

V.

THE BARONY, CASTLE, AND CHURCH OF ROTHIEMAY. BY W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, M.A., D.LITT., F.S.A.SCOT.

HISTORICAL INTRODUCTION.

One of the most remarkable facts that strikes the student of Scottish historical topography is the continuous nature of its development. Despite the successive waves of racial immigration and cultural influences, and the numerous and often severe political revolutions and devastating wars through which the country has passed, the local centres of Scotland's population have remained in most cases surprisingly constant—even from a period so far back as the Age of Bronze. I have elsewhere discussed the significance of this phenomenon, as observed in the district between the Dee and the Spey; and have analysed special instances of its occurrence, as at Inverurie, Midmar, Auchindoir, Essie, and Auchterless.¹ In the present paper it is proposed to deal with another very striking example, at Rothiemay on the left bank of the Deveron, in Banffshire. Here the evidences of continuous human occupation and of local political and religious importance, from the Stone Age down to modern times, are unmistakable and highly significant.

Rothiemay is a district (see map, fig. 1) that offered many advantages

¹ See *Scottish Notes and Queries*, 3rd series, vol. ii. pp. 39-42; *Proceedings*, vol. lxiii. p. 111; vol. lxiv. pp. 48-52; vol. lxvi. pp. 86-8. Cf. also *ibid.*, vol. lxv. pp. 115-7, and *Journ. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, November 1932, p. 143; also my *The Celtic Church in Scotland*, p. 66, note 1.

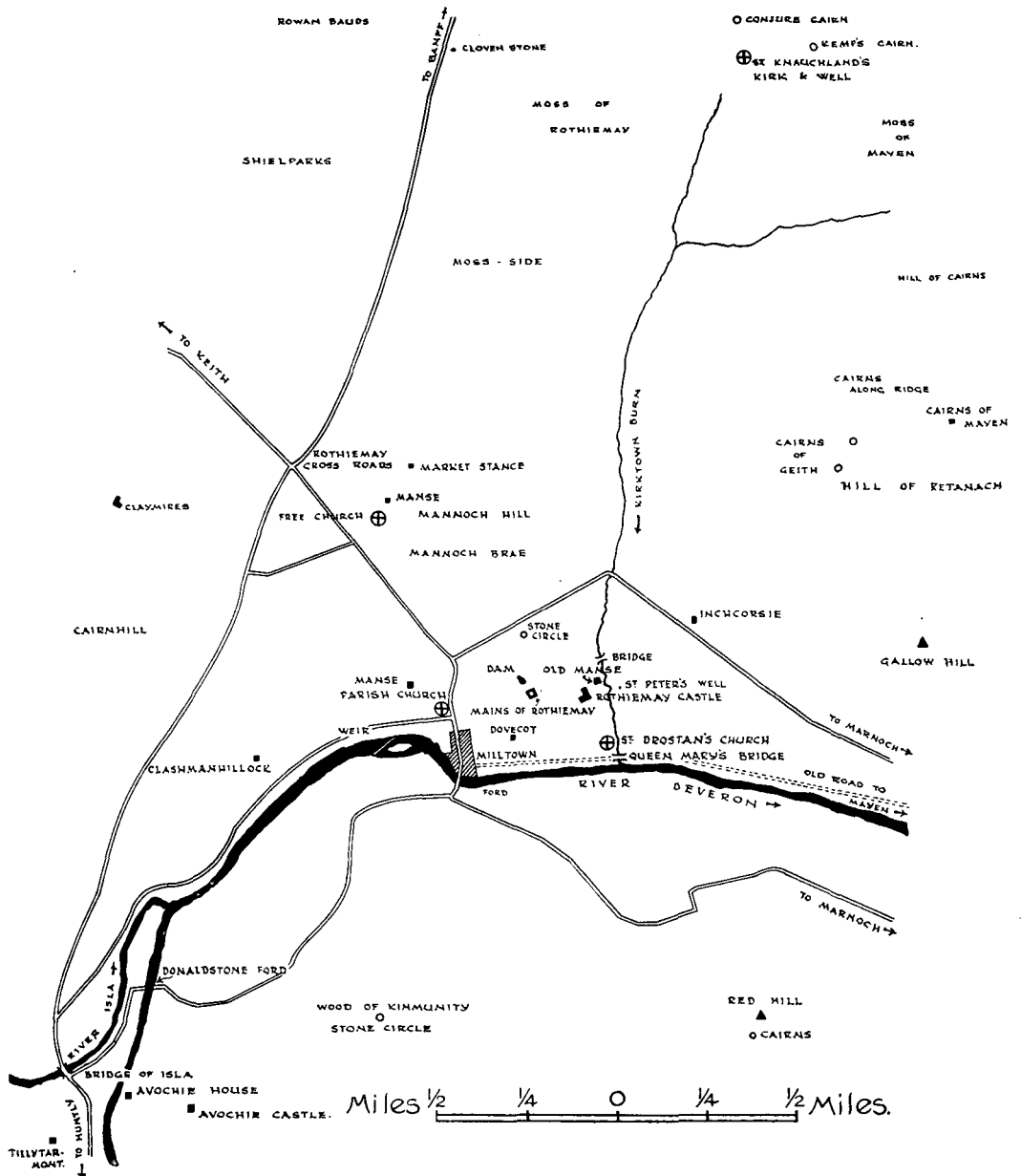


Fig. 1. Sketch-map of Rothiemay and District.

to a primitive population, and was sure of being early settled. It consists of a gently sloping plateau descending, southwards and westwards, into the valleys of the Isla and the Deveron. The basins of these two rivers to-day form the finest agricultural land in the parish; but in ancient times what are now fertile haughs would have been largely swamp, and the traces of prehistoric inhabitation are for the most part found on the slopes above, which combined shelter from the north and a warm sunward outlook with natural drainage, while not being so steep either to run off all surface water too rapidly or to prevent good and deep soil from accumulating. The native granites (gabbro and norite) are mostly overlaid by a tough species of boulder-clay known in the north country as "pan," obstinate and impermeable; and where this is near the surface the soils are waterlogged and farming is poor, but as a rule the inhospitable clay is overlaid by a sufficient depth of good, kindly arable soil. Four extensive peat mosses, all still worked—Moss of Rothimay, Rowan Bauds, Moss of Mayen, and Craighourach Moss—afford an ample ready-to-hand supply of fuel;¹ and no doubt in primitive days (as indeed the remains in the peat bogs show) large areas of the country were under forest. Such woodlands would shelter an abundant supply of game, and the two rivers, then as now, must have been well stocked with salmon, eel, and trout.

