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THE PARISH AND KIRK OF STAPLEGORDON

This old burial ground is perhaps the most historical spot in the valley of the Esk. So far back as the reign of King David I of Scotland, that "Sair Sanct for the Crown" as his descendant James VI called him, the barony of Staplegordon was in the possession of William de Cuniburg, and he, in 1127, granted the church of Staplegordon and the lands pertaining to it, to the monks of Kelso. King William the Lion in 1190 confirmed this grant; in 1232 Walter, bishop of Glasgow, the ecclesiastical superior, also confirmed it, which confirmation was ratified by Pope Innocent IV. In the Book of Kelso (*Liber de Calchow*) we find it recorded that another William de Cuniburg, a descendant of the original William, granted anew the lands of Staplegordon to the Kelso monks, and all the former privileges, with the additional privileges of free fishing in the Esk as far as the church territory extended, and "the pastures and common privileges of the said town" of Staplegordon. This extended grant was made by de Cuniburg "for the soul of Ganfred his uncle, and his ancestors." In the register of Morton it is stated that Henry, vicar of Stapilgorton, signed as witness to a charter granted by King Alexander III. The steep hillock to the south of Staplegordon was crowned by the strong castle of Barntalloch, the feudal residence of the barons of Staplegordon, of which not a trace now remains. It is interesting to know that in the reign of King David I (1124-1140), in Barntalloch Castle the charter was granted to the first Robert de Brus, great grandfather of King Robert Bruce, creating him Lord of Annandale, an office also held by his great descendant.

During the reign of Alexander III (1249-1285) we have the first notice of the

connection of the Maxwell family with Eskdale. William de Coningburt, son of Sir William de Coningburt, knight, granted on 16th April 1268, to Herbert, son and heir of Sir Aymer de Maxwell, knight, Sheriff of Dumfries, one carucate of land in Langholme, and one half carucate in Brakanwra, with the privilege of grinding at the mill of Staplegordon "without fee or multure," and all the appurtenants and common pasture of Langfelle in the fee of Staplegordon.

It appears that the line of De Cuniburg ended in a daughter, as William de Cuniburg, grantee of the carucate of land to Herbert de Maxwell, gave his only daughter in marriage to Sir John Fraser of Ewes, and as a marriage portion, Fraser received from his father-in-law a charter of the whole land of Rig, in Westerkirk, for which he was to pay the sum of twelve pence yearly, at the feast of St James. De Cuniburg seems to have died in 1281; the barony being a male fief would revert to the Crown, and we find in that year, that Herbert de Maxwell resigned all the right and claim he had in the lands of Langholm and Brakanwra, to Sir John de Lindesay, chamberlain to King Alexander III. On 30th April 1285, the King granted to Sir John de Lindesay the lands of Wauchope and Staplegordon; it is the seal of this Sir John, which is described in Laing's catalogue, date, 1292. The Staplegordon barony was held by the Lindesays for a very short time; Sir John held it, then his son Sir Philip, but *his* son John, a clergyman, canon of Glasgow, and therefore not eligible to hold the barony, resigned it at Newbattle Abbey, with staff and baton on 14th March 1316, into the hands of King Robert Bruce. In 1319, King Robert granted the lands resigned by John Lindesay to the good Lord James Douglas; on 6th May 1321, and on 30th September 1322, fresh grants of the lands and barony of Staplegordon were made to Lord James, thus securing the succession (*Register of Morton*). The good Lord James Douglas died in Spain in 1331, whilst fighting with the Moors, and Staplegordon passed to Sir

Hew Douglas, his heir, who, on 26th May 1342, resigned it to Sir William, afterwards first Earl of Douglas, nephew of the good Sir James, but kept the castle and town in his own hands for a while after. The death of the second Earl of Douglas, James, at Otterburn, in 1388, caused the King (Robert II) to appoint Sir James Douglas of Dalkeith to hold the ward and relief of the barony of Staplegordon until the lawful heir of James, Earl of Douglas, should receive "seisin" of the same, and we find that in his term of office, the annual value and extent of the Staplegordon barony are returned as follows:-

Staplegordon, £40	Craig, £6 13s 4d	
Langholme, £6	Douglan, £5	
Brakanwra, £6 13s 4d	Arkin,	} £20
Dalblane & Rig (present Westerhall), £6 13s 4d	Tarrisholm,	
Carlesgill, 4s 4d	Rischelbusk, £2	
Bombie, £4	Tenetschell, £1 4s	
Cowchargeland, £6	Quitschel.	

