

Baltersan: a stately tower house in Ayrshire

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ABSTRACT

The ruined tower house of Baltersan near Maybole, Ayrshire (NGR: NS 283 087; NMRS site no NS 20 NE) is the subject of an intended restoration. In view of its Category A Listing and the aspirations of its owner, an archaeological evaluation was conducted and extensive research carried out. The knowledge gained to date justifies a reappraisal of the origin and importance of this remarkable building.

INTRODUCTION

An inscription on the lintel of Baltersan's entrance suggests that it was commissioned late in the 16th century by one John Kennedy, at a time when his kinsfolk dominated south-west Scotland from Ayr to Creetown.

His father, David Kennedy of Pennyglen, near Maybole, was for the most part of his life in the service of the earls of Cassillis. His mother Margaret, daughter of Alexander Kennedy of Bargany and widow of William Wallace of Craigie, married Gilbert, 3rd Earl of Cassillis, in 1540/1 which places John's birth between 1537 and then.¹ Within a year of the marriage, John gained a half-brother with the birth of Gilbert, later 4th Earl and notorious, self-styled 'King of Carrick'.

Kennedy is first recorded in connection with Baltersan in the last quarter of the 15th century. James Kennedy of Baltersan, Lord of Row, married Egidia Blair, eldest daughter of John Blair of that Ilk in 1473.² James had notable ancestors and brothers. His father, Sir Gilbert, was created 1st Lord of Row prior to 1458 and later became Keeper and Constable of Stirling Castle. His grandfather, Sir James, married Princess Mary, daughter of Robert III in 1405, the year he was created Bailie of Carrick. He was killed three years later by his illegitimate brother, Gilbert. A legitimate brother, Alexander Kennedy of Ardstinchar, known as 'of the dagger', was smothered by his brothers. Hugh of Ardstinchar led Scottish troops supporting Joan of Arc and in 1421, with the Earl of Buchan, achieved a notable victory over the English at the Battle of Bauge in Anjou. His exploits brought him rich rewards and the right to add the fleur-de-lis to his coat of arms.³

James Kennedy's elder brother, John, became 2nd Lord Kennedy, and the latter's only son from his first marriage became the 1st Earl of Cassillis in 1509. Of James's other brothers, the most distinguished was the poet, Walter Kennedy of Glentig. James died without issue. About ten years later, his widow, Egidia, died at her 'dwelling-house' of Baltersan in 1530. Her Testament is a valuable source of domestic and social detail.⁴

* Baltersan Cottage, 1 Dalchomie Farm, by Maybole, Ayrshire KA19 8HQ

David Kennedy of Pennyglen was one of three Executors of Lady Row's last Will. He is first on record in 1526 as living at Dunure⁵ and was a cousin of Quintin Kennedy, Abbot of Crossraguel.⁶ Like his son, he was married three times. Firstly, to Christine Adunnell, secondly to Marion Cathcart, Lady Knockdolian, and thirdly to Katherine Kennedy, who outlived him.⁷ Christine Adunnell's fate is unknown, but the marriage to Lady Knockdolian ended acrimoniously with divorce in 1553.⁸ The aggrieved lady took her case to the Privy Council but an Assize the following year ruled against her.⁹

David's son, John, was legitimized in 1555.¹⁰ The father, described in charters as 'of Baltersan', seems to have moved into Lady Row's former home in 1560. That year he took out a 19-year lease of the lands there and at Knockronald.¹¹ Nine years later he received sasine of various properties including the 40-shilling land of Baltersan from Allan Stewart, Commendator of Crossraguel Abbey.¹²

David Kennedy died in October 1571.¹³ On 22 March 1573/4, the Privy Council awarded Thomas Kennedy of Bargany the escheat of the goods of the deceased David, who was 'at the horn' by virtue of the non-payment of certain duties from his lands which had been assigned to the great humanist George Buchanan, Pensioner of Crossraguel and subsequently sold to the Laird of Bargany.¹⁴

Seven months before his father's death, John and his second wife, Margaret Cathcart, took possession of the Lands of Baltersan.¹⁵ On 28 March 1574, the confirmatory Precept of Clare Constat by Allan, Commendator of Crossraguel, makes mention of 'the three merkland of Baltersan of old extent, with mansion and orchards, with a piece of meadow lying behind the said mansion on one side and the Lands of Dalchomie on the other side, and the meadow formerly called Lady of Row's meadow.'¹⁶ Attempting to date the present tower house from land charters is further complicated by the varying descriptions of Baltersan as 'two-merk land' (1570/1), 'three-merk land' (1560 and 1574) or, an alternative to three-merk land, '40-shilling land' (1569). Another component is the one-merk land of Fens of Baltersan to which John Kennedy and his spouse, Margaret Cathcart, received sasine 'at Baltersan' in March 1570/1 from his father David, then known as 'of Pennyglen'.¹⁷ Fens of Baltersan was resigned by William Cathcart, younger of Glendosk, in the hands of John Kennedy on 7 November 1573.

EARLY NOTICES OF BALTERSAN

In spite of its landmark setting beside the A77 Glasgow/Stranraer trunk road within sight of Crossraguel Abbey, the tower house of Baltersan is little known. It rates worthy mention by MacGibbon & Ross (1889, 502–4), albeit with some minor errors which later authors have perpetuated. Tranter (1992, 19), however, does draw attention to some of its more interesting aspects.

