Society in 1934. The SNP aimed to produce plays of Scottish life and character; to encourage the public's taste for good drama of any kind; and to found a National Theatre. The golden years of the Players were the early and mid twenties, but by the end of the decade their ideals were crumbling away and they faced increasing dissatisfaction from the public and the press. They did not successfully fulfil any of their stated aims, but their attempts were far from being worthless.

The influence of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin upon the SNP is detailed in the first chapter, along with the Players' own statements that they set out to create a similar venture in Glasgow. The Players' debt to the Glasgow Repertory Theatre is discussed.

In chapters two to five a detailed history of the Players has been given. This concentrates on the policies, organisation, achievements, people involved, and actual productions, rather than being a literary critique of the plays themselves.

Chapter six discusses the main achievement of the Scottish National Players, that they provided a training for the theatre profession which could not at that time be obtained anywhere else in Scotland. The SNP's contribution to the setting up of the BBC in Scotland is also discussed.

The appendices contain information on the Scottish National Players, detailing: the plays produced, the authors and number of performances given; the people involved with the stage productions and the parts they played; and the performances themselves, given in chronological order and noting venue and producer.

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CHAPTER ONE: THE IRISH INFLUENCE

> "... the creation of something in Glasgow which should be the counterpoint of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin."[1]

The Scottish National Players were always willing to acknowledge the fact that they were modelling themselves on the Irish Players. They stated it in the letter which advertised their first productions, describing themselves as a "new scheme on the lines of the famous Irish National Players of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin".[2] They expressed similar sentiments in 1953, when they wrote a brief history of their movement, The Scottish National Theatre Venture. Tyrone Guthrie, who was Producer to the SNP for two years, one of his earliest appointments, declares quite clearly in his introduction to the book that:

> The Scottish National Theatre Society aimed at the creation of something in Glasgow which should be the counterpoint of the Abbey Theatre in Dublin.[3]

The Irish influence was declared at the meeting of the St Andrew Society (Glasgow) in 1913, when the idea for such a group as the Scottish National Players was first proposed. W Ralph Purnell, a noted amateur actor, addressed the Society and it is made clear in The Scottish National Theatre Venture that the proposals were strongly influenced by the Irish movement:

> It is well to place on record here that the project to found a "School of National Drama" in Scotland, on the lines of the Irish Players of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin had been put before the Council of the St. Andrew Society by Mr W Ralph Purnell on the 17 November 1913, when he obtained the agreement of the Society to investigate the possibilities.[4]

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[1] Tyrone Guthrie, "Introduction", The Scottish National Theatre Venture, (Glasgow: The Scottish National Players, 1953), p. 13. Hereafter referred to as SNTV.

[2] Letter dated 16 September 1920, signed by David Glen MacKemmie on St Andrew Society headed notepaper, Scottish Theatre Archive, Glasgow University Library, hereafter referred to as STA.

[3] SNTV, p. 13.

[4] SNTV, p. 21.

The St Andrew Society was a patriotic organisation, founded in 1907, whose objects were "the guarding of the honour and dignity of Scotland, the vindication of Scottish rights in the British Union", and the "cultivation of the spirit of Scottish patriotism". This was to be done by, among other things, "the encouragement of Scottish Institutions, Arts, Letters and Music".[5] The St. Andrew Society set up various committees to look in detail at the possibilities of the Scottish National Players scheme. These were an Executive Committee with Purnell acting as Honorary Secretary, a Finance sub-Committee, and a Literary and Dramatic Committee. The latter was authorised to place adverts for suitable plays in the Glasgow Herald, the Scotsman, and The Times (London). The annual report of the Society for 1914 records a "very encouraging" response of "as many as 32 plays of Scottish life and character". These were to be assessed by a "committee of well-known literary men".[6]

The Finance sub-Committee set about raising a "Scottish Drama Guarantee Fund" of £400, a figure reached by July 1914. Guarantees were to be held for one year from 2 March 1914, or, if no plays were produced until the 1915-16 season, until 2 March 1916. This fund was set up in order to relieve the St Andrew Society and its members of any financial liability in connection with the Scottish National Players project.

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[5]Extracted from the objects of the St Andrew Society as printed in The Scottish Flag, (1914) by C Cleland Harvey. The complete statement is important as it shows that the Society was not just a literary or artistic one, but was primarily a patriotic organisation:

The objects of the Society are:

1. The guarding of the honour and dignity of Scotland, and the vindication of Scottish rights in the British Union by such means as:
   (a) The encouragement of the study of Scottish history and literature, and the promotion of the use of accurate textbooks of Scottish and British history in schools and colleges.
   (b)The encouragement of the correct use of the national names, and the opposing of the incorrect use of "England", "English", and "Anglo" for "Britain", "British", and "Brito". Also the encouragement of the use of "Celto-Teutonic" as a more correct ethnological term than "Anglo-Saxon".
   (c) The ensuring that the young people of Scotland shall have equal facilities with the youth of England for entering any of the British Services, and equal opportunities for a successful career in these services.

2. The cultivation of the spirit of Scottish patriotism by such means as:
   (a) The celebration of National Anniversaries;
   (b) The visiting and preserving of historic monuments;
   (c) The erection of historic monuments;
   (d) The encouragement of Scottish institutions, Art, Letters and Music.

In 1914 the annual subscription was five shillings, with a charge of five guineas for life membership. The Honorary Secretary was David Glen MacKemmie who was later to take a principal role in the first decade of the Scottish National Players.

[6]STA .

Details of the project were sent out to members of the Society in a letter dated 20 April 1914. It was proposed to begin "next winter" with twelve performances of several plays, during a four week season at the Athenaeum Theatre. This letter pointed out that Scottish drama lagged far behind other art forms, such as literature and music, "as a means of expressing the national genius of Scotland". Attention was drawn to the fact that Ireland had succeeded in using drama for such a purpose:

> Of late the Irish national spirit has been enabled to find dramatic expression through the work of the native Repertory Company at the Abbey Theatre in Dublin, and from various signs the moment seems ripe for a similar effort in Glasgow.[7]

Indeed the St Andrew Society not only felt that this was the right time for Scotland to attempt to create a national drama, as Ireland had created an Irish drama, but they believed that "what Ireland had accomplished Scotland can and should do also as a patriotic duty".[8] Patriotism was, of course, an important part of the St. Andrew Society.

The outbreak of the First World War, however, meant that the time was not right, and the project was "suspended until more peaceful times."[9] That this decision was justified can be seen by the number of men who kept their military rank as a title after the war had ended. Many of the men who would have been participants in the SNP scheme were most probably involved in the uniformed services. The Scottish National Players' project was not revived until 1920.

The role of the Abbey as the inspiration for the SNP was also frequently emphasised by the press. In noting that the SNP planned to do their first production in January 1921, the Glasgow Herald printed an article on 10 November 1920 which discussed the new venture by the St Andrew Society and stressed that Scottish drama had still to be created, like Irish drama before the Irish Players:

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[7]Letter from the St Andrew Society (Glasgow) dated 20 April 1914, signed by George-Eyre Todd, President, and William A Callander, Convenor of the Finance Committee of the Scottish National Players.

[8]1914 annual report of the St Andrew Society, Scottish National Players Committee, STA.

[9]1914 annual report.

> The object of the contemplated venture of the St Andrew Society is, following the example of the Irish theatre, to promote a drama based upon national folklore or expressive of phases of Scottish life and character, contemporary as well as in the past. Until the rise of the Irish Theatre, Irish drama, like Scotch, was nothing to brag about consisting largely of the plays of Boucicault and the numerous melodramatic absurdities ...[10]

The article felt that the plays which had been "quarried" out of Scott's Waverley novels which, apart from a few "literal" plays "not suited for the stage" was the sum total of Scottish drama, had to be done away with as Ireland had done away with the Boucicault tradition. In a review of the first SNP production, the Glasgow Herald (14 January 1921) noted that in the field of national drama, "there is encouragement in the precedent of the Irish National Theatre".

It was not only the Scottish papers which commented on the usefulness of the Irish experience. The Morning Post's 'Theatre Notes' on 20 January 1921 dealt with the Scottish National Players, stating that they follow the "policy" of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin. The Era, one of the newspapers of the theatre profession, gave their review the title "A Scottish Abbey Theatre", and stated that an attempt was being made to establish "a purely Scottish Theatre on the lines of the Irish venture".[11] In 1928 a French paper, L'Humanité, wrote of the Scottish theatre movement:

> Le centre du mouvement a été Glasgow. Ce fut l'example irlandais et le succès artistique à Dublin du Theatre de l'Abbaye qui stimulerant des volontés parmi la jeune génération écossaise.[12]

In later years, whenever a paper or journal gave a history or brief resume of the SNP's achievements, there was the inevitable comparison with the Abbey. It had become a standard comment in a review or article concerned with the SNP. In January 1928 Theatre World ran a series of articles on 'The British Repertory Theatre', one of which was devoted to the Scottish National Players. The article states that:

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[10] All newspaper articles and reviews are from the press scrapbooks in the SNP catalogue, STA, unless otherwise stated.

[11] n.d. STA.

[12] "The centre of the movement was in Glasgow. It was the Irish example and the artistic success of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin which stimulated the will of the young Scottish generation." L'Humanité, 27 April 1928.

> The comparison indeed with the Irish National Theatre is one which constantly suggests itself, for though the younger organisation in Scotland cannot yet attempt to rival its Irish elder sister, either in the brilliance of its playwrights or the fame of its players, yet the development of the two have many points in common.

On 7 May 1930 the Birmingham Post reviewed an SNP production at the Everyman Theatre in London. Like many others, this review began with a brief history of the Scottish National Players, and stated that they had begun:

> in 1921 as an amateur society which intended to create a national Scots drama as the Irish Players of the Abbey Theatre, created a national Irish drama.

The Irish comparison did perhaps help to make the aims and ideas of the Scottish National Players more readily understandable and accessible to the newspapers' readers. People knew what the Abbey had achieved, and could therefore see what the SNP hoped to achieve, without any long or involved explanations and theories. This use of the Abbey was, however, something of a double-edged sword. The Abbey Theatre was well-known and established, was connected with several prominent literary figures, and had produced both good actors and good plays, the best of which were undeniably Irish in character, yet neither melodramatic, nor guilty of making fun of Irish life. The Abbey's success was too much for the SNP to match, and this was taken as a sign of failure, whereas it should have been understood that a Scottish national theatre ought, by its very definition, to be different from an Irish one. The Scottish movement should have looked more for its own road rather than follow the Abbey's path too closely.

The Scottish National Players' first Producer, both in an honorary and later in a salaried position, was Andrew P Wilson. Wilson had been a member of the St Andrew Society's Scottish National Players Committee in 1914, at which time he was actually the manager of the Abbey Theatre. By 1920 Wilson was working for Sir Oswald Stoll in London. When the arrangements for the first SNP production were being made, David Glen MacKemmie, who was responsible for most of its organisation, urged Wilson to write to the press, discussing his Abbey experience in an attempt to arouse interest in the SNP venture. As there had been some interesting

correspondence in the Edinburgh Evening News, during September 1920, on the need for a national theatre and the practical problems involved, MacKemmie felt that this would provide a good opportunity for a letter from Wilson.

Wilson's letter to the Edinburgh Evening News was printed on 8 October 1920. He gave an account of the Abbey Theatre, highlighting its "largely accidental" development from "a poet's dream" to world fame and renown. Wilson stresses two points, the first being the success of the native Irish actors. He does not decry the use of English actors in the first three years, as "the experiment attracted the attention of men who otherwise might never have written a play", and because it was through these productions that the local amateurs, namely the Fay's company, were brought into contact with them. The second point concerned the dramatists themselves, as Wilson states that it was they who pushed the development of the theatre:

> The original idea was for a home of romantic drama but the newly aroused dramatic consciousness of the young Irish writer; aroused needless to say because it saw a chance for expression - soon hurried away from romanticism to realism and dramatists arose like T C Murray, the County Cork schoolmaster, who showed the world that Ireland was far from being the land of easy sentiment and buffoonery so long represented. So the movement became national.

Wilson also gave practical advice, advising the use of local talent; on the hiring initially of just a small hall; and of the fact that once there is the chance of seeing their plays staged there will be plenty of dramatists:

> It is an ill job writing a play to treasure in a bottom drawer, but give a dramatist the chance of developing his art by seeing his work played and we will be overwhelmed with manuscripts.

This could well be an accurate observation on the psychology of a playwright, or a potential one. It is certainly true that the Scottish National Players, according to publicity notices and statements made by various members, received a great many manuscripts, most of which were, however, deemed unsuitable for production.

Wilson wrote this letter, giving a brief history of the Abbey Theatre and the "birth of the Irish national drama movement" to point out to those who may be interested in a national theatre in Scotland that the Irish

experience was there for all "good Scotsmen" to profit from. The Abbey Theatre grew out of the Irish Renaissance, and was always more closely linked to it than the Scottish National Players were to the Scottish Renaissance movement. The beginnings of the Irish Renaissance can be seen in the 1880s and was linked to the political movement for "Home Rule". In 1882 University College, Dublin, was founded, and the same year saw the beginning of The Gaelic Journal. The Gaelic Athletic Association was established in 1884, as were both the Belfast and Dublin Young Ireland Societies. The National Library of Ireland was established in 1887, and in that year the Gaelic Athletic Association began to publish their own journal, The Gael. In 1888 a firm of Dublin publishers, M H Gill and Son, issued their Poems and Ballads of Young Ireland. This included work by most of the new poets such as Yeats, T W Rolleston, Katherine Tynan, John Todhunter and Rose Kavanagh. Yeats published The Wanderings of Oisin in 1889. These events reveal a great deal of activity and interest in Irish culture, which increased over the next decade.[13]

The Irish Literary Society came into being in 1892, with Yeats, Rolleston and Todhunter among its initiators. The same year saw the establishment of the National Literary Society in Dublin.[14] On 25 November 1892 Douglas Hyde, a prominent Gaelic scholar, delivered an influential lecture on "The Necessity of De-Anglicising Ireland". The lecture, which was printed as a pamphlet, put forward the ideas which led to the founding of the Gaelic League (Conradh na Gaeilge) in 1893, Hyde said:

> When we speak of 'The Necessity for De-Anglicising the Irish Nation' we mean it, not as a protest against imitating what is best in the English people, for that would be absurd, but rather to show the folly of neglecting what is Irish, and hastening to adopt pell-mell, and indiscriminately, everything that is English, simply because it is English.[15]

It was this neglect of Irish, and the influence of everything English, regardless of worth, which the Gaelic League sought to amend. Their two stated aims were:

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[13] A more detailed chronology is available in Theatre Business, Selected and edited Ann Saddlemeyer, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1982), pp. 301-315.

[14] Robert Hogan and James Kilroy, The Modern Irish Drama: a documentary history I The Irish Literary Theatre 1899-1901 , (Dublin: The Dolmen Press, 1975), p.9. Hereafter referred to as Hogan and Kilroy I.

[15] Reported in The Story of Conradh na Gaeilge, Padraig ó Fearáil , (Clódhanna Teo Baile Atha Cliath & Corcaigh: An Chéad Chló,1975), pp.1-2.

1. The preservation of Irish as the National language of Ireland, and the extension of its use as a spoken tongue.
2. The study and publication of existing Irish literature, and the cultivation of a modern literature in Irish.

The rest of the pamphlet outlines the League's ideals, and from these it can be seen that the League was something more than just an Irish-teaching body. The spirit of the Land Leaguers can be heard in the attempt to stop emigration. There is a genuine concern for Irish industry, employment and the self-esteem of the nation.[16] Although the linguistic aims were both important and taken seriously, the movement combined them with 'traditional' forms of literature, dance, music and sports.

There was interaction and a certain amount of overlapping between the various different societies, especially between the Gaelic Athletic Association and the Gaelic League. Many people involved with the League, such as Douglas Hyde or Alice Milligan, wrote plays which were performed both by the Irish Literary Theatre, and at various Gaelic Festivals.[17] W B Yeats, Lady Gregory and Edward Martyn, who initiated the Irish Literary Theatre project, were present at the inaugural meeting of the Kiltartan Branch of the Gaelic League. Yeats himself spoke at the meeting, saying that every nation has its own message to the world, "and the message is to a considerable extent bound up with the language".[18] Of the three however, only Lady Gregory made the effort to learn Irish.

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[16] It was stated that "Leaguers will support none but Irish manufacture" (ó Fearáil, p. 6). Indeed an industrial committee was set up, and the various branches helped in the compilation of an industrial directory, and even set up industries in some cases, for example, "a rug making industry in An Nás, Contae Chill Dara" (ó Fearáil, p. 21) and the local branch in County Clare set up a Knitting Company employing forty girls (ó Fearáil, p. 26). It was also stated that by "awakening in the people a sense of duty to their country, endeavouring to create employment for them at home, and encouraging the revival of native pastimes and amusements, it [the Gaelic League] is helping to stop emigration" (ó Fearáil , p. 6).

[17] The Irish Literary Theatre produced Alice Milligan's The Last Feast of the Fianna at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin, in February 1900. Her other plays The Harp that Once and The Deliverance of Red Hugh were performed in the Antient Concert Rooms, Dublin, by Maud Gonne's patriotic association, Inighinidhe na hEireann (Daughters of Erin) in August 1901, directed by W G and Frank Fay.
The Irish Literary Theatre produced Hyde's Irish play Casadh an tSúgáin (The Twisting of the Rope) at the Gaiety in 1901. During the Oireachtas (an annual competition or festival in Irish, similar to the Welsh Eisteddford or the Scottish Mod) in 1902, his An Tinceir agus an tSidheog (The Tinker and the Fairy) was produced in George Moore's garden, with Hyde playing the tinker.

[18] ó Fearáil, p.14.

The Irish Renaissance was, to a great extent, focussed on the political aspirations for Home Rule for Ireland. The emphasis on the Gaelic language, on Irish tradition and culture, and on the difference between Irish and English, all served to give weight to the Home Rule lobby. In contrast there was never quite the same intensity to, or determination for Scottish Home Rule, as part of the Scottish Renaissance. The Irish Renaissance was involved with Irish Gaelic, a language which is totally different to English, and which was still a spoken tongue. The Scottish Renaissance was more interested in Scots than Scottish Gaelic. Scots has more definite and recognisable links with the English language, and was no longer really a spoken tongue. The Scots of the Scottish Renaissance was very much an artistic, poetic and therefore artificial language.

The Scottish Renaissance was much more associated with the work of one man, Hugh MacDiarmid, than was the Irish Renaissance which immediately brings several names to mind, such as Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory. Similarly the Irish politicians, especially Pearse and Connolly, have become folk-heroes in a way that those interested in Scottish Home Rule have not. This may have been because of the different levels of political intensity in the two countries, with the Irish Renaissance stemming from an earlier cultural and political project than the Scottish one. The Scottish Renaissance was a literary project arising in the 1920s. As the Scottish National Players were active in the twenties and early thirties they were part of the Renaissance movement in Scotland at that time, although not closely aligned with the literary project. It was MacDiarmid who instigated, and kept the Scottish Renaissance motivated, and who himself provided it with its first piece of great literature, A Drunk Man Looks at the Thistle, and examined the theory behind the literary Renaissance in Albyn. His articles in the Scottish Educational Journal, later reprinted as Contemporary Scottish Studies, kept various debates and questions in the public mind, and raised many new ones. This is of course rather an over-simplification. There are the works, such as Gregory Smith's Scottish Literature Character and Influence, published in 1919, which influenced MacDiarmid. And there are the writers such as Neil Gunn and Lewis Grassic Gibbon who are also very much a part of the Scottish Renaissance.

The point is that the Scottish National Players were not really influenced by or involved in the Scottish Renaissance, which was very much a literary and mainly a poetic movement. While the Abbey's best plays were of a very high standard, the SNP never produced anything

which would hold its own against the best of the Scottish Renaissance literature. The SNP themselves looked far more to the example of the Abbey Theatre and Ireland, for inspiration than to the Renaissance which was taking place in their own country. The society which was important to the SNP, and which had the kind of association with them that the Irish Literary Theatre had with the National Literary Society, was the St Andrew Society (Glasgow).

In Our Irish Theatre Lady Gregory recounts that the impetus for the Irish Literary Theatre was given one "wet afternoon" in 1897, when the conversation between herself, Yeats and Edward Martyn turned to the subject of the theatre. Lady Gregory states that she had "never been at all interested in theatres";[19] Martyn had written two unproduced plays, The Heather Field and Maeve; and Yeats had had one play, The Land of Heart's Desire, staged at the Avenue Theatre, London, in March 1894. This was as a curtain raiser to Todhunter's A Comedy of Sighs and then to Shaw's Arms and the Man. The theatre had been leased by the actress Florence Farr, and the financial backing came from Miss Horniman.[20] There is however a link between Yeats, Florence Farr and Miss Horniman. They were all members of the Hermetic Order of the Golden Dawn, a secret magical society which had been established in London in 1880. Yeats, Farr and Horniman were all well-known to each other through their activities in the Society, in which they had all been initiated by 1890. They all belonged to the same temple, the Isis-Urania, in which they all became office-bearers. Maud Gonne was also an initiate, but she was never as deeply involved as the others, and soon broke away from the society.[21]

The money for the Irish Literary Theatre venture was raised by a guarantee fund, of £300. Lady Gregory, Yeats and Martyn signed a letter which was sent out to potential guarantors. This letter contained a statement in which the hopes, the ambitions and the ideals of the new theatre were set out. They were particularly anxious to eliminate the 'stage Irish' character, by encouraging a school of dramatic writing which would be genuinely Irish or Celtic:

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[19] Our Irish Theatre, (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe,1972), first published in 1913. p19.
[20] Hogan and Kilroy I, p. 24.
[21] George Mills Harper, Yeats's Golden Dawn (London: MacMillan, 1974).

> We will show that Ireland is not the home of buffoonery and of easy sentiment, as it has been represented, but the home of an ancient idealism.[22]

The statement also shows that the originators of the Irish Literary Theatre believed that there was a ready-made audience for them, which was "trained to listen by its passion for oratory". Lennox Robinson, playwright, producer and historian of the Abbey Theatre, said that the £300 guarantee fund was raised without too much delay. The money came from about fifty-five people, from all sides in the religious and political arenas.[23] That the project was supported by politicians can be seen from the fact that a law was changed by the efforts of W H Lecky, and other Irish MPs such as John Redmond, Mr Dillon, and T M Healy, all of whom were guarantors of the project. They successfully inserted a clause in the Local Government (Ireland) Bill, which allowed an occasional licence to be granted for dramatic productions where the profits would be either for charitable purposes or in aid of a society for science, literature or fine arts.[24]

Yeats, Lady Gregory, and Edward Martyn were all devoted to the project, however none of them had much practical experience of the theatre. At this point George Moore, a close friend of Martyn's and an absentee Irish landlord, became involved in the venture. Moore, a successful novelist, had "mixed in Paris with players and producers", and had been connected with J T Grein and the Independent Theatre Society in London. However, despite his experience Hogan and Kilroy point out that he was in reality "far from being the maestro that Hail and Farewell" (Moore's autobiography) suggests.[25]

The project was made public early in 1899. On 16 January there was a meeting of the National Literary Society which discussed the Irish

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[22]Lady Gregory, p. 20; Lennox Robinson, Ireland's Abbey Theatre A History 1899-1957, (London: Sedgwick & Jackson,1951), p. 2.

[23]Robinson, p. 2. A list of guarantors is given on p. 3.

[24]The clause was worded as follows:

(1) Notwithstanding anything in the act of Parliament of Ireland of the twenty-sixth year of King George the Third, Chapter fifty-seven, intituled an act for regulating the stage in the city and county of Dublin, the Lord Lieutenant may on the application of the council for the County of Dublin or the county borough of Dublin grant an occasional license for the performance of any stage play or other dramatic entertainment in any theatre, room or building where the profits arising therefrom are to be applied for charitable purpose or in aid of funds of any society instituted for the purpose of science, literature or the fine arts exclusively.

(2) The license may contain such conditions and regulations as appear fit to the Lord Lieutenant, and may be revoked by him.

Lady Gregory, pp. 24-25.

[25]Hogan and Kilroy I, p. 27.

Literary Theatre project. Yeats said that he "wished the project developed and carried out under the auspices of the National Literary Society".[26] The result of this meeting was three resolutions, which were passed unanimously. These were the appointment of an Irish Literary Theatre Committee, consisting of Dr George Sigerson, W A Henderson, W B Yeats, Edward Martyn and Mrs George Coffey; that the committee has powers of co-option and may take any steps they decide upon to further the project, provided that they do not "subject the Council to any liabilities without first obtaining the express sanction of this Council by resolution"; and that any profits shall be held by the National Literary Society and "reserved for the promotion of the objects of the Irish Literary Theatre".[27]

The similarities between the beginnings of the Irish Literary Theatre and the Scottish National Players are quite noticeable: the finance was by means of a guarantee fund; the main organisers were theatrically inexperienced and relied on the help of a more experienced practitioner; and the projects were under the auspices of another society, with a similar relationship existing between the society and the theatre project. The differences are also important. The Irish Literary Theatre was supported by influential and powerful people; and the National Literary Society was freed from any financial liability in connection with the Irish Literary Theatre, as Edward Martyn signed a guarantee to that effect. Finance was always an important difference between the Irish and the Scottish movements.

To publicise the forthcoming productions, the Irish Literary Theatre produced a magazine which was edited by Yeats, and published in May. This contained details of the plays, cast lists, the music to be performed, a list of the theatre's guarantors, various adverts, and a couple of articles outlining the ideas of the theatre. Yeats writes of their "Plans and Methods", stating that the plan was to produce plays "founded upon an Irish subject" which "would appeal to that limited public which gives understanding and not to that unlimited public which gives wealth".[28] Other articles included "The Scandinavian Dramatists" by C H Hereford which noted that Ibsen "grew up in the midst of a great national revival",[29] and another by Yeats

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[26]Quote from the minutes of the meeting, an extract of which is in Hogan and Kilroy I, pp. 33-34.

[27]Hogan and Kilroy I, pp. 33-34.

[28]Yeats ,"Plans and Methods," Beltaine. An Occasional Publication 1899-1900 The Organ of the Irish Literary Theatre edited by W B Yeats, (London: At the sign of the Unicorn, n.d.) This is a re-issue of the three Beltaine numbers, and is the edition referred to hereafter.

[29]Beltaine, no. 1, pp. 14-19.

which stressed that they were "anxious to get plays in Irish".[30] The magazine was called Beltaine, and was also published in February and April 1900, later on the name was changed from that of the May festival to Samhain, the October one. This magazine was a useful form of publicity. The Scottish National Players did, after a few years, try something similar with the Scottish Player. This however usually combined as a programme, thus losing the advantage of advance publicity, although it did contain articles on the aims and ideals of the movement such as "The Scottish Play We Hope For" by Alexander MacGill,[31] "The Purpose of a Scottish National Theatre",[32] and "Scottish National Drama" by Andrew P Wilson.[33]

The first performances of the Irish Literary Theatre took place in May 1899, in Dublin's Antient Concert Rooms, a "commodious hall, seating about eight hundred", with an "adequate" stage.[34] Lennox Robinson records the performances as having been "very satisfactory from the players' and producer's point of view", and that the audiences "were large".[35] The plays produced were The Countess Cathleen by Yeats and The Heather Field by Martyn. The plays had been rehearsed in London, and were played by English or English-trained actors. There had been some controversy about Yeats's play before the production, stirred by the publication of a pamphlet called Souls for Gold. This was written and distributed throughout Dublin, by F Hugh O'Donnell, who was described by Lady Gregory as having a "political quarrel" with Yeats. Cardinal Logue, the Primate of Ireland, had a letter printed saying that if O'Donnell's representation of the play was true, then catholics ought not to see it. The play was submitted for comment to three different clergymen, none of whom asked for the play's withdrawal. This was mainly to reassure Martyn, an orthodox Catholic, and the financial guarantor of the project. There was some trouble at the performances, but it mainly consisted of a group of about twenty young men who "did all they could to interfere with the progress of the play by their meaningless automatic hissing and senseless comments". This was recounted by Joseph Holloway, a devoted Dublin

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[30] Beltaine, no. 2, pp. 3-6.
[31] Vol. 2, no. 10, March 1924.
[32] Vol. 4, no. 4, n.d.
[33] Vol. 1, no. 6, n.d.
[34] Robinson, p. 5.
[35] Robinson p.5, p.11.

theatregoer, who kept detailed journals which record almost everything he saw over some fifty years.[36]

The Irish Literary Theatre's second set of performances were in February 1900, at the Gaiety Theatre, Dublin. This was one of Dublin's three patented theatres, with a large stage and a seating capacity of over one thousand.[37] The programme contained Maeve by Edward Martyn, The Last Feast of the Fianna by Alice Milligan, and The Bending of the Bough by George Moore. Maeve is a modern Irishwoman who is unsure about her English lover, when the legendary Queen Maeve appears and carries her off to the Celtic paradise, *Tir nan Og*. This has obvious meaning to Ireland's situation at the time. Ireland was being urged to reject England, and eagerly embrace its own national identity and tradition. Yeats gave an address before the presentation, pointing out that the old woman who was in rags during the day, but a queen in the "ideal world" was a symbol of Ireland.[38]

The Last Feast of the Fianna is set in Ireland's mythological past. Robinson describes it as being written in "very musical prose". It contained three lyrics, and was performed as a series of tableaux. The Daily Express stated that, "If the aim of the Irish Literary Theatre is to create a national drama it is obvious that the development of Miss Milligan's method is the proper one to reach ultimate success....".[39]

Lady Gregory has written that The Bending of the Bough was "the first play dealing with a vital Irish question that had appeared in Ireland". The subject was "the materialism of England", and its relationship to Ireland. The play was chosen, "because on it all parties are united". The play appears to have been rather dull, but it was received enthusiastically, as were the other two plays. Lady Gregory remarked that at this point they were not working for Home Rule, but preparing for it.[40] These plays were again cast with English actors. Lady Gregory notes that although they felt that the audience was very appreciative, the actors were "puzzled at the applause, not understanding the local allusions". The fact that the actors were English rather than Irish attracted criticism from some people:

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[36]Robert Hogan and Michael O'Neill ,ed, Joseph Holloway's Abbey Theatre, (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1967), p. 6. Hereafter referred to as Holloway.

[37]Robinson, p. 13.

[38]Lady Gregory, p. 28.

[39]Robinson, p.15.

[40]Lady Gregory, p. 28.

> Already there were murmurs that the plays of the Irish Literary Theatre should not be acted by players from the other side of the Irish Sea.[41]

The third, and final, season of the Irish Literary Theatre also used English actors. Diarmaid and Grania, a collaboration between Yeats and Moore, was rehearsed in Brighton and produced by F R Benson's company. This was however, a disastrous production. The actors had great difficulty with the Irish names, and couldn't even "consistently mispronounce them".[42] The production took place in the Gaiety Theatre in October 1901, with incidental music composed by Elgar. The other play on the programme was Hyde's Irish drama, Casadh an tSugain (The Twisting of the Rope). The text, with an English translation by Lady Gregory, had already appeared in Samhain. Hyde himself played the principal role of Hanrahan, with the rest of the cast coming from the Gaelic League. This was the first Irish play that the theatre had produced, and it was very well received and praised by everyone.

The main difference between the early productions of the Irish Literary Theatre and the Scottish National Players, was that the Irish productions aroused a greater intensity of feeling, either for or against, the plays, than the Scottish productions. It was 1926 before the SNP produced a 'risky' play, when in Soutarness Water a whisky bottle was likened to the Holy Ghost. In 1928, seven years after their first production, The Mannoch Family caused some protest, and a sermon was preached against it in a Glasgow church, but it was all much milder than the Irish uproars.

The Scottish National Players were also more prolific in their first year. While the Irish Literary Theatre spread their first three productions over three years, the SNP produced eleven plays in 1921, at five different sets of productions. Eight of these were one-act, one was two-act, and two were three-act, and they were all, with one exception, played for the first time on any stage. This is probably the only time where the SNP moved faster than the Irish movement. It was generally the other way about, with the Scottish movement taking a few years to achieve what the Irish had quickly accomplished.

The Irish Literary Theatre produced a Gaelic language play, and did retain some, though not always a very enthusiastic, interest in Irish language drama. The SNP did not produce a Gaelic play, nor express any

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[41] Robinson, p. 19.
[42] Robinson, p. 21.

intention of so doing. Some of their plays were translated into Gaelic during the thirties, but the motivation for this came from outwith the SNP.[43]

The other main difference was, of course, that the Irish theatre used English actors, and the SNP followed Wilson's advice to learn from this, and used native Scottish amateur actors. It is certainly not true, however, to say that the first three seasons of the Irish Literary Theatre were useless because of this, as some Scottish commentators did when the SNP were being advised to cast their plays with local amateurs.[44] It must be remembered that, as Michael ohAaodha notes in Theatre in Ireland, "the literary ideals of the founders were admirable but their knowledge of the theatre was slight".[45] Apart from these differences, the productions are fairly similar in the type of play produced, press notices of the plays and so on.

After the three seasons of Irish Literary Theatre productions, the movement changed somewhat in organisation. The Fay brothers, William and Frank, were introduced to Yeats, and became instrumental in this 'second stage' of the Irish drama movement. The Fays were both natives of Dublin with a great love of the theatre. They had attended two seasons of the acting school which was run by Maud Randford, the wife of the theatrical manager J W Lacy. In 1898 they formed their own amateur company. W G Fay worked as Lacy's advance agent for a while, and also toured with H E Bailey's Company and Lloyd's Circus.[46] Many of the actors who were involved with the Fays' company and productions, were later to become prominent Irish Players, for example, Dudley Digges, Sarah Allgood, Marie Walker, who used her Irish name, Maire nic Shuibhlaigh, for the stage, and P J Kelly. George Moore tried to get the Gaelic League to sponsor the Fays' company to tour Irish drama around Ireland, but this scheme never came to fruition. Until this point the plays which they were doing were not especially notable. However a production of AE's Deirdre and Yeat's Cathleen Ni Houlihan was arranged, and took

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[43]For example John Brandane's Rory Aforesaid was translated by Aonghas Mac Mhaoilein and published as Ruairidh Roimh-Ainmichte. (Glasgow: MacLaren, 1937).

[44]For example Reah Denholm, "The National Theatre Movement in Scotland," Scots Magazine. July 1924, stated that:

> The Irish movement made the mistake of wandering in the wilderness with English professional players, after which it came to itself and organized a trained company of native Irish actors, amateur in the sense that they were not paid. Then, and only then, did it make its histrionic mark.

[45]Michael ohAodha ,Theatre in Ireland, (Oxford:Basil Blackwell, 1974), p. 34.

[46]W G Fay and Catherine Carswell, The Fays of the Abbey Theatre, (London: Rich & Cowan 1935); Hogan & Kilroy I ,p. 21; Robinson, p. 25.

place in St Teresa's Hall on 2 April 1902, before an audience of three hundred. There was intense interest and enthusiasm about the production. Maud Gonne played the title role in Yeats's play, as she believed it to be of great importance to the Nationalist Movement,[47] and seems to have entranced her audience:

> ...and above all, Miss Gonne's impersonation had stirred the audience as I have never seen another audience stirred. At the height of her beauty, she transformed herself there into one of the half-mad crones whom we were accustomed to see by Irish roadsides, and she spoke as they spoke, in a half-crazy chant. But the voice in which she spoke, a voice that matched her superb stature and carriage, had rich flexibility and power to stir and stimulate; and the words which she spoke were the words of a masterpiece.[48]

Cathleen ni Houlihan is a short but powerful play set in a cottage near Killala in 1798, the year General Humbert's French troops landed there. An old woman is made welcome at the cottage, and entrances Michael with her songs, and her tales of the many lovers who have died for her, and of the "strangers" who took away her "four beautiful green fields". When she leaves the cottage Michael follows her, forgetting that it is the eve of his wedding. By the end of the play a great cheering announces that the French have landed, and the woman is no longer old but a young girl with "the walk of a queen". The play is stirring and very patriotic, with the strange woman a symbol of Ireland itself. This was the play which the Scottish National Players most wanted to emulate. They desperately wanted a play which would be their own "as Cathleen ni Houlihan was the Abbey's".[49]

In the summer of 1902 the members of Fay's company decided to organise themselves "on a more definite basis". They took the name the Irish National Dramatic Company (or Society), and rented a hall in Lower Campden Street for one year. This was to give them "a permanent prospect of carrying on the work" and was described as being "in every way preferable to spasmodic performances".[50] Arrangements were made with

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[47]Hogan and Kilroy, volume II, Laying the Foundations 1902-1904, (Dublin:The Dolmen Press,1976), p. 14.

[48]Stephen Gwynn, Irish Literature and Drama in English a Short History , (London: Thomas Nelson, 1936), p. 158.

[49]Alexander MacGill ,"The Scottish Play We Hope For," Scottish Player , March 1924.

[50]Letter from F Ryan, Secretary of the Irish National Dramatic Society to W B Yeats, 10 August 1902. Quoted in Robinson, pp. 27-28.

Cumann na nGaedhal, the organisation which Arthur Griffith[51] had founded in 1900 to link up all the patriotic societies and promote the cause of independence, for a set of performances from 27 October to 1 November 1902, in the Antient Concert Rooms. As well as plays, songs, dances, recitations and Florence Farr's chanting of Yeats's lyrics to the accompaniment of the psaltery were given. It is said that the recitations received more attention than the plays themselves, which only had small audiences until the last night.[52] The Scottish National Players also gave what they called items of Scots song and mime between one-act plays on a triple or quadruple bill. This was instigated by Tyrone Guthrie and was popular on tours in the latter half of the twenties, but caused dissatisfaction among those who felt that such things should have no place in a company aiming to found a national theatre.

On 1 February 1903 the name of the Irish National Dramatic Company was changed to the Irish National Theatre Society. Disagreements over the choice of plays had been greatly increasing. In 1902 the Fays turned down Lady Gregory's Twenty-five, although it was actually produced the following year, because it was felt that although the dialogue was excellent, the card-playing scene was too long, and W G Fay did not think that "an Irish peasant, however hard up, would play a stranger for his money like old Michael does", and because "in country districts it might incite emigration on account of the glowing terms in which America is spoken of".[53] Another play, The Saxon Shillin' was withdrawn from rehearsal. Robinson quotes the playwright as saying that "Willie Fay declined it on the grounds that the main situation could not be staged effectively"[54]. The play is very nationalistic and Colum himself described it as an "anti-recruiting"play and stated that there had been suggestions made at the time that Fay "wanted to attract another audience apart from the nationalistic" one.[55] Maud Gonne and Arthur Griffith, who felt that the

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[51]Arthur Griffith (1872-1922), edited the United Irishman and in 1905 founded Sinn Fein. He was imprisoned twice, but signed the peace treaty with Great Britain and became a moderate president of Dail Eireann. (Chambers Biographical Dictionary , p. 572.) Hogan and Kilroy (II, pp. 75-76) state that these journals were "despite a belligerent political bias also literary journals of a high calibre".

[52]Hogan and Kilroy II, p. 35. Holloway (p. 19) gives details of the chanting and of Yeats's lecture on it.

[53]Letter from Frank Fay to Yeats. Robinson, p. 28.

[54]Robinson, p. 38.

[55]Interview with Padraic Colum, A Paler Shade of Green, ed. Des Hickey and Gus Smith, (London: Leslie Frewin, 1972), p. 16.
The Saxon-Shillin' is short, but has both simplicity and irony. It deals with a young girl about to be evicted from the family's cottage. Her father has been arrested, two of her

Society should be primarily political and nationalistic, left the Society because Fay had withdrawn the play, thus breaking the link with Cumann na nGaedhael.

There was also tension over the production of Synge's first play In the Shadow of the Glen, in October 1903. The reaction to it was not as extreme as the reaction to Synge's later play, The Playboy of the Western World which was produced by the Abbey in 1907. The criticisms of both plays were similar: that they were a libel to the character of good Irish men and women, who would never behave in such a way. Some of the those who felt that art should be subordinate to nationalism, such as Dudley Digges and Maire Quinn, felt that the play was insulting and left the Society in protest.

As a result of these disagreements over the choice of plays, a motion was put forward by AE, and passed unanimously, which envisaged the setting-up of a Reading Committee. This committee would recommend plays for production, but the final verdict was to be given to the members of the Society:

> A Reading Committee of five members shall be elected who shall first consider all plays proposed for performance by the Society. No play shall be performed until it has been considered and recommended by the Committee. The power of final acceptance or rejection of any play thus recommended shall rest with the members of the society, to whom such plays shall be read at meetings summoned for the purpose when a three-quarters majority of those present shall decide. The author shall not be allowed to be present when the vote is taken.[56]

The Scottish National Players also operated a Play Reading Committee along similar lines. For their first productions the choice of plays was made by members of the SNP Committee of the St Andrew Society. However the SNP method of play selection was never quite as democratic as the Irish Society's Constitution. When the SNP's Reading Panel approved a play the final decision was up to the Board of Directors, ordinary members of the

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brothers have gone to England to try and find work and the third, Hugh, has joined the British army, to the anger of his family. It is Hugh's regiment which is called in to evict the girl, and after questioning his loyalties, Hugh is shot by his sergeant while "on guard" in the doorway, prepared to "defend the place to the last". It was produced on 15 May 1903 by Inighinidhe na hEireann, and is published in Lost Plays of the Irish Renaissance, ed, Hogan and Kilroy, (Newark, Del.: Proscenium Press ,1970).

[56]Quote from the substitution for rule four of the Society's constitution, Hogan and Kilroy II, p. 64.

Scottish National Theatre Society did not have any say in the matter. In common with the Irish movement, the SNP discovered that they could never please everyone with their choice of plays, and the question of whether one should produce mediocre Scottish plays solely because they are Scots, or whether it would be better only to produce good plays of any nationality was never satisfactorily answered. Once more however, the Irish movement aroused greater feelings than the Scottish one. It was towards the end of the twenties before anyone felt strongly enough about the matter to actually leave the Society, and for public dissatisfaction to be expressed in the press.

The Irish Players first visited London in May 1903. The visit was arranged by Stephen Gwynn, the secretary of the Irish Literary Society in London. The London audiences and critics were very favourable towards the performances. The Irish Players were pleased with their London visit, and indeed returned to the city, however, it is unlikely that the visit pleased anyone of a more extreme patriotic nature. Much of the Irish Renaissance was aimed at ridding Ireland of English influence, and yet the national theatre movement was taking their productions to England's capital. A national theatre in Ireland, or in Scotland, should not have seen a London production as being special in any way. Indeed it is questionable whether a fledgling society should spend valuable resources in a visit to London. The Scottish National Players also performed their plays in London, and were very proud of having done so. The idea that London was a centre of theatrical excellence, where a group would be seen by the best critics, and by the most discerning audiences, was a hard idea to dislodge. A London production was a measure of theatrical success, and was certainly used as such in the SNP's future publicity.

A great deal of the onus of the success of the Irish movement lies in the fact that they attained financial backing, and a theatre building of their own fairly early in their history. This was made possible by the generosity of Miss Horniman who, despite funding a theatre project, was not actually a very wealthy woman. It is unlikely to have been the Irish or nationalist sentiments which prompted her generosity however. Miss Horniman wanted the theatre to further and promote Yeats's career, as she wrote in a letter to Synge:

> If anyone thinks that "Irish" and "National" are anything to me beyond mere empty words used to distinguish a Society, merely a title for convenience, they are very much mistaken ... The theatre was given for the carrying out if Mr Yeats's artistic and dramatic schemes and for no other reasons.[57]

James Flannery, in Miss Annie F Horniman and the Abbey Theatre, has also stated that her "interest in the Irish dramatic movement was almost totally concentrated on Yeats".[58] Miss Horniman showed herself in many ways to be suspicious and contemptuous of any nationalist and political feelings. Indeed, she chose not to try and found a theatre in Glasgow as had once thought, in case she became embroiled in nationalism again.[59] This attitude was to a certain extent mutual, with the Irish nationalists never forgetting that she was English, and that their Irish national theatre was founded on English money.

Flannery notes that Miss Horniman "ultimately became so anti-Irish that she complained about the playing of Irish music in the intervals between the plays" as this was "chosen to please a vulgar, ignorant 'patriotic' taste".[60] The Scottish National Players also used music between plays, usually Scottish airs or music with a definite Scottish connection, such as Mendelssohn's "Fingal's Cave". There was some controversy over whether the SNP's audience should stand for the playing of "Scots Wha Hae" as they would for a national anthem. In 1925 The Scottish Educational Journal stated that the orchestra "interpretated it like a real national anthem" but asked "when will the audience, as Scots in feeling and outlook as that which frequents the performances of the National Players, recognise it as a National Song?"[61] Two years later the Scots Observer noted that the audience's attitude had changed:

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[57]Hogan and Kilroy, volume III, The Abbey Theatre: The Years of Synge 1905-1909, (Dublin: The Dolmen Press,1978), p. 58. The letter was dated 7 January 1906.

[58]James W Flannery, Miss Annie F Horniman and the Abbey Theatre, (Dublin: The Dolmen Press,1970), p. 12.

[59]Ben Iden Payne, Life in a Wooden 'O', (London: Yale U P, 1977), p. 79. It was Payne who suggested that she go to Manchester.

[60]Flannery, p. 25.

[61]January/February 1925.

> In the early days of the SNP - only a few years ago - the audience were rather hesitant about acknowledging Scots Wha Hae, and got up in straggling fashion, like converts at a revival meeting. Now they rise like soldiers, promptly and with one accord and remain strictly at "Attention".[62]

However, there was never the same depth of feeling among the audience of the Scottish National Players as there was at the Irish productions. Lady Gregory recalled that at the second production of the Irish Literary Theatre the Gaelic League was there "in great force", singing "Fainne an Lae between the acts, and the Wearing of the Green in Irish!"[63] In contrast, it was six years after the first SNP production that it was stated that the audience really responded to the playing of "Scots Wha Hae". The situation in Ireland was certainly different than that of Scotland in the twenties, and Yeats told a Glasgow audience that as a result of this he doubted whether Scotland had sufficient "national spirit" to create its own national drama.[64]

In 1904 the Abbey Theatre building was opened. This was a direct result of Miss Horniman's finance, and could not have happened without it. The theatre building was of the utmost importance to the success of the Irish Players. Without this it is more than likely that the Society would have just drifted along, hiring halls as required, but having no real 'home' with which players, writers, and most especially playgoers could identify. This was what the Scottish National Players seriously lacked. It has been said by many people who were involved with the SNP that it was the want of a theatre and the lack of capital that hindered, fatally, the development of a Scottish national drama. In the Scottish National Theatre Venture Tyrone Guthrie stressed the Irish analogy, stating that:

> the Abbey was enabled to establish itself ... because there was a building of the right type and size, which enabled the company to evolve a distinctive style of acting and production, and to play to full houses while yet drawing on quite a limited section of the public.[65]

In contrast to this Guthrie declared that the SNP's "great lack was a building". They had office and storage space but the only places they could actually perform were:

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[62] Scots Observer ,10 March 1927.
[63] Lady Gregory, p. 28.
[64] Reported in the Glasgow Herald, 8 November 1921.
[65] SNTV, p. 15.

> ... the YMCA with a hopelessly ill-equipped stage, where we were just one more in a series of amateur performances; or one of the commercial theatres, too expensive for us to rent, too large for the sort of fare we were offering, and where, in a different way, the 'ethos' was just as inappropriate as that of the YMCA.[66]

What the SNP needed, in Guthrie's opinion, was a theatre seating "five to eight hundred people", and he believed that, at that time "we could have made that pay its way".[67] Jean Taylor Smith, recalling W G Fay's time as the SNP's Producer in the early thirties, stated that "he could never understand, any more, indeed, than we could, why we had not achieved a consummation so devoutly to be wished". This wish was, of course, for "a home of our own".[68]

The other great lack of the Scottish National Players was capital, one of the important differences between the Irish and the Scottish movements. In 1905 the Abbey was further strengthened, with the Irish National Theatre Society becoming the Irish National Society Limited. Miss Horniman now gave the theatre an annual subsidy which covered the players salaries and other expenses. Robinson states that this was a sum of £800 and was to last for six years, that is until the expiry of the theatre's patent.[69] When Miss Horniman left the Abbey her contribution was recognised by the Dublin Evening Telegraph which stated, on 1 November 1910, that:

> The fairy godmother of the Irish Dramatic Movement parts with the Abbey today ... It should not be forgotten that were it not for the aid given to the dramatic movement in its infancy by Miss Horniman the Irish drama and the Irish acting world would have never grown into the healthy existence they both now enjoy.[70]

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[66]SNTV, p. 15.
[67]SNTV, p. 15.
[68]SNTV, p. 31.
[69]Robinson, p. 47.
[70]Robinson, p. 89.

Flannery stresses that Miss Horniman's subsidy gave the theatre a measure of independence from the box office:

> Above all, the subsidy enabled the Abbey Theatre to present and keep before the public eye plays which no ordinary commercial theatre would have even dared to perform.[71]

The Scottish National Theatre Society never benefitted from such a benefactor. It became a limited liability company in 1928, but at best it was only ever a semi-professional operation, and relied on the public buying shares in the company to raise capital. Guthrie stated that "from its inception the Scottish National Theatre Society was thwarted by lack of capital".[72] Lack of money was indeed always a major problem for the SNTS. With no outside funding, with the exception of an occasional guarantee fund, it was a serious matter to lose money on a production, and the consequent importance of box office receipts had its eventual effect on the choice of plays performed.

Both the Irish and Scottish societies suffered from internal dissatisfaction when they became Limited companies. Robinson describes this as not "unnatural" since the theatre had now changed from an enterprise undertaken for the love of Ireland and dramatic art, into a "commercial theatre".[73] Turning professional meant that the actors and others were now employed by the theatre directors, whereas before they had all worked together for a common cause.[74] A split occurred within both the Irish and the Scottish companies. According to Robinson, Maire nic Shiubhlaigh left the Irish Players, taking with her Miss Lavell, Miss Vernon, Miss Garvey, Seamus O'Sullivan, George Roberts, and her brother Frank Walker.[75] Holloway feared that there would be a "smash-up of the company", noting that "eternal bickerings and jealousies are the curse of any movement, artistic or otherwise in this country".[76] Such problems, however, are not limited to Ireland, and the Scottish National Players also had their share. David Glen MacKemmie, one of the originators of the

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[71]Flannery, p. 33.
[72]SNTV p15.
[73]Robinson, p. 47.
[74]Gerard Fay, Frank Fay's son, makes this point, noting that this those who had worked together in a democratic organisation were now paid employees. The Abbey : Cradle of Genius. (London: Hollis and Carter ,1958), p. 100.
[75]Robinson, p. 47.
[76]Holloway, p. 65.

movement, resigned from the post of Secretary because he felt that since the Society had become a limited liability company his role had been reduced to that of a paid administrator with no influence on policy. Indeed at the end of the twenties the SNP suffered from a crumbling away of the structure of people, policies and ideals which had been built up in the beginning of the movement.[77]

In June 1906 the Abbey Theatre Company spent a week at the King's Theatre in Glasgow as part of a tour of Britain. The Abbey's repertoire for the tour consisted of: A Pot of Broth and Cathleen ni Houlihan by Yeats; Riders to the Sea and In the Shadow of the Glen by Synge; The Building Fund by William Boyle; and two plays by Lady Gregory, Hyacinth Halvey and Spreading the News. Four one-act plays were presented at each performance. The Glasgow Herald printed a lengthy report, which detailed the "Celtic Revival" and mentioned the "vitality" of the dramatic part of it. The plays were said to "breathe the spirit of the Celt eternal" and have "illustrated the sorrows and the joys of the Irish peasantry", as well as "in some measure, the tragedy of the Irish character".[78] The article encouraged all those "who take an interest in literary movements" to go and see the Irish Players, indeed it is possible that future members of the SNP saw the productions. The Abbey's visit to the King's was a successful one. Although the tour as a whole lost money, the three Scottish venues did not. The tour had been organised by Alfred Wareing, later to found the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, who had been impressed with the Abbey company while visiting Dublin as manager to Beerbohm Tree. In Wareing's biography Winifred Isaac states that "the tour made a handsome profit at Glasgow, and did well at Edinburgh and Aberdeen".[79] Glasgow's interest in the Abbey is emphasised in a letter from Synge to Lady Gregory, dated 9 June 1906 and written in Glasgow:

> We are distinctly a success in Glasgow we had £38 in the house on Wednesday and Thursday, and £41 last night ... I think we shall be able to add Glasgow and Edinburgh to our list of safe towns, there is a great deal of interest taken in our work here now, for instance they have sold 52 copies of 'Riders to the Sea' in the last two days.[80]

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[77]This is discussed in greater detail in the 1928-1934 chapter.

[78]Glasgow Herald, 5 June 1906, p. 6, col. c.

[79]Winifred Isaac, Alfred Wareing : A Biography, (London, Green Bank, n.d.), p. 32.

[80]Theatre Business, pp. 127-128.

Frank Fay also felt that the Glasgow audiences were quite taken with the Irish Players and their plays, writing that:

> in Glasgow 'Kathleen ni Houlihan' and 'Riders to the Sea' - especially 'Kathleen' - were the favourites; but all the pieces took. They appealed to the Scottish brains."[81]

They certainly appealed to the people who were later to found the Scottish National Theatre Society. However the appeal was also felt by others, notably Graham Moffat, who ran a company which was also called the Scottish National Players.

This group was first operating round about 1908, thus preceding the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, which opened in 1909. Moffat wrote the plays himself, and they are very much in the vein of the Scotch comedy or the Kailyard. The plays are not actually written in the Scots vernacular or dialect, rather they rely on ordinary English words being pronounced with a Scottish accent:

> care being taken to pronounce the vowel sounds in the Scottish way, particularly "i" and "ou", and to give the "r" its full, but not exaggerated, expression.[82]

Moffat believed that there was nothing to be gained by confusing an audience with such things as "hae" for "have" or "dae" for "do". He also believed that this was the secret of Harry Lauder's success.[83] Moffat's plays became very popular and the most successful, Bunty Pulls the Strings, ran at the Haymarket Theatre, London for sixteen months, and for nearly a year at the Comedy Theatre in New York. Later, A Scrape of the Pen had a sixth month run in London, and also toured Australia, New Zealand and South Africa.

In his autobiography, Join Me In Remembering, Moffat emphasises that his purpose in establishing his Scottish National Players was a national one, given motivation by the visit of the Abbey Company. On seeing the Irish Players perform Moffat realised that:

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[81]Letter from Frank Fay to Patrick Hoey, dated 12 June 1906. Theatre Business, p. 128.

[82]Graham Moffat, "Author's Note", Bunty Pulls the Strings, (London: French, 1932).

[83]Graham Moffat, Join Me in Remembering, (Cape Province: Miss Winifred L Moffat, 1955), p. 26.

> ... an almost revolutionary idea had been born - the decentralisation of the drama! If Ireland could have theatre entirely devoted to the production of native plays, why not Scotland?
>
> To organise such a movement in Glasgow became my greatest ambition.[84]

Moffat believed that finding and training actors would not be a problem, the problem would be finding plays to produce. So he decided to resolve the situation by writing them himself.

Moffat had been influenced by the Irish Players, but it is doubtful whether his company had any real influence over the later Scottish National Players. Indeed Moffat tells the story of how one of the founders of the "new SNP" did not believe that a group of the same name had been run by Graham Moffat:

> One of the founders of the new SNP, on being informed by a theatrical friend of mine, in his office, that Graham Moffat was the founder of the first SNP, was so incredulous that he offered to "eat his hat" if that were proved to him. My friend, being a publicity agent, was able to produce one of our Athenaeum throw-away leaflets, dated 1908, which had "The Scottish National Players" in large, black letters on its front page.[85]

Moffat's company was, however, popular and successful within Scotland as well as in England and abroad.

The Glasgow Herald review of the Abbey's visit to the King's Theatre stressed the realism of the plays, noting that the properties used on the stage could be found in any Irish peasant cottage: "Actuality is the keynote of their method".[86] The Irish Players themselves also emphasised this realism. The programme for the 1906 tour reveals the lengths to which the company went in order to be completely accurate and true to life in their settings and props:

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[84]Moffat, Join Me in Remembering, p. 55.
[85]Moffat, Join Me in Remembering, p. 69.
[86]5 June 1906, p. 6, col. c.

was the Abbey's.[91] However the dramatist that was seen as being the best of the Irish Renaissance was J M Synge. Whenever the Scottish movement produced a new Scottish 'folk' type play, the dramatist was hailed as being the possible 'Scottish Synge'. Neil Munro was the dramatist which the Glasgow Repertory Theatre took up as their 'Scottish Synge', and John Brandane was the SNP's.

The important factor in Synge's plays, from the point of view of Scottish drama, is the language, which the SNP were very impressed by. Synge's language, often described as 'Anglo-Irish' is important in two respects. First of all it created a type of speech which used English, but which could not be described as a correct 'King's English'. This speech was distinctively Irish, yet it was not the ridiculous jokey talk of the conventional stage Irishman. Secondly, it provided an Irish alternative to the Gaelic language, which the Gaelic League believed ought to be on the lips of every good Irishman. The Scottish National Players, who did not use Scottish Gaelic, could well have benefited tremendously from a similar 'Anglo-Scottish' language.

Synge's speech is, of course, an artistic language, and is therefore artificially created. However, Synge himself declared that it was directly based on the speech of country people. Synge's childhood was spent in Wicklow, and he lived at various times in his life in West Kerry and the Aran islands, where "his fiddle made him welcome among the peasantry".[92] In his preface to The Playboy of the Western World, Synge made it clear that he believed the speech of his characters to be a true representation of the peasant speech which he had heard throughout his life:

> In writing "The Playboy of the Western World" as in my other plays, I have used one or two words only that I have not heard among the country people of Ireland ... A certain number of the phrases I employ I have heard also from the herds and fishermen along the coast from Kerry to Mayo or from beggar-women and ballad-singers nearer Dublin...[93]

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[91] "The Scottish Play We Hope For," the Scottish Player, March 1924.

[92] Introduction by T R Henn to the Methuen Master Playwrights Edition (1963) of the complete plays of J M Synge, p.1.

[93] Preface to The Playboy of the Western World, 21 January 1907.

John Brandane was the SNP dramatist who was felt to be closest to Synge. His most popular play, The Glen is Mine, was often compared to Synge's work. When it was produced at the Everyman in London the Stage (8 May 1930) said that some of Brandane's phrases contained "cadences almost as musical as those of John Millington Synge". The Star (6 May 1930) believed that the play "occasionally has a little of the lyrical quality of Synge", while the Daily Mail (6 May 1930) felt that the "beautifully picturesque" Highland speech was at times "strangely reminiscent in rhythm and cadence of the Irish dialect". Such statements are however, more than the play, or Brandane's work in general, deserves. Brandane has neither the dramatic power nor the craftsmanship of Synge. The characters in The Glen is Mine for example, do not have the life or depth of those in The Playboy of the Western World. The language of Brandane's play appears stilted and unnatural and there is little resemblance to Synge's artistic 'Anglo-Irish' speech, although they are both renditions of Gaelic into English. Any similarities between the two writers are superficial ones, which probably gained more importance due to the much stated influence of the Abbey on the Scottish National Players. One such superficial resemblance was noted by some critics who expressed surprise that what they had thought of as Irish and Welsh phrases, such as "I'm thinking", "at all, at all", and "look you", appeared in The Glen is Mine.[94]

Brandane himself denied any claims that he purposefully imitated Synge. In a letter to Neil Gunn he thanked Gunn for the comparison of some of his work "to the music of Synge" and cited the common Gaelic background as the connection: "the idioms are alike because they both come from the Gael".[95] Brandane stressed that he was not, as some critics believed "guilty ... of stealing his idiom", and that while Synge was in the Aran islands collecting material he himself was "doing a similar job" on Mull, and that it was only after this that he had read any of Synge's work.

Another Scottish playwright who was compared to Synge was J A Ferguson. The Scottish National Players produced three of his plays, Campbell of Kilmhor, The Scarecrow and The King of Morven, all one-act pieces. The latter was produced by the SNP "for the first time on any stage"

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[94]For example the Morning Post (6 May 1930) stated that it was the first Scottish play "which has shown how near the Gaelic locutions of the Highlands are to the Irish and the Welsh", and the Sunday Despatch (May 1930) noted that the audience sometimes wondered "whether Angus was an Irishman or a Welshman".

[95]Dated 25 October 1929, National Library of Scotland (NLS), Dep 209, Box 17.

on 21 October 1926.[96] However Ferguson is best know as the author of Campbell of Kilmhor, first produced in 1914 by the Glasgow Repertory Theatre. Ferguson was in no way 'discovered' by the SNP, indeed in the introduction to Campbell of Kilmhor J W Marriott notes that Ferguson "derived his impulse to playwrighting from his connexion with the Glasgow Repertory Theatre."[97]

The Glasgow Repertory Theatre operated from 1909 to 1914, and was established by Alfred Wareing, an experienced theatre manager who had organised the 1906 Abbey tour. Wareing wanted to utilise the best features of the old stock companies, believing that an established local company would be preferable by far to the touring shows. This idea is outlined in the The Introductory Brochure to the Scottish Playgoers' Company, "Opening Season, 1909" where it is stated that:

> ...The fleeting visit to a city gave the portmanteau actor little opportunity of interesting the citizens in his individual performance which was often a parrot-like interpretation of a hit made in London.[98]

Part of the objective of Wareing's new stock company was to "make Glasgow theatrically independent of London".[99] In this it could in fact be said to be more nationalistic than the Scottish National Players who, although they expressed similar sentiments, still believed that a London performance was a measure of their success.

Wareing wanted the Repertory Theatre to be a part of the life of the city, to be a true 'Citizens Theatre', as the Rep was often called. Indeed some influential people belonging to the city, such as Deacon Convener Andrew Macdonald of the city council, and the Professors J S Phillimore and Macneile Dixon of the University, were involved in the theatre. The interest and support of the University especially was quite important. There were many students in the Repertory audience, with special student performances and cheaper tickets, which were on occasion free. Walter Elliot, then the President of the University Union and later to become a prominent politician, describes the feeling between the University and the Repertory Theatre, in a forward to Wareing's biography:

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[96] SNTV, pp. 44-47.

[97] J W Marriott ed, One-Act Plays of To-day. (1924; rpt. London: Harrap, 1955), p. 114.

[98] Introductory Brochure, n. pag.

[99] Glasgow Herald, 19 March 1909, p. 8, col. f.

