

# Midmar Castle, Aberdeenshire

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*A late 16th-century Z-house; the design generally is ascribed to George Bell, an ascription that may in part be incorrect*

There are few houses in Aberdeenshire of the architectural quality of Midmar (NGR NJ 704 052) which can boast so meagre or so confused an history. Called at various times Migmar, Midmar, Ballogie, Grantfield and finally Midmar again, the times its name has changed being only exceeded by the number of families that have owned it – Broun, Ogilvy, Gordon, Forbes, Grant, Davidson, Elphinstone, Mansfield, Gordon and finally Wharton.

Four names, 10 families, no armorial or date stone, a few papers, a single mention in Spalding, brief encounters with history during the 16th century and the 'Forty-five, an occasional mention in long-forgotten travel books and legal documents, and a gravestone in the old kirkyard at Midmar; these are the materials from which a history must be made.

## THE DESCENT OF MIDMAR (fig 1)

The earliest mention of Midmar is in the late 13th century when Adam Broun, of the Brouns of Fordell, who was killed at Falkirk in 1298, held Midmar of the Bishop of Aberdeen. His grandson, Sir John Broun, was sheriff of the county of Aberdeen in 1328; clearly the family stood well in the world. It was either the sheriff's son or grandson – both of whom were named John – who was involved in a brawl in the Parliament at Scone in 1368. He and Robert D'Umfraville were ordered to find bail to the tune of £500 to keep the peace. The difference is described as a *dissensio per verba*, but bail of the size mentioned and the standing of the two sureties, the Earl of Mar and Lord Keith, suggest something more serious than an exchange of unparliamentary epithets.

Midmar stayed in the hands of the Brouns until John Broun, the grandson of the sheriff sold it in 1422 to Patrick Ogilvy, but it did not remain in the hands of that family for long. By 1468 Midmar had come into the possession of Alexander Gordon, first Earl of Huntly, as on 8 July of that year Huntly granted a charter in favour of his son-in-law, William, Lord Forbes, of lands in the barony of Midmar.

Sometime before 25 May 1484 Midmar had been granted to Alexander Gordon, second son of the first Earl, as on that date Alexander Gordon of Megmar had been one of the witnesses to a deed concerning the barony of Kennerdy. Presumably the grant of Midmar to Alexander had been made before the death of his father in 1470. Alexander was to receive the lands of Abergeldie by deed of gift in 1482 from James III, and from that date Abergeldie became the principal desig-

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nation of this branch of the family and the possession of the Midmar property is at times overlooked. Certainly it took second place to that rather bleak area on Deeside from which the family now took its territorial designation.

Although Alexander resigned the barony of Midmar to his brother George, second Earl of Huntly, he received it back from him in a fit of brotherly love. This done, Alexander embarked on a rather curious piece of legal business, selling the lands of Old Midmar to James, Lord Ogilvie of Airlie. This suggests the existence of an older house, possibly that of the Brouns, which was distinguished from the new place of Midmar. However, the curiosity does not lie in this but in the terms of the sale. These were that Lord Ogilvy was to 'tak no profit of the said landis' till either Alexander or James Gordon – Abergeldie's grandsons – were of an age to marry Janet or Marion Ogilvy – Lord Ogilvie's daughters. If the marriage failed to take place the Ogilvies were to retain the lands until the sum of 600 marks was paid. This arrangement seems to have benefited nobody but the Gordons who appear to have retained the rents and only been obliged to refund the purchase price if nothing came of the plan.

Alexander was succeeded in 1503 as second laird of Abergeldie and Midmar by his eldest son George who was successful in opposing the Crown's claim to the lands of Abergeldie. As these had once formed part of the earldom of Mar there was always a danger that the Crown might establish a right to them, but in 1507 the Privy Council decided in favour of George Gordon's claim on the grounds that the Abergeldie lands had always been distinct and separate from those lands properly pertaining to the earldom.

George Gordon was dead by 1523, and was succeeded by his second son, James, as third laird of Abergeldie and Midmar. George, the eldest son, had died before his father, and in the end neither of Lord Ogilvie's daughters was to be mistress of Midmar. James Gordon was somewhat embarrassed in having to act as surety for his uncle, William Gordon of Netherdale. William had raided the lands of Agnes Grant in Corryhoul at considerable profit to himself eight years earlier, and he obviously had no intention of paying anything back so long as his nephew could be bled. And bled his nephew was: in 1530 James Gordon was ordered to pay to Agnes

six score of ewes price of the piece 5 shillings, 60 of wethers and yield [barren] sheep price of the piece 4 shillings, and four score of lambs price of the piece 2 shillings. And for the profits of the said six score ewes in wool, milk and lambs 27 pounds. The profits of the said 60 wethers and yield sheep since the time of the said raid three pounds. The profits of the said 80 lambs since the said raid as said 4 pounds.

This was not all: in 1536 he had to part with the lands of Craibstone in the barony of Granholm to James Cheyne of Aberdeen. If at the end of 15 years James or his heirs could find the sum of

seventeen score of marks in gold of angel, nobel, crowns (of weight) unicorns and Leith crowns . . . together with the rent of ten marks in the money of Scotland

the lands could be redeemed. James was killed in 1547, at the battle of Pinkie, and was succeeded by his eldest son, Alexander as fourth laird.

The fourth laird was to hold Abergeldie for 49 years and presumably had an interest in Midmar, although his son was granted sasine of the barony of Midmar in 1602 as heir to his grandfather and not to his father. It must be assumed that it was during Alexander's life that the house at Midmar associated with George Bell was built.

The first notice of this laird is in 1560, when on 27 April he signed a bond against the Regent which had the thoroughly patriotic intention 'to expel the French maintained by the Queen Dowager and take plain part with the Queen of England's army sent by her for that purpose'.

He was no better disposed towards the Crown in 1562 when he joined Lord Huntly in the rebellion which at the Battle of Corrichie broke the power of the Gordons for a time, led to the capture and death of Lord Huntly, and probably, because of its nearness to the battlefield, brought about the plundering and possibly the destruction of Midmar. For his part in this Gordon was compelled to ward in St Andrews under a penalty of 5000 marks, and it was not until two years later in 1564 when he had made his peace, that his lands were restored to him, and it was probably from this period that the first building of Midmar dates. Most of his kinsmen had to wait until 1587 for their remissions.

His life after this seems to have been no more eventful than that of most Aberdeenshire lairds. Various public duties came his way; he signed bonds of adherence to Mary Stuart, and of allegiance to King James; his promise of defence of the 'trew religion' must be viewed objectively, as his son William was denounced as one of the treasonable 'practizars against the state of the trew religion'. The Gordons were not so very presbyterian.

In 1592 he was said to be acting as Lord Huntly's baillie in Badenoch, when he was ordered to raid the lands of the Mackintoshes in Petty. This was in revenge for the murders of Harry Gordon of Knock and of the Laird of Brackley. However this may not be correct as Gordon must have been an old man by now and possibly Sir Robert Gordon has confused him with his eldest son who was also called Alexander. It must certainly have been the son who fought with Lord Huntly in 1594 at the battle of Glenlivet. This would also explain why it was that in October 1594, following the victory of the King's forces, it was Ballogie, as Midmar was now called, and not Abergeldie that was burned and destroyed on the presumption that it was the home of Alexander Gordon, younger of Abergeldie.

On the death of his father in 1596 Alexander succeeded as fifth laird of Abergeldie, and was even less estimable politically than his father. He was a staunch Roman Catholic, and had been denounced as a rebel in 1592 for failing to answer 'touching the hearing of mass and resetting of priestis and papistis'. This may have been a matter of conscience, but both conscience and honour should have prevented him entering into a bond of 2000 marks as assurance against joining the Catholic Earls. This did not reassure his nervous sovereign, and later the same year he was in ward in Edinburgh, only being released on his promising to remain besouth the Dee. He was dead by 1601 and so his name does not appear alongside that of his brother, William, in the remission granted to Lord Huntly in 1603 for the activities of 1593-94.

It would have fallen to William Gordon, fifth laird of Midmar and sixth of Abergeldie, to make good the damage that had been done to Midmar in 1594. By 1609 he had lived down the earlier reputation he had acquired through his involvement with the conspiracy of the 'Spanish Blanks', the rebellion of the Catholic Earls and papistry in general. He was appointed a Justice of the Peace, a role he filled with restless activity, and he added considerably to his property. After this latterly respectable period he died in 1630 and was succeeded by his son, Alexander, sixth laird, and presumably the last Gordon laird of Midmar although Abergeldie remained in the possession of the family.

That Alexander Gordon was the last laird is a presumption. Inevitably at a crucial point in the history of Midmar documents are missing, and it is necessary to look for circumstantial evidence to support this theory. As early as 1635, along with other Gordons, Alexander was summoned before the Privy Council to find surety for his good behaviour. This did not prevent him from joining Lord Aboyne at Turriff in 1639 and Lord Huntly at Aberdeen in 1644. Either to protect his family and property, or to raise money, he had made over his estates and his life rent in them to Thomas Nicholson, Procurator of the Estates of the Kingdom. Nicholson's sister Katherine was Alexander's wife and in July 1644 he was petitioning Parliament for her support.

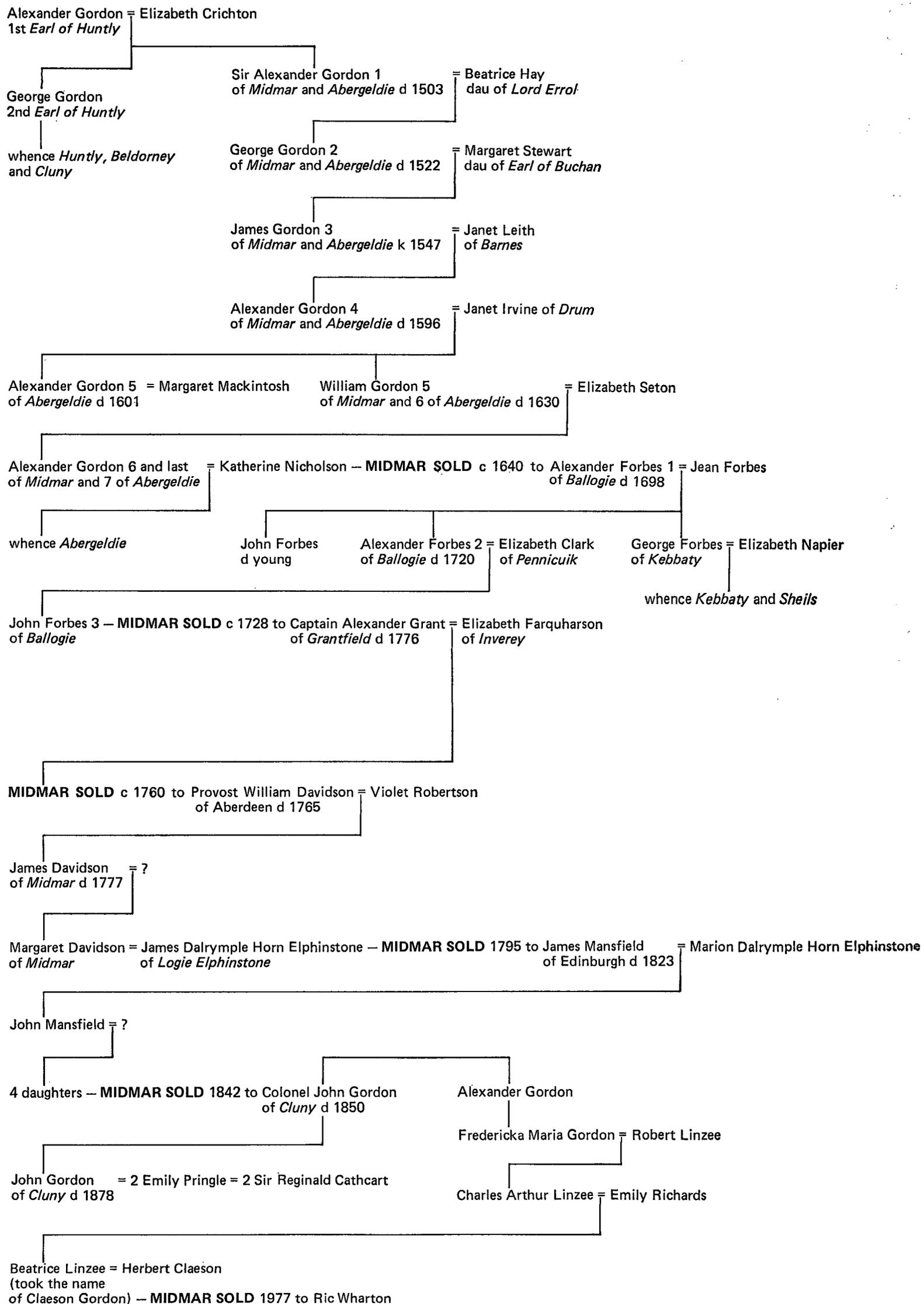


FIG 1 The Descent of Midmar. (This is a tree of ownership, not of genealogy. The changes of ownership are indicated in bold type)

His official position had been no defence against the rapacity of Argyll's troops who had settled on the lands of Abergeldie and other malignant lairds, and stripped them bare. According to Spalding they left 'not one four fotted beist in the landis of Drum, Cromar, Auchterfoull, Oboyne, Aberzeldie and countries about'.

Nicholson's account is equally harrowing:

... there are thrie hundreth men and above of these, which wer leveyed for pacifeing ye saides trouble, who have entered wpoun ye saides landes of Aberzeldie ... and satt doune wpoun ye poore tennentes ... they have not only impoverished and depeopled ye tennents by destroyeing and takeing away all their cattell, sheepe, and horse, but also have eatine and distroyed ye hail growand corn.

He was unable to receive his rents in cash or kind and was likely to be put to great expense for his sister and her children, who had fled to Angus and who 'will be destitute of interteinment and mentinance this yere to come in respect of ye distroying of ye grounds, goodes and cornes'.

It is unlikely that Mistress Gordon returned to Abergeldie as it was ordered 'be the sond of the trumpet' at Aberdeen cross to be destroyed. Although this sentence was not carried out there would have been little to have returned to, as in 1644 the rents were sequestered to compensate Forbes of Echt for his losses, and in 1645 they were disposed to Lord Fraser to compensate him for his. All this while Alexander Gordon was with Montrose.

In the course of all this devastation no mention is made of Ballogie as Midmar was generally called at this time. Had it escaped there would have been no good reason for Mistress Gordon sheltering in Angus, but the fact that she did, and that it seems to have escaped Argyll's attentions, suggests that it may have already passed out of Gordon hands, possibly sold to raise money.

Alexander Forbes, second son of the second laird of Pitnacaddel, had apparently bought Ballogie about 1650 but he may have been in possession as early as 1640. The Forbes family were on the episcopal or liberal-conservative wing of Parliament's supporters and earlier had, in the person of Bishop Patrick Forbes, provided one of the most impressive members of the Church; to quote the MS *History of the House of Forbes*:

the Right Reverend and worthy Patrick Forbes of Corse Lord Bishop of Aberdeen, a star of the first magnitude in the church – for his rare piety and great parts and his powerful and persuasive gift of preaching.

Now this worthy bishop had an equally worthy son, Dr John Forbes, Professor of Divinity at King's College, Aberdeen, and one of that eminent band of *Aberdeen Doctors*. Like his father he was celebrated for his piety, learning and humility and this had not endeared him to the more extreme Covenanters. Another of this worthy band of *Doctors* was Dr Alexander Scroggie, minister of St Machar's Cathedral kirk, a charge from which he was ejected in 1640. Both men defied the injunctions that as outstanders against the Covenant they should not receive communion, and it is greatly to the credit of Mr William Strachan, Scroggie's successor at St Machar's that he did not refuse it to his predecessor. Spalding records in 1641 that on

Wednesday, 23rd Junij, Dr Scrogie, ane old reverent priede at this kirk is now, sore against his will, compellit to quyte his duelling houss in old Abirdein, and yairdis plesandlie plantit, for the most pairt be himself; so he removes this day, his wyfe, barnes, hail famelie, insicht plenishings, goodis and geir, furth and fra the samen, and deliveris the keyis to Mr Williame Strathachin, that he may enter, aless weil to the bigging as to the pulpit. Himself transportit all to Ballogie, and tuke one chalmer for his cuming and going in New Abirdien. Thus is this wise, famous, lerned man handlit in his old age. Alvaies it is said that the said Mr Williame Strathachin payit him for his planting 400 markis befor he gat entress.

This suggests that Ballogie was no longer in Gordon hands. Although no Covenanter it is hardly likely that Dr Scroggie would have sought or received shelter with a family of notorious papists, and his association with Dr John Forbes would have made shelter in a Forbes house perfectly natural. This seems to have been only a temporary arrangement as he returned to Aberdeen in 1642 after making his recantation, and had spent much of the intervening time in Edinburgh.

The Forbes of Ballogie were cadets of Pitnacaddel, a cadet branch in turn of Tolquhon. Theirs is a branch which died out in the male line in 1773 and was remarkably undistinguished, leaving little mark on Midmar. Three lairds held it and John Forbes, third laird, was forced to sell it soon after his succession in 1720. His son Thomas bought the estate of Tilliesnaught in Birse, and renamed it Ballogie. Thus there are references to families of *Ballogie* in the 18th century which do not refer to Midmar, and to families which had ceased to have any connection with it, as when a younger son of a younger son of Farquharson of Inverey acquired this second Ballogie and took his grandmother's name of Innes, or when Charles Forbes, second of Kebbaty and Sheils, grandson of Alexander Forbes first of Ballogie, and Sheriff-Substitute of Aberdeen in 1748, sometimes appears as *of Ballogie*. However, one of the minor joys of history in Aberdeenshire is the extraordinary territorial pretensions that appear in the stud-book.

