

Hard Vrocht Grun Project



Objection and Exemption



Loss, Return and Commemoration



Work, Food and Poverty in Wartime

**RESOURCE PACKS**



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**Dockens Afore His Peers**

A resource for exploring the exemption tribunal poem by Charles Murray

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## **Note to teachers**

The 'Hard Vrocht Grun' resource was designed to be used by secondary school teachers with S3 classes to look at the effect of the First World War on North East Scotland. It does so in a creative cross-curricular way that promotes skills development in line with the Curriculum for Excellence. The topic is of course of interest to many subject areas, (notably, but not exclusively English) and other levels of the Curriculum. By exploring the work of poets like Charles Murray the resource could very easily be used as part of the SQA Scots Language Awards, which are available at SQCF levels 3 – 6 and can be offered from S3 into the senior phase.

The following materials have been produced by Aberdeenshire Council's Heritage Education Partnership in collaboration with Education Scotland. They use the outline methodology of the main 'Hard Vrocht Grun' resource, and are suggested as starting points for teachers of English, History or any other subject to explore Murray's poem 'Dockens Afore His Peers' and its wider historical context.

It would be perfectly possible and desirable in some contexts to use the materials as part of joint working between two subject areas. They are not differentiated although clearly some tasks will be more challenging for some learners than others. Those learners with a knowledge and understanding of Scots will find certain activities easier than those with none. It is intended that teachers will choose judiciously which activities to undertake with which learners or groups of learners.

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**Heritage Education Partnership**  
  
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View the **Hard Vrocht Grun** resource at

<http://www.nefa.net/hvg/index.htm>

*Dockens Afore His Peers*  
*(Exemption tribunal)*

Nae sign o thow yet. Ay, that's me, John Watt o Dockenhill:  
We've had the war throu han afore, at markets ower a gill.  
O ay, I'll sit, birze ben a bit. Hae, Briggie, pass the snuff;  
Ye winna hinner lang wi me, an speer a lot o buff,  
For I've to see the saiddler yet, an Watchie, honest stock,  
To gar him sen his prentice up to sort the muckle knock,  
Syne cry upo the banker's wife an leave some settin eggs,  
An tell the ferrier o the quake that's vrang about the legs.  
It's yafa wedder, Mains, for Mairch, wi snaw an frost an win,  
The ploos are roustin i the fur, an a the wark's ahin.  
Ye've grun yersels an ken the tyauve it is to wirk a ferm,  
An a the fash we've had wi fouk gyaun aff afore the term;  
We've nane to spare for sojerin, that's nae oor wark ava,  
We've rents to pey, an beasts to feed, an corn to sell an saw;  
Oonless we get the seed in seen, faur will we be for meal?  
An faur will London get the beef they leuk for aye at Yeel?  
There's men aneuch in sooters' shops, an chiels in masons' yards,  
An counter-loupers, sklaters, vrichts, an quarrymen, an cyaurds,  
To fill a reg'ment in a week, without gyaun vera far,  
Jist shove them in ahind the pipes, an tell them that it's "War";  
For gin aul Scotland's at the bit, theres's naethin for't but 'list.  
Some mayna like it vera sair, but never heed, insist.  
Bit feich, I'm haverin on like this, an a I need's a line  
To say there's men that maun be left, an ye've expemptit mine.  
Fat said ye? Fatna fouk hae I enoo ae Dockenhill?  
It's just a wastrie o your time, to rin them throu, but still –

