

## II.

FYVIE CASTLE. BY W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, M.A.,  
D.LITT., F.S.A.SCOT.

## I.

“Fyvie lands ly broad and wide  
And o but they ly bonny!”

The district of Fyvie, with its pleasant braes descending southward to the Ythan valley, is one of those localities by nature suited for supporting an early population. Its riverward slopes are not too rapid to prevent good deep earth from accumulating, while at the same time they are steep enough to provide natural drainage, both surface and through the gravel subsoil, and thus were admirably fitted for primitive husbandry at a time when the Howe of Fyvie—the fertile haughs by the river-side that now form the best farming land in the parish—were water-logged and noisome swamps. On those pleasant sheltered and sun-lit slopes—still known for their early harvests—the ancient inhabitants built their villages and grew their bear and oats. The forests provided them with abundant timber and game, as well as a ready-to-hand supply of fuel, later superseded by the peat mosses in whose thick beds on the colder uplands of the parish the remains of the primeval forests are embalmed.<sup>1</sup> In the Ythan, in early days as now, was available an ample stock of salmon, trout, and eel. Under these circumstances it is hardly to be wondered that traces of prehistoric occupation are frequent in Fyvie. Tools and weapons of the Stone and Bronze Ages have been picked up at various places in the parish, and burial cairns of the latter period exist at Cairnhill, at Cairn Fenny, at Cairnchedly, at King’s Seat, at Back Hill, and at Pitmancy, while there are remains of stone circles at Burreldales, Rappla Wood, Hallgreens, and Monkshill.<sup>2</sup>

Where the early population was gathered together, thither the Christian missionary would make his way. That Fyvie was a notable centre of the Celtic Church is proved by the group of Pictish sculptured stones now built into the east gable of the parish church.<sup>3</sup> The latter was dedicated to St Peter, and I have elsewhere suggested that it may have been in its origin one of the churches founded by St Boniface in his mission to Pictland about the year 715.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup> A hundred years ago “the ordinary description of fuel” used in Fyvie was peat (see *The New Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. xii. p. 344). Nowadays no peat is cut in Fyvie.

<sup>2</sup> See *Proceedings*, vol. xxxvii. pp. 102-6, 108-9.

<sup>3</sup> J. Romilly Allen and J. Anderson, *The Early Christian Monuments of Scotland*, pt. iii. pp. 164-6, 194-6; *Proceedings*, vol. xlix. pp. 41-3.

<sup>4</sup> See my *The Celtic Church in Scotland*, p. 111.

In the days of the Anglo-Norman penetration, during the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, the Celtic ecclesiastical establishment at Fyvie, probably in much the same way as happened at Turriff, Deer, and Monymusk, was reconstituted as a priory of Tironensian monks, dedicated to the Virgin Mary and subordinate to Arbroath Abbey. The site of the priory, now marked by a cross, is on a gentle knoll north-east of Lewes, and its ruins were still visible in the latter half of the eighteenth century.<sup>1</sup> About the same period the locality was organised, in the usual way, into a manor and parish, with a castle and a parochial church as the civil and ecclesiastical nuclei respectively. The church stood on the same position as its successor, which dates from 1808; the ancient building measured 90 feet by 22 feet within the walls, and therefore possessed the elongated proportions commonly met with in Scottish mediæval parish churches. In addition to the parochial church, there was the chapel of St Rule at Follarule, founded in 1376,<sup>2</sup> as well as several subordinate chapels. From 1325 onwards we have numerous references to the burgh of Fyvie, and as Fyvie was a crown demesne throughout most of the fourteenth century it is likely that this was at first a royal burgh.<sup>3</sup> Later, as often happened, its early status seems to have been forgotten, and under the Earls of Dunfermline it appears as a burgh of barony. In a description of the parish compiled in 1723 it is stated that "about a mile and a half north-east from the church there is an old village, called Woodhead of Fetter Letter, where is a stone tolbooth and a stone cross, and where in old times stood severall yearly mercats."<sup>4</sup> It therefore seems that here—latterly at all events—was the locus of the now vanished burgh. Thus the parochial topography was a curiously scattered one, and the usual close association of church, castle, and burgh was here conspicuously absent.<sup>5</sup>

Adjoining the castle was the Park of Fyvie, called the King's Park in 1395. The Park Burn preserves its name. In 1503 the barony possessed three mills, one at Meikle Gourdas—probably the romantic mill, now disused, celebrated in the ballad of "Tifty's bonnie Annie"—and two others,

<sup>1</sup> "From the appearance of the foundations, which were extant some years ago, it should seem to have been three sides of a court, the middle of which was the church, and the two sides the cells and offices of the monks" (*Statistical Account of Scotland*, vol. ix. (1793) p. 463).

<sup>2</sup> *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, vol. i. pp. 109-11.

<sup>3</sup> See *Exchequer Rolls*, vol. i., Preface, p. lxxxviii, and pp. 355-6.

<sup>4</sup> *Coll. Aberdeen and Banff*, p. 495.

<sup>5</sup> In a paper published by the Banffshire Field Club in 1899, Rev. Alexander Bremner contended that the royal burgh stood on the Castle Dales, the terrace immediately south of the castle. But some of his arguments depend on old place-names inaccurately transcribed. The burgh would naturally be outside the royal park, and as the priory lands of Lethenty and Ardlogy adjoined the park on the east and south-east, we may thus have the reason for the eccentric situation of the burgh, if it really was at Woodhead. But the ancient topography of Fyvie presents some difficult problems, and greatly requires working out. Here I can do no more than tabulate the facts, which would amply repay more thorough investigation.

also now idle, at Mill of Petty and Mill of Saphock.<sup>1</sup> Our picture of the appurtenances of the mediæval demesne is completed by the Gallowhill and Gallowslack, north of Kirktown.

In the thirteenth century Fyvie Castle was the capital messuage of the Thanage of Fermartyn, comprising the central district between the Ythan and the Don. At that time it was royal property, and charter evidence shows that William the Lion was at Fyvie, with the high officers of his court, in 1211 or 1214, while Alexander II. granted a charter from here on 22nd February 1222.<sup>2</sup> Edward I. visited "Fyuin Chastel" on Saturday, 21st July 1296.<sup>3</sup> In the next century Fyvie continued to be a royal demesne, and was leased to various occupants, but by Robert II. it was granted to his eldest son, the Steward of Scotland, afterwards Robert III., from whom it passed to his cousin, Sir James Lindsay, Earl of Crawford and of Buchan. His wife was Margaret Keith, daughter of the Great Marischal; and in 1395 she was besieged by her own nephew, Robert Keith, in the Castle of Fyvie, but was relieved by her husband, who hurried north across the Cairnamounth Pass and defeated Keith in a smart skirmish at the Kirk of Bourtie. According to Wyntown, building operations were in progress at Fyvie Castle when Keith began his blockade:

"For his <sup>4</sup> masownys fyrst gert he  
Fra thar werk remowide be;  
And quha that wattir broucht fra the burne  
He gert thaim oft withe his ost spurne.  
Thus he demaynit that lady  
Withe in the Castel of Fiwy." <sup>5</sup>

This seems to be the first mention of stone buildings at the castle.

The later history of Fyvie need not be set forth in detail here.<sup>6</sup> In the devolution of the demesne five periods are distinguished, during each of which it was held by a different family. They may be tabulated for reference as follows: (1) the Preston period, *circa* 1390–1433; (2) the Meldrum period, 1433–1596; (3) the Seton period, 1596–1690; (4) the Gordon period, 1733–1889; and (5) the Leith period, from 1889 to the present day. Each of these periods has left its mark on the fabric of the castle; but its architectural glories belong to the time of Alexander Seton, Lord Fyvie, and afterwards first Earl of Dunfermline, President of the Court of Session and Chancellor of Scotland (Pl. XXIV), who held Fyvie from 1596 to 1622—a man of high culture, and a notable patron of scholar-

<sup>1</sup> See *Coll. Shires Aberdeen and Banff*, p. 504. Mill of Tifty immediately adjoins the farm of Meikle Gourdas.