It is hardly to be conceived that a locality so favoured could have failed to become populated, as soon at all events as hunting gave place to agriculture as the staple industry of Scotland. Weapons and implements of the Stone and Bronze Ages do not seem to have been frequently picked up in Rothimay, but sites of flint industries exist at Inchcorsie and Clashmanhillock. The presence of Bronze Age man is sufficiently vouched for by the great assemblage of round cairns found on the ridge including Hill of Retanach (871 feet, the highest ground in the parish) and Hill of Cairns (800 feet).² And that Rothimay must have become

¹ The *Old Statistical Account*, published in 1797 (vol. xix. p. 385), records that at this date a great part of the town of Huntly, 6 miles distant, was supplied from the Rothimay peat moss. This moss is still extensively worked, the tenants on the Rothimay estate having each his "lair." The peat cuttings are most impressive, being as much as 10 or 12 feet deep, and showing in their middle and lower levels roots and stumps of Scots pine (*Pinus sylvestris*) many of which have the appearance of having been burned.

Craighourach Moss, which is not shown on the map (fig. 1), is about a mile north of Conjure Cairn.

² The O.S. Map (6-inch, Banffshire, Sheet XV.) shows some forty cairns or sites of cairns on the wooded ridge between Gallowhill and Moss-side of Mayen. These are mostly now submerged in vegetation, but seem on the average to have been about 18 feet in diameter. The largest cairn that I have inspected in the district is the one known as Conjure Cairn, in the strip of rough wooded ground immediately north-west of the farmhouse of Mid Knauchland. This cairn is now plundered to a mere foundation and covered with grass, but the well-marked kerbstones enable the diameter to be fixed at about 33 feet.

an important centre towards the close of this period is shown by the fragments of what has undoubtedly been one of the largest stone circles in the north-east. When complete it will have measured fully 80 feet in diameter, but only four of the pillar stones now remain, besides the splendid recumbent stone, about 14 feet in length, with its fine series of cup-marks, some of them ringed. This circle belongs to a type peculiar to the district between the Dee and the Spey, and characterised by the presence on the southern (generally the south-western) segment of the circle of a large horizontally placed or recumbent stone set between two of the pillars. At Avochie on a great whinstone boulder is another remarkable series of cup-marks, also including a number of ringed ones.¹

Naturally the first Christian missionaries would make their way to the already existing centres of population, and in the north-east there is frequent evidence that the early chapels or cells were planted at or near the stone circles of the old pagan faith. At Rothiemay, however, St Drostan, Abbot of Deer in Buchan in the sixth century, ignored the heathen temple high-perched on the brae above, and built his church on the broad haugh alongside the Deveron.² Celtic ecclesiastical sites again and again show a preference for such a *machair* or flat alluvial plain by the side of running water. It is true that no Celtic sculptured cross or other positive evidence exists to prove that the old church site at Rothiemay is the actual spot where Drostan fixed the first focus of Christian worship. But the place is so typical of old Celtic religious sites, and the persistence of the name of its founder, Drostan, is so characteristic of Celtic practice, as to render it very likely that this is the case. In the later days of the medieval Church the memory of the old Celtic missionaries, whose names so staunchly clung to the chapels they had in most cases personally founded, often tended to become obscured by dedications to saints in the Roman hagiology. At the parent monastery of Deer, in the twelfth century, we thus observe a tendency to submerge the memory of its founder, St Drostan, by an invocation of the Apostle Peter; and so also here at Rothiemay it is significant to find that a little above the old church site is a spring known as St Peter's Well.³

About a century after St Drostan's time we find traces of the presence

¹ For the Rothiemay circle see *Proceedings*, vol. xxxvii. pp. 133-7 and 227; vol. lii. pp. 104-8; G. F. Browne, *Antiquities in the Neighbourhood of Dunecht*, pp. 160-2. The Avochie cup-marks are described and illustrated in *Proceedings*, vol. xl. pp. 318-20, and vol. lii. pp. 114-5.

² The O.S. Map makes an extraordinary mistake in showing the old church on the *east* side of the Kirktown Burn.

³ See on this subject my *Historical St Columba*, 2nd ed., pp. xxviii, 38. A dedication to St John is hinted by the author of the "Description of the Parish of Rothiemay," *circa* 1726 (*Ant. Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. ii. p. 225).



Fig. 2. Symbol Stone at Tillytarmont.

of another Celtic missionary in Rothiemay at the sites known as St Knauchland's Kirk and St Knauchland's Well, immediately to the south of the farm-steading of Mid Knauchland. These are evidently foundations of St Nachlan or Nathalan, of Cowie, Bethelnie, and Tullich (near Ballater), the date of whose death is given in the Irish Calendars

as 8th January 679.¹ Inchcorsie, just east of Rothiemay Castle, and Mannoeh Hill to the north-west, are place-names which tell of the early ecclesiastical associations of the locality. Near Rothiemay railway station, but in the parish of Cairnie, is Tillytarmont, spelt in 1534 Tilentermend, which is explained to mean "girth hill";² and built into the wall of the farm-steading here is one of those mysterious sculptured symbol stones (fig. 2) that mark the dim borderland between paganism and Christianity. The stone shows the bird, mirror, and mirror-case symbols, and is about 3 feet 8 inches high.³ Its base seems to end in a kind of tenon, as if it had been designed to be fixed in a stone socket; and this fact, coupled with the name Tillytarmont,

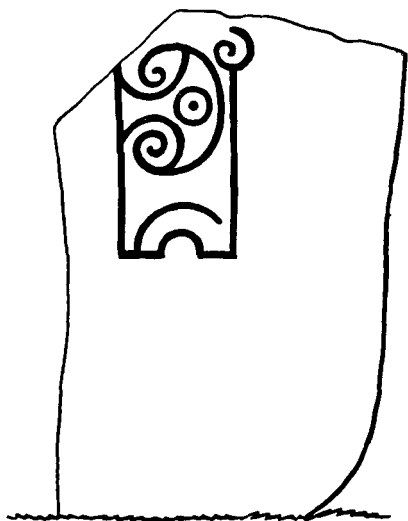


Fig. 3. Symbol Stone from North Redhill.

raises the possibility that such sculptured stones may have sometimes served, like the later girth-crosses, for sanctuary boundaries. On the terrace along the south front of Rothiemay Castle another sculptured symbol stone (fig. 3) is preserved, which came originally from North Redhill, on the opposite side of the Deveron. It shows a rectangular symbol with spiral ornamentation.⁴

THE BARONY OF ROTHIEMAY.

During the Anglo-Norman penetration in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the old Celtic centre of population at Rothiemay was organised

¹ See my *Origins of Christianity in Aberdeenshire*, pp. 27-30; also W. J. Watson, *Celtic Place-Names of Scotland*, pp. 308, 329-30.

² Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 259.

³ J. Stuart, *The Sculptured Stones of Scotland*, vol. ii. pl. cix., and Notices of the Plates, p. 63; J. Romilly Allen and Joseph Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, pt. iii. p. 185; G. F. Browne, *op. cit.*, pl. xliv. and p. 143.

