

VII.

THE RED CASTLE OF LUNAN BAY. By W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, M.A., D.LITT., F.S.A.Scot.

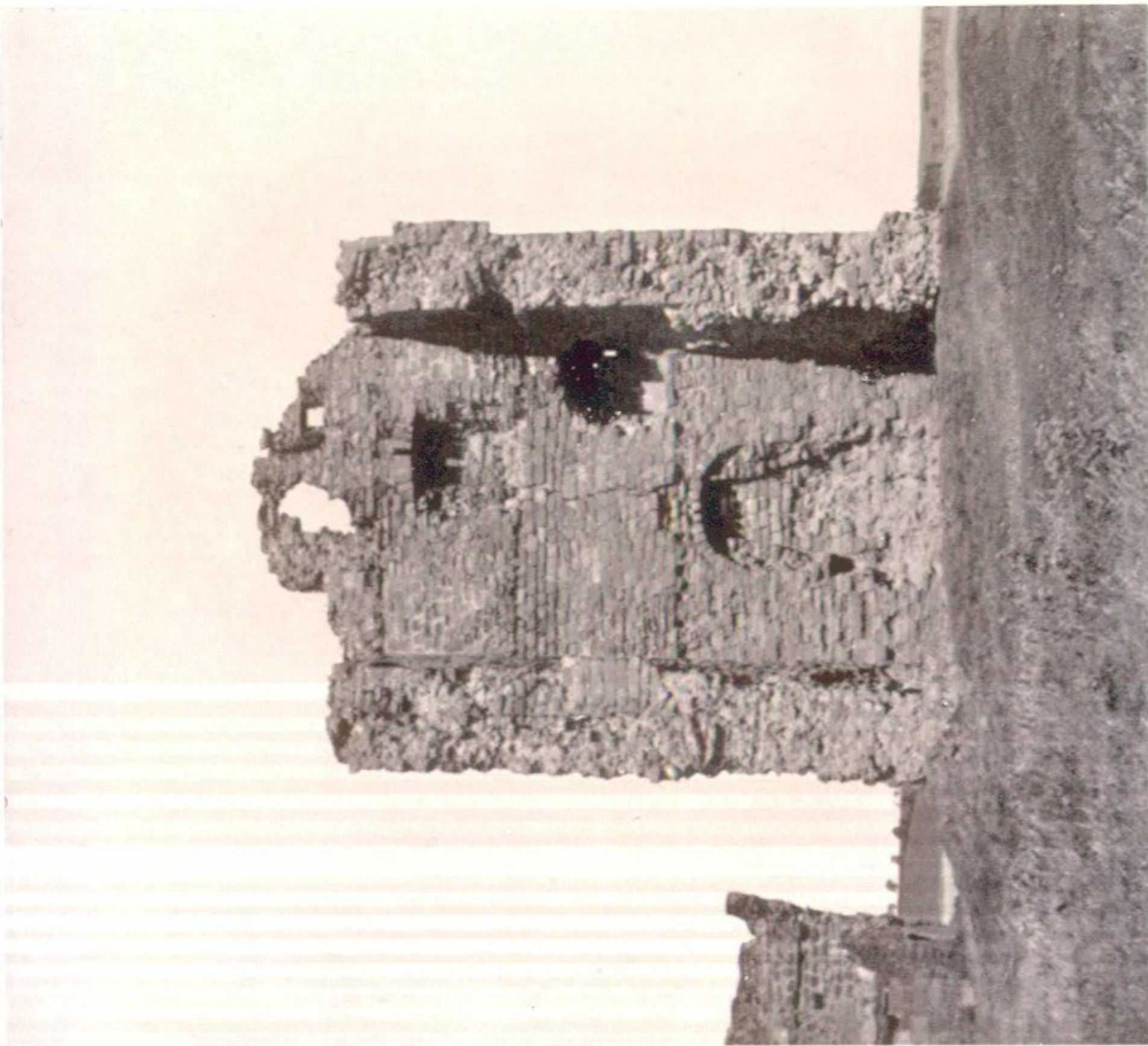
Read February 22, 1941.

