

V.

NOTE RESPECTING THE ROYAL EXCHANGE, EDINBURGH, AND THE ORIGINAL LIST OF SUBSCRIBERS, IN 1752. BY DAVID LAING, Esq., V.P.S.A. Scot.

Maitland in his "History of Edinburgh," 1753 (p. 186, &c.), has described most of the public offices as situated either within or in the immediate neighbourhood of the Parliament Close. Adjoining, he says, "to the eastern side of the Parliament House, is a fine edifice, called the Treasury, part of which, after the Union, was appropriated as the Offices of Chancery and Commissary Court." He goes on to say:—

"Within the entry to the Chancery Office and Commissary Court, in a handsome paved court lately demolished, was the Exchange, with a convenient piazza for merchants to meet in, which was erected in the year 1685; but the money laid out thereon seems to have been ill applied, since it did not take; for the merchants and others continued to meet at the Cross in the High Street as formerly. And at the upper end of the said court was a very spacious and noble room for the Convention of Royal Boroughs to meet in, denominated the Borough Room. A little to the eastward, in the Parliament Close, was a large room full of shops, called the Upper Exchange. This is also come to nothing."

The great fire which happened in February 1700 was very destructive in this part of the town; but no attempts towards the improvement and extension of Edinburgh took place for half a century. This may be dated from July 1752, when the Convention of Royal Boroughs highly approved of a scheme for "purchasing an area for a public forum or Exchange at the Cross of Edinburgh; erecting a building on the ruins on the south side of the Parliament Close, containing a Borough room, providing proper repositories for the Public Records of the Nation, and other useful Works, mentioned in a remit from the Convention."

Sir Gilbert Elliot of Minto, Bart., M.P., printed a pamphlet in 1752, entitled "Proposals for carrying on certain Public Works in the City of Edinburgh;" strongly urging the necessity of such buildings, "as the City of Edinburgh (he says) is the metropolis of this part of the United

Kingdom, the seat of the Supreme Courts, the repository of our archives, land-rights, and other valuable securities; and, besides, has now the faint appearance of becoming a place considerable for trade and manufactures."

It was with no intention of opposing this public-spirited scheme, but simply as a *jeu d'esprit*, that an anonymous Tract by Sir David Dalrymple of Hailes appeared, dedicated to "The Patron and Pattern of all Castle-builders;" under the title of "Proposals for carrying on a Certain Public Work in the City of Edinburgh." This said "*certain Work*," being a public necessary.

After a lapse of about twenty years, when the erection of the North Bridge afforded access to a much more eligible site for a repository of the Public Records, the building of the General Register House, from the designs of Robert Adam, was undertaken, at the expense of Government.

The original paper now presented to the Society of Antiquaries by WILLIAM SKINNER, Esq., W.S., is an interesting document connected with the improvements of Edinburgh. It contains the autograph signatures of Provost Drummond, and of the leading persons, merchants, and others, in Edinburgh, with the sums subscribed by them towards the erection of the proposed Exchange Buildings. It is as follows:—

"WE, SUBSCRIBERS, being informed, that the Town Council of Edinburgh, the Lords of Session, Barons of Exchequer, Faculty of Advocates, Writers to the Signet, and numbers of Noblemen, Gentlemen and Burgesses have it under consideration, that by removing the Front of the Buildings to be raised on the south side of the Street at the Cross a convenient space backward a handsome exchange or publick Forum may be procured in the said City, And the same rendered commodious by adorning it with a covered walk on the north side of the Area; As also that a Building may be erected on the ruines to the south of the Parliament Close, where the Borough Room and Council Chamber formerly stood, to contain a Great Room for the Convention of the Royal Boroughs of Scotland And their Annual Committee, a convenient Council Chamber for the use of the Magistrates, for the daily dispatch of publick Business, a dwelling House for the Lord Provost during his office, a Robing Room for the Lords of Session, a handsome Library for the Faculty of Advocates, that room

may be made for lodging the publick Records of the Nation And to provide convenient Offices for accomodating the Principal Clerks of Session, Clerk to the Commission of Teinds and Clerk to the Justiciary, that the Papers, Warrants and Records under their care may be safely lodged. As Also, in the view of extending the Royalty, that easy access may be made to the High Street both from the south and north sides of the City, and the North Loch made an Ornament in place of a publick Nusance And being sensible, that the City Revenue is not sufficient for answering so great an Expencc as will be necessary to the carrying on and perfecting these useful and ornamental Works, which cannot but tend to the great Advantage of the Nation, as well as prove beneficial to the Capital City of this part of the United Kingdom We do therefore Agree to pay the following Sums annexed to our respective subscriptions upon the Conditions and agreeable to the plan of Management to be concerted and approved of by a Committee of the Council of the City and Committees of the Lords of Session, Barons of Exchequer, Faculty of Advocates and Writers to the Signet.

