FROM HIGHLAND STRONGHOLD TO DISTINCTIVE URBAN LANDMARK: THE SCOTCH BARONIAL CASTLE

Max Herford

INTRODUCTION

As we approach the opening of the John Cunningham Centre at Scots College Bellevue Hill Sydney, it is pertinent to reflect on the origins of the Scotch Baronial architectural style. To many, it is a mysterious collection of forms with unclear motivation. Scotch Baronial as a movement is represented by more than 1000 buildings in Scotland; many of them are now ruins.

The object of this article is to explain the origins and meaning of Scotch Baronial architecture to a largely non-specialist audience. In the case of Scottish architecture, there is the persistent problem of English political and cultural dominance: this amounts to violent oppression followed by nostalgic union with mutual dependence. This article is merely an introduction to the subject, a very concise survey: there is much more to be investigated. The timeline is from the sixteenth century, to what is seen by Miles Glendinning as the apogee of Scotch Baronial in the late nineteenth century.

THE BEGINNINGS OF SCOTCH BARONIAL ARCHITECTURE

"Scotch Baronial Architecture" refers to a type of fortified castle architecture seen across Scotland. It describes many of Scotland's most important historic buildings, from the palaces left behind by the monarchy, to fortified tower buildings, revivalist castles and the mansions and civic buildings of the Victorian age. In the nineteenth century, it came to describe the built remains of a social system, which had been largely eliminated by three main causes: the Scottish Clearances, the tensions and military requirements of unionism with England, and the effects of the industrial and agricultural revolutions.

The principal example of Scotch Baronial used as a political symbol of British unity is Balmoral Castle, the Scottish residence of the King and Queen. Balmoral Castle is a product of the Victorian Romantic movement, built at a time when the smaller defensive castles in the Highlands had been largely left to ruin. Its defensive capabilities are limited, and the fort-like attributes are simply symbolic. As argued by anthropologist Clifford Geertz, symbols direct group formation.[1] As illustrated in Pevsner's Architectural Glossary, the characteristics of the Scotch baronial style include: a simple Z-plan or L-plan design with round turrets, a roofline crowded with bartizans and tourelles, crowstep gable elements, machicolation, a prominent

Max Herford is a former architectural engineer, who sold his business to embark on an academic journey. He earned his PhD in 2023, with a dissertation that focussed on English Gothic cathedrals from the years 1140 to 2000. He combines his love of architecture with interests in philosophy, history, and art. He was part of the design committee for the Neo-Traditional castle at Scots College Sydney, one of the largest such buildings in the world, which opened in 2024.

[1] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), pp. 89, 90, 353.

central tower, oriel windows, and square over round tower forms supported by extensive corbelling.[2] Most of these elements can be found at Balmoral Castle, where they refer to a seventeenth-century defensive system for castles and tower-houses.[3]

Balmoral Castle by William Smith for Prince Albert and Queen Victoria, 1853–6 – view from south; undated photograph. © Historic Environment Scotland. https://canmore.org.uk/file/image/1201441

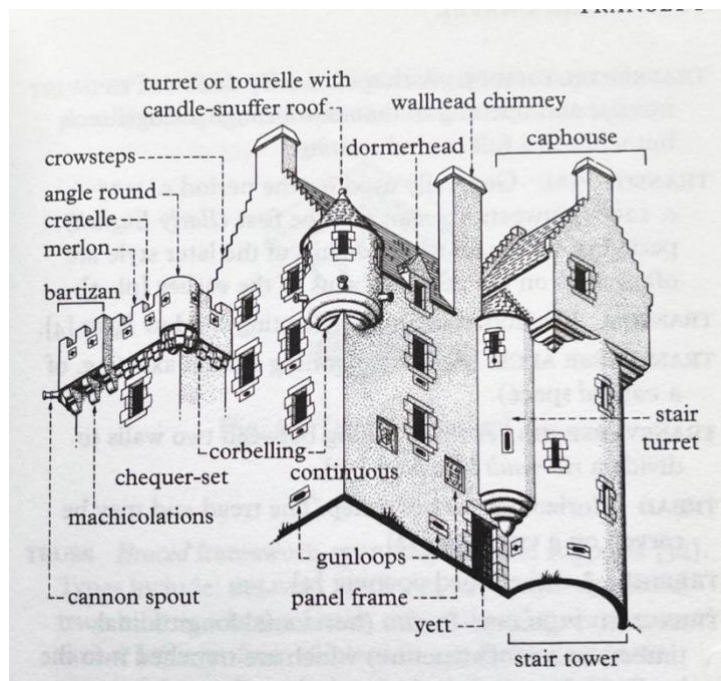Figure 1. Balmoral Castle, considered the Scotch Baronial archetype.

Figure 2. Architectural details of Scotch Baronial architecture.

