

The Gentle Shepherd

Location

Two places have laid claim to be the exact location of Ramsay's greatest work *The Gentle Shepherd* - the Vale of Glencorse and Newhall Estate, Carlops. But it is generally accepted that Newhall is the most likely location.

By the River Esk, near Newhall House, there are romantic crags which form a natural shelter - the *Craigiebeild*; one can find a large grassy plot beside the river - the *Washing Green*; and further up the valley the river has waterfalls and deep clear pools - *Habbie's Howe* and the high crag in the distance - the *Harbour Craig*.

By 1712 Allan Ramsay had become a key member of Edinburgh's literary society. He formed an improving literary discussion group known as the 'Easy Group' which met regularly in Leith. The proprietors of the neighbouring Newhall and Penicuik Estates - Alexander Pennecuik and Sir John Clerk - were members of a similar group 'The Worthies Club' which also met regularly in Leith. Sir John Clerk and Allan Ramsay became great friends.

The Gentle Shepherd evolved as it was read to both the Easy Club and the Worthy Club. In Newhall House there is a painting by Alexander Carse (Scottish Painter of Scenes

of Scottish Life 1770-1843) which commemorates William Aikman (Scottish Portrait Painter 1682-1731) drawing the gathering of Worthies at a reading by Ramsay of *The Gentle Shepherd* in a Leith Tavern.

In his dedication of the play to Susanna, Countess of Eglinton Ramsay explains his deliberate use of Doric, the Scots language, rather than English, in order to increase the sense of a specific rural Scottish location reflecting his views on Scotland and the preservation of Scottish culture. This explicit 'Scottish' quality in part explains the continuing popularity of the play, and the large number of editions of *The Gentle Shepherd* that were printed - both

authorised and pirated - over many decades. The most popular was the 1788 Foulis Edition, illustrated by David Allan who made several visits to the Carlops area meeting with the local people who remembered Ramsay reciting his own work. These humble people of the locality were his inspiration.

The importance of identifying the precise spot where the action takes place increased in significance during the 19th century and determinism to claim and establish the exact location caused rivalry between landowners around the Carlops area. Robert Brown of Newhall decided the matter by first naming or renaming buildings and features around the estate such as Patie's Hill, Symons House, Mause's Cottage Washing Green etc.

The 1808 Newhall Edition describes all the locations mentioned in the play including a map showing the Scenery of the Gentle Shepherd based on a 1770 plan, with several additions from a later survey. The book was illustrated with an engraved frontispiece by Alexander Carse and eleven further engravings, mostly by James Stevenson (1785-1854). The sites, still recognisable today,

are slightly romanticised interpretations of local settings - each has a title, description and quotation from the text - of course, Newhall is identified as the site of William Worthy's 'Fair Estate'. Taken together with the map and Brown's descriptions, they form a basic guide for any visitor who wishes to see the locations mentioned in the play. The accessibility of all the sites mentioned does vary now with the weather but views of Peggy's Lea, the waterfall at Patie's Mill, Patie's Mill Farm, Carlops Brig, Roger's Rigg, the Sites of Spittle, Mause's Cottage, Symon's House, towering Harbour Craig and many other features in and near the village are constant reminders of Ramsay's most popular work.



The opening scene of *The Gentle Shepherd* by David Allan: 1788 Foulis Edition



Sir William Worthy's 'Fair Estate'
1808 Newhall Edition

Dr. Patsy Campbell, University of Edinburgh

**"Gae far'er up the burn to Habbie's How,
Where a' the sweets o' spring and summer grow:
There 'tween twa birks, out ower a little lin,
The water fa's and makes a singin' din;
A pool breast-deep, beneath as clear as glass,
Kisses, wi' easy whirls, the bord'ring grass.**

Road to Kitley Knowe



Old entrance to Newhall



Walk towards Newhall



Habbie's Howe



Harbour Craig



Views around Newhall Estate and Carlops: Scenery of *The Gentle Shepherd*