<sup>2</sup> *Registrum de Dunfermelyn*, p. 32, No. 53; *Registrum vetus de Aberbrothock*, p. 93, No. 131.

<sup>3</sup> *Ragman Rolls*, pp. 179, 183.

<sup>4</sup> *I.e.* Sir James Lindsay's.

<sup>5</sup> Wyntown, *Original Chronicle*, bk. ix. chap. xiv.—ed. F. J. Amours, vol. vi. p. 376.

<sup>6</sup> See A. M. W. Stirling, *Fyvie Castle*; also J. B. Pratt, *Buchan*, 4th ed., pp. 396–411.

ship and the arts. "He was in great esteem att Rome for his learning," so writes the old family chronicler, "being a great humanist in prose and poecie, Greek and Latine; well versed in the mathematicks, and had great skill in architecture and herauldrie."<sup>1</sup>

At the end of October 1644 Fyvie Castle was occupied by Montrose; and in his entrenched camp on the high ground to the east of the castle, where its ditches still remain, the royalist leader was unsuccessfully attacked by Argyll, whose bivouac is stated to have been in the field still known as Campfold, on the land of Upper Ardlogie, east of the parish church.<sup>2</sup> Two years later, in 1646, the Castle of Fyvie was fortified in the royalist interest by Lord Aboyne, who left in it "a strong garisone" under Captain John Gordon and Captain Blackater.<sup>3</sup> During the Cromwellian occupation of Scotland the castle was garrisoned by a Puritan detachment, as vividly described in her diary by Mistress Murray (Lady Halkett), a member of the household at the time.<sup>4</sup>

## II.

The castle, *magnifica et amœna arx*,<sup>5</sup> stands within a great bend of the River Ythan (see sketch map, fig. 1), which, approaching it from the north-west, flows first west and then south, enclosing the position on the north and west faces. The site is an elevated gravel mound, which on the north side falls steeply away, directly under the walls, into the bed of the river. On the east and south-east are more gentle slopes, descending into a wide shallow hollow. Southwards, a spacious level platform, known as Castle Dales, runs out into a broad, hog's-backed ridge. To the west and south-west, again, the ground descends, at a little distance from the castle, dropping down gently into the Ythan valley. Along the south-eastern and southern margins of the position, beyond the limits above described, there is a broad and sinuous artificial lake, covering some fifteen acres—teeming with trout, and now a sanctuary for all kinds of wildfowl. This lake occupies the place of an earlier marsh or swamp, more extensive and probably once connected with the river.<sup>6</sup> On the opposite side of this lake the ground rises abruptly, but at such a distance from the castle as not to command it. Thus in the days before artillery the position was one of great natural strength. On three sides the castle

<sup>1</sup> Alexander, Viscount Kingston, *History of the House of Seytoun*, p. 63. For the Lord Chancellor's life see *Memoirs of Alexander Seton*, by George Seton.

<sup>2</sup> For the action at Fyvie see G. Wishart, *Deeds of Montrose*, ed. Murdoch and Simpson, pp. 73-5; Patrick Gordon, *Britanes Distemper*, pp. 90-2; J. Spalding, *Memorials of the Trubles*, vol. ii. p. 426.

<sup>3</sup> Patrick Gordon, *op. cit.*, p. 176.

<sup>4</sup> Stirling, *Fyvie Castle*, pp. 221-31.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Gordon of Straloch, *Præfecturarum Aberdonensis et Banfiensis Nova Descriptio*, 1651-60, in *Collections, ut supra*, p. 21.

<sup>6</sup> The *stagna et aquæ de Fyuyin* are on record in 1266, in which year Henry de Fyuin accounts to the Exchequer for eels taken from them (*Chamberlain Rolls*, vol. i., Alex. III, p. 33).

was surrounded by water, and the only convenient access was through the narrow isthmus, at present no more than 500 feet broad, which intervenes between the south-western point of the marsh and the left bank of the Ythan. An old ford crosses the river about a mile south of the castle, and the only convenient access was through the narrow isthmus, at present no more than 500 feet broad, which intervenes between the south-western point of the marsh and the left bank of the Ythan. An old ford crosses the river about a mile south of the castle,

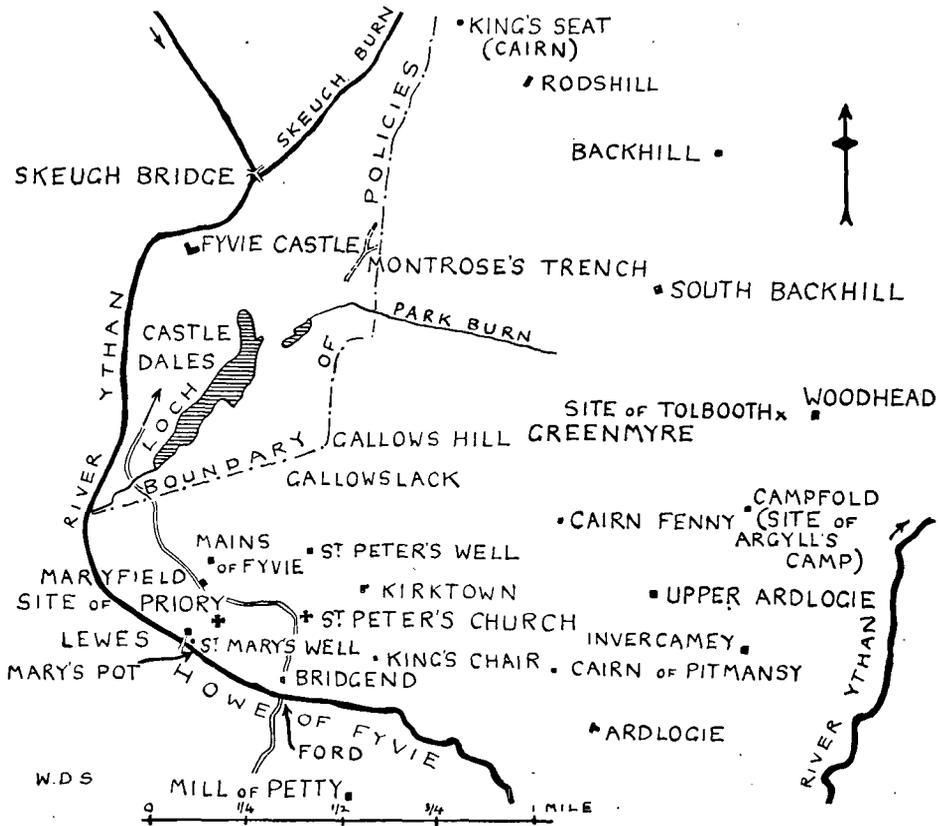


Fig. 1. Sketch Map of Fyvie.

and appears to have been the ancient means of approach.<sup>1</sup> Although the river is now fordable at any point, its haughlands in olden days were largely water-logged, and these must have presented a considerable obstacle to an attacking force. Descending from the north-east, and passing the famous Mill of Tifty, the Skeugh Burn enters the Ythan just above the

<sup>1</sup> This seems to be *le Stanyford* mentioned in 1325 (*Registrum vetus de Aberbrothock*, p. 311): it was therefore stone-bedded, as it still is. The farm at the ford is called Bridgend, which shows that latterly there had been a bridge here, prior to the erection of the present bridge at Lewes, which was in existence in 1723 (*Collections*, p. 495). This farmstead has all the marks of great age, and one of the outhouses is largely made up of stones removed from a mediæval building, including a heavy double-chamfered door, in red and yellow freestone. The old road, which is metalled, and marked out by fine old ash trees, thence makes direct for the parish church. Further on, it is traceable in the castle policies to the left of the present east drive.

castle, and with the marshlands that skirted it would have interposed an additional barrier to any hostile party approaching from the north.

