

## IV.

THE HOUSE OF SCHIVAS, ABERDEENSHIRE. BY J. FENTON  
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Situated amid well-wooded policies in the parish of Tarves, about  $2\frac{1}{2}$  miles south-east of the village of Methlick, stands the House of Schivas, the residence of Major Arthur Brooke (fig. 1).

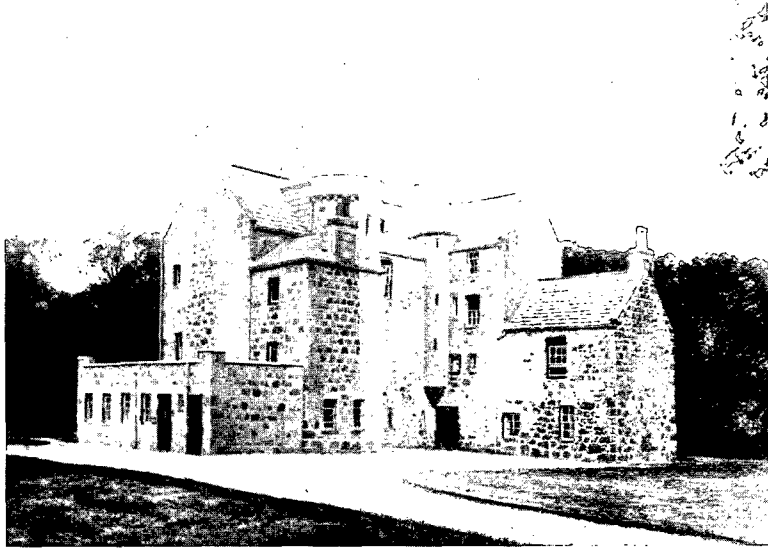


Fig. 1. House of Schivas, Aberdeenshire: View from North-east.

The exact date of the building of the original portion, now incorporated in a modern mansion, is unknown, but the plan is undoubtedly that of a sixteenth-century "house of fence" (fig. 2).

Built on what is known as the "L-plan," with the wing slightly projected so as to command the main building on two sides, the House of Schivas is almost identical in arrangement with the south wing of Tolquhon Castle, built in 1584, and standing in the same parish.<sup>1</sup>

The entrance doorway, 6 feet high by 3 feet 3 inches wide, is in the re-entrant angle of the wing, and is defended by four shot-holes—two in the main building, one in the wing, and one in the staircase tower of the main building at the second-floor level.

<sup>1</sup> For description of Tolquhon Castle refer to *Aberdeen University Review*, March 1925, by W. Douglas Simpson, M.A., D.Litt.

