

**History of English Language and Literature**  
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**Lecture 11**  
**Scottish Enlightenment of the 18th Century**

Hello everyone! Welcome again to the NPTEL course, The History of English Language and Literature. We have been discussing the long 18th century in British literature and we also had been taking a look at how the forces of enlightenment were directly influencing the ways in which literature was being written and also how the societal and other different forms of being were getting framed and reshaped and redefined during the period.

So when we discuss the history of English literature in the 18th century, it would be unfair not to mention the Scottish enlightenment and a phenomenal contributions that it made not just to England but also to the European scene in general. The political relationship between Scotland and England as we know it dates back to the beginning of the 17th century soon after the death of Queen Elizabeth when James I inherited the throne of England.

So we begin to see, we also noted that there were lot of political alliances but nevertheless hostile and cold relationship also continued with the Act of Union of 1707 which brought England and Scotland under the same political rule. We do find that the scene had considerably changed. So the 18th century was radically different for the Scottish as well as the English people. So we begin to take a look at what happened in Scotland soon after the union of 1707.

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## + Scotland after the Union of 1707

- The end of Scottish Parliament and Independence
- Parliamentarians, Politicians, aristocrats - moved to London
- Scottish law – separate – lawyers remained in **Edinburgh**
- **Church** of Scotland, **universities**, **medical** establishments – undisturbed
- The formation of **a new middle class elite in Scotland** – urban
- Unprecedented **intellectual** fertility and levels of **progress** – even after having brought to its knees in the earlier part of the century

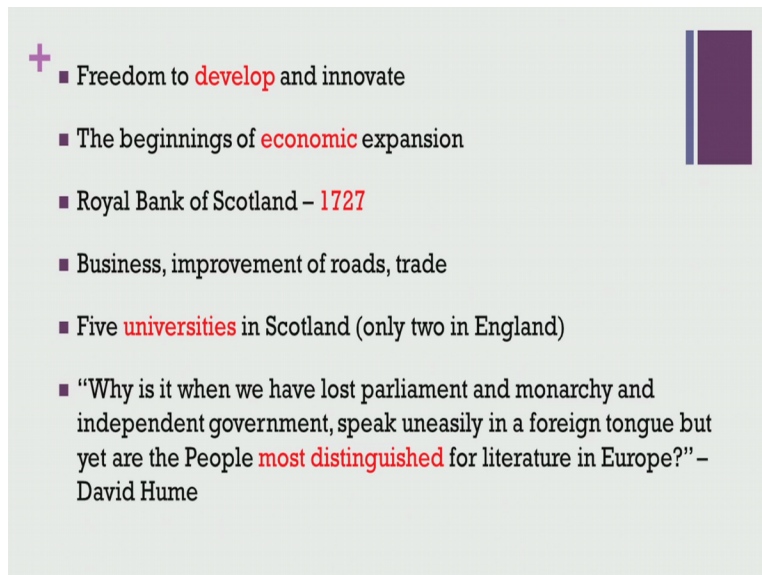
We find that politically they had come together whereas in the early 17th century with the ascension of James I, only there was a dynastical union which had been made possible. But with this union of 1707, we find that the Scottish parliament and Scottish Independence in that sense, political independence had come to an end. And along the, around the same time we find the parliamentarians, the politicians and the aristocrats who were based in Scotland. We find them moving to London and setting up a base over there.

But nevertheless it was quite significant that the Scottish law, the legal system and jurisdiction, it remained rather undisturbed and its headquarters remained in Edinburgh. So the legal system continue to operate as an entirely separate system with complete autonomy regardless of the ways in which the parliament was functioning. Along the same line we also note that the church, universities, medical establishments also remained quite undisturbed.

So there was a certain kind of life which was being made possible in Scotland even when the parliament was completely based in England, especially in London. So this also led to the formation of a new emergent middle class elite in Scotland which was also urban in nature and also highly educated which also comprised of a certain set of intelligence. So this had led to an unprecedented intellectual fertility in Scotland and we also see the two unknown forms of progress and development.

