

### III.

“THE KING’S CELLAR” AT LIMEKILNS. BY ALAN REID, F.S.A. Scot.

Limekilns, the natural seaport of Dunfermline, rose and flourished with the palaces of royalty and religion founded some three miles inland. It never attained the burghal dignity of the typical Fifeshire town, and thus is innocent of a town house. Nor does a parish kirk rear bartisan or spirelet over its crown of tiles. In the olden days the monks of Inchcolm and Dunfermline ministered to its people in the church of Rosyth, whose ruins grace a spur of the coast half a mile eastwards of the village. The redoubtable David Ferguson, first minister of Dunfermline and Rosyth after the Reformation, laboured here. The stalwart cleric who told King James “not to ban,” being overworked, handed this portion of his charge over to Inverkeithing. In course of time Limekilns drifted from its allegiance to the Establishment, and was overcome by the vigorous Dissent which holds it to this day. For many generations Rosyth Church has been roofless, and its area forms part of the common burial-ground of the district.

This seaport was a necessity in the life of the neighbouring city. The monks of the great abbey had ample storage for their Limekilns imports, but the Royal Palace was deficient in such accommodation. So it came about that in the reign of King James the Fifth—possibly during some portion of that fit of building of which the accounts of his master masons are so eloquent—Limekilns saw the erection of what is now its solitary antiquity, the vaulted structure known as “The King’s Cellar,” and figuring in the local euphony as “The Vout.” It is a long narrow erection (fig. 1) measuring 63 feet 9 inches by 24 feet 3 inches, and is

divided into two floors or stories. Its walls are 2 feet 9 inches in thickness, and are built of undressed stones laid with more regard for strength than for elegance. The lower storey had been entered by a couple of arched openings, now built up, but quite discernible in the front of the building. Trustworthy old residents remember that barrel-vaulted chamber well. Its walls, they tell us (as the result of surreptitious visitations), are lined with stone-built wine bins, proof positive of its



Fig. 1. “The King’s Cellar,” Limekilns.

object, and excellent authority for its name. They even hazard the statement that there is a well within it ; but as they also term an outside circular staircase a well, that statement must be received with reserve, for the inner walls of that staircase must cut through the angle of the cellar to their foundation. The upper storey is now reached by the modern outside stair shown in the view of the building (fig. 1). The door and windows are of last century date, and were made when the vault was converted into a school, or academy, as the native, with some humour, delights to term it. It is quite clear that, originally, access to

the upper floor had been by an outside stair leading to a remarkable pointed doorway (fig. 2), long built up but clearly traceable in the eastern gable. It will be seen from the drawing that even a greater age might be claimed for the building than that given. Our indication is made mainly because one of the historians of Dunfermline speaks definitely of King James the Fifth having in a certain year built "cellars, etc.," at Limekilns, near the town. The point need not be pressed, all the more

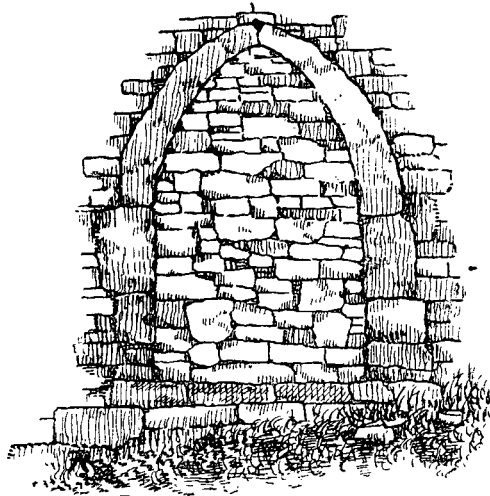


Fig. 2. Original Entrance to Upper Floor.

that the year stated is 1551, nine years after the death of the Gudeman of Ballangeich!

This upper room is solidly floored on the arched roof of the cellar beneath, and has evidently been intended as a store for less liquid cargoes. It has a fine pointed ceiling, whose arch springs unbrokenly a few feet from the floor, and rises to a height of about eighteen feet at its apex. The appearance of the chamber is thus very remarkable: tunnel-like, of course, but exhibiting a rude dignity that is impressive.

