

I.

NOTES ON A MEDIÆVAL BURGESS'S HOUSE AT INVERKEITHING.
By F. C. MEARS.

Small unprotected houses of mediæval date are rare in Scotland. The great majority are known to have been constructed of timber, usually very roughly, and they have probably all perished, with the exception perhaps of the cottages built on "crucks."

A few stone examples remain, but almost always in a much altered state, as in the case of Huntly House, Canongate, where the early nucleus remains entirely embedded within later work.

Even in the towns dwellings were probably very seldom wholly built of stone before the very end of the fifteenth century; of this date Inverkeithing still possesses a number of doorways, etc., and one complete and practically unaltered example. The view in fig. 1 shows it on the left, that on the right being Fordel House; the positions are of course reversed in fig. 2. The high interest of this building lies in its showing that the first stone builders, for lack of other tradition, followed closely after that of the small "keep," both in arrangement of parts and in details of workmanship. It shows well, in addition, the very simple standard of comfort demanded by a well-to-do citizen of an important burgh at the close of the middle ages.

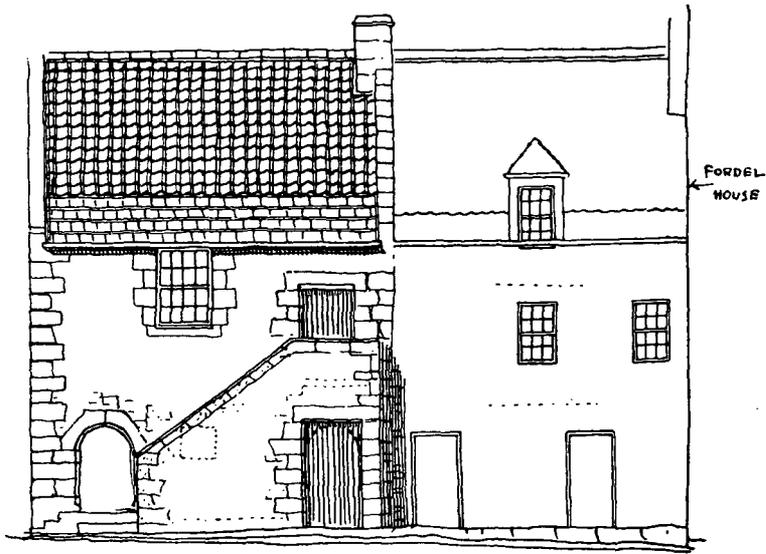
In front, on the street level, there are two doorways—each having for head a bluntly pointed arch, formed of two large stones. That on the right gives entrance to a vaulted chamber with a small barred window to the front. There is no communication between this and the house proper above. The vault is a simple barrel, well executed in roughly-squared stones, with springing very little above the floor. The door and window recesses are carried back into the vault by straight stone lintels. The left-hand door gave access to the original



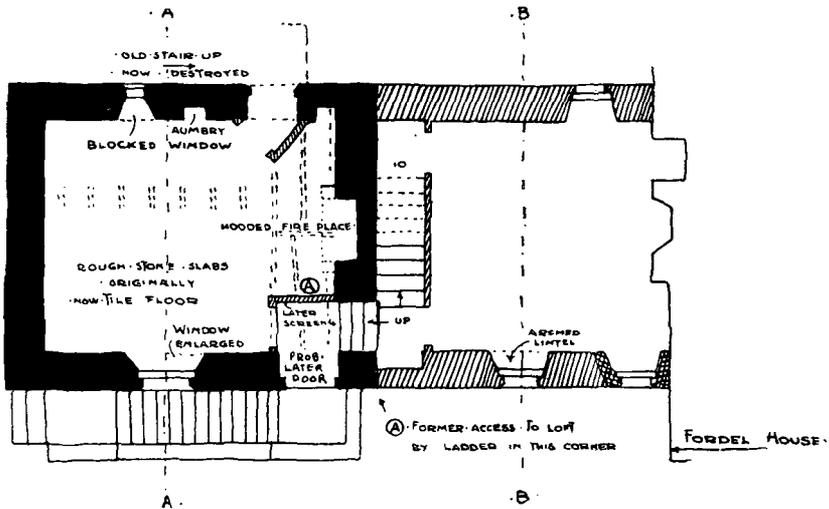
Fig. 1. Front view of Houses at Inverkeithing.



Fig. 2. Back view of Houses at Inverkeithing.