> ...he (Wareing) approached the University with round smiling face, and open arms. The Glasgow Repertory Theatre was about to promote art and letters --self-knowledge and world-knowledge-- in the city. These were the objects for which the University existed. It was not possible that the University would be uninterested.
>
> Accordingly he enveloped the whole University, professors and students alike, in a broad and comprehensive affection. It was in virtue of this attitude of his that I was made a member of the Repertory Theatre Advisory Committee, a small group which lunched and discussed theatre weekly.[100]

This committee advised on the choice of plays for production, acting as a balance against any more box-office tendencies. Both the Abbey and the SNP used committees for similar purposes. One of the members of the Repertory Theatre's committee was the medical student O H Mavor, later to become the dramatist James Bridie, whose first plays were produced by the SNP. Indeed the influence of the Abbey upon the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, as well as upon the SNP has been noted. Kurt Wittig, in The Scottish Tradition in Literature comments that:

> The impetus for the emergence of a Scottish drama came from the repertory movement, and especially from the early efforts and achievements of Dublin's Abbey Theatre. The influence of the Abbey Theatre, and of the Irish drama which it helped to foster, was most obvious in the Glasgow Repertory Theatre before the first war, but has continued in subtler ways long after that. It is palpable in the two plays that may be said to have started the turn towards larger possibilities of the native theme, John Brandane's The Glen is Mine and Gordon Bottomley's Gruach, both produced by the young Scottish National Theatre Society early in 1923, at the Athenaeum, Glasgow.[101]

The Repertory Theatre was interested in and involved with its locality. It also had a very definite concern for Scottish drama. This objective is stated in a Glasgow Herald report of the theatre's prospectus, which cites the:

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[100] Isaac, p. xi.

[101] Kurt Wittig, The Scottish Tradition in Literature, (Edinburgh and London: Oliver and Boyd, 1958), pp. 313-314.

> ...initiation and development of a purely Scottish drama by providing a stage and an acting company which will be peculiarly adapted for the productions of plays national in character written by Scottish men and women of letters.[102]

The phrase "national in character" is very similar to the one later used by the Scottish National Players to describe the type of plays which they would produce, that is, plays of "Scottish life and character".

Scottish plays were very important to the Repertory Theatre, which had been started and supported in the hope that it would result in a national theatre for Scotland. This commitment is declared by Wareing in the Introductory Brochure which ends with the following paragraph:

> It only remains for playgoers and those interested in the drama to support, actively and energetically, the movement which may lead to the establishment of a Scottish National Theatre.

The Repertory Theatre had been started and supported by its shareholders with the view, and the hope, that it would result in a Scottish National Theatre. Throughout its existence, there was always a much greater audience for the Scottish, especially the Glasgow, plays, than for any other type of drama. The Glasgow Herald review of the first night of Neil Munro's MacPherson said that every seat in the house was filled, and the same was true for plays like J J Bell's Wee MacGreegor and Oh! Christina!. In his unpublished thesis on The Repertory Theatre Movement in Britain 1907-1917, Alasdair Cameron has stated that by June 1912:

> ...the Repertory, although it had commissioned only MacPherson had acted as a catalyst and produced 27 new plays which were either Scots or about Scotland.[103]

As this represented about a quarter of their output, it is a significant number, especially as few, if any, of the plays would have been written let alone produced, were it not for the existence of the Repertory Theatre. The Glasgow Herald review of MacPherson's first night reports that in a speech made by Wareing after the production he referred to Munro as one of "our dramatists", justifying this by stating that if it had not been for the Repertory

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[102] Glasgow Herald, 19 March 1909, p. 8, col. f.

[103] Alasdair Cameron, The Repertory Theatre Movement in Britain 1907-1917, Warwick University, 1984, p. 160.

Theatre then Munro would never have written for the stage. Alasdair Cameron's thesis also points out that other dramatists who had been encouraged by Wareing, such as George Hamlen and Harold Chapin, could well have fulfilled their initial promise had they not been killed in the First World War.[104] This is an important point to note as, due to the tragic effects of the War, it will never be known how far these dramatists, encouraged by the Rep, could have developed.

There has been, however, the mistaken idea that the Glasgow Repertory Theatre was not interested in Scottish drama. A Scots Magazine article of 1924 stated that the Repertory Theatre had "seldom produced Scottish plays or work by Scottish authors", and that the "first impulse" towards Scottish drama "emanated from a few active spirits in the St Andrew Society",[105] that is from the organisers of the Scottish National Players. The SNP themselves, in their own history written in 1953, noted that although the Rep was quite successful in its other objects, "little if anything was achieved" in their Scottish aim.[106] Accordingly the Scottish National Players never acknowledged any real debt to the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, unlike their constant references to the Abbey. It is not clear why this should be so. It is perhaps more exciting to claim that what you are doing is breaking completely new ground rather than taking up an idea which had actually been started by someone else, or perhaps the explanation lies in the fact that by the 1920s the Glasgow Rep venture had been inactive for about six years and would not continue. It would have a feeling of failure about it. The Abbey on the other hand, was still seen as a successful on-going theatre. There was no antagonism to the Rep when the first SNP proposals were made in 1913, while the Repertory Theatre was still producing, as a letter to the members of the St Andrew Society shows:

> The project is in no way opposed to, or in competition with, the highly commendable work of the existing Glasgow Repertory Theatre, by the Directors of which it is cordially welcomed.[107]

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[104]Cameron, p. 159.

[105]Reah Denholm, "The National Theatre Movement in Scotland," The Scots Magazine, July 1924.

[106]SNTV, p. 18.

[107]Letter dated 20 April 1914, on St Andrew Society headed notepaper, signed by George Eyre-Todd (President) and William Callander (Finance Convenor) of the SNP Committee.

This letter goes on to say that the SNP's purpose is to "discover and foster purely native literary and dramatic talent working on purely national lines". As well as works by Scottish authors the Repertory Theatre also produced plays by Shaw, Galsworthy, Barker, St John Hankin, John Masefield, Ibsen, Chekhov, Maeterlinck and Gorky. The question of whether to produce only Scottish drama, or the best of non-Scottish drama as well, was to be a vexatious one in the career of the SNP, as indeed it has been ever since. Perhaps the patriotic sensibilities of the SNP organisers made them feel that the Rep could not really have tried to establish a Scottish National Theatre, while at the same time producing foreign and English works. This is however a narrow view as the Rep was also producing and encouraging Scottish drama, and could not have survived solely on the production of Scottish plays, which were not that numerous.

The Scottish National Players were, however, keen to get the audience which had attended the Repertory productions to attend theirs as well. When the three plays for the first SNP productions were being chosen, there was some debate over what the plays should be. Wilson suggested Campbell of Kilmhor as, although it was not a new play, "it should make an appeal to the old Rep people ... and from that point of view might be well worth our while".[108] In the end it was decided that a new play would be better and Glenforsa by John Brandane and A W Yuill was produced. In a letter to Wilson, MacKemmie described Yuill as having been "one of the leading lights of the Glasgow Rep".[109] Winifred Isaac also states that Yuill played an important role in the Rep's history:

> The idea of founding a Citizen's Theatre had been born in Alfred Wareing's fertile brain as far back as 1900, as the result of a conversation about audiences, which took place at Glasgow between J G Wilson (now the head of J & E Bumpus Ltd of Oxford Street London) and the tyro playwright A W Yuille [sic] whom Wilson had invited him to meet.[110]

The Scottish National Players also tried to get a play from Neil Munro, who had been vitally important to the Glasgow Rep, for one of their early productions. In 1920 Munro was questioned on the possibility of an adaptation of his Jus Primae Noctis (Right of First Night), but he

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[108]Letter from Wilson to MacKemmie, dated 6 October 1920, STA.
[109]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 22 October 1920, STA.
[110]Isaac, p. 34.

disapproved as, "reduced to a kissing game it would be no manner of use", and declined to contribute a play for the triple bill that year.[111] The SNP did not in fact produce a play by Munro.

At the second set of productions, in April 1921, MacKemmie was pleased to note that for the last performance the audience contained many 'children of the Rep':

> Our last audience was a genuine Repertory one, quite a number of the old Repertory Company directors being in evidence. But better still the old Royalty audience could be recognised all round. They fairly rose to The Mother.[112]

Indeed the author of that play, George Blake, wrote to Wilson following the production, expressing his feeling that the SNP were "out to establish a repertory theatre in Glasgow on national lines."[113]

The Scottish National Players did have one indisputable link with the Repertory Theatre, a financial one. The last season of the Repertory Theatre, directed by Lewis Casson, had made a profit of over £700.[114] However with the outbreak of the First World War the activities of the theatre were suspended and the money remained in the bank. The founders of the SNP were very much aware that this money existed, and had hoped that it might be given to them, which is indeed what happened. In May 1921 MacKemmie wrote to Wilson asking him to read and "opinionate" on a one-act play which Yuill had submitted, always bearing in mind that as Yuill had a significant say in the disposal of the Rep's money he must not be offended:

> You see so long as Yuill is in a position to influence the ultimate disposal of the old Rep balance, it is expedient to say the least of it to do nothing to offend his amour propre.[115]

This money was given to the Scottish National Players at about the time that they severed, amicably, their ties with St Andrew Society, and proceeded as the Scottish National Theatre Society. The Glasgow Herald

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[111] Quoted in a letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 12 July 1920, STA.
[112] Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 17 April 1921, STA.
[113] Letter from George Blake to Wilson, dated 17 April 1921,STA.
[114] Isaac, p. 45.
[115] Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 19 May 1921, STA.

printed a detailed article about this which mentions the transfer of the money:

> Almost at the same time [as the severance of the ties between the SNP and St Andrew Society] several of the leading shareholders of the old Repertory Company, which was in liquidation, circularised their fellow shareholders, asking them to transfer the proceeds of the liquidation to the Scottish Players. The response to that appeal was gratifying, £420 having been contributed to their production expenses fund - an absolutely unconditional gift. That had enabled them to take offices at 187 St Vincent Street, and to provide themselves with a permanent rehearsal room.[116]

This money undoubtedly helped the SNP to get a start, and to place themselves on a more definite basis with the hiring of these premises.

The fact that the shareholders willingly transferred the money indicates that they saw the Scottish National Players as continuing and developing the search for a Scottish drama which had been begun by the Glasgow Repertory Theatre. Indeed some people even referred to the SNP as the 'new repertory' company. This was noticeable in press articles written during the first few months of the Scottish National Players' venture, and especially in those printed in the Evening News. One of its articles, in July 1920, was headed "Amateur Repertory", and described the SNP as "an amateur Scottish Repertory venture".[117] A few months later the same paper ran a story entitled "The New Repertory" which listed the plays chosen for the first production, and stated that:

> The group is being spoken of as "The New Repertory" and gains a certain lustre from the distinction.[118]

The Manchester Guardian also referred to the Scottish National Players as the successors of the Glasgow Repertory Theatre. In an article entitled, "The Repertory Movement, A Glasgow Experiment", the recent "winding-up" of the Scottish Playgoers Company was mentioned. However as all activities had ceased in 1914:

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116 Glasgow Herald, 17 January 1922.
117 Evening News, July 1920.
118 Evening News, n. d.

> ...The recent decision of the directorate is only a formal hauling down of the flag. But it has been hauled down to be hoisted under other auspices.[119]

These other auspices were, of course, the Scottish National Players.

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[119] n.d.

CHAPTER TWO: 1920 - 1922

"The production of these plays is to be part of the patriotic work of the St Andrew Society ... and will be in the nature of an experiment."[1]

The Scottish National Players idea was revived by the St Andrew Society in 1920. The Plays Sub-Committee of the Scottish Arts Committee met in May and, with the approval of the St Andrew Society Council, agreed to produce "three short Scottish plays on the same lines as the early productions of the Irish National Players".[2] These productions were to take place in the Deaf and Dumb Institute in January 1921.

The sub-committee decided to draw up a short leet "of the more suitable plays among those received under the Scottish National Players scheme". These plays would be reviewed by the committee members, under the arrangement of Captain J Ronald Young, who undertook the role of honorary secretary to the Sub-Committee. The other committee members were: Mr J S Gregson; Major C Stewart Black; Mr W Ralph Purnell, who had been the honorary secretary of the original Scottish National Players Committee in 1913-14; Mr J Struan Robertson; Major R B Wharrie; and, Mr D Glen MacKemmie, the honorary secretary of the St Andrew Society. These were all people who had either been involved with the St Andrew Society in the past or were well-known amateur actors in the Glasgow area.

It was also decided at this meeting that enquiries should be made concerning the availability for production of the plays of Fiona MacLeod and that Mr R J MacLennan, a member of the Evening News staff, could be asked to submit a Scottish play, because the Committee felt that plays from established writers would attract a bigger audience than ones from unknown authors. More importantly, a decision was made as to who should produce the plays:

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[1] David Glen MacKemmie, letter to Andrew P Wilson, dated 12 July 1920, STA.

[2] Minutes of the Plays Sub-Committee, of the Scottish Arts Committee, of the St Andrew Society, 4 May 1920, STA.

> It was resolved that Mr A Patrick Wilson, late Manager of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin, and a member of the Society, should be invited to produce the plays for the Sub-Committee.[3]

Wilson's Abbey experience was important to the Players as it was their stated intention to model themselves upon the Abbey. Wilson had been approached before the war and had, in fact, been appointed to the Scottish National Players Committee. In 1920 he was working for Sir Oswald Stoll in London, a contact which was to be important in securing the Coliseum season for the SNP.

The next meeting of the Plays Sub-Committee was held on 30 June. The minutes of this meeting record that a short leet of the five most suitable plays had been drawn up and that these plays had been read by the committee members. They were not however believed to be "of sufficient distinction" to merit a production "under the present scheme", leaving the committee to note "that other means should be adopted to secure three suitable plays". The other means included asking established Scottish writers to submit a play to the Committee or to let them adapt a piece of their work for the stage. MacKemmie spoke to R J MacLennan, as suggested at the last meeting, and he "expressed the heartiest approval of the scheme and had promised to give it all the assistance in his power". He did not, however, promise to give them a play. MacLennan advised the Committee that if "at least two" of the three plays to be produced were "from the pens of writers whose names were well-known in Scottish Letters, as for example Neil Munro and 'Fiona MacLeod' ", it would greatly contribute to the success of the scheme. On this advice, which was in accord with the Committee's own feelings, Struan Robertson "undertook to circulate among the members a volume containing the published dramas of 'Fiona MacLeod' ". The hall of the Deaf and Dumb Institute was viewed by MacKemmie, who declared it to be "suitable for the productions", and provisionally booked it for two nights in January 1921. The Committee was now in a position to contact A Patrick Wilson, and invite him to produce the plays.

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[3]Minutes of Plays Sub-Committee, 4 May 1920.

MacKemmie wrote to Wilson on 12 July 1920, outlining the plans for the production of three plays in January 1921. MacKemmie remembered both Wilson's "warm and helpful interest" in the pre-war effort, and his "repeated promise" to assist when the opportunity came. There was no hesitation therefore in revealing their plans to Wilson and in asking him to produce the January triple bill, and in stressing the nationalist motivation behind the scheme:

> As you will see it is not proposed to resuscitate the former scheme for the present. The plan is to begin in quite a humble way with the production of three short Scottish plays of distinctively Scottish character and of genuine literary and dramatic merit, if such can be secured. The production of these plays is to be part of the patriotic work of the St Andrew Society (Glasgow) during the coming winter and will be in the nature of an experiment. If the experiment meets with approval the question of resuscitating the SNP scheme will be considered for the succeeding season.[4]

Wilson showed that he was still interested in the idea of the SNP and that he approved of their plans, by replying to MacKemmie's letter on the following day:

> It is not too ambitious to be difficult, yet it is sufficiently ambitious to provide a standard of value and basis for criticism and future development.[5]

The correspondence between MacKemmie and Wilson continued until Wilson moved to Glasgow in October 1921 and contains much useful information and insight into the organisation behind the early productions of the SNP.

By the summer of 1920 the press began to take an interest in the 'experiment', which was beginning to take shape. An article in the Evening News, most probably written by R J MacLennan, appeared in July. It revealed that three one-act plays were likely to form the bill which will be performed in January 1921, "in one of the city's lesser halls", and that " a gentleman intimately associated" with the Abbey Theatre will "assist in the production". It is stressed that this group of players, which the article refers

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[4]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 12 July 1920, STA.
[5]Letter from Wilson to MacKemmie, dated 13 July 1920, STA.

to as the "new Repertory Company", will not be in competition with the existing, though dormant, Scottish Repertory Company. The aim of the new company was reported as being to produce a selection "made from Scottish plays of all types that is considered may best reflect our national character, literature and culture."

These aims had no doubt been given to MacLennan when MacKemmie "interviewed" him in June.[6] MacKemmie was well aware of the important role which the press could play in establishing a national theatre, and of the necessity for such an organisation as the SNP to have a high public profile. Publicity was an important factor behind MacKemmie's eagerness for the SNP to be asked to perform before the King and Queen at Balmoral in 1923,[7] and for his approach to J M Barrie to write a play especially for them which they could take to London.[8] In more day to day matters, MacKemmie urged Wilson to write to the press when the subject of a national theatre was being discussed in the columns of the Edinburgh Evening News.[9] When Wilson spoke to the City Business Club in Glasgow (December 1920), MacKemmie ensured that an advance copy of his address was distributed to the press, who gave MacKemmie "promises . . . for good reports".[10]

MacKemmie also cultivated the many journalists who became involved with the Scottish National Players. In 1922 the Council of the new Scottish National Theatre Society included three journalists: William Power of the Glasgow Herald; Donald Muir, drama critic on the same paper; and George Blake who also had three plays performed by the SNP. MacKemmie described Blake to Wilson in an enthusiastic way:

6As noted in the Minutes of the Plays Sub-Committee, 30 June 1920.

7The SNP gave a Royal Command Performance at Balmoral Castle on 4 October 1922, of A Valuable Rival and Cute McCheyne.

8MacKemmie wrote to Barrie suggesting this to him, in a letter dated 4 August 1922, STA. However the first Barrie play performed by the SNP was Shall We join the Ladies? on 12 November 1929.

9Wilson's letter was published on 8 October 1920.

10Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated "St Andrew's Day 1920", STA.

> I have enlisted the sympathy and support of a young journalistic genius who is on the staff of the "Glasgow News" and writes under the pen name 'Vagabond'. He is said to be a coming man in the literary world. He is greatly interested in our Scheme and promises a play dealing with the modern social and industrial problems of the Western Isles which he has studied on the spot. Blake is his name and I think he will put some ginger into our somewhat staid committee.[11]

Blake did indeed take an active role in the Society, and used his position as a journalist to publish articles on theatre and other Scottish and literary themes. As well as the longer and more serious articles, the journalists involved with the SNP kept the movement in the public mind with amusing anecdotes of happenings at rehearsals, short pieces about the players and authors, and details of future plans and forthcoming performances.

Organising the Scottish National Players' first production appears to have been a protracted and difficult procedure. By 30 September MacKemmie complained to Wilson that "developments" had been "slow and unsatisfactory". There had been various disappointments. Neil Munro would not allow an adaptation of his Jus Primae Noctis (Right of First Night). Munro disapproved of what he felt would reduce his work to "a kissing game":

> The whole spirit ... atmosphere and manner of the story as well as any intensity of interest it might have depends for a story of that period upon the assumption of the feudal right, which as you may suppose, I would not agree to exploit in a play, for a general audience.[12]

It was also made clear that the SNP should not expect Munro to contribute a play for their triple bill. The Plays Sub-Committee had been expecting to receive a "fairy play" from C Stewart Black, with specially written music. However the composer, Julian Nesbitt of Oban, found that he did not have the time to write the music and the play was cancelled, "there being no

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[11] Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 23 October 1920, STA

[12] Recounted by MacKemmie to Wilson in a letter dated 30 September 1920, STA.

other who can be entrusted with the job".[13] Instead of the proposed "fairy play" Black wrote Chatelard, and this was accepted for the January production.

Following the policy of asking established writers either for a play or for permission to adapt a piece of their work, Joseph Laing Waugh was approached, though not without some difficulty and delay. Although he would not part with the copyright of Cute McCheyne, he agreed to an adaptation by A P Wilson, for the two January performances only. Waugh did not want to be involved in the dramatisation of the piece, but expressed his willingness to "collaborate with Mr Wilson in the matter of dialect or dialogue should Mr Wilson find himself in any difficulty". Waugh also offered to rewrite parts of the dialogue of the story if this would make it "more suitable for stage representation". The fact that Wilson was himself 'Dumfries born and bred' seemed to encourage Waugh and when he read the script he felt that it "could not have been better". Waugh thought that the "sermon motive" which Wilson introduced at the beginning of the play was "just right". He asked for no real changes, only making some "verbal alterations improving the text here and there".[14]

Two out of the three plays were now decided upon, but the third choice proved to be laborious. Campbell of Kilmhor was suggested, as Wilson noted, "it would make an appeal to the old Rep people ... and from that point of view might be very well worth our while".[15] The committee decided against its inclusion in the bill, "in view of its previous productions here", feeling that it was "very desirable" to only present new plays in their first bill.[16] It was also suggested that Wilson should adapt another of Waugh's short stories, A Sprig of Appleringie. Waugh himself believed that this would make a better one-act play than Cute McCheyne. A meeting of the Plays Sub-Committee on 11 October accepted A Sprig of Appleringie as the third play "provided no suitable substitute by another author ... be forthcoming in time."[17] This was due to objections over an author appearing twice in the same bill, especially in their first production.

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[13]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 30 September 1920, STA. The SNP believed that music was very important to theatrical performance.

[14]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 11 November 1920, STA.

[15]Letter from Wilson to MacKemmie, dated 22 October 1920, STA.

[16]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 6 October 1920, STA.

[17]Minutes of the meeting of the Plays Sub-Committee, 11 October 1920, STA.

It was mid-November before a final decision was reached and Glenforsa, by A W Yuill and John Brandane was accepted as the third play. As he did with many of the plays which the SNP were to produce for the first time on any stage, Wilson advised the author to make certain alterations to the script and gave suggestions and advice on improving the play. In the case of Glenforsa MacKemmie informed Wilson that his "suggestions have been very faithfully followed and the impression left with me is that we have quite a presentable play now."[18] This is one area where Wilson worked quietly and steadily for the society, without drawing too much attention to himself, being content to let others take the glory if the SNP would benefit by it. It was for this reason that he used what MacKemmie called a "nom de guerre" (Euchan) for his adaptations. MacKemmie protested, but Wilson's reasons show good sense and understanding:

> I don't think it wise for the general good of the movement to have my name plastered all over it. Sufficient that I have produced the plays. If the movement takes root, believe me, there will be many plays that will require attention from some hand other than the author's. I have played the gentle ghost a great many times both in Dublin and here, and it isn't always wise to let either author or public know it.[19]

Wilson certainly played the role of the "gentle ghost" in the early years of the SNP. His theatrical experience and business sense often allayed the doubts of the enthusiastic but less experienced committee members.

One such case concerned the casting of the plays. It was proposed that the committee members should approach "local amateur players whom they regarded as suitable to join a small stock company" from which Wilson could cast the plays.[20] However as this was in October and Wilson was unlikely to be in Glasgow before the end of November, he suggested that, to save time, "and a lot of worry besides", the authors should be asked to nominate suitable performers for their plays. It would be explained to the actors that they would be asked to meet Wilson on his first visit, and read

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[18]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson,dated 18 November 1920, STA.
[19]Letter from Wilson to MacKemmie, dated 19 November 1920, STA.
[20]Minutes of the Plays Sub-Committee meeting, 11 October 1920, STA.

the parts to him, as "their selection is subject to my approval as producer".[21] Black accepted this idea, but it was left to MacKemmie to fill the other parts. MacKemmie made it quite clear to Wilson that he himself would not be acting as it "sets up a nervous strain that leaves me ill for hours merely to stand up and make a formal announcement to a public audience. Forbye I have absolutely no memory for words". He was also rather apprehensive about the whole procedure,[22] but Wilson reassured him. The influence of the Abbey is apparent in what Wilson calls his "principal requirements" from the casts, that is:

> ... clearness of diction [23] and as near as possible physically adapted to the requirements of the parts ... I think you are taking rather a pessimistic view of your ability to select the players at the outset. In any case, suppose a bloomer should be made in one or two instances, I'll tell the people concerned very gently and if we do lose them it will, I feel sure, only be temporarily. Remember the players selected have something to gain in the way of personal publicity that they are very unlikely to receive for "mumming" in any other way. A couple of lines in the "Glasgow Herald" is better than a column in the "Blantyre Bugle", and that fact will not be lost sight of by the players concerned.[24]

The situation was not ideal, but did in fact appear to work quite well and, while Wilson was in London, was the best available. Wilson's job with Sir Oswald Stoll even proved advantageous in some instances, as he often had set models made and sent to the SNP, and he even brought some set pieces and costumes with him when he came to Glasgow for the productions.

With the plays chosen, the parts cast, and the necessary administration work such as licences and fees being undertaken, it was time to seek the expected final approval from the St Andrew Society Council:

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[21] Letter from Wilson to MacKemmie, dated 26 October 1920, STA.

[22] Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 30 October 1920, STA.

[23] The early stress on clearness of diction is interesting as many of the players were professionally involved with elocution. Newcomers were recruited from the prizewinners at various festivals and competitions, and the judges of one competition, Masefield ad Drinkwater, described the SNP as a nest of singing birds.

[24] Letter from Wilson to MacKemmie, dated 19 November 1920, STA.

> It only remains to obtain the approval of the Council of the Society, and that should be forthcoming alright, but it does not matter a fig if it isn't - we are committed to the scheme and it will go on now whether with the auspices of the Society or without.[25]

This shows the earnestness, perhaps bordering on fanaticism, of those involved in organising the first production, and the fact that the SNP 'scheme' had already begun to outgrow the structure of the St Andrew Society.

On 2 December 1920 Wilson gave a talk to the City Business Club in Glasgow. MacKemmie made several detailed suggestions to Wilson as to the content and title of this talk. He saw it as an excellent opportunity for publicising the movement and its objectives, and the forthcoming production, as the talk would be well reported in the press. It was also an opportunity to speak directly to the businessmen of the city in the hope that they would give their support to the SNP:

> Your paper for the City Business Club should run to thirty minutes. I suggest for a title "Scottish National Drama - a New Movement" and that you should outline the inception and history of the movement from our pre-war effort to the present position, emphasising the patriotic and artistic motive, following with the lessons to be learned from the Abbey Theatre experience (treating this from a critical point of view), foreshadow the possibilities of our movement, closing with some details as to plays, players, venue etc., and appealing for the practical support of the City Business Club for a practical and business-like scheme.[26]

The fact that both MacKemmie and Wilson believed this to be a good opportunity is seen in the letter which MacKemmie wrote to Sir Oswald Stoll asking him to grant Wilson leave of absence, to enable him to come to Glasgow and deliver the talk. MacKemmie stressed that their "motive" in producing the January bill was "purely artistic and patriotic", and stated the Committee's belief that Wilson's talk to a club "which comprises most of the leading business men of Glasgow ... will provide a powerful impetus" to the

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[25]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 4 November 1920, STA.
[26]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 30 October 1920, STA.

movement.[27] The talk, in which Wilson followed MacKemmie's suggestions, did gain publicity for the January production, with good reports in the Glasgow Herald and the Glasgow Citizen, and shorter enthusiastic pieces in the other Glasgow papers.

This was followed up by a letter sent by MacKemmie to all the members of the St Andrew Society, dated 16 December 1920. The letter mentions the 1914 scheme which had had to be suspended because of the war, and outlines the new scheme which was declared as being "on the lines of the famous Irish National Players", and would perform a patriotic duty, being a test of the country's readiness to support Scottish drama. The aim of this "patriotic movement" was stated as being "the removal of the long-standing reproach that Scotland is without a national drama." The letter described the three plays on the bill, noting that in Cute McCheyne, "the dialogue is for the most part in the Lowland Scottish tongue", and that in Glenforsa, "the atmosphere is Highland". MacKemmie introduces Wilson in a highly favourable manner as "a playwright, actor, manager and a producer, himself a patriotic Scot and a member of the Society", in whom the Scottish National Players are "fortunate in possessing not only an experienced producer but one who is heart and soul in the movement to establish a Scottish National Theatre". It can be seen from this that the people involved in the SNP believed themselves to be part of a movement, and referred to themselves as such, even from their earliest days. It is also apparent that patriotism was an important factor in the inception of the SNP, and that MacKemmie was apt to use the amount and type of a person's patriotism as a gauge to judge them by.

The letter explains the arrangements for booking tickets, urging members to book early as "there is reason to believe that the demand for seats will exceed the available accommodation". This is still a standard marketing tactic and then as now it did not actually happen. A voucher was enclosed with the letter, which was to be presented, with payment, at R G Lawrie's, a music shop in Renfield Street, and enabled one or two "reserved and numbered" seats to be booked. All tickets were the same price,[28] 3/6 inclusive of entertainment tax. Applications for more vouchers

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[27] Letter from MacKemmie to Sir Oswald Stoll, dated 9 November 1920, STA.

[28] The Citizen, 11 January 1921, notes that no seat is better than any other, and that that is a wise and democratic way for the movement to begin.

were to be sent to William Callander, the Honorary Treasurer of the St Andrew Society. A priority booking procedure was operated whereby members of the St Andrew Society could book seats from 20 to 25 December inclusive. From 26 December booking was open to the general public. By 30 December it was reported in the Evening News that the booking was "going well", although tickets for the second night were in greater demand than those for the first night. This trend continued as the Evening News gave a similar report on 13 January 1921, also noting that some tickets were still available and cash would be taken at the door.

Wilson arrived in Glasgow on 8 January, to stay for a week. Prior to this he had only been in Glasgow for a day or two at a time, when he would take rehearsals and give detailed instructions for the players to work on in his absence. In the week before the production Wilson would, according to the Evening News, "put them through their paces three times a day - with a rest on Wednesday, the day before the production."

Adverts for the production began to appear in the Glasgow press on 10 January along with articles about the movement. One of the shorter articles, in the Bulletin (11 January 1921) printed the logo which had been adopted by the SNP. The logo depicts a romanticised Scottish scene, a hillside reflected in the calm waters of a loch, with trees in the foreground, but superimposed upon the clouds is the St Andrew's Cross. Indeed the Evening News stated that the logo was "of course, a conception of the mythical origin of the St Andrew's Cross as the national banner of Scotland". This logo appeared in a great many places during the career of the SNP, and emphasised the patriotic side of their objectives. It was designed by William Gordon, from a sketch by C Stewart Black. Gordon had also done designs of a heraldic nature for various St Andrew Society publications.

The first production of the Scottish National Players took place on 13 and 14 January 1921, in the Royal Institute Hall in Glasgow, which sat 460 people. The press reaction to the production was very favourable and encouraging. There was a general feeling that the movement had got off to a good start. Many of the reviews spoke of the lack of Scottish drama and urged the public to support this attempt to remedy the situation. Critical comments were made, and of course different reviewers held very different views of certain aspects of the production.

The "teamwork" of the players was described as being "excellent" by the Daily Record which commented that "the natural style of their individual acting augurs well for the future of the movement."[29] The players' genuine regard for the work they were doing was stressed by the Evening Times, stating that in the acting, "there was that absolute and unconscious sincerity which can only come of real fondness for the thing portrayed." The Bulletin also felt that the plays had been "interpreted with feeling" and by "very capable" actors. This is echoed by the Glasgow Herald's term of "capable exponents" in reference to the players. Many individual players were praised for the portrayal of their roles, although there were a few exceptions. The Evening News stated that "there were moments when the players filled their roles as if born to them, but there were others when they carried no conviction at all." Andrew McNaughton "secured the triumph of the night", according to the Scots Pictorial (22 January 1921), in the title role in Cute McCheyne. His acting was described as "a piece of excellent characterisation" and "the outstanding feature" of that play. Grace McChlery, in the role of Mary Queen of Scots in Chatelard, "showed that she possesses an uncommon sense for creating an atmosphere" (Citizen) while The Stage stated that from the cast of Chatelard only McChlery and Paterson Whyte, who took the title role, had shown "some ability". In Glenforsa much praise went to Wharrie and Young, who played the two young lairds.

The plays themselves received much comment. Chatelard was mainly treated as "a pleasant little thing which does not aspire to any great heights of passion" (Evening News). Indeed the Evening Times (15 January 1921) called it a "graceful, romantic trifle". The Glasgow Herald noted that the play was "interesting and closed on a very dramatic note", a comment backed by the Daily Record which declared that Chatelard had "the most effective 'curtain' of the three". The Morning Post (20 January 1921) described the play as "a propitious beginning, as any national Scottish drama must be concerned with relations between Scotland and France." One of the main criticisms levelled against the play was that it was subtitled "An Historical Episode". The Glasgow Herald stated that it was

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[29]All reviews were printed on 14 January 1921, unless a date is given in brackets after the name of the paper.

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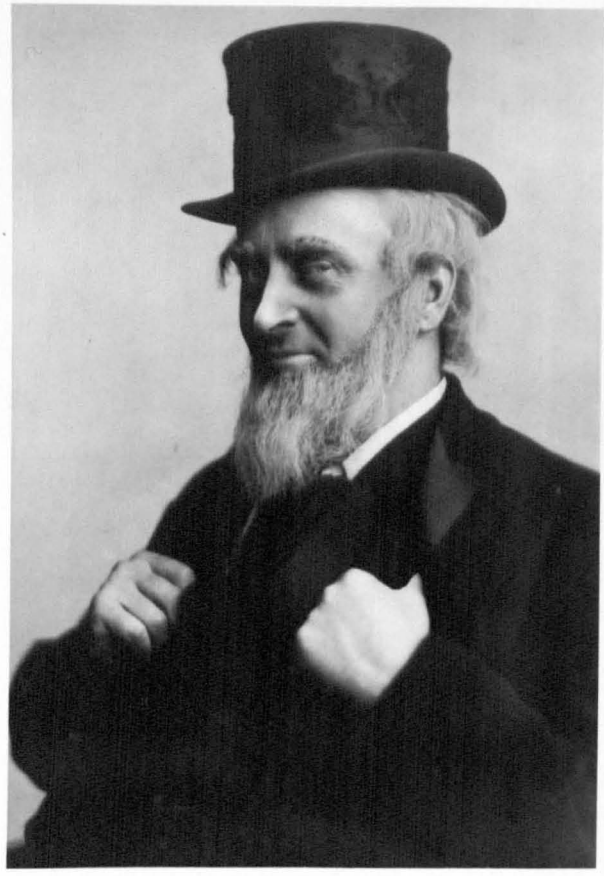

Figure one:
Andrew P Wilson, in character as Cute McCheyne for the first SNP production, January 1921.
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"carved out of romance rather than history", and the Evening News (15 January 1921) felt that "a Scottish National Theatre should know better". The Christian Science Monitor pointed out that "historical drama ought to have historical basis". It was also felt that the production was "too modern" for an historical play, the Evening News reporting that "all the characters took the roles with too much of a twentieth century manner ... one looked for something more archaic in manner". Chatelard ran for about twenty minutes and there was a feeling that it could have been a better play had it been longer. The Bulletin felt that the play was "too severely pruned, and the feelings of the audience are not worked up to the shooting." This was upheld by the Citizen, commenting that "the development of the play, from the psychological point of view, suffered through compression of the action itself, and the audience to some extent lost the dramatic intention."

Cute McCheyne was regarded by most as being a good comedy, more interesting in character than in plot, and with much of its success lying in its clever dialogue. The Bulletin stated that it "provided some excellent Scots comedy" and defined this as being "whimsical, contradictory old-fashioned Scots humour". The Evening News (15 January 1921) felt that although "the theme is slight ... there is humour and observation in it, neither of the 'Green Shutters' nor the 'kailyard' type but of genuine Scots character". The Christian Science Monitor noted "an affinity" between the title role in Cute McCheyne and Galt's Provost Pawkie, feeling that Cute was "less subtle" but "an equally true characterisation". The Glasgow Herald also felt that there was "a suggestion" of Provost Pawkie about him. Many reviews stressed that the play "consists of a series of character studies" (Evening Times), the Glasgow Herald reporting it as being "stronger in characterisation than in plot". The Citizen believed that Cute McCheyne was "probably preferred by the bulk of the audience", reasoning that this was because "the dialect of that play is distinctly good". Indeed the SNP performed Cute McCheyne a total of 45 times compared to their two performances of Chatelard and four of Glenforsa. Cute McCheyne was one of the two plays presented to the King and Queen at Balmoral in October 1922.

The critics themselves believed Glenforsa to be "the surprise of the evening" (Evening Times), "the most dramatic thing of the evening" (Glasgow Herald), and "the most dramatic and stirring note of the night"

(Scots Pictorial 22 January 1921). The Evening News (15 January 1921) called it "the best play of the three" and declared that "judged by the standard set, that of a Scottish National Theatre, makes the highest claim to consideration". This review cites various episodes such as the dice game and the duel as "having all of the essence of real drama and at the same time they are redolent of bog-myrtle and the Western Isles." The Scots Pictorial (22 January 1921) told how the play succeeded in "skilfully capturing the atmosphere of the Western Isles after the '45." The Daily Record wrote of it as "an atmospheric Highland sketch" which "carried across the footlights the spacious breath of the moor and hills". These comments are very similar to the ones made about Campbell of Kilmhor. The Morning Post is perhaps more critical when it describes the play as "a stirring highland affair, in which romance is laid on with a peat spade", but only the Stage (20 January 1921) felt that it was not a success. Glenforsa was published by Gowans and Gray as number twenty-four in a series of Repertory Plays. The Morning Post, while wondering what its "twenty-three fortunate predecessors were", described the publication as being "the most charming format a play has ever known." MacKemmie wrote to Wilson on 19 January reporting that Glenforsa is selling like oatcakes as a result of the production".

The atmosphere of Glenforsa was undoubtedly helped by the pipe music, described by the Scots Pictorial (22 January 1921) as a "good off-effect". The Glasgow Herald relates how along with the howling of the wind, the pibroch is used in a "masterly manner". The Evening Times stated that "if anything was wanted to complete the evening the incidental music selected by Mr John C MacArthur supplied the want", and the Glasgow Herald declared that the music was "appropriate to the character of the plays". On 22 January the Citizen ran a small article noting that the "beauty and appropriateness of the music played by the orchestra" had been the cause of much comment. This article described MacArthur, a member of the Scottish Orchestra, as being "one of the coming young Glasgow musicians". His association with the SNP would, it was felt, do much to assist and popularise that courageous movement". The Scottish National Players believed in the importance of appropriate music, (MacKemmie referred to it as "my pet point"), both during a performance itself, and in the intervals, and great care was taken with it. The pibroch in Glenforsa is the

first instance of this. Later in 1921 a performance of Christ in the Kirkyaird involved the Glasgow Orpheus Choir, who took up the balcony of the Athenaeum Theatre. They sang a special prelude for the play composed by Hugh Roberton, who was both the author of the play and the choir's conductor. Music was also composed for other plays, such as The Spanish Galleon, Gruach, and James the First of Scotland. There were by composers such as T Waugh Wright, J Seymour-Halley and Julian Nesbitt.[30] New works by these and other composers were also premiered during the intervals, along with arrangements of traditional Scottish airs and more classical music with a Scottish flavour, such as Mendelssohn's "Fingal's Cave", Beethoven's "Scottish Dance" and Holst's "Seven Scottish Airs."

The people who had been involved in the first production considered it to have been a success. Power sent his congratulations to Wilson, and a "thousand thanks" from his "patriotic heart".[31] MacKemmie was pleased and enthusiastic about the performances and the reaction to them:

> Shoals of congratulatory letters are being received and press notice is still being taken of our first show. Imphm! oh aye it was an unqualified success - an unqualified success it surely was - imphm![32]

As a result of the invitation in the programme for amateur players of experience to join the company "seven ladies" and five gentlemen had offered their services as players".[33] MacKemmie was to meet these people and explain the conditions of membership of the SNP to them. The players would then be considered when casting future productions. This took the list of available players to thirteen females and fourteen males.

Discussions and arrangements for the second production of the Scottish National Players began almost immediately after the first one. It was however, necessary to first of all study the financial aspect of their first

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[30]These composers were known, at least by name if not by their work, as they are mentioned in press articles from the period, however they are now forgotten.

[31]Letter from Power to Wilson ,dated 14 January 1921, STA.

[32]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 19 January 1921, STA.

[33]Minutes of the meeting of the Plays Sub-Committee, 28 January 1921, STA.

venture, for which "the accounts show a balance of £23 19 7 on the wrong side".[34] MacKemmie sent the basic details to Wilson:

Receipts			
845 tickets sold at 3/6	=	£147 17 6	
Programmes sold at 3	=	5 10 9	
Tax stamps on hand	=	2 16 6	
			£156 4 9
Loss of 4 tickets for Mr Waugh's party treated as "complimentary"	=	14	
			£155 10 9
Payments			
including tax tickets	=	179 1 4	
Deficit			£23 10 7

Against this deficit we have of course assets assessed (I think excessively) by the committee at £20.
For guidance in future estimating it was resolved to add 33 1/3% to the amount of expenditure to cover special reductions in some of the accounts, gratuitous services or properties lent without charge. This would make the expenditure figure up to £206 19 1.

The one really important deduction drawn from these figures seems to me to be that in future we must have three performances of each bill, if we are to be self-supporting. Looking through the accounts I cannot see any item that could have been dispensed with, except for trivial ones not worth considering.[35]

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[34]Letter form MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 29 January 1921, STA.
[35]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 29 January 1921, STA.

MacKemmie's comment on the accounts is accurate. The SNP had hardly been too extravagant in their spending, although some things were no doubt not strictly necessary. The payments of £179 1 4 are detailed below[36], with Entertainment tax stamps (955 @ 6d) costing £23 17/-. This means that the loss on the production as a whole was almost exactly equivalent to the amount paid in tax, the difference of 6s 5d being negligible.

The assets which the committee valued at £20, included 13 wooden frames, 5 gilt curtain rods, a green mantel board, a picture, a headless plaster statue, a stage cloth, curtains and drapes, lamps, 2 gelatine frames, 2 plug adaptors, a walking stick and 5 pieces of peat! These were being stored free of charge by the Union Transport Company in Argyll Street. The committee noted with thanks that other firms and individuals had lent properties free of charge, and J S Gregson had supplied the wigs and make-up at no cost to the Society. MacKemmie's "important deduction", that three performances of each bill would be necessary to enable the Society to be self-supporting, was justified by the accounts, and it was accepted that the second production would take place over three nights. This was provisionally scheduled for 17-19 March 1921.

A great deal of the organisation of the first production had been done by MacKemmie himself. However, as MacKemmie was also involved with the St Andrew Society, the Lauder Fund and the Glasgow Music

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[36]Printing and postage = £18 14 2. This included the sending of 668 letters and vouchers to the St Andrew Society members, and printing 500 programmes.
Advertising = £20 4 7. This covered 16 different insertions in the Glasgow Herald, the Bulletin, the Evening Times, the Evening News, the Citizen and the Daily Record, during the period of 6-12 January.
Scenery and Costumes = £36 15/-. Scenery was the main expense with most of the costumes being hired from Ashmore at a cost of £5 15/-. A few items such a pair of trousers and a tie were bought at a cost of £1.
Hall rent = £6 5/-
Properties and furnishings = £15 4 10. This covered such items as curtain material, eleven lamps, plug adaptors, the hiring of cable and fittings.
Music = £6 0 6. The hire of the hall piano was £1 0 6, and the musical director's expenses were £5.
Honorary Producer's travelling expenses = £15. (2 visits)
Services = £7 10/-. This covered payments to electricians, stage hands, the hall keeper, props man etc.
The remaining £28 14s 9d was spent on the typing of the scripts, the Lord Chamberlain's fees, the police licence for the plays, tips, tea money and gratuities, £5 5/- towards the cost of entertaining the Honorary Producer, the carriage of scenery from London, the delivery of props, and the transporting of 260 chairs to and from the Tramways Depot.

Festival, all of which would take up a lot of his time in the next few months especially, he told Wilson that "it is quite obvious that it will be quite impossible for me to do as much for the March production as I did for the January one".[37] MacKemmie proposed that special sub-committees should be appointed. This was agreed by the Committee at their meeting on 28 January, and three sub-committees dealing with play-reading and selecting, casting, and publicity were set up. Young, as the honorary secretary of the Committee, and MacKemmie as the 'founder' were appointed as members on all three sub-committees. The other members were: Wilson, William Power, Donald Muir and Struan Robertson on the Play Reading and Selecting Sub-Committee; Wilson and R B Wharrie on the Casting Sub-Committee; and Blake and J S Gregson on the Publicity Sub-Committee. The Play Reading and Selecting Sub-Committee was perhaps the most important of the three as it removed from Wilson the sole responsibility of deciding whether a play was good enough for production." As many of the plays submitted at this time were by people closely involved in the SNP such as Black, Blake, Purnell and Wilson himself, it was wise to spread the responsibility of deciding which plays ought to be produced, thereby lessening the risk of someone taking a rejection as a personal insult from the producer and leaving the movement. The Casting Sub-Committee would be working in a similar way to that of the first production, with Wilson having final choice over a player's selection. Blake, as a journalist, took on much of the work of the Publicity Sub-Committee.

The arrangements for the next production were well under way before the end of January. The possibility of hiring the Lyric Theatre was looked at. MacKemmie told Wilson that a Glasgow bailie, whom he does not name, who was both in the St Andrew Society and an important member of the YMCA, was "intrigued at the idea of our players going there", and that "interesting developments" could arise out of this.[38] The Lyric was owned by the YMCA and the hire charge at that time was £12 per night, including the use of the piano. MacKemmie stated that it could accommodate 950 people, and sent Wilson a note of the stage measurements. However, although the Lyric, then called the Royalty, had

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[37]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 26 January 1921, STA.
[38]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 19 January 1921, STA.

been used by the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, it was not an ideal theatre for the SNP. MacKemmie wrote of the "difficulties inherent in that d--d box" when telling Wilson about the production of a 'health propaganda play' there, which he would attend to see how the difficulties were, if at all, overcome.[39] This play, Muriel Comes In by Dr T Ross Scott, and produced by W St Clair Stockwell, the manager of the La Scala picture house, was reviewed by R J MacLennan in the Evening News. MacLennan criticised the YMCA for the state of a theatre which could be "suitable for the presentation of drama of the highest order", but which now had "disheartening conditions":

> The stage has been closed in, the curtain has been removed, and plays can only be presented under circumstances that tend to make them appear ridiculous.[40]

MacKemmie agreed with MacLennan's view of the Lyric, that it was "hopeless until the YMCA directors make certain absolutely necessary alterations and re-arrangements". The SNP felt this made the Lyric unsuitable for them for "a very considerable time to come",[41] and they did not perform there until December 1925. Instead the Committee "unanimously decided" to return to the Royal Institute. The first three consecutive dates available there were not until 13-15 April, but this enforced delay seemed to suit the SNP as Wharrie and Young would then be available as players, and the "amateur shows for charities will be well over and done with by our opening date".[42] It was suggested that a matinee performance should be done on one of the three days, but this was thought to be impractical in the Royal Institute in April as the "whole roof is glass and the hall simply could not be darkened".[43]

Choosing the plays for the second production appears to have been only slightly easier than for the first one. Gowans and Gray suggested The Philosopher of Butterbiggins, a one act comedy by Harold Chapin, and offered to submit proofs to the reading committee. Chapin, who was killed

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[39]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, n.d.
[40]Evening News, 25 February 1921.
[41]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 9 February 1921, STA.
[42]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 31 January 1921, STA.
[43]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 29 January 1921, STA.

in the First World War, had had several plays performed by the Glasgow Repertory Theatre, but although this play had been performed in London, at the Queen's Theatre in December 1915, it had not been seen in Scotland. George Blake's play The Mother was accepted unanimously by the Committee, but again, agreeing on a suitable third play was a lengthy process. Wilson's play The Cobbler was decided against, with MacKemmie telling him that his play, "while as good and better than anything else we have got is not quite good enough to be your first play under the auspices of the Scottish National Players".[44] MacKemmie stressed that this was his own personal opinion and that he planned to let the Play Reading and Selecting Sub-Committee make its choice without any expression of my opinion" as this was "the only fair thing to do".[45] A play by Black called Skeletons was also rejected. Wilson had offered to "do the ghost" on this play but it was felt that it would not be wise to produce on the second bill a "merely middling-good" play by the author of a play of similar standard presented on their first bill. Black was on the Committee of the SNP, which was wary of cries of favouritism being raised:

> ... I am dead against a member of the Committee appearing on two consecutive bills, unless his work is of such outstanding merit as to close the mouth of any carping critic. These opinions I am satisfied are shared by all those who matter in the Reading Committee.[46]

A Sprig of Appleringie and Luiffy, two adaptations of Waugh's work, were both considered as the third choice. The Committee was divided between those who, like MacKemmie, felt that it was better to avoid having Waugh's name on the second bill, and those who agreed with Blake that it would actually be advantageous. Everyone seemed to agree that it would be advantageous "from a box office point of view", but once more differed as to whether or not there were "other, more important, if less obvious, considerations which ... outweigh the advantage".[47] This was a problem the SNP encountered throughout their life. Their January production of

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[44]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 29 January 1921, STA.
[45]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 29 January 1921, STA.
[46]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 15 February 1921, STA.
[47]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 29 January 1921, STA.

Cute McCheyne did receive praise from the press, mainly for the dialect and acting, but there was a strong feeling that plays of similar worth could be seen on almost any stage and that its production therefore "constitutes a danger to the movement".[48] The task of pleasing both the box office and the movement's ideals, rather than having to choose between them, was never accomplished with complete success by the SNP, and in later years the claims of the box office became more important. In the early years however the Committee was more dedicated to their ideals and it was decided instead to produce a new play: The Bailie's Nominee, written by an Ardrossan journalist, David Martin.

Playbills were sent to members of the St Andrew Society to advertise the production, but no vouchers were enclosed this time. Instead 1200 vouchers were issued to committee members, players and others associated with the production. The vouchers were to be sold between 16 and 30 March, and booking opened at R G Lawrie's on 30 March. Tickets cost 3/6 and the seating arrangements were the same as for the January production. Advertising began on 29 March, and articles about the authors and plays began to appear in the press from the beginning of April.

The reaction of the press to the second production of the SNP was, once more, that this was a praiseworthy attempt at providing Scotland with a national drama which deserved public support. Indeed most papers seemed to feel that the movement had developed and improved since the January production. The Bulletin (14 April 1921) believed the production to have been "at least a repetition of the earlier success", while the Evening News (14 April 1921) declared that "the plays struck a note not merely of promise but of genuine achievement". The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald (22 April 1921) felt that the production "must have convinced those who saw them that the ambition to encourage and establish a National School of Play-wrighting is not only warranted but very likely to be achieved".

The Philosopher of Butterbiggins was regarded as being "very amusing" (Citizen 14 April 1921). The Scots Pictorial (23 April 1921) called it a "little gem of Glasgow tenement life" and even the Stornoway Gazette (21 April 1921) reported that the "many clever and amusing homilies and sallies" were "illustrative of the persistency and determination of the Scot".

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[48]Citizen, 14 January 1921.

Most reviewers noted that Chapin was well known in Glasgow as the Repertory theatre had produced several of his plays. Only the Daily Record (14 April 1921) did not see this as being advantageous. This review pointed out that the play had been seen twice already in London, and asked if it was "only the glamour of his name which induced the committee of the Scottish National Players to stage it on this occasion". It was their opinion that something "fresher and more novel" should have been produced. MacKemmie and Wilson were quite aware of the fact that by producing plays by people who had been associated with the Repertory Theatre the Rep's audience would be encouraged to support the new movement. However in this case they also believed that the play itself was worth staging.

The Bailie's Nominee was another comedy, aptly summed up by the Daily Record (14 April 1921) who reported that it "played smoothly and gave undoubted pleasure to the audience, but its memory will hardly linger". The play which aroused most comment, and the greatest praise was The Mother, with most critics thinking that something of note had been achieved in the field of Scottish drama. The Evening News (14 April 1921) felt that it "may be said without hesitation that it justified in every respect the effort of the St Andrew Society to foster national drama", while the Glasgow Herald (14 April 1921) believed that its very production "may become an event of some significance in the history of Scottish drama". The Stage (21 April 1921) declared that even if the SNP were never to produce another play " they will have justified their existence by 'discovering' its author." The Mother was published by Walter Wilson as the first in a series of Scottish National Plays. MacKemmie noted that one thousand copies were published in time to be on sale during the performance at a price of 1/- each. However by July he admitted that the sales "had not amounted to much".[49] The Philosopher of Butterbiggins, which had been published by Gowans and Gray in 1921, was also on sale during the April productions.

After the second production, MacKemmie believed that the SNP venture had been "accepted in Glasgow as one worthy of support by playgoers", although he went on to warn Wilson that theirs was still a precarious position:

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[49]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 16 July 1921, STA.

> But if the two or three of us who really matter in it lose our grip or lower our standards in the slightest the movement can still easily slip back and become second rate. At this stage this strikes me as our greatest danger.[50]

Blake was one of those Committee members who mattered in MacKemmie's view. MacKemmie told Wilson that he and Blake were planning to have "a day on the hills", with the opportunity of discussing ideas about the future of the movement. MacKemmie believed that it was himself, Wilson and Blake who were the prime instigators of the SNP at that time:

> I think that if we three come to some sort of agreement about the principles to be followed, the rest of the Committee will fall into line with us.[51]

However things did not happen quite as easily as MacKemmie envisaged. By the end of May he was still unsatisfied with the situation where not everyone was as dedicated to the movement as he was. He was also disappointed that they were not receiving the level of public support which he believed they merited:

> The type of play being submitted, the attitude of some of the players and the apathy of some of our Committee, not to mention the ignorance of even the Glasgow public, all go to prove that the real aim and purpose of our movement is not recognised much less appreciated as we have a right to expect that they should. We must therefore never be tempted to lose sight of them ourselves. In so far as we do, our movement will inevitably weaken and fail.[52]

To keep the aims of the SNP continually in the minds of everyone involved, it was necessary to make use of every opportunity, even social ones. After the April production the players themselves had suggested giving a dinner for the authors and all those associated with the productions. Wilson was to be their guest of honour. This dinner was planned for 3 June, and on 25 May, MacKemmie made it clear to Wilson that the dinner would provide a

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[50]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 17 April 1921, STA.
[51]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 25 April 1921, STA.
[52]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 25 May 1921, STA.

useful chance to stress the national aims of the Society, indeed that was what made the dinner worthwhile:

> You and I must be ready to re-emphasise the patriotic aspect of the SNP at the dinner. It is to afford an opportunity for doing this that I am going along with the dinner idea.

A reporter from the Citizen was present at the dinner and that newspaper printed an article the following day telling how "free criticism was the order of the day, and it was criticism of a most frank, friendly and useful kind." The SNP's desire to tour the small towns in Scotland was stressed. Wilson, speaking of his Irish experiences, recalled that he had toured an Abbey Theatre Company round Ireland and made a profit of £5. He believed that "if it could be done in Ireland it could even better be done in Scotland." The dinner was also publicised in the Evening News (31 May) stating that "future policy will no doubt be thrashed out over the coffee and cigarettes". The same article reported that the SNP had been acting as "unofficial examiners" at the Glasgow Musical Festival in May. They were observing the competitors with a view to recruiting the best of them into their own ranks. MacKemmie told Wilson that he had "invited the best of the senior competitors" to discuss with him the possibility of joining the Players, and noted that they were "immensely 'bucked' at being noticed by anyone connected with the SNP".[53] This shows that the SNP was already seen as a group of actors which interested young people could aspire to join. These players were "as yet quite unspoiled" and could therefore be trained by the SNP themselves. This was an important point. In the April production MacKemmie believed that the "least satisfactory player" had been Struan Robertson, who took the factor's role in The Mother. Robertson's acting had been criticised as being too melodramatic, and MacKemmie explains this as being "because his experiences and ideals are conventional. He simply could not play the part in any other way."[54] In an article on the SNP which he wrote for the Stage in September 1921, Wilson stressed the benefits of "unspoiled" actors. In describing the SNP he said that:

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[53]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 19 May 1921, STA.
[54]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 17 April 1921, STA.

> None of them, thank goodness, has preconceived notions of acting, with the result that I have already got them within measurable distance of the best Abbey Theatre standard.

The Abbey style of acting was therefore, obviously another area in which the SNP wished to emulate the Irish movement. The training of actors was in fact to become the main success of the Scottish National Players and one of their most useful contributions to Scottish theatre.[55]

By June 1921 it was realised that the Scottish National Players needed to have a separate standing committee which would be independent of the Scottish Arts Committee, of the St Andrew Society. This recognised that the SNP movement was beginning to establish itself and had already outgrown its original position of being just one of various undertakings of the Scottish Arts Committee. With their own standing committee the SNP would now be answerable directly to the St Andrew Society Council, cutting out the need to seek approval from the Scottish Arts Committee as well. The AGM of the St Andrew Society was held at the end of May, and the first meeting of the new Council was held in mid-June. It was at this meeting that the Standing Committees for the year were appointed, and the Scottish National Players Committee was set up "not without some questioning".[56] The committee members were: C Stewart Black; William Gordon; J S Gregson; R B Wharrie; J R Young; George Blake; William Power; Struan Robertson; Donald Muir; W Ralph Purnell; Elliot Mason, an actress whom Wilson appointed as assistant stage manager; Walter Buchanan, the Council Chairman; and MacKemmie as the Committee's Convener. Wharrie replaced Young as the Secretary, and Young moved over to the financial side. The three sub-committees remained with a few alterations. The Play-Reading and Selecting Sub-Committee was cut from six to four members, these being Wharrie, MacKemmie, Wilson and Power. If there was a difference of opinion concerning a play then the full Committee would be referred to. It was Wilson's suggestion that this sub-committee should be made smaller, the idea being that it would then be more practical. The Casting Sub-Committee now consisted of MacKemmie, Wharrie, Robertson, and Mason.

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[55]This is discussed in chapter six.

[56]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 30 June 1921, STA.

The old Publicity Sub-Committee became the Publicity and Finance Sub-Committee, and was to take charge of all audience arrangements. The members of this sub-committee were Young as Convener, MacKemmie, Wharrie, Blake and Gregson. MacKemmie and Wharrie were ex-officio members of all three sub-committees.

Wilson was still employed by Sir Oswald Stoll in London, visiting Glasgow when it was necessary and convenient for him to oversee the rehearsals. This was far from ideal and the next step in the SNP's development was to bring Wilson to Glasgow on a permanent basis, "to be on the spot to act as dry nurse to the SNP". MacKemmie believed that the manager's position at the La Scala picture house, which had become vacant, could be the answer. MacKemmie felt that Wilson could "do the job lying down" even if it wasn't the one which he might have chosen for himself under different circumstances. However Wilson did not get the job, or even an interview, despite MacKemmie "pulling strings to that end".[57] The next, and more adventurous idea, was to give Wilson a salaried position as Producer of the Scottish National Players.

Wilson was keen to come to Glasgow and MacKemmie conveyed his readiness to the Committee, but "refused to allow them to commit themselves at this stage".[58] Rather, MacKemmie asked the Committee to think very carefully about this step before the next meeting. In the meantime MacKemmie sought financial support for an "Expense Fund" which would help pay Wilson's salary and expenses. MacKemmie went about this very cautiously, asking only "selected members of the Society and general public - people who will not be nuisances because they have contributed". MacKemmie discussed this idea with Sir Daniel M Stevenson whom MacKemmie referred to as being "very willing to help our movement". Stevenson had been the Lord Provost of Glasgow in 1914, when the first SNP scheme had been proposed. Indeed, as a member of the St Andrew Society he was the first president of the Scottish National Players Committee. Stevenson feared that the people in the current SNP "may be tempted to be too optimistic", as he did not personally believe that Glasgow could "make a commercial success of such a movement".[59] He did

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[57]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 30 June 1921, STA.
[58]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 6 August 1921, STA.
[59]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 8 August 1921, STA.

however see the necessity of having Wilson in Glasgow, and suggested that twenty-five people should be approached, who could each subscribe £10 for one year towards the Expense Fund. MacKemmie set out to try and raise this money, but by the end of September he had only received £40: £5 from Blake, £25 from Mrs Mason, £5 from her daughter Elliot Mason and £5 from Purnell. A further £10 was subscribed by the Orpheus Choir.

At a meeting held on the 12 September the Committee unanimously decided to accept the offer which Wilson himself made to them. In so doing they wished to make it clear that they recognised and appreciated "the self-sacrificing spirit" in which the offer had been made. MacKemmie wrote to Wilson on the day after the committee meeting, giving details of the arrangement:

> The position now is that for your services as Producer from 1st October 1921 until the end of April 1922, the Scottish National Players stand committed to pay you the sum of £75, at the rate of £2 : 10/- per week. Further, that we accept the suggestion that the first call on any surplus from the productions during the period named will be for the purpose of making up a minimum sum of £250 payable to you in name of production expenses; but as this is obviously not a payment commensurate with the value of your services and can only be regarded by the Committee as a minimum, it was resolved that the question be revived and reconsidered when the financial results of the October production are made known.

The press gave enthusiastic notice of Wilson's appointment, with the general belief that the SNP had made a "definite advance" (Evening Times 17 September). The Citizen (17 September) declared that "visions of a national theatre are now becoming more concrete", and the Evening News (19 September) stated that Wilson's devotion would "lift the project out of mere experiment into the realm of possibility".

Wilson's appointment was indeed a definite step towards establishing the Scottish National Players. It meant that they had his services available on a full-time basis, giving him the opportunity to work on texts, spend more time with the actors, and oversee all aspects of production. It also provided a focal point for publicity purposes, with Wilson giving talks and press interviews and becoming a kind of representative of the Scottish National Players who was immediately associated with them in

the public's mind, and lifted them onto a higher level than other amateur societies. The next important move would be to sever the ties with the St Andrew Society and set themselves up as an independent organisation. This idea was mentioned by MacKemmie in the same letter which gave Wilson the details of the Committee's acceptance of his offer. This severance would have the double benefit of removing the financial risk from the St Andrew Society, and freeing the SNP "from the present somewhat awkward and irksome method of working". Intimation of the proposal was given to Society members in a letter circulated towards the end of November. The purpose of this letter was mainly to advertise the forthcoming production in December, of Let Graytown Flourish and Luiffy, and was signed by MacKemmie and Wharrie. It was stated that as the "young movement is strong enough to stand by itself" an amicable arrangement had been reached with the St Andrew Society whereby any financial responsibility or authority was removed from that body, but "cordial support" was retained. A new society, with the title of the Scottish National Theatre Society would be formed, and its constitution was being formed at the time of writing the letter. The public meeting at which the new society came into being was held on 16 January 1922.

Two productions took place before the end of 1921 however. The SNP presented two programmes at the Athenaeum Theatre from 31 October to 5 November. On Monday, Wednesday, Friday evenings and the Saturday matinee Christ in the Kirkyaird, a new one-act play by Hugh S Roberton was performed along with revivals of The Mother and Cute McCheyne. On Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday evenings two new plays were presented. One was John Brandane's one act play called The Change House and the other was George Woden's The Money's The Thing. This was the first three-act play produced by the SNP, and the season was their most ambitious to date. According to the letter which advertised the next production in December, the October season "resulted in a balance to the good". The Athenaeum Theatre was the venue for the production from 20 to 24 December of Let Graytown Flourish, Robins Millar's three-act play, and Luiffy, a one-act adaptation by Wilson from a short story by Joseph Laing Waugh. There were two matinees, on the Tuesday and Saturday afternoons.

