



A History Of Lennoxlove House

compiled by Dr Rosalind K. Marshall

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For over 700 years, Lennoxlove House has been a major feature of the East Lothian landscape. Its rich and complex history has been at the core of Lennoxlove's recent renovation and re-development. Over the past 12 months, Lennoxlove House's historic significance has governed decisions about repairs, adaptations and improvements in order to provide it with a viable future. It is now set to begin a new chapter in its history as luxury private accommodation, a place to hold corporate events and weddings as well as a fascinating place to visit and view some of Scotland's finest art held in private collection. Yet for all this, it continues to pay proper respect to its past.

This is a look back at the history of this magnificent home with the help of leading historian Dr Rosalind K. Marshall.

The Early Years

Lennoxlove stands in a wooded hollow a mile south of Haddington, East Lothian, looking out towards the Lammermuir Hills. The oldest part of the house is the sturdy keep, which apparently dates from the fifteenth century. Four stories high, it has walls that are in places eleven feet thick. During the Middle Ages, the main entrance led to a narrow, easily defensible turnpike stair and the windows were no more than slits. East Lothian suffered all too frequently when English armies marched over the Border to ravage the fertile countryside, and there were sometimes hostile neighbours to be fended off as well. At that time, the house did not have its present romantic name. It was known as Lethington Tower.

The Maitlands of Lethington

The lands of Lethington first feature in public records on 15 October 1345, when King David II confirmed a charter granted by Hugh, son of Sir John Gifford of Yester. In return for the usual feudal duties, and for a pair of gilt spurs, Hugh had made over Lethington to Robert Maitland of Thirlestane. Robert's Anglo-Norman ancestors had crossed into Scotland in the early twelfth century, and the family had since been accumulating considerable property. Robert, however, did not have long to enjoy his latest acquisition. He was killed the following year at the battle of Neville's Cross, fighting for David II against the English.

We do not know if there was a house on the site of Lennoxlove in Robert's day but the present tower would have been constructed for his son or his grandson. Successive generations of Maitlands steadily accumulated more lands by a series of well-judged marriages and useful service to the monarch, particularly in time of war. Sometimes, the action came dangerously near. In 1482, for instance, Richard, Duke of Gloucester (later Richard III of England) camped at Lethington with his army of invasion.

In the sixteenth century, however, the Maitland family gained fame in a rather different sphere, when Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington founded a dynasty of prominent statesmen.

The Maitland Dynasty

Sir Richard Maitland succeeded to the family estates in 1513 and enjoyed a thriving public career. He entered service under James V the after the King's death, served the French Queen Mother, Mary of Guise

In later life he became blind, but this did not hold him back.

In spite of his blindness, in 1561, with the return of Mary Queen of Scots to Scotland, he became a Lord of Session (judge), member of the Privy Council and, from 1562-7, Keeper of the Great Seal. Moreover, no longer able to take part in energetic, outdoor activities, he turned more and more to literature for consolation. With the help of his daughter Mary, who acted as his secretary, Richard, 'the blind poet', wrote his whimsical verses pleading for peace, concord, godliness and better laws, collected poetry, and composed a history of his mother's family, the Setons.

Meanwhile, his sons had followed him into public life. William, the eldest, is the best known. He became Secretary of State to Mary, Queen of Scots and married as his second wife Mary Fleming, one of the Queen's famous Four Maries. When they had a son and a daughter, they felt that they needed a country home to which they could retreat from the hectic life of the Court, and so Sir Richard agreed to lend them Lethington.

William was now known as 'the young Laird of Lethington' and Politician's Walk in the grounds is said to commemorate the place where he liked to pace back and forward, pondering affairs of state. It is quite likely that Mary, Queen of Scots visited him at Lethington during her frequent trips to East Lothian, although no evidence to that effect has so far been found.

Characterised by his enemies as 'the Chameleon' and 'Machiavelli', William had one great ambition. He hoped to see Scotland and England unite, ending the strife between them. Elizabeth I refused to recognise Mary, Queen of Scots as her successor, however, and Mary's headlong rush to disaster culminated in her defeat by her own lords and her imprisonment in England. William is suspected of having had a hand in concocting the notorious Casket Letters in an attempt to prove her guilty of the murder of her second husband, Lord Darnley, but even if he was involved, both he and his brothers eventually supported her party in Scotland

The creation of Lennoxlove

Frances Teresa Stuart, 'la Belle Stuart', was famous as the model for Britannia on the British coinage; she was also the woman who gave Lennoxlove its name.

