

R 291 c

National Library of Scotland



B000194636



BRIEF NOTES
ON THE
Mary Queen of Scots Cabinet
FROM
Castle Menzies, Perthshire


BY
E. GORDON DUFF, M.A. (OXON.)

PRIVATELY PRINTED

1913



LAURISTON CASTLE
LIBRARY ACCESSION



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2012 with funding from
National Library of Scotland



❧ QUEEN MARY'S CABINET ❧



THE Menzies Cabinet is one of the more important relics of Mary Queen of Scots which has been handed down through generations of the family of the original owner right up to the present day. A certain number of relics belonging or relating to the unfortunate Queen are in existence, and though the authenticity of some of these is fully substantiated and beyond suspicion, yet many base their claim on vague tradition or on quite unsupported evidence. In the case of the present Cabinet, a gift from the Queen to one of the family of Menzies, it is of great interest to trace not only the provenance of the relic, but also the vicissitudes of the family by whom it has been preserved and of the Castle where they lived. The Cabinet is fully described and illustrated in "The Red and White Book of Menzies" (1894), page 187. The room at Castle Menzies in which this Cabinet was preserved was known as "Queen Mary's drawing-room" and is the old drawing-room of the Castle, with panelled walls ornamented with two large pieces of tapestry representing children and fauns playing in a classical landscape with temples and fountains in the background. In a smaller room which is connected by a passage with the drawing-room, and known as "Queen Mary's boudoir," is a third piece of similar tapestry. The bedroom which tradition states was used by the Queen is above the east end of the old banqueting hall. The ceilings of the drawing-room and bedroom are of ornamental plaster-work of the seventeenth century, put up in 1660 for Sir Alexander Menzies. In the centre of the bedroom ceiling is an escutcheon with his arms impaling those of his wife Agnes, daughter of Sir John Campbell of Glenurchy, while to commemorate the return of the Stuart King, Charles II, the royal emblems, the rose, the thistle, the harp and the fleur-de-lys have been introduced into the ornamentation.

The Queen's Cabinet is a most beautiful specimen of Scottish workmanship elaborately carved in Renaissance style. Below the ornamental cornice at the top is a large panel which folds down to form a writing-desk. Upon the front of this are carved the royal arms of Scotland, the Lion rampant within a double tressure flory counter-flory, supported by the two unicorns and surmounted by a royal helmet and crown. Below are the Queen's initials, M.R., standing for Maria Regina. Round the panel is a framework ornamented with twisting stems enclosing thistles and foliage. The lower part, slightly wider than the upper, contains three drawers graduated in depth, the fronts decorated with formal Renaissance carving of foliage and thistles. This famous Cabinet has been frequently exhibited, having been lent by the late Sir Robert Menzies, amongst other places at Peterborough, during the Mary Queen of Scots Tercentenary Exhibition in 1887, and at the Glasgow International Exhibition. Queen Mary's important letter to the Laird of Menzies (Weym) will be found at page 12.