To an invader seeking to enter Scotland from the east, the broad, sheltered inlet of Lunan Bay, with its fine sandy beach, offered an obvious landfall, and one which would at once admit him to Strathmore and the heart of the ancient kingdom. The site of Red Castle, which dominates the bay, was therefore a most likely spot to be selected for planting a royal castle in the days when Norse aggression was still a danger to be feared. Thus there seems little reason to doubt the correctness of the old tradition which ascribes the origin of the castle to William the Lion, or to reject the statement of a seventeenth-century topographer who reports that the King was staying at Red Castle when he founded the Abbey of Arbroath in 1176.³ Whether any part of the existing ruins goes back as far as that

¹ Indicating perhaps half a ploughgate of land; see I. F. Grant, *Everyday Life on an Old Highland Farm*, pp. 101 and 105.

² Buchan, *op. cit.*, pp. 227 and 233.

³ *Macfarlane's Geographical Collections*, vol. ii. p. 44.



[Photo G. F. Goddard.]

2. Red Castle: Interior of Tower House.



[Photo G. F. Goddard.]

1. Red Castle: Exterior of Curtain.

time is quite another story. Most probably William the Lion's castle, like other Scottish fortalices of that era, was constructed of timbered earthwork. For a castle of this type the site is eminently suited. Red Castle was the capital messuage of the ancient thanage of Inverkeilor, which was granted by King William, in 1165, to his chamberlain, Walter de Berkeley, a member of one of those great Anglo-Norman families under whose auspices the feudalising of Scotland was at that time being carried out.¹ It was Walter de Berkeley who, soon after the founding of Arbroath Abbey, made over to it the church of Inverkeilor, with its attendant chapel.² With Walter's daughter the thanage passed to another great Anglo-Norman house, the Balliols. Ingleram de Balliol, who married the heiress, by an undated charter confirms his predecessor's grant of Inverkeilor church to the Abbey of Arbroath, and among those in his entourage who witnessed the deed were Master Roger, the mason of Forfar, and his son William.³ It is more than likely, as Jervise suggested,⁴ that these masons were then employed at Red Castle, and the curtain still existing may well be their handiwork. It is noteworthy that a close masonry parallel to this curtain is found at Dunnideer Castle, Aberdeenshire, which is first mentioned in 1260, and at that time, like Red Castle, belonged to the Balliols.⁵ This coincidence is doubtless not without significance. The name Red Castle obviously derives from the colour of its stonework, and as the castle is so called (*rubeum castrum*) in a deed of 1286,⁶ it is a fair inference that the curtain wall was in existence by that time.

It is stated that in 1306 an Englishman named Fishburn, whose father had married a daughter of the house of Balliol, was lord of Red Castle.⁷ Later on it was held jointly by Sir Henry de Percy and Sir Ingleram de Umphrville, Earl of Angus, and on Percy's forfeiture his share in the barony was granted by King Robert Bruce to Sir Donald Campbell.⁸ But there is also a grant to William Douglas, senior, of the lands of Reid-castell, in the shire of Forfar, which had been forfeited by Eve Mowbray and John Mowbray her son.⁹ This may refer to the other moiety. Sir Donald Campbell's descendant, Sir Andrew Campbell, resigned his interest in the barony in 1367, and it was thereafter granted by David II to Sir Robert Stewart of Schanbothy and Invermeath.¹⁰ A glimpse of local place-names, and of a Gaelic tenant of the soil, is afforded by a charter of Robert II, dated 18th October 1372, confirming an assedation by Ingeram M'Gillelan (M'Lean) to Sir Robert Stewart of the whole davoch of

¹ G. Chalmers, *Caledonia*, vol. ii. p. 529.

² *Registrum Vetus de Aberbrothoc*, Nos. 54, 55.

³ *Ibid.*, No. 58.

⁴ A. Jervise, *Memorials of Angus and the Mearns*, vol. i. p. 56.

