

Stirling Castle Palace Project
Edited version of a talk by
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The army occupied Stirling Castle from the late 17th century till the 1960s

- Until 1927 the guides were soldiers of the garrison; guide books emphasised the military past. Entrance charges and paid guides were first introduced in March 1927(Stirling Observer, 8 March 1927).
- Still, the guide books emphasised military as much as the royal past. The former royal apartments were subdivided as offices, recreation areas etc.
- Even though, early in the 20th century care of the fabric had been handed over to the Ministry of Works, it was only after the army left that major restoration could be contemplated.

Late 20th century

- There were three major projects.
- The Great Kitchens were presented and interpreted, with figures and food to recreate something of their 16th century origins.
- The Chapel Royal (built for the baptism of Prince James in 1594) was restored so that, for example, the early 17th century painting could be appreciated.
- The Great Hall, was also restored to something like its original condition, opening in 1999.

Great Hall (re-opened 1999)

The Great Hall had been built in the early years of the 16th century and witnessed feasts for the coronations of James V and Mary Queen of Scots, as well as for the baptisms of Mary's son (later James VI) and her grandson (Prince Henry).

On a day-to-day basis in the 16th century, however, it was where the lower tiers of the royal household ate. Very occasionally, it was used for parliamentary sittings.

But in 1793 it was said that 'they are now converting the parliament house into barracks and otherwise improving the fortress (Sutherland,, 1793).

General History of Stirling



Stirling Castle Palace Project



The older Princes Tower (to the left above) and some other older structures were incorporated into the palace, which was built for James V starting in the late 1530s.

- By the year 2000 a decision had been made to recreate the interiors of the palace as they might have been in the sixteenth century.
- SCPP would:
 - study and record the building and its changes over the centuries
 - include a set of tapestries and a complete set of re-created Stirling Heads (see below)
 - re-interpret the palace for a modern audience.

Stirling Palace Academic Research Committee

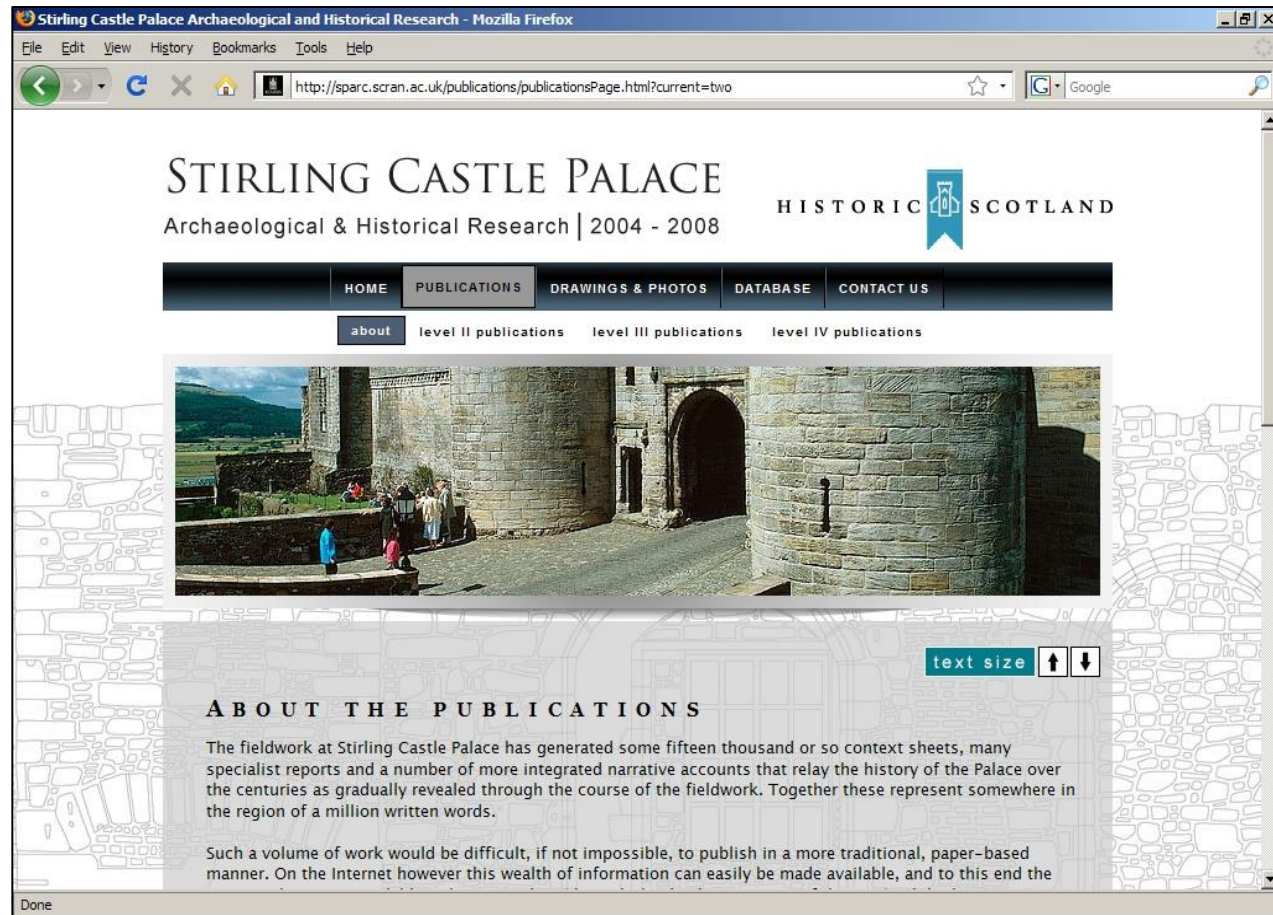
- This group was established in early 2003 to work with Historic Scotland to research the project.
- It was a multi-disciplinary team including archaeologists, documentary historians and art historians as well as scientific investigators, artists and craftspeople.
- The team worked closely with Historic Scotland with regular feedback and with periodic oversight by independent outsiders.
- At the start of the project, the palace apartments were unfurnished, the walls covered in bare, modern plaster.
- Amongst the few original features to survive were some doors and doorways, fireplaces and window openings though all had suffered damage and change.