⁴ Allen and Anderson, *op. cit.*, pp. 154-5.

into a manor or barony and parish with associated church and castle sites in the normal medieval fashion. But here once again, as so often in the north-east, continuity seems to have been preserved even amid all the great and complex series of changes involved in the infeudation of Scotland. The medieval parish church, if my reading of the phenomena be correct, remained on or near the site of St Drostan's early chapel; and the castle was set on the bold green bluff overlooking it, and commanding the ford of the Deveron and the ancient north road, leading thence along the haugh and up the under-slopes of Mayen Hill. Here again the *ensemble* is thoroughly typical: for I have elsewhere shown that in the ancient Celtic province of Mar, as also in the district on the sunward side of the Mounth, the early Norman castles are constantly found to be placed so as to command the great cross-country routes.¹ Though now much obscured by the later stone-and-lime buildings, the stance of the castle, as seen from the haugh below, still appears to retain something of the mounded character common to Norman strongholds, and it is quite likely that it should be classed as a *motte*. The name Rothiemay is said to signify the "rath or fortress of the plain,"² a description which sufficiently applies to the stronghold dominating the broad haugh of the Deveron.

Few and scanty records have survived as to the early Norman or Normanised lords of Rothiemay. The place seems first to occur in history in the year 1264, when the Exchequer Rolls record that the lands of Rothymayng are escheated to the Crown.³ They appear to have remained in the royal hands until as late as 1291, in which year it is stated that their rents had been assigned by King Alexander III. as part of the tocher of his daughter, the Princess Margaret, to King Eric of Norway.⁴ King Robert Bruce granted the lands successively to Murdoch Stewart, Earl of Menteith, and to David de Barclay;⁵ and on 22nd November 1345 David II. bestowed them on his faithful adherent, William de Abernethy, for the annual service of three suits at the head courts of Banffshire, and the payment when required of a pair of gilt spurs yearly to the King at Rothiemay on Whitsunday.⁶ This charter reveals that the lands of Rothiemay had been forfeited by David de Strathbogie, Earl of Atholl, who had been a partisan of Edward Balliol

¹ *Proceedings*, vol. lxiii. pp. 102-38; vol. lxxv. pp. 115-7.

² Watson, *op. cit.*, p. 501.

³ *Exchequer Rolls of Scotland*, vol. i. p. clxxxii.

⁴ *Documents Illustrative of the History of Scotland, 1286-1306*, ed. J. Stevenson, vol. i. p. 313; cf. J. Taylor, *Edward I. in the North of Scotland*, pp. 57-9.

⁵ *Reg. Magni Sigilli Regum Scotorum, 1306-1424*, app. ii., Nos. 384, 513, 663.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, No. 1004; Sir William Fraser, *The Frasers of Philorth*, vol. ii. p. 296. For a case in point of this *reddendo* being made, anno 1456, see *Exchequer Rolls*, vol. vi. p. 172.

and was killed at the battle of Culblean, 30th November 1335.¹ How Atholl had come into possession of Rothiemay I do not know. It remained in the hands of the Abernethies—since 1445 Lords Saltoun—until 1612,² when it was purchased from the eighth Lord Saltoun by Sir James Stewart of Killeith,³ afterwards created Lord Ochiltree, who in his turn sold the barony five years later to John Gordon of Cairnburrow,⁴ by whom it was made over to his son William, the first Gordon laird of Rothiemay. The Gordons “had the guidin’ o’t” at Rothiemay until 1712, when, having got into financial difficulties, they sold the property for £101,751, 5s. Scots to Mr Archibald Ogilvie,⁵ a son of Lord Boyne. In 1741 it was acquired by William Duff, Lord Braco, afterwards Earl of Fife,⁶ who resided there with his numerous family for many years. The old Countess died there in 1788. The Fifes remained in possession until in 1890 the estate was purchased by Lieut.-Colonel John Foster Forbes, father of the present laird, Lieut.-Colonel Ian Rose Innes Joseph Forbes, D.S.O.⁷

Specific mention of a castle of Rothiemay is absent from the early records, and the oldest reference to it appears to be in John Hardyng’s map of Scotland (*circa* 1465), which marks the “castels of Strabolgy, of Rithymay, of Dony Dowre (Dunnideer).”⁸ As the other two castles of this trio both show masonry assignable to this period, or older, it is probable that Rothiemay also had become a stone-and-lime fortress by the date when it was considered important enough to be marked with them on Hardyng’s map: and indeed it is quite likely (as we shall see) that the oldest portion of the structure now remaining, namely, the massive eastern wing, may belong to the fifteenth century. In the writs of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries it is referred to variously as the “castle,” “fortalice,” “tower,” “tower and fortalice,” “house and fortalice,” “place,” or “house” of Rothiemay; the last-mentioned

¹ See *Proceedings*, vol. lxiv. pp. 201–11.

² One of the Saltoun lords of Rothiemay fell at the “Red Harlaw,” 24th July 1411, as recorded in the old ballad:

“The Lord Saltoun of Rothemay,
A Man of Micht and mekle Main,
Grit Dolour was for his Decay,
That sae unhappylie was slain.”

³ *Frasers of Philorth*, vol. ii. p. 66; *Reg. Magni Sigilli*, 1609–20, No. 898.

⁴ *Reg. Magni Sigilli*, 1609–20, No. 1598.

⁵ A. and H. Tayler, *The Book of the Duffs*, vol. i. p. 112; see also *The Ogilvies of Boyne*, by the same authors, pp. 62–6.

⁶ *Ibid.*
⁷ Good though undocumented summaries of the history of Rothiemay will be found in *Notes, Historical and Ecclesiastical, on the Parish of Rothiemay*, by D. Shearer (1886), and in *Rothiemay House*, by W. Cramond (1900).

⁸ *Facsimiles of National MSS. of Scotland*, pt. ii., No. lxix.; *The Chronicle of John Hardyng*, ed. H. Ellis, pp. 417, 418.

designation became usual in the time of the Earls of Fife, but the more ancient and appropriate style of "castle" has been revived under the Forbesees.

On 3rd September 1562 Queen Mary, then on her northward expedition that terminated in the defeat of the Gordons on the field of Corrichie, spent a night at Rothiemay.¹ The room in which she is said to have slept is still pointed out on the first floor at the north end of the east wing. In most Scottish houses where Queen Mary passed a night, such a room is shown for the edification of visitors; and it may be suspected that in many cases the ascription is an apocryphal one, dating from that revival of interest in the tragic Queen which was a by-product of Sir Walter Scott and the Romantic Revival. But at Rothiemay "Queen Mary's Room" was known at least as far back as 1797,² and it is therefore by no means improbable that the tradition here may be a genuine one. The baron of Rothiemay at the time of the young Queen's visit was Alexander Abernethy, sixth Lord Saltoun, who afterwards took part in the overthrow of the Gordons at Corrichie: an act that had unfortunate consequences for the Rothiemay lands which lay within such easy reach from the Gordon headquarters at Strathbogie, for in 1568 Lord Saltoun and other northern barons reported to the Privy Council that "thair landis, rowmes, and possessionis wer and ar in utter perrell and dangeir to be invaidit and persewit with fyre, swerd, and all uther kynd of hostilitie be George, Erll of Huntlie, his assistaris and complices."³ Whether any scathe was done to the castle at this time we do not know.

