

MY LIFE - SIR THOMAS URQUHART OF CROMARTY

BY GREG FULLERTON

Bonjour, hola, goedendag, buon giorno, guten tag!

Hello!

Do you not know how I am? Have you not read your Scottish history? Ah, you have. Yes, well, they did overlook me a bit in the history books, c'est la vie!

Well let me present myself.

I, am Sir Thomas Urquhart, laird of Cromarty, gallant warrior, defender of King Charles, man of science, linguistic, literary and mathematical genius.

I am Cromarty. I am the sea, the sky, the earth, the wind and every last grain of sand. I am everything you see or feel. This is my town, my land and my birthright. But let me not digress.

I was born in the year of our lord sixteen hundred and eleven. A very long time ago, 400 years ago in fact. Funny, I don't feel four hundred!

The world was a very different place then from what it is now. None of your computation machines, horseless carriages or tele-visual projection devices that you all take for granted nowadays. God, King and honour mattered in my day and not necessarily in that order!

Scotland was an independent nation. We had our own parliament and England had theirs too, however, we did share a common king.

I was a loyal subject of King Charles and it was he that gave me my knighthood. You know, the "Sir" bit at the start of my name. But more of that later.

Some men have recognized my superior intellect and others just think I'm insane. I prefer to think of me as slightly eccentric. There is, after all, a

very fine line between genius and madness! And, if I were not of sound mind, then how would I be able to relate my tale to you with such clarity?

So, let me tell you a bit about my life.

At the age of eleven I enrolled at Aberdeen University. Yes, you heard correctly, eleven! Around about your age I wager? Are any of you studying at university yet? Are any of your friends?

If I'd had my way I'd have set up my own university here in Cromarty. It was all part of my grand plan for the town. However, circumstances conspired against me and my plans never did come to fruition! How different a place it would have been if it had all worked out; why, Cromarty would have been bigger and more prosperous than even Inverness. But less of my daydreams.

University was not for me. I wanted to learn about the world, but the professors could not teach me what I needed to know. I knew more than them already. In fact, I already knew everything that there was to learn!

I wanted learn the things that no one had thought of learning yet.

That, was my mission, my *raison d'être*, to be the ultimate man of science. I would answer the questions that had not yet been thought of like, why are there so many colours; how do you square a circle; and how do you calculate all trigonometrical calculations by sines without tangents? OK, so I might have lost you with the last one, however, I'm sure you get the idea!

I was there right at the birth of science, asking the questions that had yet to be asked. Now maybe I wasn't asking exactly the right questions but if I'd had the chance then it could have been me discovering gravity, working out the origin of our species or devising the theory of relativity and not Newton, Darwin or Einstein! You would certainly have been familiar with my name nowadays if that had been the case!

At any rate, I made up my mind to leave Aberdeen and from that day on, I became a student of the "University of Life".

I travelled in Europe and I learned their languages. I am fluent in French, Spanish and German to name but a few. They say I speak as well as any native.

The more I learned, the more I realised that all languages were vulgar to my ear. The words did not make sense, they did not mean anything. The world needed a language that could be easily learned and spoken by all. The sound of the words should mirror nature. It should be a language of beauty, where words are formed by what they are supposed to mean. A perfect language, made by design and not by accident. A language for all the people of the world. That was the basis of my Universal language. A work of genius, that would have changed the world as you know it. Imagine travelling the world and being able to talk to everyone you meet, in the same language. Looking at an unfamiliar object or an animal and being able to come up with the correct word for it. How great a thing would that be? Some call me arrogant, big headed or just full of my own self importance. That could be a fair accusation if it were not for the fact that my intellect is far superior to any man that lives or has ever lived. In my lifetime I wrote over one hundred great works of genius and I had planned more than 400 more.

I was a prolific writer. When writing down my Universal language, I wrote day and night for several weeks until I had a finished twelve hundred page manuscript. The only thing is that I erm, well, err....., eh.....I lost it. In fact I lost all my manuscripts. Well, not so much lost, but stolen by Cromwell's half-witted henchmen. Grrrrr. But more about that later.

When I'd finished with Europe, I returned to Cromarty, to the castle. Yes, there used to be a fine castle here in Cromarty, built by my ancestors. It was eventually flattened in the name of progress and the "big house" put in its place. Philistines!

When I got home from my travels, I discovered the family estate was deep in debt. Debts run up by my father. He wasn't good with money. He

was gullible and everyone from the butcher to the candlestick maker was taking him for a ride. He was a good man but was too gormless to notice anything wrong. The local tradesmen presented him with over inflated bills for work they hadn't even done and he just paid out the money, without question, until my inheritance was all but gone. So I had to do something, you see?

My brother and I hatched a plan. Our theory was simple: if he was locked up, he couldn't spend any money and he couldn't get us in any more debt. So that's exactly what we did, we locked him in a wing of the castle! Simple as that, and there he remained, as our prisoner!

My brother and I were delighted with ourselves. However, my father, the crafty dog, with the help of a servant, managed to serve court papers for false imprisonment against us while he was held under lock and key. He had a fair point I suppose and the law would see this too, so in the end we released him. What else could we do? He managed to get royal protection from his debtors as he claimed his debts had been rung up due to him being locked up! He blamed us! At least it solved the money worries for a while.