If the Forbeses made little mark on Midmar the next owner certainly remedied this. He was Captain Alexander Grant, son of James Grant of Gellovie, the second son of Mungo Grant of Kinchirdie, who was in his turn second son of Sir James Grant of Freuchie. Aberdeen writers have tended to turn their noses up at Alexander Grant as an upstart and an incomer, but he came of a perfectly decent family albeit from outwith the county and was a kinsman of Sir Archibald Grant of Monymusk. His purchase was made possible by the financial difficulties of John Forbes, who was in trouble with his creditors in 1722; Captain Grant finally obtained the Charter of Resignation of Midmar in 1727 and it must have been shortly after this that the extensive wings on either side of the castle which enclose the entry court were added.

The clue to this comes from a description found in *A View of the Diocese of Aberdeen* which antedates the year 1732:

*Ballogie*, at first a castle, and since erected a court, lately the seat of Forbes of Ballogie (descended of Tolquhon, the first of this family being a son to Pitnacalder, about the middle of the last age) but now possessed by Mr Grant (son to Grant of \_\_\_\_\_) under the name of *Grantfield Castle*.

Alexander Grant was Sheriff Principal of Aberdeenshire from 1741 until 1748, and in that role was active in the Government interest during the 'Forty-five rebellion. His assessment of the state of the county in a letter he wrote to his kinsman, Ludovic Grant, shortly before the rebels entered Edinburgh, is interesting reading:

*Alexander Grant of Grantfield to Ludovic Grant of Grant.  
Account of the Highlanders*

Grantfield September 7th 1745.

Dear Sir – It'll give me pleasure to hear if Lady Margaret, you, and all your good family are well, to whom I begg leave to offer my most humble dutie. I had ere now done myself the honour of waiting on you, but was told your family was not come to Castle Grant till within these 2 or 3 weeks, and since that time we have been alarum'd with different accounts of the Highlanders, who now I'm informed are all gone south, and I'm sorry to hear we have but few troops in that country to oppose them. There are no gentlemen of any character or estate in this county gone to join them, but several are spoke off that intends to go how soon they hear that they have obtained victory over the King's troupes or have entred England, and that people of character in that countrie joins them. Al these things may be stories made up, but it passes currently here. I am exceedingly anxious to know your accounts of them, and what you and the rest of the loyall clans are to do. We are told

you're to join the King's troupes, others say you're to stay at home and keep your own countrey. If you would be so good as to honour me with a line now and then, when you have spare time, it would be most oblidging.

Mrs Grant joins with me in our compliments to Lady Margaret, and I am most sincerely my dear Sir,

Your affectionate cousin and most faithfull obliged ready servant

Al. Grant.

You was so kind as to promise to give me some franks therefore I have presumed to demand them, which you'l please do with the bearer, who returns here express.

To the Honourable Ludovic Grant of Grant, Esquire, att Castle Grant.

Captain Grant was from home in December 1745, being with Sir Harry Innes of Innes, at the crossing of the Spey, when in the confusion and darkness there was some danger of the Grants being attacked by their allies, the MacLeods. It was as well that he was elsewhere as writing to the Lord Justice Clerk he was to tell him that Patrick Duguid of Auchinhove occupied Grantfield during Christmas week with

60 of the Rebels and seased my Tennants and kept them prisoners in my own house, when I was with the Laird of Grant. My Tennants were robb'd by Auchenhove and his Rebell Partie of two hundred pounds sterling.

Patrick Duguid, who was eventually to succeed to the Balquhain estates of his cousin and brother-in-law, Patrick Leslie Grant, was to suffer in his turn. After Culloden he watched from the hill of Coull as his own house burned, and his wife and young children were turned out into the night.

It had clearly been Alexander Grant's hope to found a family with the territorial designation of *Grantfield* but for some reason this came to nothing; although he had three sons, the last one dying at Dorchester in 1801, none of them succeeded as laird of Grantfield after his death in 1776. And this was for the very good reason that the property had already been sold.

The purchaser is said to have been Provost William Davidson who died in 1765 so the sale must have taken place before that date. He was succeeded by his only son, James, who was designated of *Midmar*, and who himself died in 1777 leaving the property to his daughter, Margaret. In 1780 Francis Douglas of Paisley writing of *Midmar* records that it was 'The property of Miss Davidson, a minor. Since the beginning of the century the property has been held by four heritors.'

According to some authorities James Davidson married a Miss Skene of Elrick; according to others he died unmarried. This slight doubt cast on her status in no way harmed the matrimonial chances of his daughter, who was married, in 1792, to James Dalrymple Horn Elphinstone of Logie Elphinstone. Three years later he sold *Midmar* to his brother-in-law James Mansfield, of Edinburgh, a banker and partner in the firm of Bell and Rannie, wine merchants, of Leith. It was probably during the latter's lifetime that the decoration of the dining room was carried out. He died in 1823 and was succeeded by his son, John, who was senior partner in the Leith firm. He left no son, but there were four daughters, and they sold *Midmar* in 1842. The purchaser was Colonel John Gordon of Cluny. As he by then had an enormous mansion of his own at Cluny, *Midmar* was never occupied as the main house of the estate. Used either as a shooting lodge or let to tenants there was no reason to do anything to it except to make it just habitable. Because of this many of the 18th-century interiors and fittings escaped destruction.

*Midmar* remained part of the Cluny estates until the division of the property in this century when it fell to the share of Mrs Beatrice Claeson Gordon, the great-great niece of Colonel Gordon. She sold it to the present owner Mr Ric Wharton in 1977, under whom a thorough and careful restoration of the castle has been carried out. Since 1978 *Midmar* has been a family home again.

## THE BUILDING OF MIDMAR

*Heir Lysis Georg Bel Meason Deceisit in Balogy Anō 1575*

This inscription on a graveslab in the old kirkyard of Midmar was noticed by the antiquarian James Skene of Rubislaw, who seems to have been the first to credit George Bell with the design of Midmar. This point is made neither by Billing nor by Sir Andrew Leith Hay. Skene's view is quoted by MacGibbon and Ross without comment; that is with rather less enthusiasm than usual when they quote from Skene's notes. They also note, both in the description of Castle Fraser, where the reference is first given (and not, odd as it may seem, in the description of Midmar), and in the section devoted to known masons, that the statement rests solely on Skene's authority.

Later writers have shown far less discretion and with few exceptions hail George Bell as the architect of Midmar. The first notable exceptions to this generally accepted view came with the publication of Stewart Cruden's *The Scottish Castle*, where with considerable skill Cruden discusses Midmar itself, the Bell family, and the Midmar school without more definite a comment than that 'George Bell . . . played some important part in the construction of the castle', and in a paper on Craigston Castle I suggested, but without giving any supporting evidence, that Midmar dated from the years after 1593.

There are only three dates known to relate to Midmar in any way affecting the buildings of the castle. The first is 1562 when, in the aftermath of the battle of Corrichie, the castle was almost certainly plundered and probably badly damaged. The second is 1575, the year in which George Bell died. The third and last is 1594 when in the records of the Privy Council, 7 November 1594, there is a

Declaration in favouris of the Erll Marishall and otheris . . . that the burning and destroying of the place and fortalice of Ballogy of the month of October last . . . was and is done be his Majestie's express command, allowance and approbatioun.

Now if these dates mean anything it is that the building at Midmar designed by George Bell, if in fact he did design any of it, must have been built between 1564 and 1575, and that it was likely to have been severely damaged in 1594, and that any rebuilding would have been unlikely to have started before 1602 when William Gordon, fifth laird, was granted sasine of the barony of Midmar.

This suggests that Midmar in fact is of two separate builds: a Z-house of 1565–75 contemporary with the Z-houses of Beldorney, Terpersie and Carnousie, and an elaborate heightening of 1603–9 contemporary with Cluny, and the upper works at Castle Fraser and Huntly. Stylistically the building would fit well with this theory (pl 35). It has always been difficult to reconcile the design of the upper works at Midmar with the work of a mason dead by 1575, and this difficulty had been emphasized by the quality of the plan. If, however, it is accepted that the main part of the castle is of two periods separated by some 30 years this apparent problem can be resolved (pl 39a).

The development of the early Z-house plan has always been associated with the house of Gordon, the rebuilding of Huntly in the latter half of the 15th century being the first dated example. So far there seem to be no recognized examples that can safely be dated to the first half of the 16th century, and the next step in the development of this type of plan in the north-east came with the extensive alterations, amounting almost to rebuilding, which were carried out at Huntly in the years between 1551 and 1554. This was followed by the building of Beldorney between 1554 and 1561, and by Terpersie in 1561. If Midmar in its original form dated from 1564 to 1575 it is contemporary with Castle Fraser, 1565–76, and slightly earlier than Carnousie,

c 1574–7. With the exception of Castle Fraser and Carnousie all these castles belonged to members of the Gordon family, the builders of Beldorney and Midmar both being closely related to the Huntly branch.

Castle Fraser is not a pure Z-plan, but rather a complicated re-casting of an earlier building which was considerably enlarged and altered in the following century, but Carnousie, the latest of this early group is by far the most developed example of the plan up to this date. It also, with Terpersie and to a certain extent Beldorney, retains its original comparatively low silhouette of three floors. This low silhouette was also a distinguishing feature of Glenbuchat, another Gordon Z-house dating from 1590, a house which bridges the gap between these early houses and their re-casting in the early decades of the next century.

After the partial destruction of Huntly in 1594 following the defeat of the rebellion of the Catholic Earls there had to be a considerable amount of rebuilding. This was carried out between 1602 and 1605 after the Earl's return from exile, and involved amongst other features an elaborate re-casting and probably a heightening of the upper works. At Cluny in 1604 Sir Thomas Gordon, another close connection of the Huntly branch of the family, was to build a new and high Z-house with extraordinarily fanciful upper-works. With these examples before him, coupled with the need to repair a damaged house, there was no reason why William Gordon should not have followed suit. Ten years later Andrew, Lord Fraser, was to do the same at Castle Fraser, rivalling Lord Huntly's work at Huntly.

In plan Midmar is of the same pattern as Beldorney and Carnousie in that the whole of one of the towers on the ground and first floors is devoted to the main stair, and that consequently there are only two rooms – the Hall and Withdrawing Room on the first floor (fig 2). By the time Glenbuchat was building, the convenience of having an ante- or business room at the head of the stairs and separate from the Hall had been realized, and one – albeit somewhat clumsily contrived – had been provided. By the next century the staircase had been either re-positioned or re-designed, and a well-planned third room could be provided. At Cluny and Craigston the first floor of one of the towers was given over to this. A similar arrangement had become possible at Castle Fraser with the extension of the main block.

The early houses seem to have been restricted in height to three floors; a ground floor containing the kitchen and service rooms, a first floor with the Hall and Withdrawing Room, a second floor with bed-chambers, and possibly a garret in the roof space. This form certainly pertained in the 15th-century plans of Druminnor and Huntly, and this carry-over of the *palace-plan* into the next century was the genesis of the Z-plan. With the demand for increased accommodation in the form of galleries and further bed-chambers to meet the desire for greater privacy, the most natural way to extend existing Z-houses was to add further floors, or, with new ones, to build higher from the start. Huntly and Midmar are examples of the heightened house, Cluny of a house built high from the start.

It would also seem to be characteristic of houses of the earlier period that they should be more generously provided with gun-ports or loops than those of the later period. This is certainly true at Beldorney and Carnousie, and of the earlier parts of Castle Fraser which are lavishly provided with loops, as too is Glenbuchat. Equally the two later castles of Cluny and Craigston seem never to have had any loops at all. Cruden notes similarly that the later 16th- and early 17th-century castles of Crathes and Craigievar are also largely undefended in this manner. He includes Midmar in this group, but this must have been based on inspection before the stripping and reharling carried out in the course of the recent restoration. In fact Midmar has a number of loops of various sorts. The decrease in the number of gun-ports provided towards the end of the 16th century may reflect a greater feeling of security and a stronger and more settled government;

certainly with the removal of the King and court to London in 1603 Scotland became for a time markedly less turbulent. On the other hand it may have been purely a matter of architectural fashion. Certainly as gun-ports began to disappear there seems to have been an increase in the quality and quantity of display of strength as opposed to actual strength in houses in the north-east.

Midmar, like many similar houses in Aberdeenshire, is frequently referred to as a *tower-house* or a *Z-tower*. This is confusing and inaccurate, but the practice is so widespread and so ingrained in architectural writing that it is difficult to challenge it with any very lively hope of success. The definition of *tower-house* in the *Oxford English Dictionary*:

In the border counties of England and Scotland *tower* is often the name of a solitary high fenced house, a *tower-house* or *peel-house* too small to be called a castle

is possibly too restrictive in that an element of size creeps into it. It would be difficult to argue convincingly that Tattershall, for instance, was too small to be called a castle, or that it was not a tower-house. In the north-east there are buildings that similarly are towers and where size is irrelevant to this description. Corgarff and Udney are clearly both tower-houses in that all the accommodation is contained within a single rectangular tower, and that there is only one apartment on the main floor. And although Corgarff is small and simply detailed to the point of meanness whilst Udney is vast in scale and boasts an upper work as elaborate as any in Aberdeenshire they are none the less *Judy O'Grady* to the *Colonel's Lady*. It is also possible to argue that if the only extension to a rectangular tower is a jamb containing the staircase then the resulting building is still a *tower-house*. To extend the argument to include houses where there are rooms on the first floor additional to the Hall is playing with language until words cease to have any real meaning. The use of the term *palace-house* or *palace-plan* to describe the sequential planning of the late middle-ages of *Hall*, *Outer Chamber* and *Inner Chamber*, as at Druminnor or Huntly, seems to be perfectly honest. The later Z- and L-plan houses where there was still a sequence of rooms although arranged to a slightly different pattern, either as *Hall* and *Withdrawing Room* as at Midmar, or *Business Room*, *Hall* and *Withdrawing Room* as at Cluny and Craigston, show a complexity of planning which is completely at variance with the basic simplicity of a tower-house. That they may be of four, five, or six floors is beside the point. It would be as logical to call a house in Charlotte or Belgrave Squares a *tower-house* merely because it contained accommodation on more than two floors.

With the 18th century came the removal of any remains of the barmekin and its buildings which survived, and as far as one can judge on the historical evidence the wings enclosing the entrance court were built between 1727 and 1732 when Alexander Grant was establishing himself as laird of Grantfield. It may not be entirely coincidental that the general effect is very like the arrangement of the wings or *laich biggings* at Castle Grant for which Midmar may have served as a model. The interior detail fits well with a date early in the second quarter of the 18th century. From the same time must date the formation of the upper terrace and steps and the extensive changes of levels which accompanied them, together with building of the garden walls with the stone beehives and garden house.

The ample provision of Carron grates, dating from after 1760, which survive throughout the castle, probably marks a desire for comfort and convenience introduced either by Provost Davidson after his purchase of the property, or by his son; the grates are almost certain to date before 1777 as it would have been unlikely for his daughter's trustees to have embarked on any extensive work during her minority or before her marriage.

The re-decoration of the dining room on the ground floor was probably the work of James

Mansfield after 1795. Either he or his son installed the splendid stove from Adam Anderson of Edinburgh before 1837–8, as it bears the Royal Arms still quartered with France and Hanover, a form which disappeared with the accession of Queen Victoria. The presence of so splendid a piece of technology suggests that it was also one of the Mansfields who added the now-vanished bathroom to the south-east tower.

The recent restoration of the castle by the present owner removed this structure causing a certain amount of distress to amateurs of early domestic improvements but to the undoubted benefit of the architectural effect of the tower. At the same time the opportunity was taken to remove some of the later partitions in the 16th-century kitchen, the inserted floor in the roof space, and to open up a number of blocked loops and ports (pl 35). The only major addition was an extension of the wing to the east of the courtyard to provide garages (pl 38b). This added very satisfactorily to the feeling of enclosure of the court and to the general massing of the building when seen from the east. It is perhaps less fortunate that the roof pitch chosen has more in common with the high roofs of the 16th–17th century building than that of the 18th-century roofs which it immediately adjoins.

#### DESCRIPTION (figs 2–4; pls 35–45)

The castle is made up of three separate units; the 16th–17th century Z-house, an 18th-century L-shaped east wing and a long rectangular west wing of a similar date enclosing an entrance terrace and forecourt on the north side of the Z-house. This in its turn comprises three units; a square tower of five floors and roof space, a circular tower of six floors to the south-east and a smaller square tower of five floors containing the main stairs to the north-west. There are turn-pike stairs in each of the re-entrants, that on the south side being crowned with an ogival slated roof. The south-east tower is topped by a lead flat with a castellated parapet, the main tower by a steeply pitched and slated roof, with corbelled square corner turrets at the north-east and south-west corners, and the north-west tower by a pitched roof with corbelled rounds. The chimneys are coped and the gables crow-stepped. The walls are of rubble heathens and pinnings and are harled, and the dressed work is of pink granite (pl 35). The 18th-century wings are even simpler, with plain skewes and skew-puts, harled walls and the barest amount of dressed stone possible (pl 38).

Such in brief is Midmar, but the simplicity of the description is deceptive. It allows nothing for the richness of the upper works, for the strength and justness of the proportions nor for certain features which if not peculiar to the castle, are so combined that they add enormously to its distinction. There is a resemblance at first to Castle Fraser which derives from the massing of the main house with its soaring round tower, the cluster of high-capped rounds on the square tower and the low courtyard wings. Had the round tower been given a balustraded rather than a castellated parapet this resemblance would have been much greater. Indeed as far as the upper works are concerned the likeness between these two great houses probably derives from much of them being the work of the same designer.