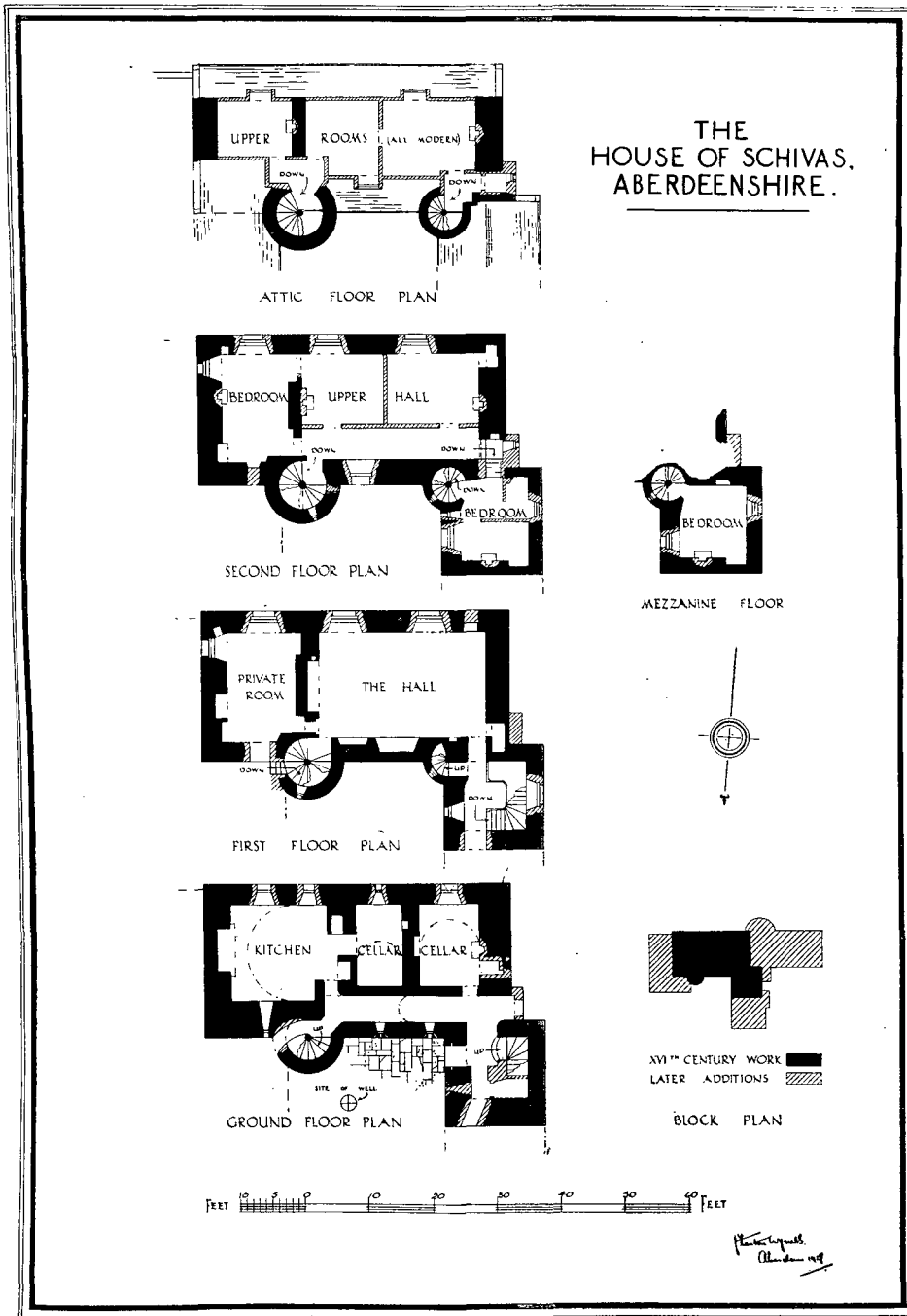


Fig. 2. House of Schivas: Plan of Floors.

The shot-holes are particularly interesting, being exactly similar to those at Tolquhon Castle, already referred to. The westmost shot-hole in the main building is circular inside, has three circular orifices outside, one forward and two diagonal, and a loop above. The eastmost shot-hole in the main building is also circular inside, is divided into four diamond-shaped orifices outside, two forward and two diagonal, and has a loop above; the shot-hole in the wing being similar, but having the loop built up. The shot-hole in the staircase tower takes the form of a plain circular orifice, splayed within, and with a loop above, cunningly placed so as to cover the doorway (fig. 3).

The positions of the bar-holes of the entrance door are preserved by two recesses left in the modern panelling of the door jambs.

A barrel-vaulted passage, lit by two loops, leads to the kitchen and two cellars.

The kitchen, at the east end of the passage, measures 17 feet 5 inches by 14 feet 6 inches, and has a barrel-vaulted ceiling. It contains a large, open fireplace, 7 feet 9 inches wide, while in the north wall one of the original loops still remains. The wall here attains a thickness of about 5 feet 9 inches. There are two recesses, one in the west wall and one in the south wall.

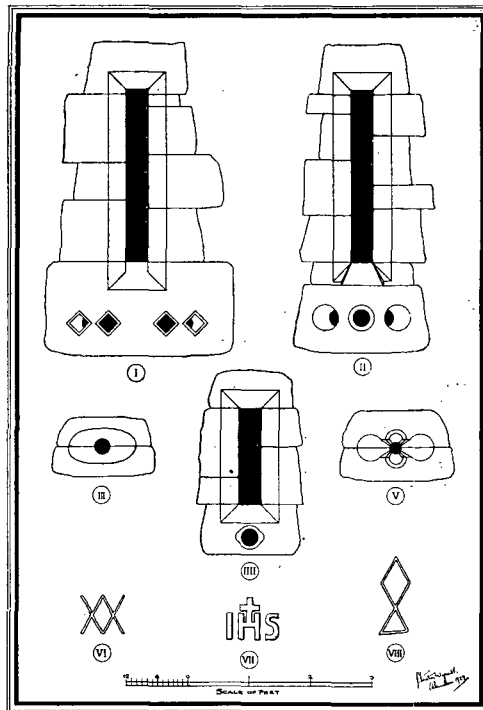


Fig. 3. House of Schivas.

