

THE COMMUNION TOKENS OF ROTHESAY PARISH CHURCH.

By Rev. JAMES HAY HAMILTON, B.D.

[Read 18th January, 1938.]

In the space of these brief notes I can do no more than give the barest possible explanation of these exhibits.

In Rothesay, up till about 60 years ago, Communion tokens would be familiar and, indeed, precious objects. The purpose for which they were used will be well-known to you; they were the means of admission to the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. Those who wished to come to the Lord's Table had to get a ticket or token from the Kirk Session before they were allowed to do so. The obtaining of them was no mere formality; intending communicants were examined by the minister and session on the fundamentals of the faith, and, of course, had to be able to show a sound knowledge of them and also an upright and virtuous manner of life. Any who could not answer satisfactorily, or who were under the discipline of the Kirk Session, were refused tokens.

In a minute of the Rothesay Kirk Session, dated June 12th, 1718, we read:—

"The minister did resume to the Session the design of this meeting, namely to consult together who in the parish were to be admitted to the Lord's Table: and after considerable time was spent in discoursing together seriously of that affair, and the judgment of all the members of the Session being had of the several persons in their respective quarters who they thought might be admitted

to that ordinance, it was agreed that according to the list now condescended on, the minister should give tokens to them."

This minute shows the Rothesay Kirk Session at its task of deciding who are to receive tokens.

The means of distribution varied at different periods. Sometimes the elders distributed the tokens to the people of their "quarters" or districts, much as elders do nowadays with the modern equivalent, the Communion card. Sometimes it was done after the Preparatory Service, or Sacramental Fast; sometimes after one of the ordinary week-day services during the week before the Communion.

According to a Session minute, however, of June 14th, 1738, we find evidence that at this later period the people had to apply for their tokens, after notice had been given by the Session.

"The Session on the minister's proposing, God willing, to administer the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper agree with him to have it on July 23d next. He exhorted all to a suitable preparation, and by the book of examinable persons in the parish gave his opinion with the Session anent who were qualified for the Sacrament, and according determin'd of all who were to get tokens (on asking them) and be admitted thereto . . ."

Of the precise method of application in this instance, and of how and when the distribution was thereafter made, we have no recorded information.

Now as to the tokens themselves. They all may be described as small discs of metal, made of lead or of an alloy of lead and tin, and marked with initials or some other device to distinguish them from the tokens used by other parishes. The date of their adoption here in Rothesay is unknown, and it is not safe to conclude that it must necessarily be sometime after

the Reformation, for some competent authorities maintain that they were in use in the pre-Reformation Roman Church. Whatever the date of their introduction, we know through the minute noted above, that they were certainly in use in Rothesay in 1718. In the Museum we have a token which bears the date 1703, and these are the ones which Mr Dugald Stewart and his elders would distribute. It is about half-an-inch square, with a narrow ornamental border; on it are inscribed the letters RO, and above the letter the date of its making—1703. It is certain that tokens were in use before that date, but the earlier tokens have vanished.

We gather from this that an early means of distinguishing the tokens of one parish from another was by means of initial or key letters in the name. Rothesay had RO in its early tokens; Kingarth, as you will see from the specimens in the Museum, had K, or later KG. The parish of Rothiemay, a word very similar to "Rothesay," had ROY, and so on.

I have here a specimen of the next issue of Rothesay tokens; no Kirk Session record has any reference to them, but they were probably made about 1740. It is the same size as the previous issue—roughly half-an-inch square; but this specimen has been badly cut or punched, and it is irregular in shape. It has a circular centre panel, within which, in clear but rather crude letters, is cut RO. There is an ornamental border round the centre panel, consisting of lines radiating to the corners. This is a good example of a middle-period Communion Token.

