

EDINBURGH CASTLE UNDER SIEGE 1559–1573

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IN a previous volume of this journal the author reviewed the information on sieges of Edinburgh Castle from 1093 to 1547. In the latter year many contemporaries would have believed that recent events had shown that the castle was impregnable, and its capture was not viewed as an appropriate objective by the English, then hoping to hold large parts of Scotland and cow the Scots into submission. Nor were serious efforts taken to win the castle in the fighting in 1559 and 1560 which saw the end of the French supported administration of Mary of Guise and the establishment of the Reformed Church. The ‘long siege’ of 1571–73 is the main subject matter of this article, one of the great sieges of British history. Its conclusion marked a significant turning point in the reign of the young King James VI, helping to create the political conditions in which he eventually united the British Isles by succeeding to the throne of England. It also showed that even an impregnable fortress like Edinburgh could not withstand effective bombardment by large guns.

1559

In 1559 Edinburgh Castle was held by John Lord Erskine (later Earl of Mar) who, despite his Protestant sympathies, refused to give access to the castle to the Lords of the Congregation during their stay in Edinburgh. He argued that he had been appointed by Parliament and only that body could require him to relinquish his control. On their departure in November the Queen Regent, Mary of Guise and her French supporters, fared no better in trying to win over Erskine, and instead took some steps to win it by force. Faggots (gabions) were erected by the French, and Erskine called on support from his friends who brought an ensign (presumably an experienced soldier) and a gunner. When they were attempting to gain entry via the ‘Low Postern’ (? The gate adjacent to the Well-house Tower) they were spotted by the French who took the gunner prisoner. A party issued from the castle and in the ensuing melee, fought from

the blockhouse (spur) as far as the Butter Tron (the Weigh House at the top of the Lawnmarket), they managed to free their man.¹

1560

Despite giving shelter to Mary of Guise from 1 April 1560 until her death a few weeks later on 11 June, the keeper of the castle, Lord Erskine, attempted to maintain his neutrality. There is no evidence of defections from the castle to one side or the other. The fees of all 14 of the royal gunners based in the castle continued to be paid and they received an 'extraordinary' payment—what we would nowadays recognise as 'subsistence'—for staying within the castle.²

In April Lord Grey of Wilton, the English commander then supervising the siege of Leith, was of the opinion that Edinburgh Castle was winnable, but was expressly forbidden to attempt it, presumably not just because such a course would be a distraction from the job at Leith, which was proving difficult enough, but also because of the political embarrassment of having to deal with the queen dowager should the enterprise be successful.³ Meanwhile on 29 April Mary of Guise wrote to her confederates that she had victualled the castle as best as she could and had caused improvements to be made to the defences of the gate in the Spur. It

¹ John Knox's *History*, D. Laing (ed.), *The Works of John Knox*, 6 vols (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1841–64), Vol. 2, p. 2; A. Clifford (ed.), *The State Papers and Letters of Sir Ralph Sadler, Knight-Banneret*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Constable, 1809), Vol. 2, p. 157.

² *TA = Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland*, (ed.) T. Dickson, J. B. Paul et al. (Edinburgh, 1877–). [J. B. Paul (ed.) Vol. 7 (1538–1541), (Edinburgh: H.M. Gen. Reg. House); J. B. Paul (ed.), Vol. 10 (1551–1559); J. B. Paul (ed.), Vol. 11 (1559–1566)], x, 332; xi, 6, 27–35, 55, 67, etc.

³ *Cal Scot Papers* 1 = J. Bain (ed.) *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots*, Vol. 1 (1547–1563), (Edinburgh: H.M. Gen. Reg. House, 1898) pp. 388, 391.

is clear that the English had free access to the town of Edinburgh at this time.⁴

1571–73

Despite their decisive victory at Langside on 13 May 1568 and the flight of Queen Mary to England, the cause of the Protestant lords and the young King James was by no means secure.⁵ The lords defeated at Langside who had fled into England soon returned and Huntly was active in support of the queen in the north-east. In 1570, however, the supporters of James VI connived at the English harrying the lands and destroying the houses of many of the borderers who had been the cause of much trouble in England and were also supporters of Queen Mary.⁶ An English army under Sir William Drury, Marshal and Deputy Governor of Berwick, and accompanied by the Earl of Lennox and other Protestant lords, went on to ravage the lands of the Hamiltons, the main supporters of the queen, destroying Hamilton Castle (Cadzow) and Palace, and Kinnel House near Linlithgow, all belonging to the head of the family, the Duke of Chatelherault, and several other Hamilton houses as well.⁷

The English help at this time was undoubtedly crucial in establishing the supporters of James VI and Protestantism in Scotland. They were led by a succession of regents:

⁴ *Cal Scot Papers* 1, pp. 389, 398.

