

## 2. Stanely Castle: a Summary Report

Dennis Topen

This report covers some of the main points from a forthcoming article on the castle and lands of Stanely.

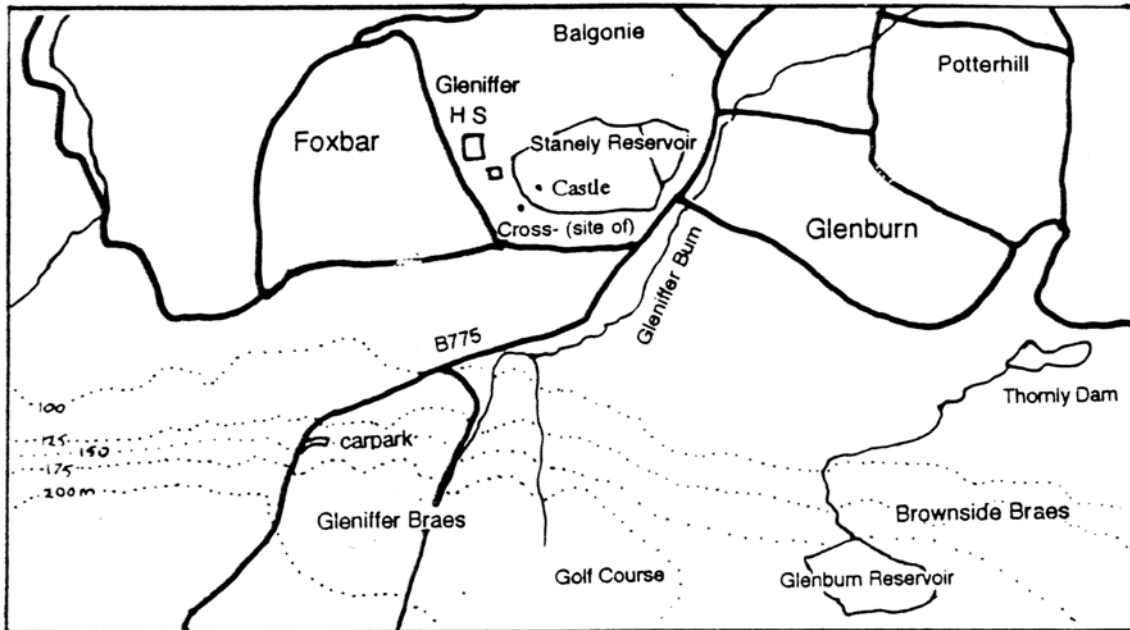


Fig. 1 Location of castle

Stanely castle has been marooned in the waters of the reservoir since 1838. It has never been surveyed before except for a brief coverage in MacGibbon and Ross who drew a couple of their invaluable sketches from the banks of the reservoir and dismissed the interior as 'gutted'.

In the mid 1980s the reservoir was drained for two brief periods and permission was obtained from Renfrew District to survey the castle. The team consisted of Dennis Topen (ACFA), John Maiden (Paisley Museum), Alex Strachan (restorer of Blackhall Castle) and Michael Davis (Scottish Architectural Heritage Society).

### Historical Context

Stanely is first mentioned in a charter of 1294 from James the fifth Steward as a pre-existing unit of land ownership with definite boundaries. It is mentioned again in 1372 when King Robert 11 granted his surgeon Thomas de Aula (Hall) "those four merk lands within the tenement of Stanely" for his lifetime "for his faithful service to us'. In 1391 Robert 111 confirmed to Sir Robert Danyeastoun "all our lands of Stanley. Sir Robert's daughter Elizabeth married Sir Robert Maxwell of Calderwood in 1402 and their son John inherited the lands of Stanely along with those of Finlaystone, being confirmed in them in 1450. In 1473 the Maxwell lands were redistributed, presumably in connection with the impending demise of Sir John. Patrick, John's brother, was granted half of the lands of Stanely but although there is no mention of a tower in the charter of 1473 it is probable that the tower was in existence by the closing decades of the fifteenth century.

