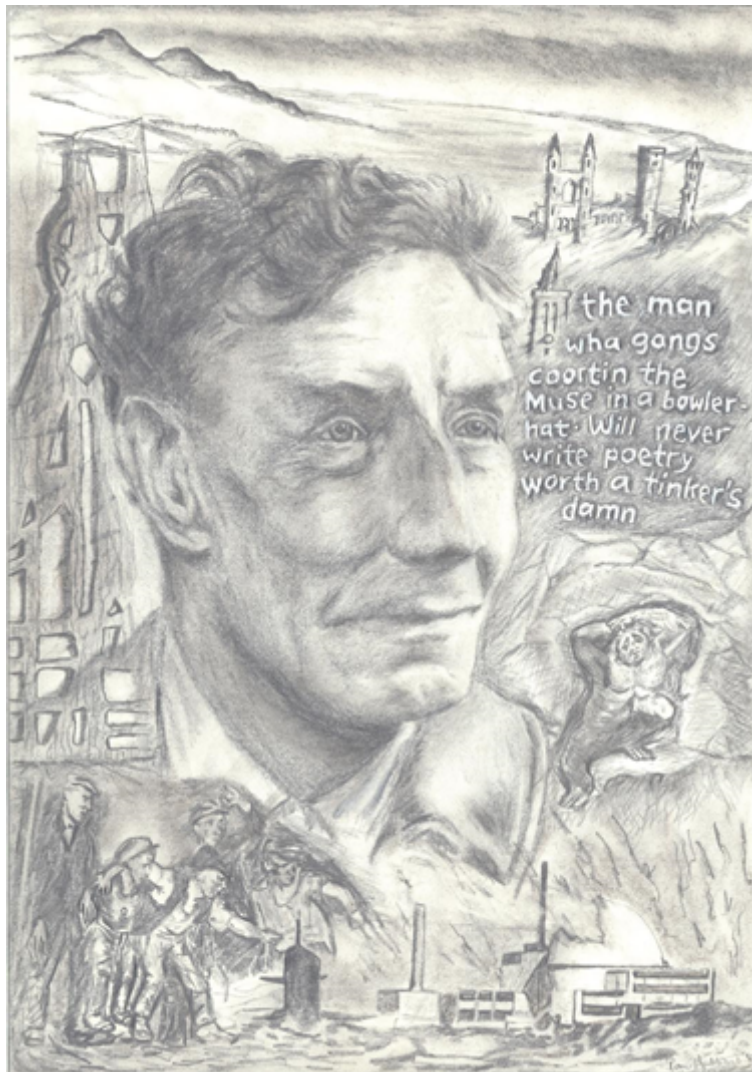

From Montsou to Bowhill: Joe Corrie's Antecedents

By Tom Hubbard



A portrait of Joe Corrie, by Tom Hubbard.

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your attention to the CD *The Joe Corrie Project* recorded by the present-day Bowhill Players, that's to say Willie Hershaw and his fellow musicians, where you can hear Corrie's poems fitted naturally to powerful tunes.

Donald Campbell has written that 'Joe Corrie did not write for an audience that attended first nights in evening dress – as many did in those days – nor did he expect his plays to be the subject of university seminars.' Well, here we are. Of course, the denunciation of 'difficult' poetry can go too far, and risk inadvertently pandering to the populist Unenlightenment of our own times. I'm thinking way back, too, to Tolstoy's dogmatic insistence that the only valid art was that which could be immediately apprehended by Russian peasants, so that meant for Tolstoy, Shakespeare was crap. George Orwell counter-denounced Tolstoy's attitude as aiming 'to narrow the range of human consciousness' – in today's parlance, dumbing-down, the patronising assumption that working folk aren't up to the more probing works of literature and the other arts. But I would put it to you that while Corrie's work might not be 'intellectual', it has keen intellect behind it, and while it may not be the most obvious carrion for academics to pick over, it illuminates no less than say Zola or Lawrence certain corners of experience that the literary world has on the whole been content to leave in the subterranean dark.