

The Baird Letters

Graeme Davis
University of Northumbria, UK

[View MS Word Version](#)

Abstract

This edition of The Baird Letters presents an example of the Scots language in its golden age. The Aberdonian authors utilise the Edinburgh written standard of a language which at that time stood in all respects equal with English. This rich medium is used in their letters over a period of twenty years to tell a story full of illumination on the clan system before Culloden and the religious strife of Scotland, and rich with the enduring human themes of fraternal love and separation. These letters deserve to be read: by those who appreciate their linguistic significance; by those who value the language and culture of Scotland; and those willing to appreciate a series of letters as a literary work.

General

These letters are the correspondence between two brothers. The elder, Gilbert Baird, is Laird of Auchmedden, Aberdeenshire, and both son-in-law and cousin of his clan chief, Walter Baird. His younger brother, Andrew, after gaining an education at a Scottish University travels to Lyon and becomes first a professor at the University there, and later a friar.

The letters were preserved by the Lairds of Auchmedden, until the time of the '45 uprising. The Laird at this time, William Baird, was an active supporter of Prince Charles Edward Stuart and took part in the Battle of Culloden. Following the Jacobite defeat he was attainted as one of the rebels wanted for trial, and lived out the remaining 25 years of his life in hiding. It was while in hiding - in Aberdeen around 1770 - that he produced a manuscript clan history into which he transcribed the letters. His manuscript was privately published in 1857, and is the source of these letters.

The value of the letters today is threefold:

- They provide a linguistic example of the golden age of written Scots
- They are a living historic document set against a background of a robust clan system and the religious conflicts of Scotland, England, France and Flanders
- They are an emotive story of a correspondence maintained over twenty years

Linguistic Framework

The orthography of sixteenth century Scots is relatively homogeneous. Edinburgh was the only place where Scots materials were printed, and this resulted in the creation of a printed standard based upon the Midlothian dialect of Edinburgh. Scots who read printed Scots modelled their own writing upon it, so that while spoken Scots of the period was characterised by a multiplicity of dialects, written Scots is the Scots of Midlothian, and may be regarded as a Scottish national standard language.

The Scots language reached its zenith at the end of the sixteenth century. At this date many written registers used Scots. Scots had a substantial literature, which in the early years of the century may be considered to surpass that of England in quality, and Scotland produced all its administrative, legal and business documents in Scots. Only religious documents in Scots are lacking - the adoption of the 1560 Geneva Bible in Scotland established English, not Scots, as the written language of religion.

The Union of the Crowns in 1603 began to weaken the role of Scots. Much Scottish administration and business gradually moved south of the border, while Scotland embraced Presbyterianism and with it the 1611 English Authorised Version of the Bible. The convergence with English has continued with few checks over the following four hundred years.

The Baird Letters are therefore written in the golden age of the Scots language. They are in the standard written Scots of the day. While the writers are from the north coast of Aberdeenshire, and presumably spoke the Aberdeenshire dialect, there is nothing in the letters which is inconsistent with Midlothian Scots. The writers are educated in a written standard which they apply in their writing.

The letters present few problems to the modern reader - indeed they witness the essential identity of Scots and English even at the time when the difference was most pronounced.

The orthography illustrates two common differences between Scots and English:

- 1) *Quh* is used for English *wh*.
- 2) Long vowels are marked by putting an *i* after them - *ai*, *ei*, *oi*, *ui*. This replaces vowel length markers of English (ie doubling the vowel, or in word-final syllables adding a final *-e*). The *quh/wh* distinction reflects a phonological difference, as Scots preceded the /w/ sound with /X/ - the *ch* in */och*. The original pronunciation of words spelt 'vowel + *i*' would have been simply a long vowel, though the impact of Scot and Stephenson has been for English and Scots alike to pronounce residual Scots words as if English -*ai*. We say *laird*, rhyming with *dared*, when the Scots form is /lard/. Similarly modern *Baird* would have been pronounced /bard/.

The linguistic competence of the writers is in part touched upon by the letters, and in part may be speculated upon. Andrew Baird describes himself as having forgotten his Scots, through not speaking or writing it for many years. He suggests throughout that Scots and English are different. His letters to his brother Gilbert make use of Latin tags, more or less in classical Latin, which he clearly expects his brother to understand as part of the education of any literate person in those days. He speaks French himself, but suggests that his brother cannot read or write it - presumably he learnt his French by living in France, and probably from the springboard of a spoken Latin. He is at pains, for example, to set out the French address his brother should use. Notwithstanding, he uses the French salutation *Monsieur et frere*. Throughout Andrew appears ill at ease writing in Scots; he makes it clear that he would prefer to write in Latin or French. The Baird clan had substantial lands in Gaelic-speaking Ross and Cromarty, which suggests a knowledge of Gaelic, yet this is not hinted at in the letters.

Historical Framework

The letters are composed at a time when the clan system is robust. Walter Baird is several times described as our chief. He and his wife are referred to as our father and mother. Andrew Baird expects patronage from his clan chief Walter Baird. The clan system glimpsed through the letters

sees the chief as the head of an extended family, readily acknowledged as chief, and fulfilling a patriarchal role within the extended family that was the clan. Following the death of Walter Baird his estates pass to his only daughter, Lillias, and to her husband Gilbert Baird.

The complex religious changes of Reformation Scotland can scarcely be summarised in a few lines. It is sufficient to note that the sixteenth century was one in which the Catholic faith came increasingly under threat, and was progressively replaced by Protestantism. Andrew and Gilbert spend much of their letters in overt religious reference.

Letter One

Andrew Baird to his brother Gilbert Baird, July 22nd 1595. At this time Andrew has been overseas for eight years, and has received no letters from home for the last two years. This letter appears prompted by a letter from a friend, John Browne, telling him that his father George Baird had died two years ago (29th May 1593). Andrew Baird appears to expect his brother Gilbert to invite him to return to Scotland. He says that he is teaching Philosophy at the University of Lyon, but that he would like a change of employment as his brother should direct. Letter five indicates that Andrew received a letter from Gilbert in 1595, so presumably this one was answered.

From ANDREW BAIRD, Professor of Philosophy at Lyons, to GILBERT BAIRD, of Auchmedden.

To the richt honourable and weil belovit brither GILBERT BAIRD, of Auchmedden in Scotland.

To Scotland.

Lyons, July 22d, 1595.

