

PITTENCRIEFF

Extracts from

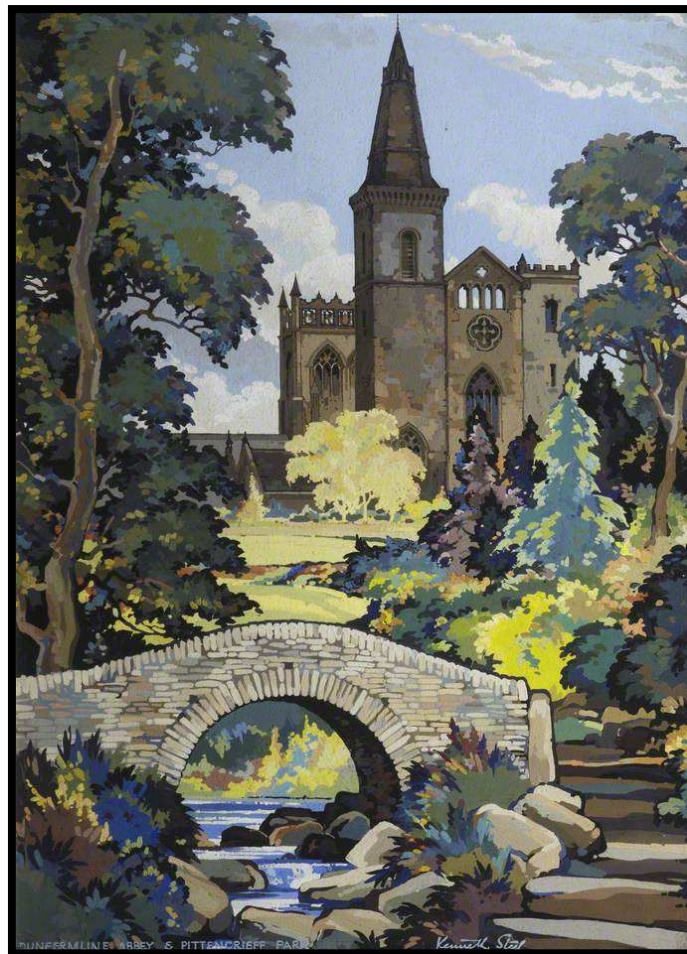
ROYAL DUNFERMLINE P. 61

By Alan Reid, F.S.A. (Scot)

&

William Kirk, J.P.

Editor of the "Dunfermline Press"



Compiled by Sheila Pitcairn F.S.A.Scot., L.H.G.

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PITTENCRIEFF.

A STRANGE COINCIDENCE. EARLY OWNERS. THE DOUBLE BRIDGE.
THE OLD WESTERN HIGHWAY. THE NEW STREET AND ROAD.
AN IDEAL PLEASURE RESORT. THE LAWN AND GARDENS. THE
MANSION-HOUSE.

Romance meets us on the threshold of this paradise, for the Right Hon. John Morley, M.P., when in America lately discovered that the man who gave to Pittsburg its name was actually born within the mansion-house* of Pittencrieff! Truly, the Glen and the centre of the Steel industry have thus a connection of singular interest; and it is a remarkable coincidence that the wealth gained in Pittsburgh should have been the medium of securing for Dunfermline the patrimony of Colonel John Forbes.

* He was born in Edinburgh 1707 posthumously, his mother brought him back to the family home at Pittencrieff.

The records of the estate carry us back to the early days of the neighbouring Monastery. In 1291, the lord of Pittencrieff granted portions of his lands to the Abbey, the whole estate, as it seems, being eventually acquired by the Abbots, who farmed it to various holders, as existing writings show. On the secularisation of the monastic possessions after the Reformation, George Seton, the first Earl of Dunfermline, acquired Pittencrieff among others lands belonging to the Abbey, and in the middle of the 17th century we find the estate in the possession of Sir Alexander Clerk, to whom the erection of the mansion-house is generally attributed. Its upper storey was added in 1740, and so strictly in keeping with the original style of the structure that the older and newer fabrics are practically homogenous. Many lairds have held Pittencrieff from the time of the Clerks down to that of Colonel Hunt, from whom it was purchased by Mr Carnegie, and all have treated the mansion with a reverence that may well be emulated by those in authority where repairs and improvements are the order of the day.

