

Extracts from Kirk Session Book of John Welch, 1604-1605

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The earliest of the Kirk Session records extant of the parish of Ayr is of the year 1604 when John Welch, son-in-law of John Knox, was minister; and so far as his Ayr ministry is concerned these records close in the year 1605. On the 23rd July of that year Welch was imprisoned in Blackness Castle and in 1606 he was banished to France.

In these days Ayr was regarded, and in fact referred to, as 'the wicked auld toun', and one historian of the times says, "the facts which have come to our knowledge concerning the religious, moral and social conditions at Ayr at this era tend to show that the bulk of the population were sunk in ignorance, superstition, immorality and barbarism." Be that as it may, the following extracts show the disciplinary measures adopted by Welch and his Session to improve the life and conduct of the parishioners.

On the first page of these records we read: "The session Book of Ayr beginning x December 1604, Mr John Welshce, minister." On the next page we have a list of the 20 elders and 9 deacons "on the fyrst November 1603." This is followed by a list of penalties for the "violatowris of the Sabbth".

PENALTIES FOR VIOLATION OF THE SABBATH.

For the first fault sal mak repentance publiklie befor the pulpit and sal pay VI s. 8 d.

For the second fault sal stand twa dayis in th(ei)r awin claithe in the publik place of repentence and sal pay xiii s. 4 d.

For the third fault stand thre sabboths and pay xxs.

Item, quha uses ony kynd of sundrie laboring upon the sabbth day cadging, mylling, &c., sal pay for the fyrst falt xiii s. 4 d., for the second falt xxvi s. 8 d., for the third 40 s. and the person to be in the publik place according to former offences.

Item, thay that sal be fund to talzie or facht or be drunkn on the sabbth day for the first falt sal pay the penaltie of xx s.,

for the second falt xl s., for the third falt iij lib. And gif the tulzeor shed ony bluid at onie tyme he sal stand in his linning claithis and double the third penaltie to pey, viz. vi lib.

Item, ony that brek the Fast apointed sal pey for the first falt xl s., for the second falt iij lib., for the third falt vi lib.

Then follows the first ordinary meeting of Kirk Session, the date of which has become partly obliterated but is probably 17th December 1604. The business of this meeting was largely a consideration of funds for the poor—"the pures purs"—and dealing with citations for minor offences.

For the succeeding meetings the following extracts are quoted, with abbreviations extended, and comments in italics.

31st December 1604 *Mr. Welch present*

Remember to summon William Ingrame, smith, and Jonet Speit his wyfe for the continual flyting togeddar, baith on Saturday at evin efter supper tyme and also on the sabboth at evin eftir th(ei)r coming fra the kirk, and warne also the byreman and the woman to witness q(ui)lk of thame beginnis the fley. Fail not to warne them by ane the morne.

Remember to summon John Conninghame the walker because his servant George Wilsoun walkit his claith on the Sabboth day, and to remember to declare the said George Wilson to the presbyterie.

Compeirit Alex. Thompsoun, Jonet Thompsoun, elder and younger, accusit for brek of Sabboth, confessit the same before the session and were found in the lyke. Ar ordainit to be put in the thefis hoal. *The thief's hole was a particular cell in the early tolbooth in High Street.*

Remember Gilbert Broun to mak his confession of the religion before the congregation the next Sabboth day.

The q(ui)lk day Alex. Lockhart frielie confessit th(a)t he repented that Alex. Kennedy become excommunicat he came into his house unwittingly and th(e)rfor the minister to reseve his publik confession upon the sabboth next.

Remember th(a)t David Fergusson hes ane hundreth pounds of siler for the hospital th(e)rfor desyre him to be here the next day.

Remember th(a)t intimation be made to all honest women for making the webbis for the pure folk.

7th January 1605

The Session discharged Margaret Kennedy for reseaving the Laird of Stair in her hous q(uy)ll the presbyterie tuik ordour with him.

Remember to summon John Peddie for his flyting with his wyfe and blaspheming the name of God upon Sunday was aucht dayis at evin.

14th January 1605

Remember yet to delyver John Boyd, boater, and his wyfe unto the magistrats, that he be put in ward untill the counsal tak cair th(a)t if they be found agane in onie publick scandal they sal be banishit the toun.

21st January 1605 *Mr. Welsh present*

Robert Campbel to compeir this day, callit and comperit not, th(e)rfor the session ordanis the minister to give him the first publick admonishing upon the Sabboth day next.

Ordains David Loudon and Jon Adam Lochhart to be deliverit to the magistrats for th(ei)r disobedience.

Remember Susana Stewart to continue her repentance publiklie in her ordinary claithes.

Remember yet to summon John Busbie quha hes not satisfied w(i)t(h) Johne Davieson, younger, for th(ei)r tuilzieing togeddar the sabboth day. *Tuilzie is a fight or squabble.*

Remember William Cunningham for resyling from his marriage.

Remember to cite John Dalrymple, chapman, to declair the caus qu(er)by he hes not satisfied his odious blasphemie in taking a piece of flesh and casting it from him said that it was the flesh of chryst as himself confessit befor the session the xvi day of Apryle 1604.

