

Sir Michael Naesmyth

Sir Michael Naesmyth, Chamberlain of the Archbishop of St. Andrews, obtained the lands of Posso and Glenarth in 1544, by right of his wife, Elizabeth, daughter and heiress of John Baird of Posso. The Bairds have ever been a loyal and gallant family. Sir Gilbert, father of John Baird, fell at Flodden in 1513, in defence of his king.

The royal Eyre of Posso Crag is on the family estate; and the Lure worn by Queen Mary, and presented by her son James VI. to James Naesmyth, the Royal Falconer, is still preserved as a family heirloom.

During the intestine troubles in Scotland, in the reign of Mary, Sir Michael Naesmyth espoused the cause of the unfortunate Queen. He fought under her banner at Langside in 1568. He was banished, and his estates were seized by the Regent Moray. But after the restoration of peace, the Naesmyths regained their property. Sir Michael died at an advanced age.

He had many sons. The eldest, James, married Joana, daughter of William Veitch or Le Veitch of Dawick. By this marriage the lands of Dawick came into the family. He predeceased his father, and was succeeded by his son James, the Royal Falconer above referred to. Sir Michael's second son, John, was chief surgeon to James VI. of Scotland, afterwards James I. of England, and to Henry, Prince of Wales. He died in London in 1613, and in his testament he leaves "his herb to his young master, the Prince's grace." Charles I., in his instructions to the President of the Court of Session, enjoins "that you take special notice of the children of John Naesmyth, so often recommended by our late dear father and us." Two of Sir Michael's other sons were killed at Edinburgh in 1588, in a deadly feud between the Scotts and the Naesmyths. In those days a sort of Corsican vendetta was carried on between families from one generation to another.

Sir Michael Naesmyth, son of the Royal Falconer, succeeded to the property. His eldest son James was appointed to serve in Claverhouse's troop of horse in 1684. Among the other notable members of the family was James Naesmyth, a very clever lawyer. He was supposed to be so deep that he was generally known as the "Deil o' Dawyk" His eldest son was long a member of Parliament for the county of Peebles; he was, besides, a famous botanist, having studied under Linnaeus, Among the inter-marriages of the family were those with the Bruces of Lethen, the Stewarts of Traquhair, the Murrays of Stanhope, the Pringles of Clifton, the Murrays of Philiphaugh, the Keiths (of the Earl Marischal's family), the Andersons of St. Germains, the Marjoribanks of Lees, and others.

In the fourteenth century a branch of the Naesmyths of Posso settled at Netherton, near Hamilton. They bought an estate and built a residence. The lands adjoined part of the Duke of Hamilton's estate, and the house was not far from the palace. There the Naesmyths remained until the reign of Charles II. The King, or his advisers, determined to introduce Episcopacy, or, as some thought, Roman Catholicism, into the country, and to enforce it at the point of the sword.

The Naesmyths had always been loyal until now. But to be cleft by sword and pricked by spear into a religion which they disbelieved, was utterly hateful to the Netherton Naesmyths. Being Presbyterians, they held to their own faith. They were prevented from using their churches, [note:In the reign of James II. Of England and James VII. of Scotland a law was enacted, "that whoever should preach in a conventicle under a roof, or should attend, either as a preacher or as a hearer, a conventicle in the open air, should be punished with death and confiscation of property."]

and they accordingly met on the moors, or in unfrequented places for worship. The dissenting Presbyterians assumed the name of Covenanters. Hamilton was almost the center of the movement. The Covenanters met, and the King's forces were ordered to disperse them. Hence the internecine war that followed. There were Naesmyths on both sides -- Naesmyths for the King, and Naesmyths for the Covenant.

In an early engagement at Drumclog, the Covenanters were victorious. They beat back Claverhouse and his dragoons. A general rising took place in the West Country. About 6000 men assembled at Hamilton, mostly raw and undisciplined countrymen. The King's forces assembled to meet them, -- 10,000 well-disciplined troops, with a complete train of field artillery. What chance had the Covenanters against such a force? Nevertheless, they met at Bothwell Bridge, a few miles west of Hamilton.

It is unnecessary to describe the action.[note:See the account of a Covenanting Officer in the Appendix to the Scots Worthies. See also Sir Waiter Scott's Old Mortality, where the battle of Bothwell Brig is described.]

The Covenanters, notwithstanding their inferior force, resisted the cannonade and musketry of the enemy with great courage. They defended the bridge until their ammunition failed. When the English Guards and the artillery crossed the bridge, the battle was lost. The Covenanters gave way, and fled in all directions; Claverhouse, burning with revenge for his defeat at Drumclog, made a terrible slaughter of the unresisting fugitives. One of my ancestors brought from the battlefield the remnant of the standard; a formidable musket -- "Gun Bothwell" we afterwards called it; an Andrea Ferrara; and a powder-horn. I still preserve these remnants of the civil war.

My ancestor was condemned to death in his absence, and his property at Netherton was confiscated. What became of him during the remainder of Charles II.'s reign, and the reign of that still greater tormentor, James II., I do not know. He was probably, like many others, wandering about from place to place, hiding "in wildernesses or caves, destitute, afflicted, and tormented." The arrival of William III. restored religious liberty to the country, and Scotland was again left in comparative peace.

My ancestor took refuge in Edinburgh, but he never recovered his property at Netherton. The Duke of Hamilton, one of the trimmers of the time, had long coveted the possession of the lands, as Ahab had coveted Naboth's vineyard. He took advantage of the conscription of the

men engaged in the Bothwell Brig conflict, and had the lands forfeited in his favour. I remember my father telling me that, on one occasion when he visited the Duke of Hamilton in reference to some improvement of the grounds adjoining the palace, he pointed out to the Duke the ruined remains of the old residence of the Naesmyths. As the first French Revolution was then in full progress, when ideas of society and property seemed to have lost their bearings, the Duke good-humouredly observed, "Well, well, Naesmyth, there's no saying but what, some of these days, your ancestors' lands may come into your possession again!"

From the Dan Wright Family Tree in Ancestry.com