
Robert Bruce in Inverness

DOUGLAS W. B. SOMERSET

Robert Bruce is generally credited with having brought the gospel to the Highlands during his two periods of exile in Inverness, from 1605-1613 and from 1622-24. These periods of his life were of great consequence for many people, both at the time and since, but they have received less attention than they deserve. As Iain Murray comments, “The preacher’s confinements in the north constitute one of the most significant periods in his life but unhappily little record of what happened in those years has survived”.¹ In this article we give detailed consideration to these two periods.²

I. Background

Robert Bruce was born probably at Airth Castle in Stirlingshire and probably in 1554. He was the second son of Sir Alexander Bruce of Airth and of Janet Livingston, who was a great-granddaughter of James I. Initially he trained as a lawyer, but to the great displeasure of his parents

¹ I. H. Murray, *A Scottish Christian Heritage* (Edinburgh, 2006), p. 52.

² The main sources of information for these periods of his life are David Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland* (8 vols., Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1842-9), Vols. 6 and 7; Wodrow’s *Life of Bruce* prefixed to *Robert Bruce, Sermons* (Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1843); and D. C. Macnicol, *Master Robert Bruce, Minister in the Kirk of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1907). The entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography (ODNB)* is very brief on these periods and follows the original *Dictionary of National Biography (DNB)* entry in giving the wrong date (by four years) for the end of his first exile to Inverness. The *DNB* entry is also wrong by two years for his time in Aberdeen and again by two years for the start of his second exile in Inverness. The *ODNB* entry is wrong by at least ten months for the end of his second exile. David Masson dismisses his first exile with the words: “the once powerful Mr Robert Bruce had been relegated into compulsory privacy and inactivity in the Highland North”, David Masson (ed.), *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland*, Vol. 8, 1607-10 (Edinburgh, 1887), p. xix.

he resolved, following his conversion in 1581, to enter the ministry, and he proceeded to study at St Andrews under Andrew Melville. In 1587 the General Assembly chose him as minister of St Giles in Edinburgh, his first and only charge, and in 1588 he was elected Moderator of the Assembly. Both these appointments show the exceptional regard in which he was held. In 1589-90 he acted as an extraordinary privy councillor for five months while James VI was absent in Denmark collecting his bride, Anne of Denmark, and in 1590 it was he who anointed Queen Anne at her coronation.

He continued on apparent good terms with the king for a further six years, but from 1596 onwards the king's determination to re-introduce Episcopacy, and Bruce's resolute opposition to this, soured the relationship.³ By 1600 James heartily disliked him, and when Bruce refused to intimate from the pulpit the royal version of the "Gowrie conspiracy" he was banished to France for several months, then detained in England, and then confined to his home at Kinnaird in the parish of Larbert. After various other difficulties, including a brief imprisonment on Inchgarvie in the Firth of Forth at the beginning of August,⁴ he was on 18th August 1605 "charged to waird in Innernesse, within ten dayes, under the paine of horning". He "entered in Innernesse and tooke instruments of his entrie" on 27th August 1605.⁵

The full sentence against him makes curious reading.

Forasmekle as, albeit the moist detestable and horrible treason conspyrit be the traytour Gowry and his brother aganis the sacred persone of oure moist gracious Soverayne be evident and manifest to the consciences of all his Majesteis guid subjectis, and that his Majestie hes gevin moist cleir testimoneis for removing of distrust of all these quha, by curioisitie, privat affectioun, or prepoisterous opinionis, wer caryed and led in that mater, nevirththeless, Maister Robert Bruce, minister, apprehending a maist sinister distrust and

³ Some extracts from letters illustrating the king's ill-will and deviousness towards Bruce in 1598-9 are given in James Young, *Life of John Welsh* (Edinburgh, 1866), pp. 444-6. Young characterizes James VI's government in Scotland during this period as "barefaced, unblushing, and unmitigated despotism", p. 176.

⁴ David Laing (ed.), *Apologetical Relation . . . by William Scot; Certaine Records . . . by John Forbes* (Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1846), p. 409. The six ministers John Welsh, John Forbes, Andrew Duncan, Robert Durie, John Sharp, and Alexander Strachan, were at that time imprisoned in Blackness Castle, five miles further up the Firth of Forth, for their part in the Aberdeen Assembly of July 1605.

⁵ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 6, p. 291.

opinioun of his Majesties sinceritie in that mater, notwithstanding of all the evidences quhilke in resoun mycht have gevin unto him contentment thairin, he hes continewalie sensyne not onlie remanit constant and resolute in his distrust, drawing thairby away simple and ignorant personis to harkin unto him and in some measour to favoure his opinioun. For the quhilke he being moist justlie and worthelie banischit this realme and found unwirthie of the ayre of his native cuntrey, yit oure moist gracious Soverayne, quha in his actionis, especialie with these of the ministerie, has ever kythit himselff a moist clement and mercifull Prince, seiking rather by fair and gentill meanis to move thame to be conformable then be executioun of the law to punische their offences, recallit him, hoping that at lenth he sould have acknowlegit his errour and given unto his Majestie satisfioun.

And now, his Majestie persaving cleirly that nather proces of tyme nor na uther [thing can] move the said Mr Robert to frame his opinionis to the treuth and to procure his Majesteis obedience, bot that he, intertenyng a maist frequent resorte alswele of memberis of the ministerie as of uther people towardis him, in all their meittingis mellis in the effairis of his Majestie and his estate, sometyme discoursing upoun the proceedingis of his Majesteis Counsale, and sometimes censuring the doingis of the ministerie, foistering thairby factionis and divisioun in the Kirk and privat grudgeis and discontentment aganis the present government, his Majestie thairfore hes moist just caus to tak ordoure with him and to exile him the hail boundis of his Majesteis dominionis.

And yit, his sacred Majestie following his accustomat dispositioun and inclinatioun, quhilke hes evir tendit to pitye and not to punische, and abstening fra that rigour and extremitie quhilke the said Mr Robert maist worthelie merites, and nevirtheless willing to remove the occasioun quhairby he may pervert sic of his Majesties subjectis as repairis to him, his Majestie hes commandit that he be wardit within the burgh of Invernes quhill it sall pleis his Majestie to gif forder directioun towardis him according as he sall find his behaviour. Thairfore the Lordis of Secrite Counsale ordains letters to be direct chairgeing the said Mr Robert Bruce to pas and entir his persone in waird within the said burgh of Invernes, their to remane upoun his awne expenssis ay and quhill he be fred and

releit be his Majestie and his Counsale, within ten dayis nixt efter chaarge, under the pane of rebellioun.⁶

Notwithstanding James' great clemency, mercy, and pity, Bruce was to remain in exile, mainly in Inverness, for the next eight years.

2. First banishment to Inverness (1605-10)

Inverness at that time consisted of the castle and four main streets, the Kyrk Get (Church Street), Est Get (High Street and Eastgate), Damisdell (Castle Street), and Bridgend (Bridge Street), together with a few vennels. There was a wooden bridge across the Ness on the site of the present Ness Bridge and an inhabited strip on the west side of the Ness known as "Beyond the Watter". What is now Chapel Street and part of Academy Street was a ditch of water called the "Foull Poull" into which the skimmers emptied their effluent. The population was about 2000.⁷ As a man of majestic bearing, who had virtually run the country for a short while, had anointed the Queen, and had enjoyed special royal favour but was now in disgrace, Robert Bruce must have been a noted figure in such a small town.⁸

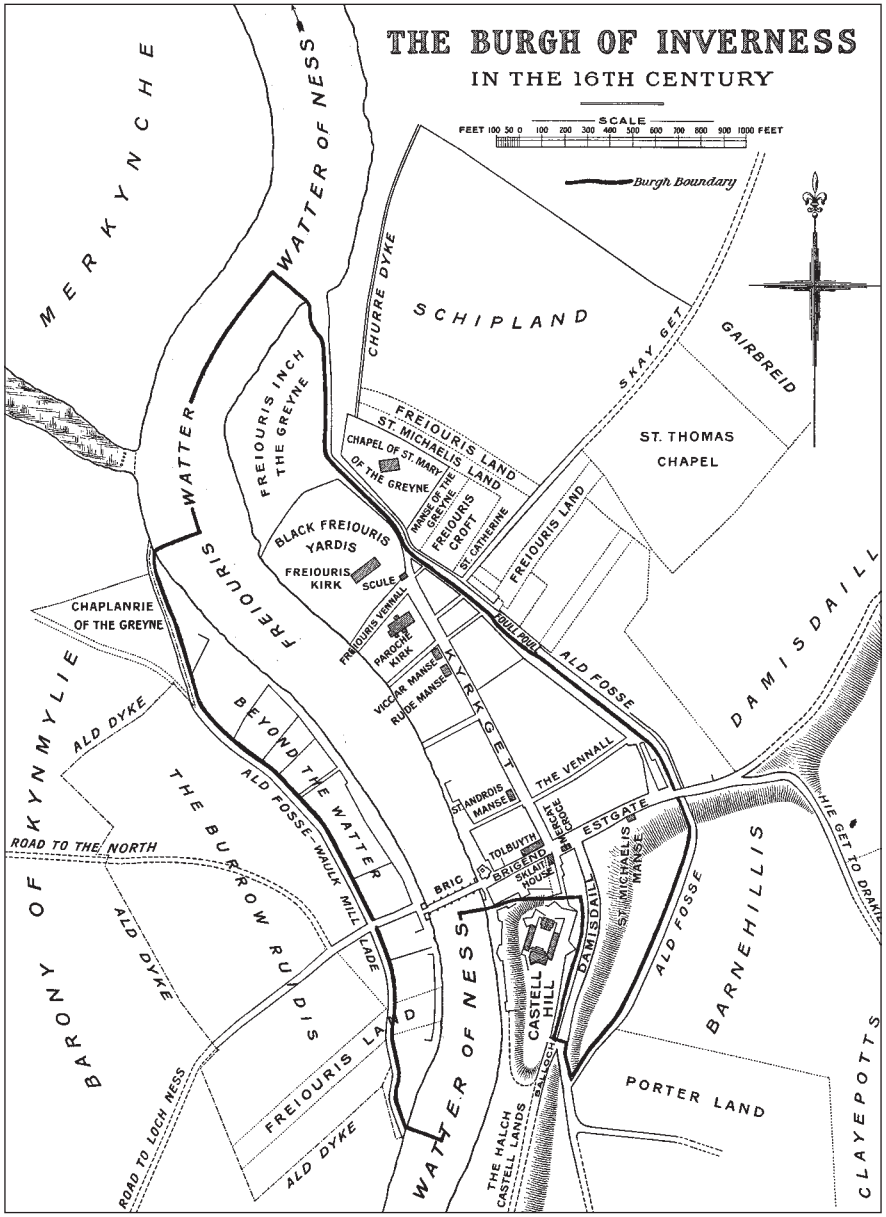
Bruce faced a number of difficulties on going north. The first one, undoubtedly, was financial. He had independent means from his estate at Kinnaird, but the estate required management, and his banishment to France and England and his confinement to Kinnaird had made this difficult. He had married Martha Douglas, second daughter of Sir George Douglas of Pittendreich, in 1590, and when he went to France he had made a deed assigning the charge of his affairs to her.⁹ On 27th February 1605, the King had procured his dismissal, by a commission of

⁶ David Masson (ed.), *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Vol. 7, 1604-7* (Edinburgh, 1885), pp. 118-9. We have not followed a consistent approach to the spelling of quotations in this paper.

⁷ William Mackay (ed.), *Records of Inverness* (2 vols., New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1911-24), Vol. 1, pp. lvii, lxi, lxxiii.

⁸ Several writers bear testimony to Bruce's majestic appearance. Robert Fleming (1630-1694) says: "He was a terror to evil-doers, and the authority of God did so appear in him and his carriage, with such a majesty in his countenance, as forced fear and respect from the greatest in the land; even those who were avowed haters of godliness", *Fulfilling of Scriptures* (n.p., 1669), p. 256. This is confirmed by Livingstone and Calderwood who both knew him personally: Livingstone – "He had a very majestic countenance", *Select Biographies* (2 vols., Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1845-7), Vol. 1, p. 307; Calderwood – "majestate vultus venerabilis", *Altare Damascenum* (Leiden, 1708 (1st edn. 1623)), p. *3.

⁹ M. E. Cumming Bruce, *Family Records of the Bruces and the Cumyns* (Edinburgh, 1870), p. 356.



Map taken from Records of Inverness, Vol. 1.

