

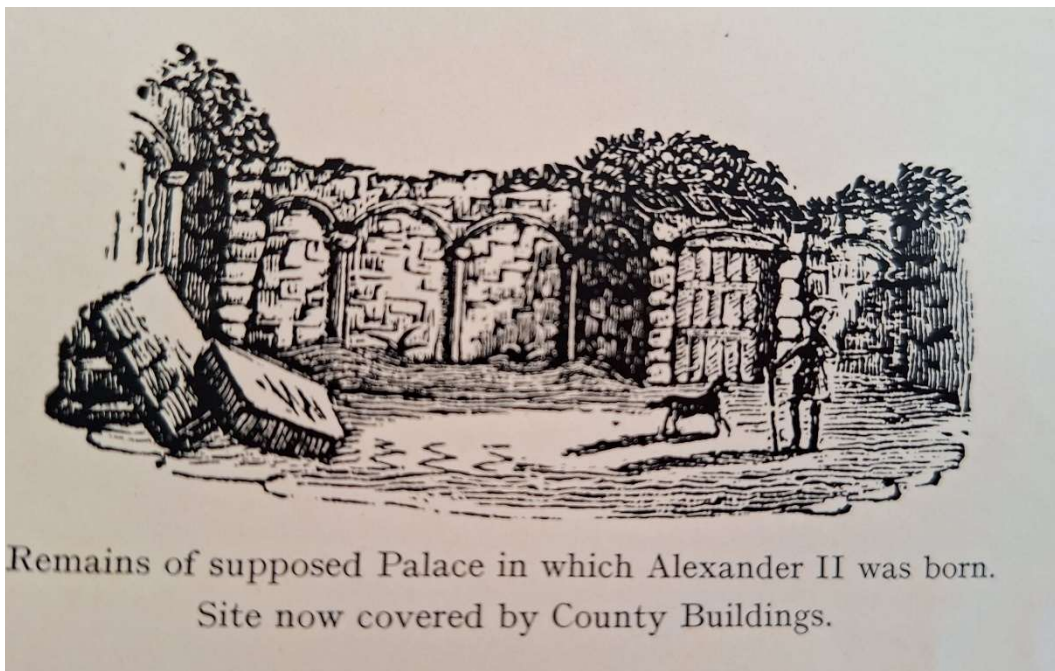
## The Haddington Palace question

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There are conflicting claims regarding the location of Haddington's 'palace'. On the one hand there is the Court Street site to the west of the burgh marked by a plaque on the wall of the court building: 'This is the site of the Royal Palace occupied by King William I styled William, the Lion, and here his son Alexander II of Scotland was born 24<sup>th</sup> August 1198.' On the other, proposed by Robertson (2019), a site on an area to the east of the burgh formerly Haddington House garden, now known as St Mary's Pleasance, where an information panel states with equal certainty 'early Royal charters reveal that the garden was part of a King's Palace and Royal Garden relating to David I of Scotland ..' In her paper of 2025 Robertson has restated her case against the Court Street site and put forward an alternative explanation for the Court Street site. The objective of this paper is to evaluate the limited evidence available for a royal residence in Haddington so that readers may reach their own conclusions on the options presented.

Hilary Mantel in her Reith lectures described History as "What's left in the sieve when the centuries have run through it – a few stones, scraps of writing, scraps of cloth." More than eight centuries have passed since the time of the Norman kings: David I (1124-53), founder of the burgh, Malcolm IV (1153-65), William I (1165-1214), probably the most frequent of royal visitors, and Alexander II (1214-49). What's 'left in the sieve' includes a sketch of a ruin on the Court Street site, a few entries in chronicles, some references in writs and other legal documents, for the most part from centuries later. Such paucity of evidence means that we must be cautious in our interpretation and guard against unqualified assertions.

The Court Street ruin was drawn by Adam Neill, printer and publisher of Haddington, just before its demolition in 1833 to make way for the construction of the former County Buildings. It shows the remnants of a stone-built structure of some status comprising a number of vaults surviving to above head-height. Five or six pillars are shown, some with capitals. Reputedly from the ruin, one of those capitals survived in the garden of a house in Neilson Park Road. It was removed late last century.