MONSIEUR ET FRERE, Thair is twa yeirs bypast I haif never ressavit any word of you, nather of my father or uther frindis, quhairfore I was very wraith that ye and all uthers has na mynd of me, mair than gif I war deid, or gif I was not your brother, or friend, the quhilk, ye cannot deny unless ye offense God and the veritie; and notwithstanding that ye haif misknawin your duty, hitherto, yet God of his guidness has preservit me unto this day that I am not deid for hunger, quhairfore I pray you, be so guid as to call to remembrance the instinct that nature has gein to all creatures, and luik gif that I heif any credit to do you any servis in France, seeing that ye heif forgottin me in Scotland, and I sall be as ready as any uther that ye may employ; or, gif ye think that I may do you stead in Scotland, command me, and I sall be reday to obey you with guidwill, as far as I may.

Mr. James Browne has wrote an letter to me, by which he has schawin me, that my father is deid, and Walter Baird's wyf, your muther-in-law; quhairof I am very wraith, yet I am very glad, and thank God greatly, that they departit guid Catholiques, and prays you, and all yours, for God's sake, to continue and leif into the trew religion. I haif thocht guid to say mass for my father in sundry pairts, and I will bair the duleweid for one yeir

I am presently in the town of Lyons, and teaching philosophy, and has fyve hundrit merks of wage, but I am myndit to leave my conditon.

I would very gladly see you and all uther guid frindis, to the quhilks, I pray you maik my farther commendation with Walter Baird, and your wyfe my blessing, and to your bairns - I understand ye haif ten or else aleven. The Lord saiff them and keip you in long lyfe and guid helthe.

Your brother for evir to serve you;

Aw. BAIRD.

I pray you excuse me gif I speak not guid Scottis, for I haif forgottin all my muther tongue. Their is aught yeirs that I haif not writtin sa meikil, nor yet spoke.

Letter Two

From Andrew Baird to Gilbert Baird, 31st October 1596. Andrew is now a Full Professor at the University of Lyon, and plans within a year to further his study at another University, in either medicine or law. Nonetheless he plans to return home subsequently, and asks Gilbert to indicate how he could be fruitfully employed at home. Andrew asks Gilbert what bequest he was left on the death of his father George Baird.

Andrew Baird (Lyons) to his brother Gilbert Baird Lyons, 1st of Octr. 1596.

RICHT HONOURABLE AND LOVING brother, After my heartie commendations of service, quhowbeit, it be long tyme since I ressavit your letter daitit the 19th day of July 1595, yet, not the less, I haif never had sic opportunity to wreat unto you as I haif now. To be schort, I am as glaid of your and all frindis helth, as I am sorrowful of my fathers deceiss. As to me, I am presently well in helthe, and reputation likeways of a scholar, being preferit to an Professor of Philosophy by the citoyens of Lyons, and not without honest recompense. And seeing that my deliberation is always set down to leif by letters, I mynd within a zeir to pass to some famous University, and thair apply my tyme, either to medicine, or lawes, to the effect, that I may be profitable to myself and uthers. As, also, being resolved, (for anything I can see presently) to leif into my country, quhairout, I am neither banished, nor expeld. I beseach you, with a most brotherly affection, to consider the moeyen by the quhilk I may leif peacable at haim, in an honest vocation in letters, and to advertise me, particularly and diligently of all things, not obmitting your brotherly and tender counsil, by the quilk I will be rulit and governit. And, gif so be that my father at his deceiss has had any fatherly memory of me - as I doubt not but he has had - I desyr you most earnestly to advertis me of the samin, and to haif sic care of me, as your brotherly luif and guid inclination promisit me, quilk will be the cause, that I will be the more diligent in my studys, and direct all my cogitations to honour you, and to merit your luif, being resolvit to leif and to die in my country.

Having no further at present, I beseih you to recommend me to Walter Baird, your guid-father, and to my sister, your bairns, and our brethren and all frindis, but chiefly to yourself.

Letter Three

From Andrew Baird to Gilbert Baird, 8th March 1597. Andrew complains that he has still received no letter from his brother. The letter comments on the political problems in France, and rumours of the problems faced by James VI of Scots. Andrew speculates that his clan chief, Walter Baird, may be dead - in fact he is still alive. The political difficulties in France are such that he expects to move from Lyon in the next few months.

Andrew Baird (Lyons) to his brother Gilbert Baird Lyons, 8th March 1597.

MONSIEUR ET FRERE, After my most hearty and humble commendations, with serviss, having the commodity of this berir, a gentleman dwelling with my Lord Abbot, of Inchaffray, vohm I did meet with, beand in the Town of Lyons, after their coming back from Italy, and schew me that he was to gang hastily to Scotland, I thought guid to wreat unto you thir few lines in haist, albeit I did wreat unto you not lang before with Mr. Alex. Boid, secretary to my Lord Cassils, quaha is presently into Rouen in France, to whom I am meikle addebted, and did unto him all the servis that I could quhile he remainit in this town, to wit, Lyons, the space of four months, and was willing to carry me haim with him, the quhilk occasion I did neglect and many uthers like unto that, looking evir for your letters and answers to them that I heif written to you of before, the quhilk, tendis not to any uther, and, but to know the guidwill ye bear unto me, and what ye will wish me to do.

For, seeing that it has pleisit to God to call our father before his days, that is to say, over soon for me, who is so far from all frindis and kinsmen, and has no great moeyen to pay myself except I travel mair nor I may, I am constraintit to rin to your wisdom and brotherly affection; quhairfore, to be short, I pray you most earnestfully to give me sum resolution and show me, gif ye think that my coming in Scotland may do unto you, or frindis, any servis or pleasure, and I sall always be ready;

gif not, I pray you, also, to advertise me, to the end, I may lippin na mair to you; the quhilk will be to me very hard; yet, not withstanding, thair is no uther remedy but patience. I heif written often to you and to our chief Walter Baird and to Walter Curriour, É quhair ye sall understand that thair is here in this town, one Mr. Andrew Curriour, the Laird of Logy-Dugluis' son whew I louff very weil for Walter Curriour's sake - and has done unto him all the pleasure that I can - I am also by compayine with one Mr. Edward Scot, a countryman, whom with I haif remaind thir two yeirs bypast, and he teachis in Logic this yeir, and I in Metaphysics, and we are both myndit the next yeir, gif we get na better method, to pass unto Italy, God willing;

