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EDINBURGH CASTLE UNDER SIEGE 1093–1544

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EDINBURGH Castle appears to be the most besieged place in Great Britain, and one of the most beleaguered places in the world. The number of occasions recorded here, sixteen, for the period from 1093 to 1544 is almost certainly an underestimate because our records for much of the medieval period are so poor. Also, this paper does not take account of the long occupation of the Castle Rock prior to its emergence as a castle in the late eleventh century nor the important sieges endured by the castle after the 1540s. For much of its history Edinburgh Castle was a desirable place to have, a royal palace. It also functioned at times as an administrative centre, as a treasure house and as an arsenal.

Incorporated in the accounts that follow are a history of the development of siege-craft, examples of great military skill and daring, and stories of fortitude and betrayal. The author believes that this overview should be of value because the castle came to be seen as the key to the kingdom, symbolically and strategically.

1093

St Margaret, the wife of King Malcolm III, was lying at the point of death in Edinburgh Castle in November 1093 when her son Edgar brought news of the death of the king and her eldest son Edward while campaigning in England. She died shortly afterwards and the castle was besieged by the king's half-brother, Donald Ban. He had heard of Malcolm's death and invaded the kingdom with the support of the King of Norway and along with a sizeable army. He knew that the king's rightful and lawful heirs were in the castle—Edgar and his younger brothers, and he clearly intended to take the kingship for himself. That he did. The queen's body is said to have been removed

from the castle during the siege, via an unwatched postern gate on the west side, and the rest of her family fled. Donald Ban had concentrated his efforts on the main gates believing that entry or exit was practically impossible anywhere else owing to the nature of the site.[1]

This is the first reliable information on a siege of the castle. The information is derived from a later source, the *Scotichronicon*, dating in its present form to the early fifteenth century, but recognised to be a compilation from earlier material.[2] Was the residence that was there in 1093 what castellologists now would recognise as a castle, in the sense of a new style earth and wood or stone fortification, or really just a traditional fortified site? Are we using the term 'castle' anachronistically? It translates the Latin word *castro* (ablative case) in the *Scotichronicon*, which is normally used in medieval Latin for a castle. Castles had been springing up all over England in the second half of the eleventh century and it would not be at all surprising if Malcolm had been influenced by these developments to have a castle of his own at Edinburgh.

The extent of the eleventh-century castle is not known. If it was limited to the highest point of the castle rock, approximately the area occupied now by the palace, National War Memorial and St Margaret's Chapel, then the postern gate that features in the escape would have been positioned about where Foog's Gate is now. From there a viable route away to safety would have included a climb down the rock in the vicinity of the Old West Sallyport. The excavators of a causeway uncovered in the vicinity of Mills Mount,

[1] A. O. Anderson (ed.), *Early Sources of Scottish History A.D. 500 to 1286*, 2 vols (Stamford: Watkins, 1990), vol. 2, pp. 83–86; D. E. R. Watt (gen. ed.), *Scotichronicon by Walter Bower*, 9 vols (Aberdeen: Aberdeen University Press, 1993–98), vol. 3, pp. 77, 79.

[2] D. Broun, 'A New Look at *Gesta Annalia* Attributed to John of Fordun', in B. E. Crawford (ed.), *Church, Chronicle and Learning in Medieval and Early Renaissance Scotland* (Edinburgh: Mercat Press, 1999), pp. 9–30.

running approximately east–west, tentatively suggested that it might be the path taken by the party fleeing with St Margaret's remains.[3]

The siege of 1093 brought to a head a major split in the Kingdom of the Scots. Malcolm III, married to an English wife, was greatly influenced by her and the ways of her people. Edinburgh was not in the old Scottish heartlands but no doubt made sense as one of the key residences for his family, especially when he was set on a policy that involved him raiding deep into English territories. Donald Ban is represented as the leader of the forces of conservatism, the old Gaelic-speaking aristocracy, elected by them as king. King Malcolm had designated his son Edward as his heir but now with his death, by the understandings and customs of the time, Donald had a good claim to succeed. His kingship, however, was not destined to last. In 1093 it was temporarily brought to an end by a coup with English backing by Duncan, one of Malcolm III's sons. Duncan only survived for six months, but then Donald Ban was finally defeated in 1097 by another nephew, Edgar, backed by an English army. It was these sons of Malcolm, as well as two others, Alexander and David, who reigned afterwards, that ensured the full opening up of Scotland to Anglo-French influences.

1255

According to Matthew Paris,[4] Richard Earl of Gloucester and John Mansel, King Henry III of England's special clerk and counsellor, entered Edinburgh Castle without arousing any suspicion. Their companions followed a few at a time until altogether they made up a force strong enough to defend themselves against those in the castle. Their purpose was to listen to the complaints of the young Queen Margaret, Henry III's daughter, recently married to King Alexander

[3] S. T. Driscoll and P. A. Yeoman, *Excavations within Edinburgh Castle in 1988–91* (Society of Antiquaries of Scotland Monograph 12, 1997), p. 49.

[4] A. O. Anderson (ed.), *Scottish Annals from English Chroniclers A.D. 500 to 1286* (London: D. N. Nutt, 1908), pp. 372–73.

III in 1251. Amongst her woes was the fact that the young couple had not been allowed to cohabit, an arrangement immediately overturned by Gloucester and Mansel. Some of the Scottish nobles were furious at what had happened and invested the castle with their own forces. They soon realised how foolish they had been to besiege their own king and queen and retired.