On 12 January 1922 several articles appeared in the press which gave a history of the SNP and drew attention to the new society which was being formed. Parts of the constitution were quoted, especially the objects of the Scottish National Theatre Society, and the transfer of funds from the now defunct Glasgow Repertory Theatre were stressed. A copy of the draft constitution was sent out together with a circular letter from Wharrie, dated 13 January, which invited the recipient to attend the public meeting. On 16 January an advert appeared in the Public Notices section of the Glasgow Herald inviting "all those who are interested in the future of Scottish Drama and the Founding of a Scottish National Theatre to attend" the meeting, which would be held in the Christian Institute in Bothwell Street, at two thirty p.m. that day.

The meeting which was "largely attended",[60] was presided over by MacKemmie who provided a resume of the movement's origins and activities. He stressed that the break with the St Andrew Society had been amicable and announced that the £420 contributed by the shareholders of the Glasgow Repertory Company to their Expense Fund had enabled them to take offices at 187 St Vincent Street, and to provide themselves with a rehearsal room. MacKemmie stated that at present the SNP had £389 11s "in free assets" and £300 in cash. The draft constitution was read by Wharrie, and then discussed. This was approved with the alteration, proposed by Councillor Rosslyn Mitchell that the Council would have the power to fill any vacancies that may arise during the year. The Council for the coming year was then elected.[61]

Wilson spoke on the artistic side of the movement, stressing that the SNP were amateurs only in so much as they were not paid for their services. He strongly denied that they were in any way "an amateurish movement". Wilson also stated his belief that they were "handicapped" by not having their own theatre. He said that they would be able to do their best work in a theatre with a capacity of between six and eight hundred,

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[60] Glasgow Herald, 17 January 1922, p9.

[61] The Council of the Scottish National Theatre Society consisted of : Dr C Stewart Black; George Blake; Walter Buchanan JP; John Currie; William Gordon; J S Gregson; Alex Kennedy MP;Prof. Robert Latta; D Glen MacKemmie (the Chairman); Miss Elliot C Mason; Donald Muir; William Power; W Ralph Purnell (Vice-Chairman); Hugh S Roberton; Struan Robertson; Ralph R Stewart (Vice-Chairman); R B Wharrie (Hon Secretary); J Ronald Young CA (Hon Treasurer).

and suggested the possibility of converting a cinema into a theatre as opposed to the more frequent conversions of theatres into cinemas. The meeting was concluded with the chairman acknowledging the support which the SNP had received from the St Andrew Society, and thanking everyone who had so far been involved in the productions.

The constitution of the Scottish National Theatre Society was as follows:

Objects

(a) To take over the assets and liabilities of the Scottish National Players Committee of the St Andrew Society (Glasgow).

(b) To develop Scottish National Drama through the production by the Scottish National Players of plays of Scottish Life and Character.

(c) To encourage in Scotland a public taste for good drama of any type.

(d) To found a Scottish National Theatre.

Membership

All members of the Society must be proposed and seconded, and their election shall rest with the Council.

Subscription

The Annual Subscription shall be five shillings, payable on or before the first day of January.

The Scottish National Theatre Fund

Donations and legacies are invited towards a special accumulating fund which is being established under the following conditions viz:-

(a) That the Fund shall be devoted to the foundation and endowment of a Scottish National Theatre.

(b) That the Fund shall be derived from public subscriptions, donations and legacies specifically given for the purpose, and to it may be contributed from time to time what surplus revenue from the productions of The Scottish National Players as, in the opinion of the Council, can be spared from the working funds of the Society.
(c) That the Fund shall be invested in the names of three Trustees, men of public standing nominated by the Society and shall in no case be applied to the ordinary purposes of the Society.
(d) That the Fund shall remain intact until in the opinion of the Council confirmed by a General Meeting of the members, it has reached dimensions which justify a beginning being made with the establishment of a Scottish National Theatre in Glasgow.

The first object of the Scottish National Theatre Society is plain, and created no problems. The second and third objects are straightforward and the efforts of the SNTS were in those directions. Criticism was almost always made concerning their choice of plays from people who believed that they should concentrate solely on Scottish work, and from others who felt that the "public taste for good drama of any type" could best be fostered by producing the best of foreign plays. Such criticism was most vociferous towards the end of the 1920s. The last object was always present in the background of the movement as the great hope, but never came to pass. Most of the people involved in the SNP share the view that things would have been alright if they had only had their own theatre. It was to this end that the Scottish National Theatre Fund was set up, with the idea being, as Tyrone Guthrie stated that "the efforts of the Players must *earn* the capital to build the theatre".[62]

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[62]SNTV, p. 15.

CHAPTER THREE: 1922 - 1924

> "... that happy time when *Gruach* and *The Glen* were in a bill together ... that really was one of the weeks of our lives."[1]

The Scottish National Theatre Society was responsible for all the activities of the Scottish National Players during the period from January 1922 until February 1928, when a limited liability company was formed. These six years proved to be a busy and thriving time for the SNP, a time when they came closest to fulfilling their aims and when they held tightest to their ideals. The first flush of enthusiasm had passed, leaving a young theatre group established and ready to build upon their achievements. Almost immediately they began to take productions outside Glasgow, visiting Dumfries in February 1922, Oban in September of that year, and the Edinburgh Lyceum in December 1923. Productions outside Glasgow developed in two directions: the one-night performances in various towns within travelling distance of Glasgow, such as Bridge of Weir, Dunoon and Kilmarnock; and the tours which travelled further afield and visited smaller towns and villages, where drama was not often seen. The tours and the one-night performances were an important part of the SNP's work and a recognition that as a national group they had a wider prospective audience than the people of Glasgow.

The Players also performed outside Scotland, visiting the London Coliseum several times during this period. This was a development which brought the movement great publicity, but which also led to criticism of the Players' motives, as a truly national Scottish theatre would not need the London 'seal of approval'. A Royal Command Performance at Balmoral Castle also brought a lot of publicity and was treated as a great honour. Radio broadcasts became a regular feature of the SNP's work, with the Players making a significant contribution to the early years of the BBC's Scottish Region. An Auxiliary Productions Scheme, or Members' Nights as the evenings came to be known, was instigated. New plays and less experienced producers were given a trial run at these performances, with the audience being invited to give their comments and criticisms.[2]

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[1] Gordon Bottomley, letter to David Glen MacKemmie, dated 21 March 1933, STA.
[2] These events are all discussed in greater detail at the appropriate parts of the thesis.

Between January 1922 and February 1928 the Scottish National Players produced forty-nine plays which they had not previously performed, with thirty-six of these being "for the first time on any stage."[3] The majority of the plays were one-act, and this remained the most popular choice for the SNP until 1933 when three-act plays became more prevalent, as a result of their decision to produce fewer new plays and concentrate on work which had been tried elsewhere. Indeed thirty of the forty-nine plays performed between 1922 and the beginning of 1928 were in the one-act form, with three two-acts, eleven three-acts, three four-acts, one five-act, and a play consisting of "ten scenes".[4] Most of the plays performed during this period could be described as being "of Scottish Life and Character", the phrase used in the objects of the Scottish National Theatre Society. There were a few exceptions such as The Dark Lady of the Sonnets by George Bernard Shaw, but in general the SNP's repertoire was more based on Scottish themes at this time than it was in the thirties.

The first production under the mantle of the Scottish National Theatre Society took place at the Athenaeum from 24 to 28 January 1922, with matinees on the Tuesday and Saturday afternoons. The Saturday night performance was played to one of the largest SNP audiences to that date, with the Evening Times (30 January 1922) calling it a "record night" for the Athenaeum Theatre. The Record (25 January 1922) noted that although the audience did not completely fill the theatre, it was "sufficiently large to be distinctly encouraging". The plays were Fledglings, a three-act Highland comedy by George Blake, and The Jolly Beggars, a one-act adaptation of Burns by A P Wilson. This adaptation was described as "a splore" and the reviews speak of a noisy, rollicking piece which was given a lively and vigorous performance, The Scots Pictorial (4 February 1922) declared it to be "racily Scottish through and through", and, while agreeing with the Record that it had no dramatic significance, believed that "as a picture of the revelry of the period it showed real artistic insight". The Evening News (25 January 1922) stated that it "should appeal to all Burns lovers", and of course the production took place as near as possible to Burns Night. Wilson gave a speech on the last night during which he drew

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[3] SNTV, List of Plays and Authors, pp. 44-47.

[4] Punch Counts Ten by Robert Bain, first performed by the SNP on 22 December 1925, at the Lyric Theatre. Performed eleven times by them.

attention to the fact that Burns himself had made a plea for a national drama in Scotland, in the prologue he wrote for the benefit night of Mr Sutherland, the theatre manager at Dumfries. This prologue opens with the line, "What needs this din about the town o' London", and continues to ask:

> Is there nae poet, burning keen for fame,
> Will try to gi'e us sangs and plays at hame?

The prologue states that there is plenty inspiration to be had from Scotland's past:

> There's themes enow in Caledonian story,
> Would show the tragic muse in a' her glory.

There is a call for someone to "rise and tell" the tale of Wallace and Bruce, and of the "lovely, hapless Scottish queen". These sentiments are similar to those held by the SNP, expounded in an article entitled "The Scottish Play We Hope For," printed on the cover of the Scottish Player in March 1924, and calling for a "fine tragic play woven around William Wallace". MacKemmie realised the similarity between their own ideals and the ideas in the prologue by Burns, pointing out to Wilson that it "very appropriately ... expresses our aim", and suggesting that the SNP use a quotation on future programmes and advertisements.[5] This suggestion was taken up and the lines, "There's themes enow in Caledonian story/Would show the tragic muse in a' her glory" became a familiar sight on SNP programmes and other material.

Wilson had a great interest in Burns and in adapting his work for the stage. On 7 February the Dumfries Guild of Players, a local amateur group, produced a play by G W Shirley entitled The Scotland of Robert Burns at the Lyceum Theatre in Dumfries, with Wilson playing the part of Burns. The play had originally been produced the previous year, and the Glasgow Herald (8 February 1922) gave the aim of the production as being:

> to get rid of the atmosphere of stiffness and formality associated with the singing of the songs of Burns on the concert platform and to substitute a natural setting in period - and with the tout ensemble - in which they were written.

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[5]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 26 April 1921, STA.

There is a similarity here with the SNP's production of Wilson's adaptation of The Jolly Beggars, of which it was commented that the songs were given "with more vigour than harmony, as befitted the scene".[6] Looking back from 1953, Jean Taylor Smith, one of the SNP's leading actresses, wrote that The Jolly Beggars had been "produced with all the gusto that Burns himself would have enjoyed".[7]

While Wilson was in Dumfries he gave a talk to the local Rotary Club on Scottish National Drama, and the work of the Scottish National Players. This was partly to promote the forthcoming visit of the SNP to the town, and partly because Wilson and other members of the SNP were always quick to take up any such opportunities to talk on the history, aims and productions of the Society. Wilson also used this particular speech to answer the criticism that the SNP were only presenting "the gloomy side of the Scottish character". This was a charge that was being levelled at the Players in many newspaper articles and reviews, such as the Evening News piece on "Our Tragic Young Men Pessimistic Playwrights of the North". This stated that, according to the SNP, Scottish life, "has as its main features illegitimacy, parricide, meanness, tawdry social ambition, with a dash of the Celtic gloom".[8] Wilson's reply was that a young author finds it easier to write tragedy than to write comedy , as it takes more experience of life to write the latter, and to realise that "the things that a young man thought were gloomy were usually only funny".[9]

The following week the Scottish National Players performed Luiffy, The Mother, and Cute McCheyne from 13-15 February, at the Dumfries Playhouse. This was their first performance outside Glasgow. Both Luiffy and Cute McCheyne were advertised as being a "Dumfriesshire Comedy".[10] Indeed much was made of the Dumfries connections of both Joseph Laing Waugh, who wrote the short stories, and A P Wilson who adapted them for the stage, and not only produced them but also played the title roles:

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[6]The Era n.d.
[7]SNTV, p.28.
[8]Evening News n.d.
[9]Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser,8 February 1922.
[10]Advert in the Dumfries and Galloway Standard and Advertiser, 11 February 1922.

> It is a new experience to have Dumfriesshire plays, from the pen of a Dumfriesshire man, presented on a Dumfries stage, with a native of the town playing the leading role, and the visit to the Playhouse this week of the Scottish National Players is a unique event in theatrical history.[11]

The first night however was not well attended. The Dumfries Courier, while praising the production, declared that the size of the audience was "the only disappointing feature about Monday evening's performance". The Dumfries Standard and Advertiser (15 February 1922) echoed this sentiment, stating that "nothing finer in dramatic work has been seen on the Dumfries stage" and that it was therefore disappointing "to see how poorly this gifted company and the movement for which they stand was supported in Dumfries". Both of these Dumfries papers agreed that Cute McCheyne was the most popular piece of the evening. The Courier noted that there "was a constant ripple of laughter" during Luiffy, and the Standard and Advertiser believed that The Mother was a "powerful and moving tragedy" which made a "deep impression" upon the audience.

The next SNP production took place at the Athenaeum Theatre from 21 to 25 March 1922, when Weir of Hermiston was performed. This was a four-act adaptation by A W Yuill of Stevenson's unfinished novel. The play had been written some years before but had not previously been produced. The press greeted it as "the most ambitious effort our National Players have made" (Evening News 22 March); the "finest achievement of the Scottish Players to date" (Daily Record, 22 March); and the Evening News on 27 February promoted the forthcoming performance as "the most important production so far presented by our National Players" with regard to "casting and staging". The Bulletin (22 March) declared that "the staging was remarkable: relevant and handsomely adapting Athenaeum proportions". Praise was given to the play's language. The Daily Record (22 March) noted that the dialogue was "lifted skilfully from the book", and the Bulletin (22 March) believed the preservation of the "Stevensonian Scots" to be a "beautiful asset to Mr Yuill's work". The Glasgow Herald (30 March) declared that the dialogue "was always vivid and true to character". The only real criticism was the comment in the Evening News (22 March) that

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11 Dumfries Courier ,15 February 1922.

the play was too long. However even that review stated that the efforts of the Players in staging Weir of Hermiston were "fully justified by the results".

A different adaptation of Stevenson's novel had been produced in Edinburgh by Mrs Finlayson Gauld and Councillor Wilson MacLaren, who collaborated on the adaptation. MacKemmie described Councillor MacLaren as having been a "personal friend" of Stevenson's. MacKemmie, Yuill, MacIntyre (John Brandane), and Struan Robertson went to see the Edinburgh version when it was produced in March 1921. MacKemmie wrote to Wilson on 13 March, describing Yuill as being "frankly contemptuous of the whole thing" and recalling that Yuill refused to go and speak to Mrs Finlayson Gauld after the production as, "he would only by hypocritical if he congratulated her!" MacIntyre said little, but "obviously agreed in the main" with Yuill. Robertson, the only actor of the group, was more "interested in details" such as the acting and the make-up, than in the play itself. MacKemmie writes that he was "non-committal" when he congratulated Mrs Finlayson Gauld. He believed that the play was "a praiseworthy attempt" which could "easily have been made a much greater success" had it been produced by the SNP. However he felt that Yuill's play was "immeasurably superior in every way", and did not think that either Yuill or the SNP had anything to learn from the Edinburgh production.

The SNP made a loss of £50 on their production however.[12] MacKemmie blames this on the fact that, without a theatre of their own, they were "restricted to one week" and could not therefore "retrieve all our initial outlays in that time". These statements were made in a letter to Sir James Barrie, dated 4 August 1922, in which MacKemmie described Weir of Hermiston as "our greatest artistic success during last season". This letter, which was written to interest Barrie in the movement, and to get him to write a play for the SNP, also discusses the SNP's appearance at the Pavilion Theatre in May, where they performed Luiffy "twice nightly" as part of an "all-star" programme, during the week beginning 8 May 1922:[13]

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[12]Reported in the Morning Post, 11 January 1923.

[13]Advert in the Evening News, 4 May 1922.

> Another useful feature of our work last season was the appearance of the Players in May as "top of the bill" at the Pavilion, one of Glasgow's most popular Music Halls. This was an ordinary salaried engagement. We did not lower the flag in any way. The Pavilion made money, our engagement proving a considerable draw. We made a profit, many popular friends whom it was difficult otherwise to interest in our work, and we got the maximum value of publicity out of it.[14]

MacKemmie believed that the proof of all this was that they returned to the same music hall at the beginning of the next season, "at a 60% increase of salary - a fact which speaks for itself". As the movement aimed, and indeed had, to be self-supporting it is obviously important the Pavilion engagements made a profit. MacKemmie would do his best to use almost any situation for publicity purposes, and was usually successful in this area. As the SNP had previously performed Luiffy in both Glasgow and Dumfries, and were to perform it fifty-eight times during their career, producing it at the Pavilion could not be called lowering the flag or losing their ideals. The important point is that MacKemmie believed the engagement to have made them "many popular friends" who would not otherwise have been interested in the SNP. This phrase implies that "popular" was associated with variety programmes rather than with straight theatre, and in particular with the Pavilion audience rather than with the audience which had been attending previous SNP performances. The SNP had been criticised on several occasions because their audience mainly consisted of friends and supporters who were therefore sympathetic, enthusiastic and encouraging to a greater degree than might normally be expected. This point was raised when it was announced that they would be appearing at the Pavilion. The Evening News (4 May) declared that this venture would be "a test of sterner character", as the Pavilion audience would be harder to please than their previous audiences. The Evening Times (5 May) believed that it would be a "useful test of the general public's willingness to support the scheme of national drama". The Bulletin (6 May) commented that the Pavilion engagement

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[14]The Glasgow Rep did something similar with their Christmas1912 Alhambra season. The Rep had had some doubts aboutperforming in a variety theatre, but it was in fact very successful and drew attention to the company. (Cameron, Repertory Theatre Movement, p. 112.)

was "a wise move" for the Players as it would "bring their merits to the notice of a large section of the public who may be attracted to their next production". The Glasgow Herald (9 May) also makes the point that this was a different audience from the one the SNP were used to, and describes the performance as an "interesting experiment". This review notes that although Luiffy is the "veriest trifle" of Scottish drama, "it is a forward step in the movement to encourage the Scottish author and the Scottish actor that it should be introduced to the popular music hall". The audience was reported as being "delighted" with the production, and gave "indications that they would have cordially welcomed a more ambitious performance on the same lines".

In his letter of 4 August 1922 to Barrie, MacKemmie declares that, in order to be not only self-supporting but to make a profit which would be placed in a fund for the purpose of obtaining a theatre building, then the SNP "ought to make even a bigger bid for popular support than we have already done". The possibility of a performance at Balmoral is mentioned, and MacKemmie states that in order to get the "full benefit" of such an occasion, the SNP "must be able to follow it up with an even bigger splash". This is where MacKemmie comes to the real purpose of the letter, to ask Barrie to write a "short Scottish play" which the SNP could "offer Stoll in the ordinary way of business". MacKemmie explained that as Wilson had worked for Sir Oswald Stoll in London for several years, Stoll is interested in their movement, and states how a play by Barrie would help them, as with such a piece:

> the London ice is broken, the movement will make a profit, the publicity gained will be worth thousands of pounds and the actual stone and lime building of a Scottish National Theatre will be within striking distance of being begun.

This shows that MacKemmie saw a London production not as a betrayal of the movement's ideals, but with hard-headed business sense. The aura of a 'London success' was needed to sell the play to the Glasgow public. The Players did indeed perform in London, being engaged by Stoll on several occasions. However it was not until November 1929 that they performed a Barrie play, when Shall We Join the Ladies? was produced at the Athenaeum Theatre, so that although his reply, if there was one, is not extant, it may be assumed that Barrie declined to write a play for the SNP.

In September 1922 the Scottish National Players ventured outwith Glasgow for the second time. The venue was the Argyllshire Gathering Hall in Oban, where on 25 and 26 September three one-act plays were performed. These were Glenforsa, Cute McCheyne and The Spanish Galleon. The latter was by John Brandane and A W Yuill, and was being presented for the first time on any stage. An article in the Oban Times on 21 May stated that the SNP had many "well-wishers" in the West Highlands, who were openly "making an attempt to induce the National Players to visit Oban". While discussing the forthcoming visit the Oban Times (23 September) stated that Oban was "distinctively favoured" by it, and noted the appropriateness of producing two plays set on Mull, plays which "should prove of exceptional interest to a Highland audience". In its view of the production the same paper declared that the fact that The Spanish Galleon was being premiered was "an honour which lovers of the drama in Oban highly appreciated".

The Glasgow Herald (26 September) noted that this was the first drama to be presented in Oban "for many years" and that it had aroused "keen interest". The hall was "crowded" according to the Oban Times, with takings amounting to £140.[15] The Evening News (29 September) claimed that the hall was "packed out", and described the first night's audience as a "fashionable gathering", consisting of "county gentlemen and townsfolk", while on the second evening the stalls, "held not a few farmer buddies, including several shepherds with long crooks and collies complete".

Praise was given to A P Wilson for his "fit up" stage in a hall where "the facilities afforded for a theatrical production ... were limited" (Glasgow Herald 26 September). The Oban Times congratulated the producer for his success in spite of "the difficulties of utilising the Hall for dramatic purposes". The music for the production was under the direction of an Oban composer, Julian Nesbitt, some of whose Hebridean pieces were played. A special prelude for The Spanish Galleon was written by J Seymour Halley. The music was commented upon by many reviews, including the Glasgow Herald who noted that the music "is always a feature of Scottish National Players' productions".

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[15] Evening Times 22 November 1922.

In his letter to Barrie in August, MacKemmie had mentioned the possibility of a Balmoral performance. Like a London production, this would greatly help to 'sell' the SNP, and encourage more people to see their productions. Court patronage has, of course, long been associated with the theatre, and early in their career the Scottish National Players were fully aware of the benefits which could be gained from it. Wilson met with a Mr Price of Ashton's Royal Agency[16] and the possibility of the SNP performing before King George V and Queen Mary was discussed. Mr Price, who knew Wilson's work when he was with Sir Oswald Stoll, suggested that Wilson should write to George Ashton, giving him information concerning the Scottish National Theatre Society and its work. In a letter dated 6 July 1922, Wilson puts forward the idea that:

> ... were the King and Queen approached, they might welcome a performance being given of one or two of our shorter plays while they are in residence at Balmoral.

Wilson enclosed an article from the Morning Post of 4 May 1922, so that Ashton could get a "fair idea" of the achievements of the SNP, and would realise that "the movement has all that is best in Scottish artistic life behind it". This article was entitled "New Northern Drama - Glasgow's Lead - Work of the Scottish National Players" and begins by recalling the Scottish Repertory Theatre's venture to "encourage the initiation of a purely Scottish drama", which was "thwarted" by the outbreak of the war. The article continues, giving the history of the Scottish National Players from the 1913 St Andrew Society Committee to their most recent productions. Cuttings from the Glasgow Herald concerning the SNP's performances at the Pavilion Theatre in Glasgow in May 1922 were also enclosed. Wilson was anxious to assure the Royal Agency that the SNP were:

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[16]The address on Wilson's letter is to Ashton's Royal Agency, 33 Old Bond Street, London. In 1893 Mitchell's Royal Library was situated there, and Ashton's Library and Theatre Ticket Agency was 38 Old Bond Street. In 1904 Ashton's Royal Agency was at 38 Old Bond Street, and by 1907 Ashton and Mitchell Ltd., Theatre Ticket Agents were at 33 Old Bond Street. This implies that a merger had taken place between Mitchell's and Ashton's, and that Ashton's Royal Agency was primarily a theatre ticket agency. The addresses were taken from Kelly's London Directory.

> ... not a "cult" movement in any shape or form. Our sole purpose is to give Scotland that place in Drama which it has already so successfully established in Art and Music.

This object would, Wilson believed, be helped by the "tremendous advantages the movement would gain" if it had the Royal "imprimatur".

MacKemmie also wrote to George Ashton, reinforcing Wilson's views, and undertaking that "all the arrangements would be carried out with the minimum of trouble and at the Society's expense". Another letter from Wilson suggests that a bill which could be "played nicely after dinner" and would not require an interval or necessitate any "noisy scene-changing" would fit the circumstances well. Wilson concludes the letter by thanking Ashton as:

> whether a visit to Balmoral materialises or not, it will always give me the greatest pleasure to recall your kindliness and courtesy in the matter.

The visit did materialise, and on 4 October 1922 the Scottish National Players performed A Valuable Rival and Cute McCheyne, "by command of the King", at Balmoral Castle before the Royal Family.[17] It was the first dramatic entertainment which had been given at the Castle for ten years.

According to an Evening News article of 5 October, the "engagement was definitely made at least three weeks ago" and was announced only to "those in the know". However, the secret was well kept, with no rumours appearing in the press. The Evening News called this a "testimonial to the honour of all concerned". It was the Master of the Household who had ordered the secrecy, this being explained to Evening News readers as being:

> ... the Court custom, stiffened in this case by the death of the Duchess of Albany. It was the Players privilege to provide the Balmoral tenantry with an entertainment in place of the annual Ball, cancelled on that account.

The Scots Pictorial article of 14 October also gave the Duchess' death as the reason for the replacement of the annual ball with a performance by the Scottish National Players. Tenants of the Royal estates of Abergeldie and Birkhall also attended the performance, with the press reporting the

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17 Wording of the Court Circular notices in various newspapers.

facing page 86

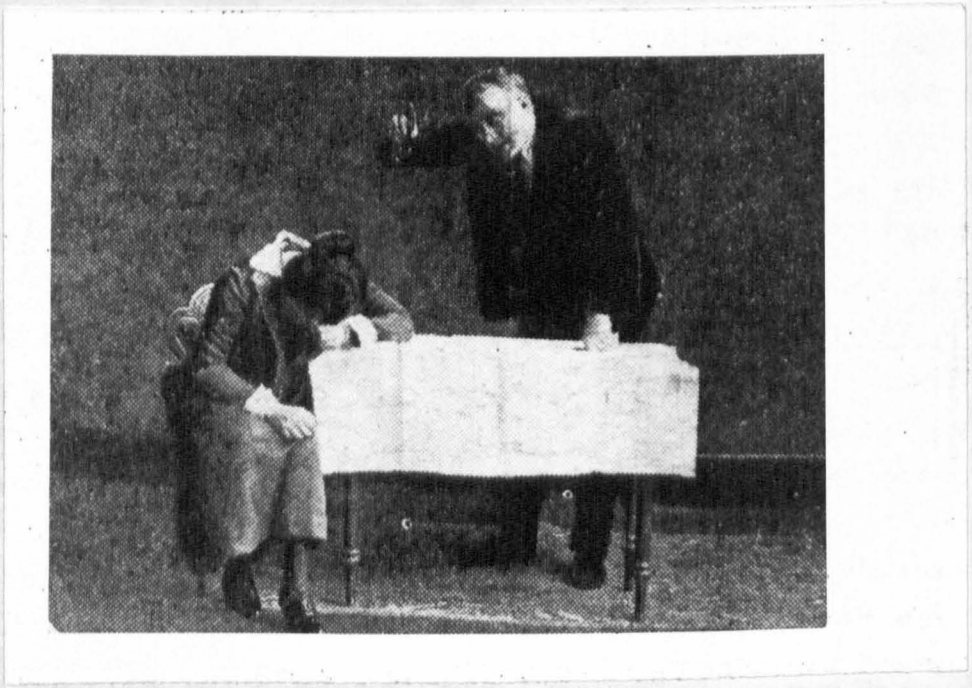

Figure two:
A Valuable Rival, Elliot C Mason and Andrew P Wilson.
The Bulletin 5 October 1922, STA.

audience as numbering between two and three hundred. The performances took place in the ballroom of the Castle, where a stage, measuring fourteen feet by eight feet, had been erected near the stairs leading from the Royal entrance. Several reviews, such as the Aberdeen Daily Journal (6 October) and the Stage (12 October) referred to the setting as "bijou".

The two plays performed, A Valuable Rival and Cute McCheyne, were both one-act comedies.[18] A Valuable Rival was written by Neil F Grant, a Scottish journalist working for the Morning Post in London. The play was first produced at the Criterion Theatre, London, in 1914, and was later produced at the Prince of Wales Theatre. This was its first performance by the Scottish National Players, who went on to give it a total of 208 known performances. Thus, it was their most popular play, the only other play which they performed more than 100 times being John Brandane's The Glen is Mine which had a total of 105 known SNP performances.[19]

A Valuable Rival is set in a small town in the north of Scotland, where the local newspaper is run by Alexander Jameson, who lives with his daughter. She discovers a forged letter and the details of a rather dubious episode in the past of Bain, the owner of a rival paper, and wants her father to use this against Bain. Her father confronts his rival and lets Bain know what would happen if this information were to become common knowledge. However, to his daughter's chagrin, he then proceeds to burn the letter and dissuades Bain from leaving town, declaring that their rivalry is just what he wants. He hasn't had "a good fecht" since he himself came to the town and put the two existing papers out of business. Later, he chastises his daughter and warns her that if she tells anyone about the letter then he will tell people of her unrequited love for Bain. The play is moderately amusing, contrasting the unexpected attitude of Jameson, who speaks in Scots, with the more predictable views of the two young people, both of whom speak in English.

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[18] The SNP list Cute McCheyne as a one-act play, although it does in fact consist of two scenes.

[19] Figures taken from the List of Plays and Authors, SNTV, pp. 44-47.

Reviewers felt that both of the plays were "typical Scottish comedies" (Dundee Advertiser, 6 October; Aberdeen Evening Express, 5 October), and full of "pawky wit". This was a phrase used in many papers including the Aberdeen Daily Journal (6 October), the Shetland Times (14 October), and the Daily Graphic (6 October). The Glasgow Herald (5 October) described A Valuable Rival as being neatly written and true to type, while the Aberdeen Free Press and Journal (5 October) defined this type as being that of "the Scots character known throughout the world - the Scot who loves a fight for fighting's sake". The Morning Post court circular of 6 October stated that both plays depict "a type of Scottish humour".

According to the Glasgow Herald (5 October), the performance was an "outstanding success" and "at the end of each production the curtain had to be raised on account of the continued applause", a fact also stated by The Times (5 October), speaking of their Majesties' "warm appreciation" of the plays. After the performance MacKemmie, Wilson and Wharrie were presented to the King and Queen by Sir Derek Keppell. In an interview with the Daily Record (6 October) MacKemmie said that the King had thanked the company for the trouble they had taken, and had:

> ... expressed great pleasure on being informed that one of the aims of the movement was to assist in the preservation of the Lowland vernacular of Scotland, and indicated his warm approval of that worthy object.

While this objective was not one of the three stated aims which the Scottish National Players used in their constitution, and in the prospectus of the Scottish National Theatre Society Limited in 1928, it was important to them, and they were keen to produce plays in Scots, or 'the Doric', as both the SNP and the press often referred to it at the time. Although the SNP did not arise out of the Scottish Renaissance, there is an obvious link between the two in this desire to use and preserve Scots. Indeed MacDiarmid described George Reston Malloch, who had three plays performed by the SNP, as one of the top twenty Scots poets, and stated that he was "one of the few dramatists yet connected in any way with the Scottish National Players who are of any real promise". MacDiarmid also wrote that Malloch's The

House of the Queen was "a beautiful little allegory of the ideal at the base of the Scottish Renaissance movement".[20]

With reference to the Balmoral performance, MacKemmie stated, without hesitation, that their Majesties' were "sufficiently conversant with our Lowland Scottish dialect to be able to get the fullest enjoyment from the plays". Some papers disagreed with this. The Aberdeen Daily Journal (6 October) felt that "many passages in the Lowland Scots tongue were not, of course, understandable to the King and Queen". However, as the reports all speak of the warm appreciation, hearty laughter and applause of the Royal Family, it may be assumed that MacKemmie's comment is justified.[21]

The Scottish National Players gained a great deal of publicity from the Balmoral performance.[22] Many of the articles, such as the Manchester Guardian of 5 October or The Graphic of 14 October, gave a history of the movement and a statement of their aims. However, a lot of reviews tended toward a more superficial treatment of the event. The Evening News (6 October) had the headline, "King Sore with Laughing", which is similar to the one in the Western Mail (Cardiff) and the Daily Mirror of the same date. Apparently after the performance the King made the comment that he was "Quite sore with laughing". This was widely reported, along with the fact that the Queen had asked that "some of the distinctively witty deliveries should be written down for her, so that she might preserve them". (Daily Mirror 6 October). The Queen was said to have "laughed heartily" at the comment made by a character about the local village "jad" who "spends

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[20]Hugh MacDiarmid, Contemporary Scottish Studies, (1926; rpt. Edinburgh:The Scottish Educational Journal, 1976), pp. 35-37.

[21]Similarly Graham Moffat notes in Join Me in Remembering (p. 26), that at the Royal Charity Matinee of Bunty Pulls the Strings in 1932, "Queen Mary was observed explaining the meaning of peelie-wallie to the Duchess of Devonshire".

[22]In Balmoral: The History of a Home (London: Collins, 1955) Ivor Brown states that it was a deliberate policy of King George V and Queen Mary to invite theatre companies who would gain from the resulting publicity:

> After the war King George V and Queen Mary made a complete and very politic innovation by inviting unstarred companies to Deeside; this conferred the most valuable publicity and prestige on those who were in most need of such assistance. In one case the command was to a small and semi-amateur team which carried the proud title of the Scottish National Theatre Society. This pleasant compliment occurred in October 1922, and the recognition of Scottish companies continued in the following reign.

The Arts League of Service Travelling Theatre also received a command to perform at Balmoral in 1925.

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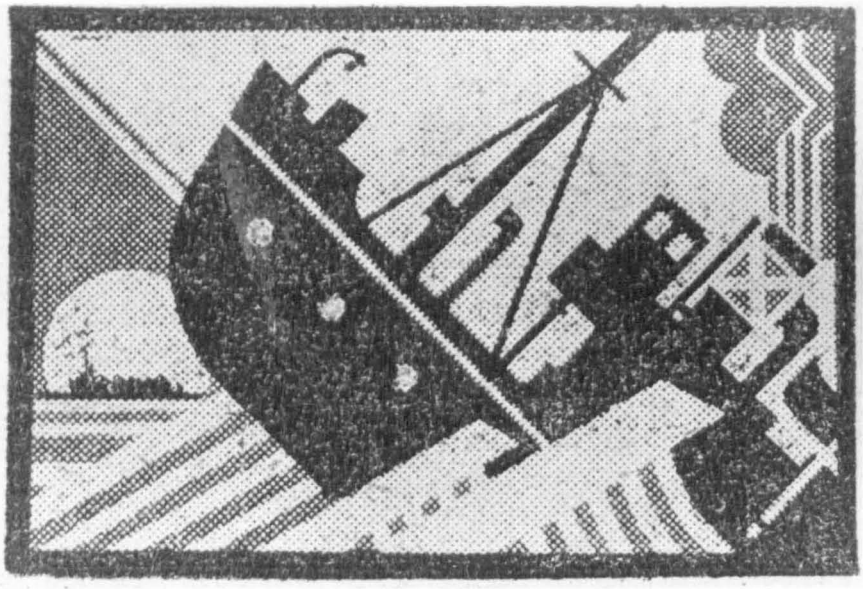

Figure three:
Poster for Clyde-Built, designed by Charles Paine.
STA.

twalmonth", reported in The Scotsman (6 October) amongst many others. However even the briefest of anecdotal articles were publicity for the movement, and undoubtedly helped them to gain a London appearance. As MacKemmie claimed, the Balmoral performance and its resulting publicity "helped to reassurance any 'doubting Thomases' among the public". To aid this the Players themselves placed a lengthy advertisement in the Public Notices section of the Glasgow Herald on 12 October 1922. This gave details of the Balmoral performance, such as the plays performed, the players involved and the reaction of the King and Queen. The aim of the Society was stated as being "to depict the DRAMA of Scottish Life - to present vividly its native character, as much in its kindly as in its rugged aspects". This is a rather unusual wording of their declared objective, with the emphasis on the "kindly" as well as the "rugged" side of Scottish life. The reason behind such a wording would be to reassure the public that the Society did not only produce the gloomy plays which they were criticised for performing so often. The notice also gives a list of "eminent Dramatists and Litterateurs" who support the SNTS, and of the authors whose work has already been produced. The forthcoming production of Clyde-Built is advertised, as is the membership of the Society, at an annual cost of five shillings. Anyone interested in joining was "cordially invited to apply for membership to the Honorary Secretary". It was also stated that a limited number of players, "with or without experience", would be accepted for the Society's training course, which is free to members. Applicants are asked to contact A P Wilson, at the "Rooms of the Society" at 140 Douglas Street, but there was little response.

To publicise the Clyde-Built production, a poster was designed by Charles Paine. This was a bold and striking design, of a ship sinking below the waves, represented by straight lines running at angles to each other. A St Andrew's Cross appears on the funnel of the ship.

In an attempt to further reassure any "doubting Thomases" amongst the public, the Scottish National Players invited the Lord Provost and the Senior Magistrate to the first night of their performance of Clyde-Built and A Valuable Rival at the Athenaeum Theatre, on 23 November. The Lord Provost was unable to attend but it was announced in the Evening Times on 22 November that the Senior Magistrate and his wife would be there, "to give the necessary touch of official sanction to the proceedings".

Clyde-Built was the third, and last play by George Blake which was produced by the Scottish National Players, who gave it a total of twenty-eight known performances, including those of the 1932 Autumn Tour.[23] The play is set in Greenock, where the Crockett family firm of lifeboat makers is in serious financial trouble. The firm can only be saved by selling to Merson's, a large shipping company, and the Merson son is willing to close the deal if Jean, the Crockett daughter, will marry him. Although Jean is in love with a sailor, he is missing, presumed dead, at sea, so she agrees under pressure from her family to marry Merson. At the last minute before the deal is signed, the sailor appears with the tale of how their ship, which had been "jerry-built" by Mersons's, foundered in bad weather and the crew were only saved by the "Clyde-built" lifeboats from Crockett's yard. The head of the Crockett family is enraged and tears up the contract, leaving Jean free to marry her sailor and the Crockett firm facing bankruptcy.

The play is melodramatic, particularly at the end when the sailor returns at the eleventh hour with news that wrecks the prospects of a business deal, but it was a serious attempt at portraying a modern Scottish business family and some of the problems in the shipbuilding industry. Most reviews mildly criticised the melodramatic tendency of the piece, but were otherwise favourable. The Citizen (24 November) described it as being the players' "best appearance so far, delighting a large audience". The Glasgow Herald (24 November) stated that, as indicated by the title, "the theme turns upon that regional patriotism that inspires everyone on Clydeside with regard to shipbuilding". The Scottish National Players did not often invoke such regional patriotism. When they played Cute McCheyne in Dumfries and premiered The Spanish Galleon in Oban, they certainly used the local connections and sentiments as publicity, but they were not important to the play itself. In Clyde-Built the pride of the craftsman is central to the plot, and that pride is defined as being part of the character and ethos of the Clydeside shipyards. The majority of the plays produced by the SNP were set in rural or Highland locations, or were historical. This

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[23] SNTV, pp. 44-47.

is in contrast to the work of a later group, Unity Theatre, who dramatised the "life and character" of a contemporary and industrial Glasgow rather than of a romantic and nostalgic rural Scotland.[24]

Regional chauvinism does not necessarily limit a play's success to that particular region, although that can occur to some extent. The Scottish Educational Journal's review of Clyde-Built on 8 December stated that the play "should appeal not merely to the parochial patriotism of the Clydeside, but to the greater patriotism that the Scottish National Theatre desires to encourage."

The following month the first annual general meeting of the Scottish National Theatre Society was held, on the evening of 27 December 1922, at the Christian Institute in Bothwell Street.[25] MacKemmie presided over "a good attendance of members"[26] and the report of the Executive Committee was given by R B Wharrie. This report listed the number of Society members as 235, and declared that 86 plays had been received since January. Of these, 39 had been rejected, 38 were still under consideration and 9 had been produced. It was further stated that since January 1921, when the first production took place, the Society had received a total of 129 plays, with 72 being rejected and 40 being held for consideration. Seventeen plays had been produced at a total of 64 public performances. Fifteen of these plays were presented for the first time on any stage, only The Philosopher of Butterbiggins and A Valuable Rival having been previously produced by other companies.

The Committee's report noted that the SNP had an "increasing acting membership" to whom they owed a "deep debt of gratitude" for voluntarily giving their services, and enabling a "high artistic standard" to be reached. New players were still being sought however, and it was for this reason the Society wished to establish "a school of dramatic

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[24]There are of course other considerations. Unity was a working-class theatre group, performing during the 1940s, whereas the SNP were a middle-class society whose main work occurred in the 1920s.

[25]Office-bearers were not elected until the council met in early January however, the following people were appointed:

Chairman	D Glen MacKemmie
Vice-Chairmen	Ralph Purnell, Colonel Ralph R Stewart
Honorary Treasurer	J Ronald Young CA
Honorary Secretary	R B Wharrie
Honorary Librarian	Miss R Munro Denholm

[26]Glasgow Herald, 28 December 1922.

instruction" and institute an "auxiliary productions scheme", the first performance of which would take place on 19 January 1923, at the Royal Institute Hall . The committee had, the report announced, undertaken "considerable propaganda" to stimulate public interest in the movement. This was mainly by means of lectures to various groups, such as literary societies and Rotary Clubs.[27]

The honorary treasurer, J Ronald Young, presented the financial statement for the period until 30 June 1922, which showed a working loss of £176.[28] The production fund however, had capital of £432. Young declared that although progress was being made the Players were a long way from being a self-supporting theatre group, which was their aim. He described the attendances at the Athenaeum as being low, with an average of only "between 53 and 58 per cent of the total accommodation" being used.[29] With an extra five hundred people per performance, Young claimed, the Players "would be able to show a profit and enable them to stage historical and costume plays".[30] The lack of public support for the movement was a major topic for discussion, with an appeal to increase the membership being made. It was decided that "the personal touch" was

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[27]Quotes taken from the report on the meeting in the Glasgow Herald, 28 December 1922.

[28]On 11 January 1923 the Morning Post printed an article discussing the career of the Scottish National Players. This was entitled "Scottish National Players, A Romance of Repertory", and gave financial details of the Players' productions. These were as follows:
The Philosopher of Butterbiggins; The Baillie's Nominee Royal Institute Hall 13-15 April 1921 PROFIT £11
(Programme one) Christ in the Kirkyaird; The Mother; Cute McCheyne; (Programme two) The Change-House ; The Money's The Thing Athenaeum Theatre 31 October - 5 November 1921 PROFIT £60
Let Graytown Flourish; Luiffy Athenaeum Theatre 20-24 December 1921 LOSS OF BETWEEN £30-40
Fledgelings; The Jolly Beggars Athenaeum Theatre 24-28 January 1922 LOSS (no amount stated)
Weir of Hermiston Athenaeum Theatre 21-25 march 1922 LOSS £50
Luiffy; The Mother; Cute McCheyne The Playhouse, Dumfries 13-15 February 1922 RECEIPTS for the three nights were £10, £24 and £36 respectively.
Luiffy Pavilion Theatre, Glasgow, week beginning 8 May 1922. The week's engagement was at a salary of £45, and the actors were paid for the first time, at a rate of three guineas per week. PROFIT £20.
The Spanish Galleon; Glenforsa Argyllshire Gathering Hall, Oban 25-26 September 1922 RECEIPTS for the two nights were £73 and £75 respectively. PROFIT £30.
Cute McCheyne Pavilion, Glasgow. A salary of £45 was received.
A Valuable Rival; Clyde-Built Athenaeum Theatre 23-29 October 1922 LOSS £15.

[29]Daily Record, 28 December 1922.

[30]Glasgow Herald, 28 December 1922.

lacking in their recruitment efforts, and that members should therefore "undertake a crusade" to persuade friends and acquaintances to join the Society.[31]

The "artistic side of their activities" was the subject of an address by A P Wilson who related that when he came to Glasgow he had decided to give himself two years to see how much could be done in obtaining the three things he believed to be essential: that is plays, players and a public. Wilson's comment on plays was that the "the great majority of the unacted were unactable", but that some of the plays recently submitted were the best that they had received so far. With regard to players, Wilson believed that they already had a talented and capable company. The problem lay with the public, and its lack of support for the movement. The Glasgow Herald article notes that Wilson's statement that "they had the players, they were getting the plays, and it was up to the public to prove that they wanted Scottish drama" was met with applause.

The tone of the meeting appears to have been somewhat smug and self-congratulatory. The only criticism was directed at the general public, that is at non-members of the Society, for not adequately supporting the SNP venture. Indeed, Wilson declared that "if the movement failed it would not be the fault of the Scottish National Players".[32] There was sufficient stress on the lack of public support to prove that those involved in the Scottish National Theatre Society held the belief that if they were to fail it would be because the public had not given them enough support, and that was therefore, the public's fault rather than their own. The press were sympathetic to this belief. On 28 December the Bulletin's report of the annual general meeting had the title "Wanted : Public Support", and declared that "there is only one other thing needful to further the ideals of the Scottish Players - public support. They should not have to plead for it". The Scots Pictorial (6 January 1923) called the lack of public support and the poor audiences, "a national disgrace, and more especially a disgrace to Glasgow".

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[31] Daily Record, 28 December 1922.
[32] Glasgow Herald, 28 December 1922.

Similar sentiments were expressed by Miss Horniman when she gave a lecture at Glasgow University in March 1923, to the Glasgow Association of the British Federation of University Women.[33] The lecture was entitled "A Woman's Experience in Theatre Management", and dealt with her experiences in Ireland and Manchester. Miss Horniman expressed her belief that the wholehearted support of the public was vital to a theatrical venture:

> If the public of Glasgow wanted a civilised theatre they could afford it. Until they really wanted it they would not be willing to pay for it.[34]

Miss Horniman acknowledged that the amateur efforts in Glasgow were "cultivating public taste", and suggested that the best way to obtain a good theatre was to "encourage discontent in the young". If the young people could be persuaded to want good plays then they would not be satisfied with the movies or the musical comedies that contented their parents, and would give their support to a theatre of high standard.

Wilson wrote an article which was published in the Stage on 28 December 1922, entitled "The Scottish Theatre - A National Movement", which repeated his statement that if the movement fails it would not be the fault of the Scottish National Players. This article reiterates that the movement found its inspiration from the work of the Irish Players and discusses the problems of developing a national drama, selecting the plays and being financially self-supporting. Wilson stated his belief that the "great plays will emerge eventually", and suggested the possibility that the greatest plays of such a national theatre as he has been describing "may first see the light in London". This would not be outside of their remit as a Scottish National Theatre, Wilson thought, asking "Will anyone argue that the Scots in London are less national in sentiment because they live south of the Tweed?". Indeed, Wilson states that a "national dramatic

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[33]Reported in the Glasgow Herald,9 March 1923, p. 10, col. h.

[34]Miss Horniman stated that she went to Manchester because the people there had demonstrated their willingness to support a theatre, whereas "the Glasgow people had indicated that they did not want to have her". She deduced this from the number of books of the Irish plays which were sold in Glasgow, Edinburgh, Liverpool, Cardiff and Manchester during the Irish Players tour. In A Life in a Wooden O, however, Ben Iden Payne stated that she was worried that in Glasgow she might get involved in nationalism again, and that he suggested that Manchester would be the best place for her theatre. (p. 79).

masterpiece" could easily arise from the "Scottish colonies" in Auckland, Toronto or New York, as these places were of "the greater Scotland beyond the sea".[35]

The Stage article served to bring the movement to the attention of the London theatre-goers as the Scottish National Players prepared to make their first appearance on a London stage on 1 January 1923, at the Coliseum. A Valuable Rival was performed by the same cast as at Balmoral: A P Wilson, R B Wharrie and Elliot Mason. This was part of a variety programme, with the Players appearing immediately after the intermission, and before the clown Grock

There was a great deal of press interest around the SNP performance in London. Indeed the Evening Times on 1 January commented that the Players:

> have received a wonderful boost from the London press newspapers, which have given them prominence to an extent that rarely if ever falls to the lot of any artistes figuring as a turn in a music-hall show.

These articles stressed that the play to be performed had been presented before the King at Balmoral, and mentioned the aims and achievements of the movement, and the influence of the Irish Players. A dinner which was given in honour of the Players was widely reported on, with quotes appearing from the speeches and from the message which was sent by George Bernard Shaw. This apologised for his absence, and encouraged the SNTS with the comment that "the unanimous refusal of the English people to establish an English national theatre must not discourage them" in their own bid for a national theatre.[36]

The Players themselves were interviewed by the London press. Elliot Mason told the Daily Sketch (1 January) that their aim was to show "the London public slices of Scottish life without any exaggeration", as

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[35]It is interesting therefore to note that the St Andrew's Society of Auckland, New Zealand, gave the first production of For Love of Appin by Alan Mulgan on 16 August 1920. The Otago Daily Times stated tha t the play "illustrates the folly of keeping alive in the new land the ancient feuds of the Old Country", and tha t the "atmosphere was wonderfully suggestive of the work of J M Synge". The New Zealand Herald declared that the "scene is laid in New Zealand but the theme is purely Scottish". Peter Harcourt, A Dramatic Appearance : New Zealand Theatre 1920-1970, (New Zealand: Methuen, 1978), pp. 18-25.

[36]Quoted in the Glasgow Herald, 30 December 1922.

many plays concerning Scotland "have been both clever and amusing, but at the same time mere caricatures". In contrast to this Mason stressed that A Valuable Rival was "absolutely true to life". Indeed the main worry of the Players was that the effect of the play would be lost in "the vast spaces" of the Coliseum. This worry was justified to some extent. When the play was performed at Balmoral and later at Glasgow, the set was described as bijou and intimate. The Coliseum would be the biggest theatre in which the Players had performed. The London correspondent of the Aberdeen Free Press stated the problem:

> It is an intimate play, but it was scarcely an intimate audience, because about two thousand people were sitting in the Coliseum. That made it a much greater strain upon the three actors than would have been their fortune had they been playing in the average-sized theatre.[37]

The Pall Mall Gazette felt that the type of play chosen was a distinct disadvantage, stating that the Comédie Française had made the same mistake with "the choice of an essentially intimate conversational playlet for a huge theatre where only broad effects can hope to carry their full honours".

Most reviews felt that the Players coped quite well with this problem. The Star declared that they had "a hard task to 'get over' the footlights in so large a house, but that they had a very good reception". The Evening Times gave a similar statement, that "the Coliseum is so large a building that it might have been expected to hamper them" in their production of such a "subtle" piece. However the actors "overcame all their difficulties with ease".

The reviews which did feel that the Players had not "quite taken the measure of the house", such as the Morning Post, which stressed that "they were all right for Balmoral but pitched short for the Coliseum", also stated that the Players were rapidly improving and getting better each night. The Sporting Life on 3 January commented that "while the acting was excellent on Monday, the members of the cast did not quite grasp that the vast Coliseum is not a drawing-room, but yesterday there was a much better conception of what is needed".

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[37]Reviews were printed on 2 January unless otherwise stated.

Some reviews stressed that the first few minutes of the performance "hung distinctly in the balance" (Evening Standard). The Manchester Despatch (3 January) stated that there were "tremors during the early part of the playlet". One reason for this was the problem of performing an intimate dialogue-based play in a large theatre. Such a play may seem a strange choice to have made, but it was their most popular play at that time, and the fact that it had been performed at Balmoral Castle was used as an advertising slogan to attract people to the audience who might not otherwise have bothered going to see a Scottish play. Another important factor was the play's language. The Evening Standard declared that once the actors "began to push a trifle of recognisable English across the footlights" the patience of the Coliseum audience was rewarded with "a palpable hit". In a paragraph sub-headed "Less Doric" the paper suggested that some of the "more difficult Doric" should be taken out of the dialogue. It also suggested that the SNP's curtain-raising music, Scots Wha Hae should be changed to something more like Coming Thro' The Rye as the former tune is "too much of a reminder of Falkirk [sic] to be really appreciated by the English". The Daily Mirror pointed out that, from an English viewpoint, "the dialect somewhat hampered a proper appreciation of the subtlety of the humour". The Pall Mall Gazette declared that Wilson "spoke the true Doric with so right an accent that some of the best of many canny lines must have sounded like a foreign language to more distant southern ears".

Reviewers were divided on the language question however, with some papers stating that the dialect was neither extensive nor unintelligible. The Morning Post of 28 December recalled that A Valuable Rival had been produced at the Prince of Wales Theatre in 1914, and that "only the older newspaper proprietor has any brogue worth speaking of, and his is not so strong as that of some of our most popular Scottish comedians". The Sportsman on 3 January also related the language of the play to the speech of the Scottish comedians, claiming that Harry Lauder and Will Fyffe had "taught" English audiences "to recognise an added charm" in Scottish speech. One critic, in the Daily News declared that even though the play was "in the broadest of Scots" he found that easier to understand than most of the English spoken on the stage for Scotsmen do sound their consonants"! The Aberdeen Free Press stated that as the "little

ripples of laughter" turned into "cheers of understanding" it was clear that "the vernacular puzzled them [the audience] not a bit". This is reinforced by Reynold's Newspaper on 7 January which declared that the Players' "Doric is understandable". Other papers felt that while the language of the play added to the difficulties faced by the Players, it was a tribute to their skill that the audience still enjoyed and appreciated the play. The Stage (4 January) called it "a considerable achievement" that a play which "depends almost entirely upon its lines, many of which are delivered in broad dialect", succeeded in holding the attention of the "huge audience" in the Coliseum. With such different opinions on the language of the play being expressed, it is almost impossible to reach firm conclusions on the issue. However, as the dialect of the play is not extreme in any way, and as all the reviews mentioned the audience's laughter and good reception of the Players, it may be inferred that the play was understood by the vast majority of the audience. It would indeed be strange if the dialect had been understood by the King and Queen at Balmoral but had proved a great barrier for the audience at the London Coliseum.

It was suggested by at least one paper that it was a large presence of Scots in the audience that ensured that "even the most subtle witticisms" were enjoyed (The Morning Post 6 January). Various papers noted that "several hundred members of the Burns Club of London" were present at the performance.[38] The Daily Chronicle (6 January) reported that a "huge body of Scotsmen" were in the audience on 5 January, and the East Anglian Times (8 January) noted that "there was a strong rally of London Scots". This article stated that while the audience at the Coliseum "could not be called essentially Scottish, there was a distinctly Northern flavour" to it. This had been anticipated before the SNP performances. The Star declared on 20 December that London Scots "will be out in force" to see A Valuable Rival. The Empire News of 31 December announced that the Scottish National Theatre Society was to make its first appearance before an English audience the next day, and then qualified the statement:

> I say an English audience, but I guess it will be as much Scottish as English, for there are so many Scotsmen in London ...

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[38]Quoted in the London Evening News, 5 January 1923.

Indeed in an interview in the Pall Mall Gazette on 22 December Wilson stated that the SNP had been engaged by Stoll "because the London Scots - and they are legion - want us", pointing out that Stoll was a shrewd businessman who "knows what his public want".

The Sunday Times (24 December) also believed that there was a public for Scottish plays in London, thinking it strange that "an important movement of this sort" should make its first appearance in London with a one-act play in a variety bill:

> Surely, there is a body of Scotsmen in London influential enough to ensure the success of a big London season. After all, a race which can produce "Bunty Pulls the Strings" should be able to fill any London theatre.

Other papers made reference to Bunty Pulls The Strings, and recalled a similarity between Graham Moffat's players and the SNP - the similarity being that both were Scottish groups performing comedy in Scots, whether dialect or accent only. The Daily Express review declared that "memories of 'Bunty Pulls the Strings' were reawakened" by the SNP's performance of A Valuable Rival, and the Manchester Despatch (3 January) described the play as being "in the Moffat tradition". Lloyd's Newspaper (7 January) stated that the SNP exhibited "that peculiar quality of naturalness and reality which we noted in the original 'Bunty' players and the Irish companies from the Abbey Theatre."

The Scottish National Theatre Society regarded the London performance as an important venture. The press treated it as such, giving it much publicity. One paper stated that the day they performed in London was "probably the greatest day in the history of the Scottish National Players".[39] Such a statement gives rise to the obvious objection that any 'greatest day' in national Scottish theatre should occur within Scotland. The fact that the SNP were seeking honour and recognition outwith their own country when they were, by their own statement, a national group was commented upon and criticised by some papers. The News of the World (7 January) questioned their actions:

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[39] Evening News 1 January 1923 [STA SII (55)]

> Strange is it not, that the company of the Scottish National Theatre should have travelled south of the Tweed to find the fullest recognition of their unquestioned talent?

Similar feelings are expressed by Hannen Swaffer in the Plays and Players column of the Sunday Times on 31 December:

> It is strange that the Scottish National Theatre, born in Glasgow and sneered at in Edinburgh, has had to come to London for a send-off which, I hope, will be enthusiastic enough tomorrow, to force it down even Scottish throats when it goes home again.

This reveals a large part of the Scottish National Theatre Society's reasons behind the London visit. With the London seal of approval upon them it was hoped that their audiences would increase in future productions in Glasgow and elsewhere in Scotland. Wilson states this in an interview with the Daily Record which was printed on 4 January:

> Our admitted success in London is an unchallengeable tribute to what we can do, and I cherish the hope that with this example before them the Scottish play-going public, more especially that section in which the sentiment of nationality is strong, will rally to our support with an enthusiasm much greater than has hitherto been manifested towards us and our efforts.

In this way the SNP were treating London as a theatrical capital rather than as the capital of the United Kingdom. Wilson believed that the presence of many Scots in London gave their visit a further justification, arguing that Scots living in London are not necessarily any less "national in sentiment" because of where they live.[40] The SNP were not nationalists in any real political sense. Indeed although the St Andrew Society, under whose auspices they began, was a patriotic association which aimed to uphold Scottish rights, they wanted to do this "within the British Union". The Scottish National Players saw themselves as a theatre movement whose aim was to provide a national drama for Scotland, rather than to use national drama for Home Rule propaganda purposes. It was as such a theatre group that they went to London and saw the visit as so important to

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[40]The Stage, 28 December 1922, article by Wilson.

their development, because they saw London as the centre of theatrical activity. The paradox of this remains, that by providing Scotland with a national drama they were aiming at breaking London's role of 'theatrical capital'. However on a practical level, they were willing to go to London and use the "London stamp" to increase their own audiences and gain greater public support within Scotland.

Another method of increasing their support was the Auxiliary Productions Scheme whereby new or less experienced actors, dramatists and producers were given the opportunity to perform before the Society members. The first of the Members' Nights, as the performances under the Auxiliary Productions Scheme came to be known, took place on 19 January 1923, in the Royal Institute Hall. Three one-act plays were produced for the first time on any stage: The Tea-Party by Anne Douglas; A Meetin' O' The Creditors by F L Billington Grieg; and The Guinea Stamp by C Stewart Black. These plays were produced by Violet Witter, Elliot C Mason and W Ralph Purnell respectively, three of the SNP's actors.

The Tea-Party was set in 1912 and portrayed some women meeting and discussing the arrival of a new minister. The Daily Record described the play as "a gathering of gossips - some kindly, others malicious".[41] The reviews regarded it as being the least important of the three pieces. The Glasgow Herald commented that the theme of "women's clavers ... hardly lent itself to the stage", a statement later disproved by Unity's productions of Men Should Weep, and the Bulletin described it as being "little more than ... a dialogue sketch". A Meetin' O' The Creditors, set in a contemporary kitchen, sees Colin Murie, a shoemaker whose business is not doing well, and his wife Janet discussing debts with the Miller, the Merchant and Robin the Tailor, and was labelled as a kailyard comedy by the reviewers. "Pleasing but sentimental" was the description by the Bulletin, and the Glasgow Herald felt that it suffered from the "slightness of its theme". The Daily Record believed that Elliot Mason had "splendidly sustained" the comedy of the play.

The best of the plays was The Guinea Stamp, the only one of the three which the Players subsequently produced, giving it a total of twenty known performances. The piece is set in a Whiting Bay drawing room

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[41] These reviews were published on 20 January 1923.

where the socially ambitious younger family members are shown up by their "hard-working but vulgar" relatives, as the Bulletin calls them, praising the play for having "contained excellent material". The Glasgow Herald stated that The Guinea Stamp "came nearest to good comedy" of the three pieces presented.

The performance was open only to members of the Scottish National Theatre Society, and there was no charge. The programme states that the object of the Auxiliary Productions Scheme, which it clarifies as being "a School of Acting or Course of Training which is meantime free", was to satisfy the Society's "need for a growing personnel". The many activities of the Society it was stressed, placed great strain upon the performers who gave their services voluntarily. Thus, "with an ever increasing number of plays awaiting production" more actors and actresses were required. The Glasgow Herald report of the Auxiliary Productions Scheme stated that such a training school was required to "enable the National Players to command the larger playing strength which will make it possible for them to bring their activities more frequently before the public". This was vital, in the opinion of the article, in establishing the SNTS "on a more enduring basis". The Glasgow Herald also noted two other advantages of the scheme. It provided more opportunity for promising dramatists to see a stage production of their work, and allowed other Society members to gain experience as Producers.

After the performance Thomas Henderson, the editor of the Scottish Educational Journal, and A P Wilson gave their criticisms of the productions. The Glasgow Herald felt that their criticisms were "tempered with mercy" as this was the first performance under the scheme. In future, more vigorous criticism "pointed towards definite defects" would be of greater use. The audience were also invited to write down their own suggestions and criticisms in the space provided on the programme and hand it in to the SNTS Council. Another Member's Night took place on 26

Figure four:
Poster for The Glen is Mine, designed by Stewart Orr.
STA.

April 1923, also at the Royal Institute Hall. Three more new one-act plays were presented,[42] with the criticism being given by Professor Macneile Dixon and J Struan Robertson.[43]

On 25 January 1923 the SNP gave the first performance of The Glen is Mine. This three-act comedy by John Brandane became one of the Players' most popular plays, and they gave it a total of 105 performances. Only A Valuable Rival, a one-act play, was produced more often. The Glen is Mine is set in the Highlands, where the laird's son, who now runs the estate, tries to ease his financial troubles by involving the estate in mining and the plan to build a hydro-electric dam in 'the glen'. Angus, the crofter who lives in the glen, has other ideas however. He is recovering from a bad accident at a local farm, and resists the attempted bribery and then coercion to make him agree to the project. He is more than a match for the young laird with his quick-wits and legal knowledge, and much of the humour of the play arises out of this. The Glen is Mine is certainly one of the more outstanding plays which the Players produced, and is Brandane's best work. The life of a crofter is portrayed as a harsh one. Angus has a broken leg and ribs and therefore cannot live at his own croft because of the difficulty of climbing the hill to it. His future son-in-law explains that the "good old Highland ways" mean getting up at three o'clock in the morning to attend to the lambing while the snow has "drifted yards deep", and having to drive thirty miles to fetch the doctor. The main problem with the play is that Brandane raises serious issues, such as the still vexed question of land use in the Highlands, but fails to provide any kind of satisfactory conclusion. Instead he retreats into comic situations, but they are weaker and less funny than those at the beginning of the play. However the play was, in the twenties, an important contribution to Scottish theatre, and did make one of the first attempts to deal with the problem of land use, even if it was in the end disappointing.

The press however, were not disappointed and congratulated the SNP on the production. The Glasgow Herald[44] described it as "the most promising advance along the line of the National Theatre Society's aim -

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[42] These were: A Sprig O' Appleringie adapted by A P Wilson from a short story by J L Waugh; The Packman by William Chapman; and The Intrusion of Nancy by J M Smith.

