

IV.

NOTES ON THE HOLYROOD "FOIR-YET" OF JAMES IV.

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Of the thousand and one times royal Holyrood has been the subject of writers, the most learned as well as the most shallow and diffuse, it is remarkable that the fact is almost ignored that a small offshoot (the "Foir-Yet") of the first palace of the ill-fated hero of Flodden field still stands where it reared its embattled walls on that 7th day of August 1503 when he led the youthful Margaret Tudor through its portals to the palace which he had built for her as his bride and queen.

The entrance to the Holyrood of to-day faces James Fifth's towers on the north-west flank of the Palace; and were these old towers cleared away and the space running due east opened up, it would be found that David had set down his Abbey of the Holy Cross pretty near the centre of "the hollow between two hills," viz., between the slopes of Calton Hill and Salisbury Crag, and it would be at once seen also that the great western doorway of the Abbey faced the approach of the Canons of St Augustine as they marched down from their first residence in "the Castle of the Maidens," passing through the way of the Canons, now and ever known as the Canongate.

It is pretty clear that at that period there was no thought of a royal palace, or of buildings throwing the Abbey out of its clear issue to the

Castle, where the Canons lodged till about 1176. Whether this tardiness in occupying the new Abbey resulted from a delayed completion or from a dread of the marshy surroundings is not known, but most probably both considerations had weight in the sacred building only being used for high festivals, etc. up till the last quarter of the twelfth century. The grand edifice of the good David being then in full use, it is reasonable to believe that as early as this period some kind of "foir-werk" or gateway would be in use.

Father Hay tells us that the marshes around Holyrood were drained by Abbot Helias,¹ who surrounded the cemetery with a brick wall, about the middle of the thirteenth century. And again, William, who was abbot in 1152, and is mentioned as a frequent witness to charters during the reigns of Malcolm IV. and William the Lion, surrounded the Abbey with a strong wall of squared stone to secure it against predatory assaults.² This, of course, leads to no other conclusion than the very apparent one, that lodge and gateway barred the entrance to the sacred precincts.

During the reign of the first three Jameses we find no signs of any structural changes in Holyrood, the more singular from the fact of its being a chief home of the first James, the birthplace of the second, and a favourite abode of the third; but what manner of "foir-werk" previous to James Fourth formed the entrance to the Abbey and dwellings of the Canons and the Stuarts we can only surmise, yet may confidently maintain that the site is unchanged.

In Mylne's³ "Master Masons" we find that in 1496 Sir Thomas Smyth, priest, was Master of Works within the Castle of Stirling, and that Walter and John Merlioun were masons under his direction. But five years after, we find Walter Merlioun at Holyrood under the famous Leonard Logy, taking part in the erection of the first palace of James

¹ Father Hay, *Lib. Sanct. Cruc.*, Pref. xx.

² Bellenden, the translator of Boece, speaks of the "vail that lyes to eist fra the said Castell, quhare now lyes the Cannogate," and which in King David's time was part of "ane gret forest full of hartis, hyndis, toddis, and siclike manner of beisties."—*History of Holyrood*, p. 4.

³ *Proceedings*, vol. xxx. p. 50.

Fourth. In the second volume of the Lord High Treasurer's accounts the editor writes:—"It is in 1501 that we first find mention of work there being begun under the superintendence of Mr Leonard Logy. Mr Leonard Logy proved an energetic and efficient Master of Works, and in 1501 a sum of £40 was granted him 'for his gude and thankfull service done and to be done to the King's hienes, and specialle for his diligent and grete laboure made by him in the bigging of the palace beside the Abbey of the Holy Croce." Then follow in the accounts of the same volume:—"Item [the xx. day of October] to Walter Merlioun, mason, in part payment of his task of the foir-werk and the new hall (chapel) in Halyrudhous, xi li" (and eight similar entries).

This is quite conclusive evidence that Leonard Logy was Master of Works, superintending the construction of this first palace, and Walter Merlioun builder of the foir-werk, as well as the new hall.

The first map, of 1544, shows us unmistakably the foir-yet of James IV., but it also shows, clear and distinct, James Fifth's towers, joined by a wall from the left of the foir-yet, where it stopped, thus forming the north wall of Palace Yard, then began again at the north-east corner of the towers, cutting off and enclosing the Abbey, entry to which apparently can only have been from the Palace front, as now. In Hollar's View, which is next, the arrangement is quite the same, nor is there sight of the two buildings alleged to be historical, viz., the so-called Regent Moray's House (which I hold to have been Lord Robert's), which clung to the north side of James Fifth's towers, and further north-east the Croft-an-righ house, also named after Lord James. But in the next and famous View of Gordon of Rothiemay, leading up to the Cromwell burning of 1650, we have a great transformation. We see that a second wall had been erected to the north of James Fifth's towers, forming a private approach from the north side of the foir-werk, with entrance from the Canongate leading up to this (so-called) Regent Moray's abode, and entirely blocking up both the view of and the approach to the Abbey. This house was undoubtedly an after-erection, and probably had been attached by and for Lord Robert Stuart, who was Commendator of

Holyrood, with an entrance through the wall to the private stair of the Queen's rooms. In point of fact, indications on the wall still show where this entry may have been.

