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The blessed sword and the blessed hat were a gift offered by popes to Catholic monarchs or other recipients in recognition of their defense of Christendom. Each pair was blessed by a pope on Christmas Eve in St. Peter's Basilica in Rome. The sword was an ornate ceremonial weapon with the hilt embellished with the pope's coat of arms, and the blade with the pope's name. A similarly ornate scabbard and belt were added to the sword.

The hat was a cylinder made of red velvet with two lappets hanging down from its top. The right-hand side of the hat was decorated with a dove representing the Holy Spirit embroidered in pearls, while a shining sun symbolizing Christ was embroidered in gold work on the top.

The earliest preserved blessed sword was given by Pope Eugene IV to King John II of Castile in 1446. The latest preserved of the blessed swords was blessed in 1772 by Pope Clement XIV and presented to Francisco Ximenes de Texada, grand master of the Knights Hospitaller.

Not all recipients are known; among those whose names have been preserved, there were at least 12 emperors of the Holy Roman Empire, ten kings of France, seven kings of Poland, and six kings of Spain. Additionally, three or four blessed swords and hats were given to kings of England, two or three to kings of Scots, and three each to the kings of Hungary and Portugal. Recipients also included various princes, including heirs-apparent, archdukes, dukes, noblemen, military commanders, as well as cities and states.



The Honours of Scotland



The Honours of Scotland, also known as the Scottish regalia and the Scottish Crown Jewels, dating from the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, are the oldest set of crown jewels in the British Isles. The existing set were used for the coronation of Scottish monarchs from 1543 (Mary I) to 1651 (Charles II). Since then, they have been used to represent Royal Assent to legislation in both the Parliament of Scotland and Scottish Parliament, and have also been used at State occasions, including the first visit to Scotland as sovereign by King George IV in 1822 and the first visit to Scotland as sovereign by Queen Elizabeth in 1953.

There are three primary elements of the Honours of Scotland: the Crown, the Scepter, and the Sword of State. These three elements also appear upon the crest of the royal coat of arms of Scotland and on the Scottish version of the royal coat of arms of the United Kingdom, where the red lion of the King of Scots is depicted wearing the Crown and holding both the Sword and the Scepter.



The Crown of Scotland in its present form dates from 1540 when James V ordered the Edinburgh goldsmith John Mosman to refashion the original crown. James wore it to his consort's coronation in the same year at the abbey church of Holyrood. The circlet at the base is made from Scottish gold and is encrusted with 22 gemstones and 20 precious stones taken from the previous crown. Freshwater pearls from Scotland's rivers were also used. The crown weighs 3 lbs. 10 oz. The crown was remodeled in 1540 for James V when the velvet and ermine bonnet were added to bring it to its present form. It is not known exactly when the crown was originally made, but it can be seen in its pre-1540 form in the famous portrait of James IV of Scotland in the Book of Hours that was created for his marriage to Margaret Tudor in 1503.

The four golden arches of the Crown are ornamented with gold and red enameled oak leaves, apparently of French workmanship. At the point where the arches meet there rests an orb of gold which is enameled in blue and ornamented with gilt stars. This is surmounted by a large cross decorated in gold and black enamel with an amethyst in rectangular form, in the center. The upper and two side extremities of the cross are adorned with pearls.



The Scepter was a gift from Pope Alexander VI to King James IV in 1494, and was remodeled and lengthened in 1536. It is made of silver gilt, and is topped by a finial with polished rock (possibly Cairngorm) and a Scottish pearl. The Scepter includes several Christian symbols: stylized dolphins, symbols of the Church, appear on the head of the rod, as do images of the Virgin Mary holding a baby Christ, of Saint James the Great, and of Saint Andrew holding a saltire.



The Sword of State of Scotland was also a papal gift; Pope Julius II presented it to James IV in 1507 (see insert). The etched blade, measuring 4.5 feet in length, includes figures of Saint Peter and Saint Paul, as well as the etched name of Julius II. The silver gilt handle bears figures of oak leaves and acorns. The sword, an example of Italian craftsmanship, was damaged in 1652 whilst being hidden from Cromwell's troops, as it had to be broken in half in order to be properly concealed while it was being taken to safety. It is accompanied by a wooden scabbard which is covered with velvet and silver and hung from a woven silk and thread of gold belt.

The Honours as coronation regalia were first used together at the coronation of the nine-month-old Mary, Queen of Scots in 1543, and subsequently at the coronations of her infant son James VI (and I of England) at Stirling in 1567 and her grandson Charles I in 1633 at the Palace of Holyroodhouse.

Despite his success at the Battle of Dunbar in 1650 and his subsequent occupation of Edinburgh Castle, Oliver Cromwell (shown below) failed to stop the coronation of Charles II in 1651 at Scone (the last coronation in Scotland).



Determined to destroy the Scottish Crown Jewels, just as he had disposed of the English regalia, Cromwell pursued the Honours to Dunnottar Castle near Aberdeen. He failed. From there, they were smuggled out for safe burial until Charles II's restoration in 1660. The Honours were never again used to crown a sovereign. Until the Treaty of Union in 1707, and in the absence of a resident monarch, the regalia were taken to sittings of the Parliament in Edinburgh to signify the

Sovereign's presence and his or her consent to the passing of each Act.

After the Union, when the new United Kingdom Parliament met in London, the Honours had no ceremonial role. They were locked away in an oak chest in the Crown Room at Edinburgh Castle.



In 1818, the chest was opened in the presence of the Castle Governor and the author Walter Scott. They discovered the Honours were still there in their linen wrappings.

During the Second World War the Honours were hidden once again. They were buried in 1941 at separate locations in the Castle as a precaution against possible German invasion.

The Honours were removed once from the Castle in 1953, to be taken to a National Service of Thanksgiving at the High Kirk of St Giles in Edinburgh. During the ceremony they were formally presented to The Queen, who then returned them to their custodians.



Since 1819, the Honours have been on public display in the Crown Room at Edinburgh Castle, together with the Stewart and the Lorne Jewels. The Stone of Scone was added in 1996, after 700 years in Westminster Abbey. The last time the Honours of Scotland were used for a coronation was to crown Charles II at Scone in 1651.

In May 1999, at the first sitting of the devolved Scottish Parliament, in October 2004 at the opening of the new Scottish Parliament Building, and at subsequent opening ceremonies of each new Session of the Scottish Parliament the Crown of Scotland has been present alongside the Monarch. Due to their age and condition the Sword and the Scepter are considered too delicate to be present alongside the Crown at such occasions.

Until next month...

Sláinte