Introduction

This chapter of history is surprisingly unknown and undocumented outside the borders of Scotland. However it was a violent period that pitted fellow countrymen against each other, rather like the English Civil War that took place around the same time. Although on a smaller scale it was often more brutal as the following chapters will describe:

Today South West Scotland is a peaceful and largely prosperous area, however there survive a large number of 'martyrs' graves, which are reminders of an altogether more turbulent past. Many are located on remote moorland, marking the spot where government soldiers killed supporters of the Covenant. Others are to be found in parish Kirkyards either erected at the time or often replaced by modern memorials. Almost every corner of southern Scotland has a tale to tell of the years of persecution, from remote and ruinous shepherds' houses where secret meetings were held to castles and country houses commandeered by government troops in their quest to capture and punish those who refused to adhere to the King's religious demands.
Scotland was in an almost constant state of civil unrest because people refused to accept the royal decree that King Charles was head of the church (known as the 'Kirk'). When those who refused signed a covenant which stated that only Jesus Christ could command such a position, they were effectively signing their own death warrant. This was a grim period of religious persecution which witnessed the bloodiest crimes of the nation's history, committed by Scots against Scots.

"The Scots holding their young King's nose to the grindstone"

A cartoon from 1651 showing Charles II being lectured to by his Scots subjects

Origins of the struggle

James VI of Scotland became James I of England in March 1603 when he was declared rightful heir upon the death of Queen Elizabeth I. It is important to remember that during the reign of James as King of both Scotland and England, the two nations retained their separate parliaments and privy councils. They passed their own laws and enjoyed their own law courts; they had their own national church, their own ways of levying taxes and regulating trade, and to a certain extent, they could pursue their own foreign policies.

Scotland itself was practically two distinct nations. There was a huge division between Highland and Lowland. James's attempts to persuade the clan chiefs to adopt the Protestant faith were a failure. They clung to the military habits of their ancestors, their
Jacobite (Catholic) heritage and continued the Gaelic tongue when most of Scotland had abandoned it in favour of English. James also had a long-running quarrel with the Presbyterian Scottish Kirk (a strict form of Protestantism) and resented what he saw as their interference in matters of state.

Presbyterianism as practiced by the Scots was a hard, unyielding faith. It was deeply suspicious of Christmas, and abominated graven images such as the crucifix. It did not recognise Easter as a celebration. James insisted that his divine authority came before the Kirk's civil jurisdiction. This conflict between two uncompromising factions was to strongly influence this whole period of Scottish history. James, despite his Scots ancestry, left London to visit his native country only once in the years he held the 'two crowns' between 1603 and 1625.

Charles I reigned 1625-1649

On the accession to the throne of Charles I in 1625 he was determined to continue the work of his father. Charles therefore proposed bringing the Scots church into line with that of England, an extremely controversial move which provoked outrage north of the border. He was an opponent of Presbyterianism and thought it would be simpler if all his subjects would adopt Episcopacy (government of the church by crown appointed Bishops). He therefore planned the introduction of the 'Book of Common Prayer' into the Scottish church service. This took some time to plan and it was not until 23rd July 1637 that the new liturgy, which many Scots believed to be more Catholic than Protestant, was ordered to be read in the Church of St. Giles in Edinburgh.
Tradition has it when the new service was read, one worshipper, Jenny Geddes stood up and threw her stool at the Dean's head shouting out "Wha daur say mass in ma lug". The congregation erupted and the service had to be abandoned. Although this act is commonly portrayed as a spontaneous outbreak of popular indignation, there is evidence that the incident was carefully planned and contrived.

On 28th February 1638 the 'National Covenant' was produced on behalf of the Church of Scotland, backed by the nobility and gentry, in opposition to the new book of
prayer. This was essentially an anti-Papist declaration and 60,000 folk gathered to sign the documents which had been placed on public display in Greyfriars church, Edinburgh. Other copies were taken throughout the country for further signatures, bringing the Scottish Kirk into direct conflict with the the King and the rule of law.

![The signing of the Covenant in Greyfriars churchyard](image)

**Solemn League and Covenant**

In 1643 Charles was ousted from the throne during a bloody Civil War by the English parliamentarians and Oliver Cromwell was installed as Lord Protector. One of his first tasks was to execute the King who was promptly beheaded. The English Parliamentarians agreed that Presbyterianism be adopted as the national religion throughout England and Scotland as they were anxious to have the Scots allied against the still dangerous forces of the Crown. The Covenanters therefore sided with Cromwell and a period of stability ensued. The treaty between the two was called the "Solemn League and Covenant". This was essentially a marriage of convenience.
Scotland was now under English rule and the Church of Scotland enjoyed a time of spiritual prosperity. Cromwell was supreme lord of a united Britain which was now a conquered country living under an army of occupation. However it was to be short-lived as Cromwell died in 1658 and in May 1660 Charles' son, Charles II was fully restored to the throne. He soon passed an act which enforced the people to recognise him as the supreme authority in matters both Civil and Ecclesiastical. The Church of Scotland rejected this and was thrown into the furnace of persecution for twenty eight long years until 1688.

