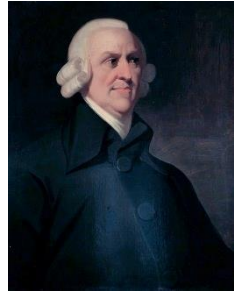




Adam Smith

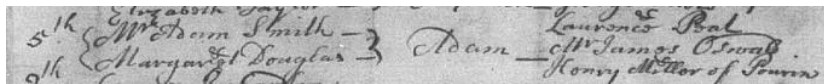
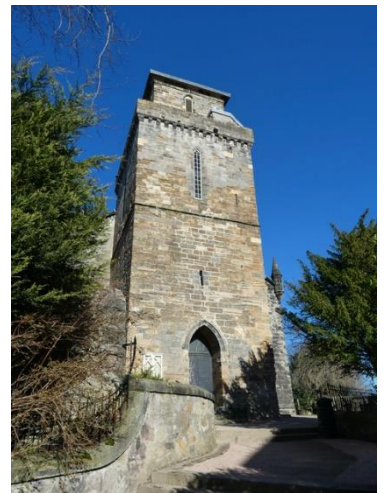
A Very Famous Son of Kirkcaldy His Periods of Time in Town of his Birth



The Early Years

What the weather in Kirkcaldy was like on the 5th June 1723 has long been lost in the mists of time but what has not been lost is the significance of an event which took place on that very day.

In front of a gathered congregation of the good folk of the burgh of Kirkcaldy, in the local parish church, along with his mother and guardians, took place the sacrament of baptism of a tiny baby. That baby was named Adam Smith and he



was to become a towering global giant in the fields of

moral philosophy and political economics.

Kirkcaldy itself had become a royal burgh in the previous century, in 1644, by royal charter conferred by Charles I, it having been moving toward that status since the Reformation, Kirkcaldy previously having been under the control of Dunfermline Abbey. The parish had a population of some 2300 people, most of whom would have been resident within the town itself. Its two main institutions were the burgh council, consisting of merchants,



shipowners and tradespeople drawn from the town's burgesses, and the kirk session of the protestant parish church and its minister. It had been a prosperous burgh, founded on the privileges of being allowed to trade with foreign ports in continental Europe, primarily Dutch, German, Scandinavian and in the Baltic states. The chief exports from the town's harbour had varied over time but were primarily coal, salt, hides and linen. A downturn had existed in the early 18th century after the Act of Union between Scotland and England in 1707 as Scotland had to come to terms with increases in various taxes and customer in this period as well as competition from English merchant, more experienced in their own trading domain. The town's own local market on the main street still continued to thrive with the sale of the manufactures of the burgh's tradesfolk as well as those from villages in the locality and the produce from Kirkcaldy's agricultural hinterland.

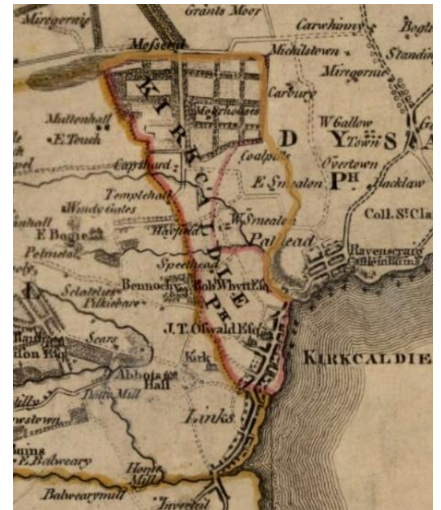


A new purpose built burgh school, replacing the old, by that time inadequate school in the church manse, was built in 1725 in Hill Street, near the parish church and the main thoroughfare which is now the town's High Street.

Adjoining villages and settlements – Linktown of Abbotshall, Pathhead, Gallatown – as well as neighbouring burgh, Dysart,

also had increasing manufacturing facilities as well as home spinning and weaving of textiles, mainly linen.

All these manufacturing facilities, its busy population and its shipping would have been in subsequent years observed and analysed by the young Adam Smith.



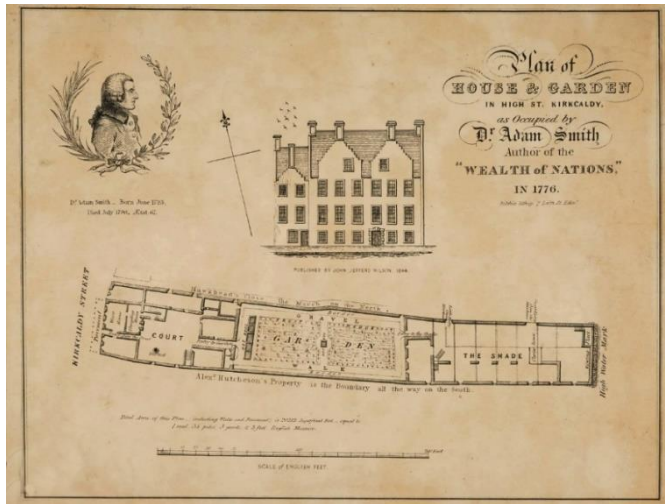
With respect to his family circumstances, Smith's father, from a laird family near Aberdeen, also Adam Smith, a qualified lawyer and the local Comptroller of Customs based in Kirkcaldy, died nearly 5

months before he was born and his widowed mother brought him up in a loving, dedicated environment, alongside the assistance of his appointed male legal guardians. She, Margaret Douglas, was from landed gentry, her father then brother, were prosperous proprietors of the Strathendry estate, near Leslie, in Fife, about 12 miles to the north of Kirkcaldy.



