

Methven Castle

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Methven Castle from the south-west 1990 *Photo: Louis Flood, Perth.*

Methven Castle stands on a ridge four miles to the West of Perth. Clearly defined against a background of tree and hill and visible across the rich Strathearn farmland, it marks ten thousand years of colourful Scottish history. This alone would be sufficient to give it special recognition but its superb architectural qualities emphasise the significance of its Cat. A listing.

An early reference is not to the Castle but to Radhard, Thane of Methven, who may have lived at Culdeesland to the West of the present building. King Culen of the Scots was crowned in 972A.D. when three years later, because of immoral living Culen was summoned to appear before Parliament in "Skoyne". Radhard, the Thane, slew the King "to the great joy of many and the grief of very few".

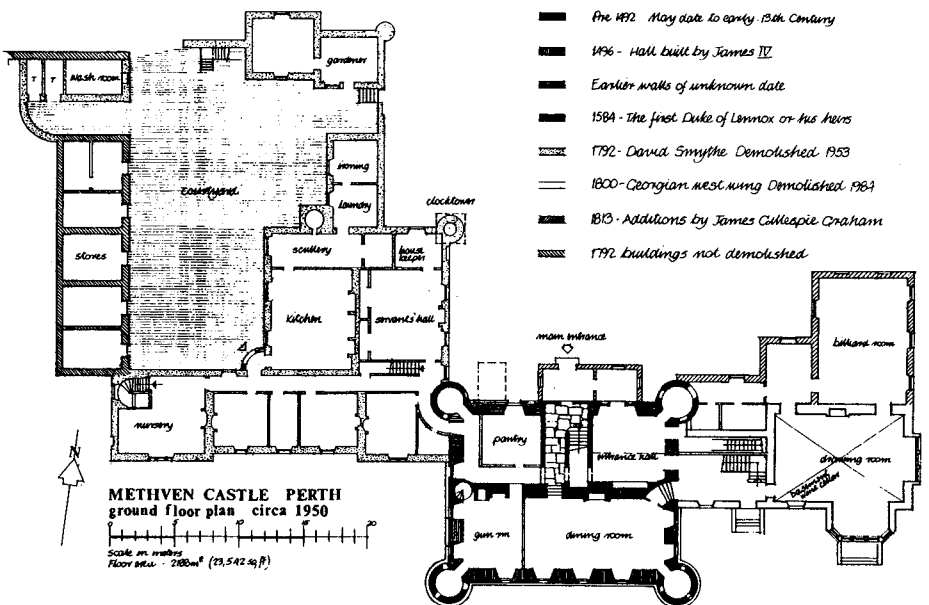
Roger de Mowbray of Normandy came to Britain with William the Conqueror and one of his descendants Philip de Mowbray obtained a grant of the Barony of Methven in 1166. Later, in the Wars of Independence Robert de Mowbray supported the Balliol faction and following the defeat of the English at Bannockburn in 1314, lands and property were confiscated by the victor, Robert the Bruce. Methven was then given to Bruce's daughter Marjory who married Walter, 8th Hereditary High Steward of Scotland. Their son Robert II became the first of the Stewart Dynasty.

In 1427 Methven Castle fell to the crown following its forfeiture from Walter, Earl of Atholl. He had been implicated in the plot to murder James I at Blackfriars in Perth and subsequently lost not only the castle but also his life. In 1444 it is recorded that Methven Castle was besieged and captured while occupied by Sir William Crichton. During 1450-51 King James II and his Queen were in residence at Methven.

Extracts from the Lord High Treasurer's accounts tell us something about King James IV when at Methven.

