

II.

ACCOUNT OF THE EXCAVATION OF THE EDWARDIAN CASTLE AT CASTLEDYKES, KIRKCUDBRIGHT. BY J. ROBISON, F.S.A. Scot., KIRKCUDBRIGHT.

The first time the castle of Kirkcudbright is mentioned, so far as the public records are concerned, is in the year 1288, when John Comyn was the guardian of "the castle and lands which belonged to the King in Kirkcudbright." It is worthy of note that King Edward placed the castles of Kirkcudbright, Dumfries, and Wigtown for a number of years under the custody of a single governor. All three castles have disappeared, and it was only in 1911 that excavations, continued in 1912 and 1913, revealed the foundations and parts of the walls of Kirkcudbright Castle, showing clearly that it was a fortress of great importance.

Passing over the centuries, nothing whatever is related of the castle, so far as can be gleaned, the charter by James IV., of date 1509,

mentioning the lands by the name of Castlemains. In 1482 several burgesses of Kirkcudbright were prosecuted for having taken forcible possession of the castleward of Kirkcudbright. In a report by an English officer of the year 1566 it is mentioned that the inhabitants stood greatly in fear of the Dukes of Somerset and Northumberland. In an interesting extract sent to me by a London friend, it is stated that, among others, the lairds of *Bombie* and *Lochinvar* were, with their retainers, ordered to pass to Kirkcudbright to defend the town against the English, and, if necessary, to build a fort; which proves that the castle, even if it had not already completely disappeared, was useless for defensive purposes.

THE EXCAVATIONS.

During all this period an impenetrable silence surrounds the castle, and all that remained of it were the mounds and names *Castledykes* and *Castlemains*. An examination of the ground showed the vast strength of the site. The castle was surrounded by a deep moat, and on three sides of the castle field were deep ditches or dykes—hence the name *Castledykes*. On the remaining side it was protected by the sea. To the south and east were numerous ditches, which can be traced to the present day, and at the turnstile near the cricket field was a strong outwork, there being traces of similar mounds at the river corner and near the entrance to the football field. Whether the town fosse was in existence during the time of the War of Independence cannot be known, but in all probability it was, with the further defence of a rude wall of turf and stones. That fosse is still traceable, and is very distinctly marked from the corner of the Academy playground on towards the river. A few yards from the point mentioned at the Academy is *Castlemains Cottage*, in front of which is a large artificial mound, which is conjectured to have formed one of the outworks of the castle. The situation was strong by nature, and was rendered more so by art. The only approach from the town would be by way

of a road very near the present St Mary's Wynd, and thence along the gravel ridge to Castlemains. The original entrance to the castle, for a reason that will be afterwards shown, I conjecture to have been from the river front.

Towards the end of September 1911 permission was obtained from Captain Hope, R.N., of St Mary's Isle, to make excavations on the castle mound. The first day remains were found which effectually disposed of any idea that no castle ever stood there. Careful drawings were made, and the sites marked off. In September 1912 Captain Hope again generously gave permission to make excavations on an extended scale, and supplied the workmen for a week. A start was made at the sites of the previous excavations, and by the end of the first day one of the buttresses and a portion of wall, which afterwards turned out to be the entrance to the east tower, were uncovered. On the following day another buttress, in an excellent state of preservation, and a part of the circular wall were laid bare. The excavation of this tower was proceeded with, and in the course of the work two buttresses, almost complete, and a third one with few stones remaining, were brought to light. Meantime a deep trench was dug from the point of wall originally found, when, to the delight of all engaged in the work, the portcullis stone, in a beautiful state of preservation, was laid bare, along with a piece of wall of Netherlaw freestone. Undoubtedly the entrance to the castle had been found, but, on careful examination, it was ascertained to be of much later date than the masonry of the tower, over the foundations of which it appeared to have been built. A cross trench was made, but unfortunately the corresponding grooved stone was amissing. A further search, however, revealed the spring of another tower to the north. This also was laid bare, and revealed the interesting fact that it was provided with one buttress, which had originally been of the same dimensions as those of the first tower, and further strengthened in the centre with a double wall, forming a huge buttress about 20 feet long.

