

RAIT CASTLE AND BAREVAN CHURCH, NAIRNSHIRE.
By W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, M.A., D.LITT., F.S.A. SCOT.

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Rait Castle occupies an exceedingly fine situation on rising ground at a height of 250 feet above sea-level, overlooking to the northward the valley of the Nairn and the rich champagne country that skirts the Moray Firth. It thus commands a magnificent panorama, of which the centre point is formed by the many-spired town of Nairn, with the blue waters of the Firth extending behind it on either hand, and beyond them the bluff red cliffs of the Black Isle and Nigg, sundered by the dark cleft of the entry to Cromarty Firth. Behind these again, in a higher lift, is a long grey line of distant hills, stretching from the swart couchant mass of Ben Wyvis on the left to the far-distant, high-upstanding cone of Morven of Caithness on the right. But from the standpoint of defence the position of the castle is a wretchedly poor one. Immediately to the south of it the ground rises abruptly into a large rough irregular knoll with bossy outcrops of glaciated porphyritic granite—a beautiful pink stone with twinned felspar phenocrysts. This rock exhibits distinct striation, the direction of the ice-flow having been to the east and south-east. The slopes skirting the knoll are thickly strewn with erratic boulders, and the whole area is at present covered with a dense undergrowth of thorn, whin, and broom, all rising into a sombre background of pine and larch. The main building—or "palace," to give it its technical term—is placed on the northern margin of the site, while the barnkin or courtyard enclosure, upon which the palace fronts, extends southward to the foot of the rock.

The palace (see plans, fig. 1) consists of an oblong hall, raised upon unvaulted cellarage and having a garret overhead: to its south-west corner is appended a round tower of three-quarter salient, with storeys corresponding to the main building; and from the west or dais end of the hall projects northward a narrow oblong garderobe tower, now greatly ruined. The dimensions of the main building, on the ground level, are 54 feet 3 inches by 21 feet 7 inches, within walls 5 feet 8 inches thick, and the round tower, with walls a foot less in thickness, has an internal diameter of 11 feet 6 inches. The garderobe tower was 8 feet 2 inches broad with a projection of 12 feet 8 inches, its walls being 2 feet 8 inches thick. At present the walls of the palace exist to an average height of about 36 feet on the north side and 25 feet on the south side, and the tower survives to a greatest height of 27 feet.

As already stated, the palace faces south upon the courtyard. In the basement on this front (fig. 2) are two small oblong windows with a heavy external chanfer. On the first floor close to the east end, at a height of 8 feet 8 inches above ground, is the entrance (fig. 3), a conspicuous and handsome feature of the castle. It consists of an outer and an inner arch, both of a drop-centred pointed form. The outer arch has a broad chanfer beneath a heavy hood moulding with chamfered upper and hollowed under faces, the whole resting on plain steps. Within this is a portcullis chase, and behind this again is the inner portal, which has a heavy double chanfer and was furnished with a wooden door, secured by a bar, withdrawn into a long slot on the western side. The daylight measurements of the inner or true portal are: breadth, 4 feet; height, 7 feet 3 inches. Immediately to the east of the portal is a pointed and chamfered observation loop for the porter.

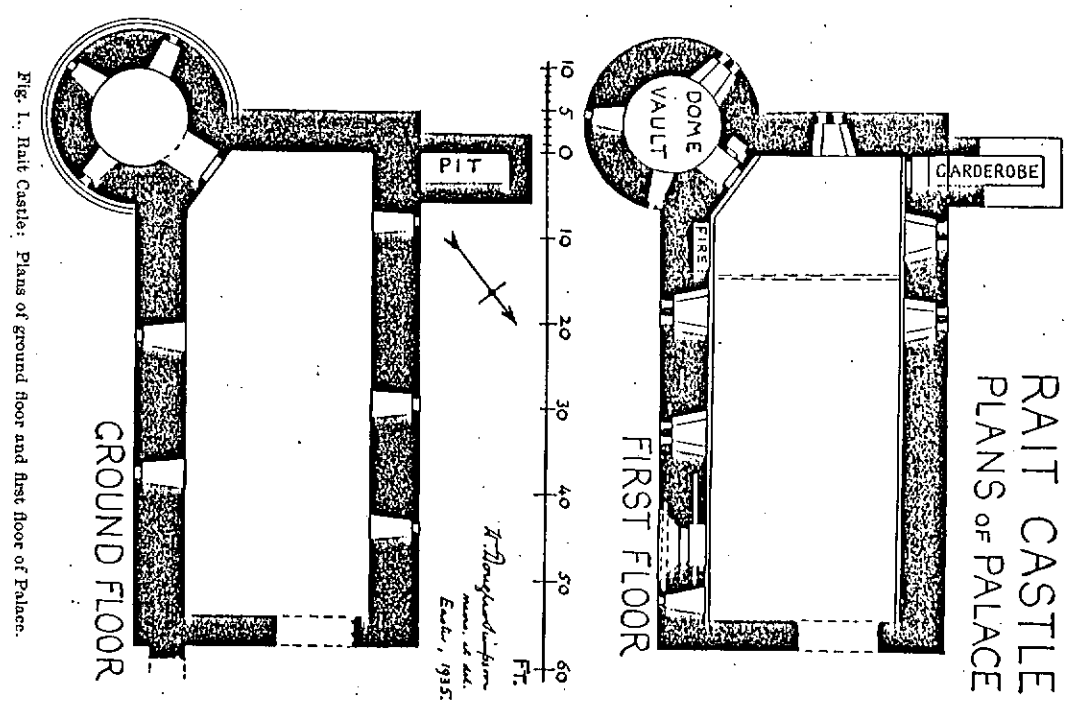


Fig. 1. Rait Castle: Plans of ground floor and first floor of Palace.

1 This eastward drift of the ice has carried craters of the Rait porphyry as far ahead as Banffshire.
2 For convenience in description it is assumed that the palace lies east and west. The actual orientation is shown on the plans.

