

IX.

THE LANDS AND TOWER OF CLAYPOTTS.

BY M. R. APTED, M.A., F.S.A.Scot.

HISTORY.

In 1365 David II confirmed a charter of liberties granted by Alexander II to the Abbey of Lindores in 1246. The confirmation quotes Alexander's charter *verbatim*, then adds:

“et volumus quod terre de Cragy, de Miltona, de Claypottys et de Balmaw, cum pertinenciis, de quibus dictum monasterium infeodatum fuit ante concessionem dicti predecessoris nostri supradictam, libere sint et quiete ab omnibus serviciis prout superius est expressum et quod dictas terras teneant et possidant iidem religiosi adeo libere et quiete tam virtute dicte concessionis domini predecessoris nostri quam nostre, sicut alias terras suas liberius et quocius possident atque tenent . . .”¹

This, the earliest known reference to Claypotts, shows that the lands were already held by the Abbey of Lindores in 1246, and the reference suggests that the tenure may have been disputed.

The charter does not define the boundaries of the lands of Claypotts, but they are likely to be substantially the same to-day as they were in medieval times, with Gotterston to the west, Ballunie to the north and Balgillo to the east.² The southern boundary was probably always the old Dundee-Arbroath road, since in the Claypotts charters fishing rights in the Tay were confined to the pendicle of land in North Ferry (fig. 1).

For the greater part of the 16th century the lands were held of the Abbey by the Strachans of Claypotts. The earliest reference to a member of the family, dated February 25, 1511, is a precept for remission to “John Strathachin in le Claypottis” and five others for the theft of seven horses and carts belonging to the Chancellory of Dunkeld, committed in the company of Gilbert Strathachin who claimed they belonged to him.³ It is unlikely that the John Strachan involved in this incident was the John Strachan who is known to have died in 1593;⁴ it can probably be fairly

¹ *R.M.S.*, 1306-1424, 188. Names of witnesses show that the original charter was granted by the second Alexander.

² Part of the lands formerly known as Warrieston may be included within the northern boundary of Claypotts.

³ *R.S.S.*, 1488-1529, 2213.

⁴ *Ed. Test.*, Strachan John of Claypotts 15 Nov. 1593. Transcript printed in the Official Guide to the Castle. See also Durham Eufame 21 Nov. 1581.

inferred that the two were father and son (see Appendix). John (the second) was succeeded by his son Gilbert in 1593 and by his grandson John (the third) in 1594,¹ who sold the lands in 1601 to William Graham of Ballunie.²

