

PEOPLE OF THE FORTH (6)

SAINT MARGARET, QUEEN OF SCOTLAND

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Saint Margaret of Scotland died in Edinburgh Castle on the 16th of November 1093 at the age of forty seven. On the eve of the 900th anniversary of her death it would be appropriate to begin by remembering her birth in far-off Hungary and early days which prepared her so well for her future life as Queen of Scots.

Much has been written about her life after her marriage to King Malcolm III (Canmore), who succeeded in uniting the warring tribes of the land and creating a single Kingdom of Scotland. There have been published studies about her saintliness; her generous gifts to the Church; her bringing of the old Culdee Church in Scotland into the Church of Rome; her care of the poor; and her radical enrichment and refinement of the Scottish Court. But little has been written about her origins and her early life - the period prior to her arrival at the Court of King Malcolm.

Margaret was a princess of the Royal House of Hungary. Hungary and Scotland in the eleventh century had a lot in common. They were both small countries, both comprised many warring tribes, and they were both made into united kingdoms by the hard road of strong leadership and religious fervour. Princess Margaret's grandfather, King Stephen, played a major part in the development of Hungary and King Malcolm III (her future husband) a similar role in Scotland. They were both men of strong personality and commanded powerful armies. Both had a robust faith which influenced their statesmanship and inspired their respective peoples. How the two countries became connected is seen by going back two generations.

Edmund Ironside, King of the Anglo-Saxons and of England (980-1016), lost the fierce war with King Cnut (Canute) of Denmark in 1016 and had to agree to share his kingdom, taking the south while Cnut had the north and the east. This resulted in his two sons, Edmund and Edward being banished from the land. They first fled to Sweden and took refuge there, then journeyed through Europe until they came to Hungary where they were permitted to settle. King Stephen I of Hungary (966-1038), canonised in 1083, and regarded as the greatest Magyar hero and national saint, gave the brothers a portion of land known thereafter as the 'land of the English', and they found a new home in the Castle of Reka. The hill on which the castle stood is known to this day as the 'Hill of the English Virgin'. Historians have identified the place as an area in the Mecsek mountains near Mecseknadasd, east of the city of Pecs, and archaeologists have uncovered evidence of the castle, a monastery and a village whose houses were scattered around the base of the hill. In the Parish Church of Mecseknadasd, Saint Margaret is remembered and so

venerated that a statue in her honour was raised there in December 1971.

Shortly after the young brothers' arrival in Hungary Edmund died at the age of sixteen, and in due time Edward married Agatha, daughter of King Stephen. Thus the royal families of England and Hungary were joined. Edmund and Agatha had three children, Margaret (born around 1045), Christine and Edgar. It was this Margaret who was to become the Queen of Scots and a Saint of the Roman Church.

Margaret having been brought up in a royal household was accustomed to the style and atmosphere of the courtly life. She lived and was educated in a small country split by warring tribes but united by the saintly rule and example of her grand-father King Stephen. Her mother was the daughter of a king; her father was to become heir apparent to the throne of England since his father King Edmund II had died in 1016, and half-brother Edward the Confessor was elected King of England in 1042. Like Margaret and King Stephen Edward was canonised in 1161 by Pope Alexander II, so there are three saints in this short story! With this ancestry on both paternal and maternal sides and her courtly training, Princess Margaret was well prepared for life at the court of the King of Scots, where she was to preside for twenty three years with firmness and compassion.

King Edward the Confessor had invited Margaret's father and family to return to England from Hungary with a view, maybe, to Edward's succeeding to the throne; and they came with the blessing and rich gifts of the Holy Roman Emperor he had served so well. But Margaret's father, the Exile, died in mysterious circumstances, which meant that her young brother Edgar, known as Edgar the Atheling, was now perhaps the heir apparent to the throne of England. During this time Malcolm, later Malcolm III King of Scots, was in exile from Scotland, since MacBeth had taken the throne by murdering his (Malcolm's) father Duncan. Under the protection of Siward, the Earl of Northumberland, Malcolm visited the court of Edward the Confessor on several occasions and came in contact with Agatha and her three children. These were the first of several meetings that Malcolm and Margaret would have; at that time she was scarcely in her teens.

Edward the Confessor died in January 1066 and his first minister Harold, Earl of the West Saxons was crowned King; not Margaret's brother Edgar. However William the Conqueror challenged the throne and took it from Harold by the battle of Hastings. So Edgar Atheling's position as a Saxon Royal claimant became hazardous. He tried to fight the Conqueror and Malcolm staunchly supported him in this, gaining a notable victory in Northumberland. Near the end of 1068, however, Edgar being defeated by William at York decided that the Conqueror was no longer to be challenged, and for the safety of his mother and sister Margaret, he should become an exile like his father - in Hungary or in Scotland where he would find sanctuary with his friend Malcolm. His sister Christine had by this time entered a Benedictine convent at Romsey.