Further on a piece of straight wall succeeded the circle, and, after being lost for about two yards, a third tower of much smaller dimensions, but beautifully constructed, was discovered. It has been suggested, with much plausibility, that this tower contained a staircase giving access to the upper storeys of the towers and to the battlements. This tower had originally been connected with the north tower, and later on it was found that it also connected with the curtain wall leading to what was conjectured to have been the largest of the five towers, that facing the river front. This curtain wall was laid bare for 35 feet, and had, in all probability, been about 50 feet in extent before it connected with the river-front tower.

Turning now to the extent of the foundations discovered, it was found that the external walls gave an average height of about $2\frac{1}{2}$ feet, and were in an excellent state of preservation. It was resolved to excavate the inside of the east tower, so as to determine the actual dimensions. The wall of this tower was found to be 10 feet thick, with a diameter of $36\frac{1}{2}$ feet, the diameter of the interior being 16 feet. To the rear was found a portion of the curtain wall, 11 feet thick, and here a most interesting discovery was made. This was a passage in the thickness of the wall, the passage being paved with stones set in lime. A peculiarity of this curtain wall is that it is provided with a strong buttress, and, with the exception of Castle Swein in Argyllshire, this is the only known example in Scotland. The buttresses to the round towers, already described, are unique. The wall of the north tower is in parts 12 feet thick, due to the huge buttress in the centre, and the curtain wall connecting with the small tower is $8\frac{1}{2}$ feet thick. All that remained to be excavated were portions of the curtain walls on both sides of the buildings connecting with the two remaining towers, and these towers themselves.

The two large towers, with the portcullis gateway, present a frontage of about 85 feet, increased to over 97 feet if the third and smaller tower is taken into consideration. From the gateway the buildings

have extended back 154 feet, and from the drawbridge to the extreme river front the extent is 214 feet. From these figures it will be readily gathered that the castle was one of the largest. Indeed, it is much larger than a fortress like Caerlaverock, which is the best example of an Edwardian castle in Scotland, and the two large towers are equal to those of Bothwell Castle, which, till the excavations at Kirkcudbright, were recognised as the largest in Scotland.

In September 1913 a start was made with the excavation of the continuation of the west curtain wall, which was found to be entire with the exception of one break 10 feet wide. This turned out afterwards to have a significant bearing on the extent of the west tower. The contour of this mound was carefully noted before the ground was cut into, but before dealing with this point it will be better to give details as to the western curtain wall, which is, as already stated, 8½ feet thick. It terminates at a narrow point, and working round this was found the north wall of a passage, which again terminates at the inside of the curtain wall. Working across the front of the passage, the south wall was found, the passage proving to be 5 feet wide; and here a most interesting discovery was made, which was the finding of the bolt of the door which had stood there. It was in a very good state of preservation. The line was continued, and it was found that the southern curtain wall also tapered off to a comparatively narrow point. This curtain wall was excavated on the outside, and was found to have a break in it at the same distance from the centre of the passage as the break already noted in the west curtain wall. On the other side of this break, although all masonry had disappeared, the line of the wall could easily be traced. A trench was next cut on the inside of the curtain wall, but the faced stone had disappeared, with the exception of one large stone, which afterwards turned out to abut on the entrance to the south tower. Along the whole of the inner line of the southern curtain wall was found a thick layer of clay,

no doubt the floor of the apartments abutting on the wall. This south curtain wall was found to be 9 feet 6 inches thick.

