

## The First Jenny Wormald Lecture (Edinburgh, 27 October 2023)

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### ‘Richt honorabill’ ladies: Noble Power and Aristocratic Women in Sixteenth-Century Scotland

#### *ABSTRACT*

This essay began as a talk given in October 2023 to inaugurate an annual public lecture in honour of Jenny Wormald. It takes its inspiration from her work on noble power, re-examining how noblewomen in sixteenth-century Scotland employed that power. Visual and cultural evidence has been prioritised in the essay which is organised around two settings: the royal court and noble country seats. As the Stirling Heads show, noblewomen formed part of the public face of the Scottish court. They also exploited their right of access to the monarch to further their own and family interests. The arrival of renaissance country houses expanded noblewomen’s central duty of running their residences, sometimes including managing the family estates. ‘Holding hous’ required the provision of hospitality and of the new country-house culture. Noblewomen formed a vital communication system linking the regions to the capital and court. Their informal networks helped negotiate the inter-relationships of birth and marital kindreds, of friendships and alliances. The female contribution to the success of noble families suggests a broader definition of Scottish noble power is required. Further exploration might also place that experience within the European context of the development of aristocratic elites.

**Keywords:** Scotland, sixteenth century, Jenny Wormald, noblewomen, noble power, visual evidence

#### *Introduction*

This essay brings together two topics that have produced interpretative changes to early modern Scottish history: the new understandings of noble power and of the role of women. It was occasioned by an

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invitation to give a public lecture in a new series in honour of Jenny Wormald and takes its inspiration from her work on noble power. One of her many contributions to Scottish history was her revelation of the complex masculine world of ‘lords and men’ during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>1</sup> By uncovering and analysing bonds of manrent, a previously untapped cache of evidence, she laid the foundations for current interpretations of the late medieval and early modern Scottish nobility.<sup>2</sup> When later summarising noble power, she explained:

the holding of land became integral to lordship and service ... Whether for military purposes, or counsel in their affairs, or the visible demonstration of their status, the great needed their affinities and retinues, the lesser the advice and protection of their lords.<sup>3</sup>

The surviving documentary sources have made it possible to discuss sixteenth-century nobles as a social group, and some individual noblemen have been studied in depth. This has produced a categorisation in masculine terms of the bases of noble power.<sup>4</sup> However, a heightened awareness of women’s roles, marking another recent shift in the landscape of Scottish history, has made it possible to re-examine sixteenth-century noble power from a female perspective.<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup> The first Jenny Wormald memorial lecture was delivered on 27 October 2023 in the University of Edinburgh. Her overall contribution is detailed in the Festschrift presented to her, *Kings, Lords and Men in Scotland and Britain, 1300–1625: Essays in honour of Jenny Wormald*, ed. Steve Boardman and Julian Goodare (Edinburgh, 2014), Introduction, 1–17; Keith Brown, ‘The Stewart Realm: Changing the landscape’, 19–33.

<sup>2</sup> Jenny Wormald, *Lords and Men in Scotland: Bonds of Manrent, 1442–1625* (Edinburgh, 1985); Jenny Wormald, ‘Bloodfeud, kindred and government in early modern Scotland’, *Past & Present* 87 (1980) 54–97 and other studies listed in her bibliography, *Kings, Lords and Men*, 341–5.

<sup>3</sup> Jenny Wormald, ‘Material Cultures, 1450–1660’, in Jonathan Clark (ed.), *A World by Itself: A history of the British Isles* (London, 2011), 226.

<sup>4</sup> The indispensable starting point for the early modern nobility is Keith Brown, *Noble Society in Scotland: Wealth, family and culture from Reformation to Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2000) and *Noble Power in Scotland from the Reformation to the Revolution* (Edinburgh, 2010), a work that was dedicated to Jenny Wormald (p. vii). My study of the 5th earl of Argyll provides one example of the use of male categories of noble power, listing military strength; legal jurisdiction; clan and kin; land and wealth; court and culture; affinity; national office and influence, Jane E. A. Dawson, *The Politics of Religion in the Age of Mary, Queen of Scots: The earl of Argyll and the struggle for Britain and Ireland* (Cambridge, 2002), 48–85.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Ewan’s trailblazing work on Scottish women has highlighted this topic. Elizabeth Ewan and Maureen Meikle (eds), *Women in Scotland c1100–c1750* (East Linton, 1999); Elizabeth Ewan and Janay Nugent (eds), *Finding the Family in Medieval and Early Modern Scotland* (Aldershot, 2008); Janay Nugent and Elizabeth Ewan (eds), *Childhood and Youth in Premodern Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2015); Elizabeth Ewan, ‘A New Trumpet? The history of women in Scotland, 1300–1700’, *History Compass* 7:2 (2009) 431–46; Elizabeth Ewan, Rose Pipes, Jane Rendall and Sian Reynolds (eds), *New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women* (Edinburgh, 2018) and the Festschrift for Professor Ewan, *Gender in Scotland 1200–1800*, ed. Mairi Cowan, Janay Nugent and Cathryn Spence (Edinburgh, 2024).

Offering a compact and easily recognised female group, for the following analysis the term 'richt honorabil' has been restricted to the wives and daughters of the titled nobility, with most individual examples drawn from their adult experience as wives or widows.<sup>6</sup> It was common practice for aristocratic daughters to marry into the families of substantial lairds and 'richt honorabil' lady was a form of address for those who occupied the upper levels of the Scottish nobility. This reflects the blurred lines within sixteenth-century Scotland between nobles with titles and substantial lairds.<sup>7</sup> That fluid situation was undergoing a slow process of adaptation as throughout Europe small elites were gradually separating themselves into the aristocratic houses who 'possessed enhanced social status, a monopoly of the higher titles of nobility, considerable social and political power and economic resources primarily in the form of land'.<sup>8</sup>

Aristocratic women were placed in a most privileged position where rank and status were as important as gender. As Brown has commented, 'nobleswomen in Scotland could enjoy all the corporate privileges of their rank and some of the honorific privileges in the absence of male heirs, including succeeding to a higher title like an earldom'.<sup>9</sup> The approximately fifty-two families who comprised this titled group remained numerically stable across much of the sixteenth century. They tended to intermarry, leading, in the pre-1560 period, to nearly all noble marriages requiring a dispensation since the couples were related within the forbidden degrees of canon law.<sup>10</sup> However close or distant, relatives and kin were everywhere to be found among this titled group. Throughout early modern Europe, nobility itself was difficult to define though nobles were easy to recognise, often identified simply by their lifestyle.<sup>11</sup> Noble status was transmitted down the legitimate male line

<sup>6</sup> The earlier archival studies of Margaret Sanderson brought to light details of the lives of individual women and have long influenced my thinking about Scottish society: *Mary Stewart's People* (Edinburgh, 1987); *A Kindly Place?: Living in sixteenth-century Scotland* (East Linton, 2002).

<sup>7</sup> 'Richt honorabil' appeared in the address on the letter from William Maitland of Lethington to Katherine Ruthven, Lady Glenorchy, 2–4 Feb. 1567, *Campbell Letters, 1559–1583* ed. Jane E A Dawson, (Scottish History Society [SHS], 1997), no. 88; William Kirkcaldy to Annas, countess of Moray, 20 Mar. 1570, *Reports of the Royal Commission on Historical Manuscripts [HMC], 6th Report* (Moray Manuscripts) (London, 1877), 650; Brown, *Noble Power*, 243.

<sup>8</sup> Hamish M. Scott, "Acts of time and acts of power": the consolidation of aristocracy in seventeenth-century Europe', *Bulletin of the German Institute of London* 30:2 (2008) 3–37, at 4.

<sup>9</sup> Brown, *Noble Society*, 7, 8–14.

<sup>10</sup> Brown, *Noble Society*, 14–21, 113–36; *Noble Power*, 35–60; Heather Parker, "'In all gudly haste": The Formation of Marriage in Scotland, c.1350–1600', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Guelph, 2012); W. D. H. Sellar, 'Marriage, divorce and the forbidden degrees: canon law and Scots law' and 'Marriage, divorce and concubinage in Gaelic Scotland', reprinted in *Continuity, Influences and Integration in Scottish Legal History: Select essays of David Sellar*, ed. Hector L. MacQueen (Edinburgh, 2021). For marriage cases in the new Commissary Court, Thomas M. Green, *The Consistorial Decisions of the Commissaries of Edinburgh, 1564–76*, Stair Society 61 (Edinburgh, 2014).

<sup>11</sup> Brown, *Noble Society*, 1–14.

and brought social esteem. It demanded the upholding of ‘honour’ and relied upon the belief that individuals were always less important than the collective group of family or house. In Scotland a noble’s standing varied from a minor laird up to a magnate such as the earl of Argyll who might in European terms be described as a semi-sovereign prince.<sup>12</sup>

The concept of a ‘female career’ organised Barbara Harris’s pioneering examination of English aristocratic women and was employed with great effect in Steve Boardman’s study of Margaret Stewart, countess of Angus and Mar.<sup>13</sup> Female careers highlighted the different tasks that noblewomen undertook and for which they were trained from birth. This article has drawn evidence from heraldry, architecture, interior decoration and furnishings, portrait and decorative painting as well as personal correspondence and literary material to illustrate some parts of an aristocratic woman’s job description.<sup>14</sup> Prioritising such visual and cultural evidence reveals more clearly how they were able to contribute to the enhancement of noble power. The essay’s framework is organised around the two main settings, at the royal court and in their country seats, within which aristocratic women operated.

*Noble power, the royal court and the capital*

The Scottish nobility was drawn to the royal court and the capital because these locations offered access to the ruler and the central institutions of royal government and provided the setting for high politics and much elite culture.<sup>15</sup> A recent study by William Hepburn of James IV’s court has demonstrated that all its activities possessed a political dimension and the political and cultural facets of the court should not be treated as separate entities.<sup>16</sup> Such an approach shows that, despite the male domination of daily political decision-making, noblewomen were able to play their part in the political aspects of court life. In sixteenth-century Scotland titled nobles rarely held positions requiring daily attendance upon the monarch. The majority visited

<sup>12</sup> Dawson, *Politics of Religion*, 48.

<sup>13</sup> Barbara J. Harris, *English Aristocratic Women, 1450–1550* (Oxford, 2002), 5. Steve Boardman, ‘Lords and women, women as lords: the career of Margaret Stewart, Countess of Angus and Mar, c.1354–1418’, in *Kings, Lords and Men*, 37–58.

<sup>14</sup> That means some important areas that have received more attention in recent studies, such as female religious roles or marriage, childbearing and rearing, or their legal position, have not been covered, see notes 5, 10, 128.

<sup>15</sup> For a clear definition of how the royal court functioned in this age of personal monarchy, Julian Goodare, *The Government of Scotland, 1560–1625* (Oxford, 2004), 88–9. For the rise of Edinburgh and the way it became an urban court, E. Patricia Dennison and Michael Lynch, ‘Crown, capital and metropolis: Edinburgh and Canongate: the rise of a capital and an urban court’, *Journal of Urban History* 32 (2005) 22–43.

