



Stow Parish Archive Newsletter March 2011

Keep a lookout later in the month for the posters of an exciting Archive led event that will be happening in the Town Hall in mid - April. In the meantime this months newsletter goes way back to more troubled times in the parish.

Thomas Pringle “ The Stow Martyr” and the Covenanters of Stow

Presbyterianism as practiced by the Scots was a hard, unyielding faith. It was deeply suspicious of Christmas, and abominated graven images. It did not recognize Easter as a celebration. When James VI of Scotland became James I of England in March 1603 he insisted that his divine authority came before the Kirk's civil jurisdiction.

After the accession to the throne of his son Charles I in 1625 he proposed bringing the Scots church into line with that of England. This provoked outrage north of the border. He thought it would be simpler if all his subjects would adopt Episcopacy (government of the church by crown appointed Bishops). He therefore planned the introduction of the 'Book of Common Prayer' into the Scottish church service.

By this time Scotland was in an almost constant state of civil unrest because people refused to accept the royal decree that King Charles was head of the church (the 'Kirk'). When those who refused signed a covenant, which stated that only Christ could command such a position, they were effectively signing their own death warrant. This was to become a grim period of religious persecution that witnessed the bloodiest crimes of the nation's history.

The noted Covenanters connected with the district were Archibald Riddell, the field preacher, Jean Moffat and her father James of Netherbarns and the Pringles of Torwoodlee, James Pringle, his son James and Thomas Pringle of Stow.

Covenanters frequently held meetings outdoors in the district. During the summer a meeting was held every Sabbath at Bluecairn. However with a view to putting down all Covenanters an order was issued imposing a fine on all heritors on whose lands a meeting was held, whether they were aware of them or not.

In 1658 the Earl of Lauderdale put up an act to ban all meetings. However amongst the Covenanters it was considered that since Lord Lauderdale had been the author of such a deed then they would hold a meeting on his land. What happened is not exactly clear but it was known that over 4,000 people attended the meeting and Mr Clelland the minister of Stow told the gathered crowd that he refused to conform to the Episcopacy.

Thomas Pringle fought at the battle of Bothwell Bridge and was taken prisoner at the battle. He and other prisoners were taken to Greyfriars Churchyard in Edinburgh where they were kept exposed to the elements for 4 months. After this time he refused to sign a bond that would purchase his liberty as it would mean he would have 'trampled principle underfoot'. Instead his suffering continued when he was taken to Leith and along with 200 other prisoners, he was put on board a ship bound for New Jersey and there they were to be sold into slavery.

Soon after the vessel sailed tempestuous weather was encountered and to prevent any prisoners attempting an escape the crew were given the order to "batten down the hatches". When the vessel reached the coast of Orkney it struck a rock and among the many who drowned was Thomas Pringle. He had tried to fight persecution but died in pursuit of the freedom to worship how one wished.

For 50 years the non-conformist Covenanters were fined, tortured, flogged, branded or executed without trial for failing to turn up to hear the "King's Curates" in the pulpit. It is estimated that 18,000 had died for their adherence to the Covenant. Of those that lived, many had been sold as slaves to America or sent to the dungeons on Bass Rock or Dunottar Castle.

Please come along to our next meeting on Wednesday 23rd March 2011 from 7.30 onwards and help us add to the Archive anything of interest. We can copy any photos or documents or we can simply make notes on any memories that you have.

