

LOST AND FOUND?

THE BARONY OF RATHENEC

IN

MORAY

BY

A FELLOW OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND

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THE BARONY OF RATHENEC: INTRODUCTION.

In an article published in 2008, the eminent historian, Professor Geoffrey Barrow, commented on the ‘lost’ *Barony of Rathenech*, “Like all the place-names which I have characterized as ‘lost’, it deserves to be rediscovered.”¹ This paper respectfully suggests its possible identification.

In an earlier publication, Barrow had recounted the story of the first advance of King Edward the First into Scotland in 1296 when the king had made camp in the *Braes of Enzie* prior to crossing the *River Spey*.² The story is well-known in Morayshire and very well documented in a contemporary diary³ kept by one who was part of Edward’s entourage.⁴

Having made the crossing of the River Spey with his large collection of forces, which were under the command of *Antony Bek*, Prince-Bishop of Durham,⁵ Edward is said to have spent the night at the “*manor of Rathenech*”. This delay is entirely understandable – the crossing of the River Spey would have taken the best part of the day and Edward would have wanted to ‘stage-manage’ his entry into the ancient Royal Burgh and cathedral city of *Elgin*. No doubt he would have wanted to time his entry to coincide with the ecclesiastically and socially important time of noon. This being on Thursday, 25 July 1296.

RATHENEC IN HISTORY

For many years, scholars have tried, in vain, to identify this manor of Rathenech. Barrow himself favoured a location close to the River Spey between the church of the Holy Ghost at *Dipple* {NGR NJ 399583}⁶ and the chapel of St Mary’s, *Orton* {NGR NJ 324552}.⁷ This latter chapel is said to date to before the Norman era.⁸

¹ Barrow (2008), p.11

² Barrow (1973), pp.48-49

³ See Appendix A.

⁴ Stevenson (1870); Taylor (1858)

⁵ See Appendix B.

⁶ The site of the ancient church is at {NGR NJ 398579}

⁷ Barrow (2008), p.16

⁸ In clearing out the foundations of the old St Mary’s Chapel at Orton, in preparation for the building of the Wharton-Duff mausoleum, Mr T. Mackenzie, the architect, discovered a fragment of stone of the Anglo-Norman style, suggesting that a chapel had stood here since at least these times, i.e. 1066-1135 [Crammond (1900), n. p.86]. The Holy Well at Orton was one of the most popular places of pilgrimage in the whole province, even as late as the 18th-century. On 29 October 1705, the Presbytery, following a report from the Session of Alves, “resolve to do their utmost to repress the superstitious practice of going to the Well of Spey {at Orton}.” [Cramond (1900), p.70] The well still exists today.

Rathenec was variously called a ‘manor’ or a ‘thanage’, and it is named as being held by the King, paying tiend to the Bishop of Moray. It was included with other lands for which, by a substantial grant made to the Bishop, the King ceased from being obliged to pay tiend.⁹

In 1238 (4 Martii: at Roxburgh) a list of the King’s lands from which he received rent is given. Listed under the *Ballia de Elgin* is: *Petendrech* (Pittendreich) and “of the Castle of Elgin – *Kyndelaneman* (Kilmalemnoc); *Dunkenedy* (Dunkinty); *Rathenec*; and *Kyntray* (Kintrae).”

Also, in 1262, an *Inquisito facta super terra de Mefth* (Meft) was held at Inverness on “*die Luna proxima ante festum Beati Andree Apostoli.*” The records of this *inquisito* link *Eugenii* (Ewen), Thani de Rattheñ, as tenant of the lands of the king {namely Meft} which his ancestors had been.¹⁰



Figure 1: Suggested location of the Thanage of Rathenec

⁹ A.P.S., i, p.101

¹⁰ A.P.S., i, p.101

THE FAMILY OF YOTHRE MACGILHYS

The thanage of Rathenec was ancient, “with its resident dynasty of hereditary thanes, and there is record of it in the surviving thirteenth-century inquests”.¹¹ Here, Barrow is referring to the time of King William the Lion (1165-1214) when one *Yothre macGilhys* held the thanage of the crown, providing in return a sergeant’s service in the army and enjoying a net for his fishing in the Spey.¹² This, in itself, is worthy of note – *Yothre* being a most unusual name.

