

SERVICES OF SONG

'Heart-Moving Stories' Illustrated by Magic Lantern

Karen E. McAulay

Researching Scottish music publishers for my second book, I knew that four particular firms had cornered the market.¹ All were founded during the Victorian era, the youngest being Bayley & Ferguson – a Glasgow firm that started out as stationers, before diversifying into 'services of song', then sheet music and song books. Their earliest publication seems to have been one of these services – *Wee Davie*, based on a book of the same name (Fig. 1).

It was noted by 'Grianach' in the *Greenock Telegraph and Clyde Shipping Gazette* in September 1884:

"Nothing in modern literature is better suited for a service of song, at least here in Scotland, than Norman Macleod's heart-moving story of 'Wee Davie' [...] adapted to this purpose by Mr William Moodie, the choirmaster in the Barony Church [...]. It has been published in a neat form by a young Glasgow firm, that of Bayley and Ferguson, 54 Queen Street, and may be obtained in either notation. Mr Moodie has been specially fortunate in his selection of hymns, and amongst the poets whose verse comes in to illustrate the pathetic story I see the names of William T. M'Auslane and Alexander Wallace of Glasgow [...]"

There is just one copy of this elusive publication, in the National Library of Scotland. I obtained a scan, and discovered that a 'service of song' was an event, often religious, charitable or sentimental in character, in which a reader would narrate a story, interspersed with hymns for the audience (or congregation, or Sunday School), whilst a set of magic lantern slides was projected to illustrate the narrative.

I bought a few more Bayley & Ferguson services on eBay, which typify their style and content: *The Golden Key; a Musical Service* (a Christian story about a child who was literally lost and then found); *The Boy Martyr: or, 'Faithful unto Death'*; and *A Musically Illustrated Service; Biddy: a Service of Song* – all three of these arranged by James Tipton from the West Country. After spending one and a half decades researching earlier printed music, I was as enchanted as any Victorian child to find myself exploring a new 'audiovisual' medium, even if the 'audio' was provided by a live narrator and audience. Such an event must have seemed very exciting for children unaccustomed to projected images in a darkened room.

These little booklets contained both the narrated story, and the words and music for the hymns. The music could be either in 'Tonic Sol-Fa' notation (doh-re-mi, commonly taught in Victorian and early 20th-century schools, and used by many choral singers in days gone by); in normal staff notation; or both. Sometimes the script contained numbers indicating when the next slide would be shown (Figs 2 and 3).



1. Wee Davie, opening slide

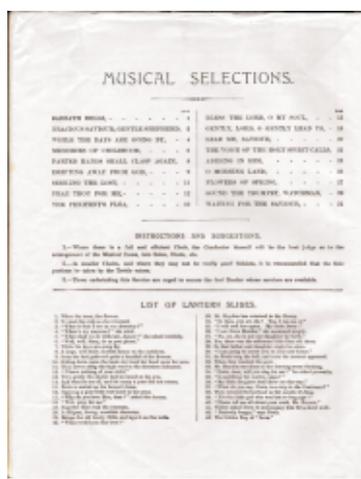
If you search *Lucerna*, 'Service' yields hundreds of entries, whilst 'Bayley & Ferguson' yields 32 texts.² Indeed, there are actually a few more than this. A number of other British publishers were also producing them, too. The other Scottish music publishers seem not to have been, and although Kerr's and Paterson's are also represented by one text each in *Lucerna*, each is described as a 'song', rather than a service. Mozart Allan seems to have eschewed the format entirely.

Whilst users of *Lucerna* may therefore have encountered services of song in passing, the format is not commonly known amongst print historians. Small, flimsy and nondescript in appearance, the leaflets constitute what librarians call 'grey literature' – ephemeral publications with far less chance of survival than the average book or song book. The booklets were very cheap: for example, *Wee Davie* and *The Boy Martyr* cost 4d. 'in either notation'. Fourpence in 1884 equates to £2.75 today.³ The profit presumably lay in the multiple copies that would have to be purchased for each event.

