

## Tillycairn castle, Aberdeenshire

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Tillycairn—*The little hill of the thickets*—lies a mile and three quarters to the south-east of Cluny, overlooking the main Aberdeen-Alford road. Two hundred and sixty years ago it was ruinous, but now, like so many of the ruined houses of the county it is being brought back to use. To those who prefer a picturesque ruin to what is still known in some circles as, albeit incorrectly, a commodious gentleman's residence this will no doubt be a matter of considerable regret.

The interest of Tillycairn is architectural rather than historical for it is remarkable that so little history attaches to this building. Its architectural interest lies chiefly in the fact that the castle demonstrates certain features that have come to be associated with the designs of the Bell family, and which entitle Tillycairn to be considered as a work of architecture and not a mere building.

The earliest recorded mention of Tillycairn is in 1444 when it, together with other lands in the Barony of Cluny, was granted in a charter given by Sir Alexander Seton of Gordon to James Forbes, the eldest son of Alexander, 1st Lord Forbes. This grant was dependent on James Forbes resigning these lands into the hands of his superior on receiving other lands in Tough and Cluny. Some of these lands James Forbes received in 1460, but it is doubtful if Tillycairn went back to the Gordons. In 1540 James V confirmed by charter both these earlier grants and this suggests that some other arrangement, of which there is no record, had been arrived at by the two families.

For some reason Tillycairn was sold in 1503 to Thomas Fraser of Muchalls, whose son Andrew was later to marry Margaret Forbes, the eldest daughter of John, 6th Lord Forbes by his second marriage. It had however come back to Lord Forbes by 1512. As Margaret Forbes was only two years old at the time the purchase could have had no bearing on her betrothal. It was however to become the portion of yet another daughter; Lord Forbes had a natural daughter, Annabel, by Helen Rutherford. On the marriage of Annabel to Matthew Lumsden, of the Cushnie family in 1540, Tillycairn was granted to them.

It is at this stage that history touches Tillycairn. Five miles to the west lay the lands of Lyn-turk, which had been held by a branch of the Strachan family since early in the 15th century. In 1526 the representative of that family, John Strachan, was an adherent of the house of Forbes, a connection of the Lumsdens, and even by the standards of the times a man of unsavoury reputation. In pursuit of the old quarrel between the Forbes and the Leslies, John Strachan and John Forbes, the Master, murdered Alexander Seton of Meldrum. For his part in this crime Forbes obtained a remission from the King in 1530. Strachan who was also guilty of sacking the castle of Kildrummy and implicated in the murder of John King of Bourtie did not obtain his remission until the following year. Five years later an even more serious charge—that of conspiring to shoot James V with a culverin in the course of a visit to Aberdeen—was brought against the two men. Or rather the charge was levelled against John Forbes, and the lesser charge of foreknowledge

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and treasonable concealment was brought against Strachan. For this Strachan was convicted and pardoned subject to him keeping himself beyond the '*Watter of Dee*', and in the event of the King crossing the river putting a space of 12 miles between himself and his sovereign. John Forbes however was executed.

There is a tradition that Strachan had asked for some favour which Forbes had been unwilling, or unable to grant. This had so enraged Strachan that to obtain his revenge he had invented the whole conspiracy, and knowing Lord Huntly to be at variance with John Forbes had taken the false accusation to him. To add colour to the charge it was said that Forbes hoped that in accomplishing the King's death 'the Dowglasses might be restor'd to their ancient possessions, titles, and honour'. Versions of this story are recorded by both George Buchanan and David Scott.

It is worth remembering that in the same year that John Forbes was beheaded his wife's sister-in-law Janet Douglas, Lady Glamis, was burnt alive for conspiring against the King. From these tragedies sprang the bitter enmity between the Forbes and Gordons that was to convulse the north-east for the rest of the century. Strachan of Lynturk ceased to be an adherent of the house of Forbes and devoted much of his not inconsiderable talent for creating mayhem to the lands of that family and its adherents.

In the course of time his attention was attracted to Tillycairn which lay near to his land, and in June 1542 Matthew Lumsden found himself lightened of 19 plough oxen, eight cows and two three-year old stirks. As compensation the Queen Regent granted to Matthew Lumsden in 1548 the lands of Little Linturk and Bridgend, together with the alehouse and alehouse croft that had belonged to John Strachan. Lumsden could hardly have felt very secure of this grant until seven years later when Strachan left Scotland for good.

It may have been as a result of these depredations that Lumsden built, or strengthened and enlarged, the strong house or 'house of defence' from which the present building has developed. What is clear is that the tradition that the original house was destroyed by Strachan has little foundation in history. Such a destruction would certainly have been recorded in the 1548 charter: in any case it was much easier to drive off stock than to break into and burn down stone houses. Indeed the former was a perfectly proper way to behave whilst the latter incurred a certain degree of social censure.

Matthew Lumsden who was at Tillycairn from his marriage in 1540 until his death in 1580, came, like St Patrick 'of dacent people', being the second son of Robert Lumsden of Cushnie. This unfortunately was less strongly impressed on his mind than the consciousness of his connection, albeit by marriage and left-handedly with the noble family of Lord Forbes. There had been and were to be other connections between the Lumsdens of Cushnie and the Forbes but these were with the cadet branches of Brux, Corse, Craigievar, and Newe. Worse; there seems to have been a connection with the Strachans for William Forbes of Ardmuro, fl 1522, had two daughters, one of whom married Thomas Strachan of Linturk, the other Thomas Lumsden of Cushnie. Perhaps it was as a result of this, and to please his father-in-law that Matthew Lumsden wrote his *Genealogy of the Family of Forbes*, as curious a work as any in a field which has always been rich in curiosities. Throughout his life he remained a supporter of the Forbes interest and his name occurs frequently as a witness to legal documents in which he is described as a 'notary'.

After Lumsden's death in 1580 his son John continued at Tillycairn as the charter dated 12 January 1588 granting the lands of Clova to Alexander Lumsden—who may have been a cousin—shows, but after this the history of the castle becomes vague. It may have been back in the hands of Lord Forbes by 1619. The financial affairs of Arthur, 10th Lord Forbes, had by that year reached a state of considerable confusion and amongst the Forbes papers are two memoranda

between Lord Forbes and his eldest son Alexander, the Master, drawn up in an attempt to resolve matters. The sixth and seventh items in the list of headings to be performed by the father to the son show that the Master was to be invested with all the lands held of superiors other than the King, and amongst these were the lands of Tilliecairne. This would not necessarily mean that the castle and land were not occupied by a tenant, or that the original grant to the Lumsdens had failed, as in May 1660 Alexander Lumsden, described as of *Cairnday and Tilliecairn* was granted sasine, the value being put at £250.6.8. It was probably with the death of Alexander, Matthew Lumsden's great grandson by 1672 that the Lumsden connection with Tillycairn ended. At some stage the property seems to have been in the hands of Thomas Burnett of Sauchen and to add to the confusion Tillycairn in the parish of *Cluny* is sometimes confounded with a Farquhar property of the same name in the parish of *Glentana*.

It seems however to have maintained Forbes connections after it passed from the Lumsdens. Five generations of descendants of Sir John Forbes of Tolquhon were designated as 'in' or 'of *Tilliecairne*'. More certainly it passed towards the end of the century into the hands of Alexander Forbes of Ballogie, who again was of a cadet branch of the Tolquhon family. This seems to have been about the year 1672. *Ballogie* was the name by which the nearby estate of Midmar was then known. It did not remain in Forbes hands for long and by the early 18th century it had been acquired by the Gordons of Cluny. In the action started by Sir William Gordon of Invergordon against Robert Gordon of Cluny following the crash of the *Mississippi Company* in 1721 the rents of Tillycairn and Cluny were valued at £426.14.6 Scots (Slade 1981). Tillycairn, which was already described as being ruinous by 1722, passed with rest of the Cluny property to John Gordon sometime after 1745 and formed part of the Cluny property until 1973 when the ruined castle and the ground immediately surrounding it were acquired from Robin Linzee Gordon of Cluny by the present proprietor, David Lumsden, who is descended from the Cushnie branch of the family.

## DESCRIPTION

When James Skene in the late 1830's copied a manuscript which he had started at Versailles in the winter of 1827–28, and which was based on material he had collected at the beginning of the same century, he included a plan, sketch and description of *Tullicairn*—one amongst 'other little Bantam cocks' as he put it. This description, altered only where it was necessary for the sake of clarity, was published by MacGibbon and Ross who relied too trustingly on Skene's authority. A comparison of his text with the building as it actually stands shows some remarkable discrepancies; discrepancies that can only be explained by the fact that more than 30 years had passed between Skene's visit to the building and his writing up his notes, and that because of the ruinous condition of castle he had been unable to inspect the upper floors.

Dr W Douglas Simpson included a short description of Tillycairn in his paper, *Notes on Five Donside Castles* (Simpson 1921), a description which he amplified twenty seven years later in *The Earldom of Mar* in the chapter which dealt with the castles of Mar and the Garioch. He noted that Skene's description was not to be depended upon, and like Skene he found the upper floors to be inaccessible. Unlike Skene he did not imagine what he could not see.

Tillycairn is also considered in some detail by Stewart Cruden in *The Scottish Castle* with particular reference to the gun loops and crosslet loops—and he includes the suggestion that it might be in part remodelled at a later date. Seven years later Alistair Maxwell-Irving (1971) was also exercised by the same subject. With the restoration of the castle (1979–81) it has been possible to expose the upper floors and wall heads and so show that the castle is of two building

periods at this level, and that there are grounds for suggesting that the lower parts may date from a third and earlier phase.

