

To expand
 Shrouded in their deserted halls -

CASTLES IN SUTHERLAND

Is it the a
Perhaps it is the a

s stories

I wonder if it is a memory of ~~childhood's~~ stories of

of knights ~~and dragons~~, ~~of~~ fair ladies and robber barons, that keeps
 so much of the flavour of romance about a castle. Or is it that
 these usually grim buildings always seem to be hiding tales of
 mysterious happenings, plots and conspiracies? Whatever the reason,

I I confess to being a great lover of castles. I have climbed the
 worn steps of innumerable towers, peered into mediaeval dungeons,
 and lingered where ~~sunshine~~ *in the sunshine of their deserted* slants through the windows of their
 deserted halls. ~~Neither~~ *Not* have I neglected their domestic arrange-

ments; their kitchens, butteries and cellars, ~~nor failed to~~ *as have always*
 consider the conditions of a large household, depending on one
 on one courtyard well for all supplies of water.

In the Highlands, *we* have none of those vast piles of masonry
 that guarded the Scottish and English Borders. Highland castles
 were built as homes, to give protection from a raid, not to hold
 a garrison to overawe the countryside. Some have now come to a
 peaceful old age, mellowed by time and altered by successive
 generations, others have become famous (Highland) beauty spots:

*the problems of a large household
 dependant on one courtyard well
 all supplies of water*

but alterations made in the early
part of the 19th century have ^{however}
~~changed~~ ^{being} ~~some~~ ^{given} ~~some~~ ^{corner}
of the look ^{that} a French chateau
rather than a semi-fortified tower
house ~~is~~ characteristic of the Scottish
Highlands

1973
1620

353

The castle stands on a steep base
which falls to the level of the Donagh
Futur & ~~has~~ ^{has} ~~never~~ ^{never} altered in the
early 19th century alterations made
in the 19th century ^{altered} ^{the}
aspect of a fortified tower house
considerably
~~where~~ ^{where} the gardens have been cultivated for
as three hundred years. Sir Robert
who wrote the history of the
of Sutherland

photo graphed by
counsellor tourist in different
1948
1848
2, 1, 4 a highland
loch
Green history
2

picturesque ruins, reflected in the calm waters of some lovely loch.

In Sutherland, there is a fertile strip of land along the East Coast, which has been cultivated from time immemorial. The castles of Sutherland are mostly placed within this fertile zone, where communication with the south was possible both by sea and by land. / Sir Robert Gordon, who wrote his History of the Earldom of Sutherland, in the seventeenth century, gives a list of the 'pyles' that were standing in his own day. Some of these are now green mounds, with hardly a trace left of their walls. Others are still standing, though ruinous. A few are enjoying a green old age. All have played their part in the history of the county.

Oldest of all, with a name known far beyond the borders of Sutherland, is Dunrobin Castle. Dunrobin has been in the possession of the Sutherland family for over seven hundred years; but only a small part of the old castle of the Earls of Sutherland was included in the alterations made to it in the nineteenth century. (The castle lies among woods, which give shelter from the north winds;) It looks out across the Moray Firth, where, on a fine day, the hills of Banff, and the blue outline of Ben Rinnes can be clearly seen; Below the terrace on which the castle stands, lie the gardens; gardens which have been cultivated for more than three hundred years

Survived

few early years?

distance the ruins, reflected in the calm waters of some lochs.

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the kingdom of Sutherland in the 18th century, gives a

list of the castles which stood in his own day. Some

of these are now ruins, but many still stand, though in ruins.

Others are still standing, though in ruins. Others are still

enjoying a green old age. All are now in ruins.

history of the county.

The chief of all, with a name known far beyond the borders of

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possession of the Sutherland family for over seven hundred

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of Sutherland was included in the alterations made to it in

the nineteenth century. The castle lies among woods, which

give shelter from the north winds; it looks out across the

Loch of Sutherland, where on a fine day, the hills of Benlue and the

blue outline of Ben Rinn can be clearly seen; Below the

terrace on which the castle stands, lie the gardens; gardens

which have been cultivated for more than three hundred years.

castles
- whose inhabitants were
in the habit of dwelling in
castles or in
ben lue castle
ben lue castle

Sir Robert Gordon 1972 who wrote a₃
long & detailed his 1761
211

Sir Robert Gordon tells us with pride, that in his day they were planted with all kinds of fruits, herbs and flowers, and with abundance of good saffron, tobacco and rosemary. He makes special mention of the excellent pears and cherries they produced. (To-day, the gardens are among the finest in Scotland, their long borders gay with flowers, their lawns green and smooth.)