As to the news in this country, thair is nane uther but that all things are very deir, and especially the quhyt; and that the King of France is to make wars against the Duke of Savoye, who is our neighbour, in the one side. The quhilk cannot be without our great hurt and travel. The bruit is here, that the King majesty of Scotland has had some dispute against his ministers, quhair throw, many men has taken an diverse opinion of him thro' Inghland, France, Italy, and Espaigne. I pray the Lord assist him and give him grace to do well, to the honour of God, profit of his soul, and consolation of his poor people. As to uther news, thair is na uther, for the present. This prays you to make my humble commendations to all our brethren, and to your wyf and bairns; as to our chief Walter Baird, I think he is not in lyf, for gif he was, I doubt not but he would heif had sum remembrance of me, yet I sall not fail to heif remembrance in my prayers every day before God of him and uther frindis. I remember not of any more, yet as the occasion occurs it sall please you to be attending to my guid will, and swa committing you to God. Be your assurit and well belovit brother to be commandit, gif ye please to wreat to me, I pray you wreat before Whitsunday, utherways ye may be na know whair that I may be, gif that all reight haldis.

Letter Four

From Andrew Baird to Gilbert Baird, 6th August 1599. It is now four years since he has received a letter from home, and Andrew complains of this, especially in view of the wars in France. Andrew wants Gilbert to advise him whether he should or should not return to Scotland. Andrew describes himself in the superscription as a resident of Lyon, but in the subscription indicates that he is writing the letter from Dijon, Burgundy.

Andrew Baird (Lyons) to his brother Gilbert Baird. VI. of August 1599.

MONSIEUR ET FRERE, Seeing that I heif written to you so many times, and that ye take no thought neither of me nor my writing, ye will constraine me at length to forget not only you but all Scottismen; or, at the least, all Kinsmen. I know not harm I heif offendit, nather you nor uther frindis, that, altogether, ye heif conspirit against me; I marvell greatly that ye consider not, quhow that I can live in this country without any help of you nor any Scottisman these three yeir bypast, among the men of war and uther troubles that has be in, and is, yet in France- quhairfore, I pray you to be so guid as to think some- times of me, your second brother, gif I be not bastard, that, I believ not. I heif writtin to the Earl of Cassils, but I know not gif he has receivit my letter, nor yet, Mr. Alex. Boid. gif ye think that I may do you pleasure or servis in France; or to any uther into your name, beleif, assuredly, that I sall do all that lies in my power, and sall be evir more as ready to be commandit by you, as any brother that ye heif

Gif I could wreat or speak, any further in Scottis, or, gif ye understood the Frenshe, or Latin, I suld wreat unto you more at lengthe, or gif I was assurit that ye wold tack my letters in guid part. Quhairfor, I pray you, excuse me quhil I be farder informit be you. Offre my hearty commendations of servis to your wyf, bairns, and all uther guid frindis. I pray God to keep you in long lyfe.

From Dijon in Bourgoyne Province in France, this VI. of August 1599. gif ye pleis to wreat unto me, address your writing from Paris to Lyons, with this endorissement, " A Monsieur, Monsieur Baird Aux Carmes a Lyons. "

Letter Five

From Andrew Baird to Gilbert Baird, 23rd January 1603. Andrew has now been without a letter from home for eight years. Andrew says that four years previously he entered a religious order, and is now a 'religieux minime' and lecturer in theology in an order which takes a vow of poverty. Andrew asks for news from home, particularly about his chief, Walter Baird, and his chief's wife, Katherine Grant (died 1599 and 1592 respectively). He has travelled extensively with his order, including Rouen and Versailles, and has some news of Scotland from Scots he has met. He is on the point of leaving for Avignon.

23rd day of January 1603

Rycht Honorable Sr., and well belovit brother, after sindrie letters and writings without any answer of you, or any uther friend in Scotland, thair is near aucht yeirs by-past, I haif thoct guid to hazard this, gif, perchance, it sall fall into your hands, to the end ye may be informit of my estate and welfare, as I desyr to be of yours and of all guid frindis - quhairfore, it sall please you to understand, that (between hope and despair never to see you in this lyfe or our most dearly belovit father, Walter Baird, and mother, Katharine Grant - spying out the wickedness of this world and the chaingement of men,) thair is four yeirs ago that I heif begun to chainge my lyf, quha, as before, being a wardly man, after the condition and mainer of laif as I did behold in uthers, now, praissit be God, I am an religieux man, more content than evir I was before, albeit, our manner to leif be very strict and poor, cur nihil habentes, omnia possidemus, for the present at Lyons quhair gif ye please to wreat, ye may inclose your letter in the Frenshe tongue, this way, without any uther titre- "A mon frere - frere Andrew Baird, Religieux minime lecteur de Theologie en convent des minimes a Lyons." The quhilk condition of lyfe I haif not choised raschly, without gryt consideration and almaist necessary arguments of salut, as many of them do say that are not well instructed in the truth, but be altogether fleshly men, - animalis autem homo non perceptit ea quo spiritus Dei sunt, - for siclyke men thinks that all religion and Godliness consists to wallow in pleasure, and mak guid chier in this lyfe as an Epicurean saying, - manducemus et bibamus, post mortem nulla voluptas ; sit ah! miseri, ducunt in bonis dies suos et in puncto ad inferna descendunt; - bot, leifing this dispute, that I seem nocht to persuade ony uther man, but be guid reason when it sall pleis God to gif the occasion.

My helthe, thanks be to God, was never bettir than it has bein thir four yeirs bypast, albeit I heif not remainit evir still into one place, but has changit sindrie times, as our profession and order requires. Since I am in France, I heif seen many Scottismen in this country, some poor, and some rich, of all conditions, Eastland, Southland, Westland, and some Northland, and Highlanders, but I heard never speak of any man that appertains to us, except of The Master of Forbes, who is a religieux man, a capuchin, whom to I haif written within thir few days, and of one callit Baird, lately at Rouen, as I am informit by Monsieur Drummond, Judge of Vesay, but of what country or house he was, he could not tell me.

