

ART. IX.—*On the Antiquities of Lochmaben.*

BY THE REV. JOHN GARDINER.

Read April 14. 1823.

LOCHMABEN is a royal burgh of very ancient erection, having received its charters from King Robert Bruce, whose paternal estate was the great lordship of Annandale. It appears very evident that the term Lochmaben must have been derived from the numerous lakes and lochs which are in the parish, and its immediate neighbourhood, amounting to the number of nine, the whole of which are of very considerable extent. Those who are acquainted with the Gaelic language inform us, that Lochmaben signifies the loch of the maidens, or ‘the loch of the fair.’ Whether it was famed for beauties in the days of our forefathers or not I cannot say; but one of its modern beauties, who is still in existence, formed the subject of one of the happiest effusions of the immortal Burns.

The parish extends along the banks of the Annan about ten miles, and is three in breadth. It is bounded on the north by the parish of Johnstone, on the east by Applegarth and Dryfsdale, on the south by Dalton, and on the west by Torthorwauld. It is eight miles north-east of Dumfries, and twelve south of Annan. This borough is governed by a Provost, three Bailies, a Dean of Guild, Treasurer, and nine Councillors. There are five incorporated trades, the Convener and Deacons of which have no right, *ex officio*, to sit as members of council. Lochmaben has also a charter of novodamus, granted by James VI. dated the 16th July 1612, giving as a reason for the renewal the frequent inroads of the English, who had plundered and burnt the town, and destroyed its records.

There is the site of a very ancient castle in the immediate vicinity of the town, between the castle and kirk lochs. The situation is truly commanding, and the view in every direction extensive. It is surrounded by a very deep moat and fosse. In this castle it is believed that Bruce was born; the fact is undeniable, that this was originally the seat where his father and family resided previous to the son reaching the throne. The ground on which this castle stood belonged to a family of the name of Maxwell, whose predecessors had been in the possession of it for more than two hundred years, David Maxwell their ancestor having been appointed sub-governor of the castle of Lochmaben by Lord Maxwell, warden of the western borders, and keeper of the castle. The castle loch is a beautiful sheet of water, lying south of the town, and considerably larger than any of the others. Its length may be estimated at a mile and a half, and its mean breadth a mile (a).

(a) There is a very great variety of fish to be found in this loch. I have seen it reported that it contains no less a number than fifteen or sixteen different kinds fit for the table. This, however, is not the truth, even though the minnow and loach (which few use at table) were allowed to be amongst the number. I have caught in this lake the pike, the perch, the roach, the bream, the loch trout of large size, the eel, and the vendoise or vendace. All these kinds mentioned are found in the other lochs, except the vendoise. This species it is said derives its name from Vendois in France, having been brought from thence by one of the Jameses. This conjecture is very improbable; as I know, from ocular demonstration, that they die almost the instant they are touched, or even exposed to the air, which renders every attempt to transfer them to the other lakes, or to gentlemen's fish ponds, ineffectual; and not a single instance can be adduced by the oldest fishers of any one of them being caught, or seen in the neighbouring lakes. A few years ago, Major Hart of Castlemilk doubted the truth of the common report that they could not be transferred. He made the attempt with every precaution that could be devised; but they were no sooner put into the vessels which he had in readiness to receive them, than they died. This must put the question to rest, whether they have ever been transferred, or are transferable. In size, they resemble a small herring or par, but more particularly the former, not only in their external appearance, but also in their anatomy. According to Mr Stewart, in his Elements of Natural History, they belong to the species which he calls ‘*Salmo Albula*, or the Juvangis.’ This species, he adds, is found in Loch-