<sup>16</sup> His analogy with immersive theatre is particularly helpful in reducing the separation between participant and spectator; William Hepburn, *The Household and Court of James IV, 1488–1513* (Woodbridge, 2023), 18, 156.

court from time to time and 'specialist' courtiers were a rarity.<sup>17</sup> When they came to court, nobles normally had to pay their own expenses and consequently do not appear in the financial records of the royal households.<sup>18</sup> Like their menfolk, aristocratic women have tended to be missed because they did not occupy full-time household roles.<sup>19</sup> It was normal for the queen consorts, Margaret Tudor, Madeleine Valois, Mary of Guise and Anna of Denmark, to be accompanied by some ladies from their own country. When Mary, Queen of Scots, returned in 1561 she brought a range of French servants as well as her four Maries, all daughters of titled nobles. They remained as close personal attendants until they were married. Though not formal additions to the royal household, Queen Mary did develop close friendships with several countesses. The long royal minorities and regencies experienced for much of the sixteenth century demonstrated it was not necessary to have an active adult monarch for a court to exist as a social and political centre.<sup>20</sup> After she was widowed the Queen Dowager, Mary of Guise, kept her own court. As Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie described it, 'hir court was than lyk wenus and cupido in the tyme of fresche majj for thair was sic dansing singing playing and merines into the court at that tyme that no man wald haue tyred thairin'. The exaggerated reference to Venus, Cupid and Maytime suggested a court's additional function as the marriage market for elite society.<sup>21</sup>

What aristocratic men and women did possess was their privilege of direct access to the monarch that automatically made them part of the wider court lying beyond the confines of the household and royal administration. Unlike their male counterparts, noblewomen had no place in the public institutions of government, such as Parliament or the Council. Periodically, a noblewoman deemed too close to the monarch or the heart of national politics attracted adverse comment for what was regarded as a disruption of the 'natural order' of men's greater fitness to govern. Janet Kennedy, James IV's mistress before his marriage to Margaret Tudor, had a forceful personality and was

<sup>17</sup> Brown, *Noble Power*, 180–207.

<sup>18</sup> Amy Blakeway, *Regency in Sixteenth-Century Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2015), 132–3.

<sup>19</sup> For an overview, Andrea Thomas, *Glory and Honour: The Renaissance in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2013). For individual monarchs: for James IV, Hepburn, *Household*; for James V, Andrea Thomas, *Princelie Majestie: The court of James V of Scotland, 1528–42* (Edinburgh, 2005), 22; 'Dragonis baith and dowis agin double forme': women at the court of James V, 1513–1542', in Ewan and Meikle (eds), *Women in Scotland*, 83–94; for Mary, Queen of Scots, Rosalind K. Marshall, *Queen Mary's Women* (Edinburgh, 2006), chs 6–9; for James VI, Amy Juhala, 'The Household and Court of James VI of Scotland, 1567–1603', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 2000); Steven J. Reid, *The Early Life of James VI: A long apprenticeship, 1566–1585* (Edinburgh, 2023).

<sup>20</sup> Blakeway, *Regency*, 129–30.

<sup>21</sup> Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, *The Historie and Cronicles of Scotland*, 3 vols (Scottish Text Society [STS], 1899–1911), ii, 15–16. Lucinda Dean, 'In the absence of an adult monarch: ceremonial representations of authority by Marie de Guise 1543–1558', in Kate Buchanan and Lucinda Dean (eds), *Medieval and Early Modern Representations of Authority in Scotland and the British Isles* (London, 2016), ch. 8.

believed to have considerable influence over her royal lover. The former Lady Regents, Annas Keith and Annabella Murray, remained active in court life or national politics long after the deaths of their respective husbands Moray (1570) and Mar (1572). Having been James VI's governess, Annabella's standing remained strong into the 1590s when she was given charge of Prince Henry, thereby causing tension with Queen Anna. In the previous decade there had been sustained criticism of Elizabeth Stewart, countess of Arran, who appeared to threaten the male dominance over royal government, with one commentator declaring nothing could be done in the Privy Council 'without the privity of my Lady'.<sup>22</sup> It was the overt wielding of direct political power by noblewomen that upset contemporaries.

By contrast, the attendance of wives and daughters of the titled nobility was positively required to add additional lustre to public royal and diplomatic activities, from the high ceremonies of coronations and baptisms to spectacles, progresses and other entertainments. In her survey of the role of women at European courts, Olwen Hufton declared:

a court without women both looks and feels wrong . . . Women have their part in ritual, in ceremonies, in dancing, in masques, in conversation, in intrigue and, above all, in furthering family interests.<sup>23</sup>

Many Scottish noblewomen enjoyed attending these special occasions, wearing the latest fashions, seeing friends and relatives and always looking to do family business. The carved heads on the ceiling of the Presence Chamber, Stirling Castle, completed *c.* 1540 for James V and Mary of Guise, offer spectacular visual evidence to support the view that noblewomen were an essential element within court life.<sup>24</sup> During the recent reconstruction process of the Stirling heads, members of royal families have been identified and, while individual identifications of nobles have not been possible, these were carvings of real people who would have been recognised by their contemporaries.<sup>25</sup> Three roundels, each with a carving of a winged cherub on their breast, probably represent women who had recently died and show all three were sufficiently valued after their death to have their likeness carved.<sup>26</sup>

<sup>22</sup> Ishbel C. M. Barnes, *Janet Kennedy, Royal Mistress: Marriage and divorce at the courts of James IV and V* (Edinburgh, 2007); Ruth Grant, "'Politicking Jacobean women": Lady Ferniehurst, the countess of Arran and the countess of Huntly, *c.* 1580–1603', in Ewan and Meikle (eds), *Women in Scotland*, 95–104, at 99. For a fresh assessment of the earl and countess of Arran's period of power, see Reid, *The Early Life of James VI*, 241–74.

<sup>23</sup> Olwen Hufton, 'Reflections on the role of women in the early modern court', *The Court Historian* 5:1 (2000) 1–32, at 2.

<sup>24</sup> John G. Harrison, *Rebirth of a Palace: The royal court at Stirling Castle* (Edinburgh, 2011), 131–61.

<sup>25</sup> Sally Rush, *The Identification and Interpretation of the Stirling Heads* (Historic Environment Scotland, 2020), 5–48.

<sup>26</sup> The winged cherub could be understood to indicate the flight of the soul to heaven, and one roundel was a portrait of James V's first wife, Queen Madelaine, who had

Most noblewomen illustrated on the ceiling have been catalogued by their costumes. The different headdresses and costumes showing French, Spanish or Italian styles of the day underlined their keen following of the latest European fashions and the significance of display for elite women at court. One particular French fashion portrayed in the roundels was the elaborately crafted ‘chaffrons’ made of gold wire that gave the impression of shining hair and gold merging. Queen Mary of Guise can be seen wearing one in the Blair Castle portrait of her and her husband. They were also provided as special royal gifts to court ladies made by royal goldsmiths and using Scottish gold from the royal mines. The Queen with her French tailor also helped create the fashion boom for ‘Paris black’ that swept across Scottish high society.<sup>27</sup> On formal occasions court ladies were commanded to dress reflecting their rank and those with titles were permitted to wear gowns with trains, like royal women.<sup>28</sup> Such splendid court dresses remained a feature even of the reduced court of Regent Moray, and after she had ceased to be Lady Regent, Annas Keith carefully stored her dresses at her parental home of Dunnottar.<sup>29</sup> A magnificent court costume is displayed in the 1599 portrait of Agnes Douglas, countess of Argyll, with her elaborate hairstyle, large stiff lace collar, quantities of jewellery and beautifully stitched gloves.<sup>30</sup> Agnes’s sister, the poet Elizabeth, countess of Errol, described as the ‘epitome of a learned female courtier’, no doubt had her own finery to display, though no portrait exists.<sup>31</sup> They were two of ‘the pearls of Lochleven’, the seven beautiful daughters of Agnes Leslie and William Douglas of Lochleven, earl of Morton, regarded as an ornament of Jacobean society.<sup>32</sup>

Aristocratic women were summoned by individual letter to the highest profile court events such as the 1540 coronation at Holyrood abbey for Mary of Guise.<sup>33</sup> Fifty years later, and in the same place, Queen Anna’s elaborate coronation was personally organised by James VI. He ensured the Scottish nobility were present in large numbers

<sup>26</sup> (*Continued*) died in Scotland in 1536. The others showed a court lady who wore a Spanish-style headdress and another who loved music and had musical notation around the edge of the carving with musical notes decorating her costume. That musical notation has been deciphered and can be played on the harp. Harrison, *Rebirth*, 56.

<sup>27</sup> Sally Rush, ‘Looking at Mary of Guise’, *Etudes Epistémè* 37 2020, <https://doi.org/10.4000/episteme.8092> (accessed 12 Mar. 2024).

<sup>28</sup> Melanie Schuessler Bond, *Dressing the Scottish Court, 1543–1553* (Woodbridge, 2019). Sumptuary law from the fifteenth century was reiterated in 1581 when the target was explicitly those who ‘presume to copy his highness and his nobility’, *The Records of the Parliaments of Scotland to 1707*, ed. Keith M. Brown *et al.* (St Andrews, 2007–14) [RPS], 1581/10/37 (accessed 28 Nov. 2023).

<sup>29</sup> Marshall, *Queen Mary’s Women*, 100.

<sup>30</sup> Adrian Vanson, Scottish National Portrait Gallery [SNPG], 1409, <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/1748> (accessed 28 Nov. 2023).

<sup>31</sup> Sarah Dunnigan, in *New Biographical Dictionary of Scottish Women*, 118.

<sup>32</sup> Sanderson, *Mary Stewart’s People*, 72.

<sup>33</sup> Thomas, *Princelie Majestie*, 197; Giovanna Guidicini, *Triumphal Entries and Festivals in Early Modern Scotland: Performing spaces* (Turnhout, 2020).

to make an excellent impression upon the Danish delegation.<sup>34</sup> Royal baptisms attracted a similarly high level of court display. Sometimes they required a distinctive contribution from an individual noblewoman, such as Jane Stewart, countess of Argyll, who acted as proxy godmother for Queen Elizabeth at Prince James's baptism in 1566.<sup>35</sup> Similarly, in 1594 the King gave Annabella Murray, his former governess, a prominent part in the christening of Prince Henry.<sup>36</sup> As a collective group, the 'ladies of the realm' provided the cast for many of the other 'Spectacles' of the Scottish Renaissance court.<sup>37</sup> Masques were a popular court entertainment in which male and female courtiers performed the drama together. One of the Stirling heads depicts a lady in a masquing costume, and other costumes were carefully kept in the royal wardrobes for multiple use. Elaborate fashion dolls might have been used as a way for court women to choreograph their performances.<sup>38</sup>

Tournaments were occasions for especially extravagant display, as at the 1507 and 1508 tournaments of the Black Lady and the Wild Knight staged by James IV. Royal and aristocratic women sitting in the central stands were needed to provide the 'female gaze' at the jousting that symbolised the wider chivalric interaction of a knight and his lady.<sup>39</sup> Martial pursuits continued to form part of later events with the teenage James VI being able to display his horsemanship in 1581 when he 'rode at the ring' during the week-long festivities for the wedding of Elizabeth Stewart, countess of Moray. Following the marriage ceremony, James Stewart was created earl of Moray by right of his wife and the couple's strong Protestant credentials were displayed in a mock naval attack on 'the pope's castle' in Leith harbour.<sup>40</sup>

Mary, Queen of Scots relished the role of 'wedding organiser' and excelled at using court weddings for royal display.<sup>41</sup> Six months after her

<sup>34</sup> For the Danish account, David Stevenson, *Scotland's Last Royal Wedding: The marriage of James VI and Anne of Denmark* (Edinburgh, 1997), 100–22.

<sup>35</sup> Michael Lynch, 'Queen Mary's triumph: the baptismal celebrations at Stirling in December 1566', *SHR* 69 (1990) 1–21. The countess received a large jewel from the English ambassador for her contribution. She was later reprimanded by the General Assembly for participating in the Roman Catholic baptism.

<sup>36</sup> This signalled the king's decision, against Queen Anna's wishes, that the countess of Mar had charge of Henry's upbringing. Maureen Meikle and Helen Payne, 'Anne (Anna, Anne of Denmark)', *ODNB*, <https://doi-org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/559> (accessed 22 Dec. 2023).

<sup>37</sup> Thomas, *Glory and Honour*, 175–99; Sarah Carpenter, 'Performing diplomacies: 1560s court entertainments', *SHR* 82 (2003) 194–225.

