

The House of Pitsligo

Charles McKean*

ABSTRACT

In 1990, the author commissioned a model of the castle or House of Pitsligo (Buchan) from Simon Montgomery for the RIAS/Edinburgh International Festival exhibition, entitled The Architecture of the Scottish Renaissance.¹ This paper outlines the background to the choice of Pitsligo, the assumptions made in the reconstruction of a ruin whose dilapidation, in some cases, left only fragmentary remains, and how those assumptions were tested. It led to a voyage of discovery of the typologies of 16th- and 17th-century Scots châteaux.

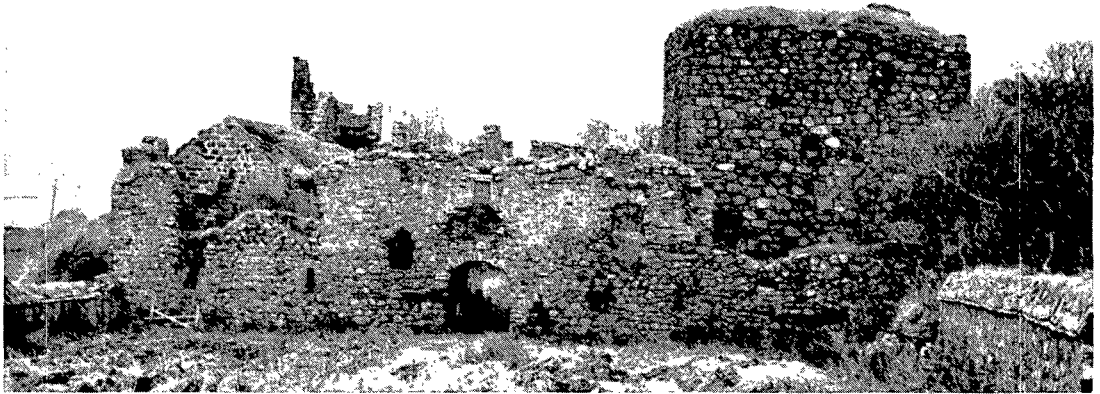
INTRODUCTION

The RIAS has undertaken a programme of illustrated architectural guides to Scotland² during the gestation of which unexpected patterns of buildings have emerged. During the preparation of volume 7 *The District of Moray*,³ the author had been puzzled by the asymmetrical round tower at the end of the Atholl Lodging at Balvenie Castle (c 1555) which seemed inconsistent both with the military rectangularity of the older fortress and customary assumptions about the form a new residential building should take. If the round tower was not necessary for military purposes, why was it there at all, putting everything off balance? The 1799 drawing by J C Nattes in the National Library of Scotland and, to a different degree, the 1847 drawing by R W Billings indicated a lavishness, if not sumptuousness, far beyond that of the W Douglas Simpson conjectural reconstruction on display within its walls – or indeed the description of it in the guide-book.⁴ The array of oriel windows lining the second floor (there is an unusual quantity of Renaissance oriel in the châteaux of Moray) was proof of deliberate architectonic quality in the Atholl Lodging. That round tower, therefore, had to be a component in a Renaissance architectural language as yet dimly perceived.

A similar if smaller round tower at Edzell is taken by the guide-book⁵ to reveal defensive tendencies. During the preparation of the subsequent Landmark/RIAS volume, *Banff & Buchan*,⁶ the round tower, large unmilitary windows, grandeur of scale and applied heraldry appeared again in the stupendous châteaux of Inverugie, Peterhead (now largely demolished), the seat of the Earls Marischal. The form was codified in the Palace of Huntly. Between 1540 and 1640, successive Earls of Huntly rank as Scotland's richest men. Magnates like them, or the Keiths, the Murrays and the Lindsays, would not have trapped themselves within an anachronistic and inconvenient quasi-military building form. Only those believing that 16th-century Scotland remained barbaric by comparative standards on the Continent could have countenanced the idea.

Their buildings form a distinct type: tall rectangular structures containing two or more

* The Royal Incorporation of Architects in Scotland, 15 Rutland Square, Edinburgh



ILLUS 1 Pitsligo from the west before consolidation (McKean).

apartments of two or three rooms the width of the building, ending in a bedroom contained within a private tower identified by its own private mural staircase.⁷ The primary purpose of those towers was less to offer enfilade fire along the walls as to act as a bedroom stack whose private staircase would ease the progress of marital relations. The other corner of the *corps de logis* would, not infrequently, display the principal stair tower. In homage to its grandest exemplar at Huntly, the term ‘palace-block’ has been used to describe it.

PITSLIGO

There had seemed little at Pitsligo, set in a sheltered and sunny spot on the northern Buchan slopes immediately above the idyllic bay of Rosehearty, worth a detailed examination: solely what MacGibbon & Ross had dismissed as labourers’ dwellings surrounding a tower in a state of picturesque annihilation – very ruinous, and very pretty from the main road (illus 1). A chance photograph, however, of the interior of the staircase tower (illus 2) transformed that perception. The quality of its stonework and vaulting seemed strangely close to the outstanding French-inspired processional staircase (1605) at Fyvie.

Consolidation of the tower and clearance work in the courtyard and the pleasance, commissioned from Douglas Forrest Associates by Malcolm Forbes (in memory of Bertie Forbes, founder of *Forbes Magazine*, who had been born in nearby Whitehills, New Deer) revealed that Pitsligo was much more than a tower with a barmkin. The flanking tower terminating the eastern wing of the courtyard, which MacGibbon & Ross had classified as a ‘round tower of defence’,⁸ had the large windows, fireplaces, and private staircase of a residential tower, and the remainder of that wing the characteristics of a palace-block. Perhaps Pitsligo had once been a gracious Renaissance equivalent of a château, schloss or herregaard. The Forbes family was consequently persuaded to fund a model of a conjectural restoration.

THE FORBES OF PITSLIGO

The Forbes of Pitsligo formed the earliest cadet branch of the House of Forbes. Sir William Forbes, younger son of Sir John Forbes of the Black Lip, received a Charter of the lands of 'Petslegah' and 'Achmacludy' in 1428, confirmed two years later. According to one source⁹ these Charters legalized the arrival of these lands in the dowry of Mary Fraser of Philorth who had married Sir William in 1423. It is thought that the great tower house of Pitsligo, on the lower slopes of Peathill, was erected (much, according to a 1732 commentator, 'after the manner of Castle Forbes'¹⁰) at this time. During the 200 years that Pitsligo developed, the history of this family reveals intermarriage with other Buchan families with



ILLUS 2 The interior of the great stair. The magnificent dressed stone would have been offset against plaster, thus highlighting the sunk carvings.

whose seats Pitsligo can now be seen to have had some similarities: Sir William had married into the house of Philorth; Sir John (1484–1556) married Jean Keith, daughter of Sir William Keith of Inverugie, the Earl Marischal family, and secondly, the widow Meldrum of Fyvie; his grandson Sir Alexander, who succeeded in 1566, married Alison Anderson, daughter of the Lord Provost of Edinburgh, and widow of Alexander Forbes of Tolquhon. It was about this period that both the family of Pitsligo and the family of Tolquhon began to build extensively, possibly with money received by the Forbes clan from the Gordons. On Alison Anderson's death, Sir Alexander married Barbara, daughter of the 4th Earl Marischal, and his son Sir John married the daughter of the 1st Lord Ogilvie of Deskford; his daughters married, respectively, Lord Forbes, Forbes of Tolquhon, Ogilvie of Boyne, and Fraser of Strichen. The Sir Alexander who inherited in 1629 married Joanna, daughter of another Earl Marischal in 1632, and was ennobled at Edinburgh on Charles I's progress to Scotland the following year.¹¹

In architectural terms, these are names to conjure with. Philorth (now Cairnbulg) was a great, early medieval keep extended by a 16th-century palace block ending in the customary round tower; Fyvie; Tolquhon extended from an old tower into a complete courtyard with two long galleries; Deskford – a tower likewise extended into a palatial courtyard; Boyne – an unusual Renaissance building, begun from scratch to a quadrangular plan, round towers at each extremity, and flanking the entrance (an almost exact replica of that described by Pitscottie as erected by the Earl of Atholl for James V's progress, now believed to have taken place in 1531, and also of the Château de Bury by Orleans); Strichen – a tall house seemingly flanked by taller towers in each corner similar to Glasshaugh (both replaced later by classical mansions); and finally, the palatial Inverugie, seat of the Keith Earl Marischals, of whose gigantic palace, double courtyard and walled garden with statuary only the ground floor of its palace block, a desultory fireplace and gateway survived its Victorian demolition by gunpowder (illus 3). Nearby Pittullie was begun by Ogilvie of Boyne in 1631, who was married to Mary, sister of Sir Alexander Forbes of Pitsligo.