First there's the wife – "Pass yer," ye say. Saul! had she been a lass  
Ye hadna rappit oot sae quick, young laird, to lat her pass,  
That may be hoo ye spak the streen, fan ye was playin cairds,  
But seein tenants tak at times their menners fae their lairds,  
I'll tell ye this, for sense an thrift, for skeel wi hens an caur,  
Gin ye'd her marrow for a wife, ye wouldna be the waur.  
Oor maiden's neist, ye've heard o her, new hame fae buirdin squeal,  
Faur she saw mair o beuks than broth, an noo she's never weel.  
But fan she's playin ben the hoose, there's little wurd o dwaams,  
For she's the rin o a the tunes, strathspeys, an sangs, an psalms;  
O "Even" an "Neander" baith, ye seen can hae aneuch,  
But "Hobble Jeannie" gars me loup, an crack my thooms, an hooch.  
Weel, syne we hae the kitchie deem, that milks an mak's the maet,  
She disna aft haud doon the deese, she's at it ear an late,  
She cairries seed, an braks the muck, an gies a han to hyow,  
An churns, an bakes, an syes the so'ens, an fyles there's peats to rowe.  
An fan the maiden's friens cry in, she'll maks a cup o tay,  
An butter scones, and dicht her face, an cairry ben the tray,  
She's big an brosy, reid and roch, an swippert as she's stoot,  
Gie her a kilt instead o cotts, an thon's the gran recruit.  
There's Francie syne, oor auldest loon, we pat him on for grieve,  
An, fegs, we sould be in a soss, gin he should up an leave;  
He's eident, an has lots o can, an cheery wi the men,  
An I'm sae muckle oo about wi markets till atten.  
We've twa chaps syne to wirk the horse, as sweir as sweir can be,  
They fussle better than they ploo, they're aul an mairret tee,  
An baith hae hooses on the ferm, an Francie never kens  
Foo muckle corn gyangs hame at nicht, to fatten up their hens.

The Baillie syne, a peer-hoose geet, nae better than a feel,  
He slivvers, an his sic a mant, an ae clog-fit as weel;  
He's barely sense to muck the byre, an cairry in the scull,  
An park the kye, an cogue the caur, an scutter wi the bull.  
Weel, that's them a – I didna hear – the laddie i the gig?  
That's Johnnie, he's a littlan jist, for a he leuks sae big.  
Fyn a, he isna twenty yet – ay, weel, he's maybe near't;  
Ower young to lippen wi a gun, the crater would be feart.  
He's hardly throu his squeelin yet, an noo we hae a plan  
To lat him simmer i the toon, an learn to mizzer lan.  
Fat? Gar him 'list! Oor laddie 'list? 'Twould kill his mither, that,  
To think o Johnnie in a trench awa in fat-ye-ca't;  
We would hae sic a miss at hame, gin he was hine awa,  
We'd raither lat ye clean the toon o ony ither twa;  
Ay, tak the wife, the dother, deem, the Baillie wi the mant,  
Tak Francie, an the mairret men, but John we canna want.  
Fat does he dee? Ye micht as weel spear fat I dee maysel,  
The things he hisna time to dee is easier to tell;  
He dells the yard, an wi the scythe cuts tansies on the brae,  
An fan a ruck gyangs throu the mull, he's thrang at wispin stra,  
He sits aside me at the mart, an fan a feeder's sell't  
Tak's doon the wecht, an leuks the beuk for fat it's worth fan fell't;  
He helps me to red up the dask, he taks a han at loo,  
An sorts the shalt, an yokes the gig, and drives me fan I'm fou.  
Hoot, Mains, hae mind, I'm doon for you some sma thing wi the bank;  
Aul Larickleys, I saw ye throu, an this is a my thank;  
An Gutteryloan, that time ye broke, to Dockenhill ye cam –  
"Total exemption." Thank ye sirs. Fat say ye till a dram?

**Difficult vocabulary – in order as it appears in the poem**

thow	thaw
gill	a dram. Literally, a unit of measure: about $\frac{3}{4}$ of an imperial gill. $\frac{1}{5}$ or $\frac{1}{4}$ of an imperial gill was the standard measure of spirits in Scotland before metrification. Shorthand for $\frac{1}{3}$ of a Scots gill – ie a dram
birze ben a bit	move along a bit
buff	nonsense
knock	clock (pronounced <i>k-nock</i> )
settin eggs	clutch of eggs a hen sits on to hatch. These need to be fertilized by a cockerel. Many people would have kept hens for eggs, but without a cockerel, they would never produce chicks and in turn more hens. Someone with a cockerel might give or sell fertilized eggs which another hen would then sit on until they hatched.
ferrier	blacksmith, horse doctor, vet
quake	heifer
vrang	wrong
fur	furrow. NB “The ploos are roustin i the fur” is metaphorical – equipment would not really be left outside to be damaged in this way.
the term	the period from one feein fair to another, when men signed up to work on a given farm until the next fair. If men left before the end of the term, it was virtually impossible to replace them before the next fair.
corn	oats
sooters	cobblers
counter-louper	draper’s assistant
vricht	wright, joiner, carpenter
cyaurds	tinkers
caur	calves (singular caufie)
marrow	match, equal
“Even” and “Neander”	prolific psalm writers
“Hobble Jeannie”	folk tune
deese	wooden seat or settle
haud doon the deese	rest, take it easy
syes	strains liquid, pours milk through a sieve
so’ens/ sowens	dish made by steeping and fermenting the husks or siftings of oats in water, then boiling
rowe	verb - wheel (in a barrow)
brosy	stout, well-fed
swippert	nimble
cotts	petticoats
soos	mess
eident	diligent, industrious
can	ability
sweir	lazy, unwilling
geet	child
mant	stammer

