

## IV.

LESMOIR CASTLE AND THE CHURCH OF ESSIE: WITH SOME FURTHER NOTES ON AUCHINDOIR. BY W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, M.A., D.LITT., F.S.A.SCOT.

The following paper will give an account of the associated church and castle site at Lesmoir, in the Aberdeenshire parish of Rhynie; and will also include some additional materials which I have gleaned since the publication of my paper on "Craig Castle and the Kirk of Auchindoir" in *Proceedings*, vol. lxiv. pp. 48-96.

In that paper I pointed out the early importance of the Essie site on one of the ancient highways (see Map, fig. 1) leading through the hills from Mar into Moray, and explained how this was no doubt the reason why the place became the scene of the defeat and death of Macbeth's stepson, Lulach the Fatuous, on 19th March 1058:—

*"Fata viri fuerant in Strathbolgyne apud Esseg:  
Heu! sic incaute Rex miser occubuit."*<sup>1</sup>

As in the case of the parallel road from Auchindoir into the Cabrach, so also the great antiquity of the Rhynie-Essie road is revealed by the archæological remains with which it is associated (see Key-map, fig. 2). The cup-marked stones at Scurdargue,<sup>2</sup> the cup-marked stones and the two earth-houses at Balhinny, the earth-house in Glencoe, the large assemblage of cairns at Milduan,<sup>3</sup> and various prehistoric burials found along the line of the road, prove that the valley was fully inhabited in early times; nor must we forget that the whole series of ancient roads in the district is dominated by the great vitrified fort on the Tap o' Noth. As I pointed out in my former paper, the introduction of Christianity in these parts seems to have been effected by St Moluag from Lismore in the later sixth century, his name being associated with the site still known as Clochmaloo, Moluag's Stone, on the south flank of the Tap: the former presence of a sculptured cross seems to be vouched for by the name Corsehills, west of Milltown of Noth.<sup>4</sup> About a mile south-east of Essie Church is a farm called Templand, known in the seventeenth

<sup>1</sup> Wyntoun, *Original Chronicle*, ed. F. J. Amours, vol. iv. p. 305.

<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. xvi. pp. 343-5.

<sup>3</sup> See Dr James Macdonald, *Place Names in Strathbogie*, pp. 253, 265, 274-8. The O.S. Map (Aberdeenshire, 6-inch, Sheet 42, N.E.) marks the sites of burials at Maiden Hillock, south-west of Lesmoir, and at Brae of Essie.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 253.

century as the Temple-lands or Templar-lands of Essie;<sup>1</sup> this was anciently a property of the Knights Templar. There was also a chapel site at

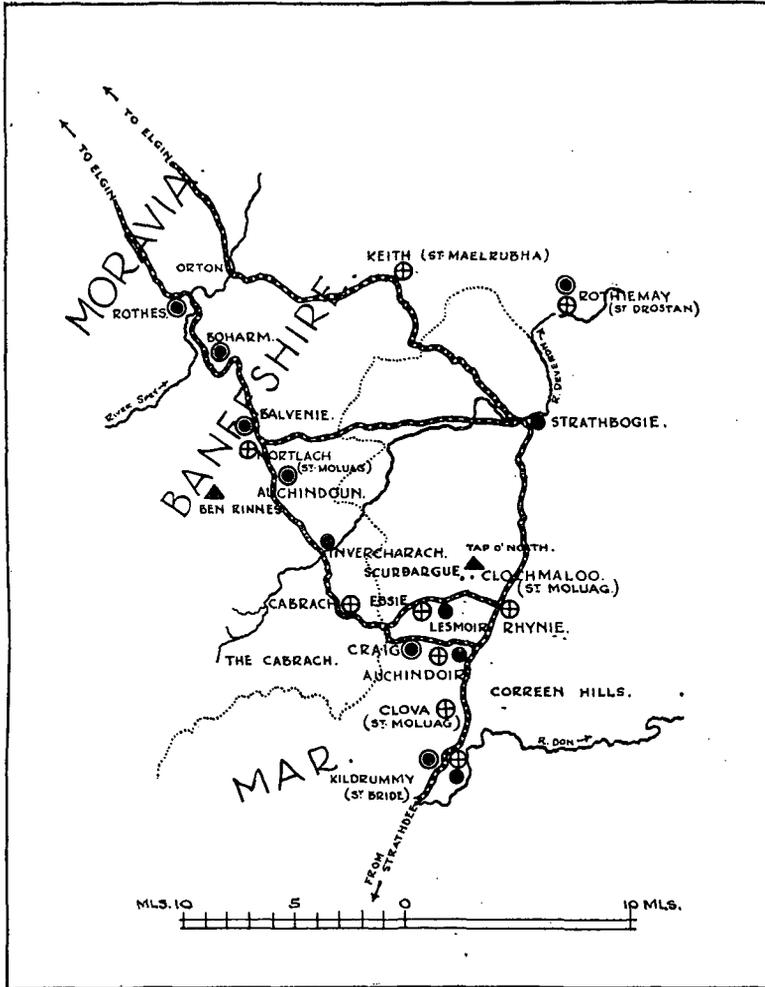


Fig. 1. Map of the Early Routes from Mar into Moray.

(NOTE.—*Mottes* are indicated by a dot; stone castles by a circled dot; churches by a circled cross.)

Chapel Cairn, near Finglenny, in the western portion of the glen:<sup>2</sup> near

<sup>1</sup> "Temple-lands of Essie," 1600, see *The House of Gordon*, ed. J. M. Bulloch, vol. ii. p. 191 (39) (for the pagination, see *infra*, p. 90, note 1); "*Terrae templariae* of Essie and Fulyiement" (Wheedlemont, see *Proceedings*, vol. lxiv. p. 53), 1610—*Registrum Magni Sigilli*, 1609–20, No. 337.