This is a partial account of an incident during complex political manoeuvring in the minority of Alexander III, not only involving Scottish factions but the English king, Henry III, ever ready to meddle in Scottish affairs. A reliable Scottish source, the *Chronicle of Melrose*,[5] has the castle seized by the English king's Scottish ally, Patrick Earl of Dunbar, and garrisoned by his men, prior to the arrival of Gloucester and Mansel. The king and queen were then taken off to Roxburgh to keep them out of the hands of the faction led by the Comyns.[6]

From the point of view of a study of the taking and holding of the castle, the interesting thing about these events in 1256 is the apparent ease with which the castle could be entered and taken over, even though it housed the king and queen at the time. Matthew Paris says there was a doorkeeper to the castle along with warders who were duped into supposing the intruders were humble knights of the household of Robert de Ros, one of those accused by the queen of mistreating her.[7]

1296

In June, Edward I besieged Edinburgh Castle. The castle was held by a Scottish garrison under a constable. The fullest account is given in the English *Chronicle of Lanercost* where there is interwoven an amusing

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[5] Anderson, *Early Sources*, vol. 2, pp. 580–82.

[6] M. Brown, *The Wars of Scotland 1214–1371* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), p. 49.

[7] Anderson, *Scottish Annals from English Chroniclers*, p. 372.

(but not for the man in question) story of the defection of one of King Edward's Welshmen.

King Edward had brought up large stone throwing engines which were positioned all round the castle. The bulk of the army with which he had invaded Scotland that April was apparently still with him. The castle was subjected to a heavy bombardment by three engines for three days and nights, starting about 8 June, during which 158 stones were fired. The king had selected a Welshman, Lewyn, as a messenger to take letters to London. Lewyn, however, spent the money he had been given as travelling expenses in a tavern, and the next day sought admission to the castle, offering to hand over the letters with which he had been entrusted, and boasting of his prowess with a *ballista* (giant crossbow). He was pulled into the castle, over the wall on a rope, but when the constable heard about this, out of a sense of honour, he would have nothing to do with Lewyn and his treachery and notified the besiegers of how they had been approached by this deserter. Lewyn was immediately ejected and was duly tried and hanged by the English.

The constable's honourable behaviour apparently influenced the English king to call off the bombardment and give the Scots the opportunity to send messengers to their King, John, at Forfar, explaining their situation and looking for help. While a response was awaited King Edward marched on to Stirling. King John could offer no prospect of relieving the siege and advised the garrison to look to their own safety. Thus on the 15th day of the siege the castle was surrendered to the English commander, Sir John Le Despenser. The Lanercost chronicler noted that there was no record of the castle ever having been captured before owing to its height and strength.[8]

[8] *Voyage of Kynge Edwarde into Scotland*, pp. 1–6, in P. Hume Brown (ed.), *Early Travellers in Scotland* (Edinburgh: David Douglas, 1891), pp. 1–6; *The Chronicle of Lanercost*, trans. H. Maxwell (Glasgow: J. Maclehose and Sons, 1913), pp. 142–45. Compare H. R. Luard (ed.), *Flores Historiarum* (Rolls Series, London: HMSO, 1890), vol. 3, pp. 98, 288; H. Rothwell (ed.), *The Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough* (Royal History Society, Camden 3rd ser. 89, 1957), p. 279.

Stone-throwing machines were to be used in many sieges by both the English and the Scots in the ensuing Wars of Independence. No detail is provided by any of our sources of the type used against Edinburgh castle in 1296 but it is probably not unreasonable to assume that they were trebuchets. Trebuchets had a beam pivoting on a fulcrum, just like a child's seesaw. In their simplest form, at one end of the beam was a heavy weight or counter-balance and at the other a sling for a stone projectile. The machine was made ready by holding the end of the beam with the sling down, and loading it with a stone. When the beam was released the weight of the counter-balance caused the sling to fly up, releasing its stone with great force. Recent experiments with a reproduction medieval trebuchet at Urquhart Castle on Loch Ness suggest that they could be formidable in knocking down walls.[9]

There is no mention of stone-throwing machines earlier in the campaign of 1296 when King Edward captured Berwick-upon-Tweed, Dunbar Castle and Roxburgh Castle. Indeed, in the case of Dunbar, the English strategy for taking it seems to have depended on the digging of mines. That garrison capitulated without putting up much resistance.[10] Roxburgh did not provide any resistance either when Edward turned his attention to it after Dunbar.[11] It is doubtful if Edward would really have seen Roxburgh as a major threat to his lines of communication when he already held Berwick and Dunbar. It is possible he only turned his attention to it to kill time while waiting either for the arrival of his war machines at Edinburgh, or their construction locally.

[9] D. H. Caldwell, 'The Scots and Guns', A. King and M. Penman (eds), *England and Scotland in the Fourteenth Century, New Perspectives* (Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer, 2007), pp. 62–64; M. J. Fisher and D. E. Fisher, *Mysteries of Lost Empires* (London: Channel 4 Books, 2000), pp. 22–53.

[10] Sir Herbert Maxwell (trans.), *Chronicle of Lanercost* (Glasgow: J. Maclehose, 1913), p. 140.

[11] Harry Rothwell (ed.), *The Chronicle of Walter of Guisborough* (London: Royal Historical Society, 1957: Camden Series, no. 89), p. 279.

