

## II.

NOTES ON THE EARLY HISTORY OF THE SOCIETY OF ANTIQUARIES OF SCOTLAND, AND THE HOUSE IN THE COWGATE IN WHICH THE SOCIETY AND ITS LIBRARY AND MUSEUM WERE ORIGINALLY ACCOMMODATED. BY CHARLES B. BOOG WATSON, F.S.A. Scot.

When making lately some researches connected with family history, I was interested to find that the original building in which the Museum of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland was first housed had been bought from the founder of the Society by my great-great-grandfather; and thinking that others might perhaps be interested in what I may call its cradle, I made some farther investigations into its history.

But before I speak of the house itself, let me rapidly run over the early vicissitudes of the Society, particularly in connection with its temporary resting-places.

The story is given at length by Wm. Smellie and David Laing in the early volumes issued by the Society,<sup>1</sup> where may also be seen the portraits of the founder and secretaries.

In November 1780 a meeting was called by David Stewart, Earl of Buchan, in his house in St Andrew Square, scarce a stone's throw from where we now meet, at which he made his proposal to form the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, and from which we may date its existence.

After a keen fight, due to the jealousy of existing societies,<sup>2</sup> a royal charter was obtained in 1782, whereby the reigning monarch is declared to be the patron of the Society.

<sup>1</sup> Smellie's *Account of the Institution and Progress of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Part First, 1782; Part Second, 1784. 4to. Wm. Creech, Edinburgh. Part Third (1784-1830), printed in *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. iii., Appendix, 1831. Anniversary Address on the State of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland from 1831 to 1860, by David Laing, Vice-President (1861), in *Archæologia Scotica*, vol. v., 1890.

<sup>2</sup> Smellie's *Account*, Part Second (1784), pp. 1-32.

The Earl soon realised that it would be necessary for the Society to have a home of its own, particularly in order to keep safely the miscellaneous collection of antiquities, curiosities, and objects of natural history which were poured in upon it. He therefore, as president, with James Cummyng, the secretary, surveyed in January 1781 a house in the Cowgate,<sup>1</sup> and reported favourably upon it. After some bargaining with Colonel Campbell, the owner, the price of £1000 was agreed to, and the first meeting was held there in April 1781, but the formal purchase was not completed till November 1784. There are many interesting notices of the house in the early minutes of the Society—the gift, for instance, of a pair of whale's jawbones, which were set up on the upper part of the ground behind the Museum—the fitting up of the hall where the meetings were held—various repairs—attempts to escape the window tax and other public burdens—iron bars fitted to the basement windows—consideration of the purchase of blunderbuss and large pistols against housebreakers, and a contribution to the "Rogue Money Fund"—the sale at 2s. 6d. per stone of the old kitchen grate—the fitting up of a reading-room on the parlour floor, and of a special room for students, of which they took little or no advantage—the presentation by the city magistrates of lamps for the gateways—and proposals for feuing part of the ground—until, owing to ever increasing financial difficulties, the house had to be sold in 1787, and the Society found refuge for five years (1788–1793) in a rented flat in Chessel's Buildings, where James Cummyng, the secretary, died.

William Smellie, one of the original members, was appointed in his stead, and the Museum found a home for two years in the now vanished Gosford's Close. There Smellie died, and was succeeded by his son Alexander, who removed the collection to a house on the Castle hill, which we now seek in vain. In 1814 the state of the funds was so bad that this house had to be sold, and a flat was taken in 42 George Street, immediately over that occupied by the Royal Society.

<sup>1</sup> Minutes of the Society, 29th January, 3rd March, and 3rd April 1781.

A memento of this "fitting" from the Castle hill may be seen in the West Princes Street Gardens—a large granite stone, too bulky to be removed, having a cross cut on the flat face, surrounded by a runic inscription,<sup>1</sup> sent originally by a zealous member from Sweden.

In 1826 the Society secured rooms in the Royal Institution Buildings, where it remained till in 1844 it was forced, under severe pressure, relieved only by the devoted self-sacrifice of one or two members, to remove again to the top storey of the premises of the Life Assurance Company, 24 George Street, where the Royal Society is now permanently housed.

In 1859, by an arrangement with the Government, the Society returned to the Royal Institution, until in 1891 the last move was made to our present abode.