With one exception the appearance of crosslet loops in Scotland in the late 15th and 16th centuries is confined to the north-east—the exception is Kirkconnel c 1560–80; these loops fall into two quite separate groups with clear dynastic links. The earlier group, Arbuthnott c 1490, Ravenscraig c 1491 and Inverugie—largely rebuilt c 1620 but possibly incorporating earlier structures or re-used material—were Keith houses, or in the case of Arbuthnott belonged to a family with strong ties with the Keith family by marriage. The second and later group, Craig c 1550–75, Gight c 1577 and Towie Barclay c 1590 were either Gordon houses or as Towie Barclay was, a house with Gordon connections. In the case of the second group it has been clearly shown that these houses are the work of a distinct family of masons (Simpson 1930). It is unlikely that the appearance of this type of loop at Tillycairn was completely unconnected with its presence in one or other of the groups. Because of the feud between the families of Forbes and Gordon which divided Aberdeenshire in the second half of the 16th century it is extremely improbable that Tillycairn should belong with the second group. In any case it displays none of the architectural quirks which that group exhibits. If it is linked to the first group the only connection is a dynastic one. In 1538, two years before Tillycairn was granted to Matthew Lumsden, William Forbes later to be the 7th Lord Forbes, and Lumsden's half brother-in-law had married. His wife was Elizabeth Keith, daughter of John Keith of Inverugie. If the Inverugie loops are a survival from the earlier building replaced in 1620 we have a possible connection. This would put the start of building at Tillycairn back into the first half of the 16th century, and would accord with the quality of the building of the lower parts of the tower with its heavy rounded corners. Assuming that the Keith-Inverugie connection is the explanation for the crosslet loops at Tillycairn then the likely date for the start of the present building is c 1538 and that initially anyway the builder was William Forbes. If there is any truth in the tradition that Matthew Lumsden was the builder it must mean that he completed the castle after it had been granted to him and his wife. Strachan of Lynturk's raid may have concentrated his mind on the task in hand, but it was not the reason for it.

The loops at Tillycairn, of which there are four complete, and at least one partly rebuilt or reused, are clearly not medieval. Like the others of this type they were designed with lower oilettes and widely splayed internal embrasures to accommodate the mounted hand guns of the period. Taken in conjunction with the more normal wide-mouthed gun ports they provide an impressive display of defence. As it stands today without any surrounding buildings the castle is provided with an excellent field of fire. How effective this might have been in practice is open to doubt. Had Tillycairn been surrounded by a barmekin wall, and the water inlet on the west side suggests that it must have been, the effectiveness of the loops would have been very much reduced.

This reasoning is supported by the relative positions of the anachronistic crosslets and the more practical straight sided wide-mouthed loops. The former occur in the long west flank, the south and east gables and the stair tower, the latter in the long north flank and covering the entrance door. This is not accidental. Bearing in mind that the water intake to the kitchen is also found in the long west flank it can be seen that the crosslet loops are all found in those parts of the castle enclosed within the barmekin wall; that is to say that although they have a defensive role their primary purpose is decorative. The wide mouthed loops which allow much greater manoeuvrability of the gun are found in the long north flank, which was presumably not enclosed within the outer wall, and covering the entrance door. They had no decorative role whatsoever and were entirely defensive. This is emphasized by the close proximity of both types on the stair tower, one for use and one for show.

As it stands today Tillycairn is an excellent example of a compactly planned *L*-house, with the stair, which rises the full height of house, in the re-entrant formed by the two arms of the *L*. There were four floors and a garret in the main block, and five in the jamb. The corners of the tower are marked by rounds which there is reason to believe were intended to be of two floors, and the stair tower is flanked by the remains of bartizanned wall walks overlooking the entrance. The stairhead and roof of the main block were altered at some time to provide a rooftop belvedere or terrace. The accommodation provided was of the nature normally associated with this class of dwelling-house. On the vaulted ground floor were the kitchen and two cellars, one of which communicated directly with the Hall and probably combined the roll of *buttery* and *pantry*. The first floor was devoted to the *Hall* which occupied the whole of the main block, and the *Private* or *Withdrawing* room, this latter room being vaulted. There were three chambers on the second floor, and a further chamber on the third floor in the jamb. On this floor the space in the main block seems to have been given over to one large room. The fourth floor was occupied by a large attic and a small chamber in the jamb.

Tillycairn is built of field rubble, stones of great size being used in the lower parts of the walls, with dressings of Corrennie granite and the walls formerly were harled. As the angles of Tillycairn are rounded and without well defined coigns there was no attempt to check the harling, which ran right round the tower, but at the various openings or other features with dressed stone the harling seems to have checked at the joint between the worked stone and the rubble. The usual practice is to check the harling to an arbitrary line defining the openings by a narrow dressed stone surround, but here there is no sign of this lining out. To run the harling to the joint whilst appealing to the modern taste for the picturesque has the added advantage of avoiding a weak feather edge which always gives trouble. One of the few similar examples of this treatment is at Craigston where it is known to have existed in the early 18th century. Possibly the present usual practice may date only from the extensive re-harlings of the 19th century. If the debris from the excavation trenches (Appendix A) is a guide the original roof covering was of stone slabs.

Externally the detailing at Tillycairn until the wall heads are reached is of the simplest. Except for the crosslet loops—and whether their form is decorative rather than practical is a matter of conjecture—the only feature of any note at ground floor level is the entrance door. This has a segmental head and 45° chamfered and stopped jambs. The absence of the more elaborate roll mould of the second half of the century suggests a date earlier than 1550 and tends to support the view that the lower parts represent a first phase. No dated stones or heraldic display survive although provision was made for them. There are two square panels with moulded surrounds jambs on either side of the stair tower. On the tower itself is a third panel with a roll mould surround, and a depressed ogival head. The windows generally have been savaged either by man or the weather. Originally they were protected by bars or grills and with chamfered surrounds. The openings were glazed with fixed upper lights and lower solid shutters. At some date presumably late in the 17th century in an attempt to improve the house some of these were torn out and appear to have been replaced by wooden casements or sashes. As the house was ruinous by 1722 it seems unlikely that these would have been sashes. However Giles in his painting of the castle in 1840 shows something uncommonly like a six-pane upper sash in the private room. The lintels of the larger windows are protected from excessive stress by relieving arches; nevertheless most of them have fractured. From this and from the evidence of charred beam ends which have disappeared since he wrote of them in 1948, Dr W Douglas Simpson concluded that the castle was destroyed by fire.

At the level of the third and fourth floors the castle blossoms out into the elaboration of the upper works that is the hallmark of Aberdeen buildings of the second half of the century. At

first sight none of this is unusual; the crow stepped gables, coped chimnies and corbelled rounds are so much a part of the architectural vocabulary that they raise no comment. On closer examination however questions begin to arise: why are the mouldings of the rounds dissimilar? what has happened to the N gable of the main block? where have two of the chimney stacks gone? what sort of a crown or cap house was there to the stair tower? if the present rounds went no higher which floors did they serve, and how did they relate to the parapet of the wall walk? and what of the elevations?

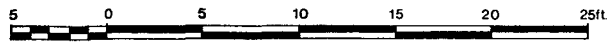
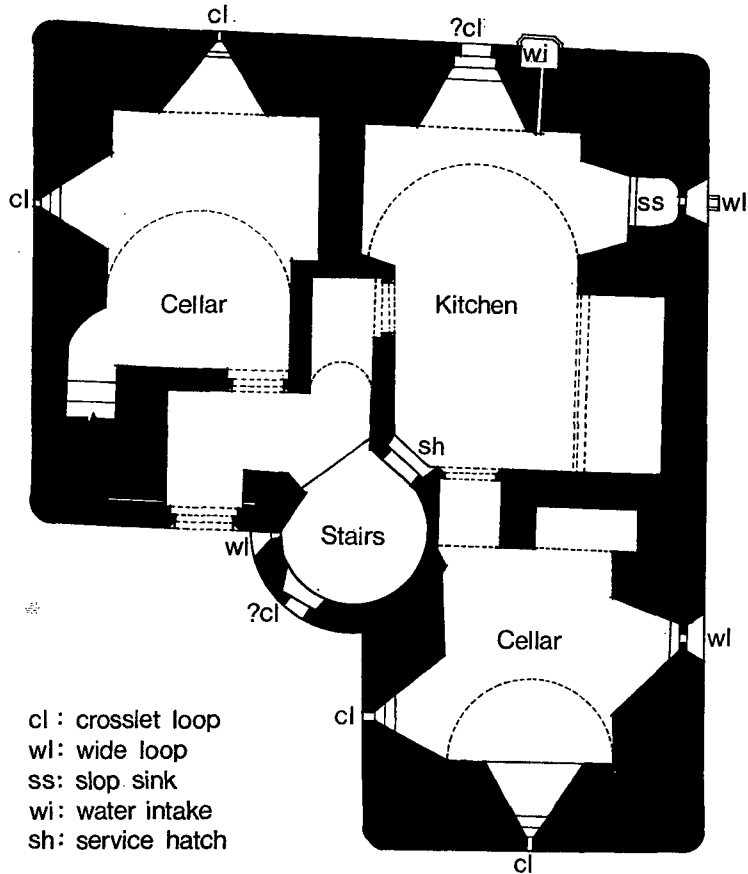
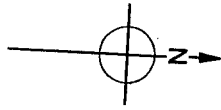
To start with the last question first: an *L* tower has properly only three viewable elevations—the two long flanks and the diagonal on the re-entrant. Tillycairn has two of these: the W elevation which is the long flank of the main block and the diagonal on the re-entrant where the interest is largely concentrated. The third elevation—the long flank comprising the N gable of the main block and the N wall of the jamb hardly exists. In its place is an almost blank cliff pierced by one small window, and a few loops, gun ports and drain chutes, with two rounds perched uncomfortably at either end and no longer related to it. When this side was still ruined the play of light on lichened stones and the evidence of its rebuilding and alteration made it of interest and not unattractive. Now that this has all been covered by a massive application of harling it has become an immense and unrelieved bore. It must be accepted that this is perhaps the least successful elevation of any tower in the north-east.