For centuries the Earls of Sutherland ruled their vast possessions from Dunrobin. Not only were they Chiefs, who kept some sort of law and order in troubled times; their castle was the centre round which revolved, such social life as was possible in a country without roads or bridges. Let us ^{take} ~~peer~~ into their ^{house} ~~castle~~, at a time, ^{over} ~~nearly~~ two hundred years ago, when Sutherland was still a month's journey from London. An old inventory, dated 1761, leads us from room to room. It tells us that my Lady's room was hung with tapestry, and her bed was of ^{welt} ~~camlet~~, lined with green silk. We can look into the drawing-room, where the furnishings included a fine large carpet, six arm chairs, eight smaller chairs, tea tables, mirrors with sconces, many pictures and a panel of fine tapestry.

Then we can mount to the nurseries, where there were four beds, and "a little folding bed from Helmsdale", or we descend to the kitchen, to the brew house, the milk house and the 'lardener'. In the servants quarters, there was a 'lad's room

and a 'lasses room', but the head servants had each their own room, and my Lady's woman had an orange bed with a green silk coverlet. There is a homely sound about it all, and it is clear that eighteenth century elegance had supplanted many of the discomforts of a mediaeval building.

Peace had come to the old castle, but there were still the stories of the old days, when the Earls led their people against the men of Caithness or the clans of the North West; and there was that strange tale of Alexander Sutherland, called the Bastard, who laid claim to the Earldom in 1518. Alexander had visited a witch, who told him that his head should be the highest that ever was in Sutherland. Encouraged by this prophecy, he and his adherants beseiged and took Dunrobin. He was driven from the castle, but retired to Strathnaver, from whence he proceeded to harry and lay waste the countryside. His enemies, however, bided their time, and when, made careless by success, he was one day seen walking along the seashore, they set upon him in great numbers. Alexander was captured and immediately executed. His head was placed on a spear and the horrible trophy was then carried to Dunrobin, where it was placed above the battlements of the great tower. Thus was fulfilled the witch's prophecy, that it should be above all others in Sutherland.

~~John~~
prot

$$\begin{array}{r} 268 \\ 6 \\ \hline 21569 \\ 78 \end{array}$$

a new road along the coast to Skelbo

A few miles south of Dunrobin, overlooking Loch Fleet and guarding the approaches to the Little Ferry, stands Skelbo Castle. In the ^{new} old days before the Mound was built, carrying the new road to Golspy and on to Caithness; the Little Ferry was the principal route for all the coastwise traffic north and south: now it is a solitary place. No longer does the ferryman ply back and fore continually across the narrow passage between the loch and the sea. Incidentally, he was bound to carry all the Skelbo folk for the payment of a boll of meal a year; payment which seems small enough even in days when labour earned no more than sixpence a day.

Those who climb the steep road to the castle, will find the broken wall of a strong keep, part of the curtain wall, and the remains of an old mansion-house, with crow-stepped gables; of much interest, ⁱⁿ despite the fact that the upper ^{floor} stories have been gutted ~~to form a barn.~~ ^{& of its ruinous state}

It is a good place to dream of old stories; as one looks down on the loch and over towards the rampart of hills stretching along the coast. More than seven hundred years have passed since the lands of Skelbo were granted by Hugo Freskyn, ancestor of the Earls of Sutherland, to Gilbert de Moravia afterwards Bishop of Caithness. It was from here, so tradition says, that Sir Richard de Moravia, Bishop Gilbert's brother,

$$\begin{array}{r} 1900 \\ 1200 \\ \hline 770 \end{array}$$

attacked *in* —
 went forth to fight the Danes, who had landed at the Little Ferry and were bent on rapine and pillage. In the battle that took place at Embo, the Danes were defeated and driven back to their ships; but Sir Richard was among the slain. He was buried in the cathedral at Dornoch; and there his stone coffin, with a knight's figure carved upon it, *may still be seen* ~~still lies~~.

Skelbo came by marriage to the Kynnards, but, in 1559, it was sold by John Kynnard, to William Sutherland of Duffus, a descendant of Kenneth, fourth Earl of Sutherland, who already held large estates in the county.