What cannot be judged with any certainty is whether the garrison in Edinburgh could have held out much longer. Three days' bombardment against the major fortress in the country was not necessarily enough to render it in danger of capture by assault. Edward was content to allow the garrison the opportunity to take advice from their king on what they should do, surely not a course of action which he would happily have taken if he were confident of the immediate reduction of the castle by battery and assault. The Scots may understandably have been unenthusiastic about holding out to the bitter end since it would have been clear, after the treatment Edward had meted out to the inhabitants of Berwick, that that would have meant death for all of them.

The surrender of Edinburgh Castle in 1296 was a major turning point for several reasons. It was probably the first time that any Scottish fortification had been seriously threatened with stone-throwing machines. As Scotland's premier castle, and with a reputation for being impregnable, its capture now was a hammer blow for those who would continue to resist the English. It also contained the country's archives, crown jewels and other treasures, which were now carted off to England. By not making any attempt to defend or relieve Edinburgh Castle King John demonstrated his powerlessness to friend and foe alike.

1314

The capture of the castle by escalade in 1314 is one of the most famous stories of Robert Bruce and his band of patriots. In this case the hero is Thomas Randolph Earl of Moray who was already besieging the English garrison in the castle when news came of how Sir James Douglas had won Roxburgh Castle by the use of ladders in the dark. This spurred Moray, helped and advised by William Francis, the son of a previous keeper of the castle, into adopting a daring plan. Francis had told how for the love of a woman he had nightly scaled the castle wall with a rope ladder and made his way down a narrow path in the rock. The story is told in considerable detail in John Barbour's epic poem, *The Bruce*, and also in the *Chronicle of Lanercost*.

The actual date of the assault is said to have been 14 March 1313/14. The castle is known to have been defended, on the basis of an

official return of 1311-12, by a force of about 200: 83 men-at-arms, 40 crossbowmen, 40 archers, 29 hobelars (light horsemen).[12]

While a diversionary attack was made on the south gate of the castle a smaller force of 30, including the earl himself and William Francis, climbed in the dark up the north face of the castle rock. Also named by Barbour in the party was Sir Andrew Gray. While they rested half way up the rock face some castle sentries assembled above them, and one, showing off to his colleagues, threw a stone down at imaginary enemies. When the sentries had dispersed the final climb was made, the wall, 12 feet (3.66 m) high being climbed with a rope ladder. William Francis was first over, followed by Sir Andrew Gray and Moray. Before the whole party could get into the castle the alarm was raised and the English constable and others had rushed to oppose the Scots. Despite the odds being against them in terms of numbers Moray and his compatriots soon won the upper hand. The English were soon disheartened by the death of their constable and turned and fled.[13]

The information on the diversionary assault on the south gate comes from the *Chronicle of Lanercost*, and 'south' has been assumed to be an error for 'east', but perhaps not so. There is evidence for an entrance in the south face of King David's Tower (erected later in the fourteenth century) which may perpetuate an earlier approach route to the castle from outside the town, up where the castle rock gives out to a steep but grassy slope.[14] Although the Scots held the town itself at the time of the siege, mounting an attack away from the obvious approach may have been deemed to have merit in terms of unsettling the garrison even more.

[12] A. A. M. Duncan (ed. and trans.), *John Barbour, The Bruce* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1999), notes on pp. 386, 390.

[13] *John Barbour, The Bruce*, pp. 386–98; *Chronicle of Lanercost*, p. 204.

[14] W. T. Oldrieve, 'Account of the Recent Discovery of the Remains of David's Tower at Edinburgh Castle', *Proceedings of the Society Antiquaries Scotland* 48 (1914), p. 267, fig. 41.

Barbour's account tells how the Scots' climbers rested together on a narrow ledge half way up the rock face. This might be identified with the ledge which supports the later crane seat above the Well House Tower in Princes Street Gardens. Recent excavations by Driscoll and Yeoman,[15] in their area T west of Mills Mount, provide no evidence for a stone defensive wall of earlier date than 1314, overlooking the site of the crane seat. The most likely siting of such a wall would surely have been on the line followed by the present day western defences.

With the taking of Edinburgh Castle, which King Robert then had destroyed to prevent it ever being easily used against him, the English hold on Scotland was reduced to a handful of garrisons, most notably that in Stirling Castle. Probably few at the time expected that the English would give up on Scotland without a fight, as was indeed the case. The final struggle was approaching when King Robert had to contemplate fielding an army against the English king. With the taking of Edinburgh and other castles he had every reason to feel confidence in the martial skill and hardiness of his men, particularly those like Douglas and Moray who were his most trusted commanders.

1335

Scottish and English sources describe how Guy, Count of Namur, attempted to defend himself in Edinburgh Castle from the Scots. The castle was still in ruins from when it was dismantled by King Robert Bruce in 1314, but in desperation Namur and his party killed their horses and made a rampart with their bodies.

Count Guy was a kinsman of the Queen of England and offered himself for service in the war in Scotland. He was too late to join Edward III and the main English army before it entered Scotland, and set out from Berwick on 30 July with his force of seven or eight

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[15] Driscoll and Yeoman, *Excavations within Edinburgh Castle*, pp. 70–75.

knights and 100 men-at-arms, along with some English guides.[16] They were intercepted by supporters of the Bruce cause: John Randolph, Earl of Moray and Guardian of the Kingdom, along with the Earl of March, William Douglas, Alexander Ramsay and others. They engaged in battle outside Edinburgh on the Burgh Muir. The count and his men were forced to flee, fighting all the way, first into the town itself, and then on to the Castle Rock where they defended themselves all night behind a wall made from the bodies of their horses. They capitulated the next morning on terms.[17]

Both Scottish and English sources agree on the generosity with which Moray and the Scots treated the count and his party once they realised who he was. This was out of regard for their ally, the French king, whose subject the count was. The goods of the count and his followers were restored to them and their ransoms cancelled. Moray personally accompanied them back to England.