In Barrow (1973) the author adds that Yothre’s son and heir was Ewen, and that his grandson was Angus, and his great-grand-son was Ewen, each in turn thanes of Rathenec.¹³

In 1266, in the year that ‘thane Ewen’ delivered up his large granary there to the king’s clerk of liverance,¹⁴ the “King’s hall” at Rathenec was re-built, boasting a roof of double-boards and walls of planks.¹⁵ In both of these references the name of the thanedom is mistakenly given as *Kathenes*.¹⁶ The name – *King’s hall* – begs the question, “which King?” May we presume that this was a left-over from the days of the *ri*¹⁷ of Moray? Note that we are told that the hall had been ‘re-built’, which suggests that the name was applied certainly to its immediate predecessor, and perhaps going back further into history. What other building would have offered such an appropriate option to Edward when he was looking for a bed for the night?

It is most likely, as Barrow states, that King Edward himself would have found his lodging for the night of 24 July, in this King’s Hall at Rathenec. After all, it would have presented an ideal opportunity for Edward to underline what he considered to be his ‘position’ in Scotland. What a propaganda coup - that his first residence in Moray should be in the “King’s hall”!

¹¹ Barrow (2008), p.15

¹² A.P.S., i, p.101

¹³ Barrow (1973), p.49

¹⁴ Exchequer Rolls, i, 10

¹⁵ Exchequer Rolls, i, 14: Both the name and the nature of this building are significant. The fact that the construction methods were deemed worthy of note implies very clearly that it was thought, at the time, to be unusual or special. No doubt such a sound construction would have been unusual, and the use of ‘planks’ for the roof, as opposed to heather or rush thatch, would too, have been unusual. In 1263, mention is made of a wooden hall being erected in *Kathenes* (scholars accept that this is Rathenec) for King Alexander II. [Chamberlain’s Accounts, Vol. 1, p.22]. Circa 1266 in the Exchequer Rolls we find the following entry: “una noue batelle apud Rothenet, cum una cabla(sic) longa empta ad batellam, 5 marks 4 s.” [Exch. Rolls., Series B, i, p.14]

¹⁶ Although some have seen this to signify “Caithness” I believe that it is a simple scribal error – the K being a mistake for an R which could easily be done by even the most careful of writers.

¹⁷ The term *ri* was used to denote an under-king or major chieftain.

Edward only spent a few days in Elgin itself and, on 30 July, he was encamped at *Rothas*, some miles to the south. On that day *William of Rathenech* came to him, disclaimed his part in the Franco-Scottish Treaty of 1295, and paid homage to the King as his Superior.¹⁸ He was followed, not long afterwards, by *Angus of Rathenech*.¹⁹

So far, then, thanks to Barrow's meticulous research, we can determine the following with respect to *Rathenech*:

- It was an old, royal thanage, from which the Church received the tiends.
- It can be argued that it lay on what was the main route west from the Spey-crossing (at or near *Bellie* – ‘Beul-Aith’, “the mouth of the ford”). This route continued towards Elgin navigating between the two great bogs of *Dunkinty* and *Barmuckity*, passing the neighbouring barony/thanage of *Kilmalemnoc*, past *the Stonecross*,²⁰ and continuing over the ford at the *Tyock Burn* and so arriving finally, and in some triumph, at the east-gate of the City.
- The thanage owed the service of one sergeant in the royal army.
- The thanedom was for long held in the family of Yothre macGilhys.
- There was a King's Hall on the estate of Rathenech proving royal links and, perhaps, royal favour. This hall was of a substantial construction, worthy of note, and indicating very high status.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Further pieces of evidence should also now be considered:

As we have seen, Yothre macGilhys, at a date 1165x1214²¹, is named as owing one sergeant in the army of William I by virtue of his fief which comprised – “*Meft*, a ‘house’ in Elgin Castle, and a net on the River Spey, for which he owes one sergeant in the army.”²² But, the

¹⁸ Instrumenta Publica, 109-110 and 158; Cal. Docs. Scot, ii, 209

¹⁹ Cal. Docs. Scot., ii, 195, 211; Instrumenta Publica, 164

²⁰ The *Stonecross* has been recorded in history from early times. It is suggested that it was a boundary marker of some sort – perhaps marking the extent of the ‘sanctuary’ garth of the cathedral. Its exact location is no longer known.

²¹ The dates of the reign of King William the Lion.

²² R.R.S., ii, no. 589

record in the Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland relates that Yothre's fief comprised – “the thanage of *Rathenec* and one net in the Spey, in return for a sergeant's service in the army.”²³ The difference between these two records is crucial. If we accept that they both refer to the same situation as regards Yothre, then it is difficult to argue that *Rathenec* and *Meft* are not one and the same. We have here the same individual, owing the same service, but the property from which the ‘service’ arises is named as *Meft* in one source rather than *Rathenec* as it appears in the second. Although Barrow suggests rather that “*Meft* was part of *Rapenec*”, it can be argued that the evidence is stronger for equivalence. A closer examination of the report on the inquest held in Inverness, and which was recorded in the Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland (APS) noted above, reveals the truth. The report says that the inquest had been called, “over whether the land of *Meft* was held by the ancestors of Ewen, thane of *Rathenach*, hereditarily and in chief, according to the brieve of the lord king to the justiciar.”²⁴ The jurors accepted he had.

Meft {NGR NJ 274634}, *Innes* {NGR NJ 282652} and *Nether Urquhard* {NGR NJ 28_62_} constitute a large part of that tract of land to the south-east of the *Bog (or Moss) of Dunkinty* which for long had royal associations. There is a *Castle Hill* at *Meft* {NGR NJ 274634}. (There was also a *motte* at *Innes* {NGR NJ 282651}, which has an outside chance of being the location of Edward's overnight stop. But it is sufficiently far north of the ‘main road/route’ to Elgin that it can probably be discounted.) In addition, this *motte* at *Innes* has traditionally been known as *Knight's Hillock*.²⁵ This seems to associate it with the knight's fee due from *Berowald the Fleming* who had the lands of *Innes* ²⁶(*Inys* – “an island”, which well describes its position in relation to the *Loch of Cotts* in these times). As the Laird of Edingight reminds

²³ A.P.S. i, p.101

²⁴ Inquest made at Inverness in the presence of the bishop of Ross and Alexander Comyn, justiciar of Scotia, and A[lexander] de Montfort, sheriff of Elgin, and A. of Swinton, by Thomas Wiseman, William Wiseman, Archibald of Dallas, Alexander his brother, James of Birnie, Adam son of Robert, Walter of Alves, Andrew ‘Wishey’, Henry of ‘Seleltoch’, Macbeth of Dyke, Hugh Ranald, William son of Turpun, Michael son of Abraham, William of Birnie, John of Ogstoun, Gillepatric Mac Gilbeg and John Smith of Inverness, over whether the land of *Meft* was held by the ancestors of Ewen, thane of ‘*Rathenach*’, hereditarily and in chief, according to the brieve of the lord king to the justiciar. All the jurors said that the lord King William gave the land of *Meft* with his house in the castle of Elgin and a fishing on the River Spey to Yothre (Ruadri?) MacGilhys in heritage for the service of one sergeant and doing Scottish army (service). He held these for life and thereafter Ewen his son, grandfather of the present Ewen, and Angus his son, father of the present Ewen, and Ewen himself, have held the land peacefully. [APS, I, 101] Dated Monday before St Andrew's Day, 1262, at Inverness.