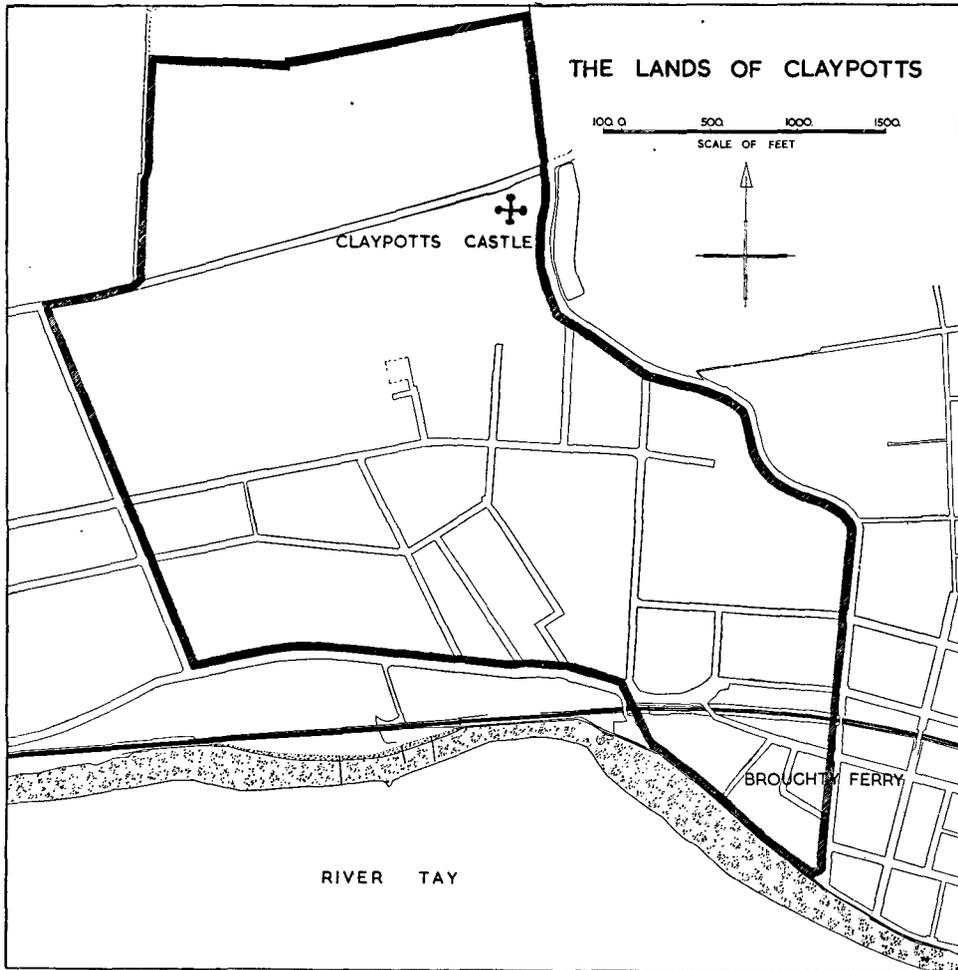


Fig. 1. The lands of Claypotts.

The relationship between the Strachans of Claypotts and other branches of the Strachan family is unknown. The Gilbert Strachan mentioned in 1511 was John Strachan's brother.³ His career is well documented: he was

¹ *Ed. Test.*, Strachan Gilbert of Claypotts 1 Feb. 1593/4: *Exch. R.*, 1595-1600, 147.

² *R.M.S.*, 1620-33, 117.

³ *Reg. Episc. Brechensis* (Bannatyne Club), II, pp. 166 ff. This document names David Seton as the uncle of Gilbert and John; their grandfather was therefore Sir Gilbert Seton of Parbroath. Cf. Seton, G., *Family of Seton*, I, pp. 286 ff.

vicar of Strathmiglo in 1498¹ and of Fettercairn in 1527;² a canon of the Cathedrals of Brechin, Aberdeen and Moray, and rector of Aberdeen University.³ He was involved in a number of disputes concerning his preferments,⁴ and was attempting in 1530 to compel a debtor to appear before the Pope in Rome "quilk is ane noveltie and nevir sic thingis was usit of before within this realme . . . and in utir heirschip and distructioun of the pur leigis."⁵ He was dead by 1538.⁶ His memory is preserved in the fragmentary remains of the chapel he founded on the south side of St Devenic's Church, Creich.⁷

The arms of the Strachans (on a chief 3 cinquefoils) are displayed on the north tower of the castle, flanked by the letters J. S. for John Strachan. The same arms appear on a seal of James Strachan, canon of Aberdeen, dated 1541, and another of Thomas Strachan of Carmyllie dated 1547.⁸ James Strathachin of Carmyllie, was one of the curators recommended by John Strachan to his grandson in his testament of 1593,⁹ and subsequently Gilbert Strachan of Claypotts was appointed curator to the young heiresses of Carmyllie.¹⁰ It is likely that the Strachans of Claypotts were related to the Carmyllie family and were members of a cadet branch of the Strachans of Angus and Thornton in the Mearns.

Contemporary documents contain little direct evidence of day-to-day life at Claypotts, but a good deal of information is contained indirectly in the testaments of the Strachans. Stock in 1594 included 18 oxen, 2 cows, 2 horses and a flock of sheep. There were 10 bolls of wheat "sawin upoun the landis of Claypottis," and in the barn and barnyard barley, oats and peas. There were 4 ploughmen, 1 shepherd, and a domestic staff of 3, including Janet Wilkie who had been with the family at least thirteen years.

The tenurial obligations of the Strachans are detailed in the charter of 1601:

"Reddend. regi (lōco monasterii de Lundoiris) 13½ mercas 12 capones (vel 20 sol.) 4 merc. antique et 3 sol. 4 den. nove augmentationis, nomine feudifirme; et 3 sectas ad 3 placita capitalia dicti monasterii; et comparendo in curiis justiciarii et camerarii dicti monast. si requisiti essent; cum servitio et expensis faciendis in sustentatione ¼ equi cum servo pedestri tempore belli in

¹ *R.M.S.*, 1425-1513, 2404.

² *R.S.S.*, 1488-1529, 3834.

³ *Fasti Aberdonenses*, publ. Spalding Club, 1854, p. 108.

⁴ Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs, 1501-54, p. 62 (Dunblane), p. 109 (Inchmahome), p. 225 (Strathmiglo).

⁵ Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs, 1501-54, p. 322.

⁶ *R.M.S.*, 1513-46, 1877.

⁷ *Royal Commission Inventory of Monuments and Constructions in the Counties of Fife, Kinross and Clackmannan*, p. 66.

⁸ Stevenson, J. H., and Wood, M., *Scottish Heraldic Seals*, III, 623. James Strachan was the brother of John Strachan of Claypotts (the second) (*R.M.S.*, 1513-46, 1877).

