

I.

NOTE ON RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT KILDRUMMY CASTLE.

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Through the kind permission of Colonel James Ogston of Kildrummy, I had the opportunity, during the months of July and August of 1919, of conducting a series of excavations at the ruins of the ancient castle, whereby the foundations of the great gatehouse were laid bare, and other interesting features recovered.

This great and renowned fortress, which Cosmo Innes justly called "the noblest of northern castles," is strongly situated on an eminence bounded on two sides by a deep ravine known as Back Den, and isolated elsewhere by a ditch 80 feet wide and 25 feet deep. The castle stands on the site of an ancient territorial seat of the Mormæors of Mar, and the ditch has indications of an antiquity far greater than that of the buildings which it now encloses. The latter are the remains of the royal fortress erected by Gilbert de Moravia, Bishop of Caithness, between 1223 and 1245, at the orders of Alexander II., and entrusted—in the usual practice of the age—to the hereditary wardenship of the local feudal landholders, the Mormæors or Earls of Mar.

Kildrummy forms one of a chain of holds which controlled the great route northwards from Forfarshire over the "Mounth"—others on the line being Brechin, Aboyne, Loch Kinnord, Coull, Migvie, Strathbogie, Boharm, Rothes, Elgin, Duffus, Blervie, and Inverness, all of which existed in the thirteenth century. It stands just half way between the two ancient centres of Brechin and Elgin. In a map of the thirteenth century, the castle is represented as a great building of hewn stone, towered and battlemented, and south of it is marked the Capel Mounth Pass, with the words "hic unum passagium." There can be no doubt that its erection was connected with the disturbances which took place about this time in Morayshire. A formidable revolt was quelled here in 1228-9; in 1221, in 1228, in 1231, and in 1244 Alexander II. visited these parts. Bishop Gilbert was entrusted with full civil and military authority beneath the "Mounth"; and his duties included the erection of castles to extend the central power in these outlying districts. The building of Kildrummy completed the process of "Normanising" the ancient Celtic Earldom of Mar, and capturing it in the interests of the Crown.

The castle is one of the most splendid examples of a great mediæval fortress in Scotland, and is distinguished by its unusual size and architectural development. It bears a remarkable resemblance to