The next issue was 1770. This token was slightly bigger, being upright oblong in shape, and, as we might expect, a little better formed. It is plain and unornamented, with the words "ROTHSAY 1770" cut on a plain circular band in the middle. We thus see the name of the parish now appearing in full. In a minute

of Rothesay Kirk Session of 16th May, 1770, we find this item included in the treasurer's accounts:—

To five hundred and twenty new tokens got	
by order of the Session, at 5shs p. hund.	£1 5 10
To the stamp made for stamping the tokens	
purchased by the Session's order, ...	0 10 0

This gives us a glimpse into the cost and method of manufacture of tokens during this period. This token is also to be seen in the Museum case.

The Lord's Supper was and is a religious and commemorative Sacrament, and it is surprising that no reference to the Sacrament itself should be indicated on the Communion tokens until a fairly advanced date. This trend was slow in coming to Rothesay. In a Session minute of 20th January, 1840, we find this, *inter alia*:—

"The Session resolve to procure a new die and new tokens before next Communion, and entrust the procuring of them to the Minister and Treasurer."

You may see this token in the Museum. It is of no intrinsic value, but it is interesting historically. It is oblong, about 1 inch long and $\frac{3}{4}$ inch broad, and it is made of an alloy in which there is a greater quantity of tin than before, which gives a clearer impression. It is stamped on both sides. On the obverse is an elliptical band within which is printed "Church of Rothesay." In the centre of the ellipse is the date, 1840. The reverse contains within an elliptical border the inscription: "1 Cor. xi., 24: This do in remembrance of Me." This is the first Rothesay token on which the connection between the Sacrament and the token which is the badge of admission to it, is explicitly indicated.

The last exhibit, which is of the last issue of Rothesay Parish Church Communion tokens, was made

in 1860, and it shows a very modern-looking article. It is made of a bright alloy, containing a good deal of nickel or tin; it is cleanly cut, and well ornamented. It is a little smaller than the 1840 issue. On the obverse is printed in bold letters "Parish Church of Rothesay;" on the reverse the same inscription as before:—"This do in remembrance of me; 1 Cor. xi., 24." These tokens, along with the remainder of the 1840 ones, were in use in Rothesay up till about 60 years ago.

In the course of my peregrinations in the Museum, I have noticed that the tokens of the Parish Church are rather inadequately represented. In view of its long association with the town, this is a notable lack. While there is an almost complete set of its tokens to be seen in the vestibule of the Church, it is but fitting that there should also be a set here in the Museum. Accordingly, I shall be honoured if these exhibits are accepted to supplement the ones already possessed, thereby providing for exhibition here a complete set of the existing tokens of Rothesay Parish Church.

ROTHESAY FROM THE TIME OF THE COMMONWEALTH TO THE REVOLUTION.

By R. D. WHYTE.

[Read 1st March, 1938.]

While we in Rothesay are proud to possess the Charters of 1400-1 and 1584, it is unfortunate that the early local records have been lost, these having been removed by Cromwell's troops. The Town Council records go back to 1654, the Kirk Session records to 1658. The Sheriff Court books begin in 1673, those of the Commissioners of Supply in 1678, while those of the Justices of the Peace do not begin till 1707. It is particularly unfortunate that we have no records to show what part the burgesses played in the great struggle which started with the signing of the National Covenant in 1638. We know that the Covenant was signed on behalf of the burgesses by Matthew Spens, Notary Public, Bailie, Commissioner to the Convention of Burgh and to Parliament,¹ that, Sir James Stewart, the Sheriff of Bute, at the beginning of the Civil War, garrisoned the Castle, and at his own expense furnished a body of soldiers from his estate to the King, though apparently the Castle was taken and held for a time by the Covenanters,² that men from Rothesay fought with the Covenanting Army at Inverlochy and that Alisdair Macdonald, having with half his Irish and all his Highlanders, left Montrose after the Battle of Kilsyth with the view of conducting a campaign in Argyle which should root the Campbells out of the Peninsula,³ carried his plundering

1. Hewison's Bute in the Olden Time. II.—326. and for further particulars concerning Matthew Spens see Transactions of this Society. III. p. 45.

2. Blain's History, p. 297.

3. Buchan—"Montrose."