I spent the next while helping out on the estate. I figured by taking to do with the mundane day to day running of the estate that I'd be able to keep us out of debt. It wasn't all boring however.

My father had a royal charter to find witches. I used to deputise for him and tried to do some good by doing my best to save these poor deluded wretches. You see, there were no witches really, well very few anyway. They were mainly just poor souls of feeble mind, accused by even more wretched souls who used witchcraft as the answer to what they had not the wit to understand. I came up with cunning schemes to save the accused by proving them not to be witches and preventing them from being burned at the stake. I found this punishment to be most distasteful, and besides, it's impossible to get the smell of burning flesh out of the castle!

When I was 28, I went off again looking for some fun. This time to fight against the Covenanters in the first battle of the Civil War. The Covenanters effectively governed Scotland at this time. They plotted with the English parliamentarians, led by Oliver Cromwell, to overthrow King Charles. At first, all went well. At Turiff, I distinguished myself in battle in defence of King Charles. We then went on to capture Aberdeen where I had once studied. After celebrating our victory we dispersed which unfortunately allowed the Covenanters to take back the city. I went on to London, where I quickly became accepted in the court of King Charles himself. He held me in such high esteem that I received my knighthood only three years later.

However, my father died the following year and I had to return home again. I found that more than half our land was mortgaged and the debts had risen, leaving an impossible situation for me. It was hopeless and we were deeper in debt than we ever had been. I did what any reasonable man of breeding would do and left for the continent once more!

My mission this time was to write and when not writing, to buy books for my great library. There was no internet back then - books were knowledge and knowledge was power.

I wrote a fine work on trigonometry during that time and I was sure that its publication would solve all our financial woes. It didn't! No-one understood it! Fools!

So I returned home yet again, however, these were still turbulent times. A dark cloud hung over our great nation. The Civil War raged on in England; the Royalists loyal to the king, fought Cromwell's parliamentarians and his New Model Army. After years of war, Cromwell took control and had King Charles executed. He declared the monarchy to be at an end. There would be no more kings of England. Our parliament in Scotland broke all links with England and we crowned King Charles II in Scone as our king.

I decided to try and win favour with the new king by helping organise a Scottish army that would restore him to his rightful throne in England.

My plan was that he'd be so grateful for my help, that he'd write off all my debts with a stroke of his quill. Well that didn't go quite to plan either.

I rode south to join the royalist army. In 1651, we hacked and slashed all the way to Worcester. I've never been beaten in a fair fight, however, one night we were betrayed by the innkeeper of our lodgings and I was taken prisoner by Cromwell's army. My trunk containing all my writings was seized and every last scrap of paper was lost including the manuscript for my Universal Language. Cromwell's army of illiterates didn't recognise the value of my work. What wasn't scattered in the street they were only able to use to wipe their bottoms and light their pipes! What an indignant end to my life's work!

None of it is really lost however. It all remains vivid inside my head!

I was taken to the Tower of London where I spent the next year. Cromwell himself told me that if I could show that I could make myself useful to him then I could be set free (and presumably if I couldn't make myself useful then that would be the end of me!).

Did I tell you I was a great genealogist too? One of my greatest works, was called "Pantochronachanon", oh never mind! In it, I traced my family history. Past my grandfather and his father and his father and his father's father for 153 generations, all the way back to Adam and Eve and the Creator himself. It impressed Cromwell at any rate even if it was all meant to be a big joke! I mean really, who honestly would believe that you could trace your family tree back to God!

At any rate, I pretended to be converted to his cause. What else could I do? Rot in the Tower because of my beliefs, no thanks! Naturally, seeing that I had proved that I could be of worth to him, Cromwell became interested in my Universal Language. But of course my manuscript was

lost. So he released me on parole but threatened to forfeit my estate and return me to the tower unless I could further prove my usefulness. So I returned to Cromarty and set about rewriting the work.

I wrote a lot in that period, I published "the Jewel" as an introduction to the Universal Language and then I gave them a bit more in "Logopandecteission". Yes, I know, maybe not the snappiest of titles! I also made my translation of the works of Rabelais. My finest work they say. Yes, true to say, it is great, but I know that "they" are wrong! My Universal Language was undoubtedly my finest work.

My time was running short, and I knew Cromwell would be wanting results soon. I could not reconcile myself to be of any help to his band of thugs. So one dark and stormy night, I slipped aboard a merchant ship bound for Holland to await the return of the rightful king. When eventually King Charles II was restored to the throne I confess I laughed so much I died! Yes, quite literally, dead!

So here I am, stuck here in the spirit world for all of time. But that's OK, it gives me time to think and time to keep an eye on all of you!

So, next time, when you enter my little town of Cromarty, look at my motto. It says "Mean Weil, Speak Weil, Doe Weil", and make sure you do so, because I, am watching you!

Ha, ha ,ha, ha.....ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.....ha, ha, ha! Ha, ha ,ha, ha.....ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha, ha.....ha, ha, ha!