<sup>38</sup> Michael Pearce, "'Maskerye claythis" for James VI and Anna', *Medieval English Theatre* 43 (2022) 108–23; for the dolls, Clare Hunter, *Embroidering Her Truth: Mary, Queen of Scots and the language of power* (London, 2022), 77–9.

<sup>39</sup> Katie Stevenson, *Chivalry and Knighthood in Scotland, 1424–1513* (London, 2006).

<sup>40</sup> Reports by Randolph and Bowes to Hundson, 4 & 7 Feb. 1581, *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary, Queen of Scots, 1547–1603* eds. J. Bain, et al. (13 vols, Edinburgh, 1898–1969) [*CSP Scot*], v. 611, 619.

<sup>41</sup> Mary organised at court or attended with her courtiers the weddings of her relatives, other aristocrats and her servants, Lesley Mickel, 'From bourgeois wife to



return from France, she turned the marriage between her half-brother James Stewart, Commendator Prior of St Andrews, and Annas Keith, daughter of William, 4th Earl Marischal, into the first spectacle of her personal rule. Their individual wedding portraits by Hans Eworth give a detailed view of their rich matching bridal attire and elaborate jewellery. Following the wedding service in St Giles Kirk, Edinburgh, the court enjoyed days of festivities at Holyrood, including much banqueting and dancing.<sup>42</sup> The underlying message was the Queen's support for her Stewart half-siblings, especially Lord James, one of her chief political advisers, and his Protestant and Anglophile policies. It also signalled that his wife Annas had entered the Queen's intimate personal circle. In 1549 Regent Arran had used the occasion of his eldest daughter Barbara's wedding to Alexander Gordon, master of Huntly, to demonstrate the semi-regal status of his family. He gave her a purple velvet 'rob ryall' wedding dress, wore his own royal robes and displayed his order of St Michael, provided musical and dramatic performances and distributed thirty gold rings alongside other presents.<sup>43</sup>

In Scotland, since the titled nobility jealously guarded their right of access to the monarch, noblewomen had a guaranteed opportunity to assist their families and themselves.<sup>44</sup> Hufton offers an eye-catching description of female activities:

a court without women is like a body without a nervous system. Women are part of a vital system of communications through which messages are transmitted, channels opened up; they investigate possibilities through talking to the right people, before men, by now confident of success, make more direct overtures.<sup>45</sup>

That European experience can be replicated in a Scottish context in Katherine Ruthven, Lady Glenorchy's strenuous efforts on behalf of Colin Campbell, 6th laird of Glenorchy following the Chaseabout rebellion of 1565. Her success depended upon acting decisively by travelling straight to court to plead his case before her husband had been outlawed. She mobilised support from her own kin and personal friends, including her brother, Patrick, Lord Ruthven; the earls of Atholl, Morton and Bothwell; and William Maitland of Lethington, the Queen's secretary, her friend and confidant. With a clear idea of what was needed and who were their supporters and enemies at court, she returned home to Balloch. She accompanied her husband when he

<sup>41</sup> (*Continued*) renaissance monarch: the royal entertainments and imperial ambition of Mary Stuart (1561–1566), *Review of Scottish Culture*, 27 (2016), 48–61.

<sup>42</sup> Wedding portraits by Hans Eworth, Brown, *Noble Society*, Plates 19 & 45. *A Diurnal of Remarkable Occurrences* (Bannatyne Club, 1833), 70–1.

<sup>43</sup> Blakeway, *Regency*, 127–8; Melanie Schuessler Bond, 'The dividing lines of social status in sixteenth-century Scottish fashion', *Medieval Clothing and Textiles* 18 (2024) 188–9.

<sup>44</sup> The restriction in 1589–90 over this right imposed by the gentlemen of James VI's chamber was viewed as a direct threat to noble power, Brown, *Noble Power*, 182–4.

<sup>45</sup> Hufton, 'Reflections', 1.

finally travelled to court, having almost certainly briefed him on exactly what to do and say to make his peace with the queen.<sup>46</sup>

Female intervention was vital when the family faced these major crises or any threat to their power. Elizabeth Keith, countess of Huntly, spent considerable time and energy trying to mitigate the effects upon her husband and sons of their falls from royal favour. After the 4th earl's imprisonment in 1554–5, she employed her own connections at court and links to the Regent, Mary of Guise, to secure his freedom and later his release from the sentence of banishment.<sup>47</sup> In 1562 she was less successful and despite her pleas failed to convince Mary, Queen of Scots to save John, her second son, from execution for treason or prevent the full forfeiture of the family following the battle of Corrichie. Having been rendered homeless by that forfeiture, the countess used her position as one of the Queen's personal attendants to work slowly over the next three years for the restoration of her eldest son to the earldom of Huntly and secure her daughter Jane's marriage to the earl of Bothwell.<sup>48</sup> Janet Scott, Lady Ferniehurst attended court for a whole month in 1583 petitioning on behalf of her banished husband and using the help of the earl of Huntly. Behind the scenes she was already running a political and Catholic network that provided an important conduit between the imprisoned Mary, Queen of Scots and her Scottish supporters. Henrietta, countess of Huntly, the daughter of the first duke of Lennox, could call upon the great affection James VI had for her father and herself to appeal to him on behalf of her husband or other friends, such as Lord Maxwell.<sup>49</sup> The king faced a sensational plea for justice in 1592 from Margaret Campbell, Lady Doune, the mother of the 'Bonnie earl' of Moray. She arrived at court with her son's body after his murder at her house at Donibristle. To avoid having to see her or deal with her demand for justice against his friend Huntly, James VI ran away from Edinburgh and remained hunting for a considerable period.<sup>50</sup> To shame the king into taking action the persistent Lady Doune had a large revenge portrait painted and displayed showing her son's bloody body and continued to pressurise James VI until her death.<sup>51</sup>

In less dramatic circumstances rulers might simply be absent from the capital and so disappoint noblewomen who had travelled seeking

<sup>46</sup> *Campbell Letters*, 50–1, nos 55–7, 60, 63–4, 74, 76–7.

<sup>47</sup> *The Scottish Correspondence of Mary of Lorraine, 1543–60* ed. Annie I. Cameron (SHS, 1927) [*Mary of Lorraine Corresp.*], 395–8.

<sup>48</sup> Sanderson, *Mary Stewart's People*, 36–8.

<sup>49</sup> Grant, 'Politicking Jacobean women', 96–7, 100–2.

<sup>50</sup> Two days after the Donibristle attack the bodies were brought across the Forth to Leith by Lady Doune, 'quha myndit vpon the morne thereafter to present thame to the King; quhair of his Majestie being forseine, he past out to the hunting'. *Memoirs of the affairs of Scotland*. by David Moysie, ed. James Dennistoun (Bannatyne Club, 1830), 90–1.

<sup>51</sup> The famous revenge portrait has survived and the incident was turned into a ballad, 'The Bonnie earl o' Moray'. Harry Potter, *Bloodfeud: The Stewarts and Gordons at war* (Stroud, 2002), 192–4.

a favour. In 1554, shortly before Mary of Guise was inaugurated as regent, Janet Beaton, Lady Buccleuch, wrote to the queen dowager from Edinburgh. She personally signed the letter as the queen's 'oratrix' (supplicant) and declared the loyalty of herself and all the Scotts of Buccleuch, 'I with all frendis pertaining me, salbe your trew servitours'. However, the opening of the letter indicated her exasperation when she demanded to be told if the queen dowager was coming to the capital and complained, 'I have tareit heir thir aucht days bipast in houpe of your cumyng to this towne: awaiting thaireupone to haif spokyng your grace at lenth in all my necessar business.' Her brother carried the letter along with further instructions about that vital business. This was a reversal of the usual noblewoman's role at court preparing the ground for the male supplicant. It was a sensible move on the volatile Janet's part since her more diplomatic brother Robert, captain of Falkland Palace, knew the queen dowager well.<sup>52</sup>

### *Female networks*

When they came to the court and capital most noblewomen quietly gathered information and created their female networks that were essential tools in the routine competition among the Scottish nobility for place and favour. It was more noticeable that noblewomen were acting as the eyes and ears of the family when their husbands or male relatives were not attending court. In his later years the reclusive 4th Earl Marischal, 'William of the Tower' (c. 1510–81), stayed at Dunnottar so his daughters and other relatives kept him supplied with court news.<sup>53</sup> In 1537 the bare assumption by James V that Lady Glamis was sending her exiled brother the earl of Angus news from Scotland was plausible enough to form part of the charges against her that eventually led to her execution.<sup>54</sup> Aristocratic women possessed personal family and kin networks that were easily extended and, as Brown has noted, 'in constructing a mental grid of their kin relations some women took a broader, more inclusive view than did men'.<sup>55</sup> Since most nobles married more than once, that problem was exacerbated by having multiple families and sets of kin.<sup>56</sup> Aristocratic wives always had to

<sup>52</sup> *Mary of Lorraine Corresp.*, 28 Jan. 1554, 369–70. Lady Buccleuch had led the Scotts after her husband was killed in a feud in 1552. She was a colourful character and was the model for Walter Scott's Wizard Lady of Branxholm in the *Lay of the Last Minstrel*.

<sup>53</sup> Miles Kerr-Petersen, *A Protestant Lord in James VI's Scotland: George Keith, fifth Earl Marischal (1554–1623)* (Woodbridge, 2019), 22.

<sup>54</sup> C. M. McGladdery, 'Douglas, Janet, Lady Glamis', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* [ODNB], <https://doi-org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/7906> (accessed 12 Jun. 2024).

<sup>55</sup> Brown, *Noble Power*, 47. As Wormald noted, defining the extent of one's kin group changed according to circumstances: 'it was obviously in the interests of members of the kin group to insist on lack of restriction when they sought help, and to demand restriction when help was sought from them', *Lords and Men*, 81.

<sup>56</sup> Brown provides a helpful range of tables and statistics relating to noble marriages, *Noble Society*, ch. 5.

balance loyalties between their marital and birth families and often between different marital families.<sup>57</sup> Katherine Campbell, countess of Crawford juggled her obligations between her Ogilvy and Lindsay marital families in addition to satisfying her Campbell blood kin. In common with many noble mothers who had remarried, her later relationship with her eldest Ogilvy son proved tense.<sup>58</sup>

Friendships might be forged within the social mixing at court that could transcend the feuding between two noble families. During the 1560s the earl of Moray and the Gordons of Huntly were rivals and enemies and that feud continued well into the following generation. Moray's wife, Annas Keith, was the cousin of Jane Gordon, daughter of the earl of Huntly who died at the battle of Corrichie fighting against her husband. This did not prevent the two women having a long-standing relationship acknowledged in 1576 when Jane, now countess of Sutherland, wrote to Annas, by then countess of Argyll. Together they had informally resolved business involving their respective earldoms, and each woman would ensure their husband signed the relevant documents. At the end of her letter Jane wrote appreciatively of their long friendship, 'I have been the mair hamelie to put your ladischip to this charge that I have evir fund your ladyschipsis gud favour in all my turnis.' Some of these 'turnis' might well refer to Annas's support in 1566–7 when Jane was married to James Hepburn, earl of Bothwell, then divorced to allow him to wed the Queen.<sup>59</sup>

An initial, informal approach about family business could be made by a noble wife more easily than by her husband. As with the countesses of Sutherland and Argyll, the ground was prepared or agreements reached before formal negotiations or signatures were added by male members of the family. One of the most important parts of a noble family's strategy, arranging the marriage of the eldest son and heir, could be a long, slow process that started with informal discussions involving noblewomen. As Hufton noted, in Europe 'every court is a marriage market'.<sup>60</sup> It was Katherine, Lady Glenorchy who took the initiative and ran the initial negotiations for the marriage of Duncan, her eldest son. She employed her friend, William Maitland of Lethington, as the main broker between the Glenorchy Campbells and the earl and countess of Atholl. Mary Fleming, Maitland's wife, when visiting her

<sup>57</sup> Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 79–80 discusses the form of kinship created by marriage. The much-misunderstood phrase 'the marriage contract was the weakest form of alliance' referred to loyalties between the two sets of 'in-laws', and not the marital bond between man and wife. She stressed it was 'too simple to characterise Scottish kinship as agnatic ... (there was) an emphasis on agnatic kinship, but never exclusively so'. When a letter of slains was needed (after a death in a feud), all four branches of kin—maternal as well as paternal—were expected to sign. Wormald also noted the careful use of the terms 'house' and 'friends' to distinguish between blood kin and those related through a marriage.

