

## III.

NOTES ON A HERALDIC PANEL FOUND IN THE PARISH CHURCH OF PRESTONPANS IN NOVEMBER 1891. By J. FOWLER HISLOP, F.S.A. Scot.

This panel was brought to light in November last (1891) in the Parish Church of Prestonpans, when the old seatings were being removed, in the course of carrying out some alterations and repairs on the building. A reduced copy of a careful drawing of the portion of the panel on which the arms are painted, kindly made by my friend Mr Thomas Ross, architect, is given in fig. 1, p. 243.

When discovered it formed the back to one of the seats in the gallery, directly opposite the pulpit, and was concealed from view by an old covering of green cloth. Originally, however, judging from its construction and mouldings, as well as from the blazonings painted on four of the compartments of the panel, it must have occupied the position of *front* to one of the more prominent pews in the gallery. The arms and initials indicate that the pew must have been that of the Hamiltons of Preston. The date on the panel, 1604, connects it with an earlier church; as the present one in which it was found was not erected till 1774.

The panel and framework are of solid oak, very substantial, sound, and generally in good preservation. In order to accommodate it to its new position, portions of the mouldings of the small arches and pilasters have been roughly cleft away. The painting does not seem to have been much interfered with, except where the original tones have been rendered somewhat indistinct by age, or where the wreaths have been attempted to be re-touched. The colouring of the older shields is remarkably rich, and along with the fine hue of the old oak, must delight the soul of every lover of the antique.

With reference to the successive churches which have existed in the place, it may here be mentioned that the Monks of Newbottle and the Canons of Holyrood appear to have had at an early period a joint

ecclesiastical interest in Preston. In the preface to the *Newbottle Chartulary* there is an account given of a dispute which occurred in 1320 between these two parties as to their respective share of tithes, and of its adjustment through the mediation of Gervaise, Abbot of Newbottle. Whether or not there was at that time a church in the parish we have no means of ascertaining with certainty. Tradition has long associated a church with the West Churchyard, and titles describe property contiguous to it as bounded by "the Church or Chapel-yard" of Broomhall. No trace, however, of any building is there discernible. That a church did exist previous to the Reformation in what is now the parish there can be no doubt, as the Church of Preston was one of the buildings which, along with the Tower, was destroyed by Hertford in his disastrous invasion in 1544, but its site is uncertain.

For some time after that date the inhabitants appear to have had the right to attend the Church of Tranent. That arrangement continued till 1595, when Preston was separated from Tranent, and formed *quoad sacra* into a separate parish, and *quoad civilia* by Act of Parliament in 1606. In 1596 a church was built by the first minister, Mr John Davidson, on ground granted by George Hamilton, laird of Preston. To this church the heraldic panel evidently belonged.

In 1774 a new church was erected on the same site, and to it the panel appears to have been transferred. This building is now being repaired and altered at the joint expense of the heritors, the congregation, and their friends.

The panel itself is now in two pieces, the one 4 feet 2 inches in length, the other, on which the arms are painted, 5 feet 7½ inches, and in height, including base, 2 feet 3 inches. It consisted of a stout base rail about 5 inches square, moulded in front, and connected with a plain top rail, 3 inches square, by strongly mortised uprights, 4 inches in breadth by 1½ in thickness. To this framework, leaving a projecting base of 2¾ inches, a facing of ½-inch boarding of oak is attached. The whole is divided into eight compartments, seven larger and one smaller; only four bear arms. These are 20 inches in height to the underside of the arch, and are separated by pilasters 13 inches apart—three fluted—2½ inches broad, with ½-inch projection, 13¾ inches in height (including base 2¾ inches) to the

top of the moulding, from which spring the small semicircular arches. Above three of these points, cinque-foils are carved in slight relief.

On the four compartments, arms surrounded by laurel wreaths are blazoned, with initials superadded. The wreaths are drawn with a broad dark outline extending to the arches and pilasters. The initials G.H. and B.C., which refer to George Hamilton, laird of Preston, and to his wife, Barbara Cockburn, are carved on the woodwork in distinct relief, and the gilding, which has not been touched, is remarkably rich.

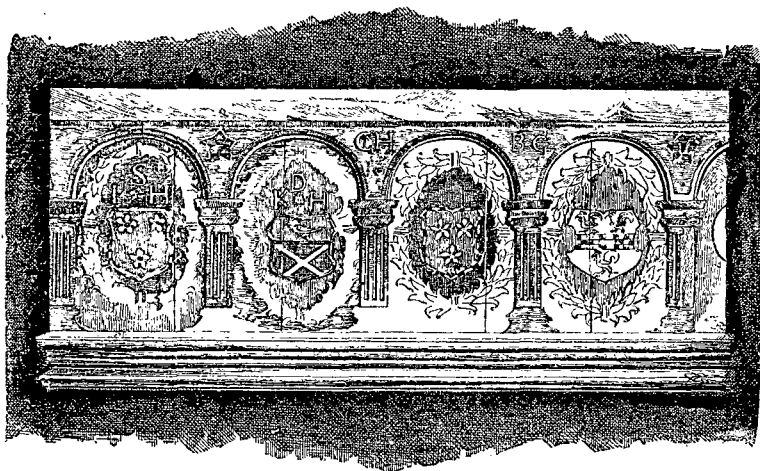


Fig. 1. Heraldic Panel in Prestonpans Church.

