

Memorials  
OF THE  
ALDERMEN, PROVOSTS,  
AND  
LORD PROVOSTS OF ABERDEEN,  
1272-1895.

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1272-1893.

BY

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1351-55.

XII. **William Leith of Ruthrieston***(Kennedy).*

It is evident from the little that can be gleaned of Provost Leith's life that he was a man living in advance of his times. In 1350 he is said to have married a daughter of Donald, 12th Earl of Mar, and to have been the progenitor of the Leiths of Leith-hall, Freefield and Glenkindie. It may be mentioned that the exact relationship of his wife to Donald is disputed, and the probability is that she was an illegitimate daughter, as she finds no place in the accepted pedigrees.\* The issue by this marriage was two sons, Laurence (his heir) and John.

In the following year tradition has assigned him the chief part in a doleful tragedy—to wit, the slaughter of one Baillie Catanach. It is a fact often remarked upon that men's evil deeds live longer than their good, and, if this be so, we can give full credence to the story that the two bells, Laurence and Mary, which formed part of the old peal of S. Nicholas, destroyed by the fire of 9th October, 1874, were a propitiatory offering, along with the Justice Mills, for the deed of blood concealed beneath the cairn on the moor of Barkmill. That the story is not a fable, and that the bells were gifted by Leith in 1351, the evidence of the Chartulary of the church can be produced to show.

The following is a translation of the entry narrating the gift:—

“1351. An honourable man, William Leithe, in his own (life-) time adorned and decored the Parish Church of S. Nicholas of Abirdene with two large bells of great price, hanging in the bell-tower, at his own cost and expense, whereof the name of the one is Lawrence and the name of the other Mary. To whose soul may God be gracious.”†

Regarding the names of the two bells, it is suggested that the larger bell, Laurence, or, as it was more familiarly designated,

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\* Davidson's Garioch, p. 72.

† Chart. S. Nicholas, II., 180.



"Lowrie," was so named after S. Laurence, the patron saint of the Provost's family, as appears from subsequent donations, and that Mary, the smaller of the two bells, was so called after the Virgin, to whose honour he later on enlarged the Quire of S. Nicholas dedicated to her. Laurence had an inscription upon it which has been preserved, along with some additional matter added when the bell was recast at Middleburg in 1634. It does not appear that there ever was an inscription on the smaller bell, or, at least, it was not preserved after Mary was recast some few years after Laurence.

"In 1351, William Leyth, Provost of Aberdeen, presented this Bell to the Church of S. Nicholas of Aberdeen. Thereafter, a cleft having been made in it, at the expense of the Community it was recast in the year 1634 while Sir Paul Menzies of Kinmundy, Knight, was Provost.

To the only God be Glory.

Michael Burgerhays made me in the year of  
our Lord 1634.

Lo, I, the bell, do not proclaim the praise  
of that which is unholy.

I glorify the Creator,  
I draw away the fear of thunder,  
I mourn in solemn tones the departed,  
I tell of the recurrent rites of faith,  
I move the heart of man that is joyful.

Behold me, I am Laurence!"

Leith's gifts to the church did not cease with the bells, for, in 1352, he gave a priest's complete vestment of blue velvet embroidered with gold, and, in 1355, he enlarged the choir of the Virgin towards the south by the space of sixteen feet, and there founded the altar of S. Laurence and S. Ninian, almost at the spot where the stone after referred to is now placed. His transactions in the purchase and sale of lands were numerous and widespread, but his chief estates were those of Ruthrieston, and Barns in the parish of Premnay, by both of which he is occasionally designated. He was elected to the civic chair at Michaelmas,



1352, and continued to act as alderman till the Michaelmas election in 1356, and again for the term of one year from Michaelmas, 1373. While in this capacity we find him representing the town in the Parliaments, especially that held on 26th September, 1357, when he gave in the burgh's consent to stand surety with Edinburgh, Perth, and Dundee for the ransom money of their king, David II., who had been taken prisoner at Neville's Cross in October of the previous year. Pending the payment of the ransom, Leith went into England the following year along with several others as hostages. It would appear that this was not his first journey into that country, for, under a safeguard of Edward, he had made a previous visit to purchase wheat, barley, and pease on account of the failure of these crops in the north through unseasonable weather.\* The only other official position which he held, so far as ascertained, was that of Collector of the King's Customs at the port of Aberdeen, a post which he seems to have retained for several years.