⁵ See my paper in *Proc. Soc. Ant. Scot.*, vol. lxi. pp. 460-71.

⁶ *Registrum Vetus de Aberbrothoc*, No. 293.

⁷ Jervise, *op cit.*, vol. i. p. 15.

⁸ *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, 1306-1424, App. I, No. 76.

⁹ *Ibid.*, App. II, Nos. 774, 1127.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, Nos. 273-4, in the body of the Register.

the lands of Castleton, Hogeston, and Westirbalblayn, with the half of the mill of Balblayne and the quarter part of Morhuse "in the barony of Red Castle above Lunan."¹

The Stewarts of Invermeath remained in possession until the end of the sixteenth century, and one of them will have built the tower-house within the ancient curtain.

On 27th February 1579, and again on 3rd February 1581, the "castell, tour-hous, and fortalice of the Reidcastell" was assailed "*bombardis et bombardulis*," captured, plundered, and burned by a neighbouring laird, Andrew Gray of Dunnimald, under scandalous circumstances, which are set forth in full detail in a contemporary Act of Parliament, by which the aggressor was outlawed and his lands and goods were forfeited.² The official account describes how on the first occasion the castle was entered under cover of night by scaling ladders and the hall and chambers within the courtyard were won, the defenders taking refuge in the great tower. The tower was thereupon attacked with bombards and its gates blown in. Marjory Stewart, the daughter of the house, was almost suffocated by the smoke, and being then great with child, sustained a miscarriage. The siege of the tower lasted until 2nd March, on which day the defenders were relieved by a force under the provost of Dundee. At the second assault the garrison consisted of two men and one woman, so Gray had no difficulty in winning the whole castle, tower and all, and thereafter burnt the "laigh bigging" both within and without the courtyard.

Before the middle of the next century, the barony of Redcastle had passed to the Ruthvens of Gardyne.³ Subsequently it was purchased by the Earl of Northesk. It now belongs to the estate of Panmure. The castle itself is said to have been last inhabited by the Episcopalian minister of Inverkeilor, after his deprivation in 1689.⁴ It is also stated to have been dismantled in 1748.⁵ Grose's picture, drawn in 1790,⁶ shows it much as it is to-day. It is recorded that after 1748 the tenants were allowed to cart away the stones, and it therefore seems that the tower has been partly demolished for the sake of its fine materials.

The site of the castle (see plan, fig. 1) is the outer or eastern portion of an elevated kame projecting boldly upon the beach about midway in the noble semicircular sweep of Lunan Bay. On the north side it overhangs, in a very steep bank, the Water of Lunan, which swings round to the

¹ *Registrum Magni Sigilli*, No. 515.

² *Acta Parl. Scot.*, vol. iii. pp. 206-210; *Reg. Privy Council*, vol. iii. pp. 125-6, 154-6, 171-2, 188-9, 211, 217, 230, 276, 278; *Misc. Spalding Club*, vol. iv. pp. 60, 63, 68-9.

³ Jervise, *op. cit.*, vol. i. p. 17.

⁴ Sir William Fraser, *History of the Carnegies, Earls of Southesk*, vol. i. p. lxxxii.

⁵ *Forfarshire Illustrated*, pp. 112-3.

⁶ *Antiquities of Scotland*, vol. ii. p. 263.

