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# Thomas Smeaton

## A 'grait light' of the Kirk of Scotland

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‘**T**hat was a dark and heavie wintar to the Kirk of Scotland, eclipsed and bereft of thrie grait lights!’<sup>1</sup> So wrote James Melville (1556–1614), nephew of Andrew Melville (1545–1622), who was so influential in the development of the Reformed Church in Scotland after the death of John Knox in 1572. Among others he was referring to Thomas Smeton, or Smeaton.<sup>2</sup> But who was Thomas Smeaton, that upon his passing he should be ‘bereft’ to the Kirk in Scotland?

Some men and movements in Scottish history are well known and well documented, others less so. Thomas Smeaton was doubtless one of the latter. Nevertheless, even those who may appear to be ‘lesser lights’ may deserve to be remembered by succeeding generations as those who had served their own generation by the will of God (Acts 13:36) and left a clear example of faithfulness to Christ and His gospel. Thomas Smeaton was surely one of those. Not now so widely known as John Knox and Andrew Melville, yet his life is full of interest as a force for spiritual good among the phalanx of the early Scottish Reformers.

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<sup>1</sup> *The Autobiography and Diary of Mr James Melvill* (Wodrow Society, Edinburgh, 1842), p. 139 (hereafter cited as Melvill). The other two men mentioned by Melville were Alexander Arbuthnot (1538–1583), and William Clark. Arbuthnot was a minister in the Kirk and subsequently Principal of King’s College, Aberdeen (1569–1583). William Clark was a predecessor of Melville’s as minister of Anstruther in Fife. See David Hay Fleming, *Guide to the East Neuk of Fife* (Cupar, 1886).

<sup>2</sup> The names are interchangeable. In this article we use the more modern ‘Smeaton’, but when the context of citations demands it, the older spelling, ‘Smeton’, will be used. The same applies to the old English (or Scottish) text, which will be given in quotations according to the original, but with the inclusion in square brackets of modern English usage, where it is thought particularly needful.

In this article we shall look at Smeaton's life and legacy, notwithstanding scanty resources and the fact that the medium of his writings was Latin. One of the few literary references to Smeaton is found in Professor H. M. B. Reid's *The Divinity Principals of the University of Glasgow, 1545–1645*. In this volume, Reid wrote of Smeaton: "There was a certain romance about Smeaton, for he had clung to the ancient Church long after others of his time were entirely outside her pale."<sup>3</sup> All the Reformers came from a background in the 'ancient Church'. The unusual feature of Smeaton's experience lies in the fact that his struggles with the distinctive dogmas of Roman Catholicism occurred after the first phase of the Reformation movement in Scotland, which culminated in the Protestant ascendancy of 1560 and the years that followed. First of all, though, we consider his birth and background.

### **I. Birth, background, and education (1536–1560)**

Thomas Smeaton, was born in Gask, near Perth, in 1536. Brought up in Perth, 'nothing satisfactory seems to be known of his parentage.'<sup>4</sup> It appears that he attended Perth Grammar School. At any rate he must have had a good education, not least given the thorough knowledge of Latin that he displayed subsequently.<sup>5</sup> He went on to St Salvator's College, St Andrews, in 1553, completing his studies there in 1556 and being appointed one of the Regents of the College.<sup>6</sup> When the Reformation changed the religious landscape in Scotland in 1560, it appears that, although feeling drawn to the Protestant, Reformation tenets, he was not entirely convinced at that point. In the event, he departed these shores for France, most likely to discuss the issues with convinced Romanists, not least zealous Jesuits.<sup>7</sup> That was in 1560. James Melville (1556–1614), nephew of one of the leading Reformers, Andrew Melville (1545–1622), mentions in his *Diary* that at the Reformation in Scotland Smeaton was 'put out from the Auld College of St Androis, past [passed] to France, where in Paris he thought mikle

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<sup>3</sup> H. M. B. Reid, *The Divinity Principals of the University of Glasgow, 1545–1645* (Glasgow, 1917), p. 83 (hereafter Reid).

