



## The Castle, South Street, Elie

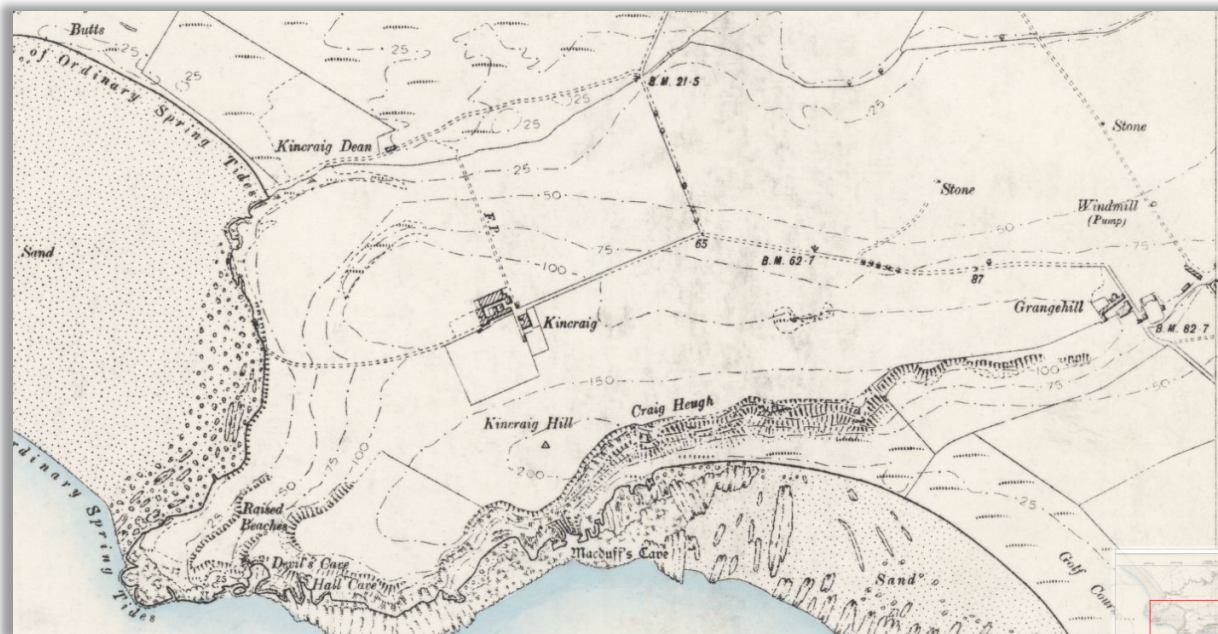
By Graham Johnston

This building has always seemed to me to be a bit of an anomaly. Here is a Castle no less in somewhat sober surroundings and no sign of big gates, sweeping driveway etc.

Historic Scotland describes the technicalities thus:

*17<sup>th</sup> Century, L-plan; 3-storey and attic, harl and slate, swept dormer-heads, garret dormer; crowstepped: interior panelling and painted ceiling; stair-tower probably dates late 16<sup>th</sup> Century.*

When I asked the current owners about their knowledge of the house they told me that they had very little information, because when they bought the house in 1990s(?) they were told that it had been in the same family for many centuries and the selling family had sort of runout of people who could use it. This appears to be accurate, as we shall see.

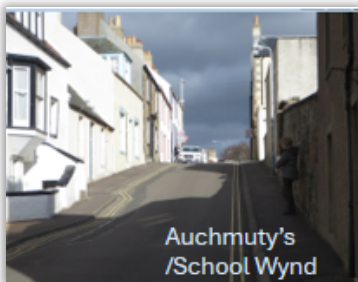


Perhaps the oldest extant house in Elie, it was apparently erected as a secondary seat for the Lairds of Kineraig, the estate situated a mile or so to the west of Elie. At one time the estate belonged to the Bickerton family, but by the time this mansion was built it was in

possession of the Gourlays. Wood<sup>1</sup> in his history says that possibly the Auchmutys who had property at Lahill near Largo may have had a close connection with Elie -

*“for there is a wynd in the town called Auchmuty’s wynd and the large house on the West side of it and close to the sea which belonged afterwards to the Gourlays of Kincaraig may perhaps have originally been theirs.”*

This makes some sense in that what is now School Wynd was called Auchmutie’s Wynd. The western portion of the castle is evidently the oldest and has consisted of a square tower or keep erected probably at the end of the 16<sup>th</sup> Century. So before the Gourlays it may have been the Auchmutys.