- 1492 Payment for Estland Burchis for wyndokes and durris at Meffane
 1496 To the King to play at the table £4.13s
 Giffen to the portare at Meffane 16d
 To the cuke and panetare in Meffane 14s
 1497 The third day of Jany giffen to the Provost of Meffane to byg the hal of Meffane with £9
 In Meffane, 24th August, giffen to a pure wif at the King's command 5s 6d

In the time of James IV and V day to day survival was a full time job leaving little opportunity to pursue other interests. The hard Scottish climate and the need to have protection against attack was the catalyst to the practical art of architecture. James IV was "given to Buildings and trimming up of Chappels, Halls and Gardens". His building exploits are well recorded and include the castles at Inverness, Tarbert and at Methven where "a new hall or palace was added to the old towers in 1496.



Other than the centre spine wall of the castle against which the James IV hall was built there is no clear indication of earlier building. This wall has interesting features. On the West there is a turnpike stair. This is built into the wall thickness

and may have been part of an earlier building. There is a small window opening confirming that the wall was once external. The large arched stone fireplace, the guardrobes at upper floors with remnants of a duct to ground level, the safe arches over stone lintels, the mason's marks, the various niches and the oyster shell wedging indicate age.

James IV married Margaret Tudor, sister of Henry VIII in 1503. Queen Margaret was not yet fourteen and her husband was 35 years. In nine years of marriage she had 6 children. James V was the only survivor. Margaret married Archibald Douglas, 6th Earl of the Douglas house of Angus at the old Church of Kinnoull in 1514 after the death of James IV at Flodden field in 1513.

1503

James IV m. Margaret Tudor
(*Union of the Thistle to the Rose*)

1514

m. Archie Douglas
6th Earl of Angus

1538

James V m. Mary of Guise

1544

Margaret Douglas m. Matthew Stewart
4th Earl of Lennox

1565

Mary Stewart m. Henry Stewart
(*Mary Queen of Scots*) (Lord Darnley)

James VI

The importance of Margaret Tudor in Scottish history is emphasised by the fact that she was the grandmother to both the mother and father of James VI.

Margaret Tudor's third marriage was to Henry Stewart. Her son James V gave them a charter to the Lordship and Barony of Methven and Balquhiddar. This charter is written with a flourish of calligraphy on parchment. The wax seal of the King is still firmly attached. Recently translated from the original Latin the description is of great interest and a unique document, dated 17th July 1528. It is a title from a royal to a royal. An abbreviation of the text reads—

“James by the grace of God, king of Scots, to all good men of his whole land, cleric and lay . . . have given, granted heritable and by this our present charter confirmed to our dearest mother Margaret Queen of Scotland and Henry Stewart her husband . . . for the wordly and favour which we have and bear towards our foresaid dearest mother and for the good faith and acceptable service rendered and to be rendered to us by the foresaid Henry brother german of our cousin Andrew, Lord Allendale, and for the exaltation of our honour All and Whole our lands and lordship of Methven with castle, mills, fishings, forests, holdings tenures avowsons and presentations to a provostship of prebends and their chaplaincies . . . and the services of their freeholders and its pertinents lying within our sheriffdom of Perth we unite, bind create and incorporate into a free lordship and barony for all time coming to be called the lordship and barony of Methven ordaining that the foresaid castle of Methven be the principal house of the said barony . . . for ever by all their right, ancient and devised meaths as they lie in length and breadth in woods, plains, moors,

marshes, ways, paths, waters, pools, streams, meadows, grazings and pastures, mills, miltures and their sequels hawkings, huntings, fishings, petaries, turbaries, coal-heuchs, quarries, stone and lime, smithies, brew-houses, heaths and brooms, with courts and their issues, herezelds, bloodwits and marckets of women with gallows, ordeal-pit sok, sac, tholl, theme, infangthief, outfangthief, pit and gallows, with common pasture, free entry and exit and with all and sundry their other liberties, commodities, profits, easements and juet pertinents whatsoever . . .”

It is unfortunate there is not more information available about Methven Castle “principal house of the barony” at the time when the charter was signed 448 years ago.

Queen Margaret died at Methven Castle in 1542. She was interred with great pomp in the Carthusian Monastery at Perth, beside the tomb of James I. Her tomb, and those of other royal personages were afterwards removed to St John's Church, Perth.