In 1578 the Castle of Rothiemay seems to have figured as a State prison, for hither apparently was sent, at the behest of Lord Ruthven, who had recently "cleaned up" the Border rievvers, one Archie Batie, brother of John of the Scoir, "to be suirlye keipit unlettin to libertie or sufferrit to pass hame." Despite these stringent instructions Archie soon vanished and Lord Saltoun had to procure himself a special exoneration from the Privy Council.⁴

In 1601 the plenishing of the "place and fortalice" of Rothiemay

¹ *Proxima nox ad Rothimaium Abrenethiorum villam satis tranquille transacta est*—Buchanan, *Hist. Scot.*, bk. xxvii. (ed. 1700, p. 488a). Cf. Ogilvy's *Diurnal of the Queen's Journey* (MS. in Nat. Lib.), printed in *Banffshire Journal*, 9th April 1935, p. 2: "The 2nd she left Balquhain after dinner and supped and slept at Rothiemay. The 3rd she set out after dinner from Rothiemay and supped and slept at Grange in Strathisla." The artillery demanded from Lord Huntly at Strathbogie was directed to be sent to Rothiemay, and thence to Banff. See *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer*, vol. xi. pp. 201-2.

² *Old Statistical Account*, vol. xix. p. 386.

³ *Reg. Privy Council*, vol. i. (1545-69) p. 645. For the interesting letter sent from Rothiemay, 23rd August 1570, to the Regent Morton by Lords Saltoun and Pitsligo, see *The Frasers of Philorth*, vol. ii. p. 59.

⁴ *Reg. Privy Council*. vol. iii. pp. 42, 62.

included a "cupboard of silver work."¹ In 1618 the "place of Rothiemay" figures in a curious altercation between George Gordon of Gicht and Patrick Livingston of Inchcoursie. The quarrel had to do with the will of Dame Margaret Stewart, Lady Saltoun: Gordon attacked Livingston bitterly "for suffering hir to mak ony testament . . . alledgeing that all scho had wes his birth-right, and that no utheris had interesse thairto." After the dispute had gone on for some time the laird of Gicht, on 14th May, made an attempt to surprise Livingston at Rothiemay, "quhair he hes dwelt thir sax yeiris bigane." "Being walking in quiet maner afore the yet," Livingston "wes almoist surprysit of him, and with grite difficultie relevit him self within the house. The yettis quhair of being closed and locked, he chopped very rudlie at the yet, crying and schouting unto the said Patrik to come furth, that he nicht have his hairt blood." Livingston carried the matter to the Privy Council, by decree of which the wild laird of Gicht was placed under lock and key in Edinburgh Castle.²

The next occasion on which Rothiemay Castle emerges on the stage of history is in connexion with the mysterious tragedy of the burning of Fren draught on 8th October 1630, in which William Gordon of Rothiemay was one of those who lost their lives. For long the Crichtons of Fren draught had been at daggers drawn with their neighbours of Rothiemay concerning some disputed fishing rights upon the Deveron; and Lady Fren draught was accused by the Gordons of having caused the fire in which the laird of Rothiemay had perished. The Gordons therefore engaged a party of Highlanders, who obtained from Lady Rothiemay, mother of the burned laird, the use of "the hous and castle of Rothemay, which they doe fortifie with meat, men, and munition; and from thence they make daylie incursions against Fren dret, and kill some of his men."³ Unfortunately these Highlanders, zealous fellows, soon displayed a tendency to carry on plundering operations on their own account, and did not bother to draw any fine distinction among their victims between those who paid them and those against whom they had been engaged to serve. And so on one occasion they expelled Lady Rothiemay and her daughters from the house—"schot the lady with hir dochteris to her owne yit to ane kilbarne quhair they remanit"—and held high revelry in "this strong hous" until the advent of the Sheriff-Principal of Banff, George Baird of Auchmedden, at the head of 200 men, forced them to quit; but as soon as the representative of law and order had departed "they cam all back agane to Rothimay, quhair

¹ Cramond, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

² *Reg. Privy Council*, vol. xi. pp. 395-9.

³ Sir Robert Gordon, *Genealogical History of the Earldom of Sutherland*, p. 475.

they held hous in wonted forme.”¹ Lady Rothimay was accused of having acted collusively with the rieviers, and in the beginning of 1635 the Privy Council sent a herald charging her to render up the castle, which she did; but almost immediately thereafter a party of Gordons “cam back agane to Rothimay, strak wp the yetis and durris, and duelt thairin noblie. Bot in the meintyme letteris of intercommoning is proclameit aganis thame, qubairby as thay war lawless so maid freindless and sua nicht not byd togidder, thairfoir thay pairtit the pelf amongis them, kest wp the yettis of Rothimay and ilk man to do for himself, and pairtit company vpon the 23rd of Januar.”² The Sheriff of Banff now (2nd April 1635) took possession again and garrisoned the place with “powder, bullet, and 24 souldiours” at Lady Rothimay’s expense.³ She herself was sent a prisoner to Edinburgh, where she lay for nearly two years. Her trial before the Privy Council gives a vivid description of the “heirschipis, reiffis, oppresiones, and depra-dations committed be licht horsemen of the name of Gordoun and utheris upon the laird of Fren-draucht and his tennentis.” The description of the manner in which the rieviers, with or without the lady’s consent, shared the house between her and themselves is interesting. They “pairtit the place betwix thame, the on side of the closs to thame, and the uther to the lady.” This suggests a building on the courtyard plan, with two lateral wings. The lady, it was alleged by her accusers, was so well pleased with the raiders’ successes against the Fren-draughts “that at Christmas thaireftir schoe dancit with the licht horsemen in the place of Rothimay the cusheoun dance upon her schoulder.” Her trial was terminated by a personal appeal on her behalf to King Charles I., who in a letter written from Whitehall on 14th February 1637 directed the Privy Council to set her at liberty upon sufficient sureties.⁴

On 30th October 1644 the “place of Rothimay,” then held by the Covenanters, was captured and plundered by Montrose on his march from Fyvie *via* Turriff to Strathbogie.⁵ In August 1651 it opened its gates to an English garrison, which remained in possession for at least

¹ Spalding, *Memorialls of the Troubles*, vol. i. pp. 51, 55.

² Spalding, *ibid.*, vol. i. p. 59.

