

29th August 2021

FAMOUS

**“And then they knew the perilous rock,
And blessed the Abbot of Aberbrothock”**

Robert Southey, The Inchcape Rock

The Inchcape Rock is a ballad poem written by the English poet, Robert Southey, in 1802. Its message is that those who do bad things will eventually be punished. Southey took his inspiration from the legend of a pirate, Ralph the Rover, who cuts down the bell on Inchcape Island (placed there by the Abbot of Aberbrothock to warn mariners of a notorious sandstone reef) and, inexplicably, throws it into the sea. But as he's negotiating his way back to Scotland in bad weather, his ship founders on the reef, and he's undone by his own misdeed. It's classic, 19th-century Romantic-style poetry, but wonderful, nonetheless.

When I heard Southey's poem, I loved "Aberbrothock" as a name, but I was disappointed to learn that this was *actually* the town of Arbroath. Formerly a royal borough, Arbroath is the largest town in Angus on Scotland's east coast and is famous for several things: it's the home of the amazing seafood delicacy, "The Arbroath Smokie"; it gives its name to "The Declaration of Arbroath", a letter written to the Pope by the Scottish Barons in 1320, the time of Robert the Bruce, asserting the independence of the Kingdom of Scotland; Arbroath FC holds the world record for the number of goals scored in a professional football match when they beat Aberdeen Bon Accord 36-0 in a Scottish Cup tie in 1885. And I know some wonderful people who've lived and worked in Arbroath over the years.

But for me, it's "Aberbrothock" that makes it *extra* famous. Southey was clever, of course. There aren't many words that rhyme with "Arbroath" but any number that rhyme with "Aberbrothock" – like "rock" in the lines above. And, anyway, doesn't the old name have a more romantic ring?

Whatever Arbroath is famous for, let's hope there are many who will bless the modern-day "Abbots of Aberbrothock" who ring their metaphorical bells to warn people of dangers that might be around. And let's beware, even now, of the Ralph-the-Rover-types who might lure unsuspecting sailors onto rocks to cause them lasting damage.

A prayer for today

Famous? Me? Only in your eyes, Lord. But that will be enough. Amen