[43] This is similar to the way the SCDA, several years later, gave adjudications on productions.

[44] All reviews were published on 26 January 1923, unless otherwise stated.

Figure five:
The Glen is Mine: James Sloan; Meg Buchanan; Archibald Buchanan; Hal D Stewart; Douglas Lamond.
The Bulletin 29 December 1932, STA.

the development of Scottish national drama- that they have made", and noted that the audience "cordially received" the "cleverly and carefully written play". The Evening Times felt that Brandane had "put the best of himself" into the play, and that he has "a fund of quaint and striking humour". The Evening News declared that The Glen is Mine "stands the test of criticism", and that the audience's reaction to it was "genuinely hearty". The Scottish Educational Journal stated that the production was "a considerable advance" in the Players' career, and believed that Brandane had "provided the Scottish theatre with its one great comedy". The Bulletin wrote that the play took "the direction which we would wish to follow", as it had "Scots material enough" and made "live comedy of the real relationships, laws, and conditions of life".The Era (1 February) declared that "the character drawing is extremely good", and praised Wilson for the production, while the Stage, also on 1 February, felt that "it is undoubtedly the best comedy that has yet been presented by the Scottish National Players". The Glen is Mine was repeated by the SNP in December 1923, when they produced a double bill with Gruach at both the Lyceum in Edinburgh, from 10-15, and the King's in Glasgow from 17-22.

On 3 March the Scottish National Players presented three one-act plays in the City Hall. This was promoted by the Glasgow Corporation Halls Department, with the proceeds going towards the Lord Provost's Fund for the Unemployed. Wharrie sent a letter to SNTS members in February advertising the venture and urging members not only to set the public a good example by booking seats early, but also to persuade "every possible friend to come". In this way they could "ensure a handsome contribution - worthy of your society - to this excellent cause". Tickets cost 2/4, including tax, when booked in advance, with some unreserved seats being available at the door at a cost of 1/3, also including tax. The Daily Record report of 5 March stated that every available seat was filled, and that the Players were accorded "an enthusiastic reception" and several curtain calls. Wharrie's letter assured the members that the platform in the City Hall would be "fully equipped as a Theatrical Stage". The Evening Times (5 March) commented that the SNP "overcame many staging difficulties" in performing in the City Hall.

The plays presented were A Valuable Rival, Luiffy, both of which had been previously produced by the SNP, and J A Ferguson's Campbell of

Kilmhor. This was its first production by the Scottish National Players, although it had been suggested as a possibility for their first ever bill in January 1921. The Evening Times was disappointed in the Players' production of Campbell of Kilmhor, stating that it was as well that it was only "in the nature of a dress rehearsal for its formal debut later". This was at the Athenaeum Theatre, when it was produced with Gordon Bottomley's Gruach, beginning on 20 March.

The twentieth of March also saw the Players involved in "a high-class music and vaudeville programme" at the Alhambra Theatre. This was a matinee organised by the Glasgow and West District branch of the Newspaper Press Fund, and the SNP performed, appropriately as it deals with rival newspaper proprietors, A Valuable Rival. The programme also included music from members of the Carla Rosa Opera Company, and Agnes Bartholomew read a prologue written by Neil Munro.

That same evening the Scottish National Players premiered a two-act poetic drama by Gordon Bottomley, entitled Gruach. The play was later produced by Basil Dean at St Martin's Theatre, London, with Sybil Thorndike in the title role. The Manchester Guardian[45] commented that it was "fitting that what is essentially a Scottish play should be performed first before a Scottish audience by Scots actors". The Daily Sketch reported that Bottomley was "highly pleased" that Gruach would be performed for the first time by the Scottish National Players in Scotland.[46]

The play is set in the Castle of Fortingall on the eve of Gruach's wedding to her cousin Conan, the Thane of Fortingall. We learn that Gruach can be rather difficult and contrary, given to roaming alone on the moors, and is full of bitterness regarding her approaching marriage. The marriage would prove advantageous to Conan, as the land Gruach inherited from her mother borders Fortingall, and as Gruach is of royal descent, "Her father was of dead King Kenneth's breed". The line was dispossessed however, and Gruach was sheltered by her aunt and cousin at Fortingall. Gruach's royal descent makes her an "heiress of peril/But also of great chance", which also seems to sum up her character as portrayed in the play.

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[45] 20 February, 1923.
[46] 26 March 1923.

It is to an uneasy household that MacBeth, an envoy of the King who has lost his way, arrives and requests shelter for the night. At that moment Gruach appears, dressed in her wedding-gown, taken to be an omen of ill-fortune that she has worn it too soon, and offers the bridal chamber to MacBeth. She also invites him to stay for the wedding and the hunting that will follow the day after. In the end however, the envoy is left to spend the night in the hall beside the fire, and urged to leave early next morning. It is obvious that Gruach and MacBeth have had an effect upon each other and this is confirmed and developed in the scene where Gruach sleepwalks. After being awakened by his kisses, Gruach then attempts to stab MacBeth with his own dagger. In the end they decide to run off together, although it is Gruach's determination which sees them through the difficulties which they encounter. Bottomley attempts to show how the character of Shakespeare's Lady MacBeth developed. Gruach is,from the start, the dominant person in the relationship, and she is capable of persuading MacBeth to do her bidding. The sleepwalking scene and business with the dagger are a too obvious attempt to foreshadow the scenes in Shakespeare's play, but they do have the effect of linking, in the audience's mind, the characters of Gruach and Lady MacBeth. After the pair make their escape, the servants appear in the hall. One of the young girls has the second sight and describes a vision she has had in which she saw Gruach dressed as a queen, with "cold eyes" in her "pitiless face", carrying a "red dagger". The rest of the servants have no time for such things and hustle her away. Gruach's note is found by the castle steward but on the advice of Marget, another servant, he leaves it for others to find. The play ends on quite an effective note of irony as Conan has risen, sword in hand, to see if the envoy has left or not. On seeing that the "disquieting stranger" has gone Conan is relieved, although he voices his discomfort over Gruach. He returns to bed to wait until he is called to prepare for the wedding, which he will go through with despite his misgivings because "land is land". The audience of course knows that there will be no wedding.

The play is written in rather pedestrian blank verse which does not rise to any great heights of eloquence or passion, but neither does it descend to tedious or stilted verbosity. The language, like the play itself, is competent, imaginative and effective in its way, but lacks whatever it is that

would make it great or inspiring. For example, Gruach describes the falling snow:

> O, joyful silence; soundlessly dropping curtains
> About the secret chamber of the earth
> That shall contain our bridal bed. O, sleep,
> The bride's white hush is in me; I will part
> The soundless curtains, and meet what is within ...

Bottomley effectively uses flower imagery throughout the play. Gruach stains her bridal gown by dropping her posy of wild flowers upon it, is quite violent to Conan's sister when she tries to keep the flower which MacBeth dropped, and then kisses the flower and fastens it in her own bodice.

The play had been published in 1921, and Bottomley recalled in A Stage for Poetry that it was a review of the book in the Glasgow Herald by William Power, and the "insight and faith" shown by MacKemmie which led to the Scottish National Players' decision to produce the play.[47] The press congratulated the SNTS on their choice of Gruach. The Bulletin (10 February) reported that the SNP were "justifiably patting themselves on the back that they have been able to secure" its production, while the Evening News (21 March) stated that "the mere fact that they should have elected to produce" the play was "greatly to the credit of the Scottish National Players".

The production was described by Bottomley himself as having been an "ideal performance",[48] and the reviews were generally enthusiastic. The Evening News declared that it was "a genuinely beautiful rendering" of the play which entitled the SNTS to "our wholesome respect for them as the pioneers of a real Scottish art of the theatre". The Glasgow Herald (22 March) believed that the Players deserved "to be congratulated on an enterprise which called for the exercise of their full technical equipment, and in a performance which surpassed anything which they have yet achieved". Similar sentiments were expressed by the Manchester Guardian (22 March), describing the production as being "the summit of their artistic achievement". This was an encouraging announcement from a paper which had earlier declared that Gruach was a "nice test" by which

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[47] Bottomley, A Stage for Poetry, (Kendal: Titus Wilson, 1948), p.16.
[48] A Stage for Poetry, p. 16.

facing page 108

Figure six:
Gruach, Gruach's entrance in the wedding dress: Catherine Fletcher (Gruach); Jean Taylor Smith (Fern); Elliot C Mason (Lady Fortingall). The Scots Pictorial 24 March 1924, STA.

"the movement must stand or fall".[49] Most reviews praised the language of the play and the diction of the Players, speaking of the "poetic power",[50] "beautiful lines",[51] and the actors "fine sense of the melody of their lines".[52] The Bulletin (21 March) declared that in Gruach the SNP had "found a medium satisfying the ambition to stage Scottish traditions and to portray Scottish characteristics". The only real criticism came from the Glasgow Herald which felt that at times Gruach spoke more like a twentieth century girl than one from the Middle Ages.

The set was designed by Allan D Mainds RSA, and the costumes by Dorothy Carlton Smyth, both from the Glasgow School of Art.[53] Bottomley believed that "as a back-cloth setting the design would be hard to improve, either in appropriateness, or practicality -- or in low costs of execution either".[54] The Evening News attributed much of the production's success to the "fine setting and fitting costumes", and the Bulletin "admired specially the scenery which "would have done credit to any play on the professional stage". Praise was also given to the specially composed music, a nocturne and interlude by J Seymour Halley.

On 26 March the Scottish National Players returned to the Coliseum in London for a three-week engagement. The Evening Times (26 March) noted that this time they would "head the bill", which was described as being "no small distinction". The Sunday Express (25 March) reported that the SNP, along with a dancer, Grace Christie, were the "leading attractions" at the theatre. The Players presented three one-act plays, a different one each week. These were Campbell of Kilmhor, Luiffy and A Valuable Rival, and formed part of a variety programme which included such acts as Lillian Burgiss, "An English Ballad Singer"; Will Evans, "The Famous Comedian"; Miss Grace Christie, a dancer "of Masks and Bubbles fame"; acrobats; hand-bell ringers; and George Grossmiths' "Offenbach Follies".[55] There were two performances daily, at two thirty and seven forty-five p.m.

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[49] 20 February,1923.
[50] Evening Times, 21 March 1923.
[51] Evening News, 21 March 1923.
[52] Evening Times, 21 March 1923.
[53] Dorothy Carlton Smyth had also designed for the Glasgow Rep.
[54] A Stage for Poetry, p. 16
[55] From the programme and playbill for the Coliseum, STA.

Press coverage was not as extensive as it had been for their first visit in January. Most articles were a small paragraph or two, noting that their first visit was so successful that they had been re-engaged, and that they were cordially received by the audience.

In September 1923 the Scottish National Theatre Society published the first issue of the Scottish Player. This was to serve as both a magazine and a programme, giving essential information, such as dates, venues and plays to be performed; more anecdotal "snippets" on the people involved in the movement; press quotations, usually from reviews, serving to advertise forthcoming plays and encourage people to attend their productions; cast lists, and a note of the music to be performed; invitations to join the Society; and articles on the movement itself, its aims, achievements and aspirations. There were also commercial advertisements, and the SNTS urged businesses to advertise with them because their "unique Propaganda Programme" were "little souvenirs of the Movement" which would be kept by their members, whereas other theatre programmes were thrown away after only a short while. In The Scottish National Theatre Venture the printer, John H Bone, recalled that the Scottish Player had been "suggested and started" by Wilson, who also "sustained it and put the fire of his enthusiasm into its pages".[56]

Some of the articles which were printed gave guidelines and advice on how an audience ought to behave. One paragraph headed "Hush!"[57] stressed that the music played was especially chosen "with a view to the creation of a sympathetic atmosphere to the plays". House lights would accordingly be turned down and it was noted that "quietness in front is respectfully requested". Time would always be allowed for conversation, with the house lights up, after the fall of the curtain. In another issue, "An Appeal"[58] was made urging members of the audience to "make a special effort to be in their places at least five minutes" before the starting time, as it is the first five minutes, particularly in short plays, in which the author attempts to create the atmosphere. It was observed that in "all well-managed theatres where fine plays are presented" that late-comers are only admitted at the end of an act, and hoped that such a rule would not

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[56]SNTV, p. 43.
[57]The Scottish Player, Vol. 1, No. 5, p. 3.
[58]The Scottish Player, Vol. 2, No. 15, November 1924, p. 4.

need to be enforced by the SNTS. By February 1925[59] however, it was still deemed necessary to print a very definite list of things an audience should not do, simply entitled "Don't". This had been reprinted from The Playgoer, published by the Liverpool Playhouse and gave such advice as:

> Don't greet your favourite's entry with a round of applause. You are not at a political meeting.
>
> Don't comment loudly upon stage business, as "She's writing a letter". etc.

Other behaviour to be avoided included rustling chocolate boxes and sweet wrappers, yawning or shuffling your feet, and laughing hysterically.

The Glasgow Herald welcomed the new publication, congratulating the Players for such an "enlargement of their activities". The articles discussing "modern problems and tendencies" in the theatre were viewed as being both "interesting and valuable", and it was noted that such educational programmes had now "become general" in London and Paris.[60]

The first time that the Scottish Player was used as an actual programme, was its second issue, in September 1923. The SNP were performing for three nights in the Argyllshire Gathering Hall in Oban, almost exactly a year since their first presentation there.[61] The SNP performed A Valuable Rival and The Glen is Mine to "crowded houses".[62] The Oban visit was regarded as a prelude to their first ever tour, which began a week later.

It was the stated opinion of the SNTS that as they were a national movement they had an obligation not to restrict their activities to Glasgow, or even its surrounding areas, but to make wider tours of the smaller country towns. In the first talk which Wilson gave on the subject of the movement for a Scottish National Drama, delivered to the City Business Club in December 1920, he emphasised the importance of taking plays to the villages, and urged divinity students at the University who were liable to go to rural parishes to take a special interest in the work of the Scottish

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[59]The Scottish Player, Vol. 3, No. 18, February 1925, p. 4.

[60]Glasgow Herald, 14 November 1923, p.6, col. f.

[61]These nights were Saturday 22, Monday 24, and Tuesday 25 September.

[62]Glasgow Herald, 26 September 1923, p. 10, col. e.

National Players.[63] Two years later Wilson asked for such ministers, along with doctors, teachers, "or other community leaders" interested in developing drama to write to him, and undertook to:

> register all such letters and any details relative to halls and local conditions until the day arrives which, I hope, will be soon, when I can start the organisation of the first village tour of the Scottish National Theatre Society".[64]

In January 1921 an article in the Morning Post which discussed the new movement and reviewed its first production, declared that it was hoped "to send out a 'fit-up' to tour the towns".[65] In an interview with the Evening News on 3 September 1921 Wilson said that once the movement was established they "could send touring companies all over the country".

The financial aspect of touring was seen as a major problem, but on 4 June 1921 Wilson told the Citizen that he had toured with an Abbey Theatre company around the Irish provinces, and returned with a balance of £5, concluding that "if it could be done in Ireland, it could even better be done in Scotland". A more realistic statement was given in October 1922 in a letter Wilson wrote to the Scotsman. This letter emphasised that the movement was "entirely self-supporting" and was only surviving because authors and players were foregoing any payment. However, if a tour was to be undertaken then money would have to be available to pay the people involved:

> Until we have the resources to engage a definitely paid company, free to devote their whole time to the matter, we cannot tackle a village pilgrimage in any organised consistent way. Last year we had hoped to play six of the Rural Institutes in Lanarkshire. Much to our regret the series had to be called off simply because it was impossible to get the necessary volunteers all free to leave Glasgow for six consecutive nights.

Wilson gave his assurance that as soon as the SNTS had enough money for such a venture he would "seek powers from my executive to put the necessary machinery in motion".

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[63] Reported in the Glasgow Herald, 3 December 1920.
[64] The Scotsman 24 October 1922.
[65] 20 January 1921.

One month later it was announced that plans were made to tour eighteen towns in the south-west area of Scotland, such as Thornhill, Moffat, Lockerbie, Castle Douglas and Stranraer. It was also declared that "many invitations" had been received from Fife, Perthshire and Aberdeenshire. This was announced in an article in the Evening Times, on 22 November, in which Wilson stated his belief that in touring the country areas they may find playwrights who see Scottish life more clearly than those who dwell in "city fog and conventions". He recounted his Abbey experience to uphold this idea, stating that it was when the Abbey toured the Irish provinces that they attracted "really good national plays" such as those by T C Murray and Lennox Robinson. The third issue of the Scottish Player also cites the Irish example, stressing that Murray's "masterpieces of direct observation", as Birthright and Maurice Harte were described, were "unspoilt by any reminiscence of previous stage strife" and had been written "in a little County Cork schoolhouse". It was stated that one purpose of a tour would be to try and encourage something of the same direct application" from would-be Scottish dramatists.

The programme for the production at the Athenaeum from 23-29 November 1922 listed the aims of the SNTS and noted that although most activities took place in Glasgow there was, "in prospect a wide development of their touring functions".[66] At the first annual general meeting of the Society in December 1922, the prospect of touring was discussed with Wilson describing the Players as "missionaries of a vital movement", which would have to consider "decentralization" and the "expediency of having a touring company".[67] Once more it was stated that the "great problem" of touring was finance. In an article for the Stage, published on 28 December 1922, Wilson discussed the reasons behind this desire and the need to tour. The main argument is that if a movement is to be truly national it must involve all areas of the country and not just the major cities:

> No single building can be truly called a National Theatre. A National Theatre must be of the people, of all the people throughout the nation. A single building even in a capital city, no matter how ornate the building may be, is at best a

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[66]The plays produced were a Valuable Rival and Clyde-Built, STA.

[67]Glasgow Herald ,28 December 1922.

> parochial institution unless the drama emanating from that building is carried by its players to storm the community town hall or even the village barn.

The press supported such a view. The Edinburgh Evening News[68] (13 January) declared that the plan to visit the towns was "the right line" to take, as there was no point in concentrating on an actual building until "the demand for a vital national drama has been created" among the people. The Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald also believed that the "missionary work in the provinces is on the right lines".[69]

The Scottish Player carried front page articles on its first three issues entitled "The Movement" which announced that the SNP were now "coming to your town or village" to present their plays, gather support and hopefully inspire the people of the area, "that therein a playwright, a player, a patron, may be led to our ranks, and help to bring our country's drama into being". The plays to be performed during the tour were A Valuable Rival, Cute McCheyne and The Mother. The tour would last for three weeks, calling at the following town halls:

Lesmahagow on Monday 1 October,
Lockerbie on the 2nd,
Langholm on the 3rd,
Annan on the 4th,
Sanquhar on the 5th,
Thornhill on the 6th and 8th,
Moniaive on the 9th
Dalbeattie on the 10th,
Castle Douglas on the 11th,
Kirkcudbright on the 13th,
Gatehouse on the 15th,
Creetown on the 16th
Newton Stewart on the 17th
Girvan on the 18th
Maybole on the 19th
Troon on the 20th

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[68] 13 January , no year given.
[69] 1 December 1922.

There were no Sunday performances, and Thornhill was the only place where two performances were given. Advance booking was available in the towns, usually at the local stationers shop.

The fifth issue of the Scottish Player carried a report by Wilson on the tour. The main observation was that the smallest audiences occurred in the larger towns. In the smaller villages people were reported to have "squeezed" themselves into full halls. In Troon only 136 people attended the performances out of a population given as 9,474, and in what was described as a "palatial" hall in Lockerbie, the audience only totalled 188. On the other hand 270 out of a total population of 528 attended the Players' performance in Moniaive and in Gatehouse a hall which "nominally held 250" actually held 323 people. Wilson highlighted the problem with a quote which he had supposedly overhead from an "ordinary man in the street", who reasoned that:

> If they are as guid as the papers wad make oot, d'ye think they'd waste their time coming tae Lockerbie?

This was, Wilson felt, the problem in the larger towns, where people were either used to touring companies playing "the usual type of sixth rate touring balderdash" and therefore stayed away, disbelieving that they could be any good, or conversely the people were afraid that the SNP would prove to be too "highbrow". In the more agricultural areas, unused to touring theatrical companies, the Players' were not prejudged. Or at least, Wilson declared, if they were then the judgement was that if the SNP were good enough to play at Balmoral then they were good enough to go and see in the local village hall. It is also true that in the smaller towns and villages the SNP visit would be quite an occasion, perhaps the only entertainment to be offered in months. The audience would go along out of curiosity, or because there was not much else to do. In larger towns there would be competition from other entertainments. Wilson declared that if they had been supported to the same extent in the larger towns as they had been in the smaller ones, then the venture would have been a "financial triumph". However it was stated that by "mixing the fat with the lean" solvency was just secured".

Two weeks after the tour, the SNP appeared at the Athenaeum with a bill of four one-act plays, beginning on 13 November. Two of the plays, The Mother and The Scarecrow had been previously produced by the Players and the other two were being performed for the first time on any stage. These were The Dawn by Naomi Jacob, and Reverie by A Campbell Watson. The Dawn was listed in the programme as "a fragment" and the Glasgow Herald called it a "sublimation of the national spirit evoked by the '45 rising".[70] The review describes the plot in which:

> Prince Charles returns to Scotland: and as a wayfarer finds hospitality with an elderly couple who have sacrificed everything for "the cause". The old lady gives expression to a wider national ideal than mere loyalty to the Stuarts, and the Prince is presented as realising his folly in marching into England.

The main fault was said to be "a suggestion of prolixity", but that apart it was commented that the theme was "carefully and reticently developed". In an article in The Scottish Player it was stated that The Dawn had been produced, as had Campbell of Kilmhor, in an attempt "to go far ben into the national soul ... not in order to propagate foolish dynastic politics but to give Scotsmen something to dream over".[71]

The other new play on the bill, Reverie, was a comedy which suffered, according to the Glasgow Herald review, from being "somewhat underacted". The play is not especially memorable. A portrait of a girl entrances Arthur Ogilvy KC, but on visiting the artists studio he finds that the model who sat for the portrait is in reality a very modern girl who smokes and whom Ogilvy finds "rather distasteful".

The second annual general meeting of the Scottish National Theatre Society took place on 29 January 1924, at the Christian Institute in Bothwell Street. As happened in the previous year, the Glasgow Herald carried a detailed report of the proceedings.[72] The main announcement was the resignation of A P Wilson, which was

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[70] 4 November 1923, p. 6, col. f.

[71] "The Scottish Play We Hope For" by Alexander MacGill, The Scottish Player Vol. 2, No. 10, March 1924.

[72] 30 January 1924, p. 10, col. f. All quotes from the 1924 AGM are from this source.

tendered that month "for health reasons". Wilson was suffering from severe laryngitis and was under doctor's orders to take a complete rest for a month. After this it was stated that it was Wilson's "expressed intention to go into variety with a sketch of his own". MacKemmie, who presided over the meeting, proposed a vote of thanks to Wilson "for his great services to the Society as a producer", and the best wishes of the SNTS were offered to him for his new venture.

The other main points of discussion at the meeting were plays, society membership and finances. For the latter, it was announced that the accounts for the year ending June 1923, donations to the productions fund had totalled £161. After paying an unspecified loss on the "working account", the Production Fund stood at £437. Donations to the building fund amounted to £39, giving a total of £61. This is a very low figure for a Society with the stated aim of building their own theatre but reflects the fact that there was never enough money to produce plays and set aside money for the building fund. Membership of the society had substantially increased during the year by 435, giving a total of 646 members of the SNTS. This showed that the placing of adverts in the newspapers, and the appeal for new members which was printed in each issue of the Scottish Players were successful to some degree.

MacKemmie declared that although a large number of plays were being received by the Society, "there was a dearth of really good plays suitable for a body with the aims and objects of the Scottish National Players". He hoped that their performances in "the commercial theatre", referring mainly to the London Coliseum, "might prove an inducement to experienced playwrights to submit the kind of material" which the SNP wanted to produce. This is in contrast, but not necessarily in opposition, to one of their stated aims in undertaking the country tour in 1923. They then said that their programme had been "designed ... in the hope that it will arouse the interest of the 'mute, inglorious Miltons', who, finding speech", may turn successfully to playwrighting.[73] It is true, of course, that they never discovered any such genius.

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[73]The Scottish Player Vol. 1, no. 1, 1923.

The office-bearers were elected for the coming year, with MacKemmie retaining the Chairman's position, and W R Purnell and Colonel Ralph R Stewart being elected vice-chairmen. Thomas Martin CA continued in the roles of Secretary and Treasurer, which he had undertaken during 1923.

The first production of the year in Glasgow, a visit having been made to Bridge of Allan on 17 February when A Valuable Rival and The Glen is Mine were produced, was John Brandane's four-act play, The Treasure Ship. The play was known at the time as Full Fathom Five, and was performed in the Athenaeum, beginning on 11 March. It was produced by W R Purnell. The plot of this comedy centres around the Moidores Syndicate, in which the local grocer and doctor are the main shareholders. They are trying to recover Spanish gold and treasure from the wreck of the San Felipe, a Spanish galleon that lies at the bottom of Torlaochan Bay. There are various connivings such as a bungled fake robbery, blackmail and the attempts to conceal the real treasure from the police. In the end it is suggested by the wife of the Head of the Syndicate that another burglary will need to be arranged to save the situation.

The Glasgow Herald review praised the diction of the actors, stating that both the Highland and Lowland dialects which form "the clever and delicately written comedy" were delivered with "purity".[74] Indeed the reviewer believed that the play fitted the talents of the Players "more happily than any of their previous ventures". An invitation was accepted from Messrs Howard and Wyndham to perform Full Fathom Five at the Theatre Royal for the week beginning 6 October. The play was also produced in Oban on 29 and 30 September, and in Dunoon on 24 October. It was performed a total of twenty-one times by the SNP.

The audience at the March production was described as "large", although it was stated that there were vacant seats in the auditorium. At the end of the final performance a speech was given by MacKemmie in which he mentioned the possibility of a permanent theatre being obtained for the SNP, as "plans were already under consideration which might lead to their securing a permanent home of their own". It

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[74] 12 March 1924, p. 10, col. f.

was hoped that the Players would open their next season in a theatre of their own, with a new professional producer. Such an occurrence would, MacKemmie recognised, "afford the public opportunity of associating itself more closely with the Players in their work for Scottish drama".[75] Unfortunately actual details of this plan were not revealed, and by 3 July it was reported that negotiations had "ultimately fallen through by no fault of the society".[76]

On 21 March the SNP made their first visit to Dunoon, where they performed A Valuable Rival and The Glen is Mine. The visit was under the auspices of the Dunoon Grammar School Former Pupils Club.

The Players had already made one radio broadcast on 8 April that year, when the BBC broadcast a patriotic Bannockburn Day programme on 24 June. This included a talk by Gordon Bottomley on "The Future of Verse Drama", and three one-act plays by the SNP. In his talk, Bottomley declared that he realised "how supremely well-equipped the verse-speaking section" of the Scottish National Players was. He stated that this was of great importance, as a national theatre had to give poetic drama "a substantial place in it co-equal with all other dramatic forms".[77] The one-act plays, produced by R B Wharrie, were Glenforsa, The Mother and the first performance of The Crystal Set by John H Bone . The SNP later performed Bone's play with the same cast at the Glasgow Pavilion on 7 July. It is a short, lightweight and rather stereotyped Scots comedy. Wullie is trying desperately to make his mother and his wife keep quiet so that he can listen to the news and then a concert on his new wireless. His mother can't understand the attraction of it, and his wife tries to defuse and control the situation. In the end Wullie himself knocks the set to the ground by accident, having already had several problems making it work properly. The fact that the play revolved around the idea of listening to the radio was undoubtedly one of the reasons why it was chosen for the broadcast. Within a week of the broadcast it was reported in the Glasgow Herald that "so cordial and encouraging" was the "appreciation of 'listeners-in' throughout the United Kingdom" that it was the hope of the SNTS to arrange "fairly

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[75]The Glasgow Herald, 17 March 1924, p. 7, col. e.
[76]The Glasgow Herald, 3 July 1924, p. 7, col. b.
[77]The Glasgow Herald, 25 June 1924, p. 9, col. f.

frequent" broadcasts for the future.[78] Although it is true, as will later be seen,[79] that the Scottish National Players were very influential in the beginnings of the BBC in Glasgow and many SNP members were heavily involved in radio drama, it is hard to see why the Players did not make more use of the medium at this time. Regular broadcasts could have interested more people in the movement, and possibly encouraged them to attend stage productions. The SNP were paid fees for each broadcast, and expenses were minimal so it could have provided some kind of regular income.

The Players had been without a professional producer since Wilson resigned in January. This is no doubt one of the reasons why there was only one main production during this period, that of Full Fathom Five. In issue number thirteen of the Scottish Player which was published in October, the Society announced that they had secured the services of Frank D Clewlow as Producer. They also stated why they were not content to continue using amateur producers, "drawn from among the ranks of the more experienced" of their players, having had the benefit of a professional producer with Wilson. This was that the:

> work of rehearsing and producing for a Company such as the Scottish National Players is so onerous and exacting, and demands such close and continuous attention, that it is too much to expect business men to undertake it except in a rare emergency.

Clewlow had worked at Miss Horniman's Manchester Gaiety for two years and was stage manager at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre for five years. During this time he acted, supervised the making of the scenery and produced "upwards of thirty of the plays". The Scottish Player states that he left Birmingham for health reasons and subsequently worked at the Nottingham Repertory Theatre, and that he was "the moving spirit" in the formation of the Leicester Drama Society.[80]

Clewlow's first production for the Scottish National Players took place on 2 December at the Athenaeum. This was also the first time that

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[78] 3 July 1924, p. 7, col. b.
[79] See chapter six.
[80] Vol. 2, no. 13, October 1924.

a non-Scottish play had been produced by the SNP. The Two Shepherds, a two-act piece, was a translation by Helen and Harley Granville Barker of G Martinez Sierra's Los Pastores. The plot centres on the village priest and doctor, both of whom are elderly and in the process of being replaced by young men who have had a more modern training. The Glasgow Herald described the theme as "calling for restraint, variety and flexibility" from the actors.[81] It was stated that the play showed the "technical limitations" of the Players in a way that their Scottish productions had not done, but also that it revealed "unsuspected merit and potential qualities" that the Players had not previously been called upon to use. The paper approved of the idea of producing foreign works as it would enable the Players to widen their technique, and give dramatists in Scotland a chance to see work from other countries "which is not often accessible here in the commercial theatre". The belief was that producing the best of foreign contemporary theatre with "what Scottish drama is available" would give the SNP actors "confidence, resource and fluency".[82]

The other new play on the bill was a one-act by George Reston Malloch entitled Thomas the Rhymer. This is set on the day Thomas is destined to return to Faery Land. He is now a prosperous and settled family man, having made his money from healing rather than harping, and is reluctant to return to that land where, although there is no sorrow, something essentially human was missing. Faery love was freely available but did not satisfy. However Thomas recognised three particular signs which have been sent, bids his son to take care of his pregnant wife, and departs. According to the Glasgow Herald the play was said to "strike a new line in native work" and after a somewhat "clumsy and verbose" opening, the later parts were "cleverly managed" and played well. The play is not written in Scots but in quite a formal and poetic, though not particularly successful, English. There is an attempt to convey a sense of the period with phrases such as "in sooth", and in the way the characters address each other as "husband", "Master Rhymer",

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[81] 3 December 1924, p. 5, col. a.

[82] This is similar to the idea behind the Experimental Theatre which MacKemmie was involved in together with R F Pollock and Norman Bruce.

"Knight", and "good neighbour".[83] The pain of Thomas, who wants to stay and continue his family and materially oriented life, but who increasingly realises that his return to Faery Land is inevitable, must be stressed to give the play a unifying idea. The part would need to be very well acted for the play to be a success, but the Glasgow Herald review reported that Wharrie "in the title role gave a good performance but just missed getting the imaginative quality" required. The evening concluded with The Crystal Set.

[83]There is a link here with the work of Alexander Reid, although Reid's plays use Scots much more effectively.

CHAPTER FOUR: 1925 - 1928

"The hope persisted, justifiably, for several years."[1]

The first production of 1925 took place from 3-9 February at the Athenaeum. The plays performed were The Guinea Stamp, a one-act "gentle satire on Glasgow Society"[2] by C Stewart Black, which was described by the Glasgow Herald[3] as being "broadly humorous" and The Lifting by John Brandane. This play was an expansion of an earlier one-act piece called The Change House which the Players had produced in November 1921. It was explained that the author:

> had felt for a long time that some further exploration of the characters and the theme set forth in the original play was desirable, if the material in his hands was to receive full artistic expression.[4]

However, the play is one of Brandane's poorest. The plot becomes quite melodramatic in the new acts, with Calum, the man who was sentenced to hang, managing to escape from Castle Duart and fall very quickly in love with Flora's cousin. Iain and Flora are themselves reconciled, in the first act they had said that they would be forced to separate for ever when it was discovered that it was Iain who had shot and killed Flora's brother who was serving in the British army, but their love overcomes their sense of duty and propriety. In the end Iain dies in Flora's arms after bravely acting as a decoy so that the injured Calum and his new love can escape to the waiting boat. There is too great a reliance on coincidence in the plot and the language of the play is stilted and unconvincing. It was given a total of nine performances by the SNP, including a visit to Bridge of Allan on 13 February and two performances at Tollcross Victoria U.F. Church Hall on 17 and 18 February. The Scottish Player issue number 19, published in March 1925, reported that at both Bridge of Allan and Tollcross the SNP "played to 'capacity' and tremendous enthusiasm", and it was noted that

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[1] Moultrie R Kelsall, The Scottish National Theatre Venture, p.35.

[2] The term used by the SNP to describe the play in adverts, as in The Scottish Player, Vol. 3 no. 17, January 1925.

[3] 4 February 1925, p. 12, col. f.

[4] The Scottish Player, Vol. 3, no. 17, January 1925.

The Lifting was "financially ... one of the most successful plays we have done". This endorses the speech made by MacKemmie at the close of the Athenaeum production, when he thanked the audience for their "splendid support" and claimed that this had been "one of the best attended productions which they had ever presented at the Athenaeum". This meant that a "substantial surplus" had been made, and would cancel out the loss incurred on the December production of The Two Shepherds and Thomas the Rhymer.

MacKemmie wanted to use the opportunity which this speech provided to clear up what he called a "rather too prevalent misapprehension regarding the aims of the Society". He quoted the Society's declared objects and emphasised that they had never intended to concentrate solely on Scottish work, it was also their aim to produce good drama of any nationality. The Two Shepherds had been produced in translation in December, and other foreign and English works would be produced in future bills "as opportunity offered".

The presentation of a non-Scottish play had aroused some criticism and questioning of their aims, and this was not so easily dispelled as MacKemmie wished. He again tackled the problem in his report to the annual general meeting, which took place on 16 February 1925. He then declared that their production of The Two Shepherds had been "the outstanding feature" of the previous year, and stressed that the Society had always planned to do non-Scottish plays in accordance with their stated aim to produce good drama of any type. MacKemmie reiterated the aims of the SNP in the hope of "correcting the impression that they were out only for Scottish plays."[5] MacKemmie stresses this fact at some length, which implies irritation at the continued criticism that the Society should only produce Scottish plays, and a desire to stop such feelings from spreading.

MacKemmie's report described the appointment of Clewlow as Producer as being "epoch-making", with Clewlow "adding triumph to triumph" for the Society. The Players broadcasts were discussed, with it being stated that they "had created something of a standard in the broadcasting of dramatic productions". It was also noted that if they had

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[5]The Glasgow Herald, 17 February 1925, p. 7, col. e. Quotes from the AGM are taken from this article.

accepted all their invitations they would have been at the broadcasting studios "every month".

The accounts up until the end of June 1924 were presented to the AGM, and showed that the building fund had increased by £33 to a total of £94, and that a working loss of £140 left the Production Fund at a balance of £310. It was also stated that a gift of £500 had been made by a "lady member" to the Building Fund, but that this would not appear until next year's balance sheets.

The tone of the meeting was, once more, quite self-congratulatory and praising. The question of a permanent home for the society was very much an important topic. Referring to the gift of £500, MacKemmie noted that they were now "ready for a big step forward". They had a new producer "with considerable repertory experience", and they themselves now had four years of experience of play production. There was a feeling that the Society as it currently operated had reached a certain limit. They had "come to a point at which, unless they could be provided with a permanent home, they could make no further progress", to which the audience replied "Hear, Hear".

On 24 March the Scottish National Players produced two plays at the Athenaeum which were described as being "the first important outcome" of their policy of producing good drama from non-Scottish playwrights. This is not entirely consistent with their earlier statements, unless The Two Shepherds was not deemed to be an "important" production. The plays were John Drinkwater's two-act piece, Mary Stuart, and the one-act play by George Bernard Shaw entitled The Dark Lady of the Sonnets. In an article headed Mary Stuart in the Scottish Player (number 19, March 1925), Clewlow anticipated that the production of Drinkwater's play would cause some controversy and "much argument". He points out, first of all, that "this is a play and not a textbook of history". The facts can be found in history books but Clewlow advocated that it is "the probing of the psychological causes and the showing of the re-action of the characters leading up to the known catastrophes" that turn history into drama. The plot deals with the deaths of Rizzio and Darnley, and Mary's marriage to Bothwell. The Glasgow Herald called the play a study of "Mary the great lover finding no-one worthy of her love".[6] The Dark Lady

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[6] 25 March 1924, p. 11, col. d.

of the Sonnets was called "Mr Shaw's Shakespearian impertinence" and the Glasgow Herald approved its production with the comment that it was "among the things that one has always wanted to see on the stage". The wisdom of putting on the shorter and wittier piece last was also noted, as the audience was then sent home laughing rather than feeling "overwhelmed by the grim power of Mr Drinkwater's work".

In May 1925 the Scottish National Players produced James the First of Scotland at the Theatre Royal. The play is a chronicle of the King's reign, beginning shortly after his accession to the throne and ending with his murder. The difficulties James has, trying to uphold law and order in a country full of unruly nobles, do come over and we see the increasing ruthlessness of James. Various levels of Scottish society are portrayed, from the fairground to the court, and this is often emphasised by the language, with blank verse being used by the King and nobles as opposed to the more earthy Scots prose of the commoners. For example in Act I the King declares that:

> Caution is cowardice. The law is King,
> Not I; and if one break the law, whether King
> Or Prince or lord or subject whatsoever,
> Then must he meet the doom the law accords.

This is in contrast to the speech of the citizens of Perth in the same act:

> *Ist Citizen* Ma certie, the new king's no feart. The biggest and the fiercest lords in a' the country cleared off at one blow.
>
> *2nd Citizen* Ay, and if he'd take my advice, he'd make siccar when he's at it. Strike hard or best no strike ava. But the times are gey kittle.

Much of the play is reminiscent of the ballads, in particular the tale of Kate Barlass and the King's murder, and the eclipse of the sun. The ballad tradition however is full of powerful dramatic scenes and well worth exploring. The play is fairly objective resisting the temptation to portray the King as an ideal romantic figure, but is somewhat marred by the attempt to include too much material and too many different scenes. This results in

some things not being fully developed, such as the conversion of Alexander, Lord of the Isles, which appears rather contrived.

The SNP production was its first performance on any stage, although it had actually been written in 1918, and published in 1921. In his preface to the published edition Bain states that when he wrote the play he "had a half hope that after the war it might have a chance of being staged by the Glasgow Repertory Company". However as that company had ceased production the play was now in the author's opinion "unlikely to be other than read". In a letter dated 21 February 1921, William Power advised Bain that his best chance of obtaining a stage presentation was to send a copy to MacKemmie as soon as possible, as "the S N P would be moderately certain to produce it, if the production is feasible and if funds hold out."

The finances required to produce such a play certainly posed a problem for the SNP. This was pointed out in the reviews which appeared when the play was published. The Evening News (12 May) hoped that the SNP committee had "had their attention drawn" to James the First of Scotland but noted that few companies "considering the matter in its simple economic aspect - can face the production of a play with twelve scenes" and a large cast.[7] The writer bluntly declared that "cash is going to stand between this fine play and the public which it can reach only across the footlights", and advises all aspiring playwrights that they "cannot afford to overlook the economics of the theatre". In an article on the Players' visit to Balmoral in October 1922, the Evening News expressed the hope that they might see Bain's play produced "this winter", although admitting that this was a "possibility that must in the meantime remain dependent on financial and stage considerations".[8]

The Players themselves were keen to produce the play, and declared so publicly. The Glasgow Herald published a letter on 3 September 1921, which was signed by MacKemmie and Wharrie, as Convener and Honorary Secretary respectively. In it, it was stated that the SNP's "greatest ambition" was to be able to produce James the First of Scotland and that this was now being "actively discussed". Bain had

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[7]When the SNP did produce the play in May 1925 their company consisted of fourteen females and thirty seven males.

[8]22 October 1922.

facing page 127

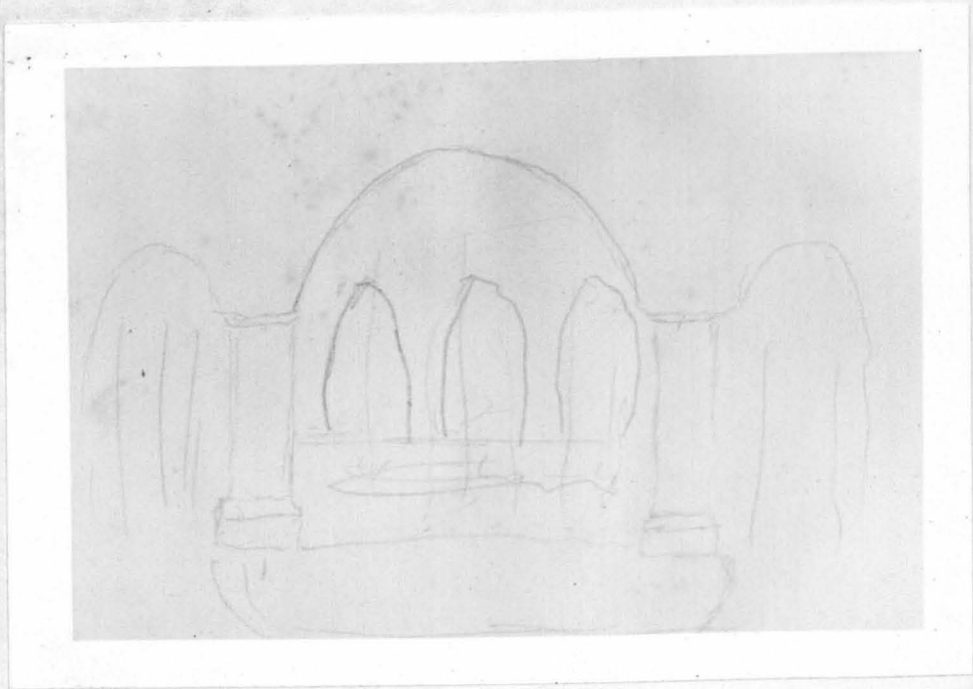

Figure seven:
Scene sketch in Andrew P Wilson's copy of James the First of Scotland, STA.

indeed followed Power's advice and sent an early copy of the play to the SNP. Wilson was quite enthusiastic about the play. He believed that the Society should present it, but that to rush into it when they were not able to give the work everything it would require would be very wrong. Wilson describes his feelings in a letter to MacKemmie:

> My whole inclination about "King James" is to say we must do this play at once. Indeed it is a play that demands the best attention of the movement, and must be done but not yet... I want to see the movement do this play, but I want it done so carefully.[9]

Wilson discusses the various problems in the play, the large cast, the need for ensemble work, and the fact that the play is just a bit too much of a chronicle of the King's life, making it more a "series of episodes rather than a play". He suggests that the play could be done in two parts, with one interval in between, that the scenes could be coped with by "judicious use of the curtains plus an apron stage", and that it is a wonderful chance for Hugh Roberton to write music specially for the play. These comments are very much akin to the way the play was eventually staged in 1925, showing that it was not a lack of ideas, or skill which prevented the Players from producing it in 1921.

However it was Clewlow and not Wilson who produced James the First of Scotland for the Scottish National Players. Clewlow suggested to Bain that he write some choruses to "knit up the play" and clear away any confusion an audience might have over the time intervals between various scenes. Bain did this and provided a prologue as well, all of which Clewlow felt were "excellent poetry" as well as ably fulfilling the purpose intended. He thanked Bain for this in a letter dated 15 January 1925, when he also expressed his feelings for the play itself:

> I get more and more excited about James the more I work on it, and I feel it a great honour and responsibility to have the handling of what is undoubtedly the finest play the Society has yet done or is likely to do for a long time.

Clewlow wrote to Bain again on 16 April with several queries and points which had arisen from the early rehearsals, which Clewlow "as a mere

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[9]Letter from Wilson to MacKemmie, dated 28 April 1921, STA.

Sassenach" did not "feel competent to judge" upon. He invited Bain to attend any of the rehearsals, which would take place every night for about the next three weeks. In the letter he also informs Bain that they "have been lucky enough" to engage William J Rea to play the title role. Rea was a professional actor who had worked at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre and was best known for the title role in Drinkwater's Abraham Lincoln. Rea gave some 870 performances in that role, and Clewlow told Bain that Rea would be great as James:

> All the poetry will have its full weight with him and with it he will be a king in every movement of body and mind. He is delighted with the part and is really putting his back into it with tremendous enthusiasm.

The Players announced the dates for the production of James the First of Scotland in the February issue, number 18, of the Scottish Player. In a front page article entitled "A Masterpiece" it is said that the announcement of the dates:

> heralded the advent of a star of the first magnitude in the firmament of Scottish drama, and so does the SNTS make its first move towards the payment of a debt which has been owing since the Society's inception.

This was referring to the fact that the play had been written in 1918, but, despite the "fine reception it had from the literary press", it had never been produced. The following month saw another article in the Scottish Player, issue number 20, which outlined the problems in producing such a play, and urged all Society members to publicise the forthcoming production and to "enlist the sympathy of everyone of their acquaintance for a work that will do great things for the good of Scotland and of Art". Another article listed the achievements of the historical King James I, along with his virtues and faults. The next issue of the Scottish Player carried a full front page advert for the production, noting that booking opens on 4 May. There were articles on Robert Bain and William J Rea, the work of the SNTS, quotes giving press opinions of the play, and a note on the music. There was also a description of the production methods which stated that the play would be presented in two parts, with an interval between acts two and

three only. The five scenes in acts one and two, and the seven scenes in acts three, four and five would be played continuously:

> To attain this a simplified form of setting is used, with curtains as the main background aided by various suggestive architectural details - a method made familiar to students of the theatre for the past twenty-five years by many designers at Birmingham and the "Old Vic" (London); and elsewhere in a more elaborate form by producers like Craig, Reinhardt, and others. Several of the scenes are played before the front curtains on what approximates to an apron-stage or fore-stage; and here also appears the Chronicler who speaks the Prologue and Chorus lines connecting up the various episodes of the drama.
>
> With careful attention to costume, lighting, and suitable suggestions in settings it is hoped to give a picture of the time of James the First of Scotland, which, if not always exact to the letter of history, will give the spirit of the period in all its intensity and colour.

This type of stage production with curtains and a few suggestive rather than defining pieces of scenery differed from the Players more usual methods which were rather more solid and naturalistic. There are however similarities with the production of Gruach in 1923. The method is described in advance to eliminate any surprise or confusion which the audience may otherwise have felt, and to generate interest in the production. The statement that it is their intention to evoke the spirit rather than the letter of the period is in agreement with Clewlow's ideas on historical drama, such as he outlined in the programme notes to Mary Stuart. Whenever the SNP produced a "historical" play, such as Chatelard ,there were comments and criticism made about the play's historical accuracy, or the 'too modern' speech and movement of the actors. Clewlow fairly successfully attempted to deflect such remarks by anticipating them in his programme notes in the Scottish Player.

The Glasgow Herald also outlined the staging methods, summarising the producer's style as aiming for "simplicity and suggestion rather than elaborateness in the stage pictures".[10] The "clever lighting effects" were remarked upon, as having been a valuable aid in achieving "the remarkable variety and colour" in the different scenes. The review was

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[10] 12 May 1925, p. 7, col. b.

favourable and very encouraging. The play was described as being both "the greatest test and the finest opportunity" that the Players had had, which they came out of with "credit and enhanced reputation". It was stated that the SNTS had done "a great service to the cause of the Scottish literary and dramatic revival" and the hope was expressed that the production might "mark a turning point" in that revival. William J Rea, described as a "distinguished actor", was praised for his portrayal of the King, and it was felt that the music "admirably reflects the atmosphere of the play". The audience was referred to as having been "large and enthusiastic", and at the end of the play calls were made for the author, who gave a "delightful little speech" of thanks from the stage.

Another play by John Brandane was performed, for the first time on any stage, on 13 October at the Athenaeum. This was a three-act piece called The Inn of Adventure. It is set in 1829, "in a Highland inn run by two sisters. Their sixteen year old niece Mairi is staying with them on her first visit to the Highlands, and is very much influenced by the works of Sir Walter Scott. The plot is melodramatic and relies on coincidence and an inordinate amount of comings and goings, even for an inn. Philip Linnell, a Naval Officer on Special Revenue duty, is trying to clear the name of his father who was branded as a cheat. There is gambling, roused tempers, love intrigue and the final revelation that it is one the young lairds, Ardow, who is using the loaded dice. It is therefore assumed that Ardow's father did the same, thus clearing the good name of Linnell's father. In 1925 the SNP production of The Inn of Adventure was only given five performances at the Athenaeum, one in Prestwick Town Hall on 23 October and one in the Pavilion in Dunoon on 20 November. It was not revived.

The Glasgow Herald review of the Athenaeum first-night described the play as being another example of Brandane's work which would be familiar to regular members of an SNP audience.[11] It had "the same admirable qualities and the same defects as its predecessors. Mr Brandane does not seem to be developing as a dramatist". However, as his best play, The Glen is Mine, had been first produced two years previously, it would have been more accurate to say that the standard of his work was falling rather than improving. The Glasgow Herald continued to give a call for more public support for the Players, although it stated that

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[11] 14 October 1925, p. 13, col. e.

the audience had been "by no means negligible". Indeed the play made a profit of £81 13s 1d at the Athenaeum and also proved popular in Prestwick where a profit of £10 9s 5 1/2d was made, and in Dunoon where the profit was £17 2s 6d.

The production for the Christmas/New Year period of 1925 was Punch Counts Ten, by Robert Bain, described as "consisting of ten scenes". It is set on Christmas Eve, when two children are in their nursery reading while a Punch and Judy show takes place outside. The children fall asleep and a fantastical dream journey occurs which takes them all to America, Bagdad and Holyrood Palace. There are songs and ballet sequences, and one character, Ginger, speaks in a broad Glasgow accent. Other characters include Sherlock Holmes; Sexton Blake; Uncas, "the Last of the Mohicans and scalper-in-chief"; the Caliph, and his "Man Friday" the Vizier; the Stewart Kings of Scotland and Mary Queen of Scots "shown as a vision"; a school teacher; a Glasgow Baillie; a policeman; Joey, described as "Punch's lieutenant"; and of course, Punch and Judy themselves. The play was advertised as being "for all children from nine to ninety", and all the performances were matinees. The music was by J Deauville Turner and the ballet and dance sequences had been arranged by Miss Constance M Herbert, eleven of whose pupils acted as Indians, eastern dancers and sprites. The play was produced at the Lyric Theatre from 22 December until 2 January, with quite a large cast of twenty-four players.

The Glasgow Herald[12] described the play as a "piece of delightful make-believe" which is most easily visualised as a play after the manner of Peter Pan". However it was also stated that Punch Counts Ten makes its appeal to the imagination of childhood by the tinsel of pantomime rather than by the flutter of gossamer wings of fancy", implying that Peter Pan makes its appeal with the latter. William Power also noted a similarity between Bain's play and the one by Barrie, beseeching Bain to "write us, oh! write us, a Scottish Peter Pan - 'Punch Counts Ten' comes near that, but I am sure you have another of the same somewhere in your head". Writing to Bain on 31 December 1925, after attending the SNP's performance Power told him that his play was greatly appreciated:

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[12] 23 December 1925 p11 col d.

> The kiddies in the house enjoyed it hugely, and I am sure I laughed louder than any of them. "Ginger" is an immortal creation - I was sorry to see the last of him - and Punch as a comic Prospero, with Judy as his Chief Assistant, was irresistible.

The main criticism of the play was that it was too long, taking over three hours to perform. The Glasgow Herald commented that "something over two hours if it could be managed" would be the ideal period.[13] As the play was intended as a children's production such comments would seem to be fair.

The first production of 1926 took place at the Athenaeum on 19 January, when two plays by George Reston Malloch were produced. These were The House of the Queen, a one-act play, and Soutarness Water, comprising of three acts. Both plays were being performed for the first time on any stage. The House of the Queen was described by the Glasgow Herald review as "an allegorical appeal to Scotsmen".[14] There are four characters, three of whom are labouring to build a house for the Queen, whom none of them have ever seen. As they are about to abandon their work, disbelieving in the Queen's existence, and go off to the fairer lands and easier life of the South, the Queen's messenger arrives. His heroic and patriotic speech about their land and its history stirs the hearts of the labourers and they return to their toil. In advertising the production in the Scottish Player (January 1926) the similarity between Malloch's play and Yeats's Cathleen ni Houlihan was stressed. It was noted however that Malloch was "no imitator", and that while Cathleen ni Houlihan demanded that the men of Ireland fight for her, Malloch's queen ordered her men to build, this being a much more hopeful and positive attitude. MacDiarmid also wrote that "*The House of the Queen* may yet be the *Kathleen ni Houlihan* of the Scottish movement".[15]

The main play on the bill was Soutarness Water. This is a grim and intense piece, questioning and probing the idea of predestination and the relationship between the Church of Scotland's version of Christianity and the more pagan beliefs and superstitions which still had a hold over the people. Although the play is not entirely consistent, and does falter in the

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[13] n.d. STA.
[14] 20 January 1925, p. 12, col. h.
[15] MacDiarmid, Contemporary Scottish Studies, p. 37.

last act, especially in the handling of the suicides, it also has its high points and was certainly one of the most powerful and effective plays that the SNP produced. The language itself is quite straightforward, although Malloch's Scots is much more flowing and less obtrusive than than of many of the SNP's plays.

The plot is rather stark. A widow, Mrs Munro, is for no apparent reason against her son Hugh courting Jean Dochart, so he leaves without her blessing. She tells the minister about her feelings for the girl and how the girl's mother had cursed her own husband, who had been Mrs Dochart's lover. The minister departs, somewhat surprised at the hold of a pagan curse over a Christian woman, and Daft Jock arrives reciting the words of the curse, words which seem like the voice of the river itself:

> Ill or well
> Trickle or spate
> Soutarness Water'll get ye yet.

Mrs Munro is greatly agitated by the rhyme, by the thought that Jean and Hugh may actually have the same father, and by the fact that she did not bless her son. With the river in spate and her own mounting anxiety that she may have set the curse in motion by not giving her son her blessing she goes out to warn Hugh to cross by the bridge. However she herself tries to use the stepping stones, and is drowned. At her funeral, Jean's father gets drunk and holds forth against the God he sees as tyrannical and malicious. His outburst is prompted by his indecision over whether to reveal that Jean is probably Hugh's half-sister, thereby ruining their chances of happiness. However Dochart suffers a stroke before he can tell anyone and the wedding proceeds, only to be interrupted by Daft Jock, who shouts out that they are half-brother and sister. The minister and the elders eventually try to force the couple to see the necessity of a complete separation. The lovers both commit suicide, Jean by throwing herself into the river, and Hugh by shooting himself. Daft Jock is left sitting in the kitchen, grinning.

The Glasgow Herald review of Soutarness Water described its subject as being "abnormal and repellent", and its treatment as "strong".[16] The review states that the Players were prepared for criticism and will no

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[16] 20 January 1926, p. 12, col. h.

doubt receive it, however as the performance progressed it began to be impressed upon the reviewer that:

> the decision to stage the work was not only justified but that the Society would have been failing in their primary duty had they not done so. It is a powerful and vital drama inspired by deep sincerity.

The sentiment that the play was one which the Players had an obligation to perform was also expressed by Gordon Bottomley in the Scottish Player, when he tells the reader that it is "one of the plays you have been waiting for", and declares that a Scottish National Theatre Society could not possibly "close their doors on it and yet hope to fulfil their aims".[17] William Power puts similar views across in the same issue. He writes that "the moral of the play is so obvious that it need scarcely be stated", and that while such an obvious moral in no way detracts from its dramatic worth or effect, no-one could see it "without having a deeper consciousness of the real nature of sin and the eternal significance of human conduct". Power sees the play as a lesson in the 'sins of the fathers', which in this case means that the sin of Mrs Dochart and Mr Munro has its "purgation" in the love and sacrifice of the young couple. Power declares that this is the type of play which the movement should be producing:

> If the Scottish National Players cannot present this play, it were better that they should disband forthwith; and a Society that can be kept together only by the support of the kind of people who object to this play is of no conceivable service to Scottish drama.

Such were the comments and views of members of the SNTS, printed in their own publication. However Soutarness Water was only given a total of six performances by the SNP, the five at the Athenaeum, and one at Tollcross on 10 March. Malloch's play could have been given more prominence by the Society, and would have been a better choice for a revival than some of the plays which they repeatedly produced. Perhaps they were frightened off by the audience's reaction to the scene where a whisky bottle is likened to the Holy Ghost. The Glasgow Herald stated that this:

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[17]Vol. 4, no. 17, January 1926.

> ... blasphemous apotheosis of the whisky bottle brought out the only expression of disapproval from the audience - a hiss which was doubtless a protest against the horrible expression...

This was however, the "only expression of disapproval", and the Players should have had the nerve to brave it out, as they were clearly expecting some criticism of the play and realised the implications of what they were doing.

Towards the end of January the Scottish National Players mounted their second country tour, covering the south west area. Although it had originally been hoped to tour for two weeks during November and December 1925, it did not actually take place until the last week of January and the first week of February 1926. The Players' first tour had taken place in October 1923, and it was declared in The Scottish Player that the venture would have been repeated before this had it not been "for the Society's heavy commitments in and near Glasgow".[18] However, "with increased public support and developing resources" the SNTS declared itself to be in a more able position to fulfill their statements that a National Theatre cannot only operate in one area or city: "it must carry its work to the small town and village as well, and this it should do consistently and thoroughly".[19]

It was in recognition of this fact and of the "educational and social value of good drama, worthily presented" that a guarantee against loss to the extent of £300 was given by the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust. The Players explained that this guarantee was given as part of a "considered scheme by the Trust for bringing good drama within the reach of small communities which cannot hope to support it on a purely communal basis" and that the Arts League of Service and the Village Concerts' Fund had already benefited from this scheme during their tours of rural areas. There is a similarity between the type of programme the Arts League of Service especially and the SNP presented during their tours.[20] The advantage of the guarantee to the SNTS was that it enabled them to "keep to the

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[18] Vol. 4, no. 17, January 1926.

[19] Vol. 4, no. 17, January 1926.

[20] This becomes even more apparent at the end of the twenties when, as will be seen later, the SNP performed song and mime items during the tours.

popular prices of admission". Indeed the ticket prices were 3s 6d for reserved seats, and either 2s 4d or 1s 2d for the unreserved seats. These ticket prices are very similar to the prices charged for productions at the Athenaeum. The booking for the reserved seats took place at a local stationers, with the exception of Thankerton where it was handled at the Post Office, and Newton Stewart where it took place at a local jeweller's shop.

During the tour the Players visited:

Thankerton on Monday 25 January;
Peebles on the 26th;
Annan on the 27th;
Sanquhar on the 28th;
Thornhill on the 29th;
Moniaive on the 30th;
Dalbeattie on 1 February;
Castle Douglas on the 2nd;
Kirkcudbright on the 3rd;
Gatehouse-of-Fleet on the 4th;
Newton Stewart on the 5th;
and Girvan on the 6th.

The venue was the local village or public hall, and there was no performance on a Sunday, the only rest day for the Players. The company consisted of six players: Meg Buchanan, Elliot Mason and John Rae, who were described as being members of the original company; Jeanne S Patullo, a graduate of the Guildhall School of Music; R Seath Innes, described in the programme as being "a well-known actor South of the Tweed for many years", whose work is also "known in the land of his birth"; and Frank Clewlow. Clewlow produced the plays and Mason acted as stage manager. Four one-act plays were presented at each venue. These were The Dawn by Naomi Jacob; The Scarecrow by J A Ferguson; The Change House by John Brandane; and The Last Move by Cormac Simpson. The last play was the only new one in the bill, being played at Thankerton for the first time on any stage. The other three plays had all been previously produced by the SNP. Income from the tour amounted to £287 7s 6d, expenditure was £386 9s 3 1/2d leaving a deficit of £99 1s 91/2d which was covered by a Carnegie grant of £100.

The Player's February production took place at the King's Theatre from 22-27. The Glasgow Herald commented that it was good that the

Players would have the opportunity of "playing in a modern theatre with a well-equipped stage" and that the work of the Society would be brought to the attention of many who "would probably be less likely to find their way to some of the Society's other productions".[21] It was stated that the "large audience consisted of both the "growing band of the faithful who no longer need the stimulus of propaganda" and those who were "still ignorant of the Society's aims and achievements". The plays presented were The Sin-Eater, a one-act play adapted by Eric Lyall and John MacKenzie from the story by Fiona MacLeod, and Brandane's The Glen is Mine. The Glasgow Herald approved of the choice of "two strongly-contrasted pieces" which would "display their versatility and accomplishment". The Scottish Player noted that The Sin-Eater was "in striking contrast to the comedy it precedes". The Sin-Eater was being performed for the first time on any stage, although the Scottish Player stated that the Grand Guignol Theatre in London had "intended staging the play". The Glasgow Herald commented that the play was indeed presented with "something of Grand Guignol realism". This is not the first time that such comments were made about SNP productions, The Mother especially was described by the press as being in the manner of Grand Guignol.

The Sin-Eater is based upon the belief that a person who consumes bread and water from the naked chest of a body due to be buried also takes on the sins of the dead person and releases their spirit. The question of whether or not this was a "fit subject" for drama was raised in the Glasgow Herald review. As with Soutarness Water, the Scottish Player had expected such questions and "considerable differences of opinion about the play", but upheld their production with the statement that such "eerie" ideas and "beliefs as rank" can be found in some parts of the country, citing Frazer's The Golden Bough for corroboration. Whatever the Glasgow Herald thought about the play's subject, the reviewer declared that the "power and effectiveness of the play are undeniable", and the lines have a "fine suggestive poetic quality". Although the play was said to have been "cordially received", the audience turned its attention to The Glen is Mine with "obvious relief", according to the Glasgow Herald. Brandane's play was the main item on the bill, and was the piece which was given more prominence in advertising and in the Scottish Player, where press

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[21] 23 February 1926, p. 5, col. f.

opinions of previous performances of it by the SNP, and extracts from reviews of the published work were quoted. The production resulted in a profit of £47 3s 8d, the income being £254 5s 2d, and the expenditure £207 1s 4d.

