

III.

OLD HOUSES AND WOOD-WORK PANELLING AT KINGHORN. BY
ALAN REID, F.S.A. SCOT. (WITH DRAWINGS BY C. J. F. REID AND
JOHN WATSON, F.R.I.B.A., F.S.A. SCOT.)

No better evidence remains of the importance and opulence of old Kinghorn than the weather-beaten dwellings of its seventeenth- and eighteenth-century burghers. The oldest example of these tall, crow-stepped structures is that picturesque pile (fig. 1) at "The Gang," which may at one time have formed a part of St James', a fifteenth-century foundation which stood near. It is doomed to early destruction, but it still shows several quaint architectural features, and a worn armorial panel, whose chief devices have been ropes, arrows, and initials. A few years ago it was inhabited, and could boast of a dated fireplace lintel and a stone-arched passage, unique among these relics of a maritime dispensation. The old manse at the corner of Nethergate and Harbour Road also retains much of its old-world character, and is very attractive to the artistic eye. All the streets on the eastern side of the town teem with surprises; and if "Bible Bruce's House" (fig. 2) is only remembered by the lintel, dated 1668, now built over the beer-cellar door of its successor, the Overgates shows so many "corbie-steps," "fore-stairs," lettered lintels, and tortuous angles that the stately domicile of the Bible-printing laird of Falkland is scarcely missed.

The railway viaduct that ruined Kinghorn artistically, throws its aggressive shadow over another house whose career of usefulness seems likely to close with the departure of its present occupant. This was the home of Henry Schanks, best known in the local records as Bailie Schanks, and often mentioned in connection with affairs of the Kirk, of



Fig. 1. The Old House at the Shore.

which he was the efficient treasurer. He was of the stock of that stark outlaw, Murdoch Schanks, whose discovery of the dead body of King Alexander III. led to his pardon, and to the endowment of Castleriggs, on which the fortunes of his descendants were founded, and by which they were fostered for over six hundred years. In 1638, as appears from the worn, hawk-crested armorial panel¹ over the main doorway of his

¹ See Arms of Shanks of Castleriggs in Sir J. Balfour Paul's *An Ordinary of Scottish Arms*.

abode (shown in the shaded gable of Mr Watson's drawing, fig. 3), H. S. (Henry Schanks) and B. B. (Barbara Beatson), his wife, took possession of their new home, and proud would they be of the comfortable, spacious, and ornate mansion that took premier rank among Kinghorn dwellings, and set the fashion even to the neighbouring lairds! The building was slightly L-shaped on plan, but the longer, eastern limb has nearly disappeared. The remaining portion, however, contains the

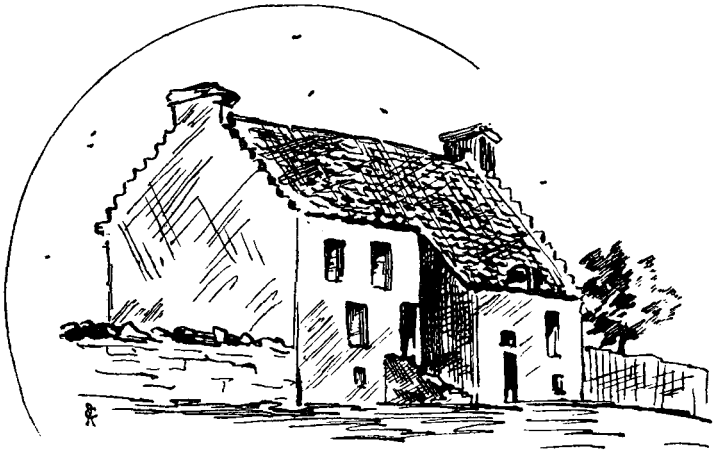


Fig. 2. The Bruce Mansion. Site of the Ship Inn.

principal apartments, a large kitchen, entered by the special door shown in the centre of the main wall (fig. 3), the living-room, with two large windows seen over the kitchen, and a bedroom storey, lighted by the flat dormers which break the expanse of the red-tile roof. The domestic draw-well may still be seen at the foot of the stair leading to the upper floors, while all over the building are innumerable quaint nooks and corners, all utilised in the most approved ship-shape manner.

The charm of the dwelling, however, lies in the fact that its interior retains more of its original character and finish than is usual in decaying structures of its kind. It certainly is unique in Kinghorn, and, if not

intact, presents much of the appearance it had when Treasurer Schanks sat by the moulded stone jambs of his own fireside, and glanced with satisfaction over his richly panelled surroundings. Mr Watson's drawing (fig. 4) shows the details of these interesting and original embellish-