The castle stands upon a peninsula of this lake, which was by far the largest and strongest of any other on the English or Scots borders, next to Carlisle. It was built by Robert Bruce, the first of that name who reigned in Scotland. The whole fortifications may contain about thirteen acres. The castle itself occupies an acre, and contains three courts being strongly built of stone and lime, the outer walls of which are twelve feet thick (*b*). It is surrounded by three moats, all opposite the south, each of which was filled with water from the loch that met on the east and west sides. The inner one went through the castle under the arches of the east and west wings, within which there was a bason for containing the boats, with the view not only of keep-

maben in Scotland, and *no where else*. It is said to have been carried thither from England in the time of Robert Bruce. It is thickly covered with roundish entire black spotted imbricated scales, of a greenish brown colour, and silvery on the sides.' The truth is, Mr Stewart had never seen one of them in his life, or he would have given a very different description of it. He must have been imposed upon by a young loach, which answers his description much better than the vendoise. I have often examined the vendoise; and I can say with certainty, that there is not a single black spot upon it. These fish are quite white, with a very slight tendency to a light blue along the back and sides. There is not so much as a dot on any of the fins; and the very mark which shows them to be a distinct, and as yet an undescribed species, is not even mentioned by Mr Stewart. I allude to a transparent mark of a heart on the crown of their heads. They are extremely delicate to the taste; indeed they are allowed to be the most delicate of all the fish that swim. They are only found in one part of the loch, and in pretty deep water. They are caught with the net, only two instances having been known in which they took the bait. The pike is their greatest enemy, as he is seldom taken in the neighbourhood of the place which they frequent without being found gorged with them.

(*b*) It appears from the vestiges which still remain, that in building, they first laid an outside and inside course of polished free-stone closely cemented, and then packed the intervening space with whin-stone, and filled up the crevices by pouring in warm mortar, and then proceeded with a new course. In examining the masses which have been tumbled from the walls, they are found to adhere as firmly as a solid piece of stone. The mortar appears to have been common lime, which is found in great abundance at the distance of a few miles. In separating some of these masses, I have repeatedly found shells resembling those of the oyster. This circumstance I cannot account for, as no oysters are found in the Solway Frith, which is distant from the castle eleven miles.

ing them out of the reach of the enemy, but of sheltering them from the weather. The width of this moat or fosse at the surface within the wings (as far as can be measured) is twenty-three feet, and the depth of water seven. At the distance of seventy yards to the south-east is the second fosse, the width of the surface of which is about sixty-six feet, and of the bottom twenty-four. In front of this stood the citadel with a draw-bridge. One hundred and twelve yards farther is the third fosse, by which the south-west part of the castle was defended, being at the surface about forty-six feet wide. The depth cannot be accurately ascertained, as it is choked up with sedges and other aquatic plants (*c*).

The building is now in such a state of ruin that it is impossible to trace any remains of doors or windows sufficient to convey to us an idea of its dimensions. There only exists a small part of the heart of one of the walls. The fine ashler work is all stripped off; and there is scarcely a house in the neighbourhood in which some of the stones are not to be seen. In an elevation plan, in the possession of a friend of mine, I observed two small windows in the turrets on the east and west wings, and in the stories beneath, a regular row. The view was taken from an eminence in the neighbourhood called the Buckridge (*d*).

(*c*) It is generally believed that the stones of the original castle were taken to build the latter one, and were conveyed across the loch from a small artificial island on the south-west, as there are stakes of oak remaining to this day on either side of it, which have been put in as a fence against the dash of the water. In a great drought, this island can be reached without any inconvenience. It is supposed that the materials were laid down here, and carried across in boats to another island considerably larger, and close to the castle, for the use of the workmen. On this latter island I have seen stones incrustated with lime.