(Forbes Gray, W. & Jamieson, J.H. 1944, *A Short History of Haddington*, facing page 120)

‘Supposed’ in the caption above suggests that the authors of *A Short History of Haddington* were not entirely convinced but those who erected the plaque on the court house believed the ruins to be the remnants of the palace. Martine (1883,96) states that , “Tradition has handed down that the site of the palace was where the County Buildings and Jail are now built. ....They consisted of several elegant and well-proportioned Saxon pillars and arches, a vault and some arched passages communicating with them.” Richardson, born 1793, in his memoir of his youth recorded in 1881 ascribed the ruins to one of ‘a number of religious houses’, “The most ancient was on the south side of Court Street, where the County Buildings now stand. In my younger days there were remains of the buildings still standing, which were called the vouts – that is, vaults – facing the street, used by a carter for placing his carts in. I never heard the building named, but there was a tradition that one of the Kings of Scotland was born there – one of the Alexanders, I think. The property was acquired by the county, and the vaults, as well as a large dwelling-house adjoining, were pulled down, and the present Court-houses erected in their stead.” (Richardson, 1905,14-15)

Robertson (2025) argues that the ruins were not the remnants of the palace but those of a monastery of the Black Friars. Miller (1844, 383) is the source of the claim that such a friary existed in addition to that of the Grey Friars in Church Street. For a small town to have two friaries would be unusual. In the second edition of Miller’s history (1900) Dr Wallace-James, physician, latinist and historian, in his introductory note explains how this claim came about. “There was no Dominican monastery in Haddington. This error probably arose from a *lapsus calami* (slip of the pen) of an exchequer clerk who credits himself one year with the payment of a sum of money to the *Black* Friars of Haddington instead of for the Grey Friars. That this is so is proved from the fact that various similar payments occur for the years both before and for the years after that date credited correctly as made to the Grey Friars.”

Robertson (2025) suggests, by analogy with the ruins of Sligo Abbey, that the vaults might indicate a religious house. Vaulted ground floors are a common feature of larger medieval buildings; not unique to religious structures. Vaults were an effective way to support the weight of an upper storey, much stronger, and safer in event of fire, than beams. The best local example is Barnes Castle, also known as The Vaults/The Vouts, where the vaulted ground floor, as the strongest part of the building, survives. Symson’s Protocol Book shows several houses on the south side of the Croce Gait had vaults. (Symson, 1532/3 pb1 61)

## Chronicles

From stones to ‘scraps of writing’. Let us consider firstly evidence from the chronicles. None are entirely reliable with much fanciful accounts of the early history of Scotland. In general the closer the composition to the events described, the more confident we can be of their accuracy. Another difficulty is that a number of editions exist with some differences in translation and presumably transcription. Later chronicles draw on earlier so inaccuracies cascade through the centuries.

*The Chronicle of Melrose*, composed at Melrose Abbey between 1140 and 1270 is considered one of the most reliable for our period. Events concerning royalty at Haddington are recorded:

*1180 A great dispute between the house of Melrose and [Richard de] Moreville, concerning the forest and pasture between [the] Gala and Leader [waters] was decided at Haddington upon mid-Lent Sunday (30<sup>th</sup> March) in the presence of William, the King of Scots, and Earl David, his brother, and before a large body of persons as well as ecclesiastics and laymen. [Corrections from Barrow 1971, 274]*

*1191 The King of Scots gave his daughter Ysembel (the widow of Robert de Brus) in marriage to Robert de Ross at Haddington.*

A notorious murder is mentioned, included here as some have sought to identify Court Street as the locale. However, the chronicler in this extract does not specify a location.

*1242 Patrick, Earl of Athol, ...was wickedly murdered – Alas! That we should have to tell it – along with two of his companions in his own residence, at Haddington, after he had gone to rest for the night and then was done by some wicked wretches. To conceal the extent of the crime, the house in which they were lying was burnt down that it might appear they had perished accidentally in the conflagration.*

*Chronica Gentis Scotorum* John of Fordun (pre-1360 to ca 1384). His authorship of the complete work is disputed. This extract on a royal birth gives no indication of where in Haddington it took place (Skene, 1872, p270).