The west elevation—the other long flank—is in no way untypical with the fenestration concentrated on the upper floors: two large windows at each level marking the Hall and Chamber floors while three smaller windows light the upper floor. All were originally barred. The rounds have moulded corbel courses with false machioliations and plunging pistol shot holes, and at the level of the windows were small ventilation holes. The level of the rounds fits awkwardly with the main roof line; this may indicate a change of intention at this point, or the loss of part of the wall head. Although restoration was too advanced to allow observation of the wall top in its original condition the line that the roof must have taken suggests that the first is the more likely theory.

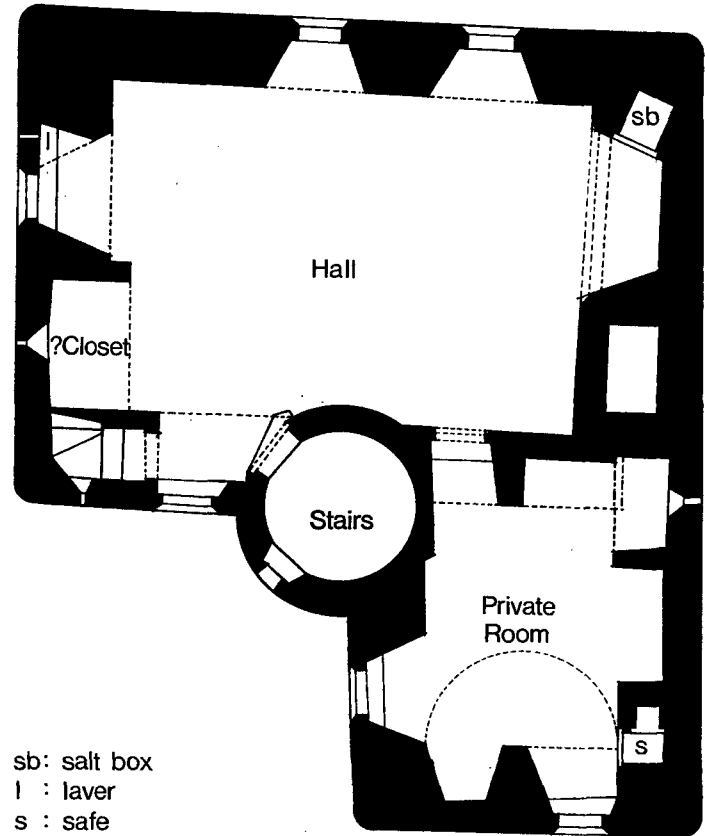
It is unfortunate that the approach from the west and the closeness of the neighbouring farm prevents a proper and moderately distant view of the elevation of the re-entrant angle for it is the treatment of this side of the castle—even in its incomplete state that really raises Tillycairn above the level of the '*other little Bantam cocks*'. The strong verticality of the two jambs which rise without any ornament to the corbelled bases of the rounds is emphasized by the stair turret which rises to a higher level than the rounds. At this point it and the wall heads are crowned by a heavily moulded granite string with false machioliations. This supports the cap house above the stairs, and the parapet of two short bartizans which give access to the upper parts of the rounds. The surviving parts of the cap house and parapet walls are of granite ashlar, finely worked. Even now the effect is impressive, and as it originally stood, with the rounds and stair tower crowned by conical roofs or castellated parapets, must have been extremely fine.

The entrance doorway which gives access to the ground floor of the castle was secured by a wood drawer bar and defended by an iron *Yett*. From the indentations in the stonework it seems that the *Yett* was of the sort where horizontal bars protruded beyond the vertical frame. Within the entrance is a small hallway with a shallow stone vault. The staircase rises directly from it; there is no porter's room, although the space under the stairs which shelters two loops covering the entrance, may have served this purpose. Opening off the hallway are a small cellar and the kitchen, the entrance to which is partly concealed in a short vaulted lobby.

The cellar entered through a square-head doorway with chamfered jambs, barrel vaulted and lit by two crosslet loops connects directly with the *Hall* by means of a precipitous mural stair.



Scale of Feet



Scale of Metres

FIG 1 Plan: ground and first floors

It probably combined in some measure the functions of *Pantry* and *Buttery* but it is unlikely to have acted as a service room although this was not impossible. The drain discovered beneath the floor during excavation does not relate to this cellar but rather to an earlier building occupation of the site.

The kitchen, again entered through a square-headed and chamfered doorway, and barrel-vaulted, is lit by a small and originally barred window in the west wall. This may have replaced a crosslet loop, in which case the only dependable light would have been that provided by the fire burning in the huge fireplace. This has a segmental head chamfered on the outer face, but there are no ovens provided. To the right of the window in the west wall is the water intake, and to the left of the fireplace is the slop chute. Above this chute is a straight sided wide-mouthed gun port. In the wall between the kitchen and the staircase is a serving hatch, originally closed by double shutters opening into the kitchen. Because of its position it is likely that service was up the main stair rather than across the hallway and through the cellar.

Beyond the kitchen lies the kitchen cellar: this has two crosslet loops, one in the east and one in the south wall, and a much mutilated straight sided wide-mouth gun post in the north wall. In the wall between it and the kitchen is a deep recess which was probably partitioned off either for storage or as a bed space. It was never a fireplace, although it now rather confusingly houses a boiler and cooker.

Apart from the jagged ends of some of the steps nothing remains of the original staircase *in situ*, but a fragment of the newel was recovered from the site. This showed that the face of each tread was not tangential to the newel but was returned, or quirked, as a radius of the newel. The treads were 1 ft 7 in (480 m) wide at the wall and the risers 8 ins (200 m) deep. In the space formed beneath the stair are two loops; one which covers the entrance is straight splayed externally, the other, an altered crosslet, is set on the 45° line.

The Hall on the first floor is entered directly from the staircase, and measures some 25 ft by 17 ft. It is lit by three large windows, two in the west wall and one in the south wall. Originally they were all fitted with iron grills having three vertical and six horizontal bars, and designed to receive fixed lights in their upper and opening shutters in their lower parts. At some time in the late 17th or early 18th centuries the windows were altered to receive wooden frames. In doing this the stone surrounds were so badly damaged that in some places the jambs had to be renewed.

The ceiling would have had beams spanning east-west with planks above. Probably the whole was painted. In the restoration a similar though undecorated solution has been adopted.

The fireplace is in the north wall at the high end. This is unusually placed in relation to the kitchen lum. Normally the kitchen and hall fireplaces were placed in different walls and as far apart as possible. The reason for this seems to have been to disperse the heat about the building providing a primitive form of background heating. At Tillycairn both lums heat the long and very exposed north wall, so this may have been a deliberate choice.

The fireplace has chamfered granite jambs, but has lost its lintel—for which the seating remains—and it is not clear whether this was flat and of a single stone, of three stones with joggled joints, or had a segmental head as in the kitchen. Above the fireplace opening is a relieving arch of which the granite springers are original but of which the remainder appeared to be a later rebuild. A lintel has now been rebuilt and all evidence of the previous arrangements is hidden under new plaster. Within the fireplace, set in the left cheek, is a large saltbox; the opening is checked to take a wood or iron cover. This was not hinged but seems to have been fastened into the stonework by four bolts or lugs—one on each side—at right angles to the plane of the wall. In the wall at the back of the fireplace is another relieving arch, which was visible internally and externally. This is not a later alteration but part of the original build. It may have formed



an opening which played some part in the construction of the castle and was blocked as its use ceased, or it may have relieved a comparatively thin section of wall of a considerable superimposed load from the upper parts of the gable. The first theory is Dr Douglas Simpson's.

The doorway to the Hall from the main stair opens into the same window embrasure as the doorway from the cellar stairs. The hanging of the doors is not clear as the jambs are badly damaged and no pins survive, but the stair door seems to have opened back against the window, and the cellar stair back into the stair itself. This is both inconvenient and dangerous and suggests that the cellar stair could not have been used as the main service stair. Above the cellar stair in the south-east corner of the Hall is a large arched recess with a small light loop. This has been rebuilt as a buffet on the basis of some garbled tradition. A buffet would more likely be for the display of such plate as the laird might possess and could be looked for in the main part of the Hall rather than at the service end; nor would it require its own window. The most likely explanation is that it was the closet often associated with the Hall, and usually placed at the lower end, for the storage of materials or vessels which needed relatively secure and dry conditions. It was probably enclosed by a timber partition, although parts of its sides have been so rebuilt over the years that a stone partition need not be ruled out.

In the cill of the large window in the south wall is a stone laver or bason with a drainage groove and outlet to discharge the water. In spite of Skene's implication that it did not *argue a high measure of refinement* it was probably used only for rinsing those vessels stored in the adjoining closet.

The doorway from the Hall to the *Laird's Room, Private Room, or Withdrawing Room*—and it probably partook of all these functions—is of granite with badly worn chamfered jambs and head. The room itself is covered by a stone barrel vault in the centre of which is a space for a carved boss. A carved pink granite boss with a fine cable mould was found in the cellarge by Dr Douglas Simpson in 1916 and is now in Aberdeen. A similar vaulted *Laird's* room is to be found at Castle Fraser but as it lies above a beamed and planked floor it has not the fire-proof qualities of the room at Tillycairn. Possibly a degree of grandeur was required and fire-proofing was an additional bonus. The room is lit by windows in the south and east walls, and the fireplace is squeezed into the south-east corner. It is straight-headed with a plain chamfer. In the north wall is a double safe with checks for the inner and outer doors, which may have been of iron. In the north-west corner of the room is a recess with a small light loop; this may have originally been a closet either for storage or for a closed stool. On either side of it are two deep recesses which could have housed great chests. They are big enough to have been bed recesses but it is unlikely that this room was used for sleeping.

