HISTORICAL GUIDE, BRECHIN AND NEIGHBORHOOD

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BY

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PREFACE.

IN compiling this little Manual an endeavour has been made to place within easy reach of the tourist a brief sketch of a few of the stirring events which have taken place in the district during the last five centuries, along with notices of some of the more prominent individuals who have taken part in them. The best authorities on the subject have been consulted and generally followed, but where I have seen cause to differ from them, I have given my reasons for doing so in the Notes. The information has been made as full as the limits of the Work would permit, and although much has been left out which might have been recorded, the reader will find a considerable amount of information not previously published in any local work. The routes chosen, apart from their historical interest, present scenery of almost unequalled grandeur and beauty.

In conclusion, I take this opportunity of thanking all those friends who have in any way assisted in what to me has been a pleasant task, more particularly, Mr. Hew Morrison, F.S.A., Scot., to whom I am specially indebted for his most painstaking and judicious revision of the proof sheets and willing counsel in every difficulty.

I would also beg to express my obligations to Messrs. Black & Johnston, who kindly placed at my service the use of their valuable collection of local works, and for their care in the production of the Work.

W. COUTTS.

HISTORICAL GUIDE TO BRECHIN.

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THE CITY OF BRECHIN is situated on the north bank of the river South Esk, and consists of one principal street, with others converging. Its length from north to south-east is about one mile, and its breadth is about half that distance.

Its origin, like most other burghs, is involved in much obscurity, but it appears to have been a place of some note as early as the tenth century, and it is not improbable that it had been the seat of the Pictish government before that period.

Kenneth III. is believed to have resided here, and the Pictish chronicle states that the king gave the great City of Brechin to the Lord in A.D. 976.

The Picts were converted to Christianity somewhere about A.D. 560 by the preaching of Columba,[1] and it is not improbable that the Culdees, or Kyldees, made Brechin one of their seats of learning shortly after that date.

St. Ninian, the patron saint of Brechin, flourished about the close of the fourth century, and built the first stone edifice erected in this country for the worship of God. He is styled by the venerable Bede "the most reverend Bishop and holy man of the British nation;" but there is

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[1] *Saxon Chron.*

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no record of his ever having even visited the city that afterwards adopted him as its patron saint.

Brechin was burned by the Danes about 1014,[1] after the battles of Barry and Aberlemno, where they were defeated by Malcolm II.; but they would appear to have kept possession of the city, for in the following year a great battle was fought between a fresh host of Danes (who landed on the coast of Buchan, in Aberdeenshire) and the Scots under Malcolm, in which both armies suffered so dreadfully that they willingly listened to the offers of the priests to mediate a peace, which was concluded upon the condition that the Danes should leave Moray and Brechin;[2] that neither of the nations, during the lives of Malcolm and Sueno, should attack the other in war; nor should the one give assistance to the enemies of the other; and that the field on which the battle had been fought should be consecrated to the burial of the dead.

Previous to the middle of the twelfth century there is little of a reliable nature in the form of history. We can but faintly trace through the gloom the pioneers of the Cross battling with the superstitious rites and ceremonies of the idolatrous inhabitants of Caledonia, who clung, with a fondness not altogether unknown in modern times, to the established beliefs of their forefathers. Towards the middle of the twelfth century, however, the mist begins to disappear, and history becomes clearer and more reliable. David I., who reigned from 1124 to 1153, rebuilt the monasteries which had gone to decay through age or had been destroyed by the ravages of war, besides founding

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[1] This date is generally given as 1012, but it could not have been in that year, as nearly all historians agree that it took place after the Battles of Barry and Aberlemno, and that these battles were fought after Sueno usurped the English throne in 1013.

[2] Buchanan's *History of Scotland*, vol. i., p. 320.

a number of new ones. To the six bishoprics which previously existed he added four—Ross, Brechin, Dunkeld, and Dunblane ;[1] and in order to provide for the support of these Sees, he reduced the succeeding kings almost to poverty by consecrating the greater part of the royal lands to the support of the monks. He was said to be " ane sair sanct " for the crown. To the Bishop and Culdees of Brechin he granted the right of market on Sundays. This right was confirmed by William the Lion,[2] who reigned till 1214.

The Culdee abbot had before this become secularised, and was sometimes styled Leod the Abbot, but often only Leod of Brechin. He was one of the lay lords who accompanied the king, and was not ranked with the clergy. Devonald, Abbot of Brechin, witnessed the confirmation of Turpin, Bishop of Brechin, 1178-80,[3] and about the same time gifted certain lands to the monks of Arbroath[4] for the "weal" of his father, Sampson. Bricio, priore de Brechin, Gillefali Keldi, and Mathalan Keldi, witness a charter, 1178-98. John was Abbot of Brechin in 1219 ;[5] and with Morgund, his son, who succeeded him, the race of the Culdee Abbots of Brechin disappears.

From this time till the death of Alexander, there is little of importance to notice, due probably to the destruction of the Scottish records by Edward I.

Immediately after the death of Scotland's best king began the contest between Bruce and Baliol and the intervention of the English monarch, which ended in the placing of Baliol on the throne and Edward being acknowledged Lord Paramount of Scotland, and a solemn surrender made to him of the kingdom by the nobles and clergy. Baliol

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[1] Buchanan's *History of Scotland*, vol. i., p. 351.
[2] *Reg. Ep. Brechin.*, vol. i., p. 3.   [3] *Ib.*, vol. ii., p. 269.
[4] *Reg. of Arbroath and St. Andrews.*   [5] *Reg. Ep. Brechin.*, vol. v.

was no sooner placed on the throne than he was made to
feel the humiliating position in which his servility had
placed him, and his endeavour to throw off the English
yoke brought Edward with a powerful army into Scotland,
where, after taking the fortresses of Berwick, Dunbar,
Edinburgh, and Stirling, he marched upon Forfar,[1] where
he heard Baliol then was. Meeting with no opposition,
he came to Montrose, from which he went to Kincardine
Castle, and remained there during the night of the 11th or
12th of July.[2] He then proceeded north as far as Elgin,
but meeting with no trace of his enemy he returned to
Kincardine Castle on the 2nd or 3rd of August. The
following day he crossed the North Esk at the King's Ford,
and was met by Baliol at Stracathro, where the unhappy
Scottish monarch tendered his submission. A few days
after he signed his abdication in Brechin Castle, 1296.[3]

About this period arose the champion of Scottish liberty,
Sir William Wallace. He visited Brechin in the following
year, and after a brief siege wrested the Castle from the
English, and partly destroyed it. The Bruce must have
honoured the city with a visit in 1310, as, by a charter
dated at Brechin on the 4th of December of that year,[4] he
granted certain privileges to the Church of Brechin.

The privilege of market, granted and confirmed by re-
peated charters, appears to have been disputed; but a new
charter was granted by David II. in 1369,[5] stating that
the whole merchants inhabiting the City of Brechin had
free ingress and egress to the waters of the South Esk and
Tay, for carrying of their merchandise in boats and ships,
upon paying duty accustomed, and that notwithstanding of
any grants to the burgesses of Dundee and Montrose, who

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[1] Buchanan's *History of Scotland*, vol. i., p. 391.
[2] *Memorials of Angus and Mearns*, 1st Ed., p. 83.   [3] *Ib.*, p. 125.
[4] *Reg. Ep. Brechin.*, vol. i., p. 8.   [5] *Ib.*, vol. ii., p. 7.