<sup>4</sup> Robert Chalmers and Rev. Thomas Thomson (eds.), *A Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen* (4 vols, London, 1870), Vol. 3, p. 365.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> David Laing (ed.), *The Works of John Knox* (Wodrow Society, 6 vols., Edinburgh, 1846–64), Vol. 6, p. 646.

<sup>7</sup> Set up by Ignatius Loyola in 1534, the 'Society of Jesus' (or Jesuits as they became known) was formed with, among other things, an aim of stamping out the Reformation. It was a distinctly Counter-Reformation movement.

[much] upon the trew way of salvation, and be [by] dealling of diverse of his acquentance...brought to ken [know] and inclynde to the best way.’<sup>8</sup> Later, Thomas M’Crie was to state that ‘so zealous was Smeaton in favour of the old system, that he left the university [St Andrews] and his native country, and retired to France, at the triumph of the Reformation.’<sup>9</sup> Probably it was something of both: Smeaton was on the one hand urged to leave St Andrews (‘put out’) and he went voluntarily to sort out his views of the true way of salvation (simply left St Andrews). At any rate this latter was something he was eager to do in retiring to France. In the event he did come to terms with the issues involved in the Protestant Reformation. The means by which these issues were resolved are interestingly told by James Melville in his *Diary*, in the details of which he is followed by Thomas M’Crie in his biography of James’s uncle, Andrew Melville, in which Thomas Smeaton receives honourable mention. But how did he come to embrace the Reformation tenets?

## **II. Smeaton’s adoption of Reformation principles (1560–1577)**

In his *Diary*, James Melville speaks of the ‘wonderfull guidnes [goodness] and providence of God towards his Kirk in this realme’ that ‘God plucked out from amangst the Jesuits a wadge of their awin [own] timber, wherwith to rent and cross thair deceaits [deceits].’<sup>10</sup> Melville speaks about Smeaton’s recounting to him the story of the working of God with him bringing him to commitment to the Reformed faith.<sup>11</sup>

Smeaton’s continental excursion was crucial in his spiritual pilgrimage. In all it must have covered around twelve years. It appears that Smeaton ‘continued for some time as an eager, though candid, champion of the Roman Catholic faith.’<sup>12</sup> According to one historian, Smeaton ‘taught humanity in the university of Paris, and afterwards in the college of Clermont, with great applause.’<sup>13</sup> Whilst in Paris he also met up with Andrew Melville and other Reformed men, such as Thomas Maitland and

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<sup>8</sup> Melvill, p. 73.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas M’Crie, *The Life of Andrew Melville* (2 vols., Edinburgh, 1819), Vol. 1, p. 118 (hereafter M’Crie, *Melville*).

<sup>10</sup> Melvill, p. 72.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 72-75.

<sup>12</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 118.

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Dempster, *Historia Ecclesiastica Gentis Scotorum* (Bannatyne Club, 2 vols. Edinburgh, 1829), Vol. 2, p. 586 (cited in *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*, Vol. 3, p. 366). See also M’Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 118.

Gilbert Moncrieff. As a result, ‘disagreeable doubts arose in his mind as to the religion in which he had been educated.’<sup>14</sup> But he was even then not entirely persuaded, and attached himself to the Jesuits, the most zealous and able defenders of the Roman Church and dogmas. After probation with them, he still had his doubts and never submitted to the Jesuit vows. His travels took him to Rome, where he spent eighteen months under Jesuits there. At one point he passed through Geneva and once again conferred with Andrew Melville, though he was not yet able at that point to commit himself to the Reformation doctrine and practice.

In Rome, Thomas Smeaton’s reaction to visiting the prisons of Inquisition apparently excited suspicions of a faltering commitment on Smeaton’s part to the Roman Catholic Church, and he was packed off to Paris. On his way he passed through Lorain [Lorraine, region of northeastern France] where, amidst some ill-health, ‘he faught a maist strang and fearfull battell in his conscience; bot God at last prevealing, he determines to schaw him selff; abandon that damnable societie, and utter in plean profession the treuthe of God, and his enemies falsehods, hypocrasie, and craft.’<sup>15</sup> When he returned to Paris after the brief spell in Lorain, he revealed his changed mind to a close friend, Edmund Hay, a Scotsman and one still a committed Roman Catholic and Jesuit.

