

THE ULSTER-SCOTS LANGUAGE SOCIETY

10th April 2003. On Inch Island in County Donegal, Elizabeth McLeister interviews Bertie Bryce. Born in 1920, Bertie farmed all his days and is a well known storyteller and raconteur. Here, he introduces and recites the haunting tale of Stumpie's Brae, written by Cecil Frances Alexander, the famous hymn-writer.

Please note that Bertie deviates slightly from the original poem, although largely gets it right. For an accurate text, please visit our website here - <http://www.ulsterscotslanguage.com/en/texts/poetry/the-legend-of-stumpie-s-brae/>

[00:00:00.00] Bertie: To go to one of these recitations that's couched in Ulster-Scottish... It's long now, your tape's long enough? There's 35 verses in this poem.

[00:00:11.05] Elizabeth: That's all right.

[00:00:13.06] Bertie: An it tells the story of how an old man met a younger man along the road one evening, jaist before it got dark.

[00:00:22.05] An he stopped the young fella to tell him a bit of the local history.

[00:00:27.15] And whether it was out of the goodness of his heart, ye know, or whether he just wanted to frighten the young fella, ye can judge for yourselves.

[00:00:35.00] But this meeting took place along a stretch of road that was made famous by the pen of a very, very famous lady

[00:00:44.10] and that lady was none other than Mrs Alexander, the famous hymn-writer.

[00:00:49.16] And from then on, that particular stretch of road was known as 'Stumpie's Brae' and it's still referred to as Stumpie's Brae to this day an age, it's still referred to as Stumpie's Brae.

[00:01:03.09] But now the people who live in an around Stumpie's Brae will all tell ye this is no fable, it really happened.

[00:01:12.16] Now whether it did or not I can't say, but A have a sneaking suspicion that it did happen.

[00:01:20.01] Elizabeth: Well where exactly is Stumpie's Brae?

[00:01:22.11] Bertie: It's in the County Donegal between the town o Lifford an the village o St Johnston along a kine of a by-road.

[00:01:29.21] I have been there and I have interviewed, talked to some of the local residents.

[00:01:34.01] And the' all maintain that this really happened. Now whether it did or not, I can only tell you the story; and the story is entitled 'Stumpie's Brae' - and this is how it goes.

[00:01:48.25] Heerd ye no tell o Stumpies Brae?
Sit doon, sit doon, young frien,

An A'll mak yer flesh tae creep this day,
An yer hair tae stan on en.

[00:02:01.15] Young man it's hard tae strive wi sin
But the hardest strife o aa
Is whan the greed o gain cums in,
An drives God's grace awa.

[00:02:14.01] Aw, it's quick tae do, but it's lang tae rue,
An when the punishment cums at last,
Ye'd gie the whole world to undo the deed,
The deed that's gone an past.

[00:02:26.29] Ower that stretch o meadow land,
An ower the wattèr bright,
Ye'll see a tal fir-tree stan,
Beside thon gable white.

[00:02:35.18] Aw I mine it weel in my young'r days,
When the story yit was rife:
There lived within that lovely place,
A farmer man an his wife.

[00:02:46.21] They sat thegither all alone,
That blessed autumn night
When the trees without, and the hedge an stone
Were white in the soft moonlight.

[00:02:57.08] The girls an boys had al gone doon
Awee til the blacksmith's wake;
When passed ane by a window smaa,
An giv the door a shake.

[00:03:07.16] Well the man got up an he went to the door -
And when he had spoken a bit
A pedlar man stepped into the floor,
And down tumbled the pack he bore,
And a right heavy pack was it.

[00:03:23.05] "God save us aa," said the wife wi a smile,
"But yours is a thriving trade."
"Ay, ay, I've travelled monies a mile,
An plenty hae A made."

[00:03:37.13] Well the man sat on by the dim fire light,
After the pedlar had gone to his rest;
Close to his ear the devil came,
And entered intae his breast.

[00:03:51.21] The man looked o'er at his wife,
And she was as bad as he -
"Could we no murder thon man the nicht?"