The people who saw the SNP for the first time at the Kings' in February however, do not appear to have been sufficiently impressed to attend further performances of the Players in any great number. The Glasgow Herald noted that the audience at the March production in the Athenaeum was made up of "their faithful admirers" and a loss of £90 15s 2d was incurred.[22] The receipts only amounted to £123 6s while expenditure ran to £214 1s 2d. The plays presented were Gregarach, a one-act "Historical Fantasy" by James W Barke, and The Fantasticks, a verse translation by George Fleming of Edmond Rostand's Les Romantiques, a three act "Romantic Comedy", the musical version of which was the longest running show on Broadway. Gregarach was the first play on the bill and was being performed for the first time on any stage. The play depicts the last hours of Rob Roy MacGregor, an old man, lying in his bed in a kitchen which, according to the stage directions, is "poverty stricken" but has an "atmosphere of warmth and homeliness". MacGregor keeps asking for the priest as his sins are weighing heavily upon him. His wife has no time for this attitude, she is still an embittered and vengeful woman, recalling how Graeme of Killearn put her and her children out of their house and then burnt it down. MacGregor's son, a piper, holds a similar attitude to his mother. MacGregor rises and dresses when a visitor, MacLaurin, calls. The two men do not get on and goad each other to fight. Although MacGregor had the advantage he does not kill the other man, much to the disappointment of his wife and son, as he has decided to use the "old ploys" no longer. MacGregor asks his son to play a pibroch, kisses his dirk muttering " 'S Rioghal mo Ghream" (Royal is my kin)[23] and dies. The play ends with his wife's melodramatic statement of her husband's death:

> He's gone, Seumas, gone! The Children of the Mist are without their Chief; but he has died with the dirk in his hand; and with the tartan on his shoulder.

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[22]24 March 1926, p. 11, col. c.

[23]The motto of the MacGregor clan. The last word should actually be *Dhream.*

The language appears contrived and not very fluid, unsuccessfully attempting to use Gaelic idiom with English words, for example: "And is it the reel you would be playing to your dying father?" The play is rather unadventurous and not particularly good, but the idea of the old MacGregor repenting his past ways, in contrast to his wife and son, is quite interesting and could have been developed further.

John Brandane wrote a short article about the play which appeared in the Scottish Player, numbers 31 and 32, which was also the programme for the production at the Athenaeum. Brandane declared that the play was "true to Scottish history, and to the psychology of the wild race it depicts". He also stated that Gregarach was "the first clear evidence of a new harvest in the field of Scottish drama". Earlier SNP plays such as The Mother and The Change House, although claimed as essentially Scottish, "bear the marks of their parentage quite clearly". Brandane defined this parentage as being the Irish dramatic movement, and although Gregarach also owed something to Irish inspiration it does so "at one remove" since its "immediate forbears" are the works of native Scottish writers which have been produced by the Scottish National Players. Brandane is adamant that the "seed of Scottish Drama has been truly sown".

The other play on the bill, The Fantasticks, was produced as part of the Society's obligation to stage good drama of any nationality. The Glasgow Herald commented that with it the Players were "forsaking for the time being the deeps of Celtic gloom",[24] and the Scottish Player quoted a line from the play, "Release from many a dreary Northern rune", that would please all those who complained about "the so-called gloom" of Soutarness Water and The Sin-Eater.[25] The plot of The Fantasticks concerns two fathers who would like their offspring to marry each other, for the practical advantage of joining their properties. Realising that the youngsters are romantic, the fathers feign hatred and let their children play at Romeo and Juliet, to the desired ending in matrimony. It is stressed in the Scottish Player that this play is not "a slice of life" with the audience "peeping through a gap in the 'fourth wall' ", but that the "age-old plot" is treated as "pure theatre". The Glasgow Herald described the production as

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[24]24 March 1926, p. 11, col. c.
[25]Vol. 4, no. 31, March 1926.

a "delightful example of delicate burlesque and exquisite fooling" to which the eighteenth century setting gave "great daintiness and charm". Although the actors did not quite achieve "the real French lightness of touch and grace", the acting is described as being "fine", the presentation as "satisfying", and the production as a whole one which did them "every credit".

The annual general meeting of the Society was held on 9 April 1926, with MacKemmie as Chairman. In his speech he emphasised that the SNP would continue to produce non-Scottish plays as well as Scottish ones. There was still, MacKemmie stated, "a certain amount of misapprehension about their aims",[26] although they could not see why this should be so, and once more a statement of their aims was given. Membership of the Society had not suffered over much from the controversy over the production of non-Scottish plays, and had increased to 1 026, an increase of 380 members since the AGM in 1924, before the first non-Scottish play had been produced.

It was announced at the AGM that a committee was currently working "with a view to reorganising the inner working of the society". The proposals included a draft scheme of productions at regular intervals. It was suggested that a production could be mounted for the first week of each month between September and April. The next production would have been decided upon and then announced during the previous one. This "scheme of reorganisation" was also to include a financial appeal to Society members, not for donations, but for guarantees to be made. It was pointed out that the Society had done this before, and that the best surety for the appeal was that "they had not found it necessary to ask for any payments under those previous guarantees". The accounts for the year ended 30 June 1925 revealed a working loss of £138. This left the production fund at £212, with the Building Fund at £626.

To conclude the meeting, MacKemmie commented that although they had not yet succeeded in procuring an actual theatre building, they did have the definite beginnings of "a worthy Scottish drama" to put into the building once it was realised. In this way, they were doing good work, and "no historian of the drama of the future ... would be able to ignore the

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[26]The Glasgow Herald ,10 April 1926, p. 11, col. e. All quotes from the AGM are from this article.

Scottish end as he might have done five or ten years ago". Such a comment was met with applause and provided a heartening end to a meeting which was not particularly different to the annual general meetings of previous years.

On 26 April 1926 the Scottish National Players began a six-night revival of James the First of Scotland, at the Theatre Royal. William J Rea returned to play the title role, and the Glasgow Herald noted that "to all intents and purposes the production is a repetition of that of last year", with "hardly any changes in the casting".[27] The review recalled that their first production of the play had been the "high-water mark of their achievement", and nothing they had since done altered that. James the First of Scotland was "still the most significant piece of native dramatic writing" which the SNP had produced and its revival, argued the Glasgow Herald was "therefore more than justified", and should also serve as a means of "increasing public interest in the Society's important self-sacrificing work for the Scottish theatre". The same settings were used for both the 1925 and the 1926 productions, and the only criticism which the Glasgow Herald made was that "a little more stage movement" would have improved "some of the more dramatic scenes". This production saw the last issue, number thirty-three, of the Scottish Player for some years. The magazine-type programme was not issued again by the SNP until December 1930.

A deficit of £106 11s was incurred on the production, which was covered by a guarantee fund specifically raised to enable the SNP to revive the play. In a guarantee fund people signed a document, which was kept by the Society, stating that they would, if necessary, pay a specified amount of money to cover losses incurred by a production. The stated amount was often £1. If a loss did occur the Society decided what proportion of the guarantees would be required to cover it. Thus, although £1 was pledged, it may only have been five shillings that was actually paid. At the AGM in March 1927 it was stated that the guarantee fund totalled £112, and that a call of 18s 11 1/2d in the pound had been made, stressing that this was the "first time in the history of the Society" that a call had had to be made on a guarantee fund raised by members. The Society used guarantee funds several times during their career. In a non-subsidised

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[27] 27 April 1926, p. 14, col. e.

theatre it provided a safety net for them to fall back on if necessary. It was announced at a special general meeting of the Society in June, that the guarantee fund which had been started at the AGM in April, had now reached £432. As this had been raised from only sixty-seven people, it was anticipated that, with over 1,000 members in the Society the fund should eventually exceed £1,000. The Glasgow Herald reported that arrangements had been made with the owners of the Lyric Theatre "for the improvement of the stage facilities there", and that the SNTS would "bear a share of the costs".[28]

The resignation of Frank Clewlow was also announced at this June meeting, when it was stated that he had "left the service of the Society to take up another appointment".[29] In The Scottish National Theatre Venture it is stated that Clewlow "left us to go to Australia where he became principal drama producer for Australian broadcasting".[30] The Society planned to engage another professional producer, and a committee had been appointed "to secure a new producer at the earliest possible date".[31] It was almost two months later that it was announced that Tyrone Guthrie had been appointed to the position. In A Life in the Theatre, Guthrie recalls that a "senior officer" from the BBC in Scotland, which officially supervised the Northern Ireland BBC where Guthrie worked at that time, recommended him to the SNP as a "promising producer".[32] He was invited to Glasgow for an interview, during which the SNP "made no attempt to conceal the fact that they were having difficulty in finding a director".[33] Guthrie states that his own qualifications were "meagre enough", adding that the SNP was "exactly the sort of wheel to which I wanted to put my shoulder".[34] The Glasgow Herald article which announced his appointment stressed that he had been "specialising in the production of radio drama", and that he had produced some plays for the

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[28]23 June 1926, p. 8, col. d.
[29]The Glasgow Herald, 23 June 1926, p. 8, col .d.
[30]SNTV, p31.
[31]The Glasgow Herald 23 June 1926, p. 8, col. d.
[32]Tyrone Guthrie, A Life in the Theatre, (London: Hamilton, 1960), p. 41.
[33]Guthrie, p. 43.
[34]Guthrie, p. 43.

Ulster Players, "whose work is in many ways very similar to that of the Scottish National Players".[35]

Guthrie brought new life to the SNP at a time when it was very much needed. He had ideas and fire and enthusiasm, and communicated them to the Players. In The Scottish National Theatre Venture, Jean Taylor Smith recounts his arrival:

> Then, suddenly, a meteor flashed across our sky - a long, thin, shining body trailing with it a cloud of fiery particles that lit up the corners and burned with an intense fury. Tyrone Guthrie. For two hectic, but most rewarding years, we hope for himself as well as for us, we burned with energy struggling along in the wake of this bright star.[36]

The two years were indeed rewarding for Guthrie. He described the Players as a "sterling group" who "knew a great deal more about acting and production" than he himself did. "For two years the Players taught me my job", he declared.[37]

The Players first production under Tyrone Guthrie was a programme of four one-act plays at the Lyric Theatre, beginning on 21 October, which resulted in a profit of £95 1s 1d. Three of the plays, C'est La Guerre by Morland Graham, The King of Morven by J A Ferguson, and The Poacher by Joe Corrie, were being performed for the first time on any stage. The fourth play was Rory Aforesaid by John Brandane. The SNP had broadcast it on 15 January 1926, but this was the first time they had performed it on stage. The Glasgow Herald review stated that Rory Aforesaid was "not so pretentious as the others but as a character study it is very enjoyable".[38] The play is set in a court room in Torlochan, a "little town" in the West Highlands. Duncan MacCallum has accused Rory MacColl of killing one of his sheep, but he has to present his own case because his lawyer never arrived. The boat that the lawyer was on "could not take the pier this morning because of the high wind; and the poor man will have been carried on to Mallaig most likely", explains MacCallum. The word "aforesaid" is continually used by MacCallum in his evidence and

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[35] 18 September 1926, p. 6, col. b.
[36] SNTV, p. 31.
[37] Guthrie, p. 43.
[38] 22 October 1926, p. 7, col. d.

questioning of witnesses, because he has been told that lawyers use such terms a lot. This causes Rory's lawyer, McIntosh, great amusement. MacCallum accuses McIntosh of not having paid for some Harris tweed which he got from his shop at Ardnish "a year ago last August". This is denied by McIntosh, and completely confuses the Sheriff, who thinks that it is somehow connected with the sheep killing. On the advice of his lawyer Rory MacColl answers "Meh", like a sheep whenever he is spoken to, as he refuses to take the oath on account of his religion. The case plus costs is awarded in Rory's favour, because of lack of evidence and incoherent and unintelligible witnesses. MacColl's lawyer approaches him with the bill, but Rory outwits him by continuing to simply answer "Meh" to this as well. The play has no great depth, with Rory being the stereotyped image of the wily and cunning Highlander. In a note to the published edition, Brandane declares that the play is "founded on" Maistre Pierre Pathelin, "an old French play - 15th Century - of unknown authorship".[39]

C'est La Guerre was described by the Glasgow Herald as being the most successful play of the evening, indeed the review claimed "that it must rank among the finest achievements of the National Players"[40]. This is a rather over-enthusiastic statement, but it was a very popular SNP play, given eighty performances in total. The play is set in a cellar, "somewhere in France", during the First World War. A Scottish regiment is pulling out of town, but one soldier is still asleep in the cellar. He is woken by Monsieur Dubois and his daughter Marie. She is "young and beautiful" and turns out to have been an actress who played Juliet in Paris. The soldier, known as Jock, is a thirty-year old miner from Shotts who was called up as a reservist. He tends Marie's shrapnel wound and makes tea for her and her father, tucking his greatcoat around the now sleeping Marie before he leaves. Communication between the three characters is difficult, and the language is a rather excruciating mix of French, English and Scots:

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[39] Rory Aforesaid and The Happy War Two Plays by John Brandane . (London: Constable,1930).

[40] 22 October 1926, p. 7, col. d.

Jock Whit are ye doon here for? Feart for Jerry?
M Dubois Je ne comprends pas, Monsieur.
Jock Compree Allymand? *(Mimicking sound of shell)* You ally toot sweet doon here?
M Dubois Oui, monsieur, ma fille est blessee.
Jock Ach ye're a' richt noo. Allymand boom-boom no' touch ye doon here.

The phrase "C'est la guerre" is also used frequently. The opening of the play attempts to use off-stage noises, such as piping and the shouts and cries of a regiment leaving town, but any dramatic interest which this arouses is not sustained. The rest of the play is sentimental and rather over-done, for example when Marie gives the soldier her brooch "pour souvenir", she declares that the brooch is sacred to her, as "the divine Bernhardt give me pour excellence dramatique".

The King of Morven was described by the Glasgow Herald article publicising the production as "the strongest piece on the bill", but its review labelled it as being "distinctly depressing".[41] However, the reviewer noted that it was "cleverly thought out" and "expressive of a mood that is to be met with to this day in the West Highlands".[42] It is written by the author of Campbell of Kilmhor, and there are some similarities between the two plays. It is set in Argyll in 1838, on the day when the native people of the area, who have been cleared from the land, are to be transported. The action takes place in the kitchen of McCaskill, the local factor who has been involved in the Clearance, against the wishes of his wife: "If you had refused, it's the proud woman I'd be this night!". she declares. A Tinker calls, hoping to sell his wares, and with his poetic speech he brings the news that the lands are being emptied all over the Highlands. Where he had previously been assured of a "kindly welcome" there was now no one to hear his tales, and he:

> slept in a burn-out place with the four winds of heaven whistling down on me through the blackened rafters - the quietness of death on the place and no sound but the falling rain - or a sheep coughing in the dark.

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[41] 16 October 1926, p. 7, col. d.
[42] 22 October 1926, p. 7, col. d.

There follows a heated exchange between the two men, and in the end McCaskill's wife sides with the tinker against her husband. To rid himself of them, McCaskill tells the two sailors from the ship that the tinker is the man they are looking for, and that he has never seen the woman before. They are taken off to the ship and McCaskill, the King of Morven of the title, is left to uneasily bolt the door of his empty house. In a note to the published edition, Ferguson states that:

> All the tinker says in this play is true. There were many McCaskills. It is the McCaskills alone who make oppression possible: they are the weak who side with the strong against the weak.[43]

The play is romantic, especially in the character of the tinker, and uses the stereotyped image of the factor. The ending is not exactly unexpected or surprising, nor is it very realistic. However the piece does have some appeal and success in creating atmosphere, and is reminiscent of Synge's work. The SNP only performed The King of Morven eight times, and it did not have anything close to the impact of Campbell of Kilmhor.

The last play on the bill, Corrie's The Poacher, was reviewed by the Glasgow Herald as being "worthy of inclusion again" in the Players repertoire, and indeed it was, being given a total of forty known performances, and forming part of the bill of the three-week tour undertaken in August 1927. The play concerns a miner who thinks that poaching is "only gettin' a bit o' your ain back", as well as being great sport. His daughter however, has brought home her "bloke", who is the new gamekeeper. He turns out to be ill-mannered and oafish, and the family try to get rid of him without letting him find out that their father is away poaching. The play is comic and uses Scots easily. It was the first play by Corrie which the Scottish National Players had produced.

The article in the Glasgow Herald which publicised the production of these four plays, also reported that it would not be possible to undertake "the proposed country tour under the auspices of the Carnegie Trust".[44] This was because of "difficulties in securing the services of suitable

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[43] J A Ferguson, The King of Morven, (Glasgow: Gowans and Gray, Repertory Plays no 22, 1922).

[44] 16 October 1926, p.7, col. d.

players". It was stated that a number of one-night visits "to places within easy access of Glasgow" had been arranged instead. The Players took these four plays to: Bridge of Allan on 5 November; Kilmacolm on 12 November; Kilmarnock on 15 November; and Dunoon on 19 November, making a profit each time. The Players also made three broadcasts in November: Rory Aforesaid and A Valuable Rival on 16 November; The Guinea Stamp on 23 November; and The Philosopher of Butterbiggins on 30 November.

The production over the Christmas and New Year period took place at the Lyric from 25 December until 8 January. There were two matinee performances, on Saturday 1 January, and Monday 3 January. The Glasgow Herald stated that they had been arranged "in response to numerous requests from country supporters and others who find it difficult to attend the city theatre in the evening".[45] There were two alternate bills, comprising C'est La Guerre and The Glen is Mine or two new plays, which were performed for the first time on any stage on 27 December. These were The Sergeant Major, a three-act comedy by William Chapman which the Glasgow Herald described as "drawing its humour from portrayal of Scottish village life", and relying "mainly on characterisation without much story",[46] and Donald Carswell's one-act play Count Albany. This is set in Rome in 1766, where the Old Pretender is dying and his elder son appears drunken and dissolute, a shameful figure bearing little resemblance to the romantic hero of the '45 so often portrayed. Charles reveals himself as a schemer with no scruples against playing up to people's fantasy for his own benefit, little grip on reality and none of the responsibility which his brother, the Cardinal of York, feels over so many deaths which occurred for their family. The play is an interesting attempt to cut through the myths associated with the Stuarts and show them as more objective historical figures. The ending, when a stranger wearing the Thistle insignia interrupts the drunken scuffle which occurs as Charles attempts to assault Clementina Walkinshaw, and announces the death of James, is effective. It is a culmination of the irony which Carswell uses throughout the piece. Charles breaks down in a fit of weeping and asks his brother to help him as he's "forgotten how to be a king", ironic of course, as he doesn't have a

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[45] 27 December 1926, p. 3, col. b.
[46] 28 December 1926, p. 3, col. b.

kingdom. The Glasgow Herald felt that the subject was "interesting" but that the play lacked dramatic action and that the "audience yawned a little as the play got beyond a reasonable length".[47] It was also commented on that neither Count Albany nor The Sergeant Major reached "the standard demanded of representative national art". This was not the only occasion when it was pointed out that the SNP chose to call themselves national and therefore had to be judged by higher standards. This use of national in their title did prove to be an encumbrance at times, although it also had its merits, as it provided them with a large part of their identity and the belief that they were a movement rather than just another dramatic society. Both plays were only given a total of eight performances each by the SNP. An income of £1001 1s 4d and an expenditure of £759 13s 7d left a profit of £241 7s 9d.

The first production of 1927 opened at the Lyric on 8 February, and was received as being a "fulfilment of what may be termed the secondary purpose of the Scottish National Players' existence".[48] This was always stressed whenever the Players performed a non-Scottish play. The main item on the bill was Mirandolina, Lady Gregory's translation of Goldoni's three-act play in which an inn is left to a young girl by her father, and she proceeds to enchant all the local men including a Marquis and a Count.[49] The Glasgow Herald, although admitting that the production "had many good points", noted "the general criticism that it was too heavy and stiff".[50] The review felt that a lighter style, such as the Players used in The Fantasticks, would have been more in keeping with the tone of the play.[51] The SNP lost £71 9s 7d on this production.

When Mirandolina was produced by the Abbey Theatre they gave it an Irish setting, and in the SNP performance it was placed in Scotland. The Glasgow Herald reported that the "homelier" characters spoke in Scots while the more aristocratic or "quality" characters spoke English, deciding that "where it was appropriate the experiment was artistically justified in the effect, but should have been confined to the parts to which it

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[47] 28 December 1926, p. 3, col. b.

[48] The Glasgow Herald, 4 February 1927, p. 9, col. g.

[49] The Lover, a one-act play by G Martinez-Sierra was played as a curtain-raiser.

[50] 9 February 1926, p. 9, col. c.

[51] The SNP produced this play, by Edmond Rostand, during 23-27 March 1926 at the Athenaeum.

was suited".[52] This was a technique which the Players later used in such plays as The Late Christopher Bean, which they toured in 1935.[53]

The Society's annual general meeting took place on 14 March 1927, at the Engineers Institute. MacKemmie's report stated that membership now totalled 820. This was in fact a drop of 206 members since the last AGM. No explanations were offered for this by the Society, nor was it commented on in the Glasgow Herald's usually detailed reports of Society AGMs. However it may be taken as evidence of a growing discontent with the SNP. Some radio broadcasts were also given, usually of a one-act play which had either been previously given a stage performance by the SNP, or which would shortly receive one. A profit of £5 or £6 was generally made on these broadcasts.

The main item of interest in MacKemmie's report was that arrangements were being made to form a professional company, which would "undertake a Scottish theatre tour", with The Glen is Mine[54]. It was suggested that the Society should invite "the leading repertory companies" to each play one week in exchange with professional SNP company's production of The Glen is Mine. The Glasgow Herald reported that several repertory companies had been approached and:

> although there were practical difficulties in the way of one or two which might prevent their acceptance, in the other cases no such difficulty existed and sufficient encouragement had been received to warrant the Council examining further the practical, and particularly the financial, aspect of the situation.[55]

Things did not work out quite as envisaged. A professional company did tour The Glen is Mine late in 1927, but the exchanges with other repertory companies did not materialise. MacKemmie did not state exactly which

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[52]The Glasgow Herald, 9 February 1927, p. 9, col. c.

[53]This is interesting in relation to Robert Kemp's later translations of Molière's plays, the most notable being Let Wives Tak Tent. This was actually advocated by Yeats in 1921 when in a talk in Glasgow he stated that the SNP were producing too much tragedy, and said that they "might do worse than translate Molière into local dialect". Glasgow Herald, 8 November 1921.

[54]Reported in the Glasgow Herald, 15 March 1927, p. 10, col. f.

[55]Reported in the Glasgow Herald, 15 March 1927, p. 10, col. f.

companies he was meaning, but they would have had to be English ones as there were no reps in Scotland at that time.

On 22 March the SNP premiered a three-act play by Cormac Simpson, called Ayont the Hill. This was performed at the Lyric Theatre for five nights, resulting in a profit of £23 11s 7 1/2d. The play is set in a Perthshire farmhouse of the twenties. The farmer, realising that he is getting old, makes a desperate attempt to see the world while he still can. However, after two weeks in London the appeal of such a lifestyle wears off and he is brought back by his daughter's fiancé. It is to this young couple that the farm passes, his son having gone to Canada, and everything ends happily. Indeed it was the ending of the play which was criticised by the Glasgow Herald, stating that it "shattered completely" the feeling, which had been prevalent throughout the first half of the play, that this "was real good Scots drama - the kind of work which the optimists feel sure is coming".[56] The disappointment felt by the reviewer was made greater by the fact that the play had "inspired such high hopes" in its early parts. However the paper did acknowledge that Ayont the Hill "merits beyond the average", and that its best parts were a "worthy peer" of The Glen is Mine. In The Scottish National Theatre Venture, Moultrie Kelsall described Ayont the Hill as being "not as good as The Glen is Mine but a promising second to it".[57]

Ayont the Hill was given a total of sixty-three known performances by the SNP, making it one of their most popular pieces. It was the main item on the bill of the 1929 tour. The play was published in 1934,[58] with an extra act which depicted the events in London at the house of another son. As was often the case, a one-act play was performed as a curtain raiser before the main piece. On this occasion it was a new play by Joe Corrie entitled The Shillin' - A - Week Man. It is described as a "domestic comedy" and set in a miner's kitchen in 1926. The women in the play, all miner's wives, have got into debt with the "shillin'-a-week man", and go to great lengths to avoid meeting him, as they cannot pay their instalments. They also strive to keep up appearances, and not to let their neighbours know that they are in debt. All of their lies and manoeuvres are found out

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[56] 23 March 1927, p. 11, col. a.
[57] SNTV, p. 35.
[58] By George Allen and Unwin.

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Figure eight:
The Scottish National Players on tour, c1927-28, Tyrone Guthrie first left.
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however, often through the apparently innocent although usually impertinent answers of twelve-year old Lizzie. Lizzie is not at school as she has "nae buits", although as her mother reminds her she's, "supposed to ha'e the flu!". The play ends with Mrs Paterson being threatened with court action, but to her great relief she is backed up by her husband, who has just lost his job, in that they will pay off the debt at sixpence a week, if and when they have the money. The play is light-hearted and comic, verging towards farce as the women hide in the other room to avoid the "shillin'-a-week man". However at the end there is a more serious note, when the miner is sharply told that it was for "buits and claes for your bairns!" that his wife got into debt, and it is revealed that this happened "after the strike". The play also provides an interesting insight into working people's lives, with the necessity of keeping up appearances and not letting either the neighbours or your husband know how bad things really are, and foreshadows In Time O' Strife.

It was almost four months later when the SNP began a three week tour. Beginning on 1 August 1927 at Callander and moving on to perform in: Killin; Pitlochry; Kingussie; Grantown-on-Spey; Cullen; Forres; Lossiemouth; Huntly; Alford; Aberdeen; Braemar; Banchory; Coupar Angus; Dundee; Cardenden and Burntisland. Broadcasts were made from Aberdeen and Dundee BBC studios. The Glasgow Herald noted that the tour was "under the personal direction" of Tyrone Guthrie, with Elliot Mason as stage manager, and that:

> The company, with their complete equipment, will travel from place to place by motor lorry and motor car. The players will sleep under canvas except in the case of exceptionally bad weather, and in this it is hoped to effect a considerable financial saving.[59]

This, along with a guarantee against loss from the Carnegie United Kingdom Trust, helped the SNP to keep to "popular prices of admission". In fact, a profit of £32 17s 6d was made on the tour. Income amounted to £386 9s 16d, with expenditure totalling £353 11s 10d.

The tour is recalled by Moultrie Kelsall in The Scottish National Theatre Venture:

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[59]30 July 1927, p. 6, col. g.

> In [1927] the summer tour went out for the first time. Tyrone Guthrie was leader of an expedition of eight (six players, a stage carpenter and a driver), doing three weeks of one night stands with a bill of three short plays, and song and mime sandwiched in between them. The entertainment was popular - even Scots songs performed from a step ladder had novelty appeal - expenses were low (the company lived under canvas), and the venture showed a profit, so the summer tour became an annual fixture, making money every time.[60]

Three one-act plays were performed at each venue, A Valuable Rival, C'est la Guerre, and The Poacher. Items of song mime, and dance were also given in between the plays, which proved to be quite a controversial innovation for the SNP, as will be seen later.

In October a revival of Yuill's Weir of Hermiston was produced at the Lyric from 11-15. The SNP first produced it in March 1922 and the revival was stated as being " the result of several requests".[61] This was reported in the Glasgow Herald which also stated that this meant that the adaptation had met with "appreciation". The review also felt that under Guthrie's direction "resource and skill" were revealed, and "more than a moderate degree of smoothness" was attained in a piece which is "somewhat episodical". The Manchester Guardian (11 November) described the play as "an honour to Scottish drama" and noted that "full houses were the rule" during the five night run. Another review however, questioned the Players' reasons for reviving the play, stating that "unless it is "sound" from the box office point of view, it is difficult to know why this play was selected".[62] The main fault was given as being the "episodic" nature of the adaptation, but the review did note that the play "had a good reception from a good house".

On 8 November 1927 a triple bill opened at the Lyric and ran for five nights. The plays were Britain's Daughter by Gordon Bottomley, Eric Lyall's The Skirlin' O' the Pipes, and Victorian Nights by Tyrone Guthrie. Britain's Daughter is a one-act verse play by Gordon Bottomley. It is set in South East Britain at the time of the Roman conquest. The Icenians have been subjugated, their warriors have been either killed or routed, their young

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[60] SNTV, p35.

[61] Glasgow Herald, 12 October 1927, p. 10, col. d.

[62] Unknown review, n.d. STA.

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Figure nine:
Britain's Daughter: Nan Scott; Jean Taylor Smith.
Bottomley, A Stage for Poetry.

women captured and their homes burnt. Their Queen and two of her daughters are dead. Another daughter, the Princess Nest, has been tied to a mooring post on the beach and flogged. The play begins with Nest still tied to the post and left there under guard during the night. Her old nurse, Widan, remains with her, trying to persuade her to submit and obey the Romans so that "something can be saved". Widan wants her to "call off the Western Rally", tell the men to hide their weapons, and say that witches and "marsh-pooks" were responsible for the beacons and fiery brands. Nest however, realises that she is now the Queen, and holds herself aloof from her Nurse's advice. Nest speaks of the innate power of royalty, which is:

> A spark that turns the substance of the blood
> To white ethereal fire most hard to thwart,

She is now Queen of the Iceni, "mysterious to myself", and arrogantly claims that she is "not commensurate with human things".

The remnants of her tribe, however, do not share her views. They have been defeated and now turn against those who led them. A group of captive girls are led past by two soldiers. Nest berates one of the girls, Megg, for being too friendly with the Romans, reminding her of "the young men of our land" who "lie out on frozen mire, dying to-night" while she is "japing with their murderers". Nest tells her that she should:

> ... find sharp stones
> To push between your ribs, and then to-night
> Lie down unconquered...

Megg scorns Nest, calling her a "child of the evil race", one of the "mad fighting fools" who were "the ruling women". She has none of Nest's high ideals of queenship and calls for their leaders to "discover that they are not higher beings than other women". She takes a practical view, her apparent friendliness to the soldiers will enable her to survive:

> Shall I tell my enemy my heart with cries?
> Shall I waste my blood as you waste others' blood?
> If men must fight for Britain, women must live for Britain.

One of the captive girls begins to scream and cry out, and the soldiers, fearful that the noise will attract the whole camp, kill her. Nest's attitude is still that of the arrogant Queen whose subjects are there to comply with her wishes. She asks Widan if the girl is dead or "only wounded", so that she could be sent to the hills to bring Nest news of the Western fight. The only pity that Nest shows on learning that the girl is dead is because "she would have served" as a messenger.

The girls are led off and another Briton appears. He is Madron, an elderly man who begins to beat Nest with his belt. He is angry over what he considers an injustice done to him by the old Queen. His only cow had been driven off by her warriors, but when he was caught taking one of the Queen's herd he was publicly beaten on three market days. This, and the fact that the Queen had Mad Ellen's baby drowned because, if idiots were allowed to "breed idiots when they would/ Her land would be over-run", shows the harshness and injustice of the tribal society for those at the bottom of the social scale. One of the women who have begun to gather near the post voices their opinion of Nest's mother:

> Ay, what a Queen was that: the earth was hers
> To idealize, judge, improve and cut to waste.
> Poor folk and poor folks' brats have been to her
> Like maggots in cheese, to be smeared off her walls.

It is these "poor folk" who have now turned against their dead leaders and who gloat over Nest's punishment and humiliation.

Nest is herself something of a contradiction. She is arrogant and defiant both to the Romans and to those Icenians who have turned against her, but she also has a weak and vulnerable side. There is the time when a bat is caught in her long hair and she cries out like a frightened child. The stage directions describe her as "shrieking and wailing abruptly", asking her Nurse to help her. Her cries alert Placidius, the Roman general who dismisses the guard as untrustworthy and takes over the watch himself. Placidius offers two choices to Nest. He will untie her and "lend you a Roman sword/If you have the fortitude to fall on it", or take her into his own protection, shipping her off to Rome "to kind captivity with a trusty lady" until he can return and claim her. We learn that Placidius had been an envoy at the Icenian court and that Nest had refused his offer of marriage then. She

is still scornful. Placidius urges her to submit as she "should be mother to a fighter's sons", and even offers to wed her in Britain. In the end, news is brought that the "western rabble is captainless and broken", and that an insurrection in North Gaul means that the legion must sail swiftly, leaving only a garrison to hold Britain. Placidius orders his soldiers to take Nest and "the comeliest of the younger women", and put them on the ships for Gaul. The play ends with a large crowd scene in which the young women are parted from their children, aged relatives and menfolk and are marched to the ships. The sea shanties of the sailors intersperse the dialogue as the ships begin to leave with the tide. The men left on the shore have a change of heart. One young man who is "wounded and bandaged" cries out that Nest has "proved herself/Within the minds of all those who fought for her". He describes her fate, that "she is made a subject by strange men,/And she must go alone to be despised,/Even to become unknown, and yet to live.", and calls out "Farewell" to the "Daughter of Britain". The other men take up the cry of "Farewell", which rouses Nest from the ship's deck where she had swooned. The crowd leaves the stage and an old man is left cowering by the mooring post. His is the last speech of the play, and in it he foresees that the Romans will "stay too long in Britain" and that Britain shall change them inwardly so that in the end "Not Rome but Britain shall be strong by them".

In A Stage for Poetry Gordon Bottomley recalls that the small stage and "plenty of willing volunteers ensured an adequate crowd scene for the climax of the play". Bottomley states that this had been lacking in the Old Vic production in 1922.[63] The crowd scene in the SNP production was, according to Bottomley, "finely handled by Tyrone Guthrie, as part of an imaginative rhythm controlling the whole play".[64] Several of the press reviewers also commented on the effectiveness of the crowd scene. The Scots Observer (12 November 1927) stated that Guthrie's "handling of the crowd scene, where the speaking parts were unusually well filled, provided some of the most thrilling moments in the play". An unidentified review in one of the SNP scrapbooks noted that the crowd scenes were "remarkably successful". The grouping of the three women and that of the

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[63]The Players production had in fact a smaller cast than the Old Vic one, with twenty-one as opposed to twenty-six people. The size of the stage, however, is obviously very important.

[64]Bottomley, p.14.

old man and the child at the end of the play was also praised. The Scots Observer believed that it "achieved powerful 'atmosphere' and balance". Another review felt that it "should stress the beauty" of them.[65]

The play is on the whole rather heavy and verbose. There are some interesting ideas, such as the portrayal of the anger of the poor against their "royal family" but the effect is somewhat lessened by the change of heart that both Madron and the other British men have at the end of the play. There is some development of Nest's character which lets us admire her now solitary stand against the Romans, yet the play also brings out the futility of that stand, and the loss of life which her stubbornness has caused. In his programme notes Bottomley writes that Nest:

> This defeated Celtic princess, "smarting from the Roman rods" might have imbued a victorious people with her own selfless idealism for her nation as something greater than those beings who compose it; but a beaten people think first of themselves and their fate, and blame their leaders for being beaten - until the spectacle of her steadfastness awakens again their national pride, and she can go into exile believing that the remembrance of her faith and endurance will pass into legend and perpetuate a national consciousness until happier times gives her country to its children again.[66]

The play does make an attempt at understanding nationalism and its various aspects, particularly from a "Celtic " viewpoint. Although there is the danger of becoming trapped in the myth and legend of national identity, this does justify the production of Britain's Daughter by the Scottish National Players. There was no doubt over the justification of the SNP's production of the play at the time. One reviewer stated that "it is a poetic expression of the ideal of nationalism and for that reason, alone, could have some claim upon the consideration of the Scottish National Players."[67] The Irish Weekly (12 November) also believed that the play was "of a type that the Scottish Players ought more often to produce".

The language of the play is too contrived. The Nurse talks of "my heart's first clothing", and "My bosom-piece, my Nestling" and such words

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[65]Unknown review, b.d. STA.
[66]Programme in STA.
[67]Unknown review, n.d. STA.

as "healthfulness", "uncouraged" and "queenling" appear frequently. However if the verse is not very exciting and not of the highest quality , it is as least as competent as the dialogue of other SNP productions, if not more so.

The speech of the actors was highly praised by the press. The Irish Weekly wrote that "A feature of both ladies [Nest and Widan] was their charmingly modulated voices as suited the mood and action of the moment". Nan Scott's "dignity and versatility of elocution" was commented upon, although that review also felt that at times it lacked an element of "fierceness".[68] The Scottish Educational Journal (18 November 1927) noted that the verse was "beautifully rendered by the Company", adding that the production "succeeded in catching the spirit of the play". Bottomley believed that the Players were capable of giving a high standard of diction to his verse drama. In a talk broadcast by 5SC on the day the production opened, he stated that "their magnificent speaking has few rivals on the professional stage".[69] In A Stage for Poetry he declared that "their fine vowels and trained diction made listening a delight".[70]

The other two plays which formed the triple bill with Britain's Daughter were more light-hearted pieces. Indeed the Manchester Guardian felt that they were of "too slight textures to be shown with advantage alongside Mr Bottomley's richly decorated tapestry". The Skirlin' O' The Pipes by Eric Lyall was produced by R B Wharrie. This was very short, lasting only a few minutes, and consisted of two men, MacNab and MacTavish, having what one critic described as "a silent discussion" of a bottle of whisky.[71] The dialogue was restricted to "Aye" and "Umphum", and the only action is when MacNab goes out armed with a knife to put a stop to the inexpert bagpipe playing which starts during the piece. The play was akin to Pollock's statements, quoted by MacDiarmid in Contemporary Scottish Studies, that:

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[68]Unknown review, by W J, n.d. STA.
[69]Reported in the Manchester Guardian, 11 November 1927.
[70]Bottomley, p.19.
[71]Unknown review, n.d. STA.

> It is characteristic of the Scot that he thinks a lot but says little. This feature is seen in the diversity of intention that may be signified by the word meaning broadly 'Yes' bur spelt phonetically 'Ughugh'.Facial expression and gesture are used so aptly that a conversation may sometimes be continued largely by use of this word or its synonym 'Aye'.[72]

The Skirlin' O the Pipes however, did not make a very favourable impression. The Scots Observer stated that it "took an expectant audience somewhat by surprise" and left them "slightly bewildered". It was described as as "trifle" by the press, without any story, purpose or effect. The Stage (17 November 1927) stated that "neither of the players was able to make much of the piece and it was not very intelligible". The Scottish Educational Journal (18 November) believed that the SNP were "badly in error" by producing it and reacted to the statement in the programme that it was performed "By permission of the Proprietors of Punch" with the comment that " "Punch's" idea of a Scots joke is seldom a Scotsman's".

Victorian Nights was listed on the programme as being "a charade without a solution". The play is set in November 1882, when an after-dinner gathering is taking place in Mrs Podbury-Paunceforte's drawing-room. The talk is of contemporary events, and the guests all take a share in providing the entertainment with popular songs from the period and poetry by Tennyson. The sets and costumes were Victorian. The Scots Observer described it as a "clever, richly played and thoroughly amusing mockery of modes and manners". Other reviewers described the piece as "genial rollicking burlesque",[73] "rich delight",[74] a "merry affair"[75] and "genuine fun".[76] Although it was suggested that the play would benefit from pruning, it was regarded as a success, and the Stage (17 November) wrote that Guthrie "should take courage from the favourable reception accorded to his play and attempt something more ambitious". The music for the piece was provided by Nellie Justice as solo pianist.

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[72]MacDiarmid, Contemporary Scottish Studies, p. 55.
[73]Unknown review,n.d. STA.
[74]Scottish Educational Journal, 18 November 1927.
[75]Unknown review, n.d. STA.
[76]The Stage, 17 November 1927.

Victorian Nights was produced on 21 February 1928 at St Cuthberts' Hall in Edinburgh and in the Rankine Hall in Elmbank Street, Glasgow on the following evening. These were not official Scottish National Players' productions, but were performed by members of the SNP and some others. Poems, ballads and Scots songs were also performed, and the evenings were entitled "Lute and Bombazine". The Evening Times (23 February) noted that the play had been "improved in artistic quality" since the November production at the Lyric. The Scotsman noted that several of the performers "appeared in the programme by the courtesy of the Scottish National Players", and added that the evening's entertainment was "original and good".[77]

The Christmas and New Year production was a new four-act comedy by John Brandane called Heather Gentry. It opened at the Lyric on 24 December and was performed for ten nights, plus two matinees on 31 December and 2 January. The producer was Tyrone Guthrie. The play was referred to at the time by the press as being the third in a series of plays, the first of which, The Glen is Mine, dealt with the crofters, and the second, Full Fathom Five,[78] with the middle classes.[79] Heather Gentry deals with the upper classes, the rich and the landowners. In the play, the laird of Drimfearn tries to keep his estate going by letting out shooting and fishing rights for high prices, and goes to great but not necessarily entirely honest lengths to do so. He even uses soft soap on the wings of the game birds so that his sporting clients will have an easier chance of shooting them. Much of the play centres round Bridget, supposedly an Irish maid, who turns out to be the daughter of a small licensed grocer who has made his fortune during the war in the new drink trade. Bridget is at Drimfearn to learn about housekeeping in a large mansion house, and because of the local doctor with whom she worked in Serbia during the war. She does, of course, accept him as her future husband, while the laird's son and the district nurse also strike up an understanding.

The play is of a much poorer standard than The Glen is Mine. The general opinion was that the play was really a farce, and that as such it

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[77] n.d. STA.

[78] Also known as The Treasure Ship.

[79] See the Citizen 27 December 1927; Scots Observer 24 December 1927; the News 20 December 1927.

was an amusing piece, but had no real depth or lasting worth. The Glasgow Herald (27 December) wrote that if the play is accepted as a farce then "there is very little criticism to offer of what then becomes jolly, inconsequent, and irresistible fooling". The Manchester Guardian (28 December) felt that there was at times an obvious "doubt in the minds of the Players as to whether they were playing straight comedy or farce", and added that the author was not blameless in this. The Stage reviewer wrote that the play contained "elements of farce ... which do not quite blend with the comedy".[80] The Citizen commented that while Heather Gentry was "not so good as its predecessors" it made "enjoyable entertainment", noting that in the end, "that is what is really wanted at this time".[81]

The main criticism that was levelled was that the play was, as the Citizen (27 December) reported, "too involved", and that the action moved at excessive speed. The Evening Times noted that act one in particular suffered from "too many entrances and exits".[82] The Bulletin (27 December) felt that the first act was "disappointingly weak", and the others marred by the fact that "the minor characters had too many superfluous 'walking-on' parts".

All of the reviews commented on the fact that the play was well received by the audience. The Glasgow Herald recorded that it produced "peals of laughter", the Evening Times said that it had a "cordial reception", the Evening News described it as having "plenty of laughs"[83] and the Era (28 December) recorded that it had been "enjoyed by a large audience". The character of Bridget was particularly successful in helping the audience enjoy the play. Several papers commented on the fact that the action really centred around her, and there was unanimous praise for Nell Ballantyne's portrayal of the character. The Evening News (27 December) declared that the play "actually becomes dependent on the quality of the part of Bridget", and continued to note that it was given "a piece of really fine acting" by Nell Ballantyne. The Stage (8 January) described Bridget as "the principal part", and said that Nell Ballantyne "plays with points and humour, and scores a success". The Bulletin (27 December) declared that

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[80] 5 January 1928.

[81] n.d. STA.

[82] 27 December 1927. This is also a fault of some of Brandane's other plays, for example The Inn of Adventure.

[83] All 27 December 1927.

Bridget "is almost the whole play in herself", adding that "the author and producer must have been grateful for the able handling it received". The Glasgow Herald (27 December) described Nell Ballantyne and R B Wharrie as "the two pillars of the piece". The review continued to state that Nell Ballantyne played Bridget "in the popular way with immense verve and freshness; her stage manner is easy and comfortable and she makes all her points with great effect". The Irish Weekly's review (31 December) also noted that "the comedy lies mainly in the hands of Miss Nell Ballantine [sic]". The paper stressed that although it is Bridget's "smart replies, odd sayings and general demeanour" that causes the laughs, "there is no vulgarity about the humour, nothing to offend Irish susceptibilities". The Irish accent was however described as being "overdrawn".

This review is interesting in that it gives an Irish reaction to the portrayal of an Irish comic role by the Scottish National Players. It is also interesting in that it is the most enthusiastic of all the reviews. Indeed it is too enthusiastic when it asserts that Heather Gentry, "will easily rank as their greatest success". Yet it is also the only one which regrets that Brandane did not make any real comment upon the problems of the Highlands. The reviewer denies that the play itself is a farce but states that:

> ... the pity is the author did not depict some of the farcical aspects of life in the Highlands and pillory the Scottish Agricultural Board and the deer-forest system. He might have imported a little tragedy into his comedy by depicting a hard-up Highland laird selling his estates to Yankee millionaires and then shown the gaiety of the town Highlander singing Gaelic songs and dancing jigs while his race is being driven abroad.

The play proved to be popular at the box office, with an income of £730 12s 6d. An expenditure of £429 18s 7d left a profit of £310 13s 11d, a large amount by SNP standards.

The first production of 1928 was The Mannoch Family, a three-act play by Murray McClymont which was staged at the Lyric from 7-11 February. This was advertised as being the first production of the play in Scotland. The press stressed that it had had its first performance at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre, and had later been staged at the Liverpool Playhouse and Hull Little Theatre. The Glasgow Herald (3 February) noted

that these theatres produced The Mannoch Family "with success", and the Evening Times (2 February) noted that the play "attracted a good deal of attention" from these performances. The Scottish National Players must have taken notice of the Hull Little Theatre production at least, as several of its reviews had been collected and kept in one of their press scrapbooks.[84]

The article in the Evening Times on 2 February which discussed the forthcoming production of The Mannoch Family was called "Repertory at the Lyric", and described the play as being "thoroughly modern and of the repertory type". The Glasgow Herald had a similar article on 3 February which said that the play was "modern in outlook and treatment" and that "the comedy is of the repertory type". Both papers stated that for these reasons The Mannoch Family was different from anything previously done by the SNP. The Glasgow Herald called it a "new venture", and the Evening Times wrote that it might "possibly mark the opening of a new phase in their career".

The play is set in Galloway where the Mannochs are a respectable and well-established family. Mrs Mannoch, a widow, firmly clings to her stern form of religion in which the main tenets are duty and obedience. Her two children however, do not live up to her standards. The son falls in love with Ailsa, whose father is a brutal drunkard. The daughter is in love with an unhappily married man, and plans to run away with him. McClymont told the Record (4 February) that the theme of the play was "the viciousness of excessive righteousness", the struggle not only between youth and age but between "a generation brought up to interpret the conduct of life according to the letter of the Bible and a generation which is fashioning a morality of its own". The Record article goes on to state that McClymont was not sure how some of the audience, brought up in the old school, would react to the play. The Glasgow Herald (3 February) also stated that some people may regard the play "as daring in the fearlessness with which conventional morality is discussed", noting that when the play was produced in England "one clergyman found a text in this aspect of play". There was no great outcry against the play in Glasgow, although at least one minister, the Reverend Arthur Hill of Elgin Place Congregational

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[84]These were from local Hull newspapers, the Eastern Morning News and Hull Advertiser (11 November 1927), and the Daily Mail (11 November 1927 and 15 November 1927).

Church took the play as his "subject" at an evening service.[85] The reviews were actually full of praise for the production, particularly regarding the acting. The Scotsman (8 February) stated that the "piece was very well produced" and the parts filled "very satisfactorily". The Glasgow Herald (8 February) said that the comedy was "certainly provided in generous measure", and noted that there was "exceptionally fine interpretation of the various characters". The Herald also commented that the reception accorded to the play last night by a large audience must have been gratifying to author and players alike", and reported that the author had been "called to the stage" at the end of the play when he "expressed his appreciation of the splendid performance" of the SNP and of the "skilful" work of Guthrie, the producer.

The Citizen (8 February) declared that the play was the "work of a capable craftsman" and the reviewer recommended "unreservedly" a visit to the theatre to see The Mannoch Family. The Scottish Educational Journal (17 February) described the performance as a "brilliant ... display of team work". and Halbert Tatlock wrote in the Scottish Musical Magazine (1 March) that "the acting was on a higher level than ever I have seen it". The Evening News declared that the piece was "played with strong feeling", adding that it was bound to "arouse interest and opinion".[86]

On 14 February 1928 the SNP performed The Scarecrow and Ayont the Hill in the Town Hall, Kirkintilloch. The local paper reported that the Players "reputations had preceded them" and that because of this the hall was filled.[87] The review was very favourable, commenting on James Gibson's "mastery grip of the Gaelic accent" as the Highland policeman in The Scarecrow and the fact that the play produced an "eerie and creepy feeling in the audience" which was stated as bearing testimony to "the high art of the players". Ayont the Hill was cited as being "a splendid piece of team work", about which the audience "was not slack in showing their appreciations".

Teamwork was cited as being an important factor in the SNTS in an article printed in Theatre World in January 1928. This was number eight in a series on "British Repertory Theatres". It was stressed that the "company

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[85] Glasgow Herald 11 February 1928.
[86] n.d. STA.
[87] Kirkintilloch Herald 15 February 1928.

has no stars", the actors having always aimed at teamwork rather than individual brilliance. This was linked to an almost austere simplicity, which it was stated that Guthrie had experienced with J B Fagen's Oxford Players, resulting in the SNP's main strength, "a quiet restrained method and a consistent ensemble".

The Theatre World article stresses that money has always been a problem for the SNP, and that their lack of financial capital has had "a cramping effect".This however was expected to lessen as a reorganisation was about to take place, which would "bring the business side more into line with the growing requirements of the production department, and will allow a more extended scope than has been hitherto possible".

The reorganisation referred to was the setting up of the Scottish National Theatre Society Limited. The prospectus of the new company was dated 20 February 1928 and announced a share capital of £10,000, which would be divided into "10,000 ordinary shares of £1 each". Of this pound, 2s 6d was payable on application and a further 2s 6d on allotment, with the balance being "called up as and when required, but it is at present intended not to call up more than 5s in any one year". The list of subscribers opened on Tuesday 21 February and the closing date was announced as being "on or before" Monday 5 March 1928.

By 3 March however, the press reported MacKemmie's announcement that the minimum number of shares, 2,000, which was necessary to float the Company had been applied for and that more applications were expected to be received during the weekend. The press reports are all very similar, if not identical in wording, suggesting that MacKemmie had circulated a press release. The Daily Record article (3 March 1928) is typical and states that applications:

> ... had come from a wide radius, and there was a gratifying sprinkling of offers for £1 shares.
>
> The promoters were delighted to find both features in their letter bag. It was highly desirable that as wide an interest as possible should be created, and the £1 supporter represented a class whom they desired particularly to encourage.

This is good sense in many ways. More people holding even just one share in the company means a greater number of people likely to attend

performances. The fact that they especially wanted to attract those likely to apply for only one share is consistent with the SNP organisers' repeated protestations that they were not a high-brow company.

A list of shareholders is extant in the SNTS material in the Scottish Theatre Archive. While it is not dated it may be assumed that it was drawn up about the time of the formation of the limited liability company as the total recorded, 4201 shares, closely corresponds with the stated number of shares allocated, 4138, given at the first Statutory meeting on 8 August 1928.[88] The list of shareholders reveals that 368 people held shares, with 123 people having just one share. Indeed more than half of all shareholders held less than five shares.

Allocations of ten and twenty shares was common, with several groups of fifty and even a hundred. The highest allocations was of 500 shares, made in two instances. One of these was to Elliot C Mason. As one might expect many of the shareholders were people associated with the SNP as actors, writers, and active supporters. Others, to judge by similar names and addresses, were undoubtedly related to such people. It is impossible to state categorically how many of the shareholders came from the general public, that is from those with no definite previous connection to the Scottish National Players. To judge by the number of familiar names on the shareholders list it would be a reasonable assumption to say that not many of them did.

Despite the confident assurances made to the press, it must have been disappointing that only just over 350 people responded to the share offer. Membership of the Scottish National Theatre Society stood at 820 at the last annual general meeting in March 1927. Even if all those who bought shares in the company had been members of the SNTS, and that is quite a likely scenario, it still means that less than half of the Society members bothered to buy even one £1 share. As the SNTS had an annual subscription of five shillings and a single share cost 2/6 an applications, 2/6 an allotment and at most 5/- per annum after that it cannot be that the cost prohibited Society members from becoming shareholders.

The memorandum and articles of association printed within the Prospectus which was issued to potential shareholders listed five articles.

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[88]The discrepancy may be accounted for by the fact that some people applied for shares but did not then complete the process and pay for them.

Four of these were straightforward and obvious: that the company was to be called "The Scottish National Theatre Society Limited"; that the company's registered office will be located in Scotland; that members' liability is limited;' and that the capital will be divided into 10,000 shares. The other article, the third in numerical order, listed the "objects for which the company is established", and included twenty one clauses. These allowed the new company to carry on normal theatrical functions and covered almost any eventuality from allowing the sale of alcohol, theatre tickets, published material; to purchasing or leasing property 'convenient for the business of the company', building or altering theatres and borrowing the money to do so; granting pensions and supporting and establishing schools, clubs or institutions of any nature; giving payment for services rendered and accepting payment for properties assets or rights disposed or dealt with; entering into partnership with any company, from a business operating on similar objects to the Society, or amalgamating with any company whose objects are similar to those of the SNP. These clauses were obviously cited under legal advice and intended to cover any situations which might arise in the following years. It is the first clause which is of real importance, and which is almost identical to the stated aims of the Scottish National Players. This clause lists the objects of the new company as being:

> To found a Scottish National Theatre for the development of a national drama through the production of plays of Scottish life and character and to produce in Scotland a public taste for good drama of any type.

This clause is expanded into a short article, simply entitled "Prospectus", intended to persuade people who may be unsure about the need for such a company or its likely success. A brief history of the SNP was given and while there was a self congratulatory note in saying that many of their plays had been taken up by SCDA teams, the general tone of the article is more realistic. It is stated quite clearly that no "national genius of the theatre" has been discovered, but that they have writers "capable of producing workmanlike and interesting plays". The article also points out that in the six years of the Scottish National Theatre Society, with professional producers, their players have built up "a standard of Scottish

acting". The reasons why the SNTS now wishes to become a limited liability company was given as being the desire to "broaden its activities" and the necessity of having a professional company. The hope way expressed that such a company would become the "nucleus round which a PERMANENT NATIONAL THEATRE can be established. "The article also states that to become a member of the Board it is necessary to hold shares in your own name to the nominal value of £10 and that Board members would not "be entitled to any remuneration whatsoever" with the exception of legitimate expenses incurred on Company business. Voting rights were stated as being, on a show of hands, one vote per member present and by poll one for every member "present in person or by proxy" for each share held up to twenty-five, with one extra vote for every twenty-five shares after that. It was also stated that "preliminary expenses" of £230, presumably incurred in setting up the Limited Liability Company, would be paid by the Company.

This article formed the basis of the many newspaper reports on the formation of the Scottish National Theatre Society Ltd. The Scotsman (20 February 1928) stressed that the main aim of such a move was to "secure a professional company of players" thereby gaining a "nucleus round which a permanent National Theatre" could in the future be established. The Record (20 February 1928) also quoted Walter Buchanan, one of the new company's directors, as saying that "we should like to have our actors & actresses devoting their whole time, if possible to stage work instead of, as at present, a part only". He also stated that the foreign drama aspect of their work would not be ignored:

> We shall not limit our activities to one field. While primarily our interest is Scottish, we are prepared to welcome a fine thing from any quarter, and to assist in making its virtues more widely known.

The Evening Times (20 February 1928) highlighted the fact that many of the plays produced by the SNP "are now being acted throughout Scotland by amateur groups" and by competing teams in SCDA festivals. The Citizen (21 February 1928) quotes MacKemmie as saying that "the issue of a prospectus was simply the result of a demand for extension", and the paper adds that although the foundation of a National Theatre is their

ultimate aim "it is not considered practical politics at the moment". The move has been made simply to put the company's affairs "on a more business like footing" stressing that "in the meantime there is to be no change in policy".

The Greenock Telegraph (22 February 1928) declared that the formation of the new company "marks the beginning of a new chapter in the history of national drama", a remark repeated by the Hamilton Advertiser on 25 February. The formation of the SNTS Ltd was also reported in: the Montrose Standard (24 February 1928); the Dunfermline Journal (25 February 1928); the Weekly Scotsman (25 February 1928); the Weekly Herald (25 February 1928); the Eastern Morning News (27 February 1928); the Kelso Mail (1 March 1928) ; the Bulletin (1 March 1928; and the Stirling Journal (1 March 1928). Outwith Scotland articles appeared in both the Newcastle Evening Chronicle (3 March 1928) and John O'London's Weekly (12 March 1928).

Some of these papers, such as the Kelso Mail (1 March 1928), the Weekly Scotsman (25 February 1928) and the Hamilton Advertiser (25 February 1928) note that several of the names associated with the Company as directors and Honorary Vice Presidents are "widely honoured in connection with the national literature."[89] The Honorary Vice-Presidents were Sir J M Barrie, Neil Munro, Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson and John Buchan MP. The Duke of Montrose was the Honorary President and the Board of Directors comprised: Lt-Col Ralph R Stewart, F H Bisset, Walter Buchanan JP, Professor Leonard Findlay, David Cleghorn Thomson, and Joseph Laing Waugh. David Glen MacKemmie was listed as the Secretary.

The Kelso Mail's report on the formation of the company had the headline "A Long Overdue Enterprise". This is an important factor in the ultimate failure of the SNP to fulfil their aims. It seems obvious that an amateur company could not hope to actually build and successfully operate a National Theatre and that to have a chance of success in this matter a professional body of actors together with stage and administrative personnel were a necessity. With hindsight it also appears obvious that by 1928 the tide had begun to turn against the Scottish National Players. The

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[89] Hamilton Advertiser 25 February 1928.

numbers of Society members were decreasing, and public criticism of the Players and the policy was becoming more frequent. It would perhaps have been better to launch the professional company in 1926, when Society membership was over one thousand, Guthrie was taking over as Producer, the public were more solidly behind the movement and there was less evidence of internal wrangling. However it is not so easy to know what is best to do at the time. It is a difficult decision to ask amateur actors to give up their jobs to form a company which has no subsidy and generally produces a working loss each year. In the end it was better to turn professional in 1928 than not to attempt it all. That would undoubtedly have hastened the demise of the Players, as people lost interest in the original ideals and the SNP became more like any other amateur dramatic society.

CHAPTER FIVE: 1928 - 1934

"... unless the SNTS directors change now their brave days are over."[1]

Under the management of the new Scottish National Theatre Society Limited, the Scottish National Players undertook a programme of five one-night visits from 9-15 March 1928, playing at Bearsden Public Hall; Biggar Corn Exchange; Lesmahagow Jubilee Hall; Paisley YMCA Hall; and Helensburgh Victoria Hall, where the local paper reported a "poor attendance".[2] The Hamilton Advertiser (3 February) described the bill as one which "will embrace all that is best in modern drama and comedy" a rather over-enthusiastic description of a bill comprising C'est la Guerre, The Poacher and the Hoose wi' the Golden Windies. The latter was premiered at Bearsden on 9 March and was written by D Morland Graham. Graham was also the author of C'est la Guerre and had acted with the SNP since 1922. The play is more or less a little moral lesson, set in the kitchen of a farm near Glasgow. The young son is always complaining that he wants to go to Glasgow and the father, who uses the cane frequently, gives his son a 5/- piece and lets him go for the Glasgow bus. However there is a thunderstorm and when the frightened child returns the father breaks his cane and flings it onto the fire. The Hoose wi' the Golden Windies was published as number 26 in the Scottish Plays series by Brown, Son and Ferguson Ltd. However it was only given ten performances by the SNP, the other five being later in the same month when the play was produced at the Lyric Theatre in Glasgow. On that occasion the press gave a mixed response. The Glasgow Herald (21 March) described it as a "characteristically Scottish playlet", then qualified that by calling it a "simple, domestic morsel". The Era (28 March) said it was a "homely and touching little play", feelings echoed by both the Scotsman (22 March) and the Evening News (21 March). The Record was less enthusiastic, stating that it was of "even slighter texture" than C'est la Guerre.[3] The most critical review was by Halbert Tatlock in the Scottish Musical Magazine (2 April) who called the play a "sentimental tract" and described it as "a very elementary effort" which had recently been broadcast from Glasgow under the name The Lesson.

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[1]Halbert Tatlock, Glasgow Herald, 14 January 1931.
[2]Helensburgh News 22 March 1928.
[3]n.d. STA.

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Figure ten:
The Sunlight Sonata: Beelzebub (James Anderson) and the Seven Deadly Sins.
The Bulletin 21 March 1928, STA.

The other plays produced at the Lyric from 20-24 March were C'est la Guerre and The Sunlight Sonata which had the alternative title of To Meet the Seven Deadly Sins. This was the first of James Bridie's plays to be performed, although he used the pseudonym Mary Henderson at the time. Before the production the press played upon the unusualness of the title and the description of the piece as farce-morality in a prologue, an interlude, a demonstration an apotheosis and an epilogue. The Scots Observer (10 March) notes "what next?" after that description, and later in the month stated that "there is a nice balance of certainty and speculation in this promised entertainment".[4]

Bridie wrote that The Sunlight Sonata was his "first step towards compromise" after being elected to the SNTS, and had "almost everything in it but step-ladders."[5] The play, and the production, especially did have many similarities with the SNP's Scots Song and Mime performances which Guthrie was keen on. Bridie notes that Guthrie liked the play, and with "magnificent courtesy and patience he helped me to iron out its amateur crudities."[6] Brandane also liked the play, despite the fact that he was strongly opposed to the Players productions of Song and Mime, a matter in which Bridie has written that Brandane's attitude was quite right.[7]

The play follows the antics of the Seven Deadly Sins who have been upbraided by Beelzebub for their lack of results. It is decided to stage a competition using the seven people coming to Loch Lomond for a picnic the next day. Beelzebub keeps the score in his wee book as the action unfolds. He is an interesting character, and the only one who uses Scots. His opening speech, delivered from the top of Ben Lomond, is resonant and atmospheric, well-suited to a Scottish devil:

> Now is the butt o' the nicht. The muckle black bens are
> about me.
> Dour and cauld and deid; what are the bens to me?
> Give me the bonny wee glens with the quick, brown,
> whispering water,
> And life in the burn, in the linn, by the river shadowed
> with cities.
> Life in the muir and the word and the clachan-fittering,
> fighting

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[4]17 March 1928.
[5]James Bridie, One Way of Living, (London: Constable, 1939), p. 262.
[6]Bridie, p. 262.
[7]Bridie, p. 261.

> The rat and the bat and the cleg; the otter, the owl and
> the adder;
> The lean, sculduddery cat, and the slaters under the
> ruckies?
> Maggots in dead mens eye-sockets; eels in the deep, cold
> loch...

His vital use of Scots continues as when, for example, he refers to Superbia as "a vaudie bit smatchet" and asks of Gula "and wha is this creeshy pockpud?" This is in contrast to the Sins themselves, for example Superbia's dramatic tones:

> How can men sin when they are warmed and fed
> Hold up your gash black hand athwart the sin
> Then Master you should see what will befall.