At his death, which occurred on the 5th August, 1380, he was interred in front of the altar of S. Laurence and S. Ninian. He left a bequest of an annual rent of 13s. 4d., payable out of the croft of John Cheyne, lying at the Crookit Myre in Futy, for an annual obit for the repose of his soul and that of Christian, his spouse. A second grant of 10s., out of property on the east side of the Gallowgate, was made for an obit in memory of Agnes Glenny, his second spouse, who survived till 1409.†

On a small brass plate placed beneath a sadly mutilated sculptured stone built into the wall on the west side of Drum's Aisle we read:—

The above stone represents the Chantry | or Annual Mass to be sung for the Soul. | Founded by | WILLIAM LEITH OF BARNES, | Provost of Abdn. in 1351, | who with many of his descendants | is interred underneath.

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\* Rotuli Scotiæ, p. 802.

† Reg. Epis. Abd., II., 216-217.



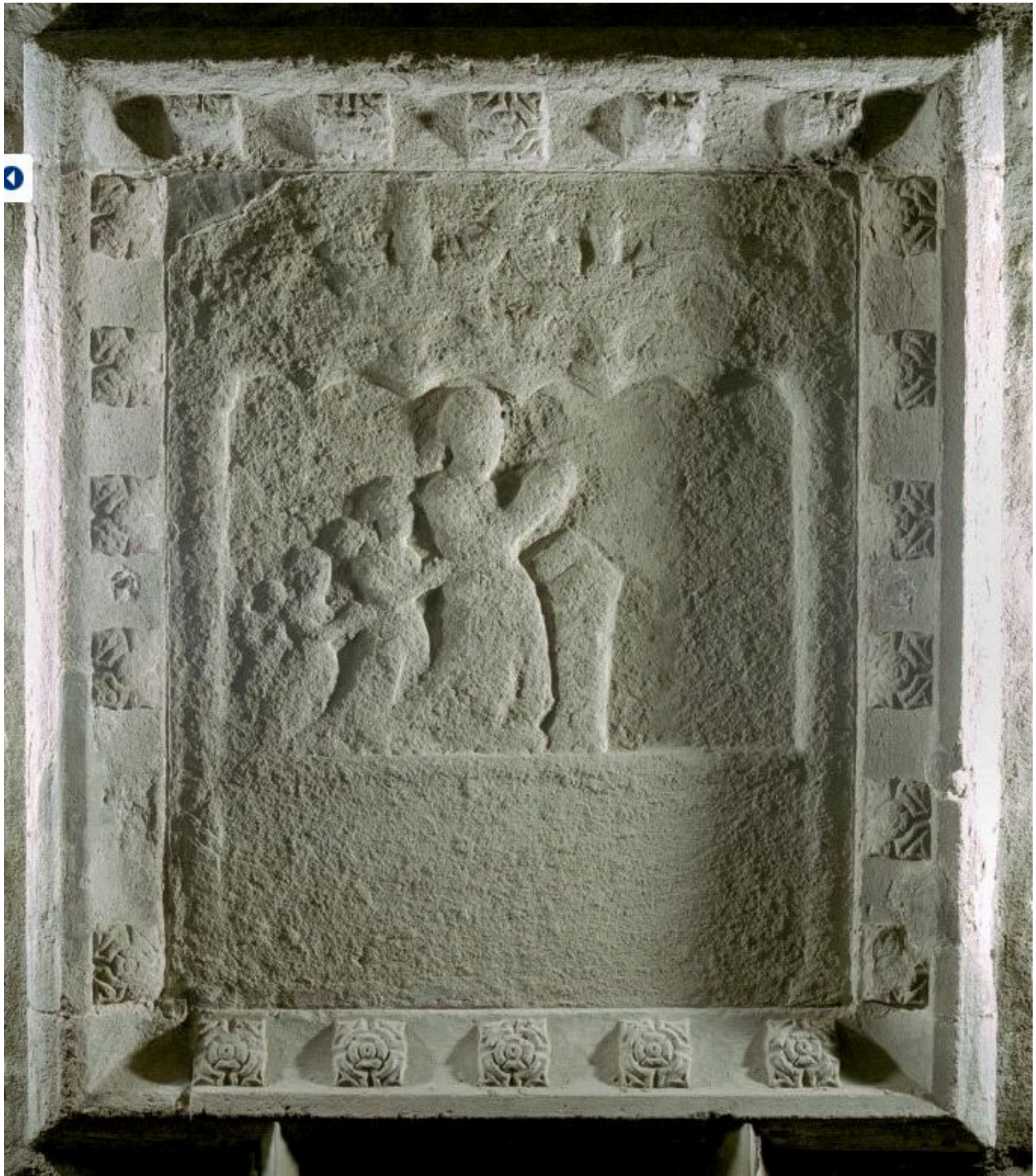
This stone leads us back to a remote period of our burgh history, and is one of the oldest links between the traditions of to-day and the events transacted over five centuries ago.