The traditional story of their arrival in Scotland is that they had intended to return to Hungary but their ship encountered a severe storm and was wrecked on the north shore of the River Forth. There they were received and welcomed by Malcolm, now King Malcolm III, and brought to the safety of his fortress home in Dunfermline, capital of Scotland. But another theory now held by scholars has a more likely explanation. Had Edgar intimated that he intended to retreat to Scotland where he would undoubtedly have gained the armed support of William's enemy Malcolm, William would have made a determined effort to stop him, and his mother and sister would have been in jeopardy. So he made it known that he was returning to his native Hungary (a natural decision for a defeated exile), but in fact he intended all the time to go to Scotland. Whether his ship was wrecked in a storm in the Firth of Forth or not the important fact was that he and his family did land on the north bank of the river and were warmly welcomed by Malcolm. The year was 1069, the place near to the site of Rosyth Castle. The name Rosyth is probably derived from the words *ross* and *hythe*, meaning a spit of land and a jetty or landing-place respectively. If this is the exact spot where Princess Margaret landed, then the bay beside it is well named Saint Margaret's Hope in memory of her.

It is said that on her way to Dunfermline, Princess Margaret rested against a large stone by the road-side until she had regained her strength sufficiently to continue her journey. In pre-Roman times there had been a Druid Cromlech or circle of standing stones close to this spot, and it is believed that this stone is the last remaining fragment of that Cromlech. The stone can be seen at the side of the road between Dunfermline and Rosyth, and is known as Saint Margaret's Stone. It is strange that the ancient pagan religion and the new Christian faith should be thus commemorated in the same stone.

Malcolm took the exiled family to his Tower or fortress. It had been built on a spur of land (a *dun*) with a narrow, steep approach; to the south was a broad stretch of marshland, to the west a dense forest, to the north a precipitous drop down to the *lyn* or burn that flowed around the base of the hill. It was a fine defensive position. The fortress itself was several stories high with at least twenty main halls or rooms and many smaller apartments for servants. The base was 11 metres by 10 (35' 6" x 31' 4"), the topmost part of the structure widening out considerably. The remains of the foundations of this fortress can still be seen in Pittencrieff Park.

The first time Malcolm had seen Margaret at the court of Edward the Confessor she was a girl of twelve, now she was a beautiful young woman, and on the day after Easter in 1070 they were married in the little Culdee Church in Dunfermline. There they made their home in Malcolm's Tower, as his fortress was called. There Queen Margaret gave birth to six sons and two daughters. There she began her true life's work.

Agatha and her family were not of course the only exiles from the Norman Conquest. A great number of people, many of them from distinguished English families, were so disillusioned with the rule of William that they too came to Scotland and found refuge here. It is unlikely that they would have been

granted asylum in Scotland had it not been for the welcoming spirit shown by the new Queen. This had its benefits for the nation, for the English brought with them many of their arts and crafts, some unknown in Scotland. Queen Margaret encouraged the strangers to cultivate their arts and establish their culture. Thus the Anglo-Saxon language became known wherever they lived and in many places superseded the local Gaelic. The loss of the Gaelic, especially along the coastal areas, was a blow to Scottish culture, nevertheless the coming of their skills and crafts did much to increase the country's commerce and trade.

At the marriage of Malcolm and Margaret it became clear that the little Culdee Church was much too small, many of the distinguished guests at the royal wedding having to stand outside during the course of the service. But the site was specially precious and sacred to Queen Margaret. Soon afterwards, therefore, she decided to replace it with a fine, large Church, more in keeping with the new forms of religion which she was seeking to introduce, and more suitable for the capital township of Scotland and the place of worship of the royal family. Work began at once and by 1072 her new Church was completed and dedicated to The Holy Trinity. It was built over the old Culdee Church, and so the ancient site was preserved as a place of Worship. At that time it was reckoned to be the largest and finest Church in the land.

While Queen Margaret replaced the Culdee Church with her own Church of the Holy Trinity which followed the Roman usage, she did not altogether displace the Culdee clergy. Indeed she maintained a close friendship with many of them, visiting them in their monasteries and discussing religious matters with them. Sometimes she sought their advice and counsel, and in the course of her reign she gave generous grants of lands and monies to them. One of her great loves was books, and some of the devotional volumes she liked best she had decorated with gold and precious stones. One of the great works of the Culdee monks was the transcribing of books, and the Queen encouraged them and so acquired a fine library of sacred volumes. It was only in later years that serious disputes arose between the Culdee Clergy and the Roman Church, and finally in 1250 the Culdees ceased to exist as a organised body: more than a hundred and fifty years after Margaret's death.