It had been lighted by four roof openings indicated on the plan (fig. 3), and still plainly obvious in the outer masonry of the rounded roof.

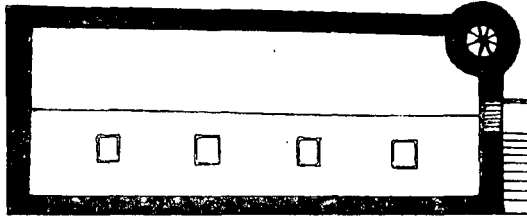


Fig. 3. Ground Plan of "The King's Cellar," showing ridge of roof, rooflights, original stairs, etc.

The circular staircase is a prominent object in the N.E. angle of this upper chamber. A built-up doorway (fig. 4) shows that access to this stair had been from this level, and from here only, as is proved by

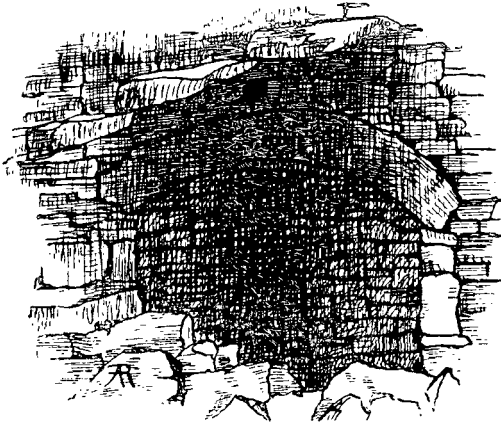


Fig. 4. Circular Stair ; door and lintel.

the fine corbelling of the tower, now hidden by the debris that has accumulated round the back of the building. The outside diameter of this interesting detail is 9 feet, and the remains of a stair show that the tower had risen considerably over the main walls. The lintel of the

door, arched, and hollowed to fit the circle of the stair-well, is very remarkable. In all probability the tower served to support a beacon kindled when some shipload of good cheer had to be guided through the darkness to the old harbour whose oaken piles were seen within living memory close by the shore in front of the ancient storehouse.

But the vaulting, the pointed eastern doorway, and the circular corbelled staircase, do not exhaust the interest of this excellent specimen of ancient domestic architecture. Over the modern door is built a

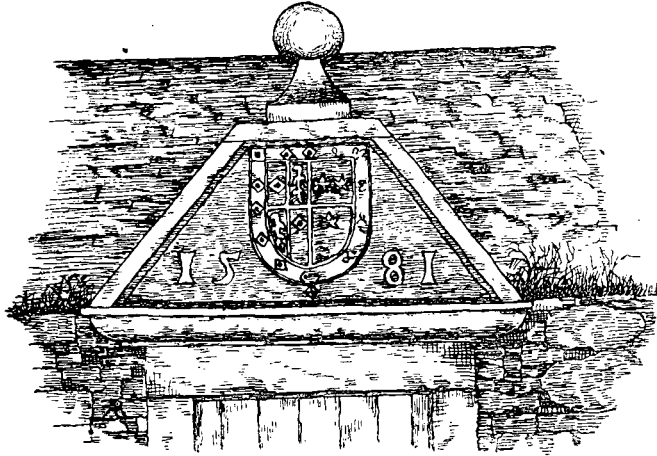


Fig. 5. The Sculptured Stone on "The King's Cellar."

sculptured stone (fig. 5), bearing among its adornments the date 1581, and a heraldic device which well deserves attention and remark. Not that these have been wanting; for many and varied have been the readings of this sculpture, and it has been termed everything, from the royal arms downwards. One writer judges it to belie the antiquity claimed for the storehouse of "the bluid reid wine," but, if a very palpable incongruity be admitted, explanation here is very simple. The sculptured stone does not belong to the vault at all, but to some other building, now vanished, that had existed in the neighbourhood in 1581. From that

building it had been removed, to add dignity, say, to the new entrance into the King's Cellar, made when it was transformed into an academy 100 years ago. No other explanation is so feasible as that; and no other is so tenable, when the local history and circumstances are taken into account.