Proximity to the abbey has guaranteed it some attention though from famous travellers and it would almost certainly have been scrambled over by the 17-year-old Robert Burns on his way back from school in Kirkoswald. His friend in later years, Captain Francis Grose, had some admiring words to say in 1789 when the house had been empty and abandoned for about half a century in describing 'Crossraguel Abbey owned by Sir Adam Fergusson who rented the precincts to a local farmer within the Barony of Baltersan . . . of which the Mansion House, a fine, old building, is still remaining, though in ruins, about a quarter of a mile from the Abbey.'¹⁸ Just what evidence Grose had for referring to the Barony of Baltersan is unclear. Its lands are described in 16th-century charters as being in the Barony of Crossraguel.

In July 1818, John Keats explored both the abbey and tower house on his way to Alloway, as part of an extensive walk covering northern England, northern Ireland and Scotland, confirming that by then the house was a ruin.¹⁹ But Robert Louis Stevenson was less impressed when he passed by in 1876, dismissing them as ‘dilapidated’.²⁰

The picturesque ruins of Crossraguel were visited by Clerk of Eldin and his brother-in-law, the architect Robert Adam, in 1762 when both drew the prospect of the abbey from the west with, in the middle distance, Baltersan surrounded by a cluster of trees. A closer attention to detail was paid by Charles Rennie Mackintosh when he meticulously sketched the house in 1895 (illus 1) during one of his holiday trips, based on Dunure. Although using only a small sketchbook, he recorded the finer points such as the tapering stair-tower and angle turret, the subtle slope of the caphouse wall onto the corbel course and even the nose and chin of the carved face on the lowest stone of the stair turret in the re-entrant angle.²¹

The house first received the false description of ‘castle’ in 1828.²² In his ‘Description of Carrick’, the Rev. William Abercrombie wrote, ‘Baltersan is a stately, Fyne house with gardens, Orchards and parks about it, lying from Mayboll about ane Myles distance.’ The language though is redolent of Timothy Pont²³ who would have seen it not long after John Kennedy moved his family in, whereas Abercrombie wrote in 1696 when the house was entering its last half century of habitation and in a process of terminal decline. By 1721 when the last John Kennedy of Baltersan died, according to his Testament ‘abroad in London’, the estate’s herd was reduced to six cows, one bull, four stirks, two nолts and one quoy (heifer).²⁴

Blaeu’s 1654 map of north Carrick (illus 2), based on Pont’s work, shows the grounds well planted with trees and fenced in a neat square. A tower symbol in one corner may suggest a dovecot, but today there are no traces of any outbuildings or ancillary offices as one would expect for the main house of an estate.²⁵ Nearby and close to Dalchomie is a farm named ‘Baltersa’ which may have been the tower’s predecessor.

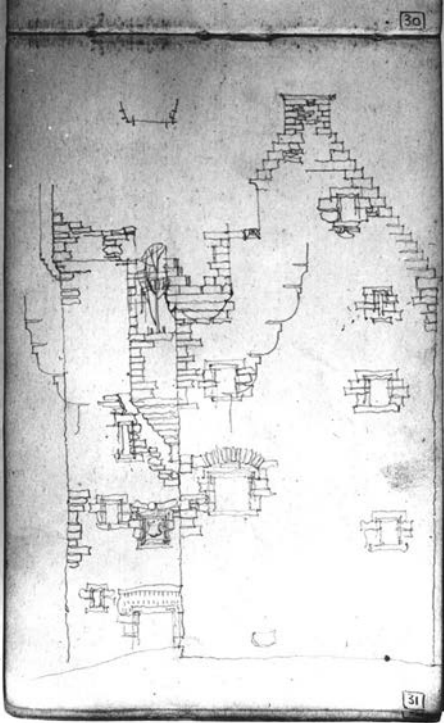
ARCHITECTURE

Built on an L-plan, Baltersan had vaulted cellars at ground level, hall on the first floor and two storeys as well as a garret above that. In the stair wing there were two chambers, one over the other, above the broad staircase. The house is aligned on north/south and east/west axes giving shelter to the entrance in the re-entrant angle from the prevailing winds. It was built on a low escarpment above the Abbeymill Burn which fed a large mill-pond there to serve the abbey mill, about 300 m downstream. The soil, of the Glenalmond/Maybole Association (Soil Survey 1981), is derived mainly from sandstones of Lower Old Red Sandstone age. This includes brown forest soils, humus-iron podzols and some gleys. Its stability and easy draining at the site has provided an ideal base as testified by the perfectly plumb walls after 450 years.

In preparing for the placing of large foundation boulders, the builders used the cleared soil to reduce the steepness of the south-facing platform at the back of the house which would have served as a sunny garden.²⁶

Attractive red, purplish and honey-coloured sandstones, all found locally, have been used throughout, with a harder greywacke for quoins at the north-west, south-west and south-east corners. Quoins in the stair jamb are of a softer sandstone. Years of frost damage and wind erosion here and across the north- and east-facing walls, have produced deeply indented elevations — the mortar being scoured from the interstices.