Queen Margaret loved her Church deeply and in the course of the years she richly endowed it with vessels of gold and silver, and with precious stones. One of her special gifts was known as the Black Rood, a beautiful cross studded with diamonds which she had brought with her from her native Hungary. She not only enriched her Church, but also the life of the Court. She herself dressed in robes of bright colours and she encouraged the women-folk to do likewise, adding much-needed colour to royal occasions. She introduced gold and silver table-ware to the royal dining hall, thereby adding some magnificence to court feasts. She was distressed by the disorderly behaviour of the courtiers at table, and sought to suppress it by introducing a Grace at the close of meals. This was not met with great enthusiasm until she proclaimed that the Grace would be accompanied by a Grace-Cup, a cup of wine passed round the company in token of their fellowship together! In the course of time this came to

be known in the homes of ordinary folk throughout Scotland as I ho Loving Cup, and is still practiced in some places.

Queen Margaret's care of the poor is legendary. It is said that she prepared food for nine orphan children each morning and fed them herself; every evening she washed the feet of six children in an act of self-abasement. Each day she gathered crowds of poor folk at her table and fed them, waiting table herself. By acts such as these she endeared herself to the people of Dunfermline, and they worshipped the ground she walked on. Her practical care of the poor was out-matched only by her own personal life of devotion. She attended every act of Worship, heard masses in private and public, observed all fast days and devoted herself to hours of private prayer. She sought regular times of prayer and devotion but could seldom find peace in the hectic rush and bustle of the court. In seeking some quiet and seclusion she discovered a cave close to the Tower Burn, some three hundred metres from her home. It was about 2 metres wide (8' 6") and, from the entrance to the rear of the cave 3 metres (nearly 12'), part of this being passageway. It was just over 2 metres (6' 9") high. For her it was an ideal place for private devotions for it was secluded and peaceful, and she used to go there daily to pray. It is said that Malcolm became suspicious of his wife's frequent absences, and one day followed her; only to discover that she was engaged in her devotions in the cave. He was so ashamed of having doubted her that he had the cave furnished as an oratory. The furnishings no longer exist, but the cave may still be seen, and in this 900th anniversary year it is to be lit and made accessible to visitors to Dunfermline.

The Queen was anxious to establish suitable social graces amongst her women-folk so she gathered them around her and taught them to sew and embroider. When the ordinary folk of the town saw the beautiful work they created they too sought instruction in the art. She was also eager to teach them good manners and lady-like behaviour. This required a more severe attitude, but it was always tinged with kindness; so the appearance and the attitude of the court ladies improved considerably.

In order to enhance the appearance of the King's majesty she persuaded Malcolm to add greatly to the number of his courtiers and attendants. While this would impress those who were entitled to visit the Royal Court, it did not have any influence on the ordinary people. So the Queen encouraged her husband to make more public appearances throughout the land so that ordinary people might see him and his brightly clad courtiers. This did much to impress and to establish loyalty.

Queen Margaret was not content to restrict herself to the matters of the court and community. She played a considerable part in national affairs also. It had always been Malcolm's aim to unite the traditionally warring tribes of Scotland into one strong nation. He being a battle-hardened soldier had done a great deal to create a united army in Scotland, but unity requires more than this. His Queen had already shown her passion for a higher culture and a richer religion, and it was the addition of these aspects of national life that

helped to establish a closer understanding between tribes and, therefore, a more stable unifying force. Moreover her passion for justice and mercy helped to soften the more rigid application of the law and so claim a readier allegiance from ordinary people.

Because of Margaret's love of precious goods and beautiful things, she encouraged the importing of many exotic wares. This was the beginning of a wider trade and commerce, and helped to expand the economy of the country. Her humanitarian interests drove her to seek out the poorest in the land and those who were most harshly treated as slaves. To the poor she gave money and food. For the slaves she interceded and on many occasions paid their ransom and set them free.

In the early days of her reign the Queen sought to encourage pilgrims to cross the Forth and travel north to Saint Andrews to visit the shrine of the Apostle. With this in view she had piers or jetties built on the north and south banks of the River Forth and instituted a ferry service, free to all pilgrims -the two landing places have developed into today's North Queensferry and South Queensferry. In 1164 the rights to the ferry were granted to the monks of Dunfermline Abbey. Later in 1821 engines replaced oars, and in the 1930s car ferries were introduced. These still functioned long after the construction of the Forth Rail Bridge, and were only supplanted when the Forth Road Bridge was built in 1964. Appropriately the new bridge was opened by Her Majesty the Queen, herself a descendant of Saint Margaret.