clog-fit	club foot
scull	basket for peats or produce
park the kye	put the cattle in a field
cogue	wooden pail, bucket
cogue the caur	feed the calves from a bucket
scutter	do messy or difficult work
lippen	trust, depend on
toon	town, farmstead
dells	digs
tansies	ragwort
thrang	busy
wispin stra	making ropes from straw
feeder	ox fattened for market
fell't	killed
dask	desk
taks a han at loo	plays cards. The game is "Loo" or "Lanterloo"

### **Conscription**

The First World War of 1914-1919 was characterised by a fervent sense of national and individual obligation to fight or otherwise contribute to the 'war effort'. In the first year or so of the war many thousands volunteered for war related services (e.g. Armed Forces, Red Cross etc), including many men from agriculture, but this flood reduced as the war went on.

In 1916 the Government introduced conscription, a law requiring men between 18 and 41 to serve in the Armed Forces. A 'conscience clause' was included in the law for those who chose not to bear arms for moral, philosophical, or religious reasons, and these men could apply for an exemption from conscription. Other men could also be exempted on grounds of ill health, family poverty, or being involved in work considered essential to the war effort or their community.

Anyone wishing an exemption from conscription, either for themselves, their family members, or people that worked for them, had to attend a tribunal to justify why they would not enlist. Those that lost their argument had to enlist or be prosecuted in court, but those that were exempted from conscription were viewed by some as 'shirkers' and cowards that were dodging their duty whilst others were putting themselves in danger to protect the nation's security.

### **Food supplies**

In 1916-18 food supplies were gradually squeezed through a combination of them being diverted to the Armed Forces, spiralling inflation, and also the increasing intensity of the U-Boat campaign against merchant shipping bringing supplies from America.

Agriculture in 1916 was not a 'reserved occupation' in the conscription scheme, and this led to complaints from farmers that their efforts to keep the country fed were being undermined. The point was well made and Agriculture became reserved in 1917. This helps to date the poem to 1916.

## What is happening in the poem?

Reading the *Hard Vrocht Grun* 'Objection and Exemption' pack (especially Bundle 2), will provide more background knowledge to help with understanding of the poem.

[Click here to view](#)

1. In a few sentences, summarise what happens in the poem.
2. Name all the characters who are present at the tribunal.

## Reading for Understanding, Analysis and Evaluation

1. Why do you think the poem begins with "Nae sign o thow yet?" (line 1)
2. Why does Dockens suggest that he has been drinking with the men of the tribunal in the past? (line 2)
3. What does the expression "birze ben a bit" suggest about how Dockens sees the tribunal's formality? (line 3)
4. Where do you think "Watchie" got this nickname? (line 5-6)
5. Why might Dockens do the banker's wife the favour of giving her some 'settin eggs'? (line 7)
6. What do we learn about the difficulties of a farmer's life? (line 9-16)
7. How does Dockens suggest his patriotism? What is the irony here? (line 20-22)
8. How important to the National interest are the occupations Dockens lists? (line 17-18). What point is the poet trying to make here, do you think?
9. Why is Dockens proud of his wife? (line 31-32)
10. What do we learn about Dockens's daughter? (line 33-38)
11. Explain why the "kitchie deem...disna aft haud doo the dees." Which technique is the poet using here? (line 39-44)
12. Why is Francie essential to the running of the farm, according to Dockens? (line 47-50)
13. What are Dockens's criticisms of his horsemen? (line 51-54)
14. What are Dockens's criticisms of his Baillie? (line 55-58)
15. How does Dockens try to put Johnnie beyond the reach of the army? (line 60)
16. From what Dockens says next, (line 61-62) what can we infer the tribunal members have said?
17. How can we tell that Johnnie is well loved in the family? (line 65-69)
18. Do you think Johnnie is essential to the running of the farm? Explain your answer. (Line 73-78)
19. How does Dockens finally obtain his exemption? (line 79-81)
20. Why is the final line an appropriate ending to the poem? (line 82)