---

[2] Stephen Bradley, *Pevsner's Architectural Glossary* (New Haven: Yale University, 2010), p. 127.

[3] Machicolation was a medieval requirement: the battlements needed openings to allow the dropping of rocks and other missiles on hostile parties underneath during siege warfare.

I have only found one authoritative work on Scotch Baronial as a discrete nationalistic strand in Scottish architecture. In *Scotch Baronial* by Miles Glendinning, the author discerns two "Castle Ages." The First Castle Age starts around 1600, building upon the design of earlier castles and the tower-strongholds of Highland clans: these buildings make a statement about Scottishness and its inherent martial qualities. The First Castle Age lasted until 1750; by this time, the need for displays of status displaced functional defensive capabilities in country house design. These priorities are recorded in this Second Castle Age from 1750 until a high point around 1870. After this, "Scotch Traditionalism" becomes the appropriate name for the inherently Scottish part of architecture in Scotland. At this moment, according to Glendinning, Scotch Baronialism as a movement is eclipsed.[4]

AFTER 1300: FIRST INTIMATIONS OF A NATIVE SCOTTISH STYLE

Figure 3: Claypotts LHS and Colliston Castle both around 1590 (Scottish Castles Association).

According to Glendinning, the "First Castle Age," which emerged after 1300, was a time of significant architectural development. This was a built outcome of the need of the country's clan and political chiefs to assert their status. Medieval Scotland had developed a national ideology based on a history of martial success.[5] This was achieved by successfully repelling attempted English invasions, and by lengthy and violent local feuding and warfare in the Highlands and to a lesser degree the Lowlands. The martial skills that had secured the country's independence were reflected within an architectural language.[6] The term "castellated architecture" in a Scottish context describes a broad category: it includes relatively small, fortified tower houses as well as grand symbolic stone castles of the nobility. In the Wars of Independence (1296-1357), England sought to subjugate Scotland. As a result, there seems to have been a distinctive Scottish identity in formation as early as the thirteenth century.[7] Following the failure of English strategy at the battle of Bannockburn in 1314, mainland Britain

---

[4] Miles Glendinning and Aonghus Mackechnie, *Scotch Baronial Architecture and National Identity in Scotland* (London: Bloomsbury, 2019), pp. 10-13.

[5] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, pp. 18-25.

[6] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, pp. 10-15.

[7] Sir Fitzroy Maclean, *Scotland: A Concise History* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2019), p. 26.

became a two-kingdom entity, and an elaborate Scottish counter-ideology emerged claiming that Scotland had enjoyed an uninterrupted monarchy since 330 BCE. The Scots held that their monarchy was far more ancient and legitimate than that of its southern neighbour.[8]
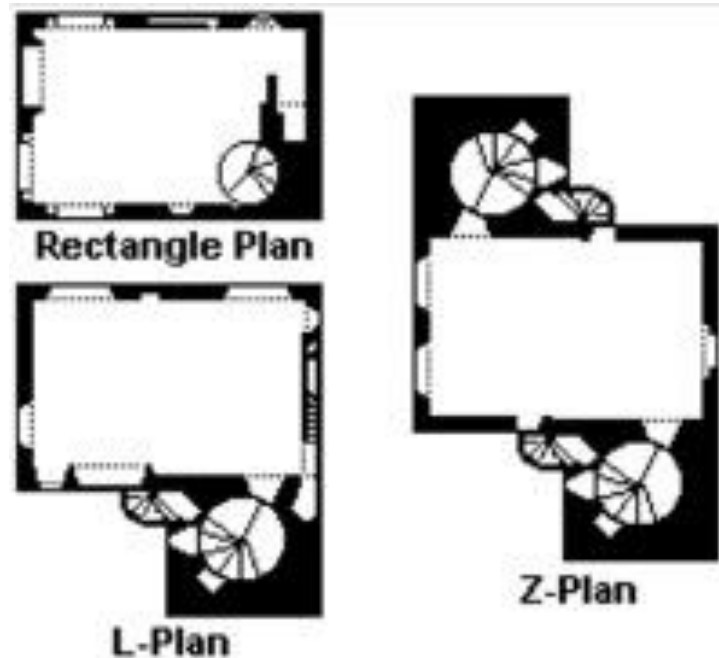

Figure 2 - L-plan and Z-Plan sketches showing the layouts.

SCOTS BARONIAL ARCHITECTURE SIXTEENTH C.

Tower Houses Z Plan from 1553

The new Baronial style was first seen in the late sixteenth century, in buildings like Colliston Castle, located six kilometres north of Arbroath on the east coast of Scotland.[9] Examples include Claypotts Castle near Dundee, said to be the quirkiest castle in Scotland.[10] Why did these relatively modest buildings need such robust defensive elements?

