

The Dumfries & Galloway Courier & Herald, March 23rd, 1901. KIRKPATRICK FLEMING – ITS HISTORIC AND ROMANTIC MEMORIES

It is an article on Kirkpatrick-Fleming and was written in reference to the twenty-five years of loyal service given to the church by the Rev. Mr Graham.

The author was Mr. G.T. Ferguson, and I quote parts of what he wrote:

Kirkpatrick-Fleming is irregular in form, measuring from north to south about 6 miles, with an average breadth of half the distance. It comprehends the ancient parishes of Kirkpatrick, Irving and Kirkconnel. Kirkpatrick derives its name from the saint to which the church was dedicated. The name of the lord of the manor, Fleming, during the 14th and 15th centuries was added to the old parochial designation to distinguish it from others of same name in Annandale and the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. This is one of those churches conferred on the monks of Giseburn, in Yorkshire, by Robert de Brus, who died in 1191. The grant was confirmed by his successors and by his sovereign, William the Lion. When settlement was made in 1223 about the church of Kirkpatrick and chapel of Logan, the prior and monks of Giseburn gave the right of appointment to the Bishop of Glasgow, reserving, however, to themselves the tithe of corner and stipulating that they should receive yearly from the Rector of Kirkpatrick a certain quantity of meal to be used either for purposes of charity or for their own support. After the Reformation the patronage of Kirkpatrick-Fleming Church, with the parsonage and vicarage tithes, were acquired by the predecessor of Marquis of Annandale. As patrons of the old parish he and his successors have shared the patronage of the united parish. When the last Marquis died in 1792 this privilege went to the Earl of Hopetoun, and in 1802 it passed to Hugh Mair, Esq. of Wyseby.

The chapel of Logan, which was attached to the church at Kirkpatrick stood at Logan Mains, distant about three miles in a north easterly direction. The ruins were still visible in the 17th century, and the site is known at the present day by the name of Chapel Knowe. Logan is another form of the word lagan, signifying a hollow or little valley. Logan water and Logan braes have been often celebrated in Scottish song. John Mayne, the author of the "Siller Gun" wrote a ballad in praise of Logan water in 1783, and in one of the verses thus refers to the ancient chapel:

"Nae mair at Logan Kirk will he
Atween the preachings meet wi' me.
Meet wi' me or when its mirk
Convoy me hame frae Logan Kirk"

The old parish of Irving is said to have obtained its name from the family who were the chief proprietors of this district. It is more probable; however, that on the contrary the proprietor took his name from the place in accordance with a well-known practice of feudal times. Irvin is a word signifying the green margin or edge, and another form of it is Erin, the poetic name for Ireland or the green isle. The heraldry of the Irvings confirms this, as their coat of arms is three green holly leaves on a shield. The clan was evidently far removed from being a clan of greenhorns.

The most northern of these three pre-Reformation parishes was Kirkconnel, which derives its name from the saint to whom the little church was dedicated. St. Connel was a Scottish saint who flourished in the early part of the 7th century. His name is also connected with a church in Upper Nithsdale and two others in the Stewartry of Kirkcudbright. The ruins of St. Connel's Kirk stand on the east side of Kirtle water, and the burying ground is situated on a rich holm in a bend of the same stream.

All these three old parishes – Kirkpatrick-Fleming, Irving and Kirkconnel – were united together in 1609 and now form the present parish of Kirkpatrick-Fleming. Great violence was done in the county by the Reformation. Churches were destroyed, chapels discontinued, and parishes were reduced in number by making two or three into one.

The present parish church can lay claim to being one of the oldest in the district, as it was built in 1735, and partly rebuilt fifty years later. In 1892 the interior was thoroughly renovated and a vestry added at the east end, so that the parishioners have now a place of worship which will serve their purpose for many years to come. A new manse was erected on the site of the old about 1878, and is both comfortable and commodious. The first minister of which whom any record survives was Mr. Robert Johnstone, son of John Johnstone, Esq. of Newbie, near Annan. He was presented to the charge by King James VI. of Scotland on the 8th February, 1577. During the disturbed state of the country after the Reformation there seems to have been no settled minister for some time except Mr. Johnstone, and it was as late as 1634 when Mr. Thomas Chalmers received the appointment. He belonged to the North of Scotland, took his degree at the University of Edinburgh on 27th July, 1611, was deposed in July, 1649, and died in February, 1673, at the advanced age of 82.

