

6. SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ICE-HOUSES AT CASTLE HUNTLY NEAR LONGFORGAN, PERTHSHIRE, AND GLAMIS CASTLE, ANGUS

IN 1955, while the writer was making a survey of the fifteenth-century Castle Huntly, the presence of an ice-house in the grounds was noted, but at the time the only reference to it was found in an old account book of 1806, noting a payment to workers for filling it with ice and the question of further investigation was deferred.

By the courtesy of Mr Hills, then Governor of H.M. Institution which now occupies the castle, the ice-house has now been cleaned out which facilitated a proper inspection and measurement.

Description

Castle Huntly is partly built up the sheer SW. face of a dolerite intrusion which rises through the Carse of Gowrie to a height of over fifty feet.¹ To the NE. the ground slopes steeply down to the mean level of the Carse and at about 110 yards from the Castle, the ice-house has been built into an excavation on the brae face (N.G.R. NO 302290).

On the lower side of the slope, a semicircular court has been excavated to a depth of 7 feet and a radius of 9 feet, with a rubble retaining wall and cobbled flooring. On the NW. side a flight of ten stone steps gives access to this forecourt. At the centre of the straight side, facing NE. is a doorway, 5 feet in height by 3 feet 3 inches wide, the rybats and lintel being checked $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches by $1\frac{1}{2}$ inches to receive a door, which gives entrance to a passage, 9 feet in length by 3 feet 3 inches wide. The side walls of the passage are built of rubble work 4 feet 9 inches up to the springing of a barrel-vaulted ceiling made of hand-made bricks, giving a total height of 5 feet 8 inches to the centre of the vaulting. The floor is of flagstones and drops slightly to the outer end. The ceiling of the passage groins into the dome of the ice-house proper. This chamber is constructed entirely of hand-made bricks, each 9 inches by $4\frac{1}{2}$ inches and is in ovate form, 13 feet 3 inches in depth and 12 feet in diameter at the level of the floor of the passage from which springs a dome of 6 feet radius. From there the chamber is sharply concaved to a base width of 3 feet, where there is a scarcement of 3 inches above a drainage sump 2 feet 6 inches in diameter and

¹ Urquhart, E. A., *Castle Huntly, Its Development and History*, Abertay Historical Society Pub. iv (1956).

