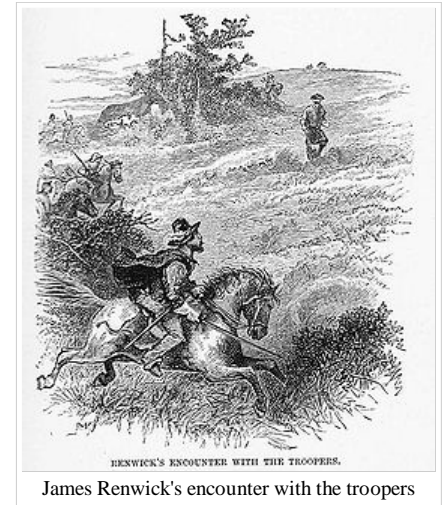


# James Renwick (Covenanter)

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**James Renwick** (15 February 1662–17 February 1688) was a Scottish minister, the last of the Covenanter martyrs.



James Renwick's encounter with the troopers

## Contents

- 1 Life
- 2 Biographers
- 3 See also
- 4 References and external links

## Life

Born in Moniaive, Nithsdale, in 1662, the young James was seen to have an affinity for the church from a very early age. Alexander Shields (and later John Howie) wrote:

"By the time he was two years of age, he was observed to be aiming at prayer, even in the cradle and about it...."<sup>[1]</sup>

Renwick's father Andrew (or in some sources, Alexander) was a weaver by trade. His mother, Elizabeth Corson, had born several children prior to James' birth, but all had died in infancy or early childhood.

In 1675, Andrew Renwick died; James went on to the University of Edinburgh, where he studied religion, in particular the Presbyterian religion of his forefathers. In 1681, he saw several Covenanters martyred in Edinburgh, including Donald Cargill. At this point Renwick fell in with the United Society, a subversive religious group; with their help he went abroad to study at Holland, Rotterdam, Groningen, and Leeuwarden. While in the Netherlands Renwick was ordained, although it was under somewhat odd circumstances as he refused to subscribe to the Dutch catechism. Upon his return to Scotland in 1683 he gave his first sermon, at Darmead, Cambusnethan, choosing passages from the book of Isaiah.

Renwick spent the next five years travelling around Scotland, giving sermons and fomenting anti-English sentiment. By July of 1684 he was being actively pursued by the king's men. In 1688, he was finally captured by the English and ordered to swear fealty to the English King, James II. He replied,

"No! I own all authority that has its prescriptions and limitations from the Word of God; but I cannot own this usurper as lawful king, seeing both by the Word of God such a one is incapable to bear rule, and also by the ancient laws of the kingdom which admit none to the Crown of Scotland until he swear to defend the Protestant Religion, which a man of his profession cannot do."<sup>[2]</sup>

Renwick was thereupon sentenced to die by hanging, which sentence was carried out on 17 February 1688, in Grassmarket Square, Edinburgh. Following his execution, Renwick's head and hands were severed and placed over the gates of the city.

*It was the 17th of February 1688 when James Renwick was martyred. Before the year was out, the Stuarts were in exile, and persecutions was closed. he died as the herald of a more gracious day. "He was of old Knox's principles," his adversaries said, when they noted his unassailable steadfastness. But we may take our farewell of him in words which were written by one who loved him dearly: "When I speak of him as a man, none more comely in features, none more prudent, none more heroic in spirit, yet none more meek, more humaned and condescending. He learned the truth and counted the cost, and so sealed it with his blood."*<sup>[3]</sup>

## Biographers

Renwick, being the last of the Covenanter martyrs, was extensively written about by many Scottish biographers, among them Alexander Shields and John Howie, as already mentioned. In 1865, Renwick's collected writings were published with an extensive biographical preface penned by Thomas Houston. Also in the mid-19th century, John Mackay Wilson published his *Tales of the Borders*, which contained a detailed narrative of Renwick's capture.

## See also

- History of Scotland
- The Killing Time

## References and external links

- ^ Reverend James Renwick (<http://www.next1000.com/family/EC/renwick.james.html>)
- ^ The Life of Mr. James Renwick ([http://www.truecovenanter.com/bio/howie\\_bios\\_renwick\\_james.html](http://www.truecovenanter.com/bio/howie_bios_renwick_james.html)) , from Howie's *Biographia Scoticana*, 1775
- ^ Smellie, Rev. Alexander. *The Men of the Covenant*. Scotland, 1903.
- *The Life of James Renwick*. 13781 at Project Gutenberg : Thomas Houston's biography of the martyr
- Wilson's Border Tales (<http://www.electricscotland.com/bordertales/vol1story145-17.htm>) : James Renwick

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