"Ay, could we naw," quoth she.

[00:04:03.28] Well the man got up without a word,
An he took the pick-axe from behind the door;
An as he passed it into the sleeper,
He stirred but he never awakened more.

[00:04:18.15] "He's deid!" said th' oul man, cummin back -
"What o the corpse, my dear?"
"Ah, we'll bury him snug in his ain bit pack,
Niver you mind the loass o the sack,
A've takken oot aa the gear."

[00:04:35.00] "Ay, but the pack'll be ower shoart by two guid span.
What'll we do?" says he.
"Ah you're a dotèrin stupid, thick oul man;
We'll soon cut him aff at the knee."

[00:04:52.18] Well, they shortened the corpse an they packed him tight,
Wi his legs in a pickle o hay;
An ower the burn in the sweet moonlight,
They cairried him tae this brae.

[00:05:04.05] They shovelled a hole right speedily,
An they laid him in on his back ...
But "A right pair are ye," quoth the pedlar,
He sittin bolt upright in his pack.

[00:05:13.23] "Ye thought ye'd lay me snugly here,
Whaur none would know my station.
But I'll haunt you far, I'll haunt you near,
Father and son, wi terror an fear
Tae the nineteenth generation."

[00:05:29.06] Well the pair were sittin the very next night,
When the wee bit doag began tae cower.
And the' knew by the blue in the fire light,
That the Evil One wus in power.

[00:05:39.18] It had just struck nine, ay nine o the clock,
The hour when the man lay dead;
When there came to the outer dure a knock,
An a heavy, heavy tread.

[00:05:49.29] Now, it was not like a natural sound
But it was like someone stumpin o'er the ground
On the bones of his raa bare knees.
The oul man's heid swam roun an roun,
The wummin she did freeze.

[00:06:02.10] When he in through the dure, like a trough of air,
And stump, stump, stump around the twa.

Wi his bluidy heid, an his knee bones bare
Here, they'd maist tae die o aawe!

[00:06:15.03] The woman's black locks e'er morn turned white,
Ay, white as the mountain snows,
The man was as straight as a staff that night,
But he was stooped ere the morn arose.

[00:06:27.20] Still, day by day, as the clock struck nine,
In the house where the' did the sin,
The wee bit doag began tae whine,
An the ghost came clattèrin in.

[00:06:37.29] Ae nicht there was a fearful flood -
Three days and nichts the skies had poured;
An white wi foam, an black wi wun,
The burn in fury roared.

[00:06:51.13] Quoth she, "Gude man,
Stumpie'll naw be here the nicht
Fur the burn's füll tae the brim.
An it's ower the linn an it's up tae the meadow ridge".

[00:07:08.28] But Stumpie, he came hirplin in
An hit the wummin a tip on the chin,
Sure he'd cum roun by the bridge.

[00:07:14.16] And it was stump, stump, stump to his ploys again,
Ower stools and ower chairs;
Ye'd surely hae thought ten men an weemin
Were dancin there in pairs.

[00:07:25.05] Well, the' sold the gear, an across the sea,
To a foreign land the' went,
But who can flee
From their appointed punishment?

[00:07:37.05] The ship swam o'er the wattèrs clear,
Wi help from an eastern breeze,
But the very first sound on the hard, smooth deck,
That came on their ears,
Was the tappin o them bare knees.

[00:07:48.21] Then out in the wilds of America,
Their weary feet they set;
But Stumpie was there first, they say,
An he haunted them there to their dyin day,
An he follows their children yet.

[00:08:02.24] Now, that's the story of Stumpie's Brae,
An the murderers' fearful fate.
Young man, your face is turned that way,

Ye'll be gaun this nicht past that gate.

[00:08:20.25] Ye'll ken it weel by the tal fir trees,
The hoose where the'r wont to dwell,
An if you see ane there, as the daylight flees,
Stumpin about on the bones o his knees
Well that'll just be Stumpie himsel.

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