

THE ROYAL PALACE - DUNFERMLINE

“Of all the palaces so fair,
Built for the royal dwelling,
In Scotland, far beyond compare,
Dunfermline is excelling.”



W. Banks & Son Edin 1856

Very little now remained of the palace but the west wall, built upon a steep slope, at the bottom of which was the water of Lyne or “Towerburn” From the portions of the palace that remained, it could be seen that many alterations had from time to time taken place in its structure. The windows in particular had undergone a great change. They were originally Gothic, and of very wide dimensions, but had been altered to square or Tudor. In the suffix or ceiling of one of the upper windows there was a large sculptured stone bearing a representation of the Annunciation. That carving was supposed to have formed part of an altar

in the Abbey, or the tympanum of an arched door or window, and to have been removed to its present position at the Reformation. When discovered in its present position it had been plastered over, as if for concealment. Charles I was born in this palace in 1600. The room generally pointed out as the place of the birth of Charles, was that of the Annunciation Stone, but he was much of opinion that it was a room in the same storey at the west, or newer, part of the building.

The kitchen of the palace was a large unroofed apartment, and had two spacious fireplaces. The iron cooking grate or range of one of these was now in Her Majesty's Office of Works, Edinburgh. A communicating passage through the pending tower, and a wheel stair, led from the monastery to the kitchen—the brethren having a right of certain supplies from the latter place.

Underneath the kitchen there was a large vaulted room, locally known as the “magazine” from the fact of its having been used during the civil wars as a store for ammunition. It had the appearance of a chapel or crypt, and from its architecture had evidently formed originally part of the monastery, and not of the palace. At the north-east corner of that vaulted room was the entrance to a dark passage; which appeared to have been an under-ground communication between the monastery and the church. On a recent exploration it was found that the passage led in that direction, but about 90 feet from the entrance it was found to be built up. It seemed quite likely that, although at one time a thoroughfare for the brethren, it had been broken at the upper end by the formation of the public road and other changes. The passage was arched with groins or ribs at intervals, and was over 6 feet in height from the paved floor, though in places, from the accumulation of earth and other matter, it was now much less. [The Architect Sept. 14 1888 p.151-2]

Like the monastery, the palace has suffered much at the hands of the vandal. Only its southern wall remains entire, and several subsidiary but remarkable chambers at its eastern end. The Tower over St Catherine's Wynd is directly attached to the monastery on the east and the palace on the west, and forms a picturesque bond of connection between the two buildings. That the vaulted kitchen of the palace served the monastery also has been suggested, but that is scarcely probable. It would be quite inadequate to supply the collective demands of the Royal table, the stately board of the abbot, the colony of monks, and the army of nobles, retainers, and servants, that gathered periodically within the bounds. Nor was here any necessity for this dual service, as the conventual buildings

were so extensive and complete that their possession of a culinary department was as certain as was the appetite of the brotherhood.

Though several Scottish sovereigns left their mark on the palace, its architectural appearance as a whole is singularly harmonious. Broadly speaking, it reflects the spirit of the 16th century Domestic Gothic style more than the effects of the earlier ideas still traceable in certain parts and details. That the substructure is much older than the upper walls is unquestioned. The eastern portion, almost in its entirety, is apparently as old as the 14th century monastic remnants; and its interior chambers have all the charm of ancient masonry that is comparatively well preserved.

There is evidence that the third James – to whom Stirling owed its grandeur – contributed to the growth of the Royal house at Dunfermline, but his portion of the work cannot precisely be determined. The central and larger section of the palace was in all probability erected by King James V whose penchant for building brought Falkland and Linlithgow also into being, King James VI further improved the residence of which he made frequent use, extending it by erecting the Queen's House, a separate but connected building which shared the fate of the monastery and palace, whose destruction now seems wanton to criminality.

From the nature of the ground, the façade of the palace was long and low. Its elevation to the Glen measures over two hundred feet in length, and walls rising to the height of sixty feet, and showing three ranges or storeys of windowed chambers. Those in the basement of the central portion have long been built up, but that they furnished accommodation for the Royal staff cannot be doubted. Over the basement, and on the level of the higher ground to the north, was a range of public apartments. Chief among these was the magnificent Hall, over ninety feet long, whose lofty windows command views of the Glen that are unrivalled in their beauty. If there be any reason in the contention that Shakespeare visited Scotland, with the players for whom according to the old records, "eight feder beds," were prepared at Dunfermline, the great dramatist may have made a histrionic appearance with his company within the very walls of this spacious room! The upper storey contained the private apartment so the Sovereign and the western wing seem to have been exclusively devoted to the Royal requirements. In which of all these classic chambers.