THE MENZIES FAMILY
AND THEIR CONNECTION WITH THE
❧ ROYAL HOUSE OF STUART ❧

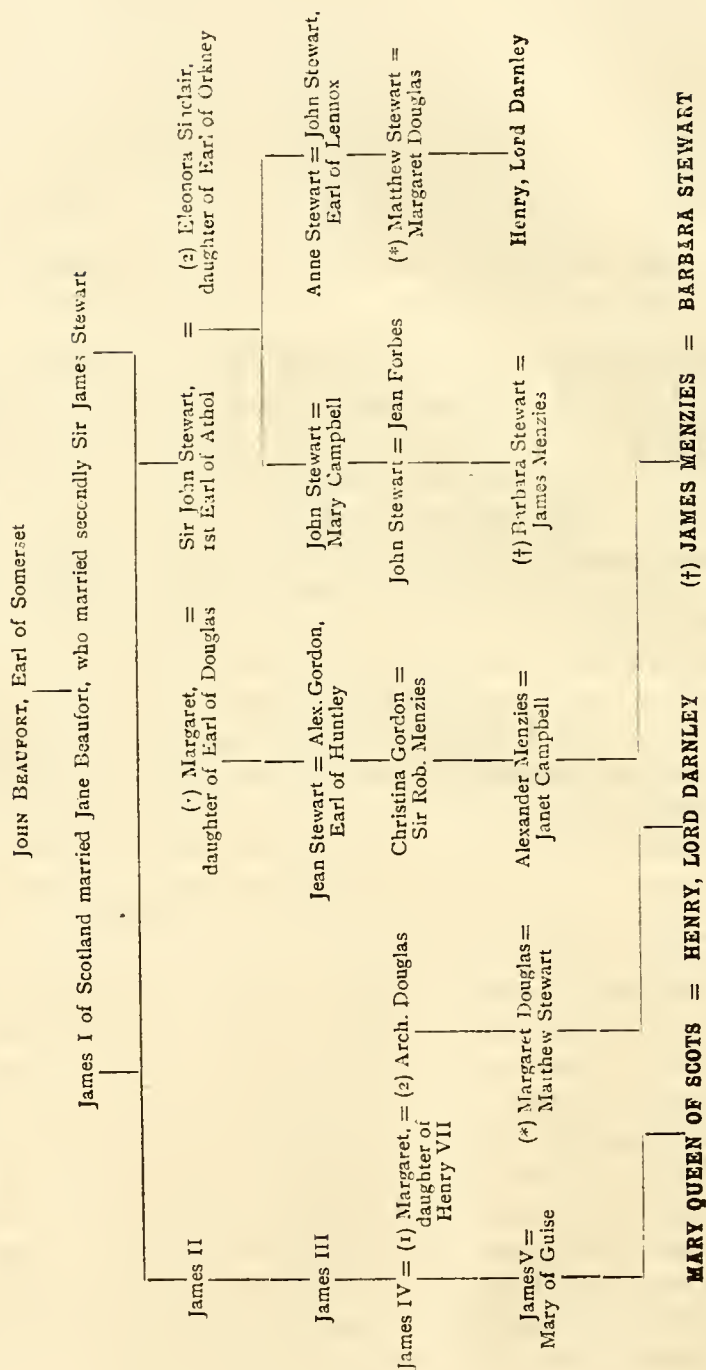


HE family of Menzies of that Ilk, though none of its members has risen to very high eminence, was nevertheless a distinguished and ancient one. During the greater part of the long period that it has existed, Castle Menzies was surrounded by very powerful neighbours, the ancient Earls of Athol, the Campbells of Breadalbane, the Stewarts of Grantully, the Grahams of Menteith ; yet the Menzies family managed to hold their own, and they were the oldest family in Strathtay with an unbroken descent in the direct male line down to Sir Neil James Menzies, eighth and last Baronet, who died in 1910, leaving no heir male, and the title is now extinct.

The most recent historian of the family asserts that it was founded by "Maynus," younger son of Fergus, King of Scotland, who began to reign in 333 B.C., and traces the generations in unbroken succession down to the late Sir Neil; the "sixty-second" in descent.

From the twelfth century onwards, we find the names of various chiefs of the family. As the witty chronicler of the neighbouring family, the Grahams, writes, "they were born with unfailing regularity, were returned heirs of their fathers at the proper time, married, hunted, fished, administered injustice after their kind, and died, and their place knew them no more. They succeeded one another as passively as keys upon a plane-tree in the recurring autumns of its existence. Some of them attended Parliaments and Courts, but their most frequent occupation (at least, that has come down to us) was the signing and witnessing of Charters. In this latter occupation they seem to have at

THE STUART—DARNLEY—MENZIES PEDIGREE



least equalled in diligence other noblemen of their time and standing."