The Chantry stone, part of the altar of S. Laurence and S. Ninian, which may be looked upon as a monument to the memory of Leith, is divided into an upper and lower compartment. On the upper panel, under a richly-sculptured canopy, there is a female figure with four children kneeling, with an open book in front of them, before what had most probably been a cross, but the chisel of the reforming Covenanters has entirely obliterated every trace of it. The lower panel had undoubtedly contained an inscription, the shape of some of the letters being distinctly visible, but the shedding of the sandstone has rendered hopeless any attempt to recover even a part of it. The stone was carefully cleaned and the brass plate inserted in the wall below it about 1836, at the expense of Mr. Leith Ross of Arnage, one of Provost Leith's descendants.

It need only be remarked here that this stone is also claimed as a monument to Provost Robert Blinsele and his wife, from the







fact that a shield with the Blinsele arms now appears on the top of the stone. The conjunction of the two stones is, however, probably accidental as some of the other fragments preserved in the transepts clearly show.\*

1360-62.

9. THOMAS MERCER

*(Kennedy. Council Register).*

In one of the volumes† of the Council Register, about the date 1460, there is a copy of a gift of an annual rent of 13s. 4d. granted to the altar of S. Laurence and S. Ninian within the Parish Church of S. Nicholas by Laurence Davidson. The deed of gift is dated 20th November, 1361, and among the witnesses there occurs the name of Thomas Mercer, alderman.

From the Chamberlain Rolls we learn that during this period of office Mercer had most probably to entertain, if not lodge, the Court when David II. paid the burgh a visit in 1362.

1366.

XIII.

**Laurence Garvock**

*(Old Charter).*

There is a procuratory, dated 23rd September, 1367, by Emma de Dunfermline, cousin and heiress of Alexander de Dunfermline, in favour of William de Callabro, chaplain to Queen Margaret, John M'Kelly, John de Ross, and Alexander Madeth, for resigning her share of Longforgund, and among the witnesses occurs the name of Laurence de Garioch, alderman.

In 1357 Laurence Garvock was a Commissioner to Parliament as representing the burgh, and his elevation to the office of alderman had, in all probability, followed upon a series of services rendered to the struggling burgh in a number of minor offices. Although his exact relationship to the families of

\* Chart. S. Nicholas, II., 192.

† Vol. V.<sup>2</sup>, 688.



the tenement referred to stood on the ground afterwards occupied by Marischal's lodging on the south side of Castle Street.

The Alderman was married to Marjorie Blacwatre, and they, with consent of their son and heir, John de Foty, granted on 20th March, 1402-3, a disposition of a half of the lands of Blacwatre, with their pertinents, lying in the barony of Inverugy, county Banff, in favour of William de Dalgarnoe, laird of Fintray.\* These lands had evidently been part of the marriage portion of his wife, or had fallen to her as an heiress.