No ditch was possible, or necessary, on the north side of the castle, where the Ythan forms a natural moat. If a ditch existed on the other sides, as is probable, it has long since been filled in.

In its present condition the castle (see plans, figs. 2 and 3) consists of two great ranges of building—one, 147 feet in length, facing south and forming the front, while the other, at right angles to it, extends 136 feet to the north, facing west. At either end of the south front (Pls. XXV and XXVI) are two tall square towers, finished off with corbelled angle turrets and high-pitched roofs between crow-stepped gables. In the middle of this front is the original main entrance, which in grandeur and boldness of design, as well as in the scale and vigour of its execution, may rank as the crowning triumph of Scottish baronial architecture. It consists of two stout rectangular towers with rounded fronts, which, at a height of some 38 feet, are corbelled out to the square and then are united by a deep arch of 11 feet span, carrying a huge cap-house, gabled to the front and on the sides, and provided frontally with angle turrets. From this magnificent central mass the south front has battlemented wall-heads extended on either flank, until they terminate against the gabled stair-heads of the two corner towers. Dormer windows break the roof of the central cap-house and the corner towers, and the upper parts of the elevations generally are profusely decorated with the moulded and heraldic detail and grotesque statuary so commonly found in the richer castles of the period. In the centre, between the half-round towers, is the arched entrance (Pl. XXVII), still retaining its massive wooden door and inner iron "yett," and covered by a *meurtrière* in the deep and lofty arch overhead.

The gatehouse is twice dated 1599, and bears the arms and monogram of Lord Dunfermline. It is therefore known as the Seton Tower. The south-eastern and south-western towers are called the Preston<sup>1</sup> and the Meldrum Towers; and it is inferred accordingly that their lower portions were erected respectively by these proprietors, although their upper parts have been remodelled by Lord Dunfermline in harmony with his grand symmetrical design.

The external elevation of the west wing (Pl. XXVIII) partakes of the same general character, but has two large eighteenth-century buttresses with weathered intakes; there are no battlements, and the high-pitched roof, loftier than that on the south front, is pierced by four dormer windows. There is a side-entrance, over which is incised the date "1599 zeiris." At the north end this wing is terminated by a fourth tower, similar in general character to the Preston and Meldrum Towers; but this

<sup>1</sup> "There is part of the old work there still called The Preston's Tower, because built by them" ("View of the Diocese of Aberdeen" (1732) in *Collections*, p. 494).

tower dates only from the eighteenth century, having been erected, about 1777, by General the Hon. William Gordon. It is thus known as the Gordon Tower. Very remarkably, considering the time when it was built,

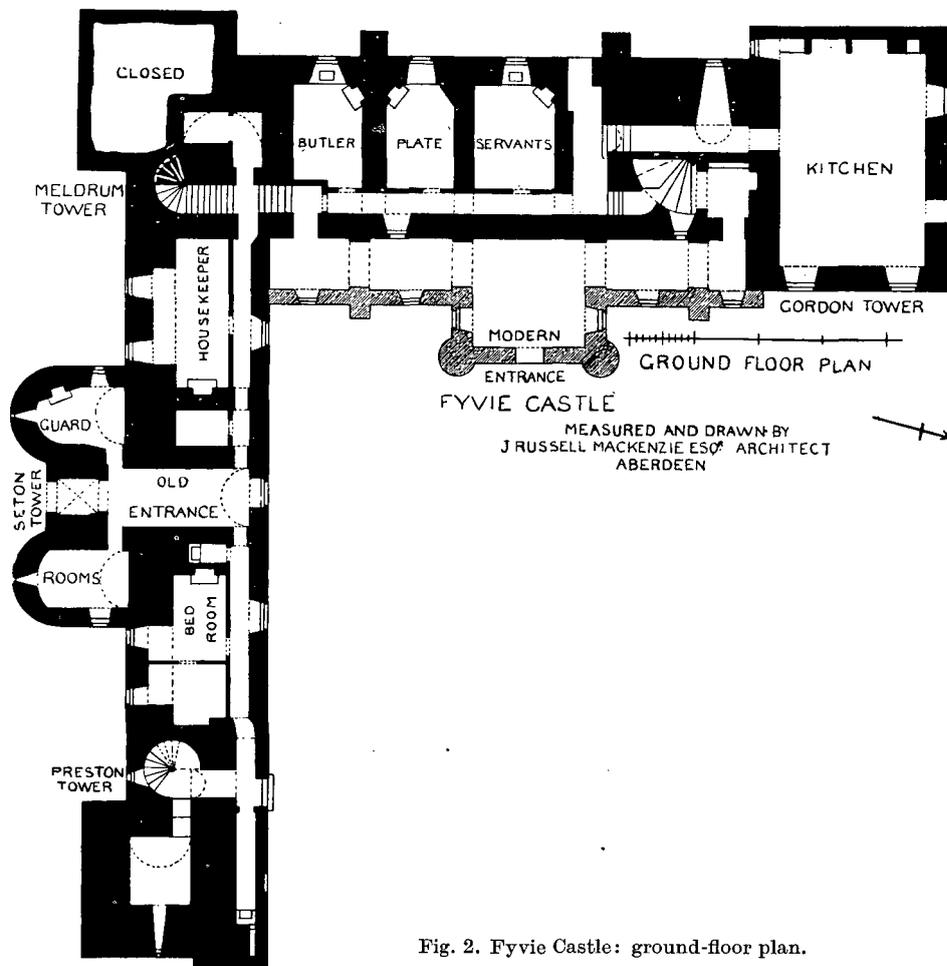


Fig. 2. Fyvie Castle: ground-floor plan.

the architecture of this tower was harmonised with that of the sixteenth-century work, and the imitation must be regarded as a highly creditable performance, although there is a patent decline in grace in the moulded profiles of the turrets, and the hard stone dressings at the quoins and voids produce an unsatisfactory effect, heightened on the former by the absence of an entasis. From the Gordon Tower a wing, furnished with large oriel windows inspired by those at Huntly Castle,<sup>1</sup> runs out westward; this was erected in 1890, and is styled the Leith Tower.

<sup>1</sup> Obvious at a glance, this is proved by a letter from the architect, John Bryce, to Lord Leith of Fyvie, dated 6th June 1890, preserved among the muniments at Fyvie Castle.

The inside or courtyard aspect of the castle has been a good deal altered by a one-storeyed porch and corridors along the west wing; while the

