

I.

THE NETHERBOW PORT. BY THE REV. R. S. MYLNE, B.C.L., F.R.S.E.,
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The Netherbow was an important boundary throughout the Middle Ages. Above was the ancient town of Edinburgh ; below, the Canon-gate, under the jurisdiction of the Abbot of Holyrood and his bailies. Only in modern times has the jurisdiction of these two sets of magistrates been thrown into one under the Lord Provost of Edinburgh.

The position of this gate was originally fixed by the line of the ancient fortified wall of the town, traces of which still exist, though the increase of the population in early days soon required more space for the accommodation of the citizens. The wall here ran nearly north and south, from the North Loch (now the North British Station) towards the Cowgate ; so that the Netherbow faced east and west, and the lower land towards the great Abbey of Holyrood fell under the jurisdiction of the Church.

Many events connected with the history of Edinburgh occurred at the Netherbow. Thus a fierce conflict took place in 1515 at this spot between the Earl of Arran and the Earl of Angus, the supporters of Arran assembling at the Archbishop of Glasgow's house at Blackfriars Wynd. About seventy perished beside the Netherbow before order was restored. In 1519 the citizens shut their gates against the Earl of Arran, when he attempted to influence the election of the Provost.

In 1560 a serious quarrel broke out between the Scottish and French soldiers, and the Provost and his son were slain at the Netherbow by the French troops, who finally retreated down the Canongate.

In 1571 the Castle was held by Sir William Kirkcaldy of Grange for Mary Queen of Scots, and on May 1st the Duke of Chatelherault entered the town with 300 troops. There was much fighting about the Netherbow, and an order was given to construct a second gate a

little higher up than the old gate for the better defence of the town. But there were scenes of joy connected with the Netherbow as well as strife and war. In 1590 King James VI. married Anne of Denmark at Holyrood. The marriage procession paused at the Netherbow to see a representation of Marriage enacted by skilled actors, and a box coated with velvet was let down from the upper part of the gate to the Queen with her initials wrought in goodly precious stones.

For the coronation of King Charles I., in 1633, the Netherbow was decorated with fine pictures by the famous painter Jameson, who died in Edinburgh in 1644. A representation of Mount Parnassus was enacted at the Tron "with a great variety of vegetables, rocks, and other decorations peculiar to mountains." Moreover, the King received a laudatory address from the famous poet, Drummond, of Hawthornden. Altogether the city spent £41,000 (Scottish money) on these various ceremonial exhibitions. King Charles hoped thereby, and hoped in vain, to obtain popularity. He had adopted the famous maxim of his father, "No Bishop, no King," and thought that the introduction of episcopacy would strengthen his feeble hold on the crown of Scotland. But here his judgment was in error, for he utterly failed to understand the sturdy nature of the Scottish people. He thought the moderate and tolerant doctrine of the Church of England was a good nucleus around which the scattered Protestant bodies might rally, and so resist the vast power of the Church of Rome. But the people would not have it so. The Stuart sovereigns were ever unfortunate, and nothing is more pathetic than the ultimate fate of Charles I., so strangely foretold by the *Sortes Virgilianæ*.

" 'Seek not to know,' the ghost replied with tears,
 'The sorrows of thy sons in future years.
 This youth, the blissful vision of a day,
 Shall just be shewn on earth, and snatched away.' "

Oliver Cromwell entered Edinburgh in September 1650 at the head of his army, and put the town under martial law. Scenes very

different from the peaceful celebrations at Charles I.'s coronation now took place. Nicol in his well-known diary relates, on September 27th, that "by order of General Cromwell there was three of his own soldiers scourged by the Provost Marshall's men from the Stone Chop to the Netherbow, and back again, for plundering houses within the town." Cromwell's rule was severe, yet he protected quiet citizens.

In the year 1540 the Parliament had passed an Act authorising the construction of a strong wall upon the west side of Leith Wynd by the Corporation of Edinburgh, and, "because the east side appertains to the Abbot of Holyrood, the bailies of the Canongate must see to this part of the construction" from the Netherbow to Trinity College Church. In 1544 the English army, under the Earl of Hertford, captured Edinburgh, entering by the Water Gate, and the earliest known map of the old town appears to have been made for the use of the English General. At the Netherbow a stout resistance was made by the citizens, but the gate was beaten open by the enemy, and a great number of people were killed. Yet the attack on the Castle altogether failed; and the English soon afterwards returned to their own land. In this peculiar way Henry VIII. thought to obtain the hand of the young Queen of Scotland for his own son.