Besides the estate of Waterton, which gave him his designation, he at one time held part of the lands of Rubislaw, and was proprietor of several crofts within the burgh.

From two of these crofts at the Denburn, formerly in possession of John Crab, he, on 1st April, 1403, granted an annual rent of 13s. 4d. to the Carmelite Friars.†

1372.

12. WILLIAM LEITH OF RUTHRIESTON

*(College Charters Mass., X., 25).*

In a charter by Laurence de Foty, confirming John Crab in a croft in the Barony of "Rubbyslaw," dated on 1st June, 1373, the name of William de Leth, "tunc aldermanus," appears among the witnesses.

1373.

12. WILLIAM LEITH OF RUTHRIESTON

*(Kennedy).*

1382.

XV. Alexander Bannerman of Waterton and Elsieck

*(Kennedy).*

Alexander Bannerman was the son of Mr. Donald Bannerman, physician to David II. On 2nd May, 1373, he received a charter

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\* *Antiq. Abd. and Banff*, I., 423, 493.

† *College Charters.*

He was alive in 1408, as his name appears in the tax-roll made up in that year.

1396-98.

17. WILLIAM DE CAMERA

(*Kennedy. Council Register, I., 1.*)

The last election, that of 1398, is the first one preserved in the existing Council Registers, and the earliest record of a municipal election in Scotland.

The minute of election bears that the Alderman was elected with the consent and assent of the whole community.

1399-1400.

XIX.

**Adam de Benyn**

(*Council Reg., I., 71, 163.*)

The members of this family seem to have been pretty numerous in Aberdeen about this period, as appears from the various municipal lists. Adam was a baillie in 1392. Symon held a similar position for several years about 1398, and in the list of baillies for 1409 there is the name of Alexander Benyn.

The Alderman was dead in all probability before 1408, as his name does not occur in any of the Council lists after 1401, nor is he mentioned in the tax roll of 1408.

1401-3.

XX.

**Laurence de Leith of Barns**

(*Council Reg., I., 200. College Charters.*)

The election at Michaelmas, 1401, is the only one recorded in the Council Register, but on 1st April, 1403, he, in his capacity as alderman, witnessed a charter of a gift by Laurence Foty.

He was the son of William Leith of Ruthrieston (12), and on his father's death he received a grant, dated 6th April, 1388, of



the lands of Capronstoun for his life, holding of the Bishops of Aberdeen, the reddendo being a silver penny.\*

His heir was Norman Leith, whose son John was the progenitor of the Leiths of Overhall.†

1404.

XXI. **William de Camera, Son**

*(Kennedy).*

The Council Register at this date is very badly kept, and no record of the election at Michaelmas, 1404, is inserted.

The early history of this alderman is associated to a considerable extent with that of his father, and in some cases it is apparently impossible to wholly distinguish between father and son.

A son of William Chalmers of Fyndon, he appears at an early stage as taking an active share in municipal work. In 1398 Robert II. visited Aberdeen, and in the burgh account rendered in 1390 by him in his capacity as baillie, there is entered in the discharge a sum of £4, the value of a gift to his mother by the King.

From the Chamberlain Rolls for 1396 it is evident that he enjoyed some hereditary position as doorkeeper of the Exchequer, for in that year he was called upon to exhibit the charter by which he held the post. It is to him likewise that in all probability the entry in the S. Nicholas Chartulary refers under date 29th September, 1417, when it records the gift of a perpetual annuity of £6 13s. 4d. to the altar of S. Katherine, founded, as already noticed, by his father in 1360. This donation was made for the good of his soul, and also of that of Elizabeth, his late wife, and his father and mother. In this entry he is designed as of Findon, he evidently succeeding to this property, while his brother got Murthill.‡

\* Reg. Epis. Abd., I., 186.

† Davidson's Garioch, p. 458.

‡ Chart. S. Nicholas, II., 37.