

"WALTER FITZ GILBERT," ANCESTOR OF THE DUKES
OF HAMILTON.

A SUGGESTION AS TO HIS ORIGIN.

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It is now nearly 600 years since the first appearance of this fortunate soldier in Scottish history; and, after all the researches that have been made as to his country and parentage, nothing more can be affirmed with certainty than that he was one of those Scotsmen who did homage to Edward I. at Berwick-upon-Tweed, on 28th August, 1296—his name being recorded on the *Ragman Roll* as "Wauter fiz Gilbert de Hameldon," he being apparently an inhabitant of the county of Lanark, in which his descendants were destined to become magnates of the first rank—and that his father was a person named Gilbert de Hameldon. This territorial addition was evidently thought little of, and little used by Walter. For in all the records examined by me, he is, with the above exception, invariably called Walter, son of Gilbert—nothing more. Barbour, also, in *The Bruce*, calls him "Schyr Walter Gilbertson." From these very slender premisses, or more probably ignoring them altogether, complaisant genealogists have invented the legendary story of the younger son or brother of an Earl of Leicester, who, after committing a murder, fled to Scotland, disguising himself on the way as a woodcutter to escape his pursuers—the story being commemorated in the Hamilton motto and crest, the well-known oak tree and frame saw. This legend, though it has been over and over again shewn to be quite impossible, consistent with the known facts, slight as these are, is constantly repeated, and reprinted in Peerage books of quite recent date.

In these days, however, a historic family like the Hamiltons, whose lives are interwoven in a remarkable manner with all the prominent events of Scottish annals since the days of Robert Bruce, needs no adventitious lustre from imaginary ancestors, and no apology is requisite for a few additional particulars regarding their ancestor Sir Walter Fitz Gilbert, derived from the undoubted source of the Public Records. Having gone through the whole of these connected with Scotland during the reigns of Edward I. and his son, I may perhaps speak with some confidence, having examined all the available *public* sources of information.

Nothing whatever has been found among these respecting Walter, from A.D. 1296 till the third or fourth year of Edward II.,

(1310-11), when several writs are issued from the King to Walter, who appears to have then been in command of Bothwell Castle in Clydesdale, as constable under Aymar de Valence, Earl of Pembroke, owner of that barony under a grant by Edward I. A more distinct account of him is given in a MS. in the British Museum¹, as follows. On 7th July, 1312, he was still in command at Bothwell, the expense of his garrison, with their and his own pay, being set down at the sum of £640 10s. for a year previous. He had twenty-nine esquires or men-at-arms, and thirty archers, the former receiving 12*d.* and the latter 2*d. per diem.* His own pay was 12*d. per diem,* from which we may conclude he was not then a knight, the pay of which rank in the same roll is 2*s.*, and that of a banneret 4*s. per diem.* One might conjecture from this that he was probably a very young man at the date of the *Ragman Roll.* Second in the roll of his men at arms is a "Leo Fitz Gilbert," who may have been a brother or near relation. Nearly half the garrison bear Scottish names.

I am not aware that any other notice of him exists except in the *Register of the Great Seal* of Scotland, where there is a grant to him by Robert Bruce of the barony of Machan in Clydesdale, which had belonged to John Comyn. It is undated, but probably soon after 1314.

Robertson's *Index of Lost Charters* contains the titles of other grants to him by Robert Bruce of the forfeited possessions of some other hostile family in Linlithgowshire. These were the rewards doubtless of his timely desertion of the English king after the battle of Bannockburn, thus described in Barbour:—

	"The erle of Herfurd fra the mellé Departyt, with a gret megné; And straucht to Bothwell tok the vai, That then in the Inglist men's fay * Was, and haldyn as (a) place of wer. Schyr Waltre Gilbertson was ther Capitane, and it had in ward. The erle of Herfurd thiidyr ward Held, and wes tane in our the wall, And fyfty of his men with all; And set in howssis sindryly; † Swa that thai had thar na mercy. The lave went towart Ingland."
* allegiance	
† separately	
rest	

So far Barbour. Another great poet may continue the story—

"Immured in Bothwell's towers, at times the brave,
(So beautiful is Clyde) forgot to mourn
The liberty they lost at Bannockburn."²

The rest is also historical. Walter and his garrison gave up the fugitives to the victorious Scots, and Hereford with others of note were afterwards exchanged for the wife and daughter of

¹ Cotton MSS., Vespasian, C, xvi.