Nor were the Forbes of Pitsligo minor Buchan lairds. At the peak of their prosperity, from probably the mid-16th to the 17th century, the Pitsligos amassed substantial gear by dynastic marriage and occasional good fortune. For it had been in the Great Hall of Pitsligo, in 1556, that Mary of Guise's Commissioners came to enquire after the spoils from the wreck of the *Edward Bonaventure* which had foundered on the Buchan coast *en route* from Russia to the English Court, laden with ambassador and lavish gifts. The ambassador reached London: the commissioners had been dispatched to seek the gifts. *Si monumentum requiris, circumspice*, Pitsligo might have said. It was also about this time that a Pitsligo daughter married the Danish Collector of Tolls at Sound in the Baltic.

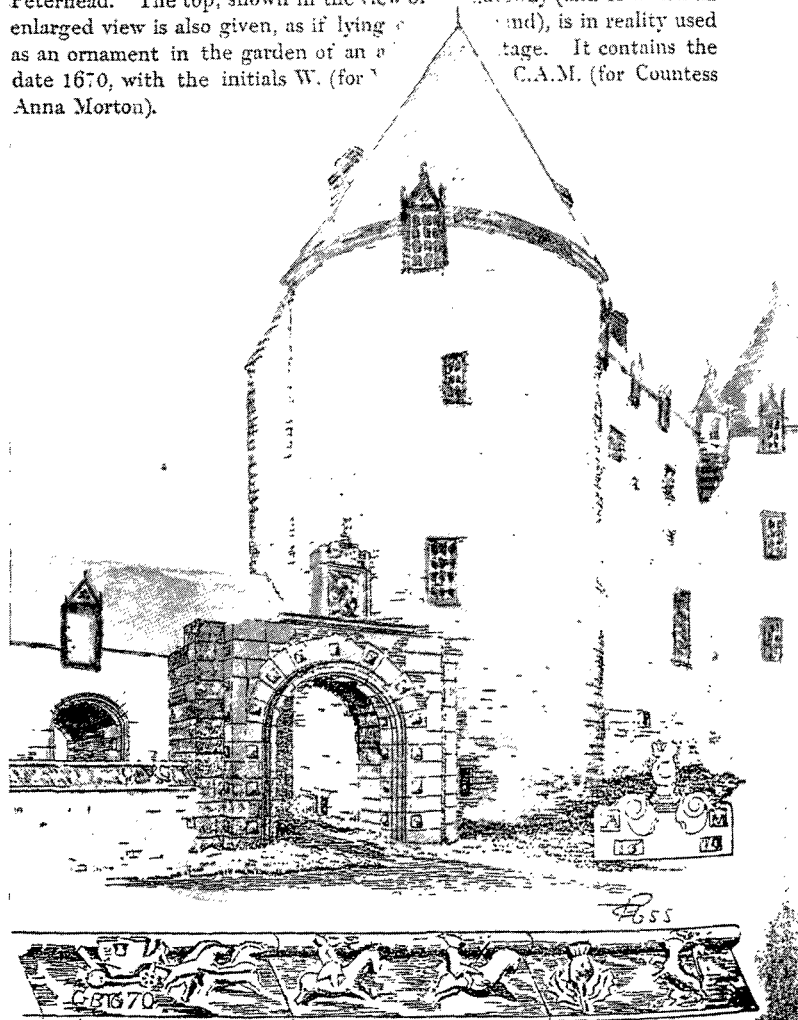
The estate appears to have been debilitated during the minority of the 2nd Lord Pitsligo who had inherited as infant in 1636, possibly only one year old if the 1656 datestone commemorates his coming of age. The 1st Lord Pitsligo had died suddenly and young, with his lady, in 1636, and over the next 20 years the estate was controlled on behalf of the infant 2nd Lord by his guardian, Tutor of Pitsligo, Forbes of Boyndlie. It was perhaps no coincidence that the great House of Boyndlie (itself later replaced) was built at this time. The 2nd Lord became an active parliamentarian between 1661 and 1689. The cost of his founding the port of Roseheartly (and perhaps poor harvests) led him to appeal to Parliament for a contribution from throughout the entire Kingdom. His son, 3rd Lord, who survived his father barely months, had earlier married Sophia Erskine, daughter of John Earl of Mar. Alexander, 4th Lord Pitsligo, was thus a first cousin of Bobbing John, 11th Earl of Mar, which may well have enhanced the naturally Jacobite sympathies of the Buchan laird, and for which he was to pay

FOURTH PERIOD

— 326 —

INVERUGIE CASTLE

Peterhead. The top, shown in the view of gateway (and of which an enlarged view is also given, as if lying as an ornament in the garden of an a stage. It contains the date 1670, with the initials W. (for Anna Morton). C.A.M. (for Countess



ILLUS 3 Author's reconstruction of Inverugie upon the drawing by Thomas Ross (published in MacGibbon & Ross, 1887-92, *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, 326).

so dearly. A Quietist philosopher at heart, he came out in both 1715 and 1745, and died aged 85 a fugitive, hunted from house to house in the garb of mendicant Sanny (Alexander) Brown.

Only echoes from history can communicate the degree of Pitsligo wealth: the Charter Chest, the ruins of the 1632 Pitsligo Kirk, and the splendid 1634 Pitsligo loft, created presumably to celebrate Lord Pitsligo's ennoblement the year before. The loft, which has been re-erected in the Hill Church of Roseheartly at the summit of Peathill, displays a quality of carving unmatched for its period in Scotland. There is, furthermore, a record of the quality of the funeral of the 1st Lord and Lady Pitsligo: a magnificent event 'carried out with almost

medieval pomp, including trumpeters, standard bearers etc'.¹² The last echoes from history are the eyewitness accounts of Helen Noble, and her father William Lascelles, the last Constable of Broadsea. In 1745, the Hanoverians scythed through Jacobite Buchan, burning churches, obliterating castles and hanging harmless village idiots as they progressed. William wrote:

Cobham's dragoons were exceedingly vicious and had much to answer in both cruelty and murder, for about forty died in Buchan under terrible circumstances. . . We lived through a rain [*sic*] of terror and Fraserburgh had seen a time as never before in our time. . . The justice of the Government is as a foul stank.¹³

In 1746, a garrison of Flemish mercenaries was sent to billet on Pitsligo, where Lady Pitsligo resided. Their arrival was predicted and orders were given to bury 'movabill geir' such as candlesticks. When the troops embarked upon a search of the house, chimneys had been blocked – as much, one presumes, to smoke out marauders as to conceal booty; vain hope.