What appears at first sight a chivalrous tale of daring-do was almost the undoing of the supporters of the Bruce cause against Edward Balliol backed by King Edward III of England. The Bruce supporters were already at loggerheads with each other and too weak to offer any real resistance to the armies under the two Edwards that had invaded Scotland that July. Moray's generosity to Namur ironically resulted in his own capture by the English and the death in a skirmish of Douglas' brother.

1337 (1)

Sir Andrew Murray of Bothwell, the Guardian of Scotland on behalf of the young, exiled King David II, besieged the English garrison in Edinburgh Castle in October, but was forced to lift the siege by the

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[16] *Chronicle of Lanercost*, p. 292; A. King (ed. and transl.), *Sir Thomas Gray Scalacronica 1272–1363* (Durham: Surtees Society, 2005), p. 121.

[17] *Scotichronicon*, vol. 7, pp. 111–15; D. Laing (ed.), *The Originale Cronykil of Scotland by Andrew of Wyntoun*, 3 vols (Edinburgh: Edmonston and Douglas, 1872–79), vol. 2, pp. 419–20.

arrival of a relieving army consisting of forces from Berwick under King Edward Balliol and Sir Anthony de Lucy, combined with the men of Westmorland and Cumberland under the Bishop of Carlisle and Sir Rauf Dacre. The Scottish chronicler, Andrew of Wyntoun, suggests that Murray was also already failing in health. He died during Lent in the following year.[18]

King Edward III had taken steps to have several Scottish castles rebuilt in 1335, including Edinburgh, intrusting that work to a Scotsman in his service, John Stirling.[19] Stirling commanded a garrison in 1335 of 60 men-at-arms (including eight knights) and 60 archers.[20] Stirling is said to have been absent from the castle during the siege.[21] Bower describes how the English garrison in the castle took revenge for the siege on the poor common people round about. The castle marshall (apparently not Stirling) is described as an arrogant man who was murdered shortly afterwards on the High Street of Edinburgh by Robert Prenderguest, a disaffected Scotsman, who made good his escape, successfully seeking sanctuary in Holyrood Abbey.[22] According to other sources Prenderguest was responsible after his escape for bringing back Sir William Douglas to

[18] *Chronicle of Lanercost*, p. 308; *Scalacronica*, p. 125; *Scotichronicon*, vol. 7, p. 131; *Originale Cronykil by Androw of Wyntoun*, vol. 2, pp. 438; A. A. M. Duncan, 'Murray, Sir Andrew, of Bothwell (1298–1338)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004): http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/19590, accessed 21 December 2013.

[19] J. Bain and others (eds), *Calendar of Documents relating to Scotland* [hereafter *Cal. Doc. Scot.*] (Edinburgh: H. M. General Register House, 1881–1986), vol. 3, no. 1186; *Scotichronicon*, vol. 7, p. 123.

[20] *Cal. Scot. Docs.*, vol. 3, no. 1186.

[21] *Chronicle of Lanercost*, p. 308.

[22] *Scotichronicon*, vol. 7, pp. 133–35.

Edinburgh secretly in the night. Much of the garrison of the castle was lodged in the town and Douglas slew 80 or more of them.[23]

Murray is known to have used siege engines successfully at the sieges of other castles, including one called Buster against the castles of St Andrews and Bothwell earlier in the year.[24] It would be surprising if that was not part of his strategy for re-taking Edinburgh.

1337 (2)

Sir William Douglas (the same who had helped the Earl of Moray against the Count of Namur in 1335), attacked a raiding party from Edinburgh Castle, led by its commander John Stirling, late in the Year. Stirling was captured along with two or three knights and about twenty men-at-arms, and Douglas summoned the castle to surrender in return for preserving the life of his captives. The remaining garrison refused to do a deal but Douglas did not carry out his threat.[25]

The 1337 siege of Edinburgh Castle by Andrew Murray, followed by the attempt by William Douglas to take it by negotiation, were both relatively minor events in the struggles by the supporters of the exiled king David II to rid themselves of the English and Edward Balliol. Already, however, the tide had turned against the English-Balliol cause, with forces of Bruce supporters able to traverse the Lothians and an English garrison hemmed in in Edinburgh, at risk when it dared to make sorties. The town of Edinburgh itself may have been cowed by the castle garrison but was not totally commanded by it. The caste did not have a secure circuit of strong defences. This situation must have been unsatisfactory for the English in terms of having their garrison lodging in the town. Presumably

[23] F. J. H. Skene (ed.), *The Book of Pluscarden*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: W. Paterson, 1880), vol. 2, p. 217; *Extracta e Variis Cronicis Scocie from the Ancient Manuscript in the Advocates Library at Edinburgh* (Edinburgh: Abbotsford Club, 1842), p. 172.

[24] Caldwell, 'The Scots and Guns', p. 63; Duncan, 'Murray , Sir Andrew'.