The Lord Lyon King-at-Arms defines the quarterings as those of Pitcairne and Murray; the Duke of Atholl as "those of the man who married a Murray"; and the Earl of Elgin says he has always understood these to be the Pitcairne Arms. The Royal Arms theory thus takes flight on the wings of the Pitcairne spread eagles, which are chiselled so crudely that at a pinch they might well pass for lions rampant. The Murray mullets are incorrectly placed, the horizontal line separating them being an obvious error. Otherwise the cutting is clear and determinate. It shows the Pitcairne and Murray shield surrounded by a tressure ornamented with lozenges and fleurs-de-lis. The sculpture is set in a modern framework of commonplace design, the whole being surmounted by a spherical finial rising from a hollowed base.

What is the story of this interesting stone, and from whence did it come? The date, 1581, and the figuring generally, open out a bit of local history which is worthy of a short examination. In 1581 Commendator Robert Pitcairne of Dunfermline was at the zenith of his power. He had married a wife, Eufame Murray of Tullibardine, widow of Sir Robert Stewart of Rosyth, who afterwards married Patrick Gray, another Commendator of Dunfermline. The couple required a residence, obviously, outside of the Abbot's Palace in the Maygate of Dunfermline, and where was this more likely to be found than at Limekilns? The lands there belonged to the Abbey, the spot was salubrious and convenient, and from these, as from other facts, it seems certain that the chancellor had a house there. He was virtually a prisoner during his latter days, and was not allowed to pass beyond five or six miles from Dunfermline. Probability is thus entirely in favour of Limekilns having been the scene of his later residence and death. Spottiswoode says that event occurred at Dunfermline; but as another occupied the residency there, our contention holds good. The Annalist

of Dunfermline also favours Limekilns, but he ventures the curious opinion—due, doubtless, to the present position of the sculptured stone—that Pitcairne died in the King's Cellar! He was buried in Dunfermline Abbey; of that there is no doubt, as witness his monument and epitaph, the latter one of the most fulsome specimens of Latinity that Scottish tombs can show.

An entry in the Chartulary of Dunfermline Abbey further proves that Eufame Murray's brother, the "Master of Tullibardine, junior," had some time prior to the date on the pediment acquired the lands of Limekilns. This was the famous Sir William Murray, who in 1572

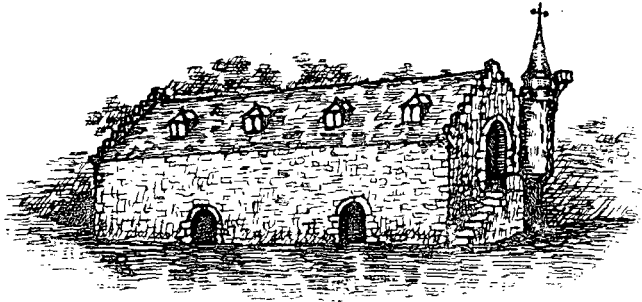


Fig. 6. "The King's Cellar"—restored.

became joint governor of Stirling Castle with Sir Alexander Erskine of Gogar. Sir William would find a residence at Limekilns quite compatible with his Stirling duties; and it may well have been that when he fell on adverse days his house was thirled to Lady Stewart, and thus became her abode as the wife of Commendator Pitcairne. Not a vestige of such a building remains *in situ*, and even its probable site is a matter of conjecture. It may have been where Lord Elgin's mansion, Broomhall, now stands; or on that pleasant brae-side, studded with old trees, which stretches eastwards from the borders of the village.

Pitcairne died in 1584, in the 64th year of his age. His heritage fell into the possession of other Pitcairnes, and latterly into decay and ruin.

Early in last century the pediment that had adorned his dwelling would be removed from its remains, and used as has been indicated. Like the building on which it has found an abiding place, it has had a varied career. It has seen many a merry company gather to enliven the old "vout," which has for over a century been to all intents and purposes the Town House of Limekilns. Storehouse, ball-room, concert-room, and library, the King's Cellar has had a career of usefulness such as few old buildings can boast. It has fallen somewhat into shade since the opening of the Elgin "Queen's Hall" at Charlestown; but it remains a structure at once sturdy and striking, and worthy of the attention of the antiquary and architect, and of careful preservation as a link between the present and the past.