And this was significant because this sort of achievement was begin made possible even after Scotland as a nation had, was brought to its knees when as early as the early 18th century. So even after that to, for them to make such comeback and contribute to the enlightenment and even, this even getting defined and known to the posterity as the Scottish enlightenment, that itself is a major achievement.

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- Freedom to **develop** and innovate
- The beginnings of **economic** expansion
- Royal Bank of Scotland – **1727**
- Business, improvement of roads, trade
- Five **universities** in Scotland (only two in England)
- “Why is it when we have lost parliament and monarchy and independent government, speak uneasily in a foreign tongue but yet are the People **most distinguished** for literature in Europe?” – David Hume

Though the parliament continue, though the parliament functioned in London and though they were the, though the English people were mostly making the rules and regulations for the Scottish and also there was this particular critic that England no longer cared or looked into the affairs of Scotland. But nevertheless the positive aspect of this was that the Scottish intelligence or the Scottish newly emergent middle class which was based in Scotland, they had a lot of freedom to develop and innovate quite free from the rules and regulations of the English and also quite free from the many stifling influences of the past which England was certainly bearing.

And this was a period which also witnessed tremendous economic expansion and this is also important because Scotland was not as rich as England to begin with. But we do find them taking long strides in this sort, this particular area as well. We find the Royal Bank of Scotland getting established in 1727. This also led to a major expansion of business, there is an improvement of roads, and there is definitely way in which trade also makes a definite contribution to the economy of the nation.

And when we talk about education and universities, Scotland was not far behind. In fact it was even slightly better than England in the sense that England only had two major universities in 18th century, the Oxford and the Cambridge. On the other hand we find Scotland boasting the presence of five major universities. So all of these major distinguishing factors had even led the famous philosopher David Hume to wonder aloud, “Why is it when we have lost parliament and monarchy and independent government, speak uneasily in a foreign tongue but yet are the people most distinguished for literature in Europe?”

So this was the image of Scotland in Europe in 18th century. They were considered as one of the most distinguished people. They were also considered as a nation which had showed tremendous energy and tremendous potential especially when it come to the discussions related to enlightenment. We shall soon see how and why.

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So before that it is important to take a look at this spread of enlightenment in Europe and other part of the world. If we look at the graphic representation over here, we can see Scotland and particularly Edinburgh emerging as a major site of enlightenment. We can also see the other forms of (enlight), the other influences from different parts of the world. We find Immanuel Kant’s influence over here from Russia. And there is also the other significant intellectual triangle of London, Paris and Amsterdam.

And this is very important for us to also note how all of these nations were contributing from various quarters of the world towards the single phenomenon known as the enlightenment. Though I call it a single phenomenon, it is also important to understand that the contribution and the influences were not singular in any way. It was in fact far from it. We find enlightenment contributing and also getting influenced by various sorts of disciplines, various influences, various ideologies and various sorts of different kinds of human minds coming together to produce what is, what can be generally called as a rational thought or a free thought.

So this was significant aspect for us at this point is that though Scotland was only a minor territory as far as England was concerned, in terms of enlightenment we find them, we find Scotland making a major contribution comparable with any other part of the world. So bearing this in mind it is important to take a look at the intellectual climate and infrastructure that prevailed in Scotland in 18th century.

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**+** The intellectual climate and infrastructure

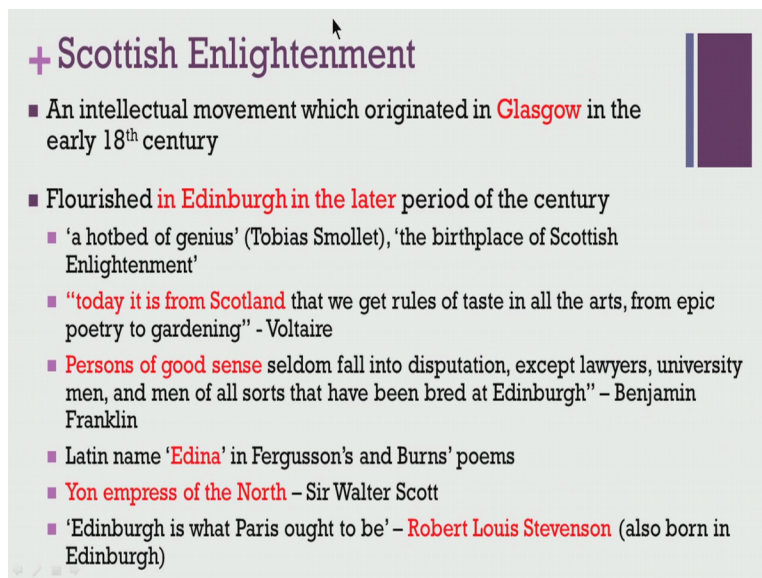
- **French** influence – Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu
- 1750 – 75% **literacy** – perhaps the most well read nation
  - Edinburgh – the ‘city of letters’
- 1763 – 6 **printing** houses, 3 paper mills
- 1783 – 16 printing houses, 12 paper mills
- **Clubs** – Political Economy Club, The Select Society, the Poker Club
- Universities, reading societies, periodicals, museums, masonic lodges
- ‘Scottish literati’