The 1520s and 1530s were years of expansion for Patrick's grandson John and his wife

Agnes Lyle. They bought the lands of Wester Thornly from John Lindsay of Dunrod which adjoined the Stanely lands on the east. John served several times on the Assizes and appears as a witness to legal documents. At this time the Stanely Maxwells appear to have been on good terms with their Semple neighbours without becoming directly embroiled in the blood feud between the Semples and the Cunninghams. John Maxwell's brother was implicated with John Semple of Fulwood in the forcible expulsion of the Abbot of Paisley's tenants from the lands of Auchynche and after the murder of the William Cunningham, laird of Craigends by the Semples, one of the five men to be beheaded was a certain Matthew Semple, described as servant to the laird of Stanely.

John's son Gabriel continued the expansionist trend established by his father. He had married Elizabeth Wallace, a daughter of the Wallace laird of Eldersile. John and Elizabeth bought part of the lands of Leechland and Heiddykes and later bought Corsebar from the Abbot of Paisley. Gabriel was involved in many convoluted financial arrangements with the Spruell family of Wadsetters and it's not clear whether he left the family burdened with debts. His will still exists in the SRO but is unreadable without specialist skills. In the financial documents there is a reference in 1560 to:

"the Mayneis of Stanelie and maner place of the samyn"

The mains can be located on Roy's map and the manor place is mentioned again in 1625. At some time, perhaps in John's time in the 1520s or 1530s or in Gabriel's time, the tower was extended into an L shape by the addition of an extension.

So far the picture is one of steady if unremarkable progress suggesting a mixture of judicious estate management, good marriages and good luck.

