

## **Local History Reflections on the 16<sup>th</sup> C. Alienation of Monastery Land belonging to the Priory of Pittenweem, The Priory of North Berwick. The Nunnery of Haddington and the benefices of the Greyfriars of Haddington.**

### **Introduction.**

Earlier this year, I published a book on the hidden history of the early Auchinlecks and Afflecks. It was the result of local history research in fourteen areas of Scotland now knitted together to offer solutions to questions previous Scottish historians had struggled with.<sup>1</sup> They included Dr George Hewitt, the biographer of the Regent Morton, Sir William Fraser, author of the four volume *Book on The Douglas Family* and Dr Frank Bardgett, the only historian I am aware of who had tried to identify the John Auchinleck who was appointed Chaplain at Holy Trinity Church in St Andrews in 1526. Unfortunately, he missed the clue that this John Auchinleck was more than a priest. He was linked to a network of Auchinleck notaries who had moved north to Inverness after the loss of the lands belonging to the Baronial line, Auchinleck of Auchinleck.

### **The Pittenweem Priory story.**

In 1526, a John Auchinleck, was appointed Chaplain at Holy Trinity Church in St Andrews. Evidence of his activities as a Notary and as the Granitor of the lands of St Andrews Priory, his participation as a Castilian after the burning of George Wishart and his subsequent death is given in the Saga.<sup>2</sup> On release in 1552, he resumed his post as Granitor at St Andrews Priory<sup>3</sup>. In June 1554 as a priest of St Andrews, he sought absolution for killing in defence of the castle after the murder of Cardinal Beaton.<sup>4</sup> In 1553, when the Priory of Pittenweem came under the authority of the Prior of St Andrews, he was appointed its Chamberlain, granted a house, married, and raised three children before his death in 1568.<sup>5</sup>

So, what was the link with the alienation of the lands of Pittenweem Priory? Firstly, I had identified the role of John Rowle who was Prior of Pittenweem Priory from 1526 until his death before 1558.<sup>6</sup> He was a Lord of Session and one of the spiritual Lords who attended the Scottish Parliament. In addition, John, the Chamberlain, had married an Isobel Wood whose uncle, John Wood, was Secretary to James Stewart, Earl of Moray and Commendator of the Priory of Pittenweem. In 1550, the Earl, his secretary and Prior John Rowle had been part of a delegation of nineteen people to France with Mary of Guise, then Regent of Scotland.<sup>7</sup> David Cook, a former Town Clerk of the Burgh of Pittenweem wrote two accounts on the history of the Burgh and of the Priory. In an article, 'Sketch of the Early History of Pittenweem' in the book, *Memorials of Fife (Conolly 1869)*, he described Rowle as anticipating the Reformation in 1543 when he feud out lands of Grangemuir within the Parish to a local Laird. On Rowle's return, a start was made to the disposal of the lands of the Priory. The lands of Rynd in Perthshire, described as an ancient possession of the Priory

on the Isle of May, was feud to the tenants because they had been put to great expense through inundations of the Tay and the Earn. The Isle of May was feud to the Learmouths of Dairsie. A number of charters for Priory land granted to the monks have survived, some with historiated images. John Auchinleck, the Chamberlain, received the lands of Inch in the Parish along with his house at the gate to the Priory.

Cook was scathing of Rowle's deviousness, suggesting that 'the later Reformers would have escaped the stigma of plundering the church because Rowle did it before the Reformation.'<sup>8</sup> Cook also suggests that Lord James Stewart, Commendator of Pittenweem on Rowle's death, supported the changes and that the interests of the Priory community consisting of between nine and twelve men had been protected by the advance planning of John Rowle.<sup>9</sup> Professor Gordon Donaldson's view that the Reformation in Scotland was achieved with surprisingly little dislocation of persons and institutions is worth noting in relation to Pittenweem.<sup>10</sup> But there was more to uncover.

