

Noble Houses of Scotland
1660-1800

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Charles Wemyss

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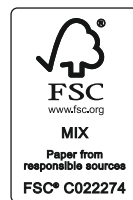
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Foreword

In the archive at Wemyss Castle there is a letter concerning the family's ancestry that was written in 1759 by William Wemyss, an Edinburgh lawyer, in which he likened the structure of the Scottish nobility to that of ancient Rome. 'Among the Romans' he claimed 'we find a division of the people into *Nobiles*, *Novi* and *Ignobiles*. This arose from the right of using pictures or statues, an honour allowed to none, but such, whose ancestors or themselves had born some office in the state. The first had pictures or statues of their Ancestors, the second had only their own, and the third had neither, so that *ius imaginis* was among the old Romans like the right of armorial bearings with us'.* The Roman right of images had established a clear distinction between the descendants of the ruling class, the *nobiles*, and those who had recently joined its ranks, the *novi*: the former had displayed images of their illustrious ancestors, while the latter had been able to display only their own effigy. It was this same distinction between the *nobiles* and the *novi* that still persisted within the ranks of the Scottish nobility in the middle of the eighteenth century and which forms the central theme of this book.

The importance of lineage, of expressing family history is an essential ingredient in understanding the architecture of Scottish castles. For many years these seemingly antiquated residences, with their crenellations and their obvious references to the medieval tower have been misinterpreted as military strongholds of militant Scottish barons or as old-fashioned vernacular dwellings typical of an isolated region far from any cultural hub: and what is more, they have also been neglected in European architectural history, notwithstanding their spectacular character and architectural magnificence. It was the late Charles McKean with his seminal study *The Scottish Chateau: The Country House of Renaissance Scotland*, who first explained in 2001 why Scottish country-house architecture of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries did not follow the Italian mainstream models of *all'antica*. McKean drew attention to the literate culture of the patrons of those houses and the quality of the local craftsmen, and argued that this distinctive form of architecture must have been the result of a conscious decision. If only historians would look beyond a narrow British perspective to the châteaux of France, they would begin to understand the true nature of the Scottish country house. It was this strong international message that he instilled into his Ph.D students at the University of Dundee, among them Charles Wemyss.

* William Wemyss' description of the *ius imaginis* appears to have been drawn word for word from Basil Kennet's *Romae Antiquae Notitia; Or, The Antiquities of Rome*, which had been published in 1754.

The Scottish Chateau ends in the middle of the seventeenth century and it is here that the current story begins. In 2008 Charles Wemyss successfully defended his doctoral dissertation *A Study of Aspiration and Ambition: The Scottish Treasury Commission and its Impact upon the Development of Scottish Country-House Architecture 1667-1682* and the book that you have in your hands draws extensively from that text. Unlike the examples of the earlier period discussed by McKean, not only do many of the country houses of the late seventeenth century remain intact, but they also possess household inventories of painstaking detail that list the names of each room and every item of furniture within them. From these two invaluable resources, a comprehensive picture has emerged which this book describes in an intelligible and enjoyable fashion. Enriched by a poetic series of photographs, some especially commissioned for the publication, it contains numerous annotated floor plans and many original architectural drawings. Above all, however, it is a story about the patrons of architecture, not about architects. It is impossible to fully understand their houses without taking account of their aspirations and ambitions.

Notwithstanding its Scottish setting, this architectural story is part of a wider European history. The conscious choice of an 'archaic' form of architecture was not restricted to Scotland. Once its specific meaning is understood, comparable – but not identical – architectural achievements can be found elsewhere in Europe. As such the story of Scottish country houses in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries is part of an international phenomenon alongside the mainstream architectural history of the period. With its remarkable and sometimes unique sources, the Scottish contribution to this part of European architectural history may be regarded as a point of reference. The current book will certainly please Scottish readers and lovers of castles but it should also inspire scholars from abroad.

Konrad Ottenheym
Utrecht, 3rd January 2014



W.P.

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Preface

Fig. 1

The Memorials of the Family of Wemyss of Wemyss and the Duchess of Portland's 'Hatbox No.10' gather dust in the attic at Wemyss.

When I became a trustee of my family's ancestral home in Scotland it occurred to me that it might be wise to learn more about the family's origins and the house that we have occupied for nearly six hundred years. All I knew was that the Wemysses had lived on the coast of Fife for so long that the name was derived from the Gaelic word, *uamh*: a cave. What was intended originally as an act of due diligence soon became a fully-fledged historical research project as I grew increasingly interested in the evolution of this ancient building. After ten or more years of clambering over battlements, peering into darkened rooms and pawing over countless late seventeenth-century plans and manuscripts, my research project finally evolved into a doctoral thesis, and it is the theme of that thesis that forms the substance of this book.