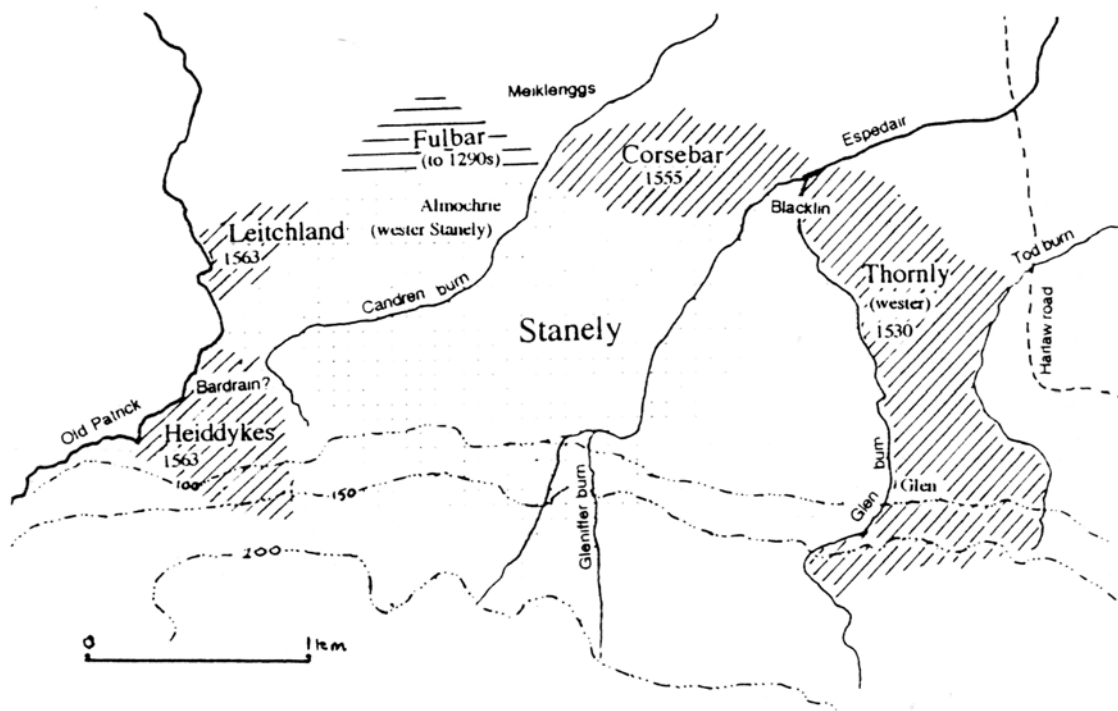


Fig. 2 The extent of the lands of Stanely

In the next generation events were set in train which were to end in disaster for the Maxwells. They became involved in a deadly and destructive blood feud with the Montgomeries of Skelmorlie which was to ruin the family. It all started in a quarrel over the lands of Giffen. A daughter of Gabriel Maxwell had married the laird of Giffen but when the laird died the Earl of Eglinton, the leader of the Montgomery family, conferred the lands on his son Robert Montgomery and dispossessed the widow. The Maxwell/ Montgomery feud merged into the wider Eglinton Glencairn feud which broke out again in the 1570s and rumbled on for the next forty years or so. This feud had a religious dimension with the Glencairn side being Protestant while the Eglintons had remained Catholic. As in the 1520s and 30s, the Semples were on the Montgomery or Eglinton side. Many of Maxwell of Stanely's neighbours were Semples and although we cannot assume that all members of these extended kinship groups would automatically make common cause with each other the fact remains that Semples feature among the enemies of the Maxwells. The Stanely Maxwells were supported by their kinsmen the Maxwells of Newark who were already involved on Glencairn's side. Robert Montgomery of Skelmorlie was one of the most active on the Eglinton side and was reputedly the man most feared by the Glencairn faction.

Very shortly after the death of Gabriel, his son Patrick, who was probably in his late teens or early twenties, was killed in an affray, leaving a young son and a widow who was a daughter of William Wallace of Elderslie. The case came to trial at the High Court of Judiciary in Edinburgh in February 1582 and the accused persons, who included Robert Semple, were obliged to put up sureties to indemnify Maxwell of Newark and Wallace of Elderslie who were acting on behalf of Patrick's widow and son. Only one accused person was actually brought to trial and he was acquitted.

Crawfurd in his History of Renfrewshire recounts a local tradition that several years after the murder of Patrick his sons espied one of the perpetrators, Robert Semple, walking on the Braes. They gave chase and to escape his pursuers Semple jumped over the "wide chasm of the Gleniffer gorge" at a spot still called Rab's loup in Semple's day. There is no other source for this incident, which bears more than a passing resemblance to the "soldier's leap" story associated with the Battle of Killiecrankie. The story is no longer current and the name "Rab's loup" does not appear on any of the available maps.

With the death of Patrick and the continuation of the feud we may be correct to infer that the Stanely lands would be more vulnerable to the depredations of their enemies. What form this pressure might take can be guessed at. We might expect harassment of tenants, destruction of crops, fences and gates, thefts of cattle and goods. Although we have no surviving evidence of such depredations, the feud continued with Robert Semple being obliged to find cautions not to harm Patrick's widow or young son and a certain James Gilmour "in Stanely" cautioned not to harm Robert Semple. In 1586 the Earl of Eglinton was ambushed and cruelly murdered with "shottis of gunnis and strokis of swordis" while his servants were "hewed to pieces" (Pitcairn).

Maxwells of Newark were present at the murder and on a separate occasion they managed to kill the father of Robert Montgomery of Skelmorlie.

As the new laird of Stanely entered his teens he had problems with a neighbour in Paisley. The laird had a house on the High Street and the adjoining property was owned by the redoubtable and litigious Andrew Knox, minister of Paisley who figured in a recent article in this journal (RLHF 3, 22 Troubled Times by John Malden). Knox had made alterations to his property which resulted in damage and flooding to John Maxwell's house. As the young laird was below the age of majority he was represented by his father in law, Wallace of Elderslie

in a case taken before the burgh authorities in 1599. Knox lost the case and was ordered to reinstate the damage but he got his revenge in 1602. John Maxwell had absented himself from the Kirk of Paisley, claiming that he had been "stayit by the sicht of his unfriends" with whom he was at "deadly feud".