There was definitely this French influence which certainly bore an influence across the world during this point of time through the names of Voltaire, Rousseau and Montesquieu. Their influence was especially significant because they had contributed to the newer forms of thought which designed and defined the way in which politics and human thinking was to be shaped and reshaped in the coming decades and even centuries.

So in terms of Scotland it is very interesting to note that by 1750 Scotland had achieved 75 percent literacy. This also had led the rest of Europe to agree that they were perhaps the most well-bred nation on earth at that point of time. Edinburgh also gained this subrogate, 'the city of letters'. By 1763 we note that they were 6 printing houses across Scotland and 3 paper mills. By 1783 this number had gone considerably high with 16 printing houses and 12 paper mills.

So this was the kind of contribution and the kind of growth that the nation was witnessing. And in terms of the various societal clubs, we see a club such as Political Economy Club, The Select Society and Poker Club leading the other minor numerable clubs as well. And there was also enormous influence in the form of the work going on in the universities as part of reading societies, the emergence of periodicals. A lot of museums were also playing a significant role. Masonic lodge just were significant as they also witnessed the coming together of many eminent personalities. Altogether this intellectual climate and infrastructure was contributing to the emergence of a new class also known later as the Scottish literati.

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### + Scottish Enlightenment

- An intellectual movement which originated in **Glasgow** in the early 18<sup>th</sup> century
- Flourished **in Edinburgh in the later** period of the century
  - 'a hotbed of genius' (Tobias Smollet), 'the birthplace of Scottish Enlightenment'
  - "today it is from **Scotland** that we get rules of taste in all the arts, from epic poetry to gardening" - Voltaire
  - **Persons of good sense** seldom fall into disputation, except lawyers, university men, and men of all sorts that have been bred at Edinburgh" – Benjamin Franklin
  - Latin name '**Edina**' in Fergusson's and Burns' poems
  - **Yon empress of the North** – Sir Walter Scott
  - 'Edinburgh is what Paris ought to be' – **Robert Louis Stevenson** (also born in Edinburgh)

So what exactly was Scottish Enlightenment? This was primarily an intellectual movement which originated in Glasgow, one of the cities in Scotland in the early 18th century. However we find that this had spread to other parts of Scotland. We find it majorly flourishing in the city of Edinburgh especially in the later period of the century. After point we also note that Scottish

Enlightenment gets referred to primarily as an event which happened mainly in the city of Edinburgh.

The city of Edinburgh was a city which really fascinated many European thinkers and even the Scottish people were extremely proud of the kind of location intellectually as well as otherwise that the city had. Tobias Smollet at a later point described Edinburgh as the hotbed of genius. And this even today Edinburgh continues to be seen as the birthplace of Scottish Enlightenment. Voltaire who was one of the major thinkers during that time he had a lot of nice things to say about Edinburgh. He wrote in one of his writings, "Today it is from Scotland that we get rules of taste in all the arts, from epic poetry to gardening."

So this was the impact and image that Edinburgh had in rest of Europe. Benjamin Franklin at a later point also noted persons of good sense seldom fall into disputation, except lawyers, university men and men of all sorts that have been bred at Edinburgh. So even the disputes that the men and women who were born and brought up in Edinburgh had a very distinguishable kind of credit and comment. The great poets from Scotland, Fergusson and Burns, we also find them using the Latin term for Edinburgh, Edina in some of their poems.