From the Abbey entrance, the approach to Pittencrieff is by the Palace, the Tower Hill, and over that remarkable structure the Tower Bridge. This object never fails to attract the attention of visitors to the Glen, its double, or super-imposed arches - as seen from the south, near the mansion-house - presenting a very striking and unusual appearance. The lower arch marks the level of the ancient approach to Dunfermline from the west, a highway that adapted itself to the natural contour of the Glen, and led to the town by the Tower Hill and the old West Port in St Catherine's Wynd. In ancient times it was known as the Girth Bow - the Bow or Arch of the Girth - a designation of much importance and of considerable meaning. It indicates that an entrance to the enclosed Girth, or sanctuary of the Abbey, was here, and that a portal of some sort formed part of the original plan. The existing lower arch, however, dates only from the days of Queen Anna, who rebuilt the ruinous early structure, according to the inscribed stone which bears her initials and the date 1611.

The story of the upper arch is more prosaic. Somewhere about the year 1765, Mr George Chalmers, who had become proprietor of Pittencrieff, desired an easier approach to his house than that offered by the old Girth bridge and more privacy than was possible with a public road passing through his grounds. He tackled the Town Council on the subject and that body after years of troubled deliberation, agreed to allow Mr Chalmers to divert the highway from the Glen to the western borders of his estate, and by that series of arches thrown across the Tower Burn which now forms the busy Bridge Street thoroughfare. The building of the new bridges and the raising of the roadway at the Tower proceeded so slowly that the work - an error of judgment as far as the Glen was

concerned - seems not to have been completed till the advent of a new laird upon the scene. In 1788, as appears from the ornamental panel built into the structure, the upper arch was finished and the new connection made between the opposing slopes of the Glen. As they stand, the double arches add much to the picturesque appearance of this corner of the demesne, their grey masonry and dark shadows adding a note of singular charm to the richly varied course of the stream tht sparkles beneath them.

The privilege of roaming at will over the "Dooble Brig" and throughout these lovely grounds is delightful. It may well be that delight is the keener because Pittencrieff was for generations as a sealed book to all but a favoured few among the citizens, albeit in earlier times the goodwives of the town oft bleached their clothes upon the Tower Hill. It was but natural that some discontent should be bred of exclusion from the beauty spot of the district, but its winter has now given place to the summer of perfect freedom, largely shared by all classes of the community. Working on popular lines, and guided by experts in various branches of knowledge, the Carnegie Trust are making Pittencrieff an ideal pleasure resort, and are using all their resources to develop its accessibility, beauty, and amenity. They are placing pathways and bridges here, forming a lake or a waterfall there, now reinforcing nature's wealth of leaf and blossom, furnishing entertainment and excitement for the young, rest and pleasant pastimes for the aged, and healthful gladsomeness for all.



Pittencrieff House

The sunny slopes spreading in front of the mansion-house from a play-field and rambling ground of great extent and charm. The grand old trees are notable for their growth and beauty, some of the oldest larches in the country being numbered among them. The modern Bandstand and Tea Pavilion may seem somewhat out of place in the verdant harmony, but they are eloquent of the attractions that are gradually being added for the greater enjoyment or comfort of the visitor, and Nature here works on a scale so lavish that there is room and to spare for the expression of the "up-to-date" spirit. The gardens are magnificent, and should be seen by every visitor. They are renowned far and wide for their grand display of fruits and flowers, which, while charming the senses, proclaim the best results of horticultural science. It is an education in nature-knowledge to ramble observantly through the Glen, the greenery, the rockery, the aviary, and the gardens of Pittencrieff, and a privilege that should never fail to rouse feelings of the liveliest gratitude towards the generous donor.