² Wordsworth's Sonnets.—The poet seems to have been deeply impressed with this fair scene, the grand ruin towering over the wooded banks of the Clyde.

Robert Bruce. Little more is known of Walter's subsequent career except the charters already referred to granted to him by Bruce, or when he died.¹ The last notice of him is in 1333, when he is enrolled among the knights who fought in the second division of the Scottish army at the disastrous battle of Halidon.

It has been suggested by an antiquary of the first rank² that the Hameldons, like other Scottish families, came from the North of England, as several of the surname appear as landowners on the Border in the 13th century. The Leicester descent he considered to be mythical, and he attached no importance to their armorial bearings being similar, as other English families used the same. On this armorial question some evidence has been found since Mr. Riddell's time of rather an interesting nature. A Robert and Roger de Hameldun, knights, are on the Great Assize of Northumberland to try a disputed right between Hugh Balliol and Robert Bertram to land in that county (*Rot. Cur. Regis*, 9 John, No. 41.) These are the same, in all probability, who appear in the Chartulary of Melros as owning land in Roxburghshire.

This Northumbrian origin suggests an idea that has often crossed my mind. Is it not here that we have the reason why the Hamiltons carried cinquefoils? A single cinquefoil was the well-known bearing of the Umfravilles of Redesdale and Prudhoe, and was adopted by several families of that county, probably in vassalage, the charges being increased to three. Among these was the family of Burghdon, or Borondoun, undoubtedly Northumbrian, some of whose members appear in the Scottish wars of Edward I. and II. One of them, a Walter de Burghdon, of Roxburghshire, is on the *Ragman Roll* in 1296; his seal, a shield charged with a single cinquefoil, being still in the Record Office. Either he, or another knight of the same name, was shortly afterwards sheriff of Perth, and in 1302 sheriff of Lanark and warden of the castle of Carstairs. In this capacity his signet is attached to his indenture also in the Public Record Office, and is charged with three cinquefoils pierced, 2 and 1, the same as the Hamilton shield. This seemed to me a singular coincidence, and I have drawn attention to it in a late work.³ It is also I think proved, that a "Chapter House" seal bearing the same charge, attributed to Walter Fitz Gilbert, cannot be his, as his name is not upon the original homage to which it was attached, but is that of a Walter Duraunt. It has sometimes occurred to me to suggest the question—Were Walter Fitz Gilbert and Walter de Burghdon not the same, or in some way related? The former, after appearing on the *Ragman Roll*, disappears from view till 1311; the latter steps on the scene, in Lanarkshire, and is a figure of more

¹ He was twice married, his first wife being Helena (surname unknown); his second, Mariota de Gordon—for whose and his own souls he gave certain vestments. *Reg. Glasg.* vol. i.

² Riddell, *Stewartiana*.

³ "Calendar of Documents relative to Scotland, 1272-1307," vol. ii.

or less prominence till at least the close of King Edward's reign.¹ The earliest undoubted instance of the three cinquefoils being used by the Hamiltons in Lanarkshire is in 1361, when, "David son of Walter called Hamilton," founded a chaplainry in the cathedral church of Glasgow.² He was the eldest son of Walter Fitz Gilbert. Sir David's son, Sir John Hamilton of Cadzow, bore them, with a boar's head and neck as crest. The oak tree and saw first appear as the crest of James Hamilton, Earl of Arran, Duke of Chatelherault in 1549,³ about which time the motto 'Threucht' (through) also first appears. Thus the evidence of the present crest and motto only extends back for little more than three centuries, no very remote antiquity, nor of much value in establishing a story at least three centuries earlier.

The Knight of Cadzow is now represented in various lines by three titled houses. The Duke of Abercorn is the heir male and head of the House of Hamilton. The Duke of Hamilton is the male representative of the Douglasses, Earls of Angus, and though he holds the Hamilton dignities and lands, is a Hamilton only by the distaff side. The Earl of Derby is the heir of line of the historic house of Hamilton, once next in succession to the Scottish crown.
