Castles and Thrones

About: Miles Glendinning & Aonghus MacKechnie, *Scotch Baronial: Architecture and National Identity in Scotland*, London & New York, Bloomsbury

By Clarisse Godard Desmarest

How can architectural styles reflect political shifts? *Scotch Baronial* analyses many of Scotland's most important buildings through the lens of political history, presenting architecture as the consequence or invigorator of mainstream history.

This book is the first comprehensive and detailed analysis of the Scotch Baronial, a Revival style which had its heyday in the 19ᵗʰ century and which presented itself as distinctly Scottish. Today's critics who are anxious about what they consider the 'threat' of Scottish independence may decide that all they see in this revival of Scottish heritage of the age of an independent Scotland is simply 'Scottish nationalism'; but hopefully, they will read on to see that the book instead stresses the paradox of clients and architects striving for Scottish political inexistence precisely when there was simultaneously a strong demand for ostentatiously Scottish architecture. In fact, this is the key point which the authors demonstrate: that while the Scotch Baronial appears to signal a Scottish nationalist culture, in fact its patrons and architects were British nationalists; this was a pro-establishment 'British', or UK, style.

In the complex development of Scottish history the authors establish a convincing chronology, and distinguish a First (pre-1603 to 1750) and a Second Castle

Age (1750 to now). In their analysis of both Castle Ages, the authors have sought to pinpoint the political or cultural significance of and motivations for architectural choices or decisions; an approach opposed to the more mainstream restricted stylistic analyses—to be found in building inventories or in the *Buildings of Scotland* series. The changes in architectural style are related consistently to the political shifts; the long-standing tension between Stuart/Jacobite and Hanoverian factions, and to dominating cultural values like Romanticism.[1] This presentation of the architecture as the consequence or invigorator of mainstream history gives the book an almost (for Scotland) unique take on the architecture.

The Stuarts and the Castellated Tradition

The authors dwell first upon the castle culture, a major strand in Scottish architecture, which is reflected in the architectural production since the Middle Ages and in the twentieth/ twenty-first century heritage-based approach to conservation. The national style developed into the form of a castellated architecture from the twelfth or thirteenth to the seventeenth centuries; stone castles were built, possibly as early as the time of King David I (reigned 1124-53). As victor in its Wars of Independence (a lengthy English military campaign seeking Scotland's conquest and absorption within England), Scotland affirmed its independence. A martial national rhetoric developed, which was centred upon the victory against the English at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314; and—consequently, according to the authors— Scotland's architecture was thereafter made symbolically martial; that is, castellated, considered to be the appropriate style for denoting a martial people, and a people always on guard against enemy invasion, given that (rather as was the case with France) even during peacetime, English monarchs maintained a claim to rule Scotland. This 'Scottish castle' culture developed and flourished over the centuries before retreating in the eighteenth century, when it became overshadowed by the new taste for an increasingly triumphant Age of Classicism; architect William Adam developed a language suitable for a base of wealthy clients who wanted an architecture comparable with that of contemporary English and continental models. There ended what the authors denote the 'First Castle Age'. Publications on this period include those by William Douglas Simpson, Stewart Cruden, Nigel Tranter, Chris Tabraham,

---

1 The Jacobites sought to restore the House of Stuart to the British throne. Staging rebellions in Scotland in 1715, 1719 and 1745, they attempted to overthrow the ruling Hanoverian Royal Family.

Deborah Howard and Harry Gordon Slade. Recently *Scottish Baronial Castles 1250-1450* (2009) was published by documentary specialist Michael Brown. The topic of medieval castles has also been addressed by Fiona Watson, and Richard Oram has covered more generally the topic of Scottish medieval architecture. Miles Glendinning and Aonghus MacKechnie by contrast, here, analyse the cultural paradigms, ideologies and models which were first used in a period that lasted until the eighteenth century (the First Castle Age), and which were later reinvigorated by revivalists.