Daily going through Brestie [Broadsea] was cartloads of plunder from the Castle of Pitsligo on their way to Fraserburgh where they were schipped from the harbours . . . so as not to break the setts, cartloads of cheers would go on one schipping, sureting tables and oil pictures on one other, the high ranking officers having the first pick of the speels . . . now we could see going past all his fine Dutch and Flemish furniture to be disposed of in London.¹⁴

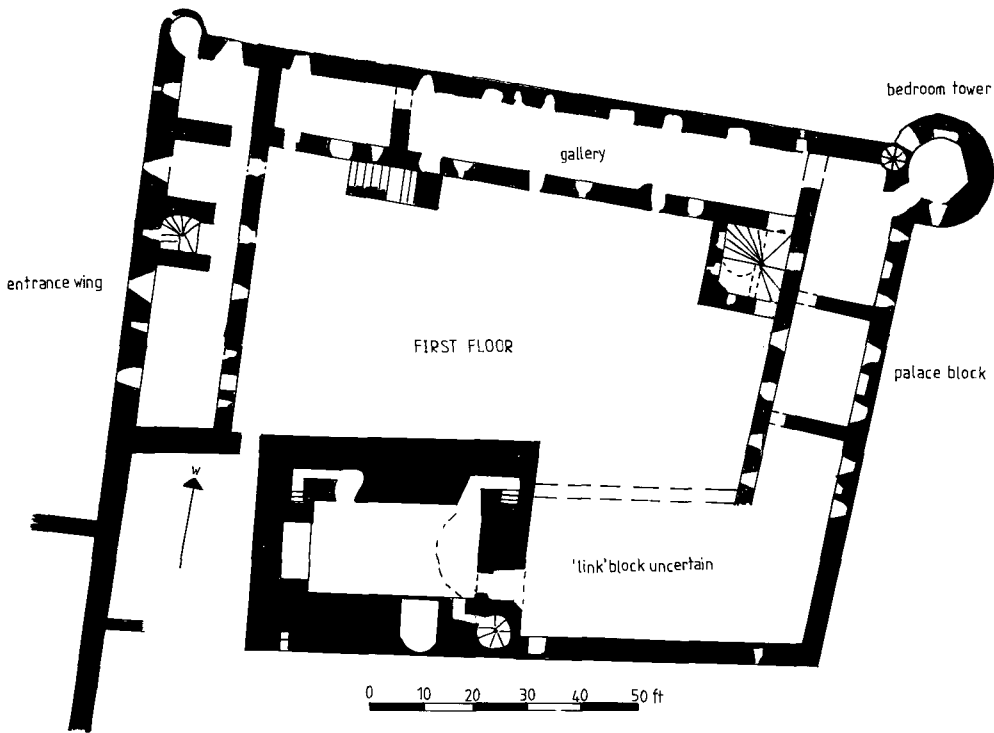
The estates of Alexander, 4th Lord Pitsligo, were forfeited in 1748 and put under the factorship of Thomas Innes of Muiryfold until 1758. They were then bought, part by the laird of neighbouring Aberdour, and part by John, Master of Pitsligo who, two years later, made the fateful sale of the property to Alexander Garden of Troup. In April 1760, Troup (a dedicated Hanoverian) had Pitsligo dismantled.¹⁵ The banker Sir William Forbes of Pitsligo repurchased the castle and 70 acres in 1770, along with neighbouring Pittullie which had lost only its south-eastern section to Hanoverian arson. Forbes completed their work: and Helen Noble watched miserably as the windows and timbers of both Pitsligo and Pittullie were resetted by the thrifty banker in his new town of New Pitsligo:

In the village of Kyask [Cyaask is still the local name for New Pitsligo] you see finely carved doors now forming the shutters of bun beds, filk [which] have come from those old castles. All this vandalism was wicked.

HOUSE OF PITSLIGO

Against this background, one considers descriptions of Pitsligo. The Revd J B Pratt¹⁶ naturally regarded it as a castle – plain, rude and massive 'without any claims to architectural beauty'. MacGibbon & Ross concurred, interested as they were only in the tower, dismissing the rest as labourers' cottages.¹⁷ In 1977, Nigel Tranter was more perceptive when he inferred 'a notable impression of grandeur and strength' from the courtyard buildings.¹⁸ W Douglas Simpson considered it 'one of the most important and interesting [castles] in Aberdeenshire'.¹⁹

Whilst Pitsligo was still occupied, a less military perspective obtained, as revealed in the *View of the Diocese of Aberdeen*.²⁰ The tower was much decayed and neglected, but 'there are, therefore, other lodgings built since, more convenient for receiving of strangers; which lodgings, together with the castle, do almost form a court'. To Patrick Cook in 1703, it was simply the 'House of Pitsligo'. The old tower received a separate notice, which Cook described in detail in a semi-ruinous state after the removal of its top storey and battlements in 1703:



ILLUS 4 Possible first-floor plan of Pitsligo (McKean).

It was 80 foot long, and 26 foot broad; the walls 9 foot thick. It was about 114 foot high, divided into three storeys of which two are yet standing. The whole house consisted of three rooms: the lowest was the kitchen and was 12 foot high; the second was the eating room and is 25 foot high. The third . . . was the sleeping room for the whole family, and had in it 24 beds . . . there was a large ditch around the whole house.²¹

Cook's description, the only one save Helen Noble's to describe the building in use, is valuable but puzzling. Neither the site nor purpose of a moat can be identified; and it seems to conflict with the pleasance lying to the west, and the gardens to the north.

SURVEY

The mansion – the country house – of Pitsligo is roughly quadrangular (entirely quadrangular 100 years ago if one is to believe MacGibbon & Ross's notional plan) with the 15th-century tower set at an odd angle in the south wing (illus 4).

There has been such change that much remains conjecture, and many of the signals are self-contradictory. If the first extensions from the tower abutted it (as would be normal) then the building sequence began against the tower's eastern gable where nothing now survives. The east wing has a palace-block plan consistent with the 1577 datestone, although its huge regular windows and doorways are later.

The north wing has the thickest external wall, but was built after the west wing since it blocked one of the latter's vaults. Although Simpson had concluded that the private

apartments were in the north wing, its dimensions and absence of room divisions imply a gallery instead; in an identical location to, but to a lesser degree of sophistication than, the Marischal's great gallery at Dunnottar. The west wing, with the most irregular fenestration, the most gunloops, the entrance pend and (perhaps) a chapel, was also built in several phases. It may have been built (most unusually) free-standing. Since the earlier construction makes free use of red stone dressings, whereas a grey stone predominates in the later, the stone itself may offer a clue to dating.

The reconstruction began with the stair tower, whose Royal armorial panel, dated 1603 (illus 5), might record the date of its construction (close enough to that of Fyvie), or perhaps commemorates the birth of the 1st Lord Pitsligo; or both. Simpson concluded that the stair tower was but a porch (thinking, presumably, of Dunnottar), but there are indications in the masonry of at least three storeys, and the normal proportions of this type of structure imply the likelihood of a fourth, each one set slightly back from the lower, the change identified by a red stone string-course. The processional staircase within has dressed stone ribs (with sunk carvings in the springers) springing from an octagonal ashlar column once offset against formerly white plastered walls. The rubble of the exterior walls was also enhanced by an enormous missing lintel that used to grace its doorway, a three-stage armorial panel (now lacking its bottom panel) and another datestone – all in grey stone. There is a curious recessed panel or blocked door inside at first-floor level.

Simpson had concluded that the red sandstone dressings came from the Delgatie quarries: but it is coarser, a slightly more bilious hue, and more friable – which implies that it was quarried from nearby Aberdour. Furthermore, it seems to have been used for dressings in the earlier buildings. By the time of the armorial panels, the stair tower, the palace block and the roll-moulded doorway, a harder grey stone is deployed – a stone similar to that of the dormer in the Jamb.

How would the stair have been capped? Some corbelling or stringing on the north-west corner of the tower implies a turnpike turreted stair leading up from the third storey – but to what? Having no residential storey to serve, it might have been either a study (as in Mains of Claverhouse, Dundee) or a balustraded flat for taking the stupendous view. The latter – given the reasonable proximity of Craigievar, Innes and Craigston – was selected. Innes, on the other hand, upon which the balustrade is postulated, was not begun till 1644, and then to a design imported from the Lothians. A solid parapet was just as likely. From the utter absence of the top storey, it might be postulated that it was built entirely of dressed stonework and robbed in consequence.

To judge (incautiously) from fragmentary remains, the great staircase appears to have debouched into the gallery at first-floor level, rather than into the eastern wing, the opening into which appears too minor for a processional entrance. That, in turn, reinforces the supposition that the palace-block's erection may well be commemorated by the 1577 datestone, and that when the stair was added in 1603, the palace-block itself underwent substantial modification. This expensive and carefully designed piece of building offers ample evidence that the Pitsligo courtyard was far more than simply labourers' dwellings. Lord Pitsligo, however, was unlikely to have gone to the expenditure of such a superb new stair tower only to have its quality lessened by the rubble of the east and north wings. Examination proved that the rubble had been harled both to conceal the looseness of the pinned rubble, and to heighten the visual impact of the armorial panels, string-courses and quoins.