*1198 He (Alexander II) was born at Haddington on Saint Bartholomew's Day in the year 1198.*

*The Scotichronicon* Walter Bower (ca1385-1449). Bower includes much of the work of John of Fordun. He is considered a reliable source for the reign of James 1, well outside our period. He would be familiar with Haddington and district as he was born in the town and served as Abbot of Inchcolm. Bower has the fullest account of the Atholl murder, including the location, perhaps drawing on anecdotal evidence from his knowledge of Haddington.

Robertson (2019) criticises Forbes Grey and Jamieson for wrongly crediting Fordun with the location of the murder (Forbes Grey, W. & Jamieson, J.H. 4). The source is rightly Bower. However, two early editions of the *Scotichronicon* credit Fordun with the work – Macpherson 1747 and Goodall 1759. The latter refers to the work as John of Fordun's *Scotichronicon* 'with additions and continuations by Walter Bower'. A note in Edinburgh University Library catalogue comments, "a title which confusingly ignores the fact that Bower's chronicle, while self-admittedly based on Fordun's work, is a separate and distinct chronicle." Both these early works are in the Library's collection and may have been consulted by the authors of *A Short History of Haddington*; hence their error. We now have access to the masterly transcription and translation published with the Latin original and the English translation side by side, edited by Der Watt et al and published 1987-1998.

*1242 At that time nearly all the nobles, magnates and knights of the kingdom gathered at the royal burgh of Haddington for a certain tournament, which in the end was turned into a killing-game. For that same night when the tournament was over some traitors said to belong to the Bisset following killed Patrick, earl of Atholl, son of Thomas of Galloway, an outstanding young man, in his estimable lodging (in hospicio suo honorabili) at the side and the western end of the same king's highway to the north-west (a parte et in fine occidentali vici regii eiusdem ad circium). It happened while he was asleep with two of his companions, in a villainous and heinous manner, as a result of long-standing hostility between their predecessors. And in order to hide this great crime they burnt down the fine manor, princely residence and house (pulcrum manerium et palacium necnon domum) in which they lay dead, so that it might appear that he had not been killed by human hands, but had perished in an accidentally kindled fire.*

Without overtly making the connection with the ruin, Bower comes close to placing a 'princely residence', Latin '*palacium*', at the Court Street site but the 'north-west' is troublesome. Robertson (2019) argues that 'north-west' would rule out the Court Street site. Court Street runs east – west. The Edinburgh road from the West Port initially heads west-north-west but soon turns west.

However, the road to Aberlady runs north-west from the West Port. Aberlady was Haddington's port and the road once an important thoroughfare. Is this what Bower had in mind?

*A History of Greater Britain as well England as Scotland* John Major (1467/69 to 1550). A historian more than a chronicler, Major was born at Gleghornie near North Berwick. Canmore reports that 'faint traces of the village remain'. He was schooled at Haddington, "...the town which fostered the beginnings of my own studies and in whose kindly embraces I was nourished with the sweetest milk of the art of grammar..." (Constable, 1892, note p39). Major records the Athole/Atholl murder but makes no mention of the specific location.

*"...when Alexander, with a great company of nobles, was at Haddington, Patrick, earl of Athole, a young man of happiest promise, was burnt to death in a house where he was sleeping."* (Constable, 1892, 181.)

Major has the King present in Haddington, Bower does not. Had the murder taken place in the royal palace or an associated building while the king was present, one would expect his presence to be recorded. Did Atholl die in a royal residence or a building associated with it, a lodge? It is not possible to say.

The chronicles provide evidence for a royal presence in Haddington, particularly of William I, from time to time. Bower identifies 'a princely residence' on a site that could be close to the former County Buildings but not proven. There is no other reference to a possible castle or palace in the chronicles.