(*d*) I have heard it reported by an old man, a near relation of my own, who died in my father's house, in 1807, at the advanced age of ninety-six, that a man of the name of Richardson, who lived in the Heck (one of the four towns, and the nearest to the castle) found among the ruins an immensely large key, supposed to have been that of the door

The grand entrance to the castle must have been by water. Before the invention of gunpowder, it must have been impregnable. Independent of all the improvements which have been made on the surrounding land, it still could very easily be made a place of great strength, as it is nearly surrounded by water and marshy ground. Before the union of the crowns, a regular garrison of 200 men was constantly kept in it. The governor had a salary of L.300 Scots, along with the fishing of the lochs. He had also for the maintenance of the garrison what was called lairdnermart cow, or laird-a-mairt, which was one of the best fat cows out of every parish in Annandale. It is not above ninety-one years since it was lifted by the Marquis of Annandale. The conversion of it was L.20 Scots, and thirty-nine meadow geese and Fasten's-e'en hens, being collected from thirty-three parishes, which number is now reduced, by annexation at the Reformation, to twenty-one. All the parishes, at that time, joined in procuring a suspension, which has never been recalled, or any payment since exacted.

of the principal entrance. He offered it for sale at the small sum of 2s. 6d. but could not find a purchaser, and very unfortunately used it in making two spades for cutting peat, which is the principal fuel in that part of the country.

Several cannon balls have been found, two of which I have seen. These are in the possession of a man of the name of Graham, who acts in the capacity of sub-factor to the present proprietor of the castle, Mr Murray of Henderland. Each of these balls weighs 35 pounds; and they are supposed to have been fired against it by the adherents of Oliver Cromwell. No inscriptions have been observed on any of the stones, nor have swords or warlike instruments of any kind been found.

I have seen a few coins which were dug up some years ago in a neighbouring moss; they were all struck in the reigns of the Edwards. This can be accounted for from the numerous attacks made against Lochmaben, particularly by Edward the First.

About twelve years ago, the late farmer's daughter, while wading about the sides of the loch, found a ring. The young woman kept this relic for several years. The circumstance, however, was mentioned to the Marquis of Queensberry, while presiding at one of the annual Pic Nic dinners which are held in front of the castle in memory of Bruce. His Lordship requested that, if possible, the ring should be brought to him, which was accordingly done, and he purchased it for sixteen guineas. It was quite plain, but broader than the generality of rings.

Among the titles of the Marquis of Annandale, he assumes that of constable, or hereditary keeper of the castle of Lochmaben. The great estate of Murray, Earl of Annandale, of which the castle and barony of Lochmaben formed a part, fell, by succession, to Murray Lord Viscount Stormont, who also claims the title of hereditary keeper and constable of the castle of Lochmaben. How much is it to be regretted that this castle has been allowed to fall into decay, as, without doubt, it would have been among the noblest in Scotland! The tract of land around it is very extensive; and in former days there was a deer park and an oak forest. This part of the country was the scene of some of the valorous deeds of Sir William Wallace. It was in this castle that Bruce, after he had learned the hostile intentions of Edward, assembled his friends, and avowed to them his intention of assuming the crown, and of redeeming the liberty of his country.

There is a mote in the parish, called Rockhall Mote, of great antiquity. This is a very beautiful mound of earth, being quite circular, and terminating in a point. It is very entire, and stands on the side of a ridge of hills which divides Annandale from Nithsdale, where it overlooks a most extensive plain on the foot of the river Nith, part of Galloway, and all the Solway Frith. With regard to the use of these motes, the general opinion is, that the people met on them to make laws, and administer justice. There are two more of the same kind in the parish.

About three miles to the north of Lochmaben stands Spedling's Castle, on the west bank of the Annan. It is a very strong square vaulted tower, with walls of great thickness, flanked with round turrets at the angles. It is almost entire, and has long been the property of the Jardines of Applegarth. In the parish of Dryfsdale there are eight vestiges of encampments, some of which are square, and others circular. There is a Roman fort on an eminence, in the centre of the extensive holm of Dryfe and

Annan ; and a British and a Roman one on two hills east of the village of Bengall, separated by a narrow mass. Another British fort occurs at Dryfsdale gate, which occupies about two acres of ground, and commands an extensive prospect ; and, at the distance of half a mile, there is one which is of Roman construction. This was formed during the time Agricola was governor of Britain.