

I.

GLENCORSE AND ITS OLD BUILDINGS. By ANDREW KERR, Esq.,
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In making the investigations for my papers on Rosslyn Castle and Chapel,—already communicated to the Society,—I found occasional references to the legendary story of King Robert the Bruce hunting the deer in Glencorse, and also to members of the Rosslyn family residing in Logan Tower in the same locality. I therefore, in 1877, walked over the glen, carefully examining such remains as then existed relating to its early associations.

Logan House or Tower has been supposed to have been a hunting-seat of some of the early Scottish kings, but there is no evidence to connect it with any of them.¹

¹ The story is told in different versions, but the following is the most comprehensive I have met with:—King Robert the Bruce, while hunting among the Pentlands, had been repeatedly baulked by a fleet white deer, and he therefore asked an assembled body of his nobles, whether any of their dogs could seize the

It is also supposed that, in gratitude for the fancied interference of St Katherine in his favour, as the legend narrates, the knight of Rosslyn may have built the chapel of St Katherine in the Hopes upon the spot where he threw himself from his horse and made his entreaty to her. Of this, however, there is no evidence, and, in the absence of record, it is impossible to say when or by whom the chapel was built. The name of St Katherine of the Hopes, or Glens, appears to have been given to distinguish it from the chapel of St Katherine upon the hill, beside the well-known Balm Well, about a mile southward from the church of Liberton.

The Sir William St Clair referred to in the legend was the eldest son of Sir Henry St Clair of Rosslyn. It appears from the Exchequer Rolls recently published, that he is incorrectly described as of Rosslyn, inasmuch as his father survived him.¹ He and his brother John accompanied Sir James Douglas on his expedition to Palestine with the heart of The Bruce, and were slain while fighting against the Moors in the plains of Andalusia. Sir William's son of the same name succeeded his grandfather, Sir Henry, and afterwards became Earl of Orkney.

game which had so frequently eluded the royal hounds. Sir William St Clair thereupon pledged his head against the forest of Pentland Moor, that his two favourite dogs, Help and Hold, would kill the deer before it crossed the March Burn. The king accepted the pledge, and immediately gave orders that a few slow hounds should beat up the deer; he also stationed himself on the best vantage ground for commanding a view of the chase,—a spot still pointed out as the King's Hill, and from which the entire course is seen. Sir William, on his part, after slipping his dogs, prayed earnestly to Christ, the Blessed Virgin, and St Katherine for success, then mounting on a fleet-footed steed, went in full pursuit, cheering on his hounds. Arriving within a few yards of the March Burn, he threw himself from his horse in despair, and, while entreating St Katherine, shouted,

“ Help! Hold! gin ye may,
Or Rosslyn tynes his head this day.”

Hold, just in the crisis of fate, stopped the deer in the middle of the brook, and the next instant Help drove it back and killed it on the winning side of the stream. The king, who had witnessed the result, came speedily from his point of view, embraced Sir William, and granted him in free forestry the lands of Logan House, Kirkton, and Earnsraig.

¹ The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland, Editor's Preface, pp. 77, 78.

In the year 1828 I visited Glencorse, and examined the remains of the chapel of St Katherine, Logan Tower, and the other old buildings situated upon the hill nearly opposite to Logan Lea reservoir. From the memoranda then made, with the aid of Mr Ramsay, late manager of the Edinburgh Water Company, the accompanying sketch of St Katherine's Chapel was prepared. The area of the burying-ground

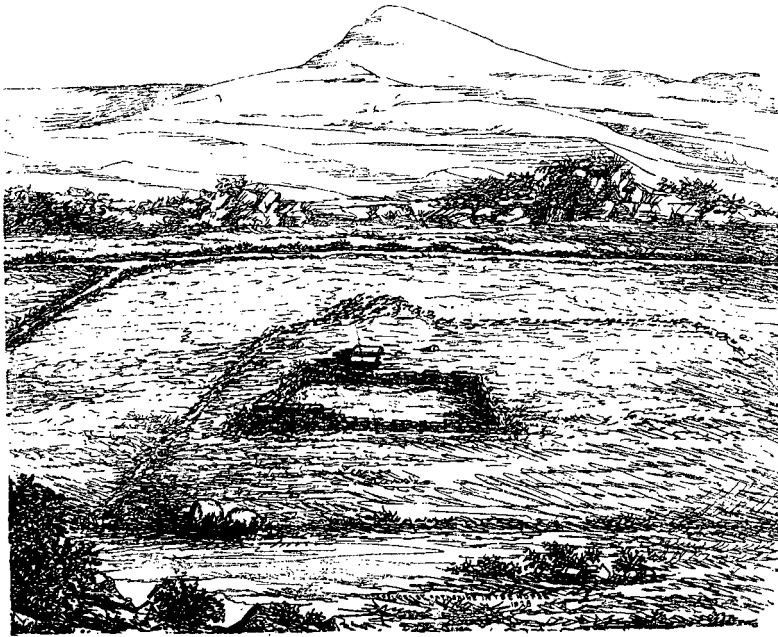


Fig. 1. St Catherine's Chapel, Glencorse.