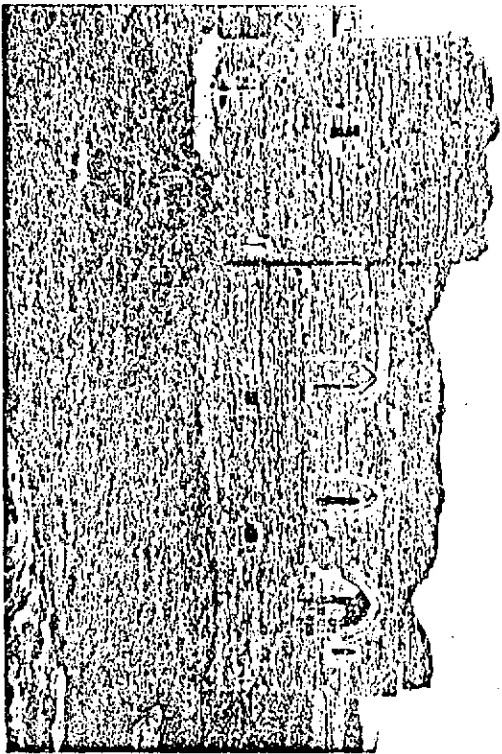


Fig. 2. Rait Castle: View of Palace from south.

[Photo: J. Craig.]

West of the doorway and set midway in the front are two large windows lighting the body of the hall (fig. 2). They have a plain chamfer without hood mould, and are of pointed arched form, divided into two lancets by a chamfered mullion branching at the impost level, so as to form a lozenge-shaped void in the head. In each case the mullion has gone, but the tracery survives, owing to the fact that the entire head of the inner order of the window, above the impost level, is cut out of a single stone, in the manner of plate tracery. The over-all daylight dimensions of these windows are: breadth, 2 feet 8 inches; height, 6 feet 1½ inch.

The east end wall of the palace is breached throughout its height. It has been crowned with a parapet oversailing on a single continuous corbel table at a height of about 24 feet above ground. Near the south end are the tusks of a barmkin wall which engaged at this point: it was 3 feet 7 inches thick and about 8 feet in height.

On the north side at the basement level are a pointed loop at either end and a plain oblong window in the middle, similar to those on the opposite front. All have the usual heavy chamfer. The loops are at a higher level than the window. On the first floor level the only openings are two large windows (fig. 4), placed close together near the west end. These have been similar in pattern to those on the south side, but have lost both mullions and tracery.

The west wall has no basement openings. On the first floor is a large window of the usual pattern (fig. 4), but now robbed of its mullion and tracery.



Fig. 3. Rait Castle: Entrance.

[Photo: J. Craig.]

The basement of the tower is lit by three loopholes, of which the south-east one is still preserved, and is a narrow unarched opening with the usual heavy chamfer. The other loopholes have had their dressings torn out and are roughly restored. On the first floor are two loopholes and also a very handsome window looking north-west (figs. 4, 5). This is of the standard pattern with branched mullion forming two lancets and a lozenge in the head, but the tracery is built in separate pieces, and is enclosed in a chamfered oblong frame, of which the lintel has been crudely renewed.

The masonry of the palace is rough but good, closely packed whinstone and granite rubble brought to course, and showing a fairly free use of pinnings. On the south front in the lower part of the wall is a considerable admixture of red and yellow freestone. This material is used

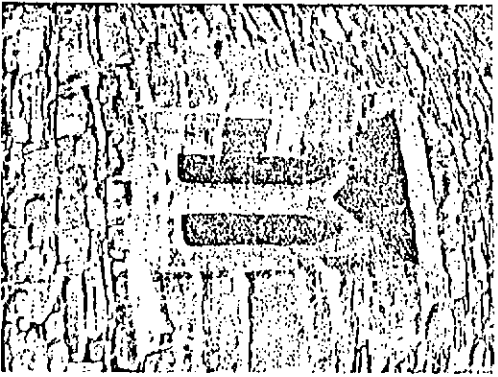


Fig. 4. Rait Castle: View of north and west fronts of Palace.

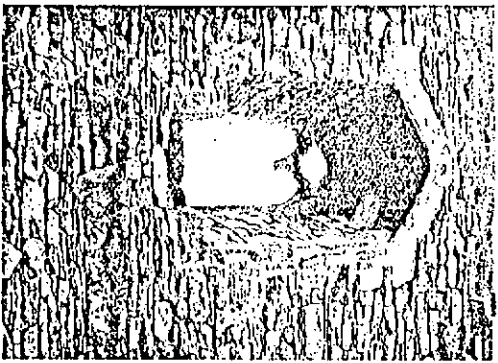
[Photo: J. Craig.]

throughout for the dressings. The prevailing chamfer on the large windows is of 3 inches, but in the narrow loops it is of 4 or 5 inches, and at the portal it is increased to 6 inches. All the larger windows are bored for iron grilles. The tower has a low battered base of two splayed freestone courses with a vertical course between and a vertical pincth in rubble work below.

Passing now to describe the interior of the palace, we find in the basement no features of interest save the loopholes and windows already noted. These have splayed ingoings with lintels originally of freestone, but now roughly restored with granite or whinstone. They are checked for internal shutters. The scarrament, 6 inches broad, for the hall floor still exists on the side walls at a height of 8 feet-6 inches above ground level. On this floor the porter's loop has a splayed and lintelled ingoing in whinstone. The portal has a high elliptic chamfered rear-arch, carefully wrought in freestone: no doubt the jambs below were also in freestone, but are replaced by rough modern repairs. The tracered windows are also carried out in freestone throughout (fig. 6).



[Photo: J. Craig.]



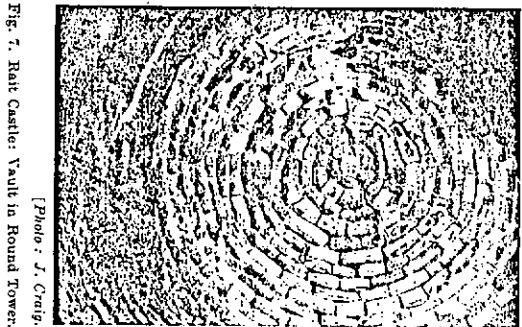
[Photo: J. Craig.]