From a personal perspective, I am now much clearer about my role as a Trustee. It is my duty, as it has been for successive generations of the family, to preserve and maintain the ancestral seat and the lands of Wemyss for future generations: to fail in this duty would incur the opprobrium of all those ancestors, with their prominent family noses, whose portraits line the walls. 'We managed to preserve the family's heritage', they seem to say, 'despite the violent incursions of Henry VIII, the depredation of the civil war, the upheaval of the Jacobite rebellions, not to mention the horror of two world wars; and we expect you to do the same.' But, I also discovered another curious feature about my ancestors. They appeared to have been preoccupied with the family's origins; none more so than my great-grandfather who had commissioned the celebrated Victorian palaeographer, Sir William Fraser, to compile a history of the family. *The Memorials of the Family of Wemyss of Wemyss*, produced in three handsome red-leather volumes, is a work of extraordinary tedium.¹ Filled with facsimiles of land charters and letters from members of the royal family, Fraser never once refers to the fact that the Wemyss family had been on the verge of bankruptcy on at least two occasions and were only rescued by a most fortunate marriage; nor does he mention the prodigious quantities of malt whisky that were delivered to the Castle on a regular basis and which must have contributed to the early death of at least one generation.² It is only on closer inspection that the true purpose of the book becomes clear: Sir William had been employed to substantiate a longstanding tradition that my family were the closest lineal descendants of the medieval Earls of Fife.



Fig. 2
My great-grandfather,
Randolph, portrayed for
posterity as an industrial
entrepreneur and the 24th
Laird of Wemyss by an
unknown artist.

I was astonished that my great-grandfather, who had been an accomplished industrial entrepreneur, should have invested so much of his time and money trying to prove something so apparently trivial; but then I discovered that the *Memorials* were far from unique. Not only had Fraser produced similar histories for twenty-four Scottish families during his career, but the tradition of the ‘family history’ in Scotland dated back to the end of the sixteenth century. There were, quite literally, scores of such works gathering dust on the shelves of country-house libraries. For some unaccountable reason, it seemed that a large number of Scottish families had been preoccupied with their ancestry.³ Such an obsession is difficult to envisage in today’s meritocratic society; yet it is clear that generations of Scottish noblemen genuinely believed that their status was derived from the accomplishments of their ancestors, rather than from their own personal achievements; what is more, the same fixation was also responsible for Scotland’s distinctive castle culture. Strange as it may appear members of the nobility actually preferred the inconvenience of a seemingly old-fashioned castle to the comfort of a classical country house, because it confirmed their family’s antiquity and defined their own status.

So obscure is the concept of lineage that most architectural historians have neglected its significance: but without understanding this almost incomprehensible notion, it is impossible to discern the underlying reasons for Scotland’s architectural heritage. It explains why there are so many castles and so few classical country houses, and why my great-grandfather, like so many of his contemporaries, should have added battlements to the walls at Wemyss when there had been none before. The battlements were not intended to be picturesque. Their purpose was to make the house look older than it really was: to give the impression that the family was descended from McDuff, the mythical Thane of Fife, and was, therefore, one of the oldest and noblest in Scotland.

At first sight, this may look like a glossy coffee-table book in which the illustrations bear little relevance to the text; in reality, it is a social history that sets out to explain in layman’s terms what it was that encouraged the Scots to become so preoccupied with their history and lineage and why the notion should have proved so enduring. It also examines the country houses of the post-Restoration era from the perspective of the patron, rather than the architect, in order to establish the underlying nature of Scotland’s castle culture: where the money and the cultural inspiration came from and how the country’s leading architects interpreted their clients’ aspirations. Finally, I have constructed a personal tour of ten surviving houses - castles and classical houses - which explores the reasons for their aesthetic appearance and their internal arrangement, and provides a logical explanation for Scotland’s distinctive country-house heritage.

Acknowledgments

Had I appreciated at the outset just how difficult it would prove to complete an illustrated history book I am not sure that I would have embarked upon the task in the first place. Without the generosity, help and enthusiasm of an army of trustees, proprietors, academics, archivists and custodians, this book would never have come to fruition.

