

Jessie the Flower o' Dunblane¹

One of Scotland's finest love songs is "Jessie, the Flower o' Dunblane". The words were composed by the famous weaver-poet, Robert Tannahill (1774 - 1810). Jessie 'the Flower o' Dunblane' was Jenny Tennant, the sweetheart and muse of Robert Tannahill



*The sun has gane down o'er the lofty Ben Lomond
And left the red clouds to reside o'er the scene
While lanely I stray in the calm simmer gloamin'
To muse on sweet Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.
How sweet is the brier wi' its saft faulding blossom
And sweet is the birk wi' its mantle o' green
But sweeter and fairer and dear to this bosom
Is charming young Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.
Is charming young Jessie, is charming young Jessie
Is charming young Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.*

*She's modest as on-y and blythe as she's bonnie
For guileless simplicity makes her its aim
And far be the villain, divested of feeling
Wha'd blight in its bloom, the sweet flow'r of Dunblane.
Sing on, thou sweet mavis, thy hymn to the evening
Thour't dear to the echoes of Calderwood glen
Sae dear to this bosom, sae artless and winning
Is charming young Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.
Is charming young Jessie, is charming young Jessie
Is charming young Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.*

*How lost were my days till I met wi' my Jessie
The sports o' the city seem'd foolish and vain
I ne'er saw a nymph I would ca' my dear lassie
Till charm'd wi' sweet Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.
Tho' mine were the station of liftiest grandeur
Amidst its profusion I'd languish in pain
And reckon as naething, the height of its splendour
If wanting sweet Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane
If wanting sweet Jessie, if wanting sweet Jessie
If wanting sweet Jessie, the flow'r o' Dunblane.*

On Tannahill's untimely death in 1810 at the age of 36, a search began to identify the girl immortalised in the poem. Although there were many contenders, it is believed that the real 'Jessie' was Jenny Tennant.

¹ <http://www.contemplator.com/tunebook/scotland/jessie.htm>
<http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/Content/Help/index.aspx?r=2222>
<http://www.grianpress.com/Tannahill/TANNAHILL%27S%20SONGS%2010.htm>

Jessie/Jenny was born in Braeport, Dunblane. A cottage, erected in 1908 on the site of her birthplace, can still be seen.



Jenny left Dunblane to work as a weaver in Paisley. She had in fact been Tannahill's sweetheart and muse for some three years, yet the poet believed she had been unfaithful. Tannahill then composed another poem to Jessie, this time entitled 'Farewell'.

In 1920 valuation roll for Dunblane you can see the title of the poem in the 'description' column. The description reads: "Cottage site of Birthplace of 'Jessie, the Flower of Dunblane', Windyhill Cot."²

It is believed that Tannahill's poem is based on an earlier poem by Allan Ramsay, a slightly risqué song called the 'Bob of Dunblane'

*"Come lassie lend me your braw Hemp Heckle (hemp comb)
And I'll lend you my Tripling Kame (a sort of bobbin)
For fainness dearie I'll gar ye keckle
If you will go dance the Bob O Dunblane*

*Hast ye gang to the ground of yer trunkies
Busk ye braw and dinna think shame
Consider in time if leading of monkeys
Be better than dancing the Bob of Dunblane*

*Be frank my lassie lest I grow fickle
And tak my word and offer again
Syne ye may chance to repent it mickle
Ye did na accept of the Bob of Dunblane*

*The dinner, the piper and priest shall be ready
And I'm grown dowie with lying my lane
Away then and leave baith Minny and Daddy
And try with me the Bob of Dunblane*

² <http://www.scotlandspeople.gov.uk/content/images/jessievrlarge.jpg>