Assembly, from his charge in Edinburgh, thus depriving him of the stipend, and it was now “upoun his awne expensis” that he was banished to Inverness. On 27th February 1606 we find him trying to recover

money from “severall persons for payment of severall soumes” connected with his stipend for the years 1597-1604. Presumably he had ignored these debts before but now found it necessary to pursue them.¹⁰

A second difficulty, consequent upon the first, was separation from his family. His wife would have needed to remain in Kinnaird at first, to run the estate, while Bruce found accommodation in Inverness. They had a numerous family, all of whom, obviously, were minors at this stage.¹¹ The family were with him by 1610, and probably well before, but his wife must frequently have had to return to Kinnaird.

A third difficulty, which, if not a problem at this time, soon became one, was his health. Calderwood describes him in 1606 as “confynned in Innerness, diseased, and farre removed from physicians”.¹² In January 1607, the Privy Council, at the request of the Linlithgow Assembly of December 1606, conveyed a petition to the King,

proporting that with all deutifull reverence [Bruce] had satisfeit your Majesteis direction be his entrie and keeping of warde within the burgh of Inuernes this year bigane and mair, and be deutifull behaviour during the tyme of his warde without just occasioun offence to your majestie, and how that in this meantyme he had contracted divers diseassis whilkis imported the hasard and perrell of his lyffe, and thairfoir he humelie crave of the Assembly that by thair intercessioun your Majestie micht be intreated to transporte his warde fra Inuernes to his awne place of Kynnaird, whair he micht haif the commoditie to be consulted and advisit with phisitianis and men of knowlege anent the mater of his disease and ordinarie remedyis for the same.

The King’s response was to grant Bruce licence to repair to Aberdeen “whereby he myght haif the help and advise of phisitionis for

¹⁰ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 7, p. 184. For one payment to Bruce in 1607, see William Cramond (ed.), *Annals of Banff* (2 vols., New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1891-3), Vol. 2, p. 22. When Bruce’s wife died in 1620 she left debts in excess of her assets. Bruce’s own wealth at his death amounted to a mere 300 pounds (*ODNB*).

¹¹ Cumming Bruce mentions four children, Robert, John, Elizabeth, and Martha, *Bruces and Cumyns*, p. 362; see also William B. Armstrong, *The Bruces of Airth and Their Cadets* (Edinburgh, 1892), p. 82. The *Fasti*, however, lists eleven children of whom at least six reached adulthood, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scotticanae* (8 vols., 2nd edn., Edinburgh, 1915-50), Vol. 1, p. 55.

¹² Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 6, p. 627.

the better recoverie of his helth". Bruce's health must have recovered at this time because he did not avail himself of the opportunity permitted.¹³

A further difficulty for Bruce was the hostility that he had to endure from several leading figures in Inverness. Calderwood speaks of "the contempt of the magistrates" and "contention with the pastor, who every year raised some new trouble to him".¹⁴ The minister, James Bishop, had himself just arrived in Inverness.¹⁵ He was a "king's man", and supported the royal policy in favour of Episcopacy. In December 1606, when he had been less than two years in the ministry, the Linlithgow General Assembly appointed him constant moderator of the Inverness Presbytery; and in January 1607 the Privy Council ordered members of Presbyteries to accept their permanent moderators "without excuse or delay, within twenty-four hours next after the charge, under the pain of rebellion".¹⁶ At the Perth Assembly of 1618 he was one of the inner circle of ministers chosen to take part in the "privy conference".¹⁷ It is unsurprising that he should have detested Robert Bruce.

Unfortunately Calderwood does not enlarge on the opposition that Bruce encountered from the magistrates. Calderwood's *History*, as published by the Wodrow Society, was finished in 1627, within twenty years of the events and while Bruce was still alive, so Calderwood presumably had accurate information on this subject.¹⁸ The published

¹³ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 7, p. 505; Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 6, pp. 607, 609; David Masson (ed.), *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Vol. 9, 1610-13* (Edinburgh, 1889), p. 134. The king was in no mood to allow Bruce to return south, the Gowrie conspiracy being "yitt recent in his Majesties memorie". In June 1607 the Privy Council was instructed to address yet another letter to Bruce requiring his opinion and judgment in the matter, *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 7, pp. 526, 531.

¹⁴ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 393.

¹⁵ In a letter dated 20th January 1615, Bishop states that he had been in the charge for ten years, David Laing (ed.), *Original Letters relating to the Ecclesiastical Affairs of Scotland* (2 vols., Bannatyne Club, Edinburgh, 1851), Vol. 2, p. 409. The previous minister, Thomas Howieson, died on 9th February 1605.

¹⁶ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 7, pp. 300-2.

¹⁷ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7 p. 318.

¹⁸ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 8, p. ix. According to Wodrow, Calderwood also had access to some of Bruce's papers: "Among some papers come to my hand, once belonging to Mr David Calderwood, I find Mr Bruce's meditation on the night preceding the fifth of August [1600]: These with the supplications and letters, and Mr Bruce's own account of what happened him in the process about Gowrie, and the after parts of his life, I am ready to think are extracts out of Mr Bruce's diary, which Calderwood got from himself or his friends. . . . Mr Calderwood hath given the substance of most of them in his MSS [i.e. that published by the Wodrow Society], save the account of his trouble at Inverness," Wodrow's *Life, Sermons*, pp. 83-4.

Inverness Burgh records, on the other hand, show no trace of this opposition, but seem rather to indicate a respect for Bruce, as we shall see shortly.

During his second exile in Inverness, Bruce had difficulty in finding accommodation there; and with the hostility of at least some of the magistrates, and being under the royal displeasure, it is possible that this was so during his first exile as well. An entry in the Inverness Burgh Court Book for 25th July 1606 shows that he was living by the River Ness at that time:

That day Andrew Innes, alleged being ane fool, for troubling of Mr Robert Bruce at the water side under silence and cloud of night, and would not obey the office men to come to ward; therefore, being put in the thieves pit, and presented now judicially, and being accused on the premises, alleged he was by dyat [crazy]: in respect whereof the judges, with his own consent, in case he be found again to do any harm to any person within the burgh, *ipso facto* to be scourged, and his lug nailed to the throne [throne, i.e. weighing place].¹⁹

Andrew Innes may have been put up to his pranks by someone but there is no indication in the record that the magistrates were reluctant to protect Bruce.

On another occasion Bruce was shot at, and escaped alive only because he had paused to examine a magpie's nest:

A hagbute was shott at him out of a fisher's house in the Fisher's Streete, whill he was going to the feilds, with his two servants.²⁰ If by the providence of God he had not stode still a little, to behold a pyet nest, which he thought curiouslie made, the bullet had pearced them all thrie, for it went hard by their bellies. The knave, efter long searche, was found under the lyne [presumably a pile of

¹⁹ *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 2, p. 39.

²⁰ We have not been able to identify "the Fisher's Street", but one possibility might be the north end of what is now Bank St, where it turns the corner into Friars Lane (a mediaeval street or vennel). The salmon fishing was then conducted from the east bank of the Ness, with the best fishing being on the stretch belonging to the Black Friars, the southern boundary of which was Friars Lane, see Lachlan Shaw (ed. J. F. S. Gordon), *History of the Province of Moray* (3rd edn., 3 vols., Glasgow, 1882), Vol. 3, pp. 233-4. Apparently there were no houses to the north of the High Kirk and Friars Lane until the latter part of the 18th century, Alexander Ross, "Ancient Churches and Chapels in Inverness", *Transactions of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club*, 6 (1899-1906), p. 112.

fishing line], and efter trial, found to be old Ladie Sutherland's officer's sone. The officer himself was in the toun in the meane time, and promised to find caution under what soume it pleased Mr Robert to enter him, when and where he pleased; which offer Mr Robert accepted.²¹

The "old Ladie Sutherland" here was Jean Gordon, the widow of the twelfth Earl of Sutherland and the daughter of the fourth Earl of Huntly. She, along with her son, the thirteenth Earl, and his wife, had been confined to Inverness in December 1606 by the Linlithgow General Assembly, "suspected of Papistrie".²² She remained a Roman Catholic all her days, and in April 1616 she received an assurance from James VI that "she would not be molested in her religion provided that she would not harbour nor receive any Jesuits".²³ Her eldest son John, the thirteenth Earl, was briefly imprisoned a second time in St Andrews in 1614 for adhering to Romanism and died the following year.²⁴ Her second son, Sir Robert, however, was a Protestant and her grandson, John, the fourteenth Earl, was the first person to sign National Covenant in Greyfriars in 1638.

Notwithstanding these various difficulties and dangers, Wodrow says that Bruce "continued at Inverness about four years, where he had very great success in his ministerial work. Many were converted and multitudes edified. He preached every Lord's day forenoon, and every Wednesday, and read and exhorted at the prayers every evening while he was there."²⁵ The language that Bruce used in his preaching in Inverness has been a matter of debate. Macnicol is adamant that it was English, but this is far from certain.²⁶ The distribution of Gaelic has been extensively

²¹ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 393.

²² Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 6, p. 608. Jean Gordon (c. 1546-1629) had an interesting life, see *ODNB*. She was briefly married to the celebrated Bothwell (1566-7), then to the 12th Earl of Sutherland (1573-94), then in 1599 to Alexander Ogilvy of Boyne, who was evidently dead by 1606. She was a woman of great ability and ran the Sutherland estates for extended periods. There is no reason to think that she was implicated in the attempted murder of Bruce. Assaults with dirks and swords are common in the *Records of Inverness* but we have not noticed any reference to the use of firearms.

²³ Sir Robert Gordon, *A Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland* (Edinburgh, 1813), p. 321.

²⁴ *Original Letters*, Vol. 2, p. 352.

²⁵ Wodrow's *Life*, *Sermons*, p. 125; Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 392. Elsewhere Calderwood says that Bruce "read the prayers every other night at even", Vol. 6, p. 292.

²⁶ Macnicol, p. 233.

researched since Macnicol's time, and it now appears perfectly possible that Bruce had reasonable Gaelic before he went to Inverness. His birthplace, Airth, was about 25 miles outside the conjectural Gaelic-speaking boundary in 1660, but Gaelic at that time had already been on the retreat for well over a century.²⁷

On the other hand, although Inverness was a strongly Gaelic area, English services were already being conducted there in the sixteenth century. As early as 8th March 1566/7 Andrew MacPhail (*alias* Brebner) is described in the Burgh Court Book as "minister of Inverness and Petty in the Erse [Gaelic] tongue", which implies that the other minister, Thomas Howieson, was conducting services in English.²⁸ Apart from a reader, Thomas Innes, in 1574, there is no further reference to a second minister in Inverness until 1604 when Alexander Clerk is recorded.²⁹ Another "second minister", John Annand, was appointed after April 1624, about the time that Bruce finally left Inverness, but it does not appear that Annand could speak Gaelic. He was translated to Kinnoir (Huntly) in 1627.

The events of a few years later are worth considering because they shed light on the ecclesiastical arrangements in Inverness in Bruce's time. On 5th September 1639, Donald Fraser was admitted as "Reader and Catechist in the Irish language within the Chapple of Inverness", his appointment being confirmed by the Presbytery of Inverness on 30th June 1640. At that time the chapel used for Gaelic services was "ruinous

²⁷ P. G. B. McNeill and H. L. MacQueen, *Atlas of Scottish History to 1707* (Edinburgh, 1996), p. 428.

²⁸ *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 1, pp. lvi-lvii, 146. In the Thirds of Benefices for 1572 Macphail/Brebner is described as minister of Farnua (Kirkhill) and "exhorter at Petty and the Yrishche kirk of Invernes", G. Donaldson, *Accounts of Collectors of Thirds of Benefices, 1567-1572* (Edinburgh, 1949), pp. 215-7. In 1706 the population of Inverness was "about 4000 persons above the age of fourteen, 3000 and more of whom can only speak the Gaelic language", Alexander Mitchell (ed.), *Inverness Kirk Session Records, 1667-1800* (Inverness, 1902), p. 25.

²⁹ The gravestone of Alexander Clerk's wife Hester Eliot, who died in 1604, is the earliest legible stone in the Chapel Yard burying ground: "Here lies the bodie of a pious and vertuous gentlewoman called Hester Eliot spouse to Master Alexander Clerk, minister of Inverness, and second lawful daughter to the verie honourable Robert Eliot of Lauristown in Liddesdale, and Lady Jean Stuart, third lawful daughter to Francis, Earle of Bothwell. She departed this life upon the 3rd September in the year of God 1604 years. Now she is with her Saviour at peace, who is the Resurrection and the Life with whom she is to appear in glory. Here lies Alexander Clerk some time minister in Inverness who departed the 13th September 1635." The separate mention of his death shows that her epitaph dates to the time of her death, see pp. 207-8 of F. T. Macleod, "Notes on the Chapel Yard, Inverness, and some of its Old Monuments", *Proc. Soc. Antiquaries Scotland* 45 (1910-1), pp. 198-219.