<sup>2</sup> Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

to this is Bell-hillock, the mound on which the chapel bell was hung from a tree, as at Rhynie, Kildrummy, and other places.<sup>1</sup>

Essie appears first as a separate parish, with its own church and church lands, in 1227;<sup>2</sup> in the fifteenth century it was for a time conjoined with Rhynie, but early in the following century it had again become

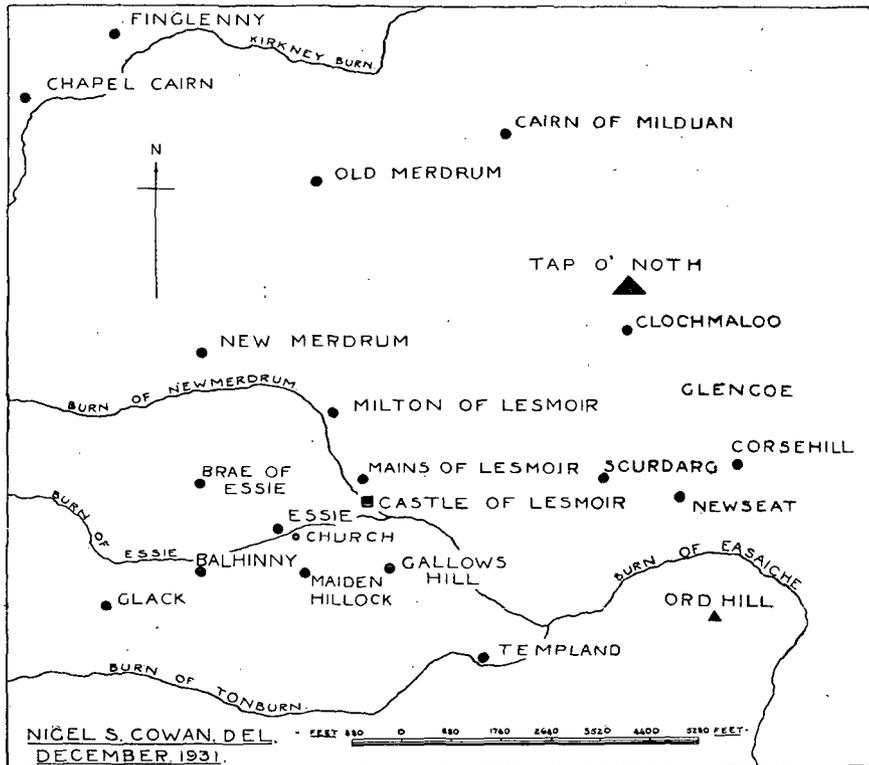


Fig. 2. Lesmoir Castle: Key-map.

a separate charge. Between 1536 and 1544 Master William Gordoune, parson or rector of Essie, is on record<sup>3</sup>—he having doubtless been a member of the Lesmoir family. The topographical phenomena are the same as those found at Auchindoir, pointing clearly to the organisation of a parish out of a manor during the Anglo-Norman penetration in the twelfth or early thirteenth century. As at Auchindoir, church and castle are found side by side: but whereas at Auchindoir, when the Gordons

<sup>1</sup> Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 270; cf. my *The Castle of Kildrummy*, p. 273.

<sup>2</sup> *Registrum Episcopatus Moraviensis*, p. 22.

<sup>3</sup> Macdonald, *op. cit.*, p. 271; *Records of Aboyme*, p. 68.

arrived in the sixteenth century, they rehoused themselves higher up the glen,<sup>1</sup> the Lesmoir branch of the family adhered to the old Norman site. The genealogical table which Dr J. M. Bulloch contributed to our *Proceedings*<sup>2</sup> in his account of the family of Craig shows how the common ancestor of the Gordons of Craig and of Lesmoir was "Jock of Scurdargue," who settled here early in the fifteenth century. Scurdargue is a large farm immediately east of Essie: but there is no trace or record of a castle or manor house ever having existed on the spot, and I agree with the late Dr James Macdonald in his opinion that the residence of Jock of Scurdargue was the early manorial centre at Lesmoir, as he is frequently referred to as the laird of "Essie and Scordarg."<sup>3</sup> Lesmoir is, of course, the *lios mor* of Essie, the "big fortified enclosure"—a name doubtless applied by the Celtic inhabitants to the early Norman castle. In a retour of 1642 it is specifically stated that Lesmoir was the manor place of the lands of Essie.<sup>4</sup> Moreover, the Balbithan MS. records that Jock of Scurdargue himself "died in Essy and was interred in the Kirk of Essy," and that his natural son Alexander, ancestor of the Buckie Gordons, as also the latter's son John, were styled "of Essy"; and that the former was buried in the church there beside his father, Jock.<sup>5</sup>

No record appears to exist of the early Norman or Normanised lords of Essie, to whom the lay-out of the manor with its associated church and castle sites must have been due. But Mr Thomas Innes of Learney, Carrick Pursuivant, has kindly drawn my attention to an unpublished charter, *circa* 1256-80, in which the Kyrktoun of Essy is granted by Duncan de Fernyndrach (Frendraught in Formartine) to Archibald, son and heir of the deceased John de Aberkerdour (Aberchirder).<sup>6</sup> The

<sup>1</sup> An exact parallel to the state of affairs in Auchindoir occurs at Boyne in Banffshire. Here the old castle of the Thanedom, known as the Craig of Boyne, was abandoned and a new castle built about a mile up the burn, *circa* 1580: and here also, precisely as at Auchindoir, the name "Craig of Boyne" was transferred to the later building. See my paper on "Three Banffshire Castles—Boyne, Findlater, and Findochty," printed in *Transactions of the Banffshire Field Club*, October 1931, p. 79.

<sup>2</sup> Vol. lxiv. p. 98.

<sup>3</sup> Macdonald, *op. cit.*, pp. 255-6.

<sup>4</sup> *The House of Gordon*, ed. J. M. Bulloch, vol. ii. p. 219 (67).

