

The Lochleven and Linlithgow hangings

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ABSTRACT

Five embroidered panels on red woollen cloth with matching valances, said to have come from Lochleven Castle, and now in the National Museums of Scotland, and in a private collection, are discussed together with three panels in a similar technique belonging to the Museum and to St Leonard's School, St Andrews. It is suggested that the panels from Lochleven were probably wall hangings for a room and were part of the furnishings of the New House of Lochleven, belonging to the Earls of Morton, rather than the Castle, that was part of the estate bought by Sir William Bruce before he built Kinross House. They were probably made in a professional embroidery workshop in Edinburgh during the first half of the 17th century. The history of the panels from Linlithgow cannot now be traced, but the material and technique show that they derive from the same workshop and must be of the same date.

INTRODUCTION

In the collection of the National Museums of Scotland are two well-known and handsome panels of needlework on red cloth, together with two matching valances or pelmets. They were bought as examples of the royal furnishings of Mary Queen of Scots, if not, indeed, the work of her needle. Linlithgow and Lochleven mark the beginning and end of Mary's reign in Scotland: Linlithgow where she was born, to become Queen seven days later, and Lochleven where she was kept in close captivity from June 1567 to May 1568. From there she escaped, only to be kept in close captivity in England for the rest of her life. Both palaces are now romantic ruins, the subject of legends, and any furnishing connected with either becomes part of the legend.

The panel from Lochleven came with two valances (illus 1: NMS no 1921.68, 68a & 68b). It is part of a large set of five panels and four strips of valance, two of which belong to the Museum. Four panels and four other strips of valance are in a private collection in Scotland. The panel from Linlithgow (NMS no 1931.54) is one of a set of three. Two others were presented to St Leonard's School, St Andrews. No valances survive for these panels.

Recently all the Lochleven panels and valances were reassembled in the Museum for study and comparison. This has provided a welcome opportunity to reconsider the date, use and background of these important Scottish hangings.

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DESCRIPTION AND DIMENSIONS

LOCHLEVEN

National Museums of Scotland (illus 1)

One panel consisting of two 'panes' or compartments 1.1800 m by 1.1120 m

Private Collection, Scotland 4 panels

One panel consisting of three panes 1.730 m by 1.460 m. This is made up of one piece of fabric. It is difficult to see whether this is a complete loom width or not.

One panel consisting of four panes 1.750 m by 1.995 m. This has a join at 1.395 in the width.

Two panels joined, making five panes 1.750 m by 2.430 m. This panel consists of two pieces of two and three panes joined together. The embroidered edge is much worn, indicating that it was joined after a good deal of use.

These five panels have tape ties at the sides.

Valances or Pelmetts

National Museums of Scotland (illus 1)

1 1922.68a: 0.256 m by 1.420 m. This has been shaped at the corners, but matches the hangings.

2 1921.68b: 0.280 m by 1.380 m. This has been made up of three strips joined together.

Although similar in material and technique, it appears to belong to a different hanging.

Private Collection, Scotland

1 0.254 m by 1.880 m

2 0.270 m by 1.880 m

3 0.254 m by 1.800 m

4 0.254 m by 1.800 m

The last two are narrower and edged with red cloth.

Loops of braid were provided as a means of hanging the fabric from a pole. They are 20 mm wide and 85 mm deep. There are 22 on the five-paned piece. The few metal rings appear to be later additions perhaps to strengthen or replace loops that have worn through.

LINLITHGOW

National Museums of Scotland

One panel consisting of two panes 1.4715 m by 1.000 m

St Leonard's School (illus 2)