All that we know about the earliest Menzies is derived from Charters, and the first from whom the direct descent of the family can be traced is Anketillus de Maynoers, whose name is found appended to a Charter relating to a donation by Willelmus de Veters Ponte to the Abbey of Holyrood "*pro salute Domini mei Regis Willielmi et Reginæ Ermengardæ.*" William the Lion died in 1214. On the succession of Alexander III to the Scottish crown in 1249, Robert de Meyners, Knight, the son of Anketillus, was raised to the position of Lord High Chamberlain of Scotland, being designated "*camerario nostro*" in a Charter of 1250. In 1253 he was succeeded in the office by Sir David Lyndsay. Sir Robert remained faithful to the King during the Barons' rebellion in 1255, and figured prominently during the earlier part of Alexander's reign. According to Fordun, he died in 1266. His son, Sir Alexander de Meyners, was one of the patriots who stood firm to the interests of his country against the pretensions of Edward I, and for this cause was imprisoned in 1296. He was at length released, and shortly afterwards obtained from John de Strathbolgie, Earl of Athol, the lands of Weem and Aberfeldy in Strathday. Weem was afterwards erected into a Barony, and it became the territorial designation of the successive owners until the creation of the Barony of Menzies in 1510. The Baronies of Weem and Rannoch continued to be the inheritance of the family down to the present day.

Sir Robert de Meyners succeeded Sir Alexander, and after the successive holders John, Robert, Sir David, and another John, the property came to Sir Robert de Menzies, who was returned heir to his father John in 1487. During his lifetime a great misfortune overtook the family, for in 1503 the Castle of Weem was sacked and burnt by Neil Stewart of Fortingall. The reason for this attack was doubtless the granting of the lands of Rannoch to Robert de Menzies, which had been claimed by Neil Stewart. Seven years after the destruction of the Castle of Weem, Sir Robert obtained a Charter from James IV under the Great Seal, dated 2 October 1510, giving a new grant of all the lands and estates

to be erected into a new Barony to be called the Barony of Menzies, and the Castle and manor place of Weem to be called the Castle of Menzies and to be the principal messuage of the Barony. One of the causes for the granting of the Charter was the good service done to the King, and also the destruction of his Charters in the downcasting of his house. "And also for this cause that we have learnt that all the Charters and deeds of his before-mentioned lands were burnt and destroyed at the time of the burning of his house of Weem by malefactors."

Among the papers in Castle Menzies relating to the burning of the old house is an interesting inventory of all the property destroyed and stolen. Although Sir Robert obtained a decree from the Lords of Session against Neil Stewart of Fortingall, his claims were not satisfied, and fifty years afterwards the amount was still owing. Sir Robert was succeeded by a son Robert, who in 1503 had married Christina Gordon, eldest daughter of Alexander, Earl of Huntly, and Jean Stewart, daughter of John, Earl of Athol, half-brother of James II. This Sir Robert appears to have taken part in the wars against the English, for there is a document in the charter-room of Castle Menzies dated 1541, charging the tenants of the Barony of Menzies, when required by Robert Menzies of that Ilk, Knight, to make themselves "reddy bodin in feir of weir," and pass forth with him in defence of the realm. The end of this war was the fatal battle of Solway Moss. Alexander Menzies succeeded his father in 1557. He took no part in public affairs, and almost all the notices we find concerning him have to do with the never-ending troubles with his neighbours the Campbells and the unruly Clan Gregor. There is a letter at Castle Menzies from Mary of Guise, the Queen Regent, exempting Alexander Menzies of that Ilk from finding caution for MacGregors his tenants in Rannoch for seven years from February 1557. Through his marriage with Janet Campbell, a daughter of Sir James Campbell of Lawers, Alexander Menzies had departed from the family traditions of distrust in the Campbells, and consequently suffered considerable trouble at their hands. During his father's lifetime, while he was tenant of the estate of Rannoch, he entered into a bond of manrent and maintenance with his

brother-in-law John Campbell of Lawers, whereby they mutually bound themselves for the defence and keeping of the lands of Rannoch, John Campbell being a tenant in life-rent of the Isle and Loch of Rannoch. They agreed to appoint a factor to look after the woods and forests of Rannoch and to divide equally between them such profits as might result, and to share between them the expenses of the upkeep of the Isle of Rannoch. The MacGregors had for long been tenants under the Menzies, and they had freedom to sublet to others of the Clan with one exception, the notorious Duncan MacGregor, who with his sons was a terror to the whole countryside. His robberies and murders became so outrageous that the Chiefs of the district combined to bring him to justice, and finally, in 1552, he and his sons Gregor and Malcolm Roy were taken and executed. In 1557 Alexander Menzies succeeded his father and moved from Rannoch to Castle Menzies. Having secured from the Queen Regent (Mary of Guise) relief from the responsibility of answering for the behaviour of the MacGregors on his property, the power of keeping that Clan in order was handed over to the Campbells, who took advantage of it to annoy the neighbouring Chiefs, and especially their former friends the Clan Menzies.