⁹ *Op. cit.*

¹⁰ *Reg. of Deeds*, LXXVII, 11 Feb. 1601, quoted *Mem. of S.* (2nd ed.), p. 16.

exercitibus regii contra invasores regni; et duplicando feudifirmam in introitu heredum . . ."¹

Other obligations are included in the list of outstanding debts inventoried in Gilbert Strachan's testament (1594):

'Item to W. Crystesoun minister at Dundie for his part of his stipend assignit to him in anno 1593 yeris out of the teindis of the lands of Claypottis and few maillis thereof	£18
Item to Adame Mekesone Chalmerlaine of Arbroth for the teindis of the landis of Skryne ² in anno foirsaid	£14. 13. 4d.
Item to Patrik Maudle of Panmure for his few dewtie of the lands of Skryne the said year . . .	£36
Item to the Abbot of Balmerinloch for his few maill of Pitskerrie the said yeir	£12

The Strachans did not farm Skryne and Pitskerrie themselves. In 1594 the rentals from these and other lands at Kingcaldrum and Tarquhappie amounted to £389. 18s. 4d.³

The testaments suggest that the Strachans led a peaceful farming existence, but occasionally events occurred which left their mark on the national record. The Strachans failed to fulfil their military obligations in 1544, for the Register of the Privy Seal includes (January 13):

"ane Lettir maid to Archibald Hammiltoun of Roploch and Maister Gavin Hammiltoun his bruther, thare airis and assignais,—of the gift of all gudis, movable and unmovable, quilkis pertenit to Johnne Strauchane in the Claypottis, Alexander Guthre in the Halkhil and now pertenying or (etc.) to oure soverane lady be resoun of escheit throw thair remanyng and biding fra the oist at Leith."⁴

How much the escheit involved is unknown, but the Strachans remained at Claypotts. Three years later they may not have been so fortunate, for an English force occupied Broughty Castle after a token attack. The Government raised a local force to meet the threat:

"understandand perfytlie that our auld ynemies of England being in the house of Brouchty ar apperandlie to invaid the burgh of Dundee and hail cuntre, and to hery, sla, and distroy our Soverane Ladys liegis duelland within the boundis thair of without thai be resistit."⁵

Sir Andrew Dudley, the English Commander, reported that he was "using the country gently as ordered," but he complained that his men were "gevyn all to eatinge and drynkyne and slowfullness," and "the refuse of

¹ *R.M.S.*, 1620-33, 117.

² The Strachans had a charter of half the lands of Skryne 1556 *R.M.S.* 1546-80, 1098. See also *Retours for Forfarshire*, 17.

³ *Ed. Test.*, Strachan Gilbert of Claypotts 1 Feb. 1593/4.

⁴ *R.S.S.*, 1542-48, 576.

⁵ *R.P.C.*, 1545-69, 80.

the army",¹ so that it seems unlikely that the neighbouring farms can have escaped unscathed. The siege was lifted by a French force in 1550, but perhaps the memory of those turbulent days played some part in determining the Strachans to build a tower-house.

There was further trouble at Claypotts in 1594 following the death of Gilbert Strachan. David Maxwell of Tealing, George, Robert and Hugh his brothers, John Scrymgeour of Kirkton and Elizabeth Maxwell "relict of Gilbert Strauchane of Claypottis" were ordered to deliver the tower, and were subsequently fined.² It is probable that an attempt was being made to exclude the lawful curators of the boy heir, John. When John grew up he married a widow, Agnes Erskyne, relict of Alexander Halkertoun, and in 1602 they were offered the protection of the Privy Council against Alexander Falconer, now of Halkertoun, and his servitor James Wischart. The dispute was not one-sided as four months later it was the Strachans who were under surety for £1000 not to harm Alexander Falconer.³

The beginning of the 17th century was a time of great change at Claypotts; the situation created by the Reformation was recognised and the superiority of the Abbey of Lindores, now purely nominal, transferred to the family of the commendator, Patrick Leslie;⁴ at the same time the Strachans transferred their rights in Claypotts to William Graham of the adjacent estate of Ballunie and moved to Balhousie, a farm next to their lands at Skryne and close to Carmyllie.⁵ John Strachan is last heard of at Balhousie in 1613.⁶ William Graham already held Ballunie north of Claypotts and Gotterston to the west, so that the lands of Claypotts ceased to exist as a separate entity.

William Graham of Ballunie, later described as Sir William Graham of Claypotts, transferred Claypotts to his eldest son David in 1616, and in 1619 David, with the consent of his father, sold the lands to Graham of Claverhouse in consideration of 12,000 marks of price paid.⁷ It may well be that David Graham was the last of the owners of Claypotts actually to live in the tower-house, as Claverhouse had properties elsewhere, and in due course established his home at Glen Ogilvie.