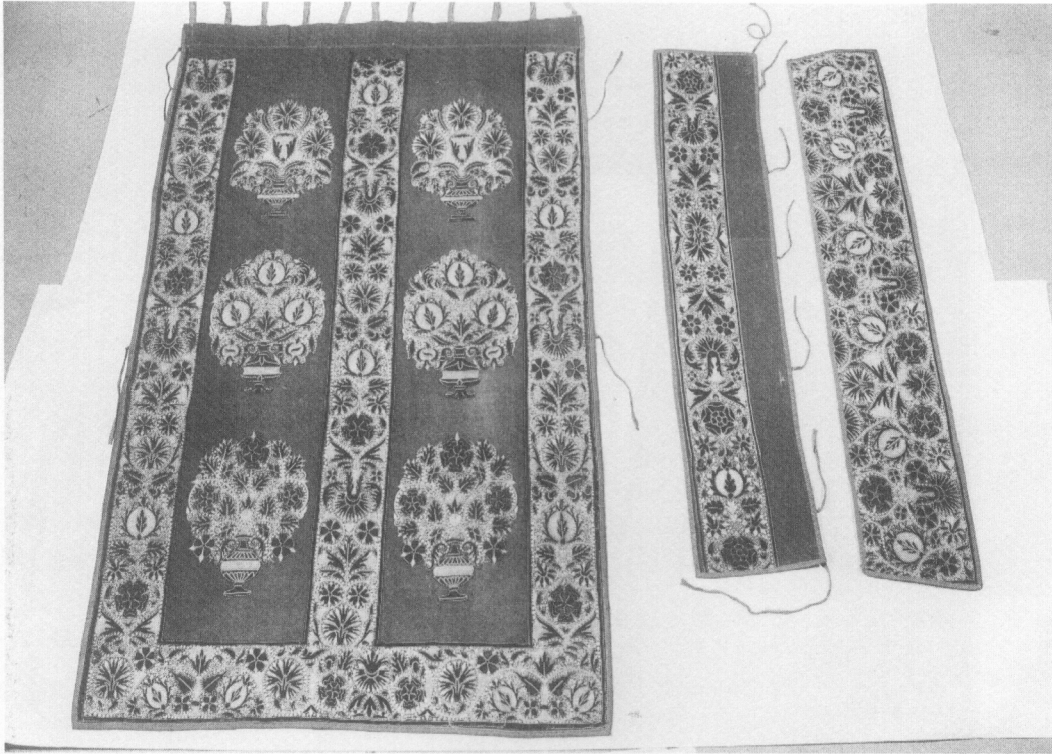
One panel consisting of two panes 1.500 m by 1.385 m

One panel consisting of two panes 1.600 m by 1.400 m

DESIGN AND TECHNIQUE

The design, technique and material of both sets are strikingly similar. They are both worked on a ground of plain weave woollen material with a slight 'nap' and are divided into panes or compartments by a rich embroidered border. The panes on the Lochleven panels are enlivened by three bases holding single stylized roses, pomegranates and carnations respectively. These flowers are repeated in the border and valance strips. The panels from Linlithgow have the same paned arrangement, but the vase is replaced by a lion at the base of a tree, each of which bears roses, pomegranates or carnations. The border repeats these flowers.

The technique is extremely assured. The embroidery is not worked separately and applied, but stitched directly on the red cloth. This must have necessitated a large embroidery frame,



