



*Tulliallan Castle, Fife. Interior of ground floor, looking west. Drawing from MacGibbon and Ross, *The Castellated and Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, Vol.1, (fig. 472, p. 555). Described by Dunbar (1966) as a hall-house.*

Scottish 'hall-houses': the origins and development of a modern castellological concept

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In a refreshing and effective tilt at 'hall-houses' and the distortions that their identification has created in the study and understanding of Irish castles and medieval society, Tadhg O'Keefe was unable to go further back than 1997-8 for the first explanations in print of the term in relation to the Irish evidence.¹ The limited purpose of this short note is simply to draw attention to the fact that by that date 'hall-houses' had been part of the Scottish castellological lexicon for about four decades. By then, at least in certain quarters, the place of these Scottish buildings may have appeared to have become relatively assured, but their character, dating and distinctiveness as a class had always posed problems akin to those that O'Keefe has iden-

tified; as a taxonomic group they never commanded total acceptance and, unlike most other categories of castle, the 'hall-house' concept had certainly not become enshrined.

In Scotland, the term first emerged fully around 1960 on the combined authority of the distinguished castle-scholars of that era. The first integrated account of what, in Stewart Cruden's words, 'we might conveniently call ... hall-houses' appeared under his name in 1960,² and his treatment of them as a discrete architectural entity was followed shortly afterwards by John Dunbar, who likewise accorded them their own sub-section.³ Given such magisterial consensus it was not long before 'hall houses' were also accorded official recognition in the first three volumes of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland (RCAHMS) *Inventory of Argyll* series.⁴

Scottish 'hall-houses': the origins and development of a modern castellological concept

In retrospect, one is struck by the rapidity with which the 'hall-house' concept received such firm, authoritative and widespread espousal, having been completely absorbed into Scottish castellar typologies within a decade of its first published definition. Such instant acclaim hints at an earlier process of gestation, perhaps one in which 'hall-houses' were being more spoken than written about. While it is no longer easy to chart these more shadowy early stages, it should occasion no surprise that the highly influential William Douglas Simpson appears to have had an identifiable hand in a slightly earlier re-branding exercise in favour of 'hall-houses'. In a revision article on Duffus, Rait and Morton Castles produced for the 1958-9 session of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (although not published until 1961),⁵ Simpson made frequent reference to his subject as a group of 'early hall-houses'; he used the term without definition, presuming his readers already knew exactly what he meant, and he retrospectively embraced Kindrochit within the category, 'excavation [having] recovered the plan of a hall-house'. In the same essay Simpson also took the recently deceased William Mackay Mackenzie (1871-1952) to task for holding 'the view that such stone hall-houses - or "palaces" in old Scottish parlance (*palatium* = hall in medieval Latin) - do not appear in Scotland before the fifteenth century.'⁶

Setting aside this serious misrepresentation of Mackenzie's judiciously balanced views of the chronology and character of castle halls and chambers,⁷ it should simply be noted here that Mackenzie's architectural vocabulary had never included 'hall-houses'. By the late 1950s, on the other hand, Simpson was using the term in a manner that obviously demonstrated an established conviction on his part of its appropriateness, application and meaning, even to the extent of defining the 'tower-keep' as 'an up-ended form of the hall-house'.⁸ On this showing, it is not unreasonable to suppose that Simpson, then the doyen of Scottish and British castle studies, was either at or very close to the birth of the 'hall-house', but it would take a more thorough trawl of his publications than

is possible here to pin-point exactly when he started using the term.⁹

In the rapid formalisation of the 'hall-house' concept in Scotland after 1960 what is both noteworthy and ironical is that the firming-up process owed much to influences emanating from Ireland, explicit acknowledgement being regularly made to the work of the archaeological survey of Northern Ireland and specifically to Dudley Waterman, one of its principal officers. Like Leask and Mackenzie before him, Waterman appears to have eschewed, or was unaware of, the term itself, but his investigations of 'rectangular keeps' was extensively cited in the buttressing of Scottish 'hall-houses', especially in comparisons with examples in the West Highlands.¹⁰

Given the knowledgeable awareness of Scottish castellology that Irish scholars have demonstrated over the years, Irish castle literature is curiously silent about this phase of cultural cross-fertilisation. However, it is not difficult to understand how, consciously or subconsciously, an authoritative-looking concept that was developed in Scotland and made much comparative use of Irish exemplars might one day find its way back to Ireland and there be further developed and consolidated. Of course, such a process might simply have been reflecting coincidental pursuits on parallel academic tracks, but what is especially noticeable to a Scottish observer is that when identification of the Irish 'hall-house' did eventually take root in the last decades of the 20th century, it did so in a manner that was an uncannily familiar echo of the Scottish experience, finding its way into the official archaeological record remarkably quickly, firmly and without apparent demur - until now.