Fig. 5. Rait Castle: Window in Round Tower.

They have seats in their splayed ingoings, the benches of which project and are chamfered below. These window bays are all most carefully finished off with ashlar scoinison arches, strengthened by a mid-rib and a rear-rib, moulded with a double hollow chamfer of rather delicate profile. All the windows were strongly barred, and are furnished with checks and bat-holes for internal wooden frames or shutters. At the west end on the south side there has been a fine fireplace, unfortunately now much ruined. It is 5 feet 2 inches wide and 1 foot 9 inches deep, and has had chamfered freestone jambs with a lintel, now gone, resting upon corbels projected in two courses.

The two large windows close together on the north side may both have been intended to light the dais. On the other hand, this would seem to imply a dais too large in proportion to the hall; and it is more

Fig. 6. Interior view of east window, south side.



[Photo: J. Craig.]

Fig. 7. Rait Castle: Vault in Round Tower.

loopholes have also been refashioned. The south jamb of the south-west loop shows a freestone quoin, re-inserted, on which is incised a large sigma-shaped mason's mark, about 4 1/2 inches long. The first floor is ceiled with a most beautifully constructed dome vault (fig. 7) in fourteen perfect rings of yellow freestone ashlar, mostly oblong blocks closely jointed, and centered on a plain octagonal unprojected keystone. The entrance passage on this floor has freestone lintels carried on a curved freestone corbel course, and on the north side is a small masonry neatly wrought in freestone, with an inner check. The two loopholes on this level have freestone jambs and lintels, all without chamfer. The ingoing of the large tracied north-west window has side benches similar to those of the hall windows: it is covered by lintels resting on a double course of curved continuous corbels, all in freestone.

No stairs are apparent anywhere in the palace, and the connection between the different floors must have been by trap-doors and ladders. It is also curious that there is no fireplace in the round tower. Both these absences indicate a relatively early date.

probable that (as suggested on plan) there was a light partition crossing the hall between the two windows, so as to form the normal medieval accommodation of hall, great chamber, and solar in the tower. In that case the hall will have had a central hearth with a louvre.

The garderobe tower (fig. 4) enters the hall level by a plain freestone door, the lintel of which is gone; the jambs are checked for a door closing against the hall. The garderobe chamber has been roughly arched. The pit below measures 10 feet 2 inches by 3 feet 3 inches, and is 8 feet deep. In excavating it a small midden deposit was found, consisting of animal bones and a little comminuted charcoal.¹

At the inside wall-head level on the south side of the hall a few of the rough corbels still remain which had carried the timbers of the roof.

The round tower has a diagonal gorge wall in which are the doors of access from the basement and hall. Above the latter the gorge wall is set back so as to allow a bench for the roof timbers. The lower door has been roughly rebuilt: the upper has chamfered freestone jambs and lintel.

The basement of the tower has not been vaulted, but the joist-holes have disappeared in the course of modern repairs, and the ingoings of the three

¹ The bones have been submitted for examination to Mr. R. M. Neill, M.C., M.A., of the Natural History Department, University of Aberdeen, who reports as follows:—

Rait Castle, 14th century.—Two oyster valves, one left metacarpus of a medium-sized ox, and nineteen broken fragments, up to 3 inches in length, of ox and sheep bones.

Dents: 1. Sheep (young)—3 fragments skull.

1 fragment vertebra.

1 " " right scapula.

11 fragments limb bones.

2. Ox (medium size)—1 left metacarpus.

1 fragment left humerus.

1 " " phalanx of foot.

1 " " skull.

3. Two oyster valves.

Owing to their greatly ruined state and the densely overgrown and encumbered condition of the site, it is impossible to give a satisfactory description of the courtyard buildings. Their plan, so far as ascertainable, is indicated on fig. 8. A striking feature is the way in which the enclosing wall on the rearward or south side is involved with a great ledge of ice-worn granite outcrop, forming a smooth, very steep, and perfectly straight slope some 8 feet high, and running about 80 feet in a south-south-westerly direction. These barmkin walls are nowhere more than 9 feet in height, and are of very slight construction, not more than 2 feet 6 inches thick. In materials and texture they are not dissimilar from that of the palace. At the position marked on plan is an area filled with stones, amid which, when the upper few layers are removed, water is found. This may mark the position of a well.

No trace now exists of the entrance. Probably it lay along the west end of the palace and past the round tower, which thus would command the approach. The main door into the palace will, of course, have been reached from the courtyard building connected with it.

Rait Castle is in every way a most noteworthy building. In fact there is nothing quite like it in Scotland. It is an excellent and early example of the "palace" plan, introduced into Scotland in the latter part of the fourteenth century.¹ As the name indicates (*palatium* in medieval Latin signifies "hall" ?), this plan consists essentially of a long hall, raised upon storage which may or may not be vaulted, and often, as in the present case, having private accommodation adjoining it in an angle tower. The plan is thus radically different from the tower-house plans which were more usually in vogue in Scotland at this period, and are so well exemplified in the neighbouring castles of Cawdor and Kinross. Particularly remarkable features at Rait are the unusual and elaborate treatment of the well-proportioned windows, more suggestive of ecclesiastical than of domestic architecture; the large and

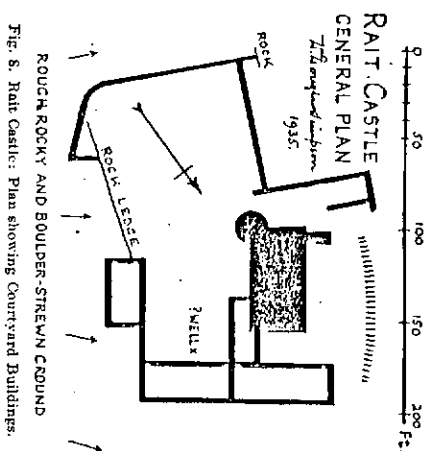


Fig. 8. Rait Castle: Plan showing Courtyard Buildings.

strongly defined doorway, which seems out of scale with the rest of the edifice; and the extremely careful finish of all the freestone dressed work and moulded detail. An attempt to work out the date and affinities of this very important building involves us in some interesting questions.