Chapel Yard burying ground, Inverness.

[Photograph courtesy of Norman Campbell]

and ready to fall to the ground and not able to contane the common and Irishe people”. On 15th December 1640, James Ross, Provost of Inverness petitioned the Presbytery regarding the building of a new church for Gaelic worship. The Presbytery agreed to this, and the site proposed was the choir of the parish church which was to be partitioned off and enlarged. Some disaffected people objected to this site, however, and no progress was made.³⁰

Meanwhile the Inverness charge was vacant and a row had developed over the appointment of a new minister. The patron, Thomas Fraser of Strichen, had presented John Annand once again, but the Gaelic congregation wanted Murdoch Mackenzie, minister of Contin and later Bishop of Moray. A compromise was reached whereby Annand and Mackenzie agreed to share the stipend and the burden. Mackenzie, however, insisted on taking this arrangement literally and would preach

³⁰ The new church, later called St Mary’s Gaelic Church, was not completed until after 1649. Rebuilt in 1792-4 and modified in 1822, it is now occupied by Leakey’s Bookshop, see A. Macdonald, “The Presbytery of Inverness, 1632-1644”, *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, 38 (1937-41), pp. 483-512 (especially pp. 498-500); CH2/553/1, pp. 96-7; *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ* (2nd edn.), Vol. 6, pp. 464-5; *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 2, pp. 179, 189, 201.

in Gaelic only fortnightly, with the result that on alternate Sabbaths there was no Gaelic. In August 1641, the General Assembly agreed that a third minister should be appointed for the Gaelic congregation, and the following year Duncan MacCulloch was taken on trials. On 23rd June 1642 an edict for his settlement was ordained to be “served both at the parioch Kirk of Inverness and at the place appointit for the Irische congregation commonlie called the chappell upon the 3rd July”.³¹

From all this it can be seen that the English services were held in the parish church (on the site of the present High Kirk), while the “common and Irish” people must have met in St Mary’s Chapel in the Chapel Yard.³² Furthermore, the English services were evidently regarded as socially superior. Presumably Alexander Clerk served the Gaelic chapel up to 1604, but there is no mention of him during Bruce’s time in Inverness. Calderwood refers to “the pastor” of Inverness (singular, rather than plural), so it seems that Clerk had moved to another charge after the death of his wife in 1604.³³ Thus when Bruce went to Inverness, there was apparently a single minister, James Bishop, conducting English services in the parish church. The provision for the large Gaelic congregation is unclear but possibly there was a reader. Furthermore, all the inhabitants of the burgh were required to attend these services on pain of a fine:

That day [12th November 1602] the Provost, Baillies, and Council statutes and ordains . . . that in all times hereafter coming that the

³¹ David Laing (ed.), *Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1841-2), Vol. 1, p. 369. See also Shaw, *Province of Moray*, Vol. 3, pp. 432-3; *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 2, pp.178-9; “The Presbytery of Inverness, 1632-1644”, p. 501.

³² For a discussion of the old chapels of Inverness, see T. D. Wallace, “Notes on the Early Churches of Inverness”, *Transactions of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club*, 6 (1899-1906), pp. 88-93; A. Ross, “Ancient Churches and Chapels in Inverness”, *ibid.*, pp. 111-14; *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 1, p. xcix; Macleod, *PSAS* 1910-1, pp. 198-207. None of the other chapels is known to have survived into the 17th century. The Chapel Yard was the usual place for public assemblies until the 19th century, Macleod, *PSAS* 1910-1, p. 201. The stones of St Mary’s Chapel were used for the building of the citadel during the English occupation between 1652 and 1655 (and thus the new Gaelic church must have been completed by this time). The remains of the chapel were still visible in 1686 but by the end of the 18th century all trace had disappeared, and it is not now known where it stood, *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 2, p. 336; *Statistical Account of 1791-99*, Vol. 9, pp. 630-1.

³³ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 393. At a murder trial in July 1609, the *Records of Inverness* refer to “the minesteris, eldaris and deaconis of the sessioun and Kirk of Invernes”, and then immediately afterwards to “the Minister and sessionaris” and “the Minister and Clerk of the Sessioun”. One wonders if Robert Bruce was the other minister present. The list of Burgh payments made in October and November 1613 mention only the one minister, James Bishop, Vol. 2, pp. 71-2, 116-7.

whole inhabitants of this burgh, with their whole family and household, haunt and keep the kirk on the Sabbath day, before noon and after noon, and there to hear the preaching of the word of God every ilk Sunday, under the paines of vi shillings viii d money unforgiven to be taken up by the magistrates.³⁴

From this it seems almost certain that Bruce's "forenoon" services on Sabbath were conducted for the Gaelic congregation at St Mary's Chapel and that they had the sanction of the magistrates. Presumably the preaching was in Gaelic (though just possibly it was felt that an English-speaking minister was better than nothing).³⁵ If large crowds attended, the services would have been held in the open outside the chapel. Bruce had started preaching in the open air in July 1605 when he received instruction that the king had discharged him from teaching: "Als soone as he went home, that same verie weeke he preached in the wood-side, and in the presence of the Lord Elphinstoun and his ladie, in the gairdin; for the Lord had visited him [i.e. Lord Elphinstoun] with the pest."³⁶

An interesting indication of the effect that the gospel was having is provided by an entry in the Inverness Burgh Court Book for February 1607. On 10th November 1606, Alexander Merchant, one of the burgesses, had railed on the Provost John Ross and one of the baillies when they were convened in the tolbooth for the annual settling of prices. Merchant gave the Provost "many irreverent and injurious words" and "gave the lie to the baillie" and threatened to strike him. On 17th November he was deprived of his freedom and position as burges for his insolent behaviour. On 9th February, however, it was recorded that,

³⁴ *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 2, p. 1. A similar statute had been ordained on 3rd February 1573/4. The statute was renewed on 26th October 1613, soon after Bruce's departure from Inverness, *ibid.*, Vol. 1, pp. 232-3, 240, Vol. 2, p. 118.

³⁵ James VI despised Gaelic and Gaelic speakers and would have regarded Bruce's preaching to the common and Irish people of Inverness as being of no consequence. Indeed given the disdain for Gaelic at the time, even among educated Gaelic speakers, it would have been an act of condescension for a man of Bruce's background to preach in the language (if indeed he did). About 1620, for example, Sir Robert Gordon (mentioned above) wrote a letter of advice to his nephew, the 14th Earl of Sutherland. Among other things, he advised him to perfect his Gaelic for dealings with his tenantry, but also to "use your diligence to take away all the relics of the Irish barbarity which as yet remains in your country, to wit, the Irish language and the habit", William Fraser, *The Sutherland Book* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1892), Vol. 2, pp. 357, 359; see also A. D. M. Forte, "Sir John Skene of Curriehill – a Gaelic-speaking lawyer in the Courts of James VI?", *Scottish Gaelic Studies*, 23 (2007), pp. 21-51.

³⁶ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 6, p. 279.

now, by instigation and earnest request of an honourable man, Mr Robert Bruce of Kinnaird, and God by his Holy Spirit having moved the said Alexander Merchant's heart, acknowledging and confessing his contempt made to God and to them openly in judgment and council, and they on the other part having considered his humility, and having compassion towards him, have granted to him his freedom, liberty and position as burgess again.³⁷

Again, the impression is that Bruce was respected by the Inverness magistrates. We shall have occasion to mention the Provost, John Ross, later on as one who supported Presbyterianism. Another indication of the effect of the gospel is seen in Kirkton's story of a poor Highlander, who, after hearing a sermon, came "and offered him his whole substance (which was only two kowes) upon condition Mr Bruce would make God his friend".³⁸

While Bruce was in Inverness, he kept up an extensive correspondence. One letter to him, written by John Forbes from his imprisonment in Edinburgh Castle on 16th July 1606, is given at length by Calderwood.³⁹ Of another letter, from Charles Ferme, Calderwood gives only a brief extract. Ferme was one of the eight ministers ordered to be banished to different parts of the Highlands after the Aberdeen Assembly of 1605, but he was the only one who went to his place of banishment. He wrote to Bruce from Bute, probably in 1608: "I have to this hour been relieved by the comfort of no creature, neither have I here to whom I may go. A thousand deaths my soul hath tasted of; but still, the mercy and truth of the Lord hath succoured me. The Lord perfect his own work in me."⁴⁰ Another, longer extract is given by Calderwood of a letter from Robert Boyd of Trochrig, dated 2nd September 1610. Boyd was in Scotland at the time but was returning to Saumur because he did not feel that he could be any use in Scotland.⁴¹

³⁷ *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 2, pp. 46-7, 50-1.

³⁸ J. Kirkton, *The Secret and True History of the Church of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1817), p. 26. The story obviously had wide circulation because it is also recorded by Thomas Goodwin, *Works* (12 vols., Edinburgh, 1861-6), Vol. 5, p. 174.

³⁹ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 6, pp. 551-6.

⁴⁰ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 6, p. 702. The dates of Ferme's exile in Bute are difficult, see *ODNB*. Ferme was brought up in Edinburgh so it is unlikely that he could speak Gaelic. Wodrow assumes that he could not, Robert Lippe (ed.), *Wodrow's Biographical Collections: Divines of the North-East of Scotland* (New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1890), p. 277.

⁴¹ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, pp. 118-9.

3. Aberdeen, Inverness, and Forres (1611-13)

At the end of December 1610, Robert Bruce left Inverness and went through to Aberdeen with his family.⁴² His health was poor and he went relying on the licence that he had received four years earlier, though he had first confirmed with Alexander Douglas, the Bishop of Moray, that this would be acceptable. He had also received an invitation from the Aberdeen magistrates, presumably to supply the third charge in the town which had been left vacant by the death of John Macbirnie in 1609.⁴³

There were at least three eminent physicians connected with Aberdeen in 1611, but whether Bruce was able to consult any of them is not known. The first, Duncan Liddell (1561-1613), a native of Aberdeen, had been Professor of Medicine in Helmstedt and had returned to Scotland in 1607. It is not certain that he was in Aberdeen in 1611, but he died there on 17th December 1613, endowing six bursaries and a chair of mathematics for the newly-founded Marischal College, so it is possible that he was.⁴⁴ The second, Patrick Dun (1581-1652), had studied medicine under Liddell at Helmstedt. He graduated at Basel in 1607 and had returned to Aberdeen by January 1608. He was appointed Mediciner at King's College in 1619.⁴⁵ The third, also a native of Aberdeen, was James Cargill (1565-*c.* 1616). His brother David was the Burgh treasurer and Dean of Guild on numerous occasions while his sister Janet was the mother of William Forbes, Bishop of Edinburgh. James studied at Basel and was famed for his knowledge of botany. Like Liddell, he left substantial sums of money to various causes in the town. Little is known of his life, but one fixed date is in that on 8th April 1601, he was appointed by the Aberdeen Council "to try the qualification of George Pacok, and Alexander Wilson, chirurgeons, in the art of chirurgerie".⁴⁶

⁴² Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 392.

⁴³ For the Third Charge of Aberdeen and John Macbirnie, see Appendix.

⁴⁴ See *ODNB* and David Irving, *Lives of Scottish Writers* (Edinburgh, 1851). After his return to Scotland, Liddell "probably lived chiefly at Aberdeen", John Stuart, *A Sketch of the Life of Dr Duncan Liddell of Aberdeen* (Aberdeen, 1790), p. 5. He was in Edinburgh on 12th June 1612 and in Aberdeen on 9th December 1613, P. J. Anderson (ed.), *Fasti Academiae Mariscallanae Aberdonensis* (3 vols., New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1889-1898), Vol. 1, pp. 129, 139.

⁴⁵ L. B. Taylor, *Aberdeen Council Letters* (6 vols, Oxford, 1942-61), Vol. 1, p. 396; *ODNB*.