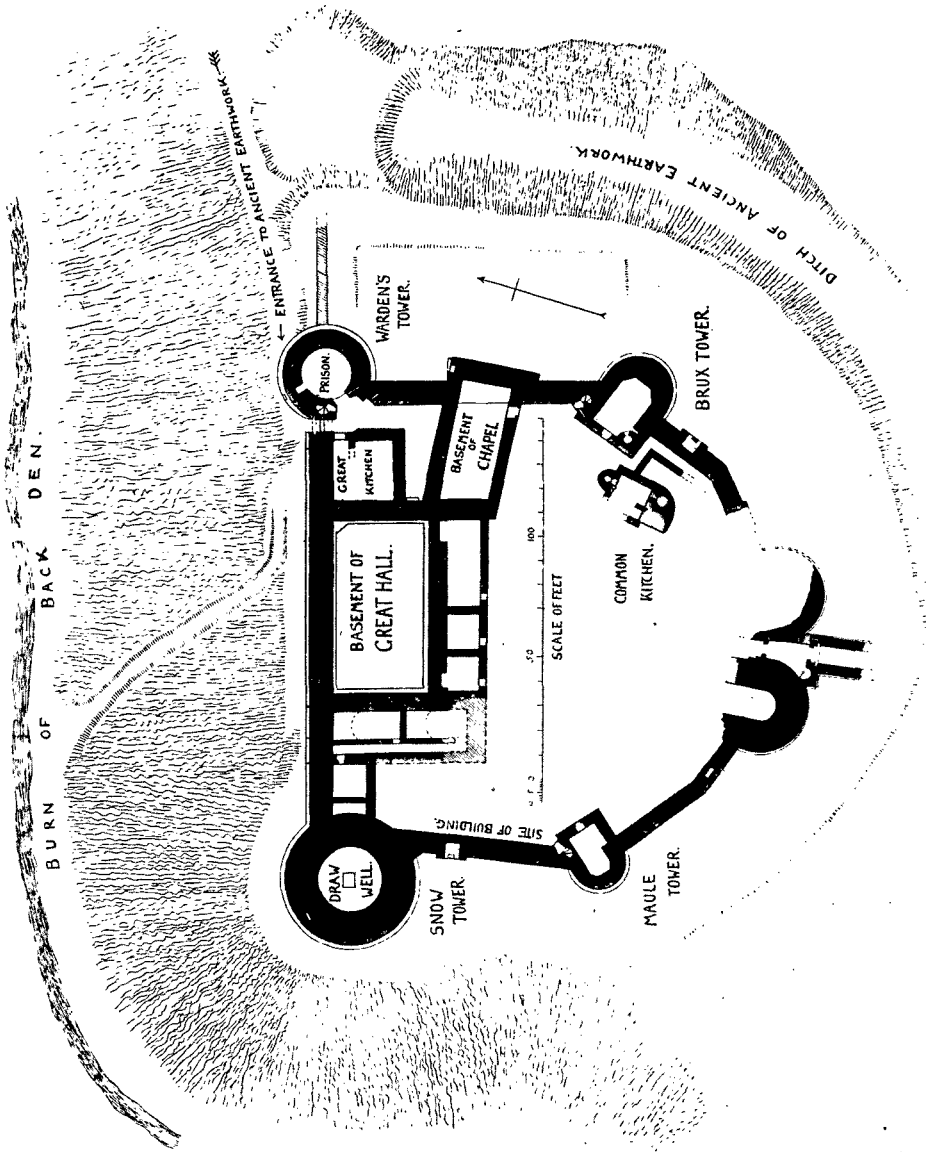


Fig. 1. Kildrummy Castle : ground plan.

Bothwell Castle on the Clyde, also a De Moravia fortress of the same period; and the two Scottish buildings have many points in common with the colossal Chateau de Coucy, near Laon in France, which was blown up by the Germans in the recent war. It should be noted that Alexander II. married in 1239 the Demoiselle Marie, daughter of Sieur Enguerrand, who built Coucy Castle. A close entente followed between the Scottish Royal Family and the house of Coucy, members of which

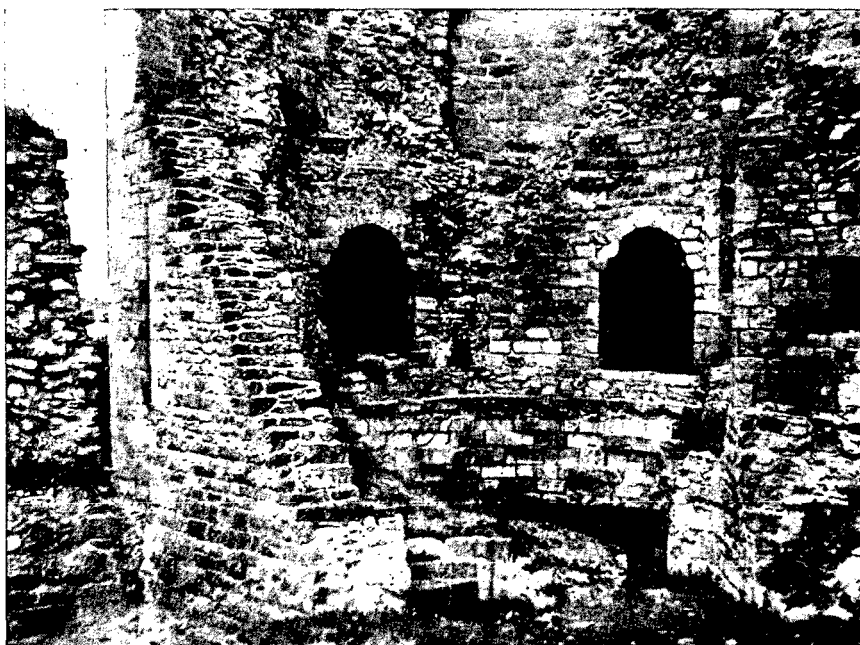


Fig. 2. Kildrummy Castle: interior of Warden's Tower.

frequently exchanged visits. Marie de Coucy herself accompanied Alexander on his last tour in Morayshire.

