

an excellent mathematician and geometri-  
cian, whom I conceive you remember.  
He was servant to King James I. and  
Charles I. When Merchiston first pub-  
lished his logarithms, Mr. Briggs, then  
reader of the astronomy lectures at Gre-  
sham college in London, was so surprized  
with admiration of them, that he could  
have no quietness in himself, until he had  
seen that noble person whose only inven-  
tion they were: he acquaints John Marr  
therewith, who went into Scotland before  
Mr. Briggs, purposely to be there when  
these two learned persons should meet;  
Mr. Briggs appoints a certain day when to  
meet at Edinburgh, but failing thereof,  
Merchiston was fearful he would not come.  
It happened one day as John Marr and the  
Lord Napier were speaking of Mr. Briggs,  
‘Ah, John, said Merchiston, Mr. Briggs  
‘will not now come;’ at the very instant  
one knocks at the gate; John Marr hastened  
down and it proved to be Mr. Briggs to  
his great contentment. He brings Mr.  
Briggs up to my Lord’s chamber, where  
almost one quarter of an hour was spent,  
each beholding other with admiration be-  
fore one word was spoken: at last Mr.  
Briggs began. ‘My Lord I have under-  
taken this long journey purposely to see  
your person, and to know by what engine  
of wit or ingenuity you came first to think  
of this most excellent help unto astrono-  
my, viz. the logarithms; but my Lord,  
being by you sound out, I wonder nobody  
else found it out before, when now being  
known it appears so easy.’ He was nobly  
entertained by the Lord Napier, and every  
summer after that, during the Laird’s  
being alive, this venerable man Mr. Briggs  
went purposely to Scotland to visit him.

There is a passage in the life of Tycho,  
Brahe by Cassendi, which may mislead an  
inattentive reader to suppose that Napier’s  
method had been explored by Herwart at  
Hoenburgh, ‘tis in Cassendi’s Observati-  
ons on a Letter from Tycho to Herwart;  
of the last of August 1599. ‘Dixit Her-  
vatus nihil morari se solvendi eujusquam  
trianguli difficultatem; solere se enim  
multiplicationum, ac divisionum vice ad-  
ditiones solum, subtractiones 93 usurpare  
(quod ut fieri possit, docuit postmodum  
suo Logarithmorum Canone Neperus.)’  
But Herwart here alludes to his work af-  
terwards published in the year 1610, which  
solves triangles by prosthaphærens, a mode  
totally different from that of the loga-  
rithms.

Kepler dedicated his Ephemerides to  
Napier, which were published in the year  
1617; and it appears from many passages  
in his letter about this time, that he held  
Napier to be the greatest man of his age;  
in the particular department to which he

applied his abilities: and indeed, if we  
consider that Napier’s discovery was not  
like those of Kepler or of Newton, con-  
nected with any analogies or coincidences,  
which might have led him to it, but the  
fruit of unassisted reason and science, we  
shall be vindicated in placing him in one  
of the highest niches in the temple of fame.

Kepler had made many unsuccessful at-  
tempts to discover his canon for the peri-  
odic motions of the planets and hit upon  
it at last, as he himself candidly owns, on  
the 15th of May, 1618; and Newton ap-  
plied the palpable tendency of heavy bod-  
ies to the earth to the system of the uni-  
verse in general; but Napier sought out  
his admirable rules, by a slow scientific  
progress, arising from the gradual revolu-  
tion of truth.

The last literary exertion of this eminent  
person, was the publication of his *Kalendo-  
logy and Promptuary*, in the year 1617,  
which he dedicated to the Chancellor Se-  
ton, and soon after died at Merchiston, on  
the 3d of April, O. S. of the same year,  
in the 68th year of his age, and, as I sup-  
pose, in the 23d of his happy invention.

In his person, the portrait I have seen  
represent him of a grave and sweet coun-  
tenance, not unlike his eminent contem-  
porary Monsieur de Peiresc.

In his family he seems to have been un-  
commonly fortunate, for his eldest son be-  
came learned and eminent even in his fa-  
ther’s lifetime, his third a pupil of his own  
in mathematics, to him he left the care of  
publishing his posthumous works; and  
losing none of his children by death, he  
lost all his daughters by honourable or  
respectable marriages.

He was twice married. By his first  
wife, Margaret, the daughter of Sir James  
Stirling of Kier, descended of one of the  
oldest and most respectable gentleman’s  
families in Scotland, he had an only child,  
Archibald, his successor in his estates, of  
whom I shall hereafter give some account.  
By his second marriage with Agnes, the  
daughter of Sir James Chisholm, of Cron-  
bie, he had five sons: John, Laird of  
Fasler Towie; Robert, who published his  
father’s works, whom I have already  
mentioned, the ancestor of the Napiers of  
Kilcroich, in Stirlingshire; Alexander Na-  
pier of Gilters, Esq; William Napier of Ar-  
more; and Adam, of whom the Napiers of  
Blackstone and Craigmart in Stirlingshire  
are descended. His daughters were, Mar-  
garet, the wife of Sir James Stuart of  
Rossfayth; Jane, married to James Ha-  
milton, Laird of Kilbrachmont in Fife;  
Elizabeth, to William Cunningham of  
Craighalls; Agnes, to George Drummond  
of Baloch; and Helen, to the reverend  
Mr.