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, vol. i. p. 57. It may be added that in the old ballad of "Jock and Tam," Lesmoir seems distinctly to be indicated as the residence of Jock of Scurdargue:—

"Jock of Scurdarg had houses grand  
In Bogie, Mar, and Buchanland,  
Straloch, Pitlurg, and Auchindoir,  
Cairnbarrow, Buckie, and Lesmoir."

<sup>6</sup> Mr Innes writes me as follows:—

"You will find in the National Library (*Hutton Collections*, p. 120) an undated charter by Duncanus de Fernyndrach to Archibald Aberkerdour, son and heir of the deceased John de Aberkerdour, of Essy, *qua vocatur* Kyrktoun. The witnesses are, Sir Gilbert de Glencairn the father, Sir Gilbert de Glencairn the son, and Sir Henry de Ferendrach, William, son of the granter of the deed, Peter de Donerdi, and Colban de Yelgedron. Hutton's transcript is stated to

organisation of the manor and parish may well have been due to the Frendraughts. How long the Aberchirder family retained an interest in Lesmoir we do not know. The history of their Gordon successors has been exhaustively treated by Captain Douglas Wimberley and Dr J. M. Bulloch.<sup>1</sup> The first laird, James Gordon, obtained a grant of the lands of Essie from his chief and kinsman, George, fourth Earl of Huntly, prior to 1537, in which year he is first referred to as "James Gordon of Lesmoir."<sup>2</sup> On 8th March 1544 Lord Huntly executed a charter of confirmation, or rather a renewal of his grant, in which are specified "the lands of Esse with the croft of Auchtleke, with the place and houses of Losmoir, and the lands of Balhenne in the barony of Strathbogie."<sup>3</sup> Either Lord Huntly had done some building at Lesmoir Castle before he handed it over to James Gordon, and had marked his work with his own coat-of-arms, or else the new laird had placed upon his castle the heraldic bearings of his feudal superior, for there still exists a fragmentary stone, removed to Druminnor from Lesmoir when it was finally dismantled, which seems to exhibit the arms of the fourth Earl of Huntly.<sup>4</sup> The stone shows a shield surmounted of a plumed helmet and earl's coronet, and charged with heraldic bearings of which the third quarter contains the three fraises that the Huntly Gordons displayed on their coat-of-arms:

be a copy of an original in the Kinloss papers. By this date it had become rather difficult to tell whether territorial designation implies ownership or a surname, and I think the tentative pedigree of the Ferendrachs which I gave in *Scottish Notes and Queries*, September 1931, requires some modification in the light of further research. The Essie charter must, however, be of date between about 1256 and 1280. The heraldic evidence indicates that the Ferendrachs were descended from the Robertsons of Struan. Who they married prior to the time of Marjorie Glencairnie we do not know. From Sir Duncan's attitude to Edward I. one may conclude that their sympathies were decidedly on the English side.

"I presume the grant was little more than a heritable security, and the grantee is presumably the Thane of Aberkerder, who was son of John de Aberkerder—who, according to an MS. copy index of the Register of the Bishopric of Moray, was living in 1242. Some of the deeds Gordon quotes in his *Province of Moray*, vol. ii. p. 388, I have been unable to trace, but there is no reason why Archibald should not have lived after John and died prior to 1286-9, when Symon, Thane of Aberkerder, founded the Chaplainry of St Marnan, *inter alia*, for the souls of his ancestors. Symon was succeeded by his daughter, Sybil de Aberkerder, who died prior to 1328 (*Ant. Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. ii. p. 218). The arms of the subsequent Thaness of Aberkerder are also based upon Ferendrach-Robertson, and one can hardly doubt that Sybil was married to either Malcolm or John de Ferendrach, but there is no evidence that the Aberkerders continued to own Essie. Sybil's son was presumably another Archibald de Aberkerder, living 31st July 1343 (*Exchequer Rolls*, vol. i. p. 515), but who was evidently dead prior to 1358 (*ibid.*, p. 548)."

<sup>1</sup> *The House of Gordon*, vol. i. pp. 153-510. The section on Lesmoir was also printed as a separate volume, and in citations made in the present paper the pagination of the separate volume is given in brackets.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10. It is an interesting sidelight on the times that the first laird of Lesmoir, although a powerful chief and closely related to the noble houses of Huntly and of Athol, could not write his own name. This appears from a deed signed by him, "led" by a notary—see *Records of Aboyme*, p. 85.

<sup>3</sup> *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, 1548-80, No. 2814.

<sup>4</sup> *The House of Gordon*, vol. ii. pp. 258-9 (106-7). The stone now lies against the outside of the garden wall at Druminnor, close west of the house.

the dexter supporter is an allound. At all events we may take the reference to the "place and house of Lesmoir" in 1544 as proof that there already existed a stone castle on the site at this date.

Although they were, inevitably, more or less mixed up in the civil and religious commotions of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, the Lesmoir Gordons never played a prominent part in the national, nor even to any great extent in the local, affairs of their day. On the contrary, they seem to have set their affections upon the acquisition of land; with so successful a result that—according to a member of the family in 1784—at the time of their greatest prosperity they had a fortune of 30,000 marks a year.<sup>1</sup> "From their root in Rhyne they branched all over Aberdeenshire, appearing in the parishes of Auchterless, Cabrach, Clatt, Culsalmond, Daviot, Drumblade, Essie, Fetterangus, Fyvie, Gartly, Inverurie, Kennethmont, King Edward, Logie-Coldstone, Newmachar, Old Machar, Peterhead, Premnay, Strathdon, Towie, and Tullynessle. They went north-west into Banff and Elgin, and they appeared sporadically in Fifeshire and Perthshire."<sup>2</sup>