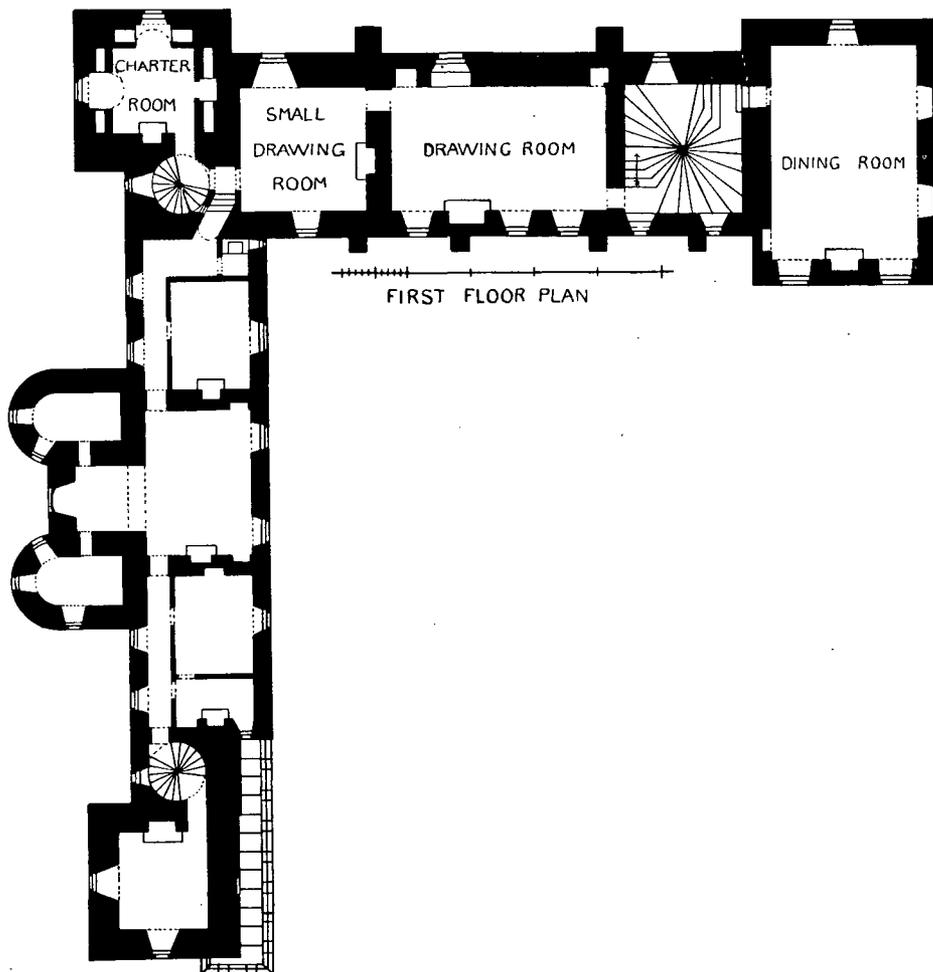


Fig. 3. Fyvie Castle: first-floor plan.

entire inner front of the south wing has been rebuilt, as we shall see hereafter, in order to give the wing greater width, a one-storeyed annexe being at the same time applied to the face of the Preston Tower, so as to form a flush front at the ground-level. All these alterations, in both wings, are the work of the General. His addition to the Preston Tower bears his coat of arms and the date 1777.<sup>1</sup> There are also various additions and

<sup>1</sup> Some part of General Gordon's work was still in progress in 1793, in which year the parish minister reports that "when the addition which is at present making to the house is finished, it will

embellishments of the Leith period, which need not be described. Two dormer windows on the inside of the west range bear the date 1599.

The grey, harled wall-planes of the castle contrast most beautifully with the deep red Cammalown freestone used for the dressed and carved work, and with the blue slating of the roof. The main ranges contain three full storeys and a garret, and the towers and gatehouse have a storey extra. An inexhaustible wealth of interest is presented by the minor architectural features and enrichments of the great building, but into these it is not our purpose to enter. Mention may be made, however, of three remarkable plaques, belonging to the Seton period, built into one of the eighteenth-century western buttresses, into the Meldrum Tower, and into the Seton Tower, respectively. The one on the buttress displays the naked figure of a woman in the conventional classical attitude of modesty. That on the Meldrum Tower shows a bust of a bearded and turbaned Oriental, with the inscription ARIADENVS BARBARVS. Who this is I have been unable to discover, unless it is meant for Ariabignes, the Persian commander who fell at Salamis. The figure on the Preston Tower shows a man wearing a Phrygian cap, with a coat of arms beside him, now illegible, and the inscription PETRVS LADVS DVX VENETIE. This is Pietro Lando, Doge from 1539-45.

From the courtyard the castle, in the original arrangement, was entered directly by a door at the north end of the west wing. It opens on to a lobby at the base of the magnificent newel stair, 9 feet wide (Pl. XXIX), which is the glory of Fyvie, and has been so admirably described by Dr Thomas Ross.<sup>1</sup> The stair comprises 63 steps, and is enriched with no fewer than 22 coats of arms and heraldic devices. Throughout the ancient parts of the building the basements are vaulted. Inevitably the upper floors have been much altered, but they still retain many original and charming features, notably the panelling in the charter-room (Pl. XXX) and the fine plaster ceiling in the old dining-room, now the morning-room (Pl. XXXI), which was executed in 1683 for the fourth Earl of Dunfermline by the Edinburgh plasterer Robert Whyte.<sup>2</sup>

### III

Accepting the traditional date of the Preston Tower, *circa* 1400, writers on Fyvie Castle have hitherto regarded this as the nucleus from which the whole wide-flung edifice has evolved. For example, Dr Mackay Mackenzie, after quoting Leslie's description of the castle, in 1578, as *insigne palatium*, goes on to assert that "Fyvie was an amplification of an original rect-  
be one of the largest and most commodious houses in the county" (*Statistical Account*, vol. ix. p. 462). Probably this addition was the porch and west corridor, which are clearly subsequent to the Gordon Tower.

<sup>1</sup> D. MacGibbon and T. Ross, *Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, vol. ii. pp. 350-3.

<sup>2</sup> See the contract in Stirling, *Fyvie Castle*, p. 260.

angular tower, which was absorbed as a wing of a long frontage with a corresponding tower wing at the other end. This was the palace of Leslie's date: the building of an additional side and of a central entrance belongs to later times. The rest of the enclosure was plain wall." This description is accompanied by a block plan, in which the development of the building, in accordance with Dr Mackenzie's thesis, is confidently set forth.<sup>1</sup>

Unfortunately, a detailed study of the building lends no support to the foregoing theory of its development.

In the first place, there is no likelihood that the Preston Tower ever stood by itself. Its dimensions, a square of no more than 24 feet (excluding the staircase "jam"), are not in the least like those of a free-standing tower-house of a powerful baron of the fourteenth or fifteenth century;<sup>2</sup> nor does its plan at all resemble that of an early tower-house. In the original scheme, before General Gordon's alterations, the staircase which serves its upper floors was entered directly from the castle courtyard, externally from the tower, an arrangement which clearly shows that the tower was never designed to be a unit in itself. The massive thickness of its walls, upwards of 7 feet, is maintained throughout the lower portions of the front wall of the south range. Clearly this is an ancient curtain wall, to which the gatehouse or Seton Tower has been applied. Positive evidence for this can be seen in the west gatehouse tower, where the inner wall, forming the front of the early curtain, exhibits a steep battered base, about 3 feet high, roughly built with uncoursed boulders, and defined above, where the wall becomes vertical, by two flat, horizontal, narrow courses. Near the doorway into the tower chamber this base has been clouded away, when the gatehouse was built, so as to allow the door to open. Although thickly masked with harl, the battered base reappears on the face of the wall beside the Meldrum Tower. The latter corresponds so closely, in its general arrangements, with the Preston Tower, as to make it clear that both towers, with the curtain wall between them, belong to one design and building scheme, although the work may have been completed in successive stages, as the names of different owners attached to the two towers would appear to indicate. The old lofty barrel-vaulted trance, 9 feet wide, with its thick side-walls, is also part of the early work. The present inner or courtyard front of the south range, as we have seen, is General Gordon's, and is in advance of the frontage which the General took down; but there is evidence which suggests that this frontage itself was not original, and probably it was Seton building. Fortunately, the breadth of the primary south range appears to be preserved by the very thick wall which forms the south side of the first adjoining cellar on the

<sup>1</sup> *The Medieval Castle in Scotland*, p. 153.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. the dimensions of the Preston Tower at Tolquhon, which originally did stand by itself, and measures 40 feet 6 inches by 29 feet.

west range, labelled "Butler" on the plan, but now forming the furnace-room. The vault of this cellar is lop-sided, being steeper on the south side, where it springs, very awkwardly, from a lower level. Clearly it has been carried up on an older south wall, which can hardly be anything else than a fragment of the north front of the primary south range.