⁵ K. Thompson, 'All things to All Men: Mary Queen of Scots and the Scottish Civil Wars 1568–73', *Journal of the Sydney Society for Scottish History*, Vol. 9 (2001), pp. 1–74, at p. 71.

⁶ G. Buchanan, *The History of Scotland*, J. Aikman (trans.), (Glasgow and Edinburgh, 1827–9), Vol. 2, p. 585; W. K. Boyd (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots*, Vol. 3 (1569–71), (Edinburgh: H. M. Gen. Reg. House, 1903) Vol. 3, Nos 186, 188, 197.

⁷ *Cal Scot Papers* 3, 264.

James Stewart, Earl of Moray (the queen's half-brother)—
murdered by the Hamiltons, 23 January 1570/1

Mathew Stewart, Earl of Lennox, killed by Kirkcaldy's men from
Edinburgh Castle, 4 September 1571

John Erskine, Earl of Mar, died 28 October 1572

James Douglas, Earl of Morton

Lennox had taken cannons from Stirling Castle in 1570 to add strength to the English artillery. He even got equipment and powder from Edinburgh Castle for them, but already the captain of the castle, Sir William Kirkcaldy of Grange, was inclined to favour the cause of Queen Mary, and in future James VI's supporters were to receive no artillery or support from that quarter. Kirkcaldy was a staunch protestant, had earlier sided against Queen Mary, receiving her surrender at Carberry on 15 June 1567, and had been appointed captain of Edinburgh Castle in September of that year by the Regent Moray. He was now to turn himself into the main supporter of the exiled queen and the focus of opposition to the new regime that ruled in the name of James VI with English support. He was totally opposed to the appointment of the Earl of Lennox in 1571 as regent (after the murder of Moray) and resented English intervention in Scotland. He also had a considerable reputation as a soldier, which appears to have been well deserved.⁸

The long siege of 1571–3 is at the heart of a complicated period in Scottish history when civil war raged and the country's future, under James VI rather than his mother Mary, as a Protestant ally of England, was finally thrashed out. As with any internecine struggle, the changing allegiances and friendships of the main players are often difficult to fathom, or even to keep track of, and can sometimes be seen to cut across more political and religious considerations. Kirkcaldy of Grange, either the main villain or hero

⁸ E. Bonner, 'Kirkcaldy, Sir William, of Grange (c. 1520–1573)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). At: <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/15660>. Accessed 5 February 2014.

of the siege depending on one's viewpoint, was certainly at enmity with two of the regents, Lennox and Morton, but John Knox, Minister of St Giles and the main spiritual and moral force behind the supporters of King James, yet seems to have retained a liking for Kirkcaldy and a hope that he would see the errors of his ways.



Figure 1: Bird's-eye view of the siege of May 1573 from Holinshed's *Chronicles*. The prominent, three-tiered structure above the Spur is David's Tower. The Constable's Tower is to its right, the Fore Wall Battery between the two.

There are a plethora of sources and descriptions of this siege, including a recent book by Harry Potter.⁹ The main contemporary sources include journals kept by Scots, principally those referenced here as the *Diurnal* (author unknown) and *Bannatyne's Memorials*, kept by Richard Bannatyne, secretary to John Knox. The *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots* (volumes 3 and 4)

⁹ H. Potter, *Edinburgh Under Siege: 1571-1573* (Stroud: Tempus, 2003).

contains a great wealth of contemporary English and Scottish reports and correspondence on the subject.

A good deal is known about the castle Kirkcaldy had to defend in the years from 1570 to 1573. There is an illustration of the siege in Holinshed's *Chronicles*¹⁰ and there is also a description of the castle made in January 1572/3 by two Englishmen, Rowland Johnson and John Fleming, sent to assess how it might be captured (paraphrased and modernised):

The Castle stands upon a high rock outcrop 600 feet (152m) long and 400 feet (122m) broad. On the fore part to the east, next to the town, is the hall [actually the Palace], 80 feet (20m) long, and next to it Davy's Tower. From it a curtain wall with 6 cannons [The Fore Wall Battery], or similar pieces placed in gun loops, overlook the main street. Behind them, 16 feet (4m) higher up, is another tier of ordnance, and at the north end stands the Constable's Tower. In the bottom of it is the way into the castle with 40 steps.

On the east side there is a spur or bulwark, positioned in front of the rock that is crowned by the curtain wall. The spur is flanked on both sides, and on the south side is the gate to the castle. The Spur is 20 feet (5m) high, vamuired [faced] with turf and baskets [of earth], and furnished with ordnance.