Sir Walter Scott, a very notable novelist and writer at a later point, he was also born in Scotland. We find him referring to Scotland as yon empress of the North. And Robert Louis Stevenson again another son of the Scottish soil, we find him making this extraordinary comment about Edinburgh, "Edinburgh is what Paris ought to be." So this was the kind of image that Scotland and particularly Edinburgh had in 18th century and even in the later centuries.

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- Influenced by **the European ideas of Enlightenment** - Based on philosophical enquiry
  - Rejection of any authority that could not be justified by reason
  - Characterised by empiricism, practicality
  - A movement that equalled and potentially even rivalled the whole of Europe
- The driving force – a remarkably well **educated** population – did not draw much upon aristocratic patronate
- For the benefit or 'improvement' of **society and individual**
- Outpouring of intellectual and scientific achievements - Literature, philosophy, education, geology
- **Far-reaching impact** in Britain and Europe

So it is also important to analyze in what ways the Scottish Enlightenment influenced the rest of Europe and also in what way the European ideals continued to shape the ways in which the Scottish Enlightenment was getting built up. So like all the kinds of enlightenment which emerged in different parts of the world in the 18th century, Scotland was also heavily influenced by the European ideals. And we also find that the foundations of this was laid primarily through a philosophical enquiry.

We find certain distinct characteristics in Scottish Enlightenment which also could be referred to other forms of enlightenment at different parts of the world as well. So this, we find the Scottish literati rejecting any authority that could not be justified by reason, thereby pronouncing the domination of rationality over any other emotion. And we also find that their thinking and their practices were mostly governed by empiricism and methods of practicality.

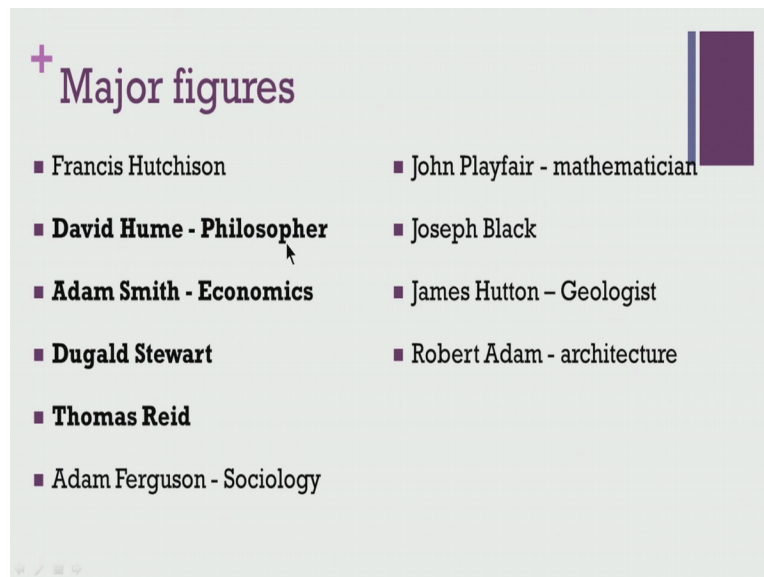
And in many senses it was also thought that the movement that originated in Scotland was a movement that equaled and perhaps potentially even rivaled the whole of Europe. So in that sense there was yet another thing which made the movement in Scotland quite different from the other aristocratic movements in, especially compared to the other aristocratic movements in certain other parts of Europe. For instance, like in France. In Scotland the driving force was a remarkably well educated population and they did not draw much upon the aristocratic patronage.



The other significant thing was that the Scottish Enlightenment was not a very self-oriented kind of movement. The focus was primarily on the benefit or on the improvement of the society and the individual. In that sense we do not find class playing a major role in this movement which originated in Scotland. On the other hand we find a more egalitarian sort of intervention happening in various fields and various disciplines.

So as a result, we find an outpouring of intellectual and scientific achievements in various fields such as literature, philosophy, education, geology, so on and so forth. And this movement significantly was not limited to Scotland or the city of Edinburgh. We do find that they were far-reaching impacts in Britain and in Europe. And some of that we shall also be taking a look at in today's lecture and also in certain other lectures that we, when we shall be talking about the 18th century.