¹ See W. Mackay Mackenzie, *The Medieval Castle in Scotland*, chap. v.

² So also in medieval German records, the regular name for the hall part of a castle is *palas*.

The fertile soil and sunny climate of the ancient province of Moravia have been celebrated for many centuries. After its incorporation in the expanding dominions of the Canmore dynasty, these natural advantages led to the province being extensively colonised by Anglo-Norman settlers, both lay and ecclesiastical. The Church, in particular, secured large possessions in this favoured region; and both the Cathedral Kirk of Moray at Elgin and the conventual establishments in Elgin and at Urquhart, Pluscarden, and Kinloss, soon drew to themselves great wealth. Wealth in the Middle Ages inevitably expressed itself in terms of building; and in Moravia conditions were particularly suited for fine building, because the low-lying portion of the province consists of broad and deep beds of Old Red and Triassic sandstone. Thus it happened that the architecture of these ecclesiastical establishments in Moravia reached a degree of perfection and a richness not surpassed anywhere else in Scotland. The existence of these great and ornate buildings of necessity implies the presence in the province of a school of masons trained in the highest conventions of their art; and it is certain that these men must have exercised an important influence also on the lay architecture of the district from the moment that stone castles began to supersede the timbered earthworks which the first early Anglo-Norman settlers threw up.

That this was the case at Rait no one who has studied the building can doubt for a moment. It is obvious that its master mason was a man of high professional standing, and familiar with the fine Gothic building which was going on at the neighbouring ecclesiastical sites. It is, however, certain that Rait Castle is not to be bracketed with the first great efflorescence of medieval architecture in Moray during the thirteenth century—the period that gave us the noblest work at Elgin, Pluscarden, and Kinloss. The plan of the castle at once forbids any such idea; for, as already stated, these "palatial" buildings do not appear before the middle of the fourteenth century at the earliest. The oldest documented example seems to be Kindrocht in Mar, which can be dated, on fairly certain evidence, to *ante* 1371.¹ Here we have the characteristic long hall on unvaulted cellarage, with private accommodation opening off it in flanking towers. The doorways have the same heavy chamfer which is found at Rait. Such broad chamfers are usual in Scotland throughout the fourteenth century; they may be studied, in a dated example, at David's Tower in Edinburgh Castle, built between 1367 and 1378;² and, in a nearer instance from the very beginning of the century, at Lochindorb Castle in Badenoch,³ where the small oblong windows in the angle towers, with their heavy chamfer, have a close resemblance to those at Rait.

Another early example of the "palatial" plan, upon whose date needless doubt has been cast, is Tulliallan Castle in Fife. Here the cellarage below the hall is beautifully groin-vaulted on central piers. The fourteenth-century character of all this detail has long been recognised, and in view of the fact that the foralice or "forslere" of Tulliallan is

¹ See my paper in *The Antiquaries Journal*, vol. viii, No. 1, (Jan. 1928) pp. 68-75.

² See *Proceedings*, vol. xviii, pp. 230-70; W. T. Oldrieve, *David's Tower at Edinburgh Castle*, 1914.

³ See my paper in *Magazine of the London Antiquarian Club*, new series, vol. ix, (Nov. 1931) pp. 33-42.

on record in 1402 and in 1410 there seems no reason to doubt that the building is really of the date which its moulded features indicate. Tulliallan possesses one feature paralleled at Rait, namely, the narrow oblong garderobe tower opening off the dais end of the hall.

The greatest of the early castles in Moravia appears to have been Duffus, which indeed is one of the grandest examples of a mount-and-bailey lay-out extant in Britain. No doubt owing to the presence in the province of fine building stone and skilled masons, its timber defences were at an early date replaced with a stone tower and curtain walls carried out on a big scale and with the high architectural finish usual in Morayland. Here again, as at Rait, the detail indicates a date in the latter half of the fourteenth century: and further, it presents points of such close resemblance with Rait as to make it almost certain that the same master mason was responsible for both buildings. We find at Duffus the same narrow oblong or lancet windows with a heavy chamfer, and in the mural passages of the tower is the identical corbelled inner construction which we have noted at Rait.

The old church of Baveran, near Cawdor, described in the second part of this paper, exhibits strong architectural affinities with Rait Castle. Its lancet windows have the same broad plain chamfer, and there is also one larger window of two lights with tracery of design exactly similar to those at Rait—except that at Baveran the external mouldings are slightly richer.

I have little doubt that the castles of Duffus and Rait and the church of Baveran were all built by the same masons, and that their date falls somewhere in the latter half of the fourteenth century—probably fairly near its end. These three buildings thus form a group the interest of which is not surpassed in the north of Scotland.

A good deal of rather harsh repair work was carried out on the castle shortly before the War, but it is now in an unsatisfactory state, and it is much to be desired that the wall-heads and the vault in the tower should be cleared of vegetation and made weatherproof.