The curtain wall on this side is at least 24 feet (6m) high, and the rock on which it stands at least 30 feet (7.5m) high. Davy's Tower is over 60 feet (15m) high, the Constable's Tower is about 50 feet (13m).¹¹

Part of this ruined spur or blockhouse, originally built in 1547–48 to protect the castle from attack from the east, has recently been located in excavations under the castle Esplanade showing that, at least by the time of its final destruction in 1649, it was defined by a 2m thick stone wall. Its exterior, raked, surface was faced with

¹⁰ G. Ewart and D. Gallagher, *Fortress of the Kingdom: Archaeology and Research at Edinburgh Castle*, Archaeology Report 7 (Edinburgh: Historic Scotland, 2014), figure 2.5, here reproduced as Figure 1.

¹¹ D. Laing (ed.), *The Bannatyne Miscellany*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1836), Vol. 2, pp. 70–71.

ashlar work.¹² In 1571 it appears to have been considerably higher than the ground before it. This is suggested by a statement in a contemporary account that a workman who fell over it in April of that year, while filling gabions with earth, died as a result of the fall.¹³ Mary of Guise had a ‘flank’ (tower or bastion) made beside the entrance in 1560¹⁴ and Kirkcaldy of Grange did further work in the early 1570s to prepare it for the great siege including the digging of a ‘sewche’ (ditch) and ‘pairing awain the greine grasse, and making all thingis smwthe and sliddrie from clymmyng of the wallis’.¹⁵ It seems that the ground between the spur and the Lawnmarket, that is, the area now occupied by the Esplanade, was turned into a glacis, a gently sloping cleared area which provided no cover to an attacker. Great quantities of earth and turf were taken into the castle to deaden the blows of enemy artillery and, early in 1573, the Englishman, Nicholas Errington, reported to his government that the garrison had cut off the fore-part of the spur, which was formerly of timber and boards, and had now replaced it by a high wall of stone and lime.¹⁶ This may refer to a parapet round its top.

The spur was not just a walled enclosure. It is important to grasp that it was rather a great earthwork, the stone walls being merely to retain the great bulk of earth within and give greater stability. Its solid, platform-like nature is made clear by Holinshed’s view (illustr. 1, above). It was meant to give bulk and depth to the castle defences and to be a platform on which to position guns. It pointed aggressively down towards the town, providing but one of three or four platforms at different levels on which guns could be mounted.

¹² Chris Tabraham, Ian Suddaby and Tim Neighbour, ‘The Spur and Esplanade’, in Ewart and Gallagher, *Fortress of the Kingdom*, pp. 98–109.

¹³ *Memorials of Transactions in Scotland AD MD LXIX–AD MD LXXIII* By Richard Bannatyne (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1836), p. 112.

¹⁴ *Cal Scot Papers* 1, No 762.

¹⁵ *Bannatyne’s Memorials*, p. 112.

¹⁶ W. K. Boyd (ed.), *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots*, Vol. 4 (1571–74) (Edinburgh: H. M. Gen. Reg. House, 1903), No 598

Here, it should be noted that it is difficult to square the description by Johnson and Fleming, given above, with the architectural and archaeological evidence. The latter shows that behind the Spur was a casemate with a large gunloop pointing down the High Street, the mouth of which has been exposed since 1912 in the face of the later Half Moon Battery. This is probably the 'goun holl' mentioned in building accounts of 1546.¹⁷ Above the casemate was the Forewall Battery, as identified in the Englishmen's account, but their further tier of guns can only be identified with artillery mounted on the roof of the 14th-century David's Tower, modified for that purpose.¹⁸

An inventory of artillery and munitions in the castle in March 1566/7 gives some idea of how the castle was defended then, and probably with little difference a few years later during the siege.¹⁹ On the forewall there were four new French cannons and two grose culverins, all mounted on carriages. On top of David's Tower there was a carriage-mounted moyen. On the hill at the back of the munition house (Hawk Hill) were two bastards, and below the hill two cannons. At either end of the chapel (St Mary's Church) were two cannons and two moyens, and at the postern, at the western end of the rock, there was a saker and a falcon. Between the butts (that is, what was later known as the Butts battery?) there was a double cannon, a culverin, a saker, two moyens and a double falcon, and, finally, at the gunhouse gable (near present site of Argyle Battery?) there was a grose culverin and a moyen. There is no mention of guns in the blockhouse, possibly because they were only positioned there when the castle was under threat.

The following table, using information extrapolated from various early Scottish sources, gives the possible specifications of the types of guns just listed.²⁰

¹⁷ *TA* 7, p. 463.

¹⁸ Ewart and Gallagher, *Fortress of the Kingdom*, pp. 44–5.

¹⁹ T. Thomson (ed.), *Wardrobe Inventories. A Collection of Inventories and other Records of the Royal Wardrobe and Jewel House* (Edinburgh, 1815), pp. 165–77.