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So who were the major figures of Scottish Enlightenment? We have these, this is not an extensive consolidated list but we have only listed a certain prominent names which are also representatives of particular forms of discipline. Francis Hutchison was a philosopher. David Hume, Adam Smith, Dugald Stewart, Thomas Reid; we have Adam Ferguson, John Playfair, Joseph Black, James Hutton and Robert Adam who had made their contributions in different fields of knowledge such as philosophy, economics, sociology, mathematics, geology and even architecture.

We see that this was not a movement restricted to particular forms or particular techniques or particular kinds of writing or particular fields of knowledge. We find this is an over-encompassing and overarching kind of movement that influenced the way in which society, knowledge forms and even human mind is structured. Let us quickly take a look at some very important figures who also said to have laid the foundations of Scottish Enlightenment.

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**+ David Hume (1711-1776)**



- *Treatise of Human Nature* – at the age of 28
  - To introduce scientific reasoning into moral subjects
- *The Natural Religion of Philosophy*
- Ahead of his time, a sceptic, sought to explain the world without a reference to God – **Experience** was the boundary of knowledge, no one can go beyond experience, or establish any principles which are not founded on that authority”
- **Empiricism**
- The cause and effect of man’s relationship with God
- “Hume is our Politics, Hume is our Trade, Hume is our Philosophy, Hume is our religion”: James Hutchison

David Hume is a very prominent figure not just in terms of Scottish literary history but also in terms of English history. He lived from 1711 to 1776. His famous work, *The Treatise of Human Nature* was written and published at the age of 28. And his, the main objective of this work was to introduce scientific reasoning into moral subjects. So right from the beginning he had a, he showed a very explicit tendency towards explaining everything through a rational way. He also wrote *The Natural Religion of Philosophy*.


There was a general impression during those times and as well as especially in the later centuries that Hume was much ahead of his time. He was a skeptic and he also sought to explain the world without a reference to God. And it is important to remember that in the medieval times and also in the early modern era, though there was a prolific presence of lot of secular and free thought, it was impossible to talk about the world without reference to God. We find many philosophers from the 18th century onwards challenging this very idea and celebrating this, celebrating the notion of looking at the world without the concept of God itself.

So one of the arguments of Hume was that experience was the boundary of knowledge and no one can go beyond experience or establish any principles which are not founded on that authority. So as long as one could not experience what exactly the abstract concept of God was, there was no point in arguing or referring to the idea of God as a reference point. That was a very controversial argument in 18th century. But nevertheless people were also a little happy to move away from the theocentric understanding of, world understanding of mind and understanding of knowledge systems in general.

He is also the founding father of this idea of empiricism which also gained much currency in Britain at later point. And he also sought to analyze critically the relationship between man and God and also understand it in terms of cause and effect relationship. His contribution to the world of philosophy itself was so tremendous that James Hutchison, his contemporary remarked, “Hume is our Politics, Hume is our Trade, Hume is our Philosophy and Hume is our religion.” His impact was quite significant in all kinds of knowledge systems of those times, all kinds of belief systems of those times and even the economic systems of those times.

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## + Adam Smith (1723-1790)



- *The Wealth of Nations* – 1776
- Political Economy
- Revolutionising concepts of trade and prophesying the **growing importance of America**
- Published in the same year as the American Declaration of Independence
- Opposed mercantilism, advocated **laissez-faire** economic system