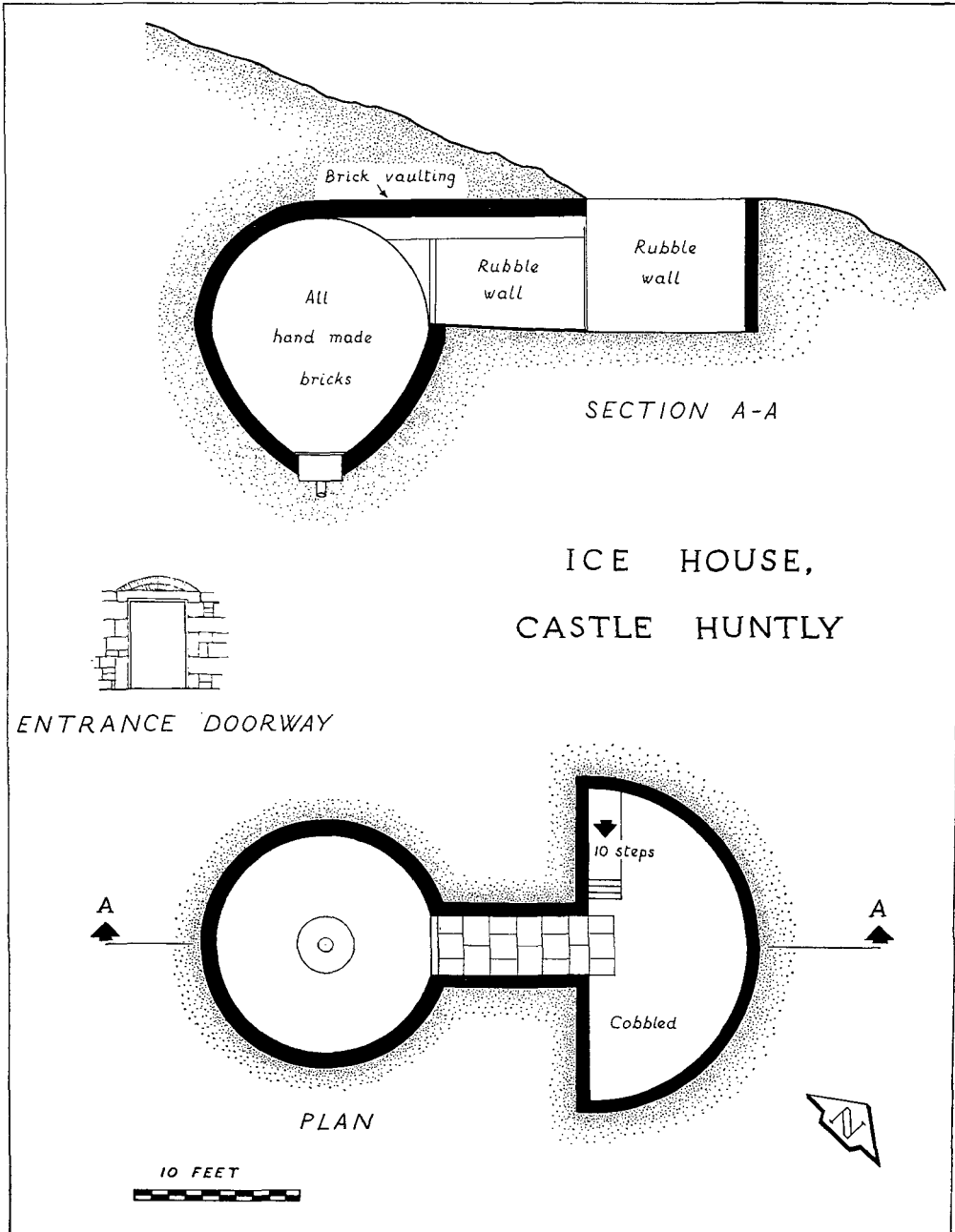


FIG. 1. Plan and section of the Ice-House at Castle Huntly

1 foot 6 inches in depth and with an exit drain at the bottom. In use a wooden grid would be fitted to the scarcement.

The outer door had been hung with crook and band hinges, the remnants of the crooks remaining in the wall. There had been a second door at the inner end of the passage, as is evinced by the remains of wooden bats in the walling to which wooden standards would be fitted.

All the brickwork is in perfect condition and the chamber, after three hundred years, is thoroughly dry. In comparison from drawings and descriptions of other ice-houses throughout Great Britain, it would seem to be one of the finest examples extant.

Owing to the heavy overload of soil it was not possible to measure the thickness of the walling of the passage or of the chamber itself or to find out whether it was constructed with single or cavity walling as was found in some ice-houses of similar design. A good example of the cavity walling is found in the ice-house at Croome Court in Worcestershire.

The whole structure of Castle Huntly ice-house is very similar to that at Moredun House, Midlothian, but the latter does not have the concave sides.¹

History

About 1669 Earl Patrick commenced restoring and adding to his castle at Glamis in order that the family might reside there during the winter and use Castle Lyon as a summer residence and he installed an ice-house there, similar to that at Castle Lyon. It is situated in the steep high west bank of a stream about 600 yards SE. from the Castle. This ovate chamber is larger than that at Castle Huntly being 18 feet diameter at the bulge and 23 feet deep from the centre of the dome. The Earl had evidently used the remnant of his hand-made bricks from Castle Huntly and had not sufficient for the whole structure so the dome is beautifully made with bricks and the lower portion for the springing of the dome at the level of the floor to the entrance passage is built of ashlar. The entrance passage in this house is 14 feet long by 5 feet 9 inches wide and 7 feet 4 inches in height, the walls being of rubble and roofed with large transverse slabs. On the first of these appears a well cut 'P' probably for Patrick. A door had been fitted at each end of the passage, the rusted remains of crook and band hinges being still evident. The outer door was hung into rybats 2 inches by 2 inches on the inside of the doorway. The latter is unusual, being formed as a sharply pointed lancet arch, 5 feet in height and 3 feet in width up to the springing of the arch and built with very heavy masonry with a large keystone, dressed to form the peak of the arch.