Attention was then directed to the large mound at the river front, on which was conjectured to have stood the largest tower of all. A series of trenches was cut on the outside, and although there was abundant evidence of building material, still not one faced stone was found. Fortunately the despoilers had not disturbed, at least to any extent, the bed of the outside course, and this was easy to follow. The mass of packing stones continued right round the front, and where lost the lime bed proved an invaluable guide. The trenches were continued on the inside, and here it was found that the stones had almost entirely disappeared; but again the lime beds were strongly in evidence, indeed more so than in any other part of the building. There was, however, a space of 5 feet where there was not the slightest trace of stone or lime, and this proved to be in continuation of the passage which had already been discovered on the outside, and where, in addition to the bolt of the door, part of a spiral staircase was found. The passage had thus extended right across the tower from the inside to the angles formed by the west and south curtain walls. The conclusion came to seem irresistible, that the outer and inner faces of this tower formed one huge buttress, with the passage in the centre, and that this buttress rose to the height of the passage, at the inner end of which would be a spiral staircase to the upper rooms and battlements. Measurements were made, which showed the tower to have had a diameter of 44 feet. When it is remembered that the towers uncovered the previous year had each a diameter of 36 feet 6 inches, and that they were equal in magnitude to those of Bothwell Castle, hitherto held to have been the largest in Scotland, some idea of its strength may be gathered, and also from the fact that the largest towers at Caerlaverock are only 26 feet in diameter.

The next operation was the excavation of the inside face of the west curtain wall, which was exposed the whole way to its junction with

the small tower at the rear of the north tower; and some interesting discoveries were made here in the way of pottery, notably the two masks subsequently referred to. The only remaining portions to excavate were the south tower and the east curtain wall, and a start was made with the former. Several trenches were cut into the mound, but for a considerable time nothing but masses of small stones and lime could be got, the walls all round having apparently disappeared. At length a small portion, about 2 feet in length, of the inner wall was laid bare, and was found to correspond with the inner wall of the east tower, thus solving the problem. It was of the same dimensions as those of the east tower, but, unlike it, it had not been provided with buttresses. Working round this small piece of inner face, the entrance to the tower was found, with one of the socket stones lying in position.

The only remaining part to put on the plan was the east curtain wall, and a considerable length was found. At its junction with the south tower another interesting discovery was made. When the workman reached the end of the wall his spade suddenly dipped into a hollow which, on excavation, proved to be a small chamber 4 feet square and 4 feet deep, right in the centre of the tower; but what its purpose was I cannot say. Only one question remained to be solved, and that was the discrepancy in the width of the east curtain wall, which is 11 feet wide at the rear of the east tower and only 7 feet 6 inches at its junction with the south tower. The explanation was found at the rear of the east tower, where, on the inside, the wall took a bend inwards.

The net result of the excavations has been that the whole ground-plan (fig. 1) of one of the most important Scottish mediæval fortresses has been laid bare. When regard is had to the defences on the outskirts, still to be traced in the deep ditches in the neighbouring fields, the conclusion must be come to that it was a formidable pile, and practically impregnable. The defences of the outer bailey have disappeared, but I presume they would be on the stockade principle,