²⁵ Young (1879)

²⁶ In the neighbouring lands of *Innes* and *Nether Urquhard (Ether Urecard)*, the ‘weel kent’ *Berowald the Flemming* had a charter of infeftment (1160) in return for the service of one knight in the (royal) castle of Elgin. [R.R.S., i, no. 175]

us, Berowald was the progenitor of the ancient family of Innes. But the site's name does not indicate a royal association.

In 1870 a particularly large and interesting collection of Neolithic finds was made on the farm of Meft. It showed what appeared to be the remains of an abandoned *manufactory* of flint implements²⁷ and illustrates the ancient roots of this area. There were also the remains of a considerable community in the field where this flint industry was situated.



Figure 2: Meft. © Ordnance Survey. (Six-inch 1st edition, 1843-1882)

It is also competent to note here a tradition amongst certain Morayshire scholars who explain the derivation of the place-name *Meft* as being from the Gaelic, *Maithe* – “a chieftain, a noble, a ruler or a hero”.²⁸ If this derivation is accepted then it provides a clear indication that since ‘ancient’ times, Meft has been associated with, and was, perhaps, the seat of a high-status family. We know that in the time of King Alexander II, these were royal lands, and perhaps this was as a consequence of the defeat of the Morayshire *normaor*: these lands were possibly ‘kings lands’ from the time of the ‘Kings of Moray’ and, passing into the hands of the King of Scots, remained ‘King’s lands’.

²⁷ Proc. Soc. Ant. 1871: article by Rev. James Morrison.

²⁸ Matheson (1905), p.195-197

It is reasonable to suggest that there was another attraction to an overnight stay at Meft – the nearby Benedictine *Priory of Urquhard* {NGR NJ 293633}. It is known that in 1296 Antony Bek²⁹ had brought with him one of England's most holy and revered 'relics' – *the Banner of St John of Beverley* – to fly in the van of the English army. This banner was no stranger to Scotland. King Athelstan is said to have carried relics of St John of Beverley with him on his campaign into Scotland in 934 and attributed his successes to the intercessions of the saint. He placed the cause of his crushing victory at '*Brunanburh*' at the feet of this very popular Yorkshire saint.³⁰ The story is recounted that this sacred banner was laid on the high altar of Elgin Cathedral during the whole of Edward's stay in the city, watched over with diligent care by the clergy. For them, in spite of the secular implications of the English king's visit, it would have been the rarest of occasions to have the custody of so holy a relic, present and on display in Moray's great cathedral church.

Urquhard is one of Scotland's earliest monasteries of the 'new order'. Founded c.1124 by King David I, and endowed with lands which had been given in earlier times to its mother-house, *Dunfermline Abbey*, *Urquhard* was the 'first foot' of the new form of monasticism in the north of Scotland.³¹ In spite of it being a 'trail-blazer' of the monastic life (of the Roman/Norman kind as opposed to that of the original Early Church), *Urquhard* is now very sadly neglected by historians.³²

It may not be going too far to suggest that, whilst the King found his rest in the King's Hall at Meft, the priory church would have presented a most suitable resting-place for the holy Banner on the night of 24/25 July, the eve before Edward's entry into Elgin. If the chance presented itself, a Holy Relic would have been kept overnight in a 'consecrated space' watched over by monks and/or priests. The Priory might even have provided a place of solitude, prayer and rest for Bishop Bek himself and his entourage of clerics, although we should remember that Antony Bek was at least as fond of secular armour as he was of donning spiritual protection! But the diminutive house of black-monks may well, that night, have received its most notable visitor in all of its history.

²⁹ The commander of King Edward I's invading forces and Prince-Bishop of Durham.

