

15. History of the County.

The early history of Renfrewshire is largely a matter of conjecture. Two thousand years ago the district was inhabited by a tribe called the Damnonii. They are usually referred to as Celts, but we have already indicated the probability that Celtic blood may not have been nearly so prominent in Scotland as Celtic speech and culture. The county lay somewhat off the main line of the Roman invasion, so that remains of the Roman occupation are not nearly so numerous as they are for example in Lanarkshire, through the heart of which ran one of the main Roman roads. Some coins and vases, however, have been found, and there was a camp at Paisley, this town being generally identified with the Roman station of Vanduara, although Skene maintains that this was at Loudoun in the Irvine

valley. The mists veiling the history of the county in Roman times are thick enough, but after the withdrawal of the legions they settle down still blacker. Almost all we know with certainty is that the Britons took possession of the district again, and it formed part of the kingdom of Strathclyde, the capital of which was Alclwyd or Dunbreatan (hill of the Britons), now known as Dumbarton.

Christianity had been introduced in the time of the Romans, but after their withdrawal the inhabitants lapsed largely into Paganism. In the sixth century, however, a number of monks from Ireland settled in the county and founded churches. Among them was the good St Mirin who laboured long and faithfully at Paisley. St Barchan and St Fillan, the patron saints of Kilbarchan and Kilallan, were the best known of the other monks. The arm of St Fillan was carried in a case at the Battle of Bannockburn, and this holy relic of the Renfrewshire monk helped to win the victory for the Scots. Another saint was given the credit of the great victory over Somerled, Lord of the Isles, that took place at Renfrew in 1164. Several years before, Somerled had devastated Glasgow, and the bishop had prayed earnestly to St Mungo to hurl divine vengeance on the spoiler's head. Somerled landed at Renfrew and marched half-way to Paisley, where he was slain and his army totally defeated.

Renfrewshire was the ancestral home of the founders of the Royal House of Stewart, whose blood runs in the veins of our present king. When David I returned to Scotland after helping Maud in the Barons' War he was

accompanied by Walter FitzAlan, who was made High Steward of Scotland, and was given lands by the king, which included almost the whole of Renfrewshire. This was in accordance with the whole feudal policy of David, who had been imbued with Norman ideas and culture at the court of Henry I. Therefore we find during his



David I and Malcolm IV

(From the *Kelso Charter*)

reign an influx of Normans into Scotland, who soon settled down in permanent residence, and founded some of the most powerful families in the country. For example, Walter gave grants of land to his own friends—Eaglesham to Robert de Montgomery, ancestor of the Earls of Eglinton; part of Mearns to Herbert de

Maxwell; and Nether Pollok to John de Maxwell, all well known and honoured names in the west of Scotland.

Walter the Steward brought with him from England thirteen monks who were settled in Paisley and were given lands and houses, their possessions extending as far as Prestwick. In the twelfth century the monastery became the powerful Abbey of Paisley, which dominated the religious life of the county until the Reformation. Walter's descendants became hereditary Stewards of the kingdom, and we find their names connected henceforth with practically all the great events of Scottish history. A band of Paisley men under Alexander Stewart, great grandson of the first Walter, came on the scene at a critical time, and helped to gain the glorious victory of the Battle of Largs over King Haco of Norway. James the High Steward, son of Alexander, made an alliance with Robert the Bruce, Earl of Carrick, and staunchly supported his claims to the throne of Scotland. His name, however, stands first on the Ragman Roll, which contains the names of all those who swore fealty to Edward I after the submission of Balliol. His son Walter, the sixth Steward, was an ardent and powerful supporter of the cause of the younger Bruce, and distinguished himself by his bravery at Bannockburn. His services were rewarded by the hand of the Princess Marjory, daughter of King Robert the Bruce, and their son ascended the throne as Robert II. Walter shared with Douglas the regency of Scotland when Bruce was campaigning in Ireland, and until his death was ever to the fore against the "auld enemy" across the border.

Walter's son (the future king) was a worthy successor. In his young days he fought gallantly against the hereditary foe. In the campaign against Edward III he took a prominent part, and was one of the leaders at the disastrous battle of Halidon Hill in 1333. He was an elderly man when the death of David II without heirs gave him the crown of Scotland. Though brave and kindly, he was not energetic enough to keep the curb on the fierce and turbulent Scottish nobles. To this day the heir to the British throne claims the titles of Steward of Scotland and Baron of Renfrew.

Scotland's greatest patriot was a native of Renfrewshire. Sir William Wallace was born at Elderslie near Paisley, and the house in which he was born is still pointed out. Most of the building is of course of much later date, but part of the massive basement may possibly have been in existence when the great warrior was born. Until fifty years ago there stood near the building a mighty tree known as Wallace's oak, and tradition says that in its branches Wallace and three hundred men hid from the English. The family was an Ayrshire one, Riccarton having been founded by Richard Wallace, and thus we find that many of Wallace's adventures are associated with the Irvine valley and other parts of Ayrshire, while few are recorded as having occurred in Renfrew.

