

Ages of Darkness and Blood

A Guide to the
MUIRKIRK MARTYRS



JAMES K. McCARTNEY

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A GUIDE TO THE MUIRKIRK MARTYRS

by

JAMES K. McCARTNEY, M.A. (Hons.) Dip. Ed.

For my Grandparents

"In a dream of the night I was wafted away to the
moorland of mist where the martyrs lay;"

Hyslop.

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N.B. For greater ease in reading the quotes from Kirk Session Records modern spellings of words have been used.

The Cover: The photograph on the Cover is of one of the plaques on the Martyrs' Monument in Muirkirk cemetery.

The Title: The Title is a quote from "The Cameronian Dream," by James Hyslop

BUS SERVICE INFORMATION

Ayr—Muirkirk	Western S.M.T., Sandgate, Ayr. Tel. Ayr 264643.
Kilmarnock—Muirkirk	Western S.M.T., Nursery Avenue, Kilmarnock. Tel. Kilmarnock 24189
Strathaven—Muirkirk	George Rowe & Sons, Toll Garage, Muirkirk. Tel. Muirkirk 229.

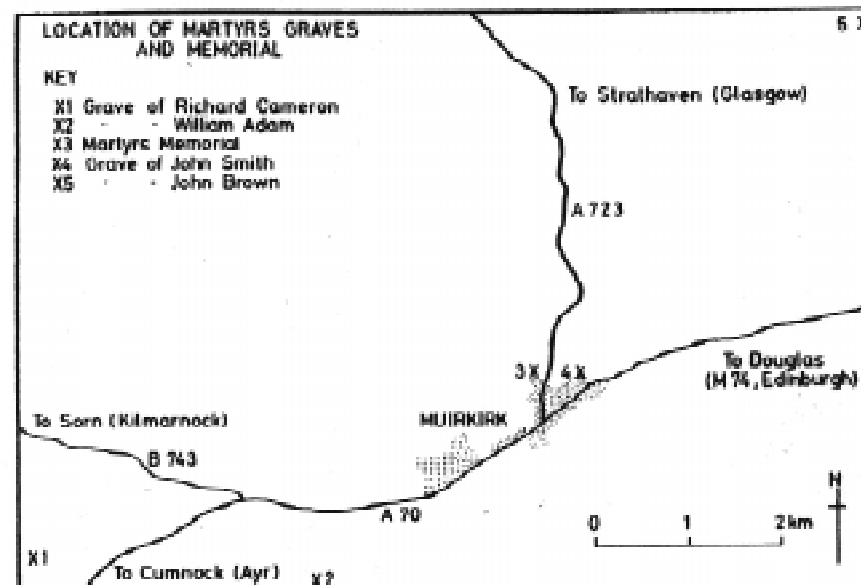
INTRODUCTION

The village of Muirkirk straddles the embryo River Ayr amid wild and lonely moorlands. Yet the village is within easy reach of all the major settlements in central Scotland south of the Tay, making it an ideal spot for a day trip for those who enjoy walking in wild open countryside. If you want to find hills where you won't see crowds of other walkers then the hills around Muirkirk are the ones for you. Here one can experience a sense of space and freedom as one walks the rugged heights or strolls through peaceful valleys with only the gentle sigh of the wind or the bleating of sheep for company.

Although the hills exude an air of tranquility to-day it was not always so. These wild places have witnessed bloody deeds in the past. This booklet recounts some of these deeds for the visitor who seeks an explanation for the lonely monuments in stone scattered on the moors. It would be an advantage to have Ordnance Survey Sheet 71 : Lanark and Upper Nithsdale for use in association with the booklet to help locate the sites described.

APPROXIMATE ROAD DISTANCES

Muirkirk to	Ayr	26 miles
	Kilmarnock	23 Miles
	Glasgow	37 Miles
	Stirling	58 Miles
	Edinburgh	52 Miles



MUIRKIRK AND THE COVENANTERS

The Parish of Muirkirk came into being in July 1631 when it was separated from Mauchline. Originally called the Kirk of the Muir or Muir Kirk of Kyle, it was probably not long until the name was abbreviated to Muirkirk. The deed of separation was ratified by Parliament in 1633 and John, Earl of Loudon, made patron. The patron, usually the most important man in the parish, had the authority to recommend a man for minister. The first minister of the parish was John Reid.

Mirroring, perhaps, the moorland location of the parish the population by 1643 numbered a mere one hundred and forty people between the ages of sixteen and sixty. A village as such did not exist. The centre of population of the parish would probably have been found in the tiny triangle formed by Kirkgreen, Burnside and Garranhill. Trade would have been drawn to this area due to the presence of the church and the main Ayr to Edinburgh road. This therefore would have been the logical place for services such as an inn and a blacksmith to have developed.

Muirkirk had been a parish for twenty-nine years when Charles II. returned to take the Crown in 1660. These had been years of great turmoil in Scotland and the United Kingdom with a Civil War, in part sparked off by disagreements between King and subjects over the organisation of the church in Scotland, which seemed to spell the end of the Stewarty dynasty, culminating as it did in the execution of Charles I. in 1649. In Scotland Presbyterianism arose militant and triumphant, a political as well as religious force, and the country became "covenanted," through the solemn league and covenant, to a crusade for a thorough reformation which would see Scotland become a "Godly" nation within the confines of what the "ayatollahs" of the Covenant perceived as being "Godly." Yet support for the idea of monarchy remained and in 1651 the Scots Covenanters, having forced Charles II. to submit to their views, supported his abortive attempt to regain the throne—an attempt which ended in defeat by Cromwell and led to the occupation of Scotland by English troops.

The humiliation which Charles had suffered in order to gain support for his attempt of 1651 meant that when he did return to the throne he showed no love for the Covenanters or the Presbyterian form of worship. Episcopacy was favoured by the monarchy since it accorded the King a position of authority in the church. The Presbyterian system, on the other hand, did nothing to bolster the prestige of the monarchy and indeed presented a challenge to it. Presbyterians saw the King as an ordinary member of the church over which God reigned supreme.

Charles, therefore, supported Episcopacy and in 1662 bishops were once again introduced into the Church of Scotland. Meetings of the General Assembly were banned and ministers ordained since 1649, when patronage had been abolished, had to seek re-appointment from the patron and be sanctioned by the bishop of the diocese or else vacate their charge. Most conformed but about one third of all ministers, strong-willed or stubborn, refused and were "outed." Most of these belonged to the parishes of the south and west and included the minister of Muirkirk in their number.