In 1625 the fourth laird, James Gordon, was created a baronet of Nova Scotia. The family adhered to the ancient faith, and suffered accordingly in the Civil Wars. During the early part of the next century they fell into pecuniary straits, and disposals of lands became necessary, culminating about 1743 with the sale of Lesmoir itself. The property, described as "the lands of Lesmoir and Essie," was purchased by John Gordon of Wardhouse and his son Arthur, by whom it was turned over in 1747 to Alexander Garioch of Kinstair, who on 19th June and on 30th October 1759 exposed the whole for sale in the *Aberdeen Journal*; the advertisement gives a detailed and a very interesting description of the condition of the estate at that time. The sixth baronet, Sir William Gordon, who sold the lands, appears to have retained the right to reside in the house until his death, which occurred there on 13th September 1750.<sup>3</sup>

As to the history of the castle itself, the following particulars have been preserved. It has been asserted<sup>4</sup> that the building was erected in 1508, but the date lacks confirmation. A family historian, writing in the year 1600, tells us that Alexander Gordon, the third laird, who succeeded in 1591, "has repaired and builded in Lesmoir more sumptuouslie by farr then it was befor."<sup>5</sup> In the Civil War the castle was held for the Crown, and on 27th March 1647 it was attacked and captured by the Covenanting

<sup>1</sup> *The House of Gordon*, vol. ii, p. 241 (89).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 159 (7).

<sup>3</sup> *Aberdeen Journal*, 18th September 1750.

<sup>4</sup> Sir Robert Douglas, *The Baronage of Scotland*, p. 30. The authority quoted is an "MS. History of the Family of Lesmoir." Cf. *Memorials of the Family of Gordon of Lesmoir*, by Captain Douglas Wimberley, p. 2.

<sup>5</sup> *The House of Gordon*, p. 193 (41).

General David Leslie. We still possess General Leslie's report of the affair, furnished to the Committee of Estates. The report is dated from Lesmoir, 27th March 1647, and makes precise but grim reading. After describing the capture of Wardhouse on the 25th, the Covenanting commander continues: "Two dayes thereafter I took in the house of Lesmoir—a place of considerable strenth and compassed with water. After the water wes diverted and the close gained with the losse of two or thrie men and some wounded, they burned the low howses"—*i.e.* the "laigh bigging" or offices within the courtyard wall—"and betook themselves to the towr; and, finding that the place could not be carried without the losse of men and bestoweing of much tyme, I conceaued it most for the advantage and speeding of the service, upon a parlye offered by the captain<sup>1</sup> to agree with him upon these conditions, that he should yeeld up the house and all that therein wes, that all the Irish should dye, and his owen lyfe, with Harthill the elder,<sup>2</sup> should be spared, but they both to be prisoners until they satisfied Church and State, otherwyse be banished the kingdome. So I caused hang 27 Irish.<sup>3</sup> The Captain and Lesmoir, with two or thrie Scottismen, poor sogers, more I haue prisoners; wherein, if I haue done any thing amisse by sparing their lyues, I desyre your lordships' positive and peremptory orders in tyme coming, that I may rule myself accordingly. And becaus the houses and holds in this countrey which have been formerly guarisoned will but occasion new troubles, if they be not slighted, I shall lykewyse desyre your lordships' orders for ruining and rendering them unprofitable."<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Captain Mortimer, "ane Scotisman," one of Montrose's most active and trusted officers, who as early as the battle of Aberdeen (13th September 1644) appears in command of "Irish muscatiers." See Patrick Gordon, *Britane's Distemper*, reff. in Index. Leslie does not mention him by name, but we learn that he was in command at Lesmoir from W. Gordon, *History of the Family of Gordon*, 1727, vol. ii. p. 531.

<sup>2</sup> John Leith, the "wild laird" of Harthill, in the parish of Oyne, where the fine ruin of his castle remains. On 31st July 1649 the Scottish Parliament considered a petition from Leith, asking for mercy on behalf of himself, his wife, and his daughter. "I, the said Johne leith, in the yeir of God 1647 yeires wes takin in the houss of Lesmoire with dyverse wthers wpon capitulatione & agriement for safetie & fredome of lyves & fortunes whilk wes reallie observed & keiped to all that wer takin with but not to myselfe. Quha ever since hes lyen in the house in extreme miserie destituit of all comfort of bodie or mynd, haveing none to befrend me nor to speak for me to your lordships to shaw your lordships my present distress & miserie. Quhill now that my said wyff & daughter ar come heir of necessitie for want of maintenance to entertaine them & myselfe, My lands and estait being ruinat & wndone," etc. (*Act. Parl. Scot.*, vol. vi. pt. ii. p. 738). This document shows that Lesmoir Castle had, at all events, not been demolished by that date—two years after its capture. The island castle on Loch Kinnord, captured soon after Lesmoir, was not ordered to be slighted until June 1648. See *Proceedings*, vol. lxiii. p. 131.

<sup>3</sup> These wretched "Irish," whom the Covenant in the tyranny of its triumph treated as worse than vermin, were probably to a large extent Celts from the western Scottish mainland and the Hebrides.

<sup>4</sup> Sir William Fraser, *The Melvilles, Earls of Melville, and the Leslies, Earls of Leven*, vol. ii. p. 96. Leslie's remarks about the policy of garrisoning captured houses evidently refer to § 6 of his instructions from the Committee of Estates, as printed in *Act. Parl. Scot.*, vol. vi. pt. i. p. 723.

