

Report of Dunse History Society Lecture 31st January 2024

The Dunse History Society much enjoyed a talk entitled 'The Funeral and Heraldry of Mary Queen of Scots' presented by John Malden on 31 January. Mary Queen of Scots was born 1542 at Linlithgow. It had been the intention of Henry VIII that she should marry his son Edward and join the two crowns. However, she had been sent to France when 6 years old and subsequently married Francois, the Dauphin. This made her a double crowned sovereign and the arms of both Scotland and France were put on her coat of arms. Francois died soon after the wedding and Mary returned to Scotland in 1561 as Queen of Scots and Dowager Queen of France to Seton Palace. The Setons were great supporters. Mary married Lord Darnley and gave birth to James. Darnley was later murdered. She then married the Earl of Bothwell who got Mary to abdicate and sent her to prison in Lochleven Castle. Mary escaped to England where she thought she would be safe with Queen Elizabeth (Mary and Elizabeth never met). However, she was sent to Fotheringhay Castle where she spent 18 years as a prisoner with her 20 courtiers. Elizabeth decided Mary should be tried for treason and she was found guilty and sentenced to death and executed wearing the red of the martyr in the Great Hall in 1587. Her severed head was displayed as proof. All her belongings were his mother's reputation but the French kept people in England to report on events. Mary's body together with the head was poorly embalmed and plactaken and destroyed to prevent her becoming a martyr. As a matter of course a death mask was taken and a portrait painted from it. James VI was then 20. He did little to promote it in lead where it soon began decomposing with a putrid smell (in fact it rotted for 4 months before burial). Elizabeth agreed to a semi-state funeral but in Peterborough, well away from London. Mary would be interred on the south aisle of the cathedral opposite Catherine of Aragon. The cortege reached Peterborough on the third day, all being done at high speed to avoid publicity and Mary's martyrdom. Every mourner was given black cloth to wear with the more important people having more. An effigy was placed on top of coffin together with the tabard of the Herald as a sign of royalty. On arrival overnight the smell of the decomposing Mary was so great that the body was quickly put into the ground. The next morning the 300 mourners walked with the funeral procession from the Abbot's House to the cathedral. The ceremony was a set procedure and as the body was already in the ground it was in effect going through the motions. As an indication of the planned secrecy the French produced 3 reports of the funeral, the English only 2. The Chief Mourner at the head of the cortege was the Countess of Bedford, followed by the holders of 4 white wands to be broken and thrown into the grave. This was followed by the bier with the coat of arms painted on the silk cover. The Queen was given an Anglican service upon which the Scots Heralds walked out. (The Scots were generally uncertain about the future of their country). Some funeral items remained attached to the cathedral walls and so memories of the funeral did remain. James I/VI ordered Fotheringhay Castle to be flattened and his mother's body brought to Westminster Abbey in 1612. Mary's heart was buried in a secret place at Fotheringhay and subsequently thistles have been planted at the site. A portrait was painted from a secreted miniature kept by 2 lady supporters which having been sent first to Douai in France during the French Revolution was taken to Blairs College Aberdeen in 1833.