The ruins (see plan, fig. 1) consist of a high and massive wall of enceinte, enclosing a spacious court, and defended by six strong round towers, of which two flanked the great gateway in the south front, while a third at the north-west corner, much larger than the others, and known as the Snow Tower, was the donjon. The courtyard measures 190 feet east and west, by 175 feet north and south. The Snow Tower, 53 feet in diameter, is now a total ruin: it had five vaulted storeys, with galleries in the walls, and a trap-door was left in each vault to draw up water from a well in the basement. The gatehouse towers have likewise almost perished; of the other three,

the best preserved is the north-eastern or Warden's Tower, 37 feet in diameter, and still over 50 feet high. It has beautiful two-light pointed windows and large mural chambers (fig. 2). On the north side is a postern, with a portcullis slot and remains of a sunk passage, leading down Back Den. In the court are: the hall against the north curtain, measuring 71 feet 5 inches by 39 feet; the chapel on the east, 49 feet 7 inches by 18 feet, with its beautiful three-light window—an austere specimen of



Fig. 3. Kildrummy Castle: East Front from courtyard.

the early English style (figs. 3 and 4); a large common kitchen, with three ovens; and various other buildings now reduced to foundations. Against the north curtain, between hall and donjon, there was added about 1510 the Elphinstone Tower, a tall oblong keep with vaulted basement and corbie-steps. The outer walls and round towers, the hall and chapel, are undoubtedly thirteenth-century work, though all have been much altered; the west curtain, in particular, has been rebuilt with inferior masonry (fig. 5). The unusual size of the chapel, and the care taken to secure orientation by setting it obliquely in the east front, are doubtless due to the fact that the castle had an ecclesiastical founder. Splendid freestone ashlar, from a quarry in Back Den, cases the ancient portions: oblong and closely set elsewhere, it is composed of

cubical blocks with very wide joints in the Snow Tower, the masonry of which has a most strikingly Norman appearance, and in a church would be assigned without hesitation to the twelfth century. The outer walls are 9 feet thick, except in the donjon, where they attain a thickness of 13 feet 4 inches. Outside the west wall was the castle garden, and the burn in Back Den was dammed to form a fish pond and "plesauunce." Several farms in the vicinity, such as Gardener's



Fig. 4. Kildrummy Castle: interior of Chapel Window.

Hill, Cook's Hill, etc., indicate by their names their former connection with the establishment of the castle.

Kildrummy played an important part in the struggle for independence. On 31st July-1st August 1296, Edward I. paused at the castle on his way south from Elgin; in 1298 Wallace spent a night here; in 1303 Edward was again at Kildrummy. In 1305 Donald, Earl of Mar, succeeded as a minor, and was placed under his uncle, Robert Bruce, who thus controlled the castle at the time of his bid for the crown. On 10th February 1305, Edward, becoming aware of his wavering fidelity, directed Bruce "to place Kildrummy Castle in the keeping of one for whom he shall be responsible." After his defeat at Methven Bruce sent his Queen, along with his brother Nigel, to Kildrummy; but on the approach of the

English under Prince Edward, the Queen fled north, while Nigel remained to hold the castle. The ensuing siege, Nigel's heroic resistance, the burning of the castle by the blacksmith Osborne, and the tragic fate of the garrison are told with splendid vigour in Barbour's *Brus*. The castle fell before 13th September 1306, and the English, having breached the Snow Tower, abandoned the ruins. Donald, Earl of Mar, who had



Fig. 5. Kildrummy Castle: interior view of junction between Snow Tower and rebuilt west curtain.

been taken at Methven, was released after Bannockburn, and probably restored the castle on his return.

In 1332 David, the Anglophil Earl of Fife, was imprisoned in Kildrummy Castle. In 1335 it was held by Christian, Bruce's sister, and attacked by the Earl of Atholl, acting for Edward Baliol and the English faction. The siege was raised by the Regent Moray, who, as narrated by Wintoun, drew Atholl into battle at Culblean, where the Earl was defeated and slain (30th November 1335). The ruined old kirk of Kildrummy, which contains an Easter-sepulchre and other interesting features, was erected to commemorate this victory.