### **The Alienation of the lands of North Berwick Priory.**

The Rev Walter Ferrier, in his book *The North Berwick Story*, questioned the relationship between an 'Alexander Wood, Vicar pensioner of North Berwick,' the second son of Sir Andrew Wood of Largo, and Margaret Howme, Prioress of the North Berwick Priory and suggested they were 'treating matters as family affairs'.<sup>11</sup> The Rev Walter Wood, author of *The East Neuk*, records that Sir Andrew Wood, the eldest son of the famous Scottish Admiral was married to an Alison Home of Unthank before 1528 but does not mention an Alexander.<sup>12</sup> In 1559, Alexander was described in a Charter as Vicar of Largo and received the lands owned by the Priory in Fife while the Prioress granted the remaining lands south of the Forth to members of her family, the Homes.<sup>13</sup> By 1573, Master Alexander Wood de Grange had been granted Earlsferry with its harbour and anchorages and the right of ferry. The Rev. Walter Ferrier also tells us that Alexander, then Vicar of Largo, had a natural daughter, Alison, who married an Alexander Carrick in 1559, two years after the Vicar had granted his North Berwick croft to him, reinforcing the use of the words, 'family affairs.'<sup>14</sup> In this instance, the main beneficiaries from the alienated lands were the Wood family members in Fife and the family members of the North Berwick Prioress south of the Forth. However, there were complexities. As indicated in a book by Archie Rennie, the purchase of Grange in 1560 cost Alexander £1000 Scots and the Convent needed the money to repair their properties in North Berwick. Secondly the Right of Ferry was owned by the Convent of Culross and they still had property rights. Rennie also suggests the Convent existed until 1588 when James VI granted to Alexander Home, brother of the last Prioress and a royal favourite, the whole of the lands that remained the Convent's property. He also suggests that in 1596, the former prioress and one surviving nun made over to the king, the ecclesiastical revenues of Logie, Largo and Kilconquhar, the very last remnants of the Convent's once large revenues.<sup>15</sup>

### **The Cistercian Nunnery of St. Mary, Haddington.**

The late Professor Gordon Donaldson contributed to an article in the 5<sup>th</sup> Volume of *The Transactions of the East Lothian Antiquarian Society*.<sup>16</sup> He suggested that Prioress Elizabeth

Hepburn was an illegitimate daughter of Prior John Hepburn of St Andrews and that she was “inclined to be guided by the interests of her own family other than those of the nunnery.” He lists details of eight feu charters between 1556 and 1560 and adds “that the prioress was given permission by the convent in May 1559 to feu, let or set in tack the lands of the priory.”<sup>17</sup> Three weeks before she died in 1563, the prioress granted a Charter to William Maitland. What then happened is almost a game of pass the parcel especially with James Hepburn, 4<sup>th</sup> Earl of Bothwell petitioning the court to annul the grant as it had been promised to him by the Queen. On the 26<sup>th</sup> December 1563, after Elizabeth’s death, Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington and his son were appointed factors and administrators of the nunnery. The new Prioress, Isobel Hepburn, managed to have the gift of the lands revoked in 1565/6, but on her death, the nunnery land was gifted back to the Maitlands after interim lease by the Prioress to the Lindsays of the Byres.<sup>18</sup> The Castle of Nunraw at Garvald and its land were returned to the Hepburns of Beanston in 1565. John Hepburn of Beanston had granted the life rent to Prioress Elizabeth. It was not owned by the nunnery.<sup>19</sup>

### **The benefices of the Greyfriars of Haddington.**

The life of John Auchinleck, Warden of the Greyfriars of Haddington is described in the book, *The Scottish Greyfriars* by W. Bryce and published in 1909. He is referred to as a Franciscan Greyfriar and was first recorded in 1543. He succeeded to the position of Warden in 1560.<sup>20</sup> Bryce sees his continued possession of the Friary benefice and its revenues as a duel with the Burgh Council until 1572. His identity is now also revealed in the Auchinleck Saga. As his early years would have been spent at Pittendreich near Kinloss Abbey or Glenbervie estate, he would have been familiar with land management. His father, Andrew Auchinleck, a notary, was living in Inverness in 1510 with family members who had moved North from Auchinleck in Ayrshire. Andrew married one of the four daughters of Sir George Douglas of Pittendreich, near Elgin. (The estate was owned by the wife of Sir George. He and his brother, the 6<sup>th</sup> Earl of Angus, were living in exile from 1528.) He was a Sheriff Depute in Inverness and then in Edinburgh in 1529 and then returned North. His eldest son, a George Auchinleck, became “Chamberlain” to the Regent Morton.<sup>21</sup> Of the three other sons, two acquired estates through marriage. Andrew acted as Notary for Chamberlain John of Pittenweem on at least two significant occasions and was still a farmer on the Glenbervie estate when he died in 1583.

Why did Friar John find himself in conflict with Haddington Burgh Council? Professor Donaldson in his book, *The Scottish Reformation*, published in 1960, refers to the approval of the Book of Discipline in January 1560/61 having the condition that ‘clergy of all ranks who supported the Reformation should enjoy their livings for life.’<sup>22</sup> According to Donaldson, friars were still known as preachers. Donaldson recognises the unstable situation for the Reformed religion immediately after 1560, ‘that monks continued to enjoy their portions and their quarters in the precincts after the reformation as before it’. He goes on; “Revenues of Friaries within burghs were to be wholly devoted to hospitals, schools and ‘other godly uses’ or friary buildings as yet undemolished should be preserved by the burghs for educational and other purposes” One strong challenge in his book is the need to recognise that the reformed church was not legally established by crown and parliament

before 1567, adding that “any proposal of the Book of Discipline must be adduced (cited) from other sources.”<sup>23</sup> It was only from 1567 that a series of gifts to burghs of the ecclesiastical properties within their bounds commenced. Where does this fit with a leaflet on the Haddington Friary giving its dates as c1240-c1560?

