

A VISIT TO EDINBURGH

Janet North

This is an account of an earlier visit to Edinburgh but nevertheless describes very accurately most of the places visited by those who joined the tour conducted by the Rev Sinclair Horne of the Scottish Reformation Society during the Galashiels Family Holiday Conference.

While on a recent short holiday to Edinburgh, I set out to see the sites connected with Reformation and Covenanting history. Being interested in history and knowing something of the history of Scotland, I was sure that there would be much of interest to see during the few days spent there.

Greyfriars Churchyard

My first stop on a cold and blustery November morning was the famous Greyfriars Churchyard. I knew that here I would find the grave of the Covenanters and Martyrs who suffered so much for the Reformed faith in days gone by. At the entrance to the Churchyard stands a statue of the famous dog known as "Greyfriars Bobby" - the little Skye terrier who followed his master's coffin into the Churchyard and sat on his master's grave every night for fourteen years. His grave is just inside the gates and has become somewhat of a tourist attraction. It was well kept, with flowers on it, and his loyalty to his master is well remembered.

However, my main reason in visiting the Churchyard was to see the grave of the Covenanters and after some searching I came across it in a corner. The inscription on it is still very legible and reads thus:

Hail passenger, take heed what you do see
This tomb doth show for what some men did die
Here lies interred the dust of those who stood
Gainst perjury resisting unto blood
Adhering to the covenants and laws
Establishing the same: which was the cause
Their lives were sacrificed unto the lust
Of Prelatists abjured. Though here their dust

Lies mixt with murderers and other crew
 Whom justice justly did to death pursue
 But as for them, no cause was to be found
 Worthy of death; but only they were found
 Constant and steadfast, zealous witnessing
 For the Prerogatives of CHRIST their KING
 Which truths were sealed by famous Guthrie's head
 And all along to Mr Renwick's blood
 They did endure the wrath of enemies
 Reproaches, torments, deaths and injuries
 And now triumph in glory with the LAMB.

From May 27th 1661 that the noble Marquis
 of Argyll suffered, to the 17th February 1688
 that Mr James Renwick suffered, were executed at
 Edinburgh about one hundred of Noblemen,
 Gentlemen, Ministers, and other noble Martyrs
 for JESUS CHRIST. The most part of them lies here.

Revelation 7 v14 - These are they that
 have come out of Great Tribulation and have
 washed their robes and made them white in
 the blood of the Lamb.

This grave stone is a reminder of the sacrifice that was made
 by those who stood firm for the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ,
 and their memory and the cause for which they died should never
 be forgotten. Sad to say, the grave looked quite neglected and was
 covered with a huge pile of rotting leaves and refuse, such as
 Coca-Cola tins, etc. It seemed strange to me that the loyalty of a
 dog to his earthly master could be given more importance than the
 memory of those who were loyal to a Heavenly Master.

As I stood alone in that bleak graveyard, I thought of those
 buried there, who maybe are forgotten by the majority of people
 in the mad rush and turmoil of this modern world, and yet they
 are not forgotten by Him who has promised that one day He will
 make up His jewels. Their grave stands as a silent testimony to the
 truths that they considered were worth dying for. How highly they
 must have esteemed the true doctrines of Christ, to lay down their
 lives for Him. This is a challenge to us. Do we treasure these
 things with the same fervour and zeal? There they lie, forgotten
 by the world, but not by the Lord. "And a book of remembrance
 was written before him for them that feared the LORD, and that
 thought upon his name" (Malachi 3:16).

I also came across the grave of Thomas M'Crie, DD (1772-
 1835), the biographer of John Knox. His epitaph reads:

Under the banner of the original Secession,
 he contended with unfaltering firmness for
 the Principles of the Reformation,
 The memory of whose Champions he has

vindicated and embalmed in the page of
imperishable history.

Next I found the grave of Alexander Henderson, statesman, scholar and divine, who framed the Solemn League and Covenant and who presided at the deposition of the Bishops and the Assembly of Divines at Westminster. He was also Minister of St Giles from 1639-1646. His grave stone was damaged by musket shot and the marks can still be quite clearly seen. Some of the inscription is in Latin but there is a verse that reads:

Reader bow down thine eyes
Not for the dust here lies
It quicken shall again
And aye in joy remain
But for thyself, the Church and States
Whose woes [th]is dust prognosticates.

Many of the noble and great of Scotland are buried here in Greyfriars but one stark reminder of the perils and persecutions of the past are the Covenanters' Prisons which stand at one end of the Churchyard. Here the Covenanters were locked up in the strangest prisons I have ever seen. Surrounded by high walls and iron gates, they were placed in small roofless enclosures, surrounded by tombs and family vaults. Here they would be exposed to the weather, with no shelter from the elements, and herded like cattle into a pen.