Repudiation of the Covenant and Rullion Green

In 1661 the National Covenant was repudiated by Charles II. The following year the Covenant was torn up and Charles' own Bishops and curates were appointed to govern the churches and 400 non-conforming ministers were ejected from their parishes. At first the authorities tolerated them preaching in houses, barns or the open-air, but it was soon realised that the people's resolve was such that they would not attend the government-appointed Episcopal minister's services. The first attempt at limiting attendance at these conventicles was made in 1663 and by 1670 attendance became treasonable and preaching at them, a capital offence.

By 1666 the persecution by soldiers who were given lists of the names of the non-attendees by the curates, was so bad that the country became increasingly restless. When the village of Dalry in Galloway witnessed an old man being roasted with
branding irons by the soldiers, a rebellion commenced. It had not been planned, but numbers flocked to the cause and a spontaneous march took place in horrific November weather via Lanark towards Edinburgh. The exhausted Covenanters were ultimately defeated at Rullion Green in the Pentland Hills when an army of 3,000 led by General Tam Dalyell routed the meagre band of 900 protestors. 100 were killed on the battlefield and 120 taken prisoner and marched to Edinburgh and charged with treason and rebellion. It is estimated that a further 300 Covenanters escaped, but died or were slain on their way home.

Greyfriars kirkyard, Edinburgh. The Covenanters prison

The captured Covenanters were crowded into part of the High Kirk in Edinburgh known as 'Haddock's Hole'. They were brought before the Justiciary Court and on December 7th 1666 they were found guilty and sentenced to be hanged on the Mercat Cross in Edinburgh. As many as ten at a time were despatched on one scaffold, dismembered and the pieces exhibited in the Covenanter's own locality as a warning.

Conventicles

On 13th August 1670 the government declared that conventicles, or meetings in the fields were illegal and it was a capital offence to attend these. The authorities were concerned that these were becoming a hot-bed of revolutionary ideas. The vast outdoor assemblies were being thrilled by the preacher's words of fiery defiance and doom-laden prophecy. However the Presbyterians defied them and held secret religious meetings in the hills, usually with a circle of lookouts, often armed, posted around the site to watch for approaching dragoons. There were many bloody skirmishes amongst the bare lowland landscape. This was a time of legends, of the soldiers fun in throwing women in pits full of snakes, of men hanged on their own door lintels.
Illegal conventicles were usually held in the open air

All conventicles were to be broken up and any land owner who refused to help could be fined; instead of turning master against man however, it forged links of shared suffering. Secret conventicles were attended by up to thousands of people at only a few hours notice, with mass marriages being carried out with a rock as an alter and baptisms performed in small streams. Followers of the Covenant were willing to risk the fines and sentences in order to hear the preachers. For example 7,000 people attended a conventicle near Maybole in Ayrshire in 1678, performed by four ministers and at East Nisbet in Berwickshire the same year 3,200 took part of which 1,600 were seated.

A massive conventicle took place on Skeoch Hill In Kirkudbrightshire in 1679. There were 6,000 Covenanters in attendance to hear three preachers, of which 3,000 were allowed to take part in communion. In the centre of the congregation a series of large boulders were arranged in four parallel rows for the communicants, perhaps around 300 at a time to sit on. These stones, known as the Communion stones are still there.

Often the conventicle was infiltrated by a few non-adherents who slipped off early to inform the authorities. The Covenanters had to be highly vigilant as the threat of armed intervention was ever present. The participants were most likely to be captured or executed, usually on their way to and from conventicles. The fact that they were away from home and probably had a bible in their possession was enough for the authorities to justify fining or executing them., often killing them where they stood.

**The "Highland Host"**

The government were becoming desperate and in early 1678, nine thousand soldiers from the largely Catholic highlands were brought south from their garrison in Stirling to Glasgow and the south-west. The town fathers of Ayrshire wrote to the Earl of Lauderdale, a senior official requesting him not to send so "inhumane and barbarous a crew of spoilers" into that county. The appeal fell on deaf ears. Parties of highland soldiers were quartered on land owned by suspected Covenanter sympathisers who were required to feed them and keep them for nothing. These were known as the
'Highland host' and the highlanders were responsible for many atrocities, robbing their hosts of all belongings and livestock; rape, pillage and destruction. Thousands of pounds worth of damage and theft were done in the few months they were in residence.

One example was in Kilmarnock where nine highland soldiers were quartered on William Dickie for six weeks. He was required to supply them with food and drink and when they eventually left his house, they stole bags full of ornaments, cutlery, plates and a sock full of money, to a total value of 1,000 merks (scottish pounds). The soldiers also maltreated him and his family. His wife was pregnant, yet one of the highlanders stuck a dirk (knife) into her side and she died soon after. Dickie himself was struck on a number of occasions for not supplying all the soldiers needs and one of the beatings resulted in two broken ribs.

The minister of Kilmarnock, Rev Alexander Wedderburn, was so appalled by the actions of the highlanders in the town that he condemned them in one of his sermons. The highlanders heard this and caught up with him as he walked through the streets. In a scuffle one of the soldiers lunged at the minister with the butt of his gun, wounding him and causing him to fall to the ground. He died shortly after of respiratory disease.