<sup>58</sup> Mary Verschuur, *A Noble and Potent Lady: Katherine Campbell, countess of Crawford*, Abertay Historical Society, 46 (Dundee, 2006), 75–93.

<sup>59</sup> 5 May 1576, *HMC 6th Report*, 639; Sanderson, *Mary Stewart's People*, 41, 43–4.

<sup>60</sup> Hufton, 'Reflections', 2, 5–6, 9, 12.

sister Margaret, countess of Atholl in 1570, discussed the personal suitability of the prospective bride before the start of negotiations for the pre-nuptial agreements.<sup>61</sup> A discussion might have taken place three years earlier when the sisters met at Callendar, the principal seat of the Flemings and, at Lady Glenorchy's request, Maitland first mentioned the idea to the Atholls.<sup>62</sup>

Such meetings among family and friends whether in their residences or in the capital were occasions for much of the social contact and informal negotiations. Visiting was probably especially important for aristocratic women since they often found themselves at a considerable distance from other members of their extended families and friends. Women also maintained close contacts with their marital kin. Annas, countess of Moray was a frequent visitor at Lochleven, the home of her mother-in-law Margaret Erskine, the dowager Lady Lochleven and her sister-in-law, Agnes Leslie, the young Lady Lochleven. She was able to bring the latest news from the court and capital and on one occasion personally delivered Agnes's order of cloth from Edinburgh.<sup>63</sup> Failing to visit several years later when Annas had been in the vicinity caused the dowager Lady Lochleven to chide her, 'I wald skarslie have belevit ye would have bene neir hand and wesit me nocht and frindis heir.' Probably half in jest, since she was convalescing and unable to travel, Margaret continued, 'bot gif I wer to cum quhair ye ar I sould do the lyke to you'.<sup>64</sup> In the following year Annas made sure she did visit Lochleven on her extensive round trip from Darnaway during which she stayed with a succession of relatives and friends.<sup>65</sup> The expectation of being kept informed made one mother, Margaret Kennedy, countess of Cassilis, tetchily complain to her son-in-law about the recent lack of any form of communication, 'I haif nocht gottin wit, nouder in word nor wrette, fra my dochtter'.<sup>66</sup>

When unable to meet in person or the matter was too pressing, noblemen and women kept in touch by sending letters. The previously unknown extent of female correspondence has been revealed by Jade Scott's database, *Scottish Women's Correspondence 1480–1625*, which contains 1515 (non-royal) letters in Scots, English, Latin, French and Gaelic, of which 80 per cent come from noblewomen.<sup>67</sup> Among

<sup>61</sup> All but one letter concerning the marriage was directed to Lady Glenorchy and, before Maitland began formal negotiations, he needed a commission signed by her as well as her husband, *Campbell Letters*, 28–34.

<sup>62</sup> *Campbell Letters*, no. 88.

<sup>63</sup> Sanderson, *Mary Stewart's People*, 71.

<sup>64</sup> *HMC 6th Report*, 654.

<sup>65</sup> Itinerary for the 19 Sept. to 27 Oct. 1572 trip from notes by 12th earl of Moray 1861, kindly shared with the author by Douglas, 20th earl of Moray.

<sup>66</sup> *Correspondence of Sir Patrick Waus*, ed. Robert Vans Agnew, Ayr and Galloway Archaeological Association, 2 vols (Edinburgh, 1887) [*Corresp. Waus*], i. 116.

<sup>67</sup> Details from Jade Scott's award-winning paper on 22 July 2023, 'Early modern Scottish women and multilingual epistolary culture: a re-assessment', to the 17th International Conference on Medieval and Renaissance Scottish Languages, Literature and Culture. Unfortunately, her database is not yet available online.

aristocratic women, sisters form an interesting group who through written contact were able to circulate a wide spectrum of news from different Scottish regions in addition to the court and capital. Throughout the sixteenth century women in the Keith family were noticeable for their literacy and were diligent letter-writers.<sup>68</sup> The nine daughters of the 4th Earl Marischal—Ladies Moray, Saltoun, Cawdor, Allardyce, Frendraught, Blairquhan, Drum, Thornton and Pitsligo—had been married to nobles based across the kingdom. In what appears to be a circular letter, Margaret, Lady Blairquhan, in Ayrshire, wrote about a genuine letter from one sister, Beatrix, Lady Allardyce, in Kincardineshire, ‘quhais wret I knaw weill’. However, she warned the others about a dishonest messenger, ‘ane verry double knave’, who alleged he had lost another sister’s letter and then relayed false, distressing news about her.<sup>69</sup> The Fleming sisters wrote to each other and could recognise each other’s writing. Margaret, countess of Atholl, contrary to normal practice, dictated a letter in 1560 to her sister Agnes, Lady Livingston, explaining:

Ye will appardon me that I wryt not to yow in my awn hand, for ther is sic ane sicknes fallin in my hed sua I can not wryt, as the berar can schaw yow, and gif ye meit with my sister the ladye Calder ye will excuiss me that I wryt not to hir.<sup>70</sup>

In addition to the physical letters, it was standard practice for letter bearers to relay personal messages.<sup>71</sup> Noble wives heard or sent greetings via their husband’s correspondence with ‘bedfellow’, the shorthand term for a spouse, being added to the closing commendations.<sup>72</sup> These brief reminders were probably accompanied by longer oral messages delivered by the bearer. Gifts also travelled with messengers, many of which were food or drink or other products of the domestic economy within noblewomen’s remit. Such gifts reflected ‘thought, effort and taste rather than cost’ and stood apart from the competitive and expensive gift-giving associated with court life.<sup>73</sup> They could be sent by noblewomen to noblemen because they did

<sup>68</sup> On the literacy of several generations of Keith women, Sanderson *Kindly Place?*, 143–4.

<sup>69</sup> Edinburgh, National Records of Scotland [NRS], GD49/570, 3 Sept. probably 1569; Sanderson, *Kindly Place?*, 153–4. It was common practice to send a packet of letters to different individuals by the same bearer.

<sup>70</sup> NRS, RH15/12/1, cited in Sanderson, *Kindly Place?*, 138. Lady Calder was their older sister, Jean, recently married to James Sandilands of Calder, *The Scots Peerage*, ed. J. Balfour Paul, 9 vols (Edinburgh, 1904–14), viii. 540–1. The other sisters were Elizabeth, Lady Sanquhar, and Mary, one of the Four Maries, who later married William Maitland of Lethington.

<sup>71</sup> *Campbell Letters*, 4–8.

<sup>72</sup> For example, *Corresp. Waus*, i. 38.

<sup>73</sup> Hufton, ‘Reflections’, 10. For a fuller discussion of gift-giving primarily in the context of the English court, Felicity Heal, *The Power of Gifts: Gift exchange in early modern England* (Oxford, 2014).

not imply reciprocity though they were significant markers of esteem. Lady Glenorchy was fortunate in being able to supply much-prized Highland hawks to her male friends and servitors, like William Maitland of Lethington or Patrick Murray of Tibbermuir.<sup>74</sup> Other aristocratic women when sending their gifts of venison or distilled spirits were also consciously reinforcing their key contacts and networks.

It was not always necessary for aristocratic women to travel to Edinburgh to participate in court life since monarchs and their entourages moved around royal palaces, particularly those at Stirling, Linlithgow and Falkland. They also went on progress, either the large-scale, planned expeditions to other parts of the realm or for the monarch's pleasure and piety on hunting trips or pilgrimages and other shorter journeys away from the royal residences.<sup>75</sup> James VI was known for his constant desire to be out hunting and, however frustrating for royal administrators, these trips provided him with vital informal opportunities to interact with his nobility.<sup>76</sup> His great-grandfather, James IV, was known for his pilgrimages to Whithorn and Tain and his grandparents visited St Aidan's shrine on the Isle of May to pray for a child. Being technically a military expedition, James V's spectacular circumnavigation of the realm was not open to aristocratic women.<sup>77</sup> Regents also went on progress, sometimes in the guise of a judicial circuit, as in 1552 when Regent Arran accompanied by Mary of Guise and many nobles went to Aberdeen and combined its judicial business with much socialising.<sup>78</sup> The enthusiasm of the court's accompanying lords and ladies might be tested by the conditions they faced on the journey. In his letter of February 1556 to the regent, Mary of Guise, the fourth earl of Argyll praised her ability to come through 'moss and mire' while tactfully reminding her, 'your gravis companye of lordis and ladeis ar mair onabill to tak sic a voyage one hand than your grace is'.<sup>79</sup> He was writing in the context of judicial circuits with a possible visit to the Western Highlands in addition to the planned circuit in the

<sup>74</sup> *Campbell Letters*, nos 113, 126, 129.

<sup>75</sup> For the court's use of indoor and outdoor spaces when on the move, Lucinda Dean, 'Making the best of what they had: adaptations of indoor and outdoor space for royal ceremony in Scotland, c.1214–1603', in J. R. Mulryne, Krista De Jonge, Pieter Martens and R. L. M. Morris (eds), *Architectures of Festival in Early Modern Europe* (London, 2018), ch. 5.

<sup>76</sup> For James VI's hunting, Reid, *The Early Life of James VI*, 275–97; other royal itineraries: Norman Macdougall, *James IV* (Edinburgh, 1989), 197–8, 313–15; Jamie Cameron, *James V: The personal rule 1528–1542* (East Linton, 1998), 336–8; E. Furgol, 'The Scottish Itinerary of Mary, Queen of Scots 1542–8; 1561–8', *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland* 117 (1987) 219–31.

<sup>77</sup> Alison Cathcart has re-examined this trip in its wider diplomatic context, 'O wretched king!': Ireland, Denmark-Norway and kingship in the reign of James V', in Steven J. Reid (ed.), *Rethinking the Renaissance and Reformation in Scotland* (Woodbridge, 2024), 118–39.

<sup>78</sup> Blakeway, *Regency*, 174–5. Since Arran's household accounts were the only regent's accounts to have survived, Dr Blakeway has been able to reconstruct his itinerary, 140.

<sup>79</sup> *Mary of Lorraine Corresp.*, i. 406–7.

north-east that summer. When on progress through the realm, the royal household and attending nobles preferred the comfort of noble country houses where they could look forward to lavish hospitality.<sup>80</sup>

*'In their country'*

The glitter of the royal court and the turbulence of high politics have sometimes distracted attention from the resilience and adaptability of the more stable power wielded by the nobility within the kingdom's regions and localities. When summarising how Scotland was governed, Wormald commented:

for almost every aspect of every-day life the important people were the local magnates and lairds ... That exercise of local power was never significantly threatened, even by adult kings of considerable personal power.<sup>81</sup>

Local power rested upon the lands the nobility controlled which brought with them resources, jurisdiction and manpower and in turn required their personal presence and lordship. In 1581 an act of parliament explicitly instructed that each noble should 'mak his ordinar duelling and residence at his awin hous with his familie'.<sup>82</sup>

During the sixteenth century noble seats of power were transformed, which altered the setting in which aristocratic women operated when they were residing in their own houses. As Charles McKean's ground-breaking book has detailed, there was a prodigious wave of building of Renaissance country houses. He described how a noble seat,

standing high and proud above its yards, plantations and estate, represented the focus of local or regional power ... the centre of the local economy, locus of justice, and the expression of its owner's standing and cultural ambition.<sup>83</sup>

Unfortunately, three-quarters of these buildings have disappeared or been substantially altered, and the loss has been greatest among the seats of titled nobility. As McKean lamented, 'not a single premier seat of the first rank nobility survives even approximately in its Renaissance condition'.<sup>84</sup> It was a major enterprise to build, or make substantial alterations to, a noble's seat and, like French chateaux, they were

<sup>80</sup> During Mary, Queen of Scots' short personal rule she visited eighty-two residences, Furgol, 'Scottish Itinerary'; Charles McKean, *The Scottish Château: The country house of Renaissance Scotland* (Stroud, 2004), 114; 'The laird and his guests: the implications of offering hospitality in the Scottish Renaissance country seat', *Architectural Heritage* 13 (2002) 1–19.

