Was real Frankenstein a Scot from Windsor?

Thesis claims mentor of Shelley inspired wife's novel, writes Celia Hall

Mary Shelley: ‘silent listener’

of Mary Shelley’s thunder because the book is a work of genius.”

He argues that Mary Shelley’s interest was primarily with the moral and social implications of her story, which was written in 1816-17, and that the details of the science are sketchy.

“Some details of the novel’s origins were later to emerge in her introduction to the revised single-column edition of 1831, where she describes how she was a ‘silent listener’ to the long philosophical discussions of her husband with Lord Byron,” he writes.

In her own words, Mary Shelley described the germ of her idea in which she saw the “hideous phantom of a man stretched out and then of the working of some powerful engine shows signs of life and stir with an uneasy half-vital motion”.

There is good evidence that Lind — an obscure doctor, who should not be confused with his cousin of the same name, the “father of nautical medicine” — carried out the frog experiments pioneered by the Italian physician and physicist Luigi Galvani.

Mr Goulding reveals that Lind was a member of the court circle at Windsor and demonstrated the experiments to George III and his family. In private correspondence he suggested the use of electric shocks to cure the king’s madness.

Mr Goulding says that, according to accounts by his son, Lind’s study was full of scientific paraphernalia of the time. “There were telescopes, galvanic batteries, daggers, electrical machines and all the divers apparatus which a philosopher is supposed to possess.”

Shelley, as a student at Oxford, had rooms full of similar objects, including “an electrical machine, an air pump, the galvanic trough, a solar microscope and a small glass retort above an argand lamp”.

Shelley’s admiration for Lind is not in question. He is Zonaras in the poem of the same name and described by the poet as a beloved friend with silver white hair “and lips where heavenly smiles would hang and blend with his wise words”.

Mr Goulding concludes: “Notwithstanding Mary Shelley’s own talent and her night of inspiration in 1816, we might now give some credit to the time spent six years previously by her husband-to-be in the study of a retired Scots physician in Windsor.”

Peter Cushing in The Curse of Frankenstein. The real doctor was more benign, argues a Ph...