From this account it appears that Lesmoir Castle in 1647 consisted of a tower and a barmkin or walled courtyard, enclosing outbuildings, and that the whole was girt by a moat. Whether the Committee of Estates agreed that it should be "ruined and rendered unprofitable," in accordance with Leslie's suggestion, no documentary evidence appears to tell. But that the castle continued to be inhabited long thereafter is quite certain: the sixth baronet, Sir William Gordon, as we saw, died in it in 1750. In this connection, importance attaches to a description of the castle, *circa* 1725, wherein it is styled "a pretty house with seven clusters of chimneys."<sup>1</sup> The mention of clustered chimneys is significant, for the old Scottish fashion was that all the flues in each gable were gathered into and vented by a single stack. Separate chimney stacks are in Scotland a product of Renaissance influence, and the allusion to "clusters of chimneys" at Lesmoir suggests some such arrangement as is found at Leslie Castle, Aberdeenshire, built in 1661-1664, where the chimney vents form separate shafts, seated diagonally.<sup>2</sup> It is possible, therefore, that if Lesmoir Castle was "slighted" after its capture in 1647, the building with clustered chimneys, of which we have a description eighty years later, may have been a reconstruction carried out after the Restoration in 1660. It is perhaps significant that after this period we meet with reference to a Newton of Lesmoir.<sup>3</sup>

When the estates were sold in 1759 the new owner, John Grant of Rothmaise,<sup>4</sup> commenced to pull down the castle piecemeal for the sake of its materials. He inflicted a like barbarous fate upon the adjoining Kirk of Essie, the parish of which had long been merged with Rhynie, although the old church continued up till about 1740 to be used as a chapel of ease. Few particulars as to the history of Essie Church are preserved, nor does its patron saint appear to be known, though we may conjecture a dedication to Moluag.<sup>5</sup> About 1350 the church is taxed at 6 marks, and about 1400 the procurations due to the Bishop of Moray from the parson of Essy are fixed at 2d.<sup>6</sup> In 1490 Richard Strachan was rector.<sup>7</sup> In the *List of Ministers and Reidaris* of 1576 Walter Leslie is entered as Reader in Essie, enjoying "the hail thrid of the personage

<sup>1</sup> *The House of Gordon*, vol. ii. p. 245 (93).

<sup>2</sup> See my paper on this castle in *Scottish Notes and Queries*, January 1925, pp. 1-5.

<sup>3</sup> *The House of Gordon*, vol. ii. p. 257 (105).

<sup>4</sup> He went bankrupt in 1779, and his estates, including Essie, were exposed for sale in the *Aberdeen Journal*, 9th August 1779. The inventory includes "The Mains and Manor Place of Lessmoir, with the Tower and Fortalice thereof."

<sup>5</sup> The references to Essy in *Copiale Prioratus Sancti Andree*, ed. J. H. Baxter (see Index), there wrongly ascribed to our Essie, belong to the parish of Essy, now Eassie, in Angus.

<sup>6</sup> *Ant. Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. ii. pp. 147, 148.

<sup>7</sup> J. A. Henderson, *Aberdeenshire Epitaphs and Inscriptions*, p. 163.

and vicarage of Essie extending to vj lib. xiijs iiijd."<sup>1</sup> In 1646 Mr George Chalmer, assistant to the minister of Rhynie, and evidently in charge of the church at Essie, made complaint to the Presbytery of Strathbogie that the parishioners had failed to implement an agreement to pay him £40 "to build ane hous vpon the manse of Essie for his present accomodatioun."<sup>2</sup>

In addition to the associated church and castle site, Essie presents other topographical features indicative of an ancient manor. The farm across the road from the castle ruins is Mains of Lesmoir, *i.e.* the demesne or mensal lands of the baronial household: while to the north is Milton of Lesmoir, which first appears on record in 1604;<sup>3</sup> and south of the castle site is the Gallows Hill. In mentioning Milton of Lesmoir, reference may be made to a curious entry in the Presbytery Records of Strathbogie, under date 13th August 1651, whereby it appears that at Milton the old Scottish superstition was followed of reserving a part of the farmland unploughed for the use of the "Goodman," that is, the Devil: it being hoped thus to placate his Satanic Majesty and avert his unwelcome attentions from the rest of the farm. Taken to task on the subject by the Presbytery, Sir William Gordon of Lesmoir admitted that part of the Mains was thus "giuen away (as is commonly said) to the Goodman," and had not been ploughed, but stated that "he had a mynd, be the assistance of God, to cause labour the samen." The Presbytery, with the respect due to an influential laird, instead of setting him up in the Kirk in sackcloth, praised him for his "ingenuitie," *i.e.* honesty in making a clean breast of the disgrace fulbusiness, and exhorted him "to take paines shortly to haue it laboured."<sup>4</sup>

#### LESMOIR CASTLE.

The site of the castle is, as General Leslie found, a very strong one. It lies between three streams, one of which, the Burn of Essie, flows past its south front, and receives into itself (first) the Burn of Newmerdrum, which flows round the west and south sides of the castle, acting here as its moat; and (secondly) the lade from Milton, which comes down along the east side of the castle area, and unites with the Essie a short distance to the south-east.

"O the bonnie wee Essachie burn,  
Hoo it rushes and tumbles in glee,  
Frae Merdrum's braes by aul' Lesmoir  
An' Craigbeg on to the sea."

<sup>1</sup> *Ant. Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. ii. p. 152.

<sup>2</sup> *The Presbytery Book of Strathbogie*, p. 65.

<sup>3</sup> *Register of the Privy Council*, vol. vii. p. 575.

<sup>4</sup> *The Presbytery Book of Strathbogie*, pp. 207-9. For other references to the "House of Lesmoir" and the harbouring of "masse priestis" therein, see *ibid.*, pp. 39, 43, 78; and *cf.* Spalding, *Memorialls of the Trubles*, vol. ii. pp. 272, 293, 296, 435, 460.

The ground to the south and east of the castle is still marshy. Lesmoir stands at a height of 950 feet above sea-level.