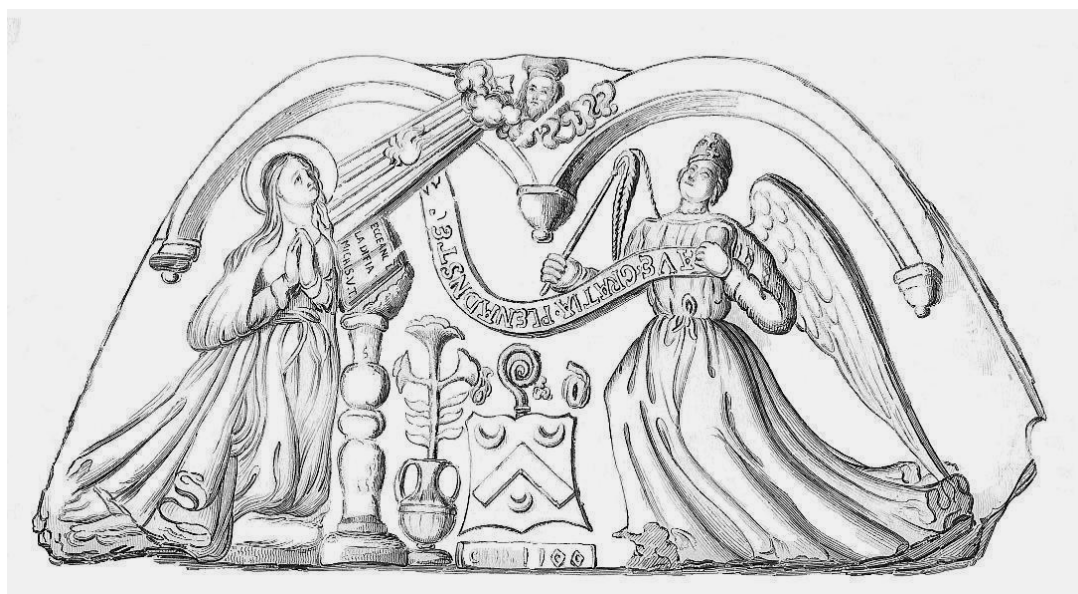
The King sat in Dunfermline toon,
Drinking the blood red wine,

Not even tradition has left a suggestion, though the voices of the past are by no means silent within their ruinous shades.

Here is the birthplace of King Charles I they tell us, the peevish baby so tried the patience of his nurse and parents that the Scottish Solomon expressed the wish that Satan himself might take the child away!

Another room has the window marked by the quaintly sculptured Annunciation Stone, and here tradition avers the Princess Elizabeth—afterward Queen of Bohemia—was born. The carved lintel itself is not without a spice of the romantic. After doing duty for a time as part of Abbot Dury's memorial, as is plausibly conjectured, Master-Mason Schaw removed it from the Abbey ruins to the palace, placing it in the chamber of august master to commemorate his daughter's birth.

Annunciation Stone



The relic was long lost under the plaster of later repairs, but was again brought to light early in the last century. Then arose a discussion regarding its age and purpose which was not without an aspect of quite humour. The syllable "fido" in the Dury legend—Confido—was read as "1100" and there and then the date of the palace was incontrovertibly assured. But, as the Dury arms and motto were more clearly revealed, and eventually understood, the puzzle gradually resolved itself into the conjecture above recorded.

It should be remembered that King Robert the Bruce was occasionally resident at Dunfermline, and that his son, who afterwards became King David II was born here in 1323. Thus it is inferable that on the rebuilding of the monastery after its destruction by Edward King of England, the Scottish monarch also restored the palace, which for long afterwards was occupied by the hero king and his descendants, David II and Johanna, his queen; Robert III and Queen Anabella Drummond, were other 14th century residents; and the rest of Scotland's royal Jameses, son of the last-named sovereigns, first saw the light within the ancient walls in 1394. As has been indicated, the other Jameses showed their favour for Dunfermline by renewals and extensions of the historic structure whose southern elevation remains their picturesque and appropriate memorial.