[25] *Chronicle of Lanercost*, p. 312.

one of the purposes of the building works recorded in English Exchequer accounts for 1339–1340,[26] was to provide enough accommodation and facilities for the garrison in the castle itself.

1341

William Douglas (of Liddesdale) did capture Edinburgh Castle, four years after his attempt in 1337. The story of how he took it by subterfuge is an inspiring tale of cunning and daring that goes some way to explaining how the Scots maintained their independence from would-be English overlordship. Douglas had a strong force, including William Fraser and Joachim Kinbuck, and was particularly reliant on the advice and foresight of a priest, sir William Bullock, and also the skill and support of a ship-owning Edinburgh burgess, Walter Curry. Curry's ship, then at Dundee, was loaded with a force of 200 chosen men and was sailed to the island of Inchkeith, in the Firth of Forth near Leith. Curry pretended to be an English merchant, come from England with a cargo of wine, grain and beer, and went to the captain of Edinburgh Castle, offering him a bribe of wine, beer and biscuits in return for a sale of the rest of the cargo. This the captain agreed to, and arrangements were made for access into the castle in the morning.

Curry went to the castle with two horses loaded with baskets and casks, and twelve men, their armour concealed by cloaks. Meanwhile Douglas hid his main force nearby at 'the Turnpike'. The great gate was duly opened by the gatekeeper for Curry's party who, as soon as they entered, slit the throats of the janitor and his two assistants and sounded a horn as the signal for Douglas' party to rush the castle. Curry contrived to jam a stake under the portcullis to stop it being dropped and threw his baskets and casks towards the entrance of the tower as a hindrance to reinforcements from the garrison.

A violent fight ensued in which the garrison was totally defeated and the castle taken by Douglas. He installed his elder illegitimate

[26] *Cal. Doc. Scot.,* vol. 3, p. 241.

brother, also called William, as keeper, and the burgesses of Edinburgh were glad to return to the allegiance of King David.[27]

This story of the taking of Edinburgh Castle in 1341 also features largely in the work of the Flemish chronicler, Jean le Bel. There we learn that the keeper of the castle was 'Watier de Lymosin' (of whom there is no trace in English records)[28] and Alexander Ramsay is also named as a key player on the Scottish side. Le Bel has the small group of 15 or 18 pretend merchants led by Douglas and Ramsay, and the castle porter, who had no advance knowledge of their coming, is only prepared to give them admittance through an outer gate, 'le premier porte des Barriers', until he has consulted with his masters. He, however, has the keys for the main gate of the castle on him, is easily overpowered, and that gate is prevented from being closed by having the merchandise dumped within it. The main party is said to have sheltered at an abbey, clearly Holyrood, over night and was ready nearby with its horses to come riding to the attack when they got the signal.[29]

Scottish sources give the date of the castle's capture as 17 April, but English Exchequer accounts indicate 16 April. At that time the garrison consisted of 49 men-at-arms, 6 watchmen and 60 mounted archers. Nobody of superior rank is mentioned although the wardenship of the castle was in the hands of Sir Thomas Rokeby, who was also warden of Stirling Castle and was probably normally based there. It seems, therefore, that the garrison of Edinburgh at the time of its capture was severely depleted, certainly down from the 140 to 150 known to have been there in the period from 1336 to 1340.[30]

The trick of a small group, above suspicion, blocking the castle entrance until a larger force can arrive, recalls the capture in 1313, as

[27] *Scotichronicon*, vol. 7, pp. 145, 147, 239–40; *Book of Pluscarden*, vol. 2, pp. 220–21; *Originale Cronykil by Androw of Wyntoun*, vol. 2, pp. 457–60.

[28] *Cal. Doc. Scot.*, vol. 3, p. xlix.

[29] J. Viard and E. Déprez (eds), *Chronique de Jean le Bel*, 2 vols (Paris: Librairie Renouard, 1904–05), vol. 1, pp. 277–80.

[30] *Cal. Doc. Scot.*, vol. 3, nos 1323, 1383 and pp. 362–63.

recounted by John Barbour, of the peel of Linlithgow by the Scottish patriot, William Bunnock, who manoeuvred his hay wain, in which were hidden armed men, into the entrance of the peel to hold it until a larger force could rush in from hiding nearby. Indeed, Duncan even suggests that the 1313 story of Bunnock was derived by Barbour from the 1341 exploit of Sir William Douglas and his companions, pointing to the similarity in name between William Bunnock in 1313 and William Bullock in the 1341 adventure.[31]

'The turnpike' where the main force of patriots waited for the signal to attack is probably not to be understood to be a stair, but as suggested by the editors of Bower,[32] a spiked outer barrier [of wood] enclosing an area known as the *barras*, accessed from the outside by the gate (le premier porte des Barriers) mentioned in le Bel's account. This is possibly to be identified with the gate under 'le hurdys' (perhaps here meaning a palisade) mentioned in a 1335 building account.[33] The erection of the wall of the barras is listed in an English building account of 1336–37.[34] So presumably this force was hidden out of sight of the castle watchmen, just outside the barras.

The Barras are mentioned in a document of 1571 as a piece of land to the west of the West Port of Edinburgh, below the southwest side of the castle rock,[35] but this seems an improbable place for the events of 1341. It is much more likely that the location was the *placea Warda*, as distinct from the *mota castri*, recorded in an English rental of 1335/6 while the castle was still in ruins and ungarrisoned.[36] The *mota castri* or motte must be the Castle Rock while the *placea Warda* or ward has been identified with an area to the northeast of the castle, extending

[31] *Barbour, The Bruce*, pp. 368–73.