Hay was naturally grieved by Smeaton’s new-found attachment to the Reformed faith. Their differences, however, did not affect their friendship, and Hay eventually encouraged his friend with four-fold advice: (1) to return home; (2) to marry a wife; (3) to read the Church Fathers (‘Doctors of the kirk’); and (strange as it may sound) (4) not give ear to the ministers!<sup>16</sup> No doubt he meant by this that he was not just to believe all the ministers had to say. Initially, Smeaton neglected the first point of Hay’s advice. He delayed returning home, as a result of which his life was in peril, and he only just evaded death by taking safe haven in the house of the English Ambassador, Sir Francis Walsingham (c.1532–1590), during the shameful St Bartholomew’s Day massacre of 24<sup>th</sup> August 1572. As a result of what was triggered on that day, an estimated 3,000 French Protestants (mostly Huguenots) were killed in Paris, and as many as 70,000 in all of France.

In the event, Thomas Smeaton was, subsequently – and safely – to accompany Walsingham to London. For a time, he was a schoolmaster in Colchester, Essex, but he eventually returned to Scotland in 1577. Of his

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<sup>14</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 118.

<sup>15</sup> Melvill, p. 75.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 73; M’Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 119.

return to his homeland, James Melville was to say of Smeaton that, ‘This year, in the simmer, God brought ham [home] Mr Thomas Smeton, a man of singular giftes of learning and godliness, a grait benefit to his Kirk, and specill blessing of my guid God, for me in particular.’<sup>17</sup> James Melville was also to say that, ‘At his coming in Scotland, he was gladlie content to be in companie with my uncle, Mr Andro [Andrew Melville].’<sup>18</sup>

In relation to Hay’s advice that Smeaton should ‘marie a wyff’, James Melville, in his *Diary* for 1578, speaks of ‘taking occasion of Mr Thomas Smetone’s companie,...I past [passed] with him to Edinbruche [Edinburgh] to fetche ham his wyff.’<sup>19</sup>

### III. Ministry at Paisley and Glasgow University

Shortly after Thomas Smeaton returned to Scotland in 1577, he became the minister of the congregation in Paisley. The following year, ‘to avail themselves as far as possible of his services, the University of Glasgow, in 1578, chose Smeton Dean of Faculty.’<sup>20</sup> He thus became a colleague of Andrew Melville until the latter was appointed Principal of St Mary’s College, St Andrews, in 1580. Thomas Smeaton was to follow his mentor as Divinity Principal at Glasgow University, from the beginning of 1581.

Thomas Smeaton was elected Moderator of the General Assembly of the Kirk in 1579. In relation of the Assemblies, James Melville made an interesting comment about Smeaton’s attitudes to some of the goings on in Assemblies: ‘Mr Thomas was verie wacryff [wakeful, taking little sleep] and peanfull [pains-taking]. And skarslie tuk tyme to refresche nature. I haiff sein him oft find fault with lang denners and suppers at Generall Assemblies; and when uthers wer thairat he wald abstain, and be about the penning of things, (wherin he excellit, bathe in langage and form of letter,) and yit was nocht rustic nor auster, bot sweit and affable in companie, with a modest and naive [lively, natural] verie frugall in fude and reyment, and walked maist in fut...’<sup>21</sup>

### IV. Smeaton’s written works

Shortly after Thomas Smeaton returned to Scotland and was settled as minister in the Church in Paisley, Andrew Melville placed in his hands

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<sup>17</sup> Melvill, p. 61.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 75.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 69.

<sup>20</sup> *Acta Univ. Glas.*, as cited in M’Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 120.