- **Publication**
- <http://sparc.scran.ac.uk>

Historical and archaeological results were published online on the website and are freely available.

Work is also being published in many other formats such as academic journals and popular magazines.

The project was about more than creating a stunning new tourist attraction; it has added significantly to our understanding of 16th century Scotland, its court culture and buildings.



Archaeology

- The archaeological study did not just involve excavation but a detailed examination of the upstanding building, to disentangle the different phases of construction
- The results of the survey could be correlated with the documentary and scientific evidence.



The Facades



This is the south facade, the one seen by approaching visitors in the 16th century; at wall-head level are armed men, the garitours. In 16th century Scots poetry the garitours have qualities such as loyalty.

- The interiors were the main focus but the facades were conserved and closely studied.
- It emerged that the statuary of each of the three main facades carried a different message, the north facade depicting images of 'the golden age'

The layout of the palace

- The principal floor has three rooms on the king's side and three on the queen's. Each room opened from the one before and the outer rooms were more public than the inner.

The north facade with the main entrance at the right; to its left the windows light the king's outer and inner halls. Beneath the main floor were vaults and on the upper floor, its windows hidden by the wall-heads, were prestigious rooms for courtiers and meetings.





- 18th century military plan showing the layout of the palace

Scots monarchy

Sixteenth century European courts shared many cultural features. But each also had its own distinctive aspects; each tried to reconcile being fashionable and conservative, being national and international.

The Scots political class expected fairly ready access to their monarch and this is reflected in the short, three-celled royal suites. In England, in contrast, where monarchs such as Henry VIII were much less accessible, there were many more apartments, the innermost accessible only to the king and his intimates.

But having separate suites for king and queen was widespread – and almost essential as each had their own household and lived semi-independent lives.

- Medieval monarchs had been constantly on the move, displaying their political and military power across their realms, going on pilgrimage or hunting, for example. This was bothersome and expensive – but essential. And it meant that adult monarchs never occupied any residence for long.
- Slowly, as central administration was strengthened, the moves became less – though James VI was still very mobile in the 1590s.
- Scots kings (and queens) seem to have dined quite publicly, in the rooms labelled as ‘guard hall’ on the plan. They talked with the other people present in quite an informal manner; it was not unlike the French royal etiquette but in sharp contrast with England

General evidence for the interiors

- Giovanni Ferrerio (1538) said that 'the lighter style' of painting was becoming fashionable in Scotland and this can be identified as 'grotesque' style (see below)
- The Stirling Heads which used to decorate the palace, are of a very high standard and indicate the quality to be expected.
- Documents show that French artisans were employed and they are likely to have used standard European styles.
- Amongst the key sources for the interiors are;
- Accounts and inventories for furniture and fittings
- Comparison with other Scots sites (eg Holyrood, Kinneil)
- Comparison with other countries for 'fashionable trends'
- Heraldic devices for Scots and dynastic motifs are to be expected.

Magnificence



The ideal medieval king was a warrior and leader, showing his power in the most direct way. During the 15th century monarchs had begun to adopt 'magnificence' as a substitute or supplement; it involved wearing rich fabrics, living in lavishly decorated apartments, having decorations of silver and gold, decorated with jewels. It was the high peak of royal 'gorgeousness'.



Of course, 'gorgeousness' was as available for women as for men – as the portraits of James V and his daughter Mary queen of Scots, show.

The Lighter Style

Grotesque painting,
or 'the lighter style'
as used in the royal
apartments at Stirling



Wall treatments

- Possibilities included
 - panelling
 - Hangings only
 - Painted plaster
 - Combinations of these

In the queen's inner hall the walls have been painted to resemble hangings, a trick often used in association with grotesque styles.



