

V.

NOTES RESPECTING CRAIGCAFFIE CASTLE, WIGTONSHIRE. By
JOHN M'LACHLAN, Esq., ARCHITECT. (PLATE XIX.)

Craigcaffie Castle is situated about two miles from Stranraer. The road to it lies along the shore of Loch Ryan. It is situated in a hollow, separated from the loch by a rising-ground on which stands the present hamlet of Innermessan. This village of Innermessan was at one time a place of very considerable importance. Symson, in his "Description of Galloway" written in 1684, says, that it was the "greatest town there-

abouts till Stranraer was built." It has now dwindled down to a few single-storey cottages, with no remains of its ancient grandeur. It may be interesting to notice that in the immediate neighbourhood of Innermessan there is one of these earthen tumuli which occur so frequently in the rhinns of Galloway called "Moats." This at Innermessan is a very large one, about 336 feet in circumference at the base, and 78 feet high, and commands the whole basin of Loch Ryan. The castle of Craigcaffie is behind this moat in a hollow, about a quarter of a mile inland, and so completely hidden from public observation that many people living even in the neighbourhood know nothing of its existence. The site seems to have been selected to escape rather than court public observation, and this, perhaps, from the comparative feebleness of the family to whom it belonged. It is only the strong man who courts *observation*, which in perilous times means danger. The building, as may be seen from the drawing, is a remarkably perfect specimen of a small laird's house of the sixteenth century, when propriety and comfort were sacrificed to secure safety and protection from the lawless.

The building may be shortly described as three small rooms and an attic, placed one above another, with a staircase in the corner leading to the different flats. These rooms are about 17 feet long by 14 feet wide, with an additional recess opposite the staircase corner. The ground flat, which is arched, and has a drawwell in the middle of the floor, served probably as the general storehouse of the castle. The first floor would be used as the hall and general living-room, and the second floor and attics as sleeping-rooms.

The gable-walls are 4 feet thick; the side walls 3 feet. The upper floors are lighted by two windows, one on each side. These windows have the *boutel* and hollow mouldings characteristic of the Scotch architecture of the period,—the upper window on the east side having in addition in the hollow a rude species of dog-tooth ornament. At the four corners there are four open pepper-box turrets, with a sentinel's walk at the gables between the turrets, supported by bold corbelling and ornamented by gurgails of various design, a few of which are shown in the sketch.

A noticeable feature of the building is a small opening in the wall immediately above the outer door, protected by an oblique stone supported on corbels. This opening is placed as high as it possibly can be, imme-

diately under the eaves of the house, and it was no doubt used as an orifice whence might be poured at a height which would ensure considerable momentum, boiling water or other liquid on the head of any visitor who might wish access to the house contrary to the wishes of the proprietor.

On the face of the bottom crow step of the north gable are some figures wonderfully distinct, which are delineated in the sketch, and which may be taken as the date of the erection of the building. The figures are 1, 5, 7, which would seem to point to 1570 as the date of building, exactly three hundred years ago. I should be inclined, from the character of the mouldings, were it not for these figures, to have fixed for the building an earlier date.

The whole building, even to the mouldings, is in good preservation, and is at present occupied by one of the yearly-men of the adjoining farm. The stone of which it is built is freestone, and must have been brought from a considerable distance, because there is no freestone in Wigtonshire. It is of a hard gritty nature, and has preserved with great sharpness the contour of the different mouldings.

Of the family history of the Neilsons, the former proprietors of the estate and castle of Craigcaffie, nothing very definite seems to be known. The family never appears to have been one of great power or political importance. So far as one can see through the gathering oblivion and mist of two or three centuries, they seem to have been a rough, fearless, honest race of men, clinging with wonderful tenacity to their little stronghold, but wanting altogether in the art of "boosing," in that suppleness, and tact, and management which, handed down from father to son, tended in so many other families in Scotland, to swell the original peel-house and adjoining field into the baronial castle and ducal estate. This worldly astuteness seems to have been altogether wanting in these old lairds.

Their small estate, which was originally granted by Robert the Bruce to John, son of Neil, Earl of Carrick, seems to have been as large then as it ever afterwards became.

The Neilsons of the succeeding three hundred years seem to have added little or nothing to the family inheritance. None of them seem to have been men of great mark. The fullest chronological list of them I have been able to find is contained in "Paterson's Lands and their

Owners in Galloway," recently published, which may be consulted by those curious in the matter. I may note one or two points in their family history which may possess a little interest.

We find it related in Sir A. Agnew's *Sheriffs of Galloway* that in 1494 the young laird of Craiggaffie (at that time Neil Neilson), out on high jinks one night along with two or three other riotous young men of the period, drove off in high glee, for their "grait solace and divertisement," the following animals belonging to Quintene Agnew, Sheriff of Galloway:—

“ 24 kye, with their calffs, price of the piece 2 merks. .