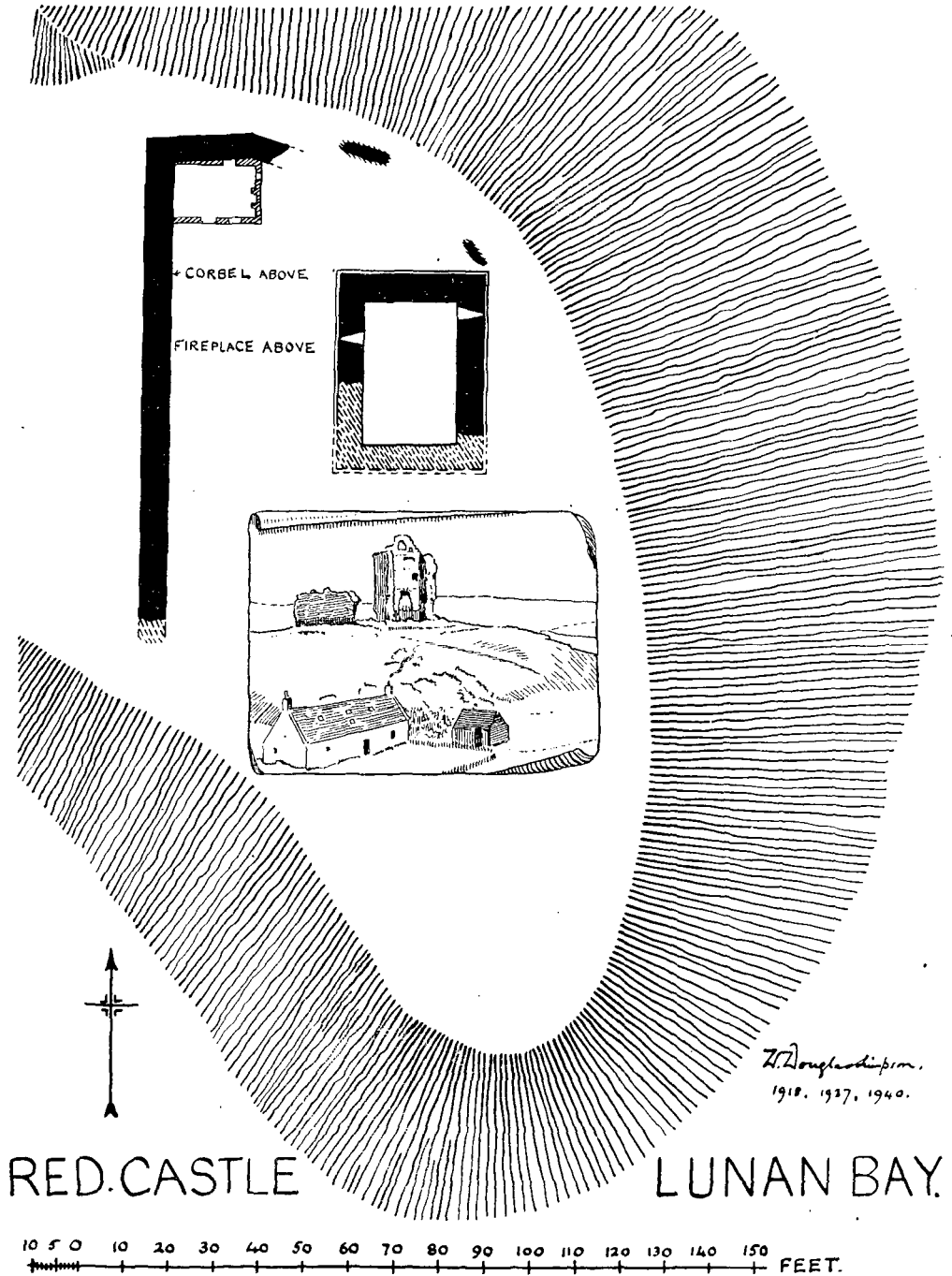


Fig. 1. Red Castle: General Plan.

eastward amid sandy flats, and enters the sea at a point about opposite the castle. This steep bank is continued round the eastern or seaward point, but towards the south the kame descends, less abruptly, into a basin now filled with arable land, but in earlier days probably a marsh. This basin extends westward until it merges into the haughs through which the Lunan Water meanders; and on that side also the kame presents a front steep and bold, though now obscured by fir-trees. The castle area itself is isolated by a transverse hollow which, starting from the basin on the south side, sweeps round by the west to the northern brink, losing rapidly in depth, but still distinct enough to isolate a more or less level area, whose highest point, at the seaward extremity, forms the actual site of the castle. It is a fairly flat, grassy platform of perhaps an acre in extent. The rest of the kame summit, west of the hollow, is also pretty flat, and covered with coarse grass and broom. Here there are no traces of outworks, and all the features described, including the transverse hollow, appear to be purely natural; but there is an indication of the start of a ditch at the north-west corner of the castle (see plan). The kame forms part of the 50-foot raised beach, which makes a conspicuous feature all round the rim of Lunan Bay.