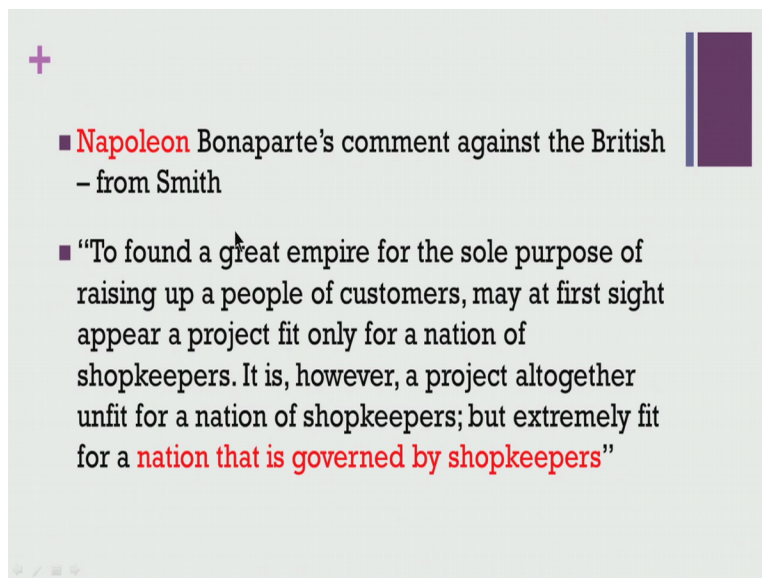
Coming to take a look at Adam Smith, who lived from 1723 to 1790, we all know perhaps that he is considered as the father of modern economics. He wrote *The Wealth of Nations* in 1776, thereby laying the foundations of a systematic study of political economy. He also revolutionized

concepts of trade and he even prophesied the significance and the growing importance of The United States of America in the coming times.

And this was seen as a very significant shift in terms of the general political understanding and general economic understanding of the world order. And this work, Wealth of Nations was supremely important. There were also a certain other significances associated with it because it was published in the same year as the American Declaration of Independence. On this, at this point it is also useful to remember that many historians at a later point had even made a connection between Scottish Enlightenment and the American Declaration of Independence arguing that the Scottish Enlightenment perhaps also had tremendously influenced a lot of American thinkers, American politicians, American Commoners at that point of time.

In his works and also through life experiences, Smith opposed mercantilism quite severely. He also advocated laissez-faire theory which also was quite revolutionary phenomenon in understanding modern economics.

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- Napoleon Bonaparte's comment against the British - from Smith
- "To found a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers, may at first sight appear a project fit only for a nation of shopkeepers. It is, however, a project altogether unfit for a nation of shopkeepers; but extremely fit for a nation that is governed by shopkeepers"

Napoleon Bonaparte had once famously commented on, about Britain as Britain being a nation run by shopkeepers. This comment in fact was taken from one of Smith's works. This is how Bonaparte's comment goes, "To found a great empire for the sole purpose of raising up a people of customers, may at first sight appear a project fit only for a nation of shopkeepers. It is,

however a project altogether unfit for a nation of shopkeepers but extremely fit for a nation that is governed by shopkeepers.”

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**+** Encyclopaedia Britannica (1768-71)

- Designed in Edinburgh – Colin Macfarquhar, Andrew Bell and a few others
- 3 volumes, 2659 pages, 160 engravings
- Soon became a standard reference
- 4<sup>th</sup> edition – 1810 – 16000 pages, 20 volumes
- Published in Edinburgh until 1898 – then sold to an American publisher

Encyclopædia Britannica;  
OR, A  
DICTIONARY  
OF  
ARTS and SCIENCES,  
COMPILED UPON A NEW PLAN.  
IN WHICH  
The different SCIENCES and ARTS are digested into  
distinct Treatises or Systems;  
AND  
The various TECHNICAL TERMS, &c. are explained as they occur  
in the order of the Alphabet.  
ILLUSTRATED WITH ONE HUNDRED AND SIXTY COPPERPLATES.  
By a SOCIETY of GENTLEMEN in SCOTLAND.  
IN THREE VOLUMES.  
VOL. I.  
EDINBURGH:  
Printed by A. BELL and C. MACFARQUHAR,  
And sold by SAUNDERS and WOODWARD, in the Strand, London.  
MDCCLXXI.

So moving on it is very important, moving on let us now take a look at perhaps the most important, most tangible contribution of the Scottish Enlightenment, The Encyclopedia Britannica. This was published over a period of time from 1768 to 1771. This, the encyclopedia was first designed in Edinburgh and the major designers and the major contributors included Colin Macfarquhar, Andrew Bell and a few other significant learned personality who were associated with various clubs in Scotland at that point of time.