### **Charters, writs, and rentals**

Turning to legal documents, Barrow (1971) includes 18 acts of William 1 made at Haddington. Of these, Robertson (2019) identified one (No 235) of ca 1180 confirming a grant of land by his mother, Countess Ada, to the Church of Saints Mary and Michael. The relevant section of the text locating the land reads *"inter domum pa[ ]ans<sup>i</sup> ortum meum cimiterium"* - between the house of pa(unclear)ans my garden and the cemetery. (1) The third letter is unclear. The phrase has been translated as 'house of pagans' or 'house of pains'.

This document would place William's garden in the vicinity of the Pleasance. The act concludes *"fecit apud hadintun"* – done at Haddington. None of William I's acts mention a specific location for the signing, castle or palace, simply the town.

A charter of Robert II of 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1389 granting various rights and privileges to the burgh includes *"Ac etiam cum prato illo juxta Burgum predictum quod vocatum est hactenus pratum regnum."* 'And also with that meadow near the said Burgh which is usually called King's Meadow.' (Wallace-James, 1895, 10-13). The name survives today for the primary school near Neilson Park.

That the crown owned land both to the east and the west of the burgh, near but not part of the original nucleus of the town, is not surprising. Countess Ada's extensive dowry included Haddington and much of the surrounding land. Royal ownership descended through her son William to subsequent monarchs. Any royal residence would be outside the immediate burgh, not part of it. The use of these two areas, *garden vs meadow*, may be more significant than their location.

Amongst the charters of James IV listed in the Register of the Great Seal of Scotland, Robertson (2019) identified one which includes mention of a 'palace'. It records the grant in 1497 to Robert Trent of a piece of waste land bordered on the south side by a croft of land belonging to the Friars, *"vulgariter nuncupatam le Kingis palace"*, commonly called le kingis palace'. (Paul 1882, 505).

Robertson (2019) has traced the subsequent ownership of the croft through sasines showing that an area east of Sidegate was known as friars' croft or king's yaird up until at least the late 17<sup>th</sup> century and that the wall on the west side bordering Sidegate was known as the 'kings wall'.

Moir Bryce ( Bryce, W.M. 1909, vol 1, 171) records ' in the year 1478 by a gift of Sir James Cockburn of Clerkington the friars acquired an important croft known as the kingis palace.' The croft was extensive. In 1559 Saint Catherine's Chapel and the lands of Robert Schort and Richard Wause bounded it on the north, the king's wall/s (of Sidegate) on the west, and on the east it is described as abutting on the butts and the sands. The Burgh court book (HAD/2/1/2/1) transcribed by Wallace-James records the rental in 1572 'of the rudes of the Frier Croft' to 9 burgesses. This excludes a further 3 rudes 'in the front to keep mesour (measure) and at the tail as they may fall in.' Such an extensive area would cover most of the area south of the properties in Church Street. It would include the ground used to extend St Mary's churchyard in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It may also include Lady Kitty's garden, an 18<sup>th</sup> century creation. The croft is similar in scale to Amisfield Walled Garden, which is 8 acres. The garden of Haddington House/St Mary's Pleasance measures 1.6 acres. If there is a royal residence site in Friars' Croft, there is a much larger area to consider.

### Other evidence

So much for 'scraps of writing'. Understandably nothing remains of Mantel's 'scraps of cloth' for our period but are there any tangible links with the time of the Norman kings in Haddington? Robertson (2019) raises the possibility of a mint in Haddington from the time of David 1 based on the existence of silver pennies of the period with the initials HA. An enquiry to the National Museum of Scotland elicited this response.

*"We do indeed have one of these coins in the NMS collection, the most likely attribution for the hA coins is Carlisle with the moneyer Ricart/Ricard. The rev legend on the coin reads as [...]LDART:ON:hA[] so it is a blundered version of Ricart of Carlisle.*

*Indeed there is no evidence that there was ever a mint at Haddington. One of the main problems with the coinage of David I is the blundered legends, even on legible coins there is still the odd spelling mistake, which can make attribution to a specific mint initially difficult. The only known mints with certainty from the reign of David I are Carlisle, Berwick, Edinburgh, Roxburgh, Perth, Aberdeen and St Andrews."* Dr Carl Savage, Treasure Trove, Department of Scottish History & Archaeology, National Museums Scotland

Tabraham in Robertson (2019) has proposed the possibility of a castle in Haddington; the implication being that a castle could become a palace in folk memory. There is a tendency in any local tradition for historical buildings to become grander. In Haddington Sandybed House became Bothwell Castle and the Priory of Haddington became known as the Abbey of Haddington.