The Thanedom of Rait was one of the oldest manors in Nainshire. It is first on record among a list of estates in the bailiwick of Nairn in the year 1238. The statement has been made that its original owners were Mackintoshes, and that Shaw, fourth chief of that clan, married Helen, a daughter of the Thane of Cawdor, and before 1265 obtained a grant of Melkie Geddes and Rait. Be this as it may, its earliest lords of whom we have contemporary record took their territorial designation from the manor, and nothing certain is known as to their origin, though they are said to have been Cornyns. Sir Gerwaise de Rait appears as witness to the charter granted by Elizabeth Bisset, conveying the lands of Kilravock to her son-in-law, Hugh Rose of Geddes; this charter is undated, but seems to belong to the closing years of

Alexander III's reign.¹ The form of the name therein is *Rath*, which means simply "fortress." Under the provisional government established by Edward I during the contested succession, Sir Gerwaise was constable of the castle of Nairn, and takes from its keeper, Thomas de Brayroft, a receipt for the latter's salary, dated at Rait, Thursday, 8th March 1292.² His name is found in the *Regiam Rollis* among a list of Scottish magnates who at Elgin, on Friday, 27th July 1296, gave in their allegiance to the all-conquering Plantagenet; and his letter of submission is still extant.³ Sir Gerwaise de Rait, with his younger brother Sir Andrew, attended as vassals of the English King at the parliament summoned by him at Berwick on 28th August following.⁴ Early in June of next year Sir Andrew de Rait was in England, and on the 11th of that month King Edward at Ospringe issued two documents affecting him. The first was a letter patent signifying that the King had committed to his liege Andrew Rait all the lands of Gerwaise Rait, his brother in Scotland, presently in the King's land. The second was a safe conduct for him "going on the King's particular business to Scotland" and authorising him to use the public horses.⁵

The great revolt against English domination had now broken out in Morayland, and the lords of Rait remained true to Edward. At the end of July Sir Andrew de Rait was sent back by the Bishop of Aberdeen with a letter to the King detailing the efforts that had been made to stamp out the rising. "He can tell you these affairs in all points," wrote the Bishop, "for he was in person at all these doings." Sir Andrew travelled south along with a cleric, Bernard de Mount, and carried with him letters to the English King from the Countess of Ross and the Earls of Mar and Strathern. Before leaving Scotland they had an audience of the notorious Hugh de Cressingham, Edward's rapacious Treasurer of Scotland, who was afterwards slain at Stirling Bridge, and is said to have had his skin flayed from his corpse and made into saddle girths by the infuriated Scots. Cressingham evidently had his reasons for distrusting Sir Andrew, for on 5th August 1297 he writes from Berwick to his royal master warning him that "Sir Andrew Rait is going to you with a credence which he has shown me, and which is false in many points and obscure, as will be shown hereafter, as I fear; and therefore, Sir, if it be your pleasure, you will give little weight to it."⁶

In 1304 Sir Andrew de Rait was employed in making a survey of the King's lands in Scotland.⁷

At this period the residence of the de Raites, like most contemporary Scottish castles, will have been a construction of timbered earthwork. Whether or not it was on the site of the later stone building we cannot say.

What became of the family of de Rait is not certainly known, but it is said that the last of them, Sir Alexander, had to flee the neighbourhood in 1404 for slaying Andrew, Thane of Cawdor, and that thereafter he founded the family of Rait of Hallgreen in the Mearns.⁸ At all events there was a Thane Andrew who was newly dead before 11th July 1405, on which day his son obtained a precept of sasine as Sheriff of Nairn and Constable of his castle.⁹ The devolution of the manor of Rait remains obscure until 1442, when it was granted to the Mackintoshes.

¹ Sir William Fraser, *The Douglas Book*, vol. iii, pp. 402, 406. There was a still earlier castle of Tulliallan, whose walls Edward I. ordered to be strengthened in 1304 (J. Bain, *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland*, vol. ii, No. 1514). But this could not have been the present "palatium" of the earl, as it was no doubt a structure of timbered earthwork. It will be represented by the remains of an earthen ditch which still encloses the site.

² Mackenzie, *op. cit.*, p. 46. Although the work carried out by the Ancient Monuments Department on Duffus Castle was completed so far back as 1928, it is most disappointing that no account has yet been published. The failure of H.M. Office of Works to provide records of the operations undertaken by them is a serious handicap to medieval studies in Scotland.

³ *Regiam Rollis*, *Memorialis*, p. 34.

⁴ *Memorialis & Genealogical Collections*, vol. ii, *ref.* in Index.

⁵ *The Family of Kilravock*, ed. C. Innes, pp. 28-9.

⁶ J. Bain, *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland*, vol. ii, No. 570; cf. J. Stevenson, *Documents Illustrative of the History of Scotland*, vol. 1, pp. 253-4 (where the date is given as 6th March).

⁷ *Regiam Rollis* (Banquhart Club), pp. 103-5, 108; Bain, *Calendar*, vol. ii, No. 759, also p. 105.

⁸ Bain, *Calendar*, vol. ii, p. 210.

⁹ *Judi.*, Nov. 892, 901.

¹ Stevenson, *op. cit.*, vol. ii, pp. 209-13, 221; Bain, *Calendar*, vol. ii, Nos. 920, 921, 924, 933.

² Bain, *Calendar*, vol. ii, pp. 441, 443. See E. M. Barron, *The Scottish War of Independence*, 2nd ed., pp. 106-9.

³ Lachlan Shaw, *History of the Province of Moray*, ed. 1775, p. 111.

⁴ *Book of the Thanes of Cawdor*, ed. C. Innes, p. 5.