Through his substantial family and guardians' connections, both locally and wider, Smith was in a surroundings which was to assist him in his future endeavours. None more so was the close family connection with the Oswalds, a local Kirkcaldy family, who had become rich international shippers and traders. He had a particularly strong friendship with James

Oswald, a contemporary, who was to become a key member within the UK government.



The young Adam Smith went to the local burgh school which was a short walk up the brae of Kirk Wynd from the family home at what is now 220 High Street. Unfortunately, that actual house was demolished in the early 1830s and was replaced by the

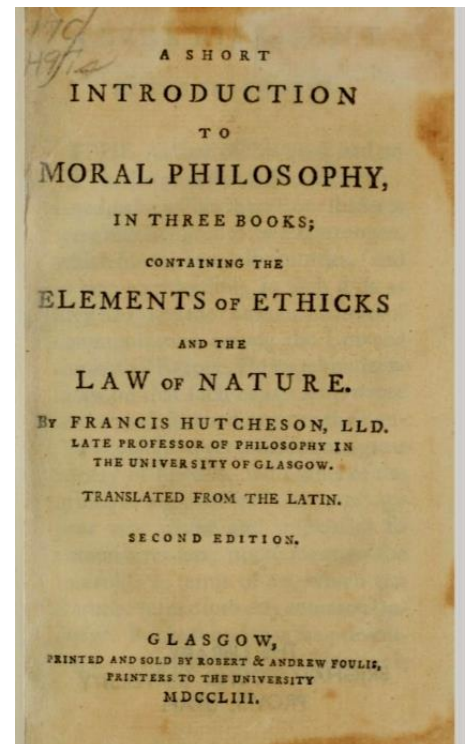
current building. Fortunately though for Kirkcaldy, and indeed Smith, was that the school had an excellent schoolmaster, David Millar, who recognised Smith's studiousness and his intellectual qualities and encouraged him. So by the age of 14, he was ready for his next progression into higher education.



For the next 3 years, 1737-40 he moved through and studied at Glasgow University. This took place under the tutorship of Professor Francis Hutcheson, whose

thinking in the field of moral philosophy was highly influential on the young Smith.

Glasgow, as a city, itself, being on Scotland's west coast, was beginning to develop a strong commercial base with



the increase in business and trade across the Atlantic.

He then obtained a Snell Exhibition scholarship for study at Oxford University, where he continued his studies at Balliol

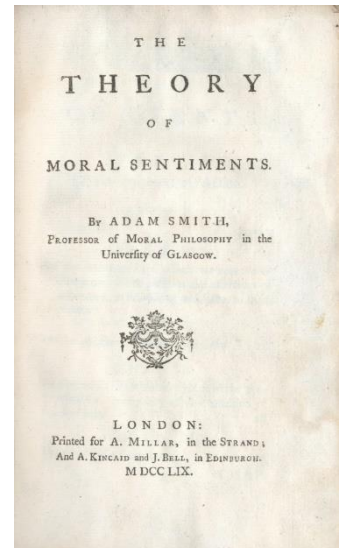


College, lasting six years. He was not impressed by the lectures and lecturers at Balliol and did not particularly enjoy his stay there. However there was the compensation of the high quality and volume of important books and

manuscripts of the great writers both from antiquity and contemporary, available to him in the university's libraries. His studies were therefore largely industrious and self-driven. This gave him the opportunity to think deeply about topics within the sphere of moral philosophy and gain an understanding of human nature, this building on the substantial base from Hutcheson and others.

He returned to Kirkcaldy in 1746 and spent a period of time with his mother, somewhat recuperating from his Oxford experiences, before he embarked on his career and his life's work. He spent two years in Edinburgh, the city which was becoming the focus for the developing Scottish Enlightenment, delivering a series of well developed, well received and attended lectures, before he was appointed in 1751 to the Professorship of Logic back at Glasgow University, then one year later he moved into the professorial seat of Moral Philosophy, in the seat of his old mentor Hutcheson.

Being back at his alma mater, he was back in his comfort zone, at ease with lecturing to his classes and working towards his first major opus, “The Theory of Moral Sentiments”, published in 1759, which became the bedrock for his further studies and publications.