David II. was much at Kildrummy, in 1341 and 1342, in 1364, and again in 1365. In 1361, having quarrelled with Mar, he captured the

castle. In 1402 Sir Malcolm Drummond, consort of Isabel, Countess of Mar, was murdered by connivance of Alexander Stewart, Earl of Buchan, a natural son of the "Wolf of Badenoch." Two years later Stewart stormed Kildrummy and forced the Countess to marry him, receiving (12th August 1404) a charter of the Earldom of Mar from her. To appease public feeling, a solemn comedy was enacted at the castle on 9th September 1404, when Stewart, before a gathering of notables outside the gate, formally renounced the Earldom, and received it back in free gift from Countess Isabel, with reservation to her heirs. These proceedings were ratified by the weak king, Robert III., on 21st January 1405. The new Earl subsequently became one of the foremost patterns of chivalry of his time in Europe, and gained special renown in his own country by his repulse of the Highland onrush at Harlaw (24th July 1411). The arrangements for this campaign were matured at a conference in Kildrummy Castle the preceding Christmas.

On Stewart's death the Earldom was annexed to the Crown, in spite of the claims of Sir Robert Erskine, the nearest heir of Countess Isabel. In 1438 James II. visited the castle, and extensive repairs and additions were instituted. In 1442 Erskine stormed the castle, but was forced to give it up. The Crown continued to retain the Earldom of Mar in its own hands or those of its nominees, and bestowed the wardenship of the castle on a variety of personages, one of them being Cochrane, the favourite of James III. In 1451, in 1464, and again in 1468-69, further repairs were made. In 1507-8 large portions of the Mar estates, including the custody of the castle, were granted by James IV. to Alexander Elphinstone of that Ilk, who in 1509 became Lord Elphinstone. On 12th August 1513 the lands were erected into the barony of Kildrummy; the Mar title remained with the Crown. In 1531 the castle was burned by Strachan of Linturk. In 1565 Queen Mary, acknowledging the Erskine claim, conferred the Earldom of Mar upon John, sixth Lord Erskine. A protracted law-suit for Kildrummy Castle and estates ended in 1626 with the removal of the Elphinstones.

During the Civil War the castle was held for the King, and on 12th February 1654 it was captured, after two days' siege, by the Round-head Colonel Morgan. In 1689, after Killiecrankie, Dundee's Highlanders fired the castle rather than allow it to become a Government post. Part of it was habitable in 1715, when the Earl of Mar hatched within its walls the Jacobite venture of that year. Upon its collapse the estates were forfeited, and what was left of the Castle was plundered and dismantled. Thereafter it was used as a convenient quarry for the district, and immense quantities of the beautiful dressed stone were carted off in all directions, the material being used for erecting houses

as far distant as Corgarff. What remained was in evil case when the present proprietor bought the estate in 1898. Since then, however, repairs have been steadily pushed forward; and the whole of the north and east fronts have now been put in a thoroughly satisfactory condition, though much has still to be done on the other sides. Also, the interior has been almost cleared of rubbish, and the ruined walls of various buildings exposed and repaired. Such restorations as have been necessary to ensure the stability of the ruins, for example, in the chapel window and Elphinstone Tower, are executed with the highest skill and taste. All who are interested in our ancient buildings will feel deep gratitude to Colonel Ogston for his public spirit in rescuing this noble ruin from the dilapidation which menaced it.

The excavations under review lasted from 16th July to 14th August, and their chief result was the exposing of the gatehouse. Its foundations were previously buried in a waste of green mounds which gave no indication of the buildings entombed therein. The nature of these will be understood by reference to the plan (fig. 1). The walls of the west tower were found intact throughout its circumference, to a maximum height of four courses, or 2 feet 6 inches above the base course. Its junction with the foundations of the broken curtain on this side was revealed, showing that, as usual in mediæval castles, the tower had been completed before the curtain was built. The east tower has been more fortunate, and at one point exists to a height of ten courses, or a little over 8 feet. Owing to the presence of a large tree, it was impossible to excavate the whole circumference of this tower. Both are cased with the usual finely-dressed, close-jointed, oblong ashlar, and are 37 feet in diameter, or equal in size to the Warden's Tower. They lack the spreading base or batter of the other towers, but rise perpendicularly from a base course or scarcement 4 inches broad. This scarcement appears also on the adjoining west curtain, but 1 foot higher.