Many parishes have records which detail the cost of putting up the highlanders, sums in money which were long in recouping. For example, two hundred and fifty soldiers and officers from Caithness were quartered within the Parish of Cumnock for fifteen nights and the total losses recorded in the accounts were £3015 6s 8d. The total for Avondale parish in Lanarkshire was reckoned to be £1,700, although it has been surmised that this figure was only one third of the true total.

**Battles of Drumclog and Bothwell Bridge**

The situation was becoming grave in the Lowlands and South West and by 1679 the men of Galloway were to rise again in what became known as the 'Second Resistance'. It began with the "Rutherglen Declaration" when they condemned the proceedings of the government since 1660. Shortly afterwards a huge conventicle was arranged, somewhere in Lanarkshire. This was more than a gesture of defiance, it was a challenge the government had to meet to retain their credibility. John Graham of Claverhouse, known to his enemies as "Bloody Graham" rode out from Glasgow with about 180 dragoons, to deal with them. Born in 1648, near Dundee, he was abhorred by the Covenanters for the part he played in ordering the execution of many friends and supporters, many being killed by his own hands.
The landscape at Drumclog in the shadow of Loudoun Hill

He found them drawn up in order of battle at the farm of Drumclog, near Loudoun Hill, on the morning of 1st June 1679. They had chosen their position skilfully, in front was a deep ditch and all around were bogs. About 1500 in number the Covenanters had had little fear of the scarlet soldiers coming towards them on horseback. After an exchange of musket fire with little effect, Claverhouse held back as he had no-one to guide his men through the morass. His enemies solved his problems for him. Led by William Cleland, a young man who was later to become a famous soldier as the first colonel of the Cameronians, a large party of men made their way around the ditch and threw themselves on the dragoons who by now had dismounted. Bogged down in the marshy ground and totally outnumbered, the soldiers had no advantage as they were attacked at close quarters by sword, pike and pitchfork. Thirty six dragoons were killed, seven made prisoner and the rest fled towards Strathaven. Claverhouse had lost the battle of Drumclog.
Thinking their hour had come, the Covenanters proposed a march on Glasgow but discovered that the fearful residents had placed barricades across the streets to prevent them from entering the city. It was now full scale civil war, with the militia mobilised and armed men guarding the fords over the River Forth on the approaches to Edinburgh. The Covenanters turned about and at Bothwell Bridge, a crossing over the River Clyde just north of Hamilton they made their stand. By now they had become a rabble with no attempt at military formation.

This time they were soundly defeated by government troops led by the Duke of Monmouth, with perhaps 600 killed on the field and in the subsequent pursuit, 1,200 taken prisoner. Most of these were marched to Edinburgh where they were locked up in an enclosure of Greyfriars Kirkyard. Five months later after many had escaped, some had died and others were forced to sign a declaration of government support, 257 Covenanters remained. They were sentenced to banishment to the American plantations and placed on board a ship at Leith. However it foundered off the Orkney Islands in the far north of Scotland, with almost all on board being drowned.
Bothwell Bridge today. The original 15th century bridge was widened and enlarged in 1822

James Thomson of Tanhill

James Thomson, born about 1630, was a farmer from Tanhill which is on the west side of Lesmahagow parish, bordering Stonehouse. The family of the martyr was in earlier times located in a place called Cunningair or Collingair in Stonehouse parish opposite Dovesdale. It was from here in the late 1500's that James Thomson's family was to travel to the lands at Tanhill.

Little is known about him, except he died of wounds inflicted at the Battle of Drumclog in 1679. His son and his wife suffered imprisonment and James was later interred in Stonehouse St.Ninian's old kirkyard. His tomb reads:

Here lays or near this Ja Thomson

Who was shot in Rencounter at Drumclog, June 1st 1679

By bloody Graham of Clavers House

for his adherence to the Word of God and Scotland's

Covenanted Work of reformation - Rev xii 11

On the other side:

This hero brave who doth lye here

In truth's defence did he appear,

And to Christ's cause he firmly stood
Until he'd sealed it with his blood.

With sword in hand upon the field

He lost his life, yet did not yield.

His days did End in Great renown,

And he obtained the Martyrs Crown.

His descendants renewed his stone in 1832 and it was repaired again in 1955 due to damage caused by the elements of nature. His descendants have been numerous, many of them have been ruling elders in the Church of Scotland. Many inhabitants of Stonehouse today can trace their origins from the family line, including a large number of Sorbies. This is because Ann Thomson who married Mitchell Sorbie the famous "foot-racer" in 1848, was James' 5xGreat Grand-Daughter.

The "Killing Times"

The period from 1680 until 1685 was one of the fiercest in terms of persecution and a few months between 1684-5 became forever known as the "Killing Times". Charles' brother James II had come to the throne, he was a believer in the Devine Right of Kings and a supporter of the Roman Catholic faith. It became his sworn intent to totally eradicate the Presbyterians.