The exterior features of the great south wall can be fairly well viewed from the pathway skirting its base. Very massive yet finely proportioned, are the strengthening buttresses rising sheer from the Glen to the top of the lofty walls, their uniting arches of solid masonry giving a sturdy character to the lower and older portion of the work. The large windows of the superstructure contrast strongly with their narrow, Gothic neighbours in the basement storey, the boldly projecting oriel cresting the central buttress forming a striking and chaste ornamental detail in the masterly composition. Its full artistic effect is impossible at so near a range, and the Glen must be negotiated before its importance and beauty are revealed under the enchantment of distance. But there is interest and enlightenment both in the nearer and wider views, in the study of details as in the appreciation of masses; and the subject is worthy of all the attention thus may be awarded to it.



DUNFERMLINE PALACE – 1856



W. Banks & Son Edin 1856

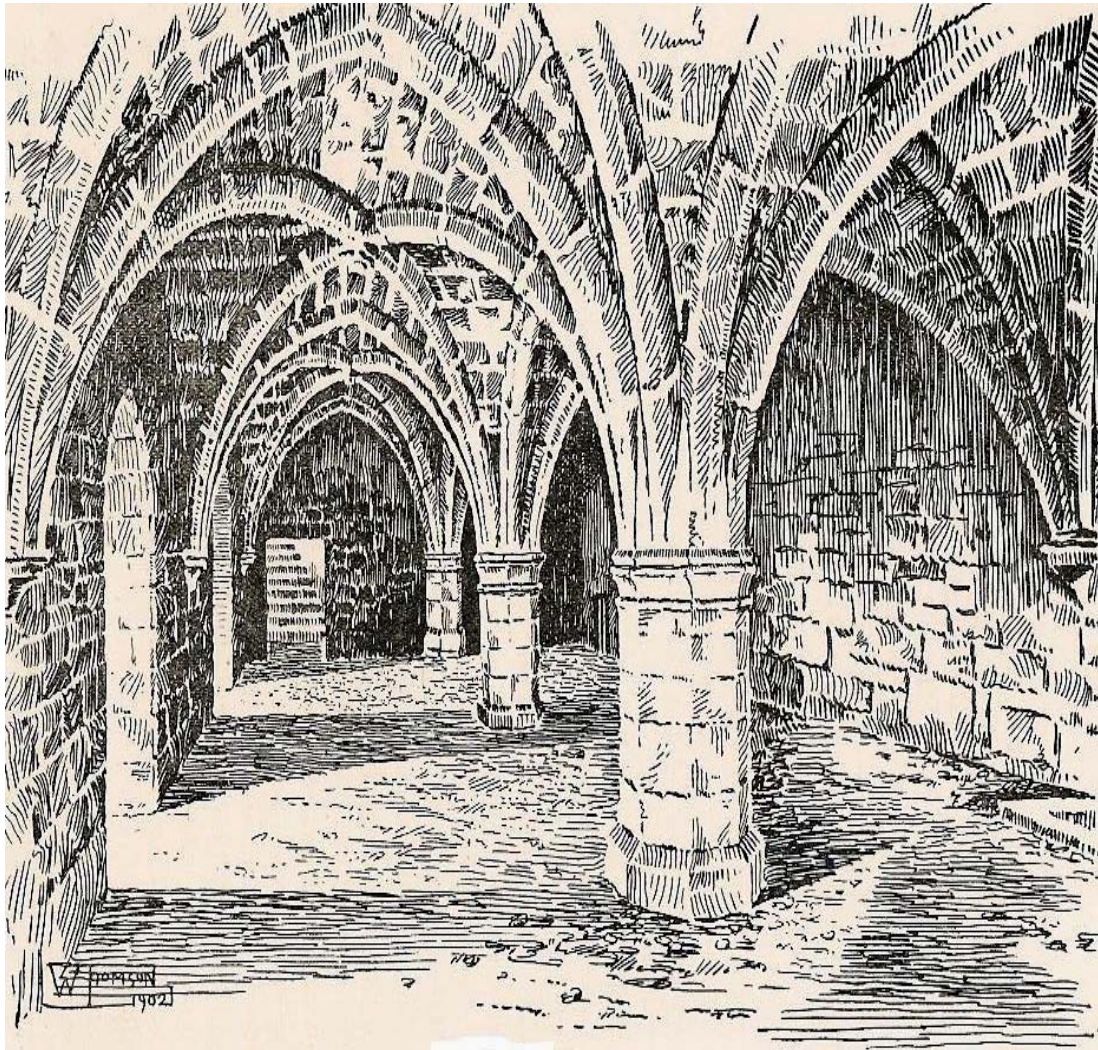
To judge from the superior style and scale of the vaulted eastern portion Adjoining the Pend Tower, the older palace must have been a structure in every respect equal with its Jacobean rival. With greater solidity of construction, these cryptic under chambers are almost exuberant in their characteristic treatment of arched groined work, and induce favourable comparison with the lighter graces of the Stuart period grafted over their weirdly fascinating areas. In the lower crypt—a store-room very evidently is the entrance to a subterranean passage which extends for nearly 100 feet outside of the northern basement wall of the main building.