The remains of the castle comprise the northern end of a massive oblong tower-house, standing at the seaward end of the platform; a long fragment of the western wall of *enceinte*, with part of its return on the north; and various foundations that indicate the considerable extent of the buildings.

Evidently the west curtain is considerably older than the tower. It extends in a straight line from near the north end of the platform for a length of 105 feet, at which point it is broken off, though its foundations extend yet farther. From the broken end one or two massive fragments have fallen. The curtain is 6 feet thick and upwards of 20 feet in height to the top of its ruined parapet wall. In construction it differs markedly from the tower. The outer facing (see Pl. XXIX, 1) consists of roughly dressed irregular stones of varying sizes, mostly of the local red sandstone, with a tendency, due to the material, to build in oblong blocks, low in the course—quite different from the careful and neat ashlar masonry of the tower. The hearting consists of large water-worn or ice-rounded boulders of the local sandstone and intrusive rocks, arranged in parallel layers separated by thick beds of mortar, in a very definite manner which shows up strikingly where the facing has been peeled away. Seashells are freely used in the mortar, in which also much charcoal is found. This bold and banded construction of the hearting finds no parallel in the tower, where the substance of the walls consists of small angular fragments thrown in anyhow.

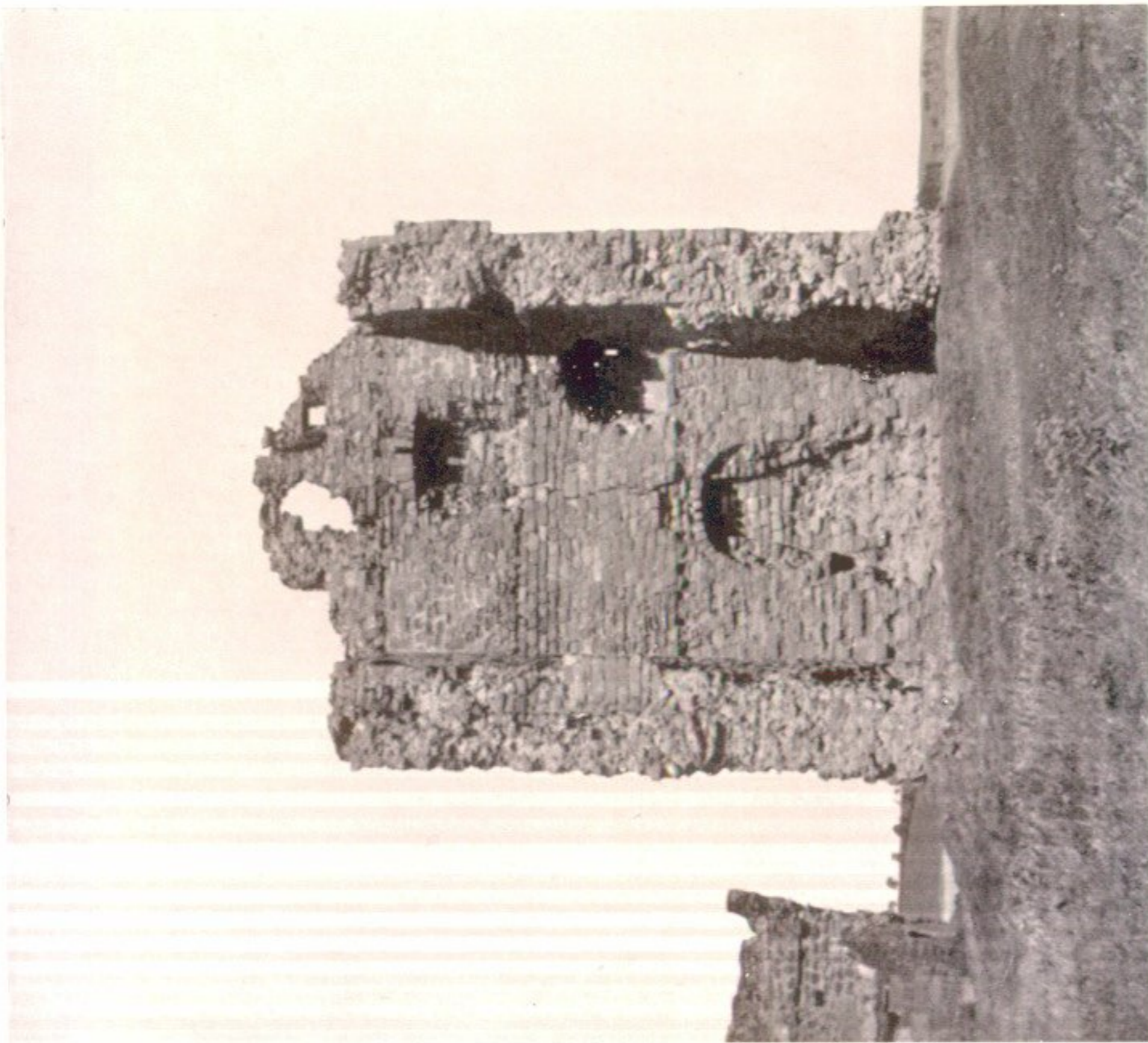
At the north end of the curtain is a quoin carefully wrought of large