Such, rapidly given, is the history of the Society in connection with its housing.

Now, as has been mentioned, the Earl of Buchan, in order to shelter the Society, with its collection of books and specimens, acquired in 1781 a house, thus described by David Laing:<sup>2</sup> "It was situated in the Cowgate, between the Meal Market and the old Fishmarket Close, to the south of the Royal Bank, and entered from the Cowgate." The house stood by itself, with open ground on every side—a matter of great consequence in reducing the risk of fire (fig. 1).

Kincaid, in his *History of Edinburgh* (p. 119, 1787), after giving a short account of the youthful Society, adds: "The hall wherein they deposit their antiquities is in the Cowgate, upon the west side of the Fishmarket, and shown to strangers by James Cummyng, their Secretary." It is thus shown in his map of 1783.

In Peter Williamson's list of streets, issued in 1783 without any map, he gives the following on the north side of the Cowgate, going eastwards: "The Meal Market, the Kirkheuch Close, *entry to the Museum*, the

<sup>1</sup> *Arch. Scot.*, vol. ii. p. 490, with an illustration.

<sup>2</sup> *Arch. Scot.*, vol. v., part i., pp. 20-21.

Hangman's Close." This last is now closed up, and occupied by the burgh engineer for stores, etc.

The ground on which the house stood belonged at the beginning of the eighteenth century to William Brown,<sup>1</sup> burgess (I have not thought it necessary to go farther back, because the house is so clearly of later date), and must have been part of the ancient churchyard of St Giles'.

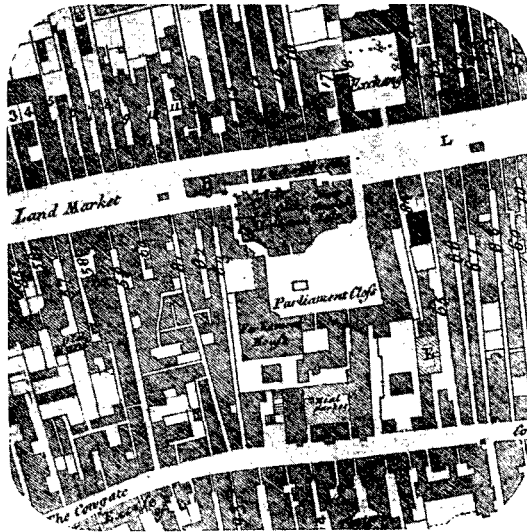


Fig. 1. Edgar's Map of Edinburgh, 1765.

In July 1714 Brown resigned the property, in equal division, in favour of his two nephews William Thomson and William Barclay, both wrights in Edinburgh.

In May 1734 Barclay disposed his half to Thomson, who, two years later (June 1736), disposed the two laigh houses to William Clark, wigmaker, and in August 1737 he disposed to William Anderson and

<sup>1</sup> Burgh Records, 3rd July 1766.

Katherine Smith his spouse in liferent, and to their heirs and assignees, the first storey above the two laigh houses, also the top storey or garret.

In July 1741 William Anderson and his spouse disposed their property to Alexander Lockhart, advocate. This property was popularly known as the Salamander Land, evidently from its having passed through some great fire, probably that of 1700, which broke out

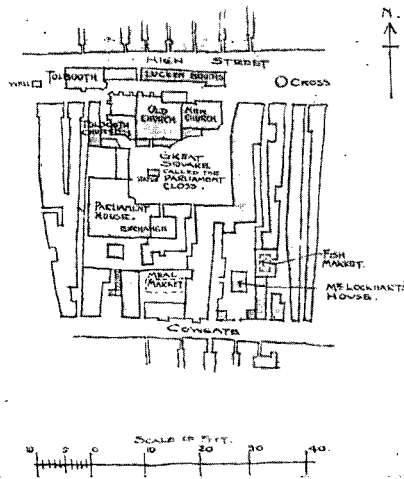


Fig. 2. Edgar's Map of Edinburgh, 1743.

in the north-east corner of the Meal Market and made its way up the Kirkheugh to the giant houses of the Parliament Close,<sup>1</sup> whose backs towered up in "Babels," as they were called, of fifteen stories high.