Within the enceinte the two towers appear to pass back and unite into a square rear-building like that of Bothwell Castle. The plan here was not fully recovered, but the interior of the west tower was penetrated, and found to be an oblong chamber, apparently some 25 feet long and 15 feet broad, with a semicircular apse in the round of the tower. Originally this chamber, like the basements of all the other towers except the donjon, was ceiled in wood; but later a barrel vault was inserted, with a semi-dome in the apse. Part of this has fallen away on the west side, exposing the vertical face of the old wall behind. The vault was found to be closely filled with dense rubble; and as its masonry is of the roughest workmanship, as if not meant to be seen, it is evident that the basement of the tower was vaulted and packed

solid, in order to render it defensible against the ram or mine. The interior of the east tower was not entered, and appears to be greatly destroyed. Deeply recessed between these two towers were found two projecting cheeks of masonry, about 3 feet long, carrying the jambs of a great gate, 5 feet 6 inches wide. Although this doubtless occupies the site of the original main entrance, it is clearly an insertion, evidently owing its origin to the very remarkable exterior works which the excavations disclosed in advance of the great thirteenth-century towers. These works consist of a long projecting barbican, containing a trance or passage of entry 9 feet wide, between walls 3 feet 10 inches thick, and, at their highest point, where the barbican meets the east tower, still remaining to a height of 7 feet above the base course, or 5 feet above the causeway within, which is cobbled and rises gently to the courtyard. The ashlar of these walls would be considered excellent in any other castle than Kildrummy. Close up against the east tower is a sally-port, 4 feet wide on the interior and 3 feet 2 inches outside, with splayed and rolled jambs and an exterior step. Its barhole, extending 7 feet on the south side, was revealed by a fracture in the wall; the sally-port itself is built up with massive, rugged masonry. One foot nine inches in advance of the sally-port, the trance has cheeks for a great gate, and outside them the chase of a portcullis, 5½ inches broad, and stopping 1 foot 3 inches above the cobbles, to allow space for the spikes of the grating. This outer or trance-gate is 25 feet in front of the inner gate between the round towers.

Directly opposite the sally-port a ruined newel stair, about 4 feet wide, is recessed in a projecting tower or turret rising from the ground, about 6 feet square, which fills the re-entrant angle between the barbican and the west tower. Its base course is very irregularly and rudely set out. This stair had led up to the portcullis room over the passage. The walls of the barbican are built up without bond against the ancient towers, whose circular faces, passing back into the straight inner passage, appear within. The freshness of these inner faces, which were protected by the addition of the barbican, contrasts markedly with the weather-beaten aspect of the towers outside.

In front of the portcullis groove the trance now extends some 18 feet, when it is abruptly broken off. Doubtless there was an outer gate, whence a gangway would drop on a timber bridge spanning the ditch. It is a curious thing that the whole of the north wall of the barbican, including the stair-turret, is constructed out of much more massive ashlar than the south wall, though lacking the regularity and beauty of the thirteenth-century masonry in the round towers. The passage between these is not quite in line with the trance, but its gateway is in

line with the trance and not with the passage which it defends. Also this gateway has no portcullis, and the projecting cheeks in which it is placed are evidently insertions, that on the south side being very irregularly built, while the walls of the ancient towers here have been refaced with poor rubble. Evidently when the barbican was built, the thirteenth-century gateway, which must have had a portcullis, was taken out, and a new and narrower gateway, without a portcullis, was inserted in the line of the trance. At the same time the basements of the ancient towers were vaulted and packed against the operations of the sapper. Some remains of the doorway which had originally led from the entrance passage into the west tower were discovered behind the inner gate; it appeared to have been masked inside by the inserted vaulting.

The whole arrangement of this barbican strongly recalls that of the great forework which was added to Rothesay Castle in 1518-20. There is the same long passage with inner and outer gates, having a sally-port on one side and a stair (at Rothesay it is straight) on the other. The works at Rothesay, however, are on a grander scale, giving space enough for guard-rooms on the ground floor, and an ample hall over the pend—features which can have had no counterpart at Kildrummy, which also lacks the huge garderobe-tower that is so striking a feature of the Rothesay barbican. There is also a considerable resemblance between these works at Kildrummy and the barbican which was added by Richard II. to the gateway of the inner ward at Porchester Castle in Hampshire.