The "outed" were replaced by others who were willing to accept the changes. Often they were reviled by parishioners who stood firm in support of their "outed" minister. In many places people stopped attending church altogether. Instead they gathered in house or moor to hear their former preacher. Those who adhered to the old Presbyterian principles came to be known as "Covenanters" after those who had stood up for their beliefs in an earlier day. The government could not allow them to flaunt the new church settlement. It saw them as a source of political as well as religious dissent and soon harsh laws were being imposed in an attempt to break them and bring them back to the official church.

Heavy fines were imposed for non-attendance at church and troops sent to troublesome areas to enforce these and break up conventicles, as the secret meetings of the Covenanters were called. As a reaction against the harsh measures meted out in Galloway, an impromptu rising took place in 1666 which began with the capture in Dumfries of Sir James Turner, commander of the troops in the area, and which then snowballed. The rebels moved into Ayrshire and the twenty-third of November found them heading from Ochiltree for Cumnock where they intended to spend the night. However, news was brought that the much feared Tam Dalyell was at Kilmarnock with royal troops and so they pushed on to the relative safety of Muirkirk, where they spent the night in the church. As they moved on towards Edinburgh where, apparently, they hoped to present a petition protesting against the heavy-handed treatment they were receiving from troops in their area, their numbers thinned. On arriving at Collinton and finding no support from Edinburgh and with Dalyell on their heels they escaped over the Pentlands to Rullen Glen where they were brought to battle by Dalyell and defeated. The Pentland Rising was over.

For all their hardships most Covenanters stuck firm to their beliefs and the action which was to divide and weaken them came less in the guise of the hawk than the dove. In 1669 an Indulgence was offered which allowed "outed" ministers to return to their parishes under very restrictive conditions. The more moderate saw this as an opportunity to opt out of the struggle with some honour. Those holding more extreme views denounced those who chose to conform accusing them of having "sold out" to their enemies. A rent was opened in the Covenanting movement which would never be healed. The Minister at Muirkirk at that time may well have been one of those who accepted the Indulgence, although the situation is unclear with the likelihood that there were two ministers in the parish then.

By a mixture of repression and concession the government continued to work at weakening the resolve of the Covenanters. The fines imposed for absence from church continued, lairds were fined for allowing conventicles to be held on their land and field preaching was made a capital offence. On the other hand a further Indulgence was offered in 1672. Yet still the dissent continued. The heartland of the unrest was south west and in an attempt to stamp out the disorder it was decided, in 1678, to flood the area with three thousand Lowland soldiers and six thousand Highlanders who would have free quarter from those who would not pay fines. In effect it was a license to loot.

To the people of the south west, the Highlanders, with their strange language and dress, must have appeared a fearsome sight. They were in Muirkirk and the session records for the fifteenth of April 1678 record that, "We had no session for some months before this because of the Highlanders lying amongst us." In that same April the Highlanders were to return from whence they came laden down with booty and leaving a poor and angry south-west.

This anger was to ferment, briefly, into rebellion in 1679, when immediate success at Drumclog was followed rapidly by crushing defeat at Bothwell Brig, which, to an extent, was brought about by the refusal of the "pure" Covenanters to allow any who were Indulged or supported the Indulgences to fight with them. Following this defeat the Covenanting movement became even more of a minority affair than it already was. Yet still the heartland of support remained in the south-west.

The remnant found a leader in Richard Cameron, a fiery preacher with extremist views. Soon the Cameronians, as they came to be known, were to declare themselves to be the only true representatives of Presbyterianism, pledge war on the King and all who were against them, and plan to make Scotland a "godly" state with themselves as its self-appointed rulers. These aims were outlined in such documents as the Queensferry Paper and the Sanquhar Declaration. The government met fire with fire and the Cameronians were vigorously hunted. On a July day in 1680 government troops, apparently acting on the advice of an informer, came on Cameron and his followers at Airdsmoss in the parish of Muirkirk and following a brief but bloody encounter Cameron was killed.

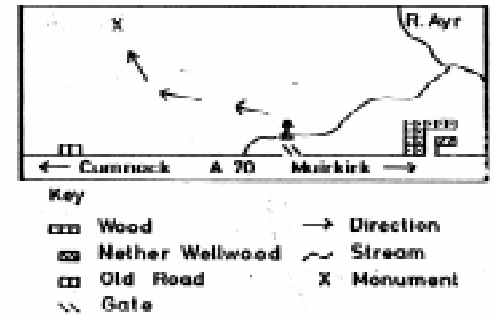
With Cameron dead, Cargill came forward to lead the movement. At the Torwood conventicle in September 1680 he excommunicated the King, the Duke of York, later to become King James VII., and other prominent men opposed to the Cameronian cause. Barely a year after Cameron's death Cargill too was to die. Captured at Covington Mill in Lanarkshire he was taken to Edinburgh and executed. In this same year, 1681, the government instituted the Test Act. This was a crude weapon designed to sort out the loyal from the disloyal. Those who "took the test" were in effect pledging loyalty to the King as supreme governor of the church and renouncing, among other things, all attempts to change the church. Others who felt that their convictions precluded them from taking the Test left themselves to swift and severe reprisals.

Yet another man came forward to keep the flame of revolt alive. He was James Renwick of Moniaive. In October, 1684 he issued the Apologetical Declaration which proclaimed all those who were against the Covenanters to be fair game for attack. In effect this was sanctioning a terrorist campaign. The government replied by introducing the Abjuration Oath. To take the Oath meant renouncing the Declaration. Anyone who refused to take the Oath when challenged could be shot on the spot and suspects, even if they passed this test were to be sent to Edinburgh for trial. This was the beginning of the period which Covenanters called the "Killing Time." The persecution was to be at its height between the autumn of 1684 and the end of 1685 though it continued until 1688. It was during the period of most intense persecution

in 1685 that John Smith, William Adam and John Brown were shot in the parish of Muirkirk for adhering to the cause of the extremist Covenanters.

Charles II. died of a stroke in February 1685 and was succeeded by his brother James who was openly Roman catholic in his beliefs. Under James VII., as he was, the hounding of the remaining Covenanters continued. The taking of Covenants was declared to be treason and mere presence at a conventicle made punishable by death. James Renwick was finally captured in Edinburgh and executed in February 1688. Yet the time of persecution was almost over for soon resentment at Catholics being favoured with the high offices of state and fear of the drift towards Roman Catholicism would lead to James being deposed in the "Glorious Revolution" of 1688.