Their successors, which stood till the conflagration of November 1824, were only eleven stories high. We find a building at the top of the Old Fishmarket Close, facing the High Street, graced with the same name, the "Salamander Land," till it was pulled down about 1847 to make room for the extension of the police office (fig. 2).

<sup>1</sup> R. Chambers's *Remarkable Fires in Edinburgh* (1824), pp. 15-16.

In 1741 the said Wm. Clark disposed his share of the subjects to the said Alexander Lockhart, who thus became possessor of the whole united property, which is thus described :<sup>1</sup> “ The tenement of land lying in the Cowgate of Edinburgh, on the north side of the street, at the foot of the Kirkheugh, which tenement of land was commonly called the Salamander, and is surrounded by a wall on the north and east parts, the way or vennel that goes from the Cowgate to the Parliament Close, called also the Kirkheugh, on the west, and the street of the said Cowgate on the south, together with as much of the waste or vacant ground at the back of the said tenement as is in proportion to the two laigh houses and dyke thereof.”

We may note in passing that the name Kirkheugh refers sometimes to the vennel and sometimes to the ground ; similarly in the deed for Patrick Heron, we find the phrase “ a ruinous tenement or area called the Kirkheugh or Babylon.” It is a little confusing at times.

Alexander Lockhart, purchaser of the property, was one of the ablest lawyers of his time : he was raised to the bench in 1774, under the title of Lord Covington, and is mentioned with high commendation by Robert Chambers in his *Traditions of Edinburgh*, as having undertaken the defence of the Highland Jacobites who were tried in Carlisle after the “ Forty-five,” along with his friend Ferguson, afterwards Lord Pitfour. So high was the estimation in which he was held, that Lord Newton, when at the bar, wore Lockhart’s old gown till it was in tatters, and at last had a new one made with a fragment of the old neck sewed into it, whereby he could still make it his boast that he wore Covington’s gown.

Lockhart, as we gather from the Burgh Registers, proceeded to demolish the ruinous buildings, and erect for himself “ a large lodging or dwelling-house, with stable, coach-house, lofts, and other buildings.”

The house is clearly shown on Edgar’s map of 1743, where it bears the name of its builder (fig. 3).

<sup>1</sup> Burgh Records, 3rd July 1766.

I have endeavoured to reproduce its appearance and surroundings.

In Kincaid's map of 1783, which is practically the same as Edgar's of 1765, the house is marked as the "Antiquarian Society Hall."

The close to the west, which bears no name in the 1647 map by Gordon of Rothiemay, or in either of Edgar's, is clearly the Kirkheugh. Lockhart's house—the Museum—stood right in the line of St Monan's Wynd, which, by a curious error, is called St Ninian's Wynd in the deed recording the purchase of the property from the Earl of



Fig. 3. Conjectural View of Lockhart's House, 1742.

Buchan by Patrick Heron, who gave to Heron's Court the name which it still bears.

Let us glance for a moment at the maps.<sup>1</sup> In the well-known perspective map or plan executed by James Gordon, minister of Rothiemay, in 1647, and engraved more than once, we see the Kirkheugh or Kirkwynd running up northward from the Cowgate to the east end of the great kirk, St Giles', where it makes a sharp bend, and, passing the east end of the church, reaches the High Street.

A little to the east is St Monan's Wynd, clear from end to end ; still farther east is the open Fishmarket, with one entrance from the Cowgate and two from the High Street. In Edgar's map, half of the

<sup>1</sup> Wilson's *Memorials*, Appendix, ii.

Kirkheugh has been swallowed up by the Parliament Close. The north part of St Monan's Wynd appears as Steil's Close, and the southern part is blocked by Lockhart's house and grounds. The Fishmarket has been much reduced in area, the north part built over, and the remainder walled round.

Steil's Close was known later as the Royal Bank Close—the New Bank Close—and even the old Bank Close,—this last name being quite misleading, the legitimate *old* Bank Close being where Melbourne Place now is. The “back” or “Hangman's Close”<sup>1</sup> has also made its appearance on Edgar's map. (Hangman's house demolished, June 1911.)