James Menzies, who succeeded to the estates on the death of his father in March 1563, had married in 1540 Barbara Stewart, a daughter of John Stewart, third Earl of Athol. This was an important alliance, and brought the family of Menzies into much closer relation with the affairs of Mary Queen of Scots, since John Stewart, the Earl of Athol, was first cousin to Matthew Stewart, fourth Earl of Lennox, who by his marriage with Margaret Douglas, daughter of Margaret Tudor, and granddaughter of Henry VII, was father to Henry Stewart, Lord Darnley, Queen Mary's second husband. John Stewart was himself directly of noble descent, being a great-grandson of Sir James Stewart, the "Black Knight" of Lorne, and Joanna, daughter of John Beaufort, Earl of Somerset, and widow of King James I of Scotland. Barbara Menzies was therefore Darnley's second cousin, and claims of relationship were always more strongly asserted and highly esteemed in Scotland than in England, for

the Clan feeling of the North was practical rather than sentimental.

The eldest brother of Barbara Menzies, John Stewart, fourth Earl of Athol, succeeded his father in 1542. He supported the Queen Dowager (Mary of Guise) in her attempt to obtain the Regency, and also against the Lords of the Congregation in 1559, voting with two other Temporal Lords against the *Confession of Faith* and expressing his determination to believe as his forefathers had believed. On Queen Mary's return to Scotland in 1561 John Stewart was appointed one of the new Privy Council of twelve, and was on very friendly terms with Mary's staunchest friend, Maitland of Lethington. On the arrival of Matthew Stewart, Earl of Lennox, in Scotland, in September 1564, he spent much of his time with his cousin, John Stewart, who at that time, in consequence of the forfeiture of the Earl of Huntly, was leader of the Scottish Catholic nobles. Lennox's son, Lord Darnley, arrived in Scotland in February 1565, and in July was married to Queen Mary. Through this marriage Athol and Lennox became all-powerful at Court and were the Queen's chief councillors. During Darnley's life Athol retained his high position, but after the former's assassination he joined with the Protestant lords and took up arms against the Queen and was one of the leaders against her at the battle of Carbery Hill. He is stated to have been present at the opening of the famous Casket and at the reading of the still more famous "Casket Letters." After Mary's escape from Loch Leven, Athol's sympathies once more veered to her side, and though he took no open part in her support he was in secret communication with Lethington and privy to the designs for her restoration. In 1570, at a Council of the nobility held at Athol, he, with the others, resolved to combine in support of the cause of the Queen. In 1578 he was appointed Chancellor, and shortly afterwards, with Argyll, took up arms against Morton, who had resumed the custody of the young King James. Through the intervention of the English ambassador Bowes, a reconciliation between Athol and Morton was brought about, but after attending a banquet given by Morton at Stirling to celebrate the renewal of their friendship Athol was taken suddenly ill and died on 25 April at Kincardine

Castle under strong suspicion of poison. There is a strange story about Athol's second wife, Margaret Fleming, widow of Thomas Erskine, who was supposed to be possessed of magical powers. It is said that when Queen Mary was confined with the child, afterwards James VI of Scotland and I of England, the Countess cast the pains of childbirth from her on to Lady Rives.