18th February 1605 *Mr Welsh present*

The q(ui)lk day the minister, eldaris, deaconis and haill session hes statute and ordanit for eschewing of al grossness and sclander

th(a)t in case ony persoun or persouns sal heir ony suspicion of publik or privat sin upon ony of th(ei)r neighbouris that the persoun th(a)t sal heir the same he sal comunicat the mat(ter) privatlie wit(h) the pairtie to the effect the sclander may be removit quyetlie. And gif the sam(e) be reveillit publiklie ether upon the hei streit or befor ony witnesses exceptane elders and deacons all an erlie in th(a)t case the persoun publisher of the suspicion sal be counted a sclanderer and punishit th(e)rfor as accordes or ordanis publik intimatioun to be maid of the act out of pulpit the next Sabbath day.

25th February 1605

Remember also Christine Striveling for her feirful blasphemis in cursing baith her body and soul, and for her abusing of the worship of God th(a)t wold not suffer the grace to be seid or the chapter to be red. Given up be Wm Rankine upon the report of Andro Fergusson quha was an eyewitness th(e)rto.

Ordains publik intimatioun to be maid th(a)t in case ony persoun or persouns at ony tyme heirafter sall find, heir or see ony ryme or cokalane, th(a)t they sall reveil the same first to ane eldar privatlie and to ne uther, and in case they fail th(e)rin in reveiling of the same to any uther th(a)t persoun salbe esteemit to be the author of the said ryme them selfis, and salbe punishit th(e)rfor, conforme to the actis of the Kirk and the laws of the realme, and further in caise ony persoun or persouns sal at onie tyme heirafter mak mentioun of the cartils and ryms (*illegible*) against the worship of God or against the young women of this toun either in privat or publik, to ony of th(ei)r nighbouris or publiklie, ye persoun speiken or heirin of the same sal mak th(ei)r publik repentance th(e)rfor. Also gyf ony ludge travellours in the hous on the Saturday at night that they sal permit not them to depairt away on the Sabbath day under the pane of (*obliterated*). *Cartils and rymes are comic shows.*

Remember to desyre the counsal that they make ane act th(a)t nane ressait ony stranger in th(ei)r hous th(a)t vil not cum to the outvard worschip of God.

28th February 1605 *Mr Welch absent*

4th March 1605 *Mr Welch absent*

11th March 1605 *Mr Welch absent still*

Ordanis yet to mak the publik prayer for Jon Glover q(ui)lk was del(a)yit becaus of the ministers absence.

Welch's absence from these meetings may have been due to his many visits to his friend Robert Bruce of Kinnaird who at this time was being persecuted and had been forbidden to preach. He was one of the ministers in Edinburgh and like Welch was opposed to bishops' rule in the Church.

24th March 1605 *Mr Welch present*

Remember to summon Thomas Smal for playing at the coppi-boall in the kirk door w(i)t(h) uitheris w(i)t(h) him on the Saboth day. Given up be Andro Fergusson.

1st April 1605

Remember th(a)t intimatioun be maid publiklie the next Sabbath day th(a)t quhosever hes th(ei)r bairnis rinnand and playing in the streets or th(ei)r servants on the Saboth day at ony tyme ether morning or evining, the wyte salbe imputed to the parents or maisters quais bairnis or servands salbe fund giltie.

8th April 1605

Remember to summon John Maxwell and the Laird of Barr's sones th(a)t uses to play at the cartes on the Sabbath day.

15th April 1605

Compeirit Johne and George Lockhart sones of the Laird of Bar, and Johne Maxwell accusit of profaning the Saboth in the playing at vaine games, they confessit th(e)roff and promest to forbeir in tyme coming and satisfied befor the session.

22nd April 1605

The q(ui)lk day compeirit Jonet Hunter accusit as ane verie vitious woman and common sklanderer quha also in face of session threatened her guidman Robert Rankin, Ordanit to stand in hir linning schiettis at the cors (*Cross*) foure market dayis and to begin on Friday next the XXVI of Aprile. As also to stand at the kirk dor certain dayis upon the Sabbath and w(i)t(h)in the kirk in place of publik repentance and this forme to continue ay and quhill th(e)r(e) appeir certain signes of her repentance.

1st July 1605 *Mr Welch absent as he had left Ayr to attend the adjourned meeting of the General Assembly at Aberdeen on July 2nd.*

15th July 1605 *Mr Welch present*

29th July 1605

Mr Welch absent

Compeirit William Nesbit and Mareoun Adam confessit th(ei)r sin of fornicatioun, gave in th(ei)r bands of mariage is ordaint to mak th(ei)r repentance and to pay th(ei)r penaltie viz the woman X s. and to stand in the pillar ane dav and befor the pulpit on the day of th(ei)r mariage and the man to pay xx s. and to purge his offence on the day of th(ei)r mariage.

Ordanis to proclame out the pulpit th(a)t everie man continue paying the contributiouns to the pure until the minister his hame coming.

On the 23rd July Welch had been summoned to Edinburgh to stand trial before the Privy Council. He never again returned to Ayr. He was first placed in ward in Edinburgh Castle, then imprisoned in Blackness Castle on the Forth, and later was exiled to France. For Welch there was to be no "hame coming".