1752.

GEO. DRUMMOND Provost of Edinburgh, Fifty pounds sterling.
 ADAM FAIRHOLME Merchant Ten pounds sterling.
 Twenty pounds sterling WILLIAM ALEXANDER.
 GAVIN HAMILTON Bookseller Ten pounds sterling.
 THOMAS HOGG, Merch^t in Edin^r. Ten pounds sterling.
 EBENEZER M^cCULLOCH Merch^t in Edin^r. Ten pounds sterling.
 PAT. LINDESAY mer^t in Edin^r Ten pounds sterling.
 WILLIAM RUTHVEN writer in Ed^r Ten pounds sterling.
 ALEX^s BROWN merch^t in Edinb^r Three Guineas.
 ALEX^s HUNTER merch^{tt} in Edinb. Five pounds s^t.
 ALEX^s SHAIRP merch^t in Edinb. for Five pounds ster.
 GEO. CHALMERS merch^{tt} in Edin^r. for Ten pounds sterling.
 JO. WILSON merch^{tt} in Edin^r for Five pounds sterling.
 JOHN INGLIS merch^t for Ten pounds sterling.
 JOHN FORREST mer^t Ten pounds ster.
 ALEX^s DONALDSON Bookseller Five pounds sterling.
 JAMES STUART merch^t Ten pounds ster.

ALEX^r. KINCAID Book^r Ten pounds st.
 GEO. LIND merch^t Five pounds.
 HUGH & ROB^r CLARK Five pounds ster. (deleted).
 JOHN CARMICHAELL jun^r. merch^t Five pound ster.
 JOHN NISBET mer^t Five pounds ster.
 WILLIAM MAITLAND Five pounds ster.
 WILLIAM TOD merchant Ten pounds sterling.
 JOHN WALKER merch^t Five pounds st^r.
 JA^s GRANT merch^t Five pound sterl.
 JAMES MILROY for Ten pound sterling.
 COUTTS BROTHERS & Co. merch^{ts} Ten pounds and ten shillings sterⁿ.
 COUTTS BROTHERS & Co. for COUTTS STEPHEN COUTTS & Co. merch^{ts}
 in London Ten guineas.
 DA : FLINT merch^t Ten pounds ste.
 J. CLARK M.D. Ten guineas.
 JO. RUTHERFOORD Ten guineas.
 AND : S^r CLAIR Ten guineas.
 RO BOSWELL Five guineas.
 JO. BROWN Ten pound.
 R. FLEMING Five pound.
 ROB. CLEUGH Two pounds.
 GILBERT LAWRIE Five guineas.
 WILLIAM SANDS Five pounds.
 ANDREW WARDROP Three pounds.
 DAVID LOCH Ten pound st^r. for father and self.
 JAMES CAMPBELL late of St Germans Five pounds and five shillings
 sterling.
 ROBERT LITHGOW Three pounds st^r.
 FRA. FARQ^uSON for self Ten guineas.
 FRA. FARQ^uSON for Collonell HALYBURTON of Pitcur Five guineas.
 GEO. BUCHAN of Kello for Ten guineas.
 ROBERT BRISBANE for the R^t Hono^{ble} THE EARLE OF ABERCORN
 Fifty pounds sterling."

The Commissioners appointed by Parliament, authorised the Town-Council to contract with tradesmen for the building, and the present

situation, then covered with decayed houses, was selected as the most eligible spot for erecting the Exchange, the Town-Hall, and other public offices.

On occasion of laying the foundation-stone, there was a grand Masonic procession, with the usual honours, on the 13th of September 1753. A detailed account of the ceremonies and procession, with the address of Provost Drummond as Grand Master, is given in Mr W. A. Laurie's "History of Free Masonry" (pages 108-115); and two Medals to commemorate this event were struck; one with the effigy of Provost Drummond, and a perspective view of the Exchange, described in the Society's Proceedings, vol. iii. p. 393; and the other, having the Masonic arms on the reverse, noticed in the above work, p. 109.

To mark the importance of this undertaking, copies were printed of the "Contract of Agreement for building an Exchange in the City of Edinburgh, between the Magistrates and Town-Council and the Tradesmen," with an engraved elevation of "The South front of a New designed Square, to serve as an Exchange in the City of Edinburgh."

The amount of the contract was £31,545, 6s. 8d. sterling. The contractors were, Patrick Jamieson, mason; Alexander Peter, George Stevenson, John Moubray, wrights; John Fergus, architect, all Burgesses, Freeman Members of Mary's Chapel of Edinburgh.

The building was not commenced till 12th June 1754, when the Contract was formally signed. It is only necessary to add that the buildings were finished in the year 1761.