⁴⁶ See *ODNB* and John Stuart (ed.), *Extracts from the Council Register of the Burgh of Aberdeen, 1570-1625* (Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1848), pp. 218-9. On 2nd September 1596, Mr Quintin Preston, "Professor of Phisick", petitioned the Aberdeen Council that he might employ an apothecary and open a shop "for the better furnishing of this burgh and of the country of all sorts of physical and chirurgical medicaments". He was already "somewhat

The usual practice in Aberdeen was for the magistrates to welcome distinguished visitors with a “cup of Bon Accord”, but the expenses at the welcome of Bruce were exceptional. On Wednesday 2nd January 1611, the Burgh accounts recorded that the town had “propynit Mr Robert Bruce, at the commandement of the counsall, with succouris, sueitt meats, and spycerie, extending to 50 lib. 8s”. On Saturday 5th January, a payment of £22 13s 4d was recorded “for tua carkaches of beaff sent to the said Mr Robert’s house.”⁴⁷ After the hostility experienced in Inverness, this friendliness must have been gratifying. But the happy period was not to last long. Within a short while, some ill-wisher had reported his presence to the king, and the king wrote at once to the Privy Council telling them that, upon “some conceit and fancy, and without his Majesty’s foreknowledge and allowance”, Bruce had “withdrawn himself from the said burgh of Inverness to the burgh of Aberdeen, and has there settled himself and his family, of purpose there to make his residence and constant abiding, express against his majesty’s meaning and intention the time of granting the said licence”. Presumably the king had got wind of the services that Bruce was conducting, and was alarmed and angry that an even more powerful preacher than John Macbirnie might now be undermining his ecclesiastical policy in “one of the chief and principal burrowis of that our kingdom”. On 21st February 1611, the Privy Council dutifully ordered Bruce to return to Inverness and to remain there, under pain of rebellion.⁴⁸

The Aberdeen magistrates did their best to intervene on Bruce’s behalf, and on 4th March, and again on 6th March they sent letters and

stricken in age” at the time, *ibid.*, p. 144. Permission was granted and on 17th September, his servant George Pacok, apothecary, was admitted burghess of the town, *Miscellany of the New Spalding Club* (2 vols., Aberdeen, 1890-1908), Vol. 1, p. 89. Pacok’s wife’s name was Marion Howesoun, *Index to Register of Sasines, Aberdeen 1599-1609, 1617-1629* (HMSO, Edinburgh, 1924), p. 444. Quinton Preston was presumably Mediciner at King’s but he is not mentioned as such in P. J. Anderson (ed.), *Officers and Graduates of University and King’s College, Aberdeen* (New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1893), p. 35. Alexander Wilson, chirurgeon, was admitted burghess on 26th June 1600, *New Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 1, p. 96. George Pacok was living in the Cruikit Quarter of the town in January 1608. One of his books, with the inscription “Georgius Pavius, Pharmacopoeus, 1619”, is in the Aberdeen University Library, see W. S. Mitchell, *Catalogue of Incunabula in Aberdeen University Library* (Aberdeen, 1968), p. 2. Another chirurgeon, who had been admitted burghess on 24th September 1605, was Hercules Guthrie. In 1611 he was living at the head of the Netherkirkgate, *Aberdeen Council Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 111, 399.

⁴⁷ John Stuart (ed.), *Miscellany of the Spalding Club* (5 vols., Aberdeen, 1841-1852), Vol. 5, p. 85. A typical sum for propining a visitor was £6. See also [J. Robertson], *The Book of Bon-Accord* (Aberdeen, 1839), pp. 13-16.

⁴⁸ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 9, pp. 134-5; *Original Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 380*.

testimonials to the Privy Council in his favour. On 6th March the Provost, baillies, “and sundry honest men” made a banquet for him, and soon afterwards “seven pints of wine” were sent round to his house for another dinner with the baillies.⁴⁹ Their efforts were in vain, however, and the command for Bruce to return to Inverness remained. By 28th March he was back in Inverness, and on that day he wrote the king an explanatory letter, remarkable for its submissive tone:

May it please your Majesty, Hearing that my coming to Aberdeen was interpreted to spring of contempt, I though it my bounden duty to purge myself to the uttermost thereof: for I count contempt of God and his Lieutenant the highest crime that is. Therefore, for my purgation, I say, whatsoever is done with a warrant of God and man cannot incur the suspicion of a contempt, let be an actual; and, indeed, if there had been a prescription or limitation of time in my licence, I had failed in passing the bounds; yea, not only that, but I awaited upon the proper time wherefor my licence was given me, and took the benefit when the necessity of my infirmity constrained me; and being more respective than that, I took it not until the Bishop of Murray brought me the advice of the Bishops of St Andrews and Glasgow to do so. And if I had received the meanest signification that could be, that the embracing of the benefit at that time would not stand with Your Highness’s contentment, I would most gladly have abstained therefrom; for I have laid my account, by God’s grace, never to involve me in that guiltiness. So, to end, there is nothing done by me wherefor my former benefit should be retrenched. And most humbly I crave, that your Majesty’s censure go not before my procuring; but that my repairing to Aberdeen, for my better health, and comfort of my wife and children, may stand with your Majesty’s favour. So, resting ever, your Majesty’s most humble suitor and orator, Mr Robert Bruce.⁵⁰

It was probably to the postage of this letter that the Aberdeen Council contributed £3 6s 8d on 15th April, “given to Adam Young, post, to carry Mr Robert Bruce his letters to James Primrose, to be direct by him to his Majesty”.⁵¹ Far from being placated by Bruce’s letter, however,

⁴⁹ *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, pp. 85-6.

⁵⁰ Wodrow’s *Life, Sermons*, p. 126; *Original Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 431-2*.

⁵¹ *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, p. 86. James Primrose was the Clerk to the Privy Council.

the king became yet more incensed. He wrote at once to the three bishops, requiring “every one of the said Bishops to certify us particularly of the verity of his foresaid allegiance [allegation]”. The three bishops, in their replies, “purg[ed] themselves of the having in any fashion condescended to his delivery”. This proved, in James’ view, that “the said Mr Robert” was guilty “of ane most evident calumny”. It then came to his attention that “the wife of the said Mr Robert doth plainly affirm that she hath in her custody the said Bishop of Moray his letter manifesting his consent to the relief of her said husband”.⁵² On 17th August, James wrote to the Chancellor, Alexander Seton, requiring him to summon the Bishop of Moray and to demand an explanation. The Privy Council, by now perhaps weary of the episode, contented itself with writing to the Bishop of Moray, and his reply has not survived, so there the matter ends.⁵³

Meanwhile, John Straiton, who had been minister of Forres since 1599, was also in trouble with the king. About February 1611 he had preached a sermon on 1 Tim 4:1, “the Spirit speaketh expressly that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith”, at the Presbytery exercise in the presence of the Bishop of Moray. The text had come up in course but Straiton took the opportunity of attacking Episcopacy, and was reported as having “spoken very contumeliously against the Assembly of Glasgow [of June 1610] and Episcopalian jurisdiction, publicly in exercise, in the bishop’s own audience”. In particular he had refused to acknowledge the bishop to be his judge. The bishop’s response had been simply to say, “Brother, I would advise you to abstain from that style, for so much liberty will bring you into trouble, for it will not be borne”. The sermon, however, came to the notice of Archbishop of St Andrews, George Gledstanes, and Straiton was summoned before the High Commission. Comparing on Thursday 14th March, he defended his sermon and even provided a written copy of it, with the result that he was commanded to be warded in Inverness Castle in “close custody”.⁵⁴

⁵² Bruce’s wife had stayed on in Aberdeen after his departure. On 1st July, the Burgh accounts record a payment of £4 “in vine and succour” for a “collation” (meal) at her house with the baillies, *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, p. 86.

⁵³ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 9, pp. 624, 627; *Original Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 434-6*. The Privy Council’s letter, though tentatively dated to 22nd July by the editor of *Register Privy Council*, is, from its contents, evidently subsequent to the king’s letter of 17th August.

⁵⁴ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 160; *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 2, pp. 156-7; J. Balfour Paul, “On a Calendar of the 16th Century containing MS Notes on Scottish History and other Records”, *Proc. Soc. Antiquaries Scotland* 31 (1896-7), pp. 156-180. The day following, 15th March 1611, was the consecration of Alexander Douglas as Bishop of Moray.

Unfortunately, the story has a sad ending. For two years Straiton adhered to his rigid opposition to Episcopacy but in March 1613 he was visited by John Grant, fifth Laird of Freuchie, who was the Justice of the Peace for Inverness-shire, Nairn, and Forres. Grant sought to arrange an accommodation between Straiton and the Bishop of Moray, and Straiton yielded to this proposal in some measure. Immediately afterwards, however, he “fell into madness and frenzy, and after lying confined to his bed for six days without relief or one word or sign of consolation, [he] breathed his last and died”, on 20th March. Bruce’s comment, in a letter written shortly afterwards to John Ker, minister of Prestonpans, was that “all here ascribe this heavy ending to this compromise with the Prelate, made against his mind and conscience; and certainly the memory of the thing appals me; to have seen one so abandoned of God and empty of grace, who before always seemed so pious”.⁵⁵

It does not appear that Straiton was deprived of his ministry, so presumably Forres was without a regular ministry for the two years that he was warded in Inverness. After Straiton’s death, the magistrates of Forres invited Bruce to supply there, and this he did until July 1613 when the new minister Patrick Tulloch arrived.⁵⁶

In the meantime, Bruce’s hopes of liberty had been raised. After the Parliament of October 1612, James felt less threatened by Presbyterianism, and on 9th February 1613 an Act of Privy Council permitted all ministers within the Diocese of Glasgow who had been warded or confined to their parishes to resume their ordinary duties.⁵⁷ Bruce had been led to expect a similar deliverance from exile and had already sent his wife and family south. His hopes were dashed, however, and on 10th February 1613 he wrote a letter of complaint to his cousin Sir James Sempill of Beltrees.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Balfour Paul, *PSAS*, pp. 159-60. Balfour Paul identifies the probable writer of the notes as Robert Durie, the minister of Anstruther Wester who had been exiled to Holland after the 1605 Aberdeen Assembly.

⁵⁶ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, pp. 392-3. The new minister, Patrick Tulloch (or Tullohe), was another “king’s man”. He had graduated at Edinburgh University in July 1601 but had moved to England and become vicar of Cobham in Surrey on 2nd May 1610. On 1st July 1613 he was presented by James to the Archdeaconry of Moray and he was in Elgin by 26th July when he appears as the witness to a tack, see Lachlan Shaw, *History of the Province of Moray* (2nd edn., Elgin, 1827), p. 463.

⁵⁷ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 9, pp. 550-1. One of these ministers was David Calderwood, see Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 181.

⁵⁸ Sempill’s mother and Bruce’s mother were sisters so Sempill was Bruce’s first cousin. Sempill had been brought up with James VI and he helped to mediate between the king

Right Honourable Cousin, Ye must give me leave to utter my friendly counsel against you. To what purpose should ye and Mr Peter Ewart⁵⁹ have put me in esperance of liberty by your letters? Of yours I saw only one, and I have four of Mr Peter's assuring me of ane comfortable issue. And in truth, I gave such credit, and was so certainly persuaded by him, that I sent home my wife and children, and spoiled myself of all my outward comforts, and exponed myself in the extremity of the season in a cold lodging in these miserable and barbarous parts, that I have almost extinguished both my vital and sensitive spirits.

Why would ye not signify his Majesty's will plainly unto me or unto Mr Peter either? His Majesty's pleasure would have been a law to me. Yea, if his Highness would command me to the scaffold, I have a good conscience to obey him, and it would be more welcome to me nor this lingering death that I am in. The time has been, I have done his Majesty acceptable service, as his Highness' own hand writs beside me will bear record; which I shall leave to my posterity as their rarest jewels.

I thank God I was never within compass of a law, and yet I am worse used nor either Papist or Atheist; always I crave no more of you but a Christian's duty; as I prayed you in my last letter so I will now. Feed me not with any compliments; the worst shall ay be welcome to me by his grace who sustains me wonderfully. I am a man that has tasted of many afflictions, and I wait not [do not seek to injure] who crosses me; but be it Papist or Atheist, bishop or minister, I will lay over all my vengeance where it belongs.

As to my prayer in the end of my last letter to his Majesty, I hear by Mr Peter Ewart that I was quarrelled as if I had prayed for reconciliation in that particular. Indeed if it had been so conceived, I might have been justly quarrelled; but the Lord knows the contrary is most true. I had no more mind of that treason at that time nor the bairn that is yet unborn. As to the rest of my

and persecuted Presbyterians, such as Andrew Melville while he was in the Tower of London, 1607-11, see *ODNB*.