The records state it was a house of Dr. John Gourlay<sup>i</sup>, second son of Sir Thomas Gourlay of Kincaraig. He had been bound apprentice to Patrick Hebron Pottinger, i.e. an apothecary or herbalist in Edinburgh. In 1657 he went to Paris to study there and came back in 1658, immediately after which he settled in Elie. This would have been in the Castle. The mansion is more than a mere townhouse for the family - he would have

had a large house from which to work. We think therefore that the Castle was built or at least substantially altered by the Gourlays for John and his wife Margaret (nee Sharp). Doctor John Gourlay died in 1667 and his widow Margaret remarried another doctor, Parick Arthur. Margaret Sharpe or Arthur died in 1719; Patrick having predeceased her. They had one child, William who died in Dundee.

There is some connection between Lady Salton, who was the daughter of Archbishop Sharpe of St. Andrews, and Arthur’s wife whose name was the same as her own, namely Margaret Sharp(e) and who was actually the daughter of Dr. Sharp of Edinburgh. It must have been towards the end of the 1600s. The Arthurs had also another property called Croftangry which is supposed to have lain to the east of the carriage entrance into Elie lodge<sup>2</sup>.

Anyway Wood tells us *“at the time of her father's death Lady Salton was paying a visit to doctor Patrick Arthur in his house in Elie opposite the foot of Auchmutys Wynd and in her grief and anxiety over the news of her father (Archbishop Sharpe of St. Andrews) she set out without a moment's delay expecting to get to Colinsburgh where a conveyance would take her to Saint Andrews.”* As tradition says in order to make more speed she cast off her high heeled shoes at the “Whyte Yett” (White Gate) and performed the rest of the journey on her stocking soles. There is some connection between Lady Salton and Arthur’s wife whose name was the same, Margaret Sharp(e).

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<sup>1</sup> Rev Walter Wood - The East Neuk of Fife Its History and Antiquities 1887.

<sup>2</sup> Elie Lodge is the property which formerly stood on the area of ground which became the Beach Hotel, Co-op Convalescent Home and then Highcroft. We speculate that Croftangry may well have been where Kingscroft is in Elie High Street.

What then happened to the Castle we are not sure. However, there is an entry in the Gourlay family history which suggests that another of the Gourlay family, George, who was born in 1672 and was the part owner of two sea vessels may have used it as a base for his seafaring activities after Margaret vacated it.

After that the provenance of the Castle is a bit vague since records of census and valuation rolls properties were not really started until the 1840s. It is difficult to know who lived in the house during that period. However, we do know the first connection to the house of the Scott Moncrieff family was when Miss Jane Scott Moncrieff, in 1855, was registered as the owner of the house. And we have discovered that Jane Scott Moncrieff inherited the castle from her father, William Scott Moncrieff, who himself inherited the castle in 1839 from his aunt Jean Gourlay. Jean Gourley/Scott was the daughter of Dr. John Scott and Jean Gourlay of Kincaig and was born in 1695. According to Wood, Dr. John Scott M.D. had the property of Coates in Newburn and he married Magdalen Moncrieff. His son Robert took the name Scott Moncreiff and lived in Edinburgh.

So it seems more than likely that Jean Gourlay, Jean Scott's mother, had obviously acquired the property down the Gourlay line. It is of course interesting that she married another doctor, John Scott. It was actually his second marriage. So her daughter, Jean Gourlay/Scott, acquired the property from her and when she died in 1839. The property passed on to William Scott Moncrieff who was her nephew. It seems, therefore, that the Gourlays retained the house up until the death of his aunt Jean. Jane Scott Moncrieff took up residence there but it was not her principal residence; she was also designed as living in India Street, Edinburgh.