Following the publication in the early 1980s of a couple of papers that articulated a cautiously-worded preliminary challenge to the concept,¹¹ the debate over 'hall-houses' in Scotland became relatively muted and descriptions of their physical characteristics more nuanced.¹² Only those who have worked within official recording agencies that operate within corporate aca-

demarcated frameworks will fully understand why the criticism had to be cautiously coded; they will also recognise the subtle but symbolic magnitude of the return of 'hall-houses' to inverted commas in the later volumes of the RCAHMS *Inventory of Argyll* series.¹³ Equally subtly, in 1997, the same year as the 'hall-house' surfaced in force in Ireland, Scotland witnessed the first appearance of 'hall castle',¹⁴ a semantic shift that acknowledged the existence of a labelling problem but did nothing to resolve the fundamental issues that surround modern invented terminologies of this kind.

As Tadhg O'Keeffe has emphasised, one of most serious aspects of the 'hall-house' syndrome is the way it distorts the ways in which medieval society is viewed and reflected through the medium of surviving buildings. When Scottish 'hall-house' identification was at its height in the 1960s and 1970s their erection into a 13th-century period-type of minimally defensive character was equated with peace and domesticity, and it was this interpretation that prompted one leading Scottish medieval documentary historian to use them as alleged social barometers in a golden age of peace. 'Lest it be urged that the assumption of a peaceful society is invalid', wrote Professor Archie Duncan,¹⁵ 'the small number of recognised hall-houses of late thirteenth century date is worth mention. Essentially a compact dwelling house in stone with a timber-roofed hall set upon a domestic and storage undercroft, the hall-house was provided with slight defensive works; those at Morton (Dumfriesshire) and Rait (Nairn), for example, are lit by generous traceried windows and, although placed within enclosures, they have none of the forbidding character of the great castles of enclosure. They are rather to be thought of as conspicuous demonstrations of independence and wealth by knights or lairds, declaiming in expensive stone what most of their fellows must murmur in timber and clay.'

Almost 40 years on from when that was published in 1975, Scottish archaeological records and classifications continue to leave them-

selves open to, indeed implicitly encourage, such historical misuse of the physical evidence,¹⁶ and will continue to do so as long as 'hall-houses' remain an unchallenged dogma.

Tadhg O'Keeffe is to be warmly applauded for opening up an issue that has wider and deeper ramifications - and more Hiberno-Scottish cultural twists - than perhaps he himself realised. Prompted by his intervention, this brief note has merely outlined the Scottish contribution to the entanglement. The next stage will be to re-work and bring up-to-date a four-page memorandum on Scottish 'hall-houses' that was submitted over 40 years ago, in February 1973 to be precise, by the present author, then a junior historic buildings investigator, in a vain preliminary attempt to curb or even just to modify RCAHMS use of the concept and the term.

Notes And References

1. Tadhg O'Keeffe, 'Halls, "hall-houses" and tower-houses in medieval Ireland: disentangling the needlessly entangled', *Castle Studies Group Journal*, 27 (2013-14), 252-62 at 253, citing Tom McNeill, *Castles in Ireland: Feudal Power in a Gaelic World* (London, 1997), 149-55, and David Sweetman, 'The hall-house in Ireland', *Archaeology Ireland*, 12/3 (1998), 13-16.
2. Stewart Cruden, *The Scottish Castle* (Edinburgh, 1960, revised edition 1963), 91-9.
3. John G Dunbar, *The Historic Architecture of Scotland* (London, 1966), 33-6; revised edition issued as idem, *The Architecture of Scotland* (London, 1978), 46-7.
4. RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, volume 1, *Kintyre* (Edinburgh, 1971), 25, 165-78 (No. 314); volume 2, *Lorn* (Edinburgh, 1975), 27-8, 184-7 (No. 282), 212-17 (No. 290); and volume 3, *Mull, Tiree, Coll & Northern Argyll* (Edinburgh, 1980), 35, 170-3 (No. 332), 173-7 (No. 333).