⁵⁹ Peter Ewart or Hewat (c. 1567-1645) held various ministerial charges in Edinburgh and was at one stage (1594-6) Bruce's colleague in St Giles. He sympathized with the Presbyterian party but up to this point had remained in favour with the king. He was eventually deprived by the High Commission in 1617.

faults that ye make in my other letters, they are but bairnly, for suppose I wrote to you with my own scrubbing hand, yet it is not worthy to present his Majesty. I waille [select] the best hand I can get; and for the omission of my subscription, what marvel, seeing I wrote not the body? And yet, the writer thereof constantly affirms that I subscribed, which makes me to think that ye have not received my closed letter to his Majesty but the copy thereof which I directed to yourself to be perused, and not to be presented except ye know it would not offend. I pray you, cousin, if ye delight in my conversation, let the effect declare it: let me find the fruit thereof; and if ye be not able, let me be in nor worse case nor I am by your deed, for that were needless. Suppose ye have gotten new friends, men, I grant, that are more able to profit you in your outward estate, yet I will look that ye observe a Christian duty toward me. So, wishing you heartily well in the Lord, I take my leave, and rests, your most loving cousin to his power in God, Mr Robert Bruce.⁶⁰

As it happened, relief was just round the corner. Bruce's eldest son Robert was now at the Court in England and about this time a licence was obtained for Bruce to return to his house in Kinnaird.⁶¹ Presumably it was this that emboldened the Forres magistrates to invite him to supply there during the vacancy. As soon as that was at an end, Bruce returned south by way of Aberdeen where once again he received warm hospitality. He had left Aberdeen by 12th August, on which date the Burgh accounts record expenses paid to Alexander Jaffray, a baillie in Old Aberdeen; to the Provost's brother David Rutherford with whom Bruce had spent an afternoon in company with the ministers and magistrates; to Robert Hoigis with whom he had lodged; and to William Kay who had provided stabling for his horse and food for his servants.⁶² Thus ended his first period of exile in Inverness.

4. Second banishment to Inverness (1622-24)

For the next seven years of his life Bruce lived partly at Kinnaird and partly at his house at Monkland, near Coatbridge, and preached wherever he was able. It is not our purpose to go through this period in

⁶⁰ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, pp. 183-4.

⁶¹ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 393.

⁶² *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, p. 93.

detail. David Masson speaks as if he did very little: “the once famous Mr Robert Bruce, after some years of compelled residence in Inverness or other northern parts, was glad, one finds, to have licence in 1613 to come south and live quietly in his own house at Kinnaird.”⁶³ It is evident, however, that Bruce frequently preached away from Kinnaird. The most significant event was the sermon he preached at Forgan about 1615 which was instrumental in the conversion of Alexander Henderson.⁶⁴

After the adoption of the Articles of Perth in 1619 the persecution of Presbyterians increased and Bruce was again singled out as one of the leading figures. On October 25th 1620 the king sent a letter to the Privy Council commanding that Bruce was to be warded in Aberdeen if he would not obey the Acts of the Perth Assembly. Bruce’s wife died the following month, however, and on 25th November it was agreed that he might continue at his own house for the time being.⁶⁵

On 29th August 1621, the king again ordered Bruce to be cited before Privy Council for breaking the bounds of his confinement:

For as meikle as the King’s Majesty is credibly informed that Mr Robert Bruce, minister, the time of the late Parliament,⁶⁶ was at Edinburgh or very near to it, stirring up sedition, and making all impediments to his Majesty’s service which he could; and whereas the said Mr Robert was at that time confined to a certain place, and his transcending the limits thereof is a great contempt of his Majesty and his government: therefore the Lords of the Secret Council ordains letters to be direct charging the said Mr Robert to compear personally before the said Lords upon the nineteenth day of September next to come, to answer to the premise and to

⁶³ David Masson (ed.), *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Vol. 10, 1613-16* (Edinburgh, 1891), p. xciv.

⁶⁴ Fleming, *Fulfilling of Scripture*, p. 257; T. M’Crie (ed.), *Correspondence of Robert Wodrow* (3 vols., Wodrow Society, Edinburgh 1842-3), Vol. 3, p. 30. For the evidence regarding Forgan and the date of 1615, see John Aiton, *Life and Times of Alexander Henderson* (Edinburgh, 1836) pp. 94-6; D. Hay Fleming, “Alexander Henderson and Leuchars”, *Original Secession Magazine*, September 1877, Vol. 13, pp. 327-9. The minister of Forgan from 1609 to 1628 was Simeon Durie, brother of the Robert Durie mentioned above who was banished after the Aberdeen Assembly of 1605. One of their sisters was married to James Melville, another to the ardent Presbyterian John Dykes, and another to George Gledstones, Archbishop of St Andrews.

⁶⁵ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 450; David Masson (ed.), *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Vol. 12, 1619-22* (Edinburgh, 1895), pp. 366, 369, 380.

⁶⁶ It was at this Parliament, held from June-August 1621, that the Five Articles of Perth were ratified. Perhaps this accounts for the king’s sensitivity.

underlie such trial and order there anent as the said Lords shall think meet, under the pain of rebellion.⁶⁷

Bruce duly compeared before the Privy Council on 19th September 1621. He repudiated the charge of contempt and sedition, saying that “he was never minded to condemn the meanest magistrate, let be the greatest, for he had laid his account never to come within the compass of laws”. He said that he was “now exhausted in his living, estate, and person, and nothing almost was left but his vital spirits and breath, which apparently were now sought”. To this the Chancellor (Dunfermline) replied that the king was not minded to seek his life. The Chancellor then passed from the charge of contempt and sedition to that of breaking his confinement. Bruce asked that he might see his accuser, “that a form of law may be kept”, but no accuser was forthcoming. According to Calderwood, the bishops were his accusers but they had absented themselves from the Privy Council that day. Bruce then explained the circumstances in which he had gone to Edinburgh. He had been driven to breaking his confinement by necessity:

Some of my servants are run away with my moyen, others detain it, and lie in ward. My name is daily heard of. Scarce can I get one to do for me since his Majesty entered in these courses against me. . . . Since God took my helper [wife] from me, I had none to do for me. I wrote to the Secretary [Thomas Hamilton, Earl of Melrose] for a licence but come no speed. It was a matter of twenty thousand marks for which I come. A day was proposed to me which I behoved to keep, and I come very secretly.

The Chancellor said that if Bruce had written to him for a licence it would not have been refused. The sentence was that Bruce was to be warded in Edinburgh Castle at his own expense. As David Masson comments, the Privy Council “would doubtless have been willing . . . to dismiss the accused from the bar; and the harsh sentence was, in reality, his Majesty’s own”.⁶⁸

On 18th December the Privy Council received another letter from the king, dated 8th December, instructing that Bruce be released from Edinburgh Castle and return to Kinnaird until 15th April, or 1st May at

⁶⁷ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 12, pp. 563-4.

⁶⁸ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, pp. 509-10; *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 12, pp. 572-4; Wodrow’s *Life, Sermons*, pp. 129-32.

the latest, depending on the weather, and thereafter be confined to Inverness once again and four miles round about.⁶⁹ Bruce returned to his house at the beginning of January. On 22nd January, the Privy Council wrote to the king asking for a relaxation of the sentence against Bruce, and Bruce himself petitioned the Privy Council about the beginning of March, but the king's reply to the Privy Council, received on 19th March, was that "it is not for love of Mr Robert that ye have written, but to entertain a schism in the kirk. We will have no more popish pilgrimages to Kinnaird; he shall go to Inverness."⁷⁰ And so, on 18th April 1622 Bruce set out to begin his second period of exile in Inverness.

Robert Wodrow has preserved an anecdote relating to one of Bruce's two departures for Inverness – Wodrow was inclined to think that it was the second one. Like several of his anecdotes about Bruce, it came from Hugh Whyt, minister of Larbert from 1690-1716, who received it "handed down from persons present". When about to mount his horse, Bruce paused "and stood with his eyes towards heaven, in a muse for nearly a quarter of an hour". The rest of the party rode on, except for one who waited with him. On being asked by his friend what he had been doing, he replied: "I was receiving my commission and charge from my Master to go to Inverness, and he gave it me himself before I set foot in the stirrup; and thither I go to sow a seed in Inverness that shall not be rooted out for many ages."⁷¹

Bruce was accompanied on his journey by his nephew James Bruce, who later became minister of Kingsbarnes in Fife. James had been with John Welsh in St Jean d'Angely, bringing back a letter from him to Bruce about November 1619.⁷² On the way north they stopped in Aberdeen, where Bruce was welcomed once again;⁷³ and on his return journey James Bruce called on David Dickson, who was exiled to Turriff,

⁶⁹ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 12, pp. 617-8.

⁷⁰ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 12, pp. 636, 684; Wodrow's *Life, Sermons*, pp. 130-2; Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 545.

⁷¹ Wodrow's *Life, Sermons*, pp. 146-8.

⁷² For James Bruce, see *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ* (2nd edn.), Vol. 5, pp. 215-6, and *Life of John Welsh*, pp. 384-6. He was a member of the 1638 General Assembly and a correspondent of Samuel Rutherford's.

⁷³ The Aberdeen Burgh Accounts record a payment of £6 3s for the "wine and spice given to Mr Robert Bruce, minister, at his bygoing to Inverness", *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, p. 97.

Aberdeenshire, between January 1622 and July 1623.⁷⁴ In the late summer of 1622, Bruce received a visit from Robert Blair, at that time a regent at Glasgow University.⁷⁵ Blair had decided to visit the sufferers in the north, among them David Dickson and Robert Bruce.⁷⁶ Bruce was so delighted with the visit from Blair that he gave him a “large book” containing “the memorable passages of his life”.⁷⁷

Bruce’s second exile in Inverness was shorter, but in some ways more difficult, than his first. Two things were easier. One was that the previous minister, James Bishop, had died about 1620 and the new minister, William Clogie, was of a milder disposition and does not appear to have made any trouble for him.⁷⁸ The other was that he now had at least some local support. John Ross of Midleys (mentioned in Section 2), who was Provost for part of his previous exile, had represented the Burgh of Inverness at the 1621 Parliament and had voted against the ratification of the Articles of Perth, and so too had George Munro of Tarrell, representing the Sherifffdom of Inverness. Considerable courage was required to vote in this way and it indicates a strong commitment to Presbyterianism. Several other commissioners

⁷⁴ Robert Wodrow, *Collections upon the Lives of the Reformers* (2 vols., Maitland Club, Glasgow, 1834-48), Vol. 2, part i, p. 170.

⁷⁵ Blair set off on his journey about the time of John Cameron’s arrival in Glasgow which was August 1622, T. M’Crie (ed.), *Life of Robert Blair* (Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1848), p. 39; H. M. B. Reid, *The Divinity Principals in the University of Glasgow, 1545-1654* (Glasgow, 1917), p. 212.

⁷⁶ We are not sure who the other “sufferers” in the north were. One of them was possibly Henry Blyth, minister of the Canongate, Edinburgh, who was banished to Inverness on 2nd July 1619, *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 12, p. 7n. After being warded there for a while, he was presented by the king on 22nd October 1622 to the less prominent charge of Eccles in the Presbytery of Duns. Row describes him as “an honest and holy man”, John Row, *History of the Kirk of Scotland* (Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1842), pp. 258, 323-4. The Canongate church at the time was a part of Holyrood Abbey, which also housed the Chapel-Royal where the king had recently installed an organ, see Row, p. 258; David Laing (ed.), *Miscellany of the Wodrow Society* (Edinburgh, 1844), pp. 457, 466.

⁷⁷ *Life of Blair*, p. 40. According to Wodrow, Calderwood had access to this “large book”, or extracts from it, in compiling his *History*, see Wodrow’s *Life, Sermons*, pp. 64, 143.

⁷⁸ William Clogie was admitted in 1620, *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae* (2nd edn), Vol. 6, p. 455. The testament of Richard Lawson, bookseller in Edinburgh, who died in September 1622, recorded debts of £4 8/8 owed by James Bishop, and seemed to be unaware of his death, David Laing (ed.), *Bannatyne Miscellany* (3 vols., Edinburgh, 1827-55), Vol. 3, p. 201. When Clogie demitted his charge in about June 1639, in connection with disputes over the National Covenant, the Presbytery recorded of him that “having deserved well of the kirk, and his praise being in the gospel, he was recommended to the several Presbyteries”, see *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae* (3 vols. in 6 parts, 1st edn., Edinburgh, 1866-71), part 5, p. 253; “The Presbytery of Inverness, 1632-1644”, p. 493.

from the region had abstained, such as Lord Lovat, the Sheriffs of Nairn and Elgin, and the Burgh representatives for Nairn and Forres.⁷⁹

The influence of these men, however, was outweighed by that of Bruce's main opponent, Lord Enzie, son of the first Marquis of Huntly and subsequently the second Marquis, who, along with his father, was the keeper of Inverness Castle and the hereditary Sheriff of Inverness-shire. Enzie had been brought up a nominal Protestant but all his family were Roman Catholic. He had a hearty dislike of Presbyterianism and did what he could to make Bruce's life uncomfortable. Since 1616 he had been a Privy Councillor and during December 1622 he was absent in Edinburgh attending several of the Council meetings. "When my Lord Enzie came to Edinburgh," says Calderwood, "[Bruce] had peace and rest, but when my Lord Enzie went home again, his battle was renewed."⁸⁰

One way in which Enzie made trouble for Bruce was by "vex[ing] him with reproachful speeches against the servants of God, and finding fault with his doctrine as treasonable". From this it appears that Bruce was again conducting services with the concurrence of the magistrates.⁸¹ At one of these services, John Gordon, minister of Kirkmichael (Tomintoul) was present, unbeknown to Bruce, who was "discoursing upon the dolour of the mind". Bruce showed "that they were unskilful physicians that would take a drink of wine, or Wallace book (i.e. some romance) to read upon, as meet physick for such a disease". Gordon thought that Bruce was attacking him and in response he "belched out reproachful speeches" against Bruce and transmitted a complaint to Lord Enzie.⁸²

⁷⁹ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, pp. 498-501. John Ross had a university degree, possibly from St Andrews – a student of that name was incorporated at St Leonards in 1576, J. M. Anderson (ed.), *Early Records of the University of St Andrews 1413-1579* (Edinburgh, 1926), p. 289. He was Provost of Inverness in 1603-7, 1615-16, 1618-20, and 1623-4, and was still alive in 1629, *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 2, pp. 167, 358. Fifteen years under the ministry of James Bishop had not persuaded him of prelacy, and one wonders if he was a convert from Bruce's first period of exile in Inverness. For George Munro of Tarrell, see A. Mackenzie, *History of the Munros of Fowlis* (Inverness, 1898), pp. 285-6.