Parish Lists were drawn up in accordance with instructions to the Episcopalian Curates to furnish Nominal Rolls of all persons, male and female, over the age of 12 within their Parishes. The Ministers were ordered to give "..a full and complete Roll of all within the Parish" and "that to their Knowledge they give Account of all Disorders and Rebellions, and who are guilty of them, Heritors or others." Their instructions concluded, "..No remarks need be made upon these Demands made upon every Curate in every Parish; they are plain enough, as also their Design.." The 'design' of this census was obviously to assist in the control and persecution of the Covenanters. The list drawn up for Wigtownshire in 1684, featured a total of 9,276 individuals in the 19 Parishes and was probably ordered by John Grahame of Claverhouse who had been appointed the Sheriff of Wigtownshire.

Amongst the list were - Marion Sorbie from Auchleand, Burgh of Wigtown; Catherine Sorbie from Lochans, Parish of Inch; John and James Sorbie from Minnigaff and Patrick Sorbie from Claughan of Penninghame.

These were the most horrific and atrocious times ever inflicted on the people of Scotland. The Covenanters were now flushed out and hunted down as never before and the common soldier was empowered to take life at will of any suspect without trial of law. Usually it was done without any evidence and often as the result of the suspicions of an over-zealous town official or Minister. Brutality in these days defied
the imagination and the persecution had no mercy on man, woman or child, irrespective of circumstances. Any class of Covenanter once caught by the King's troops was shot or murdered on the spot. The following are some examples of these crimes:

The Murder of John Brown

Most of the well-known martyrdoms took place at this time, including the notorious murder of John Brown by Claverhouse at Priesthill, about one mile from the Strathaven road. This was at his own front door, in full view of his wife and children after a long chase through the moors and mosses of Lanarkshire and Ayrshire. John was a devout Christian and would probably have been a fierce preacher were it not for the fact he had a speech impediment. Many Covenanters were welcomed to his cottage and illegal meetings were held there. On 1st May 1685 a number of soldiers arrived, commanded by John Graham of Claverhouse. Brown was asked to swear the oath of allegiance to the crown, but he refused. It was noted that in his answers to Graham, Brown's stutter left him and he is said to have responded with the eloquence of a preacher.

He was then dragged back to his own front door and in front of his wife, daughter and baby boy in arms he was thrown to the ground and told to pray. Claverhouse's temper grew as the prayers went on and on. He interrupted Brown three times and bellowed that he "gave him time to pray, not preach". 'Bloody Graham' then ordered his men to shoot the Covenanter and it was reported that they initially hesitated as they were to perform the act in front of women and children. It is said that Claverhouse suffered nightmares afterwards and the words of Brown's prayers continually haunted him. Friends helped John's wife Isabel to bury her husband near to where he fell and the spot is still marked with a memorial and flat gravestone. Many of Brown's descendants still live in the surrounding towns of Lanarkshire.

The Wigtownshire Martyrs

Another despicable event was the drowning of two women who were tied to stakes in Wigtown Bay and engulfed in the rising Solway tide. This punishment was meted out to Margaret Lachlane aged 63 years and Margaret Wilson in her mid twenties, who refused to give up the Covenant and so they became known as the "Wigtownshire Martyrs".
Monument at Wigtown to the Martyrs

Their names had been given to the authorities by two local 'king's curates' as being non-attendees at the church, thus branding them as 'disorderly' parishioners. Both had gone into hiding, but a party of dragoons led by the feared Robert Grierson of Lag soon found their hideaways. They were tried before the court in Wigtown on 13th April 1685 and were sentenced by the judges to execution by drowning.

They were marched down from the Tollbooth by the soldiers and two stakes were hammered into the sands. The tide was out, the sands being so flat that the sea recedes almost two miles thereabouts. The soldiers first went to Lachlane, and give her the chance to pray for the King, but she refused. Some men were incensed at the impudence of the old woman, and one cursed and told the soldiers to, "Let her gang to hell". As the tidal race worked it's way higher up the body of old Margaret, one of the town soldiers took his halberd and held it over her throat, bringing her to a quicker end.

Inscription on the Monument
Margaret Wilson began to sing the 25th Psalm as the waters rose up her body, "Consider mine enemies, how many they are. And they bear a tyrannous hate against me". Finally one soldier came forward and upon pushing her body under the water said "Tak anither drink, hinny; clep wi' the partans". The reference to the partans or crabs, was made as the women are said to have grasped the stakes tightly. At a later time, when the tide had once again receded, the corpses of the two women were taken from the waters and under the cover of nightfall transferred to the Parish Kirkyard. A grave was hastily dug and they were laid in consecrated soil.

Killing at Blackwood Farm

In the same month of April 1685, a group of 12 Covenanters including James White formed a small prayer group at Little Blackwood farm, near to Moscow in the parish of Kilmarnock. Peter Inglis was in charge of a company of troopers, based at the garrison in the keep in the small town of Newmilns. He had heard that an illegal covenant was planned, so he set off with a small group of soldiers. On reaching the farm they split up and surrounded the building. Something disturbed the meeting inside, perhaps a dog barking. In any case, the Covenanters abruptly ended their meting and tried to make their escape. As they stumbled about in the darkness, the Dragoons loosed a volley of shots at White and he crashed to the ground dead. Of the others eight were apprehended and three managed to escape.