The lordship of Methven continued in the possession of this branch of the Stewarts but the third Lord had no heir and the title became extinct in 1584. The Lordship was thereafter conferred by James VI on the Duke of Lennox — “a boundless favourite” of both James V and VI. In 1594 a riot took place at the Castle when a man called Farquharson was killed. At a court hearing in Perth to judge the case against William Gray of Lyndoch, burgesses who were summoned on jury duty objected to appear because the crime was committed outside the burgh. In 1664 Patrick Smythe of Braco purchased Castle and estate. Ownership remained with the Smythe family for 257 years.

Alteration work on a castle tower exposed a stone with elegant carved initials 55mm high of Patrick Smyth and Ann Keith.

Ann Keith was a formidable lady who drove a party of Covenanters from the castle grounds in October 1678. In a letter to her husband she writes—

“My precious love, a multitude of men and women from east, west and south came, the 13th day of this October to hold a field-coventide, two bows draught about our church. They had their tent set up before the sun, upon your ground I, seeing them flocking to it, sent through your ground and charged them to repair to your brother David, the baillie and me, to the castle-hill where we had sixty armed. Your brother with drawn sword and bent pistol I with the light horsemen's piece bent on my left arm, and a drawn tuck in my right hand, all your servants well armed marched forward and kept the one half of them franting with the other that were guarding their minister and their tent which is their standard. We told them if they would not go from the parish of Methven presently it would be a bloody day for I protested as also your brother before God, that we would wear our lives upon them before they should preach in our regality. We charged them to fight or fly . . .”

In the 18th and 19th centuries castle owners carried out many alterations and extensions. These were built in the style of the time and Methven Castle was one of many examples where there was little attempt to pick up the character of earlier building. In time these buildings have become listed leaving a legacy of fine buildings.



Methven Castle from the east. (19th Cent.)

James Gillespie Graham, the fashionable architect, prepared proposals for a new entrance hall. Fortunately this romantic asymmetrical Gothic building was not built since the plans show the earlier south west tower rebuilt as a square tower and finished with Gothic exenellations.

Some alterations did take place with the addition of a billiard room and some time later, two bay windows were added. A drawn record of the castle plan was prepared at the time and this has been an invaluable record. The 19th Cent photograph portrays an elegant assembly of buildings surrounded by fine planting. The following was published about the same date as the photograph—"The present laird, Mr William Smythe, the respected Convener of the County, has improved the castle very considerably covering it with a new roof and modernising it in several respects. He has also increased the amenity of the ancient edifice by enlarging the grounds to four times what they were when he came into possession, planting a large number of valuable trees and building an extensive range of glass erections in the gardens adjoining". Particular mention is made of fine specimens of *Wellingtonia gigantea* planted from seeds sent by a Californian friend. The tree boles remain in the wood to the west. Trees were cut for no apparent reason, about 40 years ago. The celebrated Pepperwell oak still stands; although damaged over the years it has a well recorded history. In the New Statistical account of the Parish it is described as "a tree of great picturesque beauty and contains 700 cub ft of wood; the trunk measures 17½ft in circumference — an increase of three feet since the year 1796". In 1867 it was measured 5'0" from the ground at a girth of 23ft. The tree was "known to be 400 years old" in 1880.

Methven was purchased by James Ernest Cox in 1923. From 1954 when it was again sold the building deteriorated substantially. Recent restoration work which started in 1984 commenced with the removal of a dry rot infected interior. Although there was interesting Georgian plasterwork this was interspersed with crude alterations dating to the 1950's. In the end all was removed including most of the roof, revealing a building as it would have been in the 17th Century.

The window openings to the James IV hall had been doubled in height to Georgian proportions and in most cases earlier windows have been altered in the same way. It was fortunate this work had been carried out before the time when Historic Buildings and Monuments were able to exert control. The enlarged windows to Georgian dimensions are significant factors contributing to the quality of light. Listed building consent was granted for the demolition of the east wing in 1984. Before this work commenced the Georgian 6 panel pitch pine doors, architraves and window shutters were removed, restored and re-used.