- I. Eastmost shot-hole in main building.
- II. Westmost shot-hole in main building.
- III. Shot-hole in east cellar.
- IIII. Shot-hole in staircase tower of main building.
- V. Shot-hole in west cellar.
- VI. Mason's mark on jamb of kitchen fireplace.
- VII. Carved symbols on keystone of altar recess in hall.
- VIII. Mason's mark on risers of stair in re-entrant angle of wing and occurring throughout the building.

The recess in the south wall presents some difficulty, as its original purpose is not quite clear. It may have been a private mural staircase giving direct communication between the kitchen and the private room or hall on the floor above. The recess is entered by a door 4 feet 1 inch high by 2 feet wide, stepped up 1 foot 9 inches above the level of the kitchen floor, extending into the thickness of the wall about 5 feet 2 inches and upwards about 7 feet. Distinct traces of the

charring caused by the fire which completely gutted the house in the year 1900 can be seen here.

Opening off the kitchen is a barrel-vaulted cellar containing an aumbry in the west wall. The second or westmost cellar, which is entered from the passage, is also barrel-vaulted, with a recess in the east wall, and a mural cupboard, possibly a built-up loop in the west wall. Both cellars have shot-holes below their windows. The shot-hole in the east cellar has a plain circular orifice splayed without, while the shot-hole in the west cellar has three circular orifices splayed without (fig. 3).

At the east end of the passage, opposite the kitchen door, a round tower with a newel staircase 2 feet 10 inches wide establishes communication between the kitchen and the hall on the floor above. This stair is carried up to the top floor, thereby serving all floors in turn, and is well lit by loops.

The principal staircase occupies the wing. The present staircase is of wood and of recent date, but traces of the original stone staircase can still be seen below. Starting opposite the entrance door it ascends to the first floor only, access to the upper floors being obtained by a newel staircase corbelled out in the re-entrant angle of the wing, and by the newel staircase already referred to in the preceding paragraph.

The hall is the principal room on the first floor, measuring 17 feet 2 inches wide by 26 feet 6 inches long. It contains a large stone fireplace 6 feet 7 inches wide; the jambs are the original ones, with a half-engaged roll moulding, but the lintel stones are modern. In the south ingo of the fireplace is an aumbry checked for a door. The room is lit by two large windows in the south wall, to the west of which is a built-up window, now a mural cupboard. In the west wall is a garderobe formed in the thickness of the wall, and in the north wall are two recesses, the eastmost one probably a built-up window, and the other a deep arched recess with the letters IHS and a cross carved on the keystone of the arch<sup>1</sup> (fig. 3). There is little doubt that its purpose was an altar recess or oratory, as numerous examples of such

<sup>1</sup> "The Grays were of the Roman Catholic persuasion, and what is now (1842) the dining-room of the mansion had been their private chapel. It contains a recess where the altar had formerly stood, and where the cross still remains, with the motto IHS." (From *Buchan*, by Rev. J. B. Pratt, M.A., LL.D., revised in 1901 by Robert Anderson, p. 432.)

"To this account (see above) of the House of Schivas we have no objection to make, except that it seems rather a poor foundation for the notion that the dining-room had been formerly the private chapel, because it contained a crucifix, along with IHS, in a recess, more particularly as the recess is in the north wall of the room, where one would hardly expect to find an altar erected. The cross and the letters have now disappeared, and the recess is occupied by a wardrobe." (From Report on Visit to Schivas, by Jas. Spence, in *Transactions of Buchan Field Club*, 1892-5, p. 242.)

altar recesses occur throughout the country in castles of the same period as Schivas.

A door to the east of the two recesses leads to the newel staircase giving direct access to the kitchen below, while a door to the west of the recesses opens on to the landing at the top of the main staircase and the newel staircase in the re-entrant angle of the wing. This staircase begins at the first-floor landing and ascends to the top floor. It is well lit by loops, and is 2 feet 4 inches wide. Several masons' marks can be seen incised on the risers of the stair (fig. 3).

Opening off the hall is a private or withdrawing-room, measuring 10 feet 2 inches by 17 feet 10 inches. It possesses the original moulded stone fireplace 3 feet 6 inches wide, and an aumbry, checked for a door, in the ingo of the window in the east wall. A door has been slapped in the north wall to communicate with the kitchen and servery, as the private room is now used as a dining-room.