Sir William Graham of Claverhouse, a man of local standing and a representative for Forfarshire in the Parliament of 1633, died in 1642, and was succeeded in turn by his son George, his grandson William and his great-grandson John, who was served heir to the lands in 1678.⁸ John Graham

¹ *Calendar of Scottish Papers*, 1547-63, 24, 61.

² *R.P.C.*, 1592-9, 610, 614.

³ *Ibid.*, 1599-1604, 718, 732.

⁴ *R.M.S.*, 1593-1608, 1032.

⁵ *Reg. of Deeds*, LXXIX, 26 Jan. 1601, and LXXXIII, 8 May 1601, quoted in *Mem. of S.* (2nd ed.) p. 18; *Douglas Inventory*, p. 151.

⁶ *Registrum de Panmure*, II, 318.

⁷ *R.M.S.*, 1620-33, 117, 799; *Douglas Inventory*, p. 151.

⁸ *Retours for Forfarshire* 474. Copy in Register House (Scrymgeour Wedderburn Collection).

of Claverhouse, ultimately Viscount Dundee (Pl. XXIII), was by far the most prominent of the owners of Claypotts, but it seems unlikely that his association with the tower-house can have been a close one. He is believed to have been born and brought up at Glen Ogilvie, as a soldier he travelled widely both in Scotland and abroad, and he ultimately made his home at Dudhope. The loyalty to the Stewarts, which had won him such great rewards, cost him his life on the battlefield of Killierankie in 1698. His lands were declared forfeit and reverted to the Crown.

In 1694 the Claverhouse lands were granted by the new king and queen to James 2nd, Marquis of Douglas:

“in consideration of the great and famous achievements of the Noble Family of Douglas, and the many Services done by them for the defence of Scotland, and that Lord Angus, eldest Son of James, Marquis of Douglas, died in their Majesties Service at Steenkirk. . . .”¹

The lands passed from the Marquis to his son without controversy in 1700, but on the latter's death, childless, in 1761 were involved in the celebrated disputed inheritance, popularly known as the Douglas Cause.² In 1769 the House of Lords gave judgment in favour of Archibald Douglas, later Baron Douglas (Pl. XXIV), and it is as his descendant that the Earl of Home is the owner of Claypotts to-day.

DESCRIPTION.

Claypotts stands on the lands from which it takes its name about three miles east of central Dundee and a mile north of the old Tay ferry at Portencraig. The associated yard and outbuildings have been replaced by a modern farm-steading, but the tower-house is virtually intact, a splendid example of 16th-century Scottish architecture. The thick walls, vaulted cellars, shot-holes and parapet walks contrast strikingly with the decorated cornice and dormer windows. As a whole the tower-house admirably illustrates a way of life popular in Scotland for more than two hundred years, and a particular period in which the demand for increased comfort and convenience was modifying the traditional requirements of defence.

On plan the tower-house consists of a rectangular central block measuring externally 25 by 35 ft., with flanking towers 21 ft. in diameter at the NE. and SW. corners, there being a stairway in the re-entrant angle between central block and flanking tower in each case; there are four storeys in the central block, five in each of the flanking towers (fig. 2). Claypotts owes its unusual and striking appearance to the square garret chambers with crow-stepped gables corbelled out over the flanking towers. The external walls are severely plain below wall-head; shot-holes, including one in the kitchen fire-back, are sited to provide all-round defence. The appearance of the

¹ *Douglas Inventory*, p. 65. Lord Angus commanded the Cameronians, one of the Scottish regiments engaged in this battle.

² For a recent account see de la Torre, L., *The Heir of Douglas*.

tower-house has been altered by the insertion of sash-windows, the removal of the external iron grills and the partial removal of all but one of the dormer windows; the dormer sills were not destroyed and show that the decoration of the missing windows was different from that of the surviving example (Pl. XXII, 1 and 2).