The names of these closes vary somewhat as time goes on. The Kirkheugh or Vennel appears in several maps as the Old Post Office Close, so called from the Post Office, which was situated in “a floor in the south side of the Parliament Square, which was fitted up like a shop, and the letters were dealt across the counter like other goods.” T. B. Laing, from whose *Historical Summary of the Post Office in Scotland* I am quoting, goes on to say: “From the Parliament Square the Post Office was removed to Lord Covington's house; thence, after some years, to a house on the North Bridge.

Maitland, in his *History of Edinburgh*,<sup>2</sup> writes: “a little eastward, in the Parliament Close, was a large room full of shops, called the upper exchange. . . . In the same staircase are kept the stamp and linen manufacture offices. And a little to the eastward the Post Office is kept in the highest private building probably upon earth, the northern part whereof in the Parliament Close is seven stories in height, and the southern part regarding (*i.e.* looking towards) the Cowgate is twelve stories high.” But, as already hinted, the house which stood here before the conflagration in the year 1700 is said to have been fifteen stories in height.

<sup>1</sup> Chambers's *Traditions*, vol. ii. p. 189, says “anciently St Monan's Close.”

<sup>2</sup> Maitland's *History of Edinburgh* (1753), p. 187.



In Drummond's *Views of Old Edinburgh*, at plate xx., when speaking of the Post Office, he says: "it was first at the Old Post Office Close, east of Craig's Close, then it was in a shop in the Parliament Square; again in a self-contained house behind the courts of law, formerly

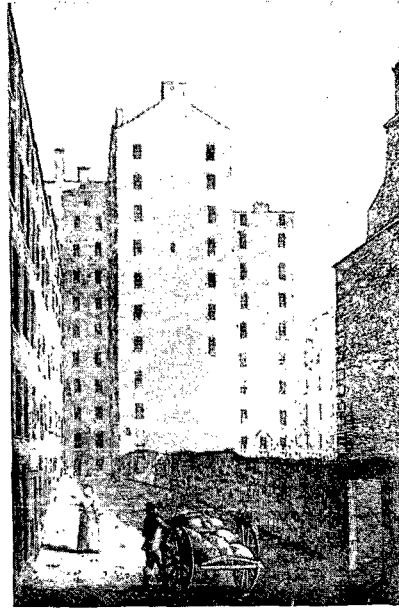


Fig. 4. View of Old Post Office Close.

occupied by Lockhart of Covington; then in the corner tenement of North Bridge Street."

So far as I can gather, the Post Office must have been in this house between the years 1778 and 1781 (figs. 4 and 5).

This Old Post Office Close, the remnant of the Kirkheugh, was the close down which Boswell led Johnson in 1773 to visit the Cowgate. The entrance from the Parliament Close must have been by a stair, similar to that yet existing at the north end of the Anchor Close. This

close is shown in the view given in Kincaid's *Traveller's Companion through the City of Edinburgh*, 1794, where one may see the low wall bounding the property on the west, and part of the west gable of Lockhart's house—the one morsel of a view of the house which I have met.

In the Ordnance Survey map of 1854 this close is called the Old Meal Market Close, but in the revised map of 1894 it has no name, nor does it bear any now, either on wall or in Post Office Directory.

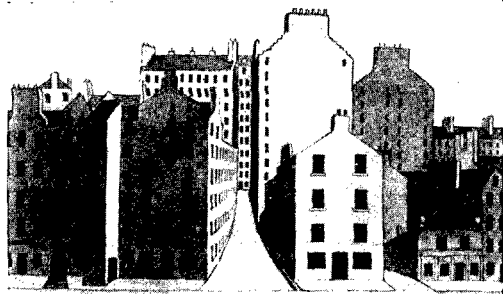


Fig. 5. Meal Market Buildings in 1816. Later building hiding "Lockhart's House."

In Wilson's *Memorials* (vol. i. p. 208) he speaks of Sir George Campbell's lodging in the Parliament Close, entering by a scale stair from the Parliament Close and the Kirkheugh.

In May 1766 Lockhart disposed the whole property to Colonel Charles Campbell, of the East India Company.

In the will of Patrick Heron, subsequent purchaser, we find mention of a new land called Campbell's Land, which Heron purchased in July 1787 from David Milne, and duly bequeathed to his daughters. Whether this is the same Campbell one cannot say, but possibly Colonel Campbell built it on the west side of the property.