⁸⁰ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 566.

⁸¹ In July 1618 the Provost and baillies of Inverness had renewed their statute "that all persons resort to the kirk every Sabbath day to the preaching before and afternoon in time coming", *Records of Inverness*, Vol. 2, p. 153. The provision of separate Gaelic services at the time is unclear. During his exile in Turriff, David Dickson was employed by the minister there to preach one sermon on Sabbath, *Select Biographies*, Vol. 1, p. 317; Wodrow, *Collections*, Vol. 2, part i, p. 170.

⁸² Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 566. Gordon had a colourful life. He was minister successively of Kirkmichael (1622), Drainie and Kinedar (1624), and Elgin (1633). In 1635 he received the degree of Doctor of Divinity from King's College, Aberdeen. In 1639 he



Abertarff House, Inverness, the town house of Lord Lovat.

[Photograph courtesy of Allan Maciver]

Another difficulty that Bruce had, probably because of Lord Enzie, was over accommodation. “He could not get convenient lodging, or at least keep it long, for warning to remove.” At one stage he had to move out to Chanonry (Fortrose), but through “intreattie”, presumably from those who wanted to hear his preaching, he “was induced to return”. Eventually Lord Lovat made “a fashion of reconciliation” between Enzie and Bruce.⁸³ In March 1623, Enzie received a licence

was deposed from the ministry on the following counts: (1) neglect of a weekly sermon; (2) lack of discipline in the Kirk Session; (3) often deserting his charge, particularly when “maid doctor at Aberdene”, and “as a man unsatled in his judgements” taking to the hills “in a gray playd and trewes”, remaining there on one occasion for about eighteen days; (4) being scandalous, profane, and irreligious; (5) careless wandering in the country on the Sabbath day; (6) fighting in the High Street and open churchyard in Elgin with an “Irish phisitiane”, both of them wrestling “in dubb [puddles] and myres” until separated; (7) scandalous and unsound in doctrine; (8) cursing all that entered into the Covenant. He moved to England, but returned to Elgin in 1642, then back to England in 1648, and then back again to Scotland. By June 1649 he had been excommunicated “for blasphime and other vicious facts”. See *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* (2nd edn.), Vol. 6, p. 393, and Vol. 8, pp. 636-7; *Records of Old Aberdeen* (2 vols., New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1899-1909), Vol. 2, p. 33.

⁸³ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 566. In the Wardlaw MS, James Fraser remarks that there was “a wonderful concord and correspondence” between Lord Lovat and Lord Enzie at that

from the king to travel abroad and he was absent, mostly in France, for the rest of the year.⁸⁴ In the midst of these difficulties, Bruce seems to have had even greater success with the gospel than before. We discuss this point in more detail in Section 5.

On 10th September 1623 Bruce petitioned the Privy Council that he might return to Kinnaird to consult physicians regarding “the heavy disease and sickness, which has so violently seized upon my aged and infirm person that by human conjecture there is little or no hope of my recovery”. Permission was granted on condition that he would return to Inverness before the end of November, and would refrain from preaching in the meantime.⁸⁵ It is not entirely clear that he availed himself of this opportunity but it seems likely that he did. On 31st October he conveyed all his land in a charter of alienation to his son Robert and his future spouse Margaret Menteith – the instrument of sasine, dated 20th November, being registered at Stirling on 29th November.⁸⁶ Presumably this step was an indication of his health at the time.

He was certainly back in Inverness by the spring of 1624 (if he had ever left) because on 16th March his son Robert obtained a licence for him to return to Kinnaird until 1st September, under the same prohibition on preaching as before.⁸⁷ On 26th April his daughter Elizabeth, who had presumably been staying with him in Inverness, was married to James Campbell, son of the John Campbell of Moy, who was the Commissary of Inverness and who was closely connected with the

time. Enzie always referred affectionately to Lovat as “my father Lovat”, see W. Mackay (ed.), *Chronicles of the Frasers: the Wardlaw Manuscript* (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 247. Lord Lovat’s Inverness town house, built in 1593, is the present Abertarff House on Church Street.

⁸⁴ David Masson (ed.), *Register of the Privy Council of Scotland, Vol. 13, 1622-25* (Edinburgh, 1896), p. 194; *ODNB*. Enzie’s family did not accompany him abroad. One of his sons, William, died in Inverness while he was away, *Gordon, Earldom of Sutherland*, p. 374. Enzie’s wife, Anna Campbell, (1594-1638) was in Inverness on 20th July 1623, see Charles Fraser-Mackintosh (ed.), *Letters of Two Centuries* (Inverness, 1890), p. 15. She was the sister of the famous Marquis of Argyll (1605-1661). A striking picture of her by George Jamesone is reproduced in *Musa Latina Aberdonensis* (3 vols., New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1892-1910), Vol. 2, facing p. 189.

⁸⁵ *Register Privy Council, Vol. 13*, pp. 361, 822-3. In the petition Bruce states that he had “inviolably observed and kept” the required bounds of “the burgh of Inverness and four miles about the same”. How this tallies with his period of residence in Fortrose is uncertain. Perhaps his stay in Fortrose was subsequent to this.

⁸⁶ *Bruces and Cumyns*, p. 650. Unfortunately, the extract from the charter of alienation does not state the place where it was signed.

⁸⁷ *Register Privy Council, Vol. 13*, p. 460. Caution money for the licence, of 2000 merks, was recorded on 19th March, *ibid.*, p. 467.

Campbells of Cawdor.⁸⁸ At some point in the spring or early summer, Bruce left Inverness – for good as it turned out – and on 25th August he petitioned the Privy Council from Kinnaird, stating that he had observed the terms of his licence, and asking that his period of liberty be extended to the spring. The Privy Council, knowing the royal sensitivity on this issue, granted Bruce a month’s extension but wrote to England for further advice. On 22nd September the reply came back from the royal residence at Theobalds that Bruce might have liberty to remain at Kinnaird during the winter but that he was not to preach nor to make feasts or visits, “for we think it neither convenient nor tolerable, that he who opposeth himself against all bishops should play the part of ane universal bishop, and like ane apostle go from place to place preaching the gospel”.⁸⁹

Bruce was far from happy with the prohibition on preaching, and Calderwood says that “the conditions of his licence were so strait, that he purposed to goe back to his confine, unless he obtained a prorogation. But the winter being driven over, and the king dying in Marche, he was not urged to returne backe, and so continueth teaching, where he can have occasion, to this houre.”⁹⁰ Charles I had less interest in pursuing Bruce, and thus Bruce’s second exile in Inverness had effectively come to an end by about April 1624.⁹¹

Bruce resumed preaching in 1625, especially in the parish church of Larbert which he repaired and where he “discharged all the parts of a minister, and many from other parts came to hear him”. John Livingstone was his hearer there “for a great part of the summer 1627”.⁹² At the king’s instruction, he was troubled once again by the Privy Council on 18th December 1628 for preaching in churches in East and West Lothian, and was confined to Kinnaird and three miles round

⁸⁸ *Bruces and Cumyns*, p. 362.

⁸⁹ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 13, pp. 595-8, 612-3.

⁹⁰ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 7, p. 624. Calderwood was writing before 1627, as we have mentioned above. In the revision of his *History*, this passage is modified to include a reference to Bruce’s death in 1631, Vol. 8, p. 124.

⁹¹ Calderwood, in the place just quoted (*History*, Vol. 7, p. 624), says that it was in September 1624 that Bruce returned home, a mistake which has been followed by many writers, and which presumably derives from a misunderstanding of the nature of the king’s letter. Calderwood himself was in exile abroad, probably until James’ death. His information about this period of Bruce’s life must have come either directly from Bruce or from someone closely connected with Bruce. Where it can be tested, it is usually impressively accurate.

⁹² *Select Biographies*, Vol. 1, p. 306.

about; but it is not our purpose to consider this part of his life. He was present at the famous Kirk of Shotts communion in June 1630 and died on 27th July of the following year. He was buried at the church in Larbert.

5. The success of his preaching in Inverness

The general state of religion in the Highlands at the beginning of the seventeenth century is an interesting subject, but not one that we can pursue here. The comment of James Melville, sent in a deputation to examine the Synods of Aberdeen, Moray, and Ross in October 1597, is well known:

And indeed, I have ever since regretted the estate of our Highlands, and am sure if Christ were preached among them, they would shame many lowland professors; and if pains were taken but as willingly for winning of these souls by the Prince and Pastors to plant their kirks, as there is for wracking and displanting of the best constituted, Christ might be preached and believed, both in Highlands and Borders.⁹³

Eighty years ago Barron showed that the Highlands were not as uncivilised at that period as is generally thought, and more recently James Kirk has proved that they were better supplied with ministers and readers than was previously realised.⁹⁴ The gospel had penetrated to some extent in that a number of prominent families such as the Munros of Fowlis had been supporting Presbyterianism since the Reformation, while John Munro, minister of Tain, was one of the ministers imprisoned after the 1605 Aberdeen Assembly. A measure of civilisation, however, and the presence of Protestant and even evangelical ministers, is not the same thing as the gospel being received and blessed; and the general testimony is that it was the preaching of Bruce that initiated the widespread acceptance of the gospel in the Highlands. In this connection, the words of James Melville appear almost prophetic.

⁹³ Robert Pitcairn (ed.), *Autobiography and Diary of James Melville* (Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1842), p. 434. James Melville died in January 1614.

⁹⁴ Evan Barron, *The Scottish War of Independence* (2nd edn., Inverness, 1934), pp. ix-lxxx; James Kirk, "The Kirk and the Highlands at the Reformation" and "The Jacobean Church in the Highlands, 1567-1625", *Patterns of Reform* (Edinburgh, 1989), pp. 305-333, 449-487. See also Jane Dawson, "Calvinism and the Gaidhealtachd in Scotland", *Calvinism in Europe, 1540-1620* (Cambridge, 1994), pp. 231-253.

The earliest specific reference to the success of Bruce's ministry in Inverness is from Father James Macbreck, a Jesuit, writing to the General of his Society on 5th August 1648 about his experiences with Montrose's army. Speaking of Loch Ness, he says,

This lake is never frozen, but the waters flow freely even in the coldest weather, and the snow will not lie on the ground within a mile of its bank. But if the region is warm so also is the temper of the inhabitants, who are ardent Calvinists, having become obstinately imbued with these sentiments by a preacher who was sent there for banishment by King James the Sixth.⁹⁵

Twenty years later, this statement was confirmed by Robert Fleming who wrote of Bruce:

The great success of his ministry at Edinburgh, Inverness, and other places, whither Providence called him, is abundantly known. While he was confined at Inverness, that poor dark country was marvellously enlightened, many were brought into Christ by his ministry, and a seed sown in these places, which to this day is not worn out.⁹⁶

A few further details are provided in the unpublished diary of John Brand, minister of Bo'ness, who visited Inverness in 1700. In his entry for 29th June he notes:

The memory of that man of God, Mr Robert Bruce, is sweet to this day in this place [Inverness]. He, in the days of King James, was confined to this town, where the Lord blessed his labours to the conversion of many brethren in the town and country about; for multitudes of all ranks would have crossed several ferries every Lord's-day to hear him; yea, they came both from Ross and Sutherland. The memory of the just is blessed.⁹⁷

Gustavus Aird (1813-98) recorded a similar but independent account which he had heard in the 1830s from Hector Holm of Invergordon, who was probably born about 1760:

⁹⁵ William Forbes Leith, *Memoirs of Scottish Catholics during the XVIIth and XVIIIth Centuries* (2 vols., London, 1909), Vol. 1, p. 319. Calderwood spoke in 1623 of Bruce having won many thousand souls to Christ – “qui plura animarum millia Christo lucrificet” – but did not mention Inverness, *Altare Damascenum*, p.*3.