As has been indicated, the mansion-house is representative of the domestic buildings of the 17th century land as such has a claim on the attention of every intelligent observer. The long, narrow structure, varied only in plan by the single staircase tower, cannot be advanced as a specimen of fine architecture, but as the home of several generations of Pittencrieff lairds it has an interest that is unaffected by artistic graces, or their absence. But there are ornamental details and constructive features worthy of remarks even in this solid-looking, unpretentious old building. The arms of S.A.C. - Sir Alexander Clerk - over the entrance doorway may be noted, as also their accompanying legend - "Praised be God for al His giftes." The mouldings associated with these inscriptions, the national emblems over the windows, the fanlight with ornamental work of Adams's design, the ornate window in the west gable, the cornice running round the south and north walls, and the quaint upper story of the tower are also worthy of observation. The massive walls are harled and cream-tinted, the windows square-headed and plain, the chimneys of a common type, and the general effect uninspiring, yet Pittencrieff House has a charm that is missed by many more pretentious structures, and a situation that might be the envy of the fairest of them all. The interior is even more interesting, and more characteristic of a bygone period than is the exterior. The fronts of the steps in the wide circular staircase show sunk panels, the principal rooms are all lined with panelled woodwork, the finely designed doors are of unusual construction, and some of the plaster work shows the elegant forms common to the decorations of its period. Other details, such as the open lettering round the parapet of the stair, the original fireplaces, and various items of minor ornamentation may also be observed, the general arrangement of the various apartments being in itself an interesting study. While the absence of accommodation

and comfort is strongly evident, the great improvement of the old domestic residence on the earlier baronial type may under this object lesson, be fairly conceded. As a museum building containing the nucleus of a good local collection of antiques and curios, and as a home of rest and recreation, Pittencrieff House is unique. The hope may be expressed here that it may long be preserved in its entirety as not least among the attractions of the beautiful estate.

In the spirit of the noble aspirations expressed by Mr Carnegie his letter explanatory of his intentions, the Trustees are carrying out their beneficent scheme, working slowly and with caution towards its fuller realisation. In the meantime, Pittencrieff is the strongest, clearest evidence of their operations; and the course of a few years will show the wisdom of their efforts to improve and beautify the lovely Park and Glen.

PITTENCRIEFF IN POETRY

NATIVE BARDS AND THEIR PRAISE. ANDREW MERCER'S HISTORY AND POEMS. KING MALCOLM'S HUNTING: HIS DELIVRANCE FROM DANGER AND HIS GRATITUDE. ROBERT GILFILLAN AND "THE BONNIE, BONNIE TOON." HENRY SYME'S TRIBUTE. A. S. ROBERTSON ON THE "AULD GREY TOON." ROBERT HENRYSON AGAIN: HIS "MORNING IN JUNE." THOMAS MORRISON'S WRITINGS. OTHER WRITERS AND THEIR REFERENCES. DAVID FLEMING AND "THE CLASHIN' WIVES O' PITTENCRIEFF". THE OTHER SIDE OF THE QUESTION.

It cannot fail to be interesting to natives, if not to visitors a well, to recall what the bards of the "Auld Grey Toon" have written in the praise of Pittencrieff. Their songs are in some cases nearly forgotten, even the names of their authors may seem strange to their successors yet the note they strike is unisonous and true. The eager interest of the citizen in the beautiful estate which princely generosity has now made his own, is carried into years that never dreamed of such good fortune, but the meed of admiration was awarded as unstintedly as it is now. Local esteem has never swerved from its fondness for the beauties of the romantic spot, and its deepest, sweetest expression lies in the warblings of its minstrel soul.

Andrew Mercer may well act as "Master of the Song." A historian of culture and repute, and a poet of very fair attainments, his verses ring almost with the cadence of authority. In 1819 he published at Dunfermline a long and varied poem, "Dunfermline Abbey," which, with a series of excellent historical illustrations, ran into a volume of nearly

200 pages. As the early portions of this poem deal mainly with the founding of Canmore's Tower in Pittencrieff Glen, we may regard them as forming a historical basis for all that follows; and if, to some extent, the data belongs more to the realm of fancy than to the region of fact, we will whisper "poetic license," and pass on.

Mercer, then finds the Royal "hunt is up" on Saline hills, and turns its flight southwards. A noble stag is singled out by King Malcolm Canmore, and with a rushing sweep.