The massive lintel stone of the entrance was engraved. Fortunately a record of the wording was kept in the 19th century, for it is now quite illegible.²⁷ It read ‘This house was begun the First



ILLUS 1 Sketch of the west elevation by Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 1895 (© The Mackintosh Collection, Hunterian Art Gallery, Glasgow)

ILLUS 2 Detail from Pont's map of North Carrick as it appeared in Blaeu's *Atlas Novus* of 1654. Baltersan is shown as an important house while Baltersa may indicate the lesser residence known in the 16th century as Fens of Baltersan



day of March 1584 by John Kennedy of Pennyglen and Margaret Cathcart his spouse.’ The arms panel, too, has faded almost completely. It contained a biblical verse from the Proverbs of Solomon (18:10) which was used by Kennedy’s brother-in-law, John Cathcart of Carletoun, in 1586 on his re-built house at Killochan, near Girvan.²⁸ It can still be read there: ‘The name of the Lord is ane strang tour: the rychteous runneth into it.’

The entrance was checked for a yett and a door, both opening inwards. They were reinforced by two drawbars.²⁹ One stone of the door jamb retains the Y-shaped grooves and a fragment of lead for the bedding of sturdy iron pintles, long since removed. The substantial threshold stone, with stooled ends, has been partly and crudely robbed.

Staircases throughout the house have been removed with but a few treads and stubs to tell of their construction. The main stair, which rose to the second storey, was wide and elegant. The underside of the treads were carefully sculpted to meet the walls in a curvaceous manner.

GROUND FLOOR: CELLARS

A large window in the east lights the length of the corridor to the kitchen. The opening had, in addition to its grille, been protected by broad bars, the slots for which are still evident. The lower sill to this window is quite deep and there are two socket holes at waist height as if for a cross bar to restrict access to the ingo (illus 3). Their purpose is unclear. The corners to the entrance of the passageway are chamfered, the western one in an unusual tapering fashion, being 80 mm wide at the bottom and 100 mm wide at the top. The corridor, like the barrel-vaulted cellars, no longer has a roof. The cellar at the east end had a stair, of which only nine treads remain, to the hall level. It may have had a service hatch to the screens passage, matching one from the kitchen to the corridor. The cellar was lit by a narrow opening in the east wall and another in the south wall provided light for the staircase. The middle cellar was illuminated by just one slit.

For such a large house, the kitchen area looks small. However the fireplace angle is deep and wide with a slops drain in the west wall. The cracked outlet spout is still *in situ* at the base of the outer west wall, in exactly the same position as that in Castle of Park, Wigtownshire. A south-facing window lights the angle. The north-west corner has a small chamber with access from the angle. It is to here that rainwater, caught by the inlet stone protruding from the outside of the west wall, would have been fed into a barrel. Unlike the other two cellars, the kitchen vault springs from the north and south walls.

Set beside the slit window in the north wall of the kitchen is a serving hatch, rebated on the kitchen side for a closure which was hinged along the top edge, and neatly radiused on all four edges on the corridor side. It measures 480 mm high by 540 mm wide and its sill is about 1000 mm above floor level.

The vaults, originally constructed of ashlar blocks, like contemporary Maybole Castle, have been completely dismantled and removed along with all but the lowest two or three courses of the door jambs.

FIRST FLOOR: THE HALL

Beside the entrance to the hall on the main staircase, a lantern niche has been thoughtfully placed low in the wall to cast light on the stairtreads. The door was given the added security of a 100 mm-square drawbar. Neatly chiselled socket holes in the north wall of the hall by this entrance betray the one-time presence of a wooden screen (illus 4). The condition of the masonry at the south-east corner of the screens passage suggests a service hatch may have been there.



ILLUS 3 View of corridor looking west, showing serving hatch to the kitchen. The wooden bar has been inserted in the window embrasure dook holes to illustrate an apparent device for restricting access

The presence of the screen would have reduced the impact of an intrusive L-shaped structure in the south-east corner of the hall. Measuring only about 2 m square within the hall and extending to the full ceiling height of nearly 5 m, these walls concealed not only the stair to the east cellar, but an enigmatic chamber, partly achieved by the thinning of the east and south walls and lit by a narrow window. The south wall above the stairs retains an almost complete expanse of plaster which reaches only to a line of three socket holes for joists. The plaster is punctured by holes for shelf supports giving strength to the possibility that this space was a pantry. Such an arrangement is specified in the building contract for the House of Partick (1611).³⁰ Above the line of joist holes, the walls are bare stone. With no obvious signs of access, it may have been a secret chamber or 'priest's hole' entered by hinged floorboards and ladder from above, for the floor of the second-storey chamber at this point was supported by only two narrow joists rather than the 300-mm-square beams elsewhere.³¹

The hall has three tall windows, one each in the north, east and south walls and high windows in the south, west and north. The ingoes of the large windows in the north and south walls were furnished with stone benches. All the windows are enhanced by roll mouldings on the inside and more elaborate profiles on the exterior. Throughout the house, every window opening was protected by either grilles or single bars. In the south-west corner, beside the door to the private stair is a tall cupboard where shelves would have supported the occupier's best plate.³²

The turnpike stair leads to what would have been the proprietor's bedchamber and an apartment on the floor above that. The stairwell was roofed in corbelled slabs of stone. Only 10 treads of the stair remain. At the level of the 11th step, a view of the entrance to the hall is gained through a spy-hole. The round, moulded opening is matched by two similar stones in the eastern exterior wall, one set low for a watch chamber underneath the main stair and the other reached from a recess in the chamber immediately above this stair.