<sup>81</sup> Jenny Wormald, *Court, Kirk and Community: Scotland 1470–1625* (Edinburgh, reissue 2018), 14, 16.

<sup>82</sup> RPS 1581/10/40 (accessed 11 Nov. 2023).

<sup>83</sup> McKean, *Scottish Château*, 2 (map), 59.

<sup>84</sup> McKean *Scottish Château*, 23



designed more for comfort and elegant living than serious defence.<sup>85</sup> The absence of visible evidence today of these changes makes it harder to appreciate their implications for the careers of aristocratic women. Only the small sketches drawn on Timothy Pont's late sixteenth-century maps show the contemporary appearance of many noble seats.<sup>86</sup>

Scottish Renaissance country houses self-consciously proclaimed themselves to be joint enterprises by the husband and wife. Heraldry, the normal visual language of the nobility, displayed both an individual and their lineage.<sup>87</sup> Separate shields for each partner or the impaled shield covering both sets of arms were found on the exterior or interior walls of the houses and datestones, with both names or initials were also common.<sup>88</sup> The principal seat of the earls of Huntly at Strathbogie (Castle Huntly) was upgraded at the end of the sixteenth century with its main entrance boasting an exceptionally elaborate display of arms.<sup>89</sup> The largest nameplate in Scotland running along the south facade trumpeted in huge letters their combined contribution, 'George Gordon, Marquis of Huntly; Henrietta Stewart, Marquise of Huntly'.<sup>90</sup> Major changes to Edzell castle, including its splendid garden that has survived, were begun in 1553 a couple of years after the marriage of David Lindsay, ninth earl of Crawford and Katherine Campbell, Lady Ogilvy. Five years later the countess of Crawford, despite becoming a widow again and having seven under-aged children and two teenage daughters ready for marriage, became the driving force on the Edzell estates and continued the reconstruction. The partnership stretched across generations and the completion of the entire project was celebrated fifty-one years later by the arms and initials of her son, David Lindsay of Edzell, and his wife Isabel Forbes displayed at the garden entrance.<sup>91</sup>

Providing a new home for a noble bride was an incentive to build a country house. A new site at Boyne, near Portsoy, was chosen for Mary Beaton, one of the queen's Maries, following her elaborate

<sup>85</sup> McKean perhaps over-emphasised his point about the non-defensive nature of the houses, review by Ian Campbell *IR* 55 (2004) 108–9; Brown, *Noble Power*, 128.

<sup>86</sup> Charles McKean, 'Pont's building drawings', in Ian C. Cunningham (ed.), *The Nation Survey'd: Timothy Pont's maps of Scotland* (East Linton, 2001), 111–24.

<sup>87</sup> Sometimes a noblewoman's conventional display of her status can give a misleading impression, as in the seal used by Margaret Stewart, countess of Mar and Angus, Boardman, 'Lords and woman, women as lords', 58.

<sup>88</sup> Brown, *Noble Power*, 40, 45–6. For armorials and their arms, Eilean Malden, *The Arma Scotica: An illustrated survey of pre-1707 manuscripts containing Scottish heraldry* (Berwick-upon-Tweed, 2022); Eilean Malden, John Malden and William G. Scott, *An Ordinary of Scottish Arms from original pre-1672 manuscripts* (Heraldry Society of Scotland, 2016) (the latter volume was dedicated to Jenny Wormald).

<sup>89</sup> Description in Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 93–4.

<sup>90</sup> When Huntly was in exile in 1595–6, Henrietta had proved a successful manager of Gordon interests; she 'governed her husband's affairs and carefullie solicited his business', quoted in Brown, *Noble Society*, 40. Plates 9 and 17 show Strathbogie.

<sup>91</sup> For Katherine's interesting career, Verschuur, *Noble and Potent Lady*. McKean, *Scottish Château*, 77.

court wedding in 1566 to Alexander Ogilvy.<sup>92</sup> A similar incentive was felt when a substantial laird married into the titled nobility and the new or improved country seat could proclaim this rise in status. The principal seat of the Campbells of Glenorchy was relocated following the marriage in 1551 of Katherine, daughter of William, 2nd Lord Ruthven, to 'Grey Colin'.<sup>93</sup> It was moved from Kilchurn castle at the top of Loch Awe in Argyll to a new site at Balloch in Perthshire at the easternmost extremity of Glenorchy's lands facing towards the Ruthven powerbase in Perth.<sup>94</sup> In 1571/2 their close neighbour to the east, James Menzies, married Barbara Stewart, daughter of the earl of Atholl, and during the next five years the House of Weem (Castle Menzies) was built with a fine 'marriage stone' of their impaled arms and the date above the main entrance.<sup>95</sup> Pont's drawing of Weem strongly suggests it aimed to upstage their neighbours' castle at Balloch with the construction of a fine turreted country house with gardens, parkland and a water-gate onto the River Tay.<sup>96</sup>

Building a beautiful new home did not always guarantee a successful marriage or partnership, as was probably the case when Carnasserie Castle was constructed in the mid-1560s.<sup>97</sup> The standard display of the husband's and wife's impaled shield over the entrance that showed the royal arms of Jane Stewart, countess of Argyll and the Campbell arms of Archibald, the fifth earl, strongly suggest it was intended for that couple.<sup>98</sup> The Argylls' fraught marital relationship had caused great concern to their kin and friends and two reconciliations had been brought about, the first before the summer of 1561 and the second in

<sup>92</sup> McKean, *Scottish Château*, 120, 177–9.

<sup>93</sup> For Katherine and Grey Colin, *Campbell Letters*, 14–18, 22–34.

<sup>94</sup> McKean, *Scottish Château*, 105–6, 116. Balloch (the pass of the calves) was a green field site from which Gregor Dougalson MacGregor had been evicted at Whitsun 1552. The new house was occupied by 12 October 1560 at the latest. Traditional tales about the siting of the castle were recorded in William A. Gillies, *In Famed Breadalbane* (Strath Tay, reprint 1987), 121–3, that blame Grey Colin's constant drive to expand his lands for building so close to their border. Balloch was replaced by Taymouth castle in the early nineteenth century.

<sup>95</sup> McKean, *Scottish Château*, 131–3.

<sup>96</sup> McKean, 'Pont', 115–16.

<sup>97</sup> See the detailed description of Carnasserie, Argyll, *An Inventory of the Ancient Monuments* (7 vols, Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments, Edinburgh, 1971–92), *Vol. 7 Mid-Argyll and Cowal* [RCAHM Arg. 7], 214–26. McKean *Scottish Château*, 37, 130 argued that Carnasserie, like Melgund, had an existing tower with thick walls to which a series of additions and adaptations were made. Both houses were transformed into fashionable and comfortable dwellings fit for a lady with Melgund built for Marion Ogilvy, Cardinal Beaton's mistress, Sanderson, *Mary Stewart's People*, 1–21. The probable link between alterations at Carnasserie and Jane Stewart is my own suggestion.

<sup>98</sup> John Carswell, the superintendent of Argyll and bishop of the Isles, supervised the additions and upgrading at Carnasserie Castle and became its eventual owner, though it was described as 'buildded be him to the Earle of Argyll'. Macfarlane, *Geographical Collections relating to Scotland made by Walter Macfarlane*, 3 vols (Scottish History Society, 1906–8), ii, 148–9. Supplied by Carswell, the Gaelic inscription 'God be with O'Duibhne' might have been seeking divine help for the earl's lineage, since the Argylls' marriage was childless, RCAHM Arg. 7, 218.

late spring 1563. Using Lowland masons, Carnasserie was transformed into a comfortable country house with elegant rooms and decoration that overlooked the pleasant view of Kilmartin Glen, more Lowland than Highland in aspect. Providing both privacy and access, it lay at a convenient distance from Argyll's main seat at Inveraray Castle. This might have offered a compromise for the countess who preferred life at the royal court or at her dower house in the Lowlands at Castle Campbell (Dollar). If Carnasserie were a device to make residence within Argyll more congenial for the countess, it failed because the couple separated in 1567 and were finally divorced in 1573.<sup>99</sup>

The new buildings or extensive adaptations of old castles brought substantial changes to their interior layouts, altering the way nobles lived and how the household was organised. In particular, the role of the mistress of the household became more prominent. In his mid-century poem 'Quhair is the blythnes that hes beine', Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington lamented what he regarded as the loss of traditional noble values; hospitality, honour, compassion, charity, piety and justice.<sup>100</sup> Within the poem Maitland wrote of that blythness in the past with lords and ladies, 'Daunsing, singing, game and play'. He then bemoaned, 'All houshalderis is worne away', probably referring to the reduction in the size of male retinues who had formed a permanent part of medieval households.<sup>101</sup> He also noted the shift in the layout and location of entertainment within country houses. Having previously been held in a castle's great hall with everyone sitting together on 'laing formis' for communal entertainment, nobles had separated themselves in private chambers with 'stuills' drawn up for individual seating.<sup>102</sup> Such chamber entertainments were closely associated with women, as portrayed in the decoration of the Muses Room at Crathes castle belonging to Katherine Gordon, the lady of the house, and proudly displaying her arms and initials. The ceiling, painted in 1599, portrayed women as muses playing musical instruments and encouraging other cultural activities.<sup>103</sup> In the same year the negative associations of 'chambering

<sup>99</sup> Jane Dawson, 'The noble and the bastard: the earl of Argyll and the law of divorce in Reformation Scotland', in Julian Goodare and Alasdair A. MacDonald (eds), *Sixteenth-Century Scotland: Essays in honour of Michael Lynch* (Leiden, 2008), 147–68.

<sup>100</sup> *The Maitland Quarto*, ed. Joanna Martin (STS, 2015), no. 5, lines 1 and 4, pp. 53, 293.

<sup>101</sup> *Maitland Quarto*, no. 5 line 12 (pp. 53, 294). The debates about the reduction of household knights, 'bastard feudalism' and the rise of the affinity are covered in Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 1–14, 76–114. 'Houshalderis' might also mean holding house or hospitality (see below).

<sup>102</sup> *Maitland Quarto*, no. 5, line 48 (p. 54, not noted in commentary). For details of the range of architectural changes that encouraged more privacy, see McKean, 'The laird and his guests', 5–6, 10, 16–17.