To compile a book containing more than two hundred illustrations would have been impossible without the generous financial support of the Strathmartine Trust. However, I also owe a huge debt of gratitude to those who allowed me to wander about their houses in pursuit of suitable photographic material: the Duke of Buccleuch, the Earl of Strathmore, the Earl of Wemyss and March, the Hon. Gerald and Edward Maitland-Carew and the trustees of the Thirlestane Castle Trust, Ken and David Murdoch, Donald Fothergill, the Trustees of the Wemyss 1952 Trust and my long-suffering brother and sister-in-law, Michael and Charlotte. I should also thank Ian Gow and the trustees of the National Trust for Scotland for arranging access to Culzean and the House of Dun, Rachel Kennedy and Historic Scotland for access to Duff House and all those guides and curators who shared their extensive knowledge with me: John Mair, Paul Pomfret, Gordon Nelson, John McKenna, Colin Bevan, Nicola Irvine and Hilary Wilkie. There was the invaluable assistance of Jamie Montgomery, Jed Gordon, Tony Gorzkowski and Gordon Clarke who provided vital images; but without a talented and patient photographer there would have been no illustrations and it is the inestimable Fiona Hutchings who deserves the credit for the book's aesthetic appearance.

When I did eventually track down the portraits of the patrons, many of which are now spread far and wide, their owners were invariably prepared to allow their inclusion, and I am particularly grateful for their help: the Earl of Elgin and Kincardine and Lady Georgiana Bruce, the Earl of Mar and Kellie, the Earl of Southesk, the Hon. Peregrine Moncreiffe, Bill Drummond-Moray, Michael Rome, Robert Innes-Smith and the Trustees of the Ailsa Trust. What is more, Keith and Elizabeth Adam not only provided access to the portraits of Keith's illustrious ancestors, but allowed me to include examples from their extensive collection of Robert Adam's landscape drawings.

To gather up the colour photographs was one thing, but to assemble the etchings and the architectural drawings and to unearth the research material was quite another. Once again, the staff of the different archives, libraries and collections were invariably both patient and helpful: the Royal Collection, the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland, the National Archive of Scotland, the National Library of Scotland, the National Gallery of Scotland, the Royal

Institute of British Architects, the British Library, the Sir John Soane Museum, the National Trust, the National Trust for Scotland, Perth Museum and Art Gallery and the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library at Yale University. To the Trustees of these many and varied institutions, I am most grateful for granting the rights to reproduce material from their collections.

Of the many academics who have shared their knowledge and research, I am particularly indebted to John Dunbar who was generous enough to bequeath to me on his retirement his collection of papers relating to houses of the post-Restoration era; to Margaret Stewart who helped me understand the architecture and landscape-design of the Earl of Mar; to Prof. Konrad Ottenheim of the University of Utrecht who explained the classical architecture of the Dutch Republic; to Adam Bowett who revealed the secrets of British cabinet-making in the late seventeenth century; and to the happy band of post-graduate researchers at the University of Dundee who willingly shared their revelations: Matthew Davis, Kate Newland, William Napier and Michael Pearce. Thank you all for your invaluable assistance.

Under normal circumstances I would have dedicated this book to Fiona, Molly, Elizabeth and Jamie, my wife and children, for the love and support that they have given me, but three weeks before its final deadline, my good friend, mentor and inspiration, Charles McKean died. I was the first ‘mature’ student to join Charles at the University of Dundee and spent countless hours discussing the nuances of Scottish country-house architecture, during which I experienced the astonishing breadth of his knowledge and the forensic nature of his mind. For nearly fifteen years, Charles single-handedly represented Scottish architectural history in Europe, giving papers on all manner of obscure architectural topics. In 2005 his talent was rewarded when members of the ‘Colloque’ visited Scotland, only to discover that, ‘all was not quite as it first appeared’. It is as a confirmed ‘European’ that Charles would, I am sure, wish to be remembered.

Charles had kindly agreed to edit the ‘Noble Houses’ and to write a foreword for the book. He was able to complete the editing, but as his health failed, it became increasingly evident that he would be unable to complete the foreword. I am particularly honoured that Konrad Ottenheim, one of Europe’s foremost experts on the development of classical architecture, who reviewed my own doctoral thesis, has agreed to fulfil this task.

To Charles McKean, one of the world’s great ‘life enhancers’.....

Chapter 1

Ancestry and Architecture



Fig. 3
Wemyss Castle,
misattributed as Dunottar,
illustrated in *Theatrum
Scotiae* by Johan Slezer,
1693.