The next proprietor of Staplegordon was that fierce warrior known as Archibald the Grim, the natural son of the good Lord James, who succeeded as third Earl Douglas. He, on 7th April 1389, presented to the Scottish Parliament a royal charter, granting him the lands of "Stabilgorton;" the preceding Earl of Douglas had in his turn granted several charters of land in his Eskdale domains to his "doer" or factor Sir Adam de Glendinning, one of which was of the lands of "Bretallow" - Barntalloch or Staplegordon. Glendinning was confirmed by King Robert in his possession of Staplegordon on December 4, 1389; and on December 30th, 1391, his mortification of lands in the barony of Hawick, for one perpetual upkeep of a chapel in Westerkirk, was confirmed by the Earl of Douglas. Sir Adam died in 1397, and was succeeded in his offices and lands by his son Sir Simon, who was one of the sureties for the keeping of the peace of 1398, and one of the twelve hostages ten years later for the re-entry of Archibald the Tine man, fourth Earl of Douglas, as prisoner into the Castle of

Durham. Sir Simon de Glendinning married Mary Douglas, daughter of his Chief, Archibald the Tine man, and left issue three sons—1st, Simon, who succeeded as hereditary bailiff of Eskdale, the office granted to his father by Lord Douglas; 2nd, John; and 3rd, Bartholomew, chaplain of the chapel of Westerkirk, who was deprived of his living for non-residence by Andrew, Bishop of Glasgow, in 1459. William, eighth Earl of Douglas and Warden of the Marches, resigned all his Eskdale property into the hands of King James II, and from that monarch received, on July 7th, 1451, a charter of the whole lands of the Regality of Eskdale (Sir Simon Glendinning being confirmed in his baillieship), and also the lands of Staplegordon, the earl and his successors promising to pay yearly, if asked, one silver penny by way of "blench ferm" at the feast of the Nativity of John the Baptist, "for all claims of service from the said lands of Eskdale and Stabilgorton." This Earl was murdered by King James II at Stirling Castle on February 22nd, 1452, being succeeded by his brother James, the ninth and last Earl of Douglas. To avenge his brother's murder, James Douglas raised the standard of revolt against the King, and assembled an army of 40,000 men, mainly composed of his own immediate retainers and dependants, thus shewing the immense power the great house of Douglas possessed, and how in truth they "overshadowed the throne."

The Douglas insurgent army retired to Eskdale, where in May 1455, it was attacked and utterly defeated at Arkinholm, where Langholm now stands, by a Royal army under the command of the Earl of Angus, the head of the other branch of the great Douglas house called the "Red Douglasses." Lord Angus had the assistance of the Laird of Buccleuch, and of Sir Simon Glendinning, who had broken with his old chieftain, and found himself on the winning side, and was preserving to himself his barony of Staplegordon. In Anderson's MS. History in the Advocates' Library, it is noted that the laird of Glendinning was

killed by the Earl of Ormond at Arkinholm, but the "Douglas Baronage" gives the date of his death as 1464.

The defeat of the Black Douglas at Arkinholm meant the final suppression of that great family, and their connection with Eskdale terminates at this period. The Earl of Angus became the possessor of their regality of Eskdale; the various barons and chief of clans who had assisted Angus at the battle of Arkinholm were rewarded by grants of land in the Lordship, and Sir Simon Glendinning's people were not forgotten. In 1479 we find that, Sir Simon being dead, his widow, Marjory, institutes proceedings in Parliament against her brother-in-law, John Glendinning, as that personage had taken several measures of corn and bolls of meal from her farms of "Skraisburgh and Daldoran," which measures and bolls were ordered to be restored, or else his lands would be distrained. In 1493, this same John was compelled to pay to the abbot and convent of Kelso the whole "teynds, fruits, proffits, and devoiteis, of the Kirk of Stablegortoun, taken up and intromittit with by the said John," amounting to £8 yearly for the previous seven years. John died in 1503, being succeeded by his son Bartholomew, as Sheriff, and leaving three other sons Ninian, Simon, and Adam. In 1505, Bartholomew Glendinning, as Sheriff of Eskdale was sent by King James IV to distrain the lands of Wauchope as a punishment for the act on the part of the then Sir John Lindesay of slaying a Royal messenger-at-arms. Lindesay raised his followers and resisted the Sheriff, who, in the battle that ensued, was killed, his brother Simon being also slain. Shortly after this period, Robert Lord Maxwell became the superior of Eskdale, and the Glendinnings disappear temporarily from Staplegordon, although we find a hundred years later, that they appear to be in possession of Megdale, Watsterker, Daldurran, Broomholm, Ardkyne, Staplegordon, and Langholm. In the interregnum we find that Lord Maxwell, in