The other letters  $\overset{S.}{J.H.}$  and  $\overset{D.}{K.H.}$ , which are painted within the wreaths, represent his son, Sir John Hamilton, and Dame Katherine Howieson, the second wife of Sir John. These initials of the two last-named persons were also to be seen some years ago on the original tympana of the west (now renewed) and east windows respectively of the south side of Preston Tower; while on that of the centre window their initials are combined in a monogram still visible, under which is the now almost obliterated date 1626. Their married life extended from 1620 to 1629, when Katherine Howieson died.

Beneath the letters G.H. and  $\overset{S.}{J.H.}$  on the panel are the Hamilton

arms—gules three cinque-foils or within a bordure compony or gules, and Stoddart states that the coat recorded by Sir Thomas Hamilton of Preston in 1672 is gules three cinque-foils within a bordure argent. Seton, in *Scot. Heraldry*, p. 96, refers to the Hamilton paternal arms as “gules, three cinque-foils ermine, while several branches make the cinque-foils argent.” In both the shields of the panel the cinque-foils are distinctly or. Arms are also blazoned under the initials of the respective wives of the father and son. Those pertaining to B.C., Barbara Cockburn, the wife (as already stated) of George Hamilton, are the armorial bearings of the Cockburns of Ormiston. The tinctures appear to be argent (indistinct), fess chequy or and gules, between three cocks or. The fess chequy of the Lindsays appears, because in 1368 John Cockburn, second son of Sir Alexander Cockburn, acquired the lands of Ormiston, a fine property about 3 miles south of Preston Tower, by marriage with the daughter and heiress of Sir Alexander Lindsay of Ormiston.

According to Nisbet, the tinctures are argent, a fess chequy azure and of the first, between three cocks gules. The adoption of “or” in the case of the cinque-foils of the Hamiltons, and the cocks on the Cockburn shield, in place of argent and gules respectively, is not easily explained, and rather induces a doubt as to the heraldic accuracy of the blazoner of the panel.

Under the initials <sup>D.</sup><sub>K.H.</sub>, Dame Katherine Howieson, the shield displays vert (doubtful), a saltire or, on a chief gules a bird (uncertain) or. These do not form, as we would have expected, the arms of the Howieson family, which are, argent, a heart gules, on a chief three fleurs de lys or. As yet I have been unable to discover to what family the arms belong, or how they come to occupy the place they do on the panel.

Sir John Hamilton appears to have had other two wives. The first was Jean Otterburn. The last was Helen Lumsden, widow of Douglas of Whittingham. To neither of these do the arms apply.

Seeing the first Act of Parliament passed in Scotland for the regulation of heraldry, with its strict provisions and penalties, had become law in 1592, only about twelve years before the date of the

panel, and that much attention was devoted at the time to such matters, it can scarcely be supposed that the bearings were so conspicuously displayed without due authority. Some explanation must therefore be looked for, which is not at present apparent.

Testamentary records and inventories connected with the estates of Katherine Howieson, and also of Sir John's first wife, are to be found in the Registers of the Commissary Court, Edinburgh. The expressions and provisions they contain throw interesting side-lights on the life of the period.<sup>1</sup> From the provisions in the record Baron Howieson had evidently been twice married before, as a daughter, Margaret Fawsyd, and sons of the name of Inglis are mentioned.

Having described the panel, its initials, and arms, I shall now briefly notice the early connection of the Hamilton family with the locality, with a reference also to those two members of it who are represented by their initials on the panel—George Hamilton, laird of Preston, and his son, Sir John.

According to Crawford in his MS. *Baronage* (who is referred to by Anderson in his *Memoirs of the House of Hamilton*), the estate of Preston came into the possession of a cadet of the Hamiltons of Fingalton, by his marriage towards the end of the fourteenth century with Jane, daughter and heiress of Sir James Lydell of Preston. This information he gives in a marginal note on the authority, he states, of a Mr Aikman, but without explanation as to the source from whence it was obtained by the latter. The family papers having been destroyed in one or other of those conflagrations from which the old tower suffered,<sup>2</sup> it is impossible to obtain the corroborative evidence which they might have supplied; but ever since its acquisition, the estate, in larger or smaller portions, has remained with short interval in the hands of the Hamilton family. Both of the Hamiltons referred to in connection with the panel seem to have been men of energy and some note in their day. George, according to Anderson, appears to have been the sixth in succession from his ancestor, who, through his marriage with the Lydell heiress, had acquired

<sup>1</sup> *Com. Test. Edin.*, vol. li., 26th December 1620; and vol. lv., 29th December 1632. The name of the first wife is entered probably by a clerical error Jean Cockburn.