In July 1784 the said Colonel Charles Campbell of Barbreck, late

of East India Company, disposed to the Right Hon. David Stewart, Earl of Buchan, "that tenement of land lying in the Cowgate of Edinburgh, on the north side of the street, at the foot of the Kirkheugh, which tenement was commonly called the Salamander, and is surrounded by a wall on the north and east parts, the way or vennel that goes from the Cowgate to the Parliament Close on the west, and the street of the said Cowgate on the south parts, with part of the waste or vacant ground at the back of the said tenement, but which tenement being demolished, as said is, there is now erected upon the ground thereof and of another ruinous tenement or area mentioned in the aforesaid disposition granted by the said Colonel Charles Campbell to the said Right Hon. David Stewart, Earl of Buchan, a large lodging or dwelling-house, with coach-house and stables, together with all right, title, etc."

As has been already mentioned, the Society occupied the house for some three years before the purchase was actually made.

Owing to the pecuniary embarrassments of the Society, the Earl, in whose name the property was acquired, was compelled to sell it. It had cost £1000, but only a part of the price had been paid; and in 1787 it was sold to Patrick Heron for £765.

It was therefore in the possession of the Earl, on behalf of the Society, for about six years.

*The name of "Lockhart's House" still clung to the building.* Patrick Heron, in his will, dated 1802, describes it as "the subjects which I acquired from the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, then passing under the name of Lockhart's House and courtyard."

In the deed in favour of Patrick Heron, after the former boundaries have been rehearsed and certain restrictions specified anent limitations of building powers, the following boundaries are given, viz., "which said dwelling-house, coach-house, stable and other offices, and area surrounding the same, are now bounded as follows, viz., on the south by the King's Road or High Street of the Cowgate, upon the west by

the said vennel called the Kirkheugh, upon the north by the south wall of the foresaid great tenement now belonging to so-and-so, and a line (where there was formerly a wall) drawn from the east corner of the said south wall of the said high land to the said close called St Ninian's Close" (error for St Monan's), "and by the said close, the west wall of the Old Fishmarket, and the west wall of the tenement of land belonging to" (name not given) "on the east side."

A glance at the map and the sketch will show the area, the western and northern boundaries of which are shown also in the view of the Old Post Office Close or Kirkheugh, where a paling seems to show the line of the former wall.

Every transfer of the property was duly vouched by staff and baston, with the delivery of earth and stone of the said tenement of land.

Patrick Heron, vintner, late of Glasgow, a cousin of Patrick Heron of Heron, in Kirkcudbrightshire, had for nineteen years occupied the famous Black Bull Inn, Argyle Street, Glasgow, from whose door the coaches started for Edinburgh.

In May 1787 he purchased from the Earl of Buchan the property whose history we are tracing, and added some buildings to make it suitable for an inn. For the woodwork he employed the notorious Deacon Brodie, who suffered for his crimes in the following year,<sup>1</sup> leaving behind him in the draft balance-sheet prepared in gaol one item, viz., "omitted to charge the work newly done for Mr Herron (*sic*) Cowgate, which will amount to about £40."

Patrick Heron used the premises for the "British Inn" for about ten years; he then retired to one of his houses in Shakespeare Square, but returned to Campbell's Land, and died there in 1803, aged 74. He and his wife are buried at the north end of Greyfriars churchyard. The inn or tavern is mentioned as the meeting-place of the Wagering Club in 1787.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Roughead's *Trial of Deacon Brodie*, p. 158.

<sup>2</sup> *Old Edinburgh Club Book*, ii. p. 154.

In 1808 it was occupied, as shown by the Post Office Directory,<sup>1</sup> by George Ramsay & Coy., printers. Robert Chambers<sup>2</sup> speaks of their still being there, in his *Traditions*, published in 1825, after the great fire. He says: "In the alley, formerly called Steil's Close, but now the Royal Bank Close, there is a house occupied by Mr Moir as his printing office; near to this, and having a front to the Cowgate, is a large self-contained house, now the printing office of Messrs George Ramsay & Coy. This was the family mansion of Lord Covington. . . . By him it was sold to Mr (*sic*) Campbell . . . after whom it was occupied by Mr Heron, from Glasgow, as an inn." (He omits all reference to the Society's occupation.) "It is worthy of remark," he continues, "that a low tenement fronting the Cowgate, immediately before this house, now containing one or two good shops, which pay a considerable rent, was formerly the coach-house of Lord Covington, a fact which shows . . . what little value our ancestors put upon property fronting a populous street and thoroughfare now so appreciated and taken advantage of by proprietors." These shops are now (1911) filled with second-hand clothes, rags, rabbit skins, and such like; the court is used as a market for old clothes, old metal, old books, and other articles, nearly as ancient and quite as miscellaneous as the early specimens housed at first in the old Museum.

