

Patrick Sanders and Anna Elder



Propped against the western wall of the northern churchyard is this small gravestone, which probably originally stood among the graves that were removed when part of the graveyard was dug away in 1823 in order to widen St Catherine's Wynd. There is no way of being 100% sure about who it commemorates, but the initials and date are a perfect fit for the children of Patrick Sanders (PS) and Anna Elder (AE).

Patrick and Anna were married in September 1656 and their eldest child, Margaret, was born in 1657. Next came John (IS) born in 1658, Robert (RS), in 1659 and then Harry (HS) in 1661. The stone was probably set up in 1662 to commemorate John, Robert and Harry. A daughter, Helen, was born in that year and is commemorated by an HS that is more faintly and less carefully inscribed, giving the impression of having been added at a later date. Helen was followed by another daughter, Elizabeth, in August 1663.

Patrick Sanders was a merchant who played a small part in the public affairs of the town and might well have risen higher if he had lived longer. At some time during the 1650s (the record is scanty for this time) he was elected to the Town Council and served on it until his death. In 1661, at the early age of 27, he was the town treasurer and an overseer of the mills and in 1663 was one of the men who inspected cloth and yarn to make sure that lime had not been used in the bleaching of them. He died at the age of 30, at some time between the birth of Elizabeth in August 1663 and April 1664, when his widow Anna paid the Kirk Session 40s for permission to place a throughstone (flat stone) on his grave. She herself re-married, John Kent a Dunfermline merchant who died in 1677.

A fatherless child was placed in the care of official guardians – a tutor (or tutrix) until the age of 14 and a curator until the age of 21. John Kent became tutor to his step-daughters and curator to Margaret but in 1678 when she was 15, Elizabeth went through the legal fiction of ‘choosing’ curators at a hearing of the bailie court. As part of the process her nearest relatives were summoned to the court. On her father’s side these were her cousins John Hutton, town clerk of South Queensferry and his brother Robert, sons of her father’s sister Janet. On her mother’s side they were her cousins Mr William Mackie, eldest son of the late John Mackie chamberlain of Dunfermline Regality and his wife Margaret Elder, and Henry Elder, a Dunfermline writer and son of her aunt Elizabeth Elder and the late Henry Elder snr, town clerk of Dunfermline. In the event, only Henry Elder attended the court and Elizabeth ‘chose’ him as her curator.

No more is heard of Elizabeth, but by 1677 her sister Margaret had been married to James Belfrage and in September of that year she brought a case in the bailie court against her stepfather John Kent, who she accused of depriving her of the benefit of a cow and calf that had been given to her in 1665 by her aunt Margaret and John Mackie her husband. Margaret’s mother reared the calf for her ‘And having come to a milk cow she did bring forth six calves, which cow and all the calves have been at several times sold and disposed on by the said Anna her mother and the said John her relict husband’. The last of the calves was now in milk and was currently in the custody of John Kent, Anna Elder now being dead. Margaret and her husband sued him for the value of the first cow and the five calves, estimated at about £130 and for possession of the current cow, worth £20. They lost the case on the grounds that the gift of the original cow and calf could not be proved and that at the time Margaret was only a child and her parents had paid for her food and clothes, inferring that the money made from the cow and calves had been spent on her maintenance.