

## Rossend Castle

*Reprinted from the "Fifeshire Advertiser" of April 29<sup>th</sup>, 1873, for which I assume now that the copyright has long since expired.... If I'm wrong, please let me know!*

It was announced in January last that this fine old baronial castle had been conditionally purchased by the Town Council of Burntisland in order to acquire the right to the foreshores from the Board of Trade, and to facilitate the dock extension works, which are now in progress. We now understand that our townsman, James Shepherd, Esq., Auchtertool House, has acquired the right to the purchase from the Town Council, on the conditions that he, as proprietor, will offer no objections to the Council obtaining the right to the foreshores. Possession will be taken in May, when we understand Mr Shepherd intends to make it his residence. About ten acres of garden and pleasure ground are attached to it; a porter's lodge in the baronial style, with a fine archway; and the small farm of Seamills, extending to thirty-five acres or thereby.

The castle possesses an interesting history, dating as far back as 1382, when its antecedents are lost in antiquity. Its original name was the Tower of Kingorne-Waster, to distinguish it from Glamis Castle, or the Tower of Kingorne-Easter, and it was also known for several generations, and designated in old title-deeds, Burntisland Castle. In 1382, when Robert, surnamed Blear Eye, the first of the Stuarts, reigned, it was but a square tower or keep, occupied by one of the ancient family of Durie of that ilk, who built the north and south wings, and inserted under a Gothic canopy over the principal entrance the arms of the Duries, supported by two savages, girded with laurels.

Several members of the Durie family were Abbots of Dunfermline, and on this account the castle was sometimes called Abbot's Hall. In the chartulary of Dunfermline Abbey there is recorded a grant of the lands of Nether Grange and Kingorne-Waster, together with the keep or fort of the same, and the lands of Erefiand and Cunningarland, now Burntisland. The grant is dated 1538. It is probable that though the Duries had long been in the actual possession of these places, they had for the first time acquired them as private property. It was recorded as a curious fact that Alexander III (who, by the way, was killed in the vicinity), at the period of his Queen's (Margaret's) funeral, took great pains to collect and preserve the remains of Saint Margaret, Malcolm Canmore's Queen, enclosing her reputed skull and auburn hair, by which many miracles were said to be wrought, in a silver chest, enriched with precious stones, which was first placed for safety in the Castle of Edinburgh, and afterwards removed to Burntisland Castle by Father Durie. This casket was subsequently transferred to Dunfermline, and in 1597 delivered to the Jesuit missionaries in Scotland, who conveyed it to Antwerp, and it is supposed either to have been lost in the confusion which attended the suppression of the Order of the Jesuits, or still to be preserved in the Escuria of Spain.

Towards the middle of the sixteenth century, during the minority of Queen Mary, the Duries were dispossessed of the castle and lands, and they would appear to have been bestowed on Sir John Melvil, who was among the first men of note in Scotland to favour the reformed religion. Melvil thereby excited the animosity of the Catholic clergy, who had him tried for high treason and executed, and his estates forfeited. At this time Sir William Kirkcaldy of Grange, styled by Montmorency "the first soldier of Europe", obtained a grant of the castle. He held it until his death, which occurred at the Cross of Edinburgh in the bright sunset of a summer evening, verifying a remarkable prediction of the Reformer, John Knox, at the time in every man's mouth, and in all men's memory. "The soul of that man", said Knox, referring to Kirkcaldy, "is dear to me. I would fain have saved him; but he shall be dragged forth and hanged in the face of the sun!"

Queen Mary in her journeys through Fife often lodged in the castle. The apartment which she occupied on these occasions is a handsome wainscotted room in the old square tower, and two closets cut out in the wall, which is here ten feet thick. In one of these closets is the entrance to a stair said to have led down to the seashore. The room is still identified with Queen Mary, and goes by the name of the State bedchamber, and contains the bed in which she slept on the night of the 14<sup>th</sup> February, 1562, more than 300 years ago. Here the romantic Frenchman, Du Chatelard, repeated the misdemeanour of which he had been previously guilty at Holyrood, of concealing himself in the Queen's sleeping chamber at night. Desperate in his attachment, he had secretly followed the Queen to Burntisland, and gaining an entrance to the Castle by the unfrequented staircase alluded to, he started from his hiding-place when the Queen was in the act of retiring to bed. The shrieks of the Queen and her attendant women brought assistance. Tytler thus describes the denouement:- "Mary, glowing with indignation