Peter Inglis found an axe on the farm and instantly severed White's head from his body. Grabbing it by the hair he tied it to his horse's saddle and returned with his trophy to Newmilns. The remainder of White's body was left lying on the ground and was trampled by cattle which were stolen from the farm. His remains were later interred at Fenwick. The captured Covenanters were arrested and marched to the garrison at Newmilns. The following day the word had spread throughout the Loudoun area about the incident and a crowd had gathered close to the garrison. They were shocked and repulsed to see Inglis carry out White's head by the hair and on the burgh green threw it into the air. When it landed he and the soldiers kicked it around, playing a makeshift game of football.
The next morning Captain John Inglis, Peter's father was about to execute the eight prisoners when officials of the burgh intervened and stated that an official order should be obtained. Peter Inglis was then despatched to Edinburgh where he readily received such an order from the Privy Council. However the parishioners of Loudoun were scheming a rescue and made plans that night to spring a release. A group of about 60 approached the tower and easily overpowered the guards. In the ensuing scramble two soldiers were shot. Using large hammers they had borrowed from the local smithy they battered the gate down and all were able to escape. The only casualty in the mêlée being John Law, one of the rescuers who was shot by a soldier from an upper window in the tower. He was buried where he fell in the castle yard.

The soldiers searched the district the following day, but had difficulty in recapturing the prisoners. They discovered a man named James Smith at East Threepwood Farm near Galston, who had given the fugitives some food. He tried to escape, but was wounded by soldiers at his front door. He was taken to Mauchline Castle where he later died of his wounds.

**Grierson of Lag and George Short**

Robert Grierson of Lag was one of the most feared persecutors of the Covenanters. Born around 1655 he had inherited the old castle of Lag in Dumfriesshire from his cousin in 1667. In 1678 he was appointed Deputy Steward of Kirkudbrightshire and the Earldom of Nithsdale. It was at this time that he drew up a bond disallowing his tenants...
from attending conventicles or associating with the Covenanters. He was unrelenting in his search for non-conformists, hunting down and murdering a large number of Covenanters in the district.

In March 2nd 1685 he surprised eight Covenanters in the East Galloway hills who had just left a prayer meeting at Lochenkit. Four men who shot where they stood and two were hung on an oak tree the following day at Irongray. A local woman named Ferguson tore her scarf in two, in order to make a blindfold for the condemned men. She was captured by the soldiers and sentenced to the American plantations for seven years. The remaining two Covenanters were sold as slaves to the West Indies.

On 11th July, the same year, Lag and the Earl of Annandale were in command of a troop of dragoons in the parish of Twynholm, Kirkcudbrightshire. At night as they were riding back to their base they came upon two Covenanters, David Halliday and George Short. Realising they had no chance of escape, they gave themselves up. Annandale decided they should be taken prisoner and face trial the next day. However Lag ordered that the pair should be shot as they lay tied up on the ground. At first the soldiers refused, but when Lag threatened them with the consequences if he was forced to do the deed himself, they pulled their guns and fired.

Location of George Short's Grave (in the foreground) at Balmaghie

The front of the gravestone reads:

"HERE LYES GEORGE SHORT
WHO WAS PURSUED AND TAKEN
AND INSTANTLY SHOT TO DEATH"
UNDER CLOUD OF NIGHT

IN THE PARISH OF TONGUELAND

BY GRIER OF LAG"
The corpses were left where they fell, but were later taken to Balmaghie Kirkyard, close to the Dee River (now known as Loch Ken) where they lie in separate graves. David Halliday is buried alongside his namesake who had already been martyred on 21st February 1685 at Kirkconnell Moor.

Lag's work hounding the Covenaters did not go unrecognised by the authorities, for on 28th March 1685, he was granted a Boronetcy and a pension of £200. He had married Lady Henrietta Douglas, sister of William, 1st Duke of Queensberry. He died on 31st December 1733 aged 88 at his town house in Dumfries. It is said the horses pulling his hearse to Dunscore's old Kirkyard died of exhaustion and that a black raven, a symbol of the devil landed on his coffin and it took many waving mourners to frighten it away. However the bird followed the cortege the six miles from Dumfries to Dunscore and only flew away when the coffin was buried in the ground.

James Renwick

In 1688, the fugitive preacher James Renwick was captured and executed at the scaffold in Edinburgh's Grassmarket, the last Covenanter to suffer a public execution. He was born in Moniaive in Dumfriesshire on 15th February 1662, the son of a weaver, Andrew Renwick. He was always interested in religion and it is said that, by the age of six was able to read and question the contents of a bible. His parents scrimped and saved to ensure James received an education and after attending school in Edinburgh was able to attend the University. After graduating with an MA degree in 1681, he began to question the King's authority over the church after witnessing the public hanging of a
number of Covenanters. He moved to Lanark and started to attend a series of conventicles and in October 1682 was chosen to study for the ministry at the University of Groningen in the Netherlands. He was ordained in May 1683 and arrived back in his homeland in October that year. On 23rd November 1683 a large conventicle was held at Darmead at which he commenced his ministry, preaching to many hundreds.