<sup>21</sup> Melvill, p. 75.

a Latin treatise by one Archibald Hamilton.<sup>22</sup> The title of the treatise was *De Confusione Calvinianæ Sectæ apud Scotos* (Of the Confusion of the Calvinian Sect among the Scots), published in Paris in 1577. It has been described as a ‘vehement assault on Calvinism’ by one who had become an apostate from the Reformed cause.<sup>23</sup> No doubt it was put into Thomas Smeaton’s hands to rebut Hamilton’s work because, as M’Crie observed: ‘He was well acquainted with the writings of the ancient, and with the mode of controversial warfare which the defenders of the church of Rome, and especially the Jesuits, had lately adopted.’<sup>24</sup> His reply to this was Smeaton’s one important work. It was published in Edinburgh in 1579. The full title of his Latin treatise is:

Ad Virulentum Archibaldi Hamiltonii Apostatæ Dialogum de Confusione Calvinianæ Sectæ; apud Scotos impie conscriptum Orthodoxa Responsio Thoma Smetonio Scoto Auctore, in qua celebris illa Quæstio de Ecclesia, de Vniversalitate, Successione, et Romani Episcopi Primatu breviter, dilucide, et accurate, tractatur: Adjecta est Vera Historia extremæ Vitæ et Obitus eximii Viri Joan: Knoxii Ecclesiæ Scoticanæ Instauratoris Fidelissimi.<sup>25</sup>

An English translation of the title, which, though wordy, effectively sets out the content, would be something like this:

To the virulent dialogue of Archibald Hamilton, the apostate, about the confusion of the Calvinian sect among the Scots, impiously written, an orthodox response by the author Thomas Smeton, the Scotsman, in which that famous question concerning the church, about the universality, succession, and the primacy of the Roman bishop is treated briefly, clearly, and accurately. Added is the true history of the extreme [i.e., the end of his] life and death of the excellent man Jn. Knox, the most faithful founder of the Scottish Church.

James Melville said that Smeaton’s response was published ‘to the grait contentment of all the godlie and lernit.’<sup>26</sup> M’Crie wrote that Smeaton’s work was executed ‘with much ability’.<sup>27</sup> M’Crie also cites Dr Edward

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<sup>22</sup> Reid, p. 86. On Archibald Hamilton, see *Dictionary of Scottish Church History and Theology* (Edinburgh, 1993), p. 388.

<sup>23</sup> Reid, p. 86.

<sup>24</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, pp. 120-121.

<sup>25</sup> Printed in Edinburgh by Johannem Rossum in 1579. It is a work of 124 pages in small quarto size.

<sup>26</sup> Melvill, p. 75.

<sup>27</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 120.

Bulkeley,<sup>28</sup> in a letter to Buchanan from Chester, 28<sup>th</sup> November 1580 (English translation of Latin): ‘I read Smythonius’ [Smeton’s] book against Hamilton the Apostate. To your Scots, now enlightened by the true knowledge of Christ and letters, I am thankful that he has such a passion for his supporter.’<sup>29</sup> Henry Reid wrote of Smeaton’s book that: ‘The book itself is a singularly able and scholarly discussion of the perennial question of the True Church and its Marks or Notes.’<sup>30</sup>

The accessibility of the work of Hamilton and the reply of Smeaton is limited as both are written in Latin and do not appear to have been translated into English. One gets a flavour of the arguments in Reid’s *Divinity Principals in the University of Glasgow*.<sup>31</sup> This constitutes the most substantial discussion of the issues raised in Hamilton’s initial work, in Smeaton’s response, and in Hamilton’s reply to Smeaton – his *Maledicam Ministrorum Scotorum Responsinem* (Malicious Reply of the Scots Ministers), published in 1581.

As indicated above, in Smeaton’s riposte to Hamilton’s castigations and criticisms of the Reformed faith in general, and the person of John Knox in particular, is a robust defence of John Knox. Included at the end of the ‘Ad Virulentum’ was ‘A True Account of the concluding part of the Life and Death of that illustrious Man, John Knox, the most faithful restorer of the Church of Scotland, drawn up by a pious and learned man, who sat by him during his sickness until his latest breath.’ The explanation and source of this part of Smeaton’s blast against Hamilton is found in the sixth volume of David Laing’s edition of *The Works of John Knox*:

The actual writer of the following narrative is not named. Calderwood quotes it as Smeton’s, but at the time of Knox’s death he had not returned to this country; and I have little hesitation in ascribing it to Mr. JAMES LAWSON, Knox’s successor as minister of Edinburgh.<sup>32</sup> But Smeton in his own work, in refuting Hamilton’s slanders, says, ‘This illustrious servant of God, JOHN KNOX, I shall clear from your feigned accusations and

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<sup>28</sup> Edward Bulkeley (1540–1621) was vicar of St Mary, Shrewsbury, 1578–82. Described as a professor of theology, he was admitted in 1580 as a burgess of Shrewsbury. He was a moderate Puritan. In 1610, he published an edition of John Foxe’s *Acts and Monuments*.