[32] *Scotichronicon*, vol. 7, p. 240.

[33] *Cal. Doc. Scot.*, vol. 3, pp. 215–16.

[34] *Cal. Doc. Scot.*, vol. 3, pp. 359.

[35] D. Wilson, *Memorials of Edinburgh in the Olden Time*, 2 vols (Edinburgh: A. and C. Black, 1891), vol. 1, p. 178.

[36] *Cal. Doc. Scot.*, vol. 3, p. 327.

eastwards from the Well-House Tower and bounded by the North Loch (now Princes Street Gardens), to the edge of the present day Ramsay Garden, and extending southwards to take in the present day Esplanade and Johnstone Terrace. The outer gate the patriots were allowed through might then have been positioned at the head of the High Street.

The main gate of the castle that the patriots had to gain was probably the great gate already being constructed in 1335–36, said to have had stone arches when four masons and others were working on it in 1339–40.[37] It was possibly located about where the Regent Morton erected the Portcullis Gate in 1574. Bower's account of 1341 suggests a tower adjacent to the main gate, from which it was expected the castle garrison would come to try and repulse the attackers.[38]

Apart from catching the imagination as a striking military exploit the capture of Edinburgh Castle in 1341 was a significant turning point in the war with the English. Although the English still retained some garrisons it is likely that none were a significant threat to the surrounding countryside. There appeared to remain little support in Scotland for King Edward Balliol and King Edward III's attention in terms of foreign policy was now firmly focussed on the Continent. It was now deemed safe enough for King David II to return from exile.

1385

In August of this year King Richard II of England mounted a devastating raid into Scotland in retaliation for the joint Scoto-French expedition into England in July. The English burnt Edinburgh, including St Giles Church. Holyrood Abbey was spared because of the hospitality provided there previously to John of

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[37] *Cal. Doc. Scot.*, vol. 3, pp. 215–16, 241.

[38] *Scotichronicon*, vol. 7, p.147.

Gaunt, the king's uncle. Presumably Edinburgh Castle was deemed too strong to attack.[39]

1400

King Henry IV of England, coming via Haddington to Leith, mounted a major military expedition into Scotland, supplied by a fleet, in August. According to Bower and the derivative *Book of Pluscarden*, Edinburgh Castle was assaulted from 15 to 17 August.[40] Barbour

King Henry had been encouraged to meddle directly in Scottish affairs by the disaffected Earl of March, and unexpectedly revived the English claim to overlordship of Scotland, requiring King Robert II and his nobles to meet him in Edinburgh on 23 August to do homage. No Scots were found to comply with his demand, and the heir to the throne, David Duke of Rothesay, had offered instead a force of 100, 200 or 300 Scottish nobles to do battle with a like number of English so that differences could be resolved with only a limited loss of blood. The offer was declined.

Edinburgh Castle was under the command of Archibald Earl of Douglas, and he had been joined there by his close ally, the Duke of Rothesay, and several other magnates and nobles from the south of the Forth. Meanwhile the governor, Rothesay's uncle the Duke of Albany was in the field with a large army less than a day's march away at Calder Moor.[41]

Whether one believes that Henry was serious in his claims that he had no desire to wreak heavy destruction on the Scots, or that the latter—sensibly—had no intention of engaging with the English, it was the English that blinked first. Suffering from a lack of supplies

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[39] *Originale Cronykil by Androw of Wyntoun*, vol. 3, pp. 28–29.

[40] *Scotichronicon*, vol. 8, p. 35; *Book of Pluscarden*, vol. 2, pp. 256–57.

[41] *Scotichronicon*, vol. 8, p. 35.

and low morale, they slunk away with nothing achieved, crossing back into England on 29 August.[42]

1416

The second earl of Douglas besieged the castle. He gave custody of it to Sir William Crawford, who handed it back to the earl in 1418. The *Scotichronicon* is our only source for this laconic entry, adding that Douglas and Crawford made an agreeable settlement.[43] Douglas was keeper of the castle for life and must have fallen out with Crawford, his constable. At this time, while King James I was a prisoner in England, Scotland was being governed by the king's Uncle Robert, Duke of Albany. The siege of Edinburgh Castle may relate in some way to shifting alliances which saw Douglas actively promoting the return of King James.[44]

1445

According to the *Auchinleck Chronicle* the Parliament held at Perth on 5 June was shifted by King James II to Edinburgh three days later because Edinburgh Castle was then under siege on his behalf. Sir William Crichton held out in the castle for nine weeks before rendering it to the king 'through treaty'.[45]

In 1445 James II was still in his minority and government was carried out in his name by factions of the nobility. Sir William Crichton then held the powerful position of chancellor, and was besides Sheriff of Edinburgh and Captain of Edinburgh Castle. It

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[42] J. H. Wylie, *History of England under Henry IV*, 2 vols (London: Longmans, Green, 1884), vol. 1, pp. 131–40; S. Boardman, *The Early Stewart Kings Robert II and Robert III 1371–1406* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 1996), pp. 226–32.

[43] *Scotichronicon*, vol. 8, pp. 87, 190.

[44] M. Brown, *James I* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 1994), p. 27.