³⁰ Stenton (1950), p.338

³¹ Kinloss Abbey (1150), O. Cist.; Deer Abbey (1219), O. Cist.; Fearn Abbey (1221), O. Premon.; Beaulieu and Pluscarden Priors (1280), O. Vallis.

³² It was during the gathering of information for a history of this priory that the author condensed the material that lies behind this paper.

In the ‘foundation’ Charter of King David I, the seventh item in the list of endowments that he grants to Urquhard Priory is, the thane’s share of the fish from Fochabers – “*et de dominus hominibus eorum qui sunt in Fochober rectitudinem piscis que ad thaynum pertinent.*”³³ This is suspiciously similar to the fishing held in 1165x1214 by thane Yothre on the west bank of the river.³⁴ These fishings were, as now, of great value.

In a further Charter relating to the lands of Urquhard Priory, dated at Kinneddar, 8 May, 1237, we find the same ‘package’ of land, namely, *Urquhard, Meft & Innes* (along with *Sallelcot* {Calcotts?})³⁵, *Byn* {Bin} and *Garmauch* {Garmouth}.³⁶ The Priory, “*quod cum a longinquis temporibus et hominum memoriam excedentibus ita est optentum quod ecclesia de Urchard habitantibus in terra de Meft, de Inays*” The Prior, and four monks sign as witnesses.³⁷ The Charter is given with the approval of the Bishop of Moray, the Dean and Chapter of the Cathedral and the Abbot of Dunfermline. Up to this point, the priory held a ‘three-fifths share’ in these lands and the church of *Essil* the remaining two-fifths share. The Charter confirmed to the priory the whole share in return for a yearly payment to the church of *Essil*, in compensation for the loss of its two-fifths share.

Recently, Ross has accepted, “... that Rathenach may have been located near Orton, [but] it is equally possible that it was situated near Meft in Urquhart parish.”³⁸

The essential evidence here is the co-incident entries in the *Regesta Regum Scottorum* and the *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*. In my opinion it cannot be denied that we have, here, two records of the one land tenure of Yothre macGilhys at the turn of the 13th century. The ‘holding’ in question being called *Rathenec* in one and *Meft* in the other. The evidence here is undeniable - that, to the clerks/writers who made these entries, at least, the two names were interchangeable. It would be perverse to suspect that these clerks were not reflecting the facts – in all other important details the two ‘records’ are the same.

³³ MacPhail (1881), p.219; Reg. Mor., pp.329, 330

³⁴ It is also an interesting early use of the term ‘thane’ in the north.

³⁵ This could also be Cotts of Innes (NJ 274666), in which case we have a west → east progression along the coast, *Sallelcot* → *Byn* → *Garmauch*.

³⁶ Reg. Mor., no. 89, pp.101-103

³⁷ The Prior was William (1237-39) and the monks were Adam, William, Andrew and Henry. Urquhard was always a small house and this short list may represent the whole community of the time.

³⁸ Ross (2003), i, p.61

CONCLUSION

Barrow is quite correct in using the term 'lost' in association with this ancient thanedom of *Rathenec* since it is a name of which there has been not a trace on the ground for many years.

However, the suggestion made here is that the thanedom lands are still traceable, masquerading under the name of *Meft*.

The evidence presented here is not yet conclusive. But the thesis is offered in order that it may be tested and no doubt there will be those in the Elgin area who will be glad to do just that.

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APPENDIX A: KING EDWARD I'S ITINERARIES

There is an exhaustive record of the itineraries of King Edward's travels covering the whole period of his reign.³⁹

Records exist in two versions. Firstly, there is one written in Norman-French of the 14th-century which is in the Royal Library, Paris (Fonds Lat., 6049, fo. 30^b). Secondly, there is one in ancient English (from about the time of King Richard II). There are copies of both versions:-

Of the first:

- A. of the same century (Cottonian MS Domitian a., xviii) and (Cottonian Nero d., vi, 18)
- B. of the 17th-century (MS Ashmole 1105).