1520, grants to John Armstrong of Gilnockie, the lands of Langholm, Broomholm, Staplegordon, etc., and it is at this period that Langholm Castle was built, the ruins of which are still standing on the Castleholm. In the year after Flodden (1514) we have accounts of a great raid made by Lord Dacre, the English warden, accompanied by his brother, Sir Christopher, the same lot whom the men of Rule water defeated at Sclaterford, in 1513, and the account of which is so ably given in Mr Laing's excellent paper in last year's transactions of the Hawick Archaeological Society. After this raid into Eskdale in 1514, Lord Dacre reported to King Henry VIII that he had burned and destroyed:— Stakeheugh (Irving), Broomholm, Wauchope, Wauchopedale, Baggaray, Staplegordon, Langholm, and Murtholm, and the whole water of Esk from Staplegordon to Canonbie. Dacre also stated that he had left "noo man dwelling in any of them in this daye, save only to the towers of Stepel and Walghapp" (Staplegordon and Wauchope.)

On March 4th, 1527, John Armstrong of Gilnockie, called in this instance "of Sabilgortown" files the following complaint:—"To the Wardyns of the Marches complenes John Armstrang of Stabilgortown, Scottis man, upon William, Lord Dacre, Sir Cristofer Dacre, knight, and their complices, Inglisshemen, that they come with plane staves to the Holehouse (Hollows), within the Lordship of Eskdale and the grounde of Scotlande, and they took, had, and reft of the saide John, goodes, and his servantes, horse, nolt, sheep, gayt, and insight of houses, and brynt houses, byggings and cornes, agen the vertue of the treux, whereof we ask redress as the law of march woll." In 1530, after the tragedy of Johnnie Armstrong's death at Caerlinrig, King James V came down Ewesdale, and we find that on June 10th he was at Staplegordon, leaving there for Peebles on June 12th.

The Armstrongs having once again made

their peace with the Scottish Government, we find that on January 24th, 1558, Sir John Maxwell of Terregles, the tutor of young Lord Maxwell, granted to "Christie Armstrong," called "John's Christie" (i.e., the son of Johnnie of Gilnockie), the teynds of the parish of "Stabilegortown," for which Christie undertook to pay the yearly sum of eight pounds Scots as long as he was in possession, and resign the same when called upon to do so. The clan Little had now become paramount in Staplegordon; the members of that clan had increased in Ewesdale and overflowed into Eskdale by way of Sorbie Hass, so that we find, in the list of those who took part in Lord Maxwell's raid to Stirling in 1585; the names of four Littles in Staplegordon, eleven Littles in Daldurran, three Littles in Craig, two Littles in Burnfoot, two Littles in Potholm, seven Littles in Milnholm, &c. At the battle of Dryfe Sands in 1593, the Armstrongs and Littles of Langholm and Staplegordon fought on the side of Lord Maxwell against the Laird of Johnstone, but were defeated, and Lord Maxwell murdered after the battle.

The Scottish Reformation of 1576 had demolished the Roman Catholic Church, and for ten years the Border churches stood vacant, no ministers being in the livings; the term between 1586 and 1612 being served occasionally by itinerant preachers, when in the latter year the first Presbyterian minister, in the person of the Rev. Archibald Gibson, was appointed to the living of Staplegordon. The Crown exercised the right of patronage as, by the General Annexation Act of 1587, the church and lands became Crown property. The stipend (two hundred marks) was paid from the lordship of Kelso in 1615, and the minister had besides the manse and glebe. In 1626 Lord Nithsdale had a lease of the teinds, paying the minister 320 marks salary. On May 13th, 1637, King Charles I annexed "the Kirk of Stablegordoun and the teinds thereof to the Bishopric of Galloway," and in 1662 the grant of 1637 was ratified in favour of Thomas, Bishop of