How James V. came to erect his towers almost in front of the grand old edifice of King David, and so cut off its free passage from its original line, can only be accounted for by the supposition that the sacred building at that time (1529-31) was, though it had been repaired by Abbot Crawford (who was abbot in 1457), reduced to the nave only; the great central tower gone; choir and transepts in semi-ruins; and the throes of the Reformation gathering in strength and influence; and that its uses as a religious house were less important, and the roadway leading from the foir-yet now obsolete, and mainly required for the palace-royal, which was henceforth to form entry to the remnant of the Abbey. One other hypothesis may, however, be advanced, that when James IV. founded the first Palace in 1503, he had planned to have but one entrance to both Palace and Abbey, as at the present day, but leaving the Abbey front clear of buildings. This conjecture finds support from Rothiemay's bird's-eye View, which shows a wide doorway in the north side of the quadrangle, and so opening towards the Abbey and grounds.

The foir-werk of the fourth James kept intact in its old position till the middle of the eighteenth century, when the archway and gates were removed, the south wall and tower being allowed to remain, the only remnants of the first palace of Holyrood, erected to receive a Tudor as the queen of a Stuart.

Premising, therefore, that the foir-werk as erected by Walter Merlioun, under guidance of Master Leonard Logy, the Master of Works at that time, and on the site of the entrance-porch of the Canons of St Augustine, was handed down to us intact, and up till the middle of the eighteenth century remained so, we have authentic views of the building both from its east and west approaches. The west approach, as represented by Skene of Rubislaw, shows a grim dead front, with high-pitched roof and storm windows to the north, and a gate apparently

reaching up two-thirds of the porch, with long hanging spikes reaching down from the top of the arch. Above this entrance there is what appears to be the royal arms, with a window on each side. To the right of this gate, forming the street, the whole of the old property as given in this View has been swept away, but on the left we have still the whole of the old buildings as there shown, including the pend leading into Thomson's Court, one of the finest bits of old Edinburgh now to the fore.

The east front to the Palace is of a more ornate character, being battlemented, with a tower on the south, which still stands. From the View by Brown, we see the pillars of the arches, the remains of which are still visible, but there is no trace of gate or spikes. This View brings us up to about the time of its demolition. Both Views show that the foir-yet only occupied the south half of the roadway, the north half, looking west, being apparently a dead wall, nearly half the height of the building; but the wall which fronted the Palace, joining the inner gateway, had a door into the Palace yard, connecting it with a door from the archway or port, and it was from this corner that the long wall, which remained till the Victorian improvements in the middle of last century, led up to James Fifth's towers. This, most probably, with another wall to the north, formed the enclosed roadway to the (so-called) Regent Moray's House, which we see in Rothiemay's Map.

Now, if the records of the Abbey Court are correct, this building, as seen in these Views, was used from the time of James VII. at latest as the legal office of the Sanctuary for Debtors (1686). The entries in the books of the bailie of the Sanctuary tell us that from that time up till 1880, when it was made obsolete by Dr Cameron's Act of Parliament, upwards of seven thousand persons found protection within its bounds. That means, that in its original form, as the foir-werk of James IV., it was used as the Court-house to issue "protections" for refugee debtors for about seventy years, viz., from 1686 till 1755, when it was demolished. And we have the further knowledge, that in 1646, forty years before, when the first Duke of Hamilton was created first Hereditary Keeper of

Holyrood, he was empowered to appoint the bailie and officers of the Sanctuary.