Hardly had the new owner completed his purchase, when the whole country was thrown into a ferment, by his murder at Thurso, by the Clan Gunn. The Bishop of Caithness seems to have had a hand in this crime, and the Earl of Sutherland took the Bishop's part in the ensuing troubles.

Later, when bitter quarrels broke out between the Earl of Sutherland and the Earl of Caithness; the Duffus family allied themselves with the Sinclairs. From Skelbo, together with the Master of Sinclair and Y Mackay, they launched the *an* attack on Dornoch which culminated in the destruction of the cathedral, after a week of fierce fighting. When, at length, a truce was arranged, the Sutherlands *2 Duffus* added to their crimes by the slaughter of the hostages, taken from the town, and given into their keeping;

their excuse being, that the Earl of Caithness had denounced the terms made by his son with the townspeople of Dornoch.

It is obvious with what relish Sir Robert Gordon relates the retribution that had fallen on all those responsible for this attack; could he have foreseen the ruin of Skelbo, as it stands to-day, he would, I feel sure, have seen the hand of fate in that also.

But it is strange how misfortune - or was it folly? - was henceforth to dog this branch of the Sutherland family.

The estates became loaded with debt, and, though a peerage was conferred on Sir Alexander Sutherland, by Charles the Second, this did not retrieve their fortunes. Ruin was complete, when the third Lord Duffus, though an Officer in the Navy, ^{English} joined the Pretender's forces in 1715.)

For this, he was imprisoned in the Tower: his title was attainted: and the estates sequestrated.

Lord Duffus died abroad, ^{his} his only son, ^{Eric Sutherland} succeeded to a barren inheritance. ~~Eric Sutherland's~~ ^{his} claim to have the title restored was refused by the government; but he was allowed to return to Skelbo, which he held as a tack. He made his home in the old mansion-house (still standing within the castle walls;) and there, for nearly thirty years, he put up a brave struggle against poverty and many cares. ~~Although his claim to the title was not allowed by the government,~~ ^{Although his claim to the title had not been} ~~accepted.~~

who were compassionate for his misfortunes but had overruled the family. In 1760 however he left Skelbo, abandoning all his

How often I have wished I could look back through the years and see those who lived in this old house. The children who ran in and out of the empty rooms; and all the strange figures of eighteenth century Sutherland, who came and went about the business of the county; for, after 1760, when Lord Duffus left Skelbo, this house was the home of William Sutherland of Sciberscross, for many years Sheriff Depute of Sutherland.

The castle ^{itself} was by that time, in a ruinous state, though there was far more of it standing than we see to-day.

From Skelbo to Dornoch is about five miles, and there in the main street, stands the tower of the old Palace of the Bishops of Sutherland and Caithness. Dornoch was the town house of the Bishops, they had a summer residence at Skibo, on the shores of the Dornoch Firth. But while their tower at Dornoch, after surviving many vicissitudes, has been added to and carefully restored; the castle at Skibo was pulled down as far back as the eighteenth century. The property was bought by Mr Andrew Carnegie in 1898, and Skibo, as it stands to-day, was rebuilt on those baronial lines, popular with millionaires in the last years of Queen Victoria's reign. Installed with electric light, central heating, lifts and other refinements of modern life, such castles were enough to make a mediaeval castle builder turn in his grave with envy.

In Skibo, there is a 'Montrose' room, in memory of the fact that Montrose was brought to the old castle of the Bishops, for two nights after he had been taken prisoner in Assynt. From Skibo he set out on that weary journey that was to end on the scaffold by the Merchat Cross in Edinburgh. There is a story, which I was often told as a child, that Montrose was received at Skibo by Lady Gray, the wife of Robert Gray, who was away from home at the time. Lady Gray had pity on the captive, and when he was brought to table, saw with anger that General Holbourn, who was in charge of the escort, would have taken the place next herself, placing the Marquis below him. Picking up the leg of mutton, which had been placed ~~before~~ them, the lady brandished it in the air, ~~exclaiming~~ and struck Holbourn on the head, exclaiming "if ye dinna ken ye're manners and ye're place, I'll mak ye". Holbourn retired discomfited; but Robert Gray had later to answer for his wife's conduct, before the Privy Council, and to pay a heavy fine for the insult.