As to the Abbot, Mr. John Quhyt, John Quhyt, of Ardlyhill's son, thair is half a yeir since I heard he is in guid helth, but Mr. Alexander Cheyne, my god-father's son, is deceist thair is neir twa yeirs, and likeways, Mr. Alexander Chalmers, the guidman's son, of the Miln of Sauquchin, gif I haif any remembrance. As to uther news that may be written for the present ye sall not luik for of me, but byding an bettir occasion, and give ye please, your luiffing answer, with the estait of yourself, wyf, bairns, brethrin and all uther guid frindis, but chiefly our father, Walter Baird, and his guid wyf our guid muther, - I pray you to look upon their godliness and halie lyf, think upon your salvation, bring up your bairns and instruct them in to virtue, the fear of God and guid letters; and as to me, albeit, I be outwith at the haly mass and all sorts of prayer, as my duty commands me, I sall pray the Almighty God to keep you in guid helthe and long lyfe, and multiply his benedictions and blessings upon you.

From Lyons this 23rd day of January 1603. Your brother evir to be commandit in Jesus Christ.
Aw .BAIRD, Minime, George Baird's Son, of Auchmedden.

It will pleis you to excuse me gif I wreat in haist, because sodainly I go to Avignon, and prays you taik my Scottis in guid part, for I haif almaist forgottin bairth the writing and speaking of Scottis.

Letter Six

From Andrew Baird to Gilbert Baird, 8th June 1604. Andrew has received a letter from Gilbert, seemingly the first in nine years. Letter seven indicates that it was dated 9th June 1603, and has therefore taken a year to reach him; letter seven also indicates that Gilbert wishes to discuss a secret with Andrew, and wishes Andrew to visit Scotland. Andrew says that if he had heard from his brother five or six years previously he might have acted differently in his choice of vocation. He gives anything which his father should have bequeathed to him to Gilbert and Gilbert's wife. The messenger - William Kirkcaldy - is also entrusted with a message, presumably an invitation for one of Gilbert's sons to come to France.

Andrew Baird (Lyons) to his brother Gilbert Baird

Rycht honourable Sir and most well-belovit brother, the paix and luif of God, I haif ressavit your maist heartie and luiffing writing be the hands of our guid friend William Kircaldy, and thank you most earnestfully of the brotherly affection ye beir unto me, praying God to gif me the grace that I may be worthy, at any tyme, to answer to your friendly guid will. As touching the death of our father and your guid-father and guid-muther, I am very wraith, gif it had pleisit to God to do utherways, but I knaw weil aneuch, omnibus hominibus statutum est semel mori, quhairfore I think it meikle better to prais and magnify the Lord Almighty, in cujus potestate est vita et mors, than to despyt his Majesty in greitting and tires - sicut illi qui non habent spem - I sall pray God for their guid souls night and day; and as to the small thing my father left to me of his heritage, Dominus pars hoereditatis meoe, et calicis mei est, qui restituat hoereditatem meam mihi, quhairfore my dearest brother, I love God of your guid faith and uprightfulness, qua in mensura mensurabis eadem tibi mensurabitur; quitting the world, I heif quittit all worldly guids and geir, and lukis after no uther untill the tym that it sall pleis God to call me, ubi, oculus non vidit, nec auris audivit quoe proeparavit Deus diligentibus se.

Gif ye had written unto me thair is now five or six yeirs ago, I might haif done uther to you or yours mair guid, than I may do at this present, except, that I sall evir pray God for you and your household; lykas, I craif nothing that may in any ways pertain to our father, do with it as ye think best, after my sister's guidwill, your wyf. I heif not yet forgottin her father and muther's kyndness to me; all your bairns and childrin are all alyke unto me, and wald do them all servis. This gentleman will speik to you mair at length upon this point.

I am very wraith of the disscord that ye heif had with your neighbours and frindis, and that our brother has lossit an air. Gif that I had knawn his being at Bourdeaux he sould haif hard wi thin few days of my news, and saw gif he comes again, he may wreat unto Lyons, quhair he sail evir get word of me in ony part that I sall be, and lykwais yourself, unto our convent, for I am of the order of the minnims-an religieus man. We haif also an house into Dieppe they call it the bons hommes; ye may address your letters to Lyons by Mr. Alexr. Pearson of Edinbourg, gif it sall pleis him to gif them to that house, or ours, or be Alexr. Ramsay or any uther, quhatsomevir it be, ye may not fail, gif ye pleis, by any ways to address your letters to Lyons the convent of the minnims is to this manner, A mon frere, frere Andro Baird religieus minnime en convent des minnimes a Lyons, " for gif ye wreat not the superscription into Frenshe, your letter sall be tint, and swa unto meeting when it sall pleis God, ye may wreat unto me quhan ye pleis, and swa, committing you to God, your wyf and bairns, brethrin and all guid frindis, I sall remain in France, Lyons, in our convent, this aucht of June 1604.

Your maist humble and weil belovit brother.

Letter Seven

From Andrew Baird to Gilbert Baird, 20th June 1604. This letter is dated just 12 days after the above. Andrew had entrusted his letter of 8th June to a messenger who is still in Lyon. He finds another messenger. Again he repeats the information that he is now in holy orders, and that his

brother and his wife should dispose of his inheritance, presumably fearing that his letters home may be miscarried. He suggests that his brother should communicate the secret by a messenger, because as a member of a religious order it is not safe for him to come to Scotland or England.

Andrew Baird (Lyons) to his brother Gilbert Baird
Rycht honourable, Sir, and most dearly belovit brother, guid helthe and welfare in our Saviour and Lord Jesus Christ.

Their is now near fifteen days that I heif ressavit an writing of your by ane Kircaldy, datit the 9th of June 1603, to the quhilk I haif made sum answer by the same bearer, according to my leisure and business, as he may be witness himself, -how soon it shall please God that he may meet with you, quhairfore, seeing that he has taken an longer staying than I believe, and finding the opportunity of this gentleman, an auld acquaintance, I thocht guid to wreat unto you this few lines of more freshe dait; to the end it may please you to wit, that I am presently into Lyons, an religieus man of the order of the minims, in guid helthe, thanks be to God, desiring the lyk of you and yours and all guid frindis. I was truly very glad, and rejoicet meikle to read your letter, and hear of your well being and prosperity, and how that ye are cum to end of all your fears and concerns, and how that ye heif always the fear of God before your eyes, following as near as ye may the footsteps of our haly forbears, in the quhilk I pray you to remain to the end, looking for sic recompense as they heif already ressavit in heaven in their souls, abyding only the glorification of their bodys, when it shall please God to call everyone in his last Judgement; thair upon this head I will wreat, you na farther, nor yet, touching that point ye wrote unto me, concerning as ye say an bairns part of geir, after the decease of our godly father, for I am not in power to possess any wordly guid, quhairfore of that nor na uther, sic lyke, I crave nothing, but would only pray you after your guid will to dispose of that as it shall please my guid sister, your guid wyf, in remembrance of so many times that I heif offendit her, and provokit her unto anger, albeit, she wisht evir my welfare.