Both the hall and the private room have fine panelled walls of Sequoia wood and decorated plaster ceilings embodying the Gordon coat-of-arms. These decorations were carried out when the building was restored for the Earl of Haddo, a former owner.

The second floor is comprised of three bedrooms in the main building and a bathroom suite in the wing. The original arrangement may possibly have been an upper hall and two bedrooms. In the east bedroom is an aumbry, as in the private room below, and a cupboard, possibly a built-up window, in the north wall; while in the westmost bedroom a garderobe is formed in the thickness of the west wall. The third bedroom, which occupies the space between the east and west bedrooms, shows no feature of interest.

A door has been slapped between the main building and the wing, giving access to the bathroom suite. This suite, originally a bedroom, was reached by the newel staircase in the re-entrant angle of the wing, and had a fireplace and cupboard in the north wall. A modern window provides light for the stair-landing here.

The top floor, occupying the main building only, consists of three bedrooms, all of which are modern. They are reached either by the newel staircase in the main building or by the staircase in the re-entrant angle of the wing.

Between the top floor and the floor below is a mezzanine floor in the wing only. It consists of a bedroom with a fireplace and recess in the north wall and a recess in the south wall.

The exterior of the house has little decoration (fig. 1). The entrance doorway is finely moulded, and, in the wall above, a moulded stone recess, now empty, is provided for the family coat-of-arms.

The corbelling out of the staircase in the re-entrant angle of the wing is worthy of note, constituting a fine example of a decorative feature, arising out of a constructional necessity, so typical of Scottish mediæval architecture (fig. 1).

With a few exceptions, the windows have all been rebuilt or enlarged, but, where possible, the old stones have been used. The original windows had a 7-inch reveal, with a 3-inch splay all round.

All the roofs are modern and also the stone parapet of the staircase tower in the main building.

Although the building has been greatly altered and added to at

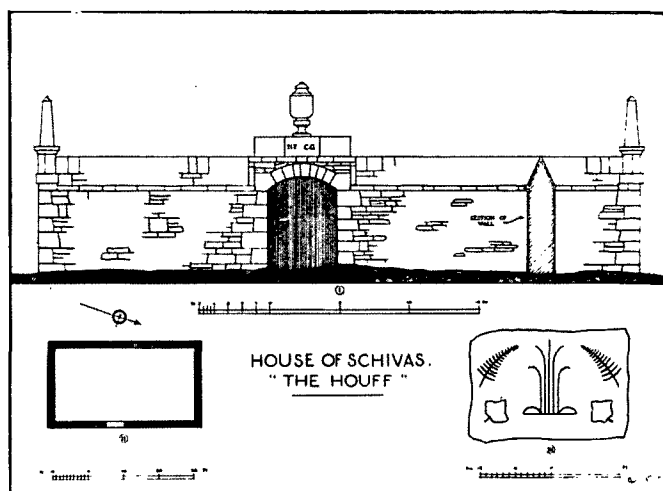


Fig. 4. House of Schivas: "The Houff"; east Elevation, Plan, and incised Stone.

different times, and despite inevitable adaption to suit modern convenience, the House of Schivas still remains a fine example of a fortified mansion of the late sixteenth century.

Before leaving the house it is interesting to note that, when the building was being reconstructed after the fire, several circular stone steps leading down to a well were discovered in the court opposite the front door (fig. 2). Unfortunately they were covered in, to give better access to the front door.

About 110 yards to the south of the house, almost entirely surrounded by trees, stands "The Houff" or burial-ground of Schivas (fig. 4, diagrams I. and II.). It measures 39 feet 7 inches by 20 feet 7 inches internally, and is enclosed by a wall 7 feet 6 inches high. An arched doorway forms the entrance, and above it is a large stone urn, while

below, on the blocking course, are the initials H. F. & C. G. (Hugh Forbes and Christian Garden, *circa* 1770), indicating the founders of "The Houff." On the top of the wall, at the four corners, are large stone obelisks.

All trace of any stones or slabs that may have marked the graves have disappeared, but an incised stone now converted into a seat opposite the entrance door of the dwelling-house may possibly have come from "The Houff" (fig. 4).

The garden of Schivas is worthy of note, being over 1 acre in extent and entirely surrounded by a massive stone wall, 11 feet high and about 2 feet thick. It is situated about 76 yards west of the dwelling-house, and is entered by three gateways in the east, west, and south walls.