²⁰ The original work is presented in the writer's dissertation: D. H. Caldwell, *Guns in Scotland. The Manufacture and Use of Guns and their Influence on Warfare from*

Gun type	Calibre, inches (mm)	Range, yards (metres)
Double cannon	8 (203)	1500 (1371.6)
Cannon	6.25 (159)	1700 (1554.48)
Grose culverin	4.67 (118)	2000 (1828.8)
Culverin	4.5 (114)	1800 (1645.92)
Saker	3.5 (89)	1500 (1371.6)
Moyen	2.75 (70)	1300 (1188.72)
Double falcon	3.1 (79)	
Falcon	2.33 (59)	1100 (1005.84)

These guns were looked after by a gunnery establishment led by the Comptroller of the Artillery, John Chisholm, and including several specialists—gunners, wrights, smiths and a founder. The gunners and other craftsmen were civil servants and, as could be expected, until this time there is no evidence that they were ever disloyal to the government. In the early 1570s, however, a period is reached in which there was open conflict between the rival political parties supporting either a succession of regents for the young king James or else his mother, Queen Mary. Since Edinburgh Castle was held by William Kirkcaldy of Grange for the Marians, the latter party not only had access to most of the royal artillery but also control of the gunnery establishment itself. Also, in April 1571 Kirkcaldy

the Fourteenth Century to c. 1625 (Unpublished University of Edinburgh PhD thesis, 1982), Vol. 1, pp. 44–59). Note that many of these guns were French or of French design, and therefore did not conform to contemporary English gun sizes.

confiscated the town of Edinburgh's artillery and took it to the castle to prevent it being used against him.²¹

In March 1572/3, the Regent Mar had attracted six gunners from the royal establishment to his cause, the rest having 'maid defectioun fra oure soveraigne lord, his obedience and service, and forsworne their faith and allegeance aucht to his hienes and adjoinit thameselfis with the tratouris and rebellis of Edinburgh Castell and toun'.²² The case of two of the most senior gunners, Harry Balfour and James Hector, is instructive. They were engaged in a feud with each other which had gone all the way to the Privy Council for a settlement in February 1567/8. It was decided in favour of Balfour though Hector claimed he had worked deceitfully on the Regent Moray to get his pay rise.²³ It ostensibly related to money and promotions but we might suppose that politics were also involved. In any case, Hector left the castle to become adviser to the burgh of Edinburgh on the ordering of their guns and munitions while Balfour was given the additional privilege of making his residence within the castle.²⁴ He died there on 11 September 1572 as the result of a wound in the head received a number of days beforehand when hit by a flying splinter from the portcullis when it accidentally crashed to the ground.²⁵

Chisholm, the comptroller of the artillery, had also taken the part of the Marians, and was sent by them to France in the winter of

²¹ *A Diurnal of Remarkable Occurrents that have passed within the Country of Scotland since the Death of King James the Fourth till the Year M.D.LXXV* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1833), p. 209.

²² RSS = M. Livingstone et al. (eds), *Registrum Secreti Sigilli Regum Scotorum*, (Edinburgh 1908-) [D. H. Fleming and J. Beveridge (eds) *The Register of the Privy Seal of Scotland*, Vol. 3 (1542-1548), 6], No. 1530.

²³ RSS 3: no 2640; 5: 829, 930, 1363, 2231, 2357; RPC = J. H. Burton et al. (eds), *The Register of the Privy Council of Scotland* (Edinburgh 1877-) [Vol. 1 (1545-1569, ed. J. H. Burton), pp. 395-6.

²⁴ C. B. B. Watson (ed.), *Edinburgh Burgesses. Roll of Edinburgh Burgesses and Guild-Brethren 1406-1700* (Edinburgh: Scottish Record Society, 1929), p. 243.

²⁵ RSS 6, Nos 159, 173; *Bannatyne's Memorials*, p. 264.

1570/1 to get money and munitions, but when he returned that June or at the beginning of July to Queensferry, he was captured by Lord Lindsay and taken off to the regent's camp at Leith. On him he had about 6,000 francs and in the ship he returned in were 12 barrels of serpentine powder (for priming guns), 100 bullets for cannon, 300 for smaller pieces, 300 calivers (firearms), 300 morions (helmets) and 200 pikes.²⁶

1571

Mary's supporters were also holding the royal castle of Dumbarton and had several not inconsiderable strongholds of their own including the Hamiltons' castle of Hamilton (Cadzow, despite its 'destruction' in the preceding year) and Draffen (Craignethan). Dumbarton Castle was captured by government forces at the beginning of April 1571 as the result of a daring escalade of the castle rock in the early hours of the morning by Thomas Crawford of Jordanhill with a small band of wageours (mercenaries).²⁷ That left Edinburgh, castle and town, as the major centre of opposition to the regent and all attention could now be focused on trying to capture both.