It is in the design of the upper works of the houses of the north-east that the spirit of the Renaissance makes itself most felt. The plans it can be argued either derive from earlier medieval examples, adapting and changing to meet altered social conditions, or – as in the case of the early Z-plan – to an increased use of firearms and a more sophisticated approach to defence. This latter is a view that has in the past perhaps been given far too much weight and ignores the element of display that was present – sometimes to the point of megalomania – in many of the houses, which must have reflected the taste and wishes of the patrons who commissioned them. In the treatment

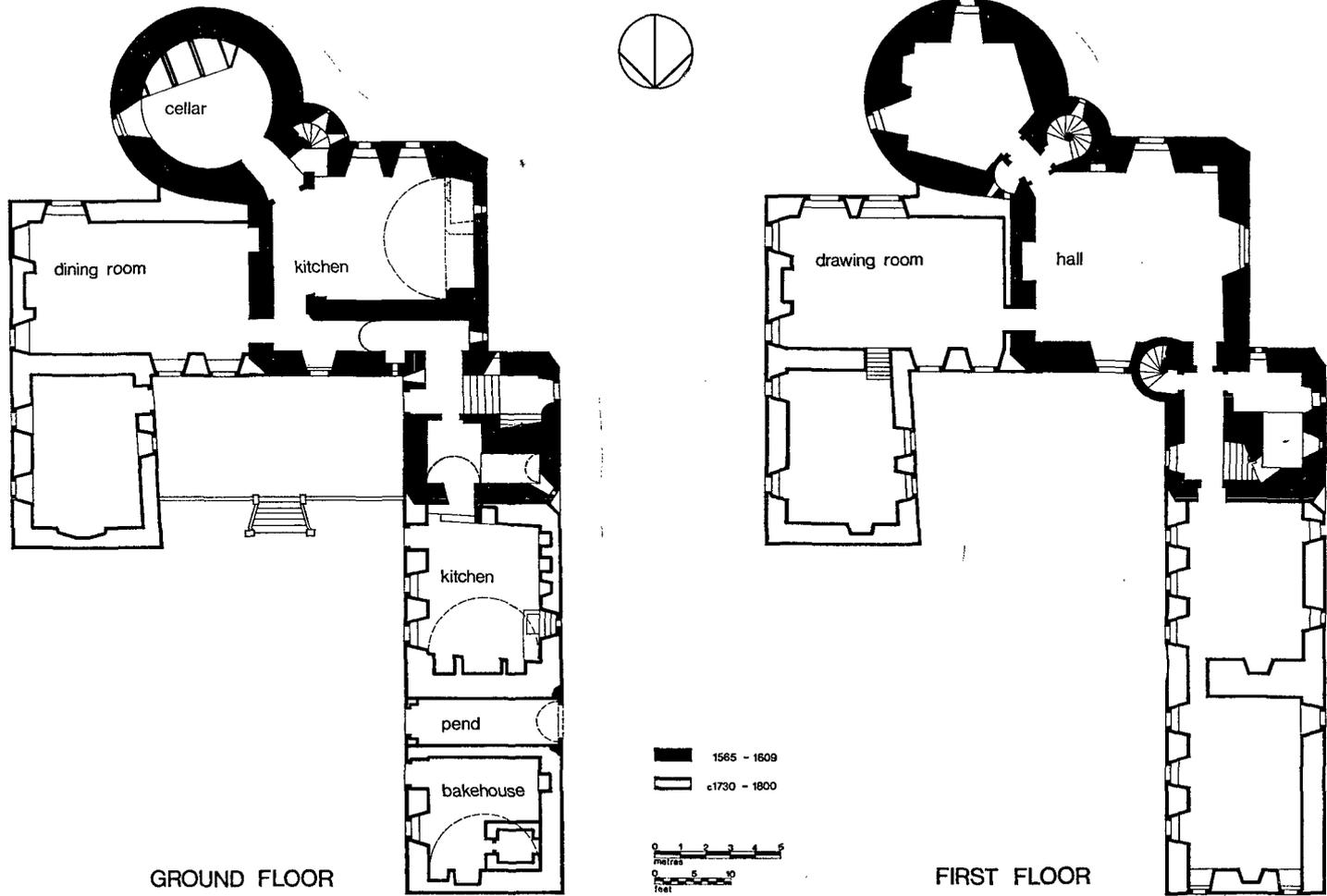


FIG 2 Plans: ground and first floors

of the upper works there is a degree of display and fantasy that, owing nothing to structural or practical necessity, is entirely alien to the spirit of medieval design, and which serves little purpose. That is of course unless one takes the view that decoration introduces an element of what John Knox called *joyosity*, which is a good, and therefore practical, thing in itself. A view which would not have been shared by that stern man.

If, by the standards of Castle Fraser, Udney or Craigston, the upper works of Midmar are muted in their exuberance there is nevertheless a richness in the use of cable and label mouldings, of drop corbels, of ornamental finials, of superimposed colonettes and *trompes* that has little justification other than that somebody delighted in it. Yet at no time does this richness overpower the general massing of the building. The designer had learned his lesson well, and never descended to constructing a decoration.

### 1562–1609: INTERIOR

It was unfortunate that the worthy desire to record the castle before the work of restoration started, extending to the items of door furniture themselves, was not carried further so that a record was also made whilst the work was in progress. Had this been done it would have been possible to distinguish with greater certainty between the two building periods of the 16th- and 17th-century house. It is known that some features came to light in the course of stripping the harling but they were not recorded before they were covered up again.

Although entrance to the castle is from the 18th-century terrace this must reflect the original ground level, the natural slope to the north having been adjusted slightly in the course of landscaping in later years. The main – in fact the only – door of the early house is segmental-headed and has the typical heavy roll-moulding which is usually associated with the early years of the 17th century. This suggests that it forms part of the new building following the destruction of 1594. Other evidence tends to confirm this.

The entrance is defended by two gun-loops; one, a wide-mouthed port, in the wall of the main tower covers the entrance itself, and from its form is likely to date from before 1594. The other, little more than a pistol-loop beside the door, covers the side wall of the main block and the approach to the door. This loop has the disadvantage that it can only be used when the draw-bar is in the secure position. When the bar is not in use it lies across the loop; and although the slot runs through the wall to the kitchen passage and is open-ended – as at Lickleyhead – there is not sufficient length within the wall thickness for it to be drawn clear of the loop. The slot, which is 7 inches (178 mm) square, still retains part of its wooden lining and allows for a bar 5 inches (127 mm) square. The presumption must be that the surviving pins carried the yett otherwise it is necessary to contemplate a wooden outer door 6 inches (152 mm) thick which seems somewhat improbable. The original arrangements are obscured by the relatively modern door and its wooden frame, but it is clear that the draw-bar is set back to allow a space of  $7\frac{1}{2}$  inches (190 mm) which must be for the accommodation of both the outer door and the yett, and even so this gives fairly generous proportions. Nor is it all clear why the yett should be secured by a timber bar. The combination of door and yett should have been sufficient without the bar. Should the door have been fired the bar would have gone as well. To add further confusion there is no socket to house the draw-bar when in the secure position; there is a recess in the opposite wall but it is 5 inches (127 mm) above the level of the bar so it clearly does not serve the purpose of a socket. The possible explanation is that in the first period the entrance door was set more deeply into the wall, secured conventionally by a timber draw-bar and given covering gun-loops. After the destruction of 1594 the doorway was rebuilt and given the stronger protection of a timber outer door and an iron yett, and that for some reason the draw-bar was retained although serving no very useful function. Apart from the two loops the doorway is otherwise unprotected; it is largely sheltered from above by the corbels of the main stair turret, and although there is a small aperture in the north-east turret which is supposed to be a pistol-loop to cover the door this seems to be romantic gloss on a rather more mundane purpose.

Immediately to the right of the entrance is a square-headed doorway with chamfered jambs and head. This opens into a small vaulted room – presumably for the porter – under the main staircase. Here there is a small loop in the splayed north-west corner that is original. The long loop in the east wall is modern and replaces a doorway to a demolished 19th-century larder, although there may have been such

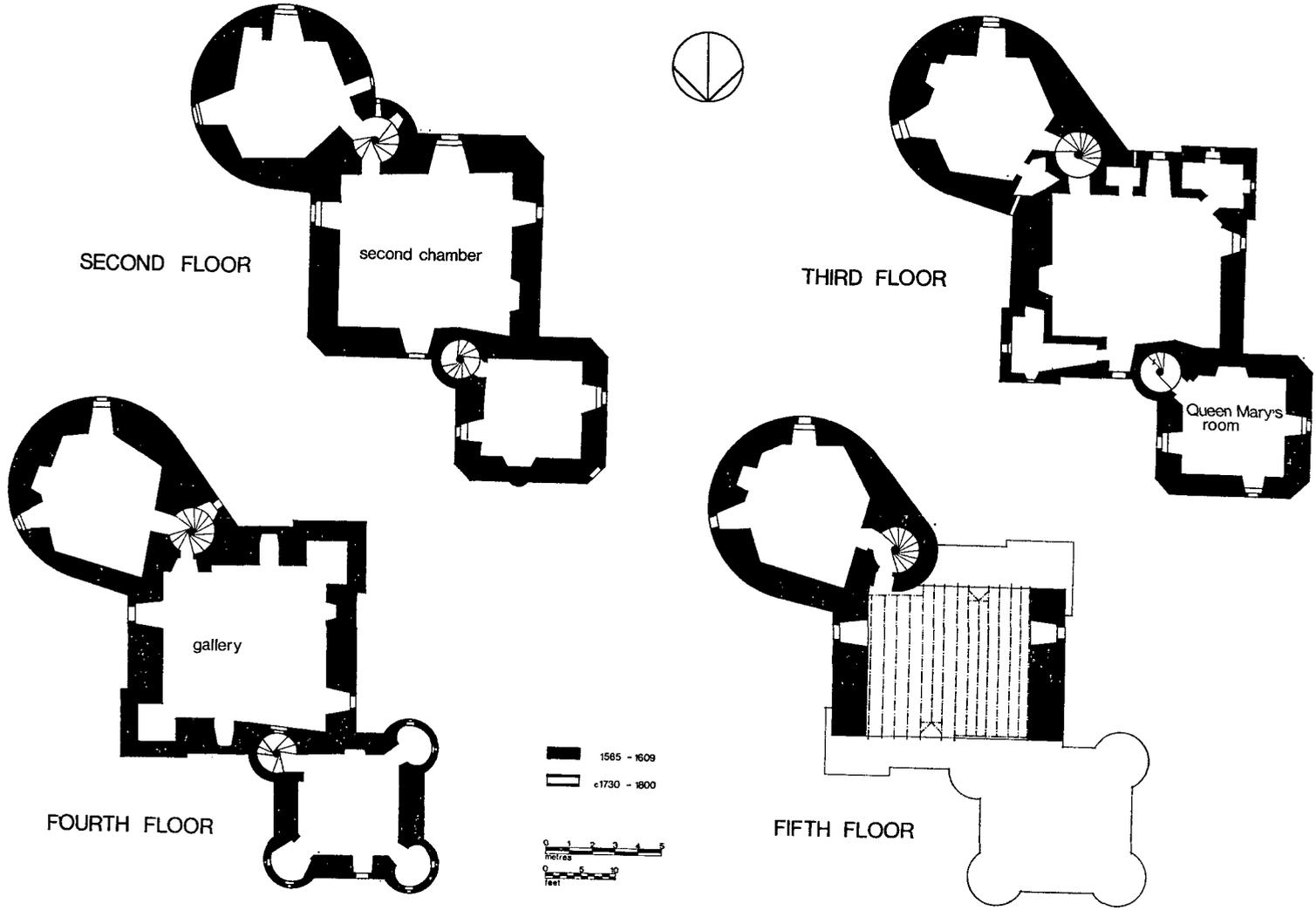


FIG 3 Plans: second, third, fourth and fifth floors

a loop there originally. Similarly there may originally have been a loop or window where the present doorway to the 18th-century kitchen wing has been slapped through the wall.

To the left of the entrance an opening leads to a passage running the length of the north side of the central block. This has a loop at its western end covering the south side of the stair tower and may have had one originally at its eastern end where there is now a doorway through to the 18th-century east wing. The window in the north wall is probably an enlargement of a smaller loop or window.

Since the kitchen occupies the rest of this floor the passage is not strictly necessary for any purpose of access, and must have been provided for the convenience of a serving space, so that the entrance and the foot of the main stair should not be blocked by servants and dishes. To reduce the nuisance of noise and smell as much as possible the entrance to the kitchen was placed at the east end of the passage away from the stairs. The kitchen is barrel-vaulted, and has been very much altered in the 18th century, when a passage was formed across its eastern end and the remainder became a servants' hall. The removal of the cross-wall has restored it to its original form, and the clearing of various 19th-century fittings has revealed enough evidence to establish many of the original features. The fireplace was originally in the west wall but was largely destroyed in the later alterations. The right-hand jamb survives to the level of the springing of the arch. At the back of the fireplace is an aumbry checked for a top-hung shutter. If this is part of the original arrangement it considerably restricts the depth of the fireplace. It is too large for a salt-box, and in any case is in the wrong position behind the fire, nor is it suitable for use as an oven. Possibly it represents an intermediate period when there was a contraction of the fireplace. The fireplace itself can never have been very large: the presence of the small window and the rough rubble above it to the left of the hearth suggest that there was a closet at this point entered either from the kitchen or directly from the in-going of the fireplace.

The kitchen is otherwise planned conventionally with a water-intake under one of the windows in the south wall. This feature occurs so frequently in houses in the north-east at this period that it throws grave doubts on there having been any very serious thought given to defence. After all if the only water supply comes from outside the main building, and frequently from outwith the barmekin wall – Harthill and Druminnor are both cases in point – there can have been little intention or hope of surviving a siege.

The access to the kitchen from the passage always seems to have been in the north-east corner – although the pins relate to a doorway in the later wall at this point. The opening forced in the wall of the passage – but now blocked – towards the west also relates to the later alterations; an entrance so close to the fireplace would have been inconvenient for the cook, and unpleasantly close to the main stair.

Beyond the kitchen lies the cellar in the base of the round tower. This was altered to a wine-cellar at the end of the 18th century, and has lost all its features, except for the two rings set into the vault to carry the hanging beam – although this may date from c 1730. As originally conceived this cellar would have combined the function of cellar and larder. In later Z-houses the two rooms were always separated; indeed the separation appears as early as c 1558 at Beldorney, and c 1574 at Carnousie, and this is a further indication that, if not positively anachronistic by c 1570, the design of Midmar in its first phase was not particularly advanced. As built this cellar was almost certain to have had three or four loops or small windows, partly to cover the south and east walls of the main tower, but more importantly to provide ample ventilation to keep the meat in the larder as sweet as possible.

The access arrangements from the cellar and the kitchen are curiously clumsy; that this should be so in a house associated with any member of the Bell family need not come as any surprise. Like many later architects employed by the landed classes the Bells ensured that any manifestations of their undoubted genius remained firmly on this side of the green baize door. Nevertheless the planning is clumsy even by Bell standards, and later alterations have not helped in any way. The generally accepted arrangement, or rather the desirable one, was for the public access and kitchen service stairs to arrive at the lower end of the Hall, with possibly a staircase from the cellar to the upper end. The ideal was seldom achieved and in early buildings such as Druminnor and Huntly one stair sufficed for all these needs. Beldorney manages better with a combined public and service stair at the lower end and a cellar stair at the high end, and the same solution is adopted at Craigston and Cluny. The linked group of Carnousie, Craig, Gight and Towie Barclay settle for separate public stairs and service/cellar stairs at the lower end as do Tolquhon, Glenbuchat and Lickleyhead, and the very late example at Leslie Castle. Castle Fraser in its final stage, and Harthill both achieved the ideal solution with three stairs. Midmar conforms to the high and low end-stair pattern and follows Cluny, Fraser and Craigston in extending the cellar stair to the top of the house to form the secondary or private stair.

The arrangement at the foot of the stair, however, is anything but clear. At the present time there are two points of entrance to it; one from the short lobby between the kitchen and the cellar, and one directly from the kitchen. The more normal one is the former as it to some extent prevents the penetration of the upper parts of the house by the smells of cooking which must certainly have happened if the latter arrangement had been adopted. But this does not seem to have been what was intended originally although as it stands the staircase now works to the lobby. In the first instance the doorway from the kitchen appears to have been in use, and the iron pins for hanging the door remain. However, it is clear that this doorway could not have been in use once the stair-foot took its present form as it would have fouled the door and effectively prevented its opening.

Admittedly the understanding of the plan at this point has not been helped by the introduction and subsequent removal of the cross wall when the kitchen was turned into a servants' hall but what seems to have happened here can only be explained if a major rebuild had been carried out at some time. If this is true then it may be necessary to put forward the view that pre-1594 Midmar consisted of only the two square blocks, the round tower being an addition of post-1594. If this is accepted then the position of the doorway in the kitchen, and the direction of door-swing makes perfect sense, the door opening back against the wall at the foot of a small straight mural stair rising to the Hall as from the kitchen at Harthill, or from the cellar as at Lickleyhead, Carnousie and Beldorney. With the building of the round tower and turret stair this doorway would have ceased to work as in order to bring the turret stairs to floor level it became necessary to block the earlier doorway.

There are two loops on the turret stair at this level; one belled internally with a recess over it, the other also belled internally but largely blocked by the staircase. As the staircase must have always worked the way that it has been built, and as the loop appears to be of the same build the conclusion must be that it was put in for show.

From the entrance lobby the main stair rises in four straight flights with quarter landings around a square masonry core – a spacious scale-and-platt stair, similar to that at Carnousie. It is vaulted but, as with so many of the vaults at Midmar, the form is somewhat indeterminate. Off the third quarter-landing a doorway forced through the wall leads to the upper floor of the 18th-century west wing. In the doorway hangs an older re-used plank door.

From the upper landing three doorways with chamfered jambs and heads lead to the Hall, the re-entrant stair and a small closet. The purpose of this closet is not clear and its form is curious. It is barrel-vaulted with two small windows, one later enlarged and checked for an external shutter. The outer part of the closet, which is entered from the landing, is square and of full height. The windows light this area. At right angles to this space is a rectangular area, also vaulted, and at a higher level, so that it is impossible to stand upright in it. Within this space is a small gun-loop in the west wall, and opening off the north-east side is a large vaulted recess or aumbry.

