

II.

NOTES ON THE DERIVATION AND MEANING OF THE PLACE-NAME OF FALKIRK, AS ASCERTAINED FROM CHARTERS AND OTHER HISTORICAL DOCUMENTS. BY P. MILLER, F.S.A. Scot.

It is impossible to comprehend this question in all its various relations unless the early Papal Bulls and the confirmation charters of the Bishop of St Andrews and the Abbots of Holyrood, previous to a given date, are fully understood. These documents disclose a forgotten page in the early ecclesiastical history of Scotland that is deeply interesting. The appropriation of the property belonging to the Pictish Ecclesiastical Establishment in Scotland, before and during the time of David I. and his successors, and the application of these endowments to the new monasteries, and the introduction by the Norman and Saxon followers of David of new orders of monks and secular canons dominated by ideas and canonical forms, chiefly Norman and Anglo-Saxon, formed a new era in our national history. It was not a change in some of the minor forms of church polity that took place, but a complete revolution, whereby the property of the old church was handed over to the newcomers, and they were not slow to crush and extinguish the old ecclesiastical functionaries. The disputes concerning the rights of property claimed both by laymen and ecclesiastics became not only numerous and frequent, but lasted for generations after David's time, and in this instance of the Abbey of Holyrood and Falkirk the contest was not terminated for a century and a half after his death. The facts are given in the Papal Bulls and charters contained in the Chartulary of Holyrood, from which it appears that the Ablands of Varia Capella, which had formerly belonged to the titular or lay abbot Hervi, were claimed by his grand-daughter Donica as having hereditary right to them. Her claims, which were disputed by the Abbot and Convent of Holyrood, came before the Bishop of St Andrews for settlement at Liston in 1319, and both claimants being personally present, the abbot, in reply to the accusation that he had detained her lands from her unjustly and ought

to be ordained to restore them, pled that the lands in question belonged to the Church of Varia Capella, and that if Donica's father had any rights in them he had renounced them, both for himself and his heirs, and had resigned the lands to the Monastery of Holyrood, and the Wednesday following was fixed for proof. On that day the abbot produced, first, an instrument, dated 1257, by Donica's father, John, son of Hervi, Abbot of Varia Capella, transferring to the Convent of Holyrood his rights in the Ablands for an annual payment during his life; and second, two deeds of resignation in favour of the Convent of Holyrood by Donica and her husband Adam, both dated in 1293. The Bishop therefore absolved the Abbot of Holyrood from the suit of Donica, and adjudged the lands in question to belong to the Church of Varia Capella, declaring it, moreover, to be the property of the Abbot and Convent of Holyrood.¹ Shortly after this, the use of the name "Varia Capella" as the distinctive name of the Church of Eglesbrich appears to have come to an end.

The Papal Bulls of Alexander and Innocentius furnish the first authentic information respecting the original name of Falkirk, where it is called the "ecclesia de Eglesbrich cum capellis et terra ad eam juste pertinente." The name-word is obviously Gaelic. These Bulls, which were obtained by the representations of Abbot Alwine and his successor William, concerning the abuses and irregularities that existed in some of the churches belonging to the Monastery of Holyrood, confer upon the abbots and bishops extensive powers to enable them to restore order and compel obedience to the canonical authority for the proper administration of the affairs of the monastery, and to enforce their rights as administrators according to the canonical Order of St Augustine.

The Bull by Pope Alexander III., A.D. 1164, "in the first place ordains that the canonical order which, according to God and the rule of St Augustine, was instituted in the said Church of Holyrood, shall be perpetually observed there in all time inviolably. Moreover, that whatsoever possessions and goods the same church at the present time justly and canonically possesses, or in future may possess, by the grant of pontiffs, the liberality of kings or princes, the offering of the faithful, or

¹ *Liber Cartarum Sanctæ Crucis*, pp. 79-83.

by other just means, should remain to the abbot (William) and his successors, sure and intact; among which we reckon these, to be expressed in proper words:—The Church of the Castle (of Edinburgh). The Church of Eglesbrich, with the chapels and land which justly belongs to the same.”¹