This ice-house had evidently been abandoned as being unsafe – the weight of the entry passage, with its enormous flag roof, had been too great for the steep earthen bank and it had fractured at the union with the ice-chamber and slipped a bit. A new ice-house was built about 150 years ago in a high bank behind where the Home Farm now is, to the west of and nearer to Glamis Castle.

The ice-house at Castle Huntly, then called Castle Lyon, was installed by Patrick Lyon, 3rd Earl of Kinghorne, who succeeded to the Castles of Huntly and Glamis in 1646. Records in the Charter Room at Glamis have been examined through the kindness of Mr Kemp, the Factor. Most of the payments entered in the account books of the period in question are given only as total amount due to the various tradesmen without details of the work done, but in a 'Compt Book of the Lordship of Lyon for the year 1692', there is recorded a payment to one William Watson, Mason, for various jobs including 'work done at the Ice-House at Castle Lyon' which shows that it was in existence at that date.

¹ *P.S.A.S.*, LXXIV (1949-50).

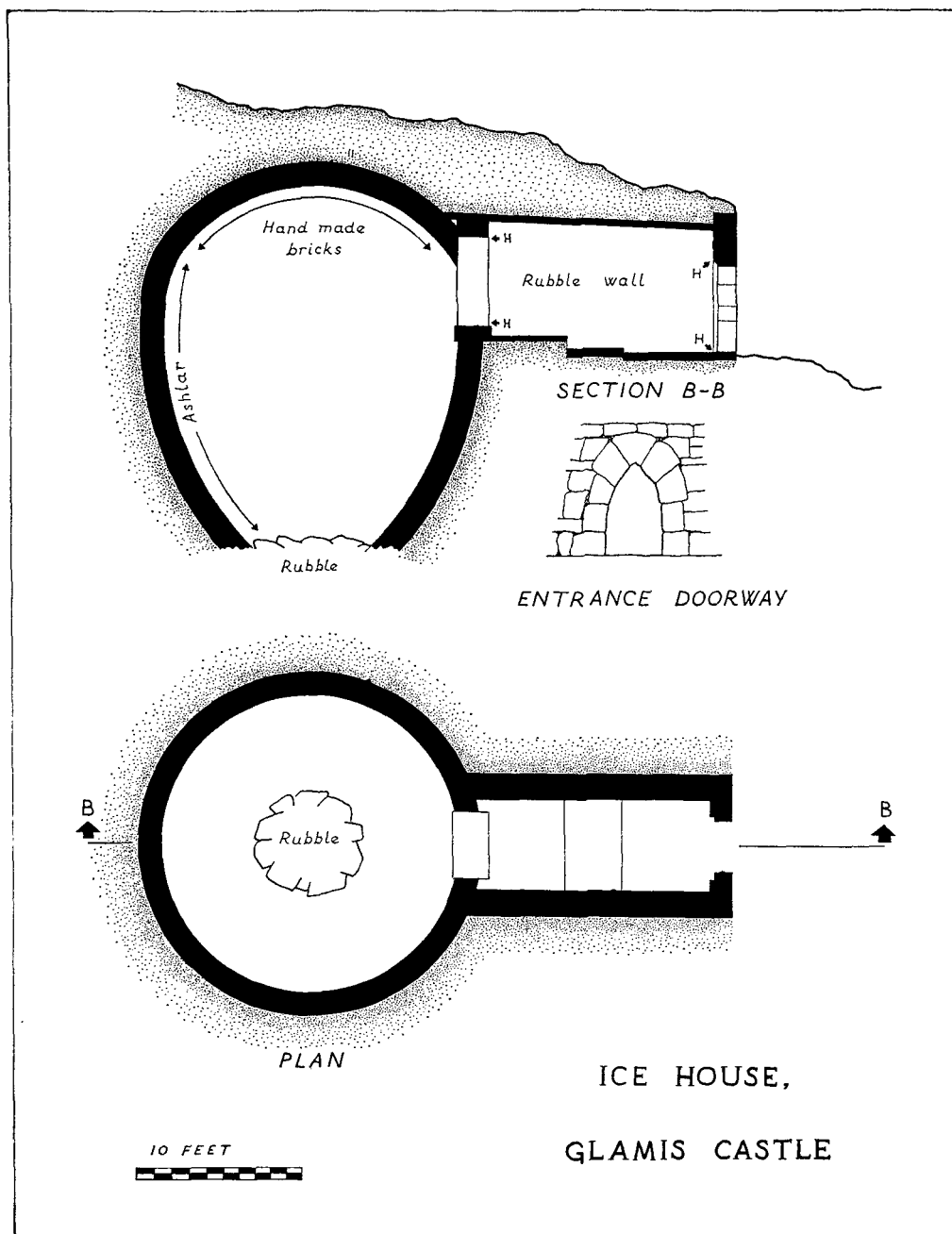


FIG. 2. Plan and section of the Ice House at Glamis Castle

After 1660, the Earl began the reconditioning and improvement of Castle Huntly and lived there for several years carrying out the work before he commenced any improvements at Glamis and, writing in his diary, *'The Glamis Book of Record'*,¹ about Castle Huntly as a feudal fortalice, says 'Such houses are worn quite out of fashion, as feuds are, which is a great happiness . . . and I wish that every man who has such houses would reform them, for who can delight to live in his house as in a prison and I am much addicted to general reformation and have not a little propagate that humour in the country where I live as general improvements have been more since the time of the King's happy restoration, than has been a hundred years before'.

The Earl was a good deal in London at the Court of Charles II, who in 1672 granted him a charter, erecting the lands of Castle Huntly into a Free Barony to be called the 'Lordship of Lyon' and in 1677 another charter provided that in future the Earls of Kinghorne should be styled 'Earls of Strathmore, Viscounts Lyon and Barons Glamis, Tannadyce, Sidlaw and Strathdichtie'.

When in London, the Earl was much taken up with the many noble buildings then being erected and furnished there. He was evidently determined to bring up to date his old Castle, the name of which he changed from Huntly to Lyon, which latter name continued to be used until 1776, when a new owner restored the old name. He bought a good deal of fine furniture and furnishings for the improvement of his Castle and shipped his purchases from London to Dundee. As there were no bricks made in Scotland until long after his day, he probably brought bricks for his ice-house in the same manner. The Earl also brought statuary for the embellishment of his gardens and introduced many new ideas such as sash windows.