With the Second castle Age, the national style which had developed over these early centuries was now revived, reaching a climax when it was used in the middle of the nineteenth century by David Bryce and his followers. This 'Scotch Baronial' constitutes the main subject of the book; the term 'Scotch' (use of which here may seem puzzling) is of course the English term for 'Scottish'. But here it is used for historical accuracy, because the word was adopted by establishment Scots for use at the time. For the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, Alan MacDonald has offered a new interpretation of the architecture of the Scottish parliament, while Ian Campbell has argued that Scotland and the Continent shared similarities in their architecture in the Renaissance period. Miles Glendinning and Aonghus MacKechnie, authors of a *History of Scottish Architecture* (1996), make a similar point in their publication by setting the Revival style in Scotland within an international context; but what is original about this new research is that the authors stress the contradictions of the Second Castle Age by addressing the tensions at stake between national identity, improvement, Empire and modernity and how this translated, from the second half of the eighteenth century, into a revival of national castellated style. Few books have yet covered this theme, with the exception of Michael Davis's *Scots Baronial* (1996).

An Architecture of 'Martial Independence'

Chapters 1-3 present the roots of this Revival style, and set the context for the discussion on the Scotch Baronial. Castellated architecture flourished under the prestige of Scotland's feudal elites—the Stuart monarchy and the landed classes. The martial virtues which—it was claimed—had secured the country's independence against the English, and which was celebrated in the triumphalist nationalist history of the *Scotichronicon* (1440s), translated into the architecture of Scotland's secular buildings and even some churches. The European model of the residential tower (such as Vincennes), chosen for King David II's tower c.1370 at Edinburgh Castle,

transmogrified into what was to become the ubiquitous and martially-symbolic tower house, or 'the Scottish castle'. Other features such as the turn-of-sixteenth-century imperial Crown spire found at King's College, Aberdeen, and at Edinburgh's St Giles, and triumphal arches, all underlined the message of Scottish independence. Symbolically, the monarch was in charge of the kingdom, and the royal palaces of Linlithgow, Falkland, Dunfermline, Stirling and Edinburgh were all reconstructed in a castellated national character, most notably during the reigns of James IV (1488-1513) and James V (1513-1542). This narrative was replicated in the architecture of the wealthy elite, which typically used such external ornaments as stepped gables and corbelled towers. Despite the castellated tradition which signalled the required martial imagery, the Chapel Royal project of 1594 at Stirling evidences the readiness to adopt other styles to meet changing political needs (in this case, to impress foreigners to the court of King James VI); the building, and its classical proportions replicating Solomon's Temple, was an early example of symmetry and proportion. Roger Mason and Michael Lynch have also helped contextualize such medieval motifs as the imperial Crown.

After the Union of the Crowns in 1603 when a Scot (James VI and I) now occupied England's throne, the castle age continued unabated. However, as chapter 2 explains, at the palaces of Edinburgh and Linlithgow—partially reconstructed 1610s-20s for James VI—the introduction of (English-looking) parapetted flat roofs combined with traditional Scottish features such as extruded stair towers already delivered a message that combined Scottish nationalist assertion and British unionism. The martial discourse, and its associated architectural language, lived on in the houses of the nobility at Huntly Castle, Craigievar, and Castle Fraser. The castellated tradition and its adaptation to the new classical ethos can be seen at small-scale urban *hôtels* and at large public buildings like George Heriot's Hospital (built from 1628) and Parliament House (1632-8), in Edinburgh.

Chapter 3 centres on the post-1660 upsurge of architectural activity by the royalist elite. Following the reconstruction of Holyrood Palace (1671-8), the chief royal palace, courtiers rebuilt their houses in a castellated, yet classical style as exemplified at Glamis Castle, or Drumlanrig Castle; and while Kinross House was classical, it was aligned upon an ancient castle with important historical associations, notably with Mary, Queen of Scots. This meant that with the fall of the direct line of Stuart monarchs in 1689 the castle style became too closely associated with the outgoing Stuarts, and therefore was brought to an end; this is the subject of chapter 4. In the half century that followed the Revolution of 1689, the castle style remained associated with a dangerous,

Jacobite past. No more royal palaces were commissioned because the monarchy no longer intended to see Scotland, and the Hanoverian nobility embraced the northern European classicism established both in England and in the Low Countries; in the decades that followed the parliamentary Union, the dominating fashion was for a purer classicism.