When Queen Mary made her state entry into Edinburgh, on September 3rd, 1561, the Netherbow was decorated in most costly fashion, as the Council Register records; she was presented with the keys of the city, received by the chief citizens in black velvet gowns with scarlet doublets, attended by fifty black slaves, and was present at the performance of a quaint mystery play, concerning the destruction of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram. Nicol records that, on May 8th, 1662, the newly consecrated bishops assembled in their gowns at the house of the Archbishop of St Andrews near the Netherbow, and marched thence to Parliament accompanied by the Earl of Kellie and the Earl of Wemyss, and were received with much honour. Soon afterwards Archbishop Sharp was murdered at Magus Moor.

In the year 1745, while the citizens were discussing their best course of action in St Giles, a party of Highlanders managed to enter the town by the Netherbow gate, and were soon followed by the young Chevalier himself. Then the heralds were ordered to publish at the Market Cross the commission of Regency which the young Prince had received from his father, and so for a brief space the house of Stuart again ruled in Edinburgh. The Prince occupied Holyrood, receiving all who came to him with the utmost courtesy, and his troops encamped in the royal park, near Duddingston.

Marching to Linlithgow, they unfortunately set fire to that Palace, which has been a ruin ever since. They were finally overthrown by the Duke of Cumberland, who burnt their standards at the Market Cross, and set up again the Hanoverian Government. The Prince's own standard was carried to the Cross by the common hangman. At the unhappy time of the Porteous Riot, in 1736, it had been proposed to demolish the Netherbow, but this foolish scheme was defeated by the energy and determination of the Scotsmen in Parliament, who would not have this ancient and historic gate destroyed. Yet its lease of life was not long preserved. In the year 1764, the edict went forth from the city that this famous landmark should exist no more, and in that same year the entire structure was pulled down, amidst the regrets of many of the citizens of Edinburgh.

A good engraving¹ was made in 1764 (fig. 1), showing the workmen taking off the top stones of the spire, and a copy is preserved in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland. There is also an engraving at p. 55 of vol. ii. of Daniel Wilson's *Memorials of Edinburgh*, engraved by W. Forrest, and drawn by D. Wilson (fig. 2). If these two engravings are correct (and they seem better than others that exist), the Netherbow cannot have been built in 1660, as some writers affirm. The design is mediæval Gothic, with traces

¹ It also shows the contrast between the Gothic and Renaissance work on the Netherbow.



Fig. 1. The Netherbow Port from the west.



Fig. 2. The Netherbow Port from the east.

of a French influence, and must be prior to the seventeenth century.

Great works were carried out at the Netherbow in 1571 for purposes of defence, and a substantial portion of this extensive gateway was most likely erected in that year, but part must be earlier than that date, and probably belongs to the prosperous and peaceful reign of James V., when so much building went on in Scotland, and there was a distinct French influence at the royal Court.

What was really done in 1606 I have been able to ascertain from original documents. It is recorded in the Town Council records:—

“January 24, 1606. The bailies, with Richard Doby, Ninian M'Moran, George Fowlis, and Edward Ker, to visit the Netherbow, and consult about the repair thereof, and to report to the Council on Wednesday next.

“March 28, 1606. The Treasurer is authorised to pay expenses of repairing the Netherbow.

“April 4, 1606. David Grandestoun is appointed overseer of the work at the Netherbow.

“November 7, 1606. The bailies are to agree with the Mason for taking down and rebuilding the North Turnepyke of the Netherbow, and to see that this work go forward.”

Thus it is clear that the works of 1606 were of the nature of repair, and not reconstruction, of the whole large and extensive building of the Netherbow. And the reason for these works was the expected state visit of King James after his coronation in London. Elaborate and beautiful decoration was therefore needful as well as mere repair of this ancient fabric.

“May 1, 1607. James Nisbet, James Arnot, Mungo M'Call, bailies, John Robertson, Dean of Guild, Alex. M'Math, Treasurer, and the Council, understanding that it is the custome of maist renownit cities to have the effigie or statue of their prince set up upon the maist patent part of the citie . . . therefore they have thought expedient

and ordain to affix and set up upon the maist patent and honourable part of the Netherbow the image or statue of his majesty gravin in maist pryncelie and decent form in remembrance of his majesty, and of their sincere affection borne unto him."