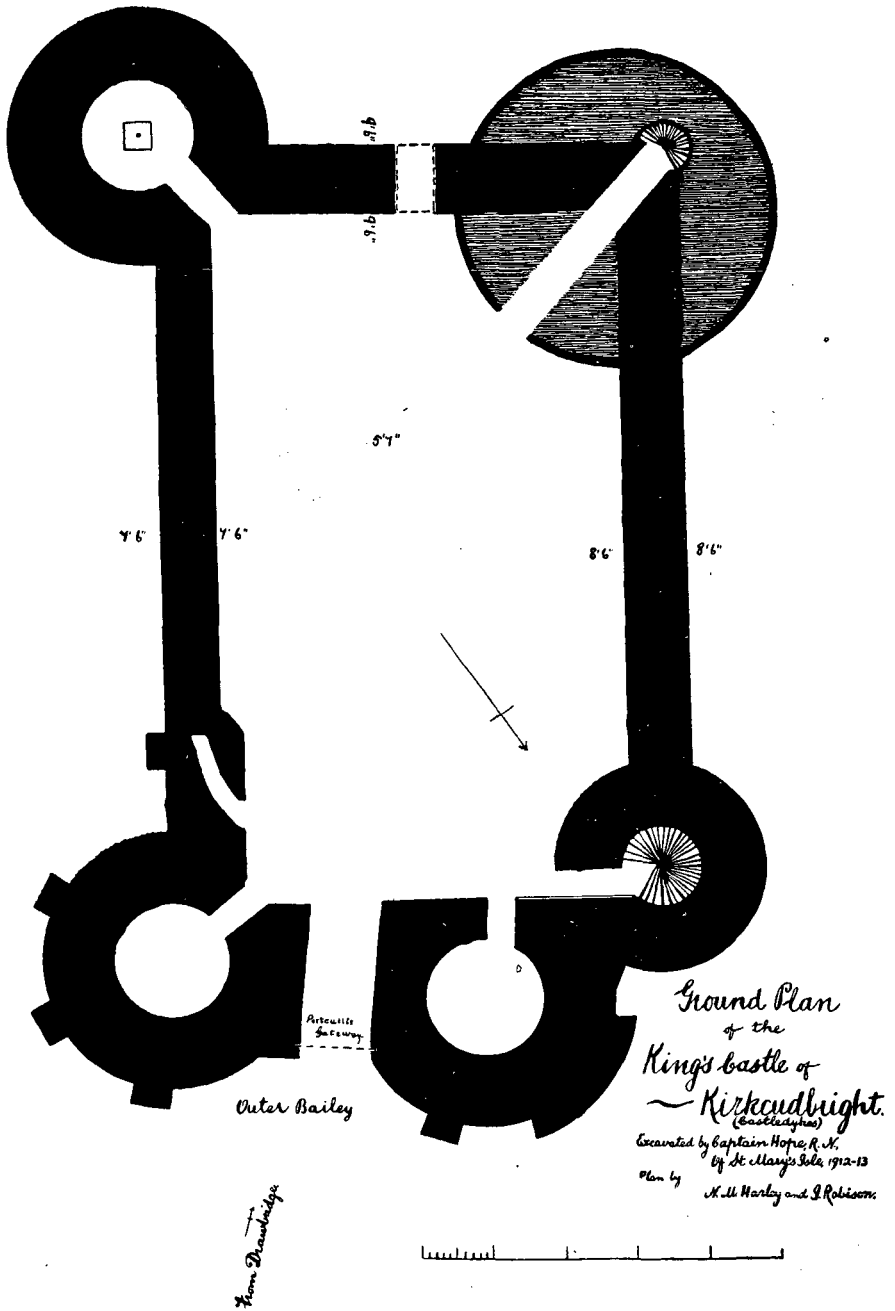


Fig. 1. Ground Plan of the Edwardian Castle, Kirkcudbright.

and if so, it is natural that no trace can now be got of them. Neither is there any trace of the drawbridge, although excavations in the moat at this point might reveal traces of supports. Another important discovery would be that of the well, which I conjecture to have been immediately behind the north tower; but probably this may also be got at some future time, and no doubt interesting relics will be found in its depths.

The following are the dimensions of the building, and they form an interesting comparison with Caerlaverock :—

	Ft.	Ins.
Length of building, including outer bailey	214	0
Length of building, excluding outer bailey	154	0
Width of building over portcullis towers and entrance gateway	85	0
Width of building over portcullis towers and entrance gateway, including small tower to the rear of the north tower	97	0
Width over west and south towers	107	0
Diameter of north, east, and south towers	36	6
Diameter of west tower	44	0

The dimensions of Caerlaverock Castle are :—

Width at entrance towers and gateway	64	0
Length along sides of triangle	152	0
Length on straight	141	0
Diameter of largest towers	26	0
Width at base of triangle	171	0

The ancient entrance is said to have been 11 feet inwards from the present entrance, making the original length, on the straight, 130 feet. It will be thus seen that the size of the King's Castle of Kirkcudbright compares very favourably with that of Caerlaverock Castle.

The present castle of Kirkcudbright was completed by Sir Thomas M'Lellan, father of the first Lord Kirkcudbright, in 1582, and it is very significant indeed that, five years previous to this, on 19th March 1577, Sir Thomas received a grant of the Castledykes from the burgh.