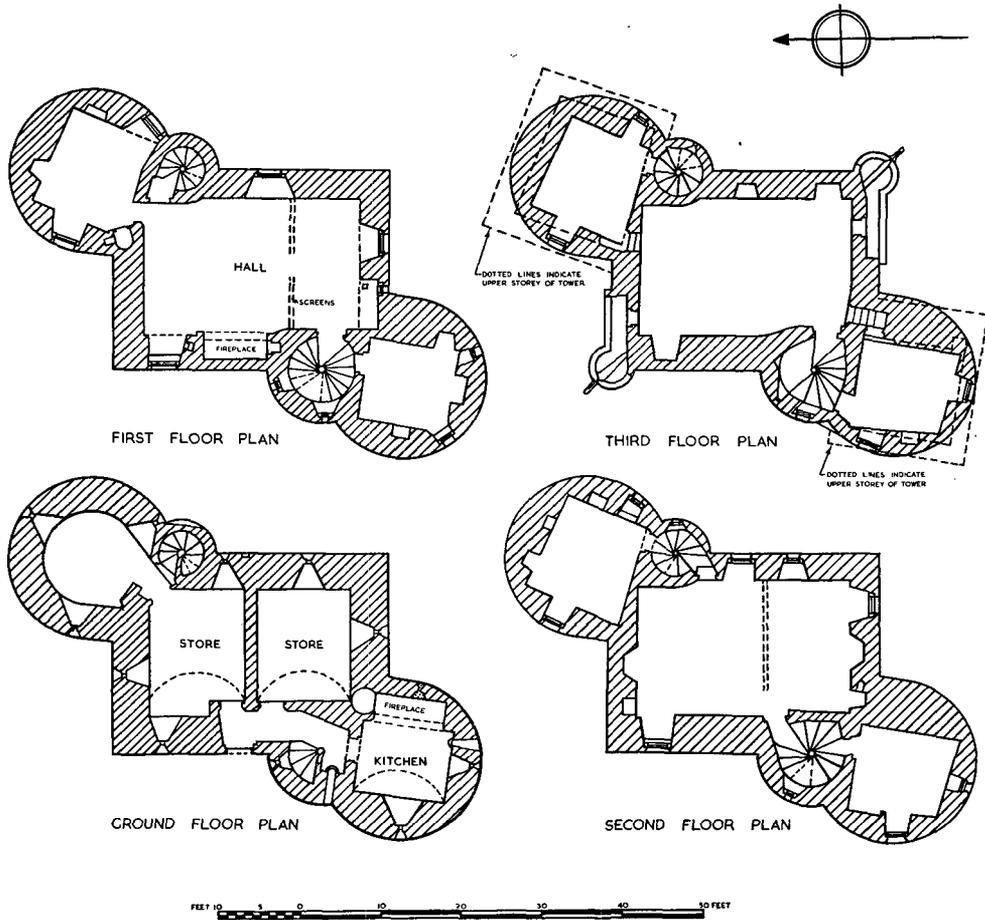


Fig. 2. Plan of the tower-house.

The entrance to the tower is on the ground floor and was surmounted by an heraldic panel. The doorway opens on to a short passage which serves the two principal cellars, the kitchen and the public stair; access to the domestic stair and to the tower cellar beyond is through the north cellar. The main feature of the kitchen is the great fireplace; the outline of the shot-hole can still be traced in the fireback. There is an oven in the thickness

of the wall to the left of the great hearth, and a drain-away in the external wall on the right. No well has been found at Claypotts, but there is a stream nearby and an arrangement for catching rain-water and storing it under the stair.

The hall on the first floor is spacious and well-lit, the extra windows high up in the walls being perhaps a defensive feature and intended to illuminate the room should it be necessary to barricade those at the normal level. There was a small servery in a wall recess adjacent to the main entry from the stair which was screened from the remainder of the hall, the position of the partition being defined by marks in the wall plaster. The present appearance of the fireplace is misleading, since what was originally a relieving arch now serves as lintel. In the left jamb of the fireplace is a salt-box, and in the in-go of the window to the right an aumbry, which still preserves its wooden framing.

The retiring-room north of the hall is the only one to open direct from the central block and not from the stair. It is a relatively handsome apartment with aumbry, fireplace and closed garderobe, and forms an interesting comparison with the tiny wall-chambers of more primitive towers. There are traces of decoration on the walls.

Above the hall is another large chamber, probably intended to be divided since there are fireplaces at either end. The position of the partition is marked on the wall plaster, and the splay of the window in the east wall has been adjusted to accommodate it. There is plaster-work of two periods at the north end of the chamber, the original layer being scratched with a representation of a ship and other designs.

Above this chamber again there is a garret running the full length of the main block. The adzed roof-timbers are still in position, the heavy tiles held by wooden pins in the traditional manner. Minor alteration marks the former position of the dormer windows. From this garret access is gained to the top storeys of the flanking towers and to the short lengths of parapet walk (Pl. XXII, 2).

The south and north flanking towers are dated 1569 and 1588 respectively, suggesting that the original ground plan was extended, or that construction was temporarily abandoned. The ground plan does not confirm extension (the siting of the shot-holes presupposes the existence of two towers), but there are structural differences between the towers. In the case of the south tower the curve of the external wall projects outside the wall of the surmounting rectangular garret, whereas in the north tower the garret sits squarely on the tower, the differences being resolved by the arrangement of the corbelling. Internally there is poor workmanship at the junction between the north cellar and north tower, and on the top floor access from the garret to the south tower was by a stone stair in the thickness of the wall, but to the north tower by removable wooden steps.