<sup>2</sup> In 1544 by Hertford, 1650 by Cromwell, and in 1663 by accident.

the estate of Preston. He was born about 1542, and was the son of David Hamilton, by his wife Janet, daughter of Sir William Baillie of Lamington. In 1563 he married (as stated already) Barbara Cockburn, the B.C. of the panel.

George, though like his father David, a staunch Reformer, also along with the Hamiltons generally, as might be expected from the nearness of their head at that time to the throne, supported the cause of Queen Mary and her faction.

Having become physically disabled, he was, on the 23rd March 1587, permitted by the king's authority "to remane and abyde at hame, frae all hosts and weirs, and also from all compearance upon assysis and inquests during his lyfytyme."

Similar indulgence does not seem to have been extended to him some years afterwards by the ecclesiastical authorities. From extracts made by the late Rev. Dr Struthers from the records of the Presbytery of Haddington, he appears to have been summoned in 1592 before the Presbytery on account of non-attendance at the Church of Tranent, to which parish Prestonpans was then attached. He excused himself, however, from attendance either at Church or Court, and his excuse is illustrative of the unsettled state of the country in these times. In answer to repeated citations from the Presbytery, he alleged that "he dare not pass thro' Lord Seton's grounds be terror of his life." And afterwards, on being pressed by the Presbytery "to submit himself to reason as became ane Christian, and to take the Communion in token of reconciliation," being assured at the same time of a safe conduct from Lord Seton, he still declined, declaring that in respect of the great injuries done to him, and of his mutilation by David Seton,<sup>1</sup> he would "neither hear or receive any of David's offers unto the tyme that landit men subscribed with him for performance thereof."

This feud evidently extended to the whole neighbourhood, for the Presbytery complains that "it was not this twallmonth as it suld be, because of the variances within the parochin, where thro' many vices lay over untried, especially in the Pannis."

<sup>1</sup> Probably chamberlain to Robert, sixth Lord Seton, first Earl Winton, and noted in *Annals of Witchcraft*. See Pitcairn.

The *bête noir* of the laird of Preston, Lord Seton, was, with his wife, also brought under discipline, at a visitation of the parish of Tranent, by the Presbytery of Haddington, and being asked why they had not attended church, and communicated for some time past, his lordship gave as excuse "the variance betwixt the laird of Ormiston, the Hamiltons, and himself, about certain civil and criminal causes." As in the case of George Hamilton, the Presbytery held that to be "nae excuse."

Mr John Davidson having been appointed minister of the newly-formed parish of Preston, the difficulties of this local feud were probably so far got over—the attendance of the folks of the "Pannis" at the church of Tranent being no longer an ecclesiastical obligation, and the recurrence of a personal clashing between the families or their retainers on their way to and from the church, obviated.

A church being required for the new parish, difficulties arose as to providing a site, and meeting the cost of erecting the building. The two principal lairds, George Hamilton of Preston and Mark Ker of Newbottle—proprietor of Prestongrange—each contended that the church should be within his bounds, and, unless assured of such an arrangement, refused in any way to contribute. The general body of the parishioners for the most part also found grounds on which to excuse themselves. The Presbytery in vain endeavoured to compel action on the part of the lairds and parishioners. Finally, the worthy minister, John Davidson, having obtained the grant of a site from George Hamilton, laird of Preston, and possessing some private means, undertook in 1596 the erection of the church at his own expense, and afterwards also that of a schoolhouse and manse.

Hume of Godscroft celebrates in Latin verse the liberalities of the laird; those of the minister have been often acknowledged, especially in connection with his advanced educational views. Not only did he provide that the youth should be instructed in virtue and knowledge, but also that they should be taught the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin languages.

The relation of the different parties to the erection of the church

were recorded on a stone, which was inserted over the principal doorway :—

“Sedem dedit Prestonus  
Aedificavit Davidsonus  
Texit Williamsonus.”

No trace of this stone can now be found, and it probably disappeared when the church was rebuilt in 1774.

The only external remains of John Davidson's church are the picturesque old spire, a few traces on the west gable, and probably a round-arch doorway on the south wall.

Of the internal fittings, the heraldic panel is believed to be the only representative.