In Scotland at that time, central military authority was far weaker than in England and feudal conditions outlived English trends. This was certainly the case in the Highlands, where the mountainous terrain played a large part in keeping groups separate and inculcating mutual dependence within the locality. A clan system emerged, diverging from the feudal structure seen in England.[11] A "laird" was a non-noble clan chief. Ownership of all property was, in

---

[8] Neil Oliver, *A History of Scotland* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicholson, 2009), p. 144-8; Maclean, *Scotland*, pp. 37-40.

[9] John Summerson, *Architecture in Britain 1530-1830* (London: Penguin, 1986), pp. 542-545.

[10] "Claypots Castle," *Scottish Castles Association*. At:
https://www.scottishcastlesassociation.com/news/news-features/claypotts-interior.htm.

[11] Sir Iain Moncrief, *The Highland Clans* (London: Barrie & Jenkins, 1977), pp. 29-31.

theory, communal; ownership of cattle was shared between all members. In the remote Highlands cattle and property theft was endemic, and territory was never securely held.[12] In the sixteenth century, three main types of fortified tower-houses emerged: these were divided into L-shaped, Z-shaped T-shaped and rectangular forms on plan with extremely thick coursed rubble walls. As we see above, one of the earliest such houses is today called Colliston Castle. It is a Z-plan building near Arbroath in Angus, Scotland. The old part of Colliston is dated 1583; there is a main block with two round towers projecting from opposite corners and a stair turret built between the main block and a tower. This tower has a rectangular watch-tower built on gabled supports over a round stair tower, and several splayed gun-loops are built into the masonry on the fourth storey.[13]

Around the same time, Claypott's Castle was another very early Z-plan tower house built west of Dundee and has a more eccentric appearance combining cylindrical and square forms with support for square corners provided by around five or six courses of masonry corbelling.[14] The thickness of the walls meant that interior space was restricted thus the need for attached towers to contain stairs. The buildings were fire-resistant and provided safety from bombardment for the lairds and their households, as well as their cattle in a small courtyard called a "barmkin." The Z-plan at Colliston and Claypotts and the T plan at Grangepans are concepts repeated frequently in every locality of late medieval Scotland.[15]

THE ALLIANCE WITH FRANCE IN THE FIFTEENTH CENTURY

In the fifteenth century, in reaction to the entrenched attitudes towards England, Scotland allied itself with France, where English expansionism had been similarly unwelcome, and Scots fought alongside the French against the English during the Hundred Years War (1337-1453). Scotland's principal palace builders were the kings James IV and James V, who created a series of rich and impressive castellated complexes within and around the Forth Valley. This area served as a focus of monarchical building in the same way as the Loire or the Thames. Linlithgow, Falkland, Dunfermline, Stirling and Edinburgh were all palaces reconstructed in what is seen today as the Scotch castellated manner. At the time, this included tall turrets, battlements, great halls and elaborate lodging blocks.

The characteristic baronial elements were in the future. French influence continued during the reign of Scotch King James V, who had visited the French court and took two French brides in succession. Around this time French masons from the Loire region first came to Scotland. It is important to remember that architecture was not yet considered a distinct art; designs came from the wooden templates of master-masons.[16]

---

[12] Moncrief, *Highland Clans,* p. 30.

[13] Summerson, "Architecture in Scotland," pp. 540-542.

[14] Historic Environment Scotland, "Colliston Castle (LB4740)." Retrieved 10 April 2018.

[15] Summerson, "Architecture in Scotland," pp. 540-542.

[16] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, pp. 34-35.

An excellent example of Scotch Baronial, Craigievar Castle in Aberdeenshire, shows the characteristics of a tower castle on a larger scale. Completed in 1626, it demonstrates a more formal corbel table moving around the tower at different levels. It is the most elegant and impressive of the early Baronial towers, with striking sculptural massing and a distinctive harled finish.[17] Fyvie Castle (1590) is regarded by historian John Summerson as one of three archtypical early Baronial castles where details were frequently copied: Fraser, Craigievar and Fyvie. Fyvie has a distinctive facade arch linking two grand stair towers.[18]

Craigievar Castle – rebuilt 1620s; view from south; photograph dated 1963. © Historic Environment Scotland. https://canmore.org.uk/collection/1579565

Castle Fraser – heightened 1617–18 by I. Bell; low wings added 1631–3; gateway and lodges by John Smith, 1836–9; view from north; photograph dated 2008. © Historic Environment Scotland. HES Scan: mb230908013_o1