⁹⁶ Fleming, *Fulfilling of Scriptures*, p. 257.

⁹⁷ National Library of Scotland MS 1668, p. 100, quoted in *Life of Blair*, pp. 39-40n.

. . . that during part of Mr Bruce's ministry in Inverness, persons from Sutherland and Ross were in the habit of going there to hear him, through bridgeless streams and rivers and across ferries.⁹⁸

Robert Wodrow, too, had heard about Bruce's success from several sources:

I have many a time heard it observed that Mr Bruce, Mr Dickson, and others, their confinement in the north during the former times of prelacy, was no service done to the prelates: and those gentlemen's confinement, and that of several ministers since the restoration, was of no small use to interests of liberty and presbytery there; and the good effects of their confinement are not yet at an end, and I hope never shall.⁹⁹

Writing a few years later, Wodrow recorded:

Some of Mr Bruce's converts were alive, though but very few, when Mr Angus M'Bain, Episcopal minister there [Inverness], had his mind enlightened, and was brought to take up the corruptions of Episcopacy and publicly owned himself sorry for his conformity about the 1684 and 1685 [in fact 1687]. His [Bruce's] ministry at Inverness was singularly countenanced of Heaven, to the awakening and conversion of many, and I hope much and new good seed is sown there since.¹⁰⁰

One question that arises from these various accounts is whether they are referring equally to both of Bruce's periods of exile in Inverness, or whether it was the second period that was especially blessed. It is generally supposed that the latter was the case.¹⁰¹ The reasons for thinking that the first period might have been the more significant are that it was very much longer, that he was younger and fitter at that stage,

⁹⁸ 1888 Assembly Address, in Alexander MacRae, *Life of Gustavus Aird* (Stirling, [1908]), p. 248; Macnicol, p. 232.

⁹⁹ R. Wodrow, *History of the Sufferings of the Church of Scotland* (4 vols., Glasgow, 1828-30 (1st edn. 1721-2)), Vol. 2, p. 4. Shaw in his *Province of Moray*, first published in 1775, has a similar statement, probably derived at least partly from Fleming and Wodrow, (2nd edn., p. 407; 3rd edn., Vol. 3, p. 450). In his notes for 1710, Wodrow records that Bruce had a multitude of converts by his ministry in Inverness, one of whom was the celebrated Alexander Munro, *Analecta* (4 vols., Maitland Club, Glasgow, 1842-3), Vol. 1, p. 267.

¹⁰⁰ Wodrow's *Life, Sermons*, p. 147; W. Mackay (ed.), *Records of the Presbyteries of Inverness and Dingwall 1643-1688* (Edinburgh, 1896), p. 125ff.

¹⁰¹ Wodrow's *Life, Sermons*, pp. 146-7; Macnicol, pp. 231-2.

and that there is some evidence of blessing – for instance the way in which Provost John Ross of Inverness voted at the Parliament of 1621. Against this are the considerations that the quotation from James Melville above, written sometime between 1610 and 1614, shows that he had not heard of any great gospel success at that stage; that James Bishop (minister of Inverness during his first period) would probably have reported such crowds of hearers to the Bishops and to the King, so that Bruce would have been banished elsewhere on the second occasion; that Bruce would have been less reluctant to return to Inverness if he knew that so many were thirsting for the gospel; and that the hearers of M'Bain in 1687 must have been few indeed who were converted under Bruce prior to 1613. On balance, therefore, it seems likely that – while Bruce's preaching enjoyed a measure of blessing during his first exile – it was during his comparatively brief second exile that the great crowds gathered from Ross and Sutherland.

We want to conclude with two comments. The first is that we can see in the ministry of Bruce one of the reasons why the people of Inverness took the National Covenant so readily in April 1638, and perhaps also why the service books were destroyed by the scholars in Fortrose in March 1638.¹⁰² Whatever other factors may have been at work, it is clear that many people had been converted, and could therefore see the spiritual danger in the liturgy that was being pressed on the Church. The result was that they were prepared to take steps against the innovation. It was the preaching of Bruce that had given the evangelical movement in the North its initial impetus.¹⁰³

As an example of the enthusiasm for the Covenant in 1638, here is Spalding's description of the reception of the commissioners, including the fourteenth Earl of Sutherland, Lord Lovat, and Andrew Cant, sent by the Covenanters to the north:

They came to Inverness upon the 25th April, and convened the whole township, to whom was produced a Confession of Faith and

¹⁰² John Spalding, *Memorials of the Trubles in Scotland* (2 vols., Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1850-1), Vol. 1, pp. 86-7.

¹⁰³ The extent of Covenanting support in the North is examined in Barry Robertson, "The Covenanting north of Scotland, 1638-1647", *Innes Review* 61 (2010), pp. 24-51. Robertson makes the point that the Covenanting movement in the North and North East was strong enough to survive several military defeats at the hand of Montrose; and that though defeated, the northern Covenanters still managed to delay Montrose in Scotland until Charles I had been decisively defeated at the battle of Naseby in June 1645.

a Covenant to be subscribed by them, and to note up their names who refused to subscribe; but the whole town except Mr William Clogie, minister at Inverness, and some few others, willingly subscribed. Then they left Inverness, and came to Forres upon the 28th of April, where the whole ministry of the Presbytery subscribed, except Mr George Cumming, parson of Dallas. Right so [i.e. in the same way], Caithness, Sutherland, Ross, Cromarty, Nairn, had for the most part subscribed, by industry of the forenamed five commissioners. They came to Elgin upon the 30th day of April. The whole people was convened, Mr Andrew Cant stood up in the reader's dais and made some little speech; thereafter provost, baillies, council, and community altogether subscribed this covenant, very few refusing, except Mr John Gordon, minister at Elgin, who did not subscribe.¹⁰⁴

The second comment is to note the importance of Robert Bruce in the lives of many people. If history is the study of people's lives, then Bruce was a very significant historical figure indeed, as far as Inverness and the north of Scotland were concerned. Many people's lives were fundamentally and permanently changed through his labours, and this influence has lasted down the generations. This point is worth making because of the tendency in an irreligious age to ignore or downplay the importance of Christianity and of prominent Christians in the past. For a pertinent example, the *ODNB* entry for the lawyer and politician Thomas Hamilton, Earl of Melrose (1563-1637), has occasion to refer to Bruce's case before the Privy Council in 1620. Instead of mentioning Bruce's name, however, the entry dismisses him with the epithet of "a dissident minister", as if the ordinary reader would neither know nor care about such a peripheral figure. But even in purely historical terms, we would think that Bruce, through the establishment of the evangelical religion in the north of Scotland, was one of the most important men of his day.

¹⁰⁴ Spalding, Vol. 1, pp. 87-8. The minister, John Gordon, was the same man who had taken exception to Bruce's preaching during his second exile in Inverness.

APPENDIX

THE THIRD CHARGE IN ABERDEEN AND JOHN MACBIRNIE

1. The Third Charge in Aberdeen

From the Reformation until 1573, Aberdeen had a single minister, Adam Heriot. In that year, feeling his age, Heriot demitted his charge in favour of John Craig who had been Knox's colleague in Edinburgh. Heriot died the following year and in 1577 Craig was joined by David Cunningham who was at the same time appointed Bishop of Aberdeen. In 1579 Craig returned to Edinburgh and was succeeded for a short while by Nicol Dagleish, 1580-1, and then in 1582 by Peter Blackburn. The first mention of a third minister in Aberdeen is of Walter or William Leslie or Leisk in 1585.¹⁰⁵ In 1591 Robert Howie was appointed "fellow-helper" to David Cunningham for a year, and thereafter was confirmed as one of the ministers of Aberdeen, a position which he held until 1598.¹⁰⁶

For most of this period the Burgh of Aberdeen formed a single congregation, with morning and afternoon services on Sabbaths, and weekday services on Tuesdays and Thursdays. In February 1590/1, communion was administered over three consecutive Sabbaths because of the size of the congregation, and the following year over two consecutive Sabbaths.¹⁰⁷ In July 1595 steps were taken for the repair of the Greyfriars kirk, and a few months later plans were formed for dividing the town into four parishes under four ministers.¹⁰⁸ In June of the following year, it was decided to partition St Nicholas into two churches with a dividing wall, and the following month a new Master of the Kirk Work had to be appointed because the old one had refused to co-operate in the division.¹⁰⁹

In September 1596, it was announced that the town would be divided into two parishes for the present, with a third parish to be formed once the Greyfriars kirk was ready. The Even and Futtie quarters

¹⁰⁵ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ* (2nd edn.), Vol. 8, pp. 526; *Aberdeen Burgh Register*, pp. 57-8.

¹⁰⁶ G. D. Henderson, *The Founding of Marischal College, Aberdeen* (Aberdeen University Studies, No. 123, Aberdeen, 1947), p. 61.

¹⁰⁷ *Aberdeen Burgh Register*, p. 54; James Cooper (ed.), *Cartularium Ecclesiae Sancti Nicolai Aberdonensis* (2 vols., New Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1888-92), Vol. 2, pp. 392.

¹⁰⁸ *Aberdeen Burgh Register*, pp. 114, 117-8.

¹⁰⁹ *Aberdeen Burgh Register*, pp. 135-6.

of the town were to comprise one parish and the Crooked and Green quarters the other. A minister and church were drawn by lot, the Even and Futtie quarters drawing Peter Blackburn and the New or East Kirk, and the Crooked and Green quarters drawing David Cunningham and the Old or West Kirk. The weekday services were divided between the two kirks and the communion arrangements continued as before, spread over two Sabbaths.¹¹⁰ For some reason, the repairs to Greyfriars kirk were not completed and by May 1607 it was being used as a wood-store and a jakes.¹¹¹

About the middle of September 1598, Robert Howie moved to Dundee and there was a delay in finding a replacement for him. The king sent a letter to the inhabitants of the burgh giving the right of electing a new minister to David Cunningham, Peter Blackburn, and the Provost and Baillies, and threatening everyone else with his “wrath and indignation” unless they submitted.¹¹² On 17th November payment was recorded to David Robertson and Alexander Scroggie for “their labours in preaching the word of God to the congregation of this burgh, after the transportation of Master Robert Howie to Dundee”.¹¹³ It was probably at this time that George Chalmer acted as minister for a short while.¹¹⁴ At the beginning of July 1599 George Grier from Edinburgh supplied for two Sabbaths, and on the 13th of July the whole town – not acting entirely in conformity with the king’s letter – agreed to give him a call. On 5th September it was reported that he had declined the call, and six days later James Rose or Ross was called in his place, and being present, accepted on the spot.¹¹⁵

In August 1600, David Cunningham died, and the following month he was succeeded as Bishop of Aberdeen by Peter Blackburn.

¹¹⁰ *Aberdeen Burgh Register*, pp. 145-6; *Cartularium*, Vol. 2, p. 397. This arrangement was confirmed in October 1604, see John Stuart (ed.), *Selections from the Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen* (Spalding Club, Aberdeen, 1846), pp. 40, 190.

¹¹¹ *Aberdeen Burgh Register*, p. 290. Another place where a third congregation might have met, provided it was not too large, was St Mary’s crypt in St Nicholas. This, however, was being used as a lumber room and as a prison for witches at this stage, *Cartularium*, Vol. 2, p. xlviiii note.

¹¹² *Aberdeen Council Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 76-7.

¹¹³ *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, p. 125.

¹¹⁴ In 1619 Chalmer was described as “minister at Dumbennan [Huntly], burgess of this burgh [Aberdeen], and sometime one of the ministers thereof and regent in the said College [Marischal]”, *Aberdeen Burgh Register*, p. 365. He had graduated at Edinburgh University in 1592, David Laing (ed.), *A Catalogue of the Graduates of the University of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1858), p. 11.

¹¹⁵ *Aberdeen Burgh Register*, pp. 188, 193-7; *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, pp. 125-6.

Peter Blackburn continued as an ordinary minister of the parish but his brother Archibald became minister of the East Kirk in 1601 while James Rose became minister of the West Kirk. By 15th January 1602, arrangements had been made for the settling of a fourth minister, John Macbirnie.¹¹⁶

2. John Macbirnie

According to the *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, John Macbirnie became minister of the third charge in Aberdeen in October 1605 and died in 1614 aged about 38. There is at least one inaccuracy in this statement, as we shall see, but if we follow the date just given, Macbirnie was born about 1576, and this fits well with his graduation at Edinburgh University on 28th July 1596.¹¹⁷ Among his contemporaries at university were Richard Dickson, later minister of St Cuthbert's in Edinburgh, who was in trouble in 1619 for administering communion in the Presbyterian fashion, and William Haig, the Presbyterian lawyer who had to flee to Holland in 1634 during the Balmerino case.