In the 19th century a water-closet was installed and the two inner areas blocked off: they have now been opened up but the room remains in use as a lavatory. Traditionally it is known as the *Butler's Room*, the raised inner area being that dignified functionary's sleeping space. This tradition is probably a late one dating from the 18th or 19th centuries when the butler dwindled in stature from the position that he had once enjoyed as a dignified officer of the household to merely that of the senior indoor male domestic, who might consider himself fortunate if he had a room to himself. Before this, however, it could have served one of two purposes. It could have been a service room, conveniently placed for the Hall, and combining the functions of buttery and pantry. On the other hand its comparatively fire-proof construction could mean that it was intended to serve as the Charter Room, and that the vaulted aumbry in the north-east corner was the safe for the most important charters and valuables. This is in all probability its most likely purpose.

The Hall, a large and almost square room, measuring 24 ft by 22 ft (7.32 m by 6.71 m) is largely devoid of any original features. The big windows in the north and south walls have roll-moulded external surrounds and were originally secured by iron grilles. The window in the west wall would seem to be an introduction, or at least a substantial enlargement of the 18th century. Its present size and position would have effectively blocked the original kitchen chimney. The fireplace in the east wall has no original features apart from a massive stone lintel and appears to have been largely rebuilt at various times. Some form of enrichment would have been expected but none survives. However, in the upper room of the small 18th-century garden house are the re-used jambs of a richly moulded fireplace of the early 17th century, and these may well be from the Hall fireplace. The only decorative feature surviving from this period is the corbelled and slightly projecting moulding supporting the re-entrant stair turret, which protrudes rather clumsily into the Hall.

In the north-east corner a doorway leads to the 18th-century east wing, and this may have been formed in an earlier window embrasure. A smaller doorway with chamfered surrounds opens from the south-east corner into a small lobby. From this lobby a door leads to the withdrawing or private room on the first floor of the round tower. A doorway between the lobby and the service stair gives added privacy making it possible to reach the upper floors of the tower without intruding on the rooms on the first floor. Also opening off this lobby is a small closet with a window and pistol-loop covering the east gable.

The re-entrant stair turret is closed from the main first-floor landing by an old single-planked door, but there are signs that this was originally of double plank construction that has at some time been fined down. There are two loops on the lower flight of the stair; one, a small pistol-loop, covers the entrance to the east wing for no very apparent reason. If it is meant to do this then either the loop dates from the early 18th century, the date of the wing, or it is purely coincidental. It is unlikely, but not of course impossible, for shot-holes still to be provided at that period.

The second-floor chamber is entered directly from the staircase, and although it now communicates with the principal chamber in the central tower the opening has been forced through as an afterthought at a very late date. The fireplace has a moulded surround, and the original planked door still survives, although the 19th century gave it a panelled face towards the stair. Another of Midmar's apparently inexplicable features occurs on this floor. Immediately behind the fireplace the wall swells outwards to present the appearance of a false mural turret on the north face of the north-west tower. This false turret rises from four moulded corbel courses hidden in the roof space of the west wing, and it terminates part-way up the second floor. There is no need to do this to provide space for the chimney flue which is accommodated without any difficulty within the wall thickness for the remainder of its height, and which in any case is the only flue within that particular wall. From the relatively simple detailing of the corbels it seems to be earlier than the rest of the worked stone visible on the building. It is a feature difficult to parallel elsewhere, although somewhat similar rounds, although larger and more elaborate, and containing stairs, occur at Crathes. Again one is faced with the possibility that this may be part of the pre-1594 building.

On the way up the private stair between the Hall and the principal chamber is a window provided with a comfortably spacious window seat and a gun port with a single internal embrasure serving two external loops.

The two other chambers on the second floor are both entered directly from the private stair and have no visible internal features of the 16th and 17th centuries. The window openings in the north and south faces of the central block preserve their old jambs and these show that they were designed to take fixed glazing in the upper parts and shutters in the lower, the fixed lights being wired to internal saddle bars.

The re-entrant stair leads to the room on the third floor of the north-west tower known as *Queen Mary's Room* (pl 40a), the tradition being that she spent the night after the battle of Corrichie here. There is little basis for this historically, and even less architecturally, as it is almost certain that it is part of the post-1594 build. Nor does *Tradition* explain why Her Majesty should have been housed in a small and relatively inaccessible room where no attempt at ceremony or state would have been possible. But though shorn of tradition the room is of great interest in its own right, for of all the rooms at Midmar it preserves its 17th-century appearance most nearly. Possibly a misplaced tradition has saved it.

The double-planked door from the staircase, with its iron nails and diagonal scoring still hangs from iron pins and straps, and the original square fireplace with a plain chamfered surround, although it contains an 18th-century grate, has not been obscured by a later chimney piece. The floor is of random width boarding, with a curious brand burnt into one of the boards (fig 4). Above, roughly chamfered pine joists, 5 inches by 5 inches (127 mm by 127 mm), carry the planked ceiling, and one small window, although reglazed in the 18th century with a timber frame, repeats the pattern of a fixed upper sash with opening shutters below. In this instance the shutters cover small secondary casements.

There is no means of access from this tower to the rest of the third floor which is reached from the private stair and, as on the floor below, both rooms open directly off the private stair. Again the 18th and 19th centuries have removed or hidden any earlier detail, although a small closet still survives opening off the room in the round tower.

The large room in the central tower has three closets, one a small mural chamber within the thickness of the south wall, the other two being the lower floors of the square corner turrets. That in the North-East corner has two 'shot-holes' in the floor, from one of which nothing can be seen and to one of which

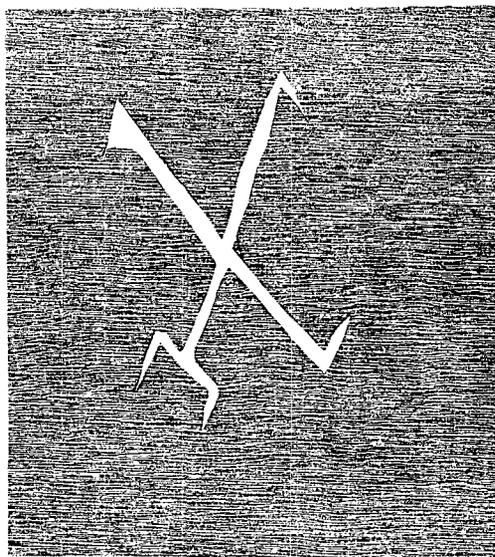


FIG 4 Brand mark on the floor of Queen Mary's Room

reference has already been made. This latter one is supposed to give covering fire to the entrance door. No doubt tests would prove which weapons could be inserted into this aperture and what would be hit if they were fired. That it would be the entrance door or anything near it is open to question. Even lying flat on the floor it is impossible to see the entrance, and generally it is held that visibility of a target is desirable if small-arms fire is to be effective. On the other hand this hole is admirably adapted for the emptying of slops. This somewhat prosaic suggestion is hardly likely to find favour with the romantically inclined but it is becoming increasingly difficult to accept the prevailing north-east belief in shot-holes. Holes there certainly are, and in plenty. No self-respecting mansion house is without them, and the fact that most of them are patently unusable does nothing to diminish belief in this item of received folk-history. But unless the men of the 17th century had guns which could fire round corners, and were frequently contortionists as well, these holes, ports and loops were largely for display externally, and for various purposes of ventilation, sanitation and general economy internally.

On the fourth floor of the north-west tower there is a chamber, with three small closets in the rounds. In the two western rounds there are small circular holes which could be for ventilation or may have been the customary ritual shot-holes.

On this floor there is an attempt to provide access to the rest of the house from the head of the stair. Unfortunately the stair does not rise to the level of the adjoining floor, and it is necessary to resort to an undignified scramble through a small hatch in the wall. The opening may have been forced at a later date to provide an emergency escape in case of fire: but if it were part of the original build it must always have been of very minor importance. Its inconvenience alone would have ensured this.

Otherwise access to this floor is from the private stair. Within the main tower both this floor and the one above are formed within the roof space. The roof consists of 15 principal trusses with double-collars, and ashlarings. It is impossible to tell if the ashlarings are housed into sole pieces, or into a third and lower tie formed by the floor beams. The lower parts of the trusses, together with the ashlarings and sole pieces, are partly hidden by the wall head which is built up to the level of the top of the ashlarings. The members are approximately  $6\frac{1}{2}$  inches by 5 inches (165 mm by 127 mm), generally lapped rather than

halved, and the timbers are pegged, although at a later date some iron nails have been introduced. The trusses have framing numbers in Roman numerals, and are numbered I–XV from the east. On the south side trusses I–IV, and on the north side trusses IX–XV are carried on wallplates partly bearing on corbels because of the irregularities in the wall faces at their junction with the stair turrets. There is no ridge piece, and there are no structural purlins, although a false purlin, since removed, was formed in the angle between the lower collar and the principals. If the intention had been to panel this room for use as a gallery this would have provided a useful fixing member. The absence of any plaster on the hard suggests that panelling was the intended finish.

At present this floor is lit by two small windows, one in each gable, but it is clear from the trimmer to truss X on the south side and truss VI on the north side and from the angle-braces to these trimmers that originally there were two large dormer windows. This ample provision of light, a fireplace, and the suggestion of a panelled finish make it almost certain that this floor was intended as a gallery from the first, although it may never have been completed (pl 40b).

A point of constructional interest is found in the arches of the end wall window-heads. In both cases they were formed on planked shuttering, the marks of the planks being clearly visible in the mortar slurry on the soffit. Presumably a slurry was poured on the shuttering before the masonry was placed in position. Of even more interest is the doorway from the staircase. Here the wooden shutter boards are still in position, acting as a lining to the soffit of the door-head. The door itself is double-planked with iron nails and diagonal scoring.

The roof space above the lower collar was intended as a garret either for storage or for the accommodation of servants, although the floor has now been removed, and the whole roof space thrown into one display gallery.

The staircase continues higher to give access to the upper floor of the round tower, and to the leads. The open roof-top is surrounded by a solid castellated parapet, unlike the open balustrades of Castle Fraser and Craigievar; the provision of stone benches, however, makes it clear that the purpose was the same, and that this was the airy and elevated situation from which a prospect of the surrounding country could be enjoyed.

#### 1562–1609: EXTERIOR

From whichever side Midmar is seen the dominant element in the composition is the great round tower at the south-east corner (pl 37). Rising 63 ft (19.2 m) to the top of the battlements, and a further 20 (6.1 m) to the top of the weather vane, it is devoid of any decoration except for the moulded string to the parapet and the coping to the battlement. This, together with the arrangement of the windows, which are placed vertically above each other in two sets, and not staggered, emphasizes its height. When viewed from certain aspects, particularly from the south-east, it almost appears to be detached from the main block of the castle. Although it is described as a round tower this is not, strictly speaking, true except of the three lower floors. On the upper three floors it ceases to be circular as its sides are carried back to the main block tangentially to the round.

This is done by means of a curious device. Instead of corbelling out from below to support the oversailing walls, these walls are carried on moulded arches or false *trompes* (pl 39b). That is to say the wall is carried on arches which abut upon or die into the walls at the re-entering angles on either side of the tower. At Midmar the east *trompe* abuts on corbels, the north *trompe* abuts on a corbel on one side, but dies into the curve of the stair turret on the other. The credit for the invention of this feature is normally claimed for Philibert de l'Orme, who devoted seven chapters to this feature in the fourth book of his treatise on architecture published in 1567. It is doubtful if he deserves this credit as the *trompe* is really only an elaboration of the squinch arch which had been in use throughout the medieval period. Normally it was used to carry circular turrets in a re-entrant angle as a variant on the more usual corbelling, and being curved in plan and section was susceptible of some quite startling variations. It rarely appears in Scotland, and never in a form that would have been recognizable to Monsieur de l'Orme. Apart from Midmar it is known to exist at five other houses in Scotland: Hillslap (1585), Airdrie (1586), Glenbuchat (1590), Muckerach (1598) and Kellie (1606).

Of these Hillslap is a false *trompe* as it is little more than a straight squinch with the turret corbelled out above; Airdrie is also false as, although the *trompe* curves on plan, the stair-turret is still corbelled out above it; Glenbuchat is nearer the original in that it is curved and the turret is defined above it by a double string, and is not carried on corbels; at Kellie the turret is again corbelled out above the *trompe*; Muckerach is a simpler version of Glenbuchat. At Midmar this feature is handled with much greater

assurance than in any of the foregoing examples; the arches are of dressed stone and carefully moulded, the corbels from which they spring are carefully designed, and the whole is not overwhelmed by super-added corbel courses. On the other hand they appear to have been used for no more satisfactory reason than to mask an awkward junction between the tower and the main building, and it can be argued that the junction of the tower with the south elevation is rendered even more awkward by this. Nevertheless, the designer of Midmar knew what he was about a great deal better than the designers of the other four castles, where this feature is used.

Dr William Kelly, in discussing this particular feature at Glenbuchat, attributes it to a Forfar mason, drawing the parallel between Glenbuchat and Hatton, which Glenbuchat greatly resembles, and as corroborative evidence adduces the marriage between John Gordon, the builder of Glenbuchat and Helen Carnegie. What he overlooked was that the builder of Hatton was Lawrence, fourth Lord Oliphant, who was also the builder, in part, of Kellie. Of course it is possible to argue that although Glenbuchat is later than Hatton, the Z-plan at Hatton derives from Aberdeen examples in the first place. Dr W Douglas Simpson followed Dr Kelly in favouring an Angus provenance for Glenbuchat, at which point his scholarly imagination came into play. Because Glenbuchat resembled Hatton, Simpson thought that Helen Carnegie had brought the mason from her native Angus. Helen was, however the daughter of Sir Robert Carnegie of Kinnaird, and he had been ambassador in France some years before his death in 1565–6. This unfortunately was two years before de l'Orme published his own work. Nevertheless, the Dowager Countess of Southesk searched the old catalogue of the library at Kinnaird Castle for a sign of it having been there. There was none.

This, of course, does not mean that Scottish masons were unaware of fashionable new ideas current in France, nor that they were unable to copy them more or less accurately, and there is no convincing reason for arguing that the Midmar *trompes* may not be of French derivation. The date, however, at which they were derived is important. Of the examples known none is earlier than 1585, a date 10 years later than the building of Hatton and the death of George Bell, and nine years after the death of Sir Robert Carnegie. Simpson, of course, implied that Carnegie was the importer of French ideas, picked up possibly at Blois in 1551. If these ideas are of French derivation, and not merely a solution that any half-way competent mason was capable of devising, then the most likely source of French influence, in the north-east at least, was the taste of Lord Huntly for things foreign acquired either whilst he was being educated abroad or during one of his periods of exile.

The use of the *trompe* at Midmar is important in its aid to the dating of the upper works of the castle, and it cannot be entirely coincidental that its use occurs in the building at the point where, if there are two building periods the change would have been made – that is at the level of the third floor.

Another feature of the older building that is difficult to parallel elsewhere, except at Abergeldie, is the use of splayed corners to the square towers. Although rounded corners are found they tend to be on older buildings as at the old tower at Drum, and when they are used on later buildings such as Crathes and Craigievar this may be a conscious attempt to create an impression of strength. The argument that rounded corners are due either to a shortage of good building stone or to masons of limited skill is romantic rather than rational. By the second half of the 16th century square quoins were normal; sometimes the angles were of roughly cut and squared stones with the harling making good any defects, in other examples, as the 17th-century work at Castle Fraser, they are of carefully dressed freestone, even though they were still covered with harling. A more exceptional case is Craigston where both the size and colour of the quoins show that they were meant to be seen from the start. The splay of the angles at Midmar is clearly a piece of deliberate design and simply adds a further difficulty to the setting out of the walls, and judging by the way that they have been built the masons found them difficult to execute.

The only decorated feature to survive on the lower part of the castle is on the north-west splay of the north-west tower. Just below the level of the second floor is a square recess with moulded jambs and a decorated head, presumably to take a dated armorial (pl 38a).

From the third floor upwards the elevations show all the signs of external richness that have come to be associated with Aberdeenshire houses of the late 16th and early 17th centuries. Even though the finials never seem to have been as elaborate as shown by Billing, the effect must have been even more exuberant when the roof-line was crowded with the two dormer heads of the gallery windows which have since disappeared (pl 36). This elaboration is, usually, confined to the square towers; the round tower, apart from the *trompes*, is by contrast unusually simple, its severity relieved only by the mouldings on the parapet and by the ogival roof to the stair tower.

The square turrets on the corners of the central block, together with the north and south elevations

of the gallery, are brought forward on a profusion of fretted label mouldings of an elaboration equalled but not surpassed by those at Allardyce in the Mearns. Similar detailing is found at Birse and Knock, both dating c 1600, and built by branches of the Gordons of Abergeldie and Cluny. The square turrets are further enriched with corner colonettes. These have embryo Ionic capitals and appear to have been designed by someone who had heard of the superimposition of the orders – just. The turret on the north elevation is enriched additionally with a pediment-like cartouche (pl 35a). The gablets on these two corner towers have, or had, carved finials on the apex and skew-puts, and balls on the skewes, some of which survive. The pierced stone decorations shown by Billing seem to be an invention of his own. The main gables are crowstepped and the chimneys coped. The smaller windows generally have flattened roll-moulded jambs and heads, and this treatment was applied to some of the larger windows. It has largely been lost in later alterations and enlargements.

If it is conceded that the upper work of the central block is by a mason who was not of the Bell school, the clue to his identity may lie in the engaged colonettes on the square corner turrets. This is not a common feature, and the use of quasi-volutes on the capitals of the shafts is of particular interest. Similar volutes can be seen on the capitals of the jambs of the great fireplace in the Hall at Castle Fraser. This dates from the re-building of 1563–76 carried out as it is thought by Thomas Leiper, fl 1550–99, and who was succeeded by his son (?) James Leiper, fl 1580–1623. If this is a correct reading of the evidence it is possible to make a cautious attribution of the first stage of the re-building of Midmar to the Leiper family. Clearly the Bell–Leiper rivalry can be paralleled by that of Archibald Simpson and John Smith 250 years later.