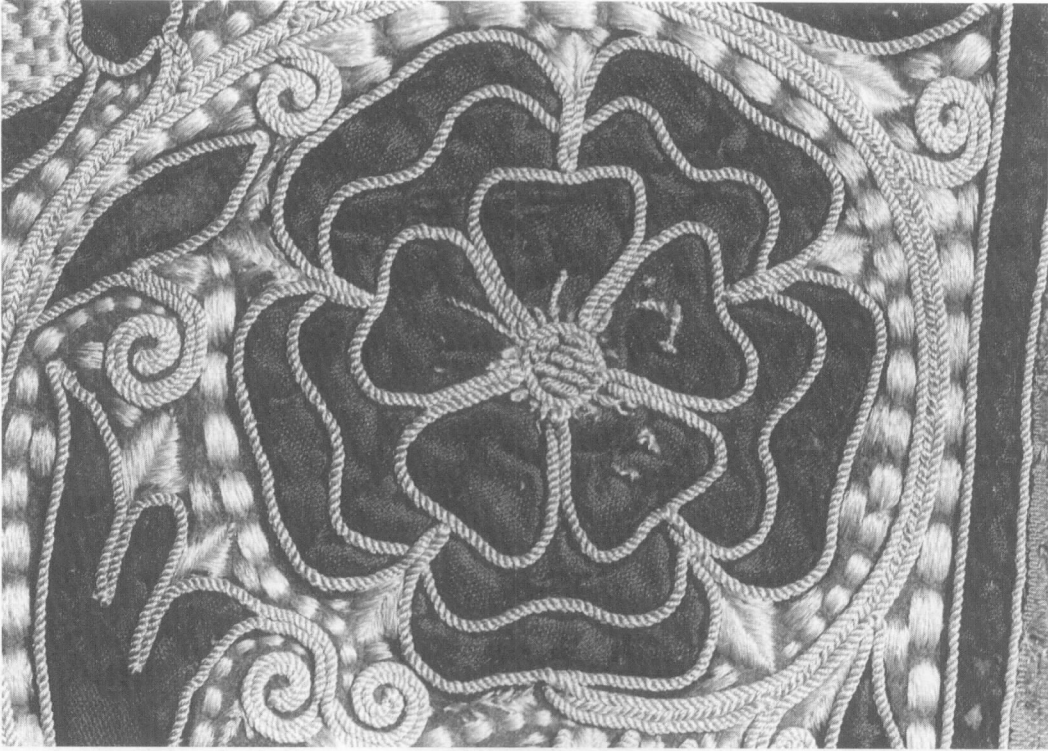
ILLUS 1 Panel, and two valances of red woollen material with black velvet appliqué and yellow and sky blue silk embroidery. Probably from the New House of Lochleven. One valance on the right matches the embroidery on the panels but has probably been reduced in length and width. The other valance is of a different but very similar design. The pieces are shown before conservation. (*National Museums of Scotland, 1921.68, 68a, 68b*)

several feet in width. The flowers, lions, and vases, and the narrow edging guard, are applied shapes cut from black velvet (now much worn and perished in some places), stitched down with yellow sewing silk. The shapes were then outlined with a yellow cord, some of it twisted, some knotted. Between the flowers and leaf shapes are trails of dots in yellow satin stitch (illus 3). The pomegranate shapes are of yellow silk ‘basket work’ filling over laid cords: the same technique as that used in gold work embroidery. Indeed, the bright yellow silk gives a livelier impression of gold work than actual metal thread would have done after so many centuries. The embroidery is highlighted with points of satin stitch in sky-blue silk. The whole effect, drawn with a sure hand, is wonderfully rich and lively.

The suggestion, made in the past, that the needlework is by Mary Queen of Scots herself, cannot now be accepted. The technique is not beyond the scope of a careful and skilled needlewoman, but it points to a professional rather than to an amateur embroiderer. The fact that it is embroidered directly onto the cloth rules out the possibility of its being the work of the Queen. Such frames were indeed listed in the inventory of Mary’s possessions made in 1578 after she had left Scotland, as ‘werklumes for embroiderers’ (Thomson 1815, 238) but they were for the use of the professionals, not the Queen. That the Queen did embroider at the court is well known. Indeed,



ILLUS 2 Three-‘paned’ panel of red woollen material with embroidery in a similar technique to that shown in ILLUS 1; said to have come from Linlithgow Palace. (*St Leonard’s School, St Andrews*)



ILLUS 3 Close-up of one of the roses on the Lochleven set to show the embroidery technique. The black velvet pile has worn away, possibly due to the iron mordant used for the dye. Yellow cord is used to outline the petals and yellow silk for the other details

the English ambassador, Thomas Randolph, reported on 24 October 1561, when Mary first returned to Scotland: 'I was sent for into the Council Chamber, where she herself sitteth the most part of the time, sowing some work or other' (Fleming 1897, 273). The fact that she embroidered during Council meetings may seem surprising to us, but Randolph's surprise was occasioned not by the needlework, but by the fact that she should attend meetings of the Council in person; this was unlike his own Queen, who never attended, but whose Councillors were expected to present the results of their deliberations for her consideration. Mary's pieces could have been done only on a small portable hand frame. Indeed, the panels that can now be attributed to her, those that bear her cipher, are all small pieces, that can be applied to large hangings later. To sit at a large table frame day after day to complete such furnishing as these hangings was out of the question for the Queen, who led an exceedingly active life during the six years she remained in Scotland.