The castle<sup>1</sup> appears to have consisted of a mount at the north-west corner, with a triangular, cape-like bailey extending with its apex to the south-east, and at its base lapping round the east and west sides of the mount. The bailey is level, and is raised about 5 or 6 feet above the surrounding marshland. It is revetted all round by a dry-built stone dyke of massive boulders. The bailey measures about 172 feet in breadth—reckoned tangentially across the south-east front of the mount—by about 140 feet in length from the mount to the apex. On the south side of the latter there appears amid the boulder dyke a length of about 16 feet of masonry, surviving to a height of 3 or 4 feet, and terminated eastward by a built quoin. This is evidently a portion of the old barmkin wall. The masonry is of the type usual in Aberdeenshire in the sixteenth century, consisting of coursed boulders with numerous horizontal pinnings. At present the mount is raised about 5 feet above the bailey, but presents the appearance of having been greatly disturbed and apparently cut down at the time when the later stone castle was built. The surface of the mount is now much confused and dug into, and is overgrown with trees and shrubbery. It is circular in form and measures about 112 feet in diameter. Remains of masonry may be detected at various points, in particular one small fragment of a wall about 3 feet thick on the north front, where now is the entrance to the site; this fragment may perhaps be part of the west cheek of the trance.

Across the road from the castle are the pleasant farmhouse and steading of Mains of Lesmoir, with a garden having a fine sunward exposure. In the garden rockery are preserved some carved freestone pieces formerly belonging to the Castle. These include a gargoyle runnel, banded and with a buckle on either side: the much damaged half-length bust of a gentleman with a ruff and a flat cap, the arms being broken off; portion of a stone carved with a conventional foliaceous enrichment; a large corbel cap, now much wasted; the dial stone of a sundial; the jambstone of a window, grooved for glass and showing a 3½-inch chamfer; a crocketed pinnacle; and a crocket which probably formed an ornament on a dormer gable. The bust of the gentleman appears to have been a companion piece to the figure putting the weight now preserved at Craig Castle.<sup>2</sup> In addition to the stone at Druminnor already alluded to, displaying the arms of the fourth Earl of Huntly, there exists another carved stone from Lesmoir which was taken to Helens-

<sup>1</sup> It has not been thought worth while to insert a plan here, as all the features of the site are fully displayed in the O.S. Map (Aberdeenshire, 25-inch scale, Sheet 42, 7; 6-inch scale, Sheet 42, N.E.).

<sup>2</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. lxiv. p. 93.

burgh, and is now built into the wall of a brick house there; it shows part of a unicorn's head, evidently a supporter of the royal arms.<sup>1</sup>

The two corbel caps now at Craig and at Mains of Lesmoir have evidently come from the angles of a large groined vault: and the fact is important, as it probably means that Lesmoir Castle had a groin-vaulted hall like that at Towie Barclay, described in my former paper. Very likely, therefore, Lesmoir formed a fifth member of the Gight-Delgaty-Craig-Towie group of castles, the peculiar character of which I demonstrated in my former paper. Here again we mark a family connection, for the first laird of Lesmoir married as his second wife, before 1546, Margaret Ogilvie, relict of Walter Barclay of Towie and Gartly.<sup>2</sup> All these various *dissecta membra* from Lesmoir belong to about the close of the sixteenth century, and must form part of the "sumptuous building" carried out by the third laird between 1591 and 1600.

There exists a transcript of an ancient "genealogy from father to son of the House of Lesmoir, as it was painted on the chimney of the said house."<sup>3</sup> If, as we have seen is likely, the hall of Lesmoir Castle was vaulted, then the fireplace may have had a tall pointed hood, like the one at Borthwick Castle, which would form an ideal basis for depicting such a "family tree."<sup>4</sup>

The Ordnance Survey map notes a sword found within the castle area, also a coin of Elizabeth and one of Mary Queen of Scots found on the line of the road between Essie Church and Balhinny:

For access to the site of the castle, and to the carved fragments preserved in his garden, I am indebted to the courtesy of Mr George Cran, Mains of Lesmoir, who now owns the farm on which his ancestors have been settled continuously for two centuries.<sup>5</sup>

Before leaving the subject of Lesmoir Castle it may not be out of place to mention some archæological memorials which its owners have left in other places. The second laird had a daughter, Elizabeth, who married William Forbes, sixth laird of Tolquhon, a rather remarkable personality, who between 1584 and 1589, as recorded on its walls, carried out extensive additions to Tolquhon Castle.<sup>6</sup> In the old church of Tarves, in which parish Tolquhon is situated, William Forbes built for himself and his wife a stately tomb, which still exists. It is in a curious mixture of Gothic and Renaissance styles, and displays his own initials and coat-of-arms in one spandrel of the arch, while in the other are his wife's initials, with the three boars' heads of Gordon impaled

<sup>1</sup> *The House of Gordon, ut supra*, p. 259 (107). I have ascertained that this stone is still there.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171 (19).

<sup>3</sup> See Wimberley, *op. cit.*, pp. 99-100.

<sup>4</sup> I owe this suggestion to Carrick Pursuivant.

<sup>5</sup> See J. Anderson, *The Cran Family* (Huntly, 1908), also Henderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 167-8.

<sup>6</sup> See my description of this castle in *Aberdeen University Review*, March 1925, pp. 120-35.

with the Tolquhon arms, and the superscription DOCHTER TO LESMOR.<sup>1</sup> Katherine Gordon, daughter of the third laird of Lesmoir, married Alexander Burnett, eleventh laird of Leys, who in 1596 completed the erection of the new castle of that family at Crathes. On the south front of Crathes Castle is a very fine group of three shields, the upper one showing the royal arms of Scotland, the lower left one displaying the arms of Alexander Burnett, ninth laird of Leys, impaled with those of his wife Janet Hamilton, with their initials and the date 1553, no doubt that of the commencement of the castle; while the right-hand shield has the Burnett arms impaled with those of Lesmoir—a fess-chequy between three boars' heads<sup>2</sup>—the initials of Alexander Burnett (the eleventh laird) and Katherine Gordon, and the date 1596. Over the old entrance door is their monogram, with the same date. The arms of Katherine Gordon, impaled with those of her husband, appear also at various places in the painted ceilings in the castle, and on one of the pendants in its vaulted hall. Among the old furniture in the castle is a magnificent oak four-poster bed, dated 1594. At the back it has a large panel showing the monograms of Alexander Burnett and Katherine Gordon, and the date 1594: on the canopy overhead are their portraits; while on the front of the canopy their monogram appears again, and the boar's head of Gordon is introduced at various other places in the rich carving. There is also an oak chair with a shield showing the three boars' heads but without the fess-chequy of Lesmoir; below are the initials K. G. and the date 1597.<sup>3</sup>