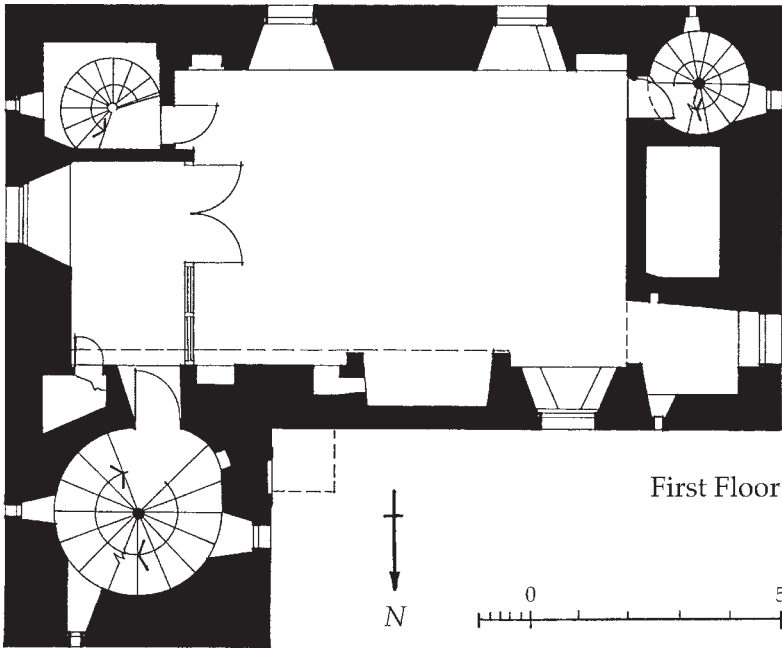
In the north-west corner of the hall is a small, mural chamber. Above this chamber, which has three socket-holes for joists, is a pleasing, square window. The ingo is 3 m deep. This form of square window is found in Killochan and Castle of Park, but in both, the deep ingo is placed to the outside of the building.

The centrepiece of the hall would have been the fireplace but this is totally gone. Only an L-shaped salt-bole indicates the function of the gaping space left in the north wall. The hall floor changed level in line with the eastern jamb of the fireplace. It was 150 mm higher at the west end than at the east. In the north-east corner a mural cupboard has served two distinct purposes. The upper part is lined with massive stone slabs and has a thick, stone shelf as well as a deep groove for a second shelf. This space was enclosed by a door and, being in the coolest part of the hall, may well have been for the storage of cheese and butter. The area below it is deeper, had no door and is lined with small rubble.

SECOND FLOOR

The chamber in the east side of the house was reached from the top of the main turnpike. Like its counterpart on the west, it has a garderobe set in the thickness of the south wall. There are two large windows, one looking east and the other south. Both have stone benches and are decorated internally with roll mouldings, but it is the southern one which commands the greater interest. It and the adjacent aumbry were sketched by Charles Rennie Mackintosh.

The absence of a floor at this level denied Mackintosh the revelation of a fascinating feature which — to the writer's knowledge — is considered unique in 16th-century Scottish architecture. As with the other sizeable windows in the house, this one beside the aumbry was glazed in the



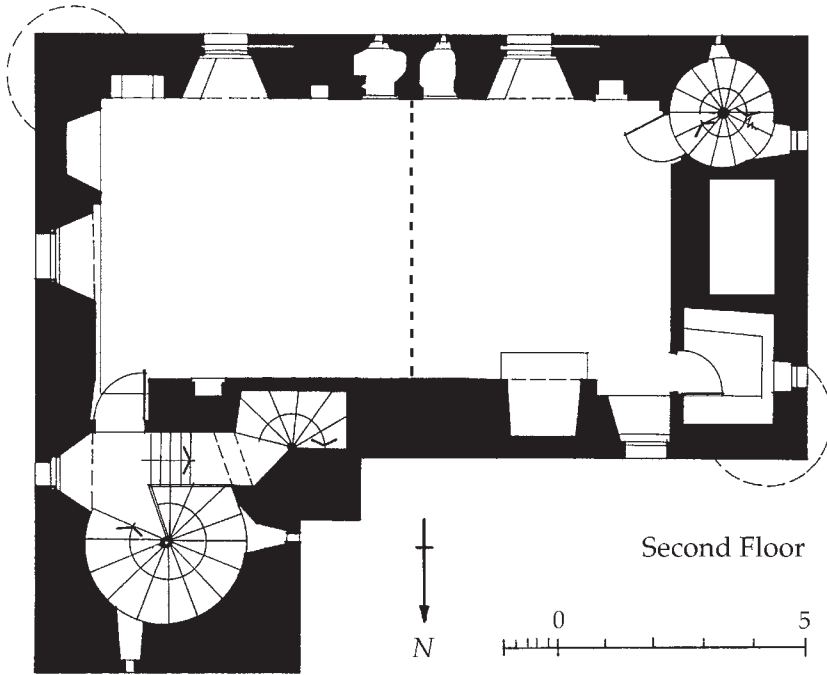
ILLUS 4 Hall level, with conjectural reconstruction of screens passage arrangements and service stair in the south-east corner (© *né Begg, Architects, Edinburgh*)

upper part and shuttered in the lower. Instead of opening inwards, the shutter in this instance slid sideways into the thickness of the wall (illus 5 & 6). The precise housings for this and the other window are evident outside by the three courses of finely cut ashlar to the left of each opening. With the stone bench facing west, the master mason certainly made provision to take maximum advantage of the wide, Carrick sky and the long hours of summer daylight — a rare taste of leisure from an age so often characterized by brutality.