Of the second:

- A. (Cottonian Vespasian c., xvi, 16);
- B. (Harleian 1309 and Additional 5758);
- C. (Ashmole 865) and (Rawlinson 131 and 491).

The parts which are of most concern to us here are those which relate the crossing of the River Spey and the night's stay thereafter. From the version in the Royal Library in Paris we read:

“Le Mardy en tentes en la mor sur la rivere [de Spe. Le Mescredy passa et jut de outré parte de mesme la rivere] a Rapenache, maynor en la paiis de Moureve; le Joefdy a la cite d'Eiglin, bonne chastel et bone ville, et y demoera ij jours. Le Dymenge a Roseise maynor, ...”

The English version (Harleian MS 1309) gives:

“the Tuesdaie in tentis in Lannoy upon the river [of Spey; the Wednesdaie he crossed and lay on the opposite side of the same river] to Repenache, maner in the count of Morenme; a good castell and a god toune, and tarried there ij days: the Sunday to Rosers maner ...”

In the other versions, “la mor” is given as “en lannoi” and “in Lannoy”, and scholars take this to be the forest of *Awne* or *Enzie*.

³⁹ See Gough (1900)

APPENDIX B: ANTONY BEK, PATRIARCH OF JERUSALEM

Antony Bek came from a knightly family who had lands around *Eresby* in Lincolnshire. He was his father's third son – his brothers were *Thomas* (to become bishop of St David's), and *John*, who was ennobled as the 1st Baron Bek(e) of Eresby.

Having been educated at Oxford University (1267-1270) Antony's glittering talents were soon recognised at court, in particular gaining the attention and favour of the then Prince Edward, heir of King Henry II. Immediately after graduating, Bek accompanied the Prince on Crusade and, as a young man trained in knightly pursuits, he spent four years at his Prince's side learning the ways of war and becoming his master's true servant. Back in England and only five years after his time at University he was *Archdeacon of Durham*, *Precentor of York*, and held prebends in three other major English cathedrals. At the same time, he was briefly *Keeper of the Wardrobe* before being appointed *Constable of the Tower of London*.

In 1277, Edward dispatched him to negotiate a treaty with *Llywelyn ap Gruffud*, Prince of Wales. A task he achieved most successfully in the king's eyes.

He was enthroned as *Bishop-Palatinate of Durham* on Christmas Day, 1285. A year later he was in Scotland negotiating for Edward in support of *Margaret (the Maid) of Norway's* claim to the Scottish Crown. On her sudden death, the bishop was employed in the negotiations in favour of Edward's choice of *John Balliol*, and he is said to have 'assisted' at the enthronement ceremonies at *Scone*

Two years later, in 1294, he was sent on Edward's behalf to the German King Adolf and the archbishop of Cologne.

In 1296, at the start of Edward's royal 'progress' through Scotland, it is said to have been the bishop who received the surrender of King John I of Scotland at Brechin.

Following a period of turbulent relations with King Edward, Bek appealed to the Pope (Clement V) in 1305. As part of the Holy Father's response, Antony Bek was named *Patriarch of Jerusalem* on 26 February, 1306.⁴⁰ As such he became the senior churchman in England, and, consequently, officiated at King Edward I's funeral on 27 October, 1307, at Westminster Abbey.

He enjoyed the confidence of the new king, Edward II, and was, in 1308, named as the chief investigator of the Templar Order.

⁴⁰ This was only one small step from being appointed a Cardinal.

But he was, by now, an old man and, on 3 March, 1311, he died at *Eltham*. With his burial, on 3 May, 1311, in Durham Cathedral, there passed from the corridors of power a most remarkable man – endowed with the ‘steel’ of knightly pursuits, a cleric who achieved the highest levels of preferment short of a cardinal’s hat, a diplomat of proven ability on the international stage and a royal servant of unshaking loyalty. This is a man who deserves to be remembered as the pages of history are written.