THE GRAVE OF RICHARD CAMERON



MAP: O.S. Sheet 71, Lanark and Upper Nithsdale.

GRID REFERENCE: 643258

VEHICLE ACCESS: Park on the section of old road which overlooks the stone or ask at Nether Wellwood for permission to park there.

BUS SERVICE: From Ayr, Kilmarnock and Muirkirk; alight at Nether Wellwood

ROUTE: Pass through metal gate at roadside. This is the first gate on the right after Nether Wellwood if travelling from Muirkirk, the last on the left before Nether Wellwood if coming from Cumnock. Having gone through the gate follow the track over the bridge and up the slope. Pass through the wooden gate at the top of the slope and continue along the track until striking out for a short distance over open moorland to reach the grave of Richard Cameron.

GROUND CONDITIONS: Dirt track, grass, rough moorland. May be wet underneath

WALKING DISTANCE: Approximately 850 metres from roadside gate.

THE BATTLE AT AIRDSMOSS

1679 is a date well writ large in the story of the struggle between the latter day Covenanters and the Crown. In this year events were to take place which inspired the Covenanters with hopes of victory, only to have them quickly flounder in the mire of defeat. It was a year of action, of movement, of excitement, of bravery, of fear and of brutal murderous death. The south-west of Scotland was rife for rebellion angered by the imposition of the "Highland Host" on the area in 1678. For many this had been the final indignation. The spark, which lit the flame of revolt, was not, however, lit in the south-west but far away on the east coast of Scotland in the Kingdom of Fife.

The third of May 1679 found two Fife lairds, John Balfour of Kinlock and David Hackston of Rathillet, leading a small party of Covenanters in a search for William Carstares, Sheriff of Fife, near to Ceres village. Carstares had been responsible for persecuting Covenanters and the idea seems to have been to find him and, some have suggested, put the fear of God into him with a "gentle" reminder of what could happen to him if he did not mend his ways. More likely they intended to kill him. Having searched all morning for their quarry, to no avail, by midday they were on the point of packing up and going home when a boy brought them news that a far bigger fish than Carstares was ready to fall into their net: none other than Archbishop Sharp himself—Sharp who had gone to Charles II. in 1660 as a representative of the Covenanters and come back an Archbishop—Sharp who urged severe penalties against those who attended conventicles. God was good they must have thought. Their chief enemy was about to be delivered unto them. Sharp was journeying that day from Kennoway to his seat of St. Andrews. He stopped en route at Ceres to rest and it was while he was there that news of him was brought to the Covenanters. They knew on leaving Ceres his coach must cross the lonely Magus Muir to reach St. Andrews. It was here they lay in wait. Hackston was asked to lead but refused giving the reason that he had a private quarrel with Sharp and did not want the attack to be seen as personal revenge. Balfour therefore assumed command and as the coach carrying the Archbishop gained the high ground of Magus Muir the Covenanters swept into the attack. It was no contest. Well armed Covenanters against the coachmen and a few servants. Sharp was hauled from the coach and brutally hacked to death in front of his daughter who had been accompanying him. Hackston stood apart a silent sinister onlooker throughout the event. The deed accomplished, the Covenanters fled no doubt with the words "Thy will be done" ringing in their ears.

Many people were shocked by this savage slaughter and the murderers were forced to flee to the relative safety of the more militant south-west. The south-west was ready to rise and the killers of Sharp were poised to play their part. The killing had made them public enemy number one and the whole machinery of law and order geared up for action against them. They must have known this but openly flaunted themselves probably hoping to provoke a confrontation. On the twenty ninth of May two of those involved in the murder, Balfour and Russell, were among an armed company led through the streets of Rutherglen by Sir Robert Hamilton to ex-

tinguish the bonfire lit to commemorate the King's Restoration Day and read out a declaration condemning the conduct of the government since 1660. John Graham of Claverhouse, in command of royal troops, was at Falkirk when news of this action reached him and he set out hotfoot in pursuit of the rebels. On reaching Strathaven he received word that a conventicle was to be held nearby and set his plans for attack. At Drumclog, beneath the lowering mass of Loudon Hill, scene of famous victories in the past for William Wallace and Robert Bruce, Claverhouse fell on the Covenanters. In the skirmish which followed, the Covenanters, with Balfour and Hackston among their number, repulsed Claverhouse and forced him to flee.

This reverse for the government troops in what was a minor action became exaggerated out of all proportion and "closet" Covenanters as well as die-hards flocked to the flag scenting victory in the air. Increasing in number all the time they advanced on Glasgow which was successfully held out against them. Stymied for the moment they settled back to plan their next move. Fruitless arguments over who was "godly" and who "ungodly" broke out and the leadership seeing only the "godly" as being worthy of fighting for the cause sent many of the most able soldiers packing as the army was purged. While the Covenanter army delayed and tore itself apart their enemies made good use of the time. The rising had not only worried those in authority in Edinburgh but also in far off Whitehall. An army was dispatched from London to link up with loyal Scottish contingents under the overall command of the King's legitimate son, the Duke of Monmouth. The royalist army came upon the Covenanters at Bothwell Bridge on the Clyde and an unequal struggle began. The Covenanters, outnumbered and outgunned, were crushed that twenty-fourth day of June 1679. Hackston was there and fought bravely holding the bridge with three hundred Galloway men for a considerable time and when panic seized the rest of the Covenanter army he and his men held their ground and were the last to leave the field. The rebellion was over. The threat to the state from armed insurrection effectively destroyed by a weakening of the Covenanting movement through internal divisions and the prowess of the military who smashed the credibility of the Covenanters as an armed force.

The flame might have died had it not been for the actions of one man, Richard Cameron, the "Lion of the Covenant," one of the most extreme hard-liners of the Covenanting movement. He had left Scotland for Holland in May 1679 to be ordained in the Scots Kirk in Rotterdam and, not returning until October 1679, he was absent during the dramatic events previously described. When he came home his cause seemed dead but that did not deter him and for the nine months that were to remain of his life he barnstormed around the country with a small band of supporters preaching for the maintenance of Scotland's Covenant with God to carry out a thorough reformation, which in his view would leave room only for those with his extremist beliefs, and against all those who in any way put up opposition to this, whether passive or active, including those who had accepted indulgences. He seems to have been a charismatic character and a superb hell-fire and damnation preacher. In his opposition to the Stewart monarchy and their interference in matters of religion he was implacable.

