

Lowland Scots in Prussia

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Like Ireland, it seems that the bulk of those of Scottish descent no longer live in Scotland. Wherever one goes in the world today, we find Scots or people of Scottish descent. In this article I want to deal briefly with references I have come across regarding Lowland Scots who went to or settled in Eastern and Western Prussia.

The last century has seen two disastrous wars between Great Britain and Germany. But this is a 20th century phenomenon. When the German Empire forces defeated the Emperor Louis Napoleon III in the Franco-Prussian war in 1870 there were great celebrations in Britain. If the Prussian Field-Marshal Prince von Blucher had not marched his men solidly for 17 hours to Waterloo, the British forces under Wellington would have lost the battle to Napoleon I. Prior to that, many Scottish soldiers fought for Prussian and other German Princes against Sweden and then joined the Protestant cause in Germany against the Roman Catholic armies.

The main centres I shall deal with here are Danzig and Konigsberg where there were settlements of Scots. Danzig, a great trading centre, was one of the most important commercial cities in the north. The native population were originally heathen Slavs called Kashubians and the town first appears in history in 997. About 1200 it became the capitol of the Duchy of Pomerellen and in 1308 it came into possession of the Knights of the Teutonic Order. T. A. Fischer (1903) writes “notices are not wanting of the brisk commercial intercourse between Scotland and Danzig and between Scotland and the Teutonic Order, which from a religious society of knights for the defence and spreading of Christianity had rapidly grown not only into a territorial power, but also into a huge trading society.”

In 1358 the citizens joined the Hanseatic League and took an active part in the wars of their allies against the northern Kingdoms and pirates, in which they were aided by the Teutonic knights. After the decline of the latter Danzig, although virtually entirely German, became a Free City. Needing a strong ally it voted to place itself under the protection of the Kings of Poland, now united with Lithuania into a Commonwealth.

When the Hanseatic League took part in the English Wars of the Roses, the ships of Danzig frequently returned home laden with booty. In March 1462 the elders of the City addressed a long letter, in latin, to Sir Alexander Napier of Merchistoun, & others.

When the Scottish king decided to send his young son, the future James I, to France for his personal safety, it was a ship from Danzig, the *Marynknight* which called at The Bass to relieve Sir Robert Lauder of his young charge.

Alas, this ship was taken by English pirates off Flamborough Head and the young prince taken into captivity. Between 1474 and 1476 no less than twenty four Scottish ships entered the harbour of Danzig.

The city embraced the Reformation but continued its connection with Roman Catholic Poland. St.Mary's is the largest Protestant church in the world, with accommodation for 25000 worshippers. During the incessant wars in which Poland became involved in the 16th-18th centuries Danzig was often besieged, being eventually taken by the Russians, in 1734, and returned to German sovereignty in 1798. It remained so until 1919 when it once more enjoyed Free City status under The League of Nations for the next 20 years. It rejoined Germany in 1939. Writing in *Germany* the Rev. J. F. Dickie states "the unique character of Danzig's architecture impresses the stranger. Looking at the city from the heights of Oliva, Danzig lies before you like a paradise."

The earliest mention I have come across of Scots in Danzig was that of Lord William Douglas of Nithisdale circa 1391. The Hohe Tor (High Gate) of Danzig was adorned with this nobleman's Coat of Arms and for centuries it was known as the Douglas Gate, even as late as 1734. In the 1440s the magistrates of Edinburgh petitioned the Hochmeister (Grand Master of the Teutonic Order) regarding arrested goods of various Scottish merchants in Danzig, notably James Lauder, James King and Robert Young. In 1448 the Scottish monarch wrote further to Hochmeister Conrad von Erlichshausen on account of James Lauder.

In 1475 a James Wright made purchases of cloth, velvet and damask for Heinrich Reffle von Richtenberg, Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, and in 1544 William Watson wrote from Danzig to the Duke Albrecht of Prussia in Konigsberg offering to procure court dresses and dress material for the Duke, the last Grand Master in Prussia.

Just outside of Danzig proper was a settlement named Alt Schottland (Old Scotland) which predated the year 1517. A family named Davidson were in possession of the Schonfeld (beautiful field) estate near Danzig, as well as owning houses in several large towns, especially Danzig and Konigsberg.

In 1577, the Scots together with other citizens of Danzig, "valiantly helped to drive off the King of Poland." As a result, Andrew Moncreiff, Osias Kilfauns and George Patterson were made Freemen of the city the following year.

In 1580, eight more were made Burgesses for the same reason, including William Lockerbie from Dumfries. He stated in his credentials that he had lived there since 1573, and after serving in the wars in northern Europe, had married and reared children and had been a trader for 20 years.

He and his wife were still alive in 1609 when they were receiving some sort of Guild assistance but it would appear their children had predeceased them.