Kirkcaldy of Grange was far too vigilant to allow himself to be caught in the same way as Dumbarton, though Crawford does, in fact, seem to have been involved in an attempt to force a way into the town in August 1571—by then firmly in control of the Marians—by means of a stratagem which recalls the deeds of the Knight of Liddesdale in 1341. Some of Crawford's men attempted to have the Netherbow Gate opened by pretending to be mealmen while others waited in hiding to make a rush on it.²⁸

²⁶ *Cal Scot Papers* 3: no 627, 638, 695, 828, 831; *Miscellaneous Papers Principally Illustrative of Events in the Reign of Queen Mary and King James VI* (Glasgow: Maitland Club, 1834), pp. 59, 65.

²⁷ *Diurnal*, pp. 202–3.

²⁸ *Cal Scot Papers* 3, No 892.

It was observed in August 1570 that Kirkcaldy was already preparing the castle for troubles to come. He was encouraging others to come and join him and at one stage he bought up all the butter and cheese in the market and had the bakers baking him biscuit night and day.²⁹ He was also refortifying the castle, improving the town defences with earthwork fortifications, blocking up the gates and installing a garrison in the steeple of St Giles. At the beginning of May 1571 it was reported that he was making a 'barrace' (fortification) above the Butter Tron and another 'at the strade of the Wester boll' (an earthwork defence outside the West Port).³⁰ It was reported in October 1571, after a long period of fighting, that there was a trench within the town walls and all the vennels connecting with the High Street had been cut.³¹ These were measures to stop the whole town being immediately overrun should the enemy manage to make a breach in the walls.

Kirkcaldy had got money and supplies from France.³² There was also a large body of nobles in Edinburgh who supported him, including Huntly, Herries and Ferniehurst. In total, to defend the town and castle he had 600 men divided into six companies.³³

In May, only a few weeks after the taking of Dumbarton Castle, the Regent Lennox came to Edinburgh with three guns which he planted in an earthwork fortification on Calton Hill with the intention of battering the northeast quarter of the town. This fortification is shown (by then in ruins) as a rectangular structure with a round bastion at each corner on Gordon of Rothiemay's 1647 view of the town.³⁴ From here Lennox's men shot into the lower part of the town, especially at 'dirtie blokhouses' (earthwork

²⁹ *Cal Scot Papers* 3, No 422.

³⁰ *Bannatyne Memorials*, pp. 114, 117.

³¹ *Cal Scot Papers* 3, p. 8 [No 13].

³² *Bannatyne's Memorials*, pp. 112–20; *Diurnal*, pp. 202ff., 212; *Cal Scot Papers* 4, No 68.

³³ *Cal Scot Papers* 3, p. 9 [No 13].

³⁴ *RCAMS The City of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1951), p. 37, fig. 150.

defences erected by Kirkcaldy to defend the Netherbow Port?), and Leith Wynd outside the walls. They also occupied a house there. In response, Kirkcaldy blocked up the Netherbow Port with turf and stone and had a double cannon brought down from the castle to the Blackfriars Yard to dislodge the regent's men from their positions. An attempt was made to surprise the fort on Calton Hill without any success.³⁵ The regent's initiatives, however, had withered by the end of the month when he wrote to Queen Elizabeth of England that he was not able to sustain wageours on the money available to him and there were no battery pieces except those in the castle. He asked for eight cannons, four culverins and two bastards with sufficient powder, bullets, instruments of war and pioneers, with 1000 footmen, 300 horsemen and money, over and above, to pay the wages of Scottish foot and horse.³⁶

Substantial English help did not materialise and a new attempt was made in the autumn by the Regent Mar. He gathered together 10 battering pieces, including two from Dumbarton, two from Stirling, one from Dundee, two from Broughty Craig and the rest from Dunbar and other places.³⁷ Two guns were placed on Salisbury Crags on 10 October but one of them broke that day.³⁸ Others were positioned in an entrenchment before the West Port but with no more result than before. These guns were removed to the east side of the Pleasance to fire at the wall on the south side of the town on 17 and 18 October but as fast as the wall was knocked down it was rebuilt by those within and no assault was attempted. The guns positioned by Kirkcaldy at St Giles and on the Kirk of

³⁵ *Diurnal*, pp. 213–14; *Bannatyne's Memorials*, pp. 123–4.

³⁶ *Cal Scot Papers* 3, No 767.

³⁷ *Cal Scot Papers* 3, Nos 911, 914, 956.

³⁸ There is a small enclosure (R. B. K. Stevenson, 'Farms and Fortifications in the King's Park, Edinburgh', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland*, Vol. 81 (1946–8), pp. 165ff., pl. XVIII, No 8) in the Queen's Park, below Salisbury Crags, which might be worth examining to see if it could be earthworks associated with the emplacement of these guns.