The Scott Moncrieff family consisted of six daughters of Brigadier Scott Moncrieff. Four of these daughters took up residence in the Castle in Elie sometime probably 1936. There was Catherine, Mary, Martha and Isabel. One of these sisters was also an auxiliary nurse at the end of the First World War, when there was an auxiliary hospital at Craigforth in Earlsferry. We have a picture of Miss Scott Moncrieff circa 1918 (below) but we're not sure which of the family this one is. They were particularly devout family and did a lot of philanthropic work both in the community and wider and many youngsters were given holidays especially from Quarriers Homes in Renfrewshire. All the sisters died in Elie at various times and Isabel Scott Moncrieff lived until she was 102. Her gravestone in Elie churchyard is pictured (right).



We think the Scott Moncrieff family continued living in the house, sometimes permanently, sometimes holiday wise, until the castle was eventually sold to Richard and Jane Keen. The Scott Moncrieff family were blessed with many daughters, only one of whom married. Indeed, during the 1880s right up to the 1930s at least, three or four of the Scott

Moncrieff girls were living there. The eldest Scott Moncrieff was the only one who married. Elizabeth Edith Scott Moncrieff married Gilbert Bevan in 1920.

They lived down in England and had one child, Robert George Bevan, who was born in October 1924 and died in 2002. He was the last surviving offspring off the Scott Moncrieff family on the male side and we understand from the Keens that at the time they purchased the property from the Bevan family they were very reluctant to let it go but by that time none of the family was interested in carrying on with it. They had told the Keens that the property had been in their family for many generations....and so it seems.

Graham Johnston March 2026

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Additional notes:

## Dr John Gourlay

John, younger son of Sir Thomas Gourlay, studied medicine, first at Edinburgh, and afterwards in Paris ; he thereafter practised as a physician at Elie, in Fife. In 1660 he married Margaret, daughter of Dr Sharp,

He had two daughters before he died in 1667 at the age of 29. My guess is that he used the house as his surgery and that on his death his wife Margaret Sharp stayed on because by December 1672 she is shown to have remarried a Dr. Patrick Arthur, who was a doctor in Elie, and I suspect he continued to use the Castle for his practice. Margaret died in 1719 and they had one child, William who died in Dundee.

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A large and handsomely built farm house and office houses all in good repair attached to it is a large farm of ground the property of Miss Gourlay and occupied by Mrs Russell. It was formerly a mansion house and as such was but a small building. anciently it belonged to a family of the name of "Bickerton" and since the reign of David II it is in the possession of the "Gourlays" and now used as a farm house, formerly. It was a barony and included many other lands in various counties.



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Photo by [arjayempee](#) on [flickr](#) ·

Elie Castle was apparently erected as a secondary seat for the lairds of Kincaig, an estate a mile or so to the west of Elie and Earlsferry, at one time belonging to the Bickerton family but by the time of this mansion in the possession of the Gourlays. The records state that it was the house of Dr. John Gourlay, second son of Sir John Gourlay of Kincaig, who in 1657 is recorded as making a journey to Paris. The mansion is more than a mere town-house for the family; and anyway, Kincaig... .. **less**

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Scions of the House of Gourlay of Kincaig had settled at Elie, in or prior to the seventeenth century. At the baptism of a child of George Gourlay, in Elie, on the 12th June 1672, the laird of Kincaig was a witness.<sup>1</sup> George Gourlay was captain of a coasting vessel, and owner of the eighth of "The Hopewell of Anstruther," and tenth of "The Margaret of Elie." He died in March 1776, when his "free gear" was valued at £2467, 6s. 8d. He bequeathed £100 for "a handsome burial stane to be placed abune his corps;" and made provision that in the failure of his own children, his substance should be inherited by the children of his brother John, skipper or ship-captain in Anstruther.<sup>2</sup>

At Elie, on the west of Auchmuty's Wynd, and close to the sea, a large house of castellated form, and evidently built in the sixteenth century, was the property of the Kincaig family. It was probably used as a marine residence.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Elie Parish Register.

<sup>2</sup> St Andrews Com. Reg., May 2, 1676.

<sup>3</sup> Wood's East Neuk of Fife, p. 66.