The 'standard model' for a castle of David I's time is the motte and bailey, a wooden tower on a raised earth mound with an enclosed courtyard below. In time these were replaced with stone built structures. There are six royal burghs of David I in south-east Scotland: Haddington, Peebles, Selkirk, Berwick, Roxburgh and Jedburgh. All but Haddington have a known castle site and in some cases considerable remnants. Peebles castle was on a raised site at the head of the town where the Eddleston Water enters the Tweed. The site is now occupied by the parish church. Selkirk castle was constructed on a motte built up from a natural feature above the town. The original wooden structure was replaced by a stone pele tower. Jedburgh castle was at the head of the town where the 1820s jail now stands. Both Berwick and Roxburgh had stone castles built on natural defensible sites.

For these five towns the castle was built on a natural dominant feature. In the case of Peebles, Berwick, Roxburgh and Jedburgh the principal street led to the castle. In Roxburgh, this was called King's Street, the name by which Court Street in Haddington was once known with the earliest record found dated 1529/30 (Symson, pb 1). However 'King's Street' can be taken as a general term for 'the King's highway'. It is applied at times to Hardgate and Sidegate, more often as Kings causey. The High Street is referred to as 'Queen's causay' in 1563. (Stevin pb 1, 378)

## Options

### 1 Court Street

The Court Street site is at the head of the town, near an important cross-roads. The Neill sketch shows the ruins of a building of some status and typical of the period. The site is just outside the original nucleus of the burgh on land belonging to the monarch. King's Meadow on the west side of the town is a reminder of this. In Martine's time (19<sup>th</sup> century) tradition had it as the site of the palace. The Atholl murders may have taken place here or in an associated building. Bower's chronicle may place a 'palacium' in the vicinity.

While the ruins are not those of a Dominican Priory, could they belong to another religious building? Known medieval religious houses within Haddington are: the chapels of Saint Anne, Saint Katherine, and Saint Ninian. St Anne's chapel is ruled out. The building survived into the nineteenth century and the present St Ann's Place at the west end of Church Street marks the site.

Could the ruins be what remained of the Chapel of St Katherine? Martine (1883, 193) through a mis-reading of a footnote in Miller (1844, 378) places this chapel on the west side of Hardgate. However, there is clear evidence that the chapel was at the east end of Church Street. For example, this extract from the Burgh Court Book of 1554, (HAD/4/6/5 fo. 284)

*Sir Johne Ramsay chaplane of st anne chapel looking for payment of annuels from 'umquihill Robert shortus at the eist part of hadington the land of umquhill henre wauss on the west the chapel of sanct katherie on the eist the freir croft on the south loth burn on the north.'* (Transcription by McKinnon, J.)

John Knox's lively account of the Siege quoted in Miller (1844, 107) describes how a French attempt to force their way into the town at the East Port was repulsed by the firing of two artillery pieces. In Knox's words, 'bullets rebounded fra the wall of the Freir Kirk to the wall of Sanct Catherine's Chapell which stood direct foiranent it.' According to Knox, who was not an eye-witness, these ricochets felled more than 100 French while the English lost some 'drinking beer' stored in the chapel and kirk.

Post- the Reformation, in 1575/76 St Katherine's chapel was converted to a school. The Burgh Council minutes record orders for lime and sand for the work (Urwin 95) and note that 'John Cockburn was loaned the great lintel stone from the chimney of St Katherin's Chapel on condition he returned it when needed'! (Urwin 92) A schoolhouse was added in 1579. The former Burgh Schools in Church Street occupy the site today.

St Ninian's Chapel. In contrast to St Katherine's chapel, there is limited evidence for its location. This extract from *The Protocol Books of Thomas Stevin* would place it on the north side of present day Market Street.