Real hangings



The beautiful hangings in the queen's bedchamber (right) are based on those in the early 16th century fresco at Malpaga Castle, near Bergamo in Italy (above)



Kinneil and other Scots examples



Paintwork in the queen's outer hall is based on near-contemporary work at Kinneil, near Linlithgow, Scotland



Evidence; James V had two sets of 'unicorn' tapestries (total 14 pieces)

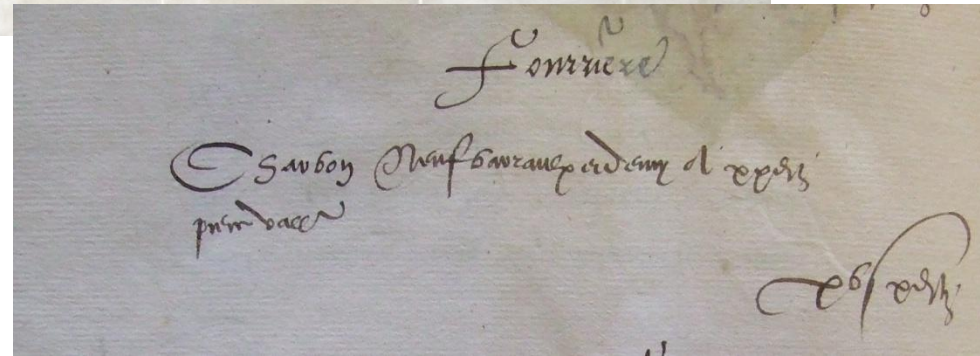


A set of seven new pieces is being woven and five are in place in late 2011



Evidence for fires

- Coal was being supplied to Stirling Castle from 14th century
- Marie de Guise bought coal from Alloa when she moved in to Stirling in July 1543.
- The household records (right) show that the fourrière department distributed coal (charbon) on a daily basis in the 1540s to 1560s. So the fire-grates and equipment are those for coal fires.



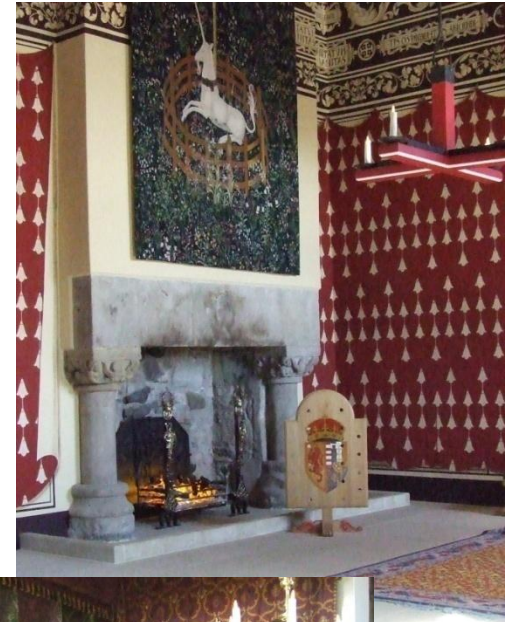
Chairs



- Chairs of state were imported and so of European style
- Chairs of state under cloth of estate and on a carpet indicate the monarch's prestige and hint at a quasi-divine setting
- Inventories include stools and benches which were lower status and perhaps more Scots in style.

Fires

- Fires were focal points in the apartments. The royal chairs would have been placed close to the fires, for warmth but also for prestige.



Lighting



- There were windows on two or three sides of most of the apartments
- Fire-light would supplement the numerous candles
- These lights reflected from crystal, silver, mirrors, jewellery...
- So the court glittered both literally and metaphorically at a time when most homes were dimly lit at best. That allowed the social and cultural life to continue at night.

Ceilings

The ceiling of the king's inner hall (left) is decorated with the newly created Stirling Heads. The queen's inner hall (right) is based on one at Winchester (England) but the detail is Scots. The queen's outer hall (centre) is painted to resemble a wooden frame (coffered ceiling) but only the main struts are 'real'. All these styles are known from the 16th century.



John Donaldson is the artist-sculptor who created the new Stirling Heads, painstakingly based on the surviving examples; the head on the right is thought to represent 'the poet' with hand on heart!



King's Side



It is not clear if the palace was 'finished' when James V died in late 1542 so his apartments are left sparsely furnished, his bed without its hangings.



West Transe (pink on the plan) looking towards the queen's outer hall

- Left bare and undecorated as a reminder that this is a much-changed building and not a restoration



Protocol and use



Staff would turn away only the humblest people from the west gallery so the two outer halls were often crowded. Scots monarchs also dined here; these big rooms could be cleared for dancing or other entertainments



The Inner Halls or Presence Chambers



- The two inner halls were more exclusive, reserved for formal audiences and access was regulated by the ushers

The bed-chambers

- Only the most privileged visitors were allowed access to the bedchambers. It is not certain that king or queen actually slept here!



Find Out More!

- John G Harrison, *Rebirth of a Palace; The Royal Court at Stirling*, Historic Scotland, 2011, is the official story of the project, and explains the decoration and furnishings in more detail. Copies are on sale at Stirling Castle as is the official guidebook.
- The website <http://sparc.scran.ac.uk/home/homePage.html> has lots of reports, drawings and further information
- See also the Stirling Castle website for details of opening times, entrance rates, guided tours etc
- <http://www.stirlingcastle.gov.uk/>