One of the descendants of Robert de Montgomery, who received from Walter the first Steward a grant of lands at Eaglesham, is famous for the part he played at Otterburn, where he captured Percy the leader of the English :

“I will not yield to a braken bush
Nor yet will I yield to a brier,
But I would yield to Earl Douglas,
Or Sir Hugh the Montgomery, if he were here.

As soon as he knew it was Montgomery
He stuck his sword's point in the gronde;
The Montgomery was a courteous knight
And quickly took him by the honde.”

There are variations of the ballad giving different readings, one stating that Sir Hugh was slain, another that he was taken prisoner. It seems probable that Sir Hugh was slain but that his father Sir John was the captor of Hotspur. Sir John Montgomery acquired the estates of Eglinton and Ardrossan by marriage, and thus from him, but through a female branch, is descended the present Earl of Eglinton. The connection of the Royal House of Britain with Renfrew has been already explained, but the county touches the kingly line at another point, again through the great Stewart family. The third son of the second Walter, High Steward of Scotland, married the daughter of Robert de Croc, Lord of Crocstoun (Crookston) and Darnley, and founded the Stewart family of Darnley in Renfrewshire. The descendants became Earls of Lennox, and one of the family, Lord Darnley, was the husband of Mary Queen of Scots, and the father of James VI.

After the War of Independence none of the main movements in Scottish history took place on Renfrewshire ground until the time of Queen Mary. The blow that finally crushed the unfortunate queen was the Battle of

Langside, which was fought in Renfrewshire, although the ever-widening circles of Glasgow's administration have now embraced this area in the boundaries of the city. When Queen Mary escaped from Loch Leven her supporters assembled in force at Hamilton. The Regent Murray was encamped at Glasgow to prevent the passage of the Clyde, if Mary, as was expected, should move on Dumbarton. Learning that the Queen's army would attempt the passage lower down the river, the regent moved out of the town to Langside Hill in order to intercept the enemy. Here he was attacked by the Queen's forces but completely defeated them. Mary was watching the battle from a hill near Cathcart, and on seeing the flight of her army galloped off in terror, and did not draw rein till she reached Sanquhar, 60 miles away.

At the Reformation two of the protagonists were Renfrewshire men. The Earl of Glencairn struggled hard on the side of England and the reformed religion, while the Abbot of Paisley, afterwards Archbishop of St Andrews, was one of the most powerful supporters of the French party and the old doctrine. In 1561 Glencairn and a rabble of so-called Reformers committed the unpardonable crime of wrecking the beautiful Abbey of Paisley. They partly demolished the buildings, they shattered the altars, they destroyed or plundered the "mony gud jowellis and clathis of gold, silver, and silk, and mony gud bukis,...and the staitliest tabernakle that wes in al Skotland and the maist costlie."

In Covenanting times Renfrew strongly resisted

episcopacy, although the county did not take such a prominent part in the struggle as Ayr or Lanark. A detachment of Highlanders was quartered in the shire to overawe the people, which they did to perfection. "Spoil the Philistines" was the creed of the Highlanders, and faithfully did they translate it into works. In Cleland's words :

"If any dare refuse to give them,
They durk them, strips them, and so leaves them."

The list of those who refused to conform to the decree of Charles included the names of all the ministers in Renfrewshire save one. They were forced to leave their houses when winter was at hand, and suffered many privations, yet they kept the Covenanting spirit burning fiercely in the county. In 1684 there took place at Paisley a wedding of more than ordinary interest. Graham of Claverhouse was married to Lady Jane Cochrane, and immediately after the ceremony, he summoned his troopers and rode out over the hills in pursuit of the Covenanters. The desolate, wind-swept moorlands round Loch Goin gave an asylum to many a weary hunted martyr to religion, fleeing from the sabres of the relentless dragoons of Claverhouse. Two victims rest in the old churchyard of Eaglesham, butchered in 1685.

In this same year occurred the unhappy rebellion of Argyll, which came to a tragic conclusion on the banks of Clyde. While Monmouth was attacking James II in England, Argyll raised the standard of revolt in Scotland, hoping that the Scottish presbyterians would support him.

Dissensions and delay led to a general break-up of his troops in Dumbartonshire. The earl crossed the Clyde and was making his way to Renfrew. He had just forded the Cart when he was attacked by two of the king's men, who concluded, in spite of his peasant's disguise, that he must be some one of position from the indifferent way in which he abandoned his horse at the river. After a struggle he was wounded and taken prisoner. In the Blythswood grounds there still exists a large block of sandstone on which the doomed earl leaned after his capture. Tradition maintains that some reddish veins in the stone were caused by the blood that flowed from his wounds.

