

# TOPOGRAPHICAL ACCOUNT

OF THE

## PALACE AND CHURCH OF LINLITHGOW.

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*Communicated to the Society by Sir Alexander Seton of Preston.*

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IN ancient times, beyond the reach of our history, tradition says, that the eminence on which the Palace and Church stand, was occupied as a military station by the Romans, commanded by Lollius Urbicus, in the reign of Antoninus Pius, *circa ann.* 140-150; and the commanding situation, free prospect by means of the loch, its vicinity to the wall of Antoninus, built by the same Urbicus, with the Roman coins found in the near neighbourhood, some of which I have, add much probability to the tradition.

The Romans having finally abandoned Britain, *anno* 446, the Saxon invasion and conquest soon after followed; when the Saxon king of Northumberland seized on that part of Caledonia to the north of the Tweed, by which means he added to his dominions the eastern part of the Roman province of Valentia, comprehending the shires of Berwick, Roxburgh, Selkirk, Peebles, and the three Lothians, bounded on the north by the Forth, and on the

west by the Avon. Considering the Forth as his frontier against the Picts on the opposite coast, to prevent their depredations, he seems to have erected a chain of strong castles along its banks, viz. Berwick, Dunbar, Tantallon, Edinburgh, Abercorn, Blackness, and on our eminence or promontory the last strong castle, one of the most defensible of them, before the discovery of gunpowder.

In the ninth century, *anno* 843, King Kenneth M'Calpin, after obtaining a decisive victory over the Picts, united them with his Scottish subjects; and, in the following century, *anno* 945, the territory of Cambria and Strathcluid was yielded to Malcom I. It was then that the Saxons of Northumberland felt the Scots a more formidable neighbour; for, after an unsuccessful war, their prince Eadolph found it necessary, at the peace *anno* 1020, to yield to Malcom II. M'Kenneth, Saxonia, or Laudonia, comprehending all his dominions north of the Tweed. Since this period, the castle of Linlithgow became the occasional residence of the kings of Scotland, who possessed in property a great estate in its neighbourhood, with numerous herds of cattle, corn, farms, and *adscripti glebæ*, bondsmen, under the direction of two bailies residing in the town, which, with its mills, territory, and customs, was then the royal demesne or crown estate. The kings of Scotland, and their court, were then, as in the other feudal nations of Europe, supported by their extensive landed property, without taxation, except on very extraordinary emergencies. Of consequence, they were ambulatory: They resided on one of their estates while the produce lasted; and, when this was consumed, removed to another. This system particularly prevailed during the reign of David I. the son of Malcom Canmore and St Margaret, *circa* 1140. He was the greatest agriculturist in his dominions; and encouraged

the population of his rising towns: but he hurt the revenues of the crown by founding religious houses, and other profuse donations to the clergy,—so that James VI. had reason to say, that he had been a *sair saint to the crown*. His successor, Malcolm IV. followed his example; and, among other foundations, erected and endowed the Cistercian nunnery of Manuel, hard by the town, *anno* 1156; and Malcolm's grandson, Alexander II. made these nuns a present of his mills of Linlithgow. These were accounted the only means, in those days, of meriting the favour of heaven. From the same principle, in a prior period, the church itself, at that time the chapel of the castle, with its patronage and teinds, was conveyed to the priory of St Andrews. The brethren of that foundation enjoyed its revenues, and appointed a vicar, with a small salary, for parochial duty. In after times, however, the vicar, as king's chaplain, had a grant of L.10 sterling from the customs of the town.

The castle continued thus to be the temporary residence of the royal family, till it was yielded to Edward I. on his unprincipled and perfidious invasion of Scotland, 1296. He lodged in it that winter; and received the oaths of fealty of the two bailies and inhabitants, together with those of the neighbouring gentry. But afterwards, when a long and bloody resistance to the English became general, the pier or castle was taken by a well laid stratagem of William Binnoch, a small tenant of the Knights of St John, near Torphichen, assisted by his six sons, and some other outlaws, *anno* 1312; the governor, Peter Luband, a Gascoigne, and his garrison, being all massacred. Soon after this, by order of King Robert Bruce, it was dismantled.

David II. his son, feeling the want of such a station in his progress through the kingdom, about 1350 agreed to give John

Cairns, an opulent inhabitant of the town, a liferent grant of the park around the old castle, containing 14 acres, on condition of his repairing again some rooms for his accommodation on his journeys. This was executed accordingly.

His successor, Robert II. and first of the Stuarts, *anno* 1387, emancipated his regality burgh of Linlithgow, by erecting it by charter into a burgh royal.