It is possible that Claypotts was substantially built by 1569 and that 1588 represents a rebuilding or repair to the north tower. There is a difference between the stonework of the bottom two-thirds and the top third of the tower to support such a suggestion (Pl. XXI, 2). What may be further evidence is contained in Timothy Pont's map of the Dundee area which is particularly detailed, major buildings being indicated by something more than the conventional symbols. Claypotts is shown as a central block flanked by one complete and one truncated tower (fig. 3). It is possible that this is a representation of the tower at the time the map was made; if so, the map supports the structural history of the tower and can itself be more accurately dated than hitherto, for although Pont is believed to have worked between 1583 and 1601 only one of his maps is dated.

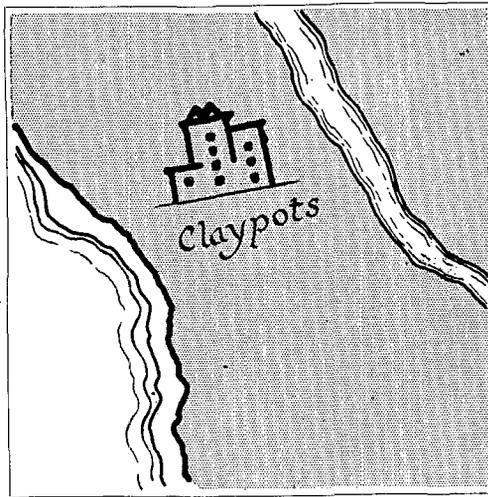


Fig. 3. The tower-house as shown on the map prepared by Timothy Pont.

Acknowledgments.

I am indebted to the Rt. Hon. The Earl of Home for access to the 18th-century Douglas *Inventory* of Claverhouse lands, and to H.M. Stationery Office for permission to use official plans and photographs. The plans were prepared by Miss T. McDonald, the detail drawing (fig. 3) by Mr T. Borthwick and the photographs by Mr J. Pugh.

Other photographic plates are reproduced by kind permission of the Edinburgh City Library (Pl. XXI, 1), the Rt. Hon. the Earl of Leven and Melville (Pl. XXIII), and the Trustees of the National Galleries of Scotland (Pl. XXIV).

Mr S. H. Cruden, Dr Gordon Donaldson and Dr W. D. Simpson kindly read through the text and suggested a number of improvements.

My particular thanks are due to Mrs Batchelor of Claypotts for her continual kindness to me and to many other visitors to the tower-house.

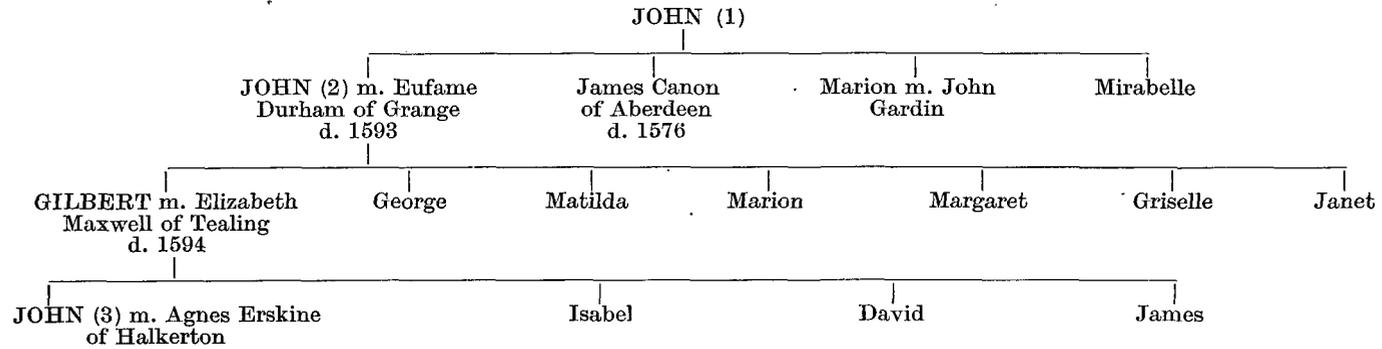
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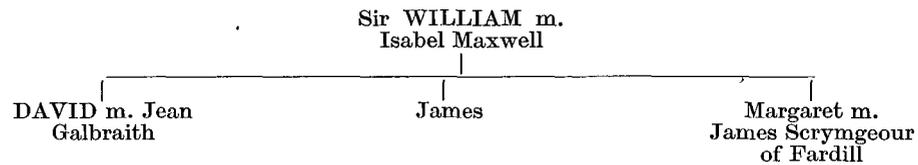
APPENDIX.

Families associated with Claypotts.