## What do we learn about what kind of character Dockens is?

1. Write and / or draw a brief description of the poem's speaker.
2. What do you think Murray's opinion of him is? Explain your answer.

### **The wider context for the poem: further enquiry**

(See the section on *Sources for further information and help* for advice on answering these questions)

1. From all the errands listed and the jobs mentioned in the poem, what do we learn about rural life in the early part of the twentieth century?  
Choose one of these areas of life to find out more about.
2. What evidence is there in the poem that Dockens and, presumably, other farmers like him, is well-off financially?
3. What pressures or problems does Dockens, and other farmers like him, face?  
Find out from sources like books on farming, the North East Folklore Archive, and the Elphinstone Institute Kist what challenges farmers faced during the First World War
4. The Baillie is referred to as a “peer-hoose geet”. Find out more about how the Poor Relief system and Poor Houses in Scotland operated at the beginning of the twentieth century .
5. Using other resources like old newspapers and Joyce Walker’s book on the Dyce Work Camp in your local library, what attitudes did people have in your area to farmers seeking exemptions for their workers?
6. Find out more about food supplies during the War years and how these were affected by the factors mentioned in the section in the “food supplies” box above.
7. Using the letters relating to the Huntly and Deer Tribunals in ‘Objection and Exemption’ Bundle 2, and the information you’ve already gathered, who do you think has the better case – the farming community, or the military authorities? Explain your answer.

### **Choose a creative response to the poem**

1. We only hear Dockens voice in the poem: can you fill in the gaps in the dialogue? Write a short play script of the Tribunal discussion or take turns to improvise the missing dialogue in a role-play.  
Look at a published play script to remind yourself of the correct layout. You should include the names of the speakers down the right hand side. You do not need to use speech marks. You should consider including: stage directions, notes on set and costume.  
In a role-play you should remember that you are pretending to be a given character. Speak in the first person. React to what others say.
2. Write a dramatic script for another, fictional, tribunal based on the information and viewpoints expressed in ‘Dockens...’ and the Huntly and Deer District dispute documents (in ‘Objection and Exemption’ Bundle 2). This could then be performed, or turned into a comic strip / piece of animation.  
Look at a published play script to remind yourself of the correct layout. You should include the names of the speakers down the right hand side. You do not need to use speech marks. You should consider including: stage directions, notes on set and costume. You should take account of how these individuals could look, dress, act etc.  
Look at a published comic strip to remind yourself of the correct layout. You should put the words spoken into speech bubbles. You should put other necessary words into text boxes within each frame. Make your drawings clear and simple. Consider the use of colour to clarify your meaning and to add drama.  
There are computer packages available to help you to create comic strips. Ask your teacher what is available in your school.

There are simple packages available to allow you to create animations using a computer. Ask your teacher what is available in your school.

3. Have a roleplay debate on the viewpoints around exemption. Use Doric as far as possible.

In a role-play you should remember that you are pretending to be a given character. Speak in the first person. React to what others say. Make sure you are clear about the views of the character you are adopting before you begin. You could make notes on this to help you.

4. Draw the characters mentioned in the poem using the descriptions you are given. Label your drawings.
5. This poem gives us the public views that Dockens provides before the Tribunal, and these are geared towards preventing his staff from being called up. Is it possible we haven't found out what Dockens truly feels and believes? Discuss this in a group, using all the documents at your disposal, as well as your knowledge and understanding of the poem.

Consider:

does he support the war?

how fair does he think conscription is, both generally and towards agriculture?

how much is emotion affecting his defence of his staff, and how far does he go in that defence (e.g. lying about how capable they are and important their work is)?

how could conscription of his staff affect him and his livelihood, and what could his real emotions be about the situation - anger, fear, sadness etc?

how justifiable are his tactics in the circumstances of his emotions?