There can be little doubt that the addition of the trance, the remodeling to suit it of the ancient gateway, and the vaulting of the round towers, were part of the extensive works carried out at Kildrummy Castle in 1438, payments for which are preserved in the *Exchequer Rolls* (vol. v. pp. 57-59). It will be remembered that the castle had just been taken over into the direct keeping of the Crown, and that in the same year James II. visited it, when the occasion was doubtless taken for thoroughly overhauling the fabric and making important additions. We have notices of activity in the quarry of Kildrummy, of payments for carriage of stone to the castle, and for hire of workmen employed in building. Thomas Blak and one Kemlok are mentioned as the masons, and Ingerame was the carpenter, under whose directions the chapel was re-roofed—orders for tiles and nails to this purpose are preserved. Large quantities of iron were bought in Aberdeen, and at Kildrummy were made into "instruments of work" by the smith of the castle, to whom various payments are entered. Four great iron bolts were fixed upon the new gates. It is also recorded that a stone chimney was renewed; and the whole operations, we are told, lasted for six weeks. At the

same time the castle-mill was repaired and the accounts of the grange audited.

In addition to the diggings at the gatehouse the excavators also opened the great well in the Snow Tower. Local tradition has it that this tower received its name from its white masonry, but there can be no doubt that the word is a corruption of the Gaelic *snuadh*, water, the name meaning simply "well-tower": Barbour in the fourteenth century speaks of it as "Snawdown," a name which, for want of the right interpretation, has caused not a little worry to his commentators. It is said that the well is 200 feet deep, and it must certainly be carried down as far as the level of the burn in Back Den, which cannot be much less than 100 feet below the terreplein of the castle. The well was found to be 6 feet square, hewn out of the solid rock, and was cleared out to a depth of some 15 feet. Below the mass of ruins which had fallen from the surrounding walls in comparatively recent times, the shaft was choked with fine percolated earth, interspersed with fragments of masonry. At the level where the digging stopped, this earth began to be heavily charged with ashes, and larger portions of burnt wood were taken out—perhaps relics of the fire in 1689.

Two large garderobe drains were also uncovered, one in the west curtain beside the Snow Tower, the other in the projecting north shoulder of the chapel. In exposing the latter flue it was found that a line of foundation runs under the north wall of the chapel, at right angles with the east curtain; from which it would appear that the original intention was to build the chapel square with the curtain, but that this was abandoned in favour of a correct orientation.

A remarkable feature of this castle is the fact that its east curtain is built at a distance of nearly 80 feet back from the very ancient enclosing ditch (fig. 6). On the wide area thus left a formidable attack might easily have been organised against the curtain, where the great chapel window must have proved a weak point. It seemed highly unlikely that this area could have been left undefended; and the probability that there was here an exterior curtain or chemise on the edge of the scarp was strengthened by the representation of a wall of ancient aspect, running outwards from the Warden's Tower, in an old engraving; and also by the fact that there was formerly a postern, now built up, between this tower and the chapel. Accordingly digging was started at this point, with the result that the foundations of a wall 3 feet thick, roughly built of partly coursed rubble, were uncovered, extending from the tower, along the edge of Back Den, almost to the scarp of the ditch, where it was lost.

Very few relics were discovered in course of these diggings. In and

about the entrance were obtained several fragments of pottery and rusted iron; two great iron nails (found in the barhole of the sally-port); and a few bits of ancient glass. Several of the massive roofing slabs, composed of hard schist $\frac{1}{2}$ inch thick, with great round holes for wooden pins, were also unearthed. Considerable quantities of bones were obtained, mainly of the ox and horse; a complete skeleton of the latter



Fig. 6. Kildrummy Castle: north end of Ditch and Warden's Tower.

was dug out near the sally-port. From the exterior of the west tower came a young boar's tusk. Here there were also deposits of ash and fragments of charred wood. The only relic obtained from the well was a much rusted large iron hinge.

In concluding this notice, I desire to express my warmest thanks to Colonel Ogston for permission to conduct the excavations, and for his interest and support throughout; to the gentlemen whose financial assistance rendered the undertaking possible; to my friend Mr William Norrie for his excellent photographs; and last, but by no means least, to the splendid corps of Boy Scouts by whose enthusiasm, in default of regular labour, the arduous work of digging was most efficiently carried out.