No description of Schivas would be complete without mentioning the Mary Gray Tree. This tree, growing about 100 yards north-east from the entrance door of the house, is a remarkably large and beautiful plane; it was planted, according to tradition, by Mary Gray, a daughter of the family that built Schivas. In its immediate vicinity are some particularly fine beeches.

#### HISTORICAL NOTE.

At an early period the property of Schivas seems to have been in the possession of a family taking their name from the place. A family called Lipp is said to have succeeded through marriage with the heiress of Schivas of that ilk (*Collections on the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff*, p. 334). They were succeeded in the fifteenth century by a branch of the family of Maitland, which ended in two co-heiresses, who in 1467 resigned the property to George, Lord Gordon. Following upon this on 18th June in the same year there is a royal grant of the territories of Scheves to George, Lord Gordon (*Antiquities of the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. iii. p. 68; *cf.* J. M. Bulloch, *The House of Gordon*, vol. i. pp. 9-10): in 1490 he makes over the lands and barony to his natural son William Gordon (*ibid.*, p. 68); but no castle is mentioned. William Gordon of Scheves appears frequently as a witness to local writs between 1505 and 1509 (*ibid.*, pp. 64, 89, 151, 224, 340, 590). In the latter year we find the first mention of a new owner in Thomas Gray "of Scheves" (*ibid.*, p. 421); but the Gordon interest was evidently not exhausted, for, on 27th November 1512, William Gordon—designated "of Scheves" so late as 1511 (*ibid.*, p. 558)—sells to Alexander Gray, burgess of Aberdeen, the lands of Newtoun of Scheveze, in the barony of Scheveze (*ibid.*, pp. 70-1). The matter is obscure, for, although in

1548 the "landis and baronie of Schiues" belonged to "the lard of Gicht" (*Collections, ut supra*, p. 116), yet even as late as 1563 a Sir George Gordon of Schives is mentioned (*Antiquities, ut supra*, vol. iii. p. 550). He is frequently referred to between 1530 and 1568 (cf. *Miscellany of the Spalding Club*, vol. iv. p. 142). It should be noted that in 1681 we have Gicht *alias* Shives (*Antiquities, ut supra*, vol. iii. p. 559); while in 1511 Mikle Gicht and Litill Gicht are mentioned as portions of the Barony of Scheves (*ibid.*, p. 558)—so that confusion with the more famous Gicht Castle, in the parish of Fyvie, is to be avoided in reading these writs (but cf. Bulloch, *op. cit.*, p. 103, footnote).

By the end of the sixteenth century, at all events, the Grays were firmly established; and it would appear to have been by them that the existing castle was erected. They were staunch adherents of the ancient faith (*Collections*, p. 334)—a circumstance which doubtless accounts for the quasi-ecclesiastical details in the hall. I have not been able to find any mention of the castle prior to 1681, in which year the tower, fort, manor-place of Schives is noted in a writ (*Antiquities, ut supra*, vol. iii. p. 559). It seems to have played no part in the disturbances of the seventeenth century. By 1721 the property had passed to the Forbeses (*Macfarlane's Geographical Collections*, vol. i. p. 43): thereafter it was for long in the hands of the Earls of Aberdeen.

In 1512 the "Chapelton of Scheues" is on record (*Antiquities, ut supra*, vol. iii. p. 70): it was held by John Gordon of Lumger under Patrick Gordon of Methlick as overlord. In 1678 the "shady third part of Newtown of Shives," mentioned above, *sub anno* 1511, was held by Richard Maitland immediately in chief of Sir George Gordon of Gicht (*i.e.* in Fyvie, of course) and Robert Irvine of Fedderat "or either of them" (*ibid.*, pp. 75-6). Possibly this Richard Maitland was a representative of the ancient Maitlands of Schivas.

It is significant that the names Fedderat Pot and Fedderat Cairn should still be preserved in the neighbourhood of Schivas.

In concluding this paper I desire to thank two successive owners whose interest I have enjoyed, Mr James Burr, Methlick, and Major Brooke, both of whom readily granted facilities for making the survey. I am indebted to W. Douglas Simpson, M.A., D.Litt., F.S.A.Scot., the Library, King's College, Aberdeen, who has furnished me with the Historical Note and given me much helpful criticism in preparing my description. I am obliged to Messrs G. J. Anderson and A. F. Ross, who assisted me in making the survey. To the *Aberdeen Press and Journal* I am indebted for the photograph in fig. 1; and to Dr W. Legge Stephen, Methlick, for the great assistance he has given me.