The following conclusions may be drawn from examining the stair tower alone: first, that the quality of early 17th-century rebuilding was very high; second, that the building's aesthetic



ILLUS 5 The great staircase from the west abutting the east wing. Note the Royal Arms of 1603 and missing lintel into the principal doorway. Note also the regularity of the windows in the east wing. (RCAHMS).

consisted of harling offset by dressed stone for major lintels, string-courses and heraldic details; third, that the staircase was probably later than its adjacent eastern wing; and finally, that the red sandstone dressings were giving way to grey stone embellishments.

EAST WING

The east wing, still in a state of serious dilapidation, terminating in the round bedroom tower at the north-east corner, has the plan of a palace-block. The ground floor consists of the customarily vaulted cellars and storerooms, save at the northern end where the principal kitchen warmed the activity above. The two apartments above consisted of a sequence of at least two chambers, some 12 ft high, leading into square-sided rooms within the round tower.²² That this block originally extended southwards is revealed by foundations. If the stair was built *de novo* in 1603, there raises the question of access. It would have been customary for an expressed round staircase at perhaps the south-west corner of the new block where it abutted the link to the tower. The regularity and size of the window openings, and of the cellar openings, contrast with all others at Pitsligo and imply a date later than 1577.

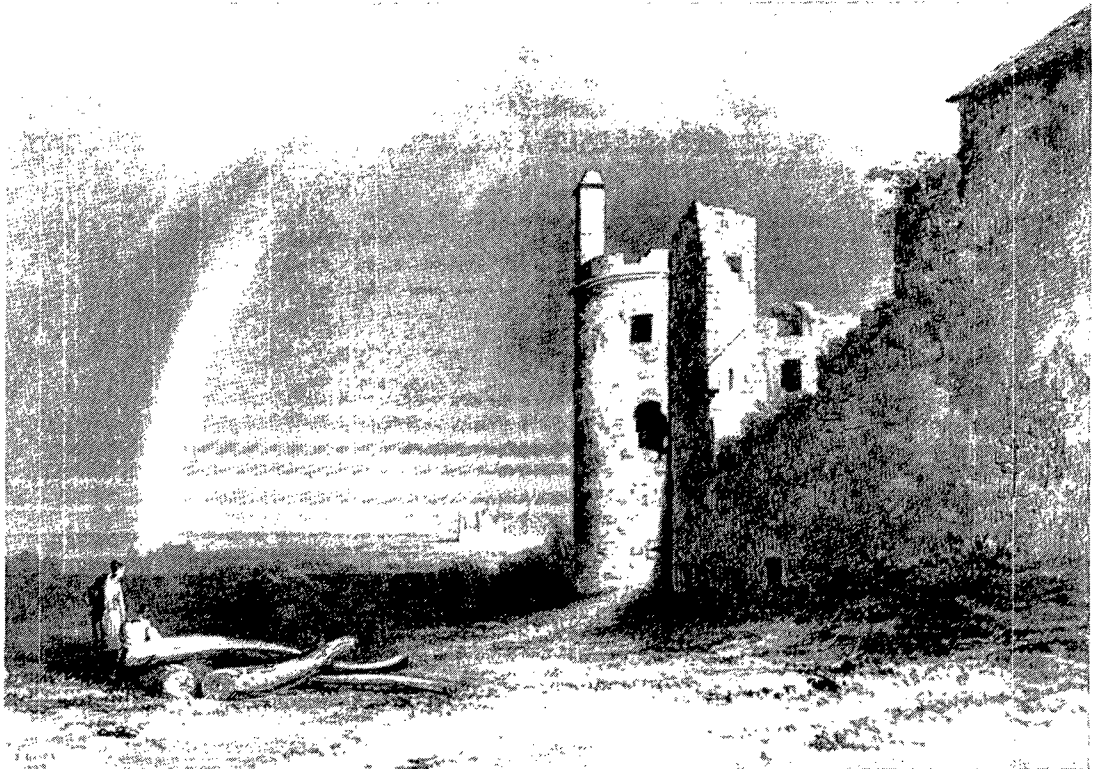
There is no surviving internal evidence. The apartments were large and well lit, and to judge by the norm (Huntly, Hamilton, Kinneil and Cullen) they would have been decorated with wall paintings on plaster by the best local artist.

THE ROUND TOWER

The gunloop at ground level was useful for chasing off predators and 'broken men of weir' but very little else. The round tower was a smart residential stack with good fireplaces, large windows facing south and west, with two principal square-sided rooms and an attic room well lit by three dormers. These were linked by a private mural staircase in the south-western edge. The quality of the tower, to judge by the moulded cornice and the dressed stone of its chimney stack, was high. The raggle of its conical hat can still be seen chased into the chimney stack. Although one can understand how military historians were deceived into believing such towers were located to provide enfilade fire, these residential bed chambers were not defensive. The placing of their windows had much more to do with the sunlight available to a north-eastern corner tower than it had to do with defence (illus 6).

THE NORTH WING

The north wing, suggested as a gallery in consequence of its long and narrow dimensions, is in a state of total dilapidation, the walls supporting its ground-floor vaults having been so splayed out as to render it dangerous. In curious contrast to the west wing, its vaults ran parallel to the walls, rather than at right angles, destabilizing rather than strengthening them.



ILLUS 6 The north flank of Pitsligo with the round tower; Pitullie Castle in the distance. Painted by James Giles c 1830 from the old garden. The raggle of the gallery roof is clearly visible, as is the embrasure for the dormer window in the round tower. (Courtesy National Trust for Scotland).

That may be a case for suggesting that the outer wall was built first, and the gallery added alongside later. The roof rattle, where it abuts the north-east corner of the palace block, implies a single storey above cellars, with the innovation (probably later innovation) of a small flying staircase towards the western end. It is the only wing shown in any state of occupancy in the 1804 engraving by J C Nattes:²³ a two-storey building, not unlike its present state today, occupied and roofed at the western end with great heavy skews and pantiles (illus 7). On the assumption that its then owner would have been unlikely to have invested in a new roof structure, it is probable that Nattes drew the original roof at its original height. Virtually no first-floor walls are left at the eastern end of this wing, and much rubble remains to be removed. The room was well lit, with larger windows to the courtyard than out over the walled garden to the Moray Firth, and would have been well suited for the indoor recreation room the gallery was meant to be. The pattern of door/window of the cellars is comparable to those beneath that at Dunnottar, to whose rippling glory Pitsligo's gallery is but a country cousin.

THE WEST WING

The west wing is full of conundra. First, it may either have been the first built or added against an existing wall of enclosure. The cellar vaulting follows the customary pattern at right angles to the walls, with the consequence that the northern cellar (with its gunloop) was



ILLUS 7 Pitsligo Castle c 1799 by J C Nattes (published in Nattes & Fittler: *Scotia Depicta* 1804): the view inside the courtyard looking west with the ruined tower in the left foreground. Note the pantiled section of the north wing converted into a farmhouse and the mass of rubble on the left.

blocked when the gallery was added. It appears to have been built in at least two phases, to judge by a line of quoins just to the north of the entrance pend, and another at the angle linking to the tower. Indeed, although substantial walls with large windows extend much to the south, it is impossible to ascertain whether it was ever built. MacGibbon & Ross, however, illustrate this corner as built right up to the tower on their block plan.

Although the vaulted pend appears to have been the principal entrance (as signified by the tattered remains of a two- or three-stage armorial centrepiece above) it is insufficiently large to accommodate a man on horseback (just as is the gate at the far end of the Pleasance). Since the upper storeys of the wing have been robbed, it is impossible to speculate with any degree of accuracy how it might once have appeared. The first floor is in too ruinous and friable a state to allow easy inspection, but a dressed stone holy water stoup in the courtyard wall at the northern end implies the location of a chapel. The missing superstructure may have provided the grandeur that is now lacking.

Some disturbed stonework at the north-western gable appears to project in a way that implies the bottom course of a corbel supporting a turret: confirmed by the remains of an ingoe within. The model presumes that the turret was less a fortified structure than a viewing structure or gazebo facing the Moray Firth.

The biggest conundrum in the west wing is access to the upper storeys. Opening north off the entrance pend is a small room which appears to have contained a circular staircase to the first floor, and probably, to judge by a small window, to the floors above. There is no surviving trace of any other stair. One must presume that the principal staircase lay elsewhere, either in the inscrutable southern end, or – more likely – projecting into the courtyard. That might explain the unusually large opening at the southern end of the west wing's courtyard façade (illus 8).