The authors explain that it was only after the conclusion of dynastic conflict in 1745/6 that Scotland's castle culture got underway. Paradoxically, perhaps, it was precisely at the time of the consolidation of the 'new Britain' that Scotland started to revive castle-building. And this Second Castle Age was inaugurated by the new castle commissioned in 1743 by the third Duke of Argyll at Inveraray. The building, designed by English architect Roger Morris, took the form of an impressive castle with side turrets and crenellated parapets. Because it was built for a prominent Whig and Hanoverian family (whose base was in the Scottish Highlands), the castle imagery could no longer be associated with Jacobitism. On the contrary, it came to represent the historical roots of the new, united Britain.

Unionism, Enlightenment and Romanticism: The Revival of the Castle Age

The Second Castle Age (chapters 5-10) spanned two centuries, initially through the impact of Robert and James Adam (e.g. at Culzean Castle), as a monumental symbol of a new increasingly confident unionist nationalism. This notion, also used by scholars in political and social history, refers to a period when it was safe for Scotland to develop its own separate national identity within Britain without this being perceived as a challenge to the Union. The focus was now on improvement and colonial expansionism; Scotland took pride in the Empire in which its participation was arguably more significant than the English one.

Although in England, like France or Germany, 'Gothic' was largely seen as a mark of national identity, in Scotland, by contrast, Gothic detailing was seen, at least by Presbyterians, as suggesting pre-Reformation Catholicism and Episcopacy; so, in Scotland, the castle culture translated nationalistic pride in a British context (chapter 5). The cult of Ossian and its celebration of the Highland castle culture was typical of this Revivalism which affected both literature and art. Castle Huntly (restored by James Playfair and John Paterson, 1777-95), Gordon Castle (John Baxter, 1769),

Douglas Castle (John and James Adam, 1757), Melville Castle (James Playfair, 1786-91), Wedderburn (Robert and James Adam, 1771-5) and Culzean Castle (1777-92) are emblematic of a new architecture nourished by Ossianic Romanticism. The general climate of 'Scotophobia' and the prejudice against the Scots was now faded[2], and Scotland's 'wildness' was subtly appropriated by the Romantics. The castellated architecture, revived at Inveraray, appealed to Tory politicians; including the manager of Hanoverian Scotland from the 1780s, Henry Dundas, first Viscount Melville, at Melville Castle. The Scots more commonly regarded themselves as both Scottish and British, and Edinburgh's New Town took shape as a British nationalist landscape, notably in the naming of streets and squares; the monarchy was celebrated at George Street, Princes Street, etc., and the union at Rose Street and Thistle Street.

Chapter 6 of the book 'National Architecture in the Age of Revolution, 1790-1820' explains that in the context of popular unrest and more democratic demands from the 'radicals'—potentially threatening the established social order—Scotland was rehabilitated as an honoured partner in the Union. Paradoxically this pervaded in the celebration of Scotland's national heroes, like William Wallace (1270-1305) and King Robert the Bruce (1274-1329), whose cult was repackaged to fill in the narrative of Scotland's supposed equal status within the Union. In line with the shared British identity, English heritage—which included Gothic, Tudor and Jacobean—unsurprisingly pervaded in Scotland, and a new, if transient, demand arose for English architects (for instance, William Wilkins's Dalmeny House was built 1814-7 in a neo-Tudor style for the fourth Earl of Rosebery); while Scottish designers quickly imitated the English Gothic or Tudor styles.

Abbotsford, Scott's family home near Melrose Abbey in the Borders, exemplified Tory unionist-nationalism; a celebration of eclectic antiquarianism referencing the Scottish past in the full spirit of unionism. The symmetry of the Palladian plan was therefore rejected at Abbotsford, and specific elements of historic Scottish buildings were replicated. This fashion echoed the Celtic revival (an offshoot of Baronial), and the renewed popularity or re-packaging of old traditions such as tartan, or 'Highland Games'. From the 1820s architect William Burn spread the new Scotch baronial idiom into urban and country house architecture, for a Tory clientèle.