<sup>103</sup> Michael Bath, *Renaissance Decorative Painting in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 2003), 219 (image, 199). Musical instruments were part of the household goods passed in 1574 to Patrick, Lord Drummond, by his mother, Lilius Ruthven, NRS, GD160/528/33. In contrast to the musical manuscript collections associated with women from the early decades of the following century, few have survived from the sixteenth century. The major exception, the Wode Partbooks, were commissioned by the

women' were expressed by Alexander Hume in the dedication of his *Hymnes and Songes* to Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross. Her renowned piety was contrasted with other noblewomen who 'spend their dayes in chambering, wantones, decking of their bodies in delicat feeding, and in satisfying their lustes'.<sup>104</sup> This was probably also intended to dissociate Elizabeth's religious poetry from readings of other poetry and prose that were part of the chamber entertainments in country houses.<sup>105</sup>

The wave of new country residences required interior decoration, furniture and furnishings and noblewomen were involved in their selection, provision and, in some cases, their making. Stitching was a skill learned by young noblewomen in preparation for their future careers. A regular part of an aristocratic wife's household management involved buying and using textiles and needlework to contribute both to everyday practicalities, such as making or mending clothes, and the more decorative domestic furnishings and even the provision of battle standards for their menfolk.<sup>106</sup> A country house's most expensive items of furniture were beds, with their elaborate furnishings that were consciously employed to display a family's status and wealth.<sup>107</sup> The valance set for Lady Glenorchy's marriage bed is the earliest surviving example of Scottish stitching, and displays the couple's initials and impaled shield, emphasising their goal of re-establishing the Glenorchy

<sup>103</sup> (*Continued*) earl of Moray, in 1562. That year Annas, the new countess, had set up her household in St Andrews, Wode Project Team, *Singing the Reformation: Celebrating Thomas Wode and his partbooks, 1562–92* (Edinburgh, 2011), [https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/11897946/Singing\\_the\\_Reformation\\_Celebrating\\_Thomas\\_Wode\\_and\\_his\\_Partbooks.pdf](https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/11897946/Singing_the_Reformation_Celebrating_Thomas_Wode_and_his_Partbooks.pdf) (accessed 18 Jul. 2024).

<sup>104</sup> The reference to 'chambering and wantonness' came from Romans 13:13 in the Geneva Bible version used in Scotland. *Poems of Alexander Hume*, ed. Alexander Lawson (STS, 1902) 4. For the context, Joanna Martin, 'Alexander Hume's hymnes or sacred songs', in Reid (ed.), *Rethinking the Renaissance and Reformation*, 242–60; Jamie Reid Baxter (ed.), *Poems of Elizabeth Melville, Lady Culross* (Edinburgh, 2010); 'Elizabeth Melville, Calvinism and the lyric voice', in David Parkinson (ed.), *James VI and I, Literature and Scotland: Tides of change 1567–1625* (Leuven, 2013), 151–72.

<sup>105</sup> For the literary context, Sebastiaan Verweij, *The Literary Culture of Early Modern Scotland: Manuscript production and transmission, 1560–1625* (Oxford, 2016); for the visual context, Lauren Murdoch, "'By craftsman's arte": Theology and Decorative Practice in Scottish Ecclesiastical and Domestic Buildings', unpublished PhD thesis (University of Edinburgh, 2022), <http://dx.doi.org/10.7488/era/2436>; for the devotional context, Jane Dawson, 'Hameely with God': a Scottish view on domestic devotion', in Jessica Martin and Alec Ryrie (eds), *Private and Domestic Devotion in Early Modern Britain* (Farnham, 2012), 33–52.

<sup>106</sup> The blue (now faded to beige) silk standard of the Earl Marischal, probably stitched by the Keith women, survived the battle of Flodden. Its symbolic significance for the lineage was shown by the efforts made by the flag bearer to hide it from his English captors and bring it home. It was later given to the Faculty of Advocate, <https://www.advocates.org.uk/faculty-of-advocates/history-of-faculty/flodden-flag> (accessed 18 Jul. 2024).

<sup>107</sup> Michael Pearce, 'Approaches to household inventories and household furnishing, 1500–1650', *Architectural Heritage XXVI* (2015) 73–86; 'Beds of "chapel" form in sixteenth-century Scottish inventories: the worst sort of bed', *Regional Furniture XXVII* (2013) 75–91.

Campbell lineage and expanding its territorial control.<sup>108</sup> The valances were stitched on canvas with coloured wool and silk threads and employed some unusual pairs of horizontal stitches.<sup>109</sup> Their design would have been approved by Lady Glenorchy and then stitched within a household group of female friends, possibly including some of her six sisters.<sup>110</sup> Commenting on these valances and a related item also featuring horizontal stitches, Swain wrote:

certainly the Arniston table carpet and the Campbell valances have been drawn out by skilled draughtsmen, and then worked by amateur embroiderers, probably the ladies whose initials appear on the respective pieces, aided no doubt by members of their households.<sup>111</sup>

As was normal practice, the Glenorchy valance's images were adapted from a book illustration, in this case from Jacob Philip Burgomensis's *Supplementum* showing scenes from Genesis of the temptation in the Garden of Eden and Adam and Eve's expulsion.<sup>112</sup> However, there was a marked difference in the depiction of the Temptation between the valance and that source. The valance showed Adam already clothed with a fig leaf, thereby changing the order of who had first succumbed to temptation. Challenging the conventional interpretation of the weakness of the first and all subsequent women, it implied that, before Eve was tempted by the serpent, Adam had already 'fallen', eaten the fruit of the forbidden tree and realised he was naked.<sup>113</sup> In furnishing their country houses, Lady Glenorchy and her fellow noblewomen were capable of moving with ease between visual and verbal texts, of biblical or other literary themes.<sup>114</sup> Regarding women in the seventeenth century, Frye has explained:

<sup>108</sup> Grey Colin was the youngest of three brothers who had become laird and had two daughters from his first marriage. He and Katherine had eight surviving children, four of them sons. *Campbell Letters*, 14–27.

<sup>109</sup> The three Glenorchy items are the earliest surviving set of Scottish valances, Burrell Collection, Glasgow Museums, <https://collections.glasgowmuseums.com/mwebcgi/mweb?request=record;id=37496;type=10> (accessed 13 Nov. 2023).

<sup>110</sup> Katherine's sisters were Lilius, Lady Drummond; Barbara, Lady Gray; Christian, Lady Lundy; Margaret, Lady Elphinstone; Jean, Lady Crichton then Lady Mercer; Cecelia, Lady Wemyss. For Mary, Queen of Scots and Bess of Hardwick's stitching group and the broader context, Susan Frye, *Pens and Needles: Women's textualities in early modern England* (Philadelphia, 2010); Hunter, *Embroidering Her Truth*.

<sup>111</sup> Margaret Swain, *The Needlework of Mary, Queen of Scots* (2004), 50. The table carpet (a decorative tablecloth) was made for the marriage of Katherine Oliphant, daughter of 3rd Lord Oliphant (1534–1602), to George Dundas of Dundas and Arniston and has remained in the Dundas family. The skilled draftsmen might have been based in Perth, where the Ruthven family were based, and Arniston lies a couple of miles south-west of the burgh.

<sup>112</sup> First published in Venice in 1483 and with many subsequent editions.

<sup>113</sup> In the second scene of the expulsion from the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve are both clothed, though the fig leaves portrayed on the valance and *Supplementum* followed different designs.

<sup>114</sup> Katherine and her husband had supported the Protestant cause before 1560, she owned a Protestant chronicle and knew her Old Testament well enough to understand cryptic allusions, e.g. *Campbell Letters*, 24, 40–1, no. 113. For the discussion of later

in their world, combining visual images and writing derived from a mode of thought charged with religious conviction, which made writing itself a visual art form; portraiture a vehicle for inscriptions; painted cloths, tapestries, and needlework the primary vehicle for translating written narratives into everyday design.<sup>115</sup>

### *Running the household*

A central requirement in an aristocratic woman's job description, for which daughters were trained and which wives and widows were automatically expected to undertake, was running the family's households. This traditional role was well established by the end of the fifteenth century when Pedro de Ayala, Spanish ambassador to James IV's court, was provoked to comment that Scottish women were 'absolute mistresses of their houses, and even of their husbands, in all things concerning the administration of their property, income as well as expenditure'.<sup>116</sup> Alongside their principal seat, noblewomen managed their other residences, frequently spread across many different localities and requiring them to spend most of their time away from the capital or court. Their presence and actions were of crucial importance when their husband was absent, in exile or had died, leaving the family's affairs and entire estates to be run by the aristocratic wife or widow.<sup>117</sup> Following the major aristocratic death toll in 1513 at the battle of Flodden, noble estates continued to function thanks to the widows.<sup>118</sup> This was not a short-term commitment—some widows served for many years until their sons were old enough to take control. Janet Hepburn, Lady Seton, 'remainit wedo continualie xlv yeris ... sche gydit hir sonnys leving quhill he was cumit to age' and then felt able to retire from her career to enter the convent at Sciennes.<sup>119</sup> Later in the century, widows such as Katherine, countess of Crawford or Jane, countess of Sutherland took full charge and ran their entire estates.<sup>120</sup> As well as positive and effective management, there were adept at defence against their family's enemies. Robert Gordon recalled that his mother 'alwise managed her effaris with so great prudence and foresight that the enemies of her family culd nevir prevaile against her'.<sup>121</sup>

<sup>114</sup> (Continued) evidence of religious imagery and interior decoration, Tara Hamling, *Decorating the Godly Household: Religious art in post-Reformation Britain* (New Haven, CT, 2011).

<sup>115</sup> Frye, *Pens and Needles*, 3.

<sup>116</sup> Cited in P. Hume Brown (ed.), *Early Travellers in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1891), 47.

<sup>117</sup> The way in which an earlier aristocratic woman (Margaret Stewart, countess of Angus and Mar) could build her own affinity was detailed in Boardman, 'Lords and women, women as lords'.

<sup>118</sup> List of women whose husbands fell at Flodden, Barnes, *Janet Kennedy*, 93–8.

<sup>119</sup> *The History of the House of Seytoun to the year MDLIX*. By Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington, knight, ed. John Fullarton (Bannatyne Club, 1829), 38. Sir Richard Maitland wrote a long section (38–41) in his *History* on the many good acts of Lady Seton and he defended her many generous gifts to religious causes.

<sup>120</sup> Verschuur, *Noble and Potent Lady*, 35–93; Sanderson, *Mary Stewart's People*, 34–54.

<sup>121</sup> Cited in Sanderson, *Mary Stewart's People*, 53.

Agnes Leslie, Lady Lochleven, shouldered much of the estate management and personally travelled to oversee the family's lands in Angus because her husband suffered considerable health problems.<sup>122</sup> Facing a parallel dilemma during the troubles of the Marian civil wars, Isobel Hamilton, Lady Seton, remained in Scotland running the family's affairs, probably based for safety at Niddrie Castle instead of their principal seat.<sup>123</sup> This explains her noticeable absence from the 1572 Seton family portrait, painted in Flanders by Frans Pourbus. In a fine image of the patriarchal family, the father was placed in the centre surrounded by his four sons and a daughter.<sup>124</sup> That part of the family were in exile alongside George, 5th Lord Seton towards the end of his two-year diplomatic mission on behalf of the Queen's Party.<sup>125</sup> The indomitable Lady Seton was added to complete the family group in a 1583 rendering of the family portrait by Thomas Keysz.<sup>126</sup> A rare depiction of an unmarried noble daughter was part of the 1572 portrait where the 15-year-old Margaret Seton was painted in a quasi-maternal pose with one hand protecting a younger brother. She was wearing a jewelled headband and necklace to demonstrate her rank, wealth and eligibility as a future wife. Added to the space between her and her father was his exhortation (in French), 'My daughter, fear God and for your honour, since the honour of ladies is tender and delicate'. Judging from her portrayal as a self-possessed young woman and her subsequent career, Margaret had already received extensive training from her mother and female relatives rendering her father's advice superfluous. While the Setons were abroad with their father, she was probably already covering for her mother's absence by running their household. Two years later she was married at Niddrie to Lord Claud Hamilton. Throughout her life she fulfilled the two requirements in her father's injunction of fearing God by upholding her Roman Catholic faith and maintaining her own honour and that of the houses of Seton and Hamilton.<sup>127</sup>

<sup>122</sup> Sanderson, *Mary Stewart's People*, 61, 63–4.