The treatment of the upper works of the north-west tower is far less idiosyncratic than on the main tower, and so much more in keeping with what is believed to be the main stream of Bell and Bell-influenced work of the early 17th century that it is difficult to believe that the same hand was responsible for both. The detailing is much simpler. The stair turret rises from a seven-fold corbel through four floors without a break, and the rounds are carried on the traditional cable-moulded string above false machicolations and three further plainly moulded courses. Because of the splayed angles of the tower a further corbelled drop bringing the angle out to the square has had to be introduced (pl 39a). The window-jambs appear to be original, designed to take fixed lights and shutters, and consequently there are small shot-holes in the two western rounds. From the condition of the jambs it is clear that these windows were not treated decoratively.

#### SUMMARY: 1562–1609

At this point it would be well to summarize the arguments advanced for the development of the Z-house at Midmar.

Sometime between 1565 and 1575, if we are to allow George Bell any hand in it, a three-floored Z-house was built for George Gordon of Abergeldie. This building was destroyed or, more likely, heavily damaged in 1594 following Alexander Gordon's participation in Lord Huntly's rebellion. The repairs and necessary rebuilding were carried out by William Gordon, fifth laird, between 1603 and 1609. It can be argued on stylistic grounds that in doing this two separate master masons were employed. One, who may have worked on the castles of Birse and Knock, was responsible for the third floors of the two flanking towers and for the whole of the central block, which was enriched with two additional dormers. Who he may have been cannot yet be identified, but it is possible that he was from outwith Aberdeenshire. The other, who is likely to have been a member of the Bell family – possibly the same John Bell who was the designer of the upper works of Castle Fraser – completed the upper floors of both flanking towers in the more correct manner of the north-east.

#### c 1730–1830

The purchase of the castle in 1728 by Alexander Grant, and its new name of Grantfield, paved the way for a considerable amount of remodelling and extension to bring the old house more into line with contemporary standards of comfort and convenience. It is difficult for us today always to appreciate what exactly were the desirable standards of the time. To a generation that equates convenience with labour-

saving devices, and has happily come to terms with *dinettes*, *kitchenettes*, *serviettes*, and *toilets*, the standards and values of an age when dining rooms could be 100 yards from kitchens, when closed stools were an improvement on earth closets, when the smells from the *garde-robe* shafts were regarded as a protection to clothes against moths, and when an inventory of the modest household of widowed Mrs Urquhart could list 12-dozen damask and linen napkins and 18 tablecloths must be largely incomprehensible. But the alterations carried out by Alexander Grant would, in the eyes of his contemporaries, have turned Midmar into as convenient a gentleman's residence, that was both elegant and commodious, as was possible short of actual demolition. It was the transformation, as has been said of Lickleyhead, of a *chateau-fort* into a *chateau-maison*.

Externally the additions are so self-effacing as to be totally unremarkable. The most striking feature is the terrace along the north front of the old castle with a flight of steps leading down to the courtyard; the walls flanking the steps have a bolection coping and the piers on the terrace are ornamented with large balls (pl 35a). Otherwise there is no decoration. The same is true of the two wings. Plain chamfers to the window surrounds in the west wing, plain gables and skew putts, with only a hint of ornament in the wooden fanlights to the pend. The chimneys are coped and some of the windows in the east wing are gible-checked for shutters, but beyond that there is little else to describe.

The most important external work of this period was, of course, the changes made in the levels which have produced the present courtyard and terrace, but these have rather lost their effect since the setting to which they related has largely disappeared. Like Castle Fraser, Midmar seems to have stood in the middle of a great sycamore avenue running north and south, some traces of which still remain. There is still a hint of this to be seen in the picture of Midmar painted in 1841 by James Giles. It is likely that originally the courtyard was separated from the avenue by an ornamental iron screen. If there were gates in the screen they were only to be opened on state occasions; the normal entrance to the court was by way of the pend in the west wing. The courtyard at Midmar was certainly large enough to admit carriages and carts but this was by no means regarded as necessary; at Beldorney where there are similar later wings the courtyard is too narrow to allow the entry of any but those on foot.

Internally the alterations were aimed at providing a better arrangement of the public rooms, and the changes in the service planning may have resulted from this. On the first floor the old Hall seems to have been relegated to the role of an ante-room to a large withdrawing room in the new east wing, beyond which there was a smaller private room or boudoir. A suite of two large rooms, opening off the stair lobby, was formed on the first floor of the west wing. Apart from the grates all the trim in these two rooms is 19th-century in date and poor in quality, so it is difficult to assign a use to them, but in all probability they were intended as the principal guest suite.

To improve the Hall the window in the north wall was blocked, and painted externally to simulate a glazed sash. As a compensation for this, and to admit more cheerful light, a large new window was opened in the west wall. This window completely blocked the old kitchen lum, thus forcing the changes on the ground floor even if they had not been intended from the first. These changes were radical. Because the kitchen lum was now blocked the kitchen was useless. Cooking was still done over large open fires and big chimneys were a necessity. A new kitchen therefore had to be provided and this was done in the vaulted ground floor of the new west wing beyond the old porter's room which now became a service room. Beyond the new kitchen was the pended entry, and beyond this a stone vaulted bakehouse. The old kitchen was altered, a wall being built across its eastern end to allow a narrow passage between the service and private stair and the ground floor corridors. To heat the old kitchen, which had become the servants' hall, a fireplace was formed in the east wall with its flue taken across the passage and up into the Hall chimney, the Hall fireplace being much reduced in size in consequence. In the new east wing at the end of ground floor corridors and reached by a doorway, forced through the wall of the older house, was a large dining room, and beyond the dining room in the ell of the wing was a room separated from the rest of the house and entered from the terrace.

Within the roof space of the east wing were attic rooms but later alterations have confused whatever access arrangements to these may have originally existed.

With the exception of the new dining room, all the alterations on the ground floor were concerned with the provision of new service rooms. At the north end of the west wing is the bakehouse with a blocked fireplace in the north wall and a large stone-built oven in the north-east corner. The bakehouse and the oven were built in two separate operations (the barrel-vault can be seen passing over the oven) but this is a matter of structural practicality and does not mark any difference in dating. Beyond the bakehouse, which opens directly on to the court, and separating it from the new kitchen is the pend. This arched

passageway seems to have been the main entrance into the courtyard except on state occasions. Its outer arch in the west wall may mark the point of original entry to the barmekin. The large round-headed external doorway with its heavy roll-moulded jambs is probably a survival from the 17th century when it was closed either by a heavy wooden door, or a yett, hung on the massive pins which still survive. In the late 18th or early 19th century a wooden door-frame and fanlight were introduced and at the same time the opening into the courtyard, which until then had been an open archway was reduced in size. Stone jambs for a much smaller doorway were built and a fanlight added. Why this should have been done is puzzling as an enclosed hallway in this position is pointless and the attempts at elegance in the fanlights are very much at variance with its later use as a coal store.

Like the bakehouse the new kitchen is barrel vaulted. A large fireplace with chamfered principal jambs occupies the whole of the north wall. In the 1730s large fires were still the custom, and huge fireplaces had not then given way to the stoves and hot closets of a later age, although these now largely fill the great opening. A rough stone sink flanks the fireplace, and in the north wall are three deep aumbries. Set in the vault are two massive cleeks supporting a long pole from which once hung the pots and pans baskets, hams and vegetables in daily use.

Whatever was done to the old kitchen when it was turned into the servants' hall has since been undone, but in the ground floor of the south-east tower are the ample stone bins built to store wine – probably brought by the Mansfields from the vaults of Bell and Rannie in Leith. This is not the only provision for wine; there are further bins, this time of brick, in the vaulted cellar under the ell of the east wing. The room in the ell opens off the terrace, and seems originally not to have communicated with the dining room as it does now. Its purpose has been obscured by later alteration, and the only original feature is the fireplace. This is a large and plain rectangular opening that has been altered, but which still retains a swey. In 1912 this room was used as a laundry but it must be doubtful if this was the purpose for which it was built. Possibly it was a room for the use of outdoor servants.

The Dining Room takes up the greater part of the south wing, measuring 28 ft by 17 ft (8.53 m by 5.18 m). It is a remarkably fine room, and would have been an even more handsome apartment had it been possible to achieve a pattern of regular fenestration. This could not be done as the walls were blocked in one direction by the south-east tower of the older building, and in the other by the rest of the east wing. This room has now been turned into a kitchen – the third that there has been at Midmar. In this change some of the original features have been hidden, and a doorway formed to lead to the remainder of the wing, but nothing has been destroyed (pl 41b).

It is likely that when this room was built in 1730 there were two windows in the south wall as there are still in the drawing room above, but in the alterations carried out by the Mansfields these were destroyed, and the present single window introduced in their place. Of the first period only the chimney-piece survives; this is a plain bolection-moulded surround to which a later mantel-shelf has been added. The grate, no longer visible, is also later. The decoration of the second period is confined to the skirting, chair rail, door-cases and window-surrounds, which are in wood, and to the frieze and cornice, which, with the central feature of the ceiling, are executed in plaster.

The doors are six-panelled and framed by pilasters carrying an entablature. There is no enrichment. The window surrounds on the other hand are treated much more elaborately, those in the east and north walls having segmental heads. The arrises of the jambs above the chair rail are treated as reeded colonettes and the same detail is repeated on the heads. The arrises between the chair rail and the skirting are treated as if they were the bases of *terms*. The lower part of the frieze is decorated with a running enrichment of wheat and honeysuckle; above it is a band of formalized palmette decoration, a horizontal reeded flat broken by small *fleurons* and finally a band of ball-drops. Whilst the frieze and cornice are in very low relief, the oval central panel is much more deeply modelled with a rich acanthus centre-piece (pl 44a).

On the first floor the Hall has lost almost all its 18th-century features apart from the cornice and ceiling. The cornice is heavy and early in section and there is an oval panel in the centre of the ceiling; this is defined by a simply moulded surround, but is otherwise undecorated. It is likely that this room was always plastered on the hard; there is not sufficient overhang from the wall of the lowest member of the cornice to allow for the fixing of panelling. From the Hall a panelled lobby leads to the Withdrawing Room, and another small lobby leads to the room on the first floor of the round tower. This particular lobby serves to shut off the private and service stair so that traffic on it did not need to interfere with the use of the Hall and Withdrawing Room.

The tower chamber retains its 18th-century skirting, chair rail, and plaster cornice, a later and simple chimney-piece and grate, and a six-panelled door that has been re-hung upside down. The other

doors on this floor except for those in the Withdrawing Room are a very 'mixed bag' and seem to have been moved about a good deal in the past.

The Drawing Room (now the Billiard Room) like the Dining Room below suffers from irregular fenestration, and from a certain amount of damage to the panelling done in the last century. Nevertheless it is still a very handsome room and it is possible to reconstruct the original form of its decoration. It was panelled with bolection panelling arranged in three tiers, the two lower tiers being separated by the chair rail. There is a difference in level between the window sills and the chair rail, which also forms the sills. To accommodate this the rail is lifted at each jamb giving slightly deeper panels on the ingoing of the reveals and on the aprons of the windows. This produces an interest and movement to the panelling without which it would run the risk of being insipid. There is no attempt to dignify the window openings by architraves, and the same was probably true of the doorways. The only ones to survive in their original condition are those to the cupboards in the corners of the west end of the room, and these are designed to be seen as part of the panelling. The two other doors are both alterations; that leading to the Hall dignified by an architrave which sits very uncomfortably on the surrounding panelling, and that leading to the room in the ell being part of a later alteration. This alteration introduced a three-leafed glazed cupboard with fretted glazing in place of two vertical panels in the west wall, a two-leafed cupboard of similar design in one of the window embrasures in the south wall, the destruction of three bays of panelling above the chair rail on the same wall, and the similar destruction of two bays on the north wall. In the place of the missing panels single flat areas of wall were substituted possibly as a background for the display of large pictures. It would not be difficult to restore the room to the original appearance (pl 42a).

The chimney piece is a plain bolection surround, the mouldings of which die into, instead of sitting firmly on, the base blocks, an odd survival of a medieval use. The grate was undistinguished and is now blocked. In front of it is a fine Royal Patent iron stove from Adam Anderson of Edinburgh. The arms of England and Scotland are quartered with those of France, Ireland and Hanover so it presumably dates from before 1837. Originally situated in the Hall, it was moved to its present position in the recent restoration.

Opening off the Drawing Room is a small room in the ell of the wing, reached by a flight of steps within the thickness of the wall. This was probably intended as an inner room or Boudoir for Mrs Grant but its original form has been confused by 19th-century alterations. Above it is an attic room with access to the garret over the Drawing Room. Although all the surviving trim is 19th century the attic room dates from the 18th century, and there must always have been a stairway to it in the south-east corner of the ell. The present staircase, however, is clearly 19th-century and dates from the time that this room became the Gun Room, needing direct access to the courtyard. When this was formed it made a new cross-partition necessary, which destroyed the original arrangement of panelling on the south wall. The altered room was given a new and much shallower cornice.

The original panelling survives on the north, east and west walls. It is arranged in two tiers with bolection mouldings and chair rail. The skirting board is an undistinguished renewal. The chimney piece has a moulded architrave with heavy single nail-heads or *diamanti* in the base-lugs and an entablature mantel. This breaks forward over capitals, which, without pilasters, sit partially and uncomfortably over the surround. The hob grate is 18th-century but the whole arrangement has been disfigured by the introduction of a mean 19th-century chimney piece within the earlier frame.

In the attic room above there is a very simple grate with bars set directly into the stone hobs, and two box-beds, each designed to accommodate two maids. This is a curious piece of planning, for domestic rather than architectural reasons. It is difficult to see why it was necessary to house servants in this particular part of the castle and that it was servants' accommodation must be argued from the provision of box-beds. Such an arrangement is unlikely in a house of this standing for members of the family unless the beds had been treated much more elaborately – and servant-use is much more in keeping with the poverty of the other fittings. There is, however, no direct communication with the servants' hall or other service rooms. Even with the 19th-century alterations the stairs only led to the room off the court, and in the 18th century not even this was possible. Possibly Mrs Grant liked to have the maids out of harm's reach at night, and tucked away above the Withdrawing Room wing where there was no possibility of the men servants getting at them. A servantless and permissive age cannot conceive what a problem *the morals of maids* was, and how large it loomed in the consciousness of any mistress.

On the second floor the two tower chambers are of comparatively little interest both having lost nearly all their original features except for the 18th-century hob grates, and the door from the north-west

turret stair to the tower chamber. This has had 18th-century panelling applied on the stair side to a 17th-century plank door.

The principal chamber on this floor in the main tower is the most elaborately panelled in the castle and has suffered only minor damage. The panelling is arranged in two tiers separated by a chair rail, with bolection mouldings defining the panels (pl 42b). The heavy section cornice is also run in timber. There was originally only one entrance to the room, from the south-east stair. The doorway leading to the room in the north-west tower is a 19th-century insertion when an additional entrance was slapped through the wall at this point. The original doorway has a moulded architrave surmounted by a heavy entablature with a pulvinated frieze. The door itself is of two panels with the framing mouldings enlarged with shoulders (pl 43a). The doorway is flanked by two fluted pilasters on pedestals, the lower part of the cornice breaking forward to form capitals. The heavy moulded base to the pedestals was probably repeated as the profile of the now destroyed skirting. Similar truncated pilasters flank the heavy panel above the chimney piece, but as these sit on the chimney shelf they have no pedestals. The chimney piece repeats the pattern of the doorcase, the bolection surround being surmounted by a heavy entablature with a pulvinated frieze, and enclosing a late 18th-century grate.

In the restoration the 19th-century cupboard filling the blocked window in the east wall was removed, the window reopened and the earlier panelling revealed. At the same time the panelling on the remainder of the east wall was moved and reused some 4 ft (1.22 m) further into the room as the front of a range of large closets. The ceiling is plain except for a roundel defined by a moulded border in the centre (pl 42b).

The principal chamber on the third floor has also managed to retain most of its original panelling, except on the west wall. As in the room below it is arranged in two tiers with bolection mouldings to the panels and chair rail. In this room the skirting survives. The chimney piece is similar to that in the room below, except that it lacks pilasters. The door, which has two small square panels between two larger square panels, is surrounded by a lugged architrave, and surmounted by a heavy entablature. In order to articulate it, since there are no flanking pilasters, the architrave and entablature are set in a plain panel which breaks forward slightly, allowing the cornice to break forward above it. The chimney piece is treated similarly (pl 43b).

The remaining rooms in the castle have been too much altered in the 19th and early 20th centuries to be of interest although they nearly all retain some features, door furniture or grates which are of specific interest.

The door furniture and hinges are generally of 18th- or early 19th-century date and have been well recorded. They merit a separate study for although it is impossible to say how many of the items are in their original positions it is unusual to find so much work of this sort surviving in one house.

One hinge, however, does deserve to be singled out. This is, or was until recently, on the door into the room on the second floor of the round tower. It takes the form of a pair of fabulous creatures – possibly some sort of horse with small ears and neatly clipped mane. If they are by an 18th-century smith it must have been one with a very whimsical turn of humour. The temptation, and it is a very strong one, is to suggest that this is a 17th-century survival. The fact that it is now on an 18th-century door need not cause any concern given the economical attitude to ironwork that has been shown at Midmar over the years. Although asked for an opinion the National Museum has not been able – up to the time of writing – to form one (pl 45a).

It was the same economical turn of mind where ironwork has been concerned that has ensured the survival of the fine series of Carron grates that still fill the fireplaces at Midmar even where the fireplaces have been disfigured by the introduction of 19th-century chimney pieces.

The patterns vary although some are repeated, and generally the earlier ones are the more attractive. The most charming is that in *Queen Mary's Room*: this has an elliptical opening with a gadrooned head. The decoration of the plate is in a delicate *rocaille* manner with flanking female figure, trumpets, floral arabesque and ribands. It is a charmingly feminine piece of work, yet it is set directly into a 17th-century opening with no chimney piece, and in a room that has never been fashionably trimmed (pl 41a).