*Alexander Castellaw resigned his tenement of land ante and retro with the pertinents liand on the north side of tolbooth gait betwixt the lands of John Ayto east, George Touris of Innerleyth west. The*

*tenement lyand contique at the west end of sanct ninian chapel, also the ground of the pentiss lyand at the east end and contique of the said chapell.* (Stevin, 1562, pb1, 344. Transcription by McKinnon, J.)

The chapel also owned two roods on the south side of the Croce Gait (High Street) (Stevin, 1562, 129) and one on the north side of present-day Court Street. (Cleland Harvey, 1913, 381).

Chapels then are ruled out as an explanation for the Court Street ruins. The ruins are the strongest evidence for the Court Street site but we cannot with complete confidence equate them with the 'palacium' where the murder of Atholl occurred nor with William I's residence.

## 2 St Mary's Pleasance/ Haddington House garden

Buit on an alluvial plain, Haddington does not have an obvious natural feature where a castle or other defensible structure could be built but this site, through its proximity to a bend of the Tyne, might offer some protection. The area was outside the nucleus of the burgh. The land was once royal property through Ada's dowry. Archival evidence shows that William I had a garden in the vicinity. Possibly the same area features in an account of the revenue of the town for 1335/36, when much of southern Scotland, including Haddington, was under English control. It notes that the King's orchard (pomario Regis), previously valued at 20 shillings per year, contributes nothing as it is now waste (Bain, 347). The Pleasance occupies perhaps a fifth of the area once known as Friars Croft, later the 'king's yaird', a term which occurs in sasines up to the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. The wall on its western edge was known as King's wall.

A site for a royal residence downstream from the burgh and in close proximity to the cemetery may not seem ideal. There is no physical evidence above ground and no depiction in words or images in known archives.

Options 3 and 4 are given simply as hypotheses; there is little or no evidence to support them.

## 3 Two sites: An early castle and a later palace

An early motte and bailey on or near the Pleasance site replaced by a stone-built structure on the Court Street site in an area not susceptible to flooding and more salubrious. As Robertson (2019) suggests, any traces of the motte could have provided material for the complex of bastions and bulwarks built to defend the town during the siege of 1546-48.

Even without the castle, the site could have continued for a period as a royal garden/park. Haddington had a reputation for its orchards in medieval times (Forbes Gray & Jamieson, 4). In recent times the garden of Haddington House served as a market garden. The reverse is also possible: a later royal residence on the Pleasance site to replace the Court Street residence after its possible destruction by forces of King John in 1216 or Henry III's campaign of 1244. In accounts of the destruction of the town by Edward III in 1355, Burnt Candlemas, there is no mention of the destruction of a royal residence, an important target had it existed at this time. The destruction of the Friary and the Abbey are mentioned. Alternatively, like Perth castle, it could have been swept away by a flood.

## 4 No castle/palace

Did the monarchy require their own residence in Haddington? The convent, founded by Countess Ada in 1158, could provide accommodation for a peripatetic monarch such as William I. It is known that Ada up to her death in 1178 was a frequent visitor to her 'dower towns' of Crail and Haddington (Barrow, 1971,5). It is most likely that she would stay at her foundation. It could also be a suitable

location for the birth of Alexander II in 1198. Royalty freely used monasteries as convenient accommodation to the extent that in Edinburgh Holyrood was taken over by the monarchy. Friend and foe made use of Haddington Abbey. Henry IV occupied the Abbey in 1400. The convent provided accommodation for Margaret Tudor on her way to Edinburgh in 1503. The Friary was also pressed into use on that occasion for her retinue and horses.

The argument against would be that the convent was not a defensible structure.

Archaeology may eventually help settle the question of the location of Haddington's Palace. At the time of writing an archaeological survey of the Pleasance is proposed. However, this former garden of Haddington House represents only a portion of Friars' Croft/King's yaird, albeit the most accessible for such an investigation. As the front line in the Siege, there may also be evidence of associated earthworks.

We have examined all the evidence we can find that remains in the sieve for Haddington's Palace. Until more emerges, to go further would be to embark on a work of historical fiction; Mantel's forte, not ours.

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