# Flemish Migration to Scotland in the Medieval and Early Modern Periods

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In last week's posting Morvern French set out the main factors that had led to numbers of Flemish people leaving Flanders. In this week's posting Morvern looks at the factors that led some to come to Scotland.

### Introduction

The Flemings were known throughout western Europe as people skilled in a wide variety of occupations. In 1188 Gerald of Wales, reflecting on the settlement in that area of a significant number of Flemings, described them as

a brave and sturdy people [...] a people skilled at working in wool, experienced in trade, ready to face any effort or danger at land or sea in pursuit of gain; according to the demands of time and place quick to turn to the plough or to arms; a brave and fortunate people.<sup>[1]</sup>

The question under consideration here is what might have led them to migrate to Scotland. Although the primary impulses for this may be broadly grouped into feudal, economic, and religious categories, the reality was much more nuanced.

# The Flemings as Traders in Scotland

Flemings' international trade links were a major factor in their migration to Scotland. St Margaret, Queen of Scotland (d.1093) is recorded as having encouraged the immigration of foreign merchants:

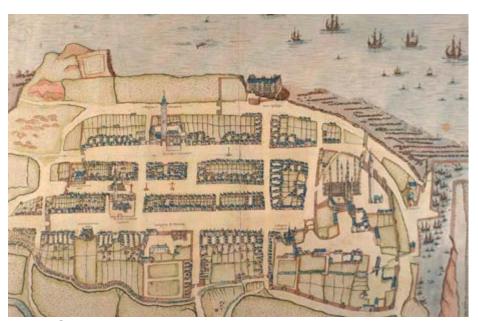
It was due to her that the merchants who came by land and sea from various countries brought along with them for sale different kinds of precious wares which until then were unknown in Scotland. And it was at her instigation that the natives of Scotland purchased from these traders clothing of various colours, with ornaments to wear. [2]

Flemings in particular have left their mark in the evidence of early trade. The name of Coupar

Angus, for example, is thought to have derived from the Flemish word 'copar', meaning one who exchanges commodities. Documentary evidence from the early years of the burghs shows that a significant proportion of inhabitants were international, including Flemings. For example, an 1164 charter of Malcolm IV referred to 'Scots, French, Flemish, and English, both within and without the burgh' of St Andrews. [4]

Flemish settlers had an important role in the establishment and growth of trading centres in Scotland, and they are thought to have brought with them continental traditions. For example around 1180 William I. (r.1165-1214) granted to the burgesses of Aberdeen, the Moray Firth, and north of the Mounth (an eastern ridge of the Grampian mountains) a free *hanse* as in the time of David I (r.1124-53); this hanse is believed to have been a trade guild as in the Low Countries. [5]

Around 1144 Bishop Robert of St Andrews founded the ecclesiastical burgh of the same name around the ancient monastic community of Kilrimund. He established there Mainard the Fleming, who had previously been burgess of the royal burgh of Berwick. Because Mainard was one of the first to build and establish the new burgh ('ex prioribus est qui burgum supradictum aedificare et instauare incepit'), he was granted three tofts in the burgh. [6] His appointment as provost of St Andrews was no doubt connected to his experience at Berwick and his foreign contacts, and his duties would have included finding merchants and craftspeople to settle in the burgh and developing its commercial and mercantile potential.



Early St Andrews, shown in the c.1580 map by John Geddy (National Library of Scotland).

In the early 1150s David I confirmed his grant to one Baldwin a toft in the burgh of Perth, in exchange for Baldwin undertaking to carry out watch service within the burgh, contributing towards enclosing the burgh within some sort of fence or wall, and providing the king with one terret and two horse collars per year. Baldwin the lorimer, as he has come to be known, was not to be sued in any court except before the king himself or his justice. David I's grant was

confirmed again by Malcolm IV (r.1153-65), who also provided Baldwin with a tenement in Perth, 'ten feet broad by twenty-four feet long'. Baldwin was perhaps deceased by the 1160s, when his lands and buildings in Perth were granted to the cathedral priory of St Andrews, under similar terms to those granted to Baldwin. He is assumed from his name to have been a Fleming, although unlike other early settlers he is never described as such in the written evidence. [8]

## **Aristocratic Settlers**

The tenth to the thirteenth centuries witnessed the mass movement of aristocrats, most famously from Normandy, outwards to the peripheral European areas of Britain and Ireland, southern Italy, Spain, Pomerania, and Silesia. Many of these noble migrants were invited to settle in their host lands and were rewarded for military service through grants of lands and titles. The Flemings who settled in Scotland, in areas such as Moray and Lanarkshire, were without ties to the local populations and were intended to bring those areas further under the control of the kings of Scots.

