

II.

THE CASTLE OF CLOUNIE CRICHTON, KINCARDINESHIRE.

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About 4 miles east of the village of Torphins, on the north side of the Aberdeen-Torphins road, stands the picturesque, ivy-clad ruins of Clounie Crichton Castle (Pl. XXXV, 1). The castle is situated in the parish of Banchory-Ternan, Kincardineshire, and commands an extensive view of the surrounding country from its site on the lower slopes of the south side of the Hill o' Fare. Clounie Crichton is now incorporated in the estate of Raemore, and, although completely ruinous, is an interesting example of a Scottish laird's "house-of-fence" of the seventeenth century. The castle is built on a modification of the familiar L-plan with an additional rectangular staircase-tower set in the re-entrant angle (see fig. 1). The material used in the building is rough granite surface gatherings taken from the hillside on which it is situated, and these have weathered to a fine warm pink colour, which blends in an unusually charming way with the surrounding landscape. Originally, Clounie Crichton Castle would have been surrounded by a wall enclosing a courtyard containing the subsidiary buildings necessary to such an establishment, but any traces of these have long since disappeared, and the castle now stands out boldly from the surrounding agricultural land.

The entrance doorway is in the west side of the staircase-tower already referred to, and is well defended by three gun-holes—one in the west wall of the re-entrant angle of the main building, one in the north wall of the re-entrant angle, and the third at a higher level in the same wall. This latter is worthy of special attention, as it is particularly cunningly concealed and directed to cover the entrance doorway. The gun-holes have plain circular orifices 5 inches in diameter externally with a fairly wide inward splay (see Pl. XXXV, 5).

The entrance doorway (see Pl. XXXV, 4) is in rather a dilapidated condition, but the remaining jamb stones show a $2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch splay, while inside are the remains of the barholes measuring 7 inches square. The bar socket is on the south side of the door and extends 7 inches into the wall, the bar-hole proper being on the north side and extending about 5 feet into the wall.

Unfortunately the jamb stones on the north side of the entrance doorway have gone, as indeed has practically all the dressed stonework of the building, including the quoins, lintels, and jambs of the doors, windows, and fireplaces. The removal of the dressed work has been a gradual process carried out from time to time, as building materials were required for the neighbouring farm-steading.

The entrance doorway gives access to a small barrel-vaulted passage 3 feet 6 inches wide, off which are three rooms, while at its north-west extremity is situated the remains of the newel staircase which served the whole building. This newel staircase is no longer in existence, but traces of the stone steps are still discernible, while the loopholes which lit the stair are still extant.

To the north-east and south-west of the barrel-vaulted passage are two storerooms measuring 15 feet 11 inches by 17 feet 3 inches and 15 feet 5 inches by 17 feet 1 inch respectively. The storerooms are lit by two loopholes and have each a gun-hole, already referred to, to cover the staircase-tower and entrance doorway. At the south-east extremity of the passage is the kitchen, measuring 17 feet 1 inch by 17 feet 2 inches. It is lit by two loopholes, and in the north-west wall are the remains of an open stone fireplace measuring about 4 feet 6 inches wide, while between it and the south-west wall is an aumbry measuring 1 foot 6 inches wide by 1 foot 6 inches high by 11 inches deep. An unusual feature at Clounie Crichton is that the basement, with the exception of the entrance passage, was not barrel-vaulted, as was general in castles of this period, so that now all the floors of the building have gone, but the joist-holes remain to indicate the various floor-levels. In consequence of this none of the upper floors are accessible except with the aid of a ladder.

The first floor was reached by the newel staircase already mentioned. There was a small landing at the first-floor level, off which opened the hall or dining-room of the castle. Through the hall access was obtained to the two other rooms on this floor. These rooms have no direct communication with the newel staircase. The hall measures about 15 feet by 17 feet and is lit by two well-proportioned windows—one in the north-west and one in the south-west wall. In the north-east wall is a smaller window, while alongside it is the gun-hole which covers the entrance doorway. In the south-east wall of the hall

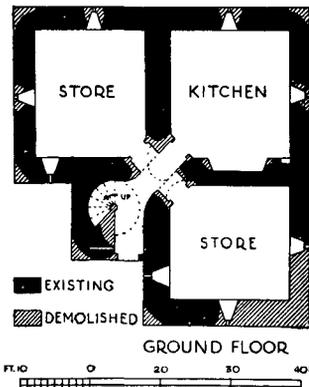
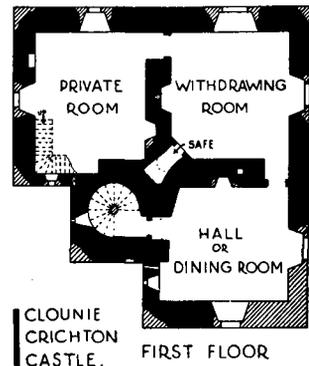
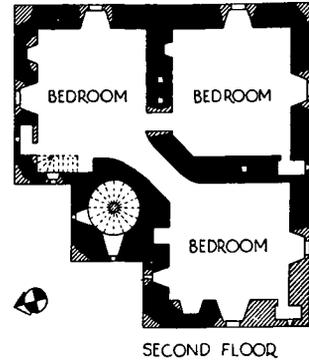


Fig. 1. Plans of Clounie Crichton Castle.

are the remains of an open stone fireplace with a doorway, leading through to the withdrawing-room, on its south-west side.