On the second floor were three chambers, one in the jamb and two in the main block. The chamber in the jamb is entered directly from the staircase and contains the usual fireplace, bed recess and closet. In the west wall is a double aumbry, one part being above the other—the lower at floor level—and each measuring 8 ins (20 cm) by 6½ in (16 cm). Its purpose is not clear, and as it is not checked to take doors or shutters it was not for the security of valuables. Although this was not the biggest chamber, it was the most private and could have been the principal guest chamber or the laird's bed chamber.

The space in the main block is entered from the staircase, and although it was divided into two rooms the entrance is common to both. This is placed awkwardly for the partition which separated the two rooms; if this was to clear the entrance it would make the north room uncomfortably narrow. It is likely that the partition was so arranged that the doorway from the stair opened into a small lobby. This would allow for the correct positioning of the partition and separate access to both rooms. Each room is provided with a fireplace and closet, that in the

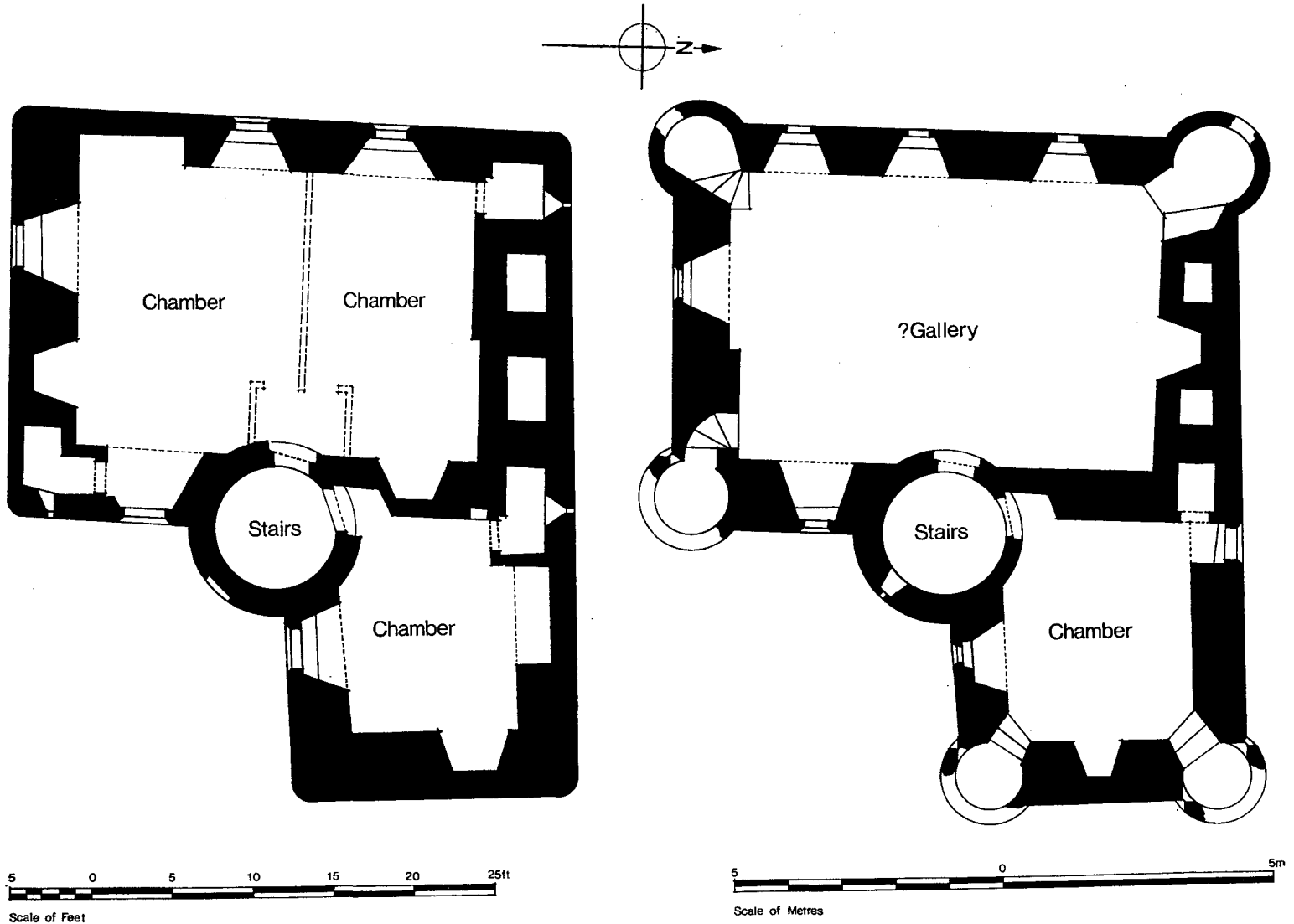


FIG 2 Plan: second and third floors

south room being the larger—and the south room has in addition a bed recess. They may both have served as bed chambers, or, and this seems more probable, as the laird's private suite. If this were so the north room would have served as the *Outer Chamber*, and the south room as the *Inner* or *Bed Chamber*. With only one staircase the normal and private circulation from the *Hall* and *Withdrawing Room* to the *Outer* and *Private* chambers was not possible.

It would be wise at this point to observe that there was no evidence whatsoever for the '*closet constructed in the wall for concealment, and probably the arrangement of the lug, and above the space is divided into several small cells, having a concealed stair in the thickness of the wall communicating with them from the corner of the hall . . .*' so enthusiastically described by Skene, and repeated uncritically by some later writers.

On the third floor a chamber again occupies the jamb with access from it to the NW and SW rounds. These are set three steps above the level of the chamber floor and appear to have always opened directly out of it, as there are no checks for doors or door frames. There is no closet for the closed stool which may have been kept in one of the rounds; in the north-west corner of the room is an unventilated space too small to be a closet and too large to be an aumbry.

Although in the restoration the third floor of the main block has been divided into three rooms and a lobby it would seem that when it was built it was one undivided space. It is not uncommon for the whole of an upper floor to be left undivided although the purpose for this is not clear. The use of it as a *Gallery* need not be ruled out, although at Tillycairn where the provision of chambers is not over-generous it may have also been used as a dormitory. That it was always a single unit is suggested by the provision of only one fireplace, in the north wall, and by the three small windows in the west wall which make partitioning the space into useable chambers even more difficult than two windows would have done. The rounds are entered directly from the room; like those in the jamb there are no checks for doors, and the floors are at a higher level than the main floors. Within the rounds are plunging shot holes, and secondary ventilation loops. The steps into the NW round had disappeared as had much of the stonework at its junction with the north gable. Unfortunately the ragged stonework and the remains of an aumbry at this point have been interpreted as the remains of a staircase up into the attic and consequently one has been built here. This is contrary to both precedent and commonsense. The draught which would have howled down from the attic through this uncloseable opening would have made this room unheatable—and it probably will.

It is at the attic floor that the building sequence becomes most difficult to interpret. At the stair-head—and the *stone* staircase rises no higher than this level—doors open out onto the two bartizan walks to the south and east carried on the heavy oversailing corbelled string. These have been carefully repaired, but not much rebuilt, and preserve the tothing for the coped parapet walls, drainage shutes, and saddle stones. At the end of the walks the stones are stepped up to a level just above that of the ceilings within the two rounds. As built now the wall-head of the rounds is well below the level of the coping of the wall walk and a junction between the parapet and the conical roofs of the rounds would have been, if not impossible, at least very unsightly. But as it is now built it is clear that the SE round on the jamb is of the same build as the chimney which has a raggle line to take account of the present conical roof. It would appear that these two rounds were intended to be higher, and entered on their second level from the wall walk as is the case at Udney and Harthill—a house where there were family connections with the Lumsdens. Whether these upper floors were to have been open or to have been fully roofed rounds can never be known, but if this work was by one of the Bell family then a full two-floored round could be looked for.

Clearly however there was a change in design; possibly a pause in the building brought