Born in 1648 in the little Fife village of Falkland, he grew up in the shadow of one of the symbols of Stewart power, Falkland Palace. His father, Allan Cameron, was a local merchant. Of his family of four, three, Richard, Michael and Marion were to be killed for their extremist Covenanting ideals. Alexander, who fled to Holland, was the only one to escape. In his youth Richard seemed an unlikely rebel. Having studied at St. Andrew's University, he returned to Falkland to become a schoolmaster and precentor in the Episcopal church. However, when he could, he made his way into the wild Lomond Hills which lie behind the village to hear the field preachers at conventicles. They changed his attitude towards church and state. He was soon converted and with the zeal of the convert in him he became more extreme in his views than many who had supported the Covenants all their days. This put him out on a limb from many of his supposed colleagues. Among the Covenanters he was the untameable wild man. Leaving Falkland he eventually found his way to Teviotdale where he was licensed as a field preacher and sent to Annandale to begin his ministry, a ministry which uncompromisingly denounced those who did not support Cameron's own increasingly fanatical views on church and state. The Cameronians, as his followers were called, became a minority within a minority, alienated, placing themselves as the elite, the only true followers of God's will.

The beginning of the end for Richard Cameron came on the twenty-second of June 1680 when he advanced on Sanquhar with a group of armed supporters. At the Mercat Cross his brother, Michael, read out the Sanquhar Declaration in which they declared themselves to be the only true representatives of the Presbyterian Kirk and Covenanted nation of Scotland and followed this by declaring war on the King and all his supporters. After this there could be no hiding place for Cameron or his followers.

Heedless he continued his preaching and legend in Muirkirk has it that night fall on the nineteenth of July found him with his followers in the safe refuge of Nether Wellwood farm. Cameron, having a premonition of what was to come, could not rest and went out to be alone with his thoughts. He came to a spring and flung himself down in anguish crying, "Poor auld bleeding Scotland who shall now haud up thy heid?" His men rose early on a misty morning and secure in the faith that the mist would shield them from their enemies they went with Cameron to a nearby knoll on the moor called Airdsmoss to pray. The mist was to be their enemy rather than their friend, for under its cover they were silently surrounded by Lord Airlie's troop and Strachan's dragoons led by Bruce of Earlsdale. A Judas, apparently Sir John Cochrane, had let slip their whereabouts. The dragoons fell on their enemies, who, though surprised, put up stiff resistance. Cameron is said to have cried, "Lord spare the green and tak' the ripe," as he plunged into the fray. By the end of this brief but bloody encounter Richard Cameron, his brother Michael and a further seven of his followers were no more. It was the twentieth day of July 1680. Richard Cameron was a mere thirty-two years old.

The head and hands of Richard Cameron were hacked off and carried to Edinburgh along with a very important prisoner captured during the fight. It was Hackston of Rathillet. His race too at last was run. On reaching Edinburgh the head

and hands were carried to Richard's father imprisoned in the Tolbooth. On being asked if he knew them he kissed them and replied, "O yes; they are my dear son's. Good is the will of the Lord. He has never wronged me or mine." The head and hands were then taken and stuck high on the Netherbow as a warning to others who might contemplate following Cameron's lead.

Hackston was drawn backward on a hurdle to the Mercat Cross, where he was taken to a scaffold. There his hands were cut off. He was hanged, cut down while still alive, disemboweled and his heart torn out by the hangman. His heart and bowels were burned, his head cut off and his body divided into quarters. One quarter with the head went to St. Andrews, a second to Glasgow, a third to Leith and a fourth to Burntisland.

Although Cameron was dead a small band of supporters continued his work, growing ever more extreme. He had kept the flame of dissent alive but the aims of that dissent had become widely removed from those supported by most other Presbyterians. He was a renegade who was to be exalted by later Presbyterians for keeping the faith only because they saw the past through the distorting lens of rose-coloured spectacles, or perhaps because they regretted that they had not fought what they wrongly perceived to be their fight as long and hard as he.

For Muirkirk people of bygone days the legend of Cameron and his death at Airdsmoss was brought vividly to life through the words of :

THE CAMERONIAN DREAM

In a dream of the night I was wafted away
 To the moorland of mist where the martyrs lay;
 Where Cameron's sword and his Bible are seen
 Engrav'd on the stone where the heather grows green
 'Twas a dream of those ages of darkness and blood,
 When the minister's home was the mountain and wood,
 When in Wellwood's dark moorlands the standard of Sion
 All bloody and torn 'mong the heather was lying.
 It was morning, and summer's young sun, from the east;
 Lay in loving repose on the green mountain's breast;
 On Wardlaw and Cairntable the clear, shining dew
 Glisten'd sheen 'mong the heath bells and mountain flowers blue.
 And far up in heaven in the white sunny cloud,
 The song of the lark was melodious and loud;
 And in Glenmuir's wild solitudes, lengthen'd and deep,
 Was the whistling of plovers and the bleating of sheep.
 And Wellwood's sweet valley breath'd music and gladness,
 Its fresh meadow bloom hung in beauty and redness;
 Its daughters were happy to hail the returning,
 And drink the delights of green July's bright morning.

But, ah! there were hearts cherish'd far other feelings,
 Illum'd by the light of prophetic revealings,
 Who drank from the scenery of beauty but sorrow,
 For they knew that their blood would bedew it tomorrow.

'Twas the few faithful ones, who with Cameron were lying,
 Concealed 'mong the mist, where the heathfowl were crying;
 For the horsemen of Earlishall around them were hovering,
 And their bridle reins rung through the thin misty covering.

'Tho' their faces grew pale, and their swords were unsheath'd,
 Yet the vengeance that darken'd their brows was unbreath'd;
 With eyes rais'd to heaven in meek resignation,
 They sung their last song to the God of salvation.

The hills with the deep mournful music were ringing,
 The curlew and plover in concert were singing;
 But the melody died 'midst derision and laughter,
 As the hosts of ungodly rush'd on to the slaughter.

Though in mist, and in darkness, and fire they were shrouded,
 Yet the souls of the righteous stood calm and unclouded;
 Their dark eyes flash'd lightning, as, proud and unbending,
 They stood like the rock which the thunder is rending.

The muskets were flashing, the blue swords were gleaming,
 The helmets were cleft, and the red blood was streaming,
 The heavens grew dark, and the thunder was rolling,
 When, in Wellwood's dark moorland, the mighty were falling.

When the righteous had fallen, and the combat had ended,
 A Chariot of fire through the dark clouds descended,
 The drivers were angels on horses of whiteness,
 And its burning wheels turn'd upon axles of brightness.