As to that, that ye would speak unto me in secret, gif it be sickin matter that may be writtin or communicatit to ony friend, fear not to commit it, either be word or wreat to this gentilman, whom to I heif given charge to ressave it, gif it shall please you. I am assurit give it be an matter of conseil, that he will give you contentment, or else, will cause me to understand the matter. As to me to come into Scotland, as be, I heif assurance of the King's Majestie and of the estates, both of England and Scotland, it schymis to be an thing impossible, gif that I will not put myself in danger, for the preists, monks, and friars are not very welcome among you, but gif thair was ony helth I could wreat to my acquaintance, who might do something for me in case of necessity, quhairfore, luyking for some lettir, I am altogether resolvit, as yet, to remain in these parts, as it shall please my superiors, or els, into Italy or Spaine, for, thanks be to God, we heif many fair houses and boothings in these parts; God, in so far, has providit for his children, only I pray you, most well belovit brother, to pray God for me, and recommend me to the prayers of your innocent bairns. After the answer that I shall ressave to this gentleman, bearer of this, I shall wreat unto you more at length, as the occasion shall require, and, in the meantime, I shall not fail to wreat whensoever any occasion shall be present unto me; quhairfore, be not in noways astonishit gif I wreat unto you in divers styles, following the divers occurrences and dispositions of the tymes, and swa committing you to God, your wyf, my sister, and bairns, and brethrin, and all guid frindis. I shall remain to the end.

Lyons, this 20th of June 1604.

Letter Eight

From Gilbert Baird to Andrew Baird, 20th September 1605, addressed from Banff, some around 12 miles from his home in Aberdeenshire. Gilbert has received letter six, and learns for the first time that his brother is in holy orders, of which he strongly disapproves. Gilbert appears to say that he sent money that was a part of Andrew's inheritance, out to him in France, but that it was stolen en route. He thanks Andrew for the inheritance that Andrew is relinquishing in his favour.

GILBERT to ANDREW. From Banff the xx. Sepr. 1605.

Honourable Sir, and his most well belovit brother, My duty of commendation being most heartfully recommendit unto you, please, I ressavit your letter from your guid friend, William Kircaldy, burges of Kinghorn, datit at Lyons in France the 8th day of June 1604, and perseves be your letter your present estate, quhairfore I thank God greatly of your guid helthe and that ye are presently alive, yet I am sorry that ye heif taken you to such a mein calling, being one of the best scholars, as is reported, in all France, quhairfore I wonder greatly, for, gif ye had pleased, ye maybe heif been promotit to many more honourable office, nor the office ye heif callit yourself to, that would heif been a greater contentment to yourself and your frindis, both, for your frindis disowns you meikle, that ye heif taken you to that form of lyfe, and I will assure you that they think very ill of it, and I, also, for my own part, -disesteem of it most heartily; for, gif ye would heif come home to your own native country,

I should heif providit for you in more honorable present lyfe afoir the warld, nor the lyfe that ye heif drawn yourself to, so long as I had guids, or geir, land, or heritage, for I suspect ye heif taken some apprehension, and displeasure, for the want of your geir, that, the Italian took from you, that was but a matter of one hundrit crowns, or two, as William Kircaldy informit me, swa, gif ye had taken you to any uther calling, nor the calling that ye hall tane yourself to, ye might heif come be geir again that would heif both pleasurit you and your frindis also; your frindis here esteem you to be a lost man, in respect of your calling that ye heif taken you to, for I could never well understand your calling full now, that this gentleman William Kircaldy spoke with you, face to face, quaha has told to me, at great lenth, the certainty of your present estate, and ressavit your letter from you the last of July, in this instant yeir of God, 1604, for he was not passing to two months after he came from you, until he delivert your letter to me, and I gave this gentleman, William Kircaldy, great gains to come to that country and visit you, and to know your perfit estate, that, I look it for to heif been better nor it is, yet, notwithstanding, gif ye be well yourself, it matters the less, for it appears be your letter that ye heif quitit the world and worldly guids and geir, and that you will dispense with that geir, that your father left you, to me, or my wyf, or any of our bairns, that we wish to give to; I would to God that I had been obleist for twyes as meikil to you, gif ye had taken anuther course with yourself, for I thought, gif ye had been in a better estate nor ye are into, til heif sent over one of my sons to you; and as to that geir that ye dispense with, and that ye will heif no geir that appertains to your father, and that ye will dispense with it to me, or my wyf, we think ourselves the more obleist to you; yet, I think your great necessity should heif ado with it, yet, seeing your calling is so simple and has no moyen, but that, that ye get out of uther people's hands for your teaching, so I thought guid to wreat this meikle to you and to advertise again with the next commodious bearer, what is the very course that ye will take with yourself, or gif ye will continue in that estate all your days.

wreat to me the certainty thereof and direct your letter to Dieppe, to the house thair, callit the bons hommes, and cause the bons hommes direct the letter to John Mew in Dieppe, quaha is factor to Alex Pearson, burges of Edinburgh, and he will direct it to Alex. Pearson, in Scotland, and so your letter will come to my hands. I sall also endorsit your letter on the back, as ye directit me, to the bons hommes, with the fonn of endorsation on the back as ye wreat-" a mon frere, frere Andro Baird, religieu.:v minnime au convent des minnimes a Lyons."-My wyf, your sister, and all your frindis here and brethren has recommdit themselves heartily to you. - Committing you to God. -From Banff the xx. Septr. 1605.

Your affect. and loving brother evir to be commandit at his pouer.

GILBERT BAIRD.

Brother, I luikit that ye suld heif rememberit your frind and mine, William Kircaldy, for his painstaking in visiting you, for, as I am informit by him, ye heif not acknowledgit him in nothing, that, I wonder of and desyrs you to advertis me thair of, because he reportit of you to me.

