

THE SCOTLAND AUSTRALIA CAIRN 1998

To commemorate two whole centuries
of sons, daughters, blood and what else you please,
exported to the world's most distant shore,
Scots at home wanted to do something more,
Than hold a dinner or propose a toast.
So were assembled great minds of Scottish boast.
Sir Ian Noble, Bart, chaired the committee.
For the right means they scoured each city.

A cairn was thought the traditional way,
To record an event, a man or day.
“But” they thought, “to be from all of Scotland,
a stone must be gathered by every hand.
If each Parish represents its People,
each part of Scotland by its Kirk Steeple
one stone from each Parish is collected,
Thus may all Scotland- be represented.”

Here the Scottish Australian Heritage
Council tried to assemble a package
of events for the Bicentennial year.
But something permanent did not appear
Until one known for his jokes suggested
A cairn. The thought was duly digested.
We all considered it the best of ways
To record Seventy Three Thousand days.

To build the Cairn the work was divided.
Scotland the stones and collection provided.
Australia had to seek and find a site,
And see the Cairn built from the stones just right.

From every Parish the stones were brought,
And he by whom the cairn was to be wrought,
Duncan Matheson, announced to all.
From the top of Ben Macdhui in the snow
At Badenoch in the Cairngorms, Glasgow
Despatches a stone from its Cathedral Aisle.
The stones collected make a Mammoth pile.

From Ulva, Governor Macquarie's home,
For something he touched, Duncan did comb
The boy Macquarie's daily path, finding
A quarter ton rock. The weight not minding,
He gets it to the jetty, but no boat
At that wharf can embark with it and float.
Resourceful Matheson ties it with buoys.
So it may be towed as in convoys.

Into the water it goes - but it sinks!
 His heart goes with it. "It is lost" he thinks.
 But it slowly reappears from the brine
 And Duncan tows it to Mull on a line.

From Mull by ferry and truck to Ross shire
 Where a mason, on one side, makes appear
 A Celtic Cross to be the Cairn's top Crown
 A Stone of beauty for Macquarie's town.

From seventeen hundred Parishes in all
 Are Stones brought by British Post, the long haul
 To Edinburgh, where at lunch congregate
 Malcolm Rifkind Scotland's Secretary of State,
 Australian Commissioner McClelland
 All those who have contributed so well, and,
 Committee to see stones from burn and heath
 Taken by Chariot Freight's trucks to Leith.
 From there the Australian National Line
 Carries the cargo to Sydney's harbour so fine.

The Australian Cairn Committee is led,
 By one whose heart in Glenlivet was bred.
 Fair Rosemary Samios is in control
 Let my verses her achievement extol.
 In Sydney the stones were brought for safety
 To Nuss's storage under lock and key.
 Pipes were played, toasts were drunk
 and our glasses thrown to the ground - Kerplunk.

Here I pause, my own moment to record.
 My photo in the Herald I almost scored.
 My hair is combed, my bonnet made neat
 My kilt is straightened, every pleat,
 The camera flashes at me holding
 Up one stone, my smile I am controlling.
 Next morning I hasten, my face to see,
 In the Sydney Morning Herald page three
 But instead of my face, happy or glum
 is a photo of the stone with my thumb.

Towns line up to offer the cairn a site
 Glen Innes and Maclean compete with might
 Scone, Daylesford, Macksville their claims assert
 And can Sydney find the right piece of dirt?
 Near Burns's Statue in the Sydney Domain?
 Government refuses again and again.

Unsworth's Minister for Planning, Bob Carr
 Excludes Mrs Macquarie's peninsular.

He recommends projected Sydney Park
On a suitable site where it would stand stark.

Alas Sydney Park is on reclaimed land.
And although the main hill looks very grand
It is subsiding three feet every year
The Cairn may ultimately disappear.

“We’ve the answer to that” says the Department of Works
(No problem or difficulty it ever shirks)
“To let the Cairn sink would be daft,
We’ll float it on a great concrete raft.”

Then a democratic punctuation
Preserves us from political stagnation
And a new Government is elected.
Severe Fiscal restraint is expected.
The State Treasury has got very low.
Estimates of the Cairn’s building costs grow.
The cabinet regrets there is no cash.
Previous promises were all balderdash.

The quest for the site Rosemary resumed.
All plans for a Sydney site seem doomed.
When out of the mists of uncertainty
Rode a shining knight of urbanity,
The Cairn’s Celtic champion he became.
Barry O’Keefe is this champion’s name.

Sydney Harbour has protecting its mouth
Three heads which are named Middle, North and South.
Above Middle Head at the highest point
With a view which will never disappoint
Nine Municipalities can admire,
Rawson Park where it could stand like a spire.
The suburb of Mosman includes this Spot
Named after an early settling Scot.
Mosman Council is led by Mayor O’Keefe
A man of such merits as tests belief.
Barry O’Keefe, one is proud to call Celt,
He has our praise and gratitude, heart-felt.
The Council’s behind him. Funds they allot
and give a site to delight any Scot.
Surrounded by grass for picnic and game
With views to set sensitive souls aflame
Mosman gave the best site in the town
Beauty and grandeur of famous renown.