In his application to be made a Burgess of Danzig in 1592, Jacob Brown "Scotchman" stated that he had lived there for 20 years and earned his living. He also stated that when the wars came, whilst he could have departed to safer places, he did not, but took part in all the skirmishes under Captain Gourlay, and, after he was drowned, under Captain Trotter (d.1653). Mr. Brown mentions that as a consequence of this loyalty to the city he was shot through the leg on one of the city bastions.

In 1597 Scottish merchants there addressed a petition to the magistrates of Danzig. The signatures include; John Trotter, Gilbert Dick, Robert Traquair, Gilbert Dickson, and Alexander Ramsay. In 1615, Patrick Gordon was Consul or Factor at Danzig. It would appear that another member of his family, possibly a son, carried on in that office as in 1655 Francis Gordon, "Consular Agent of Britain" married Margaret, daughter of James Porteous, a late minister in Scotland.

A G.Cruikshank is recorded in Danzig in 1666, and said to have died leaving "a fortune".

Other Scots who became Burgesses of Danzig were George Cleghorn (1633) and A. Marjoribanks (1705). In order to establish themselves or become citizens of Danzig, Scots often presented Birth Briefs and Letters of Commendation sealed by authorities in Scotland beforehand. Amongst these were James Jeffrey and W. Flockhart from Duns in Berwickshire (1633) and the abovementioned George Cleghorn. In his brief, George stated that he was "from Edinburgh, son of John Cleghorn of Whitsome, Berwickshire; that his mother was Helen Innerwick. Witnesses of attestation were another George Cleghorn, minister of Darnick, and Alexander Kinnair, minister of Whitsome. In 1649 we have another birth brief being presented by Robert Ainslie, son of James Ainslie, barber at Jedburgh. Witnesses were James Ainslie, glover and soldier, and Albert Ainslie, a Burgess and silk merchant at Stolp in Pomerania.

In the marriage register from St. Peter & St. Paul's Presbyterian Church, Danzig, we find the following:

1631 Daniel Ramsay and Sarah Nisbet

1636 Adam Law and Anna Nisbet

1640 Gabriel Maxwell (bride's name wanting). (This gentleman wrote a letter from Danzig to Sir John Maxwell of Pollock dated 31st August 1635).

1640 Richard Lewis, the Hon. Administrator of the Royal Treasury and Governor of Marienburg. (He is possibly of the Lewis of Manor, Peebleshire, family, members of which are known to have emigrated to Russia and Poland in the 16th century.)

The marriage register of St. Elizabeth's Presbyterian Church at Danzig contain:

1624 Jacob Scot and Maria Nun

1640 Alexander Cranstoun (see below)

1668 George Lauder

1677 George Nisbett and Miss Littlejohn.

The burial registers from St. Peter & St. Paul's contain:

1602 George Paterson

1693 Jacob Carmichael and family

1698 Buchan and family

The burial registers from St. Elizabeth's contain:

1635 Peter Maitland

1635 Gilbert Edgar

1636 Peter Lauder

1640 Elizabeth Duncan, Alexander Cranstoun's wife.

1653 Jacob Crichton

Amongst the baptisms at St. Peter & St. Paul's, we find (surnames only):

1599 Ballentine

1599 Scott

1599 Paterson

1625 Paterson

1625 Jacob Meldrum

Clearly these lists are far from exhaustive but are designed to give the reader a flavour of things. St. Elizabeth's church was badly damaged by Napoleon's army and was sold and presumably demolished. Danzig suffered terrible damage in the closing stages of World War Two. Up until 1939 the population had remained 98% German but those who did not flee the advancing Soviet Army were expelled by them. The city was then repopulated by Poles. One wonders what happened to those of Scottish descent.

South of Danzig, in West Prussia, lay the great castle called The Marienburg, which the Teutonic order commenced building about 1280 and which was the seat of the Grand Master (until 1466 when he removed to the castle at Konigsberg.) At the foot of this great fortress (still largely extant) lay the township and here we find Scots, A. Johnston, A. Hay and William Hay in 1650. Further to the south lay Posen, an ancient Polish city and here in 1600 we find one of their burgesses is Bernard Bellenden of Lasswade. To the west towards Breslau is Ratisbor, near the Oder river, a city with a fine 13th century Gothic church. In 1508 Hans Maitland swore the Civil Oath here as did Alexander Cunningham in 1506.

East of Danzig is the ancient commercial town of Elbing. The Corpus Christi Church here dates from 1405. Alexander Nisbet (d.1617) from Edinburgh appears as a citizen of Elbing towards the close of the 16th century. He built two houses in the Schmiedegasse next to the Schmiedethor. He married twice, the second time in 1614, on both occasions to daughters of town councillors. His daughter Catherine married Johannes (John) Jungschulz, the Mayor of Elbing and died the year after her father.