squared freestones. This has a more recent appearance. From here the wall returns to the east, at rather more than a right angle, for a distance of 24 feet, where there is an obtuse angle, beyond which the wall, here aligned to meet the north face of the tower, is broken away. There are no dressed quoin stones at this second angle, and indeed the whole north curtain is evidently newer than the curtain on the west. Its masonry is altogether poorer, with a more frequent use of *petit appareil*, and the hearting does not show the banded construction. Moreover, this wall is slightly thinner than the west curtain. There can be small doubt that in the original scheme the west curtain was carried right to the northern verge, here to meet, at a sharp angle, the original north curtain, some fragments of which still crop out opposite the tower.

Despite its rough workmanship the west curtain is excellently built. The allure and parapet still survive in a semi-ruinous condition. Three more or less perfect gargoyles and the stubs of four others remain. They are semi-octagonal in section, carefully mitred into their bedding stones. The parapet is built of smaller material than the rest of the curtain, and looks like a reconstruction. In the north curtain two gargoyle stubs are visible. Up to a height of about 14 feet all along the inside of the west curtain its facing has been almost entirely removed; above this the facework is much more regular and is built of better dressed stones than elsewhere in the curtain. At this level, about midway in its length, are the remains of a fireplace, from which all the dressed stones have been looted. A little north of this fireplace is a single large plain corbel. Evidently a hall stood along this curtain, with a cellar or storehouse beneath it. Doubtless the corbel marks the position of a wooden *parclose* dividing off the *camera*. Against the rebuilt north curtain there has been a lean-to, indicated by a deep chase in the north and the adjacent part of the west walls, and by a broad corbel in the former. At present, the site of this building is occupied by the roofless shell of a small one-storeyed cottage, erected in the early part of the last century for the use of the coastguard.¹ The old north returning wall does not form part of this cottage, whose north wall is built up against its peeled inner face so as to secure a rectangular interior, as the ancient walls here are rather more than at right angles. A large part of the outside of the west curtain has been similarly robbed; and it is worthy of notice that traces of joist-holes and a roof-chase seem to indicate the presence, at some period, of a lean-to on the *exterior* face of this curtain.

In the absence of distinctive architectural features, it is difficult to

¹ In olden times Lunan Bay was a notorious haunt of smugglers—*New Statistical Account*, vol. xi., Forfarshire, p. 327. The coastguard station is shown as a going concern in the view of Red Castle in *Forfarshire Illustrated*, published in 1848.



