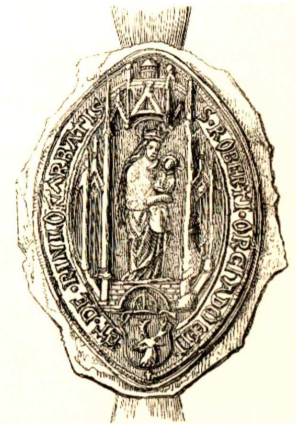


# Robertus Reid (c.1498-1558)

Robert Reid was Abbot of Kinloss, Commendator-prior of Beaulieu and Bishop of Orkney —an example of the pluralism which was accepted at the time and which only demonstrates one of the reasons why the 1560 Religious Reformation took place. He was one of the greatest bishops of the ancient Diocese of Orkney and his legacy was the founding of the University of Edinburgh. His life ended abruptly in his early 60s in mysterious circumstances, the public believing that he had been killed for political reasons .

Robert Reid was born at Aikenhead in Clackmannan Parish, son of John Reid who was killed at the Battle of Flodden and of Elizabeth Shanwell, sister of John, the Abbot of Cupar. Young Reid was educated under the watchful eye of his uncle, Robert Shanwell who was Vicar of Kirkcaldy. He matriculated at St Salvatore's College at St Andrews' University in 1511, and having studied for four years under the then principal, Hugh Spens, he graduated as Master of Arts in 1515. He travelled to France completing his studies at the University of Paris where he studied Theology and Civil and Canon Law. On his return to Scotland, he was appointed sub-dean of Elgin Cathedral. Adam Elder, a monk at the Cistercian Abbey of Kinloss described Robert Reid as being one of the most eloquent persons of his age, either on the legal bench or in the pulpit. He knew Canon Law better than anyone else in the Church. Elder, who was tutor to one of the bishop's nephews at the University of Paris, confides that Reid was charitable beyond belief drawing comparisons to St Bernard. Amongst his munificent charity he bequeathed a large sum of money to found a college in Edinburgh, the precursor of the now world-famous University. He sent numerous young relatives and friend's sons to continental universities, and to the universities of Aberdeen, Glasgow and St Andrews. But perhaps the most unbelievable of Elder's revelations is the fact that in his early days, Reid encouraged a number of 'specialists' in their field to follow him to Scotland and beautify the various buildings he was connected with and educate the resident religious brothers. It was said that he collected official incomes from multifarious sources to spend on his schemes. Perhaps Reid's greatest successes were the commissioned altarpieces for the abbey church by artist Andrew Bairhum who also decorated some of the Bishop's rooms and had a new library built. He brought the scholar Ferrerius of Piedmont to educate novice monks and imported Guillaume Lubias of Dieppe to revive the horticulture of Kinloss.

Whilst Abbot of Kinloss, Reid, who was distinguished by his diplomatic ability, was sent on an envoy as the King's commissioner discussing peace with Henry VIII of England. He was also commissioned to go to France in connection with the marriage of James V of Scotland, and was also present at the marriage of the Dauphin and Mary Queen of Scots. During Reid's illustrious reign, Kinloss became one of the largest and wealthiest religious houses in Scotland and was well known to have drawn many Royal visitors, including Edward I in 1303, Edward III in 1336 and Mary Queen of Scots in 1562 on her journeys through the Highlands.



Robert Reid's Seal of Office as Bishop of Orkney and Abbot of Kinloss



interior of St Magnus Cathedral Kirkwall

says that he removed the west part of the cathedral, lengthened it and rebuilt the western gable. Then he rebuilt St Olaf's Church in Kirkwall probably on the site of a former church and constructed a large College for instructing the youth of Orkney in Grammar and Philosophy. He made extensive alterations to the ruined Bishop's Palace making it habitable for a bishop in which to live. In his rigorous drive for efficient administration Reid caused a new Constitution for the Cathedral to be written, as the original perished through damp, this document being confirmed by Queen Mary on 30th April 1545. Reid was a very good administrator and improved the quality of the Orkney Cathedral Corporation by reorganising the cathedral staff. His new acts appointed a Provost, Archdeacon, Precentor, Chancellor, Treasurer, sub-Dean and sub-Chanter, seven canons, thirteen chaplains and six choristers, particular attention being given to the musical performance of the liturgy.

Reid was nominated as a Senator of the College of Justice by King James and around the year end 1549 succeeded the Abbot of Cambuskenneth, Mylne, as President of the Court of Session.

Reid had been sent on a Embassy with five others to witness the wedding of Mary Queen of Scots and the Dauphin. On the way home a mysterious calamity hit the small group at Dieppe. Three of them were taken with a strange sickness and died, Reid amongst them on the 6 September 1558; perhaps as a result of poison administered at the behest of Catherine de Medici, whose designs on Scotland's sovereignty through marriage to James V had been resisted. In any case the incident gave a sinister meaning to the rumours that flew about, raising the suspicions of the Scots. The more likely political cause was due to his resistance to religious change in Scotland, with another commentator blaming his depression at the seemingly irreversible changes in the National Religion. His body was embalmed and interred in the Chapel dedicated to St Andrew in the Church of St James, Dieppe.



A 16<sup>th</sup> century woodcut showing the 'laying on of hands' at the consecration of a bishop

*Stuart Donald*

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