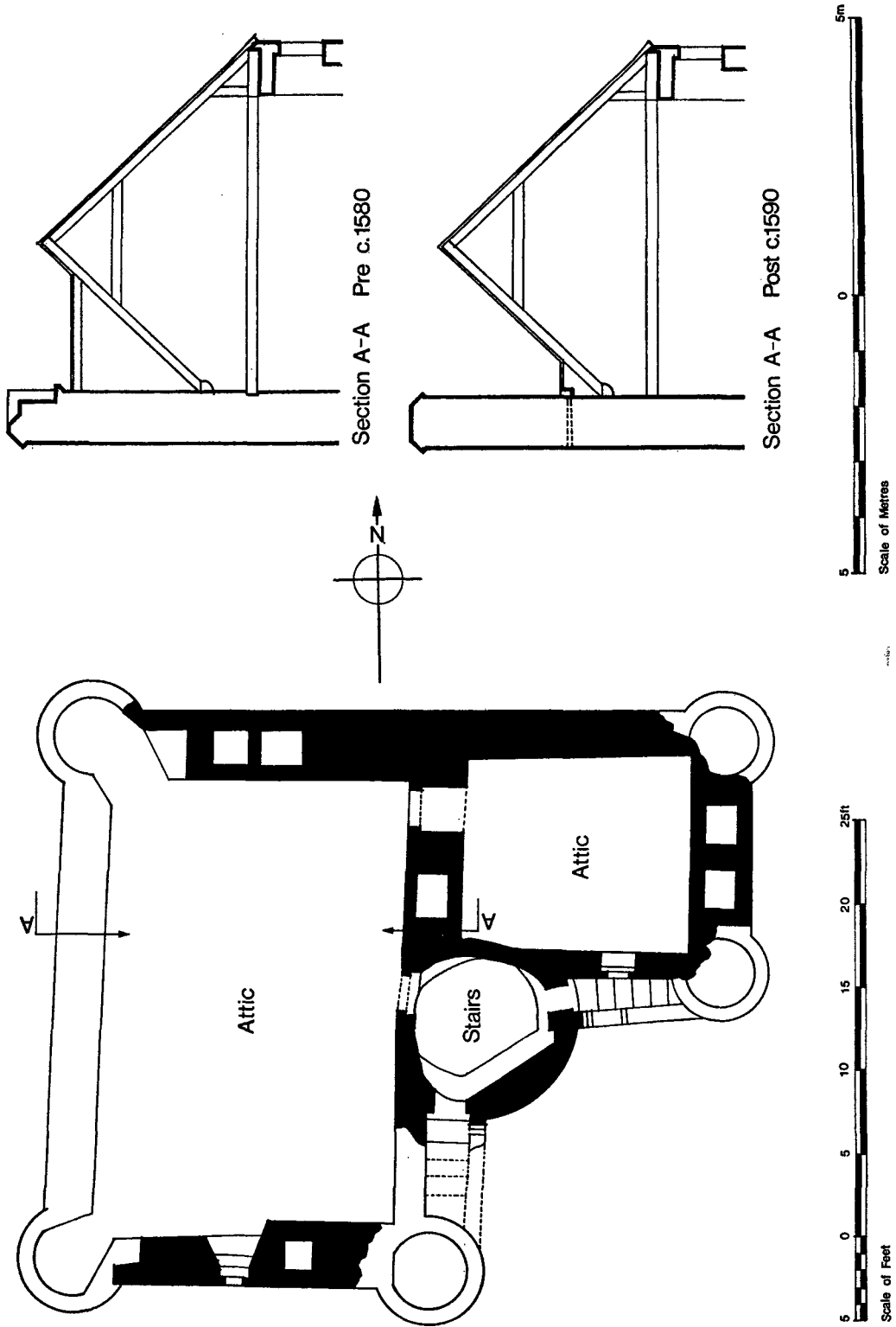


Fig 3 Plan and sections: attic floors

about by Matthew Lumsden's death in 1580 led to a resumption of the work in a less spectacular and more economical fashion. This change is also well shown in the treatment of the main roofs and the cap house to the stair turret.

The end of the stone stairs at this level mean that, as originally built, the staircase was not intended to rise any higher; it would have been difficult to have accommodated the three doors on this level—two to the wall walk and one into the attic—had it done so. In fact the whole interior of the cap house upwards from the stair-head is so clumsily organized that the whole appears—apart from the external finish—to be very much an afterthought as if appearances were all that mattered; the internal changes of plan producing such problems that the architect was not greatly concerned over solving them. This is often found in houses altered in the Bell tradition. External effect was everything and planning was sacrificed to it. The jamb was roofed with its ridge running E–W between the chimneys, and the main block was roofed with a ridge running N–S, the principals coming down onto the wall-head except against the cross wall between the jamb and the main block where three of them at least rested on corbels. Because it was necessary to obtain enough headroom for the doorway from the main stair and the doorway to the attic jamb there had to be some trimming. This produced areas of roof which were difficult to drain, and to facilitate this a stone gutter was formed within the wall round the north side of the stair tower which at this time would have had a rounded and slated roof with a ridge running back from its apex to the main roof.

With the resumption of work in the late 16th–early 17th centuries probably under Matthew's son, John, there was a drastic alteration to the roof-top. As has already been noticed the bartizan was abandoned, the rounds roofed at their present level and the south gable and chimney completed. Similarly the SW and NW rounds of the main block, which may have been intended to have two floors, the upper being entered from the attic space, were finished off at their present level. The stair tower was raised to give access to a roof-top terrace, and provided with a battlemented top. The means of reaching this terrace must have been by way of a wooden extension to the newel stair or a ladder. The former would have been possible as there was no longer any need to provide access to the wall walks, and infinitely preferable. The small doorway at the top of the stair must have been, or intended to be, larger than it is now if any sort of ease of access was to be possible.

The provision of roof top terraces, often with stone benches, was to be found fairly frequently in houses designed or altered in the early 17th century. They are to be seen at Craigievar, Castle Fraser, Craigston and possibly once at Cluny; all houses with Bell connections. They provided an elevated situation for taking the air and viewing the prospect away from the noise and smell of the courtyard, and are supposedly to have been within the dominion of the ladies of the household.

The terrace at Tillycairn is very much an after-thought and is formed over the NE corner of the main block. To shelter it from the north and east the north and cross gables were built up—the original line of them could be seen before the walls were reharled—to the level of the chimney copes. This L-shaped wall incorporated a stone bench. The space between this new wall and the old pitched roof was floored over to provide a lead flat which was drained by a stone chute through the north wall. Presumably the drop on the south side was secured by a wooden balustrade.

#### RESTORATION (pl 34–35)

Inevitably the spate of restorations which is transforming so many picturesque ruins, particularly in the North-East, into generally desirable and sometimes convenient homes gives

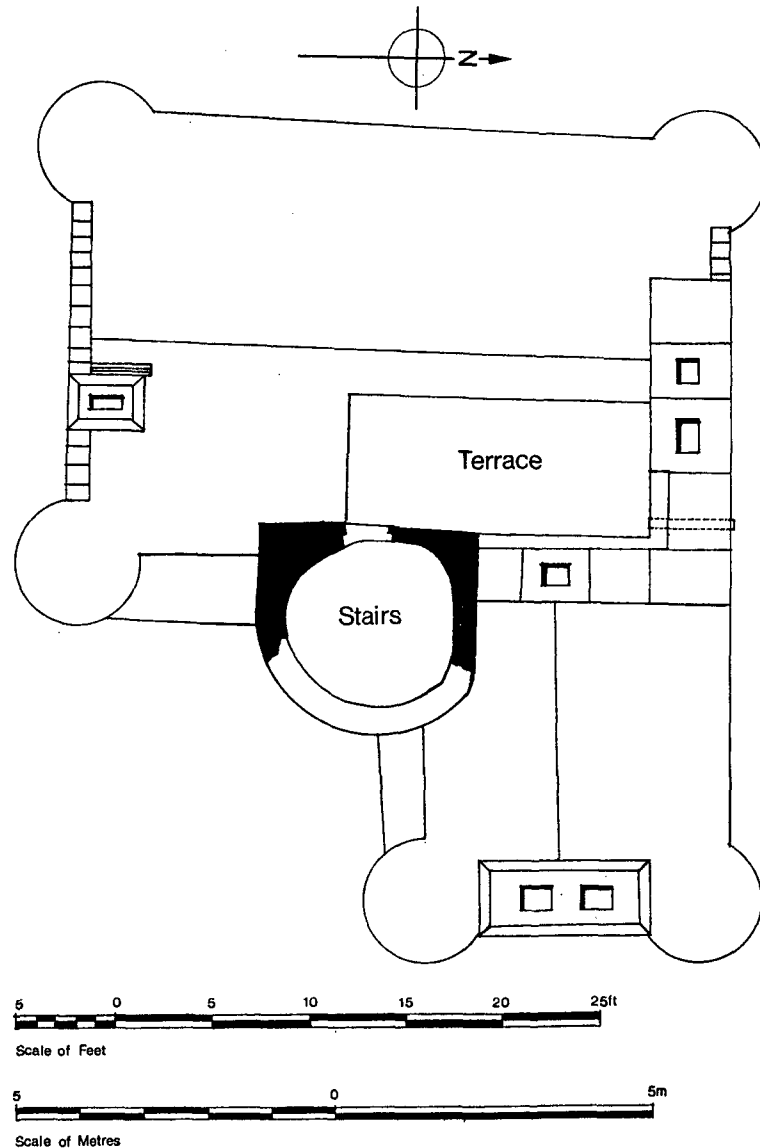


FIG 4 Plan: roof level

rise to concern. At Tillycairn the work has generally been conservative; nothing has been sacrificed although much has been covered and some interpretations may be questioned; and the finish of the stair where the traditional solution of a *bucket roof* has been adopted is admirable. It is in fact the only proper solution; to have attempted to have reconstructed either of the schemes which once existed would have been speculative reconstruction of the very worst sort. But then Tillycairn was fortunate; it was as complete a ruin as it was possible to be and still remain standing; there was nothing to destroy. But there are other houses; houses with 18th and 19th century additions and interiors, sacrificed far too often for reasons that are neither architectural nor

archaeological but rather in the interests of a bogus and instant lairdry which has sprung up, and sacrificed all too often without any attempt being made to record or analyse what has gone. At Tillycairn a very full photographic record of the building before, during and after restoration has been made, which may at some stage find its way into the national archive but this is not always true in all cases.

## CONCLUSION

With no documentary evidence available any dating of Tillycairn must be tentative and rely largely on architectural parallels and family connections.

From the heavily rounded corners and the use of crosslet loops it is possible to argue a starting date in the first half of the 16th century. This is given added strength by the marriage of William, Master of Forbes, in 1538 to Elizabeth Keith, daughter and co-heiress of John Keith of *Inverugie*. This provides a link with the earlier group of buildings in the north-east where the crosslet loop was used. After the granting of the castle to Matthew Lumsden in 1540, and the raid by Strachan of Lynturk in 1542 the castle was presumably completed and strengthened. This phase may not have included the first design for the upper works which would seem to belong to the second half of the century. Their elaboration suggests a mason of the Bell school or family. There are similarities with work at Harthill, and here there is a family connection as Christine Leith of *Harthill* married John Lumsden, son and heir of Thomas Lumsden of *Clova*. The death of Matthew Lumsden in 1580 may have left the work unfinished, there may have been a fire, or simply a change of fashion, but the second remodelling of the upper works is probably c 1590–1600, although a date as late as 1620 would be acceptable, and would have been the work of John Lumsden, Matthew's son.