But the royal visit was long delayed, and so was the completion of the royal statue. It was not till 1616 that payments were actually made on account of this work, and the record is preserved in the Council Books of Edinburgh.

"September 9, 1616. Quhilk day the Proveist, Baillies, Deyne of Gild, Thesaurer and Counsell being conveynit ordainis Johnne Byris Thesaurer to content and pay to Benjamin Lambert the sowme of 433 merks 6 schillingis 8 penyis for the King's portrait and New Armis to be erected at the Netherbow, and the same sal be allowit to him in his comptis."

But Benjamin Lambert died very suddenly while these works were in progress, and was buried at the expense of the town; and John Mylne was asked to come from Perth and carry on the work.

"November 4, 1616. To John Mylne for this last oulkes wagis £4. 10. 0, for his wages and chairges for cumming fra St Johnstoune to enter to our work because we wrett for him as the Compter and he agreed £6. 13. 4."

In the month of December his wages were raised to the same rate as Benjamin Lambert.

"April 12, 1617. For William Cockie and John Mylne stencing the covering for wax and hardis (coarse linen) to clois the coverture with rosset and brimstone 6. 8. 4."

All the items for this work occupy four pages, and the total amounts to £10, 6s. 9d. On June 4th, 1617, John Mylne was made a burgess of Edinburgh, paying to the Dean of Gild £66, 13s. 4d. But on August 8th it was ordered that this sum of money should be allowed him in his accounts, David Aikinhead being then Dean of Gild.

But the sculptured figure of King James was totally destroyed, and

all the elaborate gilding and painting connected therewith. Yet not so the stonework of Renaissance design inserted on the upper face of the Netherbow, including the stone in which the spike was inserted on which the heads of political offenders were placed after execution.

These stones I have recovered, and they are now to be placed beside John Knox's Church, close to their original position in the seventeenth century.

They are chiefly famous for their connection with the wars of the Solemn League and Covenant, though also good specimens of the architecture of their period.

Here was exhibited after execution the head of the famous James Guthrie, so prominent a leader amongst the Covenanters, and one of the most distinguished Scotsmen of his day. He was born in Forfarshire, and became a Professor at St Andrews, and knew Archbishop Sharp. In 1638 he was appointed Minister of Lauder. He attended the General Assembly that same year, and signed the Covenant at the Church of the Greyfriars, saying, "I shall die for what I have done this day, but I cannot die in a better cause." Tradition declares he passed the public executioner on the way to the Church. He was sent to Newcastle to meet Charles I., and advocate the cause of the Presbytery. In 1649 he was translated to the ministry of Stirling, and became the head of the Protesters. After the battle of Dunbar, he met Oliver Cromwell, and discussed the relative advantages of independency and the Presbytery, and went to London in 1657 to meet Cromwell again. Then came the crowning act of all, which sealed his fate. On August 23rd, 1660, with nine other ministers, he prepared a petition to Charles II. to preserve the reformed religion in Scotland. Party spirit ran high. He was at once arrested, and confined in Edinburgh Castle, whence, on February 21st, 1661, he was brought before the Scottish Parliament, and condemned to be hanged at the Cross, his estate forfeited, and his head set up on the Netherbow. Yet some of the nobles declared they would have nothing to do with

the blood of this righteous man. James Guthrie himself replied, "My Lords, let never this sentence affect you more than it does me, and let never my blood be required of the King's family." On June 1st, 1661, there was a sad parting with his little boy Willie before the hangman came. "Think not shame of the manner of my death," saith he, "for it is upon a good cause."

He delivered his dying address with great calm. His body was buried in the Old Kirk, and his head set up on the Netherbow, and little Willie, a lad of five years old, was a spectator of the barbarous scene.

They say that a Jacobite noble, passing through the Netherbow in his state coach to attend Parliament, noticed drops of Guthrie's blood fall upon his burnished harness, and ordered his coachman to wash away the stain. But the more the coachman washed and rubbed, the brighter that stain became, according to the fixed belief of every worthy Covenanter.

Other heads found their way to the sharp spike on the Netherbow, yet none more famous than the head of James Guthrie, executed in a barbarous manner in a barbarous age.