at the insult, commanded Moray, who first ran to her succour, to stab him with his dagger, but he preferred securing him to this summary vengeance, a formal trial followed, and the miserable man was condemned and executed within two days after his offence. On the scaffold, instead of having recourse to his missal or breviary, he drew from his pocket a volume of Ronsard, and, reciting the poet's hymn to Death, resigned himself to his fate with gaiety and indifference." Some authorities state that Du Chatelard expiated his love at St Andrews, whither the Queen was at the time journeying; others that the trial and execution took place in Edinburgh. Lamartine, who, with a lovely pen, sketches a too partial history of the tragedy-fraught Queen, depicts the last moments of Chatelard with good effect. "Ascending the scaffold erected before the windows of Holyrood, the theatre of his madness and the dwelling of the Queen, he faced death like a hero and a poet". "If," said he, "I die not without reproach, like the Chevalier Bayard, my ancestor, like him I die at least without fear" For his last prayer he recited Ronsard's beautiful ode on Death. Then casting his last looks towards the windows of the Palace inhabited by the charm of his life and the cause of his death, "Farewell," he cried, "thou who art so beautiful and so cruel, who killest me, and whom I cannot cease to love!"

On the death of Kirkcaldy of Grange, the castle reverted to the Melvils, Sir Robert, the second son of the Baronet before-mentioned, entering into possession. In 1587, a general annexation of Church property was made by Act of Parliament to the Crown, and James VI gifted the Abbey of Dunfermline to his Queen, Anne of Denmark, as a marriage dowry two years later (1589) which deed was ratified, and this ecclesiastical domain erected into a temporal lordship, 7<sup>th</sup> March, 1593. The lordship, we are told, included all the lands which belonged to the monastery, except the Barony of Burntisland, in which Sir Robert Melvil and that of Newburn, in which Sir Andrew Wood of Largo had been infeft, and also the Barony of Musselburgh, which had been erected in a separate temporal lordship, and conferred on Lord Chancellor Thirlessane. It was the Sir Robert here referred to who in 1587 was entrusted with the important mission of proceeding to England to endeavour to prevent the execution of Queen Mary, a duty he discharged with so much boldness before the Council that Elizabeth menaced his life, and would fain have imprisoned him.

He afterwards became first Lord Melville (ancestors of the Earls of Leven and Melville), and died in 1621 at the advanced age of 94. He was succeeded by his only son, Robert, second Lord Melville, who, on being constituted and Extraordinary Lord of Session in 1601, assumed the title Lord Burntisland. From the old Burgh records it appears that this nobleman was for many years Provost of the Burgh. While he held the office he attempted to extend the boundaries of the castle by enclosing a portion of ground belonging to the public. The community resisted, and applied to Sir George Home, afterwards Earl of Dunbar, to supersede him in the Provostship, and to protect them by his influence at Court. This he promised to do, and was elected Provost accordingly. In retaliation, Sir Robert Melville and his lady, Lady Ross, endeavoured to get the town disfranchised, a movement which the Earl of Dunbar tried his best to defeat. The inhabitants, however, appear to have wearied of the continued opposition of the laird of the castle, and in order to propitiate Sir Robert and his lady, the Town Council resolved "to treat them with courtesy, and wait on them on Sundays at the castle gate, and accompany them to the kirk." The Bishop of Brechin (Lamb?) was mediator on this occasion, but neither the courtesy of the Council nor the mediation of the Bishop had the desired effect. The Melvilles, however, after a few years regained their influence, and Sir William, son of Sir Robert, was appointed Provost. Under date 1635, August 7, allusion is made in the Burgh records to the death of Lord Melville in the following terms:- "The Council and honest men of the burgh were appointed to ride at Lord Melville's funeral at Monimail. They were greatly grieved, considering how true a friend they had lost." In these times, it should be mentioned, the Provost was almost always a nobleman or landed gentleman. He was considered the patron of the burgh, and was expected to support its interests by his influence.