By the time the castle was ruinous, possibly from fire, in 1722 it had already become part of the Cluny property. The financial problems of the Gordon's of Cluny in the first half of the century made its rebuilding impossible, and later its proximity to Cluny made this unnecessary.

## THE BUILDING GENERATIONS—AND OTHER MATTERS GERMANE

To disentangle the Lumsdens and their connections during the hundred years between 1530 and 1638 is not easy. Even by the normally complicated standards of Aberdeenshire the tree is confusing, and the assumption of the designation 'of *Clova*' by three separate branches of the family and the fact that *John, Mathew, Robert* and *Alexander* were the names generally borne by the elder sons in each line does not make for clarity.

Although the family of Lumsden is of great antiquity the present enquiry will start with the marriage of Robert Lumsden the 3rd of *Cushnie* and Isobel Forbes of *Terpersie*, daughter of Duncan Forbes of *Ardegeithan* and *Terpersie*, and granddaughter of Sir John Forbes of Tolquhon. For good measure some of the descendants of younger sons of Duncan Forbes, who had declined into the class of farmers were known as of *Tilliecairne* and in *Tilliecairne* for several generations.

Robert and Isobel had nineteen children of whom eight certainly survived into later life and it is with three of the sons, Thomas, Mathew, and Robert that we are concerned. Thomas, the eldest, who was killed at Flodden in 1513, was married to Marjory Gordon of *Hallhead* who survived him. She may have been his second wife, as a daughter of William Forbes of *Little Kildrummy* married Thomas Lumsden of *Cushnie* at about this time: she would probably have been too young to be the wife of his uncle who died in 1485. To thicken this brew there is a strong

possibility that the widow, Marjory Gordon remarried as *his* second wife John Forbes of Rires, her predecessor's uncle and a cousin in some degree of her mother-in-law. James Lumsden of *Cushnie*, the eldest son of this couple, married Christian Leith of *Harthill* in 1548 (Reg Magnis Sigilli 1546–80 p 43) and he is described as the heir of Thomas Lumsden of *Clovay*. James died the same year as his grandfather, Robert, and was succeeded by his only son, Patrick, who died childless in 1563 at the age of 14. *Cushnie* passed to John Lumsden, the third son of Thomas and thence to the son and grandson of his first marriage. On the death of the latter without heirs c 1627–33 *Cushnie* was inherited by Robert Lumsden, whose father was Alexander Lumsden of *Clova*, son of John Lumsden by a second marriage, and it is from this line that David Lumsden 19th of *Cushnie* and the present proprietor of *Tillycairn* descends.

The second line of Lumsdens springing from the marriage of Robert Lumsden and Isobel Forbes is represented by Matthew Lumsden called of *Tillycairn* following the grant of that place to him and his wife Annabel, the natural daughter of John, 6th *Lord Forbes*. Matthew was succeeded in 1580 by his son, John Lumsden of *Tillycairn* and *Clova* who died in 1624. He was in turn succeeded by his son John who had been married twice, first to Margaret Calder and secondly to Isobel Roches (Ros) but was only of *Tillycairn*, and not of *Clova*. The line ended with the death of his son, Alexander c 1690 without heirs, and *Tillycairn* passed out of the family.

The line of the third son of Robert and Isobel, Patrick Lumsden of *Clova* who married Elizabeth Keith of *Pettie*, niece of William 4th Earl Marischal, and died in 1580, ended in 1663 with the death of his grandson Alexander.

So far this is relatively clear but once corroborative evidence is sought from legal documents a field of glorious confusion opens. The succession to *Cushnie* is never in doubt; this follows the senior surviving male line. The disappearance of *Tillycairn* from amongst the family properties with the failure of Matthew's line, and its re-emergence as a Forbes property suggests that the Lumsden title to it was a qualified one. But what of *Clova*?

It appears as a designation in all three branches of the family. Thomas Lumsden of *Clovay* died 1513 and his nephew Alexander Lumsden of *Clova* died c 1627–33; they represent the first and senior line. John Lumsden of *Tillycairn* and *Clova*, died 1624, represents the second line, and Robert Lumsden of *Clova*, died 1586, represents the third line. And there is neither reason nor logic in that. Both Robert and John had sons to succeed to *Clova* but they did not. And there is neither reason nor logic in that either.

In fact both the territorial designations of the various members of the family and the legal documents which survive only increase the confusion.

On October 26 1562 Mr Robert Lumsden of *Tullicarne* became a surety for the lairds of *Auchmenzie* and *Correchie* (Reg Priv Council i, 221). This suggests that if he was the third son of Robert and Isobel he was not then known as 'of *Clova*' which he may have only acquired in 1563 after the death of his nephew Patrick—although why he should be known as 'of *Tullicarne*' which was held by his elder brother Matthew is not clear. This same Robert Lumsden of *Clova*, the husband of Elizabeth Keith of *Pettie*, is referred to in two birth brieves of 1650 and 1671 as being the brother german to Robert Lumsden of *Cushnie* (Registers of the Burgh of Aberdeen). There was no other Robert in his generation of *Cushnie*, and this must be an error and should be read as son. Robert's surviving sons may have been illegitimate as *Clova* appears to have passed after his death to his nephew John, son of Matthew. John seems to have been known as of *Tillycairn* and *Clova* although on 12 January 1588 he granted the lands of *Clova* in *Kildrummy* to Alexander his brother german, (*fratre suo*) and this charter was confirmed under the Great Seal, 3 June 1589 (Reg Magni Sigilli 1580–93, 1667). But again there is no record of John having a brother of that name although he had two cousins, grandsons of Robert and Thomas Lumsden both named



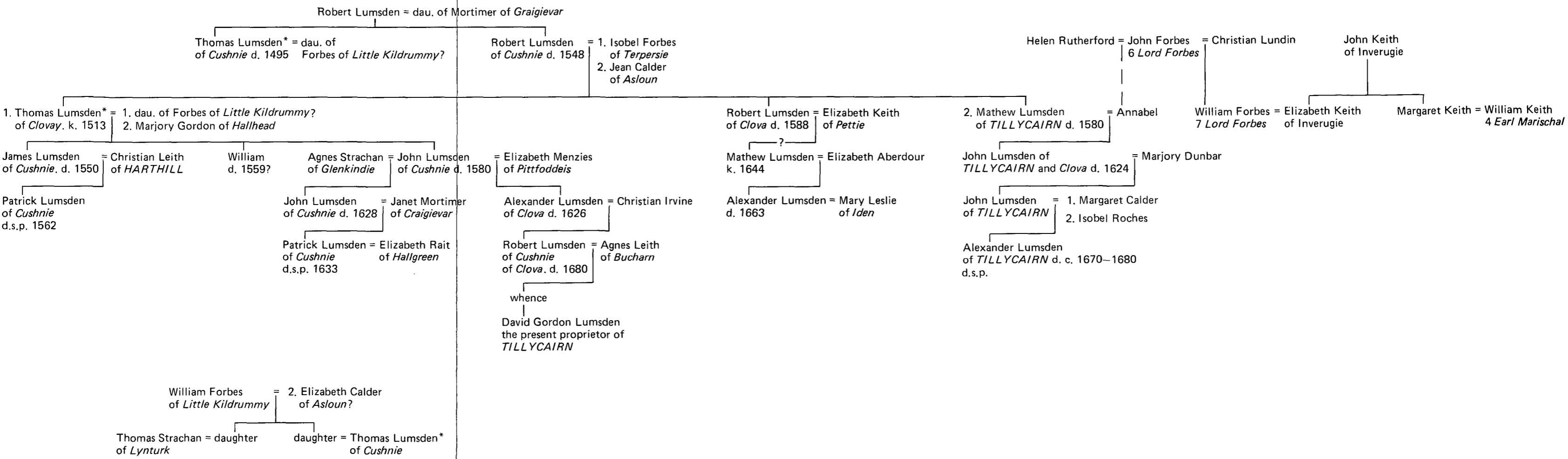


FIG 5 TILLYCAIRN: The building generations

Alexander, and one of whom (the grandson of Thomas) was known as *of Clova*. This Alexander Lumsden *of Clova* is thought to have died before 1626–27 as the *Cushnie* estate passed from his nephew Robert to his son Robert at that time. However as there is reference to Alexander Lumsden *of Clova* in 1633 in *The Book of Annual rentaris and Wadsettars within the Schirrefdome of Aberdein* showing that he was alive in that year or had been until very recently before that date (it is of course possible that the money he is credited with having paid had been collected before his death—but to have paid it he must have been alive as late as 1630). Amongst those listed are also his cousin, John Lumsden *of Tilleycairn*, and the latter's son Alexander, younger *of Tilleycairn*. There is also reference to Robert Lumsden *of Cushnie*. He may have been Alexander's son, the estate having passed a generation for some reason, or he may be Alexander's nephew in which case the date 1626–27 usually given for his death must be incorrect. A further slight oddity is the case of Isobel Roche (Ros). She was the second wife of John Lumsden 3rd *of Tilleycairn*. Before that she had been the second wife of the Rev John Ros, rector of *Cluny*, and as his relict had been granted sasine on 31 June 1634 on the lands of the Hill of Tullicarn (*Aberdeen Sasines* Vol IV), such lands being within the Barony of *Cluny*.

Had John Lumsden pledged the lands to the Rev John Ros for some reason, and did his son marry the rector's widow as the only means of regaining them? Or does this refer to lands in *Tillicarn* in the parish of *Glentannar*?—although the reference to the Barony makes this unlikely.