THE SOUTH WING

There is no clear evidence of any building between the west wing and the 15th-century tower other than the current archway. It may therefore always have remained open and be the principal equestrian entrance.

It is, however, to the east of the tower on the south wing that one would expect the first extension. Any such block would have supported principal rooms at the level of the tower's principal floor upon vaulted cellars. Since its construction blocked the principal entrance to the tower, a new stair would have been required, whether contained within the block (as in Craigmillar) or more probably an expressed circular stair tower. There survives embedded in the 18th-century stables the remains of a high-quality grey stone roll-moulded doorway, and an opening in the south wall vaulted in a way that would have been avoided in the 18th century. The probability is that there was a structure at this point.

The 1804 engraving of Pitsligo by J C Nattes delineates the tower in a condition not dissimilar to its current state, with what looks like a vaulted arch in the foreground. That archway could either be a poor representation of the current basement entry into the tower or the ruins of a transverse-vaulted service passage at the base of this block. Buildings with such passages, whose vaulted cellars open off at right angles, form a distinct type²⁴ – principally in the larger and more palatial late 16th- and early 17th-century palace blocks. It seems improbable that there would have been the remains of such a block at Pitsligo in this location, at a mid-16th-century date. It seems safer to conclude that the archway shown in the Nattes drawing is a poor representation of the remaining basement door to the tower.

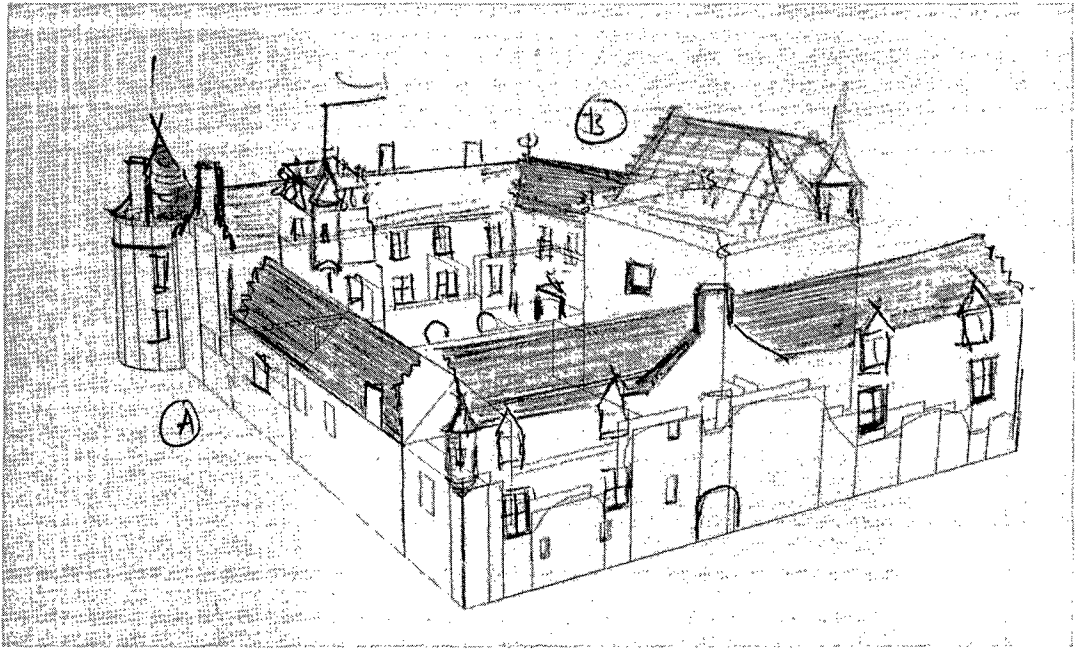


ILLUS 8 Inside the courtyard looking west before consolidation (RCAHMS).

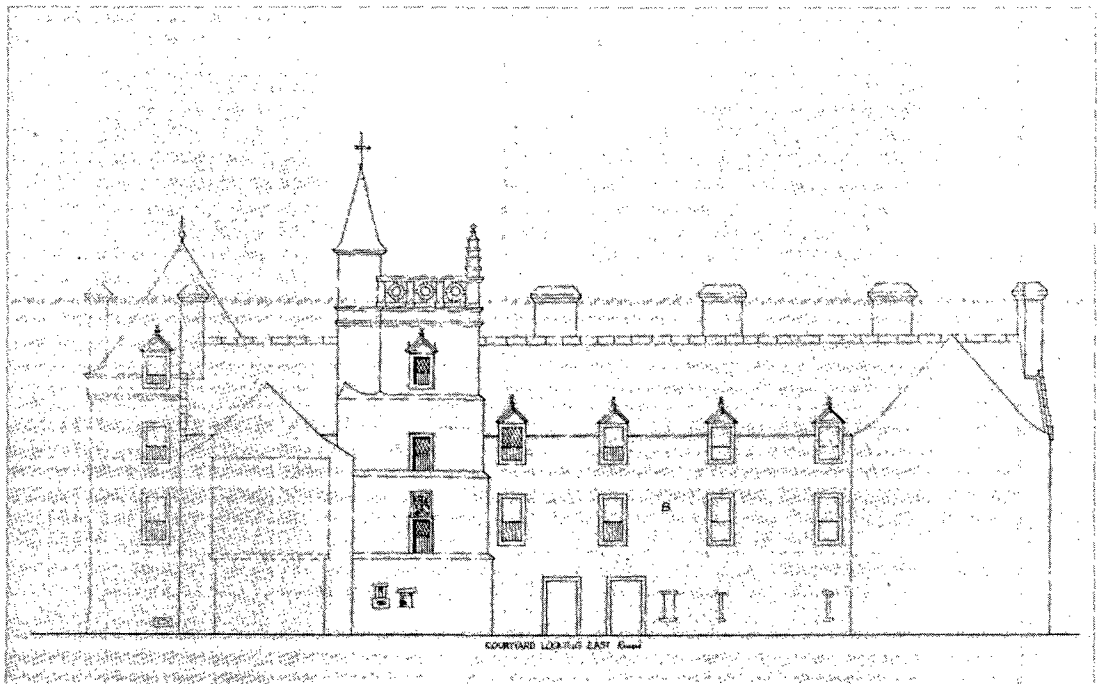
THE TOWER

This paper does not consider the tower in any detail. In its current condition much greater research time would be needed to analyse it. The principal windows and garderobes in the south wall have been blocked up and pointed over, presumably for reasons of stability. Alarming gaps in the vaulted roof are only too apparent.

It is a not-quite-rectangular solid tower of four storeys dating from c 1424, set at an odd angle to its envioning courtyard, with unusually thick east and west gables. A gigantic two-storey fissured stone vault sits above a barrel-vaulted basement. The upper storeys were removed c 1703. Nothing survives of Castle Forbes, to which contemporaries compared it, and its own contemporaries – particularly its cousin-german Philorth – have a projecting stair jamb. The walls are sufficiently thick to presume considerable rooms within. The eastern gable has collapsed. It seems likely that when the Gardens of Troup determined to turn the castle into an agricultural steading, they demolished the southern end of the palace block, the 'link' block, and part of the tower in order to allow cart access. A close examination by Neil Hynd discovered signs of sheering, implying that the tower may have collapsed of its own accord, its east gable weakened by staircases in both north and south corners, and, presumably, slappings at principal and second-floor level through into the new residential block.



ILLUS 9 Initial reconstruction by the author based upon computer modelling from Douglas Forrest Associates. From the north-east, suggesting a wallhead gable and a gazebo turret. 'A' is the large kitchen chimney. The plan and demolition of the east side of the tower and south part of the palace block indicates demolition of a linking block 'B' to provide farmyard access.