‘All of the gentlemen’s houses are strong castles,
they being so treacherous to one another,
that they are forc’d to defend themselves in
strongholds; they are commonly built upon
some single rock in the sea, or some high
precipice near the mid-land, with many towers
and strong iron grates before their windows
... The people are proud, arrogant bloody
barbarous and inhuman butchers.
Couzenage and theft is in perfection among
them and they are perfect English haters.’

Thomas Kirke,
a visitor to Scotland, 1672.⁴

Thomas Kirke was one of a number of English visitors who kept journals as they travelled around Scotland at the end of the seventeenth century and each of them appears to have been struck by the same singular feature: the landscape was dotted with castles. What is more, they all drew a similar conclusion. They looked up at the battlements, the towers and the military devices and at once assumed that the inhabitants of these castles were still living in the Dark Ages when bloodfeuds and bullying had been a common occurrence. (Fig. 3) In reality, however, nothing could have been further from the truth. By the seventeenth century, the Scottish nobility was as cosmopolitan and enlightened as any in Western Europe.⁵ So, what was it that led the English to such an unfortunate misconception?

According to Sir Roger North, who lived in Norfolk at the end of the seventeenth century and wrote knowledgeably about country-house architecture, houses built ‘castle fashion’ had become obsolete in England during the reign of King James I:

‘A house was not esteemed great, without a tower at the gate, and a moat, defence enough against any sudden assault. And this held out till neer the Scotch union [1603]. For wee see most ancient seats to be battlemented, toured and moated ... After the Scotch union, when pease was establish’t, and not before, did building in England come to be reformed, after the Italian and French examples.’⁶ (author’s bold)

After the castle had fallen out of fashion, English architecture had enjoyed a brief interlude of extravagant ‘prodigy’ houses, like Hatfield and Audley End, when the conspicuous display of wealth had been considered both acceptable and desirable. With the financial strictures of the Civil War and Cromwell’s Interregnum, however, perceptions began to change and it was in this new era of economy and restraint that the compact classical house became so enormously popular.⁷ Not only did its diminutive size fit the pocket of the recently impoverished English landowner, but its classical features provided a degree of comfort to the rising generation of merchants and professional men who could be sure that their new houses displayed connotations of a refined culture. (Fig. 4) It was against this background that Thomas Kirke and his fellow travellers made their disparaging comments about the profusion of castles in Scotland. To the English who had grown accustomed to the refinement of the compact classical villa, the presence of so many castles signified a culture that was old-fashioned and retrospective.

Fig. 4
Chevening House in Kent,
progenitor of the English
classical country house,
illustrated in *Vitruvius
Britannicus*, vol. 2, 1717.