Scottish 'hall-houses': the origins and development of a modern castellological concept

5. W Douglas Simpson, 'The castles of Duffus, Rait and Morton reconsidered', *PSAS (Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland)*, volume 92 for 1958-9 (1961), 10-14.
6. *Ibid.*, 10-11.
7. W Mackay Mackenzie, *The Mediaeval Castle in Scotland* (London, 1927), 110-31, 141-79.
8. W Douglas Simpson, 'The Tower-Houses of Scotland' in E M Jope (ed.), *Studies in Building History: essays in recognition of the work of B H St J O'Neil* (London, 1961), 229-42 at 232.
9. A T Hall (ed.), 'A bibliography of W Douglas Simpson 1896-1968' in W Douglas Simpson (J S Smith, ed.), *Dunollie, Oban, Argyll* (Aberdeen, 1991), 1-32. The Duffus, Rait and Morton article cited as note 5 above is item 319 in a list of 412.
10. See e.g. RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, volume 2, Lorn, 28, notes 1-2, referring to Castle Carra, County Mayo, and Greencastle, County Down, citing *An Archaeological Survey of County Down* (Belfast, 1966), 211-19; RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, volume 7, *Mid Argyll & Cowal Medieval & Later Monuments* (Edinburgh, 1992), 21, note 59, referring (on 538) to Athenry, County Galway, Grenan, County Kilkenny, and Kindlestown, County Wicklow, citing H G Leask, *Irish Castles* (Dundalk, 1944 revised edition), 36-9, and D M Waterman, 'Rectangular keeps of the thirteenth century at Grenan (Kilkenny) and Glanworth (Cork)', *Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, volume 98 (1968), 67-73; and John Dunbar, 'The Medieval Architecture of the Scottish Highlands' in Loraine Maclean (ed.), *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1981), 38-70 at 60, note 66, acknowledging information on Cargin, County Galway, Grenan, County Kilkenny, Kindlestown, County Wicklow, 'and other Irish hall-houses' supplied by the late Dudley Waterman.
11. Geoffrey Stell, 'Late medieval defences in Scotland' in D H Caldwell (ed.), *Scottish Weapons and Fortifications* (Edinburgh, 1981), 21-54 at 23-4, and *idem*, 'The Scottish Medieval Castle: Form, Function and "Evolution"' in K J Stringer (ed.), *Essays on the Nobility of Medieval Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1985), 195-209 at 203.
12. See e.g. Dunbar, 'Medieval Architecture of the Scottish Highlands', *loc. cit.*, 48-9, 54-5 and 67.
13. RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, volume 5, *Islay, Jura, Colonsay & Oronsay* (Edinburgh, 1984), 36-7, 263-4 (No. 400), and volume 7, *Mid Argyll & Cowal Medieval & Later Monuments* (Edinburgh, 1992), 21, 214 (No. 114), 283-6 (No. 130), 296-7 (No. 138), 297-302 at 299-300 (No. 139).
14. Chris Tabraham, *Scotland's Castles* (London, 1997), 37-8, 55; (London, 2005), 31, 44-5.
15. A A M Duncan, *Scotland: The Making of the Kingdom*, The Edinburgh History of Scotland, volume 1 (Edinburgh, 1975), 441.
16. See e.g. Michael Brown, *The Wars of Scotland 1214-1371* (Edinburgh, 2004), 103, for further demonstration of the way in which documentary historians latch on to what they are led to understand to be qualitative archaeological differences between castles and halls.