Fyvie Castle – 1590s west front; 1905 photograph by Henry Bedford Lemere. © Historic Environment Scotland. https://canmore.org.uk/collection/695340
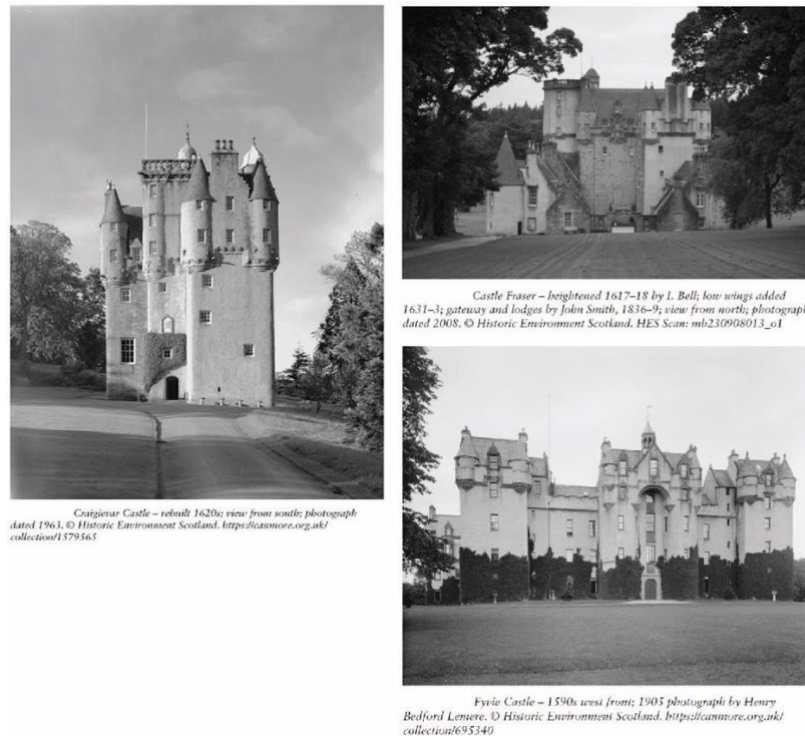
Figure 3: Craigievar, Fraser and Fyvie all examples of First Castle Age of baronial building around 1600.

If we examine later examples such as Castle Fraser at Aberdeen (1576-1617), we see a larger, grander form, but there is a new element. Like Cragievar, it has a corbel course below the top storey that rises and falls every few metres, following a zig-zag course around the whole building.[19] According to John Summerson, Castle Fraser shows the hand of French masons from the Loire, particularly in the shape and the roof-angle of the conical turrets over its round towers.[20] A comparison with Azay-le-Rideau in the Loire Valley confirms the similarities.[21] At Castle Fraser the absolute need for defence shows first signs of giving way to a need for display

---

[17] "Harling" is Coloured Rough Dash Render.

[18] Marcus Binney, *The Perfect House: 500 of the Best Buildings in England* (London: Weidenfeld Nicholson, 2010), p. 765.

[19] Summerson, "Baronial Architecture," p. 543.

[20] Summerson, "Baronial Architecture," p. 544.

[21] Polidori Robert, *Châteaux of the Loire Valley* (Cologne: Konemann, 1997), p. 56.

to emphasise the importance of the building and the clan. Note that the lower-level doors and windows at Fraser were probably installed at a later date when the risk of violent attack was greatly reduced.

The official ideology within the formally titled nobility of late medieval Scotland was that of a distinct ethnic community, in support of which it laid claim to an unmatched antiquity of pedigree, an imperial monarchy and an assertive Scottish religious and intellectual tradition. All this translated into the field of architecture. There was a more general spread of castellated architecture among elite groups after the Reformation in 1560.

Alongside this mainstream "castle culture," with its strong preoccupation with images of past martial prowess, a new grand Court Style formed out of a hybrid of Scots and English references, now began to coalesce. It combined castellated elements with an increasingly explicit classical regularity and unionist decorative iconography, in a range of domestic and public buildings from Edinburgh Castle's palace block to George Heriot's Hospital (1620) in Edinburgh and Parliament House. Even here, the asymmetrical planning principles of the Scottish Highland castle remained pervasively present in contrast to the symmetrical classicism of most English castle architecture.[22]

By the late eighteenth century, a new relationship with England was firmly in place. In economic and political terms, the focus was now on a combination of Whig 'Improvement' and the Scottish role in British colonial expansionism. As Linda Colley argues, it was at this point that England and Scotland became mutually dependent. Scotland provided thousands of soldiers for its rapidly expanding empire, many of which came from the Highlands, permanently shifting social systems.[23] Scotland also provided many political and civic leaders. Colley argues that despite the disparity in numbers became, Scotland at least an equal partner to England. This new relationship was strengthened by the notable figures of the so-called "Scottish Enlightenment."[24]

According to Glendinning, there was an interesting paradox at this juncture. The figures in this Enlightenment were attracted not just to the principle of rationality, but also to its counter-notion: the powerful movement called Romanticism. This was a European-wide cultural movement valuing creativity, national identity and passion over cool rationalism. It was in many ways a reaction to the extreme, cold logic of the Enlightenment.[25] This movement underwrote the Second Castle age.