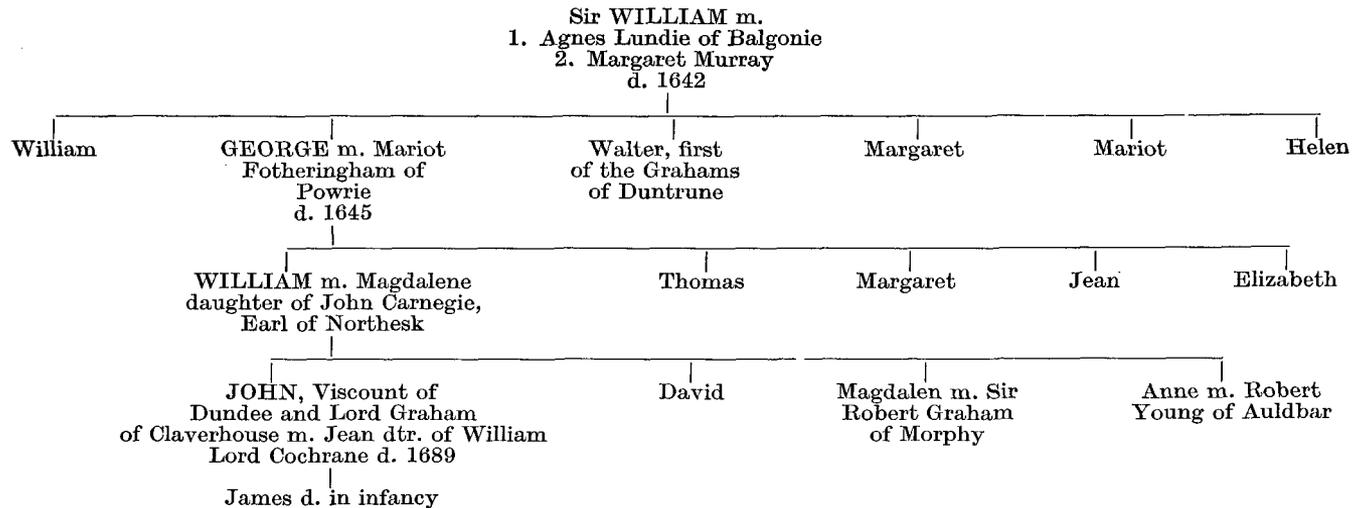
THE STRACHANS OF CLAYPOTTS.



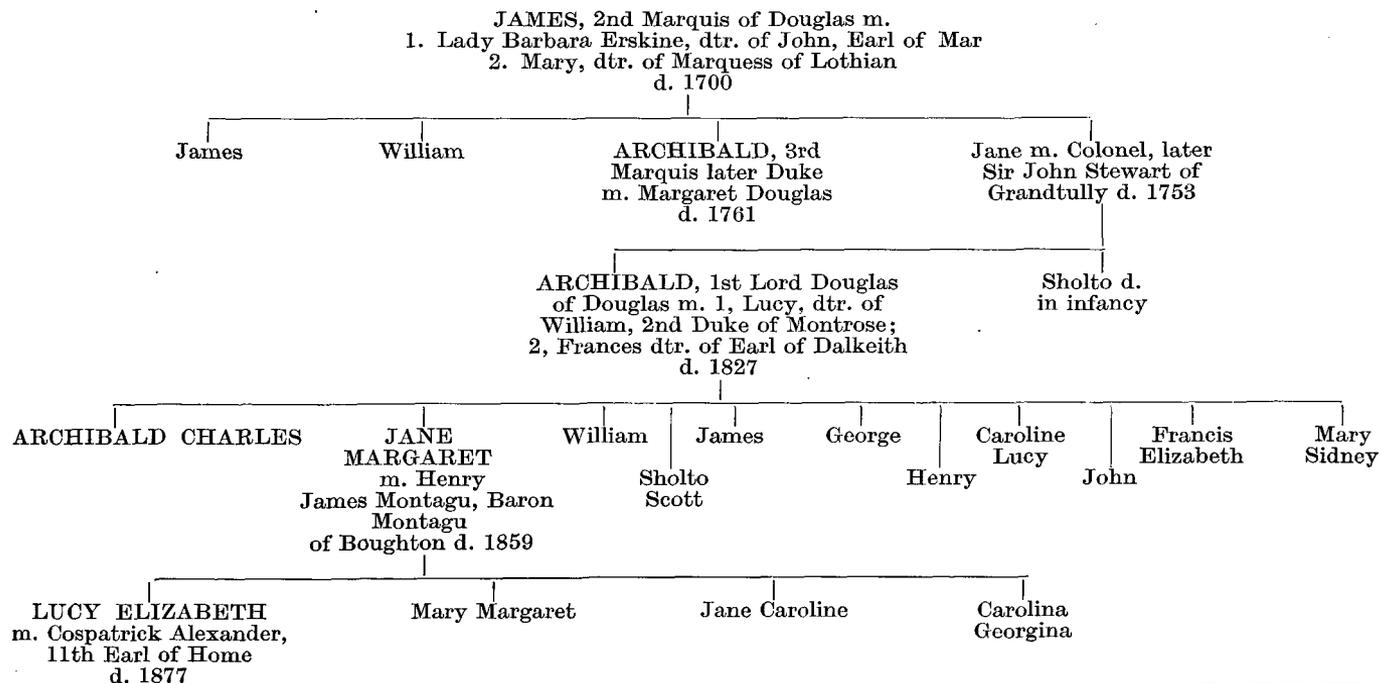
THE GRAHAMS OF BALLUNIE AND CLAYPOTTS.