³ The Sheriff, however, considered himself out of pocket to the extent of “nyne hundreth foure-score three pundis nyne shillings of his owne proper moneyes, by and attour the charge of the taking and transporting of the Ladie Rothemay, and others’ rebellis, fra time to time, as alsua in the persute and searching for the brokin men and others imployments, as his Majesteis service required.” These moneys were allowed to him by resolution of the Privy Council, 28th July 1635 (*Reg. Privy Council*, 2nd series, vol. vi. p. 73).

⁴ For all these wild doings see *Reg. Privy Council*, 2nd series, vol. iii. pp. 255-7, 429-31, 485-6, 496, 509-10; vol. iv. pp. 241-5, 333-4, 654-5, 671-2; vol. v. pp. 439-43, 446, 449, 515-7, 635; vol. vi. pp. 19, 42, 46-7, 73, 88-9, 343, 395, 400, 666. Cf. also Spalding, *op. cit.*, vol. i. pp. 432-7.

⁵ Spalding, vol. ii. p. 426.

two years; and the presence of these Puritan soldiers, of whose saintly qualities Macaulay's robust and partial imagination has painted in a famous passage such a golden picture, was productive—here as elsewhere in Scotland—of the most disastrous results in the morality of the servant girls of the neighbourhood. "Scandalouse carriage with the English souldiours quartered in the Castell" gave the Kirk Session of Rothiemay ample, and no doubt pleasant, opportunity during these years for the exercise of their inquisitorial powers.¹

On 23rd March 1780 Lord Fife's sub-factor, Alexander Stronach of Knock, wrote the following letter to his chief, William Rose, who resided at Montcoffer House but was then at Edinburgh:—²

... "I am sure you behooved to stop upon the Thursday after we parted as the wind blew wt great violence and occasioned much damage all over the country, but with still greater excess on Saturday last. The first turr'd several parts of the house of Rothiemay, not only the old tower but likeways great part of the south side which was increased on Saturday. Lady Fife proposed that I should aply to ye Earl or you for direction to make the necessary repairs on his Lp's expence, as she considers herself only lyable for tear and wear but not for the effect of Hurrycanes and she expects she will be relieved accordingly. In ye mean time she is prepareing matterials and has bespoke workmen and did not propose my takeing any concern until I receive particular directions. I told her I did not inclyne to trouble my Lord on ye subject at this time but promised to lay ye case before you."

Little seems to have been done at that time, but in 1795 the Earl himself visited the place, and writes in high wrath about the state into which it had been allowed to degenerate by the tenant. "I was yesterday at Rothiemay, nothing can describe the Stile Mr Gecky has the House in. He has taken out the Windows out of the Library. It will drive it to ruin. It is lucky I went. I shall get him out of it directly and get that part made watter tight, pull down the old side as the roof in some parts is fallen in."³ That Lord Fife carried out his intention, and

¹ For details see extracts from the Session Records in Gordon, *History of Scots Affairs*, App. to Preface, pp. lvii–lix; also Shearer, *op. cit.*, pp. 23–5. By contrast the passage from Macaulay is worth quoting, as showing how a great historian's prepossessions combined with his golden-mouthed eloquence to delude his readers into a conception of the Roundhead soldiery which the slightest acquaintance with the parochial records of Scotland during the Protectorate would have served to dispel. "But that which chiefly distinguished the army of Cromwell from other armies was the austere morality and the fear of God which pervaded all ranks. It is acknowledged by the most zealous Royalists that, in that singular camp, no oath was heard, no drunkenness or gambling was seen, and that, during the long dominion of the soldiery, the property of the peaceable citizens and the honour of woman were held sacred. . . . No servant girl complained of the rough gallantry of the redcoats. Not an ounce of plate was taken from the shops of the goldsmiths"—*Hist. of England*, ed. T. F. Henderson, p. 32.

² Extract from the original letter kindly furnished by Miss Henrietta Tayler.

³ A. and H. Tayler, *Lord Fife and his Factor*, pp. 260–1.

without delay, we learn from the *Old Statistical Account*,¹ published two years later, wherein it is stated that "the most ancient part of the house, which was fast going to ruin, his lordship has lately taken down, and has repaired and furnished the rest in a manner which does honour to his taste."

THE CASTLE.

Rothiemay Castle (see plans,² fig. 4) consists to-day principally of two long ranges, set at right angles, south and east. These ranges represent the portions of the ancient building that have survived; and to both additions have been made, apparently in course of the reconstruction initiated by Lord Fife after 1795. I am informed by Miss Henrietta A. Tayler that the alterations were mainly effected by her grandfather, Major Alexander Francis Tayler, who was granted a lease of Rothiemay House in January 1809, when his wife's father became the third Lord Fife.

The addition to the south range consists of a new front facing north, and containing on the ground floor the present library, with a triple bow-window looking north, and on the west side a semi-round tower rising through the full three storeys of the building. The bow-window was inserted by Major Tayler, and the rest of this building is doubtless Lord Fife's work. As originally designed, or altered by Major Tayler, it included a pillared entrance porch, and the new front terminated with a broad, low-pitched gable looking north, having a crocketed pinnacle on either side, and prolonged eastward with a quasi-classical balustrade, part of which still exists. The addition made about the same time to the east range consists of a two-storeyed transverse wing set across the north end of the range, like the head of a T, and having a bold semi-round tower in the centre. This tower was originally capped by a balustrade with crocketed pinnacles, all similar in design to the corresponding features on the addition to the other range; but the balustrade has now been taken down, though the pinnacles remain. The transverse wing finishes at either end with plain gables, and its roof is lower than that of the ancient east range, which overrides it and finishes in a semi-conical helmet to the round tower, this helmet rising into a pyramidal peak in a quaintly picturesque manner.³ An important addition to

¹ Vol. xix. p. 386.

² In view of the fact that the old masonry is everywhere covered externally by harl and internally by panelling, and the difficulty which consequently exists about identifying precisely the work of different periods, it has been deemed inadvisable to attempt a dated plan. The general sequence of building will be understood from the text.

³ The appearance of the mansion, as thus remodelled at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is shown in an old lithograph reproduced in *Lord Fife and His Factor*, p. 260.