The men in question are a minister, one of his elders and their respective families and friends. With the Sins at work on them, they all end up arguing, calling each other names and generally fighting among themselves. They speak English with the exception of Marcus Groundwater, a builder who when flustered, slips into such phrases as "this isnae business", "not a stiver, not a maik" and "ach, to blazes" On the end the day is saved by Faith, Hope and Charity, portrayed as a cross between pantomime fairies and well-meaning maiden aunts. Hope has a bad lisp and believes that the Sins will be "the finitht men" in two or three million years, Charity knows that there's a devil about because of the awful rheumatism in her thumb, and Faith is planning a trip to Ardlui for tea. Charity uses the little telephone on her wand to dial "Number One, The Firmament" and asks Phoebus Apollo what's going on. He throws a sun-spot which burns Beelzebub's hand. The devil goes off in a huff, the picnickers all turn nice to each other and the Sins are berated by Faith, Hope and Charity who threaten to send them to an institution. However they really have everyone's best wishes at heart, and Hope phones "666, Pandemonium" to check that "old Beelzebub" got safely back to Hell. Beelzebub, however, is a bad loser and refuses to speak to them.

The reviews of The Sunlight Sonata were generally favourable. The Glasgow Herald stated that it "adequately fulfilled the programme description of a farce-morality play".[8] The Evening Times described the play as "an amusing light-hearted treatment of one of the major themes in Scottish literature" and noted that it was the outstanding play in the

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[8]All reviews are dated 21 March 1928, unless stated otherwise in brackets.

programme. The Scotsman (22 March) stated that James Anderson added "a certain piquancy" to his speeches as Beelzebub by delivering them in a broad Ayrshire accent, and recorded that the play was "exceedingly well-received". The Record described The Sunlight Sonata as the "most ambitious" play of the programme and praised its humour:

> Nothing fuller of pure wit has yet fallen the Scottish National Players way to produce. It abounds in clever lines all with an audaciously cynical tang.

Faith, Hope and Charity particularly delighted the Record which described them as "a trio of gushing pantomime fairies" and commented that "the burlesque was brilliantly carried off". The Citizen was equally enthusiastic when it declared that the play was "the wittiest, and one of the cleverest things ever produced by the Players". The Era (28 March) stated that it was the "chief event of the evening", and The Stage(2 April) believed that it was "cleverly written" and should encourage the author to continue writing.

The least enthusiastic review was by Halbert Tatlock in The Scottish Musical Magazine(2 April), where he wrote that the play "did not deserve the great pains and truly ingenious production" which it received from Guthrie. Tatlock described the play as being "in the nature of a glorified skit from a university magazine" which had "very little sense of the stage". Although he admitted that the picnic scene was appreciated for its "humorous characterisation", he states that it was "extraneous" and "of a superfluous kind".

The October triple bill also contained items of song and mime. These were interspersed between the plays and were as follows: "The Queen's Maries" and "O Can Ye Sew Cushions" sung by Ethel Lewis, the Company in a piece entitled Gloaming and Glamour which included: "The Wee Cooper O' Fife", "The Deil's awa' wi' the Exciseman" and "Over the Sea to Skye"; Nell Ballantyne and Morland Graham performing "Duncan Gray" as a "song and mime antic"; Nell Ballantyne and Munro Dods doing the scene from "Now Now Soldier"; and "Melville Castle", described as "A Monstrosity" was done by Nell Ballantyne, Meg Buchanan, Elliot C Mason and Munro Dods. The players were costumed, and on occasions, such as "Melville Castle", masks were also used.

Guthrie introduced song and mime to the SNP programme in 1927, and it had been used in several tours since then. Its performance in Glasgow brought out contrasting opinions, although the press reviews were generally favourable. The Glasgow Herald worried that this "new

departure" was likely to cause a "difference of opinion" but felt that "as judged by last night's performance they have an appeal of their own which suggests the possibility of a development of a Celtic Ballet. The Record felt that the song and mimes were "vastly amusing", particularly Now, Now Soldier which it described as "a delicious little jeu d'esprit". This review also noted that the Gloaming and Glamour item would have been better on a bigger stage, as it was "the canvas is too crowded and composition that might otherwise be effective is not." The Evening News declared that the song and mime "proved a successful innovations", although the review stressed a couple of points that needed corrections: Now Now Soldier "should not be encored in its entirety" and in "the otherwise excellent" Gloaming and Glamour "some of the singers had their heads cut off from being seated too high". On the whole however, the Evening News felt that "the items served not only to bind the programme together, but were an added attraction in themselves". The Citizen wrote that with the exception of Melville Castle the "mimed songs were very good", and added that Ethel Lewis "sang two Scots songs with real feeling".

The introduction of the song and mime did, however, displease and offend many individuals associated with the SNP, and became something of a last straw for those who were disillusioned with the movement. A letter was printed in the Evening News on 28 April in which the writer, identified only as CM, wished "to express a keen dissatisfaction which, I know, is shared by many people". The cause of this was the fact that "when wider artistic recognition and a stable financial position seemed nearer" to the SNP, "the ideals of its early youth were being lost to view". This was, according to the writer, shown by the fact that they were "playing at theatricals" by "dropping" drama in favour of song and mime. On 18 May the Evening News published a letter from James Barke which described the introduction of song and mime as an "artistic solecism" which "cannot be justified". The next day the paper printed another letter which questioned "whether the SNP are justified in using their time and resources experimenting in branches of art which already have been perfected". This referred to the Arts League of Service Travelling Theatre which included song and mime in their programmes, and first toured Scotland in 1922. This aspect of the ALS's work was very popular and in Travelling Players Eleanor Elder notes that a "large number of people who would not otherwise have patronised a theatrical entertainment came to our shows" because of the singing. Elder also states that in Scotland it was

"Scottish songs" rather than the Kennedy-Fraser "Songs of the Hebrides" which were demanded, and that there were "appeals from the back rows" that Hugh Mackay should sing in English rather than Gaelic.[9] The ALS performed songs like "The Wee Cooper O' Fife", and "Melville Castle" which the SNP later included in their programmes. Guthrie was obviously influenced by the work of the Arts League of Service and Elder recalls that he had in fact "offered himself to the League in the early days as a folk song singer", but that unfortunately their tour dates did not fit in with his various engagements and "nothing could be arranged".[10] The SNP continued to use song and mime for some time , and the controversy it aroused never abated.

The first statutory meeting of the Scottish National Theatre Society Limited was held on Wednesday 8 August 1928 at 3.30 p.m. in the Scottish National Academy of Music. MacKemmie's report noted that the 4138 shares were allocated and that the cash received by the company amounted to £1717 7s 6d. It was also stated that preliminary expenses of the company come to £213 18s 4d, with a further estimated expense of £15. The Glasgow Herald (11 August) reported the chairman's statement that "the directors had hoped to be in a position to announce an increase of the number and period of the Glasgow productions" however as the Lyric was unavailable "no further extension would be possible this year". The Chairman also "expressed indebtedness..." to the Advisory Play Reading Panel for the "efficiency and expediency with which, under the convenorship of Dr O H Mavor they had handled a large number of plays submitted to the company". It was stated that 85 scripts had been "read and reported on" since the SNTS had become a limited liability company.

It was also noted that several one-night engagements had already been received and that "the directors desired to develop this side of the Players' activities and would welcome inquiries from committees in the county districts who were anxious to obtain a new and attractive feature for their winter programmes".

To encourage groups and societies to book the Players for a night the SNTS issued a pamphlet in August entitled The Play's the Thing. This was twelve pages long and described itself as:

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[9]Eleanor Elder, Travelling Players, (London: Muller, 1939), p. 111.
[10]Elder, p. 142.

> a short epitome of the work of the Scottish National Players specially interesting Associated Secretaries desiring a new feature in their winter syllabus.

A brief history of the movement was given, which highlighted the tours and one-night visits and it was stated that the success of this had encouraged the Society to offer "a wider service". It was explained that a "fit-up" stage and lighting were carried by the SNTS which would "readily be adapted to practically any type of hall", and stressed that the Society would undertake all travel arrangements. The pamphlet noted that engagements had already been successfully carried out for the following organisations: Ardrossan & Saltcoats Players; Bridge of Allan Public Interests Association (Concerts Committee), Bridge of Weir Literary Association; Bonnybridge Girl Guides; Dunoon Grammar School Former Pupils' Club; The Scottish Woman's Educational Union (Kilmarnock Branch); Kirkintilloch Lecture Committee; Saint Columba's School Musical Association, Kilmacolm; and Tollcross YMCA. The plays which would be available for performance this season were The Glen is Mine, Ayont the Hill, The Mannoch Family and Heather Gentry. Alternatively a programme of three "contrasting one-act plays, together with Scots song and mime" was offered. The one-act plays available were A Valuable Rival, C'est la Guerre, The Scarecrow, The Hoose wi' the Golden Windies, The Poacher, Victorian Nights and Exit Mrs McLeerie. This list however was "subject to addition and alteration from time to time". The fee for engaging the Players was stated as being "subject to various considerations, such as length of programme, number of players, distance, and size of hall", however a price range of £20-£30 was quoted for a one-night engagement which included royalties, actors salaries, the fit-up stage and lighting equipment, all properties and costumes, catering and transport. The pamphlet also advertised the fact that the Society hired out costumes and scenery, and noted that amateur dramatic societies "who have limited resources in this sphere" should write to the Secretary for more details. The Play's the Thing was illustrated with photographs from various SNP productions and also printed some quotes from various newspapers praising the Players' work.

The Coasts of India, a new three-act play by George Reston Malloch was produced at the Lyric for nine nights, opening on 23 October 1928. An article in the Evening Times (23 October) stated that for Scottish drama to succeed "we must discard the vernacular and address the dialogue in the plain, unadorned English which is, after all, what most Scotsmen of the

present day talk. Malloch was reported in this article as saying that he had mainly dropped the vernacular for The Coasts of India, in which only two characters use it:

> while the rest talk English just as most of the Scots people of to-day talk it. Yet you will notice that the play has not lost any of its Scots tang.

The play is set in the 1890s and the Evening Times (24 October) review stated that "a realistic picture" of the time was given, adding that Guthrie's "flair for Victorian themes had here ample scope". The title refers to a person's "hearts desire" but the Evening Times felt that the play "did not make it" sufficiently clear that that is worth fighting for for its own sake. The play was not produced again by the SNP.

In an attempt to counter the growing public dissatisfaction with the SNP, the Directors of the Scottish National Theatre Society Ltd issued a statement at the end of November which outlined their policy and aims. This was, basically, "to adhere to the general policy and principles" of the SNTS.[11] There were some changes, however. Players would not have to be shareholders, although it was stated that many of them were, and could choose to retain their amateur status, if they wished, by foregoing their fees. The former Play-Reading Committee, was to be replaced by a Play-Reading Panel, acting as advisers to the directors. Bridie was the convener of this panel which also comprised: Gordon Bottomley; John Brandane; William Jeffrey; William Power, and Catherine Carswell. Plays received by the society are read by Bridie, Brandane and Jeffrey. If a play is marked 'C' by two out of these three then it is returned to the author, if not it is sent to the other readers on the Panel. It was explained that the reports would be submitted to the directors by the Panel, "from time to time, through their Convener." These reports would give advice "as to the acceptance of plays, as to their grouping in a triple bill, and as to their suitability for production at any particular season." The producer would also give the directors "his professional view of the panel's recommendations". It was stressed however, that "in every case the decision as to which play, or plays, is to be produced rests solely with the directors."

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[11] Quotes taken from the directors' statement of policy, printed by the Glasgow Herald, Times, Scotsman, and Greenock Telegraph, all 1 December 1928, and the Era 26 December 1928.

The type of plays liable to be chosen was discussed, with the stated policy of the company, to produce plays "of Scots life and character", being reaffirmed. This is expanded in an attempt to answer some of the recent criticisms of the plays chosen:

> As the aim of the movement is primarily artistic and national, rather than political, educational or moral, ... one play by a Scottish author which is not in the vernacular and does not employ typically Scottish characters may be accepted as expressive of a Scots outlook.

However the statement continues, to provide a neat loophole which the directors could use to justify refusing any particular play. It was stated that since they started working with professional producers six years ago, "the Players have been developing a technique and standard of Scottish acting". The Directors explained that, because of this:

> It is possible that a play may be considered unsuitable for performance by the company although it is genuinely good of its kind, simply because it is a type of play unsuited to the technique of the players and their conditions of production.

It is unfortunate that the statement does not define this acting style, or give examples as to why it should preclude the production of plays which may be "genuinely good". If a good play which met the criteria of representing Scots life and character was rejected solely because it did not fit in with the SNP style then that style would be an extremely restricting factor, especially to a group setting themselves up as a national theatre.

The directors' statement also stressed that the company wanted their performances to "extend over as much as possible of the geographical area of Scotland" and hoped that longer seasons would be possible. The controversial issue of singing Scots songs to mime was also addressed. The directors were firmly behind the practice of including such items on their triple bills, particularly on tours, as they believed it had practical benefits:

> These [items of Scots song and mime] work harmoniously into the scheme for one-act plays, giving opportunities for change of scene and costumes, and furthermore, they have been proved to appeal to a new type of audience not hitherto interested in the work of the movement and to be a draw financially.

It is hard to justify the statement that the song and mime appealed to a new audience, although the Arts League of Service also stated that it attracted people who would not otherwise have attended their productions, however song and mime did prove to be a popular part of the programme during the country tours. The directors continued, answering the allegations that the Society was meant to perform plays rather than songs, with the statement that the latter will not interfere with play production:

> It must be clearly understood, however, that the miming of songs and ballads is only an occasional side line in the movement, and that it will not be at any point allowed to prejudice, overshadow, or interfere with the production of new plays.

The policy statement ended by repeating that the "ultimate aim" is to found a Scottish National Theatre, but that in the meantime they are keen to do what they can "in the development and encouragement of amateur acting and play-wrighting throughout Scotland". Therefore they would "co-operate warmly with the efforts of the Scottish Community Drama Association and do what they can to help such bodies as the Women's Rural Institutes". This help was to be in training both producers and actors. Indeed many of those involved with the SCDA, both as producers and also as adjudicators had acted with the SNP at some point.

The statement of policy was immediately replied to by John Brandane, whose letter, published in the Glasgow Herald on 4 December concentrated on the song and mime issue. Brandane begged the SNTS "in all friendliness to reconsider this matter", stating that a Scots song or ballad:

> is a work of art with a unity of its own; when the song is well sung or the ballad finely spoken it comes to our imagination with its miracle of evocation of story and scene and mood through its own beauty and power - it needs no trappings of stage or costume or mimicry.

If the Society desperately wants to put something other than music, or the opportunity for the audience to discuss plays and players between one-act plays then it should, Brandane felt, perform the songs and ballads in the way in which they were meant to be performed without the costumes and the mimes. Brandane counters the directors' arguments on the matter of finance and popularity by saying in a bill with both plays and mime it is

impossible to tell which part of the bill "is the element with most drawing powers", and that new audiences can be attracted any day "if you will come down low enough".

The Glasgow Herald printed other letters in support of Brandane. Cunison D Mathie wrote on 10 December that Brandane, by making such an appeal, "has earned the gratitude of most enthusiastic supporters of Scots national drama who do not enjoy the spectacle of time and talent being squandered on what is, after all, a mere divertissement". Another letter, on 11 December, which was signed merely "Supporter", stated that such a "sideline" was "useless" to the aim of fostering national drama. "Plays and more plays and still more plays are what is wanted", not mimes. In contrast, Donald Sutherland wrote on 13 December, to protest Brandane's inference that mime is not art and has no place in a theatre. He also objects to what he calls the "almost incredibly pompous, pontifical patriotism that refuses to countenance a little mild fun being poked at a couple of folk songs".

The Honorary President and Vice President of the Society entered into the debate on 6 December when the Glasgow Herald printed a letter signed by Montrose, J M Barrie, Johnston Forbes-Robertson and John Buchan. This stated that the venture of founding a national drama was "in its initial early stages" and appealed to all Scots "to take a special interest" and "rally to the support of the national venture" as both shareholders and playgoers. The song and mime controversy was not however, directly mentioned . This letter was also printed in the Daily Record and resulted in a six-point reply from C M Grieve being published in that paper on 13 December. This reply stated that he, and others who are "keenly interested in the promotion of Scottish arts and letters", will not associate with the Scottish National Theatre Society in any way, because:

> (1) It purports to be furthering "Scottish" drama without defining what is meant by the term Scottish in this connection and without giving any evidence of having even envisaged the problems involved or of having any capacity to do so.
>
> (2) It is in the wrong hands.
>
> (3) They are tied to ideas and methods demonstrably antipathetic to the evolution of a distinctively Scottish drama.

> (4) That is why they had so far failed to produce any play of any value and done nothing to create a dramatic movement of the slightest real consequence and they are unlikely to succeed any better in the future without a complete change of directive, personnel and policy.
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> (5) A truly national movement should endeavour to enlist the help of all interested not antagonising and excluding those capable of helping by keeping things in the hands of a little clique who have done nothing themselves to entitle them to the positions they hold.
>
> (6) The atmosphere surrounding the Scottish National Theatre movement prevents any attention being paid to the technical and ideological experimentation essential to the evolution of distinctively Scottish drama, which, obviously if it ever is created, will have to create its own public, whereas the present movement is appealing to ready-made tastes and represents a mere devolution of the technique and tendencies of English drama.

The Record printed another letter from Grieve on 15 December. This referred to his opinions already given in Contemporary Scottish Studies and stated that his beliefs had not changed.

> I am still of the same opinion, viz, that nothing produced by the National Players has risen to that place upon which anything worthy of the term "national" must operate.

Grieve's criticisms of the SNP were noted by other papers. The Evening News (15 December) ran a small article under the title "Grieve hits Outs" which noted that "the remarks were none the less stinging because of the truth behind them" and ends with the statement that "It is time that a second Scottish Theatre Movement was started." The writer of the article admits to possibly being prejudiced as he has had "a couple of plays rejected ... one of them after an interval of four years had elapsed". This was something which Grieve, in his article, took pains to stress, that he was not one of those critics who had had plays rejected, and were therefore not always completely objective. However, in his next letter, published on 20 December, he corrected this "inaccuracy", saying that "a number of years ago" he sent a "very short playlet" to the SNP "which they turned down in the friendliest terms". Grieve, however, entirely agreed with this judgement, saying now that "they were too kind in what they said of it; it was an entirely worthless trifle". This latest letter was, like the last one, in answer to a reply made by David Cleghorn Thomson to Grieve's original letter. Grieve

speaks of the existence of a "dominant clique", to which Cleghorn Thomson belongs, in the SNTS. This clique has, he claimed "again and again turned down the recommendations of the Reading Committee". However, he continues, even if all the clique's policies were reversed he is certain that:

> the future of Scots drama lies along entirely different lines, and that by monopolising the field and arrogating to themselves a national title to which they have no right, the SNTS are blocking the way and confusing the issues rather than helping.
>
> I think we would be better with nothing than what they have given us if that does not very quickly show that we have been pursuing an altogether wrong line, and induce a complete change of front.

On 22 December the Record printed letters from MacKemmie, members of the Reading Panel, and David Cleghorn Thomson. MacKemmie wrote on behalf of the board of directors to thank the paper "for the generous way in which you have thrown open your columns for a full and frank discussion of the future of Scottish Drama and of the present problems of its control and direction." Bridie, Brandane and Jeffrey all signed a letter which repudiated Grieve's stance of defending the Reading Panel against the Society's directors, stating that Grieve's:

> public investigation of the Society's washbasket is an unpardonable breach of private confidence and is unfair and inaccurate in substance.
>
> Differences of opinion between a Board of Directors and an Advisory Committee are necessary and healthy. The views of the Panel have always been courteously and fully considered by the Board, and no case has arisen where the Panel has seriously contemplated "throwing up the sponge".
>
> If the need arises for an appeal either to the shareholders or to the public, Mr Grieve will not be chosen as spokesman.

The News also carried letters on the subject. James Barke wrote on 19 December and reminded everyone that it is public subscriptions that keeps the SNTS going. Barke believed that while "most of the people who subscribes money to the SNTS are quite prepared to lose every penny of it should the Society go down after a brave fight", they did not give money to

the Society to enable it to produce "picnics", as the song and mime terms were referred to. Barke also makes the observations that, some twenty days into the debate, "the public are becoming a little weary of all this talk about Scottish drama ... They would like to see something really concrete".

The Christmas/New Year production opened at the Lyric on Tuesday 25 December 1928 and ran until 4 January. Matinees were given on 20 December and 1 January at 2.15 p.m. The plays were The Guinea Stamp and a new four-act comedy by Cormac Simpson called The Flower in the Vase. This play is set in the twenties, with the first act taking place in a London suburban house and the rest in a farmhouse in Aberfoyle. Irene, the 'flower in the vase' of the title, is a beautiful London model whose ambitious mother wishes her to make a 'good' marriage. Her daughter, however, dislikes city life and runs off to Aberfoyle, where her friend Mary is holidaying at her parent's farm. Irene's stay at the farm disrupts the lives of all those there but, of course, there is a happy ending. Irene successfully woos Andy, the farmer's son, and becomes the next woman to sit on 'the throne', as the armchair on which the farmer's wife sits, is called. She is a very stereotyped image of a good Scottish farmer's wife, sensible, wise and always managing everyone. The play does have some interesting ideas on beauty and artificiality, and city versus country life, but lacks originality. The Glasgow Herald (26 December) stated that the play "has a rich vein of homely Scots humour, and on that account alone is a very acceptable addition to the repertoire of the Players". The Evening News (1 January) on the other hand, felt that the play was "difficult to square with the pretensions of a Scottish National Theatre", and contains some "naive purple passages which are apt to make the sensitive squirm" but would be enjoyed by "those who like homely Scots drama, very much in the Graham Moffat traditions". The review did, however admit that the acting was "considerably good". The Scottish Musical Magazine (29 January) did not particularly like the play either, stating that "at best the play is ephemeral and, at worst, just thin". The review commented that the audience "as usual, were prepared to take the surface cream bubbles off the top and accept the rest as a necessary vehicle". The Flower in the Vase was given thirty seven performances by the SNP.

A six-night tour of Southern Scotland began on 21 January 1929 at Sanquhar, and moved on to Thornhill, Moniaive, Dalbeattie, Newton Stewart and Stranraer. The bill consisted of song and mime, C'est la Guerre, The Poacher and The Grenadier, a new one-act play by George

Reston Malloch. The 'Grenadier' of the title is the ship on which Margaret will sail to America, the same ship from which her brother John fell and was drowned. His body is brought home as Margaret is preparing to leave, but the parents decide not to tell her so that she can continue her journey.

The Players performed The Grenadier on two nights in the Rosemary Hall, Belfast on 28 and 29 January, along with The Scarecrow and Exit Mrs McLeerie. The Irish papers were enthusiastic and particularly praised the acting. The Irish News (29 January) described the piece as "a tragedy acted with consummate skill". The Belfast Telegraph (29 January) reported that the play was "very effectively done with a restraint that was admirable", adding that the "sheer simplicity of acting captivated the audience". The Belfast Newsletter (29 January) described Meg Buchanan's portrayal of the mother as "a remarkable piece of acting, manifesting imagination, and characterised by that finesse which only comes with experience". The Newsletter also described the audience's reaction to the play:

> The falling of the curtain was followed at first by a silence more complimentary than even the vociferous applause which came afterwards.

The Belfast Northern Whig (29 January) stated that "the admirable entertainment deserved a much larger audience" than it received, and noted that The Grenadier" served to reveal the capabilities of the company to the full."

The next production was It Looks Like A Change by Donald MacLaren. This new four-act play was performed at the Lyric from 5-9 March 1929. Like the Christmas production of The Flower in the Vase and The Guinea Stamp, it was produced by Elliot C Mason, with Moultrie Kelsall as stage manager.

The playwright, Donald MacLaren, was described by the press as being "well known as a writer of humorous verse" and also has a collection of "war time sketches" entitled The Silver Lining which appeared in 1916.[12] Most press notices commented that MacLaren was born in Crieff, with the Evening News (22 February) noting that "the accents of the characters in this play have a strong flavour of Strathearn". That preview continued to describe the play as:

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[12]The Citizen 2 March 1929; the Evening News 1 March 1929.

> a representation of village life which is fast dying out in Scotland, and seeks to preserve its dramatic form from characters and types ... [whose] mannerisms and outlook have not yet been completely adjusted to the modern conditions expressed by the motor omnibus and the cinema.

This concentration on character was commented on by several papers, with the Citizen (6 March) stated that "character, if not caricature is the keynote". The Glasgow Herald (6 March) was not quite so favourable when it noted that MacLaren had "infused his play with a queer caricaturish spirit", instead of "intellectual bite". The Era (13 March), did not like this stress on characterisation, and notes that it is a:

> fault that has been evident for some time in the plays they select. Full of wonderfully clever sketches of character it yet lacks entirely the dramatic elements that go to make a play and has not even the semblance of a story.

In contrast, some of the Scottish papers believed that this was a good thing, as long as the characters portrayed are not just stock kailyard types. The Evening News (6 March) said that play "covers familiar ground but the wind that blows through it is more shrewd and biting than the sillier and more customary zephyr of the kailyard." The Evening Times (6 March) declared that It Looks Like a Change was "a big step in the right direction ... at long last someone has attempted to mirror the Scot as he does not like to see himself" and praised the Scottish National Players for daring "to break the bonds of their own convention by presenting it."

Two days after It Looks Like a Change closed a revival of The Mannoch Family opened at the Lyric, and was performed for four nights, 11-14 March 1929. The producer was given as Tyrone Guthrie, who produced the first SNP production of The Mannoch Family in February 1928. The Evening Times (13 March) which had called It Looks Like a Change "a big step in the right direction", was very disappointed that the SNP chose to repeat a play which they had performed just over a year ago:

> To stage revivals when the search is for something new, something nearer to the "real thing" which we all expect, is in the nature of an anti-climax and anti-climaxes are poor nourishment for interest.

The Scottish National Players took their production of The Mannoch Family to the Lyceum, Edinburgh from 1-6 April. The Edinburgh press was divided in its reaction to the play. The Edinburgh News (2 April) described it as "ironic to the verge of bitterness", adding that the play was not "essentially Scottish". The review said that with the exception of Mattha Stroan and the cook, who both speak Doric, and the fact that Mrs Mannoch continually turns to her bible for guidance, described as "a supposedly Scottish trait", the Mannoch family "might as well be English or Irish". The Scotsman (2 April) however took a different view, that the play "breaks away from what, it is to be feared, has come to be regarded as Scottish drama convention. However it too admitted and implied that this was not necessarily a bad thing, that the play was not national "in the narrow local sense, but consists of the universal stuff of drama, with no more than a local accent." Most of the reviews mentioned that the play was well received by a large audience: the Edinburgh News stated that "never had the company a more generous audience", the Glasgow Herald (2 April) reported that a large Edinburgh audience gave the Players "a cordial reception", and another Glasgow paper, the Bulletin (3 April) stated that:

> The house was well filled in all parts and from the outset the audience was held by the excellent quality of the play and the natural acting of the players.

The Edinburgh Evening Despatch (30 March) noted that The Mannoch Family was to be "staged" by Elliot Mason. As she had done in the past, Mason used the opportunity of visiting a large town or city to give a talk about the SNP, and addressed the Edinburgh Rotary Club at their weekly luncheon on 2 April. Mason said that Scottish National Theatre Society had "a really serious interest in the drama and tried to present Scottish life as they wanted it to be presented - not as the London stage and London writers wanted it to be presented".[13]

This however provoked a reply from one Edinburgh citizen who wrote that those who want "such a travesty of Scottish life and character" as The Mannoch Family are "jealous and unfriendly cities", who enjoy "pointing the fingers of scorn at us".[14] Such a reply highlights the impossibility of pleasing everyone all the time, but dissensions and criticism of the SNTS were becoming increasingly frequent.

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[13]Report of Mason's speech in the Scotsman 13 April 1929.

[14]Letter to Editor, Edinburgh Evening Despatch 8 April 1929.

The Mannoch Family was also taken on a short tour in April 1929, playing at St Andrews on 8 and 9, Kirkcaldy on 10 and 11, Castle Douglas on 12, Kirkcudbright on 13, Lockerbie on 15 and Dumfries on 16 and 17 of the month. The Dundee Courier (9 April) reported that the first night at St Andrews had a "well filled" hall and that the play was "thoroughly Scottish in character". The nett drawings on this tour amounted to £242 11s 5d. The largest amount, £46 12s 11d, was received in Kirkcudbright and the smallest £14 15s 2d was taken in Lockerbie. A five percent royalty, £12 2s 7d, was paid to the author.

The Scottish National Players spent a week at the Alhambra in Morecambe, from 15 to 21 July 1929, when they performed The Crystal Set and The Glen is Mine. This was done under the auspices of the Mayor and the Corporation for Scottish Week. The Glasgow Herald (13 July) reported that the audience "the majority of whom are English", "thoroughly enjoyed and appreciated" the plays. The audience was not however very large, a fact which the Glasgow Herald tried to explain as being due to the "excessively hot weather". The review commented that it was the lowland dialect, not the highland one which "presented greater difficulties". The Morecambe Advertiser (17 July) described the visit of the Scottish National Players as "a daring experiment" but questioned whether "it has quite caught the popular fancy". The paper praised the acting as being "of a high order", and the play as being "well-written" and of a type which "will appeal to all who like and who can appreciate Scotch humour".

The Morecambe visit made a loss of £2 9s 4d, however this is a small amount compared to that lost on the visit to the Cambridge Festival Theatre in March 1930 of £45 1s 1d, or the £252 5s 3d lost on the May 1930 production of The Glen is Mine at the Everyman Theatre in London. It also compares favourably with losses on some Glasgow productions, and the £81 lost on the Edinburgh performances of The Mannoch Family.

The summer tour concentrated on the north east this year, where The Dawn and Ayont the Hill was performed in eighteen towns and villages. These included Pitlochry, Brechin, Blairgowrie, Broughty Ferry, Forres, Braemar, Stonehaven, and concluded at Earlsferry on 16 September. The Grenadier was broadcast from the Aberdeen BBC studios, when the SNP was in the area. Many of these places had been visited before, and the Aberdeen Press and Journal (11 September) wrote that "the Players annual visit is now a looked for event and is much appreciated both by visitors and residents." The Dundee Evening Telegraph noted that

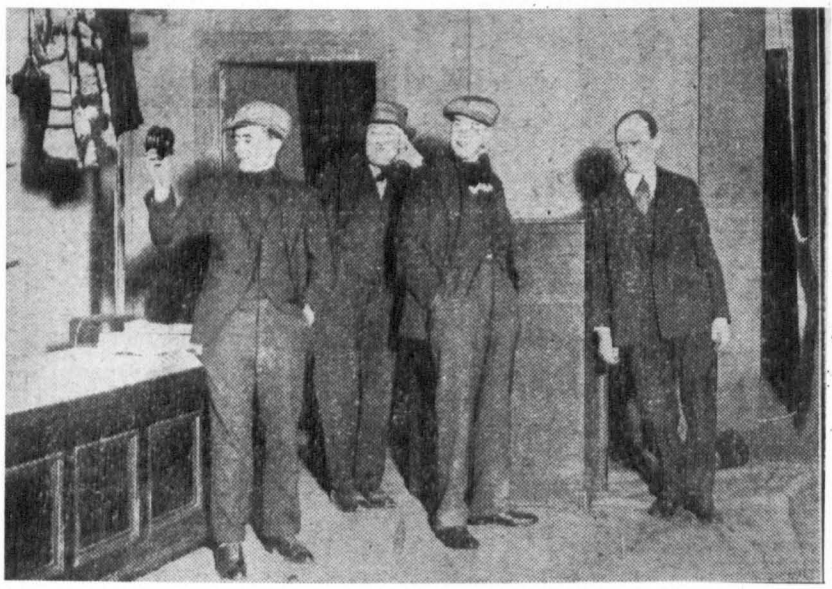

Figure eleven:
The Ancient Fire; T P Maley; James Anderson; Alan Mackill; Charles R M Brookes.
The Bulletin, 9 October 1929, STA.

"a packed house greeted" the Players at Earlsferry,[15] while the Brechin Advertiser (17 September) stated that the staging was "a veritable triumph of simplicity" and praised "the fine acting and clear enunciation of the players".

The next production of the Players was The Ancient Fire, a new three-act play by Neil M Gunn, which was performed at the Lyric from 8 to 12 October 1929. The producer was Elliot C Mason. Because the play and the reaction to its production are so important in the history of the Scottish National Players, and the play is unpublished, it will be discussed in greater detail than other plays produced by the SNP.

The first act of The Ancient Fire is set in Lachie MacDonald's drapery shop in the Gorbals. Lachie is just over fifty years old, a Highlander who came to Glasgow thirty years ago to work in his uncle's drapery shop and eventually took it over. He is helped by his unmarried sister Helen, a rather anxious, almost neurotic woman. Lachie is getting ready for a holiday in his native Corrie, where his father had been the gamekeeper, and is seen winding a salmon reel as the curtain rises. This interests two of the three unemployed shipyard workers who enter the shop: Tim, who came over from Ireland as a labourer, "to do the work you couldn't do yourselves" and Jeck, who is described by the stage directions as a "slow, laconic, country person". The third person, Isaac, described as "a Glasgow street-orator, quick-witted, with some vision", is more aloof and laughs at the three of them "gloating like lost souls over the symbol of a dead birthright. Paradise Lost in one silent act", and calls what they are doing "a worship act".

Two women enter the shop, wanting goods which they cannot pay for, because their men are unemployed. While Lachie serves them, the three men chatter away, and Isaac defines what "the ancient fire" of the play's title is. It is something which burns inside Lachie, something which makes the children poke fun at him, but which also attracts people to his shop, people like Tim, Jeck and Isaac who have "come to warm ourselves at it":

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[15] n.d. STA.

> Holy mystery it is. The glens and the streams and the hills. The freedom that the human spirit should have under the sky. The freedom that flies like a bird. It's caged in him. He does not know it's there - but he knows too, and that's what makes him at times so strange and abrupt. It's in him like a fire - the ancient fire - the ancient fire of our people - to which we all come to warm our cold hands and our dead souls.

This speech leaves Tim and Jeck staring at Isaac in what the stage direction calls an "involuntary silence". It is broken by Lachie's down to earth comment that the trousers which he is showing to the woman are "good and thick" and "will wear well". It is an effective juxtaposition of Isaac's eloquent but rather mystical rhetoric about Lachie and Lachie's own practicality. The fact that Lachie lets the woman have the trousers illustrates his generous and less practical side, he knows that it will be a long time before he is paid for them, if he is ever paid at all. Immediately after this a policeman arrives and arrests Isaac, because, Tim says, Isaac has been "at his old game - the small matter of preaching bloody revolution". The arrest is obviously not unexpected.

Lachie continues to prepare for his trip, and is getting his rifle ready when Angus Ross enters. Angus "keeps a bird shop in a slum" according to the stage directions, and has brought a ferret which he intends to sell to Lachie for six shillings. It is obvious that Lachie intends to go poaching at Corrie. The worship imagery is again used when Lachie kneels down to open the bag which the ferret is in, and Angus tells him to wait, saying that "as a small boy, that's the way you looked when you would be saying your prayers". Angus keeps taunting Lachie in an increasingly disturbing fashion, saying that because he has spent the last thirty years surrounded by caged birds he can see that Lachie too has been caged, and suffers "the torment of the damned", but has been set "alive" by the prospect of taking the reel, rifle and ferret to Corrie. Lachie is angry and pushes Angus over, saying that he is "carrying on like a dark fool". Angus also has highland origins and has a few Gaelic words sprinkled through his speech.

The act ends with the introduction of Helen. She is older than her brother and disturbed by the fact that Lachie is going back to their old home the next day. She worries about what people in Corrie will think when they see Lachie with a ferret and a reel as he never had them on his last visit five years ago, and what Glasgow folk will say when they hear that a man was arrested in their shop that morning. She is worried that Lachie is mixed up "with the wild men", and thinks its "queer" the way people and

children are always hanging round their shop. The stage directions note that she leaves "slowly" and "pitiably", and Lachie comments that "It'll be on her like that for the rest of the night", all because of his trip to Corrie.

The second act is set in Corrie and is divided into three scenes. The first one is set in the glen. Lachie has just caught a salmon, when there is a noise "among the birches, up slope to left, just off stage". It is a wounded stag, with a bullet in its guts, which Lachie, after a moment's incredulity, shoots and kills. Macdonald of Corrie, the dispossessed laird, enters. He is described in the stage directions as having the "uncanny penetrative smile of one who, if his mind is not altogether unhinged, has at least his moments of aberration". Macdonald assumes that Lachie is with Denver, the American whose father has bought the estate. Lachie surreptitiously hides his rifle, and neither confirms nor denies anything that is assumed about him. Indeed Lachie appears in control of the situation, quite unlike what we saw of him in Glasgow. Denver himself now appears, with a badly injured ankle. Denver is a rich young man, whose creed is money and who is in love with Macdonald's daughter Isobail. Lachie denies hearing any shots fired and assumes a subservient role to Denver, like that of a gillie to the laird or a private to an officer. This slightly puzzles Denver, as when Lachie gives him a drink from his own whisky flask, but asks Denver "mind if I have one myself?" before drinking. The scene becomes very static, really just a discussion between Denver and Lachie on the changes in the Highlands. Denver likens the way his mother and her friends have been buying estates in Scotland to his memory of women at a remnant sale, all dressed up and pushing forward to buy "things they don't need but must have".

The second scene takes place in the kitchen of the old Lodge, where the love interest between Denver and Isobail is developed as Isobail bathes his injured ankle. Lachie is given food by the housekeeper, Mrs MacLennan, who tells him the Macdonald family's story, how the estate was lost through gambling and attempts "to keep upsides with the English gentry". Isobail's father inherited the debt, and though he lived carefully and tried to redeem the family fortunes the war ended any such possibility. The son enlisted and was killed at the Front, and Macdonald's wife died shortly after. The scene ends with Lachie watching the old laird out in the kennels, patting the dogs. After a short pause the housekeeper reveals that there are no dogs left.

The third scene takes place in the glen, at night. Lachie has returned to recover the stag's head. He does so, but slips while carrying it and falls upon the antlers, writhing for a moment or two before losing consciousness. The stage directions at this point are very long and detailed, indeed throughout the entire play they are very much like notes a novelist might make for himself, and reveal Gunn's lack of stagecraft. For example, when Lachie is unconscious:

> A spectral greenish blue light searches the darkness and finds Lachie rising from the antlers, though the head and shoulders of his real body are still seen huddled amongst the tines. He leaves the body and steps slowly forward, his face questing and troubled. As he pauses uncertainly, listening, his real body gives a final groan between the antlers. The spectral light momentarily waivers, and as it steadies Lachie mutters with that sort of dual tortured knowledge common enough in dreams.

Initially this Lachie appears fearful and mutters anxiously that people might discover his poaching. However a twig is heard cracking loudly and suddenly all uncertainty vanishes. Angus Ross appears, "his face bright and puckish" and taunts Lachie, who reacts violently. Mrs MacLennan is seen as an old crone, singing a Gaelic song and Lachie cries out for her to stop. Denver and Isobail appear next. Isobail gives some vivid but fairly standard love imagery, but it is more love of a place than of a particular man which comes over. The scene becomes more menacing with the almost horrific "and your teeth they bite on a loveliness" as Isobail bares her teeth in accordance with the stage directions. Denver is "unbearably fascinated" with her, despite their disagreements over the nature of money, which Isobail believes to be a degrading influence. He becomes "masterful" kissing Isobail, picking her up and attempts to carry her off to some dark corner, only to discover Lachie blocking his path. Denver hits out but Lachie "floors him". Isobail faces Lachie, but they are interrupted by Mrs MacLennan's singing, which Isobail too cannot stand. Only Angus urges the singer on, telling her to "show them their shame!" with her words. Denver rises, declares that the place is haunted and grabs Isobail's arm to leave. They go towards the stag, and Denver stumbles over it, exclaiming "God, here's a man's body: it's crucified on a stag's horns".

Everyone except Lachie backs away, then leaves the stage. Lachie approaches the stag, and as the spectral light flickers and dies he "extends

himself into the darkness and the antlers and his body groans. When the light has altered completely, and the noise of a twig breaking is heard once more, Lachie sits up, realises he is bleeding and then cries out "My God, they were only creatures in a dream".

The third act takes place in the Gorbals shop. Helen is behind the counter, the two women are looking for more goods on tick, and Isaac enters and tells about the dream he has had. In it he saw a great crowd being led in procession by Lachie who was himself leading a beautiful golden stag. The people were laughing and singing, being led to *Tir nan Og*, which was not an unearthly paradise but Glasgow itself. The sounds of a crowd are indeed heard drawing near. It is Lachie returning from Corrie. He is carrying the stag's head and has a crowd behind him. However there is a struggle and commotion as he enters the shop and Angus is impaled upon the antlers. An ambulance is called, but Angus is seriously hurt and earnestly makes Lachie promise that he will release all of Angus' caged birds.

The policeman who has arrived is suspicious as to where Lachie got the stag's head, but leaves after Helen speaks up for Lachie, who is now quite sullen and angry, wanting everyone to leave. Isaac berates him for being ashamed.

> Oh I know a Scotsman hasn't it in him to be a rebel. He would refuse his own country, even if he were offered it. But why - why be ashamed? Why (*pointing to stag's head but looking at Lachie*) hide the bloody thing? Why crawl back here, as if beauty and freedom were a sin, and to enjoy your country a crime?

The play ends with Lachie and Helen unable to understand one another. She expected him to return cheerfully, having acted like a gentleman up north. She sees nothing wrong with having left Corrie:

> Many people had to leave besides ourselves. They have to leave to get on in the world, to make their way. There's nothing for young people yonder.

Lachie however only sees the people laughing at him "we are a joke" he tells her. He has returned from his beautiful homeland merely to sell a woman a shirt. At this the woman who has been in twice already enters, wanting a shirt for her man. The irony is that Lachie is giving rather than selling the shirt as the woman still has no money.

The play has a great many ideas and issues, indeed there are too many for just one play, and none of them are fully explored. There is a lot of symbolism in the play, for example the theme of worship which runs through the first two acts. This is fairly successful, but later examples such as the release of the caged birds are weaker and not as clear. There is a lot of ambiguity in the play, partly due to the fact that many of the characters are incomplete or never give any real explanations of their actions. Lachie in particular is a very reticent character.

According to Brandane, Gunn believed that reticence was a Scottish characteristic and could be used with such devices as the dream scene to develop a national dramatic technique.[16]

> I write this, in case, by your juxtaposition of "Reticence" and "the Unconscious", you think of attempting something fresh that will pass for Scots in dramatic technique.[17]

The correspondence between Gunn and members of the SNTS began in 1928 when Gunn submitted a one-act play, The Man Who Came Back, to the Reading Panel. This was put on the productions list, but never actually produced by the SNP. Brandane, however, kept in touch with Gunn, saying that he would "be delighted" if Gunn submitted more plays, and suggested that he do a three-act one.[18] Three days later Brandane wrote again to say that he was "elated at the prospect" of a three-act play, and agreed to read the first draft. He had obviously done this by the end of the month as he wrote on 3 December to say that he thought The Ancient Fire "wonderfully good". Brandane commented that the dream scene in the second act would be "a very difficult scene to get over to your audience", and suggested some alterations. One of these was:

> to distinguish vividly between the plane of what we call Reality and what we call Dream. And this could be most clearly demarcated by a slight raising of a section of the stage at back whereon the Dream characters parade - an outcropping of rock apparently about two feet high such as you suggest but all along left back with screens of birch and hazel somewhere in it to break the line.

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[16] R F Pollock also believed that reticence could be used to develop a Scottish drama technique.

[17] Letter from Brandane to Gunn, dated 29 December 1928, NLS, Gunn papers Dep 209 Box 17.

[18] Letter from Brandane to Gunn, dated 10 November 1928, NLS.

According to the notes made by Gunn in margins of the letter, he did not like Brandane's suggestion, noting that his "contention is that this can be already made perfectly clear if the lighting is at all efficient". Similarly when Brandane suggests that another actor could crawl in to take Lachie's place, under cover of some rocks in the foreground, and thus leave Lachie free for the dream itself, Gunn notes that he has already in his "lighting effects made arrangements for the super to take Lachie's place". Brandane does admit that the "symbolism of the wounding by the antlers and so on could be lost" but felt that:

> the gain of the clear line of demarcation between Dream and Reality is so great - that everything should be sacrificed here (if necessary) to gain clarity for your audience.

Gunn was upset by this however, noting that the symbolism "musn't be lost. If the symbolism be lost I'd rather it not played at all". Gunn also took exception to Brandane's suggestion that Lachie should say something like"What a dream! Too much whisky!", placing an emphatic 'No!' in the margin. Brandane was not surprised that Gunn did not like these ideas. On 27 December he wrote that:

> I knew you would boggle at my transformation of your beautiful scene in Act II - 3. And I know my translation of your stuff would appear mechanical. As writing your stuff is full of poetry - but a play isn't written only, it is also "built" - it approximates architecture in its need for clearness of line and disposition of mass.

Brandane continually stressed the need to make things clear to the audience: "Clarity - clarity - clarity and if in doubt "Cut!" ", he wrote on 26 December. He also pointed out that Gunn's ideas would be fine on film but are extremely difficult to stage. On 2 January Brandane realised that Gunn meant to keep to his own version of the dream scene, and wrote that he "need not argue further". Gunn had however, made other alterations which Brandane stated were now "good".

Brandane was eager that the SNTS should produce The Ancient Fire, advising Gunn to send in a copy soon, and saying that he would "get them [the Reading Panel] to leave a space for it on my recommendation ... even if it is not read by all the members", and that he was "fairly confident

we shall have it in the 1929-30 bill".[19] When this was written it was not known that it would be Elliot Mason rather than Tyrone Guthrie who would produce Gunn's play, and on 10 September Brandane wrote to say that they "did not dream that she would have control of it". He believed however, that the actors were "so good that I think we'll pull your stuff through". On 8 October he wrote to say that the play had been "well received here tonight" in a house that was three-quarters full, although from the dress circle the "form of a man (a super) on the stag's horns was not discernible". Brandane added that he would speak to Mason about this as "the audience must not be puzzled".

Mason also wrote to Gunn before the production, stating that the:

> production difficulties are really pretty enormous. Our stage is so very small to get distance and good lighting which is very necessary in this outdoor scene.[20]

Rehearsals were to start towards the end of August, but it was about a month later when Mason sent Gunn a copy of the play with the cuts which she had made, expressing the hope that Gunn would allow these. Mason explained that she "had tried to be most moderate" but as "the action of the play is held up so badly" she felt that "these little bits cut help guide a good deal".[21] In the same letter Mason told Gunn that she hoped he did not mind "my spoiling some of your jokes". This was, she explained, not because of her own sensibilities, but because the Scottish National Players' public:

> stand very little lewdness and also our show takes place in the YMCA [owners of the Lyric] and we have to watch our step.

Mason also stated that the actors were "finding it hard for the most part as much of it is pretty elusive".

Critics also found the play elusive and hard to understand, and the press reaction to The Ancient Fire was not at all favourable, as can be seen from some of the review headlines: "The Ancient Fire Misses. A Misguided Committee" (Evening News); "Ancient Fire's Faint Flicker. Art Lost in a Fog of Nationalism" (Daily Express); and "New Play doesn't 'Get

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[19]Letter from Brandane to Gunn, dated 6 January 1929, NLS.
[20]Letter from Mason to Gunn, dated 16 August 1929, NLS Dep 209 Box 14.
[21]Letter from Mason to Gunn, dated 27 September 1929, NLS.

Over" (Record). The main criticism was that the play was undramatic, with the Reading Panel choosing literature rather than drama. The News wrote that:

> "The Ancient Fire" is a play that would never have been chosen by a judge of drama, and in putting it forward for production the Society have done the author a rank injustice. With any competence to recognise a play they must have known that it was undramatic ...
>
> The reading panel of the Society have once more been misled by the lure of "literature". They have not yet learnt that a play must first of all be a play, and that the literary consideration is a very minor affair - an impediment unless it is handled by a master of technique.[22]

The Daily Express stated that the only possible reason for choosing to produce it could be that it is Scottish, "for it is certainly not a play", and felt that "as novel or verse" the author could probably have got his message across, but that "the stage is not his best medium of expression".[23] The Evening Times declared that the play's ideas are"obscured by a flood of words delivered in all their trappings of poetry and fine phrases" which lack "entirely any semblance of dramatic form", and that the people "who advised the production must bear the blame". The Record summarised their review by saying that "in short, this is a play not by a dramatist but by a literary craftsman", while the Bulletin felt that although some of the ideas "might make a play", Gunn is, unfortunately, "not yet a dramatist".

Another fault highlighted by the reviews is the obscurity of some of the ideas in the play, and the fact that the play is difficult to follow and understand. The Evening News stated that the discussion "relative to the Scotland of to-day" is "unclarified" and "goes round and round in one small circle", while the Bulletin felt that much of the play was "unintelligible". The Record wrote that the audience was "left in ignorance of his [Gunn's] main intention", and the Glasgow Herald noted that it was "somewhat difficult at times for the audience not to lose trace, as the play progressed, of the idea which the author sought to weave into his production". The Citizen believed that Gunn did have a good idea, but the reviewer wrote that he was "afraid the author has failed to make his meaning plain".

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[22]Evening News, 9 October 1929.

[23]All reviews are 9 October 1929, unless stated otherwise.

The News reported that The Ancient Fire was received with "laughter of the wrong sort". Some of the reviewers themselves took a mocking tone. The Citizen commented that Lachie didn't have much of a holiday in Corrie adding, "I expect he went to Dunoon the following year". The Bulletin referred to Mrs MacLennan, because of her appearance in the dream scene, as the "singing rabbit" and noted that touches of "unintended farce", as when Lachie appears holding a salmon "that had evidently just been brought down with the gun that he held in his other hand", were "unfortunate".

The acting drew a mixed response from the critics. The News stated that Charles Brookes "struggled manfully" as Lachie. The Stage (17 October) felt that Brookes "had a difficult role but managed to sustain it fairly well". The Citizen praised his "thoroughly well considered and careful study". Moultrie Kelsall, Catherine Fletcher, Meg Buchanan and Grace McChlery were also singled out for praise. The Glasgow Herald felt that all the Players "did very well", and the Daily Express mentioned the "good crisp acting that the Players have always given in spite of their authors". However the Evening Times stated that the play was "not helped in any way by the players, all of whom are miscast", and the Evening News felt that "the production was frankly bad". The Citizen noted that although the acting was good overall, "more movement would greatly help", and congratulated Elliot Mason on the production, rather surprisingly remarking that the "the dream scene was very well done, in spite of the difficulties of the Lyric stage".

Some other encouraging comments were made in the reviews. The Stage (17 October) remarked that "there are fine speeches in the play and some witty lines", and the Bulletin echoed that sentiment. The Record after criticising the piece as undramatic goes on to say:

> Yet it has a tang that has been present in few pieces produced by the Scottish Players.

The adverse press reaction obviously upset Gunn, as Brandane tries to reassure him in a letter dated 16 October:

> You're quite wrong about any interest in you being killed off in the SNTS. You haven't let down anybody neither the Reading Panel - nor the Players - nor the Society - we have had experience of the same kind before - but we have never been "savaged" by the Press so badly. Besides we had not the Producer we envisaged when we (the Reading Panel) passed your play. What I had hoped for was that Guthrie would have read our criticism and then have emphasised to you the points that myself and others made, and so borne in on you the import of these criticisms in a way we could not do ourselves. Instead we had a "fresh" producer with no experience ...

The bad press reaction also prompted Joe Corrie to write to the Evening News on 16 October with his "Sporting Offer" to the Glasgow theatres. Corrie's letter reiterates one of the major criticisms directed at the Scottish National Players since The Ancient Fire production, that "the Reading Committee ... have difficulty discriminating drama from literature". Corrie goes further and stated that they have "much difficulty in knowing whether a play is a good one or not". Corrie wrote the letter because his own play, In Time of Strife, had been rejected by the SNP in 1927 despite his having re-written it in accordance with the Reading Panel's "few suggestions for improvement" which Corrie records that he was "grateful to receive". Corrie believed that In Time o' Strife was rejected because the SNP "thought it would not suit this Lyric audience of theirs, containing, they feel, too much socialistic propaganda". Corrie also felt, however, that In Time O' Strife:

> Has more life in it than anything I have seen done by the Scottish Players. It may have its technical faults, and it may not be high literature, but I feel that it is drama. It draws good crowds and always gets an enthusiastic reception.

Corrie notes that he has "quite a lot of new plays" but asks what is the point of sending them to the Scottish National Players "when things like this happen". In Time O' Strife is a three-act play which deals with the troubles of a mining community during the 1926 strike. Issues such as their poor standard of living and the need to change things, black legging, intimidation, and disillusionment with the Union leaders are raised, although not all are followed through fully. The women in the play come

over as strong, resilient and willing to sacrifice themselves, yet at the same time hard and bitter and the ones really responsible for keeping the strike going.

The article of 16 October was subtitled "A Sporting Offer to Glasgow Theatres", and Corrie's letter explains this. If any Glasgow theatre takes his Fife Miner Players production of In Time O' Strife and fails to do "average business" with it then the Players will "play the whole week for nothing".

This offer did, as it was intended to, capture newspaper headlines and gained valuable publicity for Corrie's Miner Players who were, at that time, a professional company touring In Time O' Strife round Scotland and North East England. The fact that the letter was well-timed, appearing a few days after what the Evening News called "the controversy aroused" by the reviews of The Ancient Fire, helped to secure prominence for Corrie's offer. However, there is an element of genuine pique and annoyance that In Time O' Strife had been turned down, when the SNP produced plays of a lesser standard and the belief was that it was rejected because of its politics. The next day an Evening News 'correspondent' wrote that while he regretted that it was necessary "for a poet and dramatist of the quality of Joe Corrie practically to hawk his wares in public" he "welcomed and endorsed his outspoken criticism of the Scottish National Theatre Society". The article continued, to state that the SNTS was actually avoiding "signs of a dramatic talent rising from among the people" while the SNP produced "a succession of futile accent dramas" and "Kelvinside-cum-West Highland" productions. The paper stated that the SNP "followers" never even "considered the Miner Players worthy of their attention", and asks why the SNP "have refused to provide Corrie the experience necessary" to improve his work.

The hope that someone "holding a responsible position" in the SNTS would "come forward with an explanation" was expressed at the end of the article, and on 18 October a letter from R B Wharrie, the chairman of the SNTS board was printed. Wharrie admitted that many of the criticisms of The Ancient Fire made by Corrie and the theatre critics were justified, but asked if they could "suggest seriously that it was not well worth attempting?" Wharrie also points out that neither Corrie nor the Evening News correspondent acknowledged the fact that the SNP had previously produced two of Corrie's plays, The Poacher and The Shillin' A

Week Man, adding that "not only were these plays put before Glasgow audiences but they were played and popularised by our touring companies all over Scotland".

The Daily Record also reported Corrie's "offer", and noted on 17 October that Bridie, the convener of the Reading Panel, had been approached by the paper but had "declined to made an immediate reply". Two days later, however, the Daily Record printed a letter from Bridie which pointed out that Corrie was actually "in some slight debt to the Scottish National Players" as they gave the first production of The Poacher, "and have helped to popularise him throughout Scotland with this play,[24] and with The Shillin'-A-Week Man". Bridie continued, to state that while he is pleased at the success the Miner Players have had with In Time O' Strife, to compare Corrie's play with The Ancient Fire:

> either as drama or as literature, is a piece of ludicrous assumption on Mr Corrie's part. Bad plays have succeeded before where good plays have failed. Mr Corrie has our written opinions of his play and we should see no reason to change them if he ran for 500 nights in London and filled Drury Lane with bouquets.[25]

Other people wrote into the papers to express their opinions on the matter. On 18 October the Evening News published a letter from the manager of the Pavilion theatre, 'Jock' Kirkpatrick, JP, who felt that Corrie "has gone about his business the wrong way. He does not require to rely on the Scottish National Players". Kirkpatrick said that the Pavilion would be unlikely "to produce his once-nightly plays, but if he wrote short sketches I would give consideration to them". The Pavilion, Kirkpatrick stressed, has encouraged local talent in the past, as when the SNP performed Luiffy and Cute McCheyne there, adding that Morland Graham was appearing there that very week. E Campbell wrote to the Evening News on 17 October to call The Ancient Fire "the first pregnant word" uttered in Scottish theatre and the play everyone in Scotland has been waiting for, "in spite of the feeble production and the obvious bewilderment of the actors faced with symbolism and irony beyond their powers of interpretation". James Barke wrote to the Evening News on 19 October, that The Ancient Fire was "one of the greatest plays ever produced on the

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[24]The SNP gave 40 known performances of The Poacher according to the List of Plays and Authors, SNTV, p. 44-47.

[25]Letter from James Bridie to Daily Record, 19 October 1929.

Scottish stage" and while he could not "congratulate the SNTS on its production, their coverage in staging this play calls for admiration". Barke, however, also believed that "a grave mistake" had been made when the SNP rejected In Time O' Strife.

Barke's views are actually the most objective and clear-sighted. The Ancient Fire had a lot of flaws, as its critics stated, but a theatre group seeking to found a national drama in Scotland were justified in producing it. It was extremely unfortunate that Tyrone Guthrie had left the Society and did not produce the play himself. Mason was a competent, if somewhat inexperienced, producer but did not have Guthrie's imagination and flair. However In Time O' Strife was undoubtedly also worthy of production by a Scottish National Theatre company. It is a better play than many of those which the SNP did produce, and was more able to meet the Society's aims. As Jan McDonald has noted:

> Corrie's work was realistic, theatrical, easily accessible and topical: Gunn's was symbolic, mystical, overwritten and appeared to be full of nostalgia for a mythical golden age of the Highlands. The SNP was accused with some justification of favouring the drama of a middle-class literary elite.[26]

The Scottish National Players had previously produced two of Corrie's plays, one of which, The Shillin'-A-Week Man, deals with a very real social problem, that of housewives' debt. The SNP had also previously held Corrie in high esteem, with for example, Elliot Mason telling the Edinburgh Rotary Club earlier in the year that he had "as big a future before him as O'Casey".[27] Corrie was also one of the correspondents of the new limited liability company where it was set up in 1928. The fact that the play dealt sympathetically with the Miners' Strike was no doubt an important point in the Players' rejection of it. It is clear from Bridie's letter to the Daily Record that the Reading Panel had no intention of accepting the play whatsoever. The SNP's attitude to any form of left-wing politics is noted by Gordon Bottomley in a letter to MacKemmie when he recalled that he had:

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[26]Jan McDonald, "Neil Gunn's Ancient Fire", unpublished article, March 1984.
[27]Reported in the Edinburgh Evening Despatch, 2 April 1929.

> once had an advantageous offer to take the SNTS production of "Gruach" for a London performance in the Garrick Theatre, because A Bourchier was lending it to the I.L.P. for a series of nights; and that the S.N.T.S. was obliged to refuse it, though with the greatest regret, because many of its members would not countenance even a passing association with Labour, and it might cause a schism in the Society.[28]

When In Time O' Strife was given a Glasgow production, opening on 16 December 1929 at the Empress Theatre at St George's Cross and being performed by Corrie's Miner Players, the press reaction was favourable. The Evening Times wrote on 17 December that the play was an example of "genuine native drama" and that although it is realistic, "there is nothing in it to give offence to anyone, nor, do I think, can it be labelled propaganda". The paper also pointed out that there had been a great deal of controversy surrounding the SNP's rejection of the play and commented that the play was in fact "a challenge to the Scottish National Players".[29]

The first Annual General Meeting of the new limited liability Society was held on Monday 7 October at 3 p.m. The meeting was presided over by Colonel Ralph R Stewart, who stated that the Players had given 86 performances in 50 different locations during the year. Expenditure had been £1048, and income only £598, leaving a working loss of £449. The week at the Lyric in December 1928 when The Flower in the Vase was produced raised £333, and £92 profit was made in March with It Looks Like A Change. The autumn tour made a profit of £81, but the January one lost £45. It was very unusual for the SNP to lose money on a tour and Stewart explained that this was because the tour had been "undertaken during the course of the influenza epidemic and in some of the towns three-quarters of the people were in bed".[30] Stewart also announced that the Society had acquired new premises in Fitzroy Place for rehearsals and offices.

The AGM was rather livelier than some of those in previous years. The Daily Record reported that there was a lot of "desultory talk" which Dr Devon, one of those proposed for a place on the Board, interrupted, stating that "This is degenerating into a dog-fight". The reason behind this tension was that a new Board of Directors had to be elected, although members of the Board were eligible for re-election.

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[28]Letter from Gordon Bottomley to MacKemmie, dated 3 February 1935, STA.
[29]NLS, Corrie papers, ACC 4628.
[30]Report of the AGM in the Daily Record ,8 Oct 1929.

There had, however, been a lot of political jostling behind the scenes, with Brandane commenting in a letter to Neil Gunn that with Elliot Mason replacing Guthrie as Producer "things are in the melting pot as regards the SNP", and that it all has "the making of a lovely shindig!".[31] Brandane stated that:

> Miss Mason and I are on opposite poles in the SNP. I am for Scottish Drama: she is out for any show that gives the players and herself a chance to shine.[32]

David Glen MacKemmie had resigned from his paid position as Secretary of the Scottish National Theatre Society Ltd, in June. In early July Messrs Nicoll, Broadfoot, Martin and Co, CA were appointed as his successors. Thomas Martin had previously been Honorary Treasurer of the Society. MacKemmie had been one of the founders of the SNP and felt very strongly that the Players should uphold the patriotic and nationalist side of their work. The main reason behind his resignation was his belief that the movement had lost its direction. A statement by MacKemmie was issued to shareholders which explained his position:

> My chief reason for taking this step was the growing conviction that the original aims and objects of the Society are gradually being lost sight of by the majority of the present Board of Directors, with whose policy and methods I was becoming more and more out of sympathy.

In MacKemmie's opinion this loss of direction was highlighted by two current SNTS policies, the use of Song and Mime and the production of a Barrie play at Christmas:

> In my view, and in that of many other shareholders known to me, programmes of Song, Dance and Mime, however colourful, bright and entertaining they may be, are a waste of time for a movement such as ours, especially when they take the place of original dramatic work by young Scots writers who are waiting their opportunity to be heard and encouraged. I am also of the view that the work of such writers should not be laid aside, nor its production delayed, to enable presentations to be made of well known plays like Barrie's "What Every Woman Knows", which play the Board has decided to stage at Xmas. Not in these ways is Scottish National Drama to be developed.

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[31] Letter from Brandane to Gunn, dated 21 June 1929, NLS.
[32] Letter from Brandane to Gunn,dated 10 September 1929, NLS.

Underlying these points of principle is the fact that the manoeuvrings within the Society were leaving MacKemmie with less and less real power. His statement to the shareholders states that "as a paid official my influence in shaping the policy of the Company became practically negligible". On the other hand, Elliot Mason as the new Producer was given "largely increased powers of control and direction while the Secretary in future will be merely a Minute Clerk and Bookkeeper to the Company", as MacKemmie complained to A P Wilson is a letter dated 2 August 1929.