John Knox

I wanted to see the Church where John Knox preached, so St Giles Cathedral was next on my itinerary. Whilst in St Giles I asked a few questions as to the whereabouts of Knox's pulpit, etc, (his well known pulpit is in St Andrews Parish Church), but received blank looks from the staff! One young American tourist was there, also wishing to know something of the history of Knox. But the general information on Knox possessed by the staff seemed very scanty indeed, so I endeavoured to tell him as much as I knew. I also wanted to know where Knox was buried and, after asking several people, I was told that he is buried at the back of St Giles in what is now a car park. This was unbelievable, but on arriving in the car park and looking round for some minutes, the attendant called out: "You'll no doubt be looking out for Space 44." At that time a car was parked over Space 44, so I had to retrace my steps there three or four times until eventually, fairly late in the evening, Space 44 was vacant and there I was able to

see the spot where Scotland's great Reformer was laid to rest. A plain granite tile marks the spot; there is no name, no date, nothing to indicate that here lies John Knox. I am sure that Knox would not have wanted his last resting place to become some kind of a shrine or place of pilgrimage but there is such a thing as respect for the dead.

The only reference to Knox is a small pane of glass in one of the windows with "I.K [Latin for J.K] 1572" and a bronze casting of Knox inside the Church. It seems that Knox is somewhat of an embarrassment to the Tourist Industry in Edinburgh. We commented to someone in the car park that Knox's grave was a scandal and a disgrace; the answer was: "It's a parking space and if we fenced it off we would lose money." Such is Edinburgh's respect for the last resting place of the great Reformer. Some would like to obliterate the memory of the Reformation from the pages of history and sadly this is the state everywhere, helped on by the spineless, apostate, ecumenical climate in our land.

My next stop was John Knox's house. Here at least there were some reminders of the great Reformer. Although it is not certain that he actually lived here (according to the museum), it is almost certain that he died here. In his study a tape of someone reading his sermons is played continuously, and in another room his dialogue with Mary Queen of Scots. This was well worth a visit.

The Grassmarket

One very interesting place connected with Covenanter history is the Grassmarket. This is the place where many executions took place in Edinburgh. The Scottish Reformation Society put an excellent plaque here in 1988, with the names of those who died for the Reformed faith. It is a fine and fitting reminder of those who sealed their testimony with their blood. Among those listed are:

1661 The Marquis of Argyll	1681 Donald Cargill
1661 James Guthrie	1681 Patrick Foreman
1666 James Hamilton	1688 James Renwick
1666 Hugh McKail	

What a privilege to stand on the very spot where so many precious souls were ushered through the gates of glory into an eternity spent before the throne and before the Lamb. On the ground is the inscription: *On this spot many martyrs and Covenanters died for the Protestant Faith.*

The Maiden

From the Grassmarket I went to the National Portrait Gallery and the museum of Antiquities. There are many famous portraits here, including that of Alexander Henderson, and also the gallows invented by Sir James Morton and called "The Maiden." Morton, like Haman (Esther 7:10) perished on his own gallows. On this horrific invention many Protestants met their death. It is designed similarly to the Guillotine once used in France. It has a sharp blade that severs the head from the body. Still very much intact, it is another grim reminder of the days gone by and the perilous times many of the Lord's people had to face. It was indeed costly to be a Christian in those troubled times, known in Scotland as "The Killing Times." If persecution like that should come again, how would we stand? I believe the Lord would give dying grace in a dying hour. As William Guthrie said, "Where faith is, there is a patient enduring of affliction." The Martyrs were Christians of great courage. They had a personal interest in the Saviour of sinners; rested on Christ alone for their eternal salvation and believed in Him. They were not men of weak faith but men of mighty faith. Had their faith been weak they would have failed in the face of the horrors that confronted them. They trusted God much and God strengthened them mightily. He set their feet upon a rock and established their goings. By faith they resisted every assault of their enemies. Trusting in the Lord, they felt their hearts were safe. Their foes might tear their bodies in pieces and trample them in the dust but upon their eternal souls no injury could be inflicted.

Epilogue

Holyrood Palace and Edinburgh Castle were also places I visited. These are also very interesting, but one thing that came across to me continually was that the Roman Catholic, Mary Queen of Scots, is made into a romantic heroine despite her somewhat stormy career as Queen of Scotland, and John Knox is portrayed to a great extent as a tyrant and an annoyance.

It was altogether an interesting and profitable visit to a lovely old city but I came away saddened at the seeming neglect of a great part of Scotland's history concerning the Reformers and Covenanters. It seems that their memory is not desirable to the tourist industry and few are interested in the events that happened in those bygone days. I am sure that it is a sign of the times we live in that the Reformation is an embarrassment to many and they would like to remove it from the pages of history.