There can be little doubt that the local tradition that the present castle was partly built from the ruins of the ancient King's Castle is correct. The burgh must have resumed possession of the lands, and they were not finally alienated till the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the burgh exchanged these lands, reserving a right-of-way through them, for the lands bordering the river to the north of the railway station—Stirling Acres, Milnfats, Milncroft, and Claycroft—belonging to the Earl of Selkirk. Regarding the extent of the castle lands, it is difficult to state what it was, but, roughly speaking, it would include the ground between the town and a line drawn from Great Cross to about the head of the Sandside Bay.

NOTES ON RELICS RECOVERED DURING THE EXCAVATION.

By ALEXANDER O. CURLE, *Director of the Museum.*

The relics recovered during the course of the excavations described above are not very numerous, and for the most part consist of sherds of pottery, much broken, few pieces of which lend themselves to even partial reconstruction. They represent vessels of two classes—the glazed pitchers or jugs for holding liquids, and the unglazed, buff-coloured pots used in cooking. As the glaze is in great measure dependent on the colour of the clay out of which the vessel has been formed, the actual shades of colour are not of much importance, but the occurrence here may be noted of mottled green and yellow ware, dark green, brown, and black.

No vessel was capable of sufficient reconstruction for anything to be said about the shapes, but certain features are observable from the fragments which indicate a late thirteenth or early fourteenth century date for their manufacture.

The decoration has been largely produced by applied ornament. One piece of mottled green ware bears a wavy fillet, probably placed vertically on the vessel; a sherd of a hard, "tinkling" grey body covered with a brown glaze is crossed obliquely with a similar applied

fillet ; another small fragment of reddish ware covered with a brown glaze has placed vertically upon it a fillet with a toothed or notched surface, while the field is further decorated with small squarish impressions closely placed in parallel rows. There are, of a different fashion, several pieces which appear to have had round panels treated in a *champ-levé* style, from which rise groups of small rings each enclosing a central boss.

One small fragment is of a character of which there appears to be no previous record in Scotland. It is of thin buff ware, very light in weight and smooth in texture, and has been divided by narrow bands into compartments of green, buff, and orange colour, not applied in the form of a glaze. This piece of pot may be compared with a jug in the Guildhall Museum, London. In form that vessel is somewhat cylindrical above a deep, slightly expanded base, and has a large, narrow spout with a double ogee curve in profile. It is decorated with bands of colour, green and orange, outlined and diapered with darker colour, probably black, with a leaf-shaped ornament in the centre of a panel on each side, and, at the base of the handle, an ornament resembling a reversed *fleur-de-lis* in brown colour. The jug, which was found in Bishopsgate Street, measures $11\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height, $3\frac{3}{4}$ inches in diameter at base, and 4 inches at the mouth.¹ It is attributed to the thirteenth or fourteenth century. The peculiar form of the spout appears on another fragment from Castledykes, a spout of buff ware partially coated with a green glaze. A similar spout is to be seen on a pitcher in the Willet Collection at Brighton, illustrated in Professor Church's handbook, and attributed by him to the fourteenth century.

There is a fragment (fig. 2) bearing in relief the greater part of a figure of a circular brooch, or buckle, and pin, having slight equidistant prominences on the circle. The brooch measures about $2\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. In the Grey Collection, preserved in the Manchester Art

¹ *Catalogue, Guildhall Museum*, 1908, pt. lxvi. 2.

Gallery, is a vase of light-coloured clay, $10\frac{3}{4}$ inches in height, imperfect, and covered with an olive-green mottled glaze. From the bulge at the centre, where it has a diameter of $5\frac{3}{4}$ inches, it diminishes rapidly upwards and downwards, and finishes in the latter direction with a rather flat base, $5\frac{1}{2}$ inches in diameter. Above and below the centre it is encircled respectively by slightly raised mouldings, and resting on the upper one is a representation in relief of a circular brooch, or

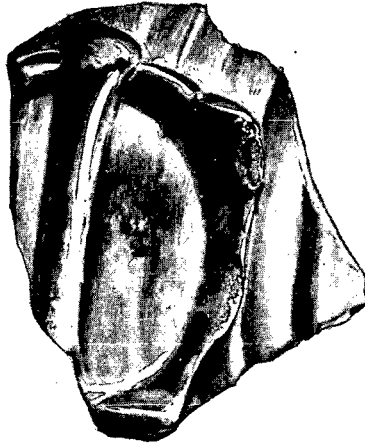


Fig. 2. Fragment of Pottery ornamented with a Brooch in relief.

buckle, $2\frac{3}{8}$ inches in diameter, on the front of which are shown four equidistant roundels, possibly representing jewels. This vessel was found in London.

