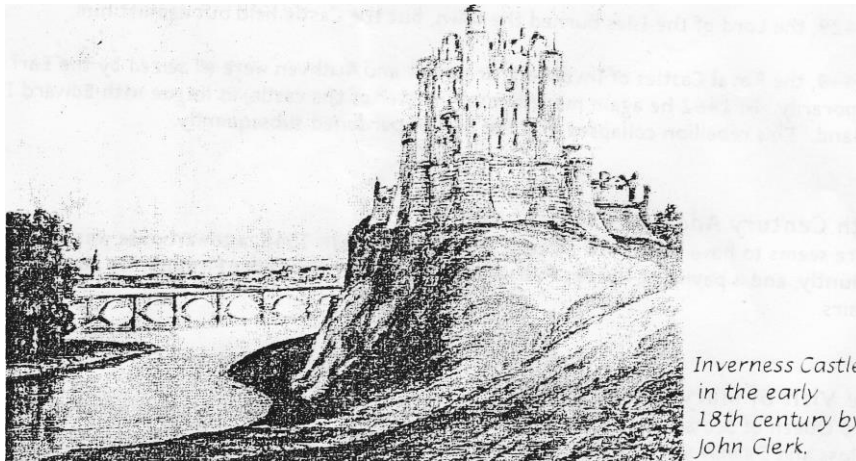


# A HISTORY OF INVERNESS CASTLE

(Written for the Inverness Local History Forum by Violet Murray)



*Inverness Castle  
in the early  
18th century by  
John Clerk.*

## **The Early Castles**

The first castle to be erected on the Castle Hill was probably the one built by Máel Coluim III of Scotland. (Malcolm Canmore) (1057-1093), in about 1057. This was to replace a castle built by MacBeth (1040-1057), the earliest known castle in Inverness, which Canmore destroyed in revenge for his father's murder. The site of the castle was traditionally said to be in the present Auldcastle road area.

Both sites would be strategically important in those times: MacBeth's Castle would have overlooked the approach to Inverness by sea, and the coastal route by land, called Via Regis (King's Route),

Canmore's site on the high bluff overlooked and commanded the place where the Via Regis reached the riverbank of the ford across the Ness.

## **The First Stone Castle**

The first stone castle to replace a more elementary one of timber may have been built during, or shortly after, the reign of King David I (1124-1153), but this is not certain. There was a reference to a stone castle in the records of the military campaign in the North by William the Lion in 1179,

## **Governors of Inverness Castle**

The first reference to a Governor of Inverness Castle concerns Shaw Macduff, who was made hereditary Governor in 1163, by Malcolm IV (1153-1165), Macduff's descendants were Governors until 1274, when the incumbent was killed in a duel over a gaming debt.

There were English governors during the period 1291-1307, of this important Fortress, who were answerable to Edward I. It was recaptured by Robert the Bruce in 1307

In 1412, the Castle was rebuilt by Alexander Stewart, the Earl of Mar, its new governor, after the defeat at the Battle of Harlaw, of Donald of Islay, Lord of the Isles.

In 1426, it was further improved by order of James I. There are exact details known about the money expended by the Earl in building turrets and a wall.

## **15th Century Turbulence**

In 1427 / 28, James I, visited the Castle, and held a Parliament within it, to which he summoned the Highland Chiefs. He executed three of them, and imprisoned others, for disobedience to his authority.

In 1429, the Lord of the Isles burned the town, but the Castle held out against him.

In 1449, the Royal Castles of Inverness, Urquhart and Ruthven were seized by the Earl of Ross temporarily. In 1462, in league with Edward IV of England, he again made himself master of the castle. The rebellion collapsed, 'though the Earl was subsequently pardoned.

## 16th Century Additions

There seems to have been little of note thereafter until in 1548, a tower house was added by the Earl of Huntly, and a payment was made to a local townsman Alexander Fleming, for carrying out some repairs.

## The Visit of Mary Queen of Scots

Mary Queen of Scots came on a visit to Inverness on 11-15 September 1562, after visiting Elgin, Kinloss and Darnaway. The Governor, the Earl of Huntly, was absent and the Captain would not permit her to enter the Castle. When she was later allowed in with her supporters from Clan Macintosh and Fraser, she had the Captain executed, and his head exhibited on the castle wall. The Earl of Moray was then appointed as Governor. The Queen stayed in a house in Bridge Street (now demolished).

## The Castle in the 17th and 18th Centuries

The Castle seems to have been allowed to fall into comparative unimportance during the 17th century and to have suffered greatly from its occupation by clans in 1639. *"They break up the doors, gates and windows of that stately castle, spoiled the pleasant plenishing and rich library of books, and brocht all to nocht within that house, inferior to few in the kingdom for decorment"*

## Civil War

During the Civil War later occupiers of the castle had held out against a siege by royalist James Graham, 1st Marquess of Montrose in 1645, but in 1649 a large royalist force stormed the area. They assaulted the town and took the castle, expelled the garrison and raised the fortifications. However, on the approach of the parliamentary forces led by covenanter General David Leslie, all of the clans retreated back into Ross-shire. However, the MacKenzies left a garrison of men in the castle and Leslie withdrew to deal with a rising in the south.

### 1715

In the 1715 Jacobite Rising, the Castle was briefly held by the Jacobites, but was soon recaptured by Hanoverian forces. It was then enlarged and strengthened and by 1725/26 it contained a barracks for 800 troops, and was named Fort George.

### 1745

In the 1745 Rising, government forces garrisoned the castle, under the governorship of Lord Loudon. When he retreated in 1746, Bonnie Prince Charlie took the castle, and razed the fortifications to the ground with explosives.

## 19th Century Changes

Thereafter the buildings were in ruins until the early 19th century. In 1833-36 the south block of the present castle was built to a design by William Burn. The northern section, designed by Thomas Brown, was built in 1846-48. The walling was designed by civil engineer Joseph Mitchell, well known in the Highlands.

The soft red sandstone of the building has severely deteriorated over the years by its exposure to the prevailing wind and rain on the elevated ground.

An extensive program of restoration work has been required in recent years. The interior has also been redesigned.

The eastern profile of the original hillside has been greatly altered by landslides: in 1909 and 1932

The castle features on the reverse of the Royal Bank of Scotland £50 note introduced in 2005.

Inverness Castle served as the Sheriff Court until 2020, when this relocated to the purpose-built state-of-the-art Justice Centre. The Castle is now undergoing a major refurbishment, and is being transformed into a world-class visitor attraction, due to open in 2025.