<sup>29</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 120. A footnote gives the reference, ‘Buchanani Epistolæ, p. 31. Edit. Ruddim.’ The Buchanan referred to is George Buchanan (1506–1582), on whom see *Dictionary of Scottish Church History & Theology*, pp. 106–107.

<sup>30</sup> Reid, p. 86.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 86–98.

<sup>32</sup> D. Calderwood, *History of the Kirk of Scotland* (Wodrow Society, 8 vols., Edinburgh, 1842–1849), Vol. 3. p. 238.

slanders, by the testimony of a venerable Assembly rather than by my own denial. “This pious duty, this reward of a well-spent life, all its members most cheerfully discharge to their excellent instructor in Christ Jesus. This testimony of gratitude they all owe to him, who, they know, ceased not to deserve well of all till he ceased to breathe. Released from a body exhausted in Christian warfare, and translated to a blessed rest, where he has obtained the sweet reward of his labours, he now triumphs with Christ.” But beware, sycophant, of insulting him when dead; for he has left behind him as many defenders of his reputation as there are persons who were drawn by his faithful preaching from the gulf of ignorance to the knowledge of the gospel.<sup>33</sup>

The General Assembly of April 1581 ordered the Latin work *De Formandis Concionibus* (On the formation of sermons) by Andreas Hyperius (1511–1564), ‘to be put in Scotish be their brother Mr. Thomas Smetone’. This had been rendered into English in 1577 by John Ludham, vicar of Wethersfeld, under the title, *The practis of preaching, otherwise called the Pathway to the pulpet: conteyning an excellent method how to frame diuine sermons, & to interpret the holy Scriptures according to the capacitie of the vulgar people. First written in Latin by the learned pastor of Christes Church, Andreas Hyperius: and now lately (to the profit of the same Church) Englished by John Ludham, vicar of Wethersfeld* (London: Thomas East, 1577). It may be that this translation, being brought to the attention of the Scottish Church, appealed to them as a timely book that could profitably be rendered into Scots. It does not appear, however, that it ever saw the light of day in such a format. Whether a MS of Smeaton’s was completed and available cannot now be confirmed. As Reid commented: ‘The Scots version by Smeaton would be a valuable example of the contemporary Scottish tongue.’<sup>34</sup>

## **V. Divinity Principal in the University of Glasgow (1581–1583)**

Andrew Melville was the Divinity Principal in the University of Glasgow between 1574 and the end of 1580, at which point it was proposed that he be translated to a new theological college at St Andrews. Thomas M’Crie states that ‘there was but one opinion as to the person who was best qualified for being placed at the head of the new theological college; and, accordingly, it was resolved that Melville should be translated to it.’<sup>35</sup> It

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<sup>33</sup> *Works of John Knox*, Vol. 6, p. 648.

<sup>34</sup> Reid, p. 98.

<sup>35</sup> M’Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 206.



was also resolved that Thomas Smeaton should succeed him as Principal in Glasgow in 1580. Melville's appointment was 'warmly opposed by the University of Glasgow'. Smeaton's appointment was also opposed by some who 'scrupled at the idea of taking a minister from a congregation, and appointing him to exercise the doctoral instead of the pastoral office'.<sup>36</sup> In the event, the General Assembly concurred with these translations, and also resolved that 'they might lawfully require a pastor, in certain circumstances, to desist from his office, at least for a time, and to apply himself to the teaching of youth.'<sup>37</sup> At any rate, Smeaton's appointment as Principal passed the Privy Seal on 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1581.<sup>38</sup>

There is a lack of information on Smeaton's tenure as Principal. As we read in the *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*: 'Most unfortunately the records of the university of Glasgow are almost wholly lost for the period during which this excellent man presided over it.'<sup>39</sup> Of his work it was said that, 'His duties, however, are known to have been of no light description; he was the sole professor of divinity, and had also the charge of the religious instruction of the parish of Govan. Besides the mere literary department, as it may be termed, of his duties, he had the general superintendence of the university...Almost equally little has been preserved respecting Smeton's share in the ecclesiastical transactions during the remainder of his life.'<sup>40</sup> From the same source comes this fitting commendation of Smeaton's character and work in the Glasgow University:

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid. The distinction in the offices in the Kirk was explicitly stated in the *Second Book of Discipline (SBD)*, produced in 1578 under the influence of Andrew Melville. In terms of office in the Church, the *SBD* identified four: 'There are four ordinary functions or offices in the kirk of God: the office of pastor, minister or bishop; the doctor; the presbyter or elder; and the deacon', *The Second Book of Discipline* (Edinburgh, 1980), Chapter 2, section 10, pp. 176-177. The *SBD* adds: 'These offices are ordinary, and ought to continue perpetually in the kirk, as necessary for the government and policy of the same, and no more offices ought to be received or suffered in the true kirk of God established according to his word' (Chapter 2, section 11). Though this seems to advocate a four-office view, the reality was that the 'office' of 'doctor' was essentially the same as the elder (he had to be an elder), and was seen as a teacher (but not a preacher), not least within the context of a School or University system. By the time of the Westminster Assembly's deliberations on the *Form of Presbyterian Church-Government* (1645) an 'office' of 'Teacher' or 'Doctor' is seen rather to be a species of pastor than of ruling elder.

<sup>37</sup> M'Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, pp. 206-7.

<sup>38</sup> Register of the Privy Seal, volume 47, folio 61 (M'Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, pp. 207-8). The 'Privy Seal' was the personal seal of the monarch authenticating official state documents. Last used in Scotland in 1898 (to confirm the appointment of the Rev. James Cooper to a Regius Chair at the University of Glasgow), it has, in fact, never been abolished.

<sup>39</sup> *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*, Vol. 3, p. 367.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

The habits and acquirements of Smeton must have peculiarly adapted him for the charge of a literary, and, more particularly, of a theological seminary. While the latter were unquestionably inferior to those of his predecessor in the principalship of Glasgow College, his manners were of a milder and more conciliatory character. Yet even his learning was greatly beyond that of the mass of his brethren. He wrote Latin with elegance and facility, and was a Greek and Hebrew scholar. Nor had he, like many of our travelled countrymen, neglected the study of his native tongue, in which he wrote with great propriety. His knowledge of controversial divinity, derived most probably from the circumstances attending his conversion to the Protestant faith, is represented as superior to that of almost any of his contemporaries.<sup>41</sup>

Thomas Smeaton was less than three years in the Principalship at Glasgow.

## VI. Smeaton's passing and his descendants (1583)

Smeaton was elected as Moderator of the General Assembly for the second time in May 1583. That year there was a desire on Andrew Melville's part that Smeaton should take up ministry in St Andrews (then Scotland's ecclesiastical capital). This translation was approved by the General Assembly but it was prohibited by James VI on the ground of its being 'injurious to the university'.<sup>42</sup> After a Commission of Assembly in St Andrews in October 1583, Smeaton returned to Glasgow. Soon after his return to Glasgow, we are told, he was seized with a high fever; after only eight days' illness, he 'fell asleep in Jesus' on 13<sup>th</sup> December 1583, in his 47<sup>th</sup> year.<sup>43</sup>

According to James Melville, as we have seen, Smeaton was married. In one place it is stated that his wife's forename was Elizabeth, and that they had issue: Theophilus, Andrew, and Thomas, M.A.<sup>44</sup> As to issue, there is reference to a 'Thomas Smeton made A.M. [Master of Arts] at Glasgow in 1604.' Of this Thomas Smeton,<sup>45</sup> M'Crie speculates that he 'was probably his son'.<sup>46</sup> That seems a reasonable assumption, though admittedly unverified.

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<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> M'Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, pp. 281, 473-4.