A seraph unfolded its doors bright and shining,
 All dazzling like gold of the seventh refining;
 And the souls that came forth out of great tribulation,
 Have mounted the chariot and steeds of salvation.

On the arch of the rainbow the chariot is gliding;
 Through the paths of the thunder the horsemen are riding,
 Glide swiftly, bright spirits, the prize is before ye;
 A crown never fading, a kingdom of glory!

How this poem came to be written is a story in itself. James Hyslop, the author, was born near Kirkconnel in Dumfries-shire, and in 1812 moved to Nether Wellwood to take up duties as a shepherd. He was to remain there for four years. Supposedly

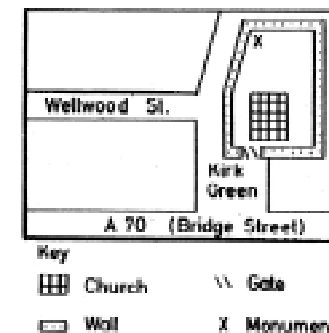
a self taught youth, perhaps in the Rabbin Burns mould, he later got charge of a school in Greenock and became a contributor to the Edinburgh Magazine in which "The Cameronian Dream" first appeared in 1821.

The inspiration for the poem had been the experience of a fellow servant at Nether Wellwood, John McCartney was in the habit of visiting a lady friend at Tarreoch. Returning one dark and misty night he lost his way and found himself at Cameron's grave. He had been following the glare of the Muirkirk furnaces which gleamed through the mist. At this eerie spot he imagined that he saw a chariot of fire circling the grave and fled in terror. Eventually he came upon the Muirkirk to Cumnock road and found hid way home.

In a panic he awakened Hyslop to tell him his strange tale. Kindly souls have suggested that the light he saw was the natural phenomenon known as "Will o' the Wisp" which is associated with marshy ground. Those less charitable have suggested that McCartney, like Tam o' Shanter when he saw "Kirk Alloway in 'a bleeze," was drunk. If that were the case the sight no doubt sobered him up quickly enough.

Hyslop's writings brought him to the notice of Lord Jeffrey who found him employment as a tutor on board the Royal Navy ships "Doris" and "Tweed." While cruising near the Cape Verde Islands, off the west coast of Africa, Hyslop caught a fever and died. He was a mere twenty-nine years old and far from the land where "the heather grows green."

THE GRAVE OF JOHN SMITH



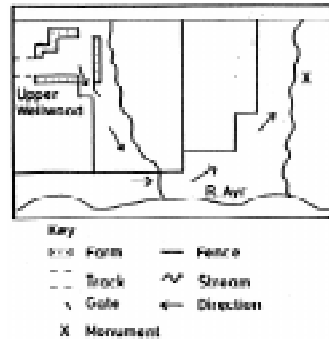
- MAP: O.S. Sheet 71, Lanark and Upper Nithsdale.
 GRID REF.: 701277
 VEHICLE ACCESS: Cars may be parked in Kirkgreen.
 BUS SERVICE: From Ayr, Kilmarnock and Muirkirk; alight at Kirkgreen.
 ROUTE: Enter Kirkyard through gate from Kirkgreen. Walk past the Church keeping the building to your right. Continue left of centre through the Kirkyard. Near the back wall you will come upon a grey painted stone with lettering on both sides marking the grave of John Smith.
 GROUND CONDITIONS: Asphalt and grass.
 WALKING CONDITIONS: Approximately 120 metres from the gate.

JOHN SMITH: THE GREAT UNKNOWN

John Smith is the least known of the Muirkirk martyrs. Perhaps this is because unlike Cameron, Adam and Brown, no heroic or romantic tale hangs around the circumstances of his death. On a February morning in 1685 he was taken in a field to the east of the church by Colonel Buchan and the Laird of Lee. Why he was there and what he was doing are questions which remain unanswered. He was questioned by his captures, presumably on his loyalty to the King, and probably asked if he would abjure the Apologetical Declaration. The fact that he was shot dead at the place where he was taken would suggest that his answers branded him a rebel. That being the case the law of the time made it quite legal for him to receive summary execution.

The body of John Smith was taken to the Kirkyard for burial and the stone which marks his grave is said to be the oldest in that place. Strangely it does not seem to have been erected until 1731, forty six years after his death. Perhaps it replaced an earlier stone and was done to honour the memory of a man who had come to be looked on as a martyr. Yet, as with so much else associated with the life and death of John Smith, the reason remains a mystery.

THE GRAVE OF WILLIAM ADAM



MAP: O.S. Sheet 71, Lanark and Upper Nithsdale

GRID REF.: 673256

VEHICLE ACCESS: Leave the A70 at the turn off for Upper Wellwood Farm. This is the first turn off on the left after leaving Muirkirk, the last on the right before reaching there. Proceed along the track to the farm and ask permission to park there and visit the grave.

BUS SERVICE: From Ayr, Kilmarnock and Muirkirk, alight at Upper Wellwood road end and walk from there.

ROUTE: Leave the farmyard by the small wooden gate at the opposite corner from the farmhouse. Walk through the field towards the River Ayr keeping to the right hand side of the burn. Cross the

fence at the bottom of the field and pass over to the left side of the burn. Walk along keeping the River Ayr and rushes to your right and slope and fence to your left. As you reach the end of the slope you will see ahead of you another burn. Look to your left and you will see the grave lying on the far bank of this burn at the foot of a birch covered slope.

GROUND CONDITIONS: Grass. May be wet underfoot.

WALKING DISTANCE: Approximately 250 metres from Upper Wellwood farm.

WILLIAM ADAM: A CASE OF MISTAKEN IDENTITY?

The local account of the events leading up to and culminating in the killing of William Adam near Upper Wellwood in March 1685 presents the incident as a cut and dried affair where an unarmed man is shot out of hand by murderous marauding dragoons simply for being in possession of a Bible: a fact which branded him a dissident. William Adam was a servant at Upper Wellwood farm and well known for his non-conforming principles. He was soon to be married to a servant girl from a neighbouring farm and on the fateful day they had arranged to meet at a quiet spot on the moors. William was first to arrive at the appointed place and to pass the time until she arrived he settled down to read his Bible. He had not been there long when he heard a noise and looking up saw a party of dragoons almost upon him. He jumped to his feet as the soldiers rode up and was immediately shot dead on the spot.