---

2 The prejudice against the Scots dominated in England in the first half of the 18th century, and was exacerbated by the last Jacobite uprising and the ensuing defeat at Culloden in 1746 ; the distinction between Lowlanders and Highlanders, Jacobites and Covenanters was somewhat blurred in England. William Ferguson, The Identity of the Scottish Nation ; An Historical Quest (Edinburgh : Edinburgh University Press, 1998), 227-8.

His codification (which was probably in hand prior to Abbotsford) of the style was essential for the subsequent development of the Scotch Baronial. The style was not, however, solely the choice of the Tories and William Henry Playfair, a pupil of William Stark, equally referenced the style for instance at Bonaly, the house he remodelled in the 1830s for the famous writer and judge (a Whig) Henry Cockburn; or at Floors Castle (1837-45). Scotch Revivalism made a key influence in Edinburgh from 1827 onwards, when improvements were made to the city—primarily in the Old Town, thereby underlining the contrast between it and the New Town opposite.

Scottish National Identity in the Age of Modernity and Empire: the 'Scotch Baronial'

Chapter 8 focuses on the heyday of the Scotch Baronial, in the mid nineteenth century, and on the contributions of architects such as Robert Billings, who documented the ancient 'prototypes', and David Bryce, foremost exponent of the style. The assertion of a national identity within a British context expressed itself very significantly at Balmoral. When she purchased the Highland estate in 1848, following a visit at Taymouth Castle in 1842, Queen Victoria wanted 'Scotch architecture'. By that time the revival of the castle culture had been framed and popularised by the writings of Sir Walter Scott, and Prince Albert, who was the prime instigator in the acquisition and construction of Balmoral, characteristically referenced Abbotsford in its design. The architectural decisions made by the royals at Balmoral, and the Highlandism of the Queen, gave further impetus to the Scotch Baronial; and no clearer evidence exists than Balmoral to show that this was a style which denoted the establishment.

By the late nineteenth century and the turn of the following century, a more monumental simplicity appeared in the work of Rowand Anderson and Sydney Mitchell; this development of the Scotch Baronial, analysed in chapter 9, was a 'Scotch traditionalism'. It coincided with a changing political environment in which there were demands for self-rule; the Scottish Home Rule Association was established in 1886, seeking to promote a Scottish legislature and to make Scotland's voice better heard in Westminster. At Dean Village, in Edinburgh, Sydney Mitchell adapted in twentieth-century social housing design features of old Scottish tenement, civic and lairds' architecture.

The last chapter turns to Scottish architectural identity in the age of modernism. Built after the Great War to commemorate those who gave their lives for the nation, the Scottish National War Memorial in Edinburgh Castle is a good example of Scotland's attempt to combine modernism and tradition, in a combined use of motifs present at Scotland's historical royal palaces, notably Falkland and Stirling. But it was in this period that Baronial 'died'—its end coinciding with the rise of a new political Scottishness when demands for Scottish independence began to be made. The book closes where the authors highlight the Scottish Parliament building at Holyrood—a project initiated in 1998—where the Catalan architect Enric Miralles produced a design which was a rather different attempt at referencing the national architecture, in an age dominated by new fashions and ideals.

This book fits into the historiography which developed since the 1980-90s, and it presents what superficially appears to have been a Scottish nationalist culture. But the authors successfully demonstrate that this style—arguably the first coherently-formulated national revivalism—was in fact used by the British elite and was not connected to any political demands for an independent Scotland. This publication constitutes an in-depth analysis of a style which appeared in *The Scottish Château* (2001), *Scotland's Castle Culture* (2011), and *Gothic Revival 1745-1845* (1975). *Scotch Baronial: Architecture and National Identity in Scotland* is indebted to the work carried out by David Walker; his recent online publication *Dictionary of Scottish Architects* has greatly enhanced the overall knowledge of the topic. It can only be wished that the authors of the *Scotch Baronial* had been given more space to expand their study, but equally the sharp and concise writing provides the reader with a rich and thought-provoking overview of Scotland's pre-eminent national style.