surrounding the chapel extended to fully a quarter of an acre. The line of the enclosing wall was distinctly seen about 12 inches above the ground, and the gravestones were also entire, with the inscriptions undecayed. The chapel (fig. 1) is about 40 feet long and 20 feet wide. The walls were built of the local stone in rubble work, the highest parts then

remaining being about 4 feet high, but in some places they were broken down to the level of the ground. The east end is nearly 20 yards from the March Burn, and the Logan Burn is about the same distance from the south wall. The Compensation Pond was then in the course of formation, and the water extending towards the chapel ultimately covered it to a depth of several fathoms. The natural features of the locality correspond with the details of the traditional story, and the situation of the chapel is so unusual, as to indicate its having been selected on account of some incident such as has been described.

During very dry seasons the water in the Compensation Pond is so much reduced as to enable the remains of the chapel to be seen. One of these occasions occurred in 1842, when the following notice appeared in the *Edinburgh Courant*, on the 13th October of that year :—

“Few of the numerous pilgrims who make annual visits to this quiet and sequestered spot are aware that several fathoms under the surface of the lake are the remains of the church of St Katherine, still quite distinct, and surrounded by the scattered monuments of its graveyard. The ruined chapel and the sepulchral monuments so long laid under its waves, with the ‘Memento Mori,’ the ‘Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord, they rest from their labours and their works do follow them,’ and the date 1623, are still fresh on one of them. It is now nearly a century since the little graveyard was used as a place of sepulture, and not less than two hundred years since the voice of psalms was heard in the church.”

On revisiting the locality in 1877, the waters of the Compensation Pond were far above the remains of the chapel. Kirkton, upon the hill to the west, had been extended and improved; but the King’s Hill, a little further on, had not been broken by the plough, and retained its rounded form and fresh grassy surface. On reaching the remains of Logan House (fig. 2), I found that the arch over the entrance gateway to the courtyard had disappeared, with a considerable extent of the polished ashlar wall facing of the north tower, and the vaulted roofs of both towers, where formerly the sapling was only appearing, were covered with

tall trees, shrubs, and creeping ivy. This hunting seat had consisted originally of a single tower. On the door lintel there has recently been cut the date 1230, which otherwise appears to be about the proper date of the building. It is built in rubble work of the local stone, with chamfered dressings to the small openings or windows. The walls are

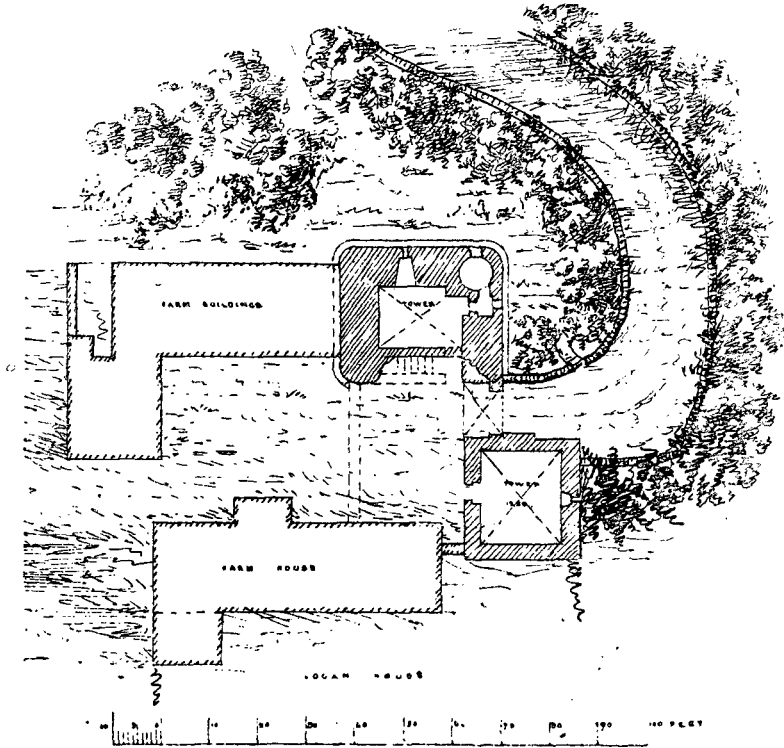


Fig. 2. Ground Plan of Logan House.

from 3 to 4 feet thick. The ground floor is all that remains, and consists of one vaulted apartment, 20 feet long by 17 feet wide, entered by a door to the side; but there has been no communication between it and the apartments which existed above.