We now come to our next principal place of interest, for Scots, Konigsberg (King's town).

The capital of the old province of East Prussia it was originally a fortress of the Teutonic Knights and was named after their ally, King Ottocar of Bohemia (1255).

The Order's control over trade is evidenced in a list of "Scottish Debtors to the Teutonic Order and its Head Business Manager at Konigsberg (1396-1417), among whom Archibald Douglas 'The Grim' Earl of Douglas owes the sum of £216 (Scottish pounds), an Alexander Hume £10 and Sir John Seton £10. In 1589, the *Records of the Burgh of Edinburgh* (iv.p.543) tell us that John Knox, James Hunter, James Macmillan, Patrick Carwood, Patrick Gilchrist, and Nath. Moir, all sailed to Konigsberg in a ship from Dysart. They were followed in 1596 by three Johnstones from Craigieburn in Annandale, who were thought to have travelled inland to Poland.

From 1466 The Grand Master was here and from 1525 the castle became the official residence of the Dukes of Prussia. The city was famous for its beautiful architecture (the cathedral was begun in 1333) and old quarter, largely destroyed by British bombing raids during WWII and the Soviets in 1945, and also for its famous sons, notably the philosopher Kant, whose grandfather was a Scot who had emigrated to Memel.

There was a large Scottish community here. In 1561 Andrew Rutherford lived in Riesenburg, a small town. He had "performed all the duties of a citizen, paying taxes, working at the fortifications and proved his honest birth by providing birth briefs." The Duke granted Andrew citizenship "to earn his bread by brewing, distilling and the sale of small merchandise." In 1590 one Jacob Ramsay asked for a passport for his servant whilst also offering to bring fine cloth and silks back to the Duke of Prussia. A Scotsman with the name of Dick obtained rights in Konigsberg in 1624. He had married a daughter of John Mirander, a famous Prussian legal advisor to the Crown.

Also in the 17th century we find at Konigsberg Robert Walker, a Scot, who had a dwelling near the market place, and who also had his own house. It was noted that he kept lodgers and let rooms and had a store and an open shop near the castle. There were also stores at the nearby ports of Fishhausen and Pillau, which belonged to someone named Walker, "and whose representatives visited all the estates and villages in the Samland [north of Konigsberg] district." It is interesting to note that as late as 1904 the Lloyd's Agents at Pillau were Messrs. E & G Hay.

In 1620 Scottish traders had received the privilege of living upon the Ducal "Freiheiten" (liberties) being the ground surrounding the Castle where most of the Duke of Prussia's retainers had their dwellings, and so were under his immediate protection. At Tilsit, a large town on the River Memel north of Konigsberg, where the 1807 Peace Treaty was signed between Napoleon I, Tsar Alexander I and Frederick William III of Prussia, we find Thomas Hay, of Tilsit, purchasing a shop for 300 gulden, in 1628, from Thomas Melville, a citizen of Aberdeen. Mr. Melville was present in Tilsit for the sale.

Returning to Konigsberg, Royal Safe-Conducts were issued, in June 1651, to Gilbert Ramsay and Andrew Ritchie "settled in Konigsberg" in order that they may attend the fairs at Elbing and Danzig.

In 1657 two Scotsmen, one of whom was the above Andrew Ritchie, the other Gilbert Ramsay, obtained free-trade and civil rights privileges. Interestingly there appear as members of the Guild of Königsberg Merchants in 1690 Charles Ramsay, son of Gilbert, and a William Ritchie. The latter gentleman, it is noted, had “gone to the wars in England” at that date. Other Burgesses of Königsberg who were Scottish settlers were A. Rutherford (1561) and J. and Adrian Hay (1650).

Elsewhere in East Prussia we find an A. Meldrum in Sensburg, and Andrew Geddes in Tapiaw (?) (1594); and at Johannisberg near Danzig in 1587, G. Meldrum and A. Robertson. At the northernmost city and port in Prussia, Memel, again founded by the Teutonic Knights about 1250, we find Daniel Henderson, a merchant (1589), William Turner “Scotsman”, a resident (1606), and Alexander Murray, described as a citizen of Memel (1656).

For those genealogists attempting to trace relatives in Germany or simply attempting to locate their wider family I hope that this article gives you some encouragement to continue with that search.

Further Reading:

The Hansa Towns by Helen Zimmern, London 1889.

The Scots in Germany by Th. A. Fischer, Edinburgh, 1902.

The Scots in Eastern and Western Prussia by Th. A. Fischer, Edinburgh 1903.

Northern Germany by Karl Baedeker, London 1904.

Germany by Rev. J. F. Dickie, London 1912.

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This article was slightly changed in 2008, following some feedback.