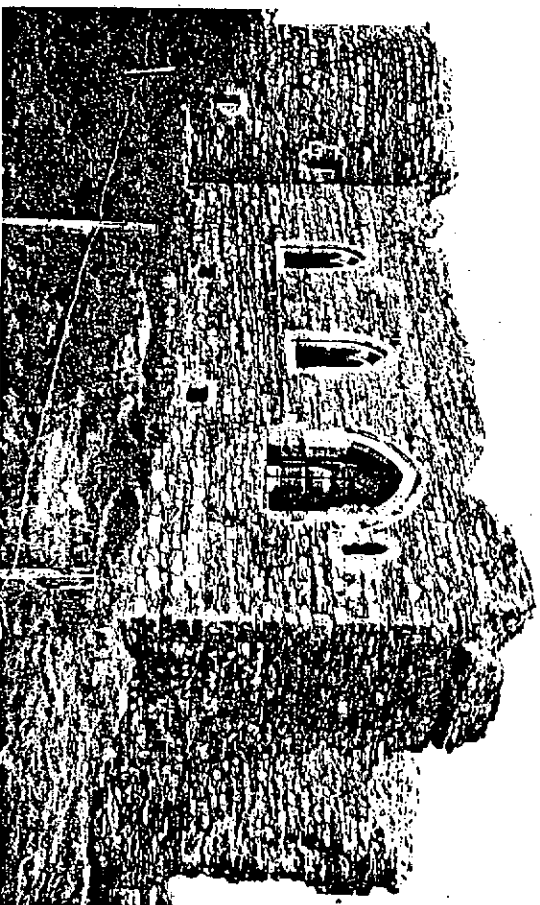
At Moy Hall there still exists

"a precept, dated 5th October 1442, by Alexander de Seton, Knight, Lord of Gordon, to William, Thane of Cawdor, as his bailie, directing him to give sasine to Malcolm Macchintosh in the lands of Melkie Geddes and half of the lands of Rait with the Castle thereof. The charter on which this precept founds was dated at Inverness on the preceding day. Towards the end of the century a charter of the lands and castle was granted by Alexander de Seton of Tullibody, eldest son of the foresaid Alexander Seton (first Earl of Huntly) to the Thane of Cawdor, to whose family the other half of Rait already belonged, but the Macchintoshes still asserted rights, and a dispute arose between them and the Campbells of Cawdor, successors of the old Thaness, which was not settled till 1521."¹

The half of the lands of Rait that belonged to the Thaness of Cawdor included the mill, as appears from a writ in the Cawdor charter chest, dated 17th August 1442.² In 1501, owing to the non-entry of Alexander Seton of Tullibody, the other half of the lands were bought from the Crown by Walter Ogilvie of Boyne. This action was resisted by the Thane of Cawdor, who "in the hall or house of Geddes," on 29th May 1501, solemnly annulled the sasine by the ceremony of breaking a dish and casting it into the fire.³ Notwithstanding this, the Ogilvies succeeded in retaining possession until finally the lands were bought from them by Sir John Campbell of Cawdor, by a contract dated at Elgin 16th July 1532.⁴ Even then the Ogilvies reserved the superiority, and so, when John Campbell of Cawdor succeeded his father as a minor in 1551, his uncle, the Prior of Ardhartan, in his capacity as tutor-in-law to the young laird, obtained a gift of non-entry of these lands from Alexander Ogilvie of Carnousie and Durn, "superior of the lands of Geddes and Rait, with the forallice land in the samyn."⁵ The "forallice of Rait" recurs in a service of John Campbell of Cawdor as heir of his father, given at Nairn on 16th November 1596.⁶ The Hiltown and Castletown of Rait are on record in 1622.⁷ At what date the castle ceased to be occupied does not seem to be known, but it is perhaps significant that in Gordon of Straloch's map, circa 1650, Raitloen is shown but not Rait Castle.

The well-known legend of the massacre of the Comyns by the Macchintoshes at Rait Castle is told in the *New Statistical Account*, and more fully by Bain:⁸ but the difficulty is to dovetail the incident into the authenticated history of the ownership.

Somewhere near the castle was the chapel of St. Mary of Rait, with a hermitage of which Nicholas the Hermit was the occupant in 1343.⁹



¹ *Scottish Historical Review*, vol. II, p. 104. In the Cawdor charter chest is a grant of feu-farm by Alexander Seton of Tullibody to the Thane of Cawdor, conveying to him "my lands of Melkie Geddes and my half of the mill of Rait," but not mentioning the Castle. It is dated at Elgin 20th October 1493 (*Book of the Thaness of Cawdor*, p. 80).

² *Thaness of Cawdor*, p. 14, etc. (see ref. in Index).

³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

⁵ Vol. xiv. (Inverness), p. 449; G. Bain, *Hist. Narratives*, 2nd ed., p. 131.

⁶ *Family of Rose of Kintyre*, p. 116.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

THE CASTLES OF DUFFUS, RAIT, AND MORTON RECONSIDERED

by W. DOUGLAS SIMPSON, O.B.E., M.A., D.LITT., LL.D., F.S.A.S.COT.

DUFFUS CASTLE, in Morayshire, is one of the finest examples in Scotland of an early Norman stronghold on the motte and bailey plan, in which a stone tower has subsequently been imposed upon the motte, and the palisades enclosing the bailey replaced by a stone curtain wall.

Rait Castle, in the adjoining shire of Nairn, is an excellent example of a small medieval hall-house, showing architectural detail that closely links it with Duffus. Morton Castle in Nithsdale is another example of a hall-house, larger and more massive than Rait, and possessing the additional feature of a gatehouse, regularly defended. Here again there are constructional details strongly resembling similar features at Rait and Duffus.

In previous accounts of these three buildings, I have assigned them to the latter part of the fourteenth century. This dating was more or less in accordance with the authoritative views expressed by Messrs MacGibbon and Ross, in their standard work on *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, and (more recently) by the late Dr Mackay Mackenzie in his Rhind Lectures on *The Medieval Castle in Scotland*. Dr Mackenzie in particular held the view that such stone hall-houses - or 'palaces' in old Scottish parlance (*palatium* = hall in medieval Latin) - do not appear in Scotland before the fifteenth century. It should, however, be stated that at Kin-drocht Castle in Braemar excavation has recovered the plan of a hall-house which can be dated, on good documentary evidence, at least as far back as the seventies of the fourteenth century.²

Dr Mackenzie's views as to the dates of this group of early hall-houses were doubtless influenced by his strong conviction as to the scarcity of domestic structures in stone and lime in Scotland before the Wars of Independence. It is, however, difficult to believe that the kings and the noble patrons who, in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries, were erecting, or helping to erect, cathedrals, monasteries, and parish churches up and down the country, in architectural quality, if not indeed in size, fully abreast of current work in France and England, should not have been able also to provide themselves with castles or halls in stone and lime. In point of fact, evidence has been rapidly accumulating, in recent years, that the late dating proposed by Dr Mackenzie for a number of our early stone castles, and adopted in the volumes of the Royal Commission on Ancient Monuments produced while he was the Commission's secretary, must now be reconsidered.

