

Covenanters

Covenanters were members of a 17th century Scottish religious and political movement who supported a Presbyterian Church of Scotland. The Covenanting period represents one of Scotland's most dramatic religious struggles.

Religion was really important to society back then, it shaped almost everything they did and how they thought about life. It originated in disputes of James VI and his son Charles I.

In the 1600s the Stewart Kings attempted to force the Scottish Presbyterian church to adopt English-style worship practices. This sparked fierce resistance from many Scots who believed that only Jesus Christ, not an earthly king could be head of the church.

This went against what the king and government thought at the time. They were banned from having their own church services so they held secret outdoor meetings called conventicles. The government did not like this.

These resisters became known as the Covenanters names after the national agreements, or covenants, they signed pledging to defend their religious freedom. The most well-known covenant is the National Covenant signed in 1638. Covenant is a biblical term for a bond or agreement with God.

On 1st June 1679 a group of Covenanters were having one of these outdoor services near Drumclog (in South Lanarkshire) when government troops led by John Graham of Claverhouse came to break it up.

Then in 1830 the flag that was in the Battle of Drumclog was found in someone's loft in Cumnock and came into the collection of the Baird Institute in 1925.

The flag is in a very delicate condition, the rich colours have faded and the motto Pro Religione et Patria have faded to almost nothing. Some conservation work was carried out in 1979, the silk was washed and straightened and the flag was sewn onto hardboard covered with cotton flannelette and heavy cotton. All the fabrics and threads used in the work were dyed to match the originals.

Peden's mask was discovered in the 1840s in a cottage near Cumnock in Ayrshire, it belonged to the great-granddaughter of Peden's brother. Peden's relics, such as the mask, wig and a sword, had been handed down through his family for generations.

The mask shown here is a replica of the face mask and wig worn by Alexander Peden, a Covenanting minister from Ayrshire. Peden used the mask and wig as a disguise when preaching at conventicles, illegal outdoor services.

The cheeks of the mask have been reddened and three long strips of wood stitched inside the chin to resemble lower teeth. The mask is shaped to the face by a T-shaped harness sewn inside. The face mask was made of leather with the wig being attached to a base of coarse knotted fabric.