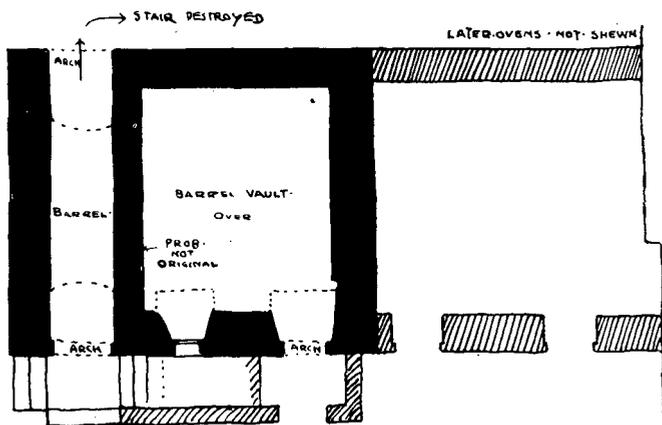
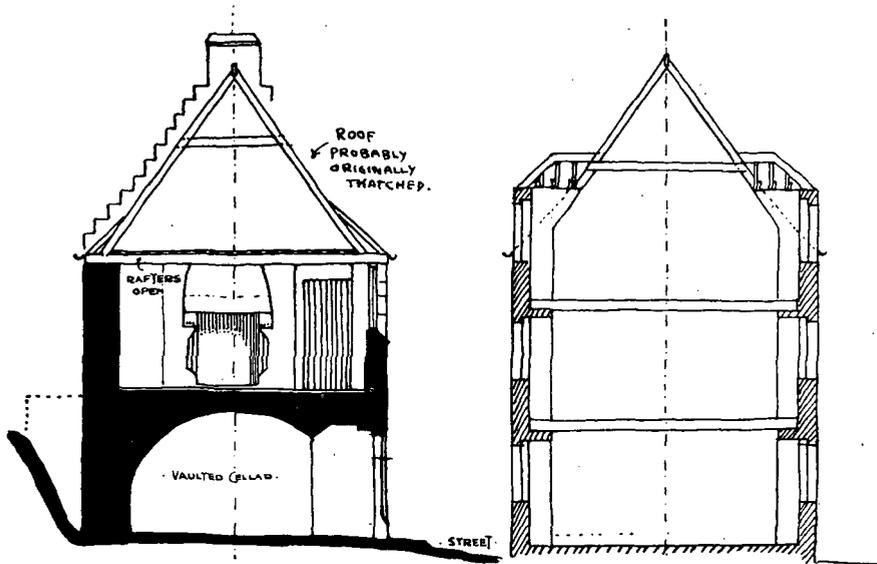


FRONT ELEVATION



UPPER FLOOR PLAN

Fig. 3. Elevation and details of plan of Mediæval House at Inverkeithing.



STREET FLOOR PLAN

F. C. MEARS
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Fig. 4. Cross sections and details of plan of Mediæval House at Inverkeithing.

outside-stair at the back of the building, by way of a passage, which is ceiled by a continuation of the cellar vault. This vault is intersected by carefully formed segmental arches carrying the front and back walls. The springing of the front door is kept very low, and it and the cellar door both have recesses behind to allow them to open back flush with the face of the wall. At the back the segmental arch runs straight out—there is no provision for a door. The old stair has recently been destroyed—that at the front is of much later date.

The first floor (fig. 3) is completely occupied by a single room about 18 feet by 15 feet by 8 feet high. The floor has been paved with rough stone slabs, one or two of which still remain in a corner. The front window has clearly been much enlarged; a small one at the back, however, has been built up, and shows the original splayed jambs and lintel. The hooded fire-place is one of the most interesting features of the house; the jambs appear to have had stopped mouldings, but they are much battered—above are simple corbels carrying a projecting hood of characteristically mediæval form.

On the back wall, between window and door, there is a small aumbry recess, with arched splayed head cut from a single stone. The ceiling is formed of the open tie-beams of the roof, and in one corner the framing of the old ladder opening to the roof still remains. The roof is old, but apparently not original; it has probably been thatched.

Both gables have been interfered with by later buildings, the remaining crow-steps are a good deal more massive than is usual in seventeenth-century work.

The cross section (fig. 4) shows well the close parallelism of the construction to that of the castles, as well as the extreme simplicity of the arrangement.

The adjoining mansion, called Fordel House—which has recently been bought for preservation,—though 100 years or more later in date, still maintains in essence the same arrangement, and shows a step in the direction of the nineteenth-century town house. The basement

persists—though still used only for storage,—while the first floor is divided by a partition to form dining-room and kitchen. The stair still projects at the back, but is enclosed within a small wing; it leads to a first floor with bedrooms, and then to the attic in the roof as before.

The other early small houses in Inverkeithing do not appear to be vaulted; they show very well, however, the encroachments of sixteenth or seventeenth century date, which narrowed the streets of Scottish towns by 15 to 20 feet—in most cases the older arched doors are to be found 6 or 8 feet back within the passageways.