In the Bull of Innocentius, A.D. 1247,² the phraseology is nearly the same, only more specific in its details, as in the last clause quoted, where the injunction is more definite, thus—“Among which we reckon these to be expressed in proper words:—The place itself in which the aforesaid Church [of Holyrood] is situated, with all its pertinents. The churches of the Castle and St Cuthberts, with their chapels and pertinents. The Church of Eglesbrich, which is called *Varia Capella*, with its pertinents.”³ Two years after the date of the first Bull, in 1166,⁴ Bishop Richard of St Andrews grants a charter of confirmation to the Canons of Holyrood of the Church of Eglesbrec, “*que Varia Capella dicitur*,” and all the lands which we and our predecessors possessed there, and everything justly pertaining to the said church and lands. There is another confirmation charter by David, Bishop of St Andrews, to the Church of Holyrood, of the various possessions thereto belonging, including the Church of “Egl[isbrich] *que hodie Varia Capella nuncupatur*” (which is to-day called *Varia Capella*) (A.D. 1240).⁵ There is another charter by Gamline, Bishop of St Andrews, to the Church of Holyrood, of the possessions thereof, including the Church of Eglesbryth (*que hodie Varia Capella nuncupatur*), A.D. 1268.⁶

There are no historical documents showing the exact significance of the words *Varia Capella*, usually translated as meaning “the Spotted or Speckled Church.” The phrase is used for the first time in Bishop Richard’s charter of 1166, two years after the date of the first Papal

¹ *Liber Cartarum Sancte Crucis*, p. 168.

² *Holyrood Chart*, p. 180.

³ A list of all the churches dependent on that of Holyrood, and the localities where they are situated, is given in the documents.

⁴ *Holyrood Chart*, p. 209.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Bull. The words are Latin, and their true meaning must be ascertained from the usage of that language and the sense in which they are employed by the authorities who use them in the charters. There is nothing in any of them respecting the structure of the church or its colour. The whole controversy, that lasted for more than a century, was about the rights of parties in the lands belonging to Holyrood, and the non-observance of the canonical rules according to the Order of St Augustine.

The meaning of the term "Varia Capella" can only be gathered from the disturbed relations that existed between the Abbots of Holyrood and their subordinates, as disclosed in the Papal Bulls and charters of confirmations, which clearly demonstrate the unfriendly and hostile attitude of these subordinates towards their ecclesiastical superiors, and show that the abbots and bishops are applying the authority and powers conferred upon them by the Papal Bulls in a disciplinary manner to recall them to their obedience. That Bishop Richard and his chapter were so acting when in their charter of confirmation in 1166 they changed the name of the Church of Eglesbrich to "Varia Capella" seems beyond question, because by the new appellative they degrade the ecclesiastical status of an important church that had chapels belonging to it by reducing it to a chapel itself. The term "Varia Capella" is, therefore, a figurative form of expression in which the unsatisfactory relations subsisting between the parties interested are ascribed to the church¹ itself. The plain and obvious rendering of the Latin "Ecclesia de Eglesbrich que Varia Capella dicitur" can only be that the name of the Church of Eglesbrich was changed, the name of the *parish* or locality in which it was situated remaining as before. If the view is adopted that it was the name of the place that was altered, the phrase would have no meaning; it would simply be tautology—a mere repetition of words having the same significance. *Varia Capella* is never used in any of the charters or other documents as a place-name, but as applicable to the church alone; and

¹ In one of the legends respecting the old names of the Church of Falkirk it is called "the broken church," a term that exactly expresses what took place when its status was reduced to that of a chapel in 1166. (*Old Statistical Account of the Parish of Falkirk*, vol. xix. p. 72.)

when used in the charters of Bishops David and Gamline, the expression has a special significance given to it by the use of the word *hodie*—"the Church of Eglesbrich, which *to-day* is called *Varia Capella*," implying that it had another name at a former time ; and it appears, further, from the record of facts, that after the claims of John, son of Hervi, and his daughter had been finally set aside in 1319, the obnoxious term is never afterwards used in any of the ecclesiastical documents, and is never used at all in any of the crown or civil charters, in which Faw Kirk or Falkirk are the only place-names used. There is, therefore, nothing in the whole record to show that the term "*Varia Capella*" had any reference whatever to the structure or colour of the Church of Eglesbrich, but was meant to be descriptive of the relations subsisting between the abbots and bishops and some of the local parties that claimed rights of property belonging to the Monastery of Holyrood.