<sup>43</sup> *Biographical Dictionary of Eminent Scotsmen*, Vol. 3, p. 367; M'Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 283; Hew Scott (ed.), *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae* (2<sup>nd</sup> edn., 8 vols., Edinburgh, 1915-1950), Vol. 3, p. 410. The entry for Thomas Smeaton in the *Fasti* has: 'died 6<sup>th</sup> (or 13<sup>th</sup>) Dec, 1583'; John Durkan gives 13<sup>th</sup> December 1583 in his entry on Thomas Smeaton in *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

<sup>44</sup> Hew Scott, *Fasti*, Vol. 3, p. 410.

<sup>45</sup> This Thomas Smeaton would have been born around 1580. According to the *Fasti*, Vol. 3, p. 410, he died in 1657.

<sup>46</sup> M'Crie, *Melville*, Vol. 1, p. 283.

Of those of whom it is claimed that they are descendants of Thomas Smeaton, the Scottish reformer, there are three who are especially notable. One is the eighteenth-century engineer, John Smeaton (1724–1792), sometimes called the father of civil engineering.<sup>47</sup> He was responsible for the fourth Eddystone Lighthouse (1756–59) as well as many other outstanding engineering works, including several in Scotland.<sup>48</sup> In relation to the building of the Eddystone Lighthouse, the following is a fascinating comment on its construction:

Local granite was used for the foundations and facing, and Smeaton invented a quick drying cement, essential in the wet conditions on the rock, the formula for which is still used today. An ingenious method of securing each block of stone to its neighbour, using dovetail joints and marble dowels was employed, together with a device for lifting large blocks of stone from ships at sea to considerable heights which has never been improved upon. Using all these innovations, Smeaton's tower was completed and lit by 24 candles on 16 October 1759.<sup>49</sup>

This effectively reveals the brilliance of this great civil engineer. There were several early attempts to construct a lighthouse on the Eddystone reefs off south east Cornwall in the eighteenth century. The first three came to grief. The first two were wooden and steel structures which were soon victim of the elements. On the second of them was a rather boastful inscription: 'Blow O winds! Rise, O ocean! Break forth ye elements and try my work!' The elements did just that. It was swept away in 1703 after only five years. The third lighthouse was more substantial, but was destroyed by fire in 1755. But then there was the fourth by John Smeaton. His structure was more permanent. It was finished in 1759. Built all of stone, it had a foundation of interlocking stones, as mentioned above. Chiselled on the lower part was the inscription: 'Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it.' And on the keystone above the lantern, *Laus Deo* (praise be to God!). This lighthouse was replaced only in 1870 after the rock on which it stood developed a crack. Later the whole of Smeaton's

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<sup>47</sup> On John Smeaton, see the biography by A. W. Skempton, *John Smeaton, FRS* (London, 1981).

<sup>48</sup> Such as the construction of the Forth and Clyde Canal, which opened a waterway between the Atlantic and the North Sea; and bridges built at Perth, Banff, and Coldstream. See <https://www.britannica.com/biography/John-Smeaton>. (Accessed 9 February 2022).

<sup>49</sup> See the website of Trinity House History: <https://trinityhousehistory.wordpress.com/2014/10/16/on-this-day-in-trinity-house-history-16-october/> (accessed 15 February 2022).

lighthouse, stone by stone, was removed to Plymouth Hoe. But so firm were the foundations that they could not be moved and the ‘stump’ remained where it was.

Of other notable descendants of Thomas Smeaton, there is a nineteenth-century Scottish Presbyterian minister and theological professor, George Smeaton (1814–1889), and his son, Oliphant.<sup>50</sup> In *Fasti Ecclesiae Scoticae*, George Smeaton is said to be a ‘grand-nephew’ of John Smeaton.<sup>51</sup> As to Thomas Smeaton, the Scottish reformer, George Smeaton’s son, William Henry Oliphant Smeaton (1856–1914), a literary celebrity in his own right,<sup>52</sup> was to write that his father ‘was a direct descendant of the famous Thomas Smeaton, the Reformer’.<sup>53</sup> In the *Dictionary of National Biography*, the contribution on Thomas Smeaton states that John Smeaton was descended from him.<sup>54</sup> The contribution on John Smeaton states that ‘He was descended from Thomas Smeton, a leader of the Scottish reformation’.<sup>55</sup> This contribution acknowledges two things that connect John Smeaton with George Smeaton: one is that Oliphant Smeaton is acknowledged as supplying notes on John Smeaton.<sup>56</sup> It also states that Oliphant Smeaton possessed a model of the Eddystone Lighthouse which he subsequently donated to Trinity House.<sup>57</sup> It may be taken for granted that both of these entries – for Thomas Smeaton and John Smeaton – would have been influenced by information Oliphant Smeaton supplied. In other words, the various attributions of relationships among these Smeatons had a common

