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Ellisland

The farm of Ellisland stands on the banks of the River Nith, six and a half miles north-west of Dumfries. It was bought by Patrick Miller of Dalswinton (*see* Miller, Patrick) in 1777, an enthusiast for agriculture experiment, who offered it to Burns in 1787. Burns took it from 11th June 1788, but, as he had to build a farmhouse, did not occupy it until the following summer. Miller allowed Burns £300 towards the cost of the new farmhouse, and for other repair work and fencing. The lease was for 76 years, at a rent of £50 a year for the first 3 years, and thereafter, £70 a year.

When Burns took on Ellisland, as in the case of most farms in 18th Century Scotland, the soil was exhausted. It was also stony. Neither crop growing nor dairy farming, to which Burns turned, paid, and Burns was soon thoroughly disillusioned. His first biographer, Robert Heron, said: '... a

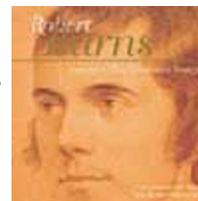
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lease was granted to the poetical farmer at the annual rent which his own friends declared that the due cultivation of his farm might easily enable him to pay. But these friends, being Ayrshiremen were little acquainted with the soil, with the manures, with the markets, with the dairies, with the modes of improvement in Dumfriesshire; they had estimated his rental at Ayrshire rates, so that contrary to his landlord's intentions, he must pay more for Ellisland than Ellisland was worth'. By the end of 1790 Burns had decided that Ellisland was 'altogether a ruinous business'. He might have had some difficulty in getting free of his lease, had not a neighbouring proprietor, John Morin, offered to buy the farm of £1,900 which Miller accepted. Burns and his family left Ellisland for Dumfries in November 1791.

Ellisland was farmed until 1921, when it was bought by a former President of Edinburgh Burns Club, John Wilson, who gifted it to the nation. The place where Burns wrote, among other things 'Tam o' Shanter', 'Of a' the airts the wind can blaw', 'O were I on Parnassus hill', 'I hae a wife o' my ain' and 'Willie brewed a peck o' maut', is now preserved as a working farm, open to visitors.

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