A number of the grates are hobs and are variously decorated: two bear the Prince of Wales feathers, one a pattern of fleur-de-lis, one swans and lions, another doves and rabbits, and one two small medallions possibly representing George III and Queen Charlotte. All are additionally decorated with swags and arabesques (pl 44b).

Of the later grates the two handsomest are those in the second floor Great Chamber, and the Dining Room. The former has large panels containing formalized floral patterns. The latter, which is now blocked

in, has a fire basket with urns and a surround decorated with Ionic pilasters carrying urns, and small portrait medallions.

### THE POLICIES

Like most great houses in the north-east Midmar stood at the junction of three great avenues, north, south and west. They have now disappeared and only individual trees have survived to show what was once there. This type of layout dates from the late 17th and early 18th centuries, and the avenues were frequently planted with sycamores, a tree that is both hardy and fast growing. A sycamore can make a very good showing in fifteen years, and this may have accounted for its frequent choice as a policy tree both for avenues and belts. The favour with which it was viewed in Scotland found little echo south of the border; in England it was grudgingly recognized as a tree of some commercial value, but not one to be given pride of place in the landscape.

The east avenue at Midmar is set well north of the house, and modest in width. Its principal function appears to have been that of a shelter belt designed to protect the garden from the north winds.

By the third quarter of the 18th century it had become customary to site the walled garden some way from the house. This was done at Castle Fraser, Craigston, and Cluny, although the garden designs for Craigston dating from the 1740s and 50s show the garden close to the house. At Midmar the garden immediately adjoins the castle to the east, and was overlooked by the windows of the new Dining Room and Withdrawing Room. It would appear to date from Alexander Grant's improvements of the 1730s. The walls are of stone, without the brick inner lining that is one of the distinguishing marks of the later gardens. In the walls are built some remarkably fine beehives. These are of dressed stone with broken pediments. There are two recesses in each hive for the bee skips and the jambs are checked to take doors. In the north-east corner of the garden is a two-floored garden house; the lower floor for storage, and the upper with plastered walls and a fireplace intended as a tea-room or summer-house. The jambs of the fireplace are reused stones with fine 17th-century detail. They may well be reused stones from the Hall fireplace.

To the south of the castle is a splendid sundial which figures conspicuously in any views taken from this side; its position varying according to the taste of the artist and the inclinations of the proprietor. It stands c 6 ft (c 1.83m) high and has nine dials. There is no date on it but from its resemblance to one in Aberdeen which is dated 1707 a date in the first half of the 18th century could be expected. The shields on the baluster pedestal were clearly designed to bear both the date and the initials of the proprietor, but the work was never completed (pl 45b).

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As usual my thanks are due to members of the staff of the library of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland in Edinburgh, who are always able to produce information at short notice and long distance. Mr Roger Mercer has also been called on to provide a similar service at even more inconvenient times. The Scottish Development Department and the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland have permitted the reproduction of various photographs in their possession, and I have had similar permission to make use of the work of Westland of Inverurie. For this I am most grateful. For the two drawings of Midmar c 1609 I am indebted to Mr Terry Ball. Finally none of this would have been possible without the

kind hospitality of the owners of Midmar, Mr and Mrs Ric Wharton who gave me the complete run of their home whilst I was engaged on this work.

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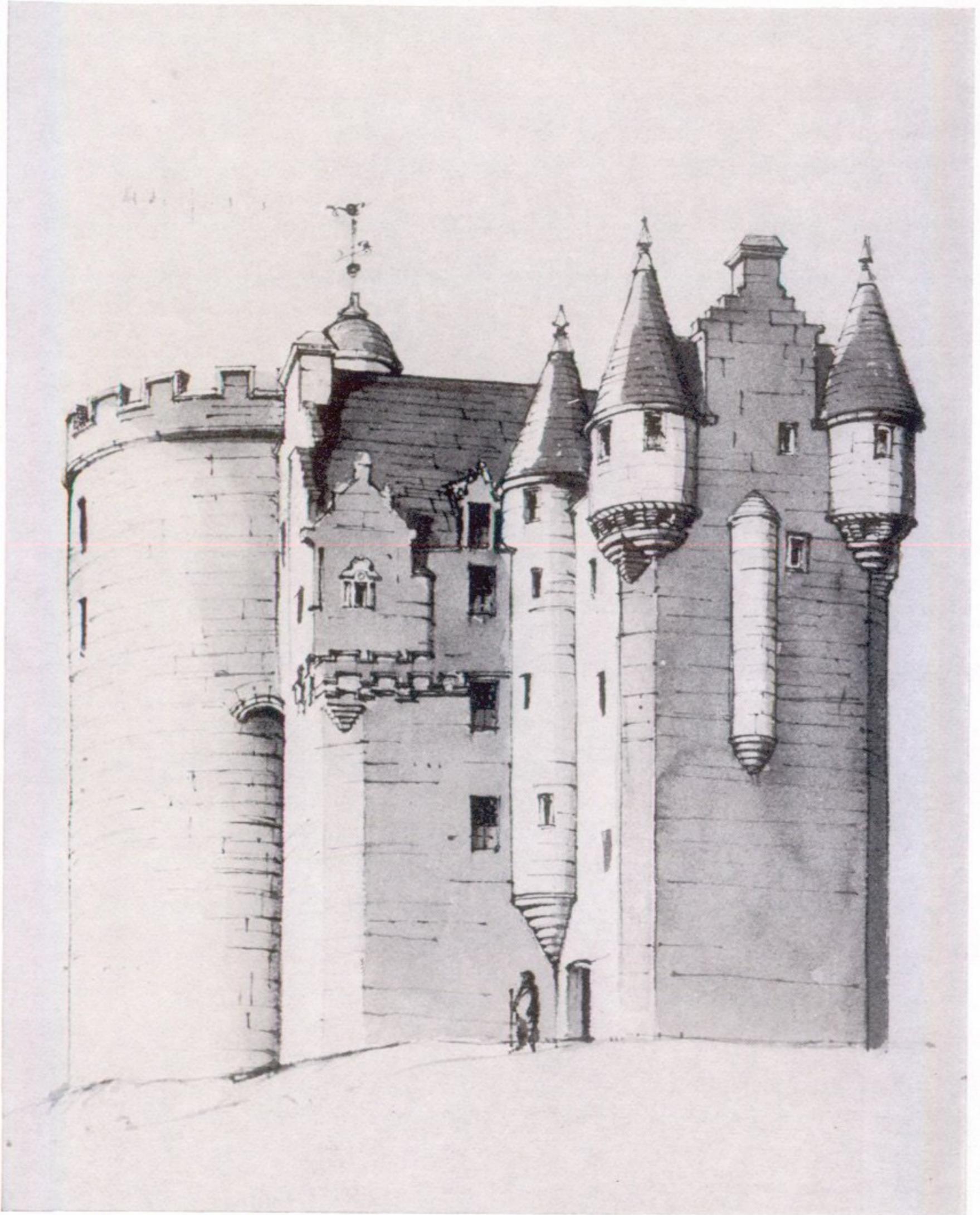
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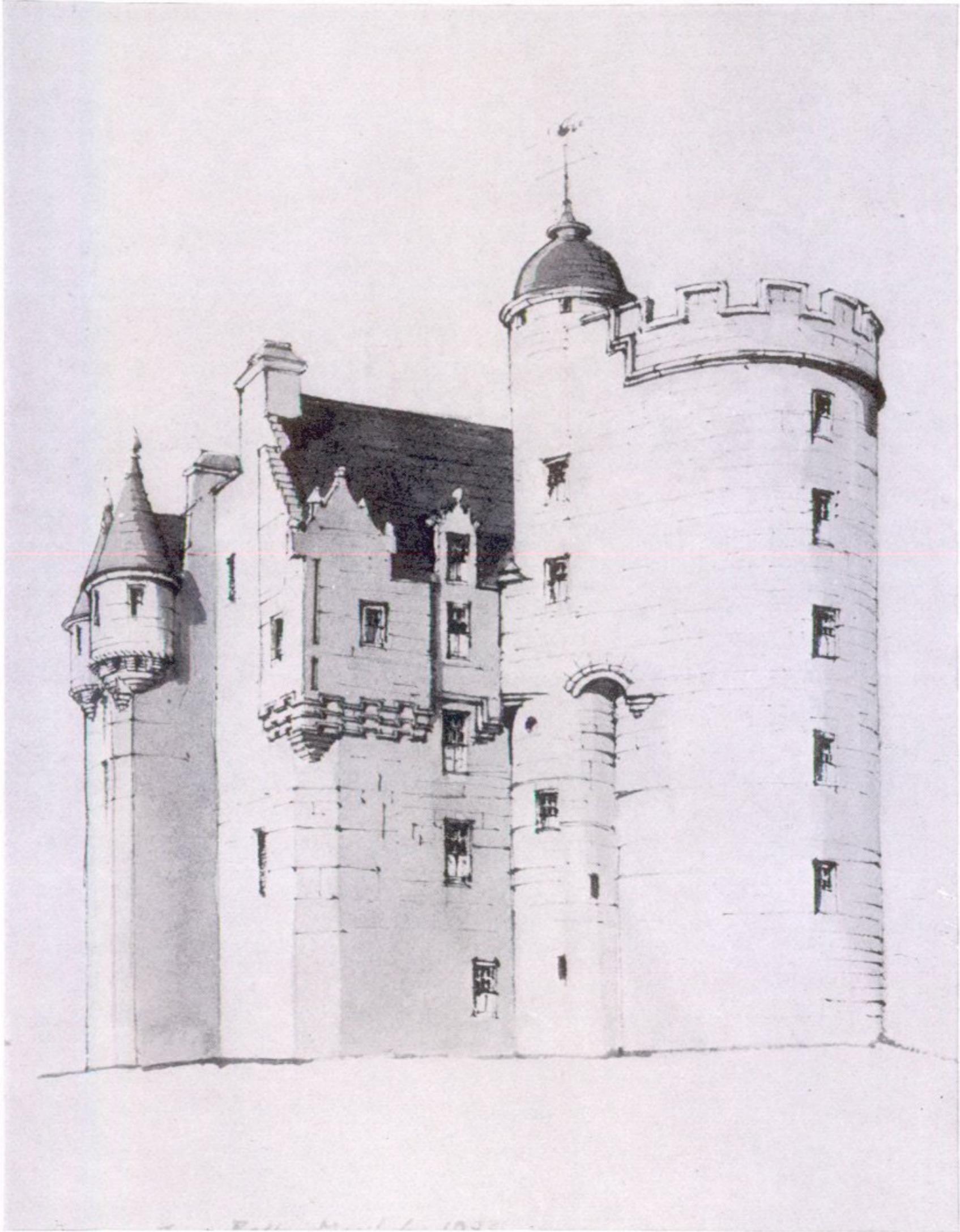
a The north elevation as restored, 1982. (Westland of Inverurie)



b The south elevation as restored, 1982. (Westland of Inverurie)



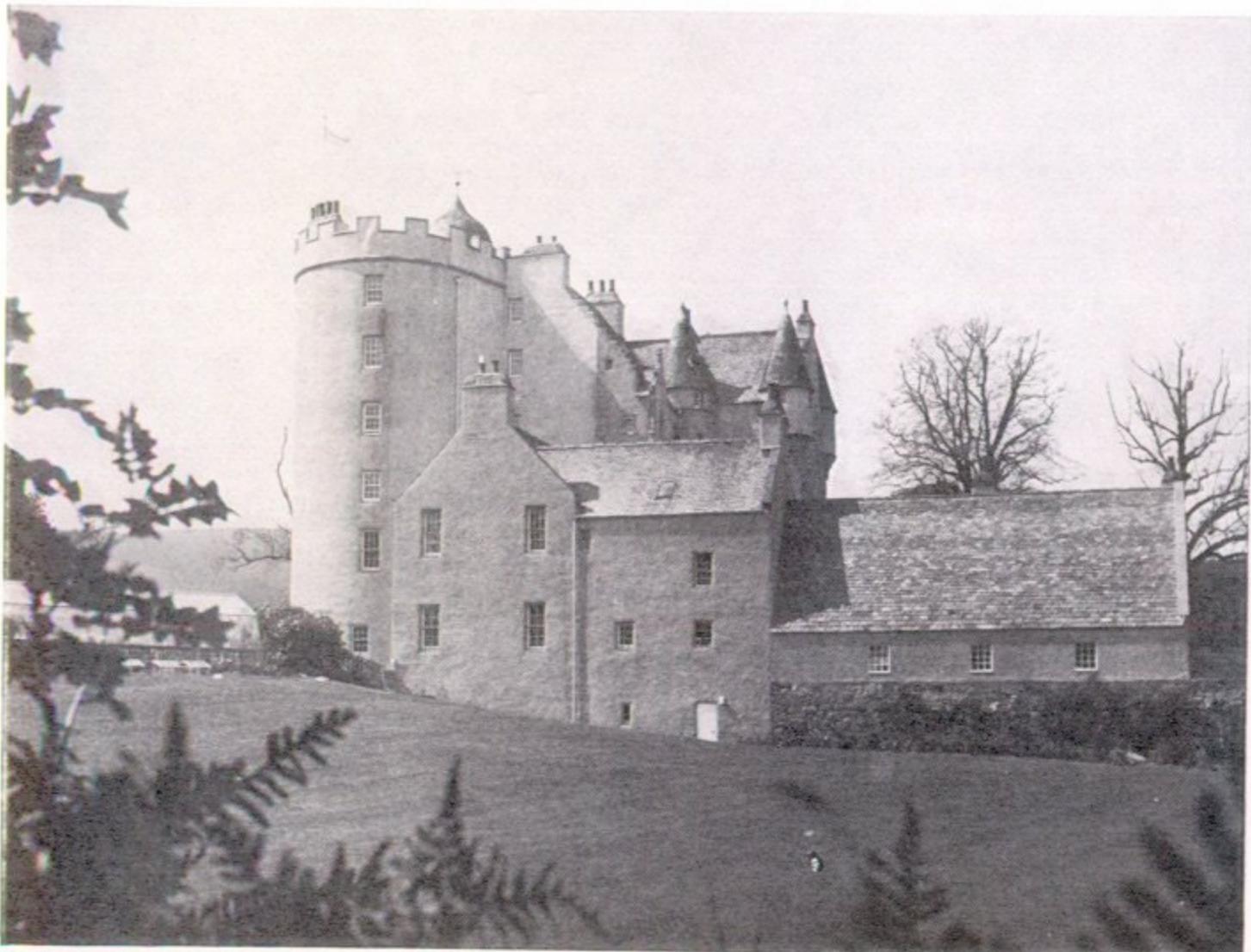
a The north elevation c 1609. (Reconstruction HGS, realization T Ball)



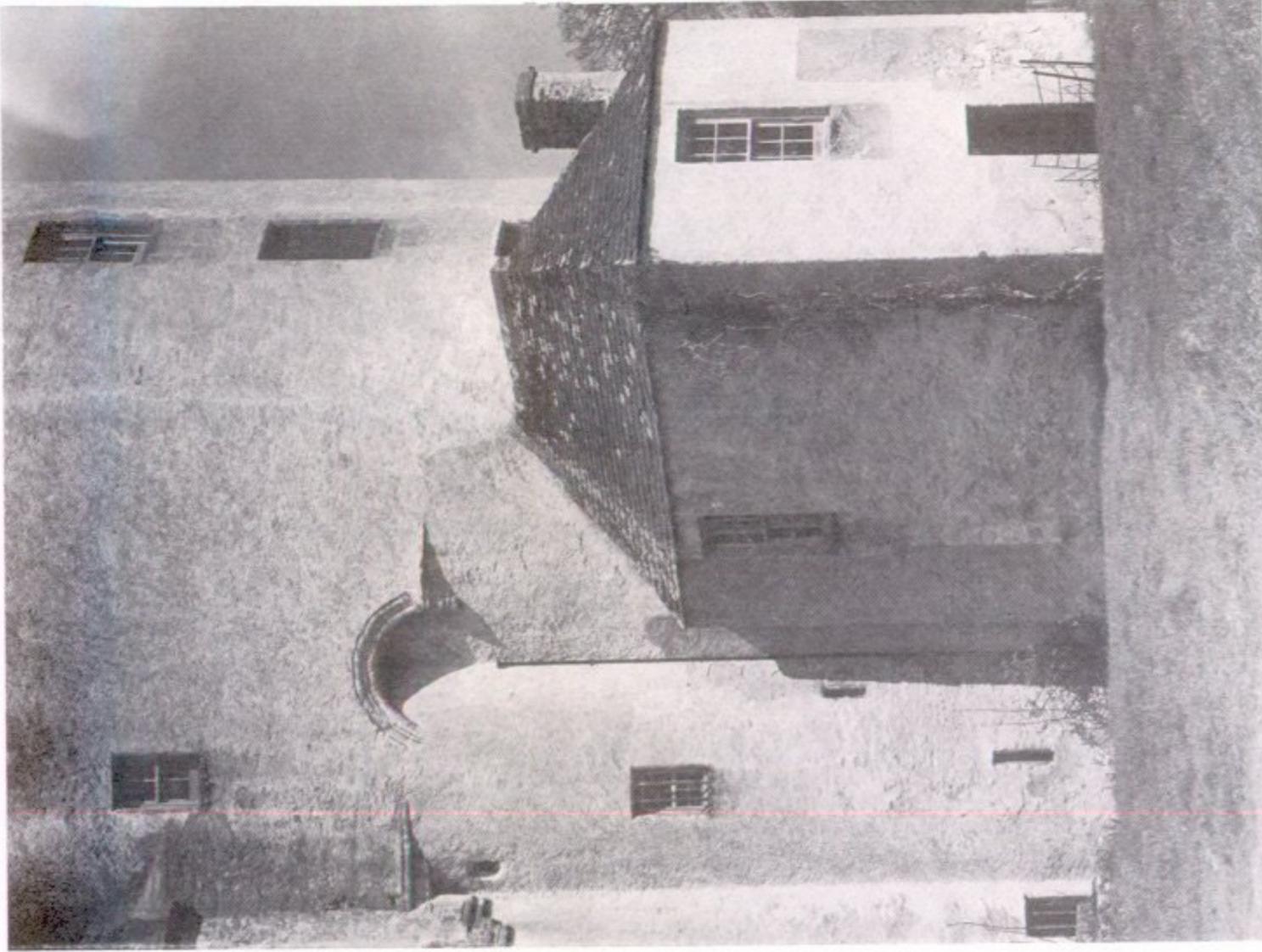
b The south elevation c 1609. (Reconstruction HGS, realization T Ball)



