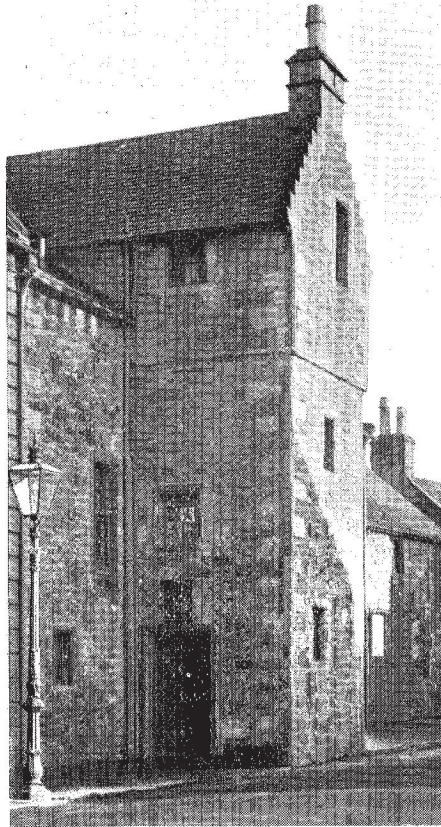




THE MANSION HOUSE OF ROTHESAY.

OLD MANSION HOUSE.

By R. D. WHYTE.

(Read 13th March, 1923.)

Under date 22nd April, 1680, the following entry appears in the Minutes of the Town Council:—

“ The Qlk day the Provist Baillies and Counsell being
 “ convenit having considered ane petition given in by
 “ Mr. George Cunningham craving libertie of so much
 “ ground in the fore street of his house as will build ane
 “ turnpyke stair they have unanimously considered to
 “ give him the samen he having room for a sink to let
 “ the watter run alongst the street Wherefore he is to pay
 “ to the said Town Treasurer ane shill scotts yeirly and
 “ ordanes him to infest therein.”

George Cunningham was a Writer in Edinburgh, and a son of John Cunningham, of Brownhill & Geiss, Caithness, and Admiral Depute of Caithness. John Cunningham married first Janet, daughter of Lord Lindores, by whom, according to Anderson's "Scottish Nation," he had 18 children in nine years (the first single, four times twins, and thrice three at a birth), but only three daughters survived to be married. This statement, however, does not seem to agree with the information given in Burke's Peerage. By his second wife, Elizabeth, daughter of Sir John Sinclair of Ratter, he had five sons and six daughters. His eldest son, John, was created a Baronet of Nova Scotia by Charles II., and his third son was George, the builder of the Old Mansion House. His youngest daughter, Mary, married John Stewart of Ascog, and this fact probably explains why George Cunningham came to Rothesay, and also the design of the house, which is almost an exact copy of the Old Mansion House of Ascog built in 1678. The house would be one of the largest in Rothesay at that time, and it was known as the "Big House." Cunningham apparently lived in Rothesay from 1680

to 1684, and he was a Town Councillor for the years 1681 to 1684. In the last year the house was conveyed to John Stewart of Ascog in security of a sum of money, and in 1706 it was sold to George Haldane, son of Patrick Haldane of Lanark, who in turn sold it in 1711 to the second Earl of Bute, who married Lady Ann, daughter of the first Duke of Argyll. Reid records that when the Earl brought his bride home she expressed disappointment at the smallness of the mansion, when the Earl pointed to the Castle, saying—"There was our house, till your friends burned it"—an argument which seems to have quite satisfied her. It is also said that when the Freedom of the Royal Burgh was being conferred on the Marquis of Lorne, Lord Bute good-humouredly twitted the Campbells with being the cause of his ancestors having twice had to seek a new home—first when they burned the Castle (1685), and afterwards when a matrimonial alliance was consummated between them, and the tall Lady Ann Campbell found the ceilings of the High Street house too low for her comfort. Mount Stuart House was begun in 1719, but was not finished when the Earl of Bute died in 1723.

For a time part of the house was used as a Custom House, and for many years it was locally known as the Custom House. Afterwards, when used as a dwelling house, it was known as The Old Mansion House, and it was so designated until in 1920 it was, through the generosity of Lord Bute, converted into the Bute Museum.

ABSTRACTS OF METEOROLOGICAL OBSERVATIONS

MADE BY

MR JOHN DAVIDSON,

AT

ARDENCRAIG, ROTHESAY.

(Latitude, 55° 50' 26" N.; Longitude, 5° 2' 0" W.; Height, above Mean Sea Level; Barometer, 187 ft.; Rain Gauge, 200 ft.)

From 1st January, 1915, to 31st December, 1924.