<sup>123</sup> Lady Seton was convicted of hearing mass, sentenced to exile, and in September 1570 left the country, probably joining her husband briefly in Flanders. She returned the following month with some aid for the Queen's Party (Pitscottie, *Historie*, ii. 237, 239). The family kept control of Niddrie Castle, and Lady Seton probably remained there until the collapse of the Queen's Party and her husband's submission in April 1573.

<sup>124</sup> The Seton portrait in the SNPG has copies at Duns and Traquair. See what follows for the portrait by Keysz in the Prado, Madrid. I am most grateful to John Malden for details and comments about the different Seton family portraits.

<sup>125</sup> Michael Lynch, 'George 5th Lord Seton (c.1530–1586)', *ODNB*, <https://doi-org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/25121> (accessed 22 Dec. 2023).

<sup>126</sup> It also added a skull in memory of the Setons' eldest son who had died in 1562.

<sup>127</sup> Lord Claud Hamilton was the youngest son of the Duke of Châtellherault and later Lord Paisley. Margaret bore him nine children and had to cope with his banishment and later his madness. She died in 1612. Peter Holmes, 'Hamilton, Claud, first Lord Paisley', *ODNB*, <https://doi-org.eux.idm.oclc.org/10.1093/ref:odnb/12057> (accessed 22 Dec. 2023).

The bland term ‘housholding’ has disguised the complexity of a noblewoman’s task. Scots law, recognising wives were running their own households, authorised a wife to pledge her husband’s credit for domestic purposes, thereby treating the couple like a business partnership.<sup>128</sup> If the wife were clearly the dominant partner, it might be regarded as her efficiency at estate management. Following her second marriage to Colin, 6th earl of Argyll, Annas Keith continued to run the Moray earldom and added the Campbell estates to her duties. When in 1583 her high profile and assertive personality was viewed as having political significance, it led to the critical comment about her husband Colin as ‘overmuch led by his wife’.<sup>129</sup> Annas’s 1575–6 shopping list demonstrates her thorough grasp of all aspects of her remit, with the purchases ranging from the usual sweetmeats, clothing and textiles to the inclusion of horse bits and weapons and even a silver baton of arms approved by Lord Lyon.<sup>130</sup> High-cost items such as a new bed and detailed instructions of expensive fashionable clothes were sent by Margaret, countess of Cassilis to her daughter Katherine, Lady Barganny. They included bracelets, a petticoat and ‘tablatt’ or apron which should include a pearl, and a precise description of what was needed for a new velvet, fur-lined cloak to match an existing doublet and skirt along with a demand for exact costings before purchases should be made. Katherine had sent news to her mother of the latest fashionable material worn by Elizabeth Durham, the wife of the lord president of the court of session, so Margaret added a postscript seeking a skirt and cloak in patterned velvet or taffeta (‘ramage’).<sup>131</sup>

More important than external purchases, to increase their efficiency aristocratic wives needed control over the foodstuffs and other resources produced, stored and consumed on their country estates. Lady Glenorchy’s careful supervision and attention to detail can be found in her 1582 farm accounts with notes such as ‘at the ladyis command’ or ‘delivered to my Lady’.<sup>132</sup> Normally, she ensured all household necessities were in the right place at the right time; the exception was at the height of the fighting with the MacGregors in the summer of 1570. Her husband Grey Colin wrote her two quick notes from Ilanran (Killin)

<sup>128</sup> Sanderson, *Kindly Place?*, 99–106. As Winnifred Coumts explained, the legal situation ‘was said to be *praepositura negotiis domesticis* which allowed her to pledge her husband’s credit for household necessities suitable to his station’, Winnifred Coumts, *The Business of the College of Justice in 1600* (Stair Society, 2003), ‘Women and the Law’, 135–205, at 139.

<sup>129</sup> This was made as part of a political assessment of the nobility’s power: Charles Rogers (ed.), *Estimate of the Scottish Nobility* (Grampian Club, 1873), 35. A full-scale biography of Annas is planned by Jade Scott.

<sup>130</sup> *HMC 6<sup>th</sup> Report*, 657–8. The baton for her husband probably related to his hereditary office as Master of the Royal Household.

<sup>131</sup> 13 Nov. 1578, *Waus Corresp.*, i. 192–3. Ramage was the pattern on velvet or taffeta showing branches or foliage, *A Dictionary of the Older Scottish Tongue* (DOST) online, [https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/ramage\\_adj\\_2](https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/ramage_adj_2) (accessed 11 Nov. 2023).

<sup>132</sup> The ‘bowhous buik’ printed in *The Black Book of Taymouth*, ed. C. Innes (Edinburgh, 1855), 265. More generally, Sanderson, *Kindly Place?*, 112–23.



explaining his urgent need for extra supplies, such as bread, malt, wine, candles, writing paper, wax, the signet stamp and his small pinsel or battle standard. Assuming she had all this to hand, he asked that everything be sent from Balloch where she and the family were safe.<sup>133</sup> Scottish women's ability to understand and cope with the logistics of supply had been demonstrated in 1543 during the first stage of the Rough Wooings. Malcolm, 3rd Lord Fleming was assured his mother-in-law Agnes Stewart, dowager countess of Bothwell, had made plans for his campaign with other women in Edinburgh: 'My ladye Bothwell your guid mother and the guid wifis ar all guid Scottis women and sayis stoutlye that thai sall supple yow sa far as thai maye.'<sup>134</sup>

### *Holding house*

Throughout the sixteenth century the term 'hous' carried interlocking meanings, both as a noble's principal seat and as the blood line of a noble kindred.<sup>135</sup> An aristocratic woman's job description included actively building up their kindred. While that obviously meant ensuring the direct blood line by bearing children, especially sons, the wider kin were equally part of her duties. These included providing a hospitable welcome in their country residences, known as keeping or holding house.<sup>136</sup> The practice of hospitality by nobles was doubly significant because it was itself taken to be a marker of nobility. Extending far beyond a noble's affinity and neighbours, it was coupled with the broader obligation of charity to those in need. Coping with the requirements of hospitality changed the layout of noble residences, especially the provision of guest accommodation. This made holding house one of the most onerous parts of a noblewoman's job description.<sup>137</sup>

<sup>133</sup> *Campbell Letters*, 25–6; two draft letters 16 Aug. & 22 Sept. 1570, nos 138 & 163.

<sup>134</sup> *Mary of Lorraine Corresp.*, 15–16. Agnes was a former mistress of James IV, and Lady Fleming was their daughter.

<sup>135</sup> Meanings noted in *Older Scots* for 'hous' 1b and 3, DOST, [https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/hous\\_n\\_1](https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/hous_n_1) (accessed 11 Nov. 2023). The profound awareness of those links between the principal seat and the blood of the lineage can be seen in the casual use of the double meanings made by James Douglas, earl of Morton in his letter to Annas Keith, countess of Moray. Taking the place names of the Keith seat of Dunnottar and his own seat of Dalkeith he wrote of their blood kinship stemming from Annas's Douglas grandmother. He referred to his own house, 'out of the quhilke ye ar descendit and nixt the hous of Dunnottar maist kyndlie vnto yow', 2 May 1571, *HMC 6th Report*, 655.

<sup>136</sup> DOST hous n 1, [https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/hous\\_n\\_1](https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/hous_n_1); hald v 7 (2) [https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/hald\\_v](https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/dost/hald_v) (accessed 11 Nov. 2023). The strong association of holding house with exercising local power was described during 1572 when Sir William Drury, the English marshal of Berwick, brought troops into Scotland and 'hys wyfe come in, and held hous in Restalrig' (on the outskirts of Edinburgh), *Memorials of Transactions in Scotland, A.D. MDLXIX–MDLXXIII*. By Richard Bannatyne, secretary to John Knox, ed. Robert Pitcairn (Bannatyne Club, 1836) [*Bann. Mems*], 230.

<sup>137</sup> McKean, 'The laird and his guests'; for a general discussion of hospitality and English evidence, Felicity Heal, *Hospitality in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 1990).

As Brown noted, aristocratic wives employed ‘hospitality and other forms of social contact to impress on kinsmen that they were important persons in the broader world of the kindred’.<sup>138</sup> In *Lords and Men* Wormald showed how bonding and alliance-making provided the building blocks for the construction of the group of ‘kin, freindis, allya and parttakaris’; those people who would support and, when necessary, fight for their lord.<sup>139</sup> What was also required was the mortar of a regular round of hospitality to hold those blocks together. A noble’s residence was the normal setting for the direct contact that made personal lordship successful. Through making them welcome in their houses, wives translated the language of being ‘kindlie’ (like kin) into reality for every member of their affinity. When they kept house, aristocratic wives were augmenting the unity and loyalty of the family’s affinity.<sup>140</sup> One fundamental premise underlying offering or refusing hospitality was that it publicly separated friends from enemies. Within the context of regional politics, wives were also expected to nurture neighbours and prevent them from slipping into hostility. Since it was hoped hospitality might help maintain peace and prevent local feuds, the 1581 Act spoke of the great worth of nobles, ‘interteyning of freyndschip with thair nichbouris be all guid and honest meanis’.<sup>141</sup> This was not easy, especially when gathering friends and relatives together for a wedding celebration, as happened in January 1563 when Margaret Campbell, daughter of the 4th earl of Argyll, married James Stewart, Lord St Colm.<sup>142</sup> This major social event involving the queen and the entire court was organised by the bride’s sister-in-law, Jane Stewart, countess of Argyll, Mary, Queen of Scots’ half-sister. She faced a problem with the guest list that included Janet Campbell, the bride’s sister, married to Hector Maclean of Duart, who attended along with her marital kin. That meant the bride’s aunt, Agnes Campbell, Lady Dunivaig, did not attend because her husband James and his kin, the MacDonalDs of Dunivaig, were conducting a long and bitter feud with the Macleans. The arrangement for the Macdonalds to stay away so the wedding would be peaceful was settled in advance, probably by the women concerned. It allowed the countess of Argyll to throw a spectacular party with banquets, music and a masque that dressed the company as shepherds in white taffeta. Unless there was a basis for reconciliation the device of arranging a marriage between two feuding families to settle their feud had limited success. It placed the wife in the difficult position

<sup>137</sup> (Continued) For changing attitudes and the practice of charitable giving, John McCallum, *Poor Relief and the Church of Scotland, 1560–1650* (Edinburgh, 2017).

<sup>138</sup> Brown, *Noble Power*, 47.

<sup>139</sup> Wormald, *Lords and Men*, 90.

<sup>140</sup> Sanderson, *A Kindly Place?*; ‘kindly’ and ‘kind’ in Older Scots were also directly associated with nobility, as it signified displaying the qualities of one of gentle birth, <https://dsl.ac.uk/entry/snd/kind> (accessed 22 Dec. 2023).

<sup>141</sup> *RPS* 1581/10/40 (accessed 11 Nov. 2023).