After the archway was cleared away¹ and the Abbey Court-house put into its present shape, it left behind, luckily, some visible portions of the

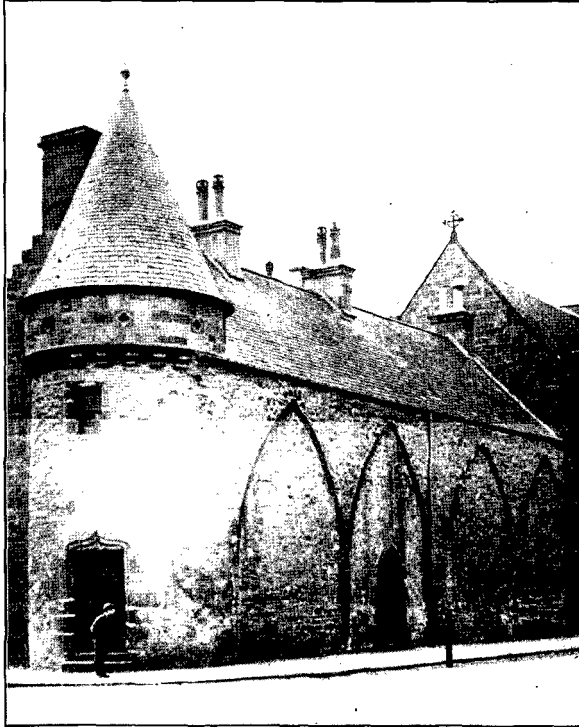


Fig. 1. Tower at south-east corner, and Wall with built-up Arches.
(From a photograph by C. W. Sinclair.)

original foir-werk, comprising the north wall of the south side (fig. 1), with its turret and with the remains of the arches. This wall, as at

¹ The keeper's house was over the gateways, and when demolished he was granted apartments in the Palace, but ultimately (in Queen Victoria's time) was shifted into what had been the soldiers' guard-house at the Palace gate, as now.

the present day, looking north, and forming one side of the roadway leading to the Palace, is clearly part of the original building in its entirety. There are the remains of four arches reaching to nearly the second storey of the building, with traces of the capitals and pillars on which they rested. These pillars, which rise about 8 feet, were fluted, with round-headed capitals. The span between each set where they rested on their pillars is 13 feet, and between each pair of pillars fully 2 feet. The length of the building from east to west is $58\frac{1}{2}$ feet till it reaches the corner of the tower, the outside round of which is 16 feet 5 inches. Near the western entrance, in the centre of the first arch, there is clear trace of a door, now built up with squared blocks, differing from the surrounding rubble, which, were it opened up, would lead into the old jail in the interior. In the original there was a fine projecting pillared arch, which formed the front of the gateway towards the Palace, the whole of which has been demolished.

The tower at the south-east corner fronting the Palace, which originally was much higher than now, and had two windows (but now has one only), is also part of James Fourth's foir-werk. The whole building was much higher than now, having attics with storm windows; this accounts for the disappearance of the upper window of this tower. It is perfectly easy to trace where the top of the original had been replaced by modern dressed stonework, for the walls had been of coarse rubble, and now the one window has been adapted to light the stairway leading up to the large room now used as their Council Chamber by the High Constables of Holyrood House. The door of this tower or turret, which the Constables always use when marching out to take duty, faces the Palace and has a curiously pointed half archway over its flat top. In height it measures 6 feet 7 inches, and in breadth only 3 feet 3 inches.

The other doorway.—This door (shown to the left in fig. 2) was probably removed here from the wall adjoining James Fifth's towers during the Victorian improvements in the middle of last century, when the

Abbeyhill approach was carried through the Palace gardens. It is now attached by a wall to the back of the Abbey Court-house, and forms an entrance to its back yard. In height it measures 6 feet 10 inches, and in breadth 4 feet 2 inches, and shows some fine carved work, emblematic of

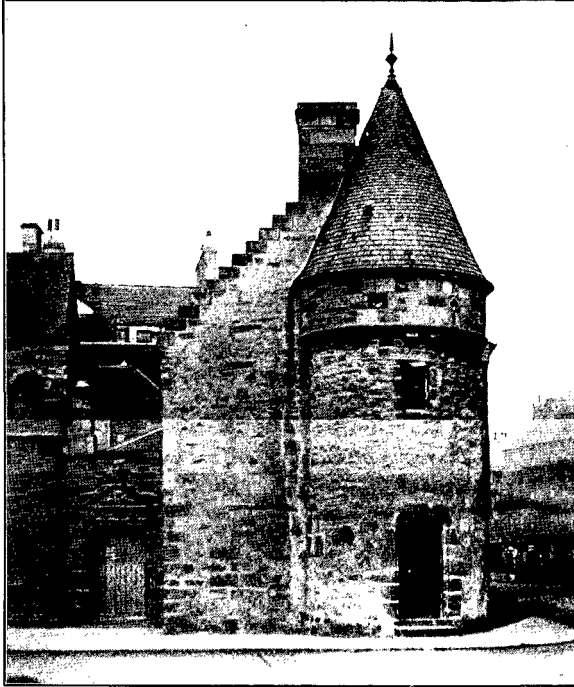


Fig. 2. The two Doorways. (From a photograph by C. W. Sinclair.)

the union of "the thistle and the rose." Over a scroll moulding on the left is the thistle, and on the extreme right is the rose; then comes a floral scroll of the entire breadth, and above this a large centrepiece of the royal arms, sorely decayed, and all bearing mark of much antiquity; while towering high above the whole design is a large thistle, which has either been picked out or is of a more recent date, the design being fully 4 feet in

height. The lintels, which are original, are 10 inches in width, finely fluted, and much decayed as well as chipped, possibly by removal. In this east gable of the foir-yet a doorway can be traced, and on the second floor what looks like the remains of a small iron-barred window ; and it may be here noted that the sockets of the iron bars of James Fifth's towers are still quite distinct on all the windows.