The neighbouring chamber, which was entered from the turnpike in the south-west corner, also had a window with a west-facing stone bench and a sliding shutter, making it a veritable 'laird's solar'. In the north-west corner there is a barrel-vaulted mural chamber with many socket holes, some still retaining fragments of wood. This may have been a fire-proof charterhouse enclosed by an iron door.

THIRD FLOOR

The private turnpike continued up to the attic floor where the chamber has the remains of a dormer window beside the doorway to the north-west angle round (illus 7). This handsome turret was built in smooth ashlar which tapered on the outside, very gently, as it rose over nine courses to meet drainage spouts to the north and west. The former, now broken, is round in section and is an integral part of a large basin which collected the run-off from the turret roof. This sits above the cavetto moulding at the wallhead. The latter is rectangular with recessed panels on its sides. The gutter which fed it drained in opposite directions. Directly below the rectangular spout is the water inlet stone previously referred to, feeding into the kitchen. The turret corbels are notable for two reasons. Instead of the more common, simple, radiused blocks of stone, they are very



ILLUS 5 The second floor was divided into two chambers, each with a garderobe and fireplace. The windows with the sliding shutters are in the south wall (© *né Begg, Architects, Edinburgh*)

graceful, yet strong-looking, and are penetrated by rectangular machicolations. One such corbel is the only relic of the south-east turret. Fortunately, more remains at the north-west angle, including some plasterwork, a recess with checks for a door and, neatly cut in the turret's ashlar, angled spy-holes covering the northern and western walls. The turret windows were part-glazed, part shuttered.

Only one jamb of a fireplace and part of the north wall of the eastern attic chamber remain. The edge-roll moulding with hollow chamfers of the fireplace jambs are considered rare by at least one authority.³³ Fortunately, photographs taken in the 1940s record the rest of this gable, both inside and out.³⁴ It is noticeable that the window ingoes of both the attic and garret chambers were not moulded like those on the first and second floors.

STAIRHEAD CHAMBERS

The caphouse, sitting on three rows of continuous corbelling, a style common to the south of the country,³⁵ must have been a most charming space. Its dormers facing east and west would, in turn, have captured the rising and setting sun. The oriel, facing north, overlooks the present-day Baltersan Mains farm which may occupy the site of the 16th-century farm-steading of Egidia Blair. In its elevated position, this chamber would have been a welcome retreat from the hubbub of the main block. By contrast, the chamber below it is a plain, functional affair.

The turret in the re-entrant angle is rectangular rather than the more conventional rounded shape. Tight curves blend it into the walls of the main block and stair jamb and it tapers gradually



ILLUS 6 Aumbry in the south-east corner of the second floor beside a window with the sliding shutter feature, the broad groove for which can be seen

as it rises. It is supported by nine courses of now much-eroded corbels, once as sinuously moulded as those on the angle-rounds.

EXTERNAL STRUCTURE

Still at its full height with the part of the chimneyhead cope in place, the western gable is a precarious survivor. Thackstones barely hang on, as do the five crow-steps and skew-put to the north, but the long run of crow-steps to the south have fallen. The corresponding gable to the east succumbed to a gale in the late 1960s.

A most precious, but now vestigial, structure is the oriel in the north wall of the caphouse (illus 8). The lower portion clings to a perforated sheet of thin walling. The fallen lintel, a 1.4-m-wide trapezium, has survived intact. The design of this type of window, which is so rare for the period, seems to be a blend of the closet and oriel adjoining the King's Bedchamber in Linlithgow Palace and the lintel appears also to echo the angularity of the merlons and crenels of the gatehouse there. A more exotic source of inspiration could have been a composition based on both the trapezoidal oriel window and the corbels of the rhomboidal turrets above it on the keep of the Moorish castle of Almodóvar del Rio in Cordoba, Spain.³⁶ The now much-eroded holes in the sides of Baltersan's oriel may have been gun-loops. They could also have doubled as shot-holes for ventilation as with Linlithgow's example.