A SECOND CASTLE AGE? 1740-1790

Architecturally, this new response took the form of what Miles Glendinning calls a "Second Castle Age." This was very different in architectural character to its predecessor, as the need

---

[22] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, pp. 50-55.

[23] Linda Colley, *Britons: Forging the Nation 1707-1837* (London: Pimlico, 2003), pp. 130, 123, 119.

[24] Colley, *Britons*, pp. 130, 123.

[25] Isiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1965), p. 17.

for defence was greatly reduced and the savage clearances of the Highlands and Lowlands had taken most of the former agricultural worker-warrior class away from their former locations.

However, the interest in display and status was growing for a new affluent elite. Classical designs and plans for country houses were often clad in castellated garb, expanding on the precedent set by Inveraray (1744). Here, Robert Adam was a dominant and innovative force. This is exemplified in his design work at Inverary (an extraordinary hybrid: symmetrical and classical but at the same time a Gothic castle) and his later design at Culzean (1792), which was far more classical and less Scottish in its symbolism. [26]

Behind this increasingly dominant imagery, castles and classicism still co-existed, but in a complex and multifaceted form. Towers referencing medieval tower-houses were introduced, while many tower-houses, which had been abandoned as old-fashioned, were now rebuilt and reoccupied. Several architects followed in the wake of Robert Adam, with new castles now built for a clientele interested in the Scotch castle idea with its inbuilt prestige. While Robert Adam was refining his new classical style, the brothers were also busy devising a new "Scotch castle revival"; a relation of England's Gothic Revival.[27]

Romanticism is difficult to define, but an understanding is essential in the Scotch Baronic narrative. My prime source for a definition is Isiah Berlin's *The Roots of Romanticism*.[28] Berlin frames Romanticism a literary and artistic movement that spread over Europe after the late eighteenth century.[29] It drew upon the appeal of the ancient, the strange, the exotic, the grotesque, the mysterious, the supernatural enchanted castles, and neglected ruins. In this architectural context, it included the rejection of classical architecture, and a search for an architecture that was less rule-driven, less rational, more emotional in its reception and most importantly more specific in its nationalistic message. It was also, in large part, a rejection of the assumed cool logic of the European Enlightenment of the eighteenth century.[30]

THE REVIVAL OF THE ROMANTIC HIGHLAND IDEA

This period also saw the post-Jacobite rehabilitation of the Highlands, on the basis of its martial commitment to Britain, and of the absorption of its culture within the realms of Romanticism. The Highland Society of London, for example, was founded in 1778 to promote Gaeldom. A crucial role here was played by the writer James MacPherson. Opposed to the government's systematic post-1746 assault on his own Gaelic culture and history, he set out to publicise its worth in an inventive way. From 1760, he published poetry which he claimed to be the work of "Ossian," a legendary third-century bard, but which was in fact an amalgam of genuine pieces and his own composition. In a demonstration of the fashion-driven internationalism of

---

[26] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, pp. 93-95.

[27] Kenneth Clark, *The Gothic Revival* (New York: Icon Editions, 1974), pp. 49, 62, 82.

[28] Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism*, pp. 17, 21.

[29] Kenneth Clark, *The Romantic Rebellion: Romantic versus Classical Art* (London: Futura Publications, 1975), pp. 19-21.

[30] Berlin *Roots of Romanticism*, p. 21

the Romantic movement, the cult of Ossian inspired Germany's *Sturm und Drang* Romanticism and its leaders such as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe; as well as the emperor Napoleon, who carried a copy with him on his campaigns.[31] By its enshrinement of the Highlands as a place of long-lost heroes, Ossian securely embedded it within the 'new Britain' and helped give birth to Scotland's "heritage" tourism. It also almost single-handedly placed Scotland at the heart of Romantic Europe, inspiring many Scottish and English patrons to build themselves neo-medievalising Romantic castles.[32]

TREVOR ROPER'S "INVENTION OF TRADITION"

In the middle of the eighteenth century there had been a profound change of the attitude of the English to the Scots. Two causes help to explain this change. As we have seen, it was the Romantic movement—in particular Rousseau's "cult of the noble savage"—that depicted the wild but noble Highlanders that civilisation threatened to destroy.[33] Before 1745 according to Hugh Trevor Roper, the Highlanders had been considered idle but predatory barbarians. In 1745, they were feared as dangerous rebels. Shortly after 1746, when their martial society had collapsed as a result of the Highland and Lowland clearances, they were framed by the English as possessing the romance of a primitive people with the charm of an endangered species.[34] All of these perspectives emphasised the Othering of the Scottish by the English, and the changing shape of Scottish societies in general. It was in this climate of opinion that Ossian enjoyed his easy triumph.[35]