Not only was he fined 500 merks and ordered to attend the Kirk of Renfrew rather than Paisley but he had to appear before the congregation at Paisley in time of sermon and publicly confess himself penitent. John Maxwell's name appears regularly along with Maxwell of Newark in the numerous bonds which had to be put up by both sides in the Glencairn/ Eglinton feud as well as in the separate feud involving the Maxwells of Pollok. These arrangements could lead to substantial financial losses. In 1609 the Glencairn/ Eglinton feud was formally ended when the two parties met at Edinburgh Castle and agreed to forgive each other for the "bloodis, slauchteris and mutillationis" they had committed. Both parties had to shake hands. The lists of those involved include John Maxwell of Stanely.

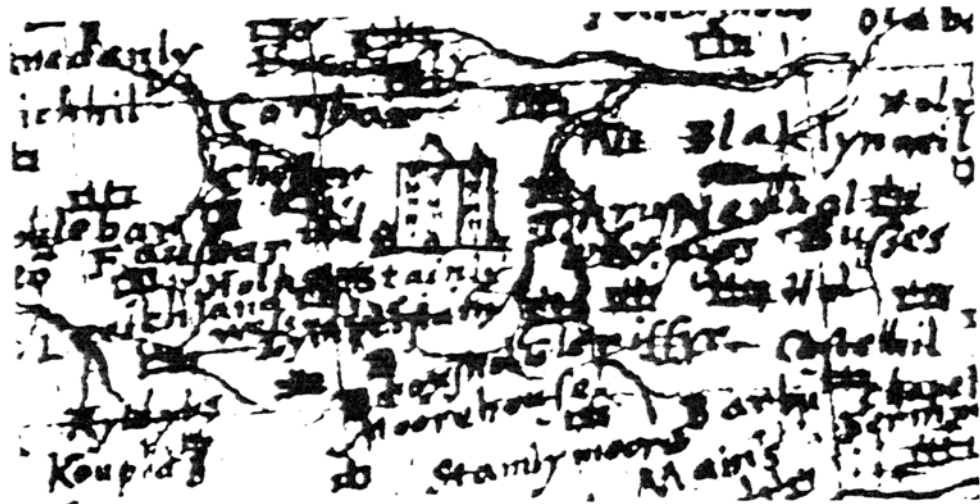


Fig. 3 A detail from Timothy Pont's Map of the Baronie of Renfrew c.1595

This pacification was at the express desire of James VI and I and was part of his more general policy of stamping his authority on the kingdom by enforcing the end of the feuds in the Borders and the Highlands as well as in the West. The more settled times that followed in the 1620s were symptomatic of a deeper change that was taking place in Scotland, as the increasingly powerful state was able to abrogate to itself a monopoly of violence, a development that rendered obsolete the need to build defensible private residences which had been highly desirable if not always absolutely essential in the previous century and a half when the country experienced prolonged bouts of feuding that amounted in some instances to localised civil war. In 1609 a marriage contract was drawn up between John Maxwell and Janet Crawford of Ferme. They did not prosper, in fact there is evidence of serious financial problems for in 1625 they agreed to grant the lands of Stanely with its tower, manor place, mill etc to John Brisbane of Bishopton for 6,100 marks, redeemable in seven years. This is the first documentary reference to the tower but it does appear on Pont's map of 1595 where it is portrayed with considerable accuracy. The Maxwells also sold off Leechland and Heiddykes as well as Corsebar. Matters came to a head in 1631 when the arrangement with John Brisbane came to the end of its term. John Maxwell had died in April 1630 and his widow and son John were unable to redeem their lands which were sold to James, Lord Ross of Hawkhead. A document of 1637 shows that the Maxwells were late with their payments on their debts.