[45] C. McGladdery, *James II* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 1990), p. 162.

appears that he had fallen foul of the real power behind the throne, the seventh Earl of Douglas.[46] The fact that Crichton came to terms and does not appear to have suffered loss of all of his offices and status suggests that the king and his Douglas' allies lacked the power to dislodge him from the castle. It was only in the following decade that the king, then fully in control, was to demonstrate the efficacy of guns in reducing fortifications—ironically those of the Douglases.

1482

In March 1482, in the presence of the Three Estates, James III declared that the actions of his uncles John, Earl of Atholl, and James, Earl of Buchan, during his minority in taking and interfering with Edinburgh Castle were done at the king's command. They also immediately handed over the castle to him when he commanded them to do so. They, and those who acted with them, were, therefore, not guilty of any crime.[47]

This declaration of 1482 relates to a power struggle that pitted King James against other members of his family. Atholl and Buchan were clearly trying to protect themselves against possible charges of treason for events in their nephew's minority.[48]

On 16 November 1482 King James III issued a charter under the Great Seal granting the office of sheriff to the provost, bailies, clerk, councillors and community of the burgh of Edinburgh. The document records that this was in appreciation of the part played by the people of Edinburgh, along with the king's younger brother,

[46] McGladdery, *James II*, p. 33; A. R. Borthwick, 'Crichton, William, of that ilk, first Lord Crichton (d. 1453)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (Oxford University Press, 2004): http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/6701, accessed 8 Jan 2014.

[47] *Records of the Parliaments of Scotland*, 1482/3/7: http://www.rps.ac.uk, accessed 1 January 2014.

[48] N. Macdougall, *James III A Political Study* (Edinburgh: Donald, 1982), pp. 151–52.

Alexander Duke of Albany, in besieging Edinburgh Castle and releasing the king from his imprisonment there.[49]

One of the main sources for this incident is the late sixteenth-century history of Scotland by Bishop Lesley. He describes how that year Scotland had been invaded by an English army led by the Duke of Gloucester, bringing with it from exile King James' younger brother, the Duke of Albany, who appeared to many an attractive alternative as king of Scots. When James had called out the host to oppose the invasion, the leading nobles mounted a coup against him and had him imprisoned in Edinburgh Castle under the care of the Earl of Atholl while they negotiated the withdrawal of the English army and the return of Albany to his heritage and his appointment as Lieutenant General of the kingdom. Albany, however, shortly after taking over the reins of government, with advice from the queen who was at Stirling, returned secretly to Edinburgh and besieged the castle in order to release the king. The castle surrendered through lack of victuals. The resulting amity between the two royal brothers did not last long, with Albany accusing James of trying to poison him.[50]

1525

Edinburgh Castle, then occupied by the Queen Mother, Margaret Tudor with her young son, King James V, and supporters, appeared to be threatened by a force of 600 or 700 men led by the Earls of Angus and Lennox in early February 1524/5. They were joined by a further force 2,000 strong of confederates who took up quarters in the town and round about, out of reach of the castle's guns. The castle guns were indeed 'bent upon' the town where a Parliament

[49] Edinburgh Charter, *Charters and other documents relating to the City of Edinburgh A.D. 1143–1540* (Edinburgh: Scottish Burgh Records Society, 1871), no. LIV, pp. 157–65, at p. 158.

[50] *The History of Scotland by John Lesley Bishop of Ross* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1830), pp. 49–50. Compare Macdougall, *James III*, pp. 170–74.

was being held, but agreement between the two parties was reached without any bloodshed.[51]

These events in the minority of James V relate to control of his person and therefore of government. An equitable agreement was brokered by which the king would be looked after by the earls of Angus, Lennox and Errol in turn while Queen Margaret was guaranteed access to her son. Angus, actually Margaret's estranged husband refused to hand his ward over at the end of his turn, thus precipitating much trouble and bloodshed.

1544

In the spring of 1544 King Henry VIII of England ordered an army, under the leadership of the Earl of Hertford north into Scotland, with very specific instructions about its objectives, including the destruction of Edinburgh and the taking of the castle.[52] Remarkably, the bulk of the force came by sea, landing at Granton Craig on 4 May. The expedition has generally been considered a devastating blow against Scotland, and the apparent lack of effective opposition to the invaders has been seen as a major failure of Scottish government and arms.

This view has developed because of an uncritical reliance on reports back to London from Hertford and his fellow commanders, and also an assumption that because the Scots avoided a pitched battle their weakness was demonstrated. Although the expedition was hardly good news for the Scots the totally negative way in which it has been seen from a Scottish perspective should be questioned.

[51] *A Diurnal of Remarkable Occurrents that have passed within the Country of Scotland since the Death of King James the Fourth till the Year M.D.LXXV* (Edinburgh: Bannatyne Club, 1833), pp. 9–10; J. S. Brewer et al. (eds), *Letters and Papers Foreign and Domestic of the Reign of Henry VIII* (London: Public Record Office, 1862–1932), vol. 4, nos 1088, 1110, 1113.

[52] M. Merriman, *The Rough Wooings: Mary Queen of Scots 1542–1551* (East Linton: Tuckwell Press, 2000), pp. 143–49.