The withdrawing-room is about 17 feet square and is lit by two windows of similar proportions to those in the hall. These windows are situated in the north-east and south-east walls, while in the north-east wall is an open stone fireplace 4 feet wide. At the north-west angle of the withdrawing-room is an interesting apartment of small dimensions. This chamber served as the strong-room of Clounie Crichton Castle, and measures 2 feet 1 inch wide in the centre, increasing in size at its north-west extremity to 4 feet, its length being 5 feet 3 inches. The strong-room is barrel-vaulted, and, as it is situated directly over the barrel-vaulted passage below, is rendered practically fireproof. The remains of the door hinges can still be traced on the north-east jamb. Strong-rooms such as these were very often features of castles of a like date to Clounie Crichton; similar ones may be cited at Leslie Castle (1661) and at Craigievar Castle (1626), although in the case of the latter the strong-room assumed rather larger proportions.

In the north-east wall of the withdrawing-room is a doorway linking it up to a private room. The dimensions of this room are about 16 feet by 17 feet. It has fragments of an open stone fireplace in the south-west wall. In the north-east wall is a window of similar design to those already mentioned in the hall and withdrawing-room, while to the east of this window is an aumbry measuring about 1 foot 9 inches square and extending into the wall about 11 inches. In the north-west wall is a small window set back in an intake.

The second storey is in rather a dilapidated condition, but it would appear to have consisted of three bedrooms of similar dimensions to the rooms on the floor below. Each bedroom is lit by two good-sized windows, while the north-east and south-west rooms have each an additional window of smaller size which could serve as gun-loops should occasion arise, as they directly cover the entry to the castle. Each bedroom is furnished with an open stone fireplace and garderobe, the south-west one having, in addition, a mural cupboard in its north-east wall. The manner in which access to the rooms on the second floor was gained is a matter of speculation as there appears to be no trace of any doorway from the newel staircase to this floor. This would mean that access was gained by way of a wooden staircase, since demolished, and in all probability this was so. The intake in the wall of the private room on the first floor may indicate the position of such a staircase, as a similar intake occurs on the floor above. The level of the two small windows in the private room and in the north-east bedroom would seem to strengthen this theory. The suggested position of the wooden staircase has been indicated on the plans.

Above the second floor there had been a "garret," reached either by



1. View from the south-west.



2. View from the south-east.



3. View from the north-west.



4. Entrance door with coat-of-arms recess and carved stone panel above.



5. Detail of gun-hole.



6. Carved stone panel with inscription.

a wooden stair or from the newel staircase. All trace of this "garret" floor has disappeared, but from the remaining masonry on the staircase-tower it is obvious that the building contained a "garret." The staircase-tower is carried up a storey higher than the main building and had probably been finished with an open ballustrading similar to that at Craigievar Castle.

The exterior of the structure has suffered as much as the interior, as practically all the dressed stonework has been removed. Where the dressed stonework remains, however, it is of a particularly high standard of workmanship. Above the entrance doorway are two recesses which had originally held the coat-of-arms of the Crichton family, with, in all probability, the royal arms of Scotland, as the feudal superior, situated above (see Pl. XXXV, 4 and 6). Between these two recesses is a finely carved panel which reads—

16 CLOUNIE 66
CRICHTOUN.

Clounie Crichton Castle is rapidly falling into complete decay, but even in its present dilapidated condition retains something of its former dignity, and is certainly deserving something better than the fate that is fast overtaking it.

There seems to be little of historical interest connected with the castle which was built, as the above-mentioned panel states, in the year 1666 by George Crichton of Cluny.

George Crichton of Cluny, a cadet of the Fren draught family, married in 1665 the only daughter of Sir Robert Douglas, of Tilquhillie, whose seat, Tilquhillie Castle, is situated four miles south-east of Clounie Crichton. How long Clounie Crichton remained the property of George Crichton is at present obscure, but the name of Crichton would seem to have disappeared from the district shortly after the building of the castle.

In preparing this survey I have enjoyed the assistance of my friend, Mr W. A. Cramond, Aberdeen, to whom my grateful thanks are due, and to John Alexander, Esq., Cluny Crichton Farm, Banchory, I tender my indebtedness for providing the necessary facilities.