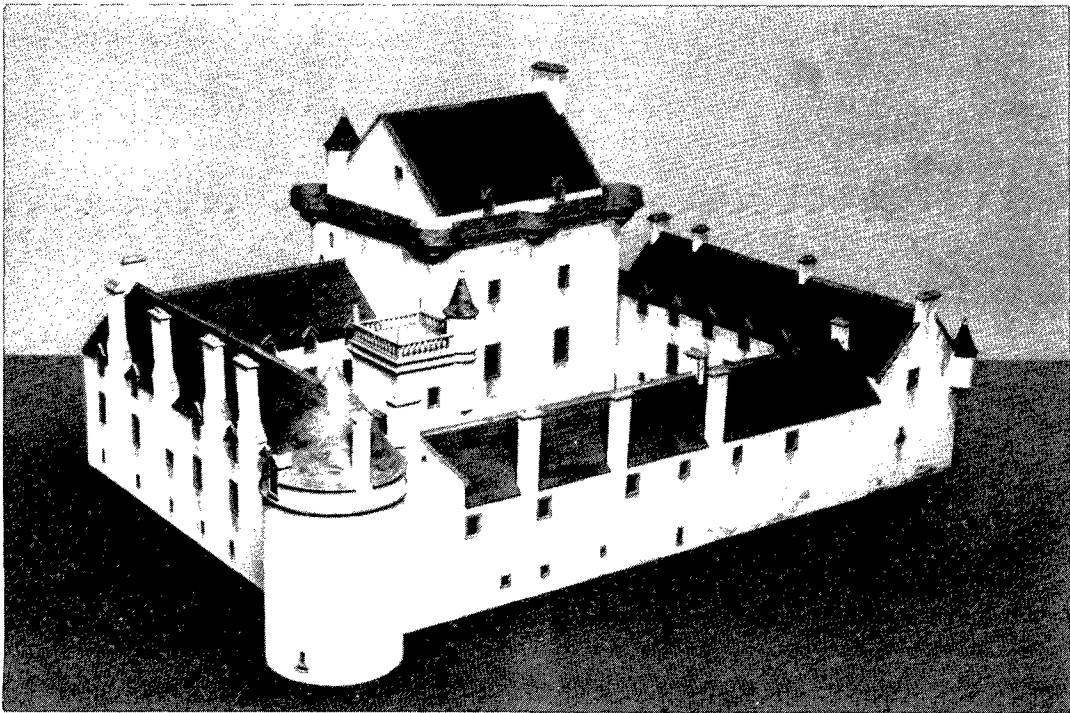


ILLUS 10 Example of a model development drawing by Simon Montgomery – courtyard elevation of the east range.

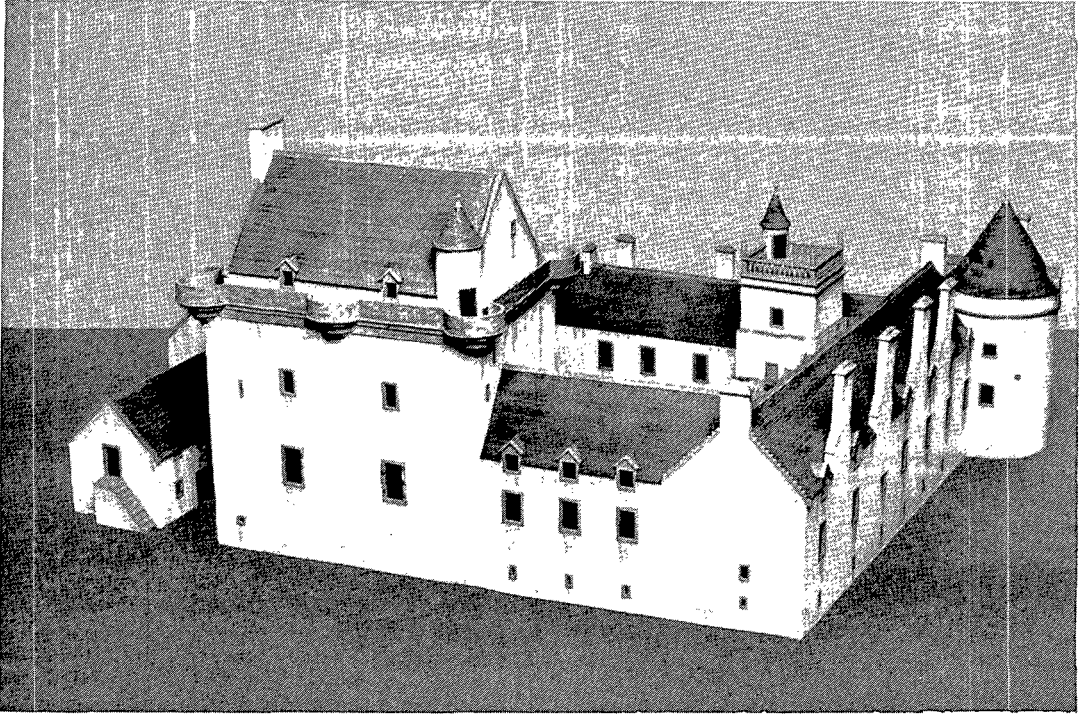
MODEL

The architects undertook to provide a ground plan with computer projections; these were developed into a notional reconstruction (illus 9), and then realized by Simon Montgomery, who translated them into three-dimensional form (illus 10). The iterative process involved checking the Montgomery elevations against photographs and comparable buildings elsewhere; and the conclusions were tested at a meeting at Historic Scotland, against dire predictions of 'doing a Brucklay'.²⁵ To meet the exhibition deadline, the model was produced in haste with little opportunity for revision, and the caveats attending it are noted at the end of this paper. The single most important caveat lies in its decoration and elaboration. What dressed stone could be safely robbed from Pitsligo's ruin had been robbed (much resetted in the house known as the Jamb in Rosehearty), leaving not a dormer head behind. It was decided to err on the side of plainness, thus recreating a model Pitsligo almost certainly less vivid than the one the 1st Lord Pitsligo had in mind (illus 11 & 12).

Construction of the model proved as much a process of investigation as did the original survey, in substitution for a true measured survey of Pitsligo which did (and still does) not exist. It was done in some haste during June and July 1990 and is acknowledged as but the first step, rather than a conclusion. Later study has already revealed more information (the private mural staircase, access beneath the north wing to the well etc). The tower is rudimentary and speculative in the upper storeys and its fenestration would not have been so regular. The 'link' block (the first extension east from the tower) is not just understated. If it existed at all, there would have been an expressed staircase at its north-western junction with the east wing. Its



ILLUS 11 Photograph of the model from the north-east.



ILLUS 12 Photograph of the model from the south-east.

first floor would have to have matched that in the tower since it blocked the latter's original entrance. The roll-moulded doorway implies a building of greater presence than the model demonstrates. After all, for over 50 years – until the construction of the 1603 staircase – it may have provided the only access to the upper storeys.

The palace block must be a storey too low unless the round tower's top room was accessible only by the mural staircase and standing proud of the remainder of the block (which would not be customary). A further storey in the palace block would also make sense of the stair tower's height.

The well lying in the easternmost of the walled gardens to the north (gardens once famous in the 18th century for their fruit trees) is offered no direct access from the courtyard. This conundrum was solved upon re-inspection in July 1991. Two blocked openings are to be found in the north wall: the (earlier ?) roughly arched in red sandstone half-way along (which would explain the pouring trough at the foot of the stair tower leading into the kitchen), and a larger, more formal doorway immediately adjacent to the base of the round tower at the far end of the other useless corridor running alongside the kitchen.

The matter of decoration or elaboration is vexed. Once it had been established that Pitsligo would have been harled with red sandstone dressings, the model eschewed all decorative detail save for the top of the stair tower: not even wayward string-courses, upper turrets or dormers. Further inspection implies otherwise. First, the later dressed stone is grey rather than red (Aberdour). Second, the dormer entombed in the face of the Jamb in Rosehearty is a triple-pinnacled grey stone pediment: the same stone as the roll-moulded door and all (save the string-courses) in the stair. Some original carving is now too weathered to be

read, but the date 1763 is crudely incised across the pediment. Given that the castle was unroofed in 1760, it seems not unlikely that the plentiful dressed stone in the Jamb, including the dormer, is the product of scavenging.

The reality of Pitsligo is likely to have been vastly different from the model in respect of its embellishment. Consider the neighbourhood: the almost Rabelaisian exuberance of the dormer windows at Cullen, or the balustrade at Craigston, the entire skyline of the south façade of Fyvie, and even the strange wildness and oriel windows of Pittullie constructed next door in 1631.

