## 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 a poignant poem called 'The Lad', written by Reverend WF Marshall, 'The Bard of Tyrone'.

Please note that Bertie incorrectly calls the poem 'The Drunken Scutcher's Son'. He also deviates very slightly from the original poem, although largely gets it right.

[00:00:00.00] Bertie: I don't suppose there's many of you people down there who have ever stood and watched a scutcher at work.

[00:00:10.06] In fact I would hazard a guess there'd be quite a few of you who wouldn't even know what it was, what a scutcher did.

[00:00:18.05] But for the benefit of those people, now let me tell you that.

[00:00:22.04] A scutcher was the first highly skilled operator that had to work with the flax crop, after the farmer was finished with it.

[00:00:30.01] And he worked in atrocious conditions in a hell-hole that they called a 'scutch mill'.

[00:00:36.09] And now there was one common denominator that you could apply to all scutchers - and that was the fact that they'd all a drink problem.

[00:00:47.24] I think it had something to do with the conditions under which they worked.

[00:00:51.17] Now, this poem was written by W.F. Marshall and, in it, I always thought that Marshall was being a wee bit too sore on these men, the scutchers I mean

[00:01:08.18] because I can tell you from personal experience that there's some damn good men among them: men that you could travel the country now

[00:01:18.29] from Malin Head to the Cobh of Cork and you couldn't come up with one single, solitary individual that would be able or willing to stand in their shoes.

[00:01:31.01] But anyway this is the poem as the great man wrote it and I like to call it 'The Drunken Scutcher's Son' - so this is how it goes.

[00:01:47.04] The' were no great aff-set anywhere, The scutchers o times ago, For drink - it follaed them like a curse That wrought amang the tow.

[00:02:00.02] Plenishment they'd have little or noan Exceptin what they'd stale, An they'd make the childèrn go out an beg Fur gopins of Indian male.

[00:02:13.09] I knew a scutcher wance - he wrought in Shane, He was a drunken scrub,

But he raired a son, an I mind that son A smart wee lump o a cub.

[00:02:30.07] His clothes were like wings, even his cap was tore. An his fire was the fire at the kill. An he went tae school on his wee bare feet. An he niver got half his fill.

[00:02:45.19] Above the mill there was this big steep hill Where he could see to the graveyard wall, To the market-house, an the station gates, An the new Hibernian Hall.

[00:02:59.00] You could hear him singing goin up that hill, But God knows why he sung, Because the people said he'd see the day When his da was sure tae be hung.

[00:03:12.24] When the Twelfth was near he'd march the road, Wi his drumsticks in his han, Boy, he was good at the double roll On the lid of an oul tin can.

[00:03:25.07] He played his lone, for th' other weans Wus ashamed of him an his rags, So he trundled his hoop an he waded the burn An he ginnled for spricklybags.

[00:03:40.01] I mind the yeir he took up with me, The ploughin had jaist begun, An as I waatched him leadin the horses roun, That drunken scutcher's son,

[00:03:51.19] It was little I thought that in times to come Ay, more than a son he'd be, For his father died in a watter-sheugh An he cum to live wi me.

[00:04:05.24] He was odd in a way for I think he heerd What nobody else could hear, An he seen what I could never see, Although me sight was clear.

[00:04:20.01] The top of a hill bewitched him still, An the fire at the mountain's rim, But the best of al was the runnin burn Because he said it sung tae him.

[00:04:32.26] There was them that tuk it on themselves tae say He was sure tae turn out wile, But that young lad grew till he grew man big But he kept the heart of a chile.

[00:04:47.12] The longer he lived about the place The less I had tae fear. And there was never a word frae him to me But done me good tae hear.

[00:04:58.18] But A'm lonesome now for he went away, An me sight is getting dim; But I didn't ask tae hold him back When they needed men like him.

[00:05:20.04] He's sleepin now where the poppies grow, In a coat that the büllets tore, An what use is a wheen o medals tae me When me own wee lad's no more?