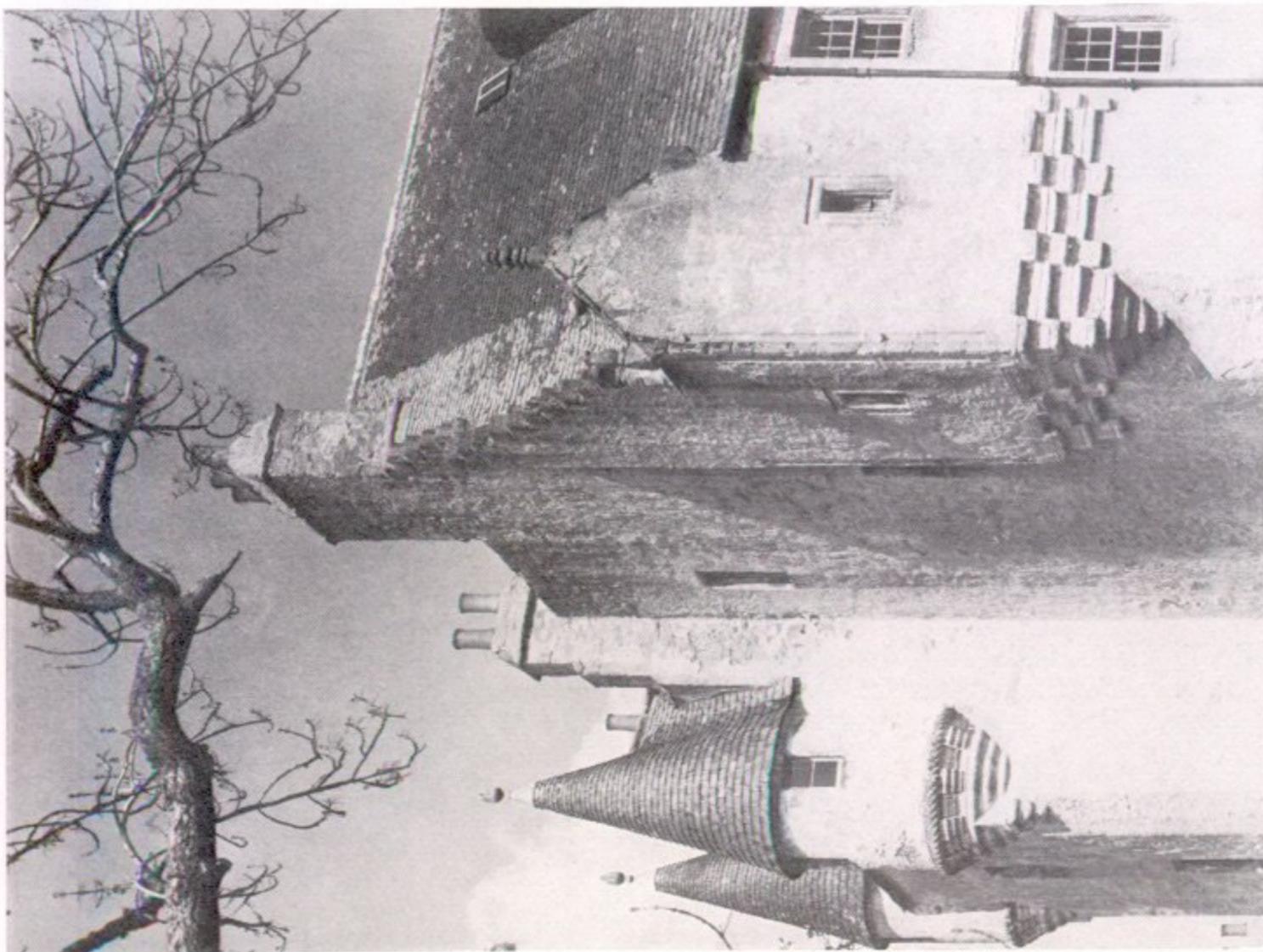
a The west elevation as restored, 1982. (Westland of Inverurie)



b The east elevation as restored, 1982. The new garage wing is to the right. (Westland of Inverurie)



b The south *Trompe*. (DOE)



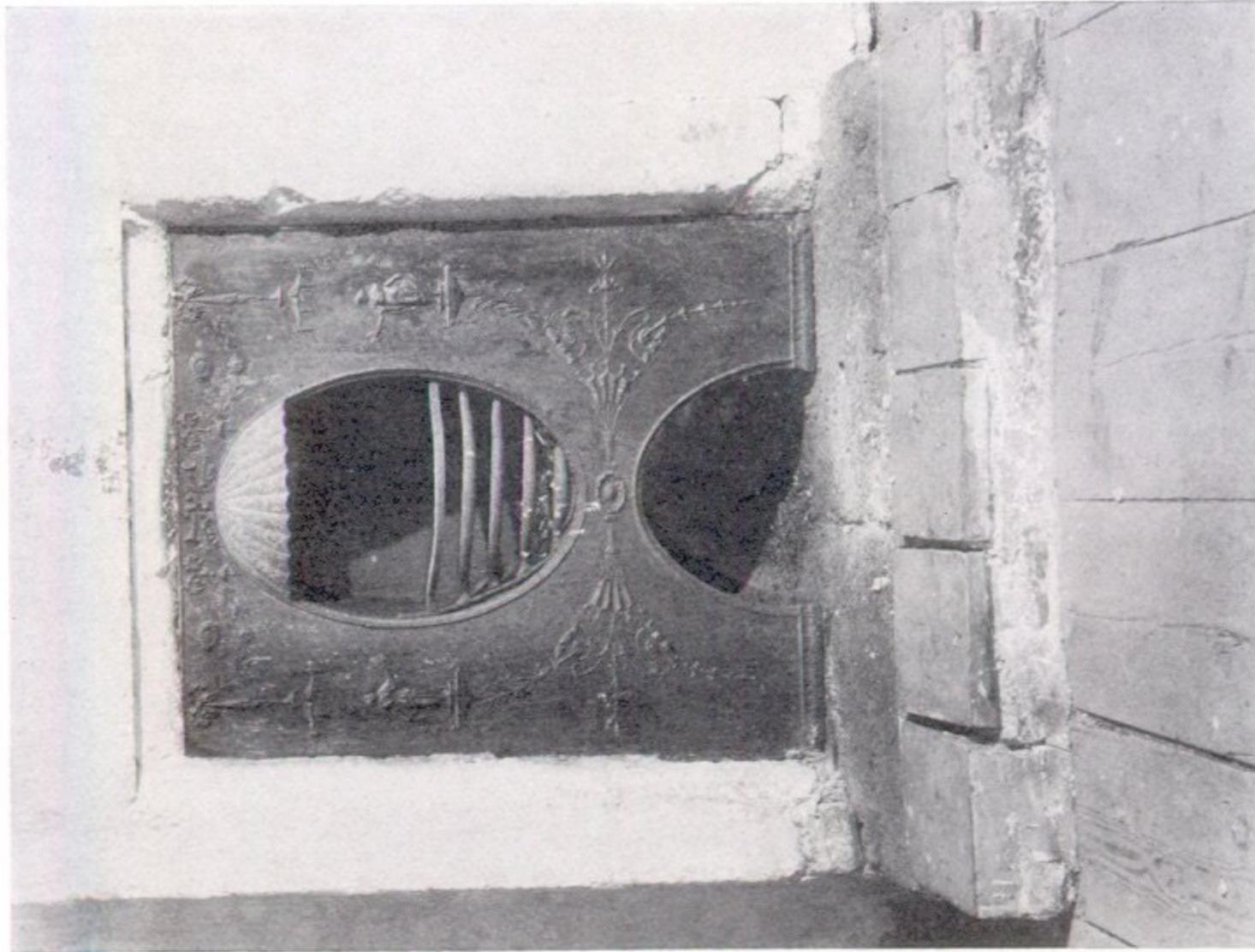
a The upper works; west elevation showing the work of the two master masons – that of Bell (?) on the left. (DOE)



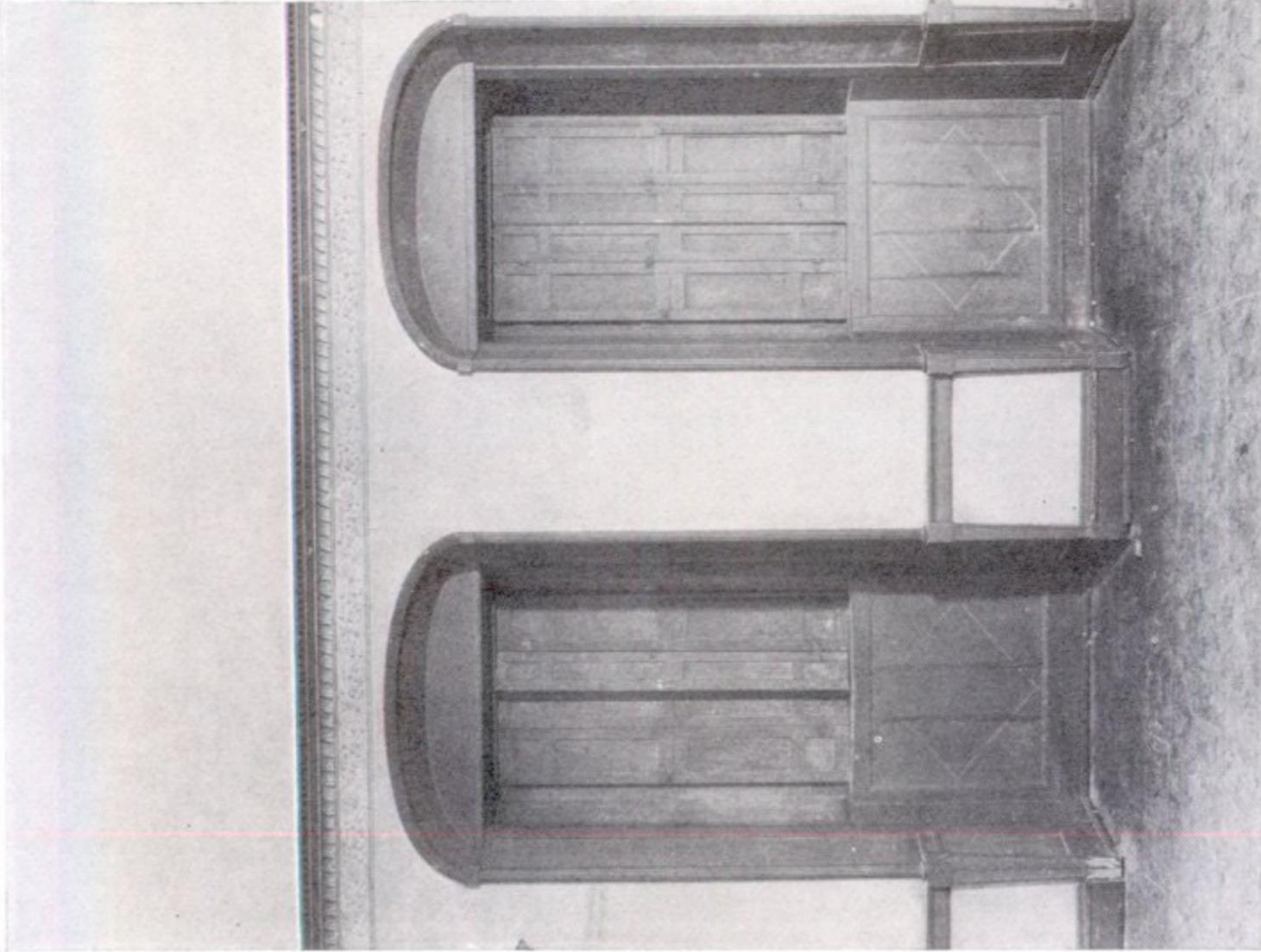
a *Queen Mary's Room.* (DOE)



b *The Gallery looking south-east showing one of the destroyed dormers.* (DOE)



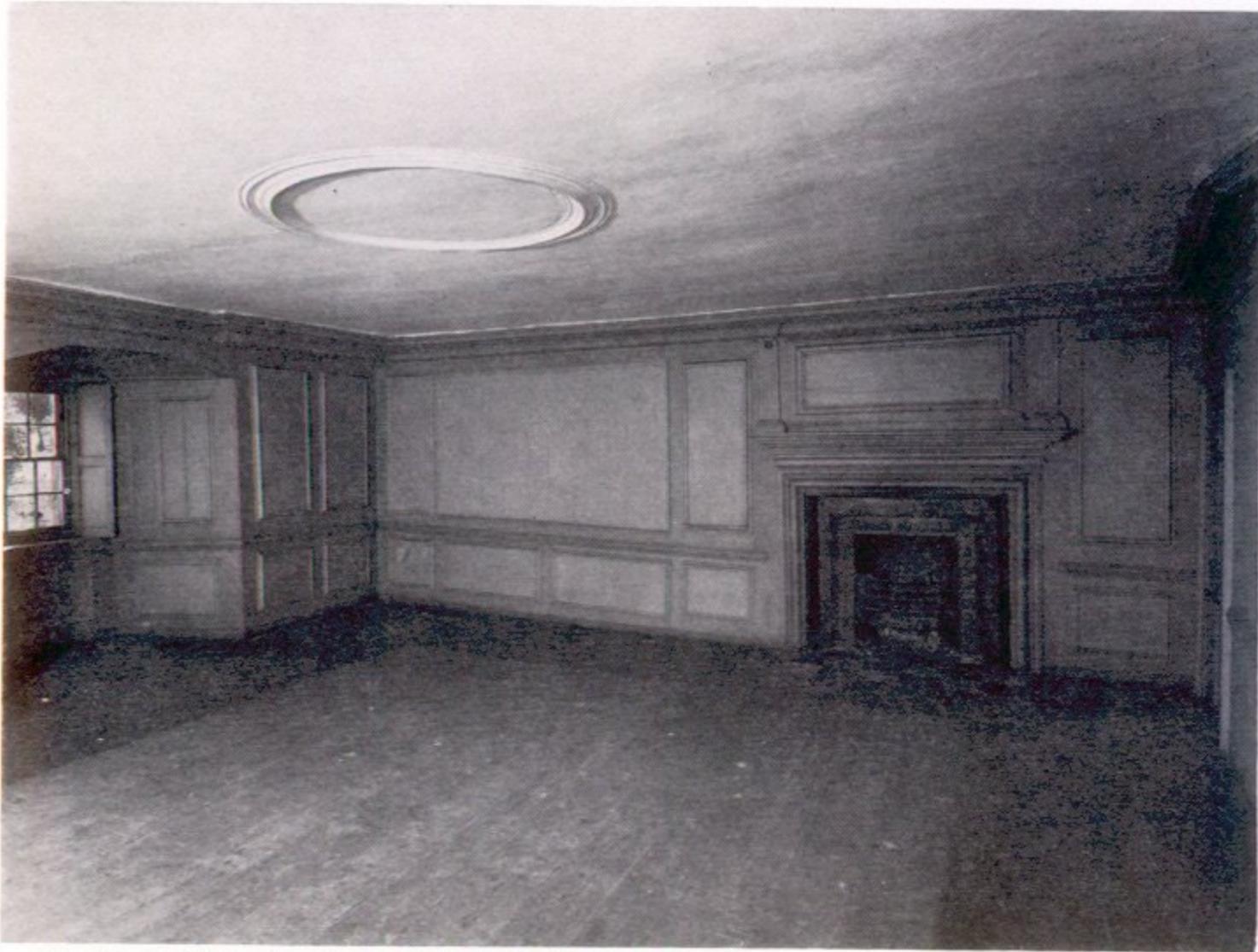
a Fireplace in *Queen Mary's Room*. (DOE)