On the north side an additional tower, with an enclosing wall forming a courtyard, has been erected early in the fifteenth century, probably by *William, third Earl of Orkney, as it is of the same character as the addition made by him to Rosslyn Castle.* The base of the tower is also deeply sloped, which is a feature introduced from France about that period. It is constructed entirely of sandstone, the face of the walls, both externally and internally, are of polished ashlar. Like the old tower adjoining, the ground floor only remains, containing one vaulted apartment 18 by 13 feet, and a well of great depth in the north-east corner, also lined with polished ashlar. I was informed that it contained a stair, some of the steps of which still remain near the bottom. The walls are 8 feet thick. The entrance has been by the courtyard communicating directly with the apartment on the ground floor, and by a stair in the thickness of the wall with those above. The courtyard wall has been entirely removed, and a farmhouse and offices erected adjoining the ruins of the towers.

It is evident, from several incidental notices, that Logan Tower or House was occasionally occupied by the St Clairs of Rosslyn until about the middle of the seventeenth century. We find that, on the 3d April 1593, the Laird of Rosslyn declared to the Synod of Lothian and Tweeddale that "he was nane of the parochinaris of Leswaid, but ane of the parochinaris of St Katherine in the Hopes, in respect his residence was in Logan House Tower." It is now the property of Charles Cowan, Esq., late M.P. for the City of Edinburgh.

About half a mile further up the Glen, situated upon a height, beside a deep scaur on the west side of the road, are the remains of a building (fig. 3) of which I can find no tradition or notice. On applying to an old residenter in the locality, I was told that it was sometimes said to be a chapel, at other times a dog-house belonging to the people who lived in the Tower, and again it was a howlet-house, which my informant thought was correct, as she had often heard them crying at night. It has probably been a chapel, with accommodation for a priest, and perhaps used before that which has been described as existing near the March Burn.

I recollect seeing the east gable with a window in it quite entire, also the complete circular arched roof of the apartment, and a stone basin built into the east wall. These have now fallen down, and the materials have been removed. On examining the remains,—which consist of the side walls of the apartment or chapel and the walls of the adjoining buildings,

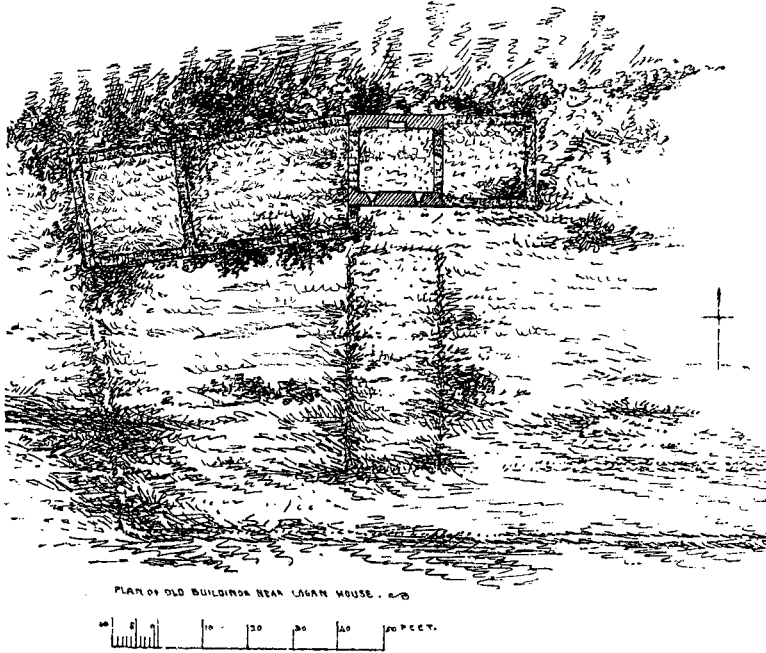


Fig. 3.

which are from 1 to 3 feet high,—I found the masonry corresponding to that of the old Logan House, with freestone chamfered dressings round the windows, and some plaster still remaining attached to the walls. The plan of the supposed chapel is turned from the general line of the building, and placed due east and west. There are some slapped

openings in the side walls, apparently for the ends of joists, to support a loft for storing hay for sheep during winter.

On the south side, at some distance from the buildings, are the indications of a wide, well-formed road, and close to the building is a bright green square plot, which evidently has been dressed, and may have been used as a small garden or burying-ground.

These remarks are only suggested from appearances; but I believe a few careful excavations at the site may tend to discover some more satisfactory indications of the purposes for which this building was erected.