220 sheep, price of the piece 4 shillings.

8 oxen, price of the piece 30 shillings ; and 3 horses.”

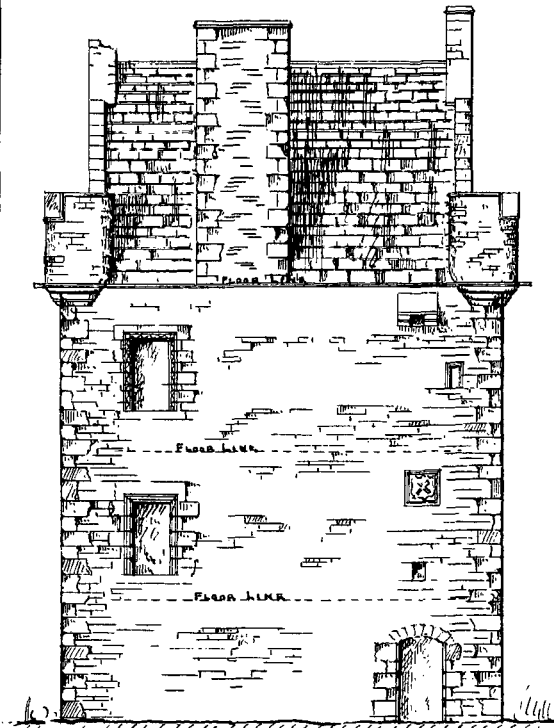
For this frolic young Neilson and his companions were tried in Edinburgh before the Lord Auditors. Their punishment was, that they should restore the “spuilzed” cattle, and pay a fine of L.40, in addition to paying 40 shillings as the expenses of the witnesses.

In 1662 we find the Neilson of that day again fined, but for a different cause. He was fined in the sum of L.1300 for his adhesion to the Presbyterian faith. Throughout their whole family history the Neilsons seem to have come in for a fair share of fines, which doubtless told in the long run on the prosperity of the family, and on the finances of their little estate, for we find that in 1688 Sir Thomas Kennedy, at one time Lord Provost of Edinburgh, had sasine of the lands and barony of Craiggaffie, no doubt on account of money lent by him.

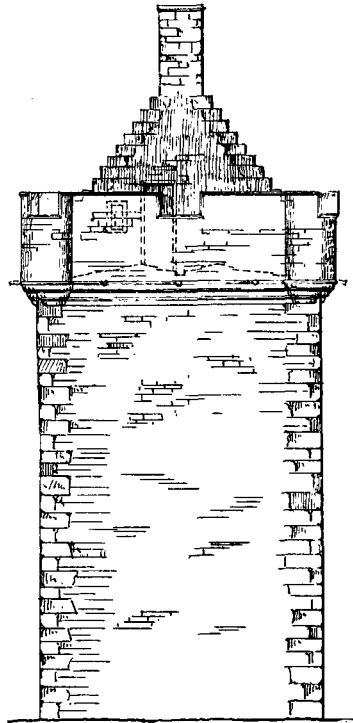
The Lairds of Craiggaffie seem never to have got their head above water much after this. The estate and castle were transferred by them to John M'Dowall of Logan in 1759, from whom it was bought by the Earl of Stair in 1791. It has now formed part of the Stair estates for the last eighty years.

Craiggaffie Castle, although not courting danger, was well adapted to stand a siege. The walls are very thick ; there is no opening on the ground flat except the outer door, covered by the shot-hole already mentioned ; the lowest window is 12 feet from the ground ; and the draw-well in the centre of the lowest floor would ensure to the garrison a never-failing supply of water.

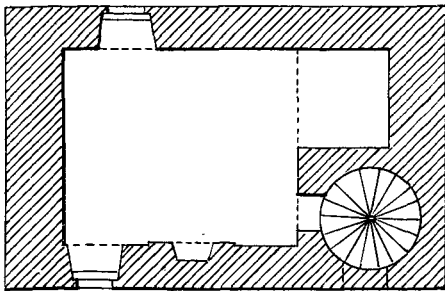
CRAIGCAFFIE CASTLE NEAR STRANRAER



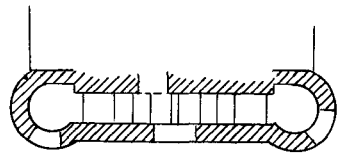
FRONT ELEVATION



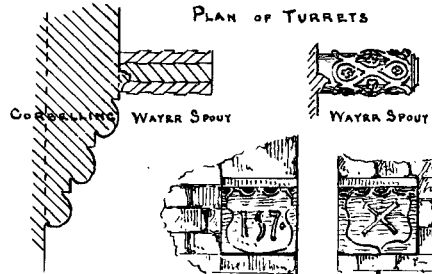
END ELEVATION



PLAN



PLAN OF TURRETS



CORBELLED WATER SPOUT

WATER SPOUT

SKIEW PUTS.