O'er Bandrum's sunny height they bound,
And through the waste below;
Now Luscar's copse-clad down they clear,
True to the slot-mark of the deer,
That points him to the foe.

Eastward he bends his rapid flight,
Deep panting in for relief;
Through bushy field and whinny vale,
Until he reach a hollow dell -
The Glen of Pittencrieff.

The King's arrow wound the stag, and infuriated, it charges the Royal steed. In the moment of danger, Malcolm recovers himself, and despatches his prey by a stroke of his battle-axe. His courtiers and attendants applaud his skill and bravery, and in halt is called :-

Hard by a mount with flattened top
Upreats its rugged brow;
Its sides are broken, rocky, steep,
That hardly there a goat might creep;
A rivulet runs below.

And winding sweeps around the mount,
Forming a lovely arch;
Then down the glen, with babbling din,
O'er crags through trees, as it may win,
Pursues its distant march.

Thither Canmore, with all his chiefs,
Ascend, and seat them there;
He orders wine and wassail straight,
His ready pages on him wait
With loads of Royal cheer.

The feasting over, the monarch, in jocund mood, surveys his charming surroundings, and makes a resolution of supreme moment in the history of Dunfermline: -

This place much winneth me, he said,
In truth it is a pleasant glade,
With wood and water rich arrayed;
With steep ascents on all sides round;
Save one approach - that narrow mound;
By nature strong, improved by skill,
'Twould be a site just to my will,
A thought has struck me; on this spot,
Before a period far remote,
I'll build a Tower, that shall convey
The memory of this lucky day.

True to his character, the impetuous King sprang to his feet: -

Here, to the brim a goblet fill!
He cried, and stood upright;
This to our fort upon the hill,
Soon may it rise to sight,
Unblotted ever be its fame,
And aye DUNFERMLINE be its name.

Nor was that all, for within the scene of that *al fresco* entertainment in Pittencrieff Glen, Canmore vowed the erection of "some sacred altars" in lively gratitude of his deliverance. In due time -

Adjacent to the Castle, on a brow
That southwards overlooks a spacious vale,
Was fixed the Monast'ry's conspicuous site,
A charming situation!

And thus were reared the noble piles that gave the town a being, and the name whose later experiences bid fair to eclipse the glories of its earlier story. Mercer was one of its most while-hearted admirers, and in the volume now before us, as in his "History of Dunfermline," and in his Edinburgh volume of poems, "Summer Months Among the Mountains," his devotion and knowledge are conspicuously apparent.



Pittencrieff Park, with Abbey in the distance.

Through Robert Gilfillan does not mention Pittencrieff by name, his song, *Dunfermline Toon*, teems with references to its charms and associations. It is to be hoped that the premier bard of his native town will retain a place of honour in the estimation of its citizens. Had Gilfillan done nothing more than enrich our native minstrelsy with one of its finest numbers, "Oh, why left I my hame?" his claims would have been of the strongest. But he did much more, though most of it has fallen from sight; and it would be a graceful act to honour him, as Paisley honours Tannahill, by an annual Gilfillan musical celebration on the sunny slopes of Pittencrieff. So may it be; and now let us peruse three of the four stanzas written by Gilfillan in praise of the "bonnie toon," and the "bonnie braes" over which wandered the kings and queens of other days:-

O Dunfermline toon is a bonnie, bonnie toon,
And wha says that it isna bonnie?
For gin we had again braw kings o' our ain,
It would lift up its head yet wi' ony.
O Dunfermline toon is a bonnie, bonnie toon,
And it tells o' auld Scotland's grandeur,
For within it, langsyne, kings drank "the bluid red wine,"
While their queens `mang its bonnie braes did wander.

O Dunfermline toon, and my ain native toon,
Will ony ane daur to deride thee?
Thou place of ancient name, which kings aye made their hame,
And now they're a' sleeping beside thee!
Brave Malcolm the sceptre, wi' Margaret, did sway,
In yonder palace, auld now and hoary,
And there Bruce did ponder owre his country's wae,
How he'd achieve her freedom, fame, and glory.