Thus few scholars today would probably accept his strange contention that the Rothesay Castle through whose walls the Norse besiegers hewed their way in 1230 was a structure of compacted clay, in view of the plain statement in the contemporary record that the material was *stein*.¹ So also Castle Sween in Knappdale, on record in the thirteenth century, is, in its oldest portion, nothing but a gutted Norman keep: typologically it is probably the most ancient stone castle now extant in Scotland. Further north, Mungary Castle with its great wall of entente pierced by double-lancet windows like those of Dunstaffnage, must be assigned to the thirteenth century, and the same is true of its neighbour, Eilean Tioram.² It becomes increasingly apparent that the older view of MacGibbon and Ross, with regard to the survival on the western seaboard of stone and lime castles dating from before or during the War of Independence, is sounder than the more sceptical opinion of Dr Mackay Mackenzie.

Further detailed study of particular buildings is likely, in my opinion, to produce additional confirmation of the foregoing thesis. For example, in a forthcoming paper I hope to show that Messrs R. G. Collingwood and Angus Graham were right in their opinion that at Skipness Castle in Kintyre substantial remains in stone and lime survive of the *castrum de Schepinichte* on record in 1261.³

In the Orkney Islands, there is no reason whatever to doubt that the little tower still known as 'Cobbie Row's Castle' in the island of Wyre, with its Romanesque manorial chapel closely adjoining, represents the *strikarida* recorded by the Orkneyinga Saga to have been erected on Wyre by its Norse owner, Kolbein Hruga, about 1150. And at the Bishop's Palace at Kirkwall I have recently shown that the lower walling of the hall or central structure, with its polychromatic masonry and other constructional details closely recalling the twelfth-century work in St Magnus Cathedral hard by, must certainly be regarded as contemporary therewith.⁴ I am permitted to say that this opinion is completely endorsed, after personal investigation, by Mr Gerhard Fischer, the foremost authority upon the medieval architecture of Norway. Mr Fischer's own excavations at King Sverre's castle near Trondheim have shown that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Norwegian kings were erecting castles built of stone and lime in the most up to date European fashion of the time.⁵ And what the Norse could do in their own country they could assuredly do in their territories in the Northern and Western Isles and on the adjoining seaboard.

It is against this general background that I would now seek to reconsider the dating of the group of early hall-houses which are the particular subject of this paper. At the very outset, the opinion which in 1937 I expressed about the date of Rait Castle was strongly challenged by the late Mr Herbert L. Honeyman, the distinguished authority on the medieval architecture of northern England. Writing to me on 17th November 1937, he set forth his views as follows:

I can't understand your dating unless 14th is a mistake for 13th century. If it had been 14th I'd have credited the building either to Sir Gervase or Sir Andrew (de Rait), the last owners of any importance. In Northumberland it could be dated between 1280 and 1320, with the reign of Edward I as the most probable part of that period. Frankly, I simply refuse to believe that a man of some prominence, a courtier as much at home in England as in Scotland, a possible relative of the John Gurney who crenellated his well-built stone *maner* at Tarsset in 1267, could have been content to live in a 'timbered earthwork', though he might have surrounded his house with a palisaded enclosure. The building has interesting points of comparison with Dally and Haughton. In particular, the absence of a kitchen, and the imposing first floor entrance reached by a wooden stair. Is the thin end wall an original outside wall? If so, one may suppose that, as may have been the case at Haughton, there was an annex, perhaps of timber-framed construction, reached through a door where the east wall is breached. Alternatively perhaps cooking was done in the hall?

With these queries and problems in our minds, I had the privilege on 24th April 1937 of making a thorough re-examination of Rait Castle along with Mr Stewart Cruden, F.S.A., F.S.A.S.COT., H.M. Inspector of Ancient Monuments for Scotland. The following is a summary of our conclusions:

We are convinced that the building is an excellent and (in Scotland) exceedingly rare example of a small medieval stone hall-house, and that its date must be placed quite early in the fourteenth century, during the Plantagenet occupation. The grounds on which this dating rests are the following:

- (1) The small oblong basement windows recall those in Lochindorb Castle, which can be dated with reasonable certainty, from record and from its plan, to c. 1300.¹
- (2) The great portal with its drop-centred arch and broad splayed resembles those at Lochindorb and in the gatehouse of Dunstanburgh Castle - the latter being dated specifically by record to 1313.
- (3) The hall fireplace, with its curved and splayed jambs and lamp sconces, has unmistakable affinities with Edwardian fireplaces of the North Welsh type, for example at Conway and Caernarvon.

(3)

¹ Duffus Castle, *Official Guide* (Ministry of Works), 'Rait Castle', P.S.A.S., 1331, 98-115; 'Morton Castle', *T. Dunm.*, 2d Coll. A.S., xxii, 26-33.

² For the Rothesay debate see P.S.A.S., LXVIII, 117-27; *T. Glasgow A.S.*, xi, 152-83 and xi, 78-79; *Annuaire Viking Norvegien* (Papers of the Second Viking Congress) (Bergen, 1933), 93-96.

³ *T. Glasgow A.S.*, N.S., xiii, 70-89.

⁴ P.S.A.S., LVII, 206-47.

⁵ *Norvik Kongevæger*, 1, 327-33 (English summary).

⁶ See *London Magazine*, iv, 33-42.

(4) The north-west window bay on the first floor of the round tower, with its double-corbelled lintel construction, irresistibly recalls the windows in the north-east tower of Kildrumny Castle, which are undoubtedly of Edwardian date.

If these conclusions are accepted, then Rait Castle emerges as the work, in all probability, of Sir Gervase de Rait, or of his younger brother Sir Andrew de Rait, both of whom were prominent supporters of Edward I during the Plantagenet occupation.