Letter Nine

From Andrew Baird to Gilbert Baird, 4th June 1607. This is a reflective letter. Andrew has heard that his brother has many children (in fact he fathered thirty-two), and exhorts that they be

brought up in the fear of God. Andrew wishes to move from Lyons to Dieppe, so that he may be nearer to his home, and seems reconciled to dying in France. He requests his brother to send him a barrel of salmon. He recommends Gilbert to keep in mind the Catholic exempla of their ancestors.

From ANDREW to GILBERT. Lyons, June 4, 1607.

Richt honorable and most deirly belovit brother. After my thinking long to hear of your welfare, wyf and bairns, I thought guid to wreat these few lines unto you being at leisure, to the end that seeing we are so far separate, that we may not heif any consolation be mutual presence, at the least, we may visit the one and uther by writing, gif ye think guid.

I heir that God blessit your house in generation of many blessit children, the quiks gif ye bring up in the fear of God, ye will make into the world and into heaven eternal memorial s cum of you.

I am sorry that I am not able to do you sic service, to quhom I am so obleist, as I heif done to many uthers without any obligation, but of courtesie and free will; thanks be to God, I am in no ways miserable, howsoever it seems to the warld and to them that knowest not what my calling means. I wish to God that a guid part of your and our brethren's children were at such a point.

I pray you excuse the exceeding luif I bear to my own blood; quhairfore, the best part of guid s and geir that ye may leave unto them, is, the virtue and guid intructions that they sall learn in their youth. God gif I might part with them, the little knowledge that God of his guidness has given unto me, and gif thair was any means to be had, I should not fail to bestow with all my heart my tyme and travel. Now presently, God willing, I am bound to a town callit Marigues, en Auvergne, to preach this caresme to after pasch: But as soon as God sall give me grace to come to Lyons, I sall wreat to Naples to our General, gif I may heif licence to come and remain at Dieppe, where we heif a monastery, to the end, it may be nearer to the country, and offer my service to all guid frindis.

In the meantime, seeing we are fishermen, and eats no uther sort of meats, and ye heif a commodity of salmond, I pray you bestow upon us some barrel of salmond once in the yeir. I remember that your father Walter Baird providit it to me, every yeir, three or four. But never in my lyfe heif I ressavit from any Scotsman any guid deit since I am in France. I am wraith to put you to charge, but, because I know that costs you nothing, or very small, I am mair bauld. Not- withstanding, ye sall do as ye think guid. Your wyf, my sister, in remembrance of her guid muther, will not forget me, and I am altogether persuadit that gif it might be her will, its not, that I die in France, but abiding your answer I will be short, praying you to heif evir before your eyes our auld fathers, their lyfe and religion, in honouring God and his children. I sall evir remain after my hearty commendations to yourself, wyf, and bairns, brethren, and all guid frindis. Your most affect. brother and servant,

Aw. BAIRD.

I hear say it is dangerous to wreat over the sea of matters of religion, or of Estate, quhairfore, unto the tyme I know more perfectly, both of your religion and Estate, I thought guid to ask your advice before I wreat anything. Among many Scotsmen we heif in France, thair is one Courier, an unwary Coureur et vagabond; he makes £1, or acts the minister, in to a town callit Issoire near where I preach. He has beguild me and himself meikle mair; -he causit me to understand that we were kin and countrymen; it sall please you to ask of him.

Letter Ten

From Thomas Baird to Gilbert Baird, 1st November 1607. Thomas is one of the younger sons of Gilbert, probably at most 14 years old at the time of this letter. His journey from Leith to Dieppe has been storm-battered, requiring landings at Tynemouth, Newcastle, (Great) Yarmouth and Calais. In fear of his life he promised God that he would give 40 shillings to charity, which he now asks his father to do for him. Walter Lesley is his uncle.

THOMAS BAIRD to his Father, GILBERT BAIRD of Auchmedden. Rouen the 1st Novr. 1607.

Richt honorable Sir, After my hearty commendations made, not forgetting my muther, my brethrine, and sisters, and all guid frindis, it will please you to wit I am in guid helthe, praisit be God, desirit the same of you and all your guid frindis. After my away comming out of Leith we found the weather and wind very contrarious, so that we were forcit by storm of weather to going into drier parts of England and France, such as Tynemouth, Newcastle, Yarmouth parts of England, and Callis in France, all these parts before my coming to Dieppe. At my departure from Jhon Pearson out of Rouen, I receivit from him the sum of Twenty crowns to transport me to Lyons by the sillar he disbursit for me before my going away from him. Not troubling you further, but my hearty commendations to yourself and muther, with the rest of the bairns, and all guid frindis not forgetting Walter Lesly. I rest
Your obedient son at command,

TOMAS BAIRD.

Being in danger coming to France, I promisit forty shillings to the poure, quhilk it will pleis you give at hame.

Letter Eleven

From Thomas Baird to Gilbert Baird, 9th January 1609. Thomas has also become a friar.

TOMAS BAIRD TO HIS FATHER GILBERT. Lyons, 9th Jany. 1609.

Ryght honerable Sr. and most dearly belovit father, my most humble service being remembered; it sall please your wisdom to understand, since my coming into France the mettar has been very hard with me unto the tyme I did meet with my uncle. thair is now five or six months past that I heif taken the habit of religion herein I sall not fail, nicht or day, to pray God for your estate and welfare, - also my muther, brothers, and sisters, and commending you to the protection of the Almighty God. I remain, &c.

Letter Twelve

From Gilbert Baird to Andrew Baird, 7th September 1614. Gilbert acknowledges receipt of a letter dated 12th October 1612, and which has taken two years to be delivered. Gilbert has heard news of his son Thomas from Andrew, and describes him as 'ingynt', a word suggesting wilful and ignorant. Gilbert seems well pleased that Thomas is in holy orders, and Andrew looking after the expenses - he offers to pay any costs Andrew may have. Gilbert expresses the wish to travel to France to meet up with his brother and discuss religion. They have not seen one another for twenty-seven years.

GILBERT OF AUCHMEDDEN TO HIS brother ANDREW, Auchmedden, Sept. 7, 1614.