The next minister was Mr. William Graham, who was a graduate of the University of Edinburgh, and died on the 11th March, 1673, in the prime of life. He possessed several properties in the district and married Margaret, daughter of David Irving of Mossknowe, who died in 1691. Their son, Mr. William Graham of Mossknowe, who served heir 21st June, 1686.

Mr. Graham's successor was not appointed for thirteen years till 1686, when the choice fell upon Mr. James Chalmers, who had taken his degree at the University of Edinburgh on the 26th May, 1682. His ministry was a brief duration, because on 17th September, 1689, he was deprived of his living for not reading the Proclamation of the Estates and not praying for their Majesties, William and Mary.

Seven years elapsed before another minister was appointed. The delay was doubtless due to the state of the country immediately after the Revolution. Mr. James Gowanlock, like the majority of his predecessors, was honoured by his degree from the University of Edinburgh on the 18th July, 1692. He was ordained in September, 1696, and died on 18th December, 1744, at the age of 73 years, and after a ministry of nearly half a century. His son, Dr. Matthew Gowanlock, was a medical practitioner on Moffat, and one of his daughters became the wife of Mr. Gatt, the Scholarly minister of the adjacent parish of Graitney.

Mr. Gowanlock's successor, Mr. James Currie, was a son of the manse, his father being at the time minister of Hoddom, Mr. Currie was presented by George, Marquis of Annandale, in May, 1745, was ordained 25th September, 1746, and was transferred to Middlebie in 1763. It may be of interest to mention that Dr. Currie, the editor of Burns, was a son of Mr. Currie, and was born in the old manse of Kirkpatrick.

The next minister was Mr. John Craig, who was ordained 20th September, 1764 and was translated to Ruthwell in the same Presbytery, 29th May, 1783. A daughter of his became the wife of his successor in that parish, Dr. Henry Duncan, founder of Savings' Banks and Moderator of the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in 1839.

Six months after Mr. Craig's translation, Mr. Alexander Monilaws, who was licensed by the Presbytery of Edinburgh on 25th June, 1783, was presented by the curator for George Marquis of Annandale in October of that year, and ordained on 4th March, 1784. He completed fifty years of service, and if jubilees had been fashionable in his day he certainly was entitled to the honour, because none of his predecessors or successors surpassed him in length of incumbency. He died 20th July, 1834, at the age of 77 years. His son James was minister of Annan and two of his grandsons are the present minister of Middlebie and Dr. Murray, a medical practitioner in Dumfries.

Mr. George Hastie, who was licensed by the Presbytery of Dumfries, 21st July, 1824, was presented by Sir Patrick Maxwell, Baronet of Sprinkell in August, and ordained 5th December, 1834. At the Disruption in 1843 he joined the Free Church and died at Moffat on 2nd November, 1866, aged 55 years.

The first minister after the Disruption was Mr. Hunter, a member of the Pilmuir family in Berwickshire, but his ministry was of short duration, and he did not live long to enjoy his preferment. His successor was Mr. Murdoch, formerly of Eyemouth, whose memory is still cherished with respect and veneration by those who knew his work and worth. Last of all, though not the least, if the present minister, to whose fidelity and zeal appropriate testimony has been given the other day by his parishioners, and their wish may be echoed that he may be spared to celebrate in due time his complete jubilee.

There is much in the parish to delight the antiquarian and the lover of the picturesque. Proximity to the Border accounts for its having frequently been in former times the scene of conflict. The family of Fleming, who came originally from Flanders, possessed certain lands in

this parish on condition of defending them at all times against the depredations of the English. They were a brave, hardy race, and had their stronghold at Redhall. About the end of Baliol's reign, during one of King Edward's incursions into Scotland, the Flemings were attacked by a band of armed Englishmen, and although those within the Castle only numbered thirty, they kept the enemy at bay for three days. Overwhelmed by superior force, they preferred death to defeat, for it is said that rather than see their home in the hands of the English and themselves prisoners, they and their stronghold perished together in the flames.

The tower of Redhall has long ago disappeared but a farm bearing that name still keeps it in remembrance. Two other towers at Holmhead and Stonehouse, not far distant, are also said to have belonged to the same family.

Several tumuli, believed to be British, and apparently of the sepulchral kind, may be traced along the south bank of the river Kirtle. One of them, indeed, from its name was evidently associated with the ancient Druids. This on account of its size was called Beltonmount, and received that name from the fact that it was the mount or altar upon which the Druids worshipped and offered their sacrifices at two different seasons of the year. These customs linger to the present day in a somewhat different form, as may be seen in the celebration of the Maypole and Hallowe'en. About 150 years ago a great part of this cairn or mount was removed, and a large square stone chest, formed of six flags was found in which there were some druidical beads. It was supposed to mark the grave of some illustrious Druid, but of him or his history nothing whatever is known. In another part of the parish on the farm of Branteth there is another mound which has evidently been a Druidical temple or place of sacrifice.

