

= Richard Rennison =

Richard Rennison (29 October 1889 ? 5 August 1969) was the last " anvil priest " at Gretna Green , Scotland . Between 1926 and 1940 , he performed " irregular marriages " of couples over the anvil at the Old Blacksmith Shop , where the couple proclaimed that they were single and wanted to get married in front of witnesses . As " anvil priest " , Rennison generally requested a fee of £ 1 , but was known to earn up to £ 20 for a ceremony (approximately £ 3 @, @ 030 in 2012) .

The popularity of the marriages grew whilst he was performing them , to the point that a special committee was formed to look at marriage in Scotland , to which Rennison was called as a witness . By the time " irregular marriages " were outlawed in Scotland by the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1939 , Rennison had conducted 5 @, @ 147 ceremonies .

= = Personal life = =

Richard Rennison was born on 29 October 1889 in Shankhouse , Northumberland to coalminer James Rennison and his wife Ann . He spent time working as a " General Dealer " and as a photographer . He also spent time as a Methodist preacher in Tyneside . In 1923 , he married Jessie Little in Nicholforest , Cumberland . The pair moved to Gretna in 1926 , by which time Rennison was describing himself as a saddler , an ironmonger and a boot maker . When he moved to Gretna , he initially set himself up as a saddler and opened a cafe , before being taken on by Hugh Mackie , the manager of the Old Blacksmith 's Shop . Rennison died on 5 August 1969 at Haltwhistle , Northumberland .

= = The last " anvil priest " = =

Before 1940 , marriage in Scotland was based on Celtic customs , rather than Catholic religious customs . As such , marriage only required a couple to agree to be married in front of witnesses . The simplicity of these " irregular marriages " meant that they were used by couples who wished to elope , and Gretna Green became a hotspot for elopement because it was the village in Scotland nearest to the English border . The marriages were provided by the blacksmith as he was certain to be a citizen of Scotland and was easy to find at the forge .

Hugh Mackie purchased the Old Blacksmith 's Shop at Gretna Green in 1890 and resided there as " anvil priest " until 1926 when he was looking to retire and find a replacement . Mackie found Richard Rennison , who had recently joined the community , and by October 1927 , Rennison was presiding over marriages and acting as caretaker of the shop . The shop had ceased any metalwork in 1900 and was solely used for marriage ceremonies . A natural showman , Rennison soon became the resident " anvil priest " and set about marrying people . He would regularly point out that , although he was not a member of the clergy , he could marry people as he was " No Sinner " ? the reverse of his surname ! In his first ten years , he married around 2000 couples , the majority of whom were couples between 40 and 60 years old . By 1939 , the number of marriages he had performed had increased past 4000 due to the many young men who wanted to get married before starting their service in World War II .

Marriages at the blacksmith shop were inconsistent during Rennison 's time as " anvil priest " . Although they followed the same pattern , and both parties were to declare in front of witnesses they were single and that one had lived in Scotland for 21 days , there are documented cases where these requirements were not confirmed . At this point , Rennison would strike the hammer on the anvil , and the couple would be married . Rennison 's wife often acted as a witness to the couples getting married , and sometimes performed the ceremonies herself . The marriage fee was supposedly £ 1 , but Rennison would sometimes perform the ceremony for free or however much he was given ; in one case he received £ 20 (worth approximately £ 3 @, @ 030 in 2012) . If witnesses were required , they would be provided at the cost of 2s 6d each .

Rennison travelled to London in 1931 for a " sight @-@ seeing visit " , and he brought the anvil with him to protect it from theft . The anvil never left his side , despite weighing 240 pounds (110 kg) .

The Leader @-@ Post suggested that , since the cost of a new anvil was much less than the cost of transporting the old one , this was more likely to be a publicity stunt .

In 1935 , due to the increasing popularity of the Gretna Green " irregular marriages " , a special committee headed by Lord Morison was appointed to look at marriage in Scotland . Rennison gave evidence before the committee in 1936 . There he claimed that he was known as " the Gretna priest " , but did not dress like one and stated that he knew he was not one . He also confirmed that he had been removing the word " priest " from marriage certificates and telling couples that they needed to confirm their marriage with the registrar at Dumfries . The committee 's findings led to the Marriage (Scotland) Act 1939 , which outlawed the process of " irregular marriages " . When the new law came into force in 1940 , Rennison had performed 5 @, @ 147 marriages . His role then changed to a symbolic one , " blessing " marriages and acting as caretaker of the forge . He also regularly appeared at court to ensure the marriages he performed were judicially recognised .