O Dunfermline toon, thou bonnie, bonnie toon,
Wi' green woods thy valleys lining;
And the sun shines sae gay on ilka turret grey,
As if for thee along he was shining.
O Dunfermline toon, thou art still a bonnie toon,
And thy braes are as bonnie as ever;
But the gowan's pu'd nae mair by the princely bairnies fair,
And our gallant chiefs ha'e left thee a' thegither.

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In the "Local Musings" of Henry Syme, published in a volume of 250 pages in 1875, there are many references to local scenes and events. A sample of these we cull from his verses on *King Malcolm Canmore and Queen Margaret*, a poem in which the writer differs considerably from the chronology of Mercer: -

Sune syne he built a stately tower  
Owertapping a' the wude;  
The rugged hill it restit on  
Was like a pyramid,  
It was a stately tower, I ween,  
Close to the crookit stream,  
'Twas Malcolm's Tower, to shield his queen  
When he micht be frae hame.

In Pittencrieff's romantic glen,  
The ruins witness still  
Where stude King Malcolm's stately tower  
Upon the Tower Hill;  
And Margret's sacred resting place  
Near Bruce's grave is seen;  
Labours of love, and godly grace,  
Made her a worthy Queen.

Among the moderns, Andrew Smith Robertson single very sweetly of *The Auld Grey Toon* and the Glen, which has become the heritage of his compatriots: -

O Auld Grey Toon ayont the Forth!  
Richt gladsome would I be  
Aince mair to tread thy ancient streets,  
Thy Abbey grey to see;  
For mem'ries dear o' youthfu' days  
Are fondly twined aroon'  
Ilk street, and house, and windin' close  
Within the Auld Grey Toon.

O Abbey grey! O Palace fair!  
O sweet sequestered Glen!  
There cluster roon' ye peacefu' joys  
That strangers dinna ken.  
Ah! mony an hour I've spent in thee  
Until the sun gaed doon,  
And pensive twilight spread her veil  
Across the Auld Grey Toon.

Nor is it stretching fancy too far to single out from among the ancients Dunfermline's famous old schoolmaster, Robert Henryson, as a frequenter and lover of the Glen, or to feel pretty certain that the woods of Pittencrieff were in his mind when he penned his *Morning in June*, and particularly in these quaintly-spelled stanzas:-

In middle of June, that joly sweet seasoun,  
When that fair Phebus with his beamis bricht,  
Had dryit up the dew fra daill and down,  
And all the land made with his lemis licht;  
In ane mornying, betwix mid-day and nicht,  
I rais, and put all sloth and sleep asyde,  
And to ane wood I went alone, but guide.

Sweet was the smell of flowers white and reid,  
The noise of birds richt delituous,  
The bewis braid bloomit aboon my heid,  
The ground growand with grasses gratious,  
Of all pleasance that place was plenteous,  
With sweet odouris and birdis harmonie,  
The morning myld, my mirth was mair furthy.

The late Thomas Morrison sang whole-heartedly of his native town and district, as is clearly shown by many patriotic effusion in the handsome memorial volume published privately in 1902. Wallace, The Bruce, Rosyth Castle, St Margaret's Well, the Abbey, and the Palace are among the local themes essayed, and very chastely does this ale singer touch on the traditions that associate the saintly Queen with her favourite haunts:-

It was within thine honoured shade,  
While friendless and alone,  
That she, proud England's exiled maid,  
Found shelter and a throne;  
For us 'twas an suspicious hour -  
Yet dark to her 'twould seem -  
When she, an outcast, sought the Tower  
Beside the crooked stream.

Here legends to our hearts endear  
Our sainted Scottish Queen:  
Retired, alone, oft strayed she there,  
In thoughtful mood, unseen.  
Here oft from yonder ancient towers  
She sought from pomp to dwell,  
And pondered o'er life's fleeting hours  
Besides her cherished Well.

She sleepeth now, enshrined with fame,  
'Neath yonder turrets grey,  
Tradition hath no nobler name  
In Scotland's earlier day;  
And oft beside her honoured grave  
The cherished tale we tell,  
That consecrates this ancient Cave  
And good St Margaret's Well.