Sir George Harvey gives a comfortable Victorian view of what must have been a far less tranquil scene in reality

Thus began one of many close shaves with the authorities. In July 1684 he was travelling with three others across Strathaven Moor. They were spotted by Dragoons and a chase ensued. He galloped towards the summit of Dungavel Hill, dismounted and hid in a hollow until nightfall before he moved on. In the next few months he was responsible for the baptism of over 300 children and also performed many marriages and funerals, all held in remote farms and on the moors.

In September 1684, the Privy Council had issued a warrant for his capture and the following year Renwick was at the head of 200 Covenanters who affixed a declaration on the cross at Sanquhar, in which James VII was denounced as a murderer an idolater. After this he made sure there was a lookout stationed wherever he went and at any conventicle at which he was preaching and there was always a horse standing by, saddled and bridled, on which the fugitive could make a swift getaway.

His last conventicle took part at Riskenhope in Selkirkshire in January 1688. According to an onlooker, James Hogg, "When he prayed that day, few of his hearer's cheeks were dry. My parents were well acquainted with a woman whom he there baptized". Renwick was apprehended on 1st February 1688 on one of his secret visits to Edinburgh. A group of excise men visited the home of his friend and trader John
Lackup under the guise that they were checking up on him. In reality they were hoping to capture Renwick and claim a reward. A scuffle broke out and the preacher made a bid for freedom, running down the Castle Wynd. However he was easily caught, taking a number of blows in the process and then taken to gaol. Patrick Graham, Captain of the Guards, looked at the 26 year old and asked "Is this boy the Mr Renwick that the nation hath been so much troubled with?"

![A condemned Renwick being taken for execution](image)

Placed on trial, the witnesses for the prosecution included such notables as Claverhouse himself. He was sentenced to die on 8th February 1688 and the execution was postponed for two weeks. In which time Renwick received numerous visitors including the Bishop of Edinburgh and the Lord Advocate who pleaded with him to accept at least some rule of the King, but he refused. On the day of his hanging he was allowed to see his mother and sister who had made their way up from Dumfriesshire, his father having died when James was twelve.

On the scaffold Renwick attempted to address the crowd, but all the time the soldiers beat their drums in order to drown out his words. The hangman sprung the trapdoor and he dropped to his death. His remains were taken from the scaffold by a follower and rolled in a winding sheet before being buried in Greyfriars' Kirkyard. Renwick would have been the last Covenanting martyr but for a 16-year-old lad, George Wood. He was shot down in the fields a few days later near the village of Sorn, Ayrshire and is buried in the parish Kirkyard there.
However for the Covenanters the period of terror was nearly over. For all his provocative attempts to restore Catholicism in England, King James II still had powerful support among the Tory stalwarts of the established order. But he seemed bent on undermining his own power base. In the spring of 1688 he ordered his Declaration of Indulgence, suspending the penal laws against Catholics, to be read from every Anglican pulpit in the land. The Church of England and its staunchest supporters, the peers and gentry, were outraged. The birth of an heir, James Francis Stuart (later to become the Old Pretender) increased public disquiet about a Catholic dynasty; fears confirmed when the baby was baptised into the Roman faith.

At the end of June a small group of peers made the fateful decision to invite William of Orange, James's son-in-law, to "defend the liberties of England". William prepared carefully, assembling a formidable army of multinational mercenaries in Holland. In November he landed at Torbay, at the head of 15,000 men. Cleverly, he made no public claim to the crown, saying only that he had come to England to save Protestantism. James, meanwhile, marched west with his small but well trained army. But to his dismay he found his troops deeply discontented and unwilling to fight.

At Salisbury there were mass desertions, and the king turned tail for London. Even then, James had hopes of retaining his throne, but his nerve failed him. He made for the Kent coast, was turned back by magistrates at Faversham, and was forced to sail from London. Finally, on Christmas Day 1688, he landed in France and from there he
moved onto Ireland. William moved swiftly to neutralise the royal army and establish a provisional government. In January 1689 a hastily summoned Parliament declared the throne vacant. In February William and Mary - the daughter of King James - jointly acceded. The second English revolution of the century had been accomplished without violence.

This put an end to the House of Stewart which had ruled over Scotland for over 300 years and England, Scotland and Ireland for eighty six years. James and his son Charles tried to reclaim the crown in the Jacobite risings of 1689, 1715 and 1745, but were unsuccessful. The "Glorious Revolution" had taken place and the William, the new King was persuaded by his advisors, principally William Carstares, a Scottish minister who had become a friend of William in Holland to accept Presbyterianism as the established church in Scotland. In the year 1690, therefore Parliament met and passed an act which re-established Presbyterianism in Scotland and to this day the Church of Scotland remains a Presbyterian Church.