Lockhart's House, unnamed, is shown in the map of the Post Office Directories for the years 1826 and 1829, in which the effects of the great fire are shown, as also in the engineer's map of the burned area. The house evidently did not suffer. Unfortunately the Directory map of 1831 is so inaccurate as to be worse than useless, and it appears year after year till 1859, even after the Ordnance Survey had removed all excuse. From this map no help can be got as to the fate of the house. In a map, however, dated 1832, by Laing and Forbes, the alterations due to new building after the fire are shown—the house has

<sup>1</sup> Also Kincaid's map of 1817.

<sup>2</sup> *Traditions*, vol. i. p. 225.

disappeared and the site of the Old Fishmarket is built over, what was the Union Bank, and is now the Commissary Office, having taken its place.

The later changes are shown in the Ordnance Survey maps of 1854 and 1895.

The old court, the remnant of the yard of the inn, is divided from the open ground behind the law courts by a wall and gate recently erected—more effective, perhaps, with their barbed wire defences than



Fig. 6. Cowgate, at the foot of the Old Fishmarket Close.  
(From J. F. W., 1823.)

the more picturesque ones standing thirty years ago, when, by the special permission of the owner of the court, the gate was opened to admit the meals of the Directors of the City of Glasgow Bank, who during their trial were lodged in the now unused cells below the courts.

So far as I can judge, the present west wall of the Old Fishmarket Close must be the old east wall of the Fishmarket, and this is borne out by some views among those in Sir Daniel Wilson's scrapbooks, in the Society's library, and the engravings of the ruins caused by the great fire of 1824 (figs. 6 and 7).

It may be mentioned that when the South Bridge was built, the Poultry Market, which stood where Hunter Square now is, was transferred for a time to the Old Fishmarket: it is shown so in Brown and Watson's map of 1793.

The site of the old Museum is now Government property; but Heron's Court, the southern part of the property, is still owned by a descendant of Patrick Heron.

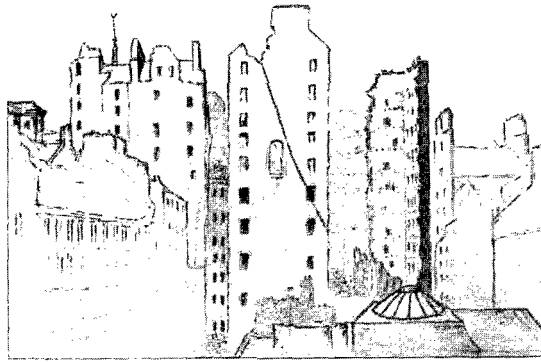


Fig. 7. Ruins after Great Fire, 1824, showing roof and cupola of Lockhart's House.

NOTE on the original Hall of the Museum from drawing (plan and elevations) by John Young, builder, approved at meeting of Society August 23, 1781, preserved in Earl of Buchan's portfolio in the Library of the Society.

Dimensions, 36 feet 9 inches by 16 feet 6 inches by 10 feet 6 inches high; six seats 8 feet 3 inches long, accommodating, say, thirty persons; sixteen seats in present library 8 feet 9 inches long, say eighty persons.

*Note.*—I learn from Mr Wm. J. Hay, John Knox House, that the "General View of the ruins after the fire" is taken from the roof of "Lockhart's House," drawn by Charles Kirkpatrick Sharpe. The original drawing was sold at the sale of his books, etc. The circular roof-light, or cupola, is a feature of mid-eighteenth-century architecture. Had I known of this in time, I would have shown it in my sketches of the house—which must have been pulled down about 1830; I have not yet ascertained the exact date.