During the ungenerous and treacherous captivity of his grandson James I. in England, captured at sea during a peace, these rooms, together with the church of St Michael, were accidentally burnt, about 1420. But we have great reason to believe that they were again repaired: for, on the death of James II. his Queen Dowager, Mary of Gueldre, who had the estate of Linlithgow as her dowry, by a privy seal warrant, 1460, ordered them to be repaired for the reception of the fugitive King of England, Henry VI. of the Lancaster family, expelled by Edward IV. of the family of York. The castle is there called the palace; but so is every place, however built, where a king resides. In the *Rotula Balivorum* for the same year, of which, per favour of Mr Thomson, deputy-register, I have a copy, the bailie takes credit for L.1. 6s. 8d. Scots, as the total amount of that repair. From the smallness of the sum, we may safely conclude that this could only be a repair of doors and windows of these royal rooms; and, in like manner, that the present palace did not then exist. Whether the old church had been repaired for the accommodation of the royal family and town, is now unknown. The probability however is, that it had. That the present palace and church are coeval, will hardly admit of a doubt. This may be concluded from the style of building, and from the stone itself; and, from the above statement, I think it next to certain that they both rose in the reign of James III. about 1476.

James himself was a prince of fine taste, particularly fond of music and architecture, the greatest builder of any of our kings. This appears from the old palace of Holyroodhouse, the hall and chapel royal in Stirling castle, the palace and church of Linlithgow, and many others. In these he was ably assisted by his master of works, Robert Cochrane, an eminent architect, who was taken under the patronage of the king while a mason's apprentice, was educated by him, became his favourite, and at length, unwisely and unfortunately for both, was advanced to be prime minister, which produced the fatal catastrophe of Lauder bridge, over which he and some other favourites were hanged by the discontented nobles, in a mutiny of the army.

When James IV. assumed the reins of government, his partiality to Linlithgow was evident. Particularly, after his marriage with Margaret, the daughter of Henry VII. of England, he frequently resided there, as appears from his charters, &c. There, too, his queen was delivered of James V. He was a magnificent and accomplished prince, fond of all knightly exercises, and master of the chivalry of the times, such as justs and tournaments; and as every knight had a lady patroness, he was the knight of Queen Ann of France. On a plain west of the town, still called Justin-haugh, I have no doubt his adroitness was often shewn. That he lived on the best terms with his town of Linlithgow, the marks of his favour testify; particularly, a privy seal grant, dated there, 2d May 1492, of a rood of ground from his park to be added to the church-yard, as a present to the community.

In the old castle, it is believed, there never was a chapel; the church of St Michael, from its vicinity, being used as such: and after the building of the palace and church, the royal family had a private entry from the palace, by a door in the north wall of the

church. We find accordingly King James IV. there at evening service in St Catherine's aisle, 1513, where the supposed ghostly visitor appeared to him before his invasion of England, from which, as then predicted, he never returned.

James V. was equally fond of show and magnificence with his father. From reported conversations with the ambassadors of his uncle, Henry VIII. of England, he also appears to have been an accomplished prince, of very considerable ability and acuteness. He was, of consequence, much courted by cotemporary princes. He added many ornamental improvements to the palace and church. It is thought to have been he who changed the entry of the palace from the east, where it was originally, by a draw-bridge to the south, and who built those two magnificent porches of approach, on the outer of which the badges of the orders of St Michael, the golden fleece, and garter, conferred on him by France, Spain, and England, together with his own order of the thistle, are cut in large medallions over the gate. He, too, revived the order of the thistle; and, in the choir of the church, erected marble stalls for the knights, and a throne for himself, as sovereign of the order, under a pannelled oak ceiling, ornamented and tastefully painted. In the palace he fitted up that elegant chapel-royal; even now magnificent in its ruins. The superb fountain in the middle of the court, of very superior workmanship, whose water came in pipes from Preston, a mile distant, was likewise his work. Of this the fountain at the cross is meant to be a copy; but it is much inferior in execution. We may judge of the appearance of the palace, and of the splendour of the court of Scotland, from its being said by Mary of Lorraine, James II.'s queen, when she first saw it, *That she had never seen a more princely palace.*