Further up the river Kirtle on Cove estate there is an artificial cave or house cut out of the solid rock. It is about 30 feet above the bed of the river and must have been difficult to access. The interior is oval in form and the breadth varies from 16 feet in some parts to 9 feet in others, while the height from door to door is nearly 7 feet. It is said that the ancient British used these hiding places as granaries or storehouses. There is some reason to believe that the estate derives its names from this circumstance.

As a good specimen of the old Border Peel, Woodhouse Tower still survives hoary with age. When Robert Bruce was flying from Edward Longshanks, this is said to have been the first roof in Scotland under which he found the protection he so sorely needed. Out of gratitude to his host, he honoured him by taking one of his sons with him as secretary, and at least he regarded his companion's fidelity by bestowing on him the lands of the Forest of Drum in Aberdeenshire. It is pleasing to note that the Irvines of Drum are still in possession of the royal gift.

Not far from the hamlet of Merkland stands an interesting cross, erected to commemorate the spot where the young Lord Maxwell fell in 1483 by the hand of an assassin.

No place in the whole parish is more worthy of a visit than Sprinkell. Those who admire beautiful scenery and

can appreciate a romantic story will find sufficient here to gratify their taste. The Kirkconnel, now Sprinkell, estates were sold in 1609 by the Irving family when they moved to the hall of Ecclefechan, and the purchaser was an ancestor of the Maxwells, upon whose chief was conferred the rank of Baronet in 1683. The present mansion house was built in 1734 and was enlarged about 70 or 80 years ago. Though retaining the title, the Maxwell family are no longer the proprietors, as the estate has within the past few years passed into the hands of Mr. Johnson-Ferguson, formerly a member of the British House of Commons.

Within easy distance of the mansion house is the ruined church and churchyard of Kirkconnel. The tragedy enacted here about 350 years ago has invested the spot with a halo of romance and given it a fame which is world-wide in its range. There is no more exquisite gem in literature than the ballad, "Fair Helen of Kirkconnel Lea". The heroine was the daughter of William Irving, the Laird of Kirkconnel, and was celebrated for her beauty. She had two suitors, young Fleming of Kirkpatrick and young Bell of Blackwoodhouse. Her preference for the former roused the furious jealousy of the latter who had the lady's friends on his side. This led to secret meetings on the part of the lovers and their favourite resort was the neighbourhood of the old church. On one of these occasions the rejected suitor suddenly made his appearance and the lady discerning his murderous intention thwarted it by throwing herself between her lover and fatal shot, saving his life by the sacrifice of her own. Adam Fleming instantly avenged Helen's death by slaying the murderer. It is said that he went to Spain to drown his sorrow there in fighting against the infidels, and on his return died of a broken heart on the grave of his early love. A cross was erected on the spot where Helen Irving died and in the churchyard two flat stones mark the place where all that was mortal of two lovers has long ago crumbled into dust.

"I wish I were where Helen lies –
Nicht and day on me she cries;
I wish I were where Helen lies,
On Fair Kirkconnel lea."

"Curst be the heart that thought the thought,
And curst be the hand that fired the shot,
When in my arms burd Helen dropt
And died to succour me!"

These notes drawn from various sources may throw some light upon and awaken some interest in the past history of Kirkpatrick Fleming. At the present day the parish is full of life and enterprise. Long may the inhabitants be blessed with health and peace and sweet content! One ancient parishioner who paid the debt of nature nearly 150 years ago had evidently these three blessings in richest measure, for we read that Thomas Wishart, who lived upon the estate of Mr. Irving of Wysebie, was born in the parish of Kinglassie upon the 26th of September 1635, and died upon the 19th of December, 1759, aged more than 124 years. He retained the use of his faculties to the last, had lost none

of his teeth, and had the use of his sight in such perfection that he could thread a needle with ease. Not two days before his death he travelled six miles upon very uneven ground. None ever heard him complain of his infirmity, but he frequently expressed regret at funerals, as he thought with envy of the deceased that "everybody can die but me". This ancient worthy was buried in Pennersaugh's Churchyard and a plain stone marks the spot. If he had been minister of Kirkpatrick Fleming he would have made a record in the celebration of Jubilees.

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