His fiancée was hurrying to their meeting place when she heard the report of fire arms from the direction in which she was headed. Fear gripped her heart as she rushed onward. She came on the dragoons as she crossed a narrow bridge thrown up by shepherds across the burn. As the dragoons walked their horses through the water beside the bridge one drew his sword and playfully struck her with the edge of the blade in an attempt to push her into the water. Incensed, she caught hold of the sword, her apron round her hand, wrenched it from the soldier's grasp, broke it over her knee and threw the pieces into the water. Her erstwhile tormentor made to go after her to avenge his humiliation but was restrained by his office captain Dalzeal. Quickly she came to the spot where she and William were to meet and found him dead.

It is likely that this account of the death of William Adam may be substantially correct. Doubt may, however, be cast on the motive for the killing. Was he killed because of his known religious beliefs or was he a victim of mistaken identity?

The owner of Upper Wellwood at that time was William Campbell. Both he and his sons William and John were suspected by the authorities of being Covenanters. 1684 was to be a bad year for them. Irvine of Bonshaw, in command of Lord Ross's troopers, had been sent to hunt them down. On approaching the farm, he split his soldiers into two troops—one to scour the moors, the other to head direct for Upper Wellwood. The troop sent to the moors flushed out the sons who were in hiding and brought them down to the farm where they found Bonshaw in a towering rage. Their

father had slipped the trap and was not to be found. Bonshaw cursed his men for not having shot the boys where they stood. William aged twenty and John eighteen had then to watch while the farm was plundered and all valuables which could be moved were taken. They were then removed under escort to Newmilns.

They were held in prison in Newmilns until the following Sunday, which was the usual military travelling day, when they were taken to Glasgow for interrogation. Time and again in reply to the questioning they said that they would pray for the King's soul but not to the King as Head of the Church as that position could only belong to Jesus Christ and they believed it arrogance for any other to claim that position. Their words proclaimed them disloyal.

They were kept in irons for a week then taken by Lieutenant Murray to Edinburgh where they were brought before a committee of the Privy Council who got down to the nitty gritty of finding out how active the Campbells had been defying the Crown. John was asked if he had fought in the battle at Bothwell Bridge five years previous. He replied at that time he was only a young boy and had not. The clerk is said to have written his reply thus; "As to Bothwell, the prisoner says, I was young then; but had I been old enough I would have been there." When this was read over to John as part of his statement he refused to sign it and accused the clerk of conjuring up a lie. He went back to jail and though questioned again, and threatened, remained unmoved.

His brother William was held and interrogated separately. At one point John was told that William had confessed his crimes and given the Council information that it wanted. John shocked by this apparent betrayal arranged to have a letter smuggled to William, in an effort to get at the truth, by a woman called Margaret Baird. Unfortunately she was discovered and tortured by the thumbscrew to obtain a confession.

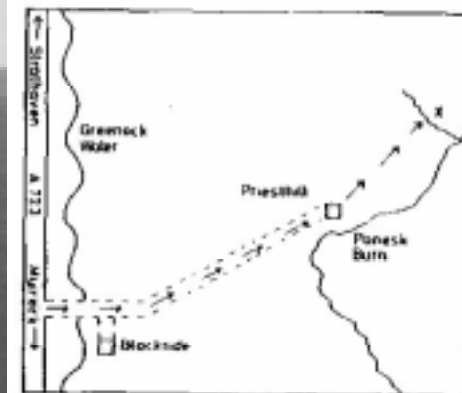
Luckily for John he escaped soon after this with a cousin of the same name and together they fled to the solitudes around Muirkirk. Here they joined up with his father, William, and another William campbell, this one from Middle Wellwood, and together they hid on the moors during the winter of 1684-1685 and for much of that latter year. In the spring of 1685 they built a small shelter in a remote part of the hills and had food smuggled to them. This refuge was discovered by soldiers but the fugitives scattered and succeeded in evading capture.

It was while his masters were on the run in the hills near to their home that William Adam was shot dead. Could it be that suddenly jumping up in front of dragoons sent to flush pout the fugitives he was mistaken for one of them by a startled trooper and killed? Certainly seems a possible scenario which in no way distracts from the tragedy of the event but perhaps gives a more rational explanation for an apparently callous killing.

The masters of William Adam were, on the whole, more fortunate than he. Young William Campbell was eventually released from prison but his health had been destroyed by the rigours of his imprisonment and he died of consumption in

the spring of 1686. John, his brother, continued his life on the run until the House of Stewart was overthrown in 1688, at which point he levied a troop of dragoons at his own expense and rode with them in Lord Cardross's regiment in the service of William III. William, their father, lived to old age and died in 1715, the same year his old enemies the Stewarts were to make an abortive attempt to regain the throne.

THE GRAVE OF JOHN BROWN



MAP: O.S. Sheet 71, Lanark and Upper Nithsdale.

GRID REF.: 731315

VEHICLE ACCESS: Leave A723 at the turn off for Blackside/Priesthill. This is the first turn off on the right after leaving Muirkirk, the last on the left before reaching there. Drive straight ahead along the track to Priesthill and ask permission to park at the farm.

BUS SERVICE: From Muirkirk and Strathaven; alight at Priesthill road end.

ROUTE: A sign post at Priesthill farm points the way. Leave the farmyard through the gate and proceed across the moorland following the trail marked out by white stones and white discs on posts until you reach the grave of John Brown.

GROUND CONDITIONS: Open moorland. May be wet underfoot.

WALKING DISTANCE: Approximately 1.6 kilometers from Priesthill farm.

JOHN BROWN OF PRIESTHILL

"John Brown's body lies a mouldering in his grave,
But his soul goes marching on."

These words written in praise of an American folk hero of the nineteenth century could just as easily refer to another John Brown who lived in the parish of Muirkirk two centuries earlier. It is said that this John Brown was originally intended for the ministry but had to give up owing to a speech impediment and that he gave religious instruction to young men of the parish who gathered at his moorland home once a week. He lived at Blackside, on the banks of the Greenock Water, and later moved to Priesthill. An unfortunate name for the home of a man so zealous for the reformed religion. Apart from the meagre living he would have been able to eke from the land he worked as a carrier moving goods around on horseback. His occupation and his piety led to him becoming known as "The Christian Carrier."

His support for Christian teachings, however, seems to have been depended on him being allowed to worship in the way he pleased within the church organisation he saw as being correct. He was a staunch supporter of the Covenants and a die-hard Presbyterian who would brook no compromise on matters of church government. These views denied him the possibility of attending the indulged minister in the parish church as he could not have squared with his conscience such a betrayal of principle. It was noted in the parish records for 1666 that: "John Brown in Blackside most sinfully and scandalously upon the Sabbath day brought one load on his horse out of the Dykeneuk in the parish of Dalgain into his own house upon May 1666 at ten hours of the day witness unto it Mr John Reid, Minister and Gavin Wilson in Lammontburn"—hardly the action of a "Christian Carrier!"