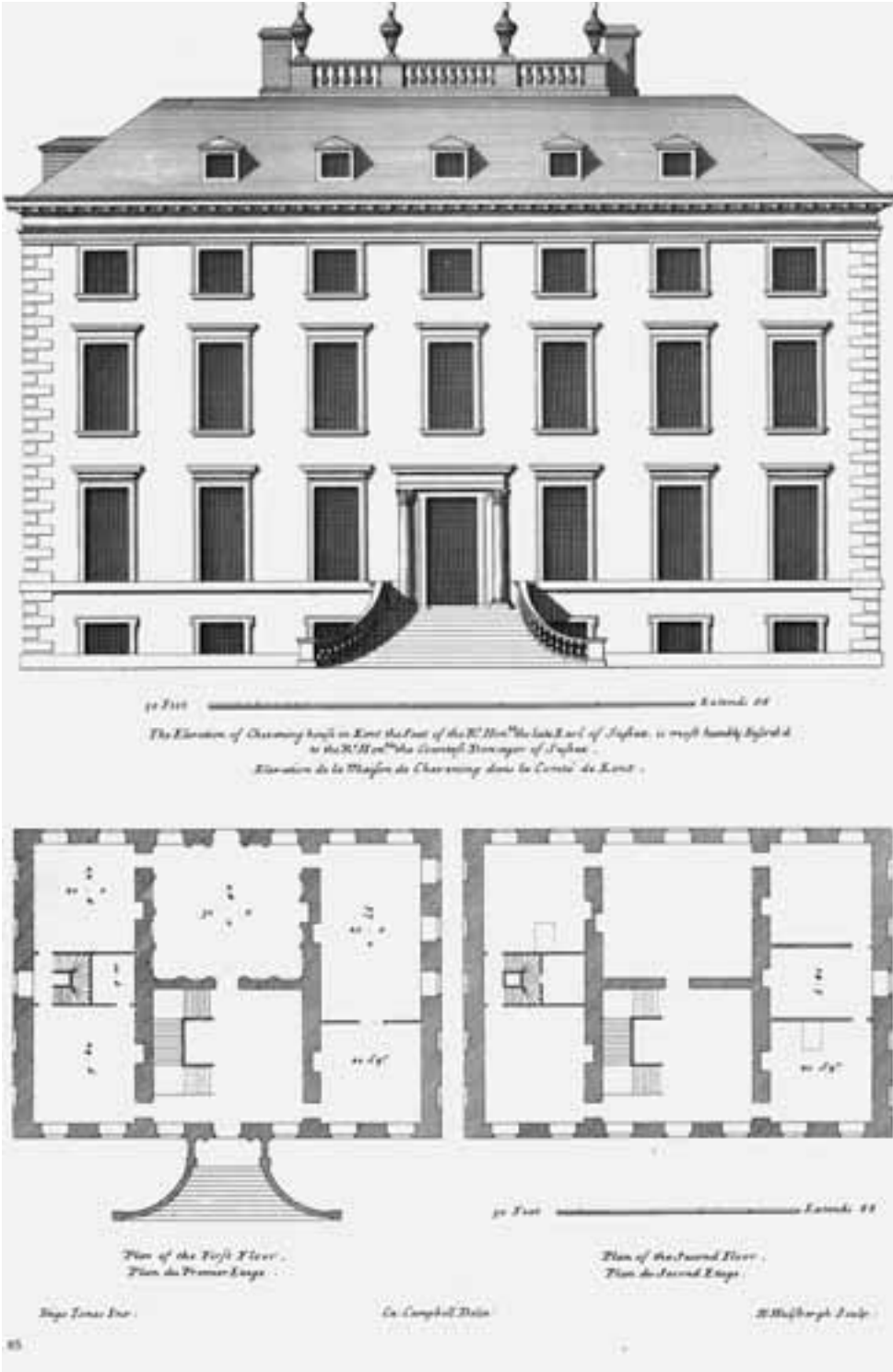




Fig. 5
Neat classical boxes: the
Buitenplaats of Goudestein
at Maarsse on the
River Vecht.

The popularity of the compact classical house was not confined only to England: a similar phenomenon occurred in Holland during the Golden Age of the seventeenth century. The classical house perfectly suited the aspirations of the eminent citizens, government officials and wealthy merchants who were the most important clients for housebuilding during the period. They too could relate to the moderation and restraint of the ‘dignified citizen’s house’ and were reassured by its position within the system of the classical theory of architecture.⁸ So why, if it became so fashionable in England and Holland, did the Scots choose to ignore the compact classical house and persevere with their antiquated castles? A very few classical villas were built in Scotland in the immediate aftermath of the Restoration in 1660, but it was not until the mid eighteenth century that their number increased, and even then there were still those who preferred their houses ‘castle-fashion’, rather than ‘classical’.⁹ The reason for their reluctance was summed up very succinctly by Sir Robert Kerr, a member of the King’s Bedchamber, who wrote to his son, Lord Lothian, in Scotland with recommendations for the reconstruction of the house of Ancram:

‘By any meanes do not take away the battlement, as some gave me counsaile to do, as Dalhousy your nyghbour did, for that is the grace of the house, and makes it looke lyk a castle, and henc so nobleste.’¹⁰ (author’s bold)

Although the castle had become outdated in England, it still remained a potent symbol of noble status in Scotland: as it did in many other countries in Northern Europe.

The same rich burgers who had been responsible for the popularity of the compact classical house in Holland, began to build summer houses in the country (*buitenplaats*) and they chose as their favoured location the banks of the river Vecht in the province of Utrecht:

‘Both sides of the way are lined with the country-houses and gardens of opulent citizens, as fine as gilt statues and clipped hedges can make them. Their number is quite astonishing: from Amsterdam to Utrecht, full thirty miles, we beheld no other objects than endless avenues and stiff parterres scrawled and flourished in patterns like the embroidery of an old maid’s work-bag’.¹¹ (Fig.5)