Field (on the site of Old College, Edinburgh University) ‘contempnet’ the regent’s guns and his pavilion was even rent by a shot.³⁹ After twelve days’ effort Mar withdrew his men and guns to Canongate and Leith. The old demolished fortifications of Leith were now re-dug to serve as a secure base for the regent and his supporters.⁴⁰

Thereafter no serious bid was made on Edinburgh for over a year. Greater efforts were made by the regent to stop provisions getting through to the town and castle,⁴¹ and the war was taken out into the country with the supporters of each party destroying each other’s lands. In March 1572 the garrison of the royal castle of Blackness, further up the Forth, decided to join forces with Kirkcaldy,⁴² and in the following June 1572 he was even bold enough to send a cannon and a double moyen to batter Merchiston Castle (the tower now incorporated in Napier College, Edinburgh). The guns pierced the walls of the castle before the Marians had to return in haste to Edinburgh with the arrival of some of the regent’s men from their siege of Niddry Castle in West Lothian.⁴³ Eventually in July 1572 a truce was patched up, largely thanks to French and English diplomacy behind the scenes. Kirkcaldy held on to Edinburgh Castle but the town itself was made free to all.⁴⁴

It was clear to the supporters of the young James VI that they would only finally daunt their opponents if they rooted Kirkcaldy out of Edinburgh Castle. It was equally clear that they lacked the power to do so. The only solution appeared to be once more to call in English help, and after all it was also in Elizabeth’s interest to see that they succeeded in suppressing the supporters of a woman who was widely regarded as the rightful queen, not only of Scotland but

³⁹ *Bannatyne’s Memorials*, pp. 192, 194–5; *Diurnal*, pp. 251–2.

⁴⁰ *Diurnal*, p. 229.

⁴¹ *Diurnal*, p. 291.

⁴² *Cal Scot Papers* 4, p. 195.

⁴³ *Diurnal*, p. 300.

⁴⁴ *Bannatyne’s Memorials*, pp. 237–46.

of England as well. Although Queen Elizabeth was reluctant to finance yet another major military enterprise in Scotland it did make sense that she should shore up a sympathetic Protestant regime, and there was the risk, probably actually remote by 1573, that if she did not act the French would rescue the castle.

1573

As noted above, in January 1572/3 Elizabeth had a survey made of the castle of Edinburgh by Rowland Johnson and John Fleming, and they concluded that (paraphrased and modernised):

No mining can prevail in this rock, but only battery with ordnance, to beat down the walls and prepare the way for an assault. The reason for this is the nature of the rock itself, solid and hard, so that it cannot be hewn by any means that man can devise, in reasonable time; and even if it is successfully mined and powder put in place, it will be impossible to stop a lot of the explosive power of the charge dissipating through fissures in the rock and so preventing a successful outcome.

A battery of 12 pieces of great ordnance—cannons, demy cannons and culverings—will be required, placed on either side of the street by the Spur; six battering pieces to beat Davy's Tower, the curtain wall with their ordnance, and the Constable's Tower, and so to make a breech; and on the south side where the hall is, the lodging, and the store houses for their munitions and victuals, it will be necessary to place six battering pieces, not only to beat down these buildings, but also to provide cross fire with the 12 guns placed to the east.

Eight demy culverings and sakers are also required to beat the back part of the castle and to dismount the guns mounted there. They can also be moved from place to place to fire at gun loops and such other places as need requires.

The castle may thus be at Her Majesty's commandment within 20 days after the gun batteries are in position.⁴⁵

⁴⁵ *Bannatyne Misc* 2, pp. 70–71.

The English expeditionary force, consisting of 1000 soldiers and 300 pioneers under the command of Sir William Drury arrived at the end of April, along with six double cannons, 14 whole culverins, two sakers, two mortars and two bombards.⁴⁶ A few other guns were supplied by the Scots, including the Earl of Argyll's cannon, and also four bands of soldiers, amounting to 500 men.⁴⁷

For the course of the siege we are fortunate in not only having detailed contemporary Scottish and English accounts but also Holinshed's bird's-eye view.⁴⁸ It is not drawn to scale, exaggerates some features and merely sketches in others. Nor can it be used as a reliable guide, for instance, to the number and positioning of the gun batteries. Nevertheless, it can be regarded as a verisimilitude of the siege, at the point that the Spur was stormed.

The regent, to try and prevent damage from the castle guns firing down the High Street, had piled up three 'traverses' of sod, turf and midden, one near the tollbooth, the other two higher up the street nearer the castle.⁴⁹ Two of these appear to be represented on Holinshed's view. Some entrenchments had also been dug around the castle by the Scots. These were considered a sufficient threat by Kirkcaldy in the preceding March that he had fired his guns at a new one being dug to the northwest and made a sally from the Spur

⁴⁶ *Bannatyne Misc* 2, p. 80. For the guns compare *Diurnal*, p. 330, a cannon royal, 4 cannons, 9 grose culverins, 4 'pottin pieces' [mortars], 5 small brass pieces and 'ane Scottispeice les nor ane cannoun, quhilk was tane be the Inglismen at the field of Flodane; she wes callit ane of the sevin sistaris'. Six other pieces are said to have arrived on 23 May (*Diurnal*, p. 332).