5b Use your notes from the discussion to write Dockens's diary, in which he outlines his true feelings after the tribunal OR create a monologue, in verse or prose in which he prepares what he is going to say, revealing his true feelings as he does so.

In a diary, people can write what they are really thinking as the intended audience is the writer him or herself. You should write in the first person, as if you were Dockens. Begin with the date and 'Dear Diary,' if you wish.

A monologue is one person talking to him or herself. In drama this is used to show the audience what that character is thinking. Stage directions can be included. You could look at published monologues for models of how to write in this way.

A dramatic monologue is a type of poem where one character is speaking to an unseen audience. He or she tends to reveal things about him or herself which he or she does not intend to reveal. You could read published dramatic monologues to see how poets use this form.

## Scots Language Awards

### Scots Words

Identify five words in the poem which interest you.

- what kind you find out about the origins of each word?
- are there similar or related words in other European languages?
- what is the English equivalent for each word?

### Features of Scots

“Ye **winna** hinner lang wi me” (line 4)

- which feature of Scots is being used here?
- can you find further examples in the poem?

“The ploos are **roustin** i the fur” (line 10)

- which feature of Scots is being used here?
- can you find further examples in the poem?

“**that's nae** oor wark ava” (line 13)

- which feature of Scots is being used here?
- can you use this feature in a sentence about the poem?

“Bit **feich**, I'm haverin on like this” (line 23)

- which feature of Scots is being used here?
- can you find further examples in the poem?

“an ye've **expemptit** mine” (line 24)

- which feature of Scots is being used here?
- can you find further examples in the poem?

“for skeel wi hens an caur” (line 31)

- which feature of Scots is being used here?
- can you find further examples in the poem? (there is one which is the same as its English equivalent and one plural which is the same as its singular)

“an **thon's** the gran recruit” (line 46)

- which feature of Scots is being used here?

“we pat him on for grieve” (line 47)

- which feature of Scots is being used here?
- can you account for there being no further examples in this poem?

How many examples of the use of initial *f*- rather than *wh*- in North Eastern Scots can you find in this poem?

## **Sources for further help and information**

*Hard Vrocht Grun resource*: The Objection and Exemption Topic Booklet, and Document Bundle 2 provide background information and primary source material that is relevant to understanding 'Dockens Afore His Peers'. This is available at <http://www.nefa.net/hvg/>

### **Library**

Aberdeenshire Libraries have a wide range of newspapers from the time that include articles and letters to the editor which indicate the different attitudes people held about conscription and its effect on agriculture. Local libraries provide access to newspapers covering their area, whilst the Library HQ provides access to all the historical newspapers that operated in the Aberdeenshire Area. More information on these can be found on page 36 of the Objection and Exemption Topic booklet.

The Library staff can provide advice on books and other sources that could be relevant to your work (e.g. on farming life during the War), so you should ask them for help. Contact details for the Local Studies Library are on page 36 of the Objection and Exemption Topic Booklet.

They could also arrange for you to see copies of the following items that could help:

Article "Is Huntly a Funkhole?" published in the Huntly Express, 23 February 1917

"Farm Life in North East Scotland: 1840-1914", by Ian Carter (Edinburgh, 1997)

"Scottish Country Life" by Alexander Fenton, (Edinburgh, 1989)

"Farming", by Gavin Sprott (part of the Scotland's Past in Action series), (Edinburgh, 1995)

"Ours the Harvest: A Life of Charles Murray" by Alex R Scott (Aberdeen, 2003)

"Hamewith: The Complete Poems of Charles Murray" by Charles Murray (Aberdeen, 1979)

"A cloak of conscience?: Dyce Work Camp, conscientious objectors and the public of NE Scotland, 1916" by Joyce Walker (Aberdeen, 2011)

*Other Aberdeenshire organisations* – there will be other information outside of the HVG resource and local newspapers that could help with your work on the poem. Some of it could be held at other organisations such as the Archives, Registrars, Museums, and local heritage organisations, so it would be worth contacting them. See pp 35-39 of the Objection and Exemption Topic Booklet for contact details. There may also be information at Aberdeenshire's Archaeology service about farming during the War period (<http://www.aberdeenshire.gov.uk/archaeology/>)