Thus we arrive at an early south range measuring about 27 feet in breadth over the walls, terminated frontally by a square tower at either end and pierced by a portal and trance. It will be observed that the latter is not set centrally in the front range, the length of this range on the west side, from the original portal to the Meldrum Tower, being 46 feet, while the corresponding measurement in the other section is only 43 feet. At Balvenie Castle<sup>1</sup> the portal is similarly to the right of the central point in the front, the reason there being that the old hall was in the left or western portion of the frontal range. So at Fyvie we may infer that the hall was to the left or west of the entrance. Allowing for a reasonable thickness of walls at the first-floor level, and assuming that the Meldrum Tower was present in the original scheme—serving as solar apartments opening off the dais, and reached by the tower stair—there is room for a hall measuring approximately 35 feet by 15 feet. These are very probable dimensions, and may be compared with those of the early hall at Balvenie, 40 feet by 15 feet 8 inches.

The small groined vestibule between the gatehouse towers is, of course, part of Lord Dunfermline's work, and is slightly out of line with the older trance behind. But the extra massiveness of its side-walls, which are over 5 feet thick, is far greater than is required by the stress of the vault—all the more so as its thrust would be counter-stressed by the tower vaults. This circumstance raises the suspicion that these side-walls of the vestibule may embody older masonry, forming piers on either side of the ancient portal, possibly with a pit between them, like the gatehouse at Dirleton Castle, or that at Tantallon in its primary form. An inspection of the vaulting in the west tower, which, unlike its twin, is not masked internally with rough-cast, tends to confirm this suspicion. The extremely awkward arrangement of the springing on the east side strongly suggests that the lower part of the side-wall here is older.

Thus we arrive at a general idea of the early stone castle of Fyvie. It consisted (fig. 4) of a great frontal range, provided with square flanking towers and pierced about midway by the entrance passage, to the westward of which, at first-floor level, was the great hall. Behind this frontal range the castle no doubt tailed off into "laigh bigging," enclosed by a curtain wall. Now that is a very distinctive and datable type of castle. I have elsewhere shown<sup>2</sup> that this frontal massing of the weight of the

<sup>1</sup> *Proceedings*, vol. lx. pp. 132-48.

<sup>2</sup> See my paper on "Doune Castle" in *Proceedings*, vol. lxxii. pp. 73-83.

building, and the absorption by it of the gatehouse, are characteristic of large Scottish castles from the end of the fourteenth century onwards, and that it is a type derived from France—whence it spread, in the other direction, as far eastward as the territories of the Teutonic Order beyond the Vistula, where the Castle of Neidenburg (fig. 5), erected about 1400, shows a frontal range very similar to what I conceive was the original scheme at Fyvie. We have seen that in 1395 Sir James Lindsay had masons working at the castle. He was one of the foremost barons of the time, and closely connected with the Crown, being a nephew of Robert II. More than likely it is to him, if not indeed to his predecessor, the King's son, John Earl of Carrick, the Steward of Scotland, afterwards Robert III.,

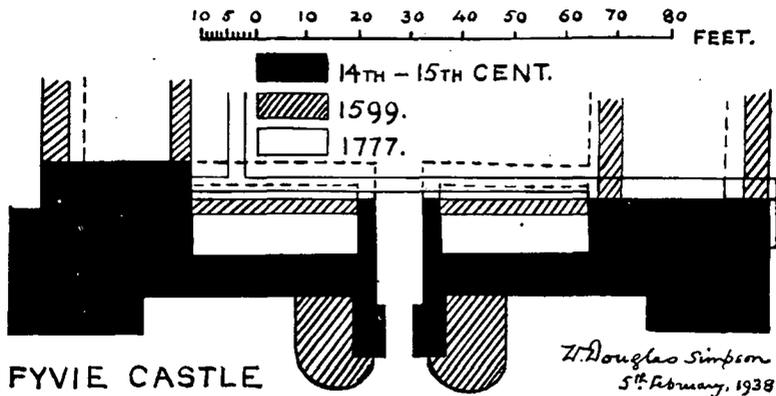


Fig. 4. Fyvie Castle. Sketch plan to show probable evolution of front.

that we owe the conception of the early stone castle. There is no reason to doubt that the Preston and Meldrum Towers are substantially the work of the proprietors whose names they bear, but it is clear that—in accordance with a common mediæval practice—the whole design of the castle was laid down at the outset. In all probability this was the first stone castle on the site. The Fyvie Chastel which the great Plantagenet occupied in 1296 would doubtless be, like the majority of Scottish castles at that early time, a structure of timbered earthwork.

It is idle now to speculate on the reasons which led Lord Dunfermline to reconstruct the fifteenth-century frontal range, reducing its width and subordinating its importance to that of the great western range which he built. We know too little of the state of the castle as he found it. If the names applied to the terminal towers are any guide, the process of building it was prolonged and probably spasmodic,<sup>1</sup> and the original design may never have been completed. Also, it is possible that structural

<sup>1</sup> On 4th November 1508 George Masone witnesses a charter at Fyvie (*Ant. Shires Aberd. and Banff*, vol. ii. p. 333). If he was actually a mason, he may have been engaged on work at the castle.

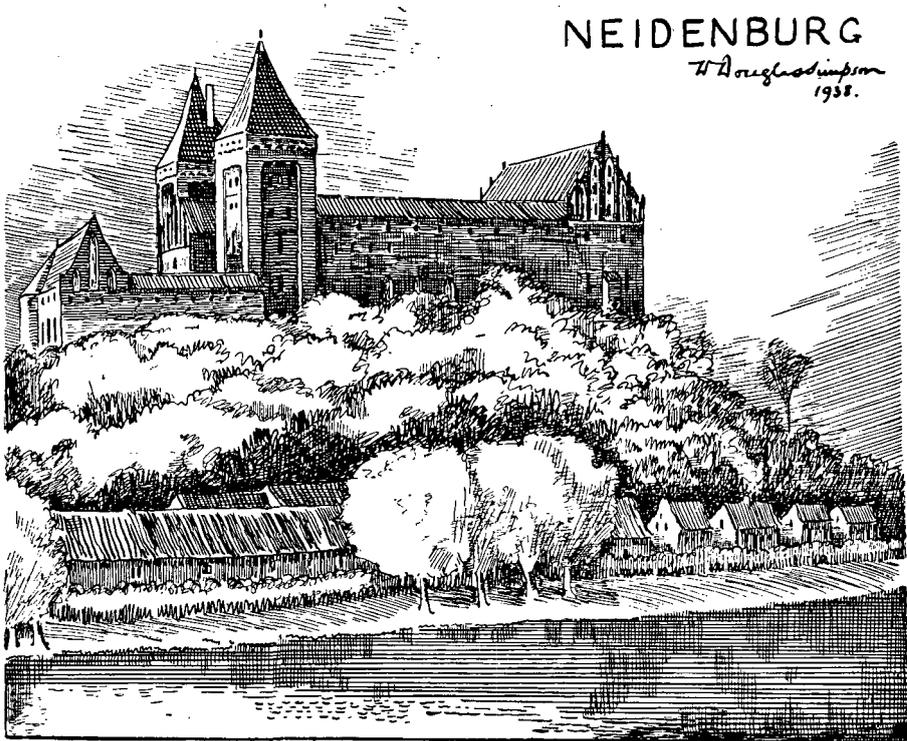
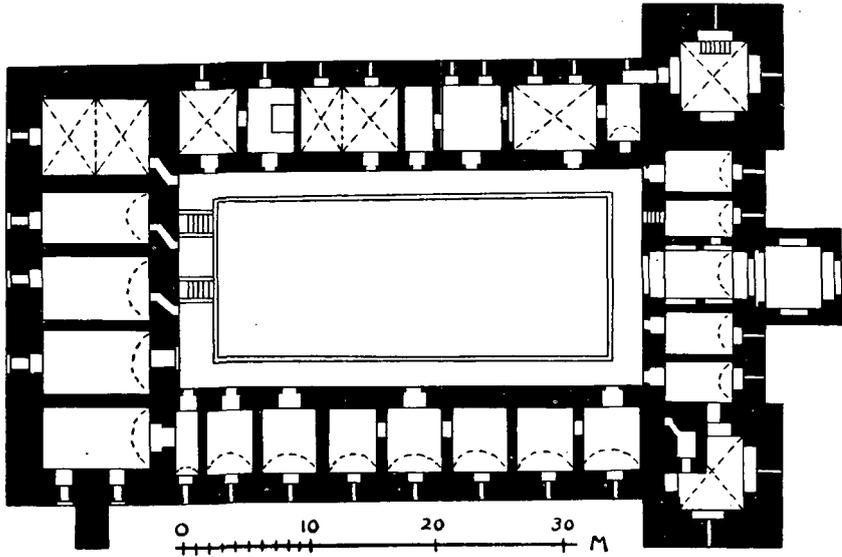


Fig. 5. Neidenburg: ground-floor plan and view.

weaknesses may have developed, especially if the early hall was vaulted, as was the case at Balvenie. In this connection it should be noted that large old fractures exist both in the Preston and the Seton Towers, and that General Gordon towards the end of the eighteenth century found it necessary to strengthen the western range with buttresses. We know nothing about the lay-out of the early earthwork castle, but it is possible that its filled-in ditches may thus have made their presence felt.