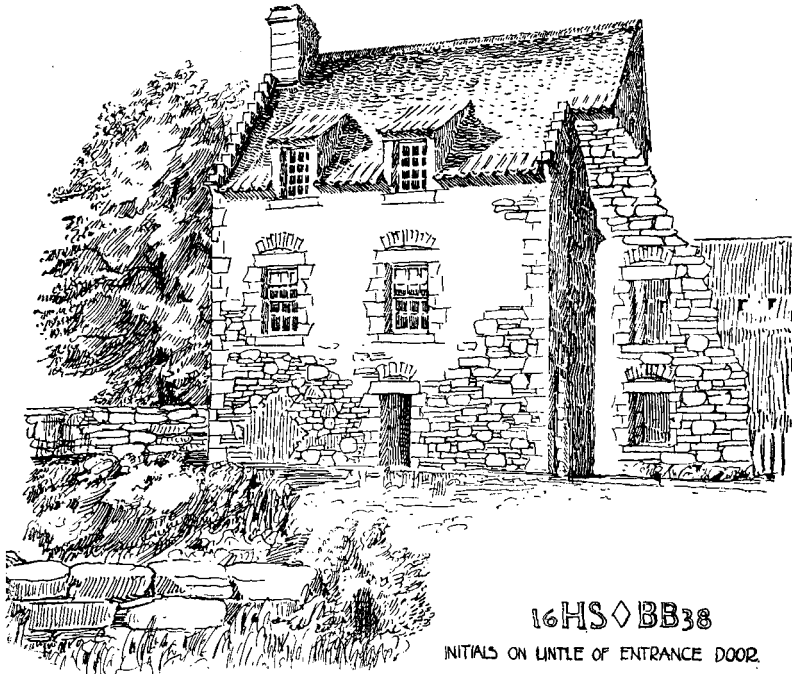


Fig. 3 Henry Schanks's House from the south.

ments of a seventeenth-century home, and only a few words are necessary to explain their position and purport.

The fireplace is placed in the west gable wall of the building, and facing the entrance, which is from the east. It is surmounted by the rich overmantel clearly shown in the drawing, and is flanked by narrow, framed panel-work, reaching from the floor to the moulded wooden

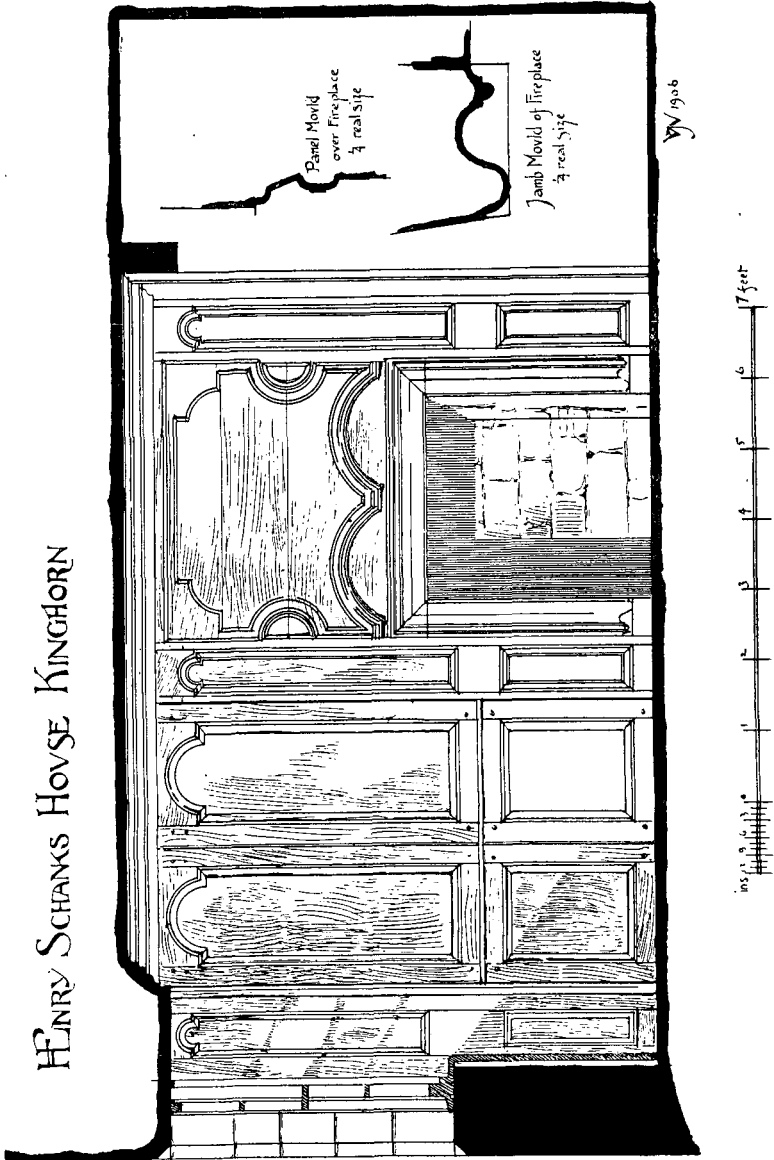


Fig. 4. Details of the Fireplace, with the wooden panelling.

cornice, into which the entire panelling of the apartment merges. On the left is a cupboard with double doors, the splay of the window claiming the last narrow panel, seen to the left in the drawing. Between the windows there is another and wider double cupboard, a single-doored specimen occupying the remaining space of the south wall. On both sides of the door in the inner east wall there are double panelled linings reaching from floor to ceiling, a single panelled frame continuing the arrangement on a narrow return, which faces the south. All the upper panels have semicircular tops, the others, including the breast panels of the windows, being rectangular in form. The windows, it may be added, are also original, and are very massive.

The absence of panelling and cornice from the north wall, as from the contiguous portions of the walls to east and west, suggests that the space thus differentiated had originally been fitted with closed beds. Doubtless these were panelled in the same style as the rest of the apartment; and if so, the effect gained by a complete wall-covering of well-designed and lustrous dark panelling must have been at once charming and dignified. The apartments in the upper storey are also lined with timber of a homely sort, but the style is meagre and the work commonplace when compared with the elegance of its late-Jacobean neighbour downstairs. The work here figured is of excellent character and strongly Scottish in feeling. Such woodwork was common to good houses of the period, but this example is of value and importance, inasmuch as it has escaped the Dutch influence which tainted design in the days of Queen Anne.