Lauran Toorians points out that settlers came to Scotland from French Flanders as well as from the Dutch-speaking region. A Philippe de Vermelles was introduced into Scotland by Robert de Quincy, who himself originated in Cuinchy, to the east of Béthune in French Flanders. De Quincy may have travelled to Britain as a follower of William the Conqueror. Based in lands around Tranent in East Lothian, he brought several other French Flemings to Scotland, including Alan de Courrières, Hugh de Lens, Robert de Béthune, Robert de Carvin, and Roger de Orchies.

Many Flemish incomers and their descendants who settled as knightly tenants of Malcolm IV (r.1153-65) left their mark on the place names of Upper Clydesdale in particular: Simon Loccard (Symington), Wice or Wizo (Wiston), Tancred (Thankerton), Lambin (Lambington), and Robert, brother of Lambin (Roberton).

Baldwin the Fleming is thought to have been the son of Stephen Flandrensis of Bratton in Devonshire, expelled by Henry II in 1154. Baldwin became sheriff of Lanarkshire and lord of Biggar, constructing a castle there, of which the large motte remains. By 1162 he was sheriff of Lanark and he acted as a witness to the charters of Bishop Robert of St Andrews, Malcolm IV, and William I. [10] Baldwin is thought to have aided in the expulsion of the invasion force of Somerled, lord of the Isles, when in 1164 Somerled landed at Renfrew with a fleet of 160 ships and attacked the lands of Walter son of Alan, the king's steward. He was defeated at the Battle of Renfrew by the royal army, and it is likely that Baldwin also participated considering the proximity of his fiefs of Inverkip and Houston. [11]

In Moray the only person described in the primary sources as being a Fleming is Berowald. He also held land in West Lothian, giving his name to Bo'ness (Berowald's-toun-ness). On 25 December 1160 Malcolm IV granted to Berowald the lands of Innes and Nether Urquhart in the

sheriffdom of Elgin, for the service of one knight in Elgin Castle. Elgin was an important centre of government in the later twelfth and thirteenth centuries, with William the Lion granting fourteen of his charters there compared to only six at Aberdeen.

Freskin is another possible Fleming in Moray. He was granted Duffus, where he built a castle, and other lands near Elgin by David I; he also held lands in Uphall and Broxburn, West Lothian. His family adopted the name *de Moravia* (of Moray). Freskin's son Hugh was given Sutherland by the king. His grandson William of Moray and lord of Sutherland was by c.1230 the first earl of Sutherland. Freskin's other grandson Gilbert was archdeacon of Moray (1203-22) and bishop of Caithness (1223-45).

At Garioch in Aberdeenshire there was a significant Flemish population in the early thirteenth century, when Bartholomew Flandrensis granted 'to the church of St. Drostan of Inchemabani [Insch] a toft and two acres of arable land adjoining the toft in his vill of Ravengille'. This Flemish settlement left its name at the farms of New Flinder, Old Flinder, and Little Flinder; and it is thought that Bartholomew also held Flemington near Forfar. [13]

# Discrimination against Flemings in England and Scotland

The expulsion of Flemings from England in 1154 was a reaction to King Stephen's (r.1135-1154) great use of Flemish mercenaries during his civil war against Empress Matilda. The most well-known was William of Ypres, an illegitimate claimant to the county of Flanders. The influx of Flemish migrants encouraged by Stephen was not well received by English contemporaries, who felt their influence over the king and their hold on land and wealth threatened. Chronicler Gervase of Canterbury recalled that,

Flemings were called to England by the king, and they, envying the long-time inhabitants of the land, having left behind their native soil and their job of weaving, flocked into England in troops, and like hungry wolves proceeded energetically to reduce the fecundity of England to nothing. [14]

On the accession of Henry II (r.1154-1189), the new king considered it necessary to rid himself of this large body of Flemish mercenary troops and to regain for the crown control of military recruitment. To this end, in 1154 he expelled those Flemings who had migrated to England during Stephen's reign:

those foreigners who had flocked to England under King Stephen for the sake of booty and in order to fight, and especially the Flemings, of whom there was then a great multitude in England, should return to their own lands, fixing a deadline for them, beyond which they would be in danger if they remained in England. Terrified by this edict, they slipped away so quickly that they seemed to disappear in a moment, like phantoms, leaving many astonished at how swiftly they vanished. [15]

Many of the Flemings who settled in Scotland in the mid-twelfth century are likely to have come from England after this expulsion.

