



BOLTON HEARSE

Bolton Kirk Session records of April 1783 register a resolution that the heritors purchase "a new fashionable hearse out of the funds belonging to the poor." This hearse was purchased by November 1783 and in that same year it is said to have brought the body of the 10th Lord Blantyre from Bath, Somerset. Robert Burns' mother, his brother Gilbert and sister Annabella, were all conveyed to their last resting place in Bolton Kirkyard in this hearse. It was in use in the parish of Bolton till 1844 but remained in the hearse house until it was donated to the Royal Scottish Museum in 1932.

The coachwork of the hearse is a composite structure, the hearse body being fitted on to an under-carriage which is probably that of a family coach of the middle 17th Century. Originally the under-carriage had a post at each corner from which the coach body was slung by leather straps. The maker or fitter of the hearse body cut away the two front posts and substituted curved wooden ones, carved so as to resemble laminated iron springs, but springing was still achieved as in the original by leather straps.

The style of the roof was probably influenced by the contemporary Chinese-Chippendale taste in furnishings. The sides are decorated to include "Memento Mori" a skull — remember that you must die — and "Hora Fugit" an hour glass — the hour flies.

The workmanship of the hearse body is distinctly inferior to that of the earlier under-carriage with its straked iron tyres (i.e. made in pieces) and believed to be the oldest surviving road vehicle in Scotland.