James Menzies appears, like his father, to have been in continual trouble with the Clan Gregor and the Campbells, and to have complained in person to Queen Mary during her stay in the Highlands. On 3 August, 1564, she wrote to Colin Campbell of Glenurchy saying that though he had been put in possession of some of the escheated property of the MacGregors he was interfering with the property of Menzies and allowing MacRanald to build and fortify a house on the Isle of Rannoch which had been pulled down by order of James V. She adds that it would be to no purpose if after dispossessing the rebellious Clan Gregor their places were to be taken by other broken men of like condition, and she expressly ordered that such doings must cease. On 29 September a summons was issued in the Queen's name against Colin Campbell on the complaint of James Menzies of that Ilk about the same matter. After rehearsing the facts about building a fortified place on the Menzies land it continues, "That the said James had complained of this to the Queen at her late being in 'Atholle in the Lunkairtis' where being in her progress she could not take order for reformation thereof, but wrote to the said Colin to cease from building in the said Isle, and bringing in of strangers of other Clans. Nevertheless they had continued to fortify the said Isle : and that when the Queen had given the said Colin gratis the gift of the escheat, it was for the expulsion of the Clan Gregor and not under pretence of it to fortify the said Isle, which strength had been demolished in her father's time, and again at her command by the said Colin : nor had ever command been given to repair it or occupy the said James' lands to which the Clan Gregor had no right : far less would it be allowed to place in the said James' lands the Clan Ranald and Clan Cameron, who if once permitted to get possession would ever after claim kindness thereto."



Mary's feelings towards the Clan Gregor appear to have undergone a change at a later date, as may be seen from the following letter :—

“Traist freind, we greit you weill. We understand that diuerss personis of the Clangregour occupiit and inhabit your landis of the Rannoch, fra the quhilk thay wer eiecitit the tyme of thair rebellioun. Now as ye knaw we have ressavit thame in our peax, and sen thai can not leif without sum rowmes and possessionis, we pray and effectuously desir you to permitt thaim to occupie and manure the same landis and stedingis quhilkis thai had and broukit of you of before, and mak thame ressonable takkis thair upoun for pament of males and dewiteis, usit and wont, as ye will do us thankfull plesour. And furthur quhair as ye may feir to be constrenit to answer for the saidis personis and thair doyngis, as duell and upoun your land, be verteu of the generall band, we be thir presentis exoneris, relevis and dischargis you of your said band in that behalf, safer as the samyn may extend towert ony personis of the said Clan Gregour or utheris in putt in your lands be thame: and will and grantis that ye sall na wis be callit, accusit, or in ony wys persewit thairfoir, nochtwithstanding the said generall band or ony clause thairin contenid, or uther lawis or ordinances quhatsumevir, anent the quhilkis we dispens be thir presentis.

“Given under our signet and subscriuit with our hand at Drymmen, the last day of August 1566.

“To our traist freynd the Lard of Weym.

“MARIE R.”

This is the only letter known addressed by Queen Mary to a Laird of Menzies, and the original was until recently preserved in the charter-room of Castle Menzies. It is dated from Drymen in the Menteith country, not far from the Loch of Menteith, where Mary had spent some time as a child and where her “bower” is still preserved. She had been making visits to various places during the month, having been in Glenartney near Comrie on 1 August, and hunting at Rodono and Cramalt on 16 August. While in Glenartney and in the Menteith country she would learn much

about the broken Clan Gregor, harassed on every side, and the inveterate foes of the Grahams of Menteith, who persecuted them with the most relentless severity. It appears from various documents of the time that such of the MacGregors as were tenants on the Menzies estates were well-behaved when not harassed by Colin Campbell of Glenurchy, who had been given a commission to search for all disaffected members of the Clan. This commission he so misused in various ways that it was cancelled by the Queen after several complaints raised by James Menzies, and his MacGregor tenants obtained a short interval of peace.

The family records state that Queen Mary several times resided at Castle Menzies, and she may have also visited there on some of her hunting expeditions from Perth. The great deer drives, which were a favourite sport with the Scottish sovereigns, were strange and very elaborate affairs. When the locality for the hunt had been decided upon and the assistance of the neighbouring Chiefs obtained, hundreds of retainers scoured the hills within a radius of fifty or sixty miles, driving before them all the wild beasts into the selected glen. There they were kept until the persons for whom the hunt was prepared had been placed in a selected position, and the whole of the game was driven before them, pursued by the hunters and hounds. By means of a large number of beaters the animals were prevented from leaving the glen, and appear to have been driven back and forwards during several days. These "tinchels," as the huntings were called, resulted in an enormous destruction of game, hundreds of deer, besides innumerable other wild animals being slaughtered during the two or three days' sport.