Another factor that may have encouraged Flemish merchants to settle permanently in Scottish burghs was the imposition from the 1330s of higher customs duties on exports by foreigners, which made up only 15% of recorded exports in this period. This bolstered the mercantile privileges already accorded to Scottish burgesses: they had exclusive rights to deal in wool, hides, and pelts, and foreign merchants could deal only with burgesses except at fair time. [16] The acquisition of burgess rights through permanent residence and the payment of a fee gave merchants greater economic privileges.

In 1347 David II's parliament moved the Scottish staple port from Bruges in Flanders to Middelburg in Zeeland, and expelled the Flemish people from Scotland:

we entirely banish the merchants of Flanders and all the Flemish people of whatever condition or estate, sailors only being excepted, so that wherever in our kingdom [...] any Flemish people are able to be found they should be seized as if banished and exiled and all their goods and merchandise confiscated. [17]

This move is thought to have been made in reaction to Flanders' expulsion of Scottish merchants from Flanders, for reasons as yet unknown. Scottish merchants probably hoped to gain a better bargaining position with the Flemish by restricting trade.

However, this hostility towards international settlers appears to have decreased substantially by the late Middle Ages. Into the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the settlement of international peoples was again considered to be highly beneficial to Scotland. James I (r.1406-1437) was recorded by sixteenth century historian Hector Boece as having,

brocht oute of Ingland and Flanderis ingenious men of sindry craftis to instruct his pepill in vertewis occupacioun, becaus Scotland was continewallie exercitt in weeris [wars] fra be dede of Alexander the Thrid to be dayis, and all be craftismen and vtheris war constrenit to pas to be weeris, and be maist part of bame distroyitt be be samyn. [18]

Also, in 1498 the Spanish ambassador Don Pedro de Ayala noted that,

Scotland has improved so much during [James IV's] reign that it is worth three times more now than formerly, on account of foreigners having come to the country, and taught them how to live. They have more meat, in great and small animals, than they want, and plenty of wool and hides. [19]

# **Desirability of Flemish Craftsmanship**

The collapse of Flanders' cloth industry from the late fourteenth century led its cities to diversify their crafts and to specialise in luxury arts in order to maintain their position as centres of manufacture and international trade. Certain towns and cities specialised in the manufacture of different objects, for example manuscript illumination in Ghent and Bruges. Several Flemish craftspeople are known to have migrated to Scotland, often temporarily, to fulfil the demand for Flemish-made objects.

The town of Arras was particularly famed for its production of high quality tapestries in the late Middle Ages, to the extent that the town became synonymous with fine Flemish tapestry. Arras was described by Spanish nobleman Pero Tafur as being 'very rich, especially by reason of its woven cloths and all kinds of tapestries, and although they are also made in other places, yet it well appears that those which are made in Arras have the preference.'[20] Rulers of this period sought Flemish tapestry weavers to settle in their lands and to produce tapestries for them. The 'Matthieu de Araz' present in Scotland in 1312 may have been one such weaver. [21] An 'Egidius Gremar de Arras' was employed by James I in 1435, being paid £6 10s. The following year an 'Egidius tapisario' was paid £7, and it is reasonable to believe that these two are the same person. [22]



An example of Flemish tapestry, c.1500 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London). None of Scottish provenance has survived.

There is evidence that the Bruges painter Willem Wallinc, master of the Bruges guild of painters in October 1506, was resident for a time in Scotland. He may have been the same William Wallanch or Wallange employed by George Brown, Bishop of Dunkeld between 1505 and 1516, as well as the same artist who painted the portrait of Bishop William Elphinstone of Aberdeen in the early sixteenth century, a copy of which bears the label 'William of Bruges'. [24]

There is further evidence of Scottish elites patronising Flemish and Low Countries painters. In 1502, for example, James IV received a Meynnart Wewyck who had previously worked for Henry VII of England. Also, in September 1505 Scottish conservator in the Low Countries Andrew Halyburton sent to James IV a 'Piers the painter':

Item, to ane servand of Andro Haliburtons that the said Andro laid down on the furnessing of the payntour to cum in Scottland. [25]

Piers remained at the Scottish court, painting such decorations as tournament banners and standards, until 1508 when he received money to 'pas in Flandrez'. [26]

James V also employed continental craftspeople such as a Peter Flemisman who carved the figures adorning the canopied buttress niches on the south front of Falkland Palace chapel. This was part of extensive works undertaken at the palace by James from 1537 to 1542, which cost a total of nearly £13,000. [27]