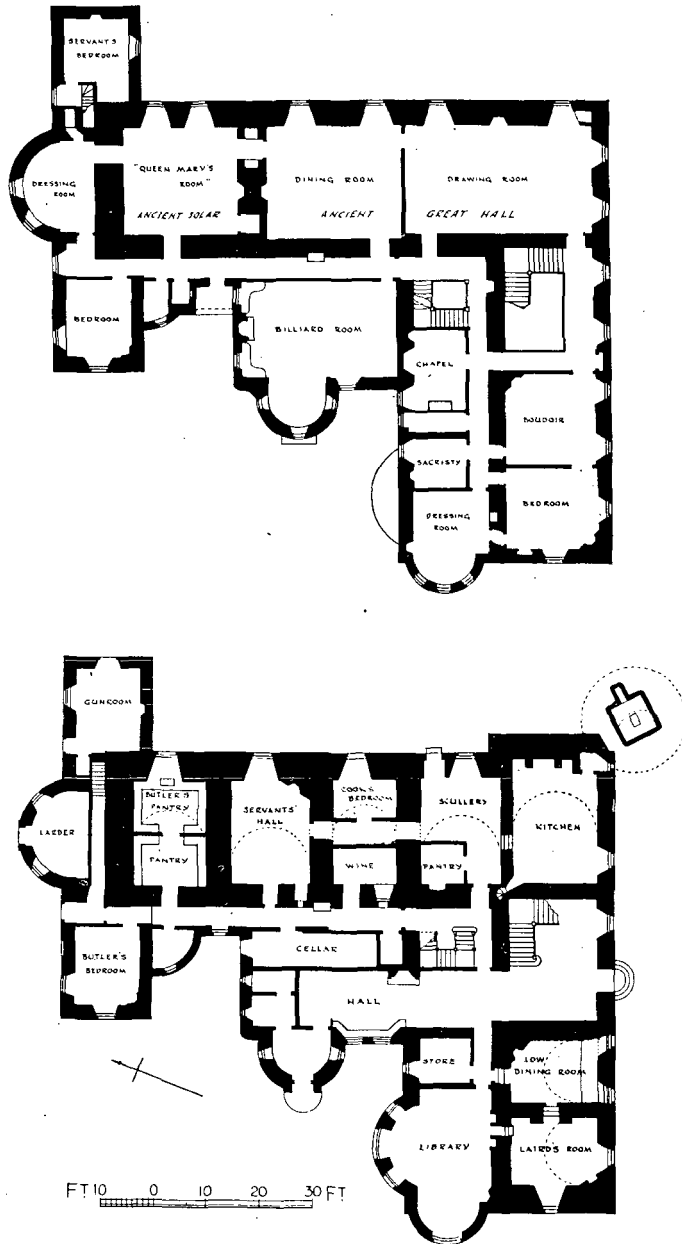


Fig. 4. Rothiemay Castle: Plans.

the building, consisting of the tall porch tower in the re-entrant angle of the two ranges, was made by the late Colonel Foster Forbes in 1901. This very effective tower (fig. 5), which ties the whole sprawling architectural composition of the house together, is reminiscent, with its corbelled cap-house and pointed stair turret, of a similar building, dated 1602, at Ballindalloch Castle, and was designed by Mr A. Marshall Mackenzie, LL.D., R.S.A., F.S.A.Scot., of Aberdeen. The same architect carried out a still further improvement upon the



Fig. 5. Rothiemay Castle: view from north-west.

castle in 1912; this latest work consists of the segmental turret, with bathroom and other accommodation, inserted in the angle between the ancient east range and the west limb of Major Tayler's addition.

Of the two ancient ranges the south one measures 88 feet in length and 22 feet 6 inches in breadth. It has been built across the south end of the eastern range, which is older and more massive in construction, and measures about 74 feet in length and 28 feet 9 inches in breadth. In both ranges the basement consists of a series of tunnel-vaulted offices; but, whereas in the south range the walls are for the most part only 3 feet thick, in the east range they reach a thickness of about 5 feet on the outer side and over 4 feet on the inner or courtyard side. Also the three main cross-walls dividing the cellars in the east range are of great

strength, being about 4 feet 6 inches thick; the southmost cross-wall, dividing the scullery from the kitchen at the east end of the south range, is much thinner (2 feet 2½ inches), and clearly belongs to the same period as the south range. The eastern vaults also are rather lower, only about 8 feet to 8 feet 6 inches in height, as compared with 9 feet to 9 feet 6 inches in the southern range. But the two western vaults of the latter are of more massive construction, and doubtless are older than the rest of this range. On the first floor the east range contains, from south to north, the present drawing-room, dining-room, and "Queen Mary's Room." The dining- and drawing-rooms are separated only by a light partition (inserted by Major Tayler) and originally formed one great hall, measuring 63 feet 4 inches by 20 feet 4 inches, to which "Queen Mary's Room" seemingly formed the solar, its dimensions being 22 feet by 20 feet 4 inches. At the south-east corner of the hall a service stair or hatch, traces of which still exist, established connexion between the screens and the kitchen below. Originally in both ranges the cellars appear to have opened directly on to the courtyard, and the rooms above were reached one from another in the old "through-going" Scottish manner. The present corridors along the eastern range on the ground and first floors were added by Major Tayler, by whom also the vault in the south range next the kitchen was cut out, and the present wide open main stair constructed, which with its balustrade and fine landing forms a dignified internal feature of the castle. During the alterations of 1901 a wooden service stair on the scale-and-platt design—also part of Major Tayler's work—which occupied a position immediately north of the library, was removed, and its place taken by a storeroom on the basement level and toilet accommodation above (as shown on plan); the present service stair was built to the north of the main stair, and the corridor and straight flight of steps were inserted between the larder and the ancient outer end wall of the east wing, so as to provide internal access to the bedroom on the first floor of the eastern limb of the T-annexe. The window in the south wall of the laird's room on the ground floor was slapped out at the same period.

The eastern range is now only two storeys in height, and has evidently been cut down: its roof mitres into that of the south range, which is of three storeys, and presents (fig. 6) an impressive example of the symmetrical and rather severe designs that came into vogue in Scotland after the Restoration. Midway in the wall-head line is a semicircular gablet with a void for a clock and a chimney perched atop. The gables are not crow-stepped and have plain skewputs, upon which in the alterations of the Duff period crocketed pinnacles have been imposed. On

the ground floor in the centre of the composition is a T-headed freestone door with late bolection mouldings. The windows are in freestone and uniformly show a $2\frac{1}{2}$ -inch chamfer: that of the laird's room still retains its caged grille of interlocking bars, the mode of intersection being reversed in diagonally opposite quarters in the usual Scottish manner.

Only two of the windows in the east range, namely those lighting "Queen Mary's Room," are old: they are in freestone and show a $3\frac{1}{2}$ -inch chamfer. A poor and incorrect water-colour drawing by the Rev. Charles Cordiner, done before 1780, now in the possession of Lord Carnegie, preserves the appearance (though in very bad perspective)



Fig. 6. Rothiemay Castle: view from south.

of this range before the Duff alterations; then, as now, it was only two storeys in height, and terminated northwards in a crow-stepped gable.