The granddaughter of Walter Stewart, 1st Lord Blantyre, Frances was brought up in France, where her father was a physician to the exiled Queen Henrietta Maria, widow of Charles I. Frances had an innocent prettiness that soon attracted the attention of Louis XIV. To keep her out of harm's way, or so she fondly imagined, Henrietta sent her to London, where the susceptible Charles II promptly began to pursue her. Unlike so many other women, 'la Belle Stuart' refused to be his mistress. Neither her subsequent marriage to the Duke of Lennox nor a bout of smallpox, which ruined her beauty, could however spoil her friendship with the King, and in her good fortune she never forgot her Scottish relatives.

Her cousin's son, Alexander, 5th Lord Blantyre was an impecunious soldier whose Renfrewshire estate was heavily burdened with debt. According to one contemporary, he was 'a very busy man for the liberty and religion of his country, yet whatever party gets the better, he can never get into the administration...'

Frances did her best to help Alexander's political career, gave him financial assistance and took a kindly interest in his wife and children, sending Lady Blantyre thoughtful little gifts of packets of chocolate, the new luxury drink. In return, Lord and Lady Blantyre called one of their daughters after her. Frances herself had no children and so, shortly before her death on 15 October 1702, she decided to leave most of her wealth in trust to pay off Blantyre's ever increasing debts and purchase a house in Scotland for his son Walter, Master of Blantyre.

He was instructed to rename this 'Lennoxlove', in memory of his benefactor. The trust was duly set up, with the 5th Lord Blantyre as one of the Trustees and when Frances died, he was given the task of disposing of her belongings. It must

have been at this time that he acquired her worktable and the beautiful tortoiseshell writing cabinet given to her by Charles II, now at Lennoxlove.

On 1 September 1703, by a charter under the Great Seal, the baronies of Lethington, Haddington, Bolton, Begbie, Erskine and Kilpatrick were united into one new barony, to be called the Barony of Lennoxlove. Lethington Tower would in future be known as Lennoxlove.

The family lives of the Blantynes

The 200 year history of the Blantyre's ownership of Lennoxlove is filled with the familiar ups and downs of family life. In this era particularly, Lennoxlove House became a home for elderly grandmothers, spinster sisters and many children.

After Walter, the first Blantyre owner, who was left Lennoxlove House by Frances Stuart, his son Robert seems to have spent a good deal of time at Lennoxlove and it is where he died on 17 November 1743, leaving his widow, Margaret, with six sons and four daughters, the eldest son aged only sixteen Lady Blantyre brought up her children at Lennoxlove, and it is evident from the correspondence that she was very much the lynch pin of her affectionate family.

Their son, Walter, 8th Lord Blantyre was sent to the continent to continue his education where a family friend, noted that 'he has extreme good sense, the best scholar, the greatest application, a vast pleasure in reading, and the best taste in books, is free from all manner of vice and has the sweetest temper in the world.' Walter's younger brothers, of course, had to make their own way in life. John died young, but William and James entered the army while Charles went off to Calcutta to seek his fortune with the East India Company and began trading in raw silk. Alexander, the third son, remained at home to learn estate management. Two of their sisters married and moved away, but Margaret and Marion remained single and stayed at Lennoxlove with their mother.

Walter continued to pursue his continental studies, but he died in Paris in 1751 at the early age of twenty-four and so William became 9th Lord Blantyre. He continued to pursue his military career, rising to the rank of Colonel in the service of the States of Holland before retiring to Erskine House. Alexander was now running the Lennoxlove Estate very efficiently for him, declaring himself happy to be a farmer – a role in which he went on to earn a well-merited reputation as a humane and improving landlord.

As time went on, it became obvious that William had no intention of marrying and producing an heir. Living happily at the family's Erskine residence, dining on beef, veal, salmon and pheasant, drinking tea from his elegant new red and gold china breakfast ware and ordering regular quantities of rum from Glasgow, he was far too comfortably placed to make any change in his way of life. Alexander, noting with anxious disapproval that his brother was very stout, took no exercise and suffered from badly swollen legs, was painfully conscious of the fact that he himself was William's heir. Well on in his forties, he too had remained a bachelor but, late though it was, it looked as if he would have to find himself a wife

In the end, he chose a delightful young neighbour, Katharine Lindesay, who was less than half his age. Telling his brothers that it was her engaging personality rather than her fortune that attracted him, he signed a contract settling a handsome jointure on her. He brought her to stay at Lennoxlove and in 1775, Katharine gave birth to the desired son. Just three weeks later William died. Alexander was now 10th Lord Blantyre.