Ryght honorable Sir, and Loving brother, My affectionate duty with my commendations remember it most heartily, please I ressavit a letter of yours from a Scotsman, whom they call William Blackater, a Kinghom man, that diit presently after the delivery of your letter to me, when he said to me that it was meikle of two yeirs since he ressavit your letter before the delivery of it to me; for your letter was datit from Besancon, in Bourgoigne, the 12th of Oct. 1612 yeirs, and I ressavit it not till the 6th of August 1614 yeirs, with another letter written to you by one whom they call Mosieur Kircaldy; quhilk letter I heif considered, and my own, both that ye sent me, and I complain as heavily as ye do, in not writing to me often nor ye do, for I heif writin many times within these two or three yeirs with the young Laird of Schives, and with one servant of his likewise since: Quhilk Laird of Schives dwells within 12 miles to my house, for he goes often to France because his wyf is thair, and is an Catholique, and will not grant to come to Scotland, for she is the Lady Gicht's sister, and remains in France for the religious cause; as also, I ressavit a letter from Mr. Adam Scot, a brother of yours, since I ressavit ony of yours, whom dwells in Paris, as ye know, and has an brother in Scotland whom they call George Scot who dwells in Persiaw in Buchan, he wrote a letter to me repeatit that ye was in guid helthe and my son both, but that my son was something hard ingynd, and wrote in his letter to me that he had ressavit an barrel of salmond out of Dieppe in the

bans hannes, and had sent the same to you, -anthing that ye esteem not much worth thair, and get it not half a yeir after I had sent it.

As to this last letter ye wreat to me concerning William Kircaldy, he has been in the wrong to you and me both, and has informit you what I should heif promisit him any guid deit for his coming over to France, but, having the occasion to going over both to France and Flanders, I directit my letter with him to give you, as a passenger and as a friend, that he would convey that letter to you, and not that he will say on his credit that I promisit him any guid deed, but that he promisit to carry it thair in kindness, that, not withstanding at his home coming with the answer, I gave him sufficient re- compensate for his painstaking, thereby he had no cause to complain, I will assure you but because he was your maith, he thought to heif gottin sum geir of you, and that was a thing that troublit him most, being a man seeking his fortune, and came home worse than he gaid a field. For, after he came unto you with that letter, he was a while in Flanders at the wairs, and that scheme misgave him, and since he came over to you with my letter when the wairs had failit him.

As to my son Thomas, I perseive ye heif a great care of him, and is well and lives as ye do, and a guid boy, servicable, but has not our great will of letters, nor born thair to, as ye alledged, thair of I am sorry that he should be so hard ingynt always, God make him his servant, with your assistance, thair into I think myself meikle bound to you that ye heif taken the care of that boy, under God, to make him an scholar, quhillk he may be able to do by himself, thair in his muther and I both think us meikle bound to you for the same, that relieves us of all his charge and expenses, and is very burdenable to you, as I doubt not, in all necessarys, and is not able as yet to do for himself. Sr, gif thair be any thing here in Scotland that I, or my wyf, can please you with, advertis us thereof, it sall not be unsent to you nether for travel nor yet expense, and wreat to us what manner of calling our son will be of, or what he is most inclinit to, for I never resavit one letter from himself since he came to you; quhairfore cause him wreat to me both in French and Scottis the next commodious bearer, for I heif directit this letter of yours with a Scottis man whom they call William Laing, to Paris, burges of Aberdein, and has wishit him either to deliver this letter to Mr. Adam Scot in Paris, or then to Mr. James Gordon, the Earl of Huntly's father's brother, who has remainit in Paris for two or three yeirs, as I am informed; É I doubt not gif ony letter come to their hands, but they will convey them to you with all diligence, for this William Laing is come to Paris to bring home the Earl of Huntly his bairns, two sons whom his Lordship has thair in France.

As also, ye was mindful to wreat to me touching the heids of religion, quhillk I percieve ye heif defered, and has no will to trouble me in that point for the present, but wishes to God that ye was near to me for a little tyme, that we might confer together in matters of salvation. All I could wish with my heart that we met ye and I, gif it please God, ere we died, and I would be content that myself make the travel, and sall come to ony part of France, either in Paris or Dieppe, upon your advertisement, with the assurance that I may find you in Paris in special, or in any uther town in this side of Paris, as it pleases you to appoint; for ye are the man in the world that I would fainest see and heif conference with, and I will know be your next letter gif ye be as well mindit to see me as I am to see you. Sua to your advertisement thair in I rest. My wyf, your sister, has recommendit her heartily to you, with all the rest of your brethrin and frindis heir. - Yours, &c.

Letter Thirteen

From Andrew Baird to Gilbert Baird, 10th February 1615. Andrew fears that the letters that have miscarried have been intercepted and may harm Gilbert. Andrew wants to meet his brother. Thomas is a scholar, and will be a good man.

ANDREW to GILBERT . Besançon, Feb. 10, 1615.

Rycht honourabile sr. and most well belovit brother, my humble duty being remembered; it sall you to know that I heif ressavit your writing from Lyons, and thank you most earnestly and heartily of your guid remembrance. I am very sory that your letter has been taken, and that they heif not come to my hand, quhillk is the cause that I do not wreat to you so often as I would, for I fear that my letters being taken do you harm, albeit I heif never written anything that may displease any man, and prays

you to assure everywhere that I am a faithful subject of the King's Majesty, and putting aside matters of religion, thair is not a man that would more willingly die for his Majesty than I, and I am very laith to trouble his Majesty's estate and wellfare. As touching the desyr ye heif to see me, ye are not so desirous as I am to see you once before I die, gif it sall please God for his honour and glory. I thought within this last month to heif dwelt near to you, to wit in Sundwert, be moyen of Mr. John Brown our guid kinsman, it sall please you to ressave him as he merits and your occasion sall be; he will show you what is my estate and what means we may heif to see us together, either this yeir or the next, God willing. I cannot tell unto you the courtesie I heif ressavit from him this fifteen yeirs bypast, that it sall please you to treat him as a guid friend, quhairfore I abide your letters and meeting be the first commodity. Your son, brother Thomas has written to you both in Frenshe and Scottis, but in truth he is a better man and speaks better nor I, and is a scholar, but not very fine. He will be a guid man, God willing, and prays God daily for you and his muther. When I sall go to Flanders I will bring him with me - in the meantime, commending me heartily to you, to my sister, your children and all, guid frindis and brethren and uthers, I commend you to God and remain, &c. -
Yours, &c.