CONCLUSIONS

What kind of condition, therefore, may we infer for the House of Pitsligo in the early 17th century? First, it is not a castle so much as an extensive courtyard country house, masquerading behind mock-military features in the manner of comparable buildings on the Continent. Second, the extensions from the tower are horizontal in plan form and of varying graciousness and splendour. Third, ground-floor rooms are universally storage, kitchens, etc. Fourth, vertical access, in addition to the 17th-century stair tower in the north-east corner, will remain uncertain without excavation.

Pitsligo was the triumphant expression of wealthy lairds and patrons within a close-knit north-eastern alliance of families who were then busy building or re-edifying the palaces of Tolquhon, Boyne, Pittullie, Inverallochy, Huntly, Inverugie and Fyvie; or embellishing the towers and building the houses of Craigston, Delgatie, Cairnbulg and Philorth. As may be inferred from the record in Macfarlane's Geographical Collections, there were similar palatial buildings at Cullen, Banff, Auchmeddan, Boyndlie, Tyrie and Hatton.

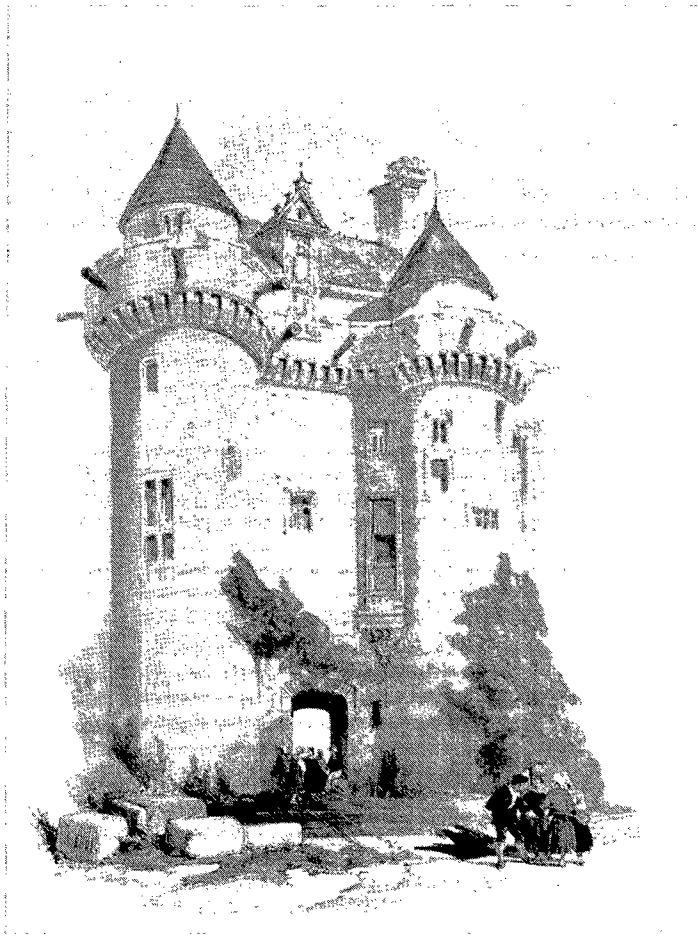
BROADER CONSIDERATIONS

The re-examination of Pitsligo suggests a wider re-examination of the typologies of 16th- and 17th-century country houses and villas for which the term 'tower with a barmkin' is wholly anachronistic save, possibly, in the Borders. We should jettison our belief – fostered by MacGibbon & Ross and fuelled by a fascination with gunloops – that such structures, or the ruins of such structures, are 'castles' to be interpreted within military terminology to conform to the mythical picture of Scotland as a country trapped in barbarism. Not only do features previously interpreted through a military perspective have valid residential purposes, but also that some of the overt militaria such as gunloops were demonstrably unfit for their purpose. The round flanking towers defended no more than the sacredness of the bedchamber, and their large windows had less to do with enfilade than with sunlight. Turrets and towers, often on the same floor as a large room and sometimes (as in Castle Leod) fitted out as a well-lit study, were gazebos: a use sometimes signalled by construction in dressed stone, as in Midhope, Craigston, Amisfield and elsewhere. Nor indeed were these houses 'fortified houses' as Nigel Tranter would have them. Mansions such as Pitsligo were less than fortified and substantially more than a house.

Scots is short of terms such as *château* (French), *schloss* (German) or *herregaard* (Danish) to describe a mock-military structure with residential purposes. Nonetheless, as the English visitor Sir William Brereton observed in 1636, that is clearly what they were: 'gentlemens (*here called laird's*) houses built all castle-wise'.²⁶ It was the fashion. In 1632, Sir Robert Kerr wrote to the Earl of Lothian: 'By any means, do not take away the battlements,

as some give me counsel to do, because that is the grace of the house, and makes it look like a castle and so noblest'.²⁷ This Don Quixote attitude may have done wonders for Sir Robert's *machismo*, and reveals much about cultural attitudes, but it could not stem domestic change.

The generating force in Renaissance Scotland was the change in plan from the vertical to the horizontal – a development brought about equally by the development of artillery and by the adoption of a more gracious living style. Architecturally it was reflected in a twin-pronged move towards either symmetry in a façade or *deliberate* asymmetry. Beyond the lavishness of Royal palaces, this move seems to have manifested itself first in the forework, then gatehouse, and then in the palace block. A short-lived passion for buildings flanked by drum towers, sometimes enfolding a principal entrance, lasted from 1500 to c 1560, as in Stirling, Holyrood, Edinburgh's Netherbow, Seton Palace, and – supremely at Falkland (illus 13) – with a later architectural development of that motif as the centrepiece of a symmetrical façade in Fyvie, Tolquhon, Barnes, Boyne, Rowallan, Thurso and elsewhere. That they were more decorative than defensive may be assumed from the enormous (but oft overlooked) oriel window



ILLUS 13 The great gateway to Falkland Palace painted by David Roberts in 1864 (RIAS Collection). Note the lavish oriel window.

projecting into Falkland's entrance. To match the new horizontal emphasis, there appears a contrasting desire for verticality in proportion, to enable such mansions to be read at a distance in country largely (at that time) devoid of trees. The *inherent sense of vertical proportion* apparent in such buildings is sufficiently strong to enable one to conjecture the number of storeys missing from a ruin with considerable confidence.

MacGibbon & Ross's fascination with the plan being generated by additions to a tower in Z, L or T formations as three-dimensional sculptures (which they undoubtedly were) led them to overlook other clues: particularly the appearance of the private bedroom tower with its own stair, the ground-floor service corridor, the development from square chambers within round towers to round chambers, and the geometric development of expressed staircases from round to square, hexagonal and eventually octagonal.

These great stairs usually served (and were attached to) tall, vertically proportioned buildings encrusted with superstructural flamboyance that dominated the policies and challenged the old tower (where one existed). It was the *laird's lodging*, consisting of two or more apartments above each other, each of a sequence of two rooms *en suite* leading into the private bedroom tower. As in Pitsligo (Castle Fraser, Huntly, Tolquhon and elsewhere), that tower had its private mural staircase. Defined as a palace block, such buildings were almost certainly derivative of James V's 1529 North Tower at Holyroodhouse. The more lavish versions of later structures reveal their palatial aspirations by the presence of the ground-floor service corridor (Palace of Huntly), by which the principal rooms above are further from the ground, wider, and protected from the sight of servants going about their business. Galleries or indoor exercise rooms may well have been more customary in Scotland than previously assumed, if they could be afforded – in addition to Royal examples or that in Hamilton Palace and the splendour at Dunnottar – by only moderately warm lairds at Pitsligo, Bargany, Crathes and Tolquhon.

A similar form was also used for freestanding houses which most closely resemble the form of French châteaux: asymmetrical, spiky and embattled houses such as Edinample, Ballone, Redcastle, Carnousie and Kilcoy. The plan of a round bedroom tower at one angle of the *corps de logis* and a stair tower at the other is almost identical to that, say, of the Château de Moncontour (Loire et Cher).