⁴⁷ *Bannatyne Misc* 2, p. 80; *Diurnal*, p. 331. The Earl of Argyll's cannon may well be the large bronze French gun with the insignia of King François I of France which sits outside Inverary Castle. It is not, as often claimed, from the Tobermory Spanish Galleon.

⁴⁸ R. Holinshed, *The Laste Volume of the Chronicles of England, Scotlande and Ireland*, with descriptions (London: for Iohn Hunne, 1577), figure between pp. 1868 and 1869, here published as figure 1.

⁴⁹ T. Thomson (ed.), D. Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland* [8 vols, 1842-49] Vol. 3 (Edinburgh: Wodrow Society, 1848), p. 281.

to clear trenches at the top of the town.⁵⁰ These entrenchments were taken over by the English on 25 April, and extended and improved to completely blockade the castle.⁵¹ We are reliant on English sources for the information that, incorporated in this circumvallation, were at least four mounts or gun batteries, three of which were commanded by Sir George Carey (son of Lord Hunsdon, the Warden of the East Marches), Sir Henry Lee (a favourite of the queen) and Sir Thomas Sutton (Master of the Ordnance in the North). The fourth was called the King's Mount and manned by a force of Scots with Scottish guns, under the command of the Regent Morton. Five hundred Scots are said to have joined with the English in the siege operations.⁵² A fifth mount, the main battery, commanded by Sir William Drury, protected with gabions, was positioned on the north side of the Castlehill where it could batter the Spur.

All of these mounts are represented on Holinshed's view (Figure 1). The King's Mount is identified, as is Drury's, though the latter is actually shown as two gun batteries, one on either side of the main street, labelled as 'The GENERALS two monts'. The first four mounts appear to be spread from near the Bristo Port on the south side of town, round in an arc westwards and then northwards to about the position of St Cuthbert's (not shown). A church is shown near the King's Mount which may represent the chapel of St Roque which stood on the southwest part of the Burgh Muir, south of Grange Loan.⁵³

One of the contemporary Scottish sources provides a different and probably more accurate picture:

[Drury's Mount] on the Castlehill on the north side of Mr John Thornton's lodging

⁵⁰ *Cal Scot Papers* 4, pp. 536–7.

⁵¹ *Diurnal*, p. 324.

⁵² *Cal Scot Papers* 4, p. 572.

⁵³ *RCAMS*, p. 249 [No 213].

On Lawson's croft—one of the crofts of the Greyfriars
 At the town, and on 'Scottis' crofts
 Above the west side of St Cuthbert's
 At the north side
 At the 'lang gait' (a predecessor of Princes Street) east from no 5, on
 Buccleugh's [land]⁵⁴

So the *Diurnal* seems to be indicating a total of six batteries. More research is necessary to identify all these locations but it is likely they were positioned right round the castle (Figure 2), not just to the east, south and west as shown on Holinshed's view. It is probable that no 2 was not too distant from Greyfriars. Much of the land to the south and southwest of the castle in 1573, adjacent to the Burgh Loch (now the Meadows) was sparsely populated, with gardens or crofts providing food for the town, and there, somewhere, would have been no 3. The approximate position of no 4 is clear enough, and nos 5–6 could have been positioned along the edge of the higher ground represented now by Princes Street. The *Diurnal* describes no 5 as having Scottish guns and no 6 as only mounting three small guns. English sources might therefore have taken less interest in these positions.

Meanwhile, the other side had not neglected to improve the castle's defences, building a rampart across the castle from north to south to defend the built-up area (Crown Square) from battery from the west and improving the Spur facing the town. More earthwork was added to it and the timber and boards of its fore-part were replaced with a wall of stone and lime. Owing, however, to major defections from the nobles supporting the queen—principally the Hamiltons, Huntly and Seton—Kirkcaldy could no longer hope to control or have any influence in the town. Only Maitland of Lethington, Lord Home and John Wishart, the Laird of Pittarow,

⁵⁴ *Diurnal*, p. 332.

remained with him to the end.⁵⁵ His whole force was probably by now not much more than 200, many of whom were not soldiers.⁵⁶

Soon after the arrival of the English, their commander, Sir William Drury, set Hubbard the miner to try and undermine the spur but this venture apparently came to naught. The battery of the castle began on Sunday 17 May, attention being directed firstly on David's Tower, no doubt since the guns positioned on top of it could command so many of the English positions. On 21 May, all the besiegers' guns from all sides opened up fire. The south quarter of David's Tower fell, together with some of the fore-wall next to it on 22 May and the east part, and some of the portcullis, two days later. By this time, all the great artillery of the castle had been put out of action or dismantled. At 7 am on 26 May, two assaults were made simultaneously. A force of Scots and English caused a diversion at St Katherine's Gate (i.e., the later West Sally-port) at the west end of the castle while the main English attack was launched upon the spur. The former force was repulsed with the loss of 28 to 30 men killed or wounded, but the assault with ladders on the spur was successful and Drury managed to lodge a force on it. That night Kirkcaldy asked for a parley and the castle was surrendered on 28 May into the hands of the English.⁵⁷ The garrison by then consisted of 164 men, 84 women and 10 boys.⁵⁸