In any case, the effect of the Seton reorganisation was to transfer the emphasis of the castle from the front to the western flank, where Lord Dunfermline erected a spacious range, containing full accommodation in accordance with the improved standards of the time—ample cellarage and a kitchen below a dining-room and a withdrawing-room, both conceived on a noble scale and served by the magnificent staircase, with a side-door leading out to what was then the garden. In thus removing the principal residential apartments from the entrance front, Lord Dunfermline was obeying a motive which we can see at work in other cases. Dwelling-houses which were also houses of entry, although they suited fourteenth-century conceptions, were found in practice to be inconvenient. Hence at Llanstephan Castle in Wales and at Dunstanburgh Castle in Northumberland, in both of which the gatehouse was also the lord's residence, the original portal later was built up and a new entrance provided elsewhere in the *enceinte*. In Scotland the same thing took place at St Andrews Castle. A second instance may be seen at Linlithgow, where the original entrance pierced the hall wing, but was later abandoned in favour of a new entrance in another part. Ireland supplies a parallel at Roscrea. At Caerlaverock, where also the gatehouse was the lord's residence, the reverse procedure was adopted: the gatehouse remained in use as such, but new apartments were erected for the lord on the flanks of the courtyard enclosure. This is in principle what happened in Fyvie.

Among the muniments at Fyvie Castle are preserved an interesting series of plans (Pls. XXXII and XXXIII) evidently prepared for General Gordon, and showing the castle as it existed before his alterations. They therefore preserve the arrangements of the Seton period. Very cursory inspection will show that they are not to be taken as strictly accurate in every detail;<sup>1</sup> but they are of great value as helping us to understand exactly what changes the General made, and in what condition he found the building. We thus learn that the early trance had side-benches, as at Balvenie, and that in the Seton arrangements the wing on either side contained one long cellar, and on the main floor three large living-rooms. On both floors the present partitions, including the eccentric

<sup>1</sup> They were not his first idea, as one of the plans, entitled "a design of the principal floor of Fyvie House," shows that it was proposed to throw the whole of the first floor of the gatehouse into one large room, absorbing everything except the bows of the towers.

setting out of the main gatehouse room, upon which Dr Ross remarked, are thus the work of the General. On the second and third floors, in the Seton building, there were long galleries, 80 feet by 12 feet, extending the whole length of the south range in the fashion so characteristic of the time; they at once suggest a comparison with the gallery which Lord Dunfermline built at his other seat, Pinkie House in Midlothian. Like the latter the upper gallery probably had a coved and painted ceiling, partly in the roof.

In the west range the General, having provided a new kitchen in his Gordon Tower, drove a passage through to it under the great stair and took off an internal corridor from the width of the old cellarage. The main floor he left untouched, but on the second floor he provided an internal corridor instead of the old "through-going" arrangement. The upper floor he also reorganised, carrying a central corridor into and through his new tower.

As already stated, the ground-floor plan shows that originally the Preston Tower basement entered directly from the outside, and not from the adjoining stair, as it does to-day. Careful inspection of the present door reveals clear traces that it has been slapped through the west wall of the tower. This was evidently one of the Gordon alterations.

But the most interesting thing which the old plans disclose is that Lord Dunfermline planned his castle to be a complete "four-quartered" structure, enclosing a central courtyard and having square towers at the two northern corners. It was a grandiose conception. The outlines of the north and east wings and the two towers are shown on the plan, and as the wings are labelled "ruinous vaults" it is evident that the ground floor at least was completed. Possibly some of this old work is still preserved under the Gordon Tower and its annexes, where there are sundry vaults, but as these are covered with plaster it is not meantime possible to say whether they are ancient or not. It is said that in this quarter stood the chapel. Traces of Lord Dunfermline's abandoned intention remain to-day in the return of the corbelled cornice on the north side of the Preston Tower, showing the set-out for continuing it along the inner face of the east wing. At Fyvie, therefore, the great Lord Chancellor might well have put up the same inscription formerly to be read on his other house of Pinkie, recording that he built it "*non ad animi sed fortunarum et agelli modum.*"

Inevitably a comparison is suggested between the two great houses with which Lord Dunfermline has enriched the architecture of his country. The inscription above referred to bears the date 1613, and shows that his work at Pinkie was done after he had finished with his northern seat. In both houses he erected two long wings, as part of a complete quadrangular programme never fulfilled. In both an older edifice was absorbed, though



*[From the painting by Zuccaro.]*

Alexander Seton, first Earl of Dunfermline, Chancellor of Scotland.