Letter Fourteen

From Mr J Brown to Gilbert Baird, 4th April 1615. Brown writes from St Andrews France as a cover letter for letters from Andrew and Thomas he is forwarding. He will arrange the details of the meeting of the two brothers. He sends regards to Lillias Baird (Gilbert's wife), whom he knew before she was married.

Mr. J. BROWN to GILBERT BAIRD of Auchmedden
Saint Andrews, April 4, 1615.

Richt honourable Sir, After my humble duty, please I ressavit some letters from your brother Mr. Andrew, and from your son Thomas, to be sent to you, quhilck I do by the moyen of this gentleman, the bearer of them. Your brother writes to me you desyr to come over to him, ye sall be welcome here to our poor house in S. Andrews, and sall ressaive sic cheir with us not as ye merit, but according to my small moyen, as this bearer will tell you. In the mean tyme I sall wreat for your brother and your son, knowing of your coming, will come here incontinent, for they remain incontinent a hundrit leagues from here in Besancon, is a town of Bourgoigne, quhairfore I will request you to advertis me before ye come over, to the end they may be warnit of your coming before hand. I remit all particulars to meeting, only I will tell you that Thomas, your son, has followit the footsteps of his uncle Mr. Andrew, and are all under one master and captain, and likewise under the same servis, albeit I hold house here. My commendations to your bedfellow Lillias, whom I did know in her father's house with you when ye were new marriit folks in your father's tyme, and her father and muther's tyme, and was in your house when her muther died. At our meeting, with God's grace, we sall speak of auld fainzian-nocht else but God preserve you. - Your assurit friend to be commandit.

Letter Fifteen

From Andrew Baird to Gilbert Baird, 2nd August 1615. The leader of Andrew's religious order is to visit Besancon, and Thomas is soon to be professed, and it is a long way to Sandvert, and there are wars in France. In short they cannot meet up. Andrew enquires whether Gilbert maintains the Catholic faith in which they were brought up.

Mr. ANDREW BAIRD to his brother, Auchmedden. Besancon in Bourgoigne, this 2d of August, 1615.

Rycht honourable Sir and most dearly beloved Brother, my affectionate duty being remembered, it sall please wit I heif ressavit your last letter in date of the first of May bypast, and I shall not weary you with long letters at this tyme, because our General is to come presently to this town, and thairanent, we haif meikle ado, and the ordinary of Flanders is upon his returning. I may not be long with you, nevertheless, it sall please you to understand that I am very glad, and prasis God Almighty, of your guid helthe, wyf, and bairns, brethren and guid frindis; as to our meeting, when

it sall please God, I see no means that it may be this yeir, because I may not travel before Thomas be profest, and that is in the beginning of Winter, and it is near two hundrit miles between this and Sandvert, and a very wickit way, and the wars that are in France and uther parts.

Of one thing it sall please you to be so guid as to assure me in truth, of your faith and religion, gif ye hald on with the guid auld faith of your guid auld father, in the quhilk, guid Walter Baird and Kathrine Grant bred us at Bamff, quhair my sister, your wyf, was very affectionate to receive God's guid servants. That will be a great consolation to me, baith dying and living, unto the tyme I heif that grace from God as to meet with you, and it may be that we may heif great consolation be letters, and of meeting, gif thair be no danger for yourself in the matter, the quhilk, abiding of you at your best commodity, ye sall wit, God willing. I past this day to see your son, frere Thomas, and to recommend him to his superior, for he is a little sickly, be reason of the great heat that is this summer in these pairts, in so far, that the wyne are almost lost and will be very deir this yeir coming.

I sall not fail to write to you at all occasions, but chiefly by the ordinary of Sandvert, seeing Father Crowe is their, who has done all he may to draw me down thair to remain with him, the quhilk, I desyr with all my heart, but our superiors in these parts will not consent, in any way, and has prayit our General to hear no request nor prayer of ony man for that, quhairfore, well-beloved brother, I am constraint to take patience while it sall please God to cause some guid occasion. Quhairupon, committing you to the protection of God Almighty, and hearty recommendations being rememberd to yourself, my sister, and your bairns, with my brethren and guid freinds, I sall evir remain, &c.

This is the last letter of the series. It is not known whether the brothers met up. Gilbert Baird died in 1620, aged 69. Andrew was still alive in 1632 when he must have been aged around 80. The letters in Andrew's possession appear to have been conveyed back to Scotland, presumably as his effects, along with an ivory chest carved by Thomas Baird.

About the Author

Dr Davis is Head of Research in the School of Modern Languages at the University of Northumbria, UK. He is best known for his work in Old English syntax and in Germanic historical linguistics. He has a complementary research interest in Scots dialectology, which provides the impetus for this article. A graduate of two Scottish universities, he has worked for the Scottish National Dictionary Association and is one of the acknowledged contributors to Chamber's *Concise English-Scots Dictionary*, a pioneering work encouraging the use of Scots. *The Baird Letters* edited here provide an example of literary Scots in its golden age.

Email: g.davis@unn.ac.uk

References

Sources of the Letters

The following two books draw heavily upon a manuscript by William Baird dated 1770, which included a transcription of the letters. Fraser (1857) appears closest to Baird's original; Baird (1870) is heavily edited and with additions by 'FMBS'; the book is described on its title page and in the British Library catalogue as being by William Baird.

Baird, William. 1870. *Dominus Fecit, Genealogical Collections Concerning the Sir-Name of Baird*, London.

Fraser, W. N. ed. 1857. *An Account of the Surname of Baird*, Edinburgh.

Scots Language

Agutter, Alex. 1987. 'A taxonomy of Older Scots Orthography', in Macafee, Caroline and Iseabail Macleod, *The Nuttis Schell, Essays on the Scots Language*, Aberdeen University Press: Aberdeen.

Jones, Charles. 1997. *The Edinburgh History of the Scots Language*, Edinburgh University Press: Edinburgh.

Macleod, Iseabail. 1990. *The Scots Thesaurus*, Aberdeen University Press: Aberdeen.

Macleod, Iseabail & Pauline Cairns. 1993. *The Concise English-Scots Dictionary*, Chambers: Glasgow.

Murison, David 1977. *The Guid Scots Tongue*, William Blackwood: Edinburgh.

Robinson, Mairi (editor-in-chief). 1985. *The Concise Scots Dictionary*, Aberdeen University Press: Aberdeen.

Warrack, Alexander & William Grant. 1986. *Scots Dictionary*, Chambers: Glasgow.