Fig. 6

Left

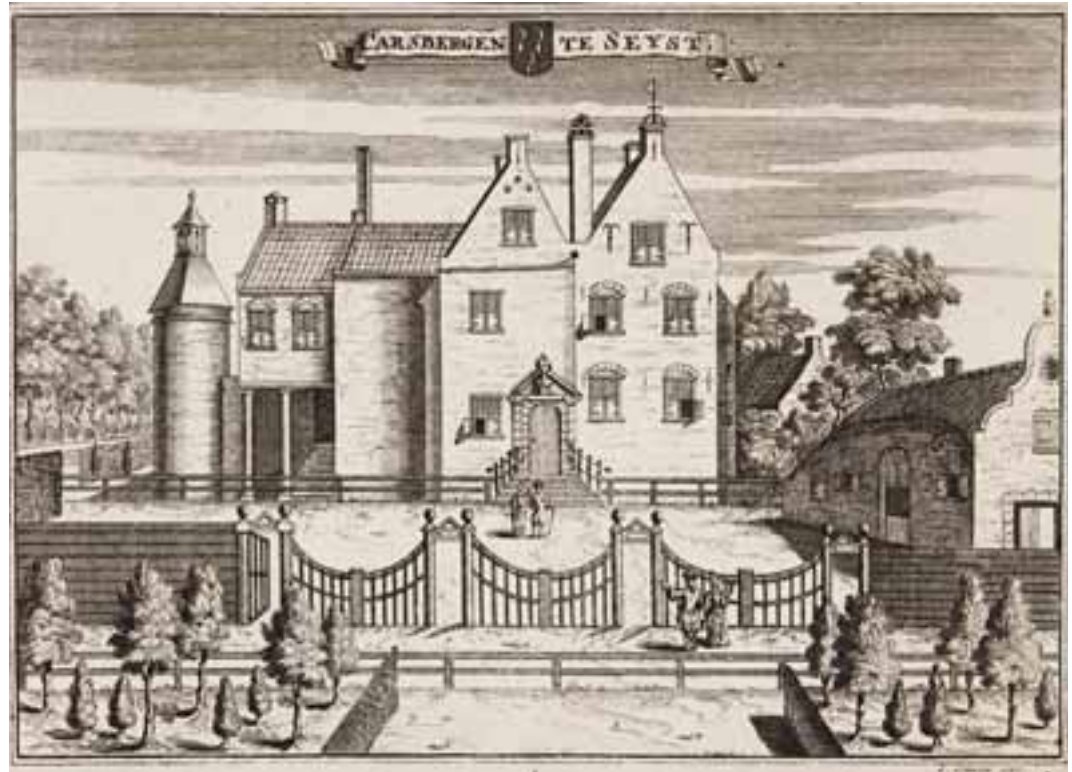
The *Ridderhofstad* of Renswoude: the traditional symbols of the drawbridge, the moat and the tower.

.....

Fig. 7

Right

The *Ridderhofstad* of Kersbergen in Zeist in 1700, illustrated in *De Riddermatighe Huysen en Gesichten in de Provincie van Utrecht*, by Caspar Specht.



Despite the restrained classical architecture of their houses, not everyone was happy with what they perceived to be a bourgeois invasion, least of all the *Ridderschap* of Utrecht: the noble families that had lived in the province for generations, who felt threatened by the newly-rich incomers. There was no way in which they could compete with the wealth of the burgers and so they were forced to adopt an alternative measure of status in order to retain their self-respect. When they sought to modernise their houses in the seventeenth century, they chose to accentuate the traditional symbols of the *Ridderhofstad*: the drawbridge, the moat and the tower.¹² (Figs. 6, 7) Much the same process was repeated in France, where a fierce rivalry arose during the seventeenth century between the ancient nobility, the *noblesse d'epée*, and the new generation of rich government officials who had acquired estates and titles in pursuit of noble status, the *noblesse de robe*. Having amassed enormous fortunes from the office of *Surintendant des Finances*, Rene de Longueil and Nicolas Fouquet commissioned new chateaux of breath-taking extravagance in the hope of impressing the king and the leaders of the court.¹³ So overtly ostentatious were the chateaux of *Maisons* and *Vaux-le-Vicomte*, (Fig. 8) however, that they incurred the resentment, rather than the admiration of the *noblesse d'epée*, who considered such conspicuous display of wealth to be both vulgar and inappropriate. When





Fig. 8
Above
The extravagant new chateau of Maisons at Laffitte (1630-51), designed by Francois Mansart for Rene de Longueil, *Surintendant des Finances* to Louis XIII.