In ascertaining the correct meaning of the early name-words used in the Bulls and Charters of Holyrood, we must be guided by the philological rules and usages of the language to which the words belong, as used at the times indicated ; and not by the philological rules of the Gaelic tongue applicable to modern times. It is the etymology and meaning of the names of the church and place of Faw Kirk or Falkirk that are the objects of this investigation, and not the meaning of *Eglais bhreac*, which no one disputes. The Latin term "*Varia Capella*," never having been used as a place-name, can have no place in the argument. The only question to determine is : What is the correct meaning of the place-name Eglesbrich,—the first used Gaelic name and its Anglicised form of Faw Kirk or Falkirk. It is assumed by many that Faw Kirk and not Falkirk is the proper form of the word, and they translate it the equivalent of *Eglais bhreac*—the spotted or speckled church. In opposition to this view, my contention is, that neither the undoubted first form of the name Eglesbrich,¹ nor its Anglicised form, has any such meaning, but that both mean the church at, or on the wall.

¹ The earliest use of the place-name of Falkirk, Eglesbrich, is contained in the Bull of 1164 : it is the same in that of Innocentius in 1247. In 1166 the church gets another name from Richard, Bishop of St Andrews, and his Chapter, but the place-name of the locality remains the same ; the charters of David and Gamline, 1240

Eglesbrich is obviously formed from two Gaelic words, *eglais* a church and *brich*. As to the meaning of the suffix *brich*, one of the best authorities on the Celtic language, Edward Lhuyd, in his *Archæologia Britannica*, says, "the Irish word *Brych* means the border of a country," and this meaning exactly coincides with what is known respecting the topographical position of the Church of Falkirk. It is situated at or on the line of what was in early times called Graham's dyke, *i.e.*, the Roman wall; and what is very much to the point, when the place-name was changed from its Gaelic form to its present form Falkirk, it was simply Anglicised by the Anglo-Saxon using the Irish or Gaelic word *fàl*,¹ meaning "a wall or hedge," and substituting the Saxon term *kirk* for *eglais*. In doing this they acted in accordance with the well-known philological rule of transposing the two words that form the composite word by placing the generic word last and the qualitative word "wall" first in the arrangement.² Those who support the ideas that *faw* and not *fàl* is the proper form of the place-name, and that *bhreac* is the original term in Gaelic, altogether fail in finding a single example of the use of the word *bhreac* in connection with Falkirk. I have searched in vain for an example in all the historical documents. The earliest that I have obtained has been kindly furnished me by Professor Mackinnon. It is after the battle of Falkirk in 1745. Both forms of the word Fawkirk and Falkirk were in use before the battle of Falkirk, 1298; and the term "Varia Capella," as applied to the church, drops altogether out of use a short time after that event. No better evidence of the fact that these two forms are merely variants of the same word, and are synonymous,

and 1268, continue to call the *locus* Eglesbrich, but they use the new appellation "Varia Capella" given to the church by Richard, with this peculiar phraseology *que hodie Varia Capella dicitur*.

¹ Joyce, in his *Irish names of places*, says: "Fàl (faul) signifies a hedge or wall; and it is used in this sense in our oldest law tracts."

² The word Falkirk occurs as a personal name about 1350, associated with the transfers of certain lands; and in the reign of Robert Second (1381) there are two charters referring to the same property as pertaining to William Falkirk,—the first has it "the lands fallen to the King by the forfeiture of William Clerc of Faukirk," and the second "by forfaulter of William Clerc of Fallkirk." Is this not positive evidence that, at the time referred to, the two forms of the word were used indiscriminately?—Robertson's *Index of Charters*, pp. 61, 129, 133.

can be adduced than that the conveyancers who drew the Charters Royal, and otherwise, used them indiscriminately as signifying the same thing.