<sup>142</sup> Stewart, commendator-abbot of Inchcolm, was later known as of Doune. For details of the wedding, see Randolph to Cecil, 22 & 31 Jan. 1563, *CSP Scot.*, i. 678–9, 681.

of either being forced to choose between her two kindreds or face the thankless task of acting as a mediator.<sup>143</sup>

Preventing relatives being caught on different sides of other families' feuds was a task that could be undertaken by aristocratic women because they had the authority of their position. In 1571 Lady Glenorchy took the initiative by writing to her older sister Liliias, Lady Drummond about the quarrel in the Strathearn district between William Reidheugh and Alexander Murray that was threatening to draw the Drummonds and Glenorchy Campbells onto opposing sides. Katherine appealed to Liliias for help to defuse the situation, 'considering we are sisteris and hes sum credit off the housses we ar in'. She added an argument about the public reputation and honour of their respective families, 'the comoun pipill will bruit ws giff thair cumis ony ewill amang frindis'.<sup>144</sup> In that same violent year the extreme danger for a wife and her household of being caught in the middle of a bloodfeud was shown in the notorious burning of Corgaff Castle by Adam Gordon of Auchindoun, with Margaret, Lady Towie, her daughters and servants inside.<sup>145</sup>

Denying or stinting hospitality inadvertently was a serious breach of courtesy, bringing shame for the noble household and anger from those who had expected better. In 1570 one such incident at Kilchurn Castle provoked a furious letter from the 5th earl of Argyll to his 'aunt', Katherine, Lady Glenorchy. Based miles away at Balloch, she was still regarded as responsible, though Kilchurn had its own captain.<sup>146</sup> When riding at the top of Loch Awe with a party of friends and visitors, Argyll was refused entry to the castle of his own kin and clan. He had found the place 'haldin as an fortres nocht preparit as we wald have belevit to our honour', with his party being treated like enemies. The incident had humiliated the earl in front of 'strangers' (probably Lowland nobles) and threatened Argyll's standing within his own heartland. He expressed his outrage in the letter's postscript, 'We regard nocht samekill meit nor drink as the yettis haldin fast of our freindis hous againis ws.'<sup>147</sup> In the event no lasting damage was done

<sup>143</sup> For feud settlement, see Wormald, 'Bloodfeud' and Keith Brown, *Bloodfeud in Scotland, 1573–1625: Violence, justice and politics in early modern society* (Edinburgh, 1986). Examples from the eastern Borders of the limited effectiveness of settling feuds through marriage: Maureen Meikle, *A British Frontier?: Lairds and gentlemen in the eastern Borders, 1540–1603* (East Linton, 2004), 231.

<sup>144</sup> *Campbell Letters*, 59–60; no. 193. In Older Scots the second meaning of 'frend' was a kinsman or relative.

<sup>145</sup> *Bann. Mems*, 212. Margaret's sister, Katherine, countess of Crawford, immediately sent a detachment of bowmen to her brother-in-law to help him avenge the murders, Verschuur, *Noble and Potent Lady*, 81.

<sup>146</sup> Gregor McAne MacGregor, from a sept who had remained loyal to the Campbells of Glenorchy, was the captain. Kilchurn lies at the top of Loch Awe facing the end of Glen Strae, MacGregor territory, and the incident happened when fighting between the Campbells and MacGregors was escalating, and a few months later Kilchurn was attacked: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/23673/kilchurn-castle> (accessed 18 Jul. 2024).

<sup>147</sup> *Campbell Letters*, 14, 23, 55–9; no. 94.

and Lady Glenorchy was speedily able to repair her friendship with Argyll.<sup>148</sup>

The stakes were much higher when the monarch was the guest. Welcoming a king or queen usually conveyed great prestige upon that noble lineage and conversely it was a serious political setback when hospitality was refused or went awry. In the summer of 1562, Mary, Queen of Scots openly snubbed the countess of Huntly's invitation to visit Strathbogie and shortly afterwards the captain of the Gordon-held castle of Inverness refused the Queen entry, which was deemed treason and outright rebellion.<sup>149</sup> At the end of the century the shambolic effort at hospitality for James VI in the earl of Gowrie's Perth house contributed to the 'conspiracy' fiasco that cost him and his brother their lives.<sup>150</sup> A bad situation appears to have been exacerbated by Gowrie's lack of a wife to run his household.<sup>151</sup>

Having an aristocratic wife to 'keep hous' and, when needed, run the estates, underpinned the land-based power of the nobility. Based on Timothy Pont's maps drawn in the 1590s, the majestic 1654 Blaeu Atlas offered a colourful picture of Scottish noble dominance. Its county maps are dotted with noble seats, frequently shown surrounded by their new parklands and presenting the heraldic achievements of titled families who had sponsored the project. Making it impossible to miss the identification of the Scottish countryside with its nobility, the accompanying descriptions of the counties included lists of their local lineages.<sup>152</sup> While not reflecting the reality of the troubled 1650s, the idyll of country living portrayed on the Blaeu maps did convey a fresh vision of what Scottish noble life should entail. Through the management of their country residences, sixteenth-century aristocratic wives had gradually brought substantial adaptations to the lifestyle and culture of the Scottish nobility.

<sup>148</sup> The next surviving letter from Argyll to Katherine Ruthven was full of his usual warmth and thanks, *Campbell Letters*, no. 119.

<sup>149</sup> The English ambassador and Argyll were sent to stay for two nights at Strathbogie as the queen's replacements, *CSP Scot.*, i. 651. Events quickly escalated to the defeat at Corrie and disaster for the Gordons.

<sup>150</sup> Jenny Wormald, 'The Gowrie Conspiracy: do we need to wait until the day of judgement?', in *James VI and I: Collected essays by Jenny Wormald*, ed. Miles Kerr-Peterson (Edinburgh, 2021), 153–68.

<sup>151</sup> It is possible that the earls of Arran and Morton were hampered in their regencies because their wives were unable to play the role of Lady Regent. The men were married to two sisters, Margaret and Elizabeth Douglas, who both suffered from mental health problems: Amy Blakeway, 'The attempted divorce of James Hamilton, earl of Arran, Governor of Scotland', *Innes Review* 61 (2010) 15–17.

<sup>152</sup> *The Blaeu Atlas of Scotland. Scotland from Theatrum Orbis Terrarum sive Atlas Novus pars quinta published by Joan Blaeu Amsterdam 1654* (National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh, 2006); Roger Mason, 'From Buchanan to Blaeu: the politics of Scottish chorography, 1582–1654', in Roger Mason and Caroline Erskine (eds), *George Buchanan: Political Thought in early modern Britain and Europe* (Farnham, 2012), 13–47.

*Conclusion*

The impact of a successful female career upon the fortunes and power of a noble house was recognised by contemporaries and sometimes recorded. After her death in 1629 Robert Gordon of Gordonstoun noted the contribution made by his mother, Jane, countess of Sutherland to the power and success of their lineage: she 'hath by her great care and diligence brought to a prosperous end many hard and difficult bussiness, of great consequence appertenyng to the house of Sutherland'.<sup>153</sup> Alexander Menzies of Weem also celebrated his mother, but went one better by only mentioning ancestors in the female line. During the 1590s Alexander and Margaret Campbell, his first wife, planned their elaborate Renaissance tomb to be erected in the Old Kirk of Weem. Their kneeling figures were placed at each end of the cornice with female statues of Faith and Charity below on either side of the central plaque with its inscription.<sup>154</sup> The Latin poem explained that the tomb celebrated 'the good name of their ancestors'. 'My mother is of the royal race of ancient Britons of Atholl, And Lawers is the house of my grandmother, And my great grandmother is a fair daughter of Huntly, And my great, great grandmother is from Edzell sprung.'<sup>155</sup> Highlighting maternal lines of descent permitted a non-titled lineage to claim other noble houses as part of its own. In 1635 George Jameson painted 'The genealogie of the hous of Glenurquhie. Quhair of is discendit sindrie nobill and worthie houses.'<sup>156</sup> It placed the family's progenitor, the first Lord Campbell, underneath a cherry tree whose branches were hung with circles carrying names of the Glenorchy line and their wives. On the right of this very large painting a succession of white rings (for women) proudly displayed the early sixteenth-century branch that had produced a clutch of titled noblewomen. Catherine Campbell, daughter of the second laird of Glenorchy, and her husband William, 10th laird of Tullibardine were the parents of Annabella Murray, countess of Mar, whose own female grandchildren were Marie, Lady Marischal, Anna, Lady Rothes, Margaret, Lady Kinghorn and Catherine, Lady Haddington. The memorialisation of Scottish noble

<sup>153</sup> Cited in Sanderson, *Mary Stewart's People*, 53.

<sup>154</sup> Charity was shown in the traditional representation of a mother with a small child holding onto her skirts.

<sup>155</sup> The tomb was completed in 1616, long before Alexander's death. His mother was Barbara Stewart (Atholl) for whom the House of Weem was built, see above; grandmother Janet Campbell (Lawers); great-grandmother Christian Gordon (Huntly); great-great-grandmother Margaret Lindsay (Crawford). The arms of each ancestor were displayed on the arch above the plaque. <https://clanmenzies.org/clan-chiefs/> (accessed 18 Jul. 2024).

<sup>156</sup> <https://www.nationalgalleries.org/art-and-artists/24093/campbell-glenorchy-family-tree> (accessed 27 Nov. 2023). Highlighting the female aristocratic members of their house was particularly important because the socially ambitious Glenorchy Campbells had to wait until 1681 for their earldom of Breadalbane.

houses had produced a rush of armorials in the 1560s, and a steady stream of family histories and tombs thereafter.<sup>157</sup>

This overview of aspects of Scottish aristocratic women's careers has shown they actively shaped the regional power and political influence of noble families through their activities in the royal court and capital and when running their country residences. It has prioritised visual evidence for their careers leaving virtually untouched alternative sources that can provide the foundation for future research. Studies of individual early modern noblewomen are being encouraged in the new book series *Scottish Women Making History*.<sup>158</sup> The cross-generational approach used to examine aristocratic Irish women from the Ormond lineage should work equally well for major Scottish houses. Within the broader field of gender studies, the construction of masculinities would bring a different viewpoint to traditional definitions of noble power: for example, how noblemen were affected by changes in their military roles and ethos and the remilitarisation of the European nobility during the seventeenth century.<sup>159</sup>

Wormald's research on bonds of manrent brought into sharp focus the power of the Scottish nobility and changed our understanding of that world. When publishing on the subject, she engaged with hotly contested European debates about nobility, such as feuding or bastard feudalism. Inevitably, fresh debates have since emerged, such as disagreements about when and why European nobilities developed aristocratic elites. A vast study covering European nobilities over five centuries has been undertaken by Hamish Scott who distilled the principal factors involved in the successful emergence of aristocracies:

- the creation of an enduring partnership with Europe's monarchies;
- the ability to secure and to retain landed property, which was the principal source of resources and of social and political leadership;
- the strengthening of inheritance arrangements to favour the eldest son, together with the widespread adoption of family trusts to secure the material foundations of a lineage over the generations and also to provide a pool of substitute heirs should the senior branch die out;
- linked to this, the systematic pursuit of a marriage strategy which aimed to prevent the loss of landholding or other resources and, if possible, to increase both these and the family's status;

<sup>157</sup> For an early example, Sir Richard Maitland of Lethington, *History of the House of Seytoun* (Maitland Club, 1829).

<sup>158</sup> The series' first volume is Helen Kay and Rose Pipes, *Chrystal Macmillan, 1872–1937: Campaigner for equality, justice and peace* (Edinburgh, 2024).

<sup>159</sup> Damian Duffy, *Aristocratic Women in Ireland 1450–1660: The Ormond family, power and politics*, Irish Historical Monographs 22 (Woodbridge, 2021). For examples of recent developments in gender studies, see Cowan, Nugent and Spence (eds), *Gender in Scotland 1200–1800*.

- the conscious fostering of family memory and therefore identity in diverse ways, principal among these being heraldry, armorials and naming practices; religious forms of commemoration; the distinctive education of future generations; representational culture and ancestral portraits; genealogies and family histories.<sup>160</sup>

These markers of aristocratic success might stimulate historians of early modern Scotland to discover new research questions and investigate how the experience of Scottish noblemen and noblewomen conforms to that European pattern and timescale.

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<sup>160</sup> Hamish Scott, 'Degrees of nobles': the aristocratisation of Europe's second estate, c.1300–1700', in Steven Thiry and Luc Duerloo (eds), *Heraldic Hierarchies: Identity, status and state intervention in early modern heraldry* (Leuven, 2021), 31–55, at 32–3. It is hoped that the late Professor Scott's study of the development of European aristocracies c. 1300–1700 will shortly be published by Oxford University Press.