From about 1650, ice-houses were being introduced into the mansions in St James Park in London 'As is the mode in France and Italy' (Survey of London, L.C.C.). Accounts of building several in St James Park area are to be found in Government Records. In *The Times* of 19th September 1957, there is a report of the discovery of an ice-house when a bombed site in St James Place was being cleared up. This ice-house is mentioned in a document of 1680, which implies that it was installed for Barbara Villiers, Duchess of Cleveland, as an adjunct to her mansion in Cleveland Row. The ice-house was surveyed and photographed before the site was again built on. From the photograph, it appears to have been of similar design to that at Castle Huntly.

The majority of the seventeenth-century ice-houses were egg-shaped with domed tops and side entrances. Such have been found scattered throughout the country; the egg-shape with the earth pressure all round gave the greatest stability. Later the design changed to cup-shaped chambers with vertical sides and by the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries they became degenerated and often were of rectangular shape and with mounds of earth raised over them. Few eighteenth-century country houses lacked this amenity and those properly buried in a mound of earth often survived the mansion itself.

Local traditions of secret underground passages are often traceable to a disused ice-house, its purpose being long forgotten. This tradition became attached to one at Hereford Castle, which was burrowed into the dry bank of a former moat. The true nature of the passage was not realised until the Castle grounds came into the possession of the Borough Council by whom it was cleared out and preserved. The Hereford ice-house is situated at the end of a vaulted passage and has a brick dome of excellent craftsmanship.

A similar tradition was attached to the ice-house at Castle Huntly, which has been in disuse for over a hundred years and when the writer was making his survey of the castle

¹ *Glamis Book of Record*, Scottish History Society (1890).

he was constantly being asked by the local people, if he had found any traces of the underground passage supposed to have run from Castle Huntly to Glamis (a distance of 14 miles!)

After 1728 Castle Lyon ceased to be used as a residence by the Earls and was mostly occupied as a Dower House by the widows of various Earls.

A Short Bibliography of Ice-Houses

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