### Later Ownership

After 1631 there was no resident laird. Ownership passed through Lord James' brothers William and Robert and then through Robert's sisters, Lady Mary who had married John Hepburn of Wauchton and Lady Jean who had married Robert Innes of that ilk. A descendant of Lady Jean, the Hon Elizabeth Ross, married John, ninth Earl of Glasgow in 1755 (Crawfurd). In 1838 the Earl of Glasgow sold the land on which the castle stands to the Paisley Water Company for the construction of the reservoir. The company was later bought out by Paisley Corporation and the lands are now the property of its successor Renfrew District Council.

### Description of the Castle

#### Location

The castle sits on a finger like promontory of bedrock which projects into more marshy ground to the north. It sits in the centre of the largest single portion of good land in the Stanely estate and is very close to sources of limestone and sandstone. Previous work consists of the twenty lines and two sketches done by MacGibbon and Ross. Crawfurd (1782) mentioned that the castle was unroofed in 1714; it had already been described in the Hearth Tax returns from 1691 as "waste". The Water Company consolidated the ruins and added internal buttresses. Victorian photos in Paisley Museum's collection show the castle from various angles. The castle is of two phases. It was originally a simple four story rectangular tower strikingly similar to a group of small towers along the Clyde coast; these are Law, Little Cumbrae, Fairlie and Skelmorlie. The resemblances of these four castles was noted and extensively discussed by MacGibbon and Ross and Stanely can be readily slotted into that discussion as another variation on a common theme. They may have been built by the same family of masons, there were masons' marks visible at Stanely but lack of time and heavy encrustations of lichens meant that detailed study had to be postponed. Apart from their size and shape the most striking similarity is in their kitchen arrangements. All these castles have the kitchen on the first floor alongside the Hall instead of in the basement or in an outhouse.