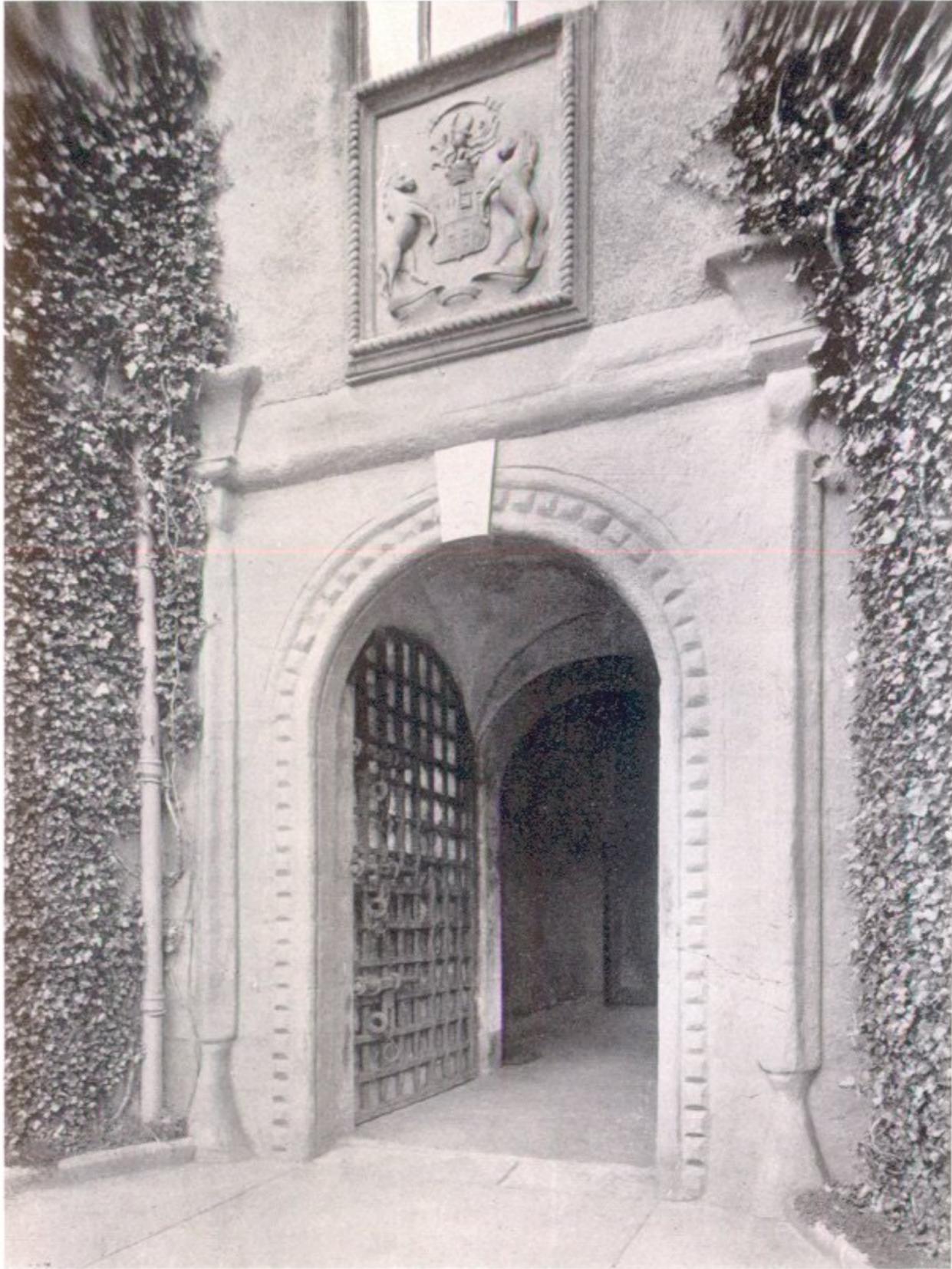


Fyvie Castle: view of south front.



[Drawn by James Giles, R.S.A., 1838

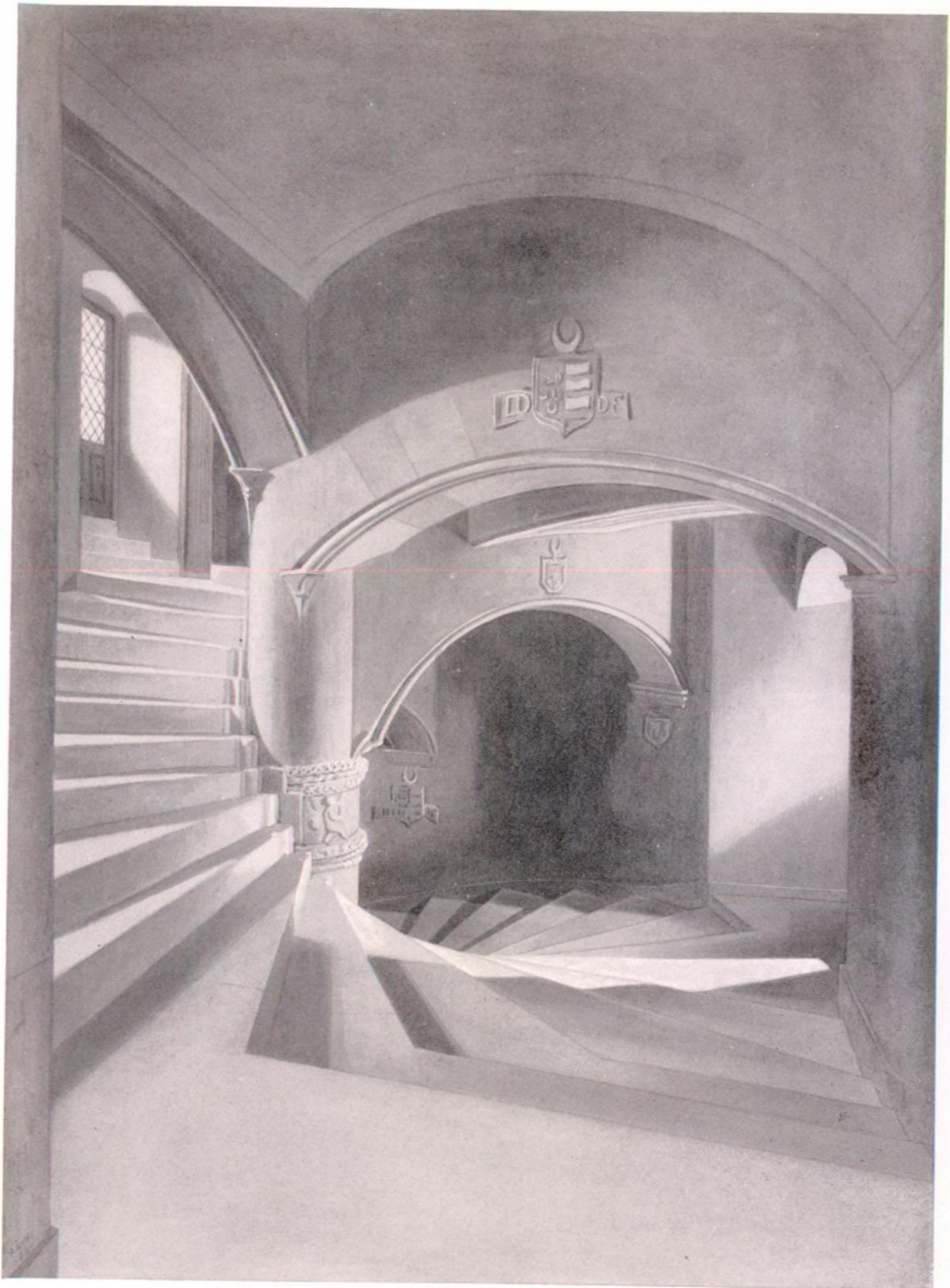
Fyvie Castle: view from south-west.



Fyvie Castle: the ancient entrance.



Fyvie Castle: view from south-west.



[*Drawn by James Giles, R.S.A., 1841.*

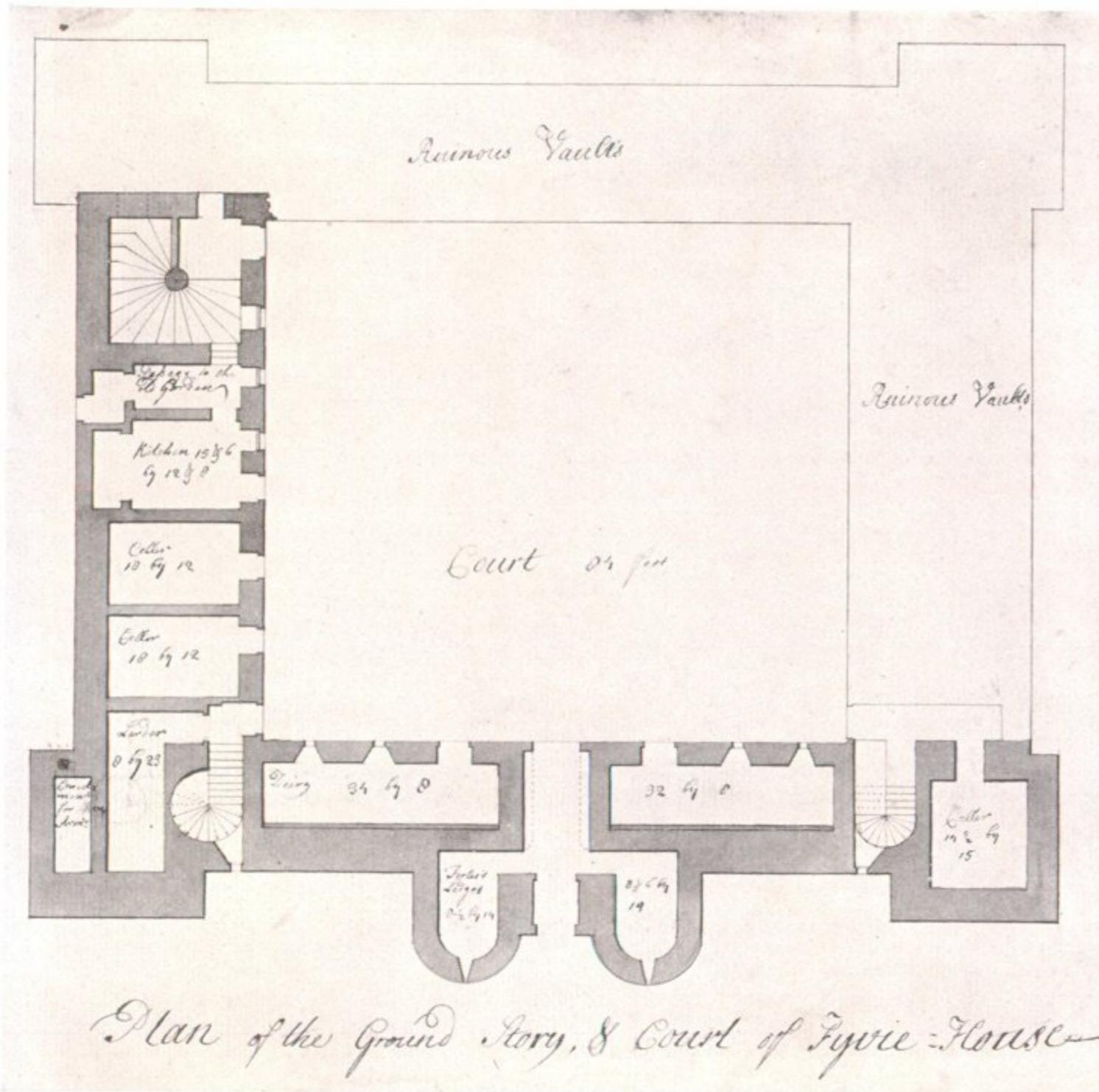
Fyvie Castle: the great stair.