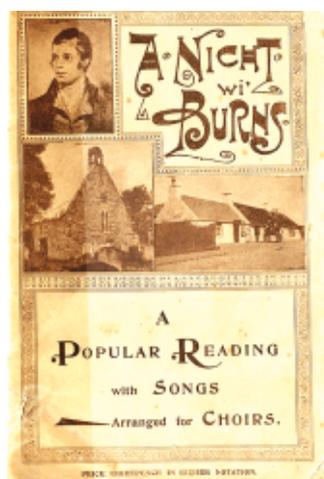
Note that 'services of song' may not always have been accompanied by magic lantern slides. A booklet in my possession, *A Nicht wi' Burns: a Popular Reading*, contains 20 songs by Robert Burns linked by narrative, and is assuredly described as a 'service of song' in the *Aberdeen Evening Express* of 18 November 1898, if not in the booklet itself. The songs are clearly arranged for choirs. However, it makes no mention of lantern slides. It does not appear to be the same publication listed in *Lucerna* from a 1926 Salvationist catalogue, since the sub-titles vary. Compare the 1893 Bayley & Ferguson booklet, Henry Charles Shelley's *A Nicht Wi' Burns: A Popular Reading, with Musical Illustrations from the Poet's Songs* (cover title: *A Nicht Wi' Burns: A Popular Reading with Songs Arranged for Choirs*) (Fig. 4), with *Lucerna's* 'Slide set record: *A Nicht Wi' Burns: His Life, Poems, and Songs* (lecture: manufacturer unknown, 73 slides, date unknown)'.



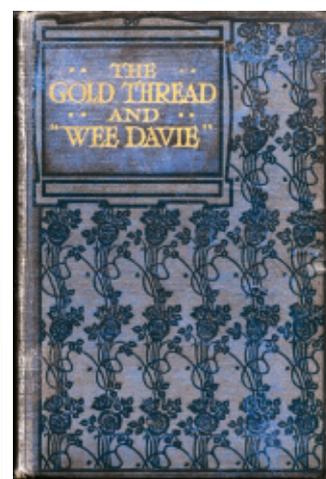
2. The Golden Key: A Musical Service, cover



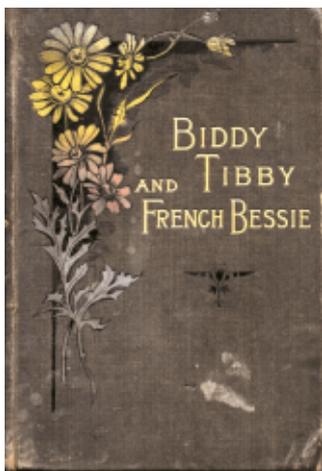
3. The Golden Key, lists of songs and slides



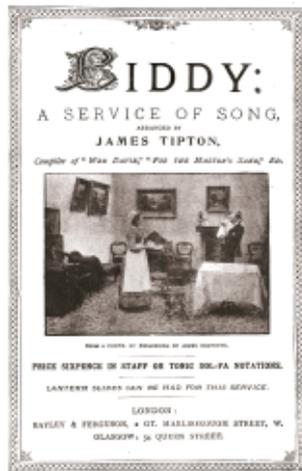
4. A Nicht wi' Burns, 1893



5. The Gold Thread and Wee Davie, book



6. Biddy, Tibby and French Bessie, book



7. Biddy: a Service of Song, arranged by James Tipton

Indeed, the services were not the only publications of this kind that Bayley & Ferguson produced. Similar, slightly chunkier booklets – not accompanying magic lantern shows – offered ‘Cantatas for Sunday School Choirs’ (advertised on the back of *The Golden Key*), and a significant number of ‘School Operettas’ from the early 1900s into the 1930s.