His indifferent attitude to attendance at church in a time when not to do so was considered an offence not only against the church but, in a sense, the state, placed John Brown in a potentially dangerous situation. The parish records further record that: "On nineteenth September 1680 it was reported to the session that John Brown in Priesthill, Thomas Richard in Greenockmains and Jean Weir in Darnhunch did not attend the public ordinances."

Elders were appointed to investigate these absences. The records for the eleventh November 1680 give the results of these investigations:

"This day the elders according to appointment the last session day gave their report. William Aird of Crossflat told that Jean Weir would give no answer or reason at all but on being pressed said she had no shoes. Those who went to John Brown, I myself the minister, being present gave his reasons. First, that I kept company with the indulged minister. Next that I paid cess. He being told that these were not sufficient grounds to make separation the third reason he gave was that he whom he looked on as the true messenger of Jesus Christ who is lying in Airdsmoss declared and discharge all, as they would answer to God in the great day, that none should hear any of these indulged persons, therefore he could not. As for Thomas Richard he is coming again to the church."

By his own words Brown was branding himself an extremist. The cess was a tax raised for the maintenance of troops used for the purpose of putting down field conventicles. His open condemnation of one who paid it by implication branded him a supporter of the Covenanters who by this time had become an extremist remnant. More damning still was his open reverence for the recently dead fanatic Richard Cameron who had advocated rebellion against and death to those who supported Charles II. It is a wonder that such an obvious rebel was allowed to live openly and apparently unmolested for a further five years.

John Brown married in 1682. Nothing remarkable about that except that by this date he was fifty-five years of age and, in the context of the lower life expectancy of those days, an old man. Of his wife, Isobel Weir, little is known. Perhaps she was a relative of the Jean Weir of Darnhunch mentioned in the parish records? She must have been much younger than her husband for in the three years they were to have together she bore him two children. They were married, as might be expected for one with John's beliefs, by the famous field preacher, Alexander Peden, in a secluded spot near Sorn. Peden was nicknamed "the Prophet" and apparently lived up to his name that day warning Isobel that she had a good man but would not have him long; that his death would be sudden and bloody; and that she should keep linen by her for his winding sheet. Inspired guess or divine foresight, his terrible words were soon to reveal themselves as true.

Legend has it that the curate in Muirkirk informed the authorities that Brown had not been attending church and that his loyalty to the Crown was in doubt. To investigate, John Graham of Claverhouse, the scourge of the Covenanters, rode out from Lesmahagow early on the morning of the first day of May 1685. Arriving with his men at Priesthill around six o'clock in the morning they came on Brown as he cut peats. He was seized and taken back to his home. His little daughter, who had been playing outside, saw them approach and ran inside to tell her mother who, on hearing the unwelcome news, snatched up her other child and hurried outside. Brown was questioned, in front of his wife and children, about his non-attendance at church and his loyalty to the Crown.

Brown told Claverhouse that he acknowledged Christ, not the King, as head of the Church and could not attend the curate as he had been replaced there contrary to His law. On hearing this reply Claverhouse ordered him to go to his prayers for he was to be shot for his treasonable words. Brown began his prayer and though interrupted three times by his impatient accuser refused to be hurried. Having made his peace with his God and committed his family to His care he said that he was ready to die. A firing squad was drawn up. Claverhouse gave the order to shoot and nothing. The soldiers, deeply moved by the obvious piety of Brown, would not fire. Not so Claverhouse who stepped forward, placed his pistol against Brown's head and sent him to his maker. It is said that Claverhouse, turning to the new made widow, asked what she thought of her husband now and received the reply, "I aye thocht meikle o' him, but noo far mair than ever."

The picture thus painted is of a pious, homely family, man slaughtered at his

door by a brutal, callous, high-handed soldier. A report on the incident sent by Claverhouse from Galston on the third of May 1685 to the Marquis of Queensberry, Lord High Treasurer of Scotland, however, views the action from a rather different angle. In it he states that he pursued two men through the hills between Douglas and the Plellands for a considerable distance before capturing them. They were searched for weapons but none were found on their persons and they denied that they had any. Presumably at this point they were marched to Priesthill for the house to be searched. Claverhouse asked the elder of the two, John Brown, if he would abjure the Apologetical Declaration. He refused and also refused to swear not to rise in arms against the King saying that he knew no King. In the house bullets, guns and treasonable papers were found. On two counts, his own words and the evidence found in his house, John Brown was marked down as a rebel and shot. A fate which according to Claverhouse he suffered unconcernedly.

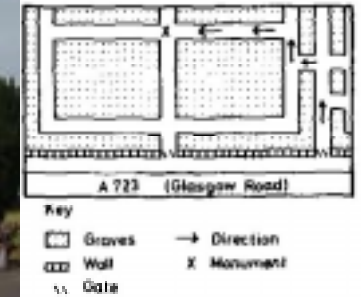
The other man, John Browning, was interrogated. While this was going on the soldiers discovered an underground shelter, with room for a dozen men, which contained swords and pistols. Browning confessed that they belonged to his uncle, John Brown, and that he had been hiding at Priesthill ever since Bothwell Bridge where he had fought for the Covenanters. His co-operation with Claverhouse did not help him. He was taken to the Lieutenant General at Mauchline and most likely hanged.

The Claverhouse report is probably nearer to the truth than the local legend. Claverhouse had no axe to grind. He did not need to justify his actions to anyone. He had the law on his side and is likely to have put forward a factual soldier's report of the events. Should this be the case it in no way detracts from the courage of John Brown in standing out, against the odds, for his beliefs.

In the same year as Brown was executed Thomas Richard of Greenockmains, mentioned with him for non-attendance in the parish records of nineteenth September and eleventh November 1680, met a similar fate. Richard, by this time an old man over seventy years of age, was questioned at his home by Ensign Peter Inglis and gave himself away as a rebel. He was sent to Cumnock where he was shot and buried.

While Thomas Richard is largely forgotten John Brown lives on in legend. The memorial at Priesthill is an ever-present reminder of his bloody end. This monument was erected and the grave enclosed from money collected at a sermon preached there by the Rev. John Milwaine on August the twenty-eight, 1825,

THE MARTYRS MONUMENT



MAP: O.S. Sheet 71, Lanark and Upper Nithsdale.