William and Mary

The House of Stewart had maintained they had been appointed kings by God and not by the people, but in dethroning James the people had claimed the right to appoint their own kings. For this time onwards, therefore, it came to be understood that kings would be allowed to remain on the throne only if they governed according to the laws of the land. After the revolution the kings could make no changes in the laws without the consent of the Parliament. Thus after James was dethroned a new day dawned, both in England and Scotland.

Cameronians

Although most of the Covenanters rejoined the established church, there were a good number throughout the country who wished to remain apart. They established the Reformed Presbyterian Church. Similarly, the followers of the Rev Richard Cameron formed the 26th Regiment of Foot in May 1689, better known as the "Cameronians". Cameron had been killed in battle by dragoons commanded by Andrew Bruce of Earlshall in the Battle of Airds Moss near Cumnock, Ayrshire in July 1680.

Sixty three Covenanters had taken to the Moss for safety and they were pursued by 112 soldiers. The Covenanters stood their ground and fought valiantly, nine being killed.
against twenty eight of the regular troops, but eventually they were overcome by the more experienced soldiers. The mutilated body of Cameron was buried there along with the other eight of his supporters who fell. A thundercloud passed over and under cover of heavy rain and mist many Covenanters managed to escape. Bruce persuaded one of his soldiers to allow him the pleasure of hacking Cameron's head and hands from his body, taking his trophies to Edinburgh in order to claim the £500 bounty. Two Covenanters later died of wounds suffered in the battle and six more were apprehended by soldiers and hung for their part in the battle.

Grave slab of Richard Cameron and eight other Covenanters

The Cameronian Regiment, subsequently numbered the 26th Foot was raised in 1689 and was later linked with the Perthshire Light Infantry, the 90th of Foot which were raised in 1794 in the Lowlands of Perthshire by Thomas Graham, later to become Lord Lynedoch. The Cameronians served with distinction in every campaign undertaken by the British Army until May 1968, not least the terrible battle at Neuve Chapelle in Belgium in 1916. The Regiment had a reputation of being a unit of fierce and loyal fighting men. In WWII it saw action in Burma, Sicily, Italy and marched across Europe from Normandy to the Baltic. The regiment marched at double time to the tune of the 'Black Bear' and wore tartan trousers and belt as part of their uniform. Each new recruit always received a bible upon joining as a reminder of the regiment's 17th century origins.

In 1815 James and William Murdoch, of Hill Road, Stonehouse enlisted in the 26th Covenanters to fight Napoleon. At the Battle of Waterloo they were mortally wounded and whilst dying on the battle field they wrote their names on the fly leaf of a bible with the only medium available to them, their own blood.

In more recent times the Regiment served in Trieste, Germany, Jordan, Kenya and Aden and took part in operations in Malaya and the Arabian Peninsula. They recruited principally in the Lanarkshire and the south of Scotland area and many local men
brought great honour to the regiment. Twelve of its serving soldiers won the 'Victoria Cross', the highest honour to be bestowed for bravery by the British armed forces. King George V felt very strongly that the decoration should never be forfeited. In a letter written by his Private Secretary, Lord Stamfordham, on 26th July 1920, his views are forcibly expressed: "The King feels so strongly that, no matter the crime committed by anyone on whom the VC has been conferred, the decoration should not be forfeited. Even were a VC to be sentenced to be hanged for murder, he should be allowed to wear his VC medal on the scaffold".

Cameronians in the early 19th Century

Their regimental barracks were in Hamilton until 1941 and then Winston Barracks in Lanark. As part of government defence cuts, the Regiment (26th and 90th) chose to disband rather than amalgamate with another lowland regiment. The disbanding ceremony took place in 1968 at a special conventicle held at Douglas in Lanarkshire, where they had been raised 279 years earlier. A monument now exists there to mark this occasion. The Cameronians Regimental Museum is located at Mote Hill off Muir Street, Hamilton. Seven Victoria Crosses reside with this museum.

John Graham of Claverhouse

As a postscript, you may be wondering what became of John Graham of Claverhouse. He was awarded the title of Viscount Dundee, and in 1689 he raised an army of highland men on behalf of James VII who was now in Ireland plotting a comeback. The rigid, intolerant government of the Presbyterians was not to the taste of the mainly Catholic highlanders. The establishment class were also horrified by the thought of the dethronement of the last in a line of at least 100 Scottish kings. The royalists marched on Killiecrankie in Perthshire, where a battle took place on 27th July.

Although "Bonnie Dundee's" forces numbered between 1,800 and 2,000 men, he was outnumbered by almost two to one by government troops. Nevertheless, his men were
victorious in the battle against the soldiers under General McKay, who retreated across the River Garry, one of them famously leaping the rocky chasm. Claverhouse however had been mortally wounded by a gunshot and his body was stripped of armour and clothing. A soldier found the corpse the following day and, wrapping it in a plaid, took it to the kirk at Old Blair, near to Blair Atholl where it was buried. Despite the fact that the day belonged to the Jacobites, Bonnie Dundee's now leaderless uprising soon petered out into a series of minor skirmishes.