In those days, in all the courts of Europe, a fool was a neces-

sary appendage of royalty; and James had an excellent one in Rob Gibb, who was a fellow of much humour and drollery, and, by all accounts, a wise fool. The king, in his better days, was lively, and liked diversion. Of such a master, and such a servant, many a humorous anecdote, now lost, must once have been told. The following is the only one which has reached us. James, before his death, turned sullen, melancholy, and discontented with the world. This originated from the dissensions about religion then begun, and his disagreement with his nobles. In order to amuse the king, and in some measure contribute to relieve him from the numerous solicitations which he saw added to his distress, Rob offered that, if the king would allow him to personate his majesty on the day appointed for answering the claimants, he would satisfy them all. This being agreed to, Rob took the chair of state in the audience room; and they being summoned to attend him, he very graciously received and heard all their claims and pretensions. He then addressed them in a very grave and sensible speech, more like a judge than a fool; expatiated on the virtue of patriotism, and declared how much his Majesty was gratified by their services; particularized them all, and their several merits, with many compliments for their loyalty; but, in place of that remuneration which they expected, he offered himself as an example for their imitation. "I have served," says he, "the king the best part of my life without fee or reward, *out of stark luif and kindness*, a principle I seriously recommend to you all to carry home with you and adopt." This conclusion, so uncommon and unexpected, uttered with the gravity of a bishop by one in a fool's coat, put them all in good humour; and Rob gained his end. From this proceeds the toast of *Rob Gibb, and stark luif and kindness*. The king, who was much pleased and amused with the adventure, soon

after made Rob a present of the lands of Easter Carrubber, now the property of the late President Blair's family, in whose possession is Rob's original charter.

In this palace was born the unfortunate Queen Mary, five days before the death of her father at Falkland. During her turbulent reign, the burgh of Linlithgow was seldom honoured with the presence of their sovereign, as the sound of a heretical presbyterian congregation, so near her residence, would have been by no means pleasant.

Her son James VI. resided often here, particularly in the hunting season: for the crown had then the extensive hunting field of Drumshorlin Muir, now entirely swallowed up by the surrounding proprietors. He so much approved of the beautiful situation of the palace, that, some years after his accession to the crown of England, 1619, he ordered the north side of the square to be pulled down, and rebuilt after his taste, *i. e.* more like a burgher than a king. For, by lowering the ceilings, and lessening the dimensions of the rooms, he obtained a greater number of them, and an additional storey to the building. It was this part of the palace which was burnt through the carelessness of the soldiers quartered in it during the rebellion 1745. The rest of this once magnificent edifice had before fallen a prey to time and neglect.

Charles I. was never at Linlithgow, except as a child. Great preparations, indeed, were made by the magistrates, when, at the commencement of the civil wars, he held a parliament in Edinburgh; at which time he notified his intention of coming. But the unpromising appearance of the times prevented him, and hastened his return to England.

Cromwell, after the battle of Dunbar, took possession of Linlithgow, made it a place of arms, and of considerable strength, by

surrounding the church and palace with a deep fosse and rampart, planted with cannon. He made no use of the church but as a stable for some troops of horse. He himself, during winter 1650-1651, had his residence in the *new wark*, or new part of the palace; and his garrison quartered in the *auld wark*, which was then habitable. After his departure, and in consequence of much solicitation, the magistrates and council were allowed the use of one half of the church for divine service by General Monk, on their granting bond for L.5000 sterling, for their peaceable deportment, and that they should not disturb the garrison.

It appears, then, that the church of St Michael of Linlithgow was considered by the royal family, first as the chapel of the castle, and latterly of the palace. Before the reformation, there were neither galleries nor seats in it; nor indeed were they customary in such cathedral-built churches as this. There was only a stone pulpit, on a north pillar in the body of the church, occasionally used; some of the sculptured pannels of which are still to be seen, built into the north-west window. The people were then in use to carry portable stools with them; and there were stone benches around the walls. Preaching was no part of public worship, except when some strolling friar happened to come round. The whole service consisted of Latin prayers, anthems, and masses, in the choir, and at the different altars around the church. Of these there were fourteen, well endowed, dedicated to different saints, and served by as many chaplains; who, by order of the magistrates and council, their patrons, were bound, under pain of deprivation, daily to say masses every half hour, from five in the morning in summer, and six in winter, till noon. Sometime after the reformation, when galleries and seats were erected, his Majesty had a projecting semicircular seat, opposite to the pulpit, to which, not only as sovereign, but as pa-

tron of the parish, and a considerable heritor (though paying no stipend) he is well entitled.

Before the alienation and infeudation of the royal estate in this parish, it and the crown lands in the neighbourhood, as we may conclude from the *Rotuli Balivorum* of Queen Mary of Gueldre, would have exceeded, according to the value of money in our times, L.10,000 sterling *per annum*.