#### ESSIE CHURCH.

In the churchyard of Essie, about a quarter of a mile west of the castle site, no traces of the ancient church are now visible. Its foundations were grubbed up when the graveyard was put in order prior to 1890: the building was then stated to have been 36 feet in length and 15½ feet in breadth.<sup>4</sup> The "high altar within the parish kirk of Essie" is on record in 1537, and again in 1550.<sup>5</sup> The Lesmoir family had a burial-place within the church, for the Balbithan MS., in recording the death of James, eldest son of Sir James Gordon, son and heir apparent of the first baronet, states

<sup>1</sup> The tomb is illustrated by A. Jervise, *Epitaphs and Inscriptions in the North-East of Scotland*, vol. ii., frontispiece; also by N. K. Macleod, *The Churches of Buchan*, p. 131.

<sup>2</sup> The fess-chequy was derived from the family of Stewart, James Gordon of Lesmoir having married, *ante* 1521, Margaret, daughter of Patrick Stewart of Laithers. An old MS. chronicle of the family mentions a coat of these arms as being "yet to be seen on the house of Lesmoir" (Wimberley, *op. cit.*, p. 2).

<sup>3</sup> All these subjects are illustrated in *The Family of Burnett of Leys*, ed. Col. James Allardyce.

<sup>4</sup> J. A. Henderson, *Aberdeenshire Epitaphs and Inscriptions*, p. 163.

<sup>5</sup> *Records of Aboyne*, pp. 67, 80-2.

that he was "honourably interred in the Kirk of Essy, 6th of August 1634"; and the same authority, as we have seen, chronicles also at an earlier period the burial there both of Jock of Scurdargue himself and of his natural son, Alexander.

About the middle of the churchyard lies an interesting old tombstone, now broken in two. It bears the full-length figures of a gentleman and his wife, carved in flat relief—he apparently clad in armour, and she in a high flat cap, ruff, and long full robe. Together they hold before them a large florid shield, on which are two coats-of-arms impaled; that in front of the lady being the Lumsden arms, a buckle between two wolf's heads coupé in chief and an escallop in base, while the arms on her husband's half of the shield are defaced, though there is still traceable what seems to be a wolf's head coupé. On either side are the initials I.D. and I.L., and round the border of the slab is the much obliterated inscription HER · LYIS · ANE · HONORABIL · MAN · IAMES · DVNCAN · OF · MARDRIM · QVH . . . . . þE · SECVND · OF · NOVEMBER · IN · þE . . . . . OF · GOD · 1601 · AND · I · LVMSDEL · HIS · SPOVS · QUHA . . . . . The material of the slab is red freestone: its dimensions are 5 feet 9 inches by 2 feet 1 inch. James Duncan in Merdrum (which lies to the north-west of Lesmoir) was a wealthy wadsetter who liked to style himself laird: his wife, Janet Lumsden, was of the family of Cushnie.<sup>1</sup>

Lying against the inside of the south wall of the old churchyard is a whin-mill stone, 3 feet 3½ inches in diameter and 8 inches in thickness, with a central hole 5 inches in diameter, checked for a stop on the shaft. The material is Rhynie freestone. (It may be mentioned that at Glack of Essie, further to the west, there is another whin-mill stone, which was in use in quite recent times: it is also in Rhynie stone, carved on one face and flat on the other, and measures 4 feet 5 inches in diameter by 11 inches in thickness. The central circular hole is 7 inches in diameter. This whin mill is now dismantled, but the circular course, lined with stones set edgeways, and measuring 17 inches in breadth, with an internal diameter of 11 feet 4 inches, still remains; in the centre the pivot stone, with its iron stang, is in position, and the wooden shaft, which still retains the iron swivel attachment, is used as a gatepost nearby.)

An interesting glimpse of the state of affairs in our district in the early part of the seventeenth century is furnished by a Minute of the Privy Council, under date 28th July 1625, granting a commission to Alexander, Master of Forbes, James Gordon of Lesmoir, and Mr James

<sup>1</sup> See *Scottish Notes and Queries*, November 1890, p. 104, where there is a good illustration of the stone: also Henderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 166-7.

Elphinstone of Barns, to search for, apprehend, imprison, and try Patrick Tower, Alexander Smith *alias* "Stowtie," David Reaugh, and George Reaugh his son, sometime in the Cabrach, whom the Presbytery of Alford had delated to the Council as "commoun and notorious thevis and vagaboundis, lieving vpoun thift, stouth, reaffe, and maisterfull oppressioun committit be thame upoun our goode subjectis within the parochine of Dauchindoir, Cabraugh, Ryne, and Essie, of whome being honnest houshalderis [some] ar be the violent stouthis and stouth reaffe of thir lymmaris broght to beggarie and hes skailled thair houssis, and the rest of the parrochynnaris ar constrayned to keepe watcheis day and night for feare of thir lymmaris."<sup>1</sup>

#### FURTHER NOTES ON AUCHINDOIR.<sup>2</sup>

*Cnoc Cailliche Earthwork* (p. 53).—*Cailleach* in modern Gaelic means an old woman, also a nun. Anciently *Cailleach Bheur* or *Cailleach Bheurr* was "the name of a colossal old deer-goddess, the best known in the Gaeldom, a being who could wade across the deepest straits—whose washtub was the mighty whirlpool of Corryvrekan—who could carry islands about with her in a basket." Possibly it is this goddess who is associated with our *Cnoc Cailliche*. Later the word *cailleach* was applied to the priestess of the deer-goddess. The curious old legend of the "Duel between Fleet-Hill-Foot and the Cailleach" has been edited and discussed at length by Mr J. G. Mackay in *Scottish Gaelic Studies* for September 1929.<sup>3</sup> It is to be noted that in the version of the duel given by the *Inverness Courier* of 5th June 1873, the *Cailleach Bheurr* appears under the name of *Coinnseag* (the meaning of this word seems to be unknown), and is described as dwelling in one of the brochs of Glenbeg (Glenelg). This presumably carries the legend in its origin back to the early Iron Age. It is therefore interesting that the name of the *Cailleach* is associated also with a hill-fort in Aberdeenshire, as such structures in this part of Scotland are usually ascribed to the early Iron Age.