[Photo G. F. Goddard.]

2. Red Castle: Interior of Tower House.



[Photo G. F. Goddard.]

1. Red Castle: Exterior of Curtain.



[*Photo G. F. Goddard.*

Red Castle: North end of Tower House and north-east corner of Curtain.

W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON.

estimate the date of this curtain. "Its ragged fragments," in the words of Grose, "carry the appearance of antiquity." The rough coursed and closely packed aspect of the external masonry, and the banded hearting, remind one of other Scottish walls of *enceinte* dating from before the Wars of Independence, such as those of Balvenie or Lochindorb, or the masonry of the tower of Dunnideer, already mentioned. Upon the whole, there seems to be every likelihood that this curtain wall at Red Castle may be as old as the thirteenth century.

The tower-house (Pl. XXIX, 2, Pl. XXX) at present stands free on the eastern verge of the castle area. It measures 44 feet by 32 feet 9 inches, lying north and south, and the walls are 5 feet 6 inches thick. Of these, the north wall, about half the west wall, and rather less than two-thirds of the east wall are extant to the parapet; the rest is mere foundations. The masonry is very substantial. A hearting of small stones, well grouted, is cased, inside and out, with fine regular sandstone ashlar in 8- or 9-inch courses, the stones varying in length from 1 foot to 1 foot 7 inches, with frequent "closers." Unlike the majority of Scottish examples, the tower, which contained four storeys and a garret, was unvaulted, the joist holes of all the floors being evident in the end wall. The basement shows two loops, one in each side wall. They are 2 feet 6 inches high and 5 inches wide, with the usual inward splay and a 3-inch external chamfer. This room would form a storehouse. On the first floor was the hall, whose large fireplace may still be recognised in the north wall, though jambs and lintel have gone, and only the well-formed, elliptic relieving arch remains. In the east wall is a tall window, with an arched ingoing, in which there appear to have been the usual stone seats, now destroyed. On this side of the tower, the wall at the first floor level has been thickened interiorly. The second floor has a similar window on the east side, and beside it in the north wall is a carefully vaulted garderobe, with a tiny loop—the only window in the north wall of the tower. Below it emerges the garderobe vent. At the broken end of the west wall, on this level, one jamb of a handsome fireplace survives. It is broad, built of fine ashlar, rounded on either side but brought out to the square above, and resting on a kind of square, swelling base. A portion of the projecting hood remains, and in the angle is a sconce for a light. This storey will have formed the great chamber of the lord. The top flat had contained his solar or private room, and is marked by the remains of a fireplace in the north wall, from which, like the fireplace below it, all the dressed stones have disappeared. On the west side there is a window—the only large opening in this wall—with an elliptic rear-arch, neatly wrought in ashlar: the chamfer of the voussoirs dies out on the jambs. At this level, just where the east wall breaks away, is the fragment of a garderobe jutty.

The parapet of the tower is gone, but the bold, handsome corbels,

each composed of two filleted courses, remain, together with the bases of two angle "rounds." These have three continuous corbels, beautifully mitred, above which are separate corbels in continuation of those on the wall-faces, and carrying the cavetto moulded base of the parapet. The three corbels on the north front next the north-east turret rest upon older, broader corbels, indicating a reconstruction. Within the roundway was a garret, of which the north gable survives in a fragmentary state, with a ragged rent marking the chimney flue, and one small window. It is built of poor masonry, and looks late. A plinth of two chamfered courses runs round the tower, and at its north-east corner is stepped down in obedience to the ground.

This tower-house has been in every way a finished and comely piece of design, and its partial demolition is much to be regretted. Its architectural characteristics point to a date in the fifteenth century. No doubt the fine workmanship has led to the extensive robbing of the dressed detail. In particular, the quoin stones, so far as accessible, have fallen a prey to local greed. Damage has been worst at the north-east corner, which overhangs the sea, and is now in a precarious state. On the north wall, a chase about 12 feet above ground, and sundry joist-holes, indicate that there has been a "to-fall" here.