I explored the history of *Wee Davie* and *Biddy* in a bit more depth, discovering that both were based on sentimental stories for children: nicely bound books that would make ideal Sunday School prizes. My own eBay copies of these books had both been awarded for good attendance (Figs 5 and 6).

Norman Macleod, the author of *Wee Davie*, was the late minister of the very church where the arranger, William Moodie, would become choirmaster. Churchgoers might recognise one of Macleod’s hymns as an old favourite (no connection with *Wee Davie*): ‘Courage, brother, do not stumble’. Moodie also taught singing at Glasgow Normal School – which would later become Jordanhill teacher training college and demonstration school. It is pleasing to think that the college which became known in the 1980s for its innovative use of audiovisual materials in teaching, had had a singing instructor who edited songs for an earlier new ‘audio visual’ medium a century before.

‘Wee Davie’ was an adorable child. His father led a better, teetotal life out of love for the lad. Davie was credited with bringing both sides of the family closer together, and was loved by the entire community. Tragically, he died whilst still an infant.

Meanwhile, ‘Biddy’ was a semi-literate Irish maidservant alone in London, who was befriended by a Highland lass and later by the girl’s mother, before both girls died in hospital. The girls’ Christian faith was highlighted throughout the story, as well as their humble social position

as servants. Regional dialects featured in both stories: Scottish in *Wee Davie*, and both Scottish and Irish in *Biddy*. The author of the latter book remains a mystery, known only by their initials; moreover, the ‘S.C.P.’ on the title page of *Biddy: the Maid-of-all-Work* is given as ‘P.E.S.’ in the service of song. Perhaps it is unimportant. What is more significant is that the arranger, James Tipton, was an evangelist who lived in the south west of England (Fig. 7). Setting their sights beyond Scotland, Bayley & Ferguson established a London office before the end of the 19th century, and did not restrict themselves to Scottish contributors.

It is not improbable that Joseph Bayley and Mungo B. Ferguson had church connections; this is certainly suggested by the 40 or more ‘Services of Song for Sunday School Festivals, Etc.’ listed on the back of *Biddy*. Ferguson also subscribed to a world Sunday School Convention in 1923. But the most intriguing thing about them is that when the Queen Street, Glasgow shop finally closed in the early 1970s, a batch of evangelical hymn books, mainly from turn-of-the-century America, were donated to Glasgow’s Mitchell Library. Moody and Sankey were amongst a number of American evangelicals to visit Britain in the late 19th century. Their hymns are very similar in style to some of those in Bayley & Ferguson’s ‘services of song’. Listing the book titles in the Mitchell, and endeavouring to correlate them with the hymn sources in the service books (where given), is proving a time-consuming exercise. Since only a small proportion of Bayley & Ferguson’s output in this genre survives, it is impossible to determine whether their library donation represents source material, or simply indicates a strongly-felt Christian conviction on the part of one or both partners or perhaps even an employee.

With the advent of silent films, followed by the ‘talkies’, magic lantern shows declined in popularity, and with them, the call for ‘services of song’. It’s debatable whether Bayley & Ferguson would have felt the draught, in light of the rest of their substantial output. The cheaper booklets were balanced by middle-of-the-road and decidedly lavish bound volumes. The occasional service books that turn up on the second-hand market are merely a reminder of an era that is now long past, but closer inspection still reminds us of contemporary concerns and different cultural mores.

Dr Karen E. McAulay is a research fellow at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland. She was awarded the MLS Mervyn Heard Award in 2024 for her work on this project and is an MLS member.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Karen E. McAulay, *A Social History of Amateur Music-Making and Scottish National Identity: Scotland's Printed Music, 1880–1951* (Music in Nineteenth-Century Britain), Routledge, London, 2024
2. A song book brings the Bayley & Ferguson count in *Lucerna* up to 33
3. Kate Rose Morley, ‘Historical UK Inflation Rates and Price Conversion Calculator’, www.iamkate.com/data/uk-inflation (accessed 24 June 2022)