MacKemmie's letters to Wilson at this period reveal his increasing disillusionment with the Society, and in particular the frustrations of being managed by Committees. Wilson wrote that it was the endless committees which had worn him down earlier in the twenties:

> ... it is the same old story rehashed. The Committee system of government broke my heart quicker than it did yours, that's all.[33]

MacKemmie replied that he had:

> hoped that the bad old Committee system would be got rid of when the Limited Liability Company was formed but a year's experience proved that the only change was that as paid Secretary I was effectively muzzled and the movement was at the mercy of a dominant coterie in the Board who cared little or nothing about the original aims of the SNP.[34]

The "dominant coterie", described by Wilson as the "Kelvinside National Players",[35] consisted of Elliot Mason, her nephew Hal D Stewart, her brother-in-law Colonel Ralph R Stewart, David Cleghorn Thomson, and with W H Sinclair and R B Wharrie wavering somewhat in their views. Those who held similar ideas as MacKemmie included John Brandane, James Bridie, Norman Bruce, C Stewart Black, George Reston Malloch, Dr Devon, Professor Findlay, Rosslyn Mitchell and Murray McClymont. Brandane kept Gunn informed of developments by letter, and explained that they wanted a larger Board, of fifteen rather than ten, the number which the current Board wanted to keep to. On 20 August Brandane declared that "the fight here is now on". He was confident that their side would win, as they already had three men on the Board, Walter Elliott,

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[33]Letter from Wilson to MacKemmie, dated 6 July 1929, STA.
[34]Letter from MacKemmie to Wilson, dated 2 August 1929, STA.
[35]Letter from Wilson to MacKemmie, dated 4 August 1929, STA.

Rosslyn Mitchell and Bridie, and that if Scott (the Rector of Hutcheson's School and a member of the Court of Glasgow University) and Brandane himself were elected only five of "the old gang" would be left, and one of them was said to have gone over to their side,[36] with one, "wavering towards us". However Brandane admits that this "speculation may be blown sky-high by the proxy votes".[37]

Many of the ordinary shareholders and players also supported MacKemmie, and wrote to him expressing their shock at his resignation and their difficulty in envisaging the SNP without him. D Martin wrote on 17 June that if MacKemmie leaves, "the movement will have lost a driving force". William MacDonald, on 19 June, wrote that "Surprise is a very mild word for the effect produced by the news . . a matter of deep regret to me." On 4 July Dora Bird, who had acted with and designed dresses for the SNP, wrote that:

> It was an absolute shock to me to hear that you are resigning from the SNP. You have been such a real part of it from the beginning that I just felt as if the headstone in the corner had walked away.

Another of the Players, R Watson Trenwith, wrote on 21 September:

> I had heard rumours from time to time of trouble "behind the scenes' but of course I knew nothing of the actual details . . . I tried in vain to picture what it could be like without the man at the helm who had shown such conspicuous organising ability, who had expanded such tremendous energy in the interests of the Society and who in fact had been the backbone and mainstay of the Players since their conception.

MacKemmie decided to stand for election to the Board at the AGM in October. There were thirteen nominations for the ten places. Much of the voting was indeed done by proxy as Brandane had feared, but many of the proxy votes in favour of MacKemmie, Brandane and Bridie were deemed invalid as the shareholders had not paid the latest call on their shares. This infuriated MacKemmie who, as a result, came in eleventh and missed

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[36]Brandane tells Gunn in a letter dated 14 October 1929 about "the 'ratting' of D C Thomson from the Stewart party to our side". NLS.

[37]Letter from Brandane to Gunn, dated 20 August 1929, NLS.

being elected.[38] This left MacKemmie with no connection to the Scottish National Players, except as a shareholder, and the control of the Society now rested with the "dominant coterie" of the Mason/Stewart faction, who were not as dedicated to the stated aims of the SNP as MacKemmie and Brandane's followers.

The next production was a triple bill of one-act plays which were produced at the Lyric from 12 to 16 November 1929. The plays were Barrie's Shall We Join the Ladies? and two new plays, The Girl Who Didn't Want to go to Kuala Lumpur[39] by Mary Henderson and Pot Hooks by Iain Cameron.

Shall We Join the Ladies? was the first Barrie play which the SNP had ever produced, and caused some comment that the choice "was inadequate and therefore unfortunate" (Evening News 13 November 1929). The Evening Times review (13 November 1929) stated that the production of the play "indicated a change of plan", confirmed by the announcement that What Every Woman Knows would be the Christmas production. The Bulletin (10 January 1930) referred to "the Barrie campaign that the Players seem to be conducting".

Pot Hooks, dealing with poachers' activities, was dismissed by most of the reviewers. The Evening News said that it was "too grotesque to be even farce", The Daily Express (13 November 1929) commented about it that "the less said the better", the Citizen (13 November) stated that it "should never have been done", and the Glasgow Herald (13 Nov) felt that it had "delightful freshness at the beginning but became "stale" and should have been shortened. The Stage (21 November) described it as "an unpretentious piece".

The Girl Who Didn't Want to Go to Kuala Lumpur, is a weak play in which Margaret is saved from going to Kuala Lumpur with her rather unsavoury guardians by falling in love with a convenient Highland postman, found for her by her friends. Bridie himself has written that it:

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[38]Those elected were James Bridie, Rosslyn Mitchell, John Brandane, R B Wharrie, Walter Buchanan, Walter Elliott, Dr Scott, Colonel Ralph R Stewart, David Cleghorn Thomson and Norman MacLeod. Dr Devon and Professor Findlay were not elected.

[39]This was referred to by the SNP as a one-act play, although when it was published in 1934 by Constable it was divided into three acts.

> was not a very good play ... I laughed myself sick when I was writing it. The actors laughed themselves sick at rehearsals ... but the audience were hardly so much amused, and the Glasgow dramatic critics not at all.[40]

The Citizen called it an "ordinary playlet" but felt that if it was meant to be a burlesque then "it missed fire", and the Record (13 November), described the characters as individual studies "etched in acid".

As had been announced at the November triple bill, the Christmas and New Year production was What Every Woman Knows by J M Barrie. It was produced at the Lyric from 27 December to 4 January by Elliot Mason. The Bulletin (14 December) noted that the choice was likely to "meet with a mixed reception" among the SNP supporters, with those "who are not pioneers in spirit" finding it welcome. The article declared that as 1929 had not been too good a year for the Players "they cannot be grudged a little shelter under the 'ready-made' wing of Barrie", noting that if they had produced a new play which did not please, "they would have been criticised anyway". The Daily Record (28 December) called the production "a bid for popularity" which was successful, but which took the Players away from their original aims. The decision to stage a Barrie play over the festive season was undoubtedly motivated by financial needs. The production made a profit of £329 17s 1d, which was vital to a company which lost £797 7s 3d on their productions during the financial year which ended on 31 May 1930. What Every Woman Knows was the only Lyric production to make a profit that year.

The press were fairly enthusiastic about the production. The Evening News (28 December) felt that it was a "pleasing performance" and was "technically ... well produced". The Bulletin (28 December) stated that "the performance was considerably better "than anything any other amateur dramatic club in Scotland" could have produced. The Citizen (28 December) reviewer declared that he had "never seen them in a play which suited them better".

A plebiscite, as they called it, was taken at this production, whereby members of the audience could vote for the plays they most wanted to see the SNP revive. The result was as follows:

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[40]Bridie, p. 270.

1. Shall We Join the Ladies?	J M Barrie
2. C'est La Guerre	Morland Graham
3. Campbell of Kilmhor	J A Ferguson
4. Gruach	Gordon Bottomley
5. The Mother	George Blake
6. The Dark Lady of the Sonnets	G B Shaw
7. Count Albany	Donald Carswell
8= Rory Aforesaid	John Brandane
8= The Shillin'-A-Week Man	Joe Corrie
10. The Philosopher of Butterbiggins	Harold Chapin
11. The Guinea Stamp	C Stewart Black
12. The Poacher	Joe Corrie

The timing of the plebiscite was criticised. It was said that if it had been taken at another time of year the result would have been different as many of the audience simply wanted to be entertained. "Nobody wants anything more at Christmas time", the Bulletin reported (10 January). That article, however, commented that the choices of Gruach, The Mother and Count Albany were "significant and cheering selections", showing that there was still "theatre-goers in Scotland with taste and memory". The Glasgow Herald (9 January 1930) noted that the first choice, Shall We Join The Ladies? received twice as many votes as C'est la Guerre, which came second. The Scottish National Players however paid little or no attention to the results, and although one or two of the plays were performed by request on one-night visits, none of them were actually revived in Glasgow.

The first production of 1930 was a new play by Clifford Bax called The Immortal Lady. This was produced at the Lyric from 4-8 February by Elliot Mason. The play, described as consisting of "scenes" rather than a given number of acts, dealt with an episode in 1715 when the Countess of Nithsdale rescued her husband from imprisonment in the Tower of London. It was noted that the author was actually English but that, as the play deals with Jacobites then it may "be considered to be brought within the national orbit" of the SNP.[41] The reviews of the play were fairly consistent if not very exciting. The Bulletin (5 February) stated that it "was not a great play" but had "polished" dialogue and "a genuine use of comedy". The Daily Express (7 February) called it "a simple piece" full of

[41]The Bulletin, 5 February 1930.

"quiet humour", the Citizen (5 February) commented on the acting, and especially on the need for "carefully planned movement", and the Evening News (5 February) declared that it would have been more effective if Lady Nithsdale "had been as Scottish in her speech as she must have been in reality".

On 3 March 1930 the Players began a six-night run at the Cambridge Festival Theatre where Tyrone Guthrie was now working, and had no doubt been behind the invitation to the SNP. The plays presented were Campbell of Kilmhor, C'est la Guerre and A Valuable Rival. The Glasgow Herald (8 January) reported the invitation, stating that the SNP should be "complimented on being thus recognised by the famous University town".

Moultrie Kelsall gave an interview to the Citizen in which he said that the theatre was unlike anything they had performed in before: "it was an Art Theatre with a capital A".[42] The lighting was particularly impressive, Kelsall said, and effects could be obtained "surpassing even those of the ordinary commercial theatre". Kelsall explained that they altered the dialogue so that it would be more readily understood by the Cambridge audience:

> . . . we Anglicized our Scots a good deal, except in C'est la Guerre, which did not require changing. In Campbell of Kilmhor for example, there is a line "I'm no' that set up wi' them masel". We changed that into "I'm no' that fond o' them masel".

C'est la Guerre was the most popular of the three plays according to Kelsall even though he admits that they broke six of the theatre's windows "when firing the 'bombs' which provide the war time atmosphere".

Granta (7 March) wrote that the atmosphere produced by the SNP was "one of heather and howling winds, one of ca' canny Scotsmen, highland romance and war-time humour. So that the heathery tang may not overpower nor bore us." The Gownsman (9 March) did not believe any of the plays to be very good but praised the Players' acting, which it described as "simple and direct", the "excellence" of which "prevented the evening being dull for the Anglo-Saxon."

The Manchester Guardian (6 March) also praised the SNP's acting, declaring that they are "probably as good actors of slight plays as may be

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[42] n.d. STA.

found". Campbell of Kilmhor, the review declared, "was enough to show the value of their conscientious teamwork". In A Valuable Rival their method was described as being "clear and unimpeachable" with "steady playing". C'est la Guerre was the least of the plays in the critic's opinion, being a "piece of photography" which stimulates enjoyment of our own emotions and not that of its own content". The Observer (9 March) felt that more of the SNP plays "reached the standard to which the Festival is accustomed. The Cambridge Review (7 March) reported that the Players' reception was "more enthusiastic than any witnessed at the Festival for some time", but noted that this was possibly due to "the natural patriotic" manifestation of the presence ... of a large number of Scotsmen in the audience". This review wished that they had been given "a longer and more solid programme", as the three plays produced left them not only with an "impression of enjoyment" but also of "slight dissatisfaction". C'est la Guerre, the Cambridge Review felt, was the "success of the evening". The company made a loss of £45 9s 3d on the Cambridge trip, a similar amount to that lost in the Lyric triple bill in November 1929, but by no means one of the largest of the year's losses.

While the SNP were at the Cambridge Festival other members of the company presented The Treasure Ship at the Lyric, from 4-8 March, with Howieson Culff as the producer. The play is a rewritten version of Brandane's Full Fathom Five which the SNP first performed in 1924. The production was not well received. The Bulletin (5 March) simply asked "was the play worth rewriting?" and the Evening News (5 March) described it as "so 'dreich' in parts". The Glasgow Herald (5 March) stated that it "was not properly a three act play" and that "the subject matter of the comedy is scarcely equal to sustained exploitation in three acts". The Evening Times (5 March) expressed the opinion that:

> Someday the Scottish National Players will present a play that has as its basis Scottish Life as it is or was. In the meantime they seem content with so-called dramas that are based on the sort of Scottish life that is exploited by "Scotch" comedians.
>
> The Treasure Ship is of this variety.

In April a quadruple bill of one-act plays was produced at the Lyric, from 1-5 of the month. Elliot Mason was listed as the "Stage Director". The plays were Campbell of Kilmhor, Cupid and the Kirk by Murray McClymont,

which had not been produced by the SNP before, and two new plays, His Own Country by C Stewart Black and T M Watson's Diplomacy and the Draughtsman. The Evening Times (2 April) noted that "the SNP are always more at home in plays of the one act type". The Daily Record (2 April) felt that His Own Country, which portrayed "a hen-pecked John Knox", was "an amusing idea overburdened with dialogue". Cupid and the Kirk was dismissed as a "rather vague love affair of a young and not very virile minister" and the problems caused by the elders. With Diplomacy and the Draughtsman, the Evening Times reported that the SNP had "conceded a corner to Glasgow and industrialism" but felt that play was "the most unreal of the four" and that the Players "stumbled over it".

The Scottish National Players produced The Glen is Mine at the Everyman Theatre in London for two weeks, beginning 5 May. The producer was Elliot Mason. Once more the papers ran articles with details of the history and achievements of the SNTS and stressed the influence of the Abbey upon them. It was also noted that this was the first time that they had performed a full-length play in London.

The London press was welcoming and gave the Players good reviews. The Daily News (6 May) stated that the play "is a very amusing little comedy and the Scottish National Players gave a good performance". The Star (6 May) declared that the production provided London with "a rare treat". The Morning Post (6 May) stated that the play received "the friendliest and most appreciative possible reception", while also wishing that the play had been "more strongly played". The Daily Telegraph (6 May) called the play "a very pleasant little comedy", and the Daily Mail (6 May) reported that "the author was enthusiastically called and spoke optimistically of the future of the Scottish drama". The Observer (11 May) stated that "the right spirit is there". Other English papers also reviewed the production. The Manchester Guardian (6 May) felt that the Players' acting smacked, at times, "of amateurishness and self-consciousness", and that it suffered from "an inability to make a consistent atmosphere, to keep the acting easy and fluent". The Birmingham Post (7 May) felt that the play lacked "the passionate intensity which is required to give it national significance", but noted that the production, "in sincerity and naturalness ... recalled the Irish Players of twenty years ago". Several of the other reviews compared the play and the production to Synge and the Irish Players. The Stage (8 May) noted that there were "cadences as musical as those in John Millington Synge" and the Star (6 May) stated that at times

the play "has a little of the lyrical quality of Synge". The Daily Mail (6 May) reported that it was "strangely reminiscent in rhythm and cadence of the Irish dialect" and Reynolds News stated that Angus MacKinnon "who is full of simple cunning, is very much like the the Irishmen in Synge's plays".[43] In an interview with the Citizen (23 May) James Gibson said that the fortnight had been "extremely popular". However it was not a financial success, losing the Players £252 5s 3d.

In June the Directors of the Society announced that W G Fay had been appointed as Producer. The papers stressed his connection with the Abbey Theatre, and that he had worked at the Birmingham Rep. Two months later the autumn tour set out, from 25 August to 23 September.[44] The plays produced were The Grenadier, Diplomacy and the Draughtsman, and Rizzio's Boots by Hal D Stewart , which the SNP had not previously performed. This was subtitled "A Historical Impertinence", and treats the supposed love affair of Mary, Queen of Scots with her Italian secretary Rizzio as a farce. Mary and Rizzio are almost discovered in an embrace by Darnley but Rizzio manages to hide behind a curtain, concealing all but his boots. When Darnley draws the curtain back, Rizzio has escaped leaving his boots behind, and when he repeats the action later he discovers John Knox instead! The play is light-hearted and relies heavily on the workings of the secret stairway which enabled Rizzio to escape. It was performed 21 times by the Scottish National Players.

In September 1930 it was announced that a Scottish National Players Club was to be formed. The Daily Record (29 September) reported that the "nucleus" of it had already been formed, with Rosslyn Mitchell as the Chairman, and that:

> It is intended that the club shall arrange social evenings and lectures by dramatists, players and critics and give private performances and readings of plays of special interest which are unlikely to be commercial successes.

The new Club was also seen as a way to encourage the public to give greater support to the SNP. The Citizen (2 October) stated that the "primary object" would be "the bringing into closer association the board of directors, the Players, and the audiences". It was also hoped that the club

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[43] n.d. STA.

[44] The tour visited Callander, Aberfeldy, Killin, Pitlochry, Lossiemouth, Huntly, Aberdeen, St Andrews, Earlsferry, Kingussie, Arbroath, Brechin, Elgin, Grantown-on-spey, Nairn, Cullon, Abeyne, Ellon and Dollar.

"might be able to arouse sufficient interest and enthusiasm in Glasgow to enable them to have a suitably equipped theatre". As most of the talks were reported in the Glasgow press, the activities of the Club also provided good publicity for the Players and their productions.

The Club had about six meetings a year, once a month during the winter. The very first meeting was held on 17 November 1930 at the Engineers' Institute in Elmbank Street when John Brandane was elected Chairman; Dr T J Honeyman as Vice-Chairman; Elsie Brotchie as Secretary; and J Ronald Young as Treasurer. Other meetings were held in the MacLellan Galleries and in later years they were often in a restaurant. An advert for the Club in 1937 stated that meetings were at the Rhul Restaurant in Sauchiehall Street, and that there was an annual subscription of 5/-, which included admission to all meetings. Most of the meetings featured a talk by someone professionally involved in the theatre, and often, though not always, with the the Scottish National Players themselves. For example, the 1930 programme included talks by Robins Millar on "Scottish Drama - the problem of dialect" and Lennox Robinson on his experiences at the Abbey theatre. Speakers proposed for the second year of the Club included Barry Jackson, C B Cochrane and W G Fay. At other meetings Club members were entertained by the SNP performing a one-act play, with a discussion afterwards.

The Club also offered to help any Literary and Debating Society which approached them for help in preparing their season's syllabus. A small article in the Citizen on 4 June 1932 stated that:

> The club has expressed its willingness to supply a speaker or a discussion leader to deal with such subjects as drama and the theatre in Scotland.

This is in line with the general feeling of the SNP that they were a body which gave help and advice to amateur societies. The statement of policy which the directors issued in November 1928 stated that the Society wished to help "the development and encouragement of amateur acting". Elliot Mason, in a talk to Kilmarnock Rotarians in September 1929, declared that as a result of the SNP's tours "there had been a great awakening of interest in dramatic art throughout Scotland and specially in the rural districts".[45] R B Wharrie, while presiding over the AGM in 1931,

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[45]Kilmarnock Standard, 13 September 1929.

said in his report that the SNTS "had made possible the work which had been carried out so notably and successfully in recent years by the Scottish Community Drama Association", and declared that that "was a justification of the existence of the Scottish National Theatre Society".[46] David Cleghorn Thomson, in Scotland in Quest of Her Youth, which was published in 1932, wrote that, "Scotland is being swept to-day by an epidemic of amateur dramatic activity in both town and country", which had been "stimulated by the visits of the Arts League of Service Travelling Theatre, the Scottish National Theatre tours and the Wilson Players".[47] Thomson also stressed that "the bulk of the actors and actresses who are now the backbone of the Scottish Community Drama Movement" had received "their initial training in dramatic work" from the SNP.[48] In 1948 Melville Dinwiddie wrote in a history of Scottish broadcasting, The Scot and his Radio, that it was the regular broadcasts of the SNP which "helped to encourage amateur drama as organized by the Scottish Community Drama Association". The belief that the SNP had encouraged the amateur groups was also stated in The Scottish National Theatre Venture, when R B Wharrie stated that from their country tours:

> came the revival of interest in drama that is now so widespread over Scotland and that is so ably fostered by the work of the Scottish Community Drama Association. In the early days of that Association ... much valuable advice, assistance, and service were rendered by members of the Scottish National Players.[49]

People in the country districts also believed that the SNP had helped the amateur societies. On 29 December 1928 the Kelso Mail noted that the promoters of amateur groups owe a great deal to the "parent stock" of the SNTS, who see this as "a side of the work" upon which they lay stress. The Evening News published a letter on 4 May 1928 which was signed "Country Cousin" and declared that the amateurs "look for a lead" from the Scottish National Players.

The second Annual General Meeting of the SNTS Ltd was held on Wednesday 1 October 1930 at 8pm. The directors' report noted that

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[46]Glasgow Herald, 2 November 1931, p. 12, col. e.

[47]David Cleghorn Thomson, Scotland in Quest of Her Youth. (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1932), p106.

[48]Thomson, p.118.

[49]SNTV, p. 24.

twenty-six board meetings had been held during the year, and that Elliot Mason had been appointed in place of David Cleghorn Thomson who had resigned.[50] As Elliot Mason was no longer the Society's Producer she was eligible for election to the Board. As a director her influence on the Society's policy and behind the scenes affairs strengthened, resulting in increased power for her "dominant coterie" and a continued weakening of the Society's ideals.

The directors' report notes that the during the year the SNP gave 93 performances and 3 broadcasts. The loss on the year's workings amounted to £788 14s 6 1/2d. However it was stated that several items of expenditure were "of a special nature" and were unlikely to recur. The accounts for the period show that £129 6s 1d were listed under "Extraordinary Expenditure", mainly accountants fees for preparation of books, and rent and rates for the Kent road premises. The directors also tried to explain the large loss by stating that "other theatrical enterprises undoubtedly suffered from the financial depression of the past season". The SNP was obviously not meant to be a profit-making enterprise, although when they started out they did have the idea that surplus funds arising out of productions would be accumulated as a Theatre Fund, but an increase of 57% in the amount lost in one year is disturbing, and highlights the fact that the Society was failing to gain public support. The loss of £252 5s 3d at the London production of The Glen is Mine was regarded as a "serious item", however:

> the Directors took this engagement holding the view that it was in the best interests of the Society's activities that it should be able to present one of its best comedies in a London theatre.

The reason for the lower than expected attendances was given as being because the production "coincided with other productions at that time", something which one should perhaps, have been prepared for if taking a theatre production to London. The directors' ended their report by stating that while the financial aspect must be "disappointing", they believed that the Society had "enhanced its reputation and has proved that it is a progressive factor in the theatrical activity of the country".

The Citizen reported the AGM the following day, noting that the Society's need for their own theatre had been raised:

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[50]STA.

> ...several suggestions had been put forward relating to the acquisition of premises and Mr R B Wharrie, the Chairman of the Society, assured the shareholders that the matter was not being lost sight of. They had examined old churches, halls and cinemas but many of the places that might have been adapted to their requirements would not conform to regulations.

The Citizen also noted that W G Fay had addressed the meeting and appealed for more people to join the SNP Club.

The next production of the Scottish National Players was of 1960, a new three-act play by J Storer Clouston. It was described by the programme as being an "ultra-modern comedy" and was produced by W G Fay at the Lyric from 7-11 October 1930. This was Fay's first production with the SNP.

As the title suggests the play was set in the future, with England wishing to emulate the exploits of Edward I, the 'hammer of the Scots', but finding that her army's main interest is in working a five-hour day. The reviews were not at all favourable. The Citizen (8 October) admitted that the play had "some amusing lines", but felt that its production was "a waste of time". The Evening Times (8 October) found the play improbable and the Glasgow Herald (8 October) noted that:

> If their public were not disposed to be indulgent towards Scottish plays and players it is to be feared that the production would be in danger of some unkindness. It taxes a patriotic charitableness to applaud it politely.

The Scots Observer (9 October) upheld the attitude that the audience is usually "indulgent" to the SNP, and stated that if it had not been for the "fine acting" of R B Wharrie then the production would not have received "even the few handclaps which were - rather grudgingly it appeared - accorded it ".

The next production received better reviews. Norman MacOwan's three-act play, The Infinite Shoeblack, was produced at the Lyric from 25-29 November. The leaflet advertising the production described it as a "London and New York success". The Daily Record (26 November) stated that while producing such a play stressed their "difficulty in finding suitable material for production" among the new plays submitted to them, their policy was not, in this instance, mistaken. The review declared that the Players had "never before so definitely risen above the amateurish in their acting", and felt that "it is well to state that last night the house was full".

That last statement shows just how important the London 'seal of approval' on a play could be. The Bulletin (26 November) stated that if it were to be judged by the size of the audience then "the SNP have made a popular move" in producing The Infinite Shoeblack. The Citizen (26 November) reported that the play was "amazingly well done", and that "if it does not draw the public nothing will". The Evening Times (26 November) declared that though there were some "doubts about the 'Scottishness' " of the play, there could be "no doubt about the wisdom" of its production. The Scots Observer (27 November) reported that although the choice of "an established success of the commercial theatre was received with lifted eyebrows", this changed to "inarticulate joy" on seeing the Players give "a performance which had all the facility, subtlety, resource and sincerity associated with the best repertory players". The Evening News (26 November) also commented on the acting, stating that Fay had "aimed at 'intimate' production" and that the play "shows the Players approaching nearer to an Abbey Theatre naturalism (thanks to Mr Fay) than they have done before". The production however, was not a financial success, a fact which The Scottish Player (March 1931) stated was due partly to "two days of impenetrable fog" which deterred and prevented people from attending the theatre.

The Christmas and New Year production was another play by J M Barrie, Alice Sit-by-the-Fire, which was produced at the Lyric from 26 December 1930 to 6 January 1931. It had originally been intended to close on 3 January but it was decided to extend the production because of its popularity. For this production the magazine-type programme, The Scottish Player, was re-issued. The Bulletin (29 December) welcomed this development and stated that it "provides an intimate touch between the Players and the public that they have lacked for some time". This article reported that the revival was "largely due to the new SNP Club". The December 1930 issue declared that the magazine had been revived "with the object of telling the friends of the Society and particularly its new and lively friends of the SNP Club, what we are doing, thinking and proposing". The editorial stated that they would "avoid explaining themselves away", or dictating matters of doctrine. There was an article by W G Fay which stressed the importance of the audience to the theatre, but the rest of the magazine was made up of small anecdotes and snippets of information. This prompted one newspaper to remark that the tone of the magazine was

"more flippant" than it had been when it was first issued.[51] Indeed it was stated that the new Scottish Player is intended to "fulfil one of the functions of the *Foyer* " which was a "sad lack" in the Lyric. This was upheld in the next issue, in February 1931, when it was stated in reply to criticism from The Scottish Stage that The Scottish Player was primarily intended as "an entr'acte entertainment". The fact that the magazine was less serious and more concerned with light-hearted gossip rather than matters of theatrical policy than when it was first issued in the twenties, illustrates the waning of enthusiasm within the Society for its original aims.

January 1931 saw the tenth anniversary of the Scottish National Players. The occasion was marked by a fancy dress ball, several short notices in the press,and by a lengthy article in the Glasgow Herald. This was by John Brandane and was published on 13 January. It was a history of the SNP, listing what Brandane considered to be their "Milestones of Progress". The article aroused controversy. Some writers were amazed at the plays which Brandane listed as "outstanding", such as The Girl Who Didn't Want to Go to Kuala Lumpur.[52] D Paterson Walker, writing on 14 January, questioned on what authority Brandane called the SNP the "theatre in Scotland", and Halbert Tatlock, also writing on the 14 January, declared that the SNP audiences have "from the start been drawn chiefly from lovers of Scotland rather than lovers of the drama and the theatre". Tatlock, who had himself acted with the Players, goes further, and pronounces that "unless the S N T S directors change now, their brave days are over". A letter from W Ralph Purnell was published on 7 February, which gave more details of the pre-war SNP effort and ended with the statement that the opportunity in the Glasgow Herald for "outspoken criticism and for all manner of grievances to be aired" is "bound to be good" for the movement, and "if used in the right way can only be helpful".

The first production of 1931 was The Dancing Bear a new three-act play by James Bridie. It was produced by W G Fay at the Lyric from 24-28 February, and the Glasgow Herald noted on 3 March that the SNP had "had the unusual experience, at once heartening and exasperating, of having to turn money away from the doors on Saturday night".

The play deals with the manners and pretensions of that part of middle-class society which takes an interest in literature and the arts, and

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[51] Unknown article, n.d. STA.

[52] For example, the letter by 'Circum-Jacker' on 14 January 1931.

shows their production of a short play by "a little grey-haired woman"[53] called Mary Henderson, Bridie's first pseudonym. A country poet is caught up in the group but realises his mistake at the last minute and goes off with the servant instead. The play is amusing, poking fun at the type of people involved with the Scottish National Players. Alasdair Cameron has noted that in The Dancing Bear, Bridie "knew this 'small bourgeoisie' intimately , and proved quite capable of extracting every ounce of satire from his encounters with their artistic representatives".[54] In One Way of Living Bridie wrote that the play had been written for the SNP, and that W G Fay "helped" him with it. He also stated that the press "attacked the play for all they were worth", and while he felt that the play was "no great matter" it did not deserve the criticism the press gave it , and that it "displayed the remarkable acting resources of the Society".[55]

The press was not, indeed, very enthusiastic about the play itself, although it was agreed that the acting and the production were good. The Evening Times (25 February) found the play disappointing because "many of the really "Bridie-ish" moments are somewhat lost in the maze of "business" which approximates to a not too clever clowning", but noted that the "Players, however, were surprisingly good". The Citizen (25 February) could not "quite grasp" the significance of either the title or the play within the play, but felt that "in spite of these drawbacks" the play was "full of amusing lines" and that the production was "good". The Daily Record (25 February) believed that the comedy, which it described as being "very frequently farce", suffered because Bridie was more "concerned with types rather than with character" with the result that the characters "never come completely to life, however amusing" they may be. The review stated that "all the large cast did well" and that as "an evening's entertainment" it is "first rate". The Bulletin (25 February) also felt that Bridie rather unfortunately preferred "witty dialogue to character, and both to the development of any theme or story". The Glasgow Herald (25 February) stated that it was the Players' acting which saved the play from having "missed fire badly" but that "the characters were excellently portrayed, every one of the men and women in the cast playing exceedingly well". However The Bulletin did also declare that The Dancing Bear was "very

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[53] As described by Bridie in the "Synopsis of the Characters" in the published edition, Colonel Wotherspoon and Other Plays by James Bridie, (London: Constable, 1934), p. 171.

[54] Alasdair Cameron, "Bridie:The Scottish Playwright", Chapman, no. 55-56, 1989.

[55] p. 274.

definitely a clever and amusing show, as well as a supremely Scots one - precisely the sort of thing, in fact, which the Players exist to produce", which is a more accurate description of the play than any others given at the time.

In early March Lennox Robinson addressed the SNP Club and spoke of his experiences at the Abbey Theatre. The talk was widely reported in the press. The Glasgow Herald (9 March) stated that Robinson had suggested that the Scottish National Players should visit the Abbey and vice-versa, and the Irish Independent Bulletin (10 March) noted that Robinson's suggestion "met with a good deal of favour with his audience". Robinson said in his talk that:

> Our case is parallel with that of Scotland and we hope we may get to know each other better by the exchange of companies in the future.

Towards the end of the month the Players produced four one-act plays at the Lyric from 24-28 March. These were: Trawl Hol by Matt Mair, the only new play on the bill; The Home Front by Hal D Stewart; Janet By Philip Blair; and Dobbie's Close by John McLoren. None of the plays had been previously produced by the SNP.

The Scottish Player (February 1931) stated that Matt Mair was "a hand on a North Sea trawler", and in the March issue it was noted that this comedy was his first play and dealt with the lives of "those who go down to the sea in ships". Gordon Bottomley, a member of the Reading Panel, said that it was he himself who had:

> urged the production of "Trawl Ho!" partly because I thought there was something in the writer and the practical experience would do him good, and partly because I thought it was time the coal-miners should see that somebody else could do something.[56]

Dobbie's Close, the other comedy on the bill, was described as a "play of slum life in Glasgow". It was set in a riveter's house on a Sunday morning, portraying how difficult it can be to rest on the 'day of rest'. The Home Front dealt with the anxieties of the women who had to carry on at home while their men were fighting in the Great War. Indeed there are no men in the cast, although they are talked about and important to the plot. It

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[56]Letter from Bottomley to Brandane, dated 2 April 1931, STA.

is set in a farm kitchen in 1918 where Billy, a Land Girl, is engaged to John, the eldest son of the farm. John is fighting at the Front and Billy attends a regimental dance with the Lieutenant billeted at the farm, a fact which some think shameful and other consider to be perfectly reasonable as John would hardly expect her to sit and mope. The play ends with the arrival of the telegram announcing that John has been killed. The remaining play, Janet, was described by W G Fay in his "Producer's Note" as dealing with "emotion and mental crisis" rather than actual events. Fay stated that this could "open up a new avenue for the development of native drama". The play deals with a woman who has had to postpone marriage for some years, then discovers that her fiancé has fallen in love with her sister.

The quadruple bill was regarded by the press as being "an excellent evening's entertainment",[57] although the plays were of differing standards.[58] The Home Front was regarded as being the best of the four, with the Glasgow Herald (25 March) calling it "a delicately wrought reminiscence of war", and the Citizen (25 March) describing it as "undoubtedly the best, both as a play and in its presentation". Trawl Ho! was dismissed by most of the press. The Evening Times (25 March) stated that it was "the only failure" of the evening, as it "lacked sincerity and the jokes were definitely 'music-hall' ". The Daily Record (25 March) stated that it was "frankly disappointing", a view also expressed by the Evening News (25 March). Only the Glasgow Herald and the Stage (2 April) felt that it had some promise as an author's first play. Dobbie's Close was regarded as containing "plenty of fun" by the Citizen, and as an "amusing sketch" by the Glasgow Herald. Janet was seen as "more than a little tedious" by the Daily Record and as a "difficult little play" by the Glasgow Herald. Only the Evening Times was enthusiastic, declaring that the SNP could congratulate themselves on having made a "discovery" in its author.

On Saturday 30 May 1931 the Scottish National Players performed four one-act plays at the Lyric as part of Glasgow Civic Week. R B Wharrie addressed the audience at the interval and said that they were undertaking the performance to "make a contribution towards the expense the Corporation had incurred during Civic Week:". Wharrie stated that the SNP were usually better off financially when performing outside Glasgow, and

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[57]The Citizen 25 March 1931.
[58]The Citizen, 25 March 1931.

hoped that one of effects of the Civic Week would be that the Glasgow public would "take a greater interest in Glasgow things", with the SNP being one of those things.[59]

The next production of the Scottish National Players took place at the Alhambra, Glasgow. The Dancing Bear was produced for the week beginning 22 June, and It Looks Like a Change the following week. The Evening Times announced the visit on 17 April, stating that "the engagement is pleasantly reminiscent of a season many years ago when the Alhambra accommodated the old Glasgow Repertory Company", and noted that it afforded the SNP "a golden opportunity of making themselves known to a new public". The Glasgow Herald (23 June) noted that the Alhambra was a better stage than the Lyric, but complained that the Players had not used this advantage because The Dancing Bear was "not good enough" as a play. The Evening News (23 June) stated that the play was "well received" and the Citizen (23 June) described it as "well produced". The reviews were not really any different in opinion than the ones for the Lyric production of the play. Similarly the other play, It Looks Like a Change, was described by the Glasgow Herald (30 June) as being "in every way a repeat" of the previous year's Lyric production. The reviews agreed that it was a "good Scots comedy",[60] with the Glasgow Herald stating that the "whole cast act well and they provide a very good entertainment", and the critic for the Evening News (30 June) declaring that he had "not heard so much laughter in a theatre for many a night".

The Scottish National Players spent the rest of the summer and autumn playing outside Glasgow. They spent a week at Dunoon under the auspices of the Town Council, from 27 July to 1 August. Two performances were given daily and the programme changed every two days. The annual tour went out as usual during August and September, the play produced being A Month of Sundays, a four-act comedy by Hal D Stewart. This was performed for the first time on any stage when the tour began at Earlsferry on 19 August. The play is set in the parish of Netherbrae, which had so much difficulty in deciding which minister to choose that the presbytery chose for them. The new minister is young and full of ideas and asks the Session Clerk's niece to marry him, but his church is left empty when it turns out that he has a 'past' and is actually married to a variety actress. The minister explains that he had been in the Air Force during the war, and

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[59]Reported in the Daily Record, 1 June 1931.

[60]Evening Times, 30 June 1931.

that he and his wife had only had three days together before he was sent back to France, and that he had believed her to be dead. The congregation are on his side once more, and are even willing to accept his wife , when the minister tells the Session Clerk that he is leaving and forming a variety act, Bluebell and the Baritone with his wife. The play relies heavily on convention for its humour and effect, convention that expects honest folk to be shocked at the thought of a minister even making a joke far less acting on a stage, and dictates that sermons cannot be any good if the congregation can actually understand them. There is no exploration of character or issue, and it is rather reminiscent of the Moffat plays.

A Month of Sundays was also produced on Saturday 26 September at Lamlash on the island of Arran. On Monday 28 three one-act plays were given. These were Rizzio's Boots, Diplomacy and the Draughtsman, and A Valuable Rival. They had all been previously produced by the SNP. Song and mime items were given between the plays. This was the Players' first visit to Arran, and the local paper, the Ardrossan and Saltcoats Herald (2 October), declared that they "gave great pleasure to the large audiences".

The third Annual General Meeting of the Scottish National Theatre Society Ltd, was held on 30 October 1931, when a working loss of £802 was reported. The tours had made a profit of £128, and the Christmas production of Alice Sit-by-the-Fire had made £297. However the other Lyric productions all lost money, and it was stated that the society was "in common with other theatrical enterprises" suffering from "the economic depression".[61] This was the second year that the SNTS Ltd had lost about £800, and it was becoming increasingly clear that such a theatre group could not survive as a business concern without some form of subsidy.

A new three-act play by Donald MacLaren entitled The Fringe was produced at the Lyric from 19-25 November 1931, by W G Fay. The advertising leaflet described it as "an island comedy", and the play is set on Arran. Visitors with an interest in the Celtic movement are staying at the Laird's house, and various old village worthies are brought forward for their entertainment. This sours however, when the Laird's son is taken by a crazy old woman who is known locally as a witch. The young lad who rescues the boy is given a financial reward by the Laird, thus finding favour with the father of the girl he loves. The reviews described the piece as a satire on the 'Celtic Fringe', but felt that it was of a much lower standard than MacLaren's other play It Looks Like a Change. The Evening news (20

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[61] Glasgow Herald, 2 November 1931, p. 12, col. e.

November) called the theme "slight", and the Bulletin (20 November) criticised the "rather incoherent snatches of dialogue" between the old 'worthies'. The Daily Record (20 November) however, declared that the "chief function of this piece is to amuse and it contrives to do that very successfully".

The Scottish Player (November 1931) noted that the SNP Club had completely booked the Dress Circle for the first night of The Fringe, and hoped that other societies interested in the theatre would follow suit. A discussion of the play would take place at the Club in December. On the three days immediately following the production of The Fringe the SNP revived The Infinite Shoeblack "in response to many urgent requests".[62]

The Christmas and New Year production was another play by J M Barrie, the four-act A Kiss for Cinderella. It was performed between 26 December 1931 and 5 January 1932, at the Lyric. The play was popular with both audience and press. The Bulletin (28 December) noted that the audience was large and enthusiastic", the Evening Times (28 December) reported that "a large audience" received the play "with considerable enthusiasm", and the Evening News (28 December) stated that it had "hearty support". The Glasgow Herald (28 December) thanked the Players for "reviving this Barrie-esque version of the immortal romance of Cinders and her Fairy Prince", and highlighted the "fineness of the elocution" of Cinderella, noting that:

> Miss Daeblitz is not alone in the care she takes over elocution. The entire company, practically without exception, speak with clarity and can be easily heard ... In Mr Fay the Players have a true friend of clear and beautiful speech.

Several reviews also mentioned the inadequacy of the Lyric theatre stage. The Glasgow Herald called it a "heartbreak", the Evening News described it as "limited" and the Bulletin said that Fay's production was very clever "considering the difficulties of the play and of his stage". These comments prompted R B Wharrie to write to the Evening News (4 January) to remind people that the stage was actually even worse:

> until a few years ago when, through the efforts of the Scottish National Theatre Society, the stage was enlarged and improved, half the cost being borne by that Society.

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[62] The Scottish Player, November 1931.

The first Glasgow production of 1932, the Players having produced A Month of Sundays at Crieff on 22 January, was The Lord O' Creation. This three-act play by Norman MacOwan, which had not previously been performed by the SNP, was produced from 11-16 February at the Lyric by W G Fay. The play was regarded as a retelling of the Cupid and Psyche story, with Psyche as "a Scots fisher lass showing herself too clever by far for her mysterious husband".[63] A young gentleman goes to the East coast for a holiday, gets a job on a fishing smack and then marries the owner's daughter. He says that he is a sailor and this explains his long absences during the next sixteen years of their happy marriage. He is, in fact, a very famous shipowner, and when a rival discovers his 'secret' family and attempts blackmail, it turns out that his wife knew all about her husband's other life all the time. The Evening Times (12 February) felt that it was "a rather strange yarn", and the Evening News (12 February) believed that the situation was "rather incredible for serious drama". The Bulletin (12 February), although admitting the play was "interesting in bits", did not think that it should "find a permanent place in the Players' repertoire".

Immediately following the production of The Lord O' Creation the SNP produced A Month of Sundays, from 17-20 February. This was the first performance of the play in Glasgow, the SNP having premiered it on tour the previous autumn. The Evening News (18 February) stated that it was "chock full of amusing lines, which have a bite and flavour which is more than just pawkiness", and that Meg Buchanan as the spinster "gave a brilliant Scottish character study". The Citizen (18 February) described the play as being "full of Scots wit and humour of the right kind, and a real appreciation of Scots rural character". The Bulletin (18 February) however, stated that it was " a relic of the old fashioned Scottish village life which persists on stage".

In April the Scottish National Players produced W E Gunn's three-act play, Scott of Abbotsford, from 14-23, at the Lyric. The production was under the auspices of the Sir Walter Scott Centenary Committee, and the producer was W G Fay. The programme described it as a "chronicle play". The published edition of the play notes that it is "a dramatic presentation of the man". [64]The Glasgow Herald (15 April) described the production as "a distinctly interesting dramatic enterprise, well worthy of a visit", and said that the play itself was " a masterly condensation of Scott biography". The

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[63]Bulletin, 12 February 1932.

[64](London: Constable, 1932).

Evening News (15 April) felt that the prologue and first scene were "really great theatre" but felt that later on, even the "really excellent" acting of James T Woodburn could not "disguise the fact that Scott ... had descended to the level of an "extract" from biographies treated without imagination or great skill". The play attracted a great deal of interest in the Border newspapers in particular, and it was noted that members of the cast visited Abbotsford "in order to acquire local colour".[65] The play was revived later in the year, from 10-15 October, the production being once more under the auspices of the Sir Walter Scott Centenary Committee.

The 1932 tour began on 22 August at Callander and finished at Earlsferry on 20 September. The play produced was Clyde-Built, first performed by the SNP almost ten years previously. Song and mime items were also given. The fact that a Society which stated that it existed to promote new Scottish writing was producing a play that it premiered a decade ago indicates that the policy was not working. The tour itinerary was similar to other years, with Dingwall being visited for the first time. The broadcast from Aberdeen was rather unusual in that it took place in the model studio at the North-East Trades Exhibition and was a full costumed production in front of an audience which viewed the play through a glass wall and heard it through loudspeakers.[66]

The fourth Annual General Meeting of the Scottish National Theatre Society took place on Friday 8 October 1932 at 8pm. The Directors' Report stated that during the year 22 board meetings had been held, and that the SNP had given 98 performances and visited 27 towns and villages.[67] It was stated that the Play Reading Panel had reported on 58 plays during the year, this being 21 three-acts, and 37 one-acts. Out of these only 9 three-act and 4 one-act plays were passed as being suitable for production. From the remainder of the plays 23 were returned to the authors as unsuitable, and 22 were returned with "constructive suggestion and criticism for the guidance of the authors". Two additional members had joined the board during the year, J E Highton representing the SNP Club, and Archibald Buchanan representing the Players themselves. The accounts for the year ending 31 May 1932 showed a working loss of £638

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[65] Citizen 22 March 1932. The players were invited to Abbotsford by Major-General Sir Walter I Maxwell-Scott.

[66] Reported in the Edinburgh Evening Despatch, 3 September 1932.

[67] Directors Report located in STA. These towns were: Earlsferry; Brechin; Insch; Keith; Kingussie; Callander; Dunoon; Lamlash; Crieff; St Andrews; Banchory; Huntly; Nairn; Pitlochry; Killin; Falkirk; Markinch; Dollar; Broughty Ferry; Braemar; Elgin; Grantown on Spey; Aberfeldy; Bonnybridge; Hamilton; New Cumnock; and Perth.

4s 1d, despite the fact that the Christmas production of the play by J M Barrie raised a profit of £359 2s 6d. The surplus from the tours and one-night visits was £61 18s 6d, and the only other profit came from the production in April of Scott of Abbotsford, which raised £32 6s. Both of the other Lyric productions lost money, £130 4s 10d on The Fringe and The Infinite Shoeblack in November, and £112 13s 10d on The Lord O' Creation in February.

The Scottish National Theatre Society Ltd had only ever made a loss on its year's work, and with this in mind the Directors announced that "in the interests of economy" it had been decided "to engage Producers only as required" rather than appoint someone for a complete season as had been done in the past. This was one of the first definite steps which led up to the Society's disbandment. The press noted that things were not going well for the Society, with the Evening News (4 November) stating that the decision was "a retrograde step but one which they could scarcely avoid taking".

On 20-21 December members of the SNP, with the approval of the Board produced three one-act plays at the Lyric in aid of the Necessitous Children's Holiday Fund. As it was in aid of charity it was not an official SNP production. The Glasgow Herald (21 December) described it as "a gracious undertaking by the individual players, aided and abetted by the approval of the directors", but noted that "in point of its dramatic value" it was a Players' production. The plays were Six Hundred Chicks by James Gibson, a well-known SNP actor; The Nineteenth Hole by Hal D Stewart; and The Lover, which the SNP had first performed in 1927. Items of song and mime were also done.

The Christmas and New Year production opened at the Lyric on 28 December and continued until 7 January 1933. The plays produced were The Proposal, Chekhov's one-act play which James Bridie had adapted into a Scots version using the English translation by Constance Garnett, and the ever popular The Glen is Mine. The plays were produced by Andrew P Wilson, who had been the SNP's first professional Producer.

The Proposal was described by the Scots Observer (7 January 1933) as "an uproarious curtain raiser" which "afforded Miss Nan Scott a glorious opportunity". However the review also warned against mistaking "a Muscovite skeleton wrapped in Scots plaid for the Muse of Scottish drama". Similarly, although the critic stated that The Glen is Mine provided "an entertaining afternoon", and that Archibald Buchanan's portrayal of

Angus MacKinnon was a "brilliant performance", he questioned whether it was "worthy of a Scottish National Theatre". The Glasgow Herald (29 December 1932) however, stated that the play had been "deliberately selected with the idea of rallying to the support of the Scottish Theatre Society new friends to reinforce the old loyal phalanx", and noted that the supply "of soundly popular Scottish drama ... being as it is there can be no question of the wisdom of the selection". The Scottish Player (December 1932) explained their reasons further:

> ... once interest is aroused in a really characteristic specimen of the Society's work it will be held through future seasons; for the floating public who see a Barrie play done by us during the holidays can form no judgement of the sort of work we are really doing, and because they have formed no judgement they let the matter rest and stay at home.

There was little opportunity to find out if the production had appealed to a new audience however, as the next production was the usual August/September tour in 1933, when The Flower in the Vase was produced by Elliot Mason. The tour began at Earlsferry on 17 August and finished at Dollar on 13 September.[68]

The first Lyric production of 1933 did not take place until October, and even then was only for two nights, the third and fourth of the month. The play was At Mrs Beam's by C K Munro, and this was its first production in Scotland. It was a three-act play which the advertising leaflet described as a "modern comedy of character".[69] The play was produced by Edward C MacRoberts, and is set in Mrs Beam's London boarding-house. The inhabitants, described as "typical" by the Citizen (3 October), include Miss Shoe who believes the new arrivals to be the people responsible for all the murders in neighbourhood recently, and that they stow the bodies away in their large trunk. In fact they are just a couple of crooks who take all the valuables with them when they go. The Glasgow Herald (4 October) stated that the players' "acting is so good that the play is almost saved from its inherent monotony", and the Evening Times (3 October) reported that it "had not a word of Scots", and "nothing more outstanding in the way of plot than an old maid's quick fire gossip in a well known attempt to add two and

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[68]The other towns visited, in chronological order, were: Leven; St Andrews; Callander; Killin; Ballinluig; Kingussie; Grantown-on-Spey (2 nights); Golspie; Dingwall; Tain; Inverness; Nairn; Lossiemouth; Elgin; Insch; Ballater; Braemar (2 nights); Brechin; and Carnoustie.

[69]Located in STA.

two and make five". The Daily Record (4 October) felt that it provided the Players with "ample opportunity to display their undoubted gifts for character drawing".

The fifth and last Annual General Meeting of the Scottish National Theatre Society Ltd was held on Friday 27 October 1933 at 8pm. The directors' report stated that there had been 18 board meetings during the year and that the SNP had given 51 performances, both of which were smaller numbers than in previous years. The Play Reading Panel had considered 48 plays, 23 of which were three-acts, and 25 one-acts. Out of these 7 three-acts and 3 one-acts were deemed suitable for production, and of the rest 19 were returned to their authors as unsuitable with another 19 being returned with suggestions for improvement. Bridie had resigned from the Board due to the pressure of other duties, but would remain as Convenor of the Play Reading Panel. Brandane had also resigned from the Board.

The accounts for the year ending 31 May 1933 showed that the working loss was £287 4s 6d, a greatly reduced figure compared to previous years. This was stated as being a result of the "decided policy of the Board to curtail activities in Glasgow".[70] In fact, there had only been two Glasgow productions. In October a loss of £52 2s 1d on Scott of Abbotsford was met by the guarantors, the Sir Walter Scott Centenary Committee. However the Christmas and New Year production of The Glen is Mine made a loss of £45 10s 9d, in sharp contrast to the large profits made when a Barrie play was produced at the festive season in previous years. The tours and one-night visits made a profit of £100 19s 8d, however this was not enough to even cover the Business Manager's salary of £215 3s 10d. As a result of such financial pressure the SNTS board "after conference with representatives of the Players and the SNP Club" decided that no new plays would be produced in the forthcoming season. Instead, three productions of two nights each, when "plays which have all been previously produced but have not been presented in Scotland" would be given. It was also announced that in "connection with this Season a system of admission vouchers at reduced prices has been introduced".[71] The decision that the Society would not produce any new play in its next season was another forerunner of the decision to disband the company itself.

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[70]Directors' Report, 1933, located in STA.

[71]Announced in the Directors' Report.

Edward C MacRoberts was engaged to produce these three productions. The first one after the AGM was The Switchback, a three-act play by James Bridie, which was produced at the Lyric on 14-15 November 1933. The advertising leaflet noted that this was the first production of the play in Scotland, having originally being produced at the Birmingham Repertory Theatre in March 1929, and then at the Malvern Festival in August 1931.[72]

The Switchback concerns a country doctor who believes that he has found a cure for tuberculosis. He is taken up by the press, and his wife is flattered at the attention. However, his cure does not actually work and his conduct is considered unethical, with the result that he is struck off the medical register. By the last act the doctor has found comfort from the whisky bottle, and when an opportunity for him to regain his lost position arises he does not want it. He decides instead to go and look for ancient relics in Palmyra. Bridie stated in the published edition of the play that it:

> is intended to demonstrate the Vanity of Human Wishes, the Importance of Being Earnest, the Inevitability of Fate, the Immortality of the Soul and the Pleasures of Hope.[73]

The press stated that it "satirises contemporary manners and the Big Business Mind"[74] and that it shows that Bridie:

> in his witty sallies has recognised that Medicine and Press are two professions which stand up prominently to be shot at. And the shooting is good, if not deadly.[75]

The Glasgow Herald (15 November) felt that the SNP had "been well guided in their choice" of The Switchback, and the Daily Record (15 November) noted that "seldom in their history have the Players attracted such a large audience". The Evening Times (15 November) also reported the play's popularity:

> But somebody at last led Glasgow last night in gratifyingly abnormal numbers to see its National Players, packing the Lyric Theatre with a full house and giving invitations to the curtain speech in repeating rounds of final applause.

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[72]Leaflet located in STA.
[73]Constable, 1932, p.xi.
[74]Evening News, 15 November 1933.
[75]Daily Record ,15 November 1933.

It was however, too late for a full house to save the SNP from what was becoming increasingly inevitable.

The next production took place on 8-9 December, when Edward C MacRoberts produced Michael Barringer's three-act play, Inquest at the Lyric. Again it was noted in the advertising leaflet that this was the first production of the play in Scotland.[76] Inquest is set in a small English village, where the coroner's court is investigating the suspicious death of an elderly married man the previous year. It is very much a 'whodunnit' drama, with the press accepting that as such it did grip the the audience, but was marred by details and motivations left unrevealed. The Citizen (9 December) complained that while the ending of the play was "sound enough", the author never once gives a hint as to how it was done, and the Glasgow Herald (9 December) noted that it was "only by virtue of the adequacy of the cast" that the play was entertaining.

The Daily Express (9 December) noted that this production "marked the final step in the experiment of the Players to test whether there exists in Glasgow an audience" for their work, and reported that the audience was "not as large" as that at The Switchback. The paper also reported R B Wharrie as saying that they had "done very well financially" but would have to wait until they "can review the results of the experiment" before making any further decisions or plans. It was announced however, that "in an attempt to encourage young people, a special Christmas show is to be given", and that the play chosen was Milestones.

This is a three-act play by Arnold Bennett and E Knoblock, and was produced at the Lyric by Edward C MacRoberts from 29 December 1933 to 6 January 1934. The play follows the fortunes of a family through three generations, showing the daughter, Emily, rebelling against her parents but later turning into the maternal Lady Monkhurst, and Rose's transformation from young girl to grandmother. Indeed the Glasgow Herald felt that it was perhaps the acting challenge of portraying the aging process on stage that made the SNP choose the play, as the drama itself was "somewhat hackneyed".[77]

The first production of 1934 was a new three-act play by James Bridie called Colonel Wotherspoon. It was produced at the Lyric by Andrew Stewart, one of the Players, from 22-24 March. The play deals with the difference between a bestseller and a work of literature. Archie, the young

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[76]Leaflet located in STA.

[77]Glasgow Herald, 30 December 1933, p. 10, col. f.

writer, asks Emily, his university-educated cousin and fiancée, what she thinks of his novel. Emily is not impressed by it and tells him so, but the book does in fact become a bestseller. There are various family storms, with Archie being managed by an American business woman, but his second novel is a flop. In the end Archie and Emily are reconciled and begin to plan the scenario for a book which they will write together.

The press felt that the play was not quite up to the standard of other Bridie plays, and that it had probably been written earlier in his career. The Daily Express (23 March) reported Bridie as having said that Colonel Wotherspoon had been "on the Players' shelves for a year" and the reviewer felt that it seemed to have been "written long before then". The review also commented that the play "is quite a way from the author's usual line", in that "Bridie enthusiasts ... will be perplexed because Bridie has given them nothing to be perplexed about" in the new play, and because it has a happy ending. The Evening News (23 March) headlined their review "A Bridie Happy Ending", and declared that the play was "scarcely up to Bridie standard in incisive wit".

By the time that the SNP produced Colonel Wotherspoon rumours were rife that the Society was about to disband. The review of the play in the Evening News (23 March) had the headline "Is it their Swansong?", and reported that "the SNP may be suspending business after the present engagement". The review also noted that the theatre was "little more than half filled". The Daily Express (23 March) described the production as an "eleventh hour attempt to create an audience for their work in Scottish drama", and actually announced that the production of Colonel Wotherspoon was the "last but one" which the SNP would give before they disband. An article in the Sunday Times (25 March) noted that a resolution calling for the disbandment of the Scottish National Theatre Society Ltd would be put forward at a meeting of the Society the following day. The Glasgow Herald (26 March) reported that at the close of the last night of Colonel Wotherspoon R B Wharrie made a statement to the audience "in which he cleared up some misconceptions regarding the future of the SNP." Wharrie announced that the next production, Twelfth Night, which was the last planned for this season would not be the Players' "swansong". This was because even if the SNTS Ltd decide "to suspend their activities as a play-producing body" then the SNP who have worked "under the auspices" of that Society would carry on on their own "as an active group".

This is indeed how matters developed. The decision to disband the Scottish National Theatre Society Limited was taken at a meeting on 26 March 1934. The Chairman, R B Wharrie addressed the meeting, explaining that it was:

> customary at this time of year to consider their plans for the next season and make a careful review of their financial position. Taking into account their present assets and their commitment to the end of the season on May 31st, it seemed obvious that by that time the capital remaining would not be sufficient to justify their undertaking play production after that date.[78]

There seemed to be little doubt about the decision being made, and the Falkirk Herald (28 March) noted that Wharrie's resolution was "carried unanimously".

The press were obviously expecting this outcome, and various articles appeared which discussed the position of Scottish drama, and the contribution which the SNP had made. Most of these gave a history of the SNP movement, and acknowledged that their work in touring the country districts, and in training young actors was particularly valuable. The Citizen (28 March) noted that the Players' autumn tours had "never failed to make money" and that "everywhere their visit is eagerly awaited, and everywhere enthusiastic audiences meet them". The Glasgow Herald (28 March) noted that 100 plays had been produced, 70 of which were either new or were being performed for the first time in Scotland, and that "in setting a standard of character acting especially the Players have shed a bright light". The Scotsman (31 March) stated that "various groups and individuals have achieved success and repute far beyond the parent movement [the SNP] who could be glad to admit a debt both in training and inspiration". The Evening News (7 April) declared that it was the "amateur bogey" which had been too strong for them to break:

> There is only one way to account for it. There still exists in the public mind the idea that the SNP is not a regular company. The term amateur still means to many people badly produced, poorly acted, wishy washy plays, thrown onto the stage any old fashion ...

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[78]Reported in the Glasgow Herald,27 March 1934, p. 7, col .e.

The article explains that the SNP must take some of the blame for this, as their publicity "did little or nothing to dispell the idea of 'amateurism' in connection with their productions". Other articles highlighted the irony that the SNTS should be losing so much money at a time when amateur groups in Scotland were flourishing, and connected this to the fact that the SNP were always popular on tour, but struggled to get a Glasgow audience to support them.

The fact that the Scottish National Players had decided to carry on on their own was reported in the press. The Citizen (28 March) noted that when the SNTS headquarters in Fitzroy Place are closed down then the SNP will be "homeless", and have no place to store their stock of scenery, props and costumes. The article stated that "a small committee of actors and producers has been appointed to direct the future activities of the SNP", and that the annual tour has "never failed to make money" it seems likely and practical that this will be the first venture of the new SNP. By June the Players were in a position to announce their new organisation, and this was reported by the Glasgow Herald on the sixth, stating that:

> membership [of the SNP] shall consist of Scottish National Player shareholders in the Scottish National Theatre Society Ltd together with players who have played two or more speaking parts for the Scottish National Players. There shall be an associate list to which individuals may be nominated. Such associates shall be eligible for full membership on having played two parts and been duly elected, but until being elected shall have no voting powers in the affairs of the Society.

It was also stated that the management of the SNP would be the responsibility of a committee of not more than seven, which would be elected annually. There would also be an annual subscription of one guinea.

The disbandment of the SNTS Ltd, however, would not take effect until 31 May, and the Players had one more production prior to that date. This was Twelfth Night, produced by Edward C MacRoberts at the Lyric from 26-28 April. There was some discussion as to whether it was wise to attempt their first Shakespeare play at such a critical time in their career, but the production received pleasant reviews. The Glasgow Herald (27 April) called it a "fine performance", the Evening news (27 April) described it as "delightful" and the Citizen (27 April) commented on the "forthright, happy manner in which they tackled" the play.

Twelfth Night was the last production of the Scottish National Theatre Society, and the first Shakespeare play that they had produced. It seems a strange choice to have made, and while it undoubtedly fills the Players second aim, of producing good drama of any nationality, it also highlights how far the SNP had moved from their main objective, the production of new Scottish plays.

CHAPTER SIX: A TRAINING GROUND

"... we were receiving a thorough training in the complex art of the theatre, *free* ..."[1]

The Scottish National Players did not fulfil their stated aims. However there was one aspect of their work one which justifies their existence and gives lasting importance to their career. What the Scottish National Players achieved was the training of a large body of actors and actresses who then went on to other ventures within Scottish theatre. The Curtain, the Park, the Citizen's, the Close, the Gateway, Rutherglen Repertory, the Tron Experimental Theatre, Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre, and the Scottish Community Drama Association, all contained members of the SNP. The Scottish region of the BBC was also indebted to the SNP, from the beginning of radio broadcasting in Glasgow in 1923 onwards.

It was not a stated aim of the Scottish National Players to act as a training ground for new and developing talent. However several things were done to encourage inexperienced players. New young members were invited, through an invitation printed in SNP programmes, to audition and join the Players. The prizewinners in the elocution classes of the Glasgow Music Festival were often recruited to the SNP ranks. In 1923 two members' nights were organised, at which Society members, but not the general public, could see and then discuss the work of new players. More experienced players would try their hand at production in this "safe" atmosphere. At least two actors made their first appearance at a members' night, and went on to have a long involvement with the SNP. Nan Scott, for example, played the part of Mrs Wishaw in The Tea Party at the Members' Night production on 19 January 1923, and went on to act in twenty-five other productions before 1934. Esther Wilson first acted in a Members' Night production of both The Tea Party and The Guinea Stamp, and went on to make fourteen other SNP appearances before the disbandment of the SNTS. Both Nan Scott and Esther Wilson continued to act with the SNP after 1934.

The Scottish National Players recognised that their training of people had been a valuable contribution to Scottish theatre. When Tyrone Guthrie introduced the Players' own history of the movement in 1953 he stated that:

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[1]James Gibson, SNTV, p. 38.

> Our main achievement, as I see it, was that we provided a valuable training ground for talent: the best in Scotland, and one of the best in Britain, and, more important, that we were one of the links in the chain that will ultimately result in some form of indigenous drama in Scotland.[2]

The value of such a training ground was also recognised by those outside the SNP movement. The brochure for the 1957 Christmas production at the Citizen's Theatre recognised that although they failed to discover any great new plays, "they did demonstrate that we had a number of excellent players".[3] Bridie also expressed this sentiment in Dramaturgy in Scotland when he said that:

> The Scottish National Players achieved a great deal. On the acting side it proved that there is an almost unlimited supply of acting ability in Scotland if the actors are properly directed and are given something to act.[4]

The number of people who were involved with the stage productions of the Scottish National Players is actually very large. Appendix eight lists the people involved, from the first production in January 1921 until the last production of the Scottish National Theatre Society Ltd in April 1934, and describes their involvement. All of the main Glasgow productions during this period are cited, with a large number of visits outwith Glasgow also represented. It is not, however, possible to claim that all non-acting or producing people have been included in the 1921-34 list as some programmes and most publicity leaflets and handbills only name the cast and producer.