A pendant stone beneath the corbels of the re-entrant stair turret contains the faded impression of a head-and-shoulders portrait, partly covered by a pillar cross. This may be a rebus on the common pronunciation of Crossraguel as Cross-regal or the 16th-century Latin version of



ILLUS 7 Turret at the north-west angle viewed from the west

Crucis Regalis. The image has a similarity to the portrait on the seal of David II who granted charters to the Abbey.³⁷

Close to the entrance of the house, the courtyard was paved. In the north elevation of the main block, one of three slit windows, that nearest the entrance, is set slightly lower than the others to give a clear view of the line of approach to the door. Beside it, covering the doorway, is a splayed gun-loop, 520 mm wide by 200 mm high, which has been deliberately blocked with stones and lime mortar. To one side of the gun-loop at a distance of 470 mm centre-to-centre is a hole about 80 mm wide by 100 mm high and, 1.45 m directly above it, a smaller hole. Almost in line with these two apertures, on the inside of the tower, is yet another, small hole, just 10 mm wide by 50 mm high. Its centre is 400 mm to the west of the centre of the gun-loop and 660 mm above it. Could this be an arrangement for creating updraught to extract troublesome gunsmoke? There appears to be a flue in the interior embrasure above the throat of the gun-loop. The asymmetrically splayed, rectangular embrasure measures 600 mm wide by 400 mm high and 680 mm deep. Proof that a void exists within this area of the 1.1-m-thick wall is given by the presence of a bees' nest with the small, interior hole being used as the point of ingress and egress.

The building had been harled,³⁸ drawing together the asymmetrical elevations and the whole ensemble would have been united by limewash over the exposed door and window margins of which there are at least eight different forms of mouldings, as well as the ashlar blocks and corbels of the turrets and oriel window.



ILLUS 8 Reconstructed north elevation with the oriel window of the caphouse (© *né Begg, Architects*)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL EVALUATION

Following a planning application to South Ayrshire Council, an archaeological evaluation was carried out by Glasgow University Archaeological Research Division (GUARD 1996) in September 1996. A number of trial trenches were dug but yielded little, apart from that against the southern wall and those to the west of the house. A trench at the south wall face exposed the upper part of a stone-lined cess pit (illus 9); in trenches to the west, a fragmented, shallow line of stones marked a change in ground level and almost certainly represent the base of a barmkin wall.

In the course of subsequent topsoil and rubble clearance by the writer, traces of walls have been found running northwards, eastwards and westwards from the corners of the staircase jamb, creating a series of small courtyards. The fragmentary remains at the north-east corner of the tower still retains a chamfered stone with a rebate for a door or gate. The position of these courtyard walls makes sense of the various spy-holes or gun-loops as well as the machicolations in the angle rounds and oriel window.

WHO BUILT BALTERSAN?

With five storeys and about 370 sq m of floor area, Baltersan is much larger than the average contemporary tower house. If the dated inscription on its entrance lintel is to be believed, it was



ILLUS 9 Garderobe outfall at the foot of the south wall

built by a Roman Catholic when the Reformation had completely gripped Scotland. After a succession of Kennedy occupants, the house was inherited in 1721 by Hugh Arbuthnot, a sea captain based at Deptford, London.³⁹ He certainly took up residence for he is recorded as becoming a Burgess and Guild Brother of Ayr on 1 May 1725.⁴⁰ Yet by the time Robert Adam sat down at the abbey with his water-colour box in 1762,⁴¹ Baltersan was roofless. It has lain empty for longer than it was inhabited.

Being a Cluniac house, Crossraguel Abbey was a sumptuous place. It was fortified and enjoyed a form of protection by the earls of Cassillis. So much so that Gavin Dunbar, Archbishop of Glasgow, entrusted his great wealth to the custody of Abbot William Kennedy and the sanctity afforded by the abbey's high boundary walls.⁴² Since then, those expensive robes, vessels, furnishings and jewels have disappeared, leaving no trace in any local or national museum.

Carved oak panels from Baltersan, found in a neighbouring farm in the early 1900s, are now in the care of the Trustees of Loudoun Hall, Ayr.⁴³ One set of three in what could be contemporary framing contains images of artichokes and a large serpent with a demonic head, proffering what appears to be an apple. The leaves are similar to the tomato plant, known in the 16th century as the love-apple. The pattern of the other two panels bear a resemblance to 1530 work from Waltham Abbey.⁴⁴ Another set of three, now uncomfortably juxtaposed in a modern frame, is thoroughly secular in subject matter and could have been specially commissioned by the dynastically minded John Kennedy. Of the three medallion portraits, the one encircled by salamander-like creatures with grotesque, human heads stimulates curiosity and deserves deeper investigation.⁴⁵

Baltersan was neither military castle, royal palace nor ducal seat. Its relationship with the abbey is, on present evidence, unresolved. So, too, is the main question of who caused it to be built. It may have been designed to serve as the abbot's house for Crossraguel. When disparate evidence is collated, the idea gains credence. Within the precincts of the abbey are the remains of two houses for abbots. The older one dates to the 14th century and the other, a tower house, may be the work of Abbot Colin (1460–91). Also in Ayrshire, Abbot Andrew of Melrose (c 1444–71)



ILLUS 10 Crossraguel Abbey viewed from the west with Baltersan in the distance. On the left is the belfry from which John Kennedy of Baltersan removed two bronze bells around the beginning of the 17th century. Other features (from left to right) are Abbot William Kennedy's early 16th-century gatehouse, the late 15th-century library with its mullioned window and the tower house, both the work of Abbot Colin

built a tower house, at Mauchline.⁴⁶ Quintin Kennedy, an articulate defender of the Old Faith and legitimate brother to Gilbert, 3rd Earl of Cassillis, succeeded his uncle William to the abbacy in 1547.