On the 13th of November 1093 Malcolm was killed in battle at Alnwick Castle, and his eldest son, Edward, heir to the throne, was mortally wounded. By this time the Queen was ill and had been taken to Edinburgh Castle for safety, since the usurper Donald Bane was already gathering a rebel army. When she heard the news of the death of her husband and son she died. The little Chapel in which Queen Margaret worshipped is the oldest part of Edinburgh Castle, much visited and known yet as Saint Margaret's Chapel.

Queen Margaret's body was brought back to her own Church of the Holy Trinity in Dunfermline and buried before the High Altar. The outline of the walls of the old Church of the Holy Trinity are clearly marked on the floor of the great Norman Nave which was constructed over its site, and beneath the floor the foundations of Queen Margaret's Church have been preserved and made to be seen through iron gratings. It is quite possible to make an enlightened guess as to the exact spot where she was buried.

In later years her son David I replaced his mother's Church of the Holy Trinity with a magnificent Abbey, the Nave of which still stands as one of the finest examples of Norman architecture in Scotland. This meant, however, that the body of Queen Margaret now lay buried, not at the High Altar of the new Abbey, but close to the Rood Screen in the Nave.

Clearly this was deemed to be unsuitable, especially when in 1249 Margaret was canonized by Pope Innocent IV and officially enrolled in the Papal Catalogue of Saints. It was thought that it would be more appropriate to build a new shrine at the east end of the Abbey and have her body removed and reburied there.

This shrine was completed in 1250 as an exquisite addition to the great Abbey, and on the 13th of July 1250 the remains of Saint Margaret were exhumed and carried in solemn procession to their new resting place. It is said that as they passed the place where her husband Malcolm lay, her bier became so heavy that it was impossible for the bishops and abbots to carry it further. It was decided that this indicated that Saint Margaret was not content to rest apart from Malcolm, so his remains were also exhumed and carried with her to the new shrine where they were re-interred together. Thus the King and Queen who had together done so much for Scotland and the Church were laid to rest side by side. The marble slab that covered the tomb can still be seen outside the east end of the Abbey Church, and the base of the walls of the shrine and the pillars that supported the roof are also visible. Jn lglg thfi mmg of thg Choir of David I's Abbey, (or Conventual Church as it was called) were cleared away and a new Parish Church was added on to the Norman Nave. This is the structure now known as the Abbey Church of Dunfermline. In it can be seen many mementos of the Queen who was responsible for the foundation of the Abbey.

A stained glass window in the south transept commemorates her marriage to Malcolm; plaster heads of Margaret and Malcolm are set at the top of the pillars around the building; the emblem of the Cross and Martlets (the Coat-of-Arms of Edward the Confessor which Margaret inherited) are stitched on the pulpit falls, engraved on a plaque on the front of the gallery, and may also be seen on the strip of heraldic emblems which surrounds the building high above the galleries. In the Norman Nave there is a stained glass window above the west door which depicts Margaret along with Malcolm, Wallace and Bruce.

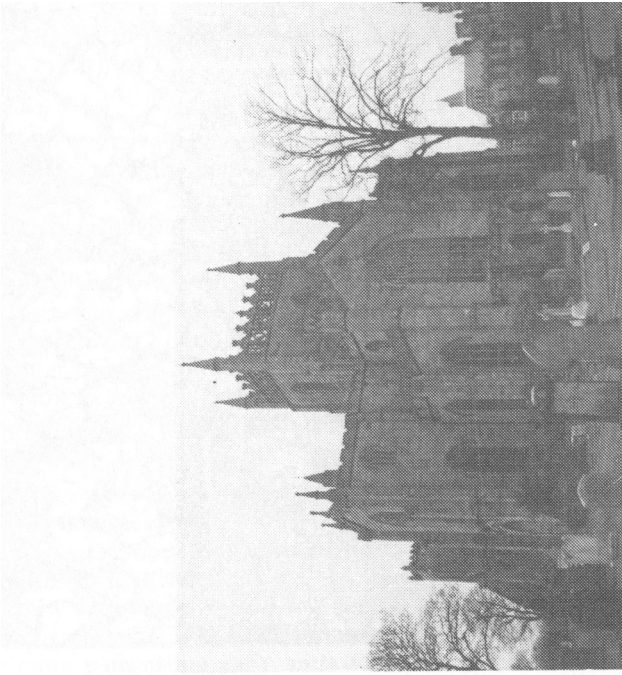
So in the course of her comparatively short life, Saint Margaret left an indelible mark on Scotland in terms of culture, social graces, trade and commerce. She exerted a great influence on the Royal Court in dress, status, dignity and decorum. She showed a personal example of the care of the poor and the freedom of slaves, and encouraged the spirit of mercy and justice in the courts. But above all she influenced the religion of Scotland by the building and enriching of her Church, and the introduction of the Roman usages in worship. Many of Saint Margaret's innovations have been for the permanent benefit of the nation, others have been described as the destruction of Scotland's heritage, culture and religion. But, however her life and work are seen, it has to be admitted that few people have accomplished so much in so short a time.

