

# The Ramsay Family

850 YEARS OF HISTORY  
IN THE MAKING



*Dalhousie Castle*

HOTEL AND AQUEOUS SPA

## The Ramsays of Dalhousie have reason to be proud of their heritage and their long links with Scottish history.

They held possession of Dalhousie longer than any other family has retained possession of a castle in Scotland. The Castle, which is situated in the parish of Cockpen, eight miles south of Edinburgh, dates from the 13th century, although only the enormously thick walls at the foundation level and the vaults remain, of the original building. The main parts of the present structure were built about 1450 from red stone quarried from the opposite bank of the South Esk River on which the Castle stands. In the succeeding centuries there have been various additions and modifications, but the essential form of the Castle which had an L-shaped keep surrounded by an outer curtain wall can still be clearly discerned.

The Drum tower which dates from the 15th century has a well at

ground level which supplied the castle and still yields potable water. The area between the keep and the curtain wall was first built up by the 1st Earl of Dalhousie in the early 17th century. The castle closely resembles nearby Dirleton Castle which is now in ruins.

Originally access to the castle was obtained by crossing a drawbridge over a deep dry moat. This moat was re-excavated during the castle's conversion into a hotel. The "rainures" (recesses for the counterbalance beams) of the original drawbridge raising mechanism can still be seen above the main door, as can the machicolations used by the defenders to assail those beneath. Other interesting features are the mural staircase from the banqueting hall to the vaults. There is also a spiral stair leading from what was

the first floor of the keep, down to the top of the bottle dungeon which measures 10'10" by 10'3", it has a latrine and a ventilation shaft but no window. Prisoners were lowered into it by rope, the score marks of the ropes can still be seen in the stonework, once in there was no escape through the 11' thick walls.

An old account claims that Simundus de Ramesia a freeman followed King David 1st to Scotland from Ramsay, a Huntingdonshire village, in about 1140 and was the founder of the line and the first to have land at Dalwalsey. Certainly the Ramsay name appears in Midlothian records all through the 13th century. William Ramsay, who witnessed deeds regarding land in 1280, was the first to be known as Ramsay de Dalwalsey and he was so styled not then as receiving his lands but as his usual and known designation. This Williams name stands on the Ragmans Roll of 1296 as doing homage for those lands to Edward I. The English King

spent a night in Dalhousie Castle before going on to Falkirk where he defeated William Wallace. William Ramsay later joined the forces of Robert the Bruce and was present at the Battle of Bannockburn in 1314 and in 1320 he was a signatory to the famous Declaration of Arbroath in which the Scottish Barons appealed to the Pope in Rome against the oppressions of the English.

William was succeeded by his son Alexander who became a renowned figure. The Scottish chronicler, John Fordun, wrote of Sir Alexander "in his brave deeds of arms and in bodily strength he surpassed all others of his day". During these times the English had regained the incentive in the war with the Scots and were in the possession of many of the Scottish castles including Dalhousie.

Sir Alexander formed a band of loyal knights, and mass troopers, and organised raids on the English.

By the year 1342 most of the castles and occupied areas were captured and David 2nd was able to return from France.

By Easter of that year only Roxburgh Castle remained in the hands of the English. The titular constable of the Roxburgh Castle was Sir William Douglas, who had made a number of unsuccessful attempts to retake it. On the eve of Easter, Sir Alexander and his followers scaled the walls and surprised the occupants