

Variation on the Origin of the NaeSmyth Coat-of-Arms

Another variation of the legend concerning the origin of the Naesmyth coat-of-arms appears in "*James Nasmyth: Engineer and Autobiography*", written by him in 1863. He attributes the following story as happening during the reign of King James III about 1469. In his account, the story reads "the following is the family legend of the origin of the name of Naesmyth: - in the troublous times which prevailed in Scotland before the union of the Crowns, the feuds between the King and the Barons were almost constant. In the reign of James III, the House of Douglas was the most prominent and ambitious. The Earl not only resisted his liege lord, but entered into a combination with the King of England, from whom he received a pension. He was declared a rebel, and his estates were confiscated. He determined to resist the royal power, and cross the Border with his followers. He was met by the Earl of Angus, the Maxwells, the Johnstons, and the Scotts. In one of the engagements which ensued, the Douglases appeared to have gained the day, when an ancestor of the Naesmyths, who fought under the royal standard, took refuge in the smithy of a neighboring village. The smith offered him protection, disguising him as a hammerman, with a leather apron in front, and asked him to lend a hand at his work. While thus engaged, a party of the Douglas partisans entered the smithy. They looked with suspicion of the disguised hammerman, who in his agitation, struck a false blow with the sledge hammer, which broke the shaft in two. Upon this, one of the pursuers rushed at him, calling out 'Ye're nae smyth!' The stalwart hammerman turned upon his assailant, and wrenching a dagger from him, speedily overpowered him. The smith, himself armed with a big hammer, effectually aided in overpowering and driving out the Douglas men. A party of the royal forces made their appearance, when Naesmyth rallied them, led them against the rebels, and converted what had been a temporary defeat into a victory. A grant of lands was bestowed upon him for his service. His armorial bearings consisted of a hand dexter with a dagger, between two broken hammer-shafts, and there they remain to this day. The motto was 'Non arte sect marte', 'not by art but by war'." It is quite likely that the original motto was Non marte sect arte and would have displayed the broken martels from the time of Alexander III. I think that the martels were changed to the smaller blacksmith hammers about the time of James III after 1469. In all likelihood the first story, c.1263, is probably more accurate in keeping with the historic timeline, as there were NaeSmyths living in Tweeddale during the 13th century and they would have had their own coat-of-arms by that time.