THE LOCHLEVEN HANGINGS

Much embroidery remains in Scotland that is believed to have been worked by the Queen during her ten and a half months of captivity on Lochleven. This belief is based on the frequently quoted letter asking for an embroiderer 'to draw forth designs' for her work (Stevenson 1837, 220). This request was refused, for her embroiderer, Pierre Oudry, was a devoted personal servant. Instead she

had to be content with 18 little flowers painted on canvas, and outlined in black silk, along with silks to work them; these were sent to her in July 1567, together with clothing and shoes. It is unrealistic to believe that Mary, who daily awaited either death or escape, would embark on a large work, ignorant of the length of her captivity. But the belief was widespread, even as long ago as 1768, when John Wesley, on a preaching journey in Scotland, visited Scone Palace, where he saw 'What is far more curious . . . a bed and a set of hangings . . . which were wrought by poor Queen Mary, while she was imprisoned in the Castle of Lochleven. It is some of the finest needlework I ever saw, and plainly shows both her exquisite skill and unwearied industry' (Wesley 1906, 325).

The panels in the Museum collection are usually described as bed hangings, though it has been suggested by those unaware of the existence of the several other panels that they may have formed part of a cloth of Estate (eg Swain 1970, 18). A list, dated December 1562, of the effects seized from the deceased Earl of Huntly included:

6 Item. Ane claith of estate of cramoisie satine figurit permit with gold furnisit with ruif and taill, three single pands the haill freinyeit with gold and cramoisie silk.

This entry bears the annotation 'in Lochleavin' (Thomson 1815, 154). It is hard to believe that figured crimson satin (damask) could be mistaken for red woollen cloth. Moreover, the existence of so many other matching panels rules out the possibility that either of the two Museum pieces could have been the 'taill' for a cloth of Estate over the royal chair.

They have been described as bed hangings several times (RSA 1922, no 12; Antrobus & Preece 1928 Pl 52; RSA 1934, no 17; Signet Library 1948, no 32). Although most of the royal bed hangings listed in the inventories of 1561 and 1578 are silk or velvet, woollen material was, not surprisingly, frequently used in Scotland for bed as well as wall hangings. 'Striped Musselburgh stuff' is encountered in many inventories for both purposes in the 17th and 18th centuries, especially for less important rooms for family and servants. Plain and tartan woollen material was also used. In 1640 the Campbell of Glenorchy family at Balloch (Taymouth Castle) had bed hangings of velvet, silk and London cloth, a woollen material thought to have had a nap similar to those under discussion (Innes 1855, 349).

John Warrock described the Lochleven set as bed hangings, but worked out an ingenious arrangement of the various pieces showing that they were sufficient to encircle the bed, with a gap on one side between the two narrower curtains, where the occupant of the bed got in and out. These two curtains showed a certain amount of wear at the edge that 'perhaps by Queen Mary's own hand as she drew them back to face each new morning of her captivity' (Warrock 1920, 170-1). The difficulty of his arrangement lies in the fact that the curtains could not be drawn back to the posts during the day for making and airing, as they are always depicted in paintings; indeed, he seems to have envisaged them permanently closed, tied at the sides with tapes.

A more compelling argument against these hangings having been used on a bed is the fact that they are unlined, and bear no trace of lining. Embroidered bed curtains were always lined, in order to hide the 'wrong side' of the embroidery. The lining was usually specified in the inventory, especially if it was a contrasting colour. Only the head cloth at the back of the bed against the wall was unlined. By the end of the 17th century, the lining sometimes consisted of separate curtains, hung on an inner rail, that matched the ornately decorated ceiling, as in the splendid bed at Holyroodhouse, supplied by John Ridge of London to the Duke of Hamilton in 1682, and for many years known as Lord Darnley's Bed.