On 25th October 1598, Macbirnie is mentioned as “on the exercise” in Haddington, and on 16th October 1600 William Moray for the Session of Crail informed the Presbytery of St Andrews “that a young man, Mr John Macbirnie, having preached publickly, was destitute of a present moyane, and they were content in case he would tarry among them to entertain him, which the Presbytery liked well and gave their consent thereto”.¹¹⁸ Probably he was ordained minister at this time.

On 15th May 1601, the Assembly nominated him, along with George Grier (mentioned above) and William Arthur, to be planted in the joint Presbytery of Kirkcudbright and Nithisdale.¹¹⁹ The name Macbirnie is a Dumfriesshire name and he might well have had connections with that part of the country.¹²⁰ The plantation did not take place, however, and on 15th January 1602 Macbirnie is listed as one of the ministers in the Presbytery of Aberdeen. It is clear from a comparison of the Presbytery lists of January 1602 and March 1606 that he was minister (or rather minister designate) of the third charge in

¹¹⁶ *Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen*, p. 186.

¹¹⁷ Laing, *Catalogue of the Graduates of the University of Edinburgh*, p. 14.

¹¹⁸ CH2/1132/17, p. 178; *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* (1st edn.), part 4, p. 421.

¹¹⁹ Alexander Peterkin (ed.), *The Booke of the Universall Kirk of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1839), p. 497.

¹²⁰ George F. Black, *The Surnames of Scotland* (New York, 1946), p. 458.

Aberdeen.¹²¹ That he had not yet been settled in Aberdeen appears from the St Andrews Presbytery register of 11th February 1602 where he is recorded as “ain of ye ministers of Craill”, permission being given him to administer baptism at Kingsbarnes because the “pest” was present in Crail. In the event it does not appear that he was settled in Aberdeen at this stage and on 22nd March 1604 he was transported from Crail to Ferryport-on-Craig, being admitted to his new charge on 10th May 1604.¹²²

On 21st October 1605, a few months after the Aberdeen Assembly, Macbirnie was finally settled in the third charge in Aberdeen.¹²³ Both Archibald Blackburn and James Rose had been members of the Aberdeen Assembly and had subsequently been forced to concede its unlawfulness, and one wonders if the choice of Macbirnie, who was known to be unpopular with the king, was an expression of the general resentment in Aberdeen at the high-handed way in which the king had dealt with the Assembly. Furthermore, it was a surprisingly long time, nearly two years, before the king heard about the admission of Macbirnie. As soon as he did so, the reaction was violent. His indignation was directed, partly against Macbirnie, but chiefly against Peter Blackburn, Bishop of Aberdeen, for admitting him. On 3rd July 1607, James wrote to the Privy Council in the following terms:

Our godly and zealous intention of establishing of quietness and good order in the Church of our kingdom, for the better flourishing of the Gospel and of the religion presently professed, having been hitherto many ways thwarted by the unruly, turbulent, and unquiet spirits of some of the ministry, who, howsoever of duty they ought to have been the preachers of peace and obedience, did nevertheless in their actions try firebrands of strife and dissension, so now also that same good resolution of ours is impeded by the mischeat inconstancy and volubility of some of those whom we did

¹²¹ Macbirnie’s name is a later insertion in the list, CH2/1/1, p. 143; *Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen*, pp. 186, 198.

¹²² *Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen*, p. 190; CH2/1132/17, pp. 183, 206, 209; *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ* (1st edn.), part 4, pp. 421, 426.

¹²³ The old *Fasti* gives the date as 31st October (*Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanæ* (1st edn.), part 4, p. 426). Certainly Macbirnie was not one of the Aberdeen ministers on 13th October 1605, *Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen*, pp. 47-8. The Aberdeen Burgh accounts record a letter being sent to Macbirnie by the Council about this time, but no exact date is given, *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, p. 78.

chose as good instruments for the furtherance of the work. Who, being either led by some fantastic opinion of their own, or then being of full intention to oppose themselves directly to the progress of that work, by their outward actions kyith direct contradictory as in special the Bishop of Aberdeen.

At the last session of Parliament in Perth, as also at that General Assembly kept at Linlithgow, and lately now before you of our Council there the time of his giving his oath of obedience, he did clearly manifest his forward and evil inclined disposition in all these matters.¹²⁴ And, as we are further certified, either by his direct doing or at least by his oversight and toleration without finding any fault therewith, that Mr John M'Birnie, minister (one whose unquiet spirit has made him a frequent remover from place to place, neither desiring to be a long remainer anyway nor contenting his flock where he did stay, but being of an unsettled both mind and residence), should be lately placed as actual minister at our burgh of Aberdeen, being one of the chief and principal burrowis of that our kingdom, without our knowledge or the consent of the ministers of the General Assembly. By whose placing there no better fruit can be expected than the like of that proud conventicle at Aberdeen, which did import so much disquietness to the estate of that Church.

And therefore, as we have given order to the Commissioners of the Assembly for the present displacing of the said Mr John, and discharging of him to preach any further there, so, in regard of the Bishop's own offence in this matter, in presuming at his hand, without our knowledge or consent of the Commissioners, to plant such a minister in one of our chief burrowis, – at least he being guilty of connivance in not finding fault therewith, – it is our pleasure and will that you call the said Bishop before you; and if

¹²⁴ At the Perth Parliament of July 1606, the bishops rode to the Parliament “clothed in silk and velvet”. Peter Blackburn, however, “thought it not becoming the simplicity of a minister to ride that way in pomp; therefore he went on foot to the parliament house. The rest of the bishops caused the Chancellor remove him out of the parliament house, because he would not ride as the rest did,” Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 6, pp. 493-4. In June 1607, Blackburn seems to have delayed taking the Oath of Allegiance which acknowledged the Royal Supremacy “over all persons and in all causes” (i.e. especially ecclesiastical causes). He took the Oath on 23rd June, *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 7, pp. 374-5, 397. We do not know what his offence was at the Linlithgow Assembly of December 1606.

you do try the planting of the said Mr John to have proceeded upon the causing, command, or direction of the said Bishop, our will is that, upon your trying thereof, you commit him presently in ward within some of our castles, and thereafter acquaint us with the same, that we may thereupon return our further pleasure and will. But, if otherwise you find no wilful offence in him, but a point of negligence in not finding fault therewith, our pleasure is that you admonish him of his duty, assuring him that, if he should commit any of such oversights hereafter, that the same shall not be overslipped unpunished.¹²⁵

On 10th July, Peter Blackburn was charged to appear before the Privy Council on 4th August to give an account of his conduct on pain of rebellion, but nothing further was heard of the matter.¹²⁶ Probably the lapse of time was a sufficient reason for dropping it. By October he was entirely rehabilitated and was sitting on the Commission of Assembly before which Macbirnie was required to appear.

Meanwhile on 23rd May 1606, Macbirnie had been required by the Aberdeen Presbytery at its exercise “to follow furth the common head of controversy concerning the power of the civil magistrate”.¹²⁷ Clearly this was a highly sensitive subject at the time and it is unlikely that Macbirnie observed discretion. On 7th October of the following year, he was summoned before the Commission of Assembly “for preaching against Bishops and constant Moderators”. At the Commission, he promised not to meddle any more “with these controverted points in pulpit before the people, but only to preach Christ Jesus” – a compromise, says Calderwood, at which “good brethren were offended”.¹²⁸ It does not appear that his preaching had upset the town, however, because his travel expenses were paid by the burgh, and Alexander Cullen, whose term as Provost of Aberdeen had just finished, was appointed to accompany him on the journey to Falkland.¹²⁹

¹²⁵ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 7, pp. 532; *Original Letters*, Vol. 1, pp. 379-81*.

¹²⁶ *Register Privy Council*, Vol. 7, p. 411. An undated and rather vague letter from Blackburn to the king, which might well be his response to this summons, is given in Wodrow, *Divines of the North-East of Scotland*, p. 77. In the letter he assures the king of his “good service” and pleads his “good age” and infirmity as an excuse for any deficiencies.

¹²⁷ *Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen*, p. 198.

¹²⁸ Calderwood, *History*, Vol. 6, p. 682.

¹²⁹ *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, p. 81. Macbirnie was not universally popular, however, because on 28th June 1608 one of his parishioners, Alexander Mortimer, took “off his

Macbirnie evidently found it difficult to co-operate with those who were undermining Presbyterianism because on 7th March 1608, he was admonished by Presbytery to “conform himself and keep a harmony in his ministry with the rest of his brethren in the city, particularly the Moderator (Mr Peter Blackburn)”. On 13th March 1609, he was further instructed by the Presbytery “to take the advice of the said brethren, that a harmony be amongst them in all things”.¹³⁰ Within a few months, however, Macbirnie was dead.¹³¹ After his death, the third charge remained vacant until William Forbes was admitted in October 1616.

Among his Presbyterian brethren, Macbirnie was noted for his piety. John Livingstone had “heard the Lady Culross say that he was godly, zealous, and painful preacher, and that he used, always when he rode, to have two Bibles hanging at a leathern girdle about his middle, the one original, the other English; as also a little sand-glass in a brazen case, and being alone, read, or meditated, or prayed; and if any company were with him, he would read and speak from the Word to them”. John Row describes him as “a most zealous and painful pastor, a great opposer of Hierarchy. He was a shining torch and a burning star.”¹³²

Livingstone had also heard of a remarkable provision made for his family: “When he died he called his wife and told her he had no outward means to leave her or his only daughter, but that he had got good assurance that the Lord would provide for them; and that, accordingly, the day he was buried, the magistrates of the town came to the house after the burial, and brought two subscribed papers, one of a competent maintenance to his wife during her life, another of a provision for his

(i.e. Macbirnie’s) hat and [struck] him on the face therewith”, *Records of the Kirk Session, Presbytery, and Synod of Aberdeen*, p. 61.

¹³⁰ *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* (1st edn.), part 6, p. 470.

¹³¹ Macbirnie died on Whitsun 1609 according to Row, *History of the Kirk*, p. 421. Whitsun is the “seventh Sunday after Easter”, which was on 16th April that year, so this places his death on 4th June. Both editions of the *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* give the year of his death as 1614, an error which seems to go back to *Coll Aber and Banff*, p. 49 (the reference in this to MS Aberdeen Burgh Records, Vol. 51, p. 59, also seems also to be erroneous). Macbirnie was certainly dead by November 1612 (MS Aberdeen Burgh Records, Vol. 45, p. 226), and he had ceased to be an Aberdeen minister by 15th October 1609, CH2/448/3, p. 11. There seems no reason, therefore, to query Row’s date for his death. We have not discovered the source of the statement in both editions of *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* that he was aged about 38 at his death.

¹³² *Select Biographies*, Vol. 1, pp. 299-300; Row, *History of the Kirk*, p. 421; Robert Fleming, *Scripture Truth Confirmed and Cleared by Some Great Appearances of God for his Church under the New Testament* (n.p., 1678), p. 140.

daughter.”¹³³ In point of fact he had two daughters, Elizabeth and Anna. His wife’s name was Anna Black and she and the two daughters were still alive at Martinmas (11th November) 1617 when the Burgh accounts record, in considerable detail, the annual payment of this maintenance.¹³⁴ Both daughters were dead by 1623, however, when the question arose as to whether the widow alone was still entitled to receive it. The case was decided in her favour. She subsequently married Macbirnie’s former colleague Archibald Blackburn, dying about 1641.¹³⁵

In conclusion, the relevance of all this to Robert Bruce is twofold. First, it shows that the third charge was indeed vacant when Bruce was in Aberdeen in 1611, contrary to the impression given by the *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticanae*. Secondly, it shows that although there were usually three ministers in Aberdeen (or four if one includes the Bishop), there were only two congregations.¹³⁶ Thus if Bruce conducted services, which presumably he did, these would have been held in either East or West St Nicholas. We do not know if his labours in Aberdeen bore any fruit but one possible hearer was the subsequent Covenanting leader Andrew Cant, who was a student at King’s College, Aberdeen, from 1608-1612. Cant was himself minister in Aberdeen from 1641 to 1660.

¹³³ *Select Biographies*, Vol. 1, p. 300; Fleming, *Great Appearances*, pp. 140-1.

¹³⁴ *Spalding Miscellany*, Vol. 5, pp. 141-2.

¹³⁵ *Aberdeen Council Letters*, Vol. 1, p. 202.

¹³⁶ Indeed we have not yet discovered exactly when the third charge at St Nicholas became a separate congregation.