Abbot William died within a short time of the arrival of the late Archbishop of Glasgow's treasure at Crossraguel. Quintin, on the other hand, was in a strong position to dip into those immense riches. As a churchman of national stature, albeit one who did not formally take holy orders, he would have been ill at ease in Crossraguel's confined, 15th-century tower house. Although a small religious establishment, it was a busy place, so some form of detachment would have enhanced his sense of status and dignity. By contrast, it is worth reflecting on the modest Abbot's Tower of the redoubtable Gilbert Broun of Sweetheart Abbey. Like Baltersan, it is placed some distance from the abbey, in the lee of neighbouring slopes with wide views to the south. But its floor area is less than one-quarter that of Baltersan. On 13 August 1550, Quintin is found witnessing an Instrument of Resignation by his brother, David Kennedy of Culzean, at Baltersan. Another witness was David Kennedy of Pennyglen.⁴⁷ This suggests that Quintin was residing at Baltersan.

The presence of the carved corbel with the rebus — *Cross-regal* — and the ecclesiastical nature of some of the wood panels, combined with the absence of related estate buildings,⁴⁸ place doubt on the belief that Baltersan was a country house for a mere bonnet laird. Quintin Kennedy died at the age of 44 in 1564.⁴⁹ Just as he could have been a beneficiary in the death of the Archbishop of Glasgow, John, son and heir of the abbot's cousin David Kennedy of Pennyglen,



ILLUS 11 A mid 19th-century view of Baltersan with Crossraguel Abbey in the distance by John Boswell (© *National Galleries of Scotland*)

may in turn have been enriched by Quintin's passing. Regardless, Quintin Kennedy had, more so than John Kennedy, the power and resources to commission such a large and fine tower as Baltersan. Apart from access to the bountiful coffers in the abbey's treasury, he had the cultural and courtly credentials. Having been a student in Paris he would have had easy communication and empathy with the king's French masons. As a cerebral author of various works on religious matters rather than an estate owner, he would have fitted into Baltersan's stateliness much more easily than John Kennedy. As a Privy Councillor and Ambassador to England and France,⁵⁰ he had more direct access to influential courtiers than the peripheral farmer John.

Instead of being interpreted as a late building with antique features, Baltersan could be an early building with most advanced features. Wall thicknesses place it in the 16th century, but two chambers per floor tend to put it in the earlier part rather than the end of that period. Although claims for connecting different buildings with the same mason through masons' marks must be treated with the utmost caution, it is worth considering the marks which can be found at Crossraguel Abbey (none has been discovered at Baltersan).⁵¹ Two of these can also be found at Rosslyn Chapel. They are not particularly unusual marks, one being a five-pointed star, the other a W formed by overlapping two Vs. The latter can also be found at Borthwick Castle. Another mark at Borthwick (a variant of the St Andrew's cross) appears at Crossraguel, Melgund and Linlithgow Palace. David Kennedy, 1st Earl of Cassillis who died at Flodden, was married to Agnes, daughter of Lord Borthwick, thereby providing a family connection. David's sister Janet was the favourite mistress of James IV.

From a chronological point of view, it is easy to move from Borthwick (completed around 1446 when Rosslyn's foundations were laid) to Rosslyn and then to Crossraguel when some of its finest work was carried out in the half-century straddling the 15th and 16th centuries.

But if the proposition that Baltersan was started c 1547 is to be substantiated from evidence of its mason, then it is to the buildings with hints of stylistic similarities that one must look. Melgund (c 1530–40) has one mark which can be found at both Borthwick and Crossraguel but the time difference between Melgund and Borthwick of 80–90 years rules out this being made by the same man. But that same mark (a variant on the St Andrew's cross) exists on work carried out c 1530–40 at Linlithgow Palace.

Finally, there is one other scrap from history which may have some bearing on the undetermined relationship between Baltersan and the abbey. In a letter to Crossraguel's commendator, Sir John Waus of Barnbarroch, dated 21 February 1602, King James VI requested the laird to demit the property for repair as the residence of Prince Henry. Significantly, the king mentioned two distinct components when he wrote, 'In respect we intend to caus build and repair the hous and place of Corsragwell to the use of our dearest sone the Prince to quhome the same is maist proper for his residence quhen he salhappin to resorte in thai pairtes.'⁵² Prince Henry died young and the plan was never fulfilled.