Galloway, by King Charles II. This ratification was the beginning of a long series of Cavalier outrages in Eskdale, and the year 1664 was marked by the eviction of the Rev Robert Law, the Presbyterian minister of Staplegordon, from his church, manse, glebe, and living. Mr Law had acted as assistant to the first minister, Mr Gibson, for some time before the latter's death, and when that sad event took place Robert Law stayed as parish minister. Wodrow relates that "he was not only a pious, but learned and able man," and when the "Collation Act" was passed by Middleton and his drunken council, which declared that all ministers who had been ordained during the Commonwealth period, must be re-ordained by the bishop of their diocese, Law felt that he could not submit to have his conscience over-ridden by any such command, from such a ribald court as that which had the directing of Scottish affairs at that time. He therefore left his living rather than submit, and formed one of the noble band of 400 ministers who declined to "bow the knee to Baal," and his two co-presbyters and neighbours, the Rev James Pringle of Westerkirk, and the Rev John Lithgow of Ewes, followed his example. For ten years Mr Law went about the country preaching at conventicles, but in 1674 he was arrested by orders of the Privy Council, and consigned to Glasgow prison, as he had refused to cease holding field meetings. He was brought before the council in Edinburgh on July 28th that year, and bound over in the sum of 5000 merks to appear again when ordered. The next fourteen years of Mr Law's life are a blank, as we can find out nothing of his doings during that period, but at the Revolution we learn that he returned to Staplegordon as minister, and laboured there until his death in 1702, being the last minister of the ancient parish

One Sunday afternoon, two years ago, my brother-in-law, Mr Carlyle of Milnholm, and I were in Staplegordon Clurchyrd, engaged in looking for a very old stone, when we came upon a large tombstone

lying against the wall of the old disused enclosure. The stone was covered with moss and dirt, but we cleaned it as well as we could with our pocket knives and handfuls of grass, to see if we could make out the inscription. Our surprise and pleasure may be understood when we found it to be the tombstone of the Rev Mr Law, and we copied the inscription, which is as follows:—

This Monument is erected in Memory of the Rev Mr Robert Law, descended from the Ancient Family of Laws Bridge in the County of Air, minister of this Parish. He was Pious, Learned, Wise, Judicious, Moderate, and a Cheerful Sufferer for Religion, and his Memory is Dear to all who knew him.

He died April 8, 1702, in the 72 year of his Age, is Interred in Staplegordon Church, as was also Mary, his wife, who Died, Jan 9, 1694.

She was Doughty, Zealous, Meek, and of great Charity, and spent Her time in doing good. Many daughters have done virtuously, but thow excellst them all. Prov.

This is put up by the orders of their son Robt. Law, Doctr, of Physick, Deceased, and Performed by his Daughter Dame ELIZ. HALIBURTON, Relict of S^r John HALIBURTON, Knight.

We lost no time in informing the Rev Mr Buchanan, parish minister of Langholm, of our good fortune in thus finding out this old tombstone, sending a copy of the inscription to him, and to Mr Bell of Hillside, one of the elders. These gentlemen brought the matter before the Kirk Session, and it was instantly agreed to take steps that the tombstone should be carefully preserved. This has been seen to; the stone has been firmly set up on a new base, against the west wall of the mortuary chapel of the Maxwells of Broomholm, and

there it will stand for many years as a memorial of a gentleman who suffered persecution in the troublous days of Covenanters, and who was the last incumbent of Staplegordon parish.

In 1703 a great redistribution of Border parishes took place; part of Staplegordon was annexed to Westerkirk, the great part of the parish went with the parish of Wauchope, and half of the parish of Morton, to form the present parish of Langholm. The old town of Staplegordon had fallen into decay 100 years before this time. In 1610 Robert, Earl of Nithsdale, the superior at that time, created the burgh of Langholm, taking the old burgh Charter from Staplegordon, and getting it renewed in favour of Langholm. This Charter for Langholm was augmented by an Act procured from King Charles I by Francis, Earl of Buccleuch, the new Superior, in 1643, erecting Langholm into a burgh, which was further implemented by James, Duke of Buccleuch and Monmouth, in 1672.

The connection between the Glendinning family and Staplegordon seems to have finally terminated between 1606 and 1610. Lord Nithsdale possessed the Barony from 1610 until his attainder in 1640, and the Earl of Buccleuch succeeded as proprietor, his descendant the present Duke of Buccleuch and Queensberry still holding the lands and barony.

Such then is the history of this secluded place, a history but imperfectly shewn I am afraid, but nevertheless a history possessed by very few other places on the Borders. For eight hundred years the graveyard of Staplegordon has been in use, and, no doubt, contains the dust of de Cuniburg, Douglasses, Glendinnings, and Littles, as well as that of countless others whose names are evanished from history or tradition.

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