

# Fred's Thread

**June 2009**

## **PORTLETHEN-----SWEDEN-----POLAND-----PORTLETHEN**

The Great Seal of Scotland informs us that on the 4<sup>th</sup> of February 1625, James VI of Scotland conceded to Robert Buchane and his son William, the lands and Barony of Portlethen with the fishing rights in the adjacent sea at Balquharne and Clashfarquhar. Robert Buchane was already a Burgess of Aberdeen and during the 1620's, there are records of him trading from Aberdeen to Ross and Cromarty Leith London and Bordeaux exporting salmon, timber, meal beer etc.

Around this time he was commissioned by the Council of Scotland to survey Scottish rivers for the presence of Pearl producing shellfish. He discovered 37 rivers capable of providing fresh water pearls. This information he passed to the Scottish Parliament who allocated the fisheries to the local nobility during the meeting of the estates in 1641.

The Bishops wars of 1639 – 1640 had a calamitous effect on the business ventures of Robert Buchane, who, as an ardent royalist became a target of the Covenanters led by William Keith Earl Marischall of Scotland. (Spalding writes, "many tounes men heiring of Marschillus cuming to the toun, takis the flight, amongst whome Robert Buchane of Portlethen with his second sone, efter his houses and ground were plunderit, takis the sea, so ilk man shiftit for him self, pairt by sea, pairt by land as they thocht best") Robert Buchane departed Aberdeen April 1640 prior to the order being given by William Keith to strip ships of their masts, in order to keep them in port.

Robert Buchane arrived in Sweden in 1642 where he applied to the Swedish Council of State for a Pearl Fishing license. He also requested and was given permission to train a few local men in the secretive art of pearl fishing. By 1643 he had identified 25 Pearl producing river in Western Sweden. He had a very combative nature and was not averse to arguing his corner with Axel Oxenstierna Lord Chancellor of Sweden and in a more condescending manner with Queen Christina of Sweden. Robert Buchane claimed to have introduced broom (Genista) to Sweden, also tapestry makers from Antwerp and weavers from Tournia. His biggest problem, unlike many other Scotsmen in power in Sweden was his inability to speak Latin or Swedish. This left him at the mercy of interpreters, usually in the pay of rivals.

During his time in exile, the lands and barony of Portlethen had been handed over to Mr David Herit (Herriot) by Oliver Cromwell but George Buchane (son of Robert) an eminent business man in Poland, came back and successfully appealed to Aberdeen Baillies for the return of his Fathers lands and property.

PS In 1633 Robert Buchane built the first Church in Portlethen.

He also built Portlethen House, the site now occupied by the Mains of Portlethen

For the remaining 99% of this story see Northern Studies Vol. 40- article by Steve Murdoch reader in Scottish History at the University of St. Andrews.

For more information, please visit **Portlethen Library**  
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