As to dates, in the absence internally of distinctive architectural features, and as the walls are all either plastered or panelled, it is difficult to speak with any certainty. The south range, however, is plainly an addition. With the exception of the two massive older cellars at its west end, it seems to be uniform throughout its height, and its symmetrically planned external details point to a date in the latter part of the seventeenth century. The east range is clearly more ancient, and may not impossibly be as old as the latter part of the fifteenth century. In its general design it recalls the "palace" added about this period to the neighbouring castle of Huntly. The heavy chamfer found on the windows of "Queen Mary's Room" is very common in the later fifteenth century, though found also both earlier and later. I suspect that the builder of the east range may have been William Abernethy, second Lord Saltoun, who was the first of his line to make Rothiemay his definite

headquarters, as appears from a crown charter that he obtained on 10th January 1482, gathering all his scattered lands—which lay in the shires of Banff, Angus, Fife, Stirling, Midlothian, East Lothian, Berwick, and Roxburgh—into one free barony, to be known as the barony of Abernethy, the service for which was to be done at the Sheriff Court of Banff, evidently because he had made Rothiemay his chief residence.¹ It is probably significant that in the next Abernethy charter after this date (issued on 9th March 1491)² specific mention is found, for the first time so far as I know in charter evidence, of the *castrum de Rothiemay*. At this time the place was sometimes styled Abernethy in Rothiemay, the Saltouns evidently desiring to transfer that name to their new capital messuage—in the same way as their neighbours the Gordons, with greater success, brought the name Huntly from Berwickshire to Strathbogie.

In the bow which now caps the north end of the east wing is a remarkable doorway (seen to the left in fig. 5). It is in granite and round-arched, with quasi-classical mouldings, and the keystone shows an angel's or cherub's head with outspread wings. This doorway has clearly been derived from elsewhere, and when built into its present position was heightened by the insertion of a sandstone course midway in each jamb. Originally the height had been about 7 feet 8 inches, and the width is 3 feet 6 inches. It seems to date from the late seventeenth century, and probably came from the old parish church.

There still exist three stones which had formed portions of a dormer window or windows. One of them appears to show part of the Forbes arms and the motto SALUS PER [CHRISTUM]: the other two show a dove as a supporter, and on one of them are the initials E. S. The Lady Rothiemay who figures so prominently in the feud with the Crichtons of Frenndraught, as noted above, was Katherine, a daughter of John, eighth Lord Forbes.

Internally the decorative features of the castle seem in the main to be due to Major Tayler's restoration, though two rooms on the first floor at the west end of the south range show good vernacular panelling of the late seventeenth century. By Major Tayler the drawing-room ceiling was heightened, with the peculiar result that the windows of the storey above open *below* the floor level. Many fine paintings of the Duff period still remain.³

In October 1932, while a drain was being laid, a small subterranean

¹ *Reg. Magni Sigilli*, 1424–1513, No. 1534.

² *Ibid.*, No. 2094.

³ See list of the paintings in Cramond, *op. cit.*, pp. 28–30.

vault was discovered close outside the south-east corner of the castle. The vault, which is out of alignment with the existing buildings, measures 6 feet 7 inches square and was entered from above by a trap, 2 feet 5½ inches by 1 foot 6½ inches, carefully checked for a hatch. On the east side of the vault is a long narrow aumbry, 3 feet 2 inches deep and 14 inches square. This vault may have been a "pit" or prison cell in the base of a former round angle tower (as suggested on plan, fig. 4), which must have been removed before the present south wing was built. If this was so, then the original east wing will have been a long building with an angle tower, very similar to the "palace" at Huntly Castle.

It is known that old cobbling exists immediately in front of the north bow window of the library, so that this ground was doubtless within the ancient barmkin.

THE PRECINCTS.

West of the castle is the farm of Mains of Rothimay, representing the demesne or "board-land" of the manorial residence. The "Mains thereof" is listed along with "the place, fortalice, and yards" of Rothimay in a deed of 1601.¹ Part of the buildings seem to be of considerable antiquity, and they include a large kiln with a stone-domed roof. Perhaps this is the identical "kiln-barn" on record in 1634 (see *supra*, p. 232). To the south-west is the dovecot, a building measuring 27 feet 4 inches square over walls 3 feet thick (fig. 7). It is divided into two compartments, of which the east one has been altered to serve as a shelter for beasts, while the west one still retains its numerous stone nests. On the external walls are flat-arched recesses, one midway in the south face, two in the east side, and three in each of the west and north faces. Some of these at least seem to be built-up windows. The two door lintels on the south face are in freestone, and chamfered. There is a garret floor under a plain hipped roof, but both are secondary, and the dovecot, which must have been of unusual size, has evidently been cut down and rearranged. The castle and its demesne have been enclosed, east and west, by spacious precinct walls, taking in a stretch of some 800 yards along the Deveron, and extending back northward on the west side to a distance of over 1300 yards. These walls, and those which enclose the very beautiful garden, are of a most remarkable character, composed of enormous boulders, often as much as 3 feet by 2 feet on the face. The gardens at Rothimay are probably of very ancient date, for in October 1496 the third Lord Saltoun sent to King James IV.

¹ Cramond, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

a gift of pears,¹ presumably from Rothiemay. At the end of the north avenue, and in the west avenue at the entry from the Mains, are rusticated pillar gates of the Duff period. Prior to Lord Fife's time, when it was diverted to the north, the ancient main road (see map, fig. 1), after crossing the Deveron by the Milltown ford, held alongside the river, where its course is still marked by an avenue of fine old trees, by gaps in the precinct walls, and by the picturesque little balustraded bridge (now known as "Queen Mary's Bridge") that carried it over the Kirktown Burn. From this point the approach to the castle



Fig. 7. Rothiemay Castle: Dovecot.

led up the east bank of the burn, and then crossed it again by another but plainer bridge at the north-east corner of the precinct.

The village of Milltown of Rothiemay, at the eastern entrance to the precincts, preserves the close association between the capital message of a medieval manorial centre and the barony mill to which the tenants were thirled. The "castle of Rothiemay and mills thereof" are mentioned in a charter of King James IV. dated 9th March 1492.² The mill is evidently very old, and on its door, whose massy iron key is a notable specimen of old Scottish smithwork, a mark still indicates the highest point reached by the Deveron during the "Muckle Spate" of 1829.

In the Kirk Session records under the year 1607 mention is found

¹ *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer*, vol. i. (1473-98), p. 302.

² *Reg. Magni Sigilli*, 1424-1513, No. 2094.

of the "Castletoun of Rothiemay";¹ and our picture of the appurtenances of a medieval barony is completed by the Gallowhill, which overlooks the castle from the east.

THE "QUEIR OF ROTHIE MAY."

Rothiemay was a mensal church of the Bishop of Moray, and various entries relative to it will be found in the chartulary of that diocese.² On 28th May 1540 Alexander, Lord Saltoun, received a tack of the parsonage of Rothiemay for nineteen years—"the said Lord to uphold, beit and mend during the forsaidis yeirs the queir of Rothemay in theking the utheris necessaris reparatioun concerning the personage thereof upovn his awin costis."³ From this it appears that the church consisted of a chancel to which no nave had been added, as often in Scotland during the later Middle Ages; and also that in the sixteenth century at all events the roof was thatched. In September 1626 it was slated, as appears from an entry in the Kirk Session's records in the following terms:—⁴

"Itim it is ordeint that thrie horses of ilk pleuch pas to the sclait heuch of Mayne to bring heam sclaites to the Kirk."