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NOTES

- 1 See MacKenzie (1990), *Scottish Renaissance Household*, 21, for a family tree of the Wallaces of Craigie.
- 2 RMS, vol II, no. 1127.
- 3 Robertson (1908) *Ayrshire: its history and historic families*, vol II, 8.
- 4 AGAA (1886) *Charters of the Abbey of Crossraguel*, vol I, 92–6.
- 5 NAS GD25, National Archives of Scotland, *Ailsa Muniments*, vol II, no. 996.
- 6 *ibid*, no 581.
- 7 AGAA (1886) *Charters of the Abbey of Crossraguel*, vol II, no 117.
- 8 AANHS Collections, vol 10, 1970/72, *Protocol Book of James Colvill*, no 111, 51.
- 9 RMS, vol IV, no 943.
- 10 RSS, vol IV, no 3080.
- 11 AGAA (1886) *Charters of the Abbey of Crossraguel*, vol I, 119–21.
- 12 AGAA (1886) *Charters of the Abbey of Crossraguel*, vol I, 185–6.
- 13 NAS CC/8/8/4, National Archives of Scotland, *Reg of Testaments, Edinburgh Commissariot*, ff. 325v–328r.
- 14 AGAA (1886) *Charters of the Abbey of Crossraguel*, vol I, 179–82.
- 15 AANHS Collections, vol 10, 1970/72, *Protocol Book of James Colvill*, no 159, 65.
- 16 AGAA (1886) *Charters of the Abbey of Crossraguel*, vol II, 43–6.
- 17 AANHS Collections, vol 10, 1970/72, *Protocol Book of James Colvill*, no 159, 65.
- 18 Grose (1789) *The Antiquities of Scotland*, vol II, 39.
- 19 Walker (1992) *Walking North with Keats*, 64, 180 n12.

- 20 Stevenson (1902) *A Winter's Walk in Carrick & Galloway*, 132.
- 21 Billcliffe (1977), *Architectural Sketches and Flower Drawings by Charles Rennie Mackintosh*, 40.
- 22 Thompson (1828), *Map of Ayrshire*.
- 23 Abercrombie was a contributor to *MacFarlane's Collections* and may have been lazily plagiarizing Pont's narrative which accompanied his maps of Carrick. Compare Dobie (1876) *Cuninghame Topographized by Timothy Pont, A.M. 1604–1608* for property descriptions and Robertson (1908) *Ayrshire: its history and historic families*, vol I, 305–8 where he attributes descriptions to both Abercrombie and Pont.
- 24 NAS CC/8/8/88, National Archives of Scotland, *Reg of Testaments, Glasgow Commissariat*, ff. 167v–168r.
- 25 Blaeu (1654), 'Caricta Borealis'.
- 26 See MacKenzie (1990) *Scottish Renaissance Household* for a detailed inventory of a mid 16th-century tower house at Newton on Ayr, including a list of trees and shrubs.
- 27 Bryden (1889) *Etchings of Ayrshire Castles*.
- 28 Bryden (1910), *Etchings of Ayrshire Castles: Castles of Carrick*.
- 29 See Maxwell-Irvine (1981, 440).
- 30 MacGibbon & Ross (1892) *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, vol V, 6. The contract is reproduced in its original Scots in a private publication of 1855 by Hill, *The Story of Partick Castle etc.*
- 31 Castle Fraser, Aberdeenshire (1592–1618), still retains hinged floorboards which gave fugitive priests access to an escape passage which emerged in the kitchen flue. It also has the famous 'Laird's Lug', a small chamber within the vault of the Great Hall which may have had a more prosaic purpose than that of eavesdropping on conversations, so enthusiastically taken up by Sir Walter Scott.
- 32 The eastern wall of Melgund's Hall has three rows of raggling to hold shelving for a proud and extensive show of plate.
- 33 Zeune (1992) *The Last Scottish Castles*, 32.
- 34 National Monuments Record of Scotland, Photograph nos AY/7 and AY/500/32.
- 35 Mackenzie (1927), *The Medieval Castle in Scotland*, 205–6.
- 36 Anderson (1970), *Castles of Europe from Charlemagne to the Renaissance*, 236.
- 37 See illustration of seals in Tytler's *History of Scotland*, vol I, undated, published by Wm. MacKenzie, Glasgow.
- 38 Scottish Lime Centre Analysis AP313 of 5 Nov 1998 revealed that the effective quicklime:aggregate ratio was approximately 1:6.5 by weight and 1:3 by volume.
- 39 NAS C22/1, National Archives of Scotland, *Services of Heirs in Scotland*, vol I, 1700–49.
- 40 Carnegie Library, Ayr, B6 18 11, *Minutes of the Burgh of Ayr*.
- 41 Picture in possession of the University of Glasgow.
- 42 AGAA (1886) *Charters of the Abbey of Crossraguel*, vol I, 108–16.
- 43 Edinburgh Architectural Assoc (1929) *Details of Scottish Domestic Architecture*, 22.
- 44 Chinnery (1979) *Oak Furniture: the British tradition*, 423.
- 45 The quality of workmanship is disappointing, especially compared with the Killochan panels which show Kennedy's brother-in-law, Cathcart of Carletoun. See *Proc Soc Antiq Scot*, 73 (1939), 324–5 and pl XCV.
- 46 Fawcett, R *Scottish Abbeys and Priors*, 111.
- 47 NAS GD25, National Archives of Scotland, *Ailsa Muniments*, vol I, no 532.
- 48 See MacKenzie (1990) *Scottish Renaissance Household* for a detailed description of the kind of ancillary buildings connected with an estate home, in this case the mid 16th-century tower house of Sanquhar-Hamilton at Newton on Ayr.
- 49 AGAA (1886) *Charters of the Abbey of Crossraguel*, vol I, xl–xlvi.
- 50 RSS, vol XIV, 1545–1625 (Addenda), 127.
- 51 See Zeune (1992) *The Last Scottish Castles*, 58–67, for an extensive survey of masons' marks.
- 52 AGAA (1886) *Charters of the Abbey of Crossraguel*, vol II, 69.

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