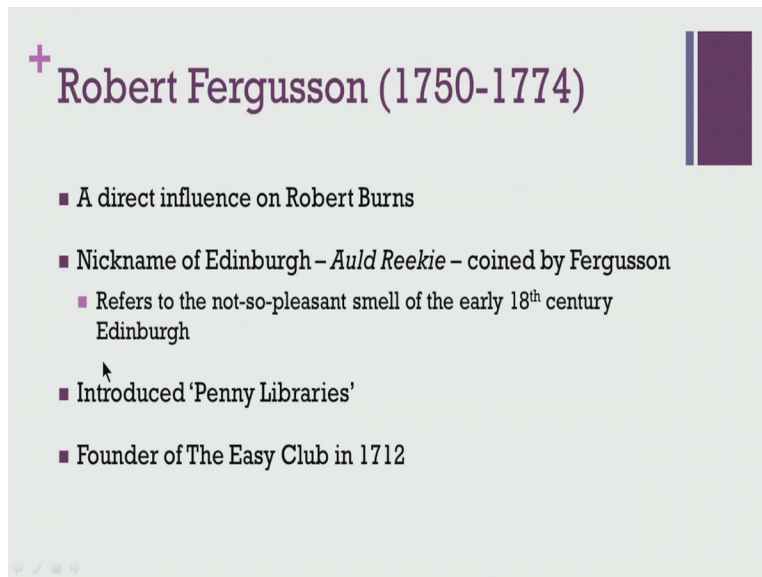
The first edition ran into 3 volumes with 2,659 pages and 160 engravings. So it was a very enormous work in the beginning. So if we could see over here, this is the first page of the first ever encyclopedia compiled. It reads Encyclopaedia Britannica or a Dictionary of Arts and Sciences compiled upon a new plan in which different sciences and arts are digested into different treatise or systems and the various technical terms are explained as they occur in the order of the alphabet, illustrated with 160 copper plates. This was the engraving which also made it extremely popular during that time.

And this was by a society of gentlemen in Scotland. So we begin to see how the clubs and the various ways in which the Scottish literati had been coming together also led to such very tangible and very significant contribution which were to even define the ways in which the

posterity looked it knowledge and also preserved and disseminated various systems of knowledge. And as we all know Encyclopedia Britannica soon became a standard reference and continues its status in the same way.

The fourth edition which appeared in 1810 was even more enormous with 16,000 pages and 20 volumes. The Encyclopedia Britannica continued to be produced and published in Edinburgh till 1898 and after that it was sold to an American publisher. Nevertheless the roots of this is very important for us to understand that the Scottish Enlightenment was not just a passing phase, it was a major revolutionary turning point in history at that point of time.

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**+ Robert Fergusson (1750-1774)**

- A direct influence on Robert Burns
- Nickname of Edinburgh – *Auld Reekie* – coined by Fergusson
  - Refers to the not-so-pleasant smell of the early 18<sup>th</sup> century Edinburgh
- Introduced 'Penny Libraries'
- Founder of The Easy Club in 1712

There were major literary contributions also from the period of the Scottish Enlightenment. One of the most important literary figures of this time is Robert Fergusson. He is not much talked about in modern times but nevertheless his contribution cannot be neglected or overlooked. He was a direct influence on Robert Burns who was credited as the national poet of Scotland. And Robert Burns is very, is an important figure for English literary history as well as we shall be taking look at a little detailed.

Robert Fergusson in fact had a nickname for the city of Edinburgh. He called it Auld Reekie and also had a poem composed with the same name. He had referred to the not-so-pleasant smell of the early 18th century. In spite of this not so positive reference, we do find that this nickname had stayed on. And Fergusson's contribution was not just in terms of his own writings, he had

introduced this idea of 'Penny Libraries'. This was a sort of an institutional library where people could come and borrow books by paying just a penny.

This was very significant in the 18th century because books continued to be extremely expensive. And they, the common people could not afford them. They were also not easily procurable. In spite of the number of publishing houses which were really high, the number of people who could afford all of these facilities were considerably low. So the penny libraries really revolutionized the way in which the commoners and their modes of thinking were getting shaped during that time. He was also the founder of one of the clubs, the Easy Club in 1712.