It remains to be considered whether these panels from Lochleven may not have formed part of a set of wall hangings. Textile wall hangings were important items of furnishing in the Scottish domestic interior, as letters and inventories show. For those who could afford them, tapestries

(‘arras hangings’) were used in principal rooms, but they were expensive and had to be imported. Other materials served, plain or embroidered. A set of wall hangings of blue linen survives at Glamis Castle. Now hung around King Malcolm’s Room, they bear the date 1683, and have applied embroidered motifs of flowers and animals. They are topped with a matching pelmet. They bear the names of Helen, Countess of Strathmore and K, and Patrick, Earl of Strathmore and K [Kinghorn]. The hangings have a distinctly old-fashioned air for their date, but they must have been made between 1677, when Earl Patrick was created Strathmore, and 1708 when his wife died.

Apart from tapestries, and the panels by Mary Jamesone in Aberdeen that simulate tapestries, these are the only textile wall hangings known to have survived from the 17th century in Scotland. However, a striking illustration of the use of textiles for wall hangings can be found in the memorandum written in 1700 when the widowed Marchioness of Montrose was about to marry John, son of Sir William Bruce (SRO GD29/433). It lists the furniture she thought needful for Kinross House, where the couple were to live. It included ‘Hingings for the dressing room at 4 sh. ster £9.12.0’.

The house already had some rooms hung with leather bought from Alexander Brand, of Edinburgh, in 1692 (SRO GD29/432/Item 4). She proposed that the hall and staircase should also be hung with gilded leather requiring 96 skins in all. There was to be a ‘Tartan Roome’:

This tartan roome being 23½ elne to fit the hinging of the roome the ½ of the hingings to be made of Callicoe at 20 sh. the eln £111.15/0. 23½ Musselburgh stuff [presumably tartan] at 8 sh. to mix in wt the calicoe breed and breed for hingings in 9.8.0.

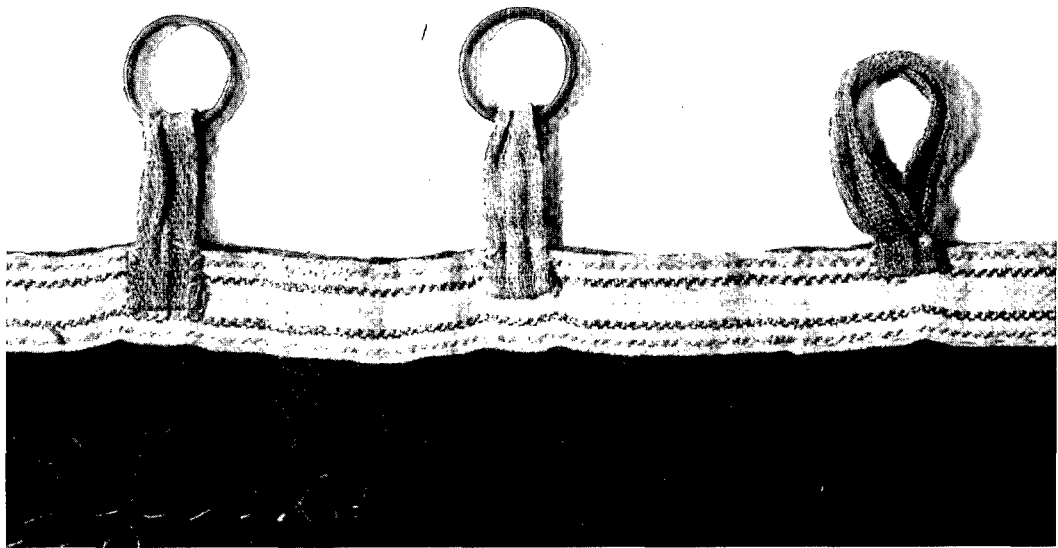
The bed in this room was to be hung with calico at 26 shillings per ell.