For a family which could produce so many notaries, lawyers and baillies in the 16th and 17th centuries the Lumsdens have been strangely and badly served by their legal kinsmen.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks are due in the first place to Mr David Lumsden of Tilleycairn for asking me to undertake this study. Mr Peter Yeoman has very generously allowed the inclusion of his report on the excavations at Tilleycairn as an appendix to this paper. James Skene's description of the castle is reproduced with the permission of the Chief Librarian of Edinburgh City Library from the original unpublished MS. I must also record my indebtedness to Mr Ian Cumming who explained much of the work that was being done on the ruins and who prevented me from breaking my neck on several occasions, and to Mr Ian Begg for providing copies of his drawings which formed the basis of my own survey. My thanks also go to Mr Terry Ball for the reconstruction drawings which he realized. I am particularly grateful to Mrs Robin Linzee Gordon of Cluny, who introduced me to Tilleycairn in the first place, and sheltered me whilst I was working on it.

## APPENDIX A

### From domestic and ecclesiastical architecture

James Skene

... '*Tullicairn*' near Cluny, and various other little Bantam cocks of the same kind, which stand sentinel in many a bare moor and deserted nook of the glens of Aberdeenshire, displaying all the usual preparations for war offensive and defensive. But it must be recollected that the size of the Castellets was in no respect commensurate necessarily with the military power of the Baron to whom they belonged, as the retainers who in case of emergency became the defenders dwelt in the adjoining villages and huts, and were not as in other countries retained as a permanent garrison. Accordingly the domestic accommodations of the family only, and of that but a scanty supply only was all that was generally wanted.

'*Tullicairn*' although a small specimen, is nevertheless a very pure one of [a] form observable in some of the castles of this period, consisting in truth of but one tower, having an angle notched out for the security of the entrance door. It is built in the strongest fashion, having the angles rounded and

containing four storeys of vaulted apartments, but from the disproportionate thickness of wall to a building of so small a size, the lowness of the vaults and very sparing admission of light and air, it is but a dark, prison like and comfortless mansion. It exhibits the usual arrangements, the hall engrossing near the whole of the second floor, having a huge fireplace in one end, and an arrangement at the other which does not argue a high measure of refinement, being that of a stone basin in the window recess with a drain to the outside. 'Scottice' a jaw-hole. Above the fireplace is a closet constructed in the wall for concealment, and probably the arrangement of the lug, and above the space is divided into several small cells, having a concealed stair in the thickness of the wall communicating with them from the corner of the hall, from which a narrow trap stair leads to the dungeon below, presenting in all aspects a miniature of the great castle arrangements of the Scottish style. A very heavy projecting cornice of good workmanship encircles the building at the top, supporting the parapet and communicating with the corner turrets, the whole upper part of the building displays greater care and pretension in the structure and dressing of the stones than the lower part which is extremely rough of great boulder stones, some of great dimensions to the extent of four feet thick. The defensive loops deserve notice being different from the usual practice, demonstrative of their use for musquetry being small round holes with a raking level, and having generally two together, one immediately over the other so as to give the means of an uninterrupted discharge being kept up.

## APPENDIX B

Tillycairn castle excavations: watching brief report

Peter A Yeoman BA

### INTRODUCTION

At the request of the Scottish Development Department, Ancient Monuments Branch, the writer undertook a watching brief during the rehabilitation of the castle. It was hoped to investigate and recover evidence for original floor surfaces, building details, buried structures, and occupation debris. Interior observations were hampered by poor lighting conditions.

Observations were made in March 1980 of five deep cuts (fig 6) below ground level, in and around the structure, at an early stage in the building work. These cuts were for services which had to pass through walls and below existing walls.

It was clear that the building had been used extensively in recent years for human and animal accommodation, as demonstrated by the roof scar of an early 19th-century bothy which had abutted the east wall.

Outside the building, there was a difference of over 1 m in ground level, sloping to the south from the north side of the castle.

### AREA 1

This consisted of a T-shaped trench 70 cm wide and 50 cm deep which ran east-west centrally across the southern cellar chamber, continuing through the screen wall facing the entrance. A right-angled extension of this was cut to the north.

Large amounts of 19th and 20th-century rubbish was found sealing earlier debris above an area of unset stones situated 1.6 m east of the south-western musket loop. These stones were removed and proved to be the filling of a gully, 80 cm in width, running north-south, which continually filled with water.

This gully may have been a 'rubble-drain' originally laid in the ground to encourage water to flow off to the south. It is unlikely that this post-dates the decay of the castle, or that it was originally incorporated in the 16th-century structure.

The gully was associated with a green-brown, clay-silt, hard packed deposit with small stones, which may have been a floor surface.

No material dateable prior to the 19th-century was found.

### AREA 2

The sloping ground surface to the east of the tower made it necessary for the builders to remove 1 m of topsoil. A trial hole, 2 m square, was excavated to test this area down to the maximum proposed depth of levelling. The material removed consisted of modern soil and rubbish, and sealed a very hard extensive

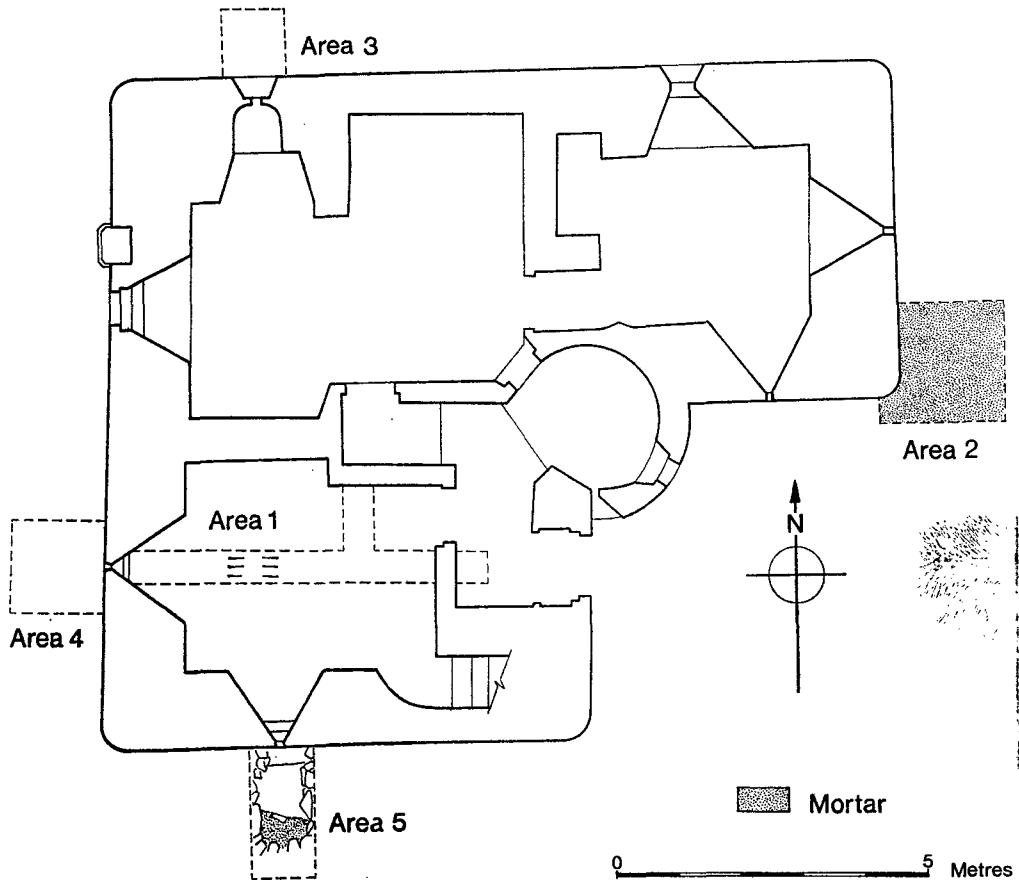


FIG 6 The excavations

deposit of dark yellow-brown, lime mortar and stones, 5 cm in depth. The extent of this deposit could not be fully investigated, although it is likely that it spread over a large area to the east of the entrance, abutting the tower walls, or possibly even running beneath the existing foundations. It is possible that this deposit represents a courtyard surface, earlier than the 19th-century steading, and possibly belonging to an early structure. No dating evidence for this surface was found.

A mortar sample was taken (Tillycairn i, CEU440).

#### AREA 3

A small trench was excavated against the outside north wall, situated 2 m east of the north-west corner of the tower. The land to the north had been ploughed repeatedly to within centimetres of this wall, leaving 1 m of ploughsoil above the 16th-century ground surface. This surface did not yield any archaeological features or deposits. A broken stone drain outlet with a channel 4 cm in width, presumably draining a stone sink, was fully uncovered beneath the gun slits.

#### AREA 4

The western service trench of Area 1 was continued through the west wall, and this area was tested with a 1.5 m square cut. The massive battered-out foundations of unshaped boulders were exposed after the removal of 1.3 m of dark-brown, silt-clay and large natural stones down onto a sterile light brown level. No finds or features were recovered.

### AREA 5

The southern area presented the best opportunity for revealing previously unknown archaeological features, as the ground level here was clearly similar to that of the original, and would probably have been enclosed within a walled courtyard.

An area 1 m wide by 2 m in length was opened below the southern musket loop, exposing a stone structure of an uncertain form, sealed by 20 cm of modern farmyard soil and midden material. This contained stone which abutted the battered tower foundations. The structure ran in a southerly direction, and consisted of two drystone walls, 1 m apart, with the space between filled by dark-brown, clay-silt with small stones. This material sealed a partially mortared surface at a depth of 70 cm below the existing ground level. (Tillycairn ii, CEU441).