There is little reason to doubt that this foir-werk, like the Palace proper and the Abbey of King David, had a share, however small, in the damage done by the English invasions of 1544 and 1547, not to speak of the mob violence of the Reformation tumults and the Revolution of 1688 ; but such ill-usage, so far as we can ascertain, must have been of no great account, probably extending only to doorways and ornamentation. Be that as it may, the remaining portions, viz., the north and east walls, tower, doors, arches and prison, are beyond dispute assignable to James IV. ; and it is gratifying to know, that although the other two outlying portions of this royal residence were subjected to the humiliation of sale to private parties,¹ the old foir-werk has always remained in possession of the Crown. It is true that care and patronage of this historical treasure was bestowed on the first Duke of Hamilton, as Hereditary Keeper, in 1646, but as a property it did not pass out of the hands of the Crown ; and now, after two and a half centuries, it has again reverted to the full possession of His Majesty's Board of Works, and let us hope that what remains of the old foir-werk may remain in good preservation for ages to come.

The Interior.—From the back wall view of the present erection it is quite evident that, with the exception of the east gable and the north front, with its remains of the archways, the whole is modern. One other exception, however, is worth consideration—the old prison on the street floor. An interior inspection of this Abbey Court-house leaves

¹ The Croft-an-righ house was repurchased by the Board of Works in the middle of last century from Hector Gavine, engraver. Queen Mary's Bath was bought back early in last century from the Veitch family, who are still the proprietors of the adjoining property.

no doubt of its reconstruction, on the removal in the middle of the eighteenth century of gateway and porch; but the old prison, which is built of dressed stone, with arched roof, and flagstoned, may have been found to have been built for all time, and under every occupancy requisite for use, and so incorporated with the new building. It is situated at the right-hand or west corner of the passage, and is of great strength and security. The floor space is 17 feet 4 inches lengthwise, and 12 feet 3 inches across, with fireplace in west gable. The side walls rise to 6 feet 6 inches to the spring of the barrel-shaped roof. The window facing the south, being part of the modern back wall, is of the usual dimensions, and, of course, iron-barred. The door of this quaint little prison is of great interest, and closely resembles the jail doors still to be seen at the top of James Fifth's towers. It is of great thickness, bolt-headed, and with the inevitable jailor's spy-hole, which is iron-barred, with sliding shutter, which can only be opened from the outside. As already noticed, there is evidence on the old outside wall of an entrance into this prison from the original archway; the present entrance, however, is from the passage in the interior of the building.

It should be here noted that overhead of this cell or prison there is another of a similar build, probably part of the last erection, entering from a stone gallery. That these prison cells were used up till nearly the time when the Sanctuary was swept away is perfectly certain. And that they were required when the refuge was in full occupation is also certain. If we take one year, 1816, we find the number of "Abbey lairds" or protected debtors to be 118, and this place of bondage was their place of punishment should they contract fresh debts during their refuge in Holyrood. This is the more easily understood when it is explained that the Court of Session had decided that any debtor who had gone to reside within the Abbey bounds had incurred bankruptcy, even though he had not been regularly "booked." In 1810 we find one Richard Perry Ogilvie, an English refugee, being incarcerated in this old prison for a debt incurred to Richard Townley, a Canongate draper.

The prisoner appealed to the Court of Session, but the Court confirmed the decision of the bailie of the Abbey.

Whether this Sanctuary for insolvent debtors, which was the only one existing in Scotland, derived its privileges from the well-known rights of ancient monasteries, has not been ascertained; but the editor of the *Liber Cart. Sanct. Crucis* is of opinion that this refuge, not being for criminals, as of old, was simply a privilege by usage attached to the royal residence. But it is pretty certain that from the time of the Canons of St Augustine, through the period of James Fourth and his royal palace, there was always a convenient place of incarceration for the refractory at the gateway; and it is quite safe to say that the present jail on the ground-floor of the Abbey Court-house is part of the old "foirwerk" of 1503, though it may have been remodelled in the reconstruction of the eighteenth century, at least in the matter of its entrance-door.