A remarkable description of the great hunting prepared for Queen Mary's father, James V, and her grandmother, Queen Margaret, as well as for the Papal ambassador, by the Earl of Athol, is preserved in Pitscottie's Chronicle. It runs, with the Scottish idiom modified, as follows :—"The Earl of Athol hearing of his [the King's] coming made great and gorgeous provision for him in all things pertaining to a prince, that he was as well eased in all things as if he had been in one of his own palaces. For this the

noble Earl of Athol caused to be made a curious palace for the King, his mother and the ambassador whereby they were as well eased as if they had been in any palace either of Scotland or England, and adequate for the time of their hunting, which was built in the middle of a green meadow and the walls thereof were of green timber, woven with birches and built in four quarters, as if it had been a palace, and in every quarter a round like a block-house, which were lofty and joisted three stories high. The floor was lain with green earth and strewn with such flowers as grew in the meadow that no man knew whereon he trod, but as he had been in a green meadow. Further, there were two great rounds [towers] on either side of the gate and a great portcullis made of a tree falling down as it had been a barrace [outpost] gate, with a great drawbridge and a moat of water sixteen foot deep and thirty foot broad. This palace was hung with fine tapestry within and well lighted in all necessary parts with glazed windows.

“The King was very well entertained in this wilderness the space of three days with all such delicacies and sumptuous meats as were to be had in Scotland, for flesh, fish, and all kinds of fine wine and spices, requisite for a prince. Further, there were no fish that could live in fresh water but were there swimming in the foss about the palace. It is said, by the space of the three days that his grace was there, the Earl of Athol was every day at a thousand pounds of expense. The Pope’s ambassador seeing so great a triumph in a wilderness where there was no town nearer than twenty miles, thought it a great marvel that such a thing could be in Scotland, that is, so courtly and delicious entertainment in the Highlands of Scotland where he saw nothing but woods and wilderness. But most of all this ambassador, when the King was coming back from the hunt, marvelled to see the highlanders set all this palace on fire that the King and the ambassador might see it. Then the ambassador said to the King, ‘I marvel, Sir, you let burn that palace wherein you were so well eased.’ The King answered, ‘It is the use of our highlandmen that be they never so well lodged all the night, they will burn the same on the morn.’ This being done the King returned to Dunkeld that night and on

the morn to St. Johnstown. It is said at this time in Athol and Stratherdail bounds there were slain thirty score of hart and hind with other small beasts such as roe and roebuck, wolves, foxes, wild cats, etc."

Queen Mary, like her father, was very fond of hunting, and at the beginning of August 1564 was at "Lunkartis" in Glentilt for this purpose. In her progress she probably visited Castle Menzies, and no doubt Menzies, with other Chiefs, accompanied her while in the country. She certainly, while at Glentilt, signed a letter to Colin Campbell of Glenurchy, in which she reprimanded him for his harsh conduct towards members of the Clan Gregor and for bringing in "broken men" in their place. Also for attempting to rebuild on the Isle of Rannoch, belonging to Menzies, a castle which had been ordered to be destroyed by her father, James V.

In a Work by William Barclay, father of the author of the "Argenis," entitled "De Regno et Regali Potestate adversus Buchananum," etc., there is an account of a great hunt held for Queen Mary in 1563 by James Menzies' brother-in-law, the Earl of Athol. Barclay, then a lad, was present, and saw a great herd of two thousand deer driven before the Queen, and also noticed the Earl pointing out to the Queen one splendid stag whose movements controlled the whole herd, a sight he would never forget.

During the period that Queen Mary remained in Scotland, from August 1561 when she landed at Leith until she fled to England after her forces had been overcome at the battle of Langside in May 1568, there were two lairds of Menzies—Alexander, who died in 1563, and James who died in 1585; and it must have been during this period that the Cabinet was presented to the owner of Castle Menzies.