In all, this means that about 285 people were involved, along with 14 shops, companies, costumiers etc, who, it is acknowledged, lent or supplied various articles. The programmes do, of course, also include acknowledgements for loans of such things as furniture or props. These people have not been included in the appendix, because they were not themselves integral to the productions. People involved with costumes have been included as they have usually been involved in design to some

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[2] SNTV, p. 13.

[3] STA.

[4] This was the text of a lecture delivered on 12 October 1949, and published by the Royal Philosophical Society, Glasgow 1949, p11.

extent, or because it is interesting in the context of theatrical history to note where costumes have been obtained from.[5]

There are some people who do not fall easily into categorisations, perhaps because they are individuals rather than shops or because they are involved in more than one area. Ethel Lewis designed and made costumes for some productions, on occasions with Dora Bird. Both these people are listed as SNP actors, with Lewis also performing as a solo singer in the Scots Song and Mime pieces. Peter Barrie provided Cinderella's costume for A Kiss for Cinderella. T J Ashmore designed the costumes and scenery for Cute McCheyne in the first SNP productions in January 1921.

Several designers were associated with the Scottish National Players. Allan D Mainds designed the scenery for Gruach and Dorothy Carlton Smyth designed the costumes. Nancy Chisholm and Mary McKinlay designed the scenery for The Maitlands in 1935. Muriel Sterling designed the set for James the First of Scotland, together with Clewlow the producer. This was first performed in 1925 and revived a year later. Betsy Moffat designed the scenery for eleven plays during 1931-2. The scenery was then made in the Scottish National Players' Workshops. The Workshops, or Workrooms as they were also known were located at 13 Fitzroy Place until 1934, when they moved to 18 Watson Street. They made the scenery, and occasionally the costumes, for twenty-four plays between 1927 and 1931. Archie Frew was the carpenter employed by the SNP. He is also recorded as having built and painted scenery at the SNP Workrooms in 1934. Charles Frew toured with the SNP in Autumn 1934, with the responsibility of setting up the stage and scenery at each venue. Scenery was also provided by Storie & Curlette of Glasgow for the Christmas 1926 bill of C'est la Guerre, The Glen is Mine, Court Albany and The Sergeant-Major. During 1921-1927, that is before the SNP Workrooms

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[5]The Citizen House in Bath, for example, provided the costumes for Thomas the Rhymer in December 1924. This was their only association with the SNP. L & H Nathan of 12 Panton Street, London supplied dresses for four productions in 1927, and men's costumes and wigs for The Immortal Lady in 1930. Several Glasgow shops were used by the SNP. Originality Ltd twice provided special costumes such as Clementine Walkenshaw's dress in Court Albany and various costumes for the Christmas production of A Kiss for Cinderella in 1931. The Glasgow theatrical costumier, Josephine Smith, was the source of costumes for nine productions between 1923 and 1932. As many of these were triple or quadruple bills of one-act plays, Smith was involved in costuming sixteen different plays. J S Gregson Ltd of Glasgow had a long association with the SNP, supplying both wigs and make-up during the first two years of the Society, and then wigs only until 1928. On occasions wigs would also be supplied by R Sheldon Bamber (Glasgow), or "Bert" (London) as well as Gregson.

took over, scenery was supplied and painted by William Glover and William Glover Junior. The Glover family ran the Theatre Royal, Dunlop Street in the nineteenth century, with William Glover being a distinguished scene painter, and the family being "fond of mounting lavish productions, especially for the National Dramas derived from the novels of Sir Walter Scott".[6] In 1935 William Glover Junior also painted the set for The Maitlands and in 1936 for The Anatomist. There was one other technical person involved with the SNP. William Morton provided the electrical effects for Punch Counts Ten in December 1926, and the lighting for three double bills, one in 1926 and two in the following year.

Music was always viewed as important by the SNTS. It created an atmosphere and was useful when several one-act plays were being performed. Six people are noted as having been musical directors for the SNP before 1934: Alfred Carpenter at the Theatre Royal production of Full Fathom Five in October 1924; J Deauville Turner at the Christmas 1926 production of Punch Counts Ten; Alex Hoskins at the production of The Glen is Mine and The Sin-Eater at the King's Theatre in February 1926; Julian Nesbitt at the two Oban performances of The Spanish Galleon, Cute McCheyne and Glenforsa in September 1922; Miss M F Norrie at six productions between 1923 and 1925; and John C MacArthur at seven productions between 1921 and 1922. The Glasgow Amateur Orchestral Society played at the production of A Valuable Rival and Clyde-Built in November 1922. The Orpheus Choir was involved in one of the performances of Christ in the Kirkyaird in November 1921, when they performed a special prelude written by Hugh S Roberton, the choir's conductor and author of the play.

There were eight musicians credited in the programmes with having played at SNP performances before April 1934. Often there would be a trio of piano, violin and cello. Nellie Justice played solo piano at three productions during 1927-28 and Jenny J Waddell performed as pianist twenty-five times between 1925 and 1933. She also played the part of Flora Campbell in The Grenadier, which was given two performances in Dunoon in July 1931. Charles Stewart provided the piping for Glenforsa in 1921 and The Glen is Mine in 1923. Five other musicians are noted as having played in two productions after the disbandment. Justine Clark, Mary Dall and Mona O'Neill played at The Proper Place in November

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[6]Alasdair Cameron, See Glasgow See Theatre, (Glasgow:The Glasgow File, 1990), n. pag.

1934; and Betty Govan and Retta McAllister performed for The Maitlands the following year.

As opposed to music, dance did not play a major role in the SNTS. There were only two productions where a choreographer was listed in the programme. Constance Herbert arranged the dance and ballet scenes in Punch Counts Ten, the Christmas 1926 production which used eleven of Herbert's pupils as eastern dancers and sprites. James the First of Scotland had dances arranged by Jean Milligan in both the 1925 and 1926 productions. This play also had wrestling scenes which were arranged in 1925 by William Carswell.

Several people acted as producers for the SNP between 1921 and 1934. The term producer was then used in the way that the word director is now used in the theatre. The term stage director was also used by the SNP, particularly in the period when Wilson was the producer (1921-23). This role was usually taken by Elliot Mason, in addition to an acting part, and appears to have been a combination of the roles of stage manager and assistant director. The term stage manager was used more often by the SNP from 1924 onwards. The term assistant stage manager was also used occasionally.

Andrew P Wilson was the Players first producer and was involved with twenty productions between 1921 and 1923. He also produced The Proposal and The Glen is Mine in December 1932. Frank D Clewlow was the next full-time producer, with twelve productions during 1924-26. After Clewlow's departure Tyrone Guthrie filled the position, with fifteen productions between 1926 and 1929. Elliot Mason then took over as producer, with eight productions between 1928 and 1930. She also produced The Flower in the Vase for the autumn tour in 1933. Mason's first production for the Scottish National Players was A Meetin O' the Creditors at the members' night in January 1923. Howieson Culff produced one play, The Treasure Ship in March 1930, and then W G Fay took over. Fay had fifteen productions between then and 1933. He was followed by Edward C MacRoberts, who had acted five times with the SNP in 1923-24 and now returned to do five productions in 1933-34.

A producer did not always fill the gap immediately his predecessor left, so one of the more experienced SNP actors would produce plays occasionally. W Ralph Purnell first produced a play for the SNP at one of the 1923 members' nights. He produced The Scarecrow in October 1924 and Full Fathom Five the following month. R B Wharrie produced The

Crystal Set which the SNP performed at the Pavilion for a week in June 1924. He also produced The Skirlin' O' the Pipes, which was part of a triple bill in November 1927. Wharrie acted in the other two plays, which were produced by Guthrie. Andrew Stewart, who had been acting with the SNP since 1925, produced Colonel Wotherspoon in March 1934.

After the disbandment of the Scottish National Theatre Society in 1934 the players decided to carry on on their own, still using the name the Scottish National Players. Unfortunately records are not comprehensive for this period but it is known that Willard Stoker, Llewellyn Rees, Wilfred Fletcher and William Henry all produced plays for them. Several people who had produced for the SNP prior to 1934 returned to perform the same service. Edward C MacRoberts produced People at Sea in February 1939 and Jack and the Beans in April 1940. Andrew P Wilson produced Brief Harmony for the Autumn tour in 1934. This was the first production after the disbandment. He also produced The Proper Place in November of that year. The Scottish National Theatre Venture notes that such "old friends" as R B Wharrie, Andrew Stewart, James Gibson and Alan Mackill produced for them "during the years just before the last war".[7] These people are listed in appendix eight as having acted with the SNP between 1921 and 1934.

Many of the producers also acted in the plays. Wilson in particular often took leading roles, such as Alexander Jameson in A Valuable Rival, John McCheyne in Cute McCheyne and Luiffy in the play of the same name. The majority of people associated with the Scottish National Players, however, were actors. Approximately 249 people acted with the Scottish National Players between 1921 and 1934. This figure includes Elliot Mason as she did more acting than producing, and others who stage managed productions, as they were also actors. It does not include people like Wilson, Guthrie and Fay who were full-time producers to the SNP. Out of this number it is known that 113 people only appeared once. The names of these people and the year in which they acted with the SNP are listed in appendix four.

It is known that some of these people[8] did actually act with the SNP after the disbandment of the SNTS in 1934. It is also possible that some others did as well, as not all the programmes for the period are available. However very few of the people on this list can be traced to other theatre

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[7]p. 32.

[8]These people were: Madeleine Christie; Rob Dow; Robert Paterson; Tom Smith.

companies, so it may be assumed that for various reasons they did not pursue acting as either a career or a hobby. Those who have been discovered to have acted with other companies are noted below:

Andrew Gray	Park Theatre
Anna Jones	MSU Repertory Theatre
J Macrae (Duncan)	Citizen's, Curtain, MSU
Joyce Muirhead	Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre
Muriel Robertson	Park Theatre
Matthew Service	MSU Repertory Theatre
Gordon Gildard	BBC

In most cases these people acted with the SNP just prior to the dates that they are to be found in other companies. J Macrae was later known as Duncan Macrae, and in The Story of the Citizens' Theatre 1943-48, is said to have "been associated with every attempt to develop Scottish Drama in Glasgow, playing with the Scottish National Players, the Tron Theatre, and the Curtain Theatre".[9]

It can be seen from appendix five that ninety-four people acted with the SNP between one and nine times during the period 1921 to 1934. Similarly, it is clear that twenty people acted between ten and twenty times with the SNP during the 1921 to 1934 period. Their names are listed in appendix six. Nineteen people acted with the SNP more than twenty times between 1921-34, and are listed in appendix seven.

These lists show that there was an inner core of people who were the mainstay of the SNP productions, an outer circle of people who acted in less than ten productions, and a large body of people who only appeared once. The inner core of people can be divided into those who acted more than twenty times and those who acted between ten and twenty times. The first group were generally involved over a longer period of time than the second group. Jean Taylor Smith was involved throughout the 1921-34 period and acted in forty-four of the eighty-nine productions during this time. James Anderson, Nell Ballantyne, Grace McChlery and George F Yuill also acted in SNP productions between 1921 and 1934. Elliot Mason was involved in seventy-four productions as either actor or producer

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[9]Edited by Gourlay and Saunders (Stage and Screen, n.d.), p21.

between 1921 and 1933. Archibald Buchanan and R B Wharrie were also involved between those years. Catherine Fletcher appeared between 1921 and 1930.

The second group were usually involved for a four to six year period. W Levack Ritchie, for example, appeared seventeen times between 1923 and 1927, Graham Squire acted ten times between 1930 and 1933, and W Ralph Purnell was involved in thirteen productions between 1921 and 1924. There are exceptions of course, James T Woodburn was involved between 1921 and 1933 and acted eleven times. It should be remembered that the people in these two groups were not professional actors all the time that they were in the SNP. They had other work and family commitments which would at times prevent them from taking part in some productions. This certainly caused problems with regards to touring. People needed to have a certain amount of dedication to be in the SNP. Rehearsals often ran from six to eleven p.m. most evenings in the weeks prior to a performance. In The Scottish National Theatre Venture James Gibson recalls that if someone was included in the cast of an SNP production then "he, or she, had to be prepared to forego all leisure, home or social life for a period of four weeks, including Saturday afternoons and some Sundays".[10]

It was also the case that with a large company of actors not everyone who was available could be involved in all of the plays. Although some plays such as James the First of Scotland had a very large cast, others needed only a few actors. Nell Ballantyne, for example, who appeared in twenty-eight productions between 1921 and 1934, was still therefore a significant figure in the SNP during that period.

The fact that so many people acted with the SNP proves that they were a place where actors could learn and gain experience. James Gibson has written that, while everyone was keen to help establish a Scottish national theatre, they were also "receiving a thorough training in the complex art of the theatre, *free* ".[11] There was a variety of roles available in, for example: the poetic verse dramas of Gordon Bottomley; the stark fatalism and the Scots of Soutarness Water; the tragedy of The Mother; the comedy of The Glen is Mine and Cute McCheyne; historical pieces like Chatelard and James the First of Scotland; and plays like Clyde-Built and

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[10]p. 38.
[11]SNTV, p. 38.

The Shillin'-A-Week Man which were concerned with contemporary issues. Some of the roles were admittedly light and stereo-typed, particularly in one-act plays like Exit Mrs McLeerie, but others, for example Lachie MacDonald in The Ancient Fire, were very demanding.

The fact that so many of the people who had trained with the Scottish National Players went on to have professional careers, and to be involved with many subsequent Scottish theatre groups and the BBC, proves that this aspect of the SNP's work was very successful. At the time there was no other place or theatre group within Scotland which could have provided the kind of training which was offered by the SNP.

It is not surprising that most of the people who formed the hard core of the SNP, those people who acted more than twenty times, went on to play a part in other Scottish theatrical ventures. James Anderson acted at the Citizens' Theatre; Nell Ballantyne at the Citizens' and the Gateway Theatres, with the Sherek Players, and with Scottishows, T M Watson and Duncan Macrae's company; Charles R M Brookes with Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre; Meg Buchanan at the Citizens' and the Gateway; Catherine Fletcher at the Citizens'; James Gibson with the Citizens', the Gateway, Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre and the Close, as well as the Sherek Players and both acting and producing with Scottishows; D Morland Graham at the Citizens'; Moultrie Kelsall at the Citizens', the Gateway and Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre; Grace McChlery at the Park and the Gateway; Nan Scott at the Park, the Citizens' and Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre; Jean Taylor Smith at the Citizens' and with Scottishows; Andrew Stewart at the Citizens', Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre and with Scottishows. R B Wharrie was involved with the Citizens' Theatre as treasurer of the the Theatre Society and as a member of the Board. George Paterson Whyte was the first Chief Adviser appointed by the SCDA in 1941, and held that full-time position for ten years. Of the people not listed above, T P Maley was involved in broadcasting, H C Stark with the SCDA, and Elliot Mason pursued a successful acting career in London and abroad. Andrew P Wilson, the Players' first producer, toured with his own company, often playing his own one-act plays. George F Yuill is the only member of this group whom it has not been possible to trace beyond the SNP.

There are also records of people like Nell Ballantyne and James Gibson appearing in plays produced at the King's Theatre in Glasgow, such as E Martin Browne's production of A Man Named Judas in May

1956. Ex-members of the SNP were to be seen for many years, particularly in "character parts", in plays and films both in this country and America. Scottish National Players like Nell Ballantyne and James Woodburn appeared in such films as The Bridal Path, and Whisky Galore.

Of the twenty people who acted between ten and twenty times with the SNP during 1921-34, six acted at the Citizens' Theatre: Enid Hewit, Douglas Lamond, John Rae, W Levack Ritchie, Graham Squire and James T Woodburn. Graham Squire also appeared at the Park and with Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre. Queenie Russell, who acted ten times with the SNP between 1921 and 1923, left them to join Lena Ashwell's company.

As one might expect, a much smaller proportion of the people who acted with the SNP between two and ten times went on to appear with other Scottish theatre companies. Only thirteen of the ninety-four people have been traced to other groups. Elvira Airlie, Aileen Callander and Alexander Crawford appeared at the Curtain, Margaret Gourlay produced for the MSU Repertory Theatre, Norah Irvine toured with Scottishows, Rosina McCulloch acted with the MSU, Hugh McGettigan was part of Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre, Louise MacLaren appeared at both the Citizen's and the Close, Bert Ross acted with the Curtain, MSU, and the Citizen's, Winning Rough appeared at the Curtain, Halbert Tatlock at the Park, and Bertha Waddell, of course, ran her Children's Theatre.

After the disbandment of the SNTS in 1934, the Scottish National Players continued to be a place where young and inexperienced actors could get the opportunity to prove themselves. This is seen by the fact that at least ten people who first acted with the SNP after May 1934 went on to other Scottish theatrical ventures. Marjorie Dalziel acted at the Citizens' and Gateway Theatres, toured with Scottishows, was a member of the Wilson Barrett company and acted with the Scottish Theatre Company in 1982. Archie Henry appeared at the Citizens' Theatre. Eileen Herlihy acted with the Park, before moving to London where she was known as Eileen Herlie. Jessie Morton acted with the Park, the Citizens', the Gateway and the Falcon, Bryden Murdoch with the Park, the Citizens' and the Gateway, Penelope Skelton became the assistant stage manager and later stage manager at the Citizens', Rhona Sykes appeared at the Citizens', Owen Webb at the Park, and Edmond Fraser with Bertha Waddell's Children's Theatre. Howard Lockhart, W H D Joss, E J P Mace and Bryden Murdoch

were all involved in radio broadcasting, which will be discussed separately from the theatre companies.

Theatre companies inspired by the Scottish National Players included the Curtain, which was started in 1933 in the drawing-room of a large Glasgow house, with later productions taking place in the Lyric Theatre. The Curtain had similar aims to the SNP, but also had a broader repertoire. Grace Ballantine was very much the motivating force behind the group. Elvira Airlie, Aileen Callander, Jessie Morton, Bert Ross and Winning Rough were all involved in the Curtain.

The Park Theatre opened in 1941, with a small theatre seating just over one hundred people which John Stewart had had built in a house in Woodside Terrace, Glasgow. The intention was to stage good plays of any type. Madeleine Christie, Andrew Gray, Eileen Herlihy, Grace McChlery, E J P Mace, Jessie Morton, Bryden Murdoch, Nan Scott, Graham Squire, Halbert Tatlock and Owen Webb all acted at the Park. Edward C MacRoberts and Howard Lockhart were both involved in producing.

Molly Urquhart's MSU Repertory Theatre opened in Rutherglen in 1939. Anna Jones, Rosina McCulloch, Bert Ross and Matthew Service acted there. Rosina McCulloch in particular appeared in many of their productions. Bert Ross also produced plays, as did Margaret Gourlay. The MSU theatre had difficulty surviving the privations of wartime and closed when Molly Urquhart joined the newly-formed Citizens' Theatre. However local enabled Guy Muir and Bert Ross to reopen as the Rutherglen Repertory Theatre. Rosina McCulloch was also on the "Campaign Committee" which was set up to "rouse active and financial interest in the project".[12] She later became the production secretary dealing with administrative matters, produced various plays and acted on occasion. Matthew Service was involved in writing for Rutherglen Repertory Theatre, and became Chairman of the Directors in 1955.

The first season of the Citizens' Theatre was in 1943-4. James Anderson, Meg Buchanan, Morland Graham, W Levack Ritchie, Bert Ross and Nan Scott all appeared in the first season. In the following years Nell Ballantyne, Madeleine Christie, Marjorie Dalziel, James Gibson, Enid Hewit, Moultrie Kelsall, Douglas Lamond, Louise MacLaren, Jessie Morton, Bryden Murdoch, Jean Taylor Smith, Graham Squire, Andrew Stewart, Rhona Sykes and James Woodburn acted with the Citizens'. Penelope

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[12] 1945-1950 :The First Five Years of the Rutherglen Repertory Theatre. ed Mamie Crichton, Souvenir brochure, (n.p.: n.p., n.d.), p.16.

Skelton was involved in stage management. R B Wharrie and J Ronald Young were involved in the administration of the theatre and the theatre society. The Close Theatre was a small intimate theatre club which opened in 1965, and was both situated next to and associated with the Citizen's. James Gibson and Louise MacLaren acted there in the mid to late sixties.

The first production of the Gateway Theatre was Bridie's The Forrigan Reel in October 1953. The programme noted that the company's policy would be to "present plays by Scottish dramatists, classics and English or foreign plays of interest". Moultrie Kelsall recalled that the "policy was very definitely to include a large proportion of Scots plays", adding that in "that aim we were the lineal successors of the Scottish National Players".[13] This view was shared by others including Lennox Milne who wrote that apart from the sheer delight in acting, the "driving impetus" behind the theatre was that they "might be building another pillar of the theatre in Scotland", noting that "the foundations had been laid long before by the Scottish National Players".[14] James Gibson was the theatre's first producer, with Marjorie Dalziel, Nell Ballantyne, Meg Buchanan, Jean Taylor Smith, Bryden Murdoch, and Grace McChlery all acting in Gateway productions. Moultrie Kelsall acted in one production, The Switchback, stating that he could not resist having three SNP actors back on stage together again, especially as James Gibson would be playing his original part. Kelsall was Chairman of the Council between 1960 and 1965. The theatre's production of The Glen is Mine in March 1954 also saw SNP actors in their original parts: James Gibson as Dugald MacPhedran and Nell Ballantyne as Mrs Galletly.

As well as playing an important role in theatre in Scotland, the Scottish National Players also contributed a great deal to the establishment of the BBC in Glasgow. The Players themselves believed that they played a vital role in the early years of the BBC. In R B Wharrie's "History" chapter of The Scottish National Theatre Venture, there is an outline of the Players' contribution to Scottish drama, and included in this is the fact that it was the SNP "who were the backbone of broadcast drama in the earlier years of the Scottish Home Service of the B.B.C."[15] It was also noted that several of the Players', such as D C Thomson, Andrew

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[13] The Twelve Seasons of the Edinburgh Gateway Company : 1953-1965. (Edinburgh: St Giles Press, 1965), p. 41.

[14] Twelve Seasons, p.16.

[15] p. 27.

facing page 248

Figure twelve:
The Scottish National Players broadcasting in the early thirties: Harold Wightman; Jean Taylor Smith; Grace McChlery; Jean Faulds.
Early Days of Broadcasting inScotland.
Jean Faulds never acted on stage with the SNP, but did broadcast with them.

Stewart, and Moultrie R Kelsall went on to fill "responsible positions" within the BBC.[16]

The Scottish National Players also provided many of the actors taking part in broadcast drama. Howard Lockhart, who worked with the BBC for many years, recalls in his autobiography On My Wavelength, that "most of the leading players in Scottish radio plays were from the Scottish National Players". Lockhart was discussing the twenties and thirties and lists the "big names in radio drama in those days" as being Moultrie Kelsall and Elsie Brotchie:

> Others included Elliot Mason, Jean Taylor Smith, Nell Ballantyne, Meg Buchanan, Nan Scott, Grace McChlery, Catherine Fletcher, Bertha Waddell, who was to become famous later for her Children's Theatre, R B Wharrie, Hal D Stewart, Halbert Tatlock, who specialised in giants and sinister parts. James Urquhart, Ian Sadler, Harold Wightman, James Gibson and Charles R M Brookes.[17]

All of these people were actors with the Scottish National Players. Many of them had been with the SNP since its very first production in January 1921, and continued to appear in SNP cast lists throughout its existence. David Hutchison, in The Modern Scottish Theatre, has also noted that the SNP "made a substantial contribution to broadcast drama in the early years of the BBC in Scotland".[18]

The BBC has recognised and acknowledged its debt to the Scottish National Players. In 1948 Melville Dinwiddie, who was the Scottish Controller from 1933 until 1957, wrote The Scot and His Radio to celebrate twenty-five years of Scottish broadcasting. Dinwiddie noted that numerous broadcasts were made by the SNP who "ere long ... made regular appearances at the microphone", and stated that this "helped to encourage amateur drama as organized by the Scottish Community Drama Association".[19]

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[16] SNTV, p. 41.

[17] On My Wavelength, p. 8.

[18] David Hutchison, The Modern Scottish Theatre, (Glasgow: Molendinar,1977), p. 45.

[19] The Scot and his Radio Twenty-Five Years of Scottish Broadcasting, (BBC, 1948) copy in the BBC Reference Library.
The SNP also believed that they were greatly responsible for the growth of amateur drama.

In a booklet to mark the thirtieth anniversary of Scottish broadcasting, the BBC acknowledged the SNP's contribution more clearly, declaring that:

> In the early days of broadcasting, the Scottish National Players became the nucleus of a team of semi-professional artists who have given splendid service throughout the years.[20]

For their fiftieth anniversary the BBC published an illustrated book entitled Early Days of Broadcasting in Scotland. This described the simplicity of organising broadcast drama in those days:

> A telephone call could muster the Scottish National Players, or the famous Ayrshire team from Ardrossan and Saltcoats, who'd show up at the studio with their current production and, without further rehearsal, put it on the air.

The booklet contains a picture of the SNP during a broadcast in the thirties, and notes that "names which still figure in the 'Radio Times'" such as James Gibson, Jean Taylor Smith and Grace McChlery, appeared early on as speakers of poetry and verse on the radio.

The Glasgow station, with the callsign 5SC, was the sixth of the British Broadcasting Company's eight "main stations",[21] and the first one to be located in Scotland. 5SC opened on 6 March 1923, about four months after the London station (2LO) made the first BBC broadcast.[22] On 31 August 1923 Rob Roy, the first play for radio adapted from a novel was broadcast from the Glasgow station. The adaptation was by R E Jeffrey, who also produced the piece and undertook the title role. Rob Roy was repeated on 10 October 1923, when 5SC became the first station outside London to have a play simultaneously broadcast. It was also heard by listeners of the London, Manchester, Cardiff, Birmingham and Newcastle stations. There were two members of the Scottish National Players in the cast. Nan Scott played Diana Vernon, although the singing was done by Edith Brass, and James Gibson played Mr Owen.

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[20] The First Thirty Years Scottish Broadcasting 1923-1953 . (BBC, 1953), copy in the BBC Reference Library.

[21] The others were : London; Manchester; Cardiff; Newcastle; Aberdeen and Dundee.

[22] This was the News, at 6pm on 14 November 1922.

Like other stations, Glasgow had its own company of actors which broadcast plays at irregular intervals. This was variously billed in the Radio Times as "5SC's Repertory Company", "5SC's Dramatic Company", "The Station Repertory Company", and "The Station Repertory Players". Various SNP members were involved with this company. In April 1924, James Gibson appeared in two plays with the 5SC Repertory Company, In the Zone by Eugene O'Neill and The Long Voyage Home. The author of the second play was not listed in the Radio Times.[23] On 26 August 1924 R B Wharrie took part in a broadcast by the 5SC Dramatic Company of a scene from Pippa Passes by Browning.[24] On 9 September 1924 R B Wharrie and Elsie Brotchie played Romeo and Juliet in the "Balcony Scene", during a "Literary Night".[25] Struan Robertson played Macbeth in the "Dagger Scene" on another "Literary Night" on 7 October 1924.[26] The company performed various "phases" such as the scene at Jean MacAlpine's Inn at Aberfoyle, from Rob Roy, with James Gibson as Dougal, in June 1925.[27] The Three Musketeers was broadcast as a serial in four episodes, beginning on 19 June 1925, with James Gibson in the cast.[28] Gibson also appeared in The Fourth Man, a one-act comedy broadcast on 14 October 1925.[29] The Station Company made many other appearances, however it is unfortunate that the Radio Times has not printed the cast lists for many of these broadcasts.

Edinburgh, which opened as a relay station on 1 May 1924, also had a station company. Madeleine Christie played Mary Seton in The Station Players broadcast of C Stewart Black's play, Chatelard, as part of a "Scottish Evening" on 14 July 1926.[30] Madeleine Christie made at least one other broadcast from Edinburgh, on 14 April 1926, when she was a member of a cast which was not described as being the station company. The play was The Bishop's Candlesticks, billed as being a play in one-act by Norman Mackinnel, which was "founded on an incident in Victor Hugo's novel 'Les Miserables'".[31]

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[23] Radio Times (RT) 18 April 1924, vol. 3, no. 30, p.41.
[24] RT 22 August 1924, vol. 4, no. 50, p. 363.
[25] RT 5 September 1924, vol. 4, no. 50, p. 451.
[26] RT 3 October 1924, vol. 5, no. 54, p. 57.
[27] RT 5 June 1925, vol. 7, no. 89, p. 507.
[28] RT 12 June 1925, vol. 7, no. 90, p. 554.
[29] RT 9 October 1925, vol. 9, no.107, p.121.
[30] RT 9 July 1926, vol. 12, no. 145, p. 112.
[31] RT 9 April 1926, vol. 11, no. 133, p. 120.

Plays were also broadcast from Glasgow which were not listed as being by the station company. These also often included SNP actors. On 2 March 1925, James Gibson played Mr Spaddletree in the three-act play listed as "Jeannie Deans" or "The Heart of Midlothian".[32] Gibson was also in the cast of The Pied Piper by Reginald Benyon, which was given its first broadcast on 27 November 1925,[33] and on 23 February he took part in The Passing of the Third Floor Back by Jerome K Jerome.[34] Nan R Scott and Catherine Fletcher played the two daughters in Phantom Hoofs, a one-act play by David Hawkes, on 4 November 1926.[35] The other member of the cast, the Father, was played by Augustus Beddie, an elocutionist who made numerous broadcasts in the early years. Beddie also made up the third cast member, along with two SNP actors, Grace McChlery and Moultrie R Kelsall, in The Long Lost Uncle. This was listed as being "a Scots comedy by Arthur Mack" and was broadcast on 20 December 1926.[36] T P Maley and Jean Taylor Smith broadcast Managin' John's Mither on 28 December 1926. This was a one-act comedy by Ella Boswell , set in the "kitchen of a homely cottage in Scotland".[37] On 10 January 1927, Jean Taylor Smith and Alex MacGregor took part in The Maker of Dreams, "a fantasy in one-act" by Oliphant Down with music by Beatrice Pattenden. [38] On 12 January 1927 the Glasgow Revue included Grace McChlery, T P Maley and Gordon Gildard.[39] The broadcast of Young Heaven by Jean Cavendish and Miles Malleson on 2 February 1927, was made by Jean Taylor Smith and Moultrie Kelsall,[40] while James Anderson and Gordon Gildard took part in A F Hyslop's The Infernal Quadrangle on 9 March 1927.[41]

Sometimes all the members of a cast would be SNP actors although it was not an SNTS production. The Last Survivor by William Cumming Tait, was broadcast on 26 October 1926 with the cast comprising Gordon Gildard, James Urquhart and Tyrone Guthrie.[42] In his autobiography, A

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[32]RT 27 February 1925, vol. 6, no. 75, p. 443.
[33]RT 20 November 1925, vol. 9, no.113, p. 411.
[34]RT 19 February 1926, vol. 10, no. 126, p. 407.
[35]RT 29 October 1926, vol. 13, no. 161, p. 294.
[36]RT 17 December 1926, vol. I 13, no. 168, p. 696.
[37]RT 24 December 1926, vol. 13, no. 169, p. 757.
[38]RT 7 January 1927, vol. 14, no. 171, p.61.
[39]RT 7 January 1927, vol.14, no. 171, p. 67.
[40]RT 28 January 1927, vol. 14, no. 174, p, 215.
[41]RT 4 March 1927, vol. 14, no. 179, p. 486.
[42]RT 22 October 1926, vol. 13, no. 160, p. 233.

Life in the Theatre. Guthrie states that during his time spent as Producer to the SNP his wages "paid my subsistence; pocket money was earned by the occasional engagement on the radio ... ".[43] Guthrie had broadcasting experience, having joined the SNP after two years with the BBC in Belfast. During December 1926, January and February 1927 Guthrie made eight broadcast appearances outwith the Scottish National Theatre Society. On 8 December 1926 he played in The Glittering Gate by Lord Dunsany, with Halbert Tatlock taking the other part.[44] On 31 December Guthrie and James Urquhart, another SNP actor, were in the cast of Eight O'Clock, a one-act melodrama by Cyril Ashurst.[45] Together with Flora Robson, Guthrie broadcast a programme entitled Divertissements, comprising of short plays, sketches, monologues, and "traditional tales and ballads", from Belfast on 26 January, from Glasgow on 28 January,[46] and from Aberdeen on 31 January 1927.[47] On 30 January and 16 February Guthrie broadcast "Scenes from Shakespeare". The first programme comprised Measure for Measure Act 3 scene 1 with Guthrie, William J Rea and Nan Scott in the cast, and Richard II with William J Rea as the Gardener and Nan Scott as the Queen.[48] Rea was a professional actor who had played the title role of James the First of Scotland in both the 1925 and 1926 SNP productions. The programme on 16 February was Richard II Act 2 scene 1, and The Merchant of Venice Act 2 Scene 2. In this instance the Radio times does not give a full cast list, merely stating that the Station Players appeared with Guthrie. On 17 January 1927, Guthrie took part in a broadcast of Allan Ramsay's The Gentle Shepherd with a cast of eleven people, eight of whom were members of the SNP. These were: Guthrie; R B Wharrie; T P Maley; James Anderson; Nan R Scott; Jean Taylor Smith; Elliot C Mason; and Catherine Fletcher.[49]

A feature of broadcasting in the twenties was the large amount of verse speaking. This is noted in Early Days of Broadcasting in Scotland:

> In the early years not a night seemed to pass without some poetry being read aloud. Every category got an airing: the ballads, classical and modern English verse, Burns,

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[43] p. 47.
[44] RT 3 December 1926, vol. 13, no.166, p. 576.
[45] RT 24 December 1926, vol.13, no. 169, p.768.
[46] RT 21 January 1927, vol. 14, no.173, p.167;173.
[47] RT 28 January 1927, vol. 14, no. 174, p. 209.
[48] RT 28 January 1927, vol 14, no.174, p.205.
[49] RT 14 January 1927 vol. 14, no. 172, p. 109.

> Dunbar, makars ancient and contemporary, dramatic selections in blank verse, and couthie "doric" lyrics of the homeliest style.

Many of the reciters of poetry were members of the SNP, and were generally billed as being elocutionists. Nan R Scott was very prominent in this field, broadcasting "Corrymeela" and "Tim, an Irish Terrier" as part of an "all Irish Night" on 3 November 1923.[50] On 9 June 1924 she read two Scots ballads, "Helen of Kirkconnel" and "The Demon Lovers" along with some of John Masefield's poetry.[51] As part of a "Festival Prize Winners" programme on 11 December 1924, Nan Scott read some of Keats's work.[52]Charles R M Brookes was another SNP actor to broadcast poetry in 1924, when he read "The Wee, Wee German Lairdie" to a background of music, and "Tullochgorum", on 17 October 1924.[53]

After 1925, most of the poetry readings were done under the auspices of the Scottish Association for the Speaking of Verse, but the majority of the reciters still came from the ranks of the Scottish National Players. The SASV readings were preceded or inaugurated by a talk on 4 February 1925 given by Marjorie Gullan on "How to Listen to Poetry".[54] This was simultaneously broadcast to Aberdeen. On 18 February 1925 there was an SASV recital "under the direction of Nan R Scott", with readings from Milton, Shelley, the Oxford Book of Ballads, Keats, Shakespeare and Scott.[55] The programme was simultaneously broadcast to Edinburgh and Dundee. Enid Hewitt broadcast recitals under the SASV on 18 March[56], which was simultaneously broadcast to Dundee, and on 9 June 1925. The latter programme was listed as being of "Some Seventeenth Century Lyrics", and was broadcast from the Aberdeen

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[50]RT 26 October 1923, vol. 1, no. 5, p.159.
[51]RT 6 June 1924, vol. 3, no. 37, p. 445.
[52]RT 5 December 1924, vol. 5, no. 63, p. 493.
[53]RT 10 October 1924, vol. 5, no. 55, p. 111.
[54]RT 31 January 1925, vol. 6, no. 71, p. 255.
[55]RT 13 February 1925, vol. 6, no 73, p.351.
The actual programme was:
"At a Solemn Music" and the last speech and chorus from "Sweeney Agonistes" by Milton
"Night" and "The Fugitives" by Shelley
"The Lowlands O' Holland", and "The Demon Lover" from The Oxford Book of Ballads
"La Belle Dame Sans Merci" by Keats
Speeches from The Winter's Tale and King Lear
"Coronach" and "Pibroch" by Scott.
[56]RT 13 March 1925, vol. 6, no. 77, p. 543.

studio.[57] Hewitt also undertook recitals on 6 July 1925[58] (simultaneously broadcast to Edinburgh), and on 17 August 1925.[59] Catherine Fletcher was the reciter in the simultaneous broadcast to Belfast and Dundee on 22 June 1925.[60] R B Wharrie broadcast "Half an Hour with Shakespeare" under the SASV auspices on 26 October 1925.[61] Other SNP actors who broadcast by arrangement with the SASV were: Jean Taylor Smith, with programmes on 7 December 1925,[62] and 18 December 1925[63] which came from Dundee; David Cleghorn Thomson, who took part in a "Victorian Period" programme on 8 February 1927[64], which came from Edinburgh and was simultaneously broadcast to Glasgow and Dundee; and Charles R M Brookes, who recited some ballad poetry on 1 March 1927.[65] There were some other poetry broadcasts in 1926 and 1927 which were not listed in the Radio Times as being connected with the SASV. R B Wharrie read excerpts from Shakespeare and Jonson on 3 December 1926.[66] Catherine Fletcher took part in a "Romantic Period" programme on 24 January 1927, when pieces by Wordsworth, Byron, Shelley and Burns were read by herself and Duncan Clark.[67]

Morland Graham was also involved in broadcasting in 5SC's opening years. On 16 October 1923 he gave a talk entitled "The Drama".[68] He was billed as a "Character Actor" when he broadcast on 5 February 1924, giving several "character studies" from the novels of Dickens.[69] There were several other instances of involvement in the early years of the BBC in Scotland by members of the Scottish National Players. Jean Taylor Smith was involved in a broadcast on 19 December 1926 when she read a prose psalm given as chapter 13 of 1st Corinthians.[70] In Campbeltown

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[57]RT 5 June 1925, vol. 7, no. 89, p. 493.
[58]RT 3 July 1925, vol. 8, no. 73, p. 65.
[59]RT 14 August 1923, vol. 8, no. 99, p. 327.
[60]RT 19 June 1925, vol. 7, no. 91, p. 587.
[61]RT 23 October 1925, vol. 9, no. 109, p. 217.
[62]RT 4 December 1925, vol. 9, no. 115, p. 508.
[63]RT 11 December 1925, vol. 9, no. 116, p. 569.
[64]RT 4 February 1927, vol. 14, no. 175, p. 269.
[65]RT 25 February 1927, vol. 14, no.178, p. 426.
[66]RT 26 November 1926, vol. 13, no.165, p, 527.
[67]RT 21 January 1927, vol. 14, no.173, p. 159.
[68]RT 12 October 1923, vol. 1, no. 3, p. 79.
[69]RT 1 February 1924, vol. 2, no. 18, p. 225.
[70]RT 17 December 1926, vol. 13, no. 168, p. 693.

Loch was transmitted on 12 July 1927. This was said to have been "overheard and set down" by T P Maley, and was "spoken" by Maley and Andrew Stewart.[71]

The significant contribution made by members of the SNP to Scottish broadcasting can be seen from the Radio Drama Scripts in the Scottish Theatre Archive, which contain examples of the following people in various capacities: acting, producing, reading, writing, presenting, and adapting pieces for broadcasting between 1927 and 1978:

ELVIRA AIRLIE : acting 1936, 1948.

JAMES ANDERSON : acting 1935, 1968.

NELL BALLANTYNE : acting 1935.

GEORGE BLAKE : talk 1939.

JOHN BRANDANE : writing 1936.

CHARLES R M BROOKES : acting 1935, 1938 (2), 1942, 1946, 1947, 1948 I2), 1950, 1956 (2), 1957, 1959, 1971.

ELSIE BROTCHIE : acting 1935, 1936 (2).

HESTER PATON BROWN : writing 1933.

ARCHIBALD BUCHANAN : acting 1948.

MEG BUCHANAN : acting 1935 (2), 1947, 1948 (2), 1949, 1956.

MADELEINE CHRISTIE : acting 1935, 1956 (2), 1957; reading 1955.

A J CRAWFORD: acting 1936.

MARJORIE DALZIEL : acting 1949, 1955, 1957 (3), 1969, 1971; reading 1948, 1970 (2), 1971, 1972 (2), 1973 (5), 1974, 1978.

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CATHERINE FLETCHER : acting 1935, 1936 (2); reading 1938 (2).

JAMES GIBSON : acting 1935, 1947, 1948, 1949 (2), 1950, 1955, 1957, 1969; reading 1940, 1944, 1949, 1962.

GORDON GILDARD : acting 1955; producing 1932, 1933 (2), 1934 (3), 1935 (4), 1936, 1937, 1945, 1947, 1948; adapting 1938, 1939, 1947.

D MORLAND GRAHAM : acting 1942.

TYRONE GUTHRIE : producing 1948; writing (nd c 1927).

ARCHIE HENRY : acting 1947; reading 1948 (3).

W H D JOSS : acting 1936, 1937, 1938, 1939 (4),1941, 1942, 1943, 1946, 1947 (2),1948 (2), 1949, 1956, 1957, 1959, 1962, 1975 (2); reading 1939,(Tammy Troot) 1955 (3), 1963, 1964 (3), 1965 (3), 1966 (5), 1967 (4), 1968 (3), 1969 (2); writing 1973 (a story which he also read himself).

MOULTRIE R KELSALL : acting 1946 (2), 1948 (2), 1949 (2), 1950 (4), 1952, 1954 (3), 1955, 1956 (3), 1957, 1960, 1970, 1971; reading 1944, 1947 (2), 1948, 1949, 1956 (2), 1957, 1972; producing 1932, 1933 (2), 1937, 1940, 1941 (8), 1942 (17), 1943 (8), 1944 (3), 1945 (21), 1946 (2), 1947, 1950, 1953, 1954; writing 1931, 1934, 1950 (2), 1952, 1953, 1956, 1961; adapting 1946, 1949, 1955, 1958; reviewing 1947.

ETHEL LEWIS : presenting a music programme (n.d. c1930); acting (n.d. c1930).

HOWARD LOCKHART : acting 1947; reading 1963, 1968, 1969; producing 1938 (3),1945, 1946 (3), 1947 (6); writing 1936, 1971 (he also presented this piece himself).

GRACE MCCHLERY : acting 1935, 1948, 1954, 1968; reading 1939.

DUNCAN MACRAE (J MACRAE) : reading 1949.

E J P MACE : acting 1936, 1938 (2), 1939, 1946, 1948, 1949, 1957, 1971; reading 1939 (2); writing 1971.

T P MALEY : acting 1927; producing 1931 (2); writing 1927, 1947.

ELLIOT C MASON: acting 1942.

DAVID MOWAT : acting 1946, 1956 (3); reading 1962.

BRYDEN MURDOCH: acting 1947, 1948, 1949, 1956, 1957; reading 1956.

IAN SADLER : acting 1935, 1936, 1937, 1938 (2), 1939 (3), 1949; reading 1948 (3).

NAN R SCOTT : acting 1938, 1946, 1957; reading 1938 (2).

JAMES SLOAN : acting 1942.

JEAN TAYLOR SMITH : acting 1935, 1936, 1942, 1943, 1947 (2), 1948 (2), 1950, 1955, 1956, 1959, 1961 (2), 1970, 1973; reading 1937, 1939, 1942, 1961, 1967.

TOM SMITH : acting 1936, 1941, 1942, 1947, 1948 (2); reading 1937, 1939 (2), 1947, 1948.

ANDREW STEWART : acting 1927; producing 1935, 1937, 1939; writing 1935.

HAL D STEWART : acting 1934.

HALBERT TATLOCK : acting 1929, 1937, 1938, 1939, n.d.; reading 1938.

DAVID CLEGHORN THOMSON : producing 1932; writing 1932.

CAVEN WATSON : acting 1935.

R B WHARRIE : acting 1947 92); reading 1938 (2), 1939; writing 1964.

G PATERSON WHYTE : acting 1935; writing 1935.

HAROLD WIGHTMAN : acting 1935 (2), 1936, 1938, 1939 (3), 1943 (2), 1947, 1950 (2), 1957 (2); reading 1956, 1959 (2); adapting 1948 (he also acted as narrator in this piece).

JAMES T WOODBURN : acting 1938, 1942,1947; reading 1948.

ANDREW P WILSON : acting 1933, 1934, 1941; writing 1930, 1933, 1935, 1941 (also acted in this); writing Sandy and Andy 1936 (5), 1942 (2), 1946 (2), 1947 (8); writing and producing 1936, (1 n.d.); adapting 1930, 1933, 1934, 1940, 1945 (2), 1947; talk 1937.

CHAPTER SEVEN: CONCLUSIONS

" ... lovers of Scotland rather than lovers of the drama and the theatre."[1]

The three aims of the Scottish National Players were never fulfilled. The general standard of the plays which they presented was not very high, and they never received the Scottish masterpiece which they sought. Their audiences were often criticised for being made up more from their friends and supporters than from the public at large, and indeed the SNP themselves were always crying out for more public support. One comment on the SNP audiences was that they had always been "drawn chiefly from lovers of Scotland rather than lovers of the drama and the theatre".[2] This is also a revealing comment on the Players themselves, who arose out of a patriotic society and played "Scots Wha Hae" before every production. The Players' third aim was to build a national theatre, but the Theatre Fund which they started to enable them to do this never amounted to more than about £600, although that is understandable when it was difficult enough just to break even without having to put aside money in a special fund. Indeed the lack of capital, and the fact that they always had to hire theatres were serious problems for the SNP. The attitude of some of the Players also caused internal problems, especially towards the end of the twenties when a split developed between those who believed that it was the Scottish aspect of their policy which was the most important and others whose interest in particularly Scottish drama seemed to be lessening in favour of more popular work or better pieces of theatre.

The Players also received a lot of external criticism at this point, with C M Grieve in particular making a stand against the Players with his six-point letter to the Daily Record on 13 December 1928.[3] Grieve is basically right in his major premise that while the SNP believed themselves to be developing Scottish drama and techniques they were in fact only putting a Scottish veneer onto the methods and ideas of other theatre traditions and did not do enough experimentation in areas which might have been more fruitful for the evolution of a distinctly Scottish drama.

The SNP were always willing to acknowledge the fact that they were using the Irish Players as a model, and stated this on many occasions. The

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[1]Halbert Tatlock, letter to the Glasgow Herald printed on 14 January 1931. Tatlock had himself acted with the SNP and reviewed many of their productions.

[2]Letter to the Glasgow Herald on 14 January 1931 from Halbert Tatlock.

[3]See p. 180-181.

press also frequently emphasised the Abbey's inspirational role in the SNP's career. The comparison with the Irish company did have its uses. People knew of the Abbey's success and could therefore visualise what the SNP hoped to achieve with no need for long explanations and theories. There were dangers, however, in this use of the Abbey as a symbol of the SNP's aims. An important factor in the Abbey's success was the financial subsidy given by Miss Horniman which enabled the Irish venture to have its own theatre building and not to be too reliant on box office receipts. The Scottish National Players had no such benefactor and never raised enough money for their own theatre. There was no outside funding, except for an occasional guarantee fund and the money raised by subscriptions and the selling of shares in 1928, so it was a serious matter to lose money on a production, and the consequent importance of box office receipts had its eventual effect on the choice of plays performed. With such a major obstacle in their way the SNP were unable to match the Abbey's success and this was seen as a sign of failure. It should have been understood, however, that a Scottish theatre ought, by its very definition, to be different from an Irish one. The Scottish movement should have concentrated more on finding their own methods rather than emulate the Abbey too closely.

Another of the dangers of the SNP's use of the Abbey was that they had their own somewhat blinkered view of what the Abbey was. To them the name meant the early years and the work of Yeats, Synge and Lady Gregory, rather than that of O'Casey and the Abbey of the twenties. They also blithely disregarded the fact that Ireland had gone through a period of bloody revolution since the days of the Irish Literary Theatre. This is perhaps more easily understood when it is remembered that the first SNP proposals were made in 1913. When the idea was revived in 1920 there were no significant changes as a result of the First World War. In ideology the Scottish National Players were still a pre-war group.

In contrast to their eagerness to imitate the Abbey, the Scottish National Players rejected the Glasgow Repertory Theatre's use of English New Drama as a way to found a national theatre. As the Rep operated from 1909-14, it came before the Scottish Renaissance period, and just overlapped with the first SNP attempt. The SNP, however, denied that the Rep had been an influence upon them, stating that their Society "drew its inspiration from the Dublin Abbey Theatre, and that theatre's dramatists and players, not from the much-beloved but dead and gone Glasgow

Repertory Theatre".[4] The SNP held the view that although the Rep had been quite successful in its other objects, "little if anything was achieved" in its aim of developing Scottish drama.[5] In fact, about a quarter of the Rep's output was Scottish plays. The SNP did benefit however from the Rep's remaining money and from its audience.

The Scottish National Players overturned the Rep's policy of mixing productions of Scottish plays with works by such authors as Shaw, Galsworthy, Barker, St John Hankin, John Masefield, Ibsen, Chekhov, Maeterlinck and Gorky. Although the SNP, at Clewlow's instigation did produce some non-Scottish plays, and stressed that this was in accordance with their secondary aim of securing a public for good drama of any sort, they did not really make this an important aspect of their work. The Rep had tried to encourage Scottish drama by exposing it to comparison with their productions of New Drama, and such plays as might have been seen at the Royal Court under the management of Granville Barker (1904-7). The Scottish National Players took the line that such major works would dwarf the type of Scottish writing that was available to them. A typical one-act Scottish comedy such as Cute McCheyne or Exit Mrs McLeerie, would appear to be a ridiculously poor attempt at national theatre beside the best of Ibsen or Shaw. The people involved in the Scottish National Players could perhaps be described as zealots for their cause, and indeed, referred to themselves as 'the movement'. It is not surprising therefore to find that they were extremely sensitive about their own ideas, and that they retreated into a very defensive position of only producing Scottish plays. This may in fact have been a wise decision, as it did at least prove that there was a stage constantly available for Scottish plays, and gave encouragement to the prospective writer to continue as his work would have a good chance of being produced.

Although the SNP believed that they were not influenced by the Rep, and differed from it by almost solely producing Scottish plays, it is clear that it was an important factor in what they thought a national theatre should be. The idea of a text-based theatre, in either the English repertory tradition, via the Glasgow Rep, or the Irish tradition via the Abbey, was solidly placed in their minds. The problem is that a Scottish national theatre needed a Scottish model rather than, as Grieve put it, "a mere devolution of the technique and tendencies of English drama."

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[4]'Ourselves and Our Movement', the Scottish Player, Vol. 4, No. 32, March 1926.
[5]SNTV, p. 18.

The Scottish National Players did begin to investigate one area which was deeply rooted in Scottish culture, the folksong. They used items of what they called "Scots Song and Mime" between one-act plays on a triple bill. Songs such as "Now Now Soldier" were mimed in costume, with masks being used in "Willie's Gane tae Melville Castle". Although the Players stated that this development was always very popular on tour, there were several criticisms of it from the press and public, and it caused internal disagreements and dissatisfaction. People made the point that something similar had already been carried out by the Arts League of Service, and claimed that by continuing with it the SNP were merely "playing at theatricals". In the face of all this the Players never really explored the idea that folksong, as an instantly recognisable and deep-rooted part of Scottish culture, could be used to develop a Scottish theatre in the way that, for example, it was successfully used by 7:84 in The Cheviot, the Stag and the Black, Black Oil.

The first of Grieve's six points stated that the SNP had never defined the term Scottish or understood the problems of doing so. This is not quite true. In fact the type of play which they produced set the standard of what "a Scottish play" should be for the SCDA clubs, the BBC, and indeed for theatre in general until Unity began to question this assumption in the forties. The SNP were seeking Scotland's national identity through drama, and the overwhelming feeling from a survey of the plays which they presented is that this would be found in the Highlands and in the past. Jacobite plays were an especial favourite with the Scottish Player declaring in March 1924 that Campbell of Kilmhor and The Dawn were being produced, "not in order to propagate foolish dynastic politics but to give Scotsmen something to dream over". The dream was more potent because it was set in the past when, it was felt, Scotland's national identity was more obvious and the Scots were more distinct from the English. Commonly held ideas about the past hold a peculiar fascination for Scotland, without any universal compunction to discover or analyse the actual historical details, and it is true that a kind of perverse pride is taken in the disasters and defeats of bygone ages. Culloden raises as many, if not more, emotions as Bannockburn. To the SNP this was "the need to render tribute to our lost causes and broken leaders". They believed that the "lost cause" was a barely understood "mysticism" which the Scot "treasures ... as a holy thing", and which could provide the material for a national drama:

> We need a dramatization of our lost causes; we would welcome a fine tragic play woven around William Wallace, one which will show us all the splendour of the Man of Scotland, the man who did not merely represent the Scots nation, but was the Scots nation in himself. We do not ask for ranting patriotism and bombast, but we do need a dramatic interpretation of the Wallace symbol whose name we salute in our national song after the manner we have of saluting our kings and heroes and the ancient and holy dead. We have set a theme to the dramatist we eagerly await season after season in the Athenaeum and in the village hall.[6]

Part of the appeal of the lost cause, however, is the very fact that it is lost and unobtainable, and therefore safe. It is easy to sing "Will ye no come back again?" because there is no possibility that a comeback can be made. It demands no commitment and makes no direct comment on contemporary society. The SNP's vision of Scottish theatre is summed up in the controversy that surrounded their production of Neil Gunn's The Ancient Fire, in October 1929. Their preference of a play full of mystic longing for the Highlands and a lost Golden Age, rather than Joe Corrie's In Time O' Strife, a contemporary picture of life in industrial Scotland highlights their image of what a Scottish National Theatre should be. When the Players did do a play set in lowland Scotland, it was usually either a rural comedy, such as Cute McCheyne, or centred on the middle-classes, such as the ship-building family in Clyde-Built.

Grieve's second point bluntly states that the wrong people were in charge of the movement, and, in his fourth, he notes that there would be no chance of success without a complete change of personnel. The people involved in the Scottish National Players movement, and they regarded it as such from the very beginning, were a mixture of experienced local amateurs, elocutionists, festival prizewinners, journalists and other 'professional' people, members of patriotic societies, and of course, the experienced theatre practitioners who held the full-time salaried position of Producer, such as Andrew P Wilson, Frank D Clewlow, Tyrone Guthrie and W G Fay. It was very much a middle-class affair which, as Gordon Bottomley explained, "would not countenance even a passing association

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[6]Alexander McGill, 'The Scottish Play We hope For', The Scottish Player, Vol. 2, No. 9, March 1924.

with Labour".[7] The politics of the SNP were in accordance with the middle-class professional people who made up the Society, and tied in with their vision of what a Scottish play should be.

The Scottish National Players' first production, in January 1921, was under the auspices of the St Andrew Society, a patriotic organisation founded in 1907, whose objects were "the guarding of the honour and dignity of Scotland, the vindication of Scottish rights within the British Union", and the "cultivation of the spirit of Scottish patriotism".This was to be done by, among other things, "the encouragement of Scottish Institutions, Arts, Letters and Music".[8] The important point is that although the St Andrew Society members were staunch patriots, they were not a politically orientated Home Rule body. They wanted to be both Scottish and a part of the British Union. The Scottish National Players kept to the spirit of the St Andrew Society, even though relations were amicably severed in January 1922 when the Scottish National Theatre Society was set up to take over the organisation and financial responsibility for SNP productions. Their development from the St Andrew Society and pre-First World War origins, together with their idealisation of the Abbey Theatre, show that the Scottish National Players were more a product of the Irish Renaissance than the Scottish one. It was not really until the thirties and the work of Robert MacLellan that drama played a part in the Scottish Renaissance.

Where Grieve goes too far is in his sixth point when he states that they have produced no play "of any value and done nothing to create a dramatic movement of the slightest real consequence". While it is true that many of the plays the SNP produced were mediocre and forgettable, plays such as Soutarness Water, The Glen is Mine and Gruach cannot be dismissed so easily. They may not be masterpieces but they do have merit and provided Scottish theatre with something to develop and build upon, an important function as great plays rarely appear out of thin air.

Neither is it fair to say that the SNP had achieved nothing toward the creation of a dramatic movement. They did, as has been seen, function as a training ground for actors. They also rendered valuable service by

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[7]Letter to David Glen MacKemmie, dated 3 February 1935, STA. Bottomley was recalling that the SNP had "with the greatest regret" turned down an invitation to take their production of Gruach to the Garrick Theatre, London, because Bourchier was lending it to the ILP.

[8]Aims of the St Andrew Society, printed in The Scottish Flag by C Cleland Harvey, published by the Society in 1914.

touring Highland and other country areas, believing that a national theatre could not be contained within a single building. It had to be "of all the people throughout the nation". This is particularly apt in Scotland with three main towns outside the central belt and a scattered rural population with a different way of life from that in industrial areas. There are regional variations too in culture, dialect and accent. Scotland is far from being a homogeneous country, and no one area on its own can be said to define Scotland as a whole. To be of interest and relevance to more than just Glasgow or Edinburgh, a theatre company must be prepared to visit other areas such as the Highlands, Grampian or the Borders. This is as true today as it was in the twenties, and the past two decades have seen an increase in the commitment to touring with companies such as 7:84, Wildcat, Communicado and Theatre Alba.

Another important service which the Scottish National Players did render was that they provided Scottish theatre with something to react against. Grieve felt that the SNP were "tied to ideas and methods demonstrably antipathetic to the evolution of a distinctively Scottish drama", and that the "atmosphere surrounding the Scottish National Theatre movement prevents any attention being paid to the technical and ideological experimentation essential to the evolution of a distinctively Scottish drama". While there may be some truth in the first statement the second one does not logically follow. If enough people with sufficient motivation agreed with Grieve there was nothing to stop them from setting up in opposition to the SNP.

The Scottish National Players then, did not fulfil their stated aims and received their share of criticism, but they were the most interesting and important group in Scottish theatre in the 1920s. They were actively trying to develop a national drama, and indeed the type of play which they produced defined Scottish theatre for almost two decades and provided something for later groups, such as Unity, to react against. The SNP became the focus for the aspirations of young people wanting to progress to a professional career within theatre and were responsible for training a whole generation of Scottish actors. Later theatre groups, such as the Curtain and the Gateway, were greatly influenced by the Scottish National Players, who also made a major contribution to the early years of broadcasting in Scotland. The SNP recognised the necessity for a national theatre group to tour as widely as possible, and in doing so helped to fire the enthusiasm for amateur drama which swept Scotland in the thirties.

Many of the problems and debates which confronted them in their attempt to provide Scotland with a national theatre, such as the vexed question of whether production should be restricted to Scots plays, irrespective of quality, in the hope of better things to come, are still relevant issues. Thus, the Scottish National Players have an important place in Scottish theatre history, being as Tyrone Guthrie stated, "one of the links in the chain that will ultimately lead to some form of indigenous drama in Scotland".[9]

[9]SNTV.

EPILOGUE : THE SCOTTISH NATIONAL PLAYERS AFTER 1934

After the Scottish National Theatre Society Limited disbanded, a group of actors decided to carry on on their own and to continue to call themselves the Scottish National Players. They were, however, more in the nature of any other amateur play producing body, rather than a theatre group interested in experimentation and with a definite desire to produce Scottish plays. They no longer held to the policies and aims of the original Scottish National Players, whose glorious years had passed. Those aims were now being pursued by groups like the Curtain Theatre, which aimed to give the Scottish writer and actor a platform while attaining the highest standards of design and production.

The SNP produced thirty plays after the SNTS disbandment, but only eight of them were new works. Three of the new plays were by Hal D Stewart, but were of no greater merit than A Month of Sundays which the SNP produced in 1931, and were in a similar vein. Plays by J M Barrie continued to be produced, and although three of Bridie's works were performed they had all been previously produced elsewhere. Many of the others in the SNP's list of productions were of a type which might have been seen in any repertory theatre in England during the thirties, for example People at Sea by J B Priestley; Hobson's Choice and Possession by Harold Brighouse; and The Maitlands by Ronald McKenzie.[1]

Moultrie Kelsall describes the Players' decline from the beginning of the thirties:

> ...in the next few years it became clear that the spate was indefinitely delayed. The policy of mixing occasional international theatre with Scottish output, started by Frank Clewlow in 1924, was widened to include English repertory comedies. The result was increased box-office, but decreased prestige: in that field some of the better amateur companies in Scotland were no worse than the Scottish National Players. Loss of prestige meant increased difficulty in recruiting: old stalwarts died or went to London - the result was the same from the Scottish National Players' point of view: as BBC engagements increased, so did temporary defections. The war provided the coup de grace.[2]

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[1] The first three appendices list all the plays performed, including those between 1934 and 1947, to show that the SNP were no longer adhering to the aims of the original group.

[2] SNTV. p. 36.

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Figure thirteen:
The Scottish National Players on tour August/September 1935. The posters on the bus are typical of the style used by the SNP throughout their career.
STA.

Some weak attempts were made to keep to the old Scottish ideals, with Jean Taylor Smith 'translating' Hobson's Choice into a Scottish version. The reviewers were not very impressed however. The Glasgow Herald (31 March 1939) noted that the alterations consisted of the substitution of a Scots doctor for the Irish one, and changing names such as Vicky into Ina. The Evening Times stated that this was "hardly a daring piece of theatre", and questioned the Players continued use of the words 'Scottish National' in their title:

> The title "National Players" surely should connote worthwhile dramatic endeavour. Why are the SNP content to dabble in mediocrities? Can they look back at the 1938-39 season and assure themselves that they have made theatrical progress? Is it enough competently to produce "safe" plays?[3]

The Players, although they "found it increasingly difficult to keep together", continued in this manner until the outbreak of the Second World War.[4] After the war a revival attempt was made, mainly, the Scottish National Theatre Venture states, "through the enthusiasm of Moultrie Kelsall". Short visits of one or two nights each were made, the most notable being the production of Robert Kemp's Walls of Jericho, first produced at Lanark on 4 April 1947. But the time for such a group as the Scottish National Players had passed, and the revival did not succeed. As Jean Taylor Smith recalled:

> ...we found that the commercial theatre in Scotland could now do, with greater ease, what we were trying to do with divided energies, and we abandoned the project.[5]

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[3]Evening News n.d. STA.
[4]SNTV, p. 32.
[5]SNTV, p. 32.

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Programmes;
Plays, both published and unpublished scripts;
Accounts and minute books;
Miscellaneous business items, such as lists of shareholders and application forms;
Interviews;
Photographs.

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