The Scottish regents, successively Lennox, Mar and Morton, had made much of their inability to take the castle and their need of English guns and manpower. Putting to one side the issue of whether with more skilled diplomacy it might have been surrendered by Kirkcaldy, it is not clear that he could have held it much longer than May 1573. His supplies and manpower were by then limited and his ability to make sorties to gather in more was

⁵⁵ *Bannatyne Misc* 2, pp. 72ff. [= Holinshed's *Chronicle*]; *Diurnal*: 322, 330-3; *Cal Scot Papers* 4, no 598.

⁵⁶ *Cal Scot Papers* 4, no 572.

⁵⁷ *Bannatyne Misc* 2, pp. 72ff.; *Diurnal*, pp. 330-3; *Cal Scot Papers* 4, no 649.

⁵⁸ Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, p. 283.

probably very constrained. By March 1573 the water supply in the wells within the castle had failed and he was forced to rely on water from outside, particularly the well (St Margaret's) to the north, below the castle rock. To access it men had to be let down from above on ropes, but it was then poisoned by his enemies, resulting in the death and illness of several in the garrison.⁵⁹

Drury left for England straight after the siege. By prior agreement, although the castle had surrendered to him, he left it intact, though substantially damaged, with all its guns. Morton set about a major rebuild, including the Portcullis Gate and Half-Moon Battery which survive to this day. The spur survived, even if with a considerable amount of remodelling, and the main castle entrance was positioned in its flank. From here, a roadway led to the right round the bottom of the Half Moon Battery through an Inner Barrier Gateway to the Portcullis Gate: a replacement for the Constable's Tower. The capture of Edinburgh Castle marked the end of effective support for Mary in Scotland. Kirkcaldy was tried for treason and executed. Despite one or two scares, no real threat of French or Spanish invasion ever materialised and successive Scottish governments saw fit to maintain and develop good relations with England.

⁵⁹ *Cal Scot Papers* 4, p. 536 [No 603]; G. Donaldson (ed.), *The Memoirs of Sir James Melville of Halhill* (London: Folio Society, 1969), p. 99; Calderwood, *The History of the Kirk of Scotland*, p. 282.

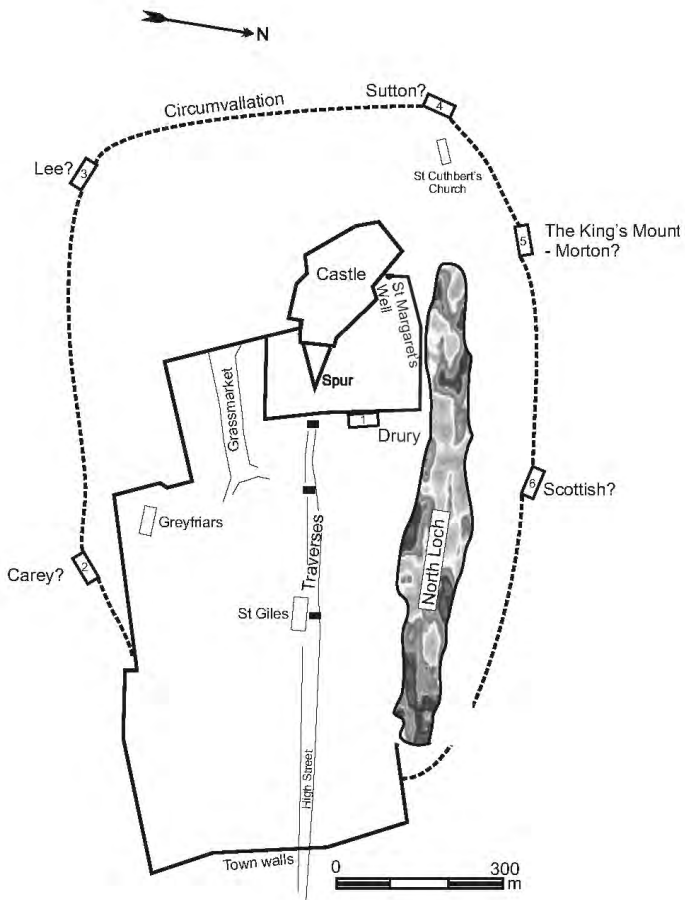


Figure 2: The English and Scottish siege works of May 1573 based on *A Diurnal of Remarkable Occurrents*.