In other rooms: a closet and the ‘Olive Room’ were to be hung with ‘Course Musselburgh stuff’ at 7 shillings per ell. For the Gray Roome, Musselburgh stuff at 8 shillings an ell was indicated, though it was only half an ell broad. My Lady Bruce’s Antechamber (she had died in 1689) was to be hung with ‘Stript stuff like Mrs Christian Leslie’s ground, the half yr of and the other half plain green.’ Remarkably, two rooms were to be papered: the ‘Tobacco Roome’ and ‘John Stirling’s room.’

Thus it will be seen that even as late as 1700, hangings were still ‘paned’ by using widths of contrasting material around the room. It is not known how these textiles were hung on the walls. It is unlikely that they reached the wooden floor, bare of carpets, that required sweeping. It is probable that they all hung above a wainscot dado. This was a common feature of houses in Britain, so much so that tapestry weavers in Antwerp in the 17th century wove panels to a shorter depth ‘in the English fashion’ in order to capture the market.

The Lochleven panels show little sign of wear at the lower hem, so it is likely that they too were suspended over wainscotting. Indeed, their depth suggests that they might have been hung below a plaster or painted frieze, such as the one recently uncovered at Holyroodhouse in the Bedchamber of Mary Queen of Scots, and dated to 1617. The iron rings (illus 4) suggest that they were hung from rods, hidden under the valance. The fringed valances at Glamis still perform this decorative function.

The hangings at Glamis now hang in a different room from the one they originally decorated. The Lochleven panels, too, are out of their original context and it is difficult to see how they were disposed around the room. It is highly probable, as at Glamis, that the full set no longer survives, since some panels, beside a door or fireplace, received more wear than those at the corners of the room. Kelly, in discussing the needlework panels attributed to Mary Jamesone, now at St Nicholas Kirk, Aberdeen, made an ingenious suggestion as to how they might have been disposed to allow



ILLUS 4 Detail showing tapes and rings for hanging the panel

for fireplace and window (Kelly 1941, 10). However, without any indication of the size of the room for which they were intended, any attempt to do so in the case of the Lochleven hangings would be extremely hypothetical.

PROVENANCE

The panels descended from Sir William Bruce, who in 1675 bought Lochleven and the barony of Kinross from the 8th Earl of Morton and built the present Kinross House. His son, John Bruce, who married the widowed Marchioness of Montrose, died before his father without issue. In 1869, Sir William's descendant, Thomas Bruce of Arnot, found hangings in a box and gave the following description of them:

The tapestries etc. left by Queen Mary after her flight from Lochleven Castle in May 1568 remained in the castle till it was abandoned, when they were removed to Kinross, the residence of the Earls of Morton, who at that time held the estate and barony of Kinross till 1765 [note: the middle numbers are transposed: it should read 1675]. In that year the estate was purchased by Sir William Bruce, and personal property, including the curtains, passed into his possession (Antrobus & Preece 1928, Pl 52, caption).

In 1921 the Museum acquired from the estate of his son, Sir Charles Bruce GCMG, one panel and two valances for the sum of £120 with help from the National Art Collections Fund. Four other panels with valances were purchased by the Marquess of Bute and lent by him to the SWRI exhibition in 1934 and the exhibition in the Signet Library in 1948.

It is questionable whether the hangings were left behind at Lochleven Castle after the stay of Mary Queen of Scots. Indeed, the evidence is to the contrary. In 1578, a careful inventory was taken of the textile furnishings and clothes left behind by the Queen, including items at Stirling, Lochleven and Linlithgow. Moreover, missing pieces were to be accounted for, as the process



Three-‘paned’ panel of the Lochleven hangings, showing the loops at the top for suspending the panel and the ties at the sides. The black velvet appliqué has fallen out in many places, particularly at the right hand side. (*Private Collection*)

against James, Lord Torphichen in 1573 indicates (Thomson 1815, 182). He was accused of keeping, among other things, the roof and hangings of a bed of red velvet fringed with gold, six pieces of tapestry and a coffer of books. He claimed that Servais de Condé, the Queen's *valet de chambre*, had given him 'small pieces' at the Queen's command, but 'schortlie thairafter the pest come in Edinburgh', so he went to Hamilton, taking them with him. They had been damaged through 'harling thame on sleddis through the foule muris and taking no compt of thame quhen thai were in Hammiltoun', but he admitted to having some of the bed and four pieces of tapestry, and some books but no coffer.