By the year 1572, age and infirmity had taken its toll of the Greyfriars while recruitment even to monasteries had ceased.<sup>24</sup> The Burgh Council had pressed for transfer of the benefices held by the Greyfriars as their right. When the Privy Council first met under Morton in 1572, the conflict was resolved by the decision to grant Warden John, his nephew, a pension of £20 and designate him as a reader at Athelstaneford Kirk. In January 1573/74, Morton was writing about the need for the good order of the Kirk in things ambiguous and unresolved.<sup>25</sup> According to Bryce, the Friary Rental books were handed over to the Burgh Council in April 1574. Friar John’s death in 1578 is recorded in the Register of the Privy Seal.<sup>26</sup>

Was that the conclusion of the events affecting alienated land at North Berwick and Haddington? Unfortunately, it was only the beginning. In 1587, an Act of Parliament declared that all ecclesiastical property was declared to belong to the king. In 1625, Charles I. cancelled all grants of crown property since 1540 and rescinded all dispositions of ecclesiastic property. It was never fully implemented.<sup>27</sup> In practice, church lands were to remain with the present owners but were to be held of the Crown. Revenue from tiends<sup>28</sup> took much longer to resolve but a formula proposed by Charles I was eventually agreed in September 1629 and continued to operate until 1925. Writing in 1909, the Prestonpans historian, P Hume Brown, describes the agreement as *the greatest economic revolution recorded in Scottish History*<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Affleck., D. K. (2021.) *The Saga of the Early Auchinlecks and Afflecks*

<sup>2</sup> Register of the Privy Council. 31/7/1546. Sir John Auchinleck summoned for the treasonable slaughter of Cardinal Beaton. Forfeited of all lands. Guilty of High Treason

<sup>3</sup> See Knox Book 1, Reformation in Scotland. Page 111. Eight men including John Auchinleck were set at liberty and restored to their lands.

<sup>4</sup> See Bardgett, Biographies of pre-Reformation secular clergy from C. 1530, RFVA, ASPA Vol 137, vi. (Edinburgh PhD.)

<sup>5</sup> CC8/8/13 1583/84

<sup>6</sup> There are conflicting references as to whether he died in 1553 or 1558. The Register of St Andrews Kirk Session ,1559-1582, (SHS 1889) gives the date of 1553. Cook says that on his death, James Stewart became Commendator of Pittenweem.

<sup>7</sup> The involvement of Rowle would appear to relate to his wider status in the new Court of Session and one of the spiritual lords who attended the Scottish Parliament. Maurice Lee Jnr. in his book on the Earl of Moray dismisses the suggestion Lord James did not attend and in a footnote on page 19 quotes a source that Lord James was made Commendator of Pittenweem and of Macon in France in 1555 for his support to Mary of Guise.

<sup>8</sup> Cook., (1869) p. 210

<sup>9</sup> *ibid.*, p. 213

<sup>10</sup> Donaldson., 1560. Page 75

<sup>11</sup> Ferrier., (1980) page 36. On page 35, he notes that two mills and their lands were made over Alexander Home in 1544, Prioress Margaret Home’s brother.

<sup>12</sup> Wood., (1887) p.74.

<sup>13</sup> Ferrier., (1980) p. 35.

<sup>14</sup> *ibid.* p.36

<sup>15</sup> Rennie., A.L.(2008) p.14-15.

<sup>16</sup> There were two contributors. See Part 2, pages 12-24 for Professor Donaldson’s account. (The Transactions are now available online.)

<sup>17</sup> Donaldson. (1952) page17.

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*, p. 23

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<sup>19</sup> Affleck., (2015) p.30.

<sup>20</sup> Bryce., (1909) p188

<sup>21</sup> NRS/CC8/8/13.31/1/1583/4

<sup>22</sup> Donaldson., (1960) p.65

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, p.75

<sup>24</sup> See Dilworth., (1995) page 78-79. He does not give the date but the year 1572 saw a “convention” held at Leith in March 1572 to agree on plans for episcopal appointments, later referred to as the Assembly of 1572. The conclusions were ratified at the Assembly of August 1572.

<sup>25</sup> Donaldson., (1960) p.146

<sup>26</sup> Register of the Privy Seal. 1665. 26/9/1578.

<sup>27</sup> Donaldson., (1994) page296

<sup>28</sup> After The Reformation, Teinds were a tithe or tenth of the value of the produce of the land paid to maintain the clergy.

<sup>29</sup> Brown., (1909) Vol 2 p290

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