During the civil wars of the seventeenth century the castle was held by the Covenanters, and was the headquarters of their forces in the neighbourhood. The town and castle was besieged by the army of the Commonwealth, and surrendered to the Protector on 10<sup>th</sup> April 1651, on condition of his repairing the streets and ruinous piers – a condition that was to some extent implemented. During Cromwell's temporary residence in the castle he mounted the ramparts with guns. On the 29<sup>th</sup> July 1651, he addressed the following letter to the Speaker of the House of Commons:-

"The greater part of the army is in Fife, waiting what way God will further lead us. It had pleased God to give us Burntisland, which is indeed very conducive to the carrying on of our affairs. The town is well seated, pretty strong, but marvellously capable of further improvement in that respect without great charge. The harbour at a high spring is near a fathom deeper than at Leith, and doth not be

commanded by any ground within the town. We took three or four small men-of-war within it, and I believe 30 or 40 guns. Commissary Whalley marched along the seashore in Fife, having some ships to go along the coast, and had taken great store of great artillery and divers ships. The enemy's affairs are in some discomposure, as we hear. Surely the Lord will blow upon them. Your most humble servant,  
O. Cromwell."

The castle continued the property of the Earls of Melville for a long period of years, and afterwards of the Earls of Wemyss and of Elgin. Of the noble family of Wemyss, Sir James of Bogie was in 1672 created Lord Burntisland, and had a seat in the Scottish parliament until his death in 1687. In 1715 the castle was garrisoned by the Earl of Mar and his troops. Half a century later Murdoch Campbell (of the Caithness Campbells) occupied Rossend, and in 1790 Robert Beatson of Kilrie, Royal Engineers, married this gentleman's only child, by Margaret, daughter of John Taylor of Pitcairnie, and the heiress of Carbiston. By this marriage he inherited the estate, which has since remained in the family, several members of which have more or less distinguished themselves – one being Colonel and Governor of St Helena immediately prior to its becoming the residence of Napoleon Bonaparte, and another the author of several useful compilations, receiving the title of LL.D. from the University of Edinburgh.

The late proprietor, W.A.Laurie, Esq., W.S., Keeper of H.M. Gazette for Scotland (whose first wife was a Miss Beatson), took pleasure in carefully preserving the antique character of the castle by making it a conservatory of many curious and interesting specimens of ancient armour, heraldry, paintings and furniture. In a limited compass he worked out the idea so richly exemplified in the case of Abbotsford, of making the castle a "romance of stone and lime," bringing always into prominence its associations with the unfortunate Mary. For this reason Frenchmen, and particularly the officers of the French Navy, on their visits to the Firth of Forth, were enamoured of the spot as pilgrims are of a favourite shrine. Dungeons are believed to exist below the central square tower. From this tower runs eastward a rampart with embrasures flanked by a round embattled tower romantically clad with ivy. Within, the five rooms on the first floor are all of old wainscot, and the kitchen fireplace of very old construction, being 18 feet wide and arched with torus moulding. In the pleasure grounds and garden are some fine old timber, and a curious well 30 feet deep, of further remote existence than the castle itself.

Our Burntisland friends, and lovers of the rare and antique everywhere, will be glad to learn that Mr Shepherd has agreed to take over the whole of the antique furniture, armour, and ornaments in and about the castle, and thus preserve intact one of the old historical Castles of Scotland connected with the eventful life of Queen Mary. Much was done for this property by the late proprietor, William A. Laurie, Esq., and from Mr Shepherd's good taste, we have no doubt he will spare no pains to conserve the historic nature of the structure and its surroundings. This most picturesque structure is situated on the northern shores of the Firth of Forth, a little to the west of Burntisland, and directly opposite to Edinburgh. In its original construction, the castle has been so built as to receive into one or more of its windows the greatest amount of sunlight possible. No matter from what point of the heavens the sun may be shining, there are some of the rooms where his rays will be received. The castle and pleasure grounds command magnificent views of Edinburgh, and of the shores of both sides of the Firth.