The second cause was more particular and deserves closer examination. This was the formation by the British government of the Highland regiments, which had begun before 1745. Indeed the first such regiment, the Black Watch, had fought at Fontenoy in 1745. It was in the years 1757-1760 that the Prime Minister William Pitt systematically sought to divert the martial spirit of the Highlanders from Jacobite adventures and revolution to British imperial war campaigns. The removal of hundreds of Highlander men from their clan territories and their agricultural work had a devastating effect on the Highland economy and culture.[36]

Most significant for the course of future Scottish architecture, however, was the radical composition Vanbrugh and the Adam brothers first set at Inveraray Castle in 1760. The Adam family thereafter took the lead in promoting an uneasy combination of Gothic, Palladian and Baronial, presented as a symmetrical composition. At Inverary, this new impulse celebrated

---

[31] Fitzroy Maclean, *Scotland A Concise History*, p. 126; Hugh Honour, *Romanticism* (New York: Harper Row 1979), p. 192.

[32] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, pp. 97-100.

[33] Ter Ellingson, *The Myth of the Noble Savage* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001).

[34] T. M. Devine, *The Scottish Clearances: A History of the Dispossessed 1600-1900* (London: Penguin, 2019), pp. 83-119.

[35] Eric Hobsbawm (ed.), *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 112-120.

[36] Hobsbawm, *Invention of Tradition*, p. 115.

the idea of the castle, which, rather like tartan, would soon become the paramount symbol of the new landed elites of unionist Scotland underpinned by the high status of Scotland's old nobility and lairds. This was further amplified by the global impact of the Ossian myth.[37] By the Adams' invention of a new castellated national architecture and by the British adoption of the cult of Mary Queen of Scots, castles were now increasingly helping highlight Scotland as the archetypal land of Romanticism. This took place at precisely the period most commonly associated with Enlightenment, Edinburgh's claimed classical "Hotbed of Genius." The chief models were Inveraray and Holyrood House, which recalled Mary Queen of Scots. The generic tower-house reemerged in revived form as a prestigious "lairdly" residence.[38]

Figure 4: Inverary Castle, built for an absentee Duke. It combines classical symmetry, Gothic details and Scotch towers with crenelations. This marked the end of the First Castle Age.

Overall, the built legacy of the First Castle Age was increasingly respected for its romantic antiquity, as in 1771, when Craigievar was described as an old house expressive of the dignity of an established Highland Laird.[39] Increasingly, that respect was reflected in the proliferation of new castles. A speculative estimate of the number of castles, large and small, ancient and modern, in Scotland in the eighteenth century is well in excess of 1500.[40] Whereas thirty new castles had been built between 1746 and 1800, no fewer than thirty more were begun in the single decade of 1800–1810. Robert Adam developed his castellated style with new castles at Airthrey, Mauldslie and Barnton.[41] Robert Adam also showed the potential for extending the castle style outside the domestic architectural field at Edinburgh's Bridewell (1791–1795),

[37] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, p. 97.

[38] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, p. 99.

[39] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, p. 34.

[40] Note: I could find no academic consensus on this speculative figure.

[41] Clark, *The Gothic Revival*, p. 81.

whose "Bastile order of Architecture" established the idea of dramatic castellation being appropriate to civic architecture.

Wealth from industrialism, agricultural improvement, empire, slavery and tobacco meant that the British unionist *status quo* now commanded strong support. At the same time the French Revolution prompted the establishment to devise a range of defences. In 1707 the English Scottish union was formalised, and the Scottish parliament closed down. Scotland's overriding political ideology was subsequently a proud unionist nationalism; which amounted to a collective self-regard focused on a combination of improvement, progress and martial prowess. Scotland's rehabilitation as an honoured partner within the British union was now so complete that, ironically, early rebels such as William Wallace and Robert the Bruce could be claimed as repatriated Britons. However, the Highlands were in many places deserted: large-scale sheep farming had greatly reduced the need for labour and the former lawless clan chiefs had mutated into property-owning businessmen.[42]

WALTER SCOTT AND PRE-VICTORIAN BARONIALISM

The prevailing architectural expression for this emergent unionist nationalism still mingled Gothic, Tudor and castellated elements in a very eclectic mix, but in the second quarter of the eighteenth century, the Second Castle Age took several major steps forward as Scottish architecture and architects led by Walter Scott and William Burn responded to the burgeoning cult of "tartanry" and the post-Waterloo pride in martial Scotland through a coherent and effective architectural recipe, widely known for the first time in common usage as the "Scotch Baronial style." The starting point in this phase of the campaign for Baronial as an idea was the reconstruction from 1816 by Scott of his own house, Abbotsford. This building exemplified Tory unionist-nationalism, setting out to celebrate all that was great in Scottish history within the fullest spirit of unionism both architecturally and in the eclectic antiquarianism of its context.[43]