When Montrose set out from Skibo, on his journey south, he had ~~already~~ travelled over forty miles from Assynt through some of the wildest country in Sutherland. There, the mountains of the North West stand in all their grandeur; ² fit guardians of the legends of savage feud and clan warfare that cling to that wildness

of rock and heather.

A short time ago, I was walking by the side of Loch Assynt, and came on the grassy track of an old road, running close to the edge of the loch; just such a road as the drovers used on the way south with their herds, traces of which can still be found in other parts of Sutherland. Ahead, I could see the castle of Ardvreck standing out into the loch; behind it, the shadow of Quinag, loomed in a misty sunset. I thought I might well be following the very track taken by the captive Montrose and his escort, on that day, long since, in April, 1650. The story of Montrose's capture has been so often told, but here, on the very spot, it is a hundred times more vivid. The tower of Ardvreck, long deserted; is now open to the sky. In the foundations, two small vaulted rooms or cellars remain, (in which lie two rusty old cannon) Grass is growing on the floor above. There is little left of the castle but jagged walls of weathered grey stone: but those walls once echoed the voice of Montrose. There are no voices to be heard there now: but there are other sounds, that must always have been familiar to those who lived in Ardvreck. The ripple of water lapping against the shore: the cries of gulls circling overhead: (and the sough of the wind blowing down from the encircling hills.)

What were the thoughts of Montrose as he lay within these walls, weary and fevered from the hardships and exposure he had suffered in his wanderings from the field of Carbisdale. His little army totally overwhelmed, his followers scattered; himself a prisoner and about to be consigned to the hands of pitiless enemies. If ever his spirit sank beneath the bitterness of defeat, it must have been here. We cannot know what thoughts beset him, ²we only ¹know that his faith supported a courage that did not fail him to the last moment of life.

Solitary Ardvreck ! But when the sun is setting, and the shadows of the hills sweep down on old castles, it is time to leave them and seek the warmth and the lights of a friendly Highland Inn. To be in touch once more with the life of our own day; but not forgetting the tales of the past, which are forever a background to the Highland scene.

we only know
we know only that his faith supported
a courage that did not fail him
to the last moment of life

That can be so few buildings left in this
western country which can lay claim to any
great antiquity adds additional interest to
this

his little army, completely overwhelmed, his followers scattered;
himself a prisoner and about to be consigned to the hands of
his enemies. At ever his spirit sank beneath the
bitterness of defeat, it must have been here. We cannot know
what thoughts beset him, we only know that his faith supported
a courage that did not fail him to the last moment of life.
Solitary and bleak! But when the sun is setting, and the
shadows of the hills sweep down on old castles, it is time to
leave them and seek the warmth and the light of a friendly
highland inn. To be in touch once more with the life of our
own day; but not forgetting the tales of the past, which are
forever a background to the highland scene.

we have only time for a few minutes
to rest before we must
be on our way again
to the next inn.

Neither the Earl of Sutherland nor Lord Hay
took part in the fighting that followed
after Philiphaugh. The army of the parliament
was commanded by Major General Middleton
& in May 1646 King Charles gave himself
up to the Scots army at Newark. Huntly
& Huntley were commanded to lay down
their arms & peace was proclaimed. Middleton
had been empowered to make terms with the
~~remains~~ ~~of Huntly's army~~ royalists - from the
west to Denmark & then to require others
of the royalist side ~~to~~ submit also.
But Lord Sutherland ~~threw~~ himself desert
of enemies, the clan & chiefs were
Donald Neilson & but when peace was declared
the Huntlies gave up the siege & the
in the Scots parliament ^{sent sent} of Sutherland
then ~~returned~~ to Edinburgh to attend the
parliament which began to

After Philiphaugh the Earl of Sutherland
took on board in the frigates carried on
his following after Philiphaugh - He
remained in the north until Jan. in
May 1646 King Charles left Oxford disguised
& reached Newark upon Trent where he
gave himself up to the Scots army.
~~He then & then~~ ^{where} Peace was declared
the Royalist forces were disbanded
Some of those who were made certain
of his leaders including of course himself
were exempted from the general pardon
(as followed). But the Earl of Sutherland
kept a foot on June Sir Robert F.
arrived in Sutherland to endeavour
to reconcile his two nephews, the Earl of S.
& Lord Reay. Sir Robert had deserted
the cause, from whom he had received
nothing but misfortune, & established himself
on his estates in Dorset, the

Salary
535