### **Web**

The web can be a great research tool, but only if it is used correctly and checked for reliability. A general Google or Wikipedia search is unlikely to provide anything of help with understanding this poem, and it will be more helpful when you explore beyond a general search. The following links are worth exploring:

*The Elphinstone Kist* has some useful information about life in North East Scotland at the beginning of the 20th Century that could be helpful - <http://www.abdn.ac.uk/elphinstone/kist/>

It also has a section on Work could help too - <http://bit.ly/1GuMAEb>

*The North East Folklore Archive* (NEFA) is a site that is also worth exploring - <http://www.nefa.net/archive/index.htm>

Its section on The Land could also be helpful - <http://bit.ly/1HiySmA>

*Poor Relief and Poorhouses* - Some information is available at <http://bit.ly/1cA6j7Q>  
and <http://www.workhouses.org.uk/Scotland/>

## Curriculum For Excellence Experiences and Outcomes

The following Es and Os apply in addition to those noted in the main 'Hard Vrocht Grun' resource:

Outcome Statement	Curriculum Area
I regularly select and read, listen to or watch texts for enjoyment and interest, and I can express how well they meet my needs and expectations and give reasons, with evidence, for my personal response. I can identify sources to develop the range of my reading LIT 3-11a	Literacy and English> Reading> Enjoyment and Choice
Through developing my knowledge of context clues, punctuation, grammar and layout, I can read unfamiliar texts with increasing fluency, understanding and expression. <b>ENG 3-12a</b>	Literacy and English> Reading> tools for reading
I can select and use the strategies and resources I find most useful before I read, and as I read, to monitor and check my understanding.  <b>*Responsibility of all</b> <b>LIT 3-13a</b>	Literacy and English> Reading> tools for reading
Using what I know about the features of different types of texts, I can find, select, sort, summarise, link and use information from different sources.  <b>*Responsibility of all</b> <b>LIT 3-14a</b>	Literacy and English> Reading> Finding and Using Information
To show my understanding, I can comment, with evidence, on the content and form of short and extended texts, respond to literal, inferential and evaluative questions and other types of close reading tasks. <b>ENG 3-17a</b>	Literacy and English> Reading> Understanding, analysing and evaluating
To help me develop an informed view, I am exploring the techniques used to influence my opinion. I can recognise persuasion and assess the reliability of information and credibility and value of my sources.  <b>*Responsibility of all</b> <b>LIT 3-18a</b>	Literacy and English> Reading> Understanding, analysing and evaluating
I can: discuss and evaluate the structure, characterisation and/or setting using some supporting evidence; identify the main theme of the text and recognise the relevance this has to my own and others' experiences; identify and comment on aspects of the writer's style and other features appropriate to genre using some relevant evidence.	Literacy and English> Reading> Understanding, analysing and evaluating

<p><b>ENG 3-19a</b></p>	
<p>I enjoy creating texts of my choice and I am developing my own style. I can regularly select subject, purpose, format and resources to suit the needs of my audience.</p> <p><b>*Responsibility of all</b></p> <p><b>LIT 3-20a</b></p>	<p>Literacy and English&gt; Writing&gt; Enjoyment and Choice</p>
<p>I can use notes and other types of writing to generate and develop ideas, retain and recall information, explore problems, make decisions, generate and develop ideas or create original text. I recognise when it is appropriate to quote from sources and when I should put points into my own words. I can acknowledge my sources appropriately.</p> <p><b>*Responsibility of all</b></p> <p><b>LIT 3-25a</b></p>	<p>Literacy and English&gt; Writing&gt; Organising and Using Information</p>
<p>By considering the type of text I am creating, I can independently select ideas and relevant information for different purposes, and organise essential information or ideas and any supporting detail in a logical order. I can use suitable vocabulary to communicate effectively with my audience.</p> <p><b>*Responsibility of all</b></p> <p><b>LIT 3-26a</b></p>	<p>Literacy and English&gt; Writing&gt; Organising and Using Information</p>
<p>I can engage and/or influence readers through my use of language, style and tone as appropriate to genre.</p> <p><b>ENG 3-27a</b></p>	<p>Literacy and English&gt; Writing&gt; Creating Texts</p>