In the seventeenth century Renfrewshire was notorious for the number of witches that seem to have chosen the place as their home. The county rose to a bad eminence about the middle of the century, when Mary Lamont, a girl not out of her teens, was accused of having sinister designs on the Kempoch Stone, and of being in league with the devil to achieve them. The stone was to be cast into the sea, because of this storms would follow, and the final aim of wrecking boats would be accomplished. The unhappy girl was condemned to death, and along with some other so-called witches of Greenock and Gourcock was burned at the stake. Towards the end of the century a Mr Blackwell became minister of Paisley, and obtained great celebrity as a witch finder. He seems to have been as expert as the famous witch-smellers of the Zulus, although the heathen had the advantage of the Christians in their more merciful method of murdering the victims. Mr Blackwell either stamped out the witches or took them

with him when he left the county, for, strange to say, when he departed, "the great rage of Satan in this corner of the land" gradually disappeared.

The most notorious case was that of Christian Shaw, daughter of the laird of Bargarran, and founder of the thread industry of Renfrewshire. This "poor, afflicted damsel" was but ten years of age when the effects of witchcraft became manifest. She cried out in her sleep, "and then suddenly got up and did fly over the top of a bed where she lay to the great astonishment of her parents and others in the room." Subsequently also she floated through the room and the hall, and down a long winding staircase, which naturally perplexed the onlookers still more. She was sometimes blind, sometimes deaf and dumb, "her body was often so bent and stiff that she stood like a bow on her feet and neck at once"; again, "several weeks by past she hath disgorged a considerable quantity of hair, folded-up straw, unclean hay, wild foule feathers, with divers kinds of bones of fowls and others, together with a number of coal cinders, burning hot candle grease, gravel stones, etc." Several people were accused by her of being the cause of her torments, a Commission of Enquiry was appointed to investigate the case, and no fewer than seven persons were found guilty of witchcraft. One committed suicide in prison; the other six were burned on Gallow Green, Paisley, in the year 1697. It is amazing to think that such things could happen only two hundred years ago. The hysterical girl can hardly be held responsible, but no words are strong enough to describe the conduct of men of responsible position and

good education who allowed their bigotry and superstition to hurry them into acts of such cruelty.

James VI of Scotland was connected with Renfrewshire both on his father's and his mother's side. His mother, Mary Queen of Scots, was a direct descendant of Walter the first Steward through King Robert II.



Dumbarton Castle

His father Henry, Lord Darnley, was the eldest son of the Earl of Lennox, who was descended from the Stewarts of Darnley. In 1575 we find King James VI paying a special compliment to a son of the shire. One of the Crawfurds of Jordanhill had captured Dumbarton Castle and had otherwise distinguished himself in the service of the king. He was rewarded by a letter very characteristic

of the monarch in whom simplicity and cunning were so curiously mingled :

Capten Crawford,

I have heard sic report of your guid service done to me from the beginning of the wars among my onfriends, as I shal sum day remember the same, God willing, to your greit contentment. In the mein quhyle be of guid comfort, and reserve you to that time with patience, being assured of my favour. Fareweil.

Your guid friend,

James Rex.

It is not known whether Captain Crawford's patience was equal to the task. The gallant gentleman, however, distinguished himself later as Provost of Glasgow, and built a great part of the bridge then erected over the Kelvin at Partick. In 1800 the estate of the Crawfurds came into the hands of the Smiths of Jordanhill, several members of which family have shed distinction on their native county.

At the rebellions of the Fifteen and the Forty-five, Renfrew like all the other south-western shires was a staunch supporter of the House of Hanover. The people had suffered too much from the Stewarts to look on their return with pleasure. In his retreat from England the Young Pretender marched up Annandale and down the Clyde to Glasgow. The Provost of Glasgow maintained that his only recruit from that town was "ane drunken shoemaker." He fared little better in Renfrewshire, and Paisley and Renfrew were among the towns on which fines were imposed.

During the nineteenth century Renfrewshire was prominent in the agitation for social reform. At the time of the Chartist movement and the Reform Bills, riots broke out in various parts of the shire, particularly in Paisley and Greenock. In those days the terms "weaver" and "radical" were synonymous. At the same time as they wove new and striking textures on their looms, the warp and woof of their minds seemed irresistibly to become fashioned on a bolder and more daring pattern than that of other workers. But it must not be forgotten that these men were intellectually of a high order. They could not but see that in intelligence, in industry, in skill of hand and eye, in cultivated taste, in love of literature and science, they were far superior to many possessing social rights denied to them. Apart from slight disturbances due to politics or to industrial depression, the history of the county since the '45 has been one of uninterrupted peace and progress. Its famous events have been discoveries in industries, its revolutions have been those of manufacturing methods, and the improvement in social conditions and customs has been no less marked.