The most significant foundations for what became the Scotch Baronial Movement were laid in the early nineteenth century after say 1830, when a fully-fledged international cult of Romantic Scotland was elaborated in the novels of Sir Walter Scott. Scott's work inspired countless copy works. Cleverly, Scott framed the lost past of Jacobite Scotland as a poignant counterpoint to the thrusting modernity of the Industrial Revolution, which seemed to pose a ceaseless threat to all authentic national identity and established hierarchy. In one of the finest of Scott's novels, *Waverley* (1814), he wrote:

> There is no European nation which within the course of half a century or little more has undergone so complete a change as this kingdom of Scotland. The effects of the insurrection of 1745, the destruction of the patriarchal power of the highland chiefs and the abolition of the heritable jurisdictions of the Lowland nobility and barons, the total eradication of the Jacobite party which, averse to intermingle with the English or adopt their customs, long continued to

---

[42] Devine, *The Scottish Clearances*, p. 332.

[43] A. N. Wilson, *Laird of Abbotsford* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1989), pp. 28, 29, 40, 55.

pride themselves upon maintaining Scottish manners and customs, (all) commenced this innovation.[44]

Abbotsford House, completed for Sir Walter Scott by William Atkinson, 1824 – extended to left of the porch by William Burn, 1853–7; view from south-east; photograph of c. 1880. © Historic Environment Scotland. https:// canmore.org.uk/collection/1199043

Figure 7. Abbotsford House.

This richly complex ideology formed a key building block of Scotland's increasingly fervent nationalism, which was inspired by a practical recognition of the unrivalled power and status of Britain (including Scotland) in the decades following the 1814–1815 Council of Vienna.

Within the politics of this symbolic display, architecture played a central role in the valorisation of "Scottish heritage." The key example in the search for a distinctly and proudly Scottish architectural past was new: Scott's own house of Abbotsford. This decisively rejected the symmetry of the "Palladian plan" and freely replicated specific elements of historic Scottish buildings, in the first serious attempt to develop a new architectural style based on antiquarian study of "original" (i.e. pre-eighteenth century) Scottish castellated buildings. Abbotsford was a key point of transition: it extended what had been begun by others, and set a precedent for what would follow. From the 1820s, architect William Burn led the decisive move towards generalisation of the Baronial. At Abbotsford, the front porch was inspired by the design of the same element at Linlithgow Castle.

The New Nineteenth Century Scotch Baronial Idiom

Scott's *Waverley* developed the establishment-held line of tension between the "head" (Hanoverian unionist progressivism) and the "heart" Scottish nationalism. Romanticism was

---

[44] Walter Scott, *Waverley* (London: Penguin, 2012 [1827]), p. 363.

promoted by an increasingly broad range of establishment opinion, including the royal family, who encouraged the publication of Hogg's *Jacobite Relics of Scotland 1819–21*, under the aegis of the Highland Balmoral Castle near Aberdeen.

Queen Victoria (1819-1901) and Prince Albert (1819-1861) first visited Scotland in 1842, when they were both twenty-three years old. What began as immature love turned into a life-long affection for the country, its landscape, its architecture, and the Scottish people. Their sentiment culminated in 1852-1856, when they built their holiday home, Balmoral Castle, in the remote hills near Aberdeen, following a design by the Aberdonian architects John Smith and his son William. According to the authors, Balmoral Castle was an example of "built unionism"; that is, a building that promoted the royal couple's agenda of underlining the union between England and Scotland. At the same time this building communicated ideas about national revival.[45]

ROBERT BILLINGS BARONIAL AND ECCLESIASTICAL ANTIQUITIES OF SCOTLAND

Figure 8. Robert Billings Baronial Antiquities of Scotland: selected plates (1852).

First and foremost among these source drawings was the four-volume *Baronial and Ecclesiastical Antiquities* (1852), published by architect Robert W. Billings.[46] Although based on accurate drawings, the finished illustrations presented dramatically shaded perspectives of castles and churches. As with Adam, the subjects, even if symmetrical on plan, were presented in an irregular and asymmetrical manner, emphasising mass and monumentality and their ruinous and neglected quality These characteristics were to help form the mature Scotch Baronial idea and style. Billings' survey work was assisted by advocate and historian John Hill Burton and local ministers; he also befriended David Bryce who became the leading Victorian architect working in the Scotch Baronial style.

In 1887, architects and publishers Macgibbon and Ross documented just under 800 castles, large and small, many ruinous before 1800. What had originated as a collection of

---

[45] Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Early Victorian Architecture* (New Haven: Yale University, 1954), pp. 246-249; Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, p. 174.

[46] Robert Billings, *Baronial & Ecclesiastical Antiquities of Scotland* (Edinburgh: Oliver and Boyd, 1901).

defensive elements were seen in the late Victorian period as romantic motifs for the newly affluent.