Characteristic of the pottery of the early fourteenth century are two bearded masks (fig. 3), portions of the mouths of pitchers, indicating a diameter over all of $4\frac{3}{8}$ inches and $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches respectively. The body of the vessels has been of a buff colour, and has been coated with a glaze of a yellowish-green tint mottled with orange. These masks were probably attached to the neck to act as side-handles.¹

¹ Burlington Fine Arts Club—*Catalogue of a Collection of Early English Earthenware*, 1913.

Another unusual fragment, covered with a green glaze, has been a spout representing the head of a bird. The duct through it



Fig. 3. Masks on fragments of the lips of two Earthenware Pitchers.

is only $\frac{1}{4}$ inch in diameter, and it has probably belonged to a puzzle jug of some description.

As a rule, the bases of the handles found display, at the point of

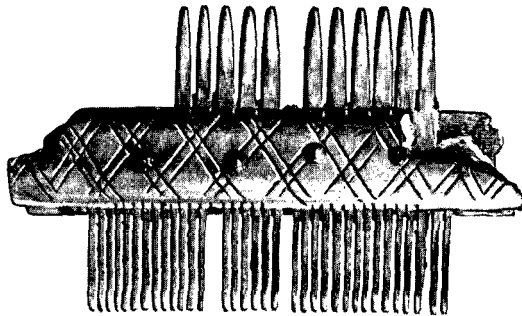


Fig. 4. Small-toothed Comb of Bone.

their junction with the body, deep leaf-shaped depressions ; two large handles are fluted at their upper extremities, and another, circular in section, is fluted, or reeded, its whole length on the upper surface and sides. The bottoms of the vessels are slightly convex, and the basal edges are marked with slight finger depressions at intervals,

caused by the pulling down of the clay before the vessel was fired so as to form struts to counteract any instability due to the convexity of the bottom. No portion of a bottom shows these markings continuous.

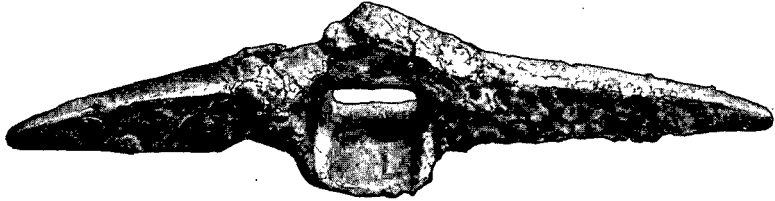


Fig. 5. Iron Pick for dressing Stones.

The following are the only other relics of importance :—

A small-toothed comb (fig. 4), $3\frac{5}{8}$ inches long, formed of a number of sections of bone, with very narrow teeth at one end and broader teeth at the other, kept in position by two plates of bone crossing them at right angles on either side, and riveted

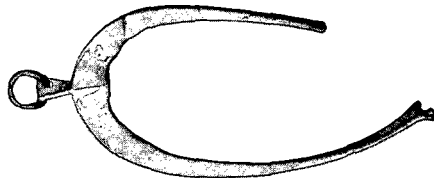


Fig. 6. Object of Brass, imperfect.

together. Incised lines on each of the plates form a diaper ornament along each side :

An iron knife dagger, imperfect at the point, tanged and triangular in section, $4\frac{7}{8}$ inches in extreme length :

A small iron pick (fig. 5), pointed to both ends, 6 inches long, such as might have been used for dressing stones :

An imperfect object of brass (fig. 6) of indeterminate use, $2\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, cut out of a flat plate, oval in outline, and with a ring for suspension at one end.