The large fireplace on the first floor, mentioned above, is plainly a hall fireplace. My 1937 idea of a great chamber partitioned off here is untenable. We have to think rather of a broad dais, lit by one coupled window on the south and two on the north, from which side most light was needed and from which moreover a noble view could be enjoyed. This dais would be the centre of 'high life' in the hall. The eastern or lower end of the hall would be screened to shut off the outer door and the porter. This would leave a comparatively restricted space for the body of the hall, but doubtless sufficient for the indoors staff of this modest hall-house.

The scarcement provided for the hall floor is really the chase for a heavy wall-plate or sleeper beam, into which the joists will have been mortised. Above the chase the wall-face projects somewhat.

We are satisfied that the remnant of a wall engaging with the east gable of the hall-house is older than the hall-house. It is embedded in the gable wall, and plainly is not contemporary. Had it been later, the gable wall would have been spliced, so as to show irregular jointing on either side. As it is, the masonry of the gable on both sides comes up against the embedded wall, and the joints, close against the latter, are neatly and skilfully packed in with vertical spalls or splints. Probably therefore this wall is a remnant of an older manor-house of Rait, like the long tenement on the western side, which has apparently been partly removed to make room for the hall-house and its round tower.

The continuous corbel course on the present summit of the east gable suggests that the hall-house had a projecting parapet on either gable, between which would be a high pitched roof resting directly on the lateral wall-heads.

In 1343 Nicholas the Hermit occupied the chapel of St. Mary of Rait, which is on record c. 1189-99.¹ It is possible that this may be the detached oblong building, measuring about 32 feet by 16 feet, to the south-east of the hall-house.

There are slight yet quite distinct traces on the north side of the castle suggesting that on this side at least it may have been enclosed by a ditch.

The foregoing revised dating of Rait Castle implies a similar reconsideration also for Duffus Castle. As pointed out in my former paper, the architectural connection between the two buildings is unmistakable. Both structures display the same unvaulted main interior, the same narrow oblong or lancet windows heavily chamfered, and in both is the distinctive corbelled lintelled construction over window bays or mural passages. At Duffus this construction is found alike in the keep and in the posterns of the curtain wall. The masonry at Duffus is much superior to that at Rait; the latter is 'cowan's' work, whereas the former is obviously due to a *maître maçon de franchise* part of the highest standing. It could be that the Duffus master-mason supplied the dressed work for Rait, while the general masonry work was executed by local craftsmen.

Duffus Castle and Duffus Parish Church were both destroyed during the great rising in Moray against English domination in 1297; and in 1305 Sir Reginald de Cheyne received a grant from Edward I of 200 oaks from the royal forests of Darnaway and Longmour to repair his manor of Duffus, while at the same time the parson of Duffus obtained twenty oaks for the repair of his church. Twenty good sized oaks would probably provide enough timber to replace the woodwork of a small parish church. On the other hand 200 would be totally insufficient to reconstitute the timber tower, palisades, and internal courtyard buildings of a large mount-and-bailey castle. They would, however, doubtless suffice to replace the floors and roof of the present stone keep and of such early buildings as may have existed within the curtain wall, inside which the joist-holes for such may still be seen on the side opposite the present fifteenth century stone hall. It looks as if that was the purpose to which the oaks

were to be applied. If all this is true, we should ascribe the stone keep and curtain wall at Duffus to Sir Reginald de Cheyne, one of the most prominent adherents of Edward I in Morayland.

When my former account of Morton Castle was published, it also, like my paper on Rait, evoked criticism as to dating from Mr Honeyman (18th January 1943):

The plan and photos would make me say 'Edwardian at latest' (say c. 1310) with later insertions. I don't know what the mouldings of the door are like, but its masonry is ill-bonded to the ashlar and may be an insertion.

Upon further consideration, I have been more than ever struck by the obviously close architectural connection between Morton and Rait, to which attention was first directed by MacGibbon and Ross.

The principle underlying the two castles is the same: a long hall resting upon unvaulted storage. The large and architecturally conspicuous doorway, entering the hall at its lower end, and the small window adjoining it to the right, correspond in both cases. The fireplace at the dais end of the hall, and the lord's rooms in a circular tower opening off the dais, are the same in both. The narrow door on the opposite side of the dais from the fireplace at Morton could easily have opened into a garderobe annexe, like the corresponding door at Rait. The continuous corbelled lintel construction, so characteristic of Rait, is present also at Morton. The large fireplace in the sole remaining gate tower of the latter is of decidedly Edwardian character; and so - though it is more ruined - is the fireplace of the great hall. Throughout the building the shoulder-headed lintel is used, and this is widely accepted as a characteristic Edwardian mannerism, though it is found both earlier and later. At Morton we have the same small oblong windows which we have noted at Rait and Lochindorb. All things considered, I now find it difficult to resist the conviction that Morton Castle should be dated somewhere in the Plantagenet occupation. On the other hand, the very anomalous mouldings in the doorway do not suggest Edwardian work; and, *pace* Mr Honeyman, I can find no evidence of the door having been inserted.

Turning now to the record, *le manoir de Morton en baai de Nith* is on record in 1297; and later we are told that it belonged to Bruce's paladin, Sir Thomas Randolph, one of the greatest men in the land, and surely well able to house himself in fair stone and good lime. In 1337, under the terms of the treaty by which David II obtained his release from an English prison, Morton was one of the castles in the south-west of Scotland which were ordained to be demolished. Now it is clear that one half of the gatehouse, and of the south-eastern tower, have been deliberately removed, as if to render the castle untenable; and this could well have been done pursuant to the treaty of 1357. On the other hand, Morton Castle was certainly occupied until much later times - in fact, until the year 1714. Nevertheless, the partial dismantling which has clearly taken place, while rendering the castle almost useless in a military sense, is not inconsistent with the possibility of subsequent domestic occupation. It is clear that the problems of Morton Castle are difficult, and could be solved only by thorough excavation.

¹ *Regium Episcopatus Moravensis*, 7.