The hangings might, however, have been part of the furnishings of the 'New House of Lochleven' built about 1545 (Walker 1990, 41) a little to the north-east of the present Kinross House. This house, used by the Douglas family (the Earls of Morton) in conjunction with the Castle, was part of the property bought by Sir William Bruce in 1675. In 1682 furnishing was sent from Sir William's lodging in the Canongate to 'Newhouse'. It included Lady Bruces' bed, arras hangings and a fine little Turkey work carpet, as well as Sir William's drawing table and the 'modell of the Abbey [Holyrood] Gate wrappt in a sad-coloured curtain and corded' (SRO GD29/429). Other furniture was sent to Balcaskie, his other house, but Sir William and his wife appear to have lived at Lochleven House, not the Castle, during the building of Kinross House.

On the marriage of his son John in 1700, Sir William, with his second wife, went back to live in the New House of Lochleven, leaving Kinross House for his son and his bride. Lochleven House was demolished in 1723, and the furnishings were presumably stored in Kinross House. It was from there that the hangings were found in a box by Thomas Bruce of Arnot and the legend of their connection with Mary Queen of Scots originated.

DATE

If the hangings were indeed part of the furnishings of Lochleven House, taken over by Sir William Bruce, when were they made? They are exceedingly difficult to date, though several other examples of this technique survive. Four fragments are in the Victoria and Albert Museum, one on a red ground (T633–1898) with black silk and canvas work appliqué. This is called 'French'. There are two pieces from Berkeley Castle, Gloucestershire, called 'English 17th century'. These come from wall hangings that are still on the staircase of the castle. They hung previously in a bedroom, and the general technique of black appliqué on red woollen material is similar to the Lochleven hangings, though there is less rich silk embroidery. The Burrell Collection, Glasgow, has a comparable piece (29/180) with valance en suite, formerly at Kimberley Hall, Norfolk. This is much shorter than the Scottish pieces, but has the familiar black velvet with yellow threads on a red woollen ground. The only piece that can be dated occurs on a portrait (illus 5) dated 1628, of John Harrison (1552–1628) by an anonymous artist, now in the City of York Art Gallery (acc no 1128). He was High Master of St Paul's School, London, 1581–96, and was later 'servant of Prince Henry', the eldest son of James VI. He is depicted seated at a table covered with a red cloth decorated with a border of applied black flowers and embroidery in yellow silk. It should not be assumed, however, that the tablecloth was a fashionable piece of furnishing in 1628, since every detail of the portrait, thought to have been painted posthumously, has significance. The Bible, with a marker at the Book of Revelation, and the antique ring on his finger (he was a collector), tell us something about him. Possibly the stamped leather chair and the embroidered red tablecloth told the beholder more about the elderly scholar. The painting simply shows that such embroidery was in use in 1628.

The Lochleven hangings could therefore have been acquired at any time during the first half



ILLUS 5 Portrait of John Harrison, 1628. The decoration of the tablecloth is similar to that of the two panels. (City of York Art Gallery acc no 1128)

of the 17th century or even earlier. They could have been made in Edinburgh. In spite of the fact that the court had moved to London, and the Church of Scotland had no place for embroidery, there were still professional embroiderers working in Edinburgh in 1628, though William Beatoun, Embroiderer to the King (James VI), had died in 1620. He is known to have undertaken work for other patrons even before the King left Edinburgh. A family named White [Quhyte], a father and two sons, were also embroiderers, and two others so described themselves when they signed the National Covenant in 1638 (information from Edinburgh City Archives: Burgess Rolls). As we have seen, embroidered hangings were made for Glamis, and 'paned' hangings were still in fashion in 1700. The presence of similar hangings from Linlithgow makes the Edinburgh origin even more compelling. Until further evidence comes to light, however, no firm date can be ventured.