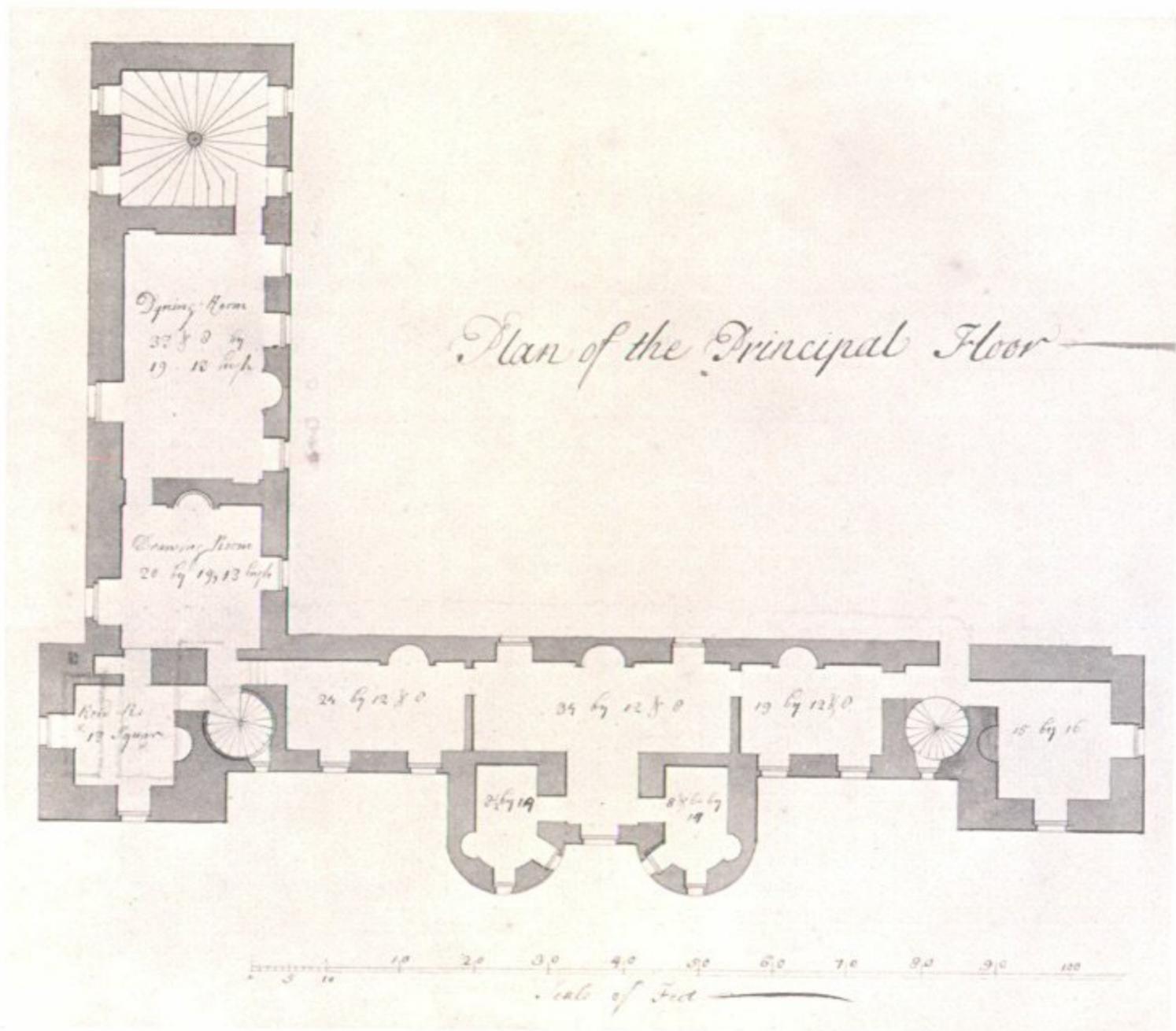
Fyvie Castle: view in charter room.



Fyvie Castle: ceiling in old dining-room.  
(This is the room labelled "drawing room" on plan (Fig. 3), and now called the morning room.)



Fyvie Castle: ground plan, ante 1777.



Fyvie Castle: first-floor plan, ante 1777.

these earlier portions have nothing in common in the two edifices. In both houses a long gallery was a prominent feature in Lord Dunfermline's design. But here the resemblances cease. In their external elevations both mansions are characteristically Scottish Baronial, yet Fyvie is as thoroughly Aberdeenshire in the way in which its main masses are resolved on the sky-line as Pinkie is equally typical of the Lothians. In its turrets, corbelling, and minor features, Fyvie clearly belongs to the remarkable north-eastern group which includes Castle Fraser, Craigievar, Crathes, and Midmar. Two of these mansions, Midmar and Castle Fraser, are known to have been built respectively by George and I. Bell, members of a distinguished family of local master-masons. George's tombstone in Midmar Kirk is dated 1575; I. Bell's inscription on Castle Fraser bears the date 1617; and David Bell was doing work at Pitfichie Castle in 1607.<sup>1</sup> I suspect that one of the Bells had a hand in the Chancellor Seton's work at Fyvie. How far the Chancellor himself may have been responsible for elements in the design we cannot tell; but having regard to his strong personality, his high culture, and his special interest in architecture, his influence on the building is hardly likely to have been negligible.

I have to acknowledge the courtesy of Sir Ian Forbes Leith, Baronet of Fyvie, in allowing me to examine the castle and to have access to its muniments, and for information on various points. The blocks for the illustrations of Plates XXIV, XXV, XXVII, XXVIII, XXX, and XXXI, from Mrs Stirling's work on Fyvie, are lent by the publisher, Mr John Murray. Those for Plates XXVI and XXIX are lent by the Council of the Third Spalding Club. The plans at figs. 2 and 3 are reproduced from the survey made by the late J. Russell Mackenzie, architect, Aberdeen, for the sale prospectus of the estate issued in 1886. Since then various alterations have been made in the interior arrangements of the building.

<sup>1</sup> *Reg. Privy Council*, vol. viii. p. 635.