THE GRAHAMS OF CLAVERHOUSE.



THE DOUGLASES.

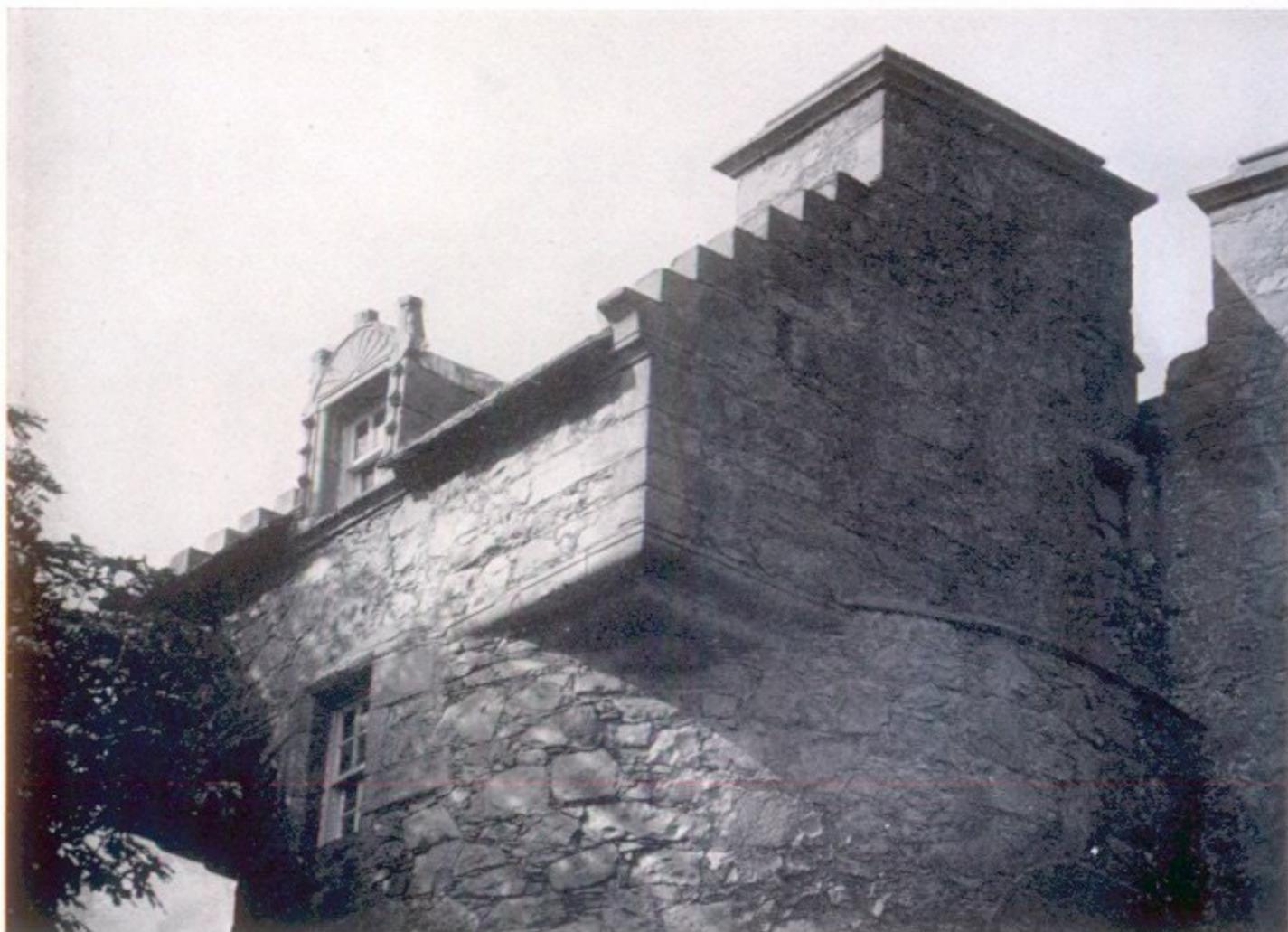




1. The tower-house in 1847, from the painting by Mary Webster.



2. The tower-house to-day.



1. The south tower (detail).



2. The south parapet walk.



John Graham of Claverhouse, Viscount Dundee.



Archibald Douglas, victor in the Douglas cause.