GRID REF.: 696277.

VEHICLE ACCESS: Access to Cemetery from A723. Park at Main Gate.

BUS SERVICE: From Ayr and Kilmarnock, alight at junction of Glasgow Road and Main Street. Walk up Glasgow Road heading out of Muirkirk to reach the cemetery on the edge of the village. From Muirkirk and Strathaven alight at cemetery.

ROUTE: Enter cemetery by the main gate. Follow the path straight ahead then turn first left, first right, then first left again. You will see the monument straight in front of you.

GROUND CONDITIONS: Asphalt path.

WALKING DISTANCE: Approximately 80 metres from the gate.

THE FALL OF THE HOUSE OF STEWART

In June 1688 a son was born to James VII and II, much to the chagrin of many powerful men in England for whom the birth conjured up the vision of a line of Roman Catholic Kings. No longer could they pin their hopes on James being succeeded by his Protestant daughter, Mary, and her husband, William of Orange and so William was invited to come with an army and take the throne. William landed at Tor Bay in Devon on fifth November 1688. The same day in 1605 had witnessed the Gunpowder Plot, commemorated to this day with bonfires and fireworks, and when a Catholic attempt to topple the Protestant King, James VI and I, failed. In 1688 it marked a Protestant attempt to topple the Catholic King, James VII and II, which was to succeed. With news of the landing support for James ebbed away and on the twenty-third of December 1688 he fled to France. In England the "Glorious Revolution" was accomplished with little opposition. In Scotland, the ancient kingdom of the Stewarts, it was to be a different story.

John Graham of Claverhouse, "Bluidy Clavers" of Covenanting tradition, though not a Catholic himself, remained loyal to James who had created him Viscount Dundee shortly before his flight to France. Dundee, realising that William would be welcomed by the men of power meeting in Edinburgh, decided to try to raise an army for James. He raised the Kings' standard on Dundee Law but few flocked to the colours. Undeterred he turned, as his kinsman Montrose before him, to the Highlands for help. By July 1689 he had mustered a force of over two thousand men as he lay at Blair Atholl he received word that General Hugh Mackay of Scourie was moving up from Dunkeld through the Pass of Killiecrankie, the perfect site for an ambush, and as Mackay and his men made their way through the Pass on the twenty-seventh day of July, Dundee and his followers duly fell on them from the heights above. The momentum of their wild charge devastated Mackay's troops but Dundee, killed by a bullet which pierced his armour, did not live to see the victory. "Bonnie Dundee" was dead and with him Jacobite hopes.

Deprived of the unifying personality of Dundee, the Highland army began to break up. Some went home while others carried on south only to be stopped and held at Dunkeld. This town was defended by the Cameronians, a force recently recruited from the ranks of the extremist Covenanters. The former rebels had come in from the cold and were prepared to fight for the new King against their old enemies. Their leader was William Cleland who had been with the Covenanters who had faced Dundee and his men at Drumclog in 1679 and turned them. At Dunkeld he was to play a part in turning the tables on his recently dead enemy once again. The Cameronians halted the Highlanders' advance and, failing to break through, they gave up and dispersed. Cleland, like Dundee before him, was not to enjoy the fruits of his victory as he was killed in the fighting.

While these dramas were being played out in the north in the seats of power in the south of Scotland Presbyterians were seen to become the dominant force in politics and religion. The refusal of the Scottish Bishops to accept William unequivocally

as King meant that he could not trust the Episcopalians and so Presbyterianism triumphed almost by default. In 1688 those ministers still alive who had been "outed" in 1662 were restored to their parishes. The winter of 1688 saw Episcopalian ministers driven from their homes in many parts of Scotland but particularly in the Covenanting heartland of the south west. John Gray who had been appointed minister at Muirkirk in 1684 appears to have fled the parish at this time and may have been the victim of what can be viewed as either persecution or retribution depending on which side, if any, one sees as being right.

In 1690 an Act of Parliament established Presbyterianism as the religion of the land and at the time abolished the 1669 Act of Supremacy and Patronage. The Covenants were not to be renewed but to the majority of Presbyterians this probably did not matter as to all intents and purposes their form of religion at last was seen to prevail. The Presbyterians were anything but magnanimous in victory, perhaps with reason, and the general Assembly refused to allow anyone in who had supported Episcopacy and the Church was purged. The remaining ministers of the extremist Covenanting faction came in from the cold and welding together of the various Presbyterian factions into a united and coherent unit was begun. The rehabilitation of the extremist Covenanting into the main body of the Kirk was eased by awarding those who had died for their belief a martyr's crown.

In Muirkirk the fierce passions aroused during the years of struggle were to linger on. In 1693 three parishioners who had taken the Test were to be prohibited from taking Communion unless they acknowledged that the taking of the Test was a sin and showed repentance. Even as late as 1704, fourteen years after the Presbyterian victory, the taking of the Test remained a contentious issue and objection was made to John Leprevick (Lapraik?) becoming an elder as he had taken the Test. Though he made public his regret for doing so the Session decided to pass him over to avoid giving offence.

For many years the only Kirk in Muirkirk was the Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The original building no longer exists having been replaced by the present building, which stands near the site of the original, in the early nineteenth century, the foundation stone being laid on the eighth day of May 1812. During the nineteenth century Muirkirk was to grow rapidly as one of the "boom towns" of the Industrial Revolution, its prosperity based on local supplies of coal and iron ore. The population of the parish greatly increased and in this age of religious toleration other churches soon sprang up to cater for the needs of the believers. Thus the Kirk was joined by the Roman Catholic Church, the United Presbyterian Church, the Free Church, and the Evangelical Union Church. To-day the circle has almost turned full course for, as the population has declined with the demise of the industries for which Muirkirk grew and interest in organised religion has waned, so, one by one, the churches have closed until today only Kirk and Chapel remain.

The Kirk on the moor from which Muirkirk's very name is derived provides through its continuity a constant link with the past, particularly the Covenanting past.

A more direct reminder of the part played by the people of Muirkirk in these turbulent times is to be found in the Glasgow Road Cemetery. Here stands the impressive Martyrs' Monument presented to the people of Muirkirk by Charles Howatson Esq. of Glenbuck on the eighteenth of June, 1887, the Golden Jubilee year of Queen Victoria. It is dedicated to the memory of those who died for their beliefs in the parish during Covenanted times.

This Booklet,
AGES OF DARKNESS AND BLOOD
was
Typographically re-composed
by
JAMES TAYLOR