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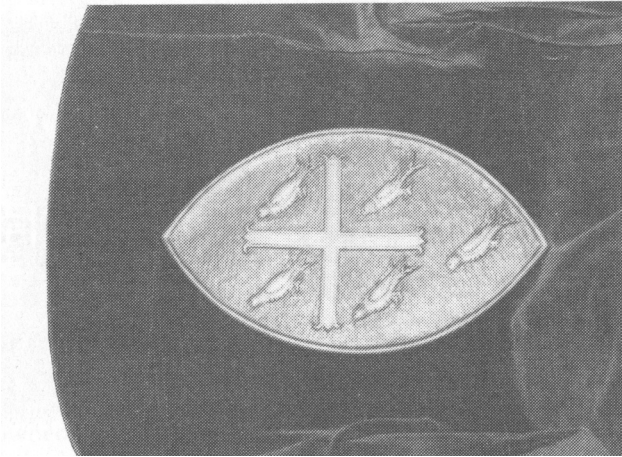


St. Margaret's Shrine
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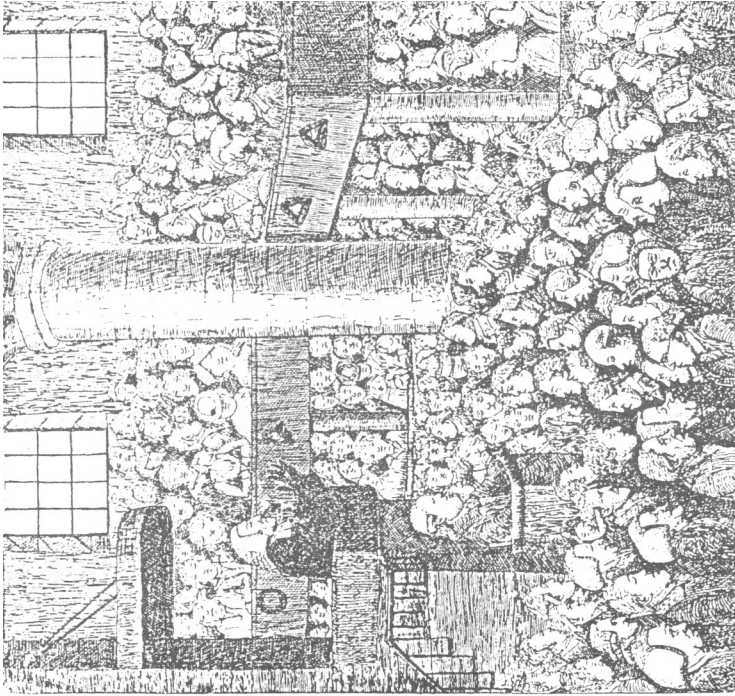
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Dunfermline Abbey



Cross and Martlets Coat of Arms

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Figure 3. A rare drawing of a Church interior of 18th century: Tolbooth, Edinburgh in 1785.
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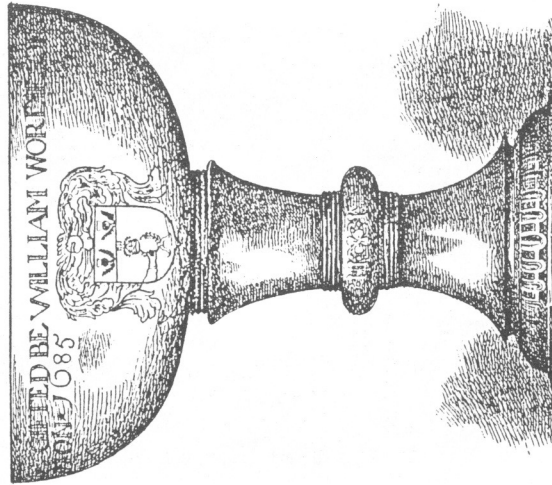


Figure 1 St. Ninians Communion Cup (1685); from Old Scottish Communion Plate by Thomas Burns, Edinburgh, 1892
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