John Graham of Claverhouse, known as 'Bloody Graham'

Summary

For 50 years the non-conformist Covenanters had been fined, tortured, flogged, branded or executed without trial for failing to turn up to hear the "King's Curates" in the pulpit. One famous observer of the times, Daniel Defoe, the author of "Robinson Crusoe" estimated that 18,000 had died for their adherence to the Covenant. Of those that lived, many had been sold as slaves to America or sent to the dungeons on Bass Rock or Dunottar Castle. Those who escaped sought refuge in Holland and England. The cause still rings out on many martyr graves scattered throughout the South West as follows: "For the word of God and Scotland's work of Reformation. Scotland's heritage comes at a price which invokes our greatest heart felt thanks for the lives sacrificed on the anvil of persecution, when innocent blood stained the heather on our moors and ran down the gutters of our streets with sorrow and sighing beyond contemplation".
Kirkyards all over Scotland have tombstones to victims of the years of Covenanting persecution, but no area is as rich in them as the south-west corner of Scotland, particularly the counties of Ayr, Lanark, Kirkcudbright and Dumfries, where virtually every Parish Kirkyard contains at least one Covenanter's grave. Many more are to be seen on the moors and hills which the Covenanters were forced to frequent, the bodies of the shot hill-men being buried where they fell, for burying the body in the Kirkyard could result in another death. If the authorities learnt that a murdered Covenanter had been given a decent burial, their bodies were usually disinterred and buried in places reserved in places for thieves and malcontents. Quite often the corpse was hanged or beheaded first.

One of the most well known martyrs' resting place is in Hamilton old Kirkyard where there is a tombstone to the "Heads of John Parker, Gavin Hamilton, James Hamilton and Christopher Strang, who suffered at Edinburgh, Decr 7th 1666":

Stay passenger, take notice what thou reads;
At Edinburgh lie our bodies, here our heads,
Our right hands stood at Lanark, these we want,
Because with them we swore the Covenant.
The Hamilton Martyrs Monument

The above Covenanters were captured at the battle at Rullion Green. After hanging at Edinburgh, their heads were despatched to Hamilton and their right hands sent to the tollbooth in Lanark. This was the location only weeks earlier, on the march to Edinburgh where they had re-sworn the covenant along with their comrades.

A Covenanters tombstone in the Kirkyard of Galston, Ayrshire commemorates Andrew Richmond, "who was killed by bloody Graham of Claver-House, June 1679". The inscription shows the victim, pointing at an open Bible, while a soldier is taking aim with a rifle, a sword hanging round his waist, and a steel helmet upon his head. Between the two is an hourglass.
At Ayr there is a headstone to seven martyrs who were executed in the town as a warning to the townspeople of what would happen if they joined in any of the uprisings. The men were not of the county but were brought there and hanged as an example, the same happening in Dumfries and elsewhere. There were originally eight men to be hanged, but the burgh hangman disappeared, and the hangman brought from Irvine refused to do it, even under threat of torture. Therefore the authorities announced that one of the men could go free if he agreed to hang the remaining seven. Cornelius Anderson agreed, only if his associates would offer him forgiveness. This was forthcoming, and following the execution Anderson emigrated to Ireland, where he died insane.

The number of Covenanters' graves to be seen in the Kirkyards of southern Scotland is far too numerous to be mentioned here. Suffice to say that they are all recorded in various books, particularly old guidebooks, and are usually well known by the locals, who will easily direct an inquisitive visitor to them.

Those wishing to find out more about the many graves which can still be seen should read Horne and Hardie's "In the Steps of the Covenanters", which lists all graves and monuments, with short details on how to reach them. Alternatively, join the Scottish Covenanters Memorials Association, which cares for those monuments and gravestones. Contact is the Honorary Secretary; Mr Dane Love, Lochnoran House, Auchinleck, Ayrshire, KA18 3JW.
"Here lie the Heads of John Ross and John Shields who suffered at Edinburgh Dec 27th 1666 and had their heads set up at Kilmarnock"

"..O wild traditioned Scotland, thy briery burns and braes Are full of pleasant memories and tales of other days. Thy story-haunted waters in music gush along, Thy mountain-glens are tragedies, thy heathy hills are song.

Land of the Bruce and Wallace, where patriot hearts have stood: And for their country and their faith like water poured their blood; Where wives and little children were steadfast to the death, And graves of martyr'd warriors are in the desert heath.."

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgment to the following books, pamphlets and websites for excerpts used:

Dane Love : "Tales from the Killing Times"

Dane Love : "Scottish Kirkyards"

Visit Dane Love's website at:

www.dane-love.co.uk

P. Hume Brown : "Scotland A Short History"

Nithsdale Covenanting Trail : "In the Footsteps of the Martyrs"

David Roy : "The Covenanters"

R. Dalziel : "The Covenanters" Website

John R. Young : "Wha's like us? A History of Stonehouse"

Cliff Hanley : "History of Scotland"

The Scottish Covenanter Memorials Association website can be visited at:

www.covenanter.org.uk

Cumnock and surrounding areas online community forum :
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