To design the plinth, the walk and surround,
John Reid architect of Melbourne is found,

He who designed the Australian Tartan.
 But his stunning design is not Spartan;
 The piper's walk and the finely hewn stone
 Do not fit a budget cut to the bone.
 Scottish Amicable Life Assurance
 Generously helped with the finance.

Duncan Matheson is brought by Qantas
 So the Cairn's workmanship will be first class.
 Alderman Shirley Page provides a home
 For Duncan so he doesn't have far to roam.

The work begins. In company elite
 A Gaelic name is given to the street.
 Duncan with his strong arms and shoulders broad
 With hat against sun and his pipe well jawed
 Works day by day, first sorting out each stone
 In order to keep the shape of a cone.

Stones nicely engraved are kept at eye level
 Colours are mixed from cream to caramel
 Ulva's final placed at the Cairn's top
 Brings Duncan's hard working weeks to a stop.

Two stones are kept out marked by their beauty
 Orkney and Shetland and from Roseheartly,
 To go in Mosman's permanent display
 To tell the Cairn's story, like a replay.

The dedication on St Andrew's Day
 Has gathered near three thousand to the fray.
 Every Scottish group is represented -
 Scottish Heritage is here cemented.
 Forty armigers' banners deck the scene.

Such Scottish colour Sydney's never seen.
 The sun is bright the sky is clear and blue.
 The harbour gleams like it was sparkling new.
 The assembly, cooled by an Ocean breeze
 With cameras poised the instant to seize
 Are by Neil Morrison kept informed
 of the ceremony to be performed.

The Pipes are heard in the distance
 The Band of Scots College leads the entrance
 Of the official party in review.
 The Mayor; the Aldermen in robes of blue;
 Chairman of our Council, Chieftain McLennan;
 The Earl of Erroll, Chief of the Hay Clan
 And the Lord High Constable of Scotland;

With his fair haired Countess follow the band.

Sir Iain Noble, radiant Rosemary
 Each as chairman of a Cairn committee
 Are there for the completion of their plan.
 Also there is Robertson of Struan,
 Chief Mac Neacail of Scorrybreac as well
 The Earl of Dunmore of whom Murrays tell
 Lord Forres and the Viscount Fincastle
 The Cameron Chieftain - quite a parcel.

To dedicate the Cairn in finest style.
 Mac Cailein Mor, the great Duke of Argyll,
 With his banner high in a clansman's grip,
 Displaying to all the heraldic ship,
 of the Chief of the Campbell's. That banner
 May never be carried. in a happier manner.
 Was ever Argyll banner so displayed
 Amid such scenic beauty, on parade.
 The speechmakers then get on with their work,
 Words from the old Religion and the Kirk,
 Our ties with Scotland, Mayor Barry O'Keefe
 gives us in golden phrases all too brief.
 His Duchess watches the Duke of Argyll
 Deliver after his journey worthwhile
 The dedication that we came to hear.
 The Duke's words are apt and his voice is clear.

The Duke's speech is translated, so the stones
 May be dedicated in ancient tones,
 By Duncan McLeod, our Gaelic teacher
 who tries to make Gaelic always a feature.
 "That some future great Campbell we beseech,
 May be able to translate his own speech".
 Says bold Duncan. Was that a frosty smile
 Crossed the face of the Duke of Argyll?

Duncan's pibroch "MacDougall's gathering"
 Attracted our applause most flattering.
 The pipes of the Seventeenth Battalion
 Should earn the Pipe Major a medallion.
 We much enjoyed Dorothy Kerr's dancers.
 Sir Iain Noble's speech gave all the answers.
 James McConnell's, "Australia 200",
 his own work. "Marvellous" everyone said.

A *quaich* is poured for Sir Iain and Duncan,
 But Matheson goes first -most is drunken.
 Says Sir Iain: " thought we were supposed to share"
 Then, in deference to the bright day' glare

There is poured a single nip of whisky
For Chair and pipers - ore would be risky.
But McLennan won' have such a small nip:
He pours again - enough to sink a ship.
The glasses are drained for the occasion.
That honour is the day's peroration.
The Mosman Council's hospitality
Then taken with conviviality
Ends this historic happy assembly
Leaving all of our knees a bit trembly.

Our Cairn will endure for hundreds of years
It was worth the effort, the sweat and tears.
It shines in the day and floodlit at night
Its beacon glow is a glorious sight.
Like a badge of unity let it stand:
Blood and People; Australia and Scotland.

MALCOLM DAVID BROUN