THE LINLITHGOW HANGINGS

Unfortunately, the three Linlithgow hangings have an even less precise pedigree than the Lochleven panels. The panel in the collections of the National Museums of Scotland was bought at Sotheby's on 7 November 1930 (Lot 36) for £25. The seller, Miss Young of Kilbymount, St Andrews, presented the other two to St Leonard's School. She wrote to the school:

The three curtains were given by Miss Cheyne, of Churchill, Edinburgh, who told me that her uncle, who had given them to her, had bought them from villagers at Linlithgow. These villagers had rescued them from Linlithgow Palace which had been set on fire by fleeing dragoons who had been defeated at Prestonpans in 1745.

It was, of course, on 1 February 1746 that the palace was burned in a fire started reputedly by the Hanoverian forces who had retreated there after the Battle of Falkirk. It is said that the burgesses of Linlithgow left the fire to burn, since they were Jacobites at heart, although they rescued furnishings which they took to their own homes, some of which were later recovered.

By 1746, however, the furnishings of the palace were unlikely to have belonged to the Crown. As at Holyroodhouse, the royal palaces were left to decay, and were occupied by Keepers and others who brought their own furniture. Linlithgow had a succession of Keepers, culminating in Alexander Livingstone, created Earl of Linlithgow in 1600, who was made Hereditary Keeper of the palace, which he used as his principal residence. His younger brother, James, was created 1st Earl of Callander by Charles I who also made him Keeper of Stirling Castle in 1647.

The following year an inventory was made of furnishings belonging to the Earl of Callander 'within the two north eist chalmers of the third transe of the new work of the Palace of Linlithgow'. Seven rooms are listed, each containing a bed, together with the contents of a pantry, brewhouse and kitchen. The east room contained a canopy bed, two embroidered chairs and a stool, and 'ane fyne peice of hangings with ane brace peice with ane red hinging befor the window'. (A 'brace peice' may have been a continuous valance running along the top of the hanging.) In another was a 'stand bed furnished, ane single grein covering, ane pair grein courteanes and two peice of pand [valance] sax peice of hingsings and ane brace peice, ane chair covered with grein, ane tabill cloath of grein.' In two other rooms were 'four pieces of hingsings and ane brace peice, and sax pieces of hingsings', apparently without a brace peice. 'In Lord Linlythgow his own Chalmer, quher he layis' there were 'sevane peice of hingsings with ane brace peice, and stand bed . . . four peice of rid courteanis, ane pand, and ane ruif, ane grein stwill [stool] ane shewed [sewed] stwill . . . and ane browne velvet tabill cloath' (Maidment 1845, 370-1).

Unfortunately, as in most Scottish inventories, the wall hangings did not receive more explicit description from the recording clerk. James, 4th Earl of Callander, succeeded his uncle as 5th Earl of Linlithgow and hereditary keeper in 1695, but was forfeited in 1716. Thereafter the keepership passed through various hands, being held in 1746 by James Glen, who was also Governor of South Carolina and whose representative at Linlithgow was his sister, Mrs Glen Gordon.

Thus the chequered history of the palace, and the time lag between 1746 and 1931, make the link between the Linlithgow hangings and Mary Queen of Scots exceedingly problematical. There is no doubt, however, that the design, the technique and the material of these panels all point to their having been made in the same workshop, and at the same time, as the Lochleven set. The existence of these two sets of comparable workmanship strengthens the argument that they were made in a professional workshop in Edinburgh.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My thanks are due to Naomi Tarrant, who not only initiated this paper, but made valuable contributions to it; to Mrs N H Walker for information regarding the New House of Lochleven, and to Dr David Breeze for the reference to the furnishing of Linlithgow.

This paper was prompted by the need to research these hangings for their future display in the new Museum of Scotland, where the pieces belonging to the National Museums of Scotland will be shown in turn. The article is therefore dedicated to the memory of the 6th Marquess of Bute (1933–93), Chairman of the Trustees of the National Museums of Scotland, who was instrumental in securing a new building for the Scottish collections.

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