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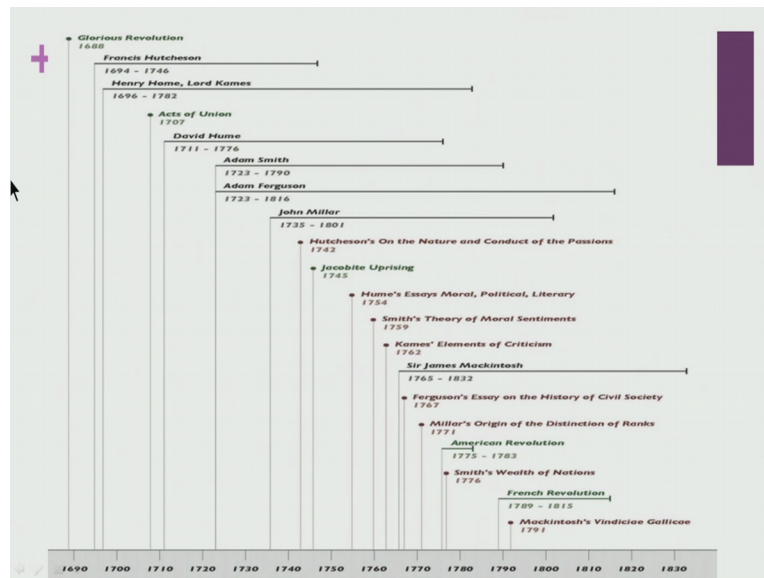


The other major literary writers of this period include James Boswell who also wrote the *Life of Samuel Johnson*. And many of these writers we shall again come back to talk about in detail when we continue our discussion on 18th century English literature. Allan Ramsay was also very significant. There is also the names of Henry Home and Hugh Blair who were hugely associated with the Scottish Enlightenment movement.

James Macpherson was a very significant historical and literary figure. He translated and also brought back a set of poems known as the Ossianic cycle of poems. This is also a form in which Scottish literary revival was taking place not just in Scotland but also in England and in the other parts of Europe. So Macpherson in that sense is an important writer whom we shall be talking about again when we talk about English literary history. Robert Burns is perhaps the most

significant in terms of not just representing the 18th century Scottish poetry but also signaling a transition from the 18th century towards romantic tendencies of the 19th century. He is also considered as the one of the national poets of Scotland.

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This is a very brief timeline of the Scottish Enlightenment movement. So we can note that over here that some of the historians also sight its beginnings from 1688 onwards with the beginning of the Glorious Revolution. And moving on we find the Act of Union of 1707 which politically united England and Scotland. They were also forming the Great Britain. We find that Hume, Adam Smith, Ferguson, John Millar, many of the writers whom we already have spoken about they all significantly contributing to the process of Scottish Enlightenment.

And we also find that there were the significant world events happening simultaneously, The American Revolution and also the French Revolution which happened respectively in 1775 to 1783 and 1789 to 1815. So we do find that Scottish Enlightenment was happening at a time when the world order itself was getting radically changed in terms of politics, economics, religion and society. The contributions and significance of the Scottish Enlightenment was not given the due attention until recently.



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But in the recent past we do find that there is a lot of research interest and lot of scholarly interest in, into this particular phenomenon now known as the Scottish Enlightenment. We find that number of books have been written about it and also the Scottish universities are also taking an active interest in teaching the world about what exactly Scottish Enlightenment and how it influenced not just Scotland but also the rest of Europe in multiple ways.

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In that context as and when we wind up, it is very important to highlight the significance of a particular article that appeared in the 1990s titled Scotland's Neglected Enlightenment which

argued that Scotland's Enlightenment was not limited to just the cities of Glasgow and Edinburgh but it was truly a national phenomenon which did not get the kind of attention that it deserved.

So moving on as we, in the forthcoming lectures as we shall be continuing our discussion on 18th century British literature, 18th century English writings and writers, we shall also note how the Scottish Enlightenment directly and indirectly contributed to the development and the emergence of particular forms of writing or particular genres or even the ways of thinking. Having said that we come to the end of today's lecture. Thank you for listening and we look forward to seeing in the next session.