*The Old Church of Auchindoir* (p. 60).—Since my former account was published the ivy has now been partly stripped off the walls, with the result that several interesting features hitherto concealed are now exposed. In particular it is seen that the whole east gable above the splayed base has been rebuilt, and that the old Gordon stones have been reinserted. The skewstone at the south-east corner bears the arms

<sup>1</sup> *Reg. Privy Council*, 2nd series, vol. i. pp. 97-8. It does not appear that these "lymmaris" were ever laid by the heels.

<sup>2</sup> The page references in brackets are to my former paper.

<sup>3</sup> Vol. iii. pt. i. pp. 10-51.

of Davidson, a stag couchant between two piles reversed in chief and one reversed in base: accompanying the shield are the initials M W D for Master William Davidson, carved in relief, and the date 1638 incised.

*Craig Castle* (p. 79).—In the autumn of 1930 a mural closet (see Plan, fig. 3) was discovered and opened out at the north-east corner of the private room on the second floor of the old tower. The closet is entered from the private room by a door measuring 1 foot 11 inches broad and 4 feet 10 inches high, with a  $3\frac{1}{2}$ -inch chamfer. From the present floor of the bedroom there is a step down of 6 inches. The closet measures 4 feet in length by 2 feet 4 inches in breadth, and is covered with an elliptic vault on an east-to-west axis at a height of 6 feet 7 inches. On the east side is a window, on the north an aumbry,

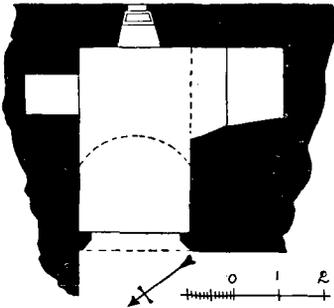


Fig. 3. Craig Castle: Plan of Mural Chamber in Tower.

and on the south a mural recess. The daylight measurements of the window are 1 foot  $8\frac{1}{2}$  inches high and 5 inches broad. In its ingoing a small, carefully cut, stone basin, 6 inches long, 2 inches broad, and 1 inch deep, is formed in the sole. The aumbry measures 11 inches broad and 1 foot 2 inches deep, and is 1 foot 2 inches in height, its sole being at a level of 2 feet 8 inches above the floor. The recess on the opposite side has a sloping sill at a height of 1 foot 11 inches above the floor, and is 3 feet 9 inches high, 1 foot 6 inches broad, and 1 foot 4 inches deep. It is roughly lintelled over.

It seems most probable that this singular little closet formed a *prie-dieu* or small oratory. The recess would contain a crucifix, and on its sloping sill a prayer book would lie at a height just suitable for use when kneeling. The stone basin might be a stoup, and the aumbry would contain furnishings. There is an oratory in a similar position in the private room at the Castle of Tolquhon.<sup>1</sup>

A window has also been discovered and opened up in the south wall of the main room at this level, to the east of the fireplace.

In one of the partitions which at present curtail the north end of the hall (p. 76) there is an old window (fig. 4) measuring 1 foot 6 inches broad by 1 foot 11 inches tall, made of leaded glass in lozenge-shaped panes of squares and oblongs set diagonally. The glass seems to be of medium thickness, perhaps  $\frac{1}{10}$  inch, and is translucent, with a slightly greenish tint. The window in its present form has evidently made up part of a larger design. This glass appears to date from the late seventeenth or early eighteenth century.

<sup>1</sup> See my paper on this castle in *Aberdeen University Review*, March 1925, p. 128.

*The Den of Craig* (pp. 94-5).—Sir Thomas Dick Lauder, in his *Account of the Great Moray Floods of August 1829*,<sup>1</sup> has a most interesting description of the damage done in the Den of Craig. He gives particulars, with a sketch, of a huge boulder which was carried down the stream for a distance of about 300 yards. From his drawing it is possible to identify this boulder, which still remains where it came to rest on that memorable occasion, and retains its dainty growth of maidenhair fern just as described by him.

*Corrigendum.* A mistake occurs in the description of Towie Barclay Castle at p. 85 of my former paper. The access to the chapel gallery is, as correctly shown on Dr Kelly's plan, fig. 18, by steps down from the floor above the hall, and not, as stated in my text, by a mural stair up from the hall. The arrangement is an ingenious one, because the main newel stair could not have given access (as at Craig) to the chapel gallery unless the altar had been towards the west: therefore, to admit of an eastern position, the access to the chapel gallery had to come down from the second floor.

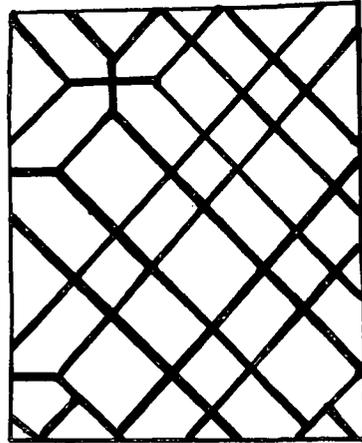


Fig. 4. Craig Castle: Leaded Glass in Tower.

<sup>1</sup> Ed. 1873, p. 256.