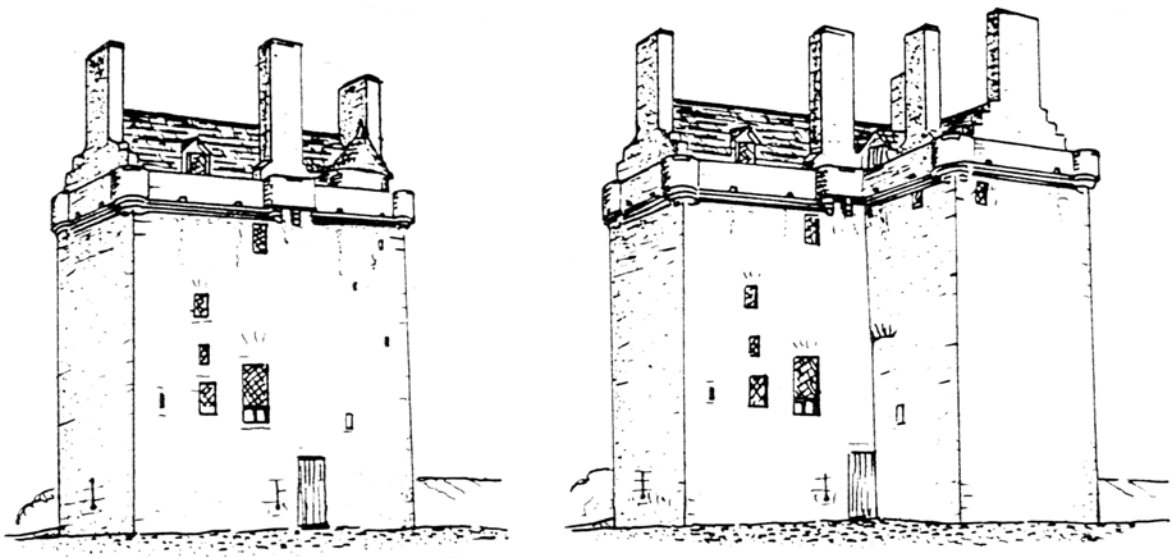
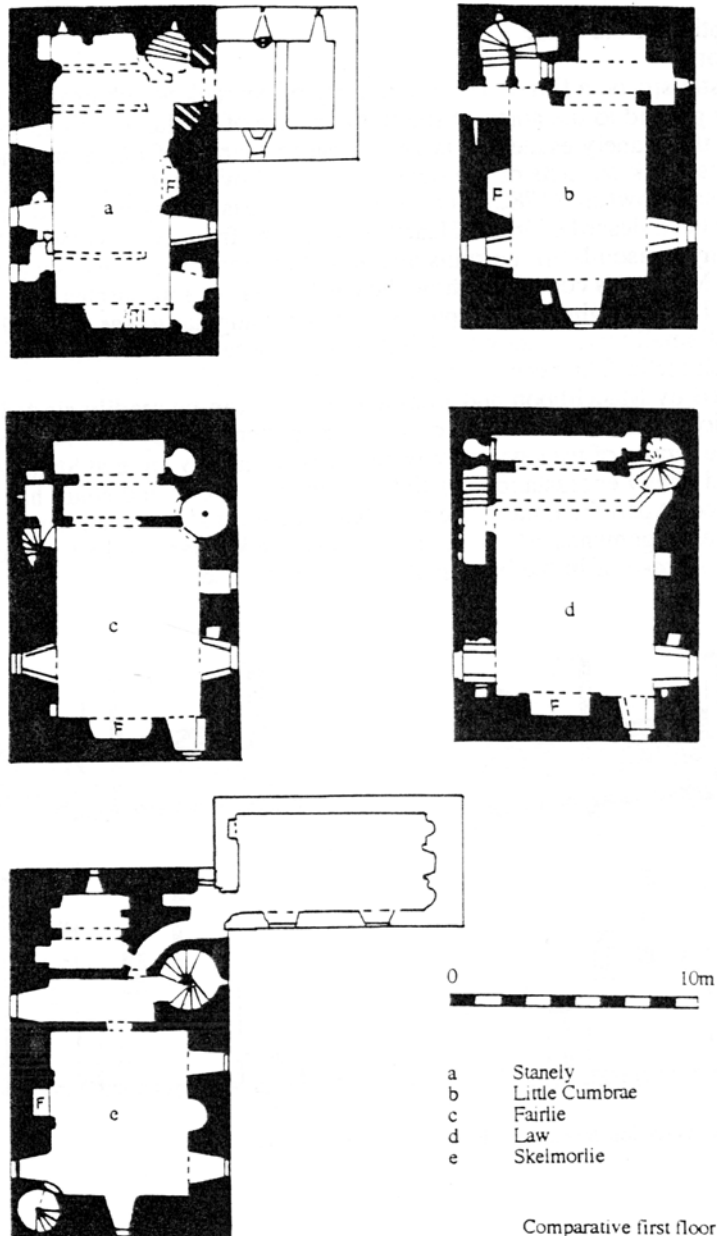


Fig. 4 Reconstruction drawings of the two phases of the castle

**The Original Tower**

The ground floor was entered by a square headed doorway almost centrally placed and protected by shothole and by a projecting platform or bartizan on the parapet walk above. The entrance passage gave access to two vaulted chambers, whose vaults are now fallen and to the main turnpike stair in the north east corner. The first floor was divided symmetrically with the kitchen at the north end, accessed from the stair and a private withdrawing room or closet at the south end. The kitchen fireplace was as large as the kitchen itself and there was scullery and drain. The closet has its own garderobe, fireplace and high level window. The lobby that gave access to this closet was lit by a small window and also gave access to a private stair in the corner leading down to the cellar. The Hall is not large but was undoubtedly well-appointed; one jamb of the fireplace survives with a simple roll moulding. There were three windows, one at a high level and the others with window seats.



Comparative first floor plans.

The second and third floors were each divided into two bed chambers, each equipped with a garderobe, at least one window and a fireplace. Most of the corbels for the floor beams are still in position. On the top floor a patch of coarse plaster survives in a sheltered recess.