Scottish ‘hall-houses’: the origins and development of a modern castellological concept

TABLE 1:
Surviving Scottish buildings identified as ‘hall-houses’ or ‘hall castles’

Name/Island	Pre-1975 County	Source
Ardtornish Castle	Argyll	Dunbar, 1978; RCAHMS, 1980; Dunbar, 1981.
Aros Castle, Mull	Argyll	Dunbar, 1978; RCAHMS, 1980; Dunbar, 1981. Tabraham, 1997/2005.
Camus/Knock Castle, Skye	Inverness-shire	Dunbar, 1981
Fortified dwelling, Caol Chaorann, Torran	Argyll	RCAHMS, 1992
Carrick Castle	Argyll	Tabraham, 1997/2005.
Castle Coeffin, Lismore	Argyll	RCAHMS, 1975; Dunbar, 1981
Claig Castle, Jura	Argyll	Dunbar, 1981; RCAHMS, 1984.
Craigie Castle	Ayrshire	Cruden, 1960/3; Tabraham, 1997/2005.
Duffus Castle	Moray	Simpson, 1958-9; Simpson, 1965/8
Fincham Castle	Argyll	Dunbar, 1981; RCAHMS, 1992.
Fraoch Eilean	Argyll	RCAHMS, 1975; Dunbar, 1978; Dunbar, 1981; Tabraham, 1997/2005.
Glensanda Castle	Argyll	Dunbar, 1981
Hailes Castle	East Lothian	Simpson, 1965/8
Manor House, Hestan Island	Kirkcudbright	Cruden, 1960/3.
Bishop’s Palace, Kirkwall	Orkney	Cruden, 1960/3; Dunbar, 1966.
Lochranza Castle, Arran	Buteshire	Cruden, 1960/3; Dunbar, 1981. Tabraham, 1997/2005.
Morton Castle	Dumfriesshire	Simpson, 1958-9. Cruden, 1960/3. Dunbar, 1966. Dunbar, 1978.
Rait Castle	Nairnshire	Simpson, 1958-9; Cruden, 1960/3 Dunbar, 1966; Dunbar, 1978 Tabraham, 1997/2005.
Fortified dwelling, ‘Robber’s Den’, Ardrishaig	Argyll	RCAHMS, 1992.
Building, St Abb’s Head	Berwickshire	Tabraham, 1997/2005.
Skipness Castle	Argyll	Cruden, 1960/3. Dunbar, 1966. RCAHMS, 1971. Dunbar, 1978. Dunbar, 1981. Tabraham, 1997/2005.
Toward Castle	Argyll	RCAHMS, 1992
Tulliallan Castle	Fife	Dunbar, 1966.

Scottish ‘hall-houses’: the origins and development of a modern castellological concept

TABLE 1: Full bibliographic references

- Cruden, 1960/3. Stewart Cruden, *The Scottish Castle* (Edinburgh, 1960/3), 91-9.
- Dunbar, 1966. John G Dunbar, *The Historic Architecture of Scotland* (London, 1966), 33-6.
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- RCAHMS, 1971. RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, volume 1, *Kintyre* (Edinburgh, 1971), 25, 165-78 (No. 314).
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- Simpson, 1958-9. W Douglas Simpson, ‘The castles of Duffus, Rait and Morton reconsidered’, *PSAS (Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland)*, volume 92 for 1958-9 (1961), 10-14.
- Simpson, 1965/8. W Douglas Simpson, *The Ancient Stones of Scotland* (London, 1965 and 1968), 176-8.
- Tabraham, 1997/2005. Chris Tabraham, *Scotland’s Castles* (London, 1997 and 2005), 31, 44-5.

TABLE 2:

Irish buildings referred to in comparative discussions of scottish ‘hall-houses’

Name	County	Source
Athenry	Galway	RCAHMS, 1992
Cargin	Galway	Dunbar, 1981
Castle Carra	Mayo	RCAHMS, 1975
Greencastle	Down	RCAHMS, 1975
Grenan	Kilkenny	Dunbar, 1981; RCAHMS, 1992
Kindlestown	Wicklow	Dunbar, 1981; RCAHMS, 1992

Table 2: Full bibliographic references

- Dunbar, 1981. John Dunbar, ‘The Medieval Architecture of the Scottish Highlands’ in Loraine Maclean (ed.), *The Middle Ages in the Highlands* (Inverness, 1981), 38-70 at 48, 60, note 66.
- RCAHMS, 1975. RCAHMS, *Inventory of Argyll*, volume 2, *Lorn* (Edinburgh, 1975), 28, notes 1-2.
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