At different times, Alexander and his family lived at both Erskine and Lennoxlove, where they were company for his mother Margaret. Old Lady Blantyre finally died at Lennoxlove on 13 December 1782 at the age of eighty-five. A year later, Alexander died and Katharine, at no more than thirty, was a widow with seven children under the age of nine.

A History of the Hamiltons

The Duke of Hamilton is the descendant of generations of men and women who had played a highly significant part in Scotland's history.

The family's rise to power and influence was swift with an astute marriage to a sister of King James III, putting the Hamiltons very close indeed to the crown. This was never more so than during the minority of Mary, Queen of Scots when it had seemed a distinct possibility that she might die and the Regent Arran become king.

The 1st Marquis of Hamilton was high in the favour of James VI and I, James, 2nd Marquis of Hamilton was that king's Master of the Horse and the 3rd Marquis was the close friend and leading Scottish adviser of Charles I, who created him 1st Duke of Hamilton and made him hereditary keeper of the Palace of Holyroodhouse. The 1st Duke was executed by Oliver Cromwell in 1649 because of his royalist activities and his estates were confiscated, but his daughter Anne, Duchess of Hamilton in her own right, managed to reclaim them. She and her husband, William Douglas, 3rd Duke of Hamilton, the Duke of Lauderdale's opponent, set in hand a programme of rebuilding Hamilton Palace and improving the estates.

Their son the 4th Duke died in a notorious duel in 1712, the 6th Duke married the famous Irish beauty, Elizabeth Gunning and their young son, the 7th Duke, was Archibald Douglas's rival in the Douglas Cause. The Hamiltons may have lost the battle for the Douglas estates, but they nonetheless reached new heights of magnificence in the early nineteenth century when the 10th Duke married Susan, daughter of William Beckford and formed his own amazing collections of paintings, sculpture, furniture and silver, making Hamilton Palace world famous.

His grandson dissipated his fortune, and the collections were largely dispersed at sales in the 1880s. With the death of the 12th Duke in 1895 the titles, estates and those treasures from the Palace which had not been sold passed to a cousin, Alfred, a naval officer who became 13th Duke of Hamilton. There were further sales in 1919, and in the 1920s the Palace itself had to be demolished. It had been suffering serious flooding and it was feared that it had become unsafe because of the coal workings beneath. The 13th Duke and his wife, Nina Poore, then brought up their children at Dungavel, near Hamilton, where he died in 1940.

The arrival of the Hamiltons at Lennoxlove

From Mary Queen of Scots through to the union of Scotland and England, from infamous marriages through to accumulation of amazing collections of paintings, sculpture, furniture and silver, the Hamilton peerage is world famous. In 1946, the 14th Duke, the current Duke's father, found and purchased Lennoxlove.

The 14th Duke of Hamilton was a noted boxer and aviator, member of parliament for East Renfrewshire before he inherited his many titles, and Lord Steward of the Royal Household. In 1933 he had won international fame as chief pilot of the first expedition to fly over Mount Everest and he was later to gain less welcome publicity when, to his astonishment, Rudolph Hess arrived in Renfrewshire demanding to see him. After World War II, during which the Duke and his three brothers served in the RAF, he decided that he and his wife, Lady Elizabeth Percy, needed a new home.

Driving round Scotland in search of a pleasant country mansion which could accommodate not only their young family but the fine collection of Hamilton portraits, they came upon Lennoxlove, purchased it from Robert Baird and brought to it not only the paintings but the vast Hamilton archive, along with the remaining furnishings and evocative memorabilia from Hamilton Palace. These included the sixteenth-century silver-gilt casket believed to have contained the notorious letters incriminating Mary, Queen of Scots in Lord Darnley's murder and the beautiful sapphire ring she sent to Lord John Hamilton.

During their years at Lennoxlove, the 14th Duke and Duchess brought up their five young sons, employed John Fowler of Colefax and Fowler to decorate the interior of the house, continued their many public activities and took a keen interest in local affairs. The Duchess famously set up the Lamp of Lothian Trust to fund and oversee the restoration of many historic buildings in Haddington.

When the Duke died in 1973 their eldest son, Angus, became 15th and present Duke of Hamilton. His parents had opened Lennoxlove to the public, and he and the Trustees went about improving and extending the facilities, before the ravages of dry rot and crumbling stonework, forced the Trust to close the House for its current renovation.

Fortified tower, military headquarters, country retreat, dower house and family home; it has been all of these and it not only symbolises for us today the changing history of Scotland over the centuries. The portraits, archives, furnishings, china and memorabilia preserved within its walls provide a unique record of three families who played a vitally important role in this nation's political and cultural past.

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