16. Antiquities.

The earliest men in Britain were unacquainted with the use of metals. Their weapons and tools were of stone roughly shaped and chipped. These weapons of Palaeolithic type do not occur in Scotland; but stone weapons

and tools, of the Neolithic type, finely chipped or polished, have been discovered in many parts of the country. They consist of celts or axes, arrow-heads, spear-heads, flail-stones, knives or scrapers, slick stones for softening hides, and other implements. Many of the so-called Druidical monuments were probably erected by Neolithic man. The race was widely distributed, stone structures of a similar kind having been found all over Europe, in Africa, in Asia, and in America. The cromlechs (or table-stones) and menhirs (or standing stones) of Scotland probably belong to this period. The Neolithic race had long skulls, good features, dark complexions, and were about 5 feet 4 inches in average height. There are one or two standing stones in Renfrewshire but no good examples of cromlechs or of stone circles. South of Kilbarchan there is a curious stone known locally as the Clochodrich or Stone of the Druid. Its significance is unknown although its name would suggest that it was associated with Pagan rites, or possibly, as Chalmers suggests, it was used by the natives of Strathclyde as a base for signal fires in times of battle. Near Langside a good specimen of "cup and ring" marking was discovered. The purpose of these curious carvings is not known, but they are found all over Scotland, often in the most inaccessible spots.

As man progressed in civilisation the art of metal working was discovered, and the earliest metal implements are made of bronze because of its easy working. These at first imitated the stone tools, so that we find celts and other implements fashioned like the stone ones

but of bronze. With the introduction of bronze another race is associated in Britain. These immigrants were much taller and stronger than the long-headed Neolithic race, they had fair complexions, and their skulls were round in shape. To the Bronze Age and perhaps earlier belong the "pile dwellings" found in different parts of the country and called crannogs in Scotland and Ireland. Many of the British crannogs, however, are of much later date than the Bronze Age, some perhaps being as recent as the ninth and tenth centuries of our era. Much controversy has raged round the crannog discovered some years ago at Dumbuck on the north of the Clyde, but in 1901 a crannog was found in Renfrewshire which fortunately has given rise to no scientific bickering. This pile-dwelling occurs at Langbank, and at high water the existing platform is covered to a depth of two or three feet. From the crannog was obtained a highly ornamented bone comb which throws perhaps a little light on the age of the structure, for a very similar comb was found in East Lothian associated with late Roman relics. In addition to several other articles, there were found a small bronze fibula or buckle, and drawings made on shale. A few years ago (in 1907) an interesting and important discovery was made near Cathcart. This was a burial place belonging to the Bronze Age, in which no fewer than eight interments had been made. The bodies had first been cremated.

Few authentic traces of Roman occupation are to be found in Renfrew. Dunlop in his history describes a large Roman camp at Paisley. The street known as

Causewayside in Paisley is said to take its name from a Roman road on that site, and Paisley itself is generally identified with the Roman station of Vanduara. In Cathcart parish a Roman vase was found which is now in the Glasgow Hunterian Museum.

Near Barochan on a fine situation on the summit of a little hill stands the most interesting memorial stone in Renfrewshire. This is the Barochan Cross, beautifully proportioned and finely carved. Semple tells us that it is "a Danish stone, being full of wreathed work, such as lions and other wild beasts; but no letters are legible." History is silent regarding the stone, but local tradition ascribes it to a defeat sustained by the Danes in the neighbourhood. From the pattern of the carving it has been considered to date from the tenth century. Many stone coffins containing human bones have been discovered in the locality. Another so-called Danish stone may be seen near the Paisley Waterworks. In all probability it is the broken remnant of a religious cross such as may well have been set up on the road leading to such a popular shrine as that of St Mirin. Semple tells us that it was in his time (the latter half of the eighteenth century) that the cross piece on the top was broken off.

The modern parish church of Renfrew is believed to stand on the site of the original church granted by David I to Glasgow. The church contains an interesting monument dating back to the seventeenth century. It is a tomb erected to the memory of Sir John Ross and his wife, Dame Marjory Mure. This Sir John is said to have been created by James IV the first Lord Ross of



Effigy of Sir John Ross of Hawkhead in
Renfrew Parish Church

Hawkhead. Effigies of the knight and his lady lie on a sculptured tomb enclosed within an arched canopy, the front of which is richly ornamented with vigorous carving. Sir John is known traditionally as Palm-my-Arm from his wrestling encounter with a famous English champion. The Scot, outmatched in size and strength, acted at first on the defensive, and the Englishman was unable to seize him, particularly as his body was well oiled. The English champion then tempted Ross by stretching out his arms with the invitation "Palm my arm." The Scot seized his wrists, jerked his shoulders from their sockets, and dispatched him.