In the James IV hall at ground floor level, walls have been left in stone. Arched windows and robust stonewalls add to the pleasure of looking out and beyond to the Lomonds.



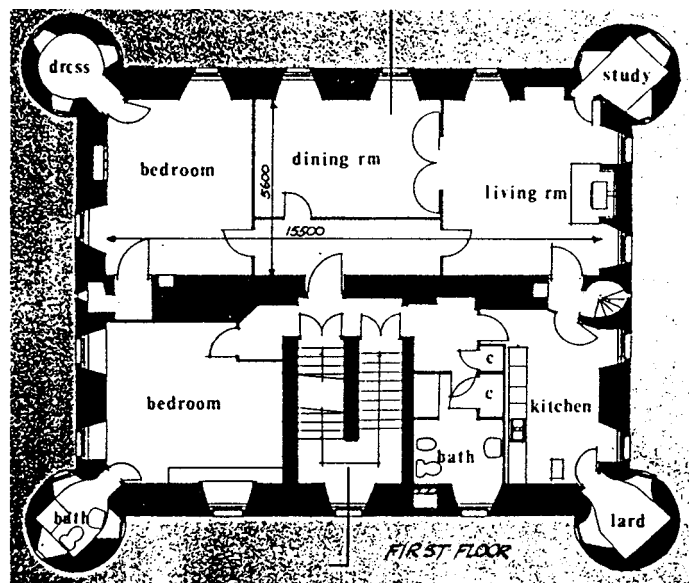
*James IV Hall
South Window*

Many materials required for the reconstruction have been scavenged from demolished buildings. Redwood joists from Huntingtower Bleach Works and Dewar's Bonded Warehouse, maple flooring from a flax factory and yellow pine church pews from an abandoned church have each in their own way implanted an "age factor" thereby retaining some of the character we associate with old buildings. Roof timbers are new but of a size similar to the original adzed trees used for rafters. Many of the 600+ panes of glass were cut from windows following their replacement by double glazing.

The date of the present castle has not been positively established. At ground and first floor the circular corner towers show clearly that they have been spliced onto older walls. A tree root embedded into an internal wall at first floor ceiling level on the S.E. corner suggests that it had taken a firm hold before towers were added. The stone work at the second and third floors ties into towers indicating that upper walls and towers were built at the same time. Ground floor windows have stone arches and apart from the first floor windows to the north side, the remaining openings are spanned with oak lintels.

It is recorded that the architect, or master mason for Methven Castle was John Mylne. The first of this name practised his craft in the reigns of James III and IV (1460-1513). John Mylne was established in Dundee during the last decade of the 16th Century. He and his father successively held the post of King's Master Mason. In 1580 he was engaged in various works at Dundee including in 1586 the market cross. His son John Mylne (1611-1667) was born in Perth and succeeded his father as Master Mason to the Crown. From 1584 during the ownership of the Duke of Lennox, a Stewart related to both James V and VI, it is more than likely that John Mylne was asked to carry out work for the re-building of the Castle.

The north elevation survey shows the outline of the now demolished east wing built in 1803. Superimposed on the original castle is a square, centred on the circular corner towers. Were these proportions used in the preparation of the design?



A spacious flat at first floor was completed in 1986 to provide a comfortable centrally heated home. The ground floor with workshop and utility room provides an important backup to the continuing restoration in the upper floors and below ground there is a tunnel which has been sealed off until time can be found to carry out further investigation.



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Methven Castle and its Many Owners

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Portrait of Perth, Angus & Fife

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Charter by James V to his Mother
Transcription and translation by James J. Robertson, Dundee University

Early Sources of Scottish History — AD 500-1286
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Woods, Forests and Estates of Perthshire
Thomas Hunter