.....
Fig. 9
Left
The chateau of Blancafort near Bourges. When the chateaux of the *noblesse d'epée* were modernised, the medieval towers were retained as the sign of a seigneurial residence.

members of the *noblesse d'epée* came to modernise their ancient family chateaux, they followed the same course as the *Ridderschap* of Utrecht. They too retained the traditional symbols of the tower and the moat, so that their houses were readily distinguishable from those of the newly-rich.¹⁴ (Fig. 9)

In projecting these traditional symbols, the ancient nobilities of Europe were deliberately reverting to their medieval origins, when society had been divided into three separate Estates: the clergy, the military and the manual labourer. It had been from the second estate, the military element of society that the nobility had originally evolved as a distinctive group with its own ideology.¹⁵ They had promoted the military ethos that had set them apart from clergymen and labourers, and had set great store by the landed estates and privileges that they had been awarded in return for their support. They had adhered to the principles of inheritance and the pre-eminence of family over personal ambition. It was to these seemingly old-fashioned values that members of the ancient nobility resorted when their influence was threatened by the newly-rich. There was, however, one measure of status that no wealthy government official or merchant could acquire, however great their fortune, and that was an ancient lineage. As a result, many old families



WILLIAM CAMPBELL
1600-1650

WILLIAM CAMPBELL
1650-1700

WILLIAM CAMPBELL
1700-1750

WILLIAM CAMPBELL
1750-1800

WILLIAM CAMPBELL
1800-1850

WILLIAM CAMPBELL
1850-1900

WILLIAM CAMPBELL
1900-1950

WILLIAM CAMPBELL
1950-2000

Fig. 10
The Campbell of Glenorchy
Family Tree, painted by
George Jamesone, 1635. The
family traced their descent
to Duncan ‘the fortunate’ of
Lochawe who died in 1453.

set out to record their origins for posterity. (Fig. 10) In Scotland, the earliest of these family histories had been written by Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington in 1560. The *History of the House of Seytoun* had alleged that the family was descended from Dougall who had been granted the lands and surname of Seytoun by King Alexander I in the twelfth century. In the seventeenth century, however, the number of family histories increased sharply. In 1646, David Hume of Godscroft was commissioned by the 1st Marquess of Douglas to compile, a *Historie of the House and Race of Douglas and Angus*, which traced the family’s origins back to Sholto Douglas, a legendary knight who had fought for the mythical King Solvanus in the eighth century. In 1681, Viscount Strathallan published, the *Genealogy of the most noble and ancient House of Drummond*, which claimed that the family was descended from Maurice, a Hungarian, who had been granted the lands and the surname of Drummond by King Malcolm Canmore. The purpose of these often fanciful genealogies was clear. According to William Drummond of Hawthornden, they were intended to distinguish families of ancient lineage from those who had recently acquired their wealth:

*‘Nobility is that which cannot be bought, for it consists in a high descent and undegenerate race of Ancient Worthies, more adorned with eminent virtues than outward pomp.’*¹⁶

In an economy as rich as the French, where government officials were able to amass enormous fortunes and indulge in flagrant displays of wealth, it is understandable that members of the *noblesse d’epee* should have been so envious that they felt the need to dissociate themselves from the *noblesse de robe*. In Scotland, however, where the economy was so poor, it was very difficult for aspiring government officials to amass sufficient wealth with which to acquire landed estates and join the ranks of the nobility, and therefore it seems improbable that they were regarded with great envy.¹⁷ Could it be that the source of resentment lay in England, rather than Scotland?

Following the Union of the Crowns in 1603, when King James VI had succeeded to the throne of England, the Scottish court had been disbanded. From that moment onwards, any member of the Scottish nobility who sought the king’s influence had been forced to travel to the court in London where he had encountered a way of life that was incomparably richer than the one at home. There was no way, given their relative poverty, that members of the Scottish nobility could match the wealth of their English counterparts. If, on the other hand, they adopted lineage as a

Fig. 11
The Coronation of King
Alexander III on the Moot
Hill at Scone, illustrated
in Walter Bower's,
Scotichronicon, Vol. 1,
c.1440.

measure of status, they could consider themselves to be every bit as noble as the richest and most influential members of the English peerage. Having ascertained that his family lands had been granted by King Solvanus in the eighth century, the Marquess of Douglas could claim with justification that he was the superior of the Duke of Devonshire, whose family had bought Chatsworth as recently as 1549.¹⁸ Yet, there was nothing new about members of the Scottish nobility adopting lineage as a measure of status in the seventeenth century: a similar strategy had been employed for generations. Whenever they had felt oppressed by the power and wealth of the English, the Scots had responded by claiming that their kings were of an older bloodline than the kings of England and therefore their nation, however poor it may have been, was of greater antiquity.¹⁹