FIGURE 8.10 *Fettes College, Edinburgh, by David Bryce, 1864–70 – view from south-east; photograph dated 1994. © Historic Environment Scotland. https:// canmore.org.uk/collection/793539*

Figure 9. Fettes College in the centre of Edinburgh, High Victorian with
SB touches such as the lucarne, the tourelles and crowstep gables.

BRYCE DAVID MOST PROLIFIC SB ARCHITECT 1803-1876

Bryce worked in all styles; at first in the so-called Palladian and Italian Renaissance, but he soon devoted himself more exclusively to Gothic, particularly that variety of it he called Scottish Baronial. It was in this style that his greatest successes were achieved, particularly in the erection and alteration of around fifty large country houses, which testify to his appreciation of picturesque effects.[47] The best of his public buildings in this Scottish Baronial style are probably the High Victorian Fette's College Edinburgh and the Royal Infirmary in Edinburgh. His buildings of the Bank of Scotland, which so largely contribute to the beauty of the outline of the Old Town of Edinburgh, exhibit him at his best in the Italian style.[48]

MACKINTOSH AND THE FIRST CASTLE AGE

In this brief examination of Baronial, the last notable and original architect working in a simplified Scotch baronial mode was Charles Rennie Mackintosh. He used the L-plan as a design for residential projects. The building was well thought through, simple and imposing,

---

[47] Alistair Disley, *Scotland's Lost Country Houses*. At: http://slch.disley.org/.

[48] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, p. 176.

using an L-plan but without many of the Scotch Baronial elements.[49] His personal interpretation of Scotch architecture was best exemplified by the Hill House, Helensburgh (1902), a long, relatively low block recalling precedents such as the south façade of Keith Marischal house (1589), but with blank-walled expanses and random-looking multipaned windows.[50] According to Glendinning, Mackintosh was inspired by the simpler buildings of the First Castle Age rather than those of the more elaborate more symbolic Second Age.

Figure 10. Hill House by CR Mackintosh, an L-plan concept with minimal SB effects.

The years after 1880 in Scotland saw a rejection of picturesque complexity, and greater calls for simplicity. Highly decorated buildings declined in popularity, a development that had affected the public view of the Second Castle Age. The patronage base of this was now extending to the new expanding affluent middle-class. In Edinburgh and Eastern Scotland especially, "Scotch Baronial" mutated into "Scotch traditionalism"; a movement whose advocates rejected stylistic eclecticism in favour of a more intuitive individualism. They were still focusing on castellated forms but were inspired directly by what they believed to be the Scottish Renaissance but at the same time they rejected Scotch Baronial as a direct model.[51]

However, documentation to support the Scotch Baronial idea was under way. In 1887, Macgibbon and Ross published five volumes covering around 900 buildings as Scotch Baronial. This invaluable record includes scaled floor plans and hand-drawn elevations in a far less heightened, dramatic tone than previous accounts. [52]

---

[49] Jackie Cooper (ed.), *Mackintosh Architecture* (London: Academy Editions, 1978), p. 41.

[50] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, p. 217.

[51] Glendinning, *Scotch Baronial*, pp. 204-220.

[52] David Macgibbon and Thomas Ross, *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland from the Twelfth to the Eighteenth Century* (Edinburgh: James Thin Publishers, 1892).

CONCLUSION

Were the majority of houses of the Scottish nobility built in the Baronial style? This is an interesting question, throwing light on the question of the extent of Scotch Baronial style adoption. It is of interest that in Hugh Montgomery Massingberd's *Great Houses of Scotland* (1997), a popular survey of twenty-six larger country houses, only four are classical, while the rest are Baronial to some extent, having several of the characteristic forms. Of the classical houses, Kinross Castle is the most English, with no Scotch Baronial forms at all. The most notable Scotch Baronial castle is Glamis Castle, with its stair tower connecting two wings.[53]

David Black reached the following conclusions about the two ages of the Scotch Baronial movement when seen from the time around 2019. Baronialism offered rather more flamboyant opportunities than the Adams' corrected neoclassical style, which is not to say the latter lacked the odd dramatic pie-crust crenellation. Whereas the first castle age was, for all its variations, reasonably authentic, with real lords and barons holding out against all comers, while still capable of telling the world how stylish and fashionable they were.

Castle age number two had an altogether different function. Even where some might still profess nobility, the old clan feifdoms had fallen, and fortunes were being earned elsewhere. A senior position in the East India Company, a Jamaican plantation, a pot of Napoleonic War prize money might furnish the necessary cash for a Scots Baronial castle.[54]

---

[53] Hugh Montgomery Massingberd, *Great Houses of Scotland* (New York: Universe Publishing, 2001).

[54] David J. Black, "Miles Glendinning and Aonghus Mackechnie, Scotch Baronial: Architecture and National Identity in Scotland [Review]," *The Innes Review* 70, no. 2 (2019): pp. 221-224.