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<sup>50</sup> Ordained in the Church of Scotland in 1839, George Smeaton went into the Free Church of Scotland in 1843. He subsequently served as Professor of Divinity in its Aberdeen College (1853–1857) and afterwards was Professor of Exegetical Theology at New College, Edinburgh (1857–1889). He was the author of theological works on the Atonement and the Holy Spirit which remain in print. See John W. Keddie, *George Smeaton: Learned Theologian and Biblical Scholar* (Darlington, 2007).

<sup>51</sup> Hew Scott, *Fasti*, Vol. 5, p. 154: ‘grand-nephew of John S., the engineer’. This relationship, however, has been disputed: See <https://www.bordersancestry.co.uk/blog/archives/11-2018>. (Accessed 9 February 2022). There was, however, clearly a strong family tradition of some sort of relationship, possibly at the level of cousins.

<sup>52</sup> On Oliphant Smeaton, see the entry for him in *Who Was Who, 1897–1916* (London, 1920), p. 656.

<sup>53</sup> William Knight, *Some Nineteenth Century Scotsmen* (Edinburgh and London, 1903), p. 108.

<sup>54</sup> Entry for Thomas Smeton (Smeaton) in *Dictionary of National Biography*.

<sup>55</sup> Entry for John Smeaton in *Dictionary of National Biography*. The entries for Thomas Smeaton and John Smeaton were from different contributors.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.* For Trinity House, which serves as a General Lighthouse Authority, see <https://www.trinityhouse.co.uk>. (Accessed 9 February 2022).

source. However, given Oliphant Smeaton's clear interest in establishing links between these Smeatons, it seems evident that, to his satisfaction at least, John Smeaton and George Smeaton (and himself) were directly related to the Reformer Thomas Smeaton, and were therefore related to one another, however difficult it may be now to establish the exact relationship.

## 7. In conclusion

In his relatively brief life, Thomas Smeaton passed through tumultuous times in the religious movements of the day. That was true for him personally and for Church and nation. He left his mark as someone who struggled to come through a background thoroughly steeped in the old ancient religion of the Roman Catholic Church and its distinctive dogmas and errors. That he did so was testimony no doubt to the *solī gratia* principle of the Reformation tenets he came to embrace: the grace of God experienced in his life.

The fact that he is so little known doubtless relates on the one hand to temperament, as one overshadowed by Andrew Melville, and, on the other hand, to his short life, and to the fact that his written works, few as they were, were written in Latin, the *lingua franca* of much of ecclesiastical writing of the time. Only brief extracts have been translated into English, such as the account of the last words of John Knox. It is good, however, to know of the life and times of those who contributed to the moulding of the religious, Reformed Christianity in the nation at the time of the Reformation and beyond.

The affection and admiration of Andrew Melville for Thomas Smeaton (and Alexander Arbuthnot, Principal of King's College, Aberdeen, who also passed away in 1583) is clear from an epitaph written by Melville at the time:

Scarce for Arbuthnot cease our tears to flow,  
 Scarcely with funeral rites we laid him low,  
 When close a second death accents our moan,  
 One great star quenched, a greater still is gone!  
 Arbuthnot from the north its night dispelled,  
 But Glasgow's star the midmost heaven held.  
 Thus is our darkness overwhelming quite,  
 For night and day have both been robbed of light.  
 Give back the light, Lord! or Thyself descend,  
 Thou Light of men! Thus night for us shall end!<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Reid, p. 102. This epitaph was originally written in Latin, of which the above is an English translation in Reid's book.

Short though his life was, Thomas Smeton, or Smeaton, should be remembered as one of the prominent forefathers of our Reformed and Presbyterian heritage. He served his own generation by the will of God, and, we believe, died in lively hope of the life everlasting.