The Middle to Latter Years

He accepting the post of travelling tutorship of Henry Scott, the young Duke of Buccleuch, to accompany him on his European Grand Tour, an activity, which was expected for those in the elite gentry. Their travel commenced in 1764. Over the next nearly three years they visited Paris (twice), Toulouse (a prominent French university city at that time), Bordeaux, Marseille and Geneva. This gave the young Duke the opportunity to become a more rounded, cosmopolitan individual in a foreign environment, speaking fluent French on the day. Smith was the ideal companion with his intellectual abilities and academic and philosophical connections



(although it was recorded that Smith's conversational French was not particularly fluent).

Smith return back to his mother's house in Kirkcaldy in late 1766 and that started a new phase in his life. His intent was to work on a major publication, on political economics, based on the principles of moral philosophy he had espoused in the "Theory of Moral Sentiments". This period lasting the best part of 10 years meant taking many solitary walks, deep in thought, and the slow scribing of early drafts of the chapters of the book. He declared that this time was one of the happiest and most productive times of this life. He even shunned any requests by his fellow members of the Scottish Enlightenment, especially the philosopher David Hume, one of his closest compatriots, to move across to reside in Edinburgh, even on occasions, to socialise and imbibe again the intellectual interaction, and no doubt some claret, a favourite drink of gentlemen in the 18th century.

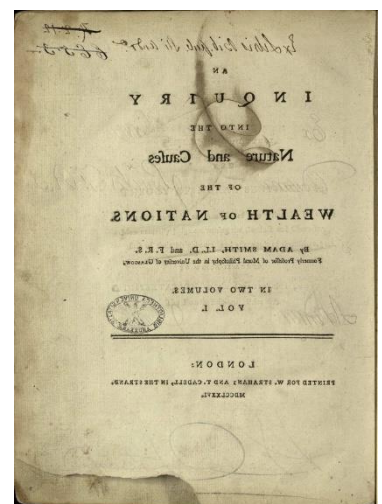


When the book for ready for publication and printing he travelled down to London to see his publishers, W. Strahan (a

fellow Scot) and T. Cadell.

Subsequently in 1776, the first edition of 'An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nation', his opus magnum in the

embryonic field of political economics went on sale. It was extremely well received and was an instant success.



After all the necessary book publishing protocols were completed he again returned back to Kirkcaldy. A significant event taking place at that time on the other side of the Atlantic was of course the American War of Independence, which was also to feature in his future writings.

Shortly after that in 1778 he was appointed to the post of *Commissioner of Customs in Scotland*, based in Edinburgh. Normally such a post would be treated as sinecure (a position requiring little or no work but giving the holder status or financial benefit) but Smith took the role seriously and worked hard in it. Most days he was seen walking up the Royal Mile from his new house in the Canongate area of Edinburgh in Panmure House to his office, with a cane in one hand and a nosegay in the other (the nosegay was necessary in Old Reekie in these days because the Old Town of Edinburgh smelled rather less than pleasant!)



Portrait of Margaret Douglas, Adam Smith's Mother by Conrad Metz.
Credit: File Cultural Trust

Having moved to Panmure House in the Canongate area with his mother and cousin he was never to return to Kirkcaldy. His mother died in 1784, in her 90th year, which caused Smith to grieve for a considerable period.

He himself died on the 7th July 1790, aged 67, being buried in the close-by Canongate Church graveyard.



Gravestone in Canongate Church graveyard.

Into the 19th century, Smith influence continue to grow and he was liberally quote in academic works and well as in newspapers and pamphlets. He became know to many as the Father of Modern Economics. Even up to the present day he is still revered in academic, economic and political circles, and his writings and analyses in both philosophy and economics are still widely discussed and debated and indeed to some extent fought over.



FRONT VIEW OF NEW HALLS AND BEVERIDGE LIBRARY

It should be noted though that it did take till 109 years after his death for Kirkcaldy to fully recognise their famous son. This took place in 1899 with the opening of the Adam Smith Halls (this is covered as object 11 in the Kirkcaldy's Heritage in 50 Objects series).

Portraiture and Images of Smith

Smith never sat for a formal portraiture, so all images are either from memory or retrospective. Here are some of these images, statuary and caricatures, even banknotes.



Further Reading

This modest narrative has intentionally been limited to Adam Smith in his 18th century Kirkcaldy context. It is probably fair to say that no Kirkcaldy native has been more written about. For a much fuller account of his life, work and ongoing global influence, there have been a myriad publications over the last two centuries. The following represents a very modest bibliography of such works.

Adam Smith: What He Thought and Why It Matters – Jesse Norman – Penguin (2019)

The Life of Adam Smith – Ian Simpson Ross – Oxford University (1995)

Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life – Nicolas Phillipson – Penguin 2011

The World of Adam Smith – C.R. Fay - Cambridge : W. Heffer & Sons Ltd (1960)

Adam Smith and the Scotland of His Day – C.R. Fay - Cambridge University Press (2011)

Adam Smith and the Pursuit of Perfect Liberty – James Buchan – Profile Books (2006)

Adam Smith: A Primer – Eamonn Butler – Institute of Economic Affairs (2008)