The norm appears to be the creation of a courtyard thriftily extending, in the first instance, from an existing tower – as in Edzell. Exceptions – central towers surrounded (Craignethan), twin separate towers (Laurieston and Inveraray), detached palace blocks (Old Sauchie, Clackmannan and Wester Powrie) – demand further investigation. Over the 100 years from c 1550 to c 1660 there was continuous development from expressed circular stair towers to square ones and then to the incorporation of stairs within a formal design. The development of formal L-plans and U-plans with symmetrically disposed staircases may reflect a change in influence from France to England. Flanking towers, however, flourished. They mutated from round (save in delightful mid 17th-century aberrations such as Methven) to square (Drum, Elcho, Fordell), eventually becoming formalized within a symmetrical design as pavilions as at Barnes, Heriot's Hospital, Queensberry House (Canongate), Caroline Park, Glasshaugh and – eventually – to William Adam's Floors and Duff House.

Pitsligo also lends the controversy over harling a new perspective. Dressed masonry was expensive and occasionally difficult to come by. The Earl of Huntly (suitably married to a Keith of Inverugie and possibly motivated to outshine Balvenie) had to wait five years for a mason to repair the Palace of Huntly and produce its magnificent superstructure: and it was eventually the English mason Ralph Rawlinson who did so.²⁸ It is not credible to believe that

the rest of the Palace of Huntly would have been left naked rubble, thus to detract from the luxurious impression of the dressed stone above. The remainder of the Palace of Huntly would have been harled or limewashed; and there are many parallels for such a combination of the châteaux of France. Random rubble was probably never intended to be visible where it could be avoided.

The topmost storeys of Amisfield Tower, Dumbriesshire, may now be perceived as a smooth and polished superstructure set upon a harled plinth. Conversely, if many rubble plinths should have been harled, some harled superstructures should not have been, and may well conceal dressed stone beneath. A comparison between Brodie and Cleish is instructive. Nothing is harled at Cleish, thus eliminating the effect of the beautiful ashlar of the projecting stair tower: whereas at Brodie, all is harled, including the ashlar stair tower and parapet. Both misunderstand their aesthetic. An old photograph also indicates the likelihood of dressed stone above the corbel course at Fyvie implying that an examination above the corbel course at Crathes, Craigievar, Castle Fraser and elsewhere might not come amiss.

The heightened importance of dressed stone to this aesthetic is emphasized by the discovery of the same initials on the dressed stone corbelling on a number of towers on the Black Isle and in Cromarty. It implies that a native or regional mason may have been responsible for the principal structure, and travelling high-craft masons for the dressed stone and – sometimes – the superstructure.

The changing plan was accompanied by the development of a coherent aesthetic for Scottish Renaissance architecture which has been only indifferently understood. These buildings were less ‘vernacular’ so much as the consequence of deliberate design decisions within a limited range of choice. Their vocabulary was probably based upon the interaction between dressed stone and harl or limewash; and possibly upon the interaction between local masons and travelling high-craft masons. Oriel and bay windows, gazebos, string-courses, corbel tables, superstructures, dormer windows, aedicules, stair tower flats, lanterns, balustrades, ceremonial entrances, and the mock-military turrets and battlements formed part of a rich vocabulary. Changes in plane, which add not a tittle of floor space within, were not the accidental consequences of vernacular illiteracy or functional need so much as the deliberate product of design (illus 14). By definition, the product of design implies the hand of the designer: as both Robert Billings and Charles Rennie Mackintosh recognized over 100 years ago.²⁹

ENVOI

This investigation of how the House of Pitsligo might have appeared in the mid-17th century has revealed the need to re-evaluate the architecture of the period.³⁰ To call such structures ‘castles’ is to perpetuate the inaccurate myth of a primitive, savage, backward and largely uncultured country beyond the Central Belt. The developing plan of the mock-military Scots country mansion, as revealed in the advent of the bedroom tower with its private staircase, of the processional stair and of the service corridor at ground level, requires systematic analysis against Continental and Scandinavian models. We have almost certainly underestimated the wealth, quality, colour, decoration and flamboyance of such buildings – which formed a rich Scots Renaissance vocabulary overlaid or destroyed by subsequent generations.



ILLUS 14 Author's impression of Pitsligo from the gardens, ie looking to the south.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to pay tribute to the many people who have assisted me in this particular hunt: John Dunbar, Dr David Walker, Aonghus MacKechnie, Anne o'Connor, Ian Shepherd, Douglas Forrest, Dr Deborah Howard, Neil Hynd, Prof Gordon Donaldson, Geoffrey Stell, Dr Deborah Mays and Simon Montgomery. All inaccuracies, however, are mine.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

- 1 Howard, D (ed) 1990 *The Architecture of the Scottish Renaissance*. Edinburgh.
- 2 RIAS/Landmark Trust illustrated architectural guides to Scotland 1982–present: *Edinburgh; Stirling and the Trossachs; Dundee; Aberdeen; Clackmannan and the Ochils; The South Clyde Estuary; Moray; Central Glasgow; Banff and Buchan; Shetland; The Kingdom of Fife; Orkney*.
- 3 McKean, C 1987 *The District of Moray*. Edinburgh.
- 4 MacIvor, I 1988 *Balvenie Castle*. Edinburgh.
- 5 Fawcett, R 1982 *Edzell Castle*. Edinburgh. In the original, Douglas Simpson recognized the palatial nature of the round tower; it is a more modern caption that advises us that the 'circular tower is a reminder that there was still a need for defensibility'.
- 6 McKean, C 1990 *Banff and Buchan*. Edinburgh.
- 7 Private residential towers, identified by the presence of a private staircase, appear frequently in MacGibbon & Ross's plans of buildings of this period: Claypotts, Balvenie, Huntly, Noltland, Castle Campbell, Fordell, Elcho, Inverugie, Tolquhon and Ballone (among others).
- 8 MacGibbon, D & Ross, T 1897 *Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, Edinburgh, IV, 214 ff.
- 9 Pratt, J B 1970 *Buchan*, Aberdeen, 3rd edn, 204–7, 438–45.

- 10 *Collections for the History of the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff*, 9. Spalding Club, 1832.
- 11 *The House of Forbes*, 3rd edn, Spalding Club, 1937.
- 12 *ibid*: reference to papers held at Fettercairn House, including a description of the funeral and an inventory of their belongings.
- 13 Fraser, D (ed) 1983 *The Christian Watt Papers* 8–13. Edinburgh.
- 14 *ibid*.
- 15 Taylor, A & H, *op cit*.
- 16 Pratt, *op cit*, 204–7, 438–45.
- 17 MacGibbon & Ross, *op cit*.
- 18 Tranter, N 1977 *The Fortified House in Scotland*, IV 75–6.
- 19 Simpson, W D 1952 ‘Pitsligo Castle’, *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 88 (1952), 125–129.
- 20 See 11 above.
- 21 *ibid* quoting Macfarlane’s Geographical Collections MSS.
- 22 An examination of the plans in MacGibbon & Ross reveals a progression from flat-sided chambers in round towers to circular chambers with thinner walls. The latter are insufficiently thick to contain the privies, wardrobes and mural staircases of the former, which then have to be corbelled out. Flat-sided rooms within circular towers can be found in Holyroodhouse, Balvenie, Huntly, Earlshall, Terpersie and Dudhope and can assist in differentiating the differing dates of the two round towers at Glamis.
- 23 Nattes, J C & Fittler T 1804 *Scotia Depicta*.
- 24 Ground-floor vaulted corridors may be seen in Craigmillar, Drum, Castle Campbell, Dalcross, Castle Stewart, Traquair, Newark, Kilcoy, Rossend, Edinample and Kilmartin.
- 25 Brucklay, near Turriff, was a romantic castellated conjection invented by Thomas Mackenzie upon an inoffensive but plain 17th-century mansion.
- 26 Hume, B 1973 *Early Travellers in Scotland* (reprint), Edinburgh, 132–58.
- 27 Sir Richard Kerr: quoted in Prentice, R 1981 *National Trust for Scotland Guide*, 36.
- 28 Information from John Dunbar.
- 29 Robertson, P (ed) 1990 *Charles Rennie Mackintosh: The Architectural Papers*, Glasgow, 52; and R W Billings’ paper to the Architectural Institute of Scotland.
- 30 Howard, D forthcoming *The Architectural History of Scotland 1550–1660*. Edinburgh.