In the year 1390 it is the Church of Faukirk in the Exchequer Rolls, and in the Register of the Great Seal in 1458 the district is called the *dominium* of Falkirk, and in the same Register in 1511 it is Fawkirk. In the Register of the Privy Seal there is the vicarage of Falkirk in 1585. In another charter of the Great Seal, 1533, there is "infra ecclesiam Variæ Capellæ," and in the same charter a certain person resides "in Villa de Fawkirk"; this last notice clearly proves that *Varia Capella* was the distinctive name of the church, while the town was called Falkirk.¹ When we come down to a later period the word Falkirk is invariably used in all Acts of Parliament and Charters having reference to Falkirk.

As already stated, the two words Faukirk and Falkirk are simply two forms of one word used synonymously, according to the custom of the time. They are the Anglicised form of the original Gaelic name Eglesbrich, and both forms appear to have come into use about the same period of time. It is also beyond question that Eglesbrich² is the first form of the place-name on record, and this fact satisfies the requirements of the well-known canon of criticism adopted by all our authorities, that we must be regulated in getting at the correct place-name of any given

¹ With respect to the two forms of the word, Ruddiman, in his Glossary appended to Gavin Douglas' translation of Virgil's *Æneid*, says, in reference to the word *fow*: "It is usual in Scotland to change *ll* or *l* into *w*, as roll, row; scroll, scrow; toll and tolbuith, into tow and towbooth; poll, to pow; hold, to haud," and so on. The all but universal practice of the writers of charters and other historical documents, from David the First's time downwards, following a similar philological rule with respect to personal and place names, accounts for the use of the two forms of this place-name. Numerous examples can be given. The following will suffice for my argument. Place-names, Falkland, Falside, Almond, written also Faukland, Fauside, Awmond. Personal names, Galfridus, Gaufridus; Falconer, Fauconer.

² Falkirk is not the only locality in which the Gaelic word *Brich* is used as an early place-name. Bishop Reeves, in his *Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Down and Connor*, gives the name of a church and parish in Down, in Ireland, about the year 1170, as "Ecclesiam de Brich," now corrupted into New Bright. He adds that in the Tripartite Life of St Patrick the church is called Brettan. This church is situated on an eminence alongside of an ancient castle, and in 1178 was called *Briet*; it was also called *Brichton*."

locality by finding the oldest form of the word as used in the earliest historical documents extant. The assumption that it is *faw* and not *fâl* altogether fails in the application of this rule. The earliest form of the word yet discovered is in *Simeon of Durham*, where he calls it Eglesbreth. I do not consider him as an authority on some matters of fact, but his spellings of Anglicised Gaelic words are different; and beyond question the most reliable form of the original is in the Papal Bull of Alexander, dated 1164, where it is called Eglesbrich, and its equivalent as used in the Anglicised form Falkirk—the church at, or on the wall, or the boundary-line. Bede, in his *Ecclesiastical History*, records a word of the Old Pictish language, *Peanfahel*, as applied to the old Roman wall that stretched between the Forth and Clyde before his time. Gordon, in his *Itinerarium Septentrionale*, from his personal observation about the year 1726, records some of the place-names along the line of that wall, most of which are Gaelic. Among others, he gives two that have relation to the wall. The first is close by New Kilpatrick, and the structure named—apparently part of the wall, or connected with it—is named Procter Faal. The prefix is obviously of Latin origin. The suffix is clearly the Irish and Gaelic word *fâl* of the dictionaries, meaning a dyke, wall, or fold. The other is Cairn Faal, an old castle about a mile and a half west from Castle Carey, of which he gives an engraving. In the Survey Sheets of both the 1-inch and the 6-inch scales, this name is corrupted into Garn Hall. The identity of those two Faals with the Gaelic and Irish forms of the word for wall is obvious, and it is all but equally certain that the Fal of Falkirk and the two Faals described by Gordon are only the lineal descendants of Bede's Pictish word *fahel*—the Roman Wall of Antoninus. *Faw* and *fau*, on the other hand, are not Gaelic, and the translation of these words, or parts of a word, by the Gaelic word *breac*, is a very questionable mode of getting at the origin, derivation, and meaning of the place-name Eglesbrich.

[Mr George Neilson and Mr Hew Morrison took exception to the views expressed in the foregoing paper, and maintained that the commonly accepted views as to the etymological relations of Eglaisbrich and Falkirk were the correct ones.]