❧ CASTLE MENZIES ❧



CASTLE MENZIES, known earlier as Weem Castle, is said to have been originally built in 1061, and considerably altered and enlarged about 1214 by Sir Robert de Meyners. It was burnt and partly destroyed by Neil Stewart of Fortingall in 1503, though the massive strength of the walls would enable them to withstand the effects of the fire. For a time the family appear to have lived at a Castle on an Island in Loch Tay. How far the old Castle was repaired is not known, but during the time of James Menzies it appears to have been much enlarged and partly rebuilt, probably at the instance if not through the means of his wife Barbara. It was a general custom in Scotland when building or rebuilding important houses to insert in the walls escutcheons with the arms and initials of the owners and the date of the work. Thus over what was then the main door of the Castle is a sculptured slab containing a shield with the arms of Menzies impaling Stewart, and the initials J.M. B.S. for James Menzies and Barbara Stewart and the date 1571. An interesting document relating to the matter and dated 1572 is extant. It is the confirmation by James of a Charter dated at Menzies 27 Sept. 1571, by which James Menzies grants to his wife Barbara in life-rent the lands of Weme with the house, fortalice, and towers of the same both the new and old, with the houses, buildings, and gardens and orchards in the Barony of Menzies, co. Perth, receiving in return "one penny blench," i.e., the nominal rent of one penny. This deed would seem to suggest that it was Barbara Stewart rather than her husband who was responsible for the restoration of the Castle, and that the building, apparently a lengthy matter of several years, was undertaken at her expense.

The building was completed in 1577 and is recorded under that year in the Chronicle of Fortingall: "That symmyr the Castle

of Weym was byggyth and ended," and at the top of one of the gables of the dormer windows is a stone inscribed "1577. J.M. B.S. In our tyme. Prysit be God for ever."

Upon another stone in the Castle wall the Royal Arms of Scotland are sculptured. Tradition asserts that this stone was placed in memory of Queen Mary's visits; but it may also be intended to emphasize Barbara Menzies' own relationship to the Royal House of Stuart. Her father placed the royal arms on his bookbindings; and apart from her near connexion with Darnley, both she and her husband were descendants of royalty, being both descended, she in the male and he in the female line, from John Stewart first Earl of Athol.

In 1716, shortly after the defeat of the Jacobite army, Castle Menzies was seized by Campbell of Glenlyon with about thirty followers from Fortingall. Captain James Menzies, tutor to the young Chief, ordered his men to "block them up," and the blockade was conducted so successfully that Glenlyon soon surrendered on condition that he should be allowed to march off with his soldiers and ammunition. In this raid on the Castle little damage appears to have been done, but it was far otherwise after the next rebellion of 1745. In February 1746 Prince Charles in his retreat towards Inverness spent some days at Castle Menzies, where he was entertained by Sir Robert Menzies, who owing to lameness was a non-combatant, and by his wife Lady Mary Stewart, daughter of the third Earl of Bute. Soon after the Prince's departure the Duke of Cumberland arrived at Perth. In a memorial petitioning the Government for compensation, presented by Sir Robert Menzies in 1750, he stated that the Duke of Cumberland ordered a detachment of five hundred men under Lieut.-Col. Leighton to fix a garrison at Castle Menzies, and that the garrison of two hundred men with officers and levies continued from February until August; that he and his family had to remove from Castle Menzies on an hour's notice, leaving his furniture in the rooms, kitchens, and offices, and had to repair a house in the neighbourhood for his family; that owing to the presence of rebels in the neighbourhood his house had to be put into a state of defence and some of the buildings destroyed, and

that besides the consumption of fuel and meal, some of the furniture was rendered useless by the outbreak of an epidemical fever among the troops. Sir Robert ultimately obtained compensation for all losses and for the relinquishing of certain ancient rights amounting to twelve thousand pounds. After the Country had again become settled he spent a considerable amount in laying out and planting the grounds around the Castle, now celebrated for their fine timber. In the nineteenth century a west wing was added to the Castle and completed in 1840.



120