Flanders was also known as a centre of munitions production and expertise. As early as 1369 unspecified munitions were imported from Flanders for use in Edinburgh castle: 'quedam emenda in Flandria pro municione castri de Edynburgh'. From at least the 1470s the Scottish crown was developing and manufacturing guns; however, materials for casting guns (for example, wax, copper, and iron) continued to be imported from Flanders and France. By 1458 the crown was employing 'cuidam Teutonico dicto Dedrik, gunnar' ('a certain Teuton called Dedrik, gunner'), whose duties are likely to have involved the construction, testing, and use of the royal artillery. Several other names in the documentary record suggest that Flemish or Low Countries mercenaries continued to work in Scotland into the early modern period, for example Josias Rikker and Peter Sochan. [30]

Flemings were also utilised as textile workers in Scotland. The region maintained a reputation for high quality cloth production, and efforts were made in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries to settle Flemish weavers in Scotland. In 1581 an Act of Parliament brought a Robert Dickson to Scotland,

to learn within this realm the art of the making and working of silks, to be as good and sufficient as the same is made within the countries of France or Flanders and to be sold within the same cheaper than the like silks are sold within this realm brought here or out of other countries. [31]

In return, Robert was granted the sole privilege of silk weaving and the authority to allow others to practice it; custom-free imports of raw and finished materials; and the position of burgess in Perth, 'or such other places where he shall please to plant'.

In 1587 this was followed by another Act which brought to Scotland the Flemings John Garden, Philip Fermant, and John Banko. These incomers were,

to exercise their craft and occupation in making of serges, grograms, fustians, bombasines, stemmings, baize, coverings of beds and others appertaining to their said craft and for instruction of the said lieges in the exercise of the making of the works, and have offered to our said sovereign lord and whole commonwealth of this realm the experience and sure knowledge of their labours. [32]

It was considered 'for the common good of the realm' that these three should bring with them a further thirty weavers, fullers, and other textile workers, and that they should take on as apprentices only Scottish boys and girls, to be taught the Flemish art of cloth production over five years. Significantly, Garden, Fermant, and Banko were granted,

the liberty and privilege of naturalisation and to be as free within this realm during their remaining as if they were born within the same, and that their lawful bairns shall possess the said privileges as if they were naturalised or born Scotsmen.

# **Religious Incentives for Migration**

Artisanal skills are known to have coincided with religious concerns in the encouragement of Flemish immigration. A 1600 Act of the Privy Council authorised the immigration into Scotland of a hundred 'stranger' families with textile skills, the masters of the families to be 'naturalizeit and maid frie denisen' of the realm. [33]

Many religious refugees settled initially in large Protestant cities such as Geneva or Zurich then migrated to England, where Edward VI had in 1550 established London as a location for 'Stranger Churches', in which Calvinists from the Low Countries and France could practice their religion among their own people. A small number of these Stranger Church members may have migrated northwards to Scotland. Although there is no record of such establishments north of the border, David Dobson has identified several Flemish or Dutch names in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth century baptismal register of Edinburgh. [34]

The Flemish immigrants of 1587 were also to be granted a kirk and minister, 'when they are a sufficient number', suggesting that efforts were being made to encourage the Flemings to stay in Scotland permanently. James VI of Scotland and I of England is thought to have been interested in bringing in Protestant Flemish and Walloon weavers to Scotland via their established settlement in Norwich, linking the Flemings' reputation for textile production to their growing status as refugees from religious persecution in the Low Countries. [35] Several similar measures, which connected Flemish origin with expertise in cloth manufacture, were enacted in this period. [36]

### Conclusion

Having reviewed the myriad reasons for Flemish migration to Scotland, it is clear that Gerald of Wales was correct in describing the Flemings as being adaptable 'to the demands of time and place'. The principal reasons for their migrating to Scotland can be summed up as follows:

- Flemish expertise in urban planning and trade was desired for the establishment of Scottish burghs.
- Aristocratic Flemings were granted lands and titles, most notably in Upper Clydesdale and

Moray, in order to maintain the power of the Scottish king in those areas.

- Those Flemings expelled from England in 1154, and those seeking lower customs duties from the 1330s, may have been encouraged to settle permanently in Scotland.
- Flemish expertise in such crafts as tapestry weaving, painting, gun casting, and textile production was sought after by the Scottish crown.
- Flemish Protestants were encouraged to settle in both Scotland and England by the reformminded monarchies of James VI and Edward VI.

Although many of the examples above were temporary migrations, with the subjects returning to Flanders after their stay in Scotland, a common theme is that these movements were often initiated by the Scottish crown itself, which was cognisant of the advantages that Flemings could bring to Scottish society. The mercantile, feudal, artisanal, and religious objectives of the crown in the medieval and early modern periods appear to have complemented those of the Flemish people who chose to move away from the Low Countries.

# Morvern French November 2015

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