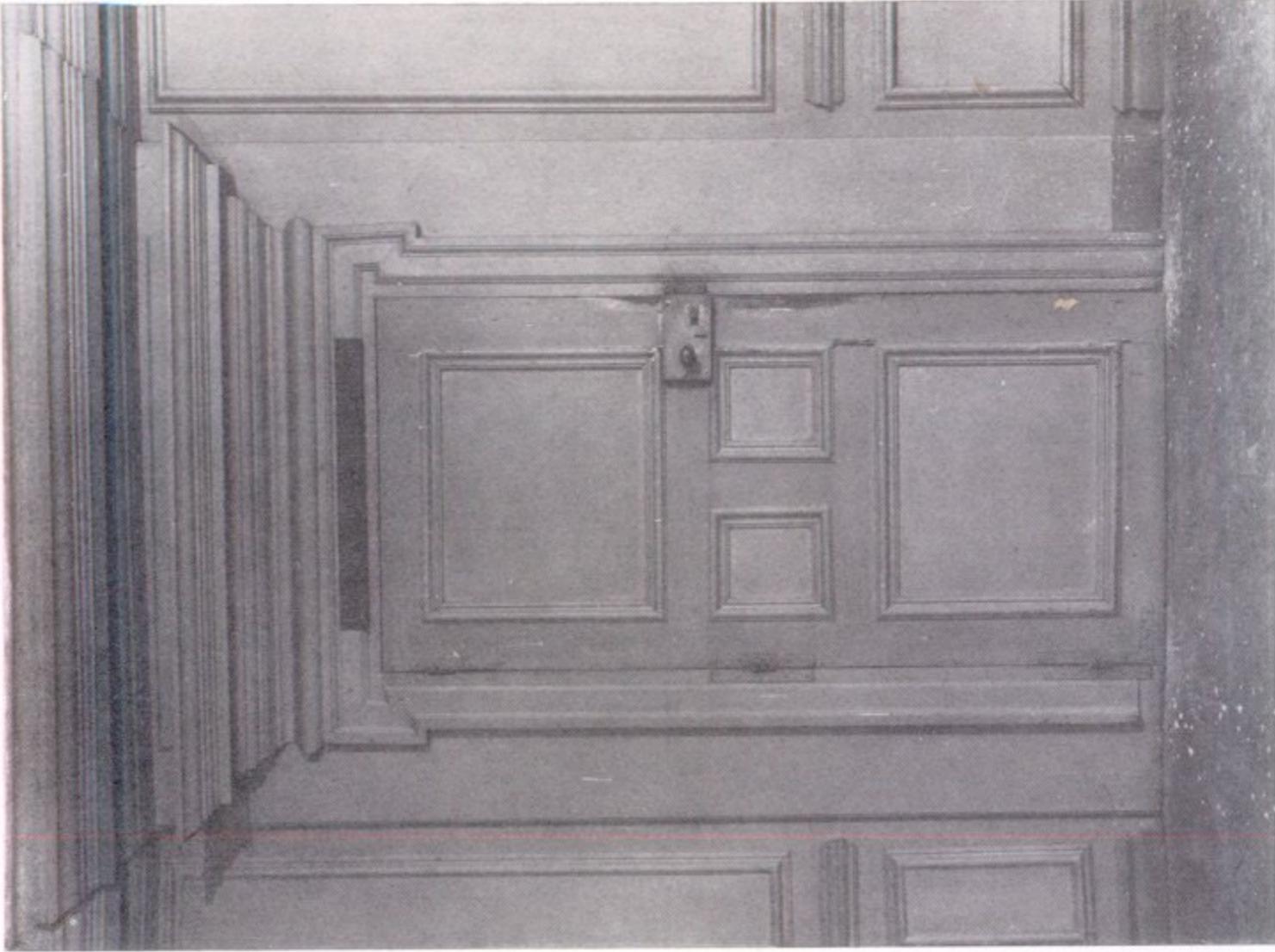
b The Dining Room before restoration: detail of north wall. (DOE)



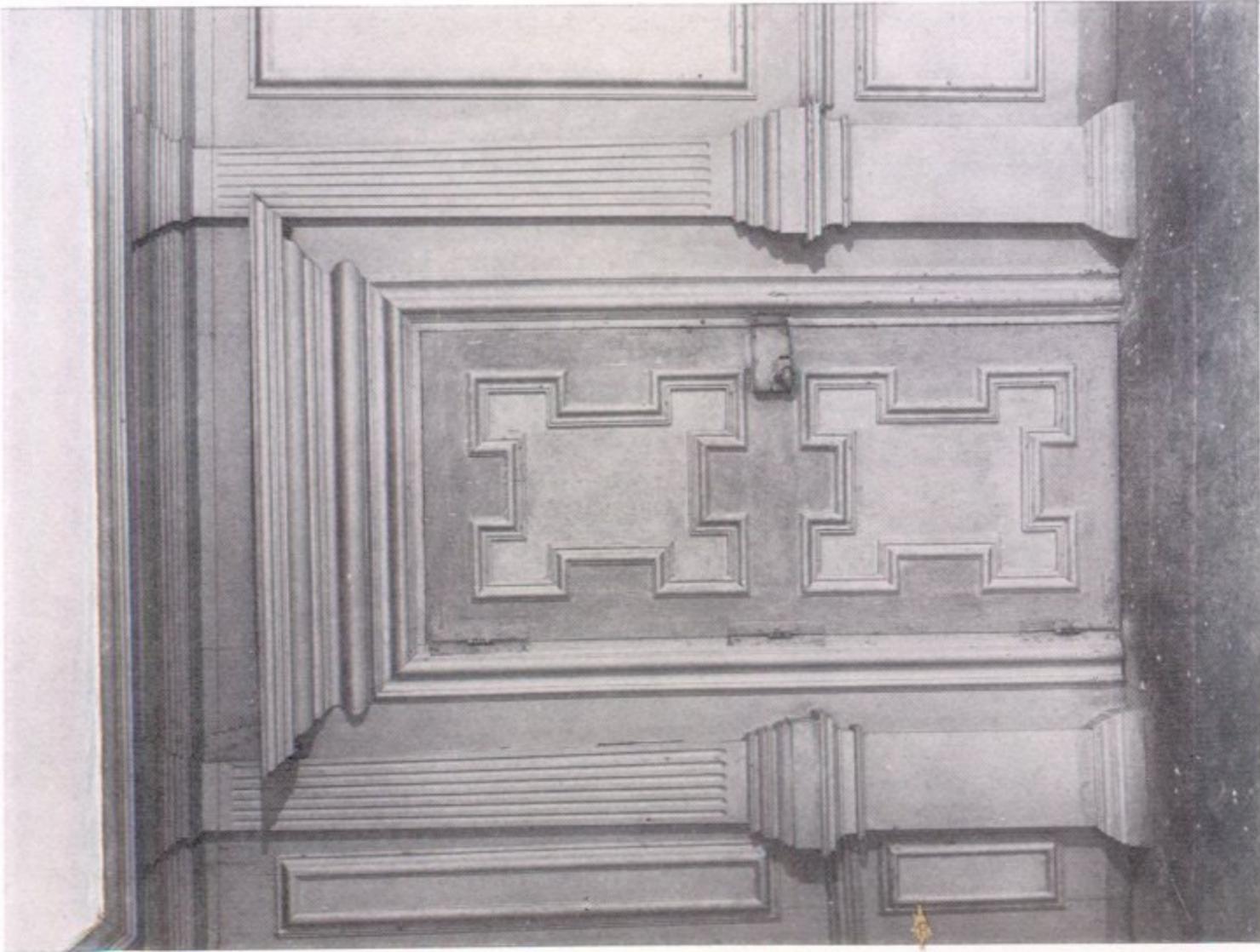
a The Drawing Room looking east. (DOE)



b The Great Chamber (second floor) looking west. (DOE)



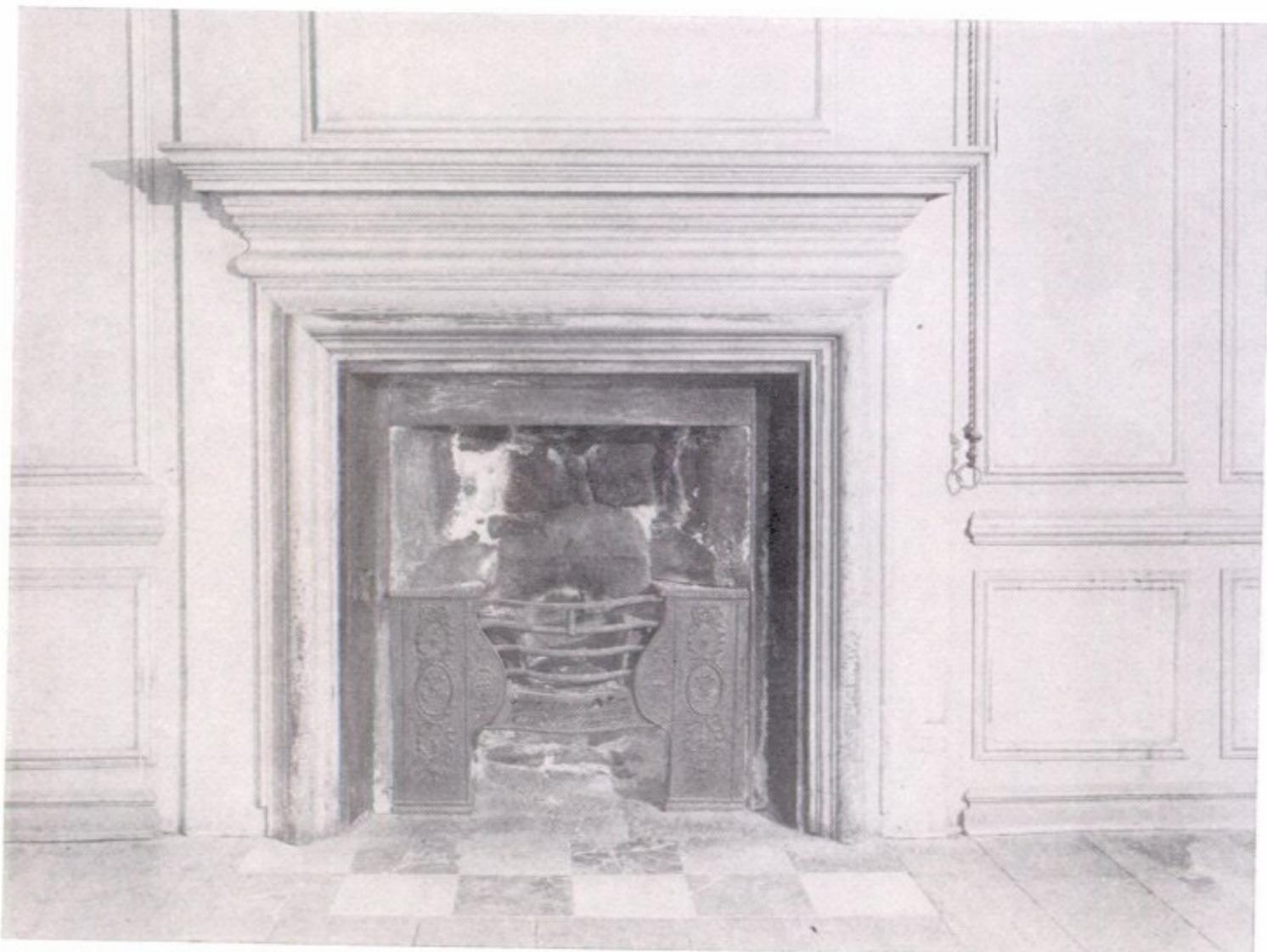
b The Second Chamber; the doorway. (DOE)



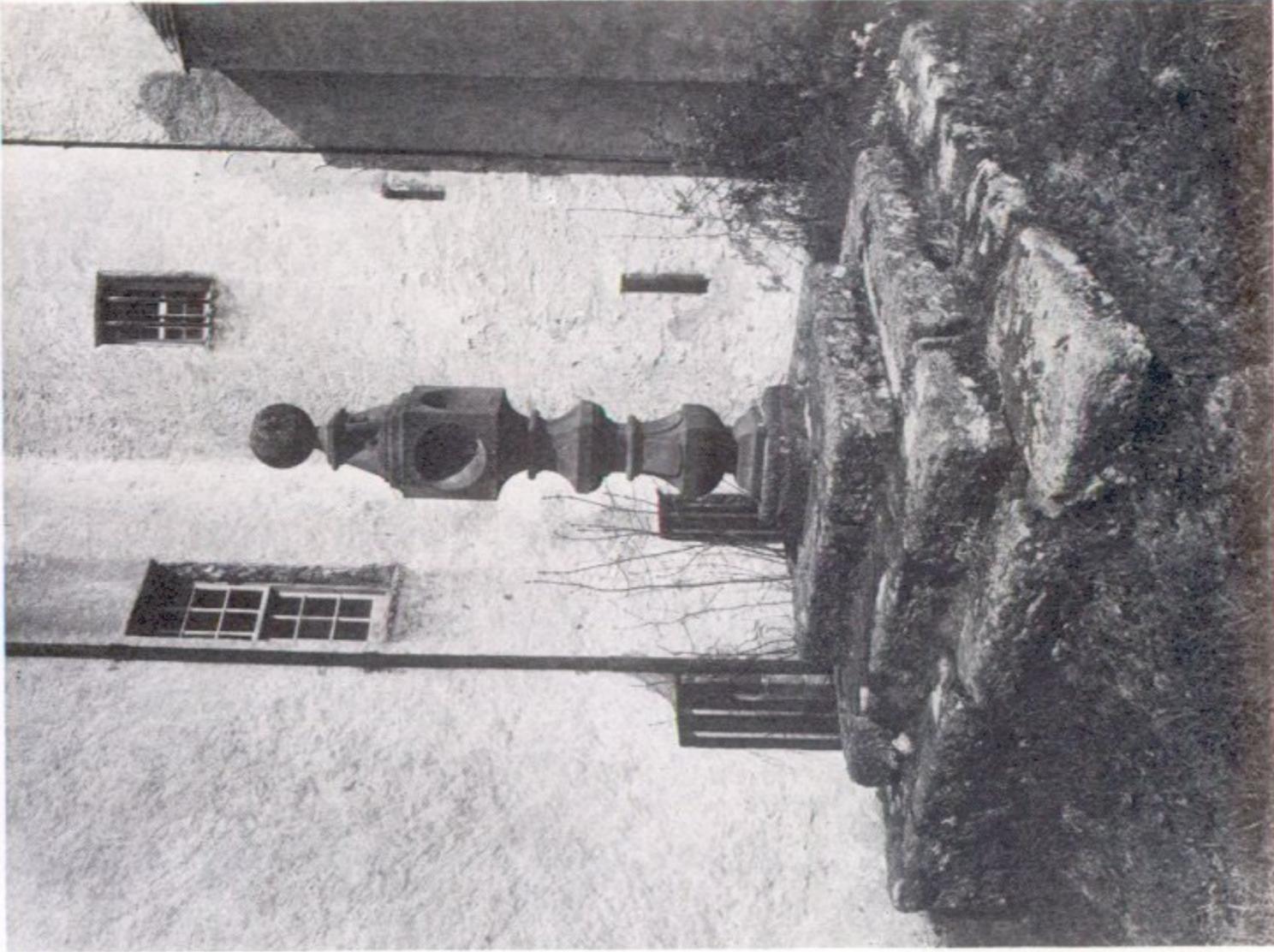
a The Great Chamber; the doorway. (DOE)



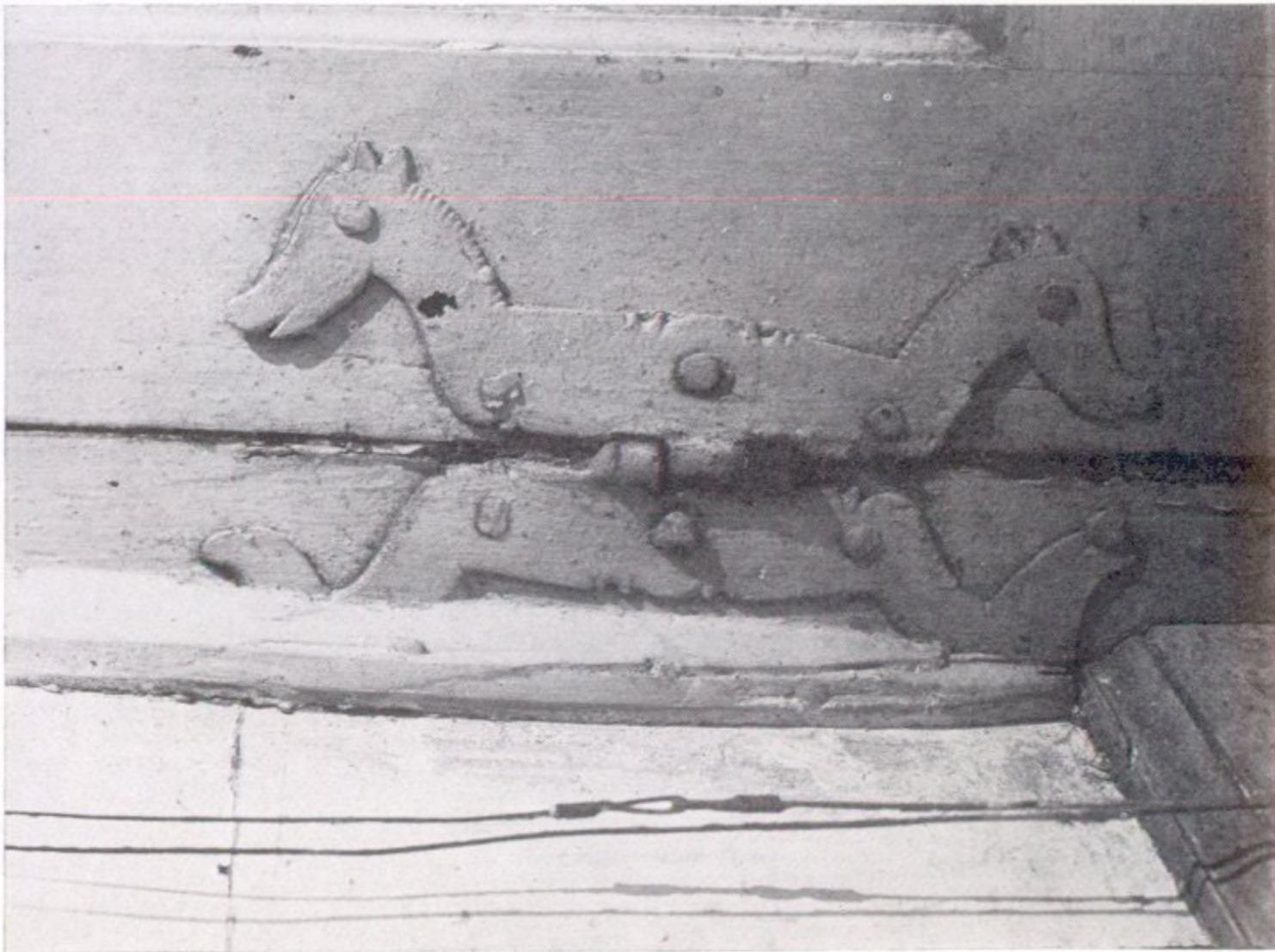
a The Dining Room: detail of ceiling. (DOE)



b Fireplace in the Second Chamber. (DOE)



b The Sundial. (DOE)



a Grotesque door hinge, 17th century (?). (DOE)