These two walls appeared to join 1.5 m south of the tower foundations, although it was impossible to be sure as the space available was very limited. The feature continued to the south, but its purpose must remain unclear. It is unlikely that a wall would be built obscuring a musket loop, unless it was built after the tower went out of use. There is no visible scar on this wall face. This structure may have been a stone lined drain, running south on a similar alignment to that of the possible drain uncovered in Area 1. The nature of the filling was similar to that found in wall trenches, and the apparent adjoining of the walls may simply be where this structure has been cut by the foundation trench for the 16th-century tower house. If this interpretation is correct, the lower mortar layer may then be construction debris.

### SUMMARY

The features discovered during this watching brief of the cutting of trenches were firstly the internal under floor drain in Area 1, secondly the extensive mortar surface of Area 2, and thirdly the stone structure/trench in Area 5. No dating evidence was found, or evidence for the suggested attacks and subsequent reconstructions prior to the house being recorded as ruinous in 1722. The use of the tower and surrounding area as farm buildings since this date has contributed greatly to the destruction of earlier archaeological remains.

In all areas the massive foundations of the 16th-century tower were uncovered, and these reached a recorded depth of at least 2 m, and consisted of natural stone boulders so laid that the foundations had an angle of some 30 degrees. Area 5 suggested a similarly large associated foundation trench. The roof of the 16th-century house was covered with large grey-green metamorphic stone slabs, measuring approximately 60 cm<sup>2</sup>. A large number of these were found in all areas, and were probably quarried locally, as was most of the stone.

The comparative analysis of the mortar samples from Areas 2 and 5 suggested a common source of component parts, rather than a chronological similarity. The sample from Area 5 was of disturbed mortar mixed with sediment, as would be expected from construction debris, whereas the layer in Area 2 appeared to be a made surface.

The writer wishes to acknowledge the assistance of Laurence Keen, Charles Murray and Harry Gordon Slade in the preparation of this report.

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a West front: before restoration



b West front: after restoration



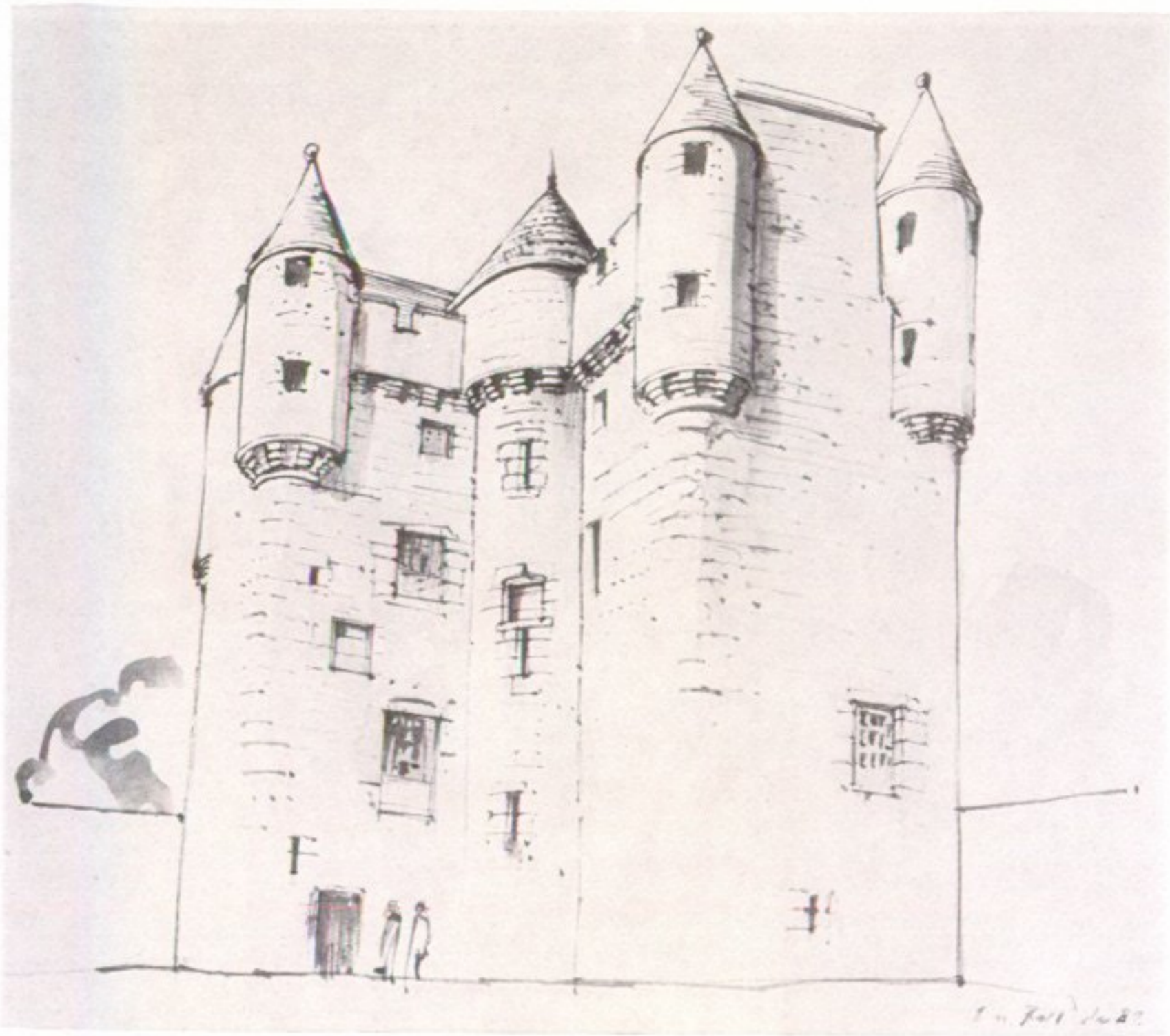


a Stair tower and Cap house:  
before restoration

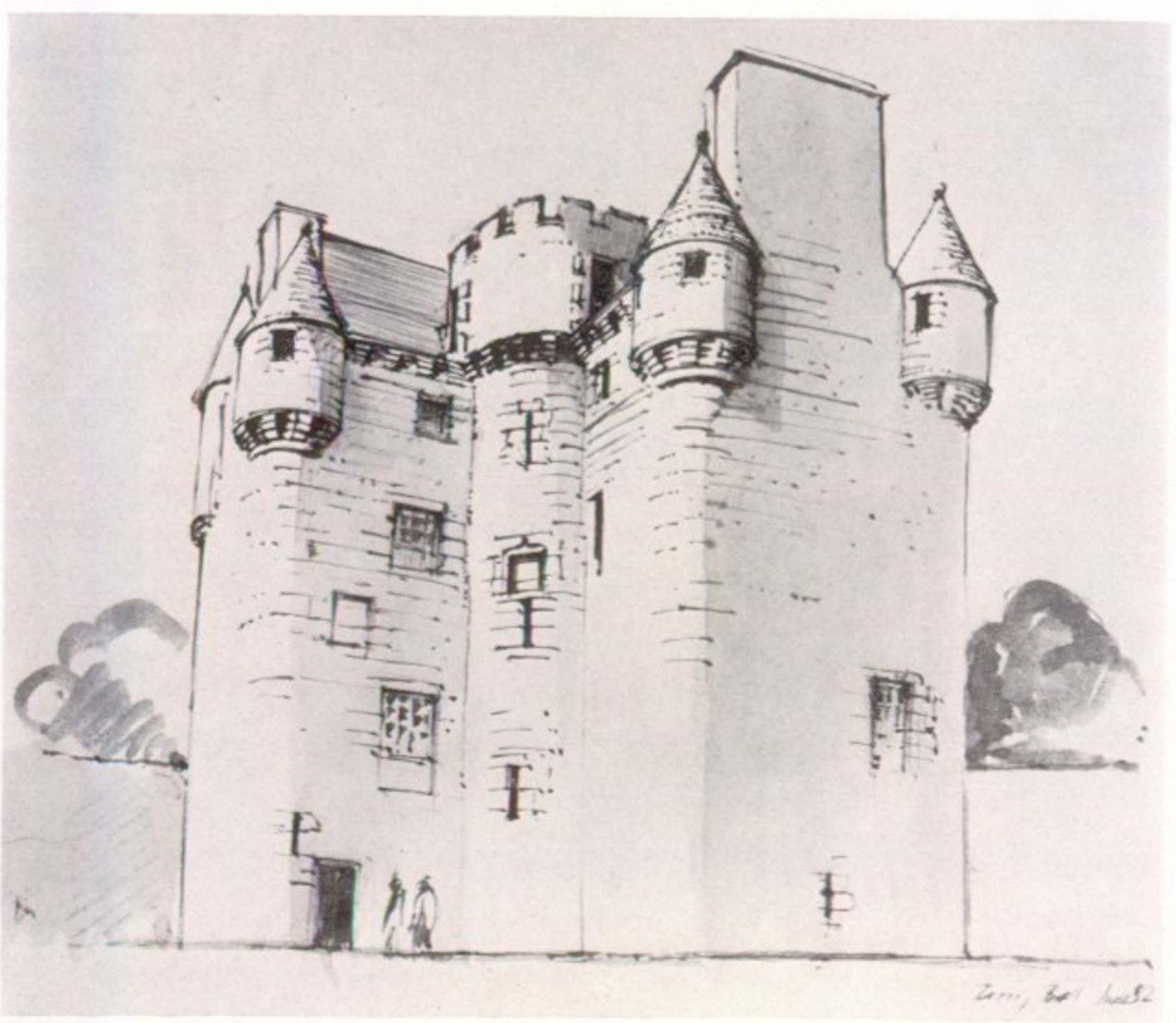


b Stair tower and Cap house:  
after restoration





a The cap house as intended. Pre 1580.  
Reconstruction HGS.  
Realization TB



b The cap house as built. Post 1580.  
Reconstruction HGS.  
Realization TB