On Sunday, 3rd August 1651, "at the very tyme of ringing the third bells," the congregation in the church was "quytte brocken upp" by the arrival of a troop of English dragoons, under the command of Captain Robiesone, who quartered themselves upon the parish, and as befitted Cromwell's sectaries, did not delay long in venting their ill-feeling upon the church. "The Sackloth wes tackne awaye," laments the Session Clerk, "and not long after this the stoole of repentence upon the very Lords day after sermone tumoultously throwne downe by the English souldiours."⁵

About 1726 the church is described as standing "amid a wood of birch and alder on Doavern."⁶ It was pulled down by the first Earl of Fife in 1752 because it interfered with the privacy of the house.⁷ A new church was built at the Milltown, the stones of the demolished building no doubt being used for the new one. Many of these stones seem to have reappeared in the present church, which dates from 1807. Nothing save the site of the old building until recently was apparent,

¹ Gordon, *History of Scots Affairs*, vol. i., App. to Preface, p. lii.

² *Registrum Episcopatus Moraviensis*, p. xix, and reff. in Index.

³ Gordon, *Scots Affairs*, App. to Preface, p. liv.

⁴ *Antiquities of the Shires of Aberdeen and Banff*, vol. ii. p. 225.

⁵ Cramond, *op. cit.*, pp. 23-4.

⁶ *Op. cit.*, p. 419.

⁷ *Op. cit.*, p. lvii.

enclosed with a paling, and containing a single tombstone. Colonel Forbes has now cleared the site, exposing the foundations of the whole building, as shown on plan (fig. 8), with the font and a pediment inscribed 1672. The north jamb of the transept door is in Byth stone and shows a 3-inch chamfer. The font is in granite, octagonal externally, 1 foot 5 inches in internal diameter and 1 foot 8 inches in height. There is a centre drain, and on the edge of one side are two

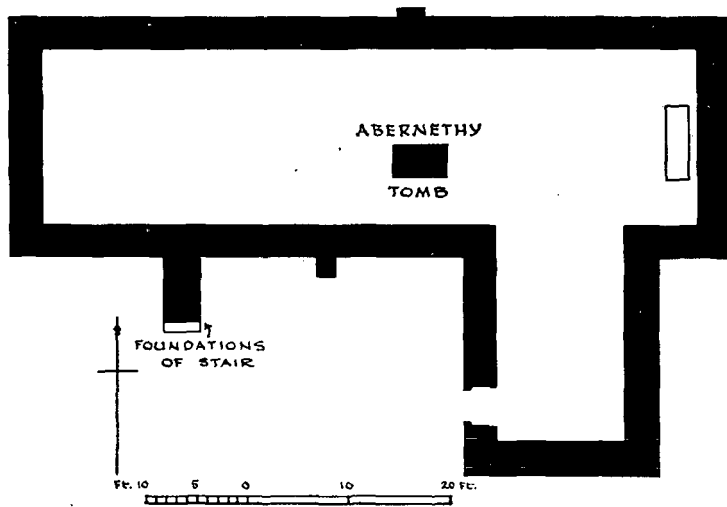


Fig. 8. Old Church of Rothiemay: plan of foundations.

sockets for the hinge of a lid. A quantity of human remains were found, and one shard of medieval pottery. The inscription on the tombstone, now mostly illegible, is thus given by Cramond:

“Among his ancestors underneath this stone is interred John Abernethy of Mayen, a young man of an amiable character. He died 2nd May 1779, in the 21st year of his age; also Helen Abernethy, his sister, who died — April 1787, aged 34; also their nephew, Charles Graham, who died December 1800, aged 28 years.”

THE MANSE AND ST PETER'S WELL.

The old manse, a plain oblong two-storeyed edifice, still stands in the Den to the east of the castle, and is now used as the laundry. Beside it is St Peter's Well, with a stone lintel bearing the date 1580; this, however, does not seem to be *in situ*, and probably came from the castle.

THE KIRKTOWN.

The Kirktown of Rothimay is on record in 1617, in which year it was erected by royal charter into a free burgh of barony, with power of choosing bailies and councillors, maintaining a courthouse and market cross, and holding a weekly market on Thursdays. There were also to be three annual fairs : Dustan (St Drostan's) Fair on the 14th December, Sanct Denneis Fair on the 9th October, and Halycroce Fair on the 3rd May. The Castle of Rothimay was declared to be the principal messuage of the barony.¹ Traces of a cobbled causeway exist between the old manse and the church, and this probably was the principal street of the Kirktown.

An "oastler hous in the toun of Rothimay" is mentioned in 1628,² but whether at the Kirktown or Milltown does not appear. Probably it was at the Kirktown, for during the campaign of 1715 we hear of a "blind ale house very near Rothimay's House," in which Lord Lovat, Duncan Forbes of Culloden, and Major Fraser took up their headquarters on their journey to Inverness, of which Major Fraser has left us so entertaining an account. Lady Rothimay, whose husband (Archibald Ogilvie) was with Mar at Perth, invited them to the house, and on their declining her offer of hospitality sent them down "two dozen of strong ale," which with the brandy that they got in the inn no doubt insured them a comfortable night.³

Miss Henrietta Tayler has kindly drawn my attention to an amusing passage in a letter amongst the Harley Papers, from which it appears that Dr Johnson's famous Dictionary joke about oats—"a grain which in England is generally given to horses, but in Scotland supports the people"—was not original, but had been made a century before, and *à propos* of Rothimay. The letter is written at London, on 13th September 1672, by Denis de Repas to Sir Edward Harley: ⁴

"I was forced for two months' time, in the north, in a place called Rothimay, to live altogether upon pap for want of bread. The Scotch men and the Scotch horses live altogether upon the same diet, I mean upon oats, for there is not a horse in thirty to whom hay is afforded; their bread is made with oats and so is their bonny ale."

I have much pleasure in acknowledging the facilities and assistance which I have received, in preparing this paper, from Colonel and Mrs Forbes of Rothimay; and from Miss Katherine Forbes, who helped

¹ *Reg. Magni Sigilli*, 1607-20, No. 1598.

² *Reg. Privy Council*, 2nd series, vol. ii. p. 334.

³ *Major Fraser's MS.*, ed. Col. A. Ferguson, vol. ii. pp. 62-4.

⁴ *Hist. MSS. Commission, Portland MSS.*, vol. iii. (Harley Papers) p. 327.

me to make the surveys. The illustration of fig. 2 is taken from Bishop G. F. Browne's *Antiquities of Dunecht*, with permission of the syndics of the Cambridge University Press. Fig. 5 is reproduced by courtesy of Aberdeen Journals, Ltd. Mr Alistair and Miss Henrietta Tayler have done me the favour to read my typescript through, and I have derived much benefit from their intimate personal knowledge of the castle.