As early as 1297, at the inauguration of King Alexander III, a bard had recited in Gaelic the young king's long and illustrious ancestry. (Fig. 11) He had begun by tracing the genealogy of the Scottish kings to Fergus mor mac Ere in AD 500, before embarking upon a list of mythical figures that stretched all the way back to Fergus mac Ferchar who had reigned at the time of Alexander the Great. According to this oral tradition, Alexander III had been able to claim that he was the direct descendant of a royal line that had ruled over the Scots for nearly sixteen hundred years. By the fourteenth century, the mythical origins of the Scottish nation had been committed to paper by John of Fordun, a chantry priest of St Machar's Cathedral in Old Aberdeen.²⁰ In his *Chronica Gentis Scotorum*, Fordun had related in Latin the legend of Gaythelos, the son of Scota an Egyptian princess, who had been driven out of Egypt after refusing to pursue the Israelites across the Red Sea. He and his adherents, the Scots (after Scota), had wandered westwards in search of a new home and had settled briefly at Brigancia in Spain where they had constructed a tower of great height. (Fig. 12) On a clear day, Gaythelos had climbed to the top of the tower where he had spied an island in the far distance. Thinking that this might have served as a home for the Scots, he had despatched his son, Iber, who had quickly taken possession of the island, which had come to be known as Hibernia or Ireland. After several expeditions, the Scots had settled in Hibernia and had established their seat of government at Tara, where Simon Brec, a descendant of Iber, had placed a 'marbled chair' with magical properties that was said to have been brought by Gaythelos from Egypt. It had been the descendants of Simon Brec who had then spread to the uninhabited land of Alba and Fergus mac Ferchar who had become its first king. For eight hundred years, the legend continued, the Scots had held sway in Alba and had permitted the Picts from

Fig. 12
 Gaythelos and Scota sailing
 west in search of a new
 home, illustrated in Walter
 Bower's, *Scotichronicon*,
 Vol. II, c.1440.

Aquitania to live alongside them, until they had been driven out by the Roman Emperor, Maximus. In AD 500, Fergus mor mac Ere had returned to his homeland and had expelled the Romans with the assistance of the Picts; whereupon the Picts and Scots had continued to live happily alongside one another. In AD 843, however, Kenneth mac Alpin, the king of Scots, had succeeded to the throne of Pictland and the Picts had simply disappeared from the annals of history. Fordun's mythical account has now been committed to the realms of fantasy. Picts are considered to have been the indigenous people of Alba, and Scots who had lived in north-east Ireland had only established their diminutive kingdom of Dalriada on the Argyllshire coast after the Romans had departed. Yet the legend of Gaythelos and Fergus mac Ferchar played a vital role in establishing the national identity of the Scots. By tracing the genealogy of the Scottish kings to 300 BC, they could claim to be one of the oldest nations in Europe.²¹

Until the Union of the Crowns in 1603, the Scots had lived in a state of almost permanent apprehension at the threat of domination by the English. They had been subjected to the aggressive invasion of King Edward I in the thirteenth century, and had been terrorized again by King Henry VIII in the sixteenth century. On each occasion, the English king had cited the same pretext for his claims to sovereignty: the *Historia Regum Britanniae* of Geoffrey of Monmouth. This mythical account of the origins of Britain had related the story of Brutus, a great grandson of Aeneas, who had set sail after the fall of Troy with a party of Trojans in search of a new home. Travelling westwards, Brutus had been guided by the goddess Diana to settle on an island inhabited by giants, called Britain, where he had founded the city of Troia Nova on the banks of the river Thames. Having established this settlement, Brutus had then divided Britain between his three sons: the eldest, Loerinus had been granted Loegria (England); the second, Albanaetus had been given Albania (Scotland); and the youngest, Kamber, had received Cambria (Wales). Shortly after his reign had begun, Albanaetus had been slain by Humber, king of the Huns, whereupon the people of Albania had turned to Loerinus for protection, uniting both nations under the same ruler. It had been as the successor of Loerinus that both Edward I and Henry VIII had claimed sovereignty over the Scots. They had not, however, claimed direct lineal descent; instead, they had argued that the feudal superiority of Brutus and Loerinus had been bequeathed to the kings of England. It was in this one vital respect that the Scots had been able to claim superiority. On the evidence of Fordun's origin myth, their royal line was of greater antiquity than the English.²²