For a poet and artist to whom the Glen must have been the source of much early inspiration, Sir J. Noel Paton has left but few impressions in his published volumes. Alexander Macnash has also been somewhat niggardly, though in his books he refers to the "City of the Crooked Stream," and forgets not to honour "The Tomb of the Bruce" and its picturesque surroundings. But it would be difficult to exhaust the burden of such references, and perhaps enough has been quoted to prove that the singers of Dunfermline are agreed on the charms of their lovely heritage.

No poetic garland would be complete, however, that did not include David Fleming's well-known "Clashing' Wives o' Pittencrieff"; so here it is in all its questionable purity minus the original fourth verse which is of too strong a flavour for ears polite. The old favourite appears first in a

sixteen-page pamphlet of "Original Songs," now a very scarce "commodity," most of which is very creditable to Fleming's natural and untutored abilities. It may be well to premise that the spirited lines, rattled off briskly in other days to the tune of "The Tinker's Waddin'," have not the slightest reference to Pittencrieff in the present year of grace.

### **THE CLASHIN' WIVES O' PITTENCRIEFF.**

My sang is short, and just for sport,  
Yet nane the worse o' bein' brief;  
And the subject that I've gotten for 't  
Is the Clashin' Wives o' Pittencrieff;  
For noo, since gloomy winter's game,  
And spring expands the tender leaf,  
It sets abroad baith wife and wean  
Frae east to wast o' Pittencrieff.

*Chorus* - For tittle-tattle, nicht and day,  
Sustains them under a' their grief,  
So seek - if wastwin be our way -  
Some ither road than Pittencrieff.

If business leads you east or wast,  
I' the mornin' early tak' the road,  
For then the drowsie god holds fast  
The beldames in the Land o' Nod;  
For, be ye simple or genteel,  
Your rank affords ye nae relief,  
For young and auld desert their wheel  
To *glowre* ye oot o' Pittencrieff.

As sune's the denner's aff the board,  
And John awa' to join his loom,  
They sally oot wi' ane accord  
To saunter bye the afternoon;  
Towards the "Entry" noo they've strolled,  
To meet wi' cronies dear and chief;  
Noo, in that angel group behold  
The Scandal Club o' Pittencrieff.

Ilk wifie brags o' her guidman -  
Hoo mony ells a day he'll work -  
Till the "Entry" wi' their clatter rang,  
The verra craws were thun'er-struck:  
But four o'clock was heard to chime  
Frae the steeples baith o' tron and kirk,  
Reminding them `twas near tea-time,  
And time for them to "cut their stick."

Each gossip took her homeward way,  
Fell sorry that her time was up.  
Resolved to meet some ither day  
And gie the kintra-side a whup;  
If thro' the streets a wauf-like chiel'  
Should pass, he's marked like a thief,  
An suffers martyrdom, atweel,  
I' the Scandal Club o' Pittencrieff.

If Fleming never felt the weight of a weaver's rubbing bane," it was not because he did not deserve it! Truth to tell, his conscience must have cried out under the weight of the slanderous indictment of his verses, for to their bane he was compelled to furnish an antidote. This we find in his "Response to the Above," the second song in his bookie, and a rather evasive or left-handed apology for his attempt to remove the mote from eyes that too clearly saw the beam in is own :-

Mony braw thanks to ye, dear Mister Editor,  
For printin' the sensitive bachelor's sang;  
You may be the means o' reformin' the character  
O' the Pittencrieff wifies, and that before lang;  
For the "Entry's" deserted since the verses were printed,  
And I've heard it affirmed that the Club is dissolved,  
While the weel-behaved wives o' the place slyly hinted  
The names o' the clashers should just hae been told.

But then that were guilty ran roond helty-skellty,  
Ragin' and flytin' the simmer day lang;  
Declarin' they'd droon the black-hearted loon  
That sent to the *News* sic an awfu'-like sang,  
But here's the advice I wad gi'e to ilk cummer -  
Just attend to the wark that awaits her at hame;  
And, instead o' gaun trailin' aboot after denner,  
To redd up her hoose and her dirty hearthstane!

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