The Palace Ruins.



From the Glen, looking north West

Palace Ruins – Showing the Room below the Kitchen



The King's Wine-Cellar, Dunfermline Palace
From the 'Weavers Craft' By Daniel Thomson

Its dim and arched recesses form another mystery of the past, not easy to solve in these days of greater peace and security, though we may safely conclude that it was designed for purposes of refuge or concealment. The kitchen over the crypt measures 42 feet by 34 feet, and bears also the distinguished appearance of early vaulted work. It is interesting to trace its connection with the palace proper by an inner stair, and with the vault beneath by an outer stair; and the clear traces of upper arched rooms communicating with the Tower and Monastery should also be noted.

The departure of King James VI for England sealed the fate of the palace. Deserted by Royalty, it seems to have been gradually neglected by all and sundry, the existing records of any subsequent function in which it figured showing that much had to be done to furbish it for the occasion. Charles II renounced the Pope and all his works within its walls, but the Merry Monarch must have done so with his tongue in his cheek, as was clearly proved by subsequent happenings. Nevertheless, he held his court here for a short time, and the “Dunfermline Declaration” of adherence to the Covenant remains a historic proof of Charles’ residence as of his roguery. Cromwell, (his men) also, is credited with a visitation of the birthplace of the Royal Martyr; and in 1715 some of the Pretender’s wild Highland supporters held high jinks within its decaying walls. In later times, the Queen’s House—which was situated at the eastern end of the Palace Yard, and close to St Catherine’s Wynd—was treated so cavalierly by the bucks of Dunfermline that they held cock-fights within it, its demolition being ordered by “the powers” in order to stop the indecent exhibition which, otherwise they could not prevent.

It is regrettable in the extreme that a structure so interesting and so beautiful architecturally, was so cruelly despoiled. But the strictest care will now be taken of the precious remnants of the Royal Palace, so that for many years to come they may speak to the heart in the spirit of Thomas Morrison’s verses:-

Time was when Scotland’s banner flung
Its fold across thy wall,
When our heroic sires here sprung
At Freedom’s sacred call.

And oft here would assemble then
The gay and festive throng,
And scarce the echoes of the Glen
With midnight mirth and song.

But all are gone, we whispering sigh;
The gay, the proud, the brave,
Who thronged the halls of yore, now lie
Oblivious in the grave.

The Palace Ruins were for many years regarded as a pertinent of the Pittencrieff estates, and their proprietors—to their credit be it told—put themselves to much trouble and expense in repairing and preserving them. Latterly, their strongly-asserted claims of proprietorship were

questioned, with the result that the Crown took possession of the buildings, and restored to the public, under certain conditions, acquisition of Pittencrieff by the Carnegie Trust has brought the ancient palace closer than ever under the observation of the citizen and the visitor, an advantage for which patriotic sentiment must ever be grateful. This birthplace and residence of Scotland's Monarchs is a historic monument of the deepest interest among the local antiquities of Dunfermline, with a history that every child of the city should learn and a charm that every visitor of the Glen should feel. [Royal Dunfermline by Alan Reid p. 50 - 60]

PALACE DUNFERMLINE



Picture taken by Alan Calder
Looking down on the ruins of the Palace at Dunfermline.