The impression is one of quality. The stonework is of large coursed blocks, roughly squared with narrow joints snecked with small stones, with a great deal of cut stone on the interior. The hard local freestone is hardly weathered and given the nature of the stonework it is unlikely that it was harled.

**The Extension**

The extension increased the accommodation by 50%. It contained a vaulted storage room on the ground floor, its vault has fallen and this room is full of rubble. The first floor contained the new kitchen which is small but very comfortably appointed. It has a window with a widely splayed recess provided with seats and a well made slop drain. The roof was vaulted and the vault still stands as does the kitchen arch although its keystone is fractured and clearly under great pressure. Above the kitchen there were two bed chambers. Part of the rear wall has fallen and that portion probably contained the garderobes. The topmost apartment must have been a particularly comfortable room in what was clearly a house designed for domestic convenience as well as defence. It has two windows in the corner, facing south and east and flanking a long window seat. These windows are themselves flanked by chimney breasts coming up from the floors below. This must have been a bright and cosy room, well away from the bustle and smells of the kitchen and was perhaps a place where the ladies of the house could do their needlework in peace.

The parapet walk was continued around the extension, it is now covered in rubble and vegetation but the overlapping slabs still survive and can be seen in several places. The parapet was carried on bands of continuous corbelling as at Law and numerous other castles in Scotland and also in France, whereas Fairlie and Little Cumbrae have the more decorative and cheaper false machicolations or chequered corbelling which became popular in the early sixteenth century.

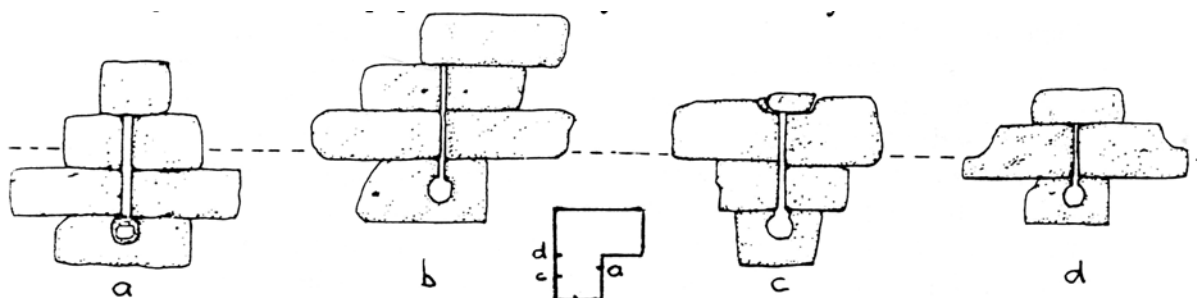


Fig. 5 Shotholes in the original tower

**Defences and dating**

There are four shotholes in the ground floor, all of them narrow slits with a hole at the bottom of the type normally associated with the use of bows. The shotholes at the other castles grouped with Stanely are of the wide-mouthed splayed type associated with the use of firearms and normally dated to the early sixteenth century. The parapet walk had round turrets at each corner as well as the bartizan already referred to. All the windows show evidence of having had iron bars built into their stonework. There is no shothole in the north gable which looked out over the difficult marshy approach; defence in this area would have been from the parapet and turrets. It is important to remember that the defensive features have to be taken as an overall system and that it is misleading to think in terms of "low level" or "high level" defence. There are no shotholes in the extension. The shotholes would

support a date in the later fifteenth century, during the days of Patrick Maxwell whom appears to have been the first Maxwell laird.

### **Conclusions**

The castle's first phase was as a simple tower of the same type as Law, Little Cumbrae, Skelmorlie and Fairlie and it probably dated from the late fifteenth century, perhaps the 1480s. It was extended in the sixteenth century, doubling the accommodation and went out of use as a laird's residence in the mid seventeenth century and was derelict by 1691. Future work could profitably be done on the masons' marks on the castles in this group and also on the shotholes and their internal recesses so that a sequence of construction can be suggested. When the opportunity arises there should be some consolidation work, especially on the gable of the extension.