The other member of the Hamilton family, whose initials J.<sup>S.</sup>H. appear on the panel, Sir John Hamilton<sup>1</sup> (the son of George above mentioned), was born in 1565. From early life he seems to have taken an active part in public affairs. While still a young man he was attainted for participation in the raid of Ruthven. But along with others he was restored by Act of Parliament in 1581. He was a zealous supporter of the covenant of 1638, and in the great questions which agitated his times, he remained faithful to the opinions of his father and grandfather, and took an active part in resisting what he considered arbitrary encroachments on the civil and religious liberty of the nation. He was commissioner to Parliament for East Lothian in several Parliaments between 1621 and 1641, and was also one of the Lords of “the Articles.” Calderwood specially refers to his “manly” opposition to the Articles of Perth in the face of strong family and Court influence.

As the following incident throws some light on the character of Sir John, as well as on the customs of the period, I shall shortly relate a few details. At the Riding of Parliament in 1621,<sup>2</sup> Sir John, mounted and duly appalled, was about to take up that position

<sup>1</sup> Various notices of George and John Hamilton, and other members of the family, occur in the Registers of the Privy Council of Scotland.

<sup>2</sup> See Innes' *Legal Antiquities*, p. 143. Drawings of the “Solemnity” are in the MSS. Chalmers' Collection, Advocates' Library, but of much later date, 1681.



in the cortege to which, according to his rank, he was entitled, when he was suddenly accosted by the brother of the Secretary for Scotland (himself a Hamilton) along with a number of his servants. They proceeded to demand that Sir John should deliver to them the foot-mantle<sup>1</sup> with which he rode, and which they alleged he had borrowed some time before from the Secretary. Sir John explained that the one he then had was not the Secretary's—he had not considered it “seemlie” for the occasion, being only cloth “pasmented,” so he had borrowed from another the one he then used, which was of “velvet.” The Secretary's messengers were proceeding to force him to dismount, when Sir John declared—“If ye make me alight I shall make all Scotland hear of it.” On their further demanding that he “swear to them that the footmantle was not my Lord's,” he at once resented it, declaring—“Ye sall not make me sweare; go, tell my Lord I sall be as true as ane Hamilton in Scotland.” The Secretary annoyed, on account of the action of Sir John in opposition to the urgent representations of the Governor and himself, sent his messenger to inquire further what place Sir John would take in the “Riding”? “Say,” was the answer, “I sall take such a place as sall not be quarrelled.”

And so he did, says the historian, riding among the meanest of the barons, perhaps thereby submitting to some humiliation in the matter of precedence.

After an active life, Sir John died in May 1644, being 79 years of age.

The panel having been exposed for sale in January last by the contractors for the woodwork of the Prestonpans Church, was purchased by Mr William Dunlop, Seton Castle, for presentation to General Sir William Stirling-Hamilton of Preston, in whose possession it will remain, and to whom I am indebted for the opportunity of now exhibiting it to the Society.

<sup>1</sup> An embroidered mantle reaching from the waist to the knees, or lower, worn by knights on horseback. It is referred to by Milton under the name “bases” :—

“ . . . . Caparisons and steeds,  
Bases and tinsel trappings, gorgeous knights.”—*Paradise Lost*, ix. 36.

Since the discovery of the panel a large number of funeral hatchments<sup>1</sup> has come to light in connection with the alterations on the church. They were found in the Prestongrange Burial Vault, and are painted on cloth, stretched on wooden frames. Five of these are about 6 feet square, bearing the Grant or Hyndford, and the Suttie and Kinloch Arms.

On several of the frames the larger central shield is surrounded by the arms of related families painted in tinctures on small pieces of cloth about 16 inches by 12, the names of the respective families being printed above. There are above fifty coats, some of them, unfortunately, too much wasted to be discernible. These have been submitted to Mr Balfour Paul, and the majority of them have been identified.

By the kind permission of Lady Susan Grant Suttie, photographs of the hatchments were taken before being replaced in the vault, a situation, it is to be regretted, far from being favourable for their preservation. It is understood, however, that they are all of comparatively recent date, the oldest dating from the latter part of the last century.

<sup>1</sup> The subject of heraldry in the sixteenth, and, perhaps, more generally in the earlier half of the seventeenth century, must have largely engrossed the minds of the local proprietors. Nisbet in his *Armories* frequently refers to the display in the old Palace of Seaton. He states, that on the ceiling of Samson's Hall there, in his time, there were twenty-eight large achievements of the nobility related to the family, with that of the sovereign, all curiously embossed and illuminated by the order of George, sixth Lord Seton, in the year 1524. Several houses in the neighbourhood, as Northfield, the old mansion in Preston, and others, still bear the arms of their original possessors, and a number of the seventeenth-century tombstones in the churchyards are similarly decorated.