The Scots failed to oppose the English landing but successfully blocked an initial move by the invaders on Edinburgh. After some sharp fighting the Scots withdrew to Edinburgh and the English took Leith. The English marched on Edinburgh two days later and had little difficulty in battering down the Netherbowgate with a large piece of ordnance (a culverin) despite the opposition of the town's guns mounted there and fire from the castle. The English gunners established a gun battery to launch a battery of the castle but the gunners in the castle successfully dismounted the English culverin which then had to be blown up to prevent it falling into Scottish hands. There was some street fighting in which the Scots are said to have come off worst but the English withdrew in disorder having attempted to fire some of the town. Two days later they again forced their way in through the newly refortified Netherbowgate, this time reinforced by 4000 of their own border horse which had come overland. Again efforts were made to burn the town down, which were probably not as effective as has often been supposed, and no further attempt was made against the castle before the army withdrew and returned to England though East Lothian and Berwickshire, shadowed all the way by Scottish forces.[53]

It should be noted how Hertford, in his reports back to London distanced himself from his failure against the castle. He had not authorised his gunners to attack the castle; that resulted solely from their own misjudged enthusiasm. He was then advised by his artillery/fortification experts, Sir Richard Lee and John Rogers that the castle was in fact impregnable. All this helped obfuscate the fact that he had failed in one of his main objectives and lost a major piece of equipment. Indeed, the lack of specific detail in his reports suggest that the ability of his forces to cause extensive damage may have been rather limited; which surely ought to be credited to the Scots as some sort of success.

[53] *Letters & Papers of Henry VIII*, vol. 19/1, nos 472, 483, 518, 533, 534; 'The Late Expedicion In Scotlande … 1544', in J. G. Dalyell (ed.), *Fragments of Scottish History* (Edinburgh: A. Constable, 1798), pp. 1–16.

Perhaps too, it is time to recognise the professionalism and ability of the gunners in Edinburgh Castle. If the castle had fallen in 1544 how different the course of history might have been.

The English culverin that had to be abandoned is shown at the head of the High Street, pointing at the castle, in the English drawing in the British Library illustrating the capture of Edinburgh in 1544.[54]

The 1544 invasion marked the opening of the Wars of the Rough Wooing, an ill-judged attempt by the English to persuade the Scots to allow the marriage of their infant Queen Mary to the English Prince, later king Edward VI. Although the castle was not seriously threatened this was a wake-up call to improve its defences. Work was well underway by the summer of 1546 when mention is made in the Treasurer's Accounts of 60 pieces of stone for the 'goun holl'.[55] This is most likely to be the gunloop which now points through the Half-Moon Battery directly down the High Street. It was only rediscovered and its outer face exposed in 1912. Built up against the north wall of David's Tower is a massive vaulted casemate containing this loop, which has a single splayed opening sloping downwards slightly and formed of good quality ashlar. Its throat is about 50 mm in diameter and the wall it pierces is a good four metres thick. There would have been an open battlement above, and by February 1546/7 ditches were being cut, possibly just in front of this forewall.[56]

Thus far, the work is very much in the tradition of other important Scottish fortifications, but later in 1547 we first hear of something rather different, representing an entirely new phase in the building, or perhaps a change of plan. It is normally called the blockhouse, fort or spur, and work was already started on it in April, continuing apace after the Battle of Pinkie in September. The expenses of its Italian

[54] British Library, MSS Cotton Augustus 1, vol. 2, ant. 56. See G. Ewart and D. Gallagher, *Fortress of the Kingdom. Archaeology and research at Edinburgh Castle* (Historic Scotland Archaeology Report 7, 2014), illus. 2.2.

[55] T. Dickson, J. B. Paul et al. (eds), *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland* [hereafter *T. A.*] (Edinburgh: H. M. General Register House, 1877–), vol. 8, p. 463.

[56] *T. A.*, vol. 9, p. 56.

designer are recorded, possibly Captain Ubaldini who was sent to Scotland by Henri II of France, and payments were still being made as late as September 1552.[57]

In September 1547 Hertford—now Duke of Somerset and Protector of England for the young Edward VI—invaded Scotland in force, intent on creating pales from which he could influence and control much of the country. On Saturday 10 September he won a major victory over the Scottish host at Pinkie a few miles to the east of Edinburgh. It might seem remarkable that Somerset failed to take greater advantage of his victory but the truth of the matter is that he probably lacked the time—before his supplies of food ran out—and the men to do so. No attempt was made on Edinburgh itself and it is hard to believe that this was altogether 'for consideracions moovying hym to pitee', as claimed by a contemporary English witness, William Patten.[58] Edinburgh was defended by walls and may have harboured much of the defeated Scottish army. It was also overshadowed by the castle which Somerset believed from his recent experience was not worth attempting. Just as in earlier times the English capture of Edinburgh Castle had been fundamental to their hold on Scotland, now the ability of the castle to withstand English efforts helped to secure Scotland from capitulation to English demands. Two consequences of Somerset's failure in September 1547 to capitalise on his victory at Pinkie in hindsight now seem to have been inevitable—firstly the removal of Queen Mary to France and her ultimate marriage to the Dauphin, and secondly the arrival of help from the French. The impregnability of the castle in 1547 was key to Scottish resistance, both symbolically and strategically.

[57] J. Bain et al. (eds), *Calendar of the State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547–1603* (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1898–), vol. 1, no. 10, p. 71; *T. A.*, vol. 9, p. 163; G. A. Bergenroth et al. (eds), *Calendar of Letters, Despatches, and State papers, relating to the Negotiations between England and Spain* (London: Public Record Office, 1862–), vol. 9, p. 246; R. K. Hannay (ed.), *Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs 1501–1554* (Edinburgh: H.M. General Register House, 1932), p. 61.

[58] 'The Late Expedicion In Scotlande', p. 80.