
Bitesize History - Castles

Peil Castle



This an island fortress, situated on a small islet in the Loch of Lochwinnoch and was of old surrounded on all sides by the waters of the Loch. The Lords Sempill began to reduce the size of the Loch by deepening the outlet and drainage about 1690. Their successors, the McDowalls, continued this work till about 1780.

This fortress was small. It was erected as a place of security in times of danger. Its length was from thirty-three to thirty-six feet, and breadth twenty-nine or thirty feet. The height of the walls are not now ascertainable. Their thickness was four feet nine inches; and in shape it was an irregular pentagon, having a sharp point or angle to the west, the

better to resist the action of the water and of storms, which, in this part, generally prevail from the west and north-west.

This fortress was a place of refuge for the lords and family of Semple in the days of yore, in the times of the feuds to defend them from their antagonists, the lords and family of Glencairn.

(*Historical Account of Lochwinnoch Parish, p4. Lochwinnoch Scandal, p. 43.*)



A very fine brass canon was found many years ago in the Loch near the Peil, where other six are, by tradition, reported to have been lost. This one preserved at Castlesempill, being mounted on the lawn in front of the house. It bears the initials J. R. S. for “*Jacobus Rex Scotie*” above that, a griffin rampant and immediately above the last a coronet having the cross, and the *fleur de lis* figured on

it, all being near the breech of the piece and in front of the touch hole.

Mr George Crawford, in his *History of Renfrewshire (Rob. Edition, p. 11)*, says:—“In Lochwinnoch Loch there is a little rock, on which Robert the great Lord Sempill raised a small tower, called ‘The Peil of Castlesempill,’ which, it was of use for security against the insults of rambling parties in times of ancient feuds, so it was for pleasure when the family of Sempill did recreate themselves by diversion in their boat of pleasure on the lake.”

This Peil was entire, it would seem, when Crawford wrote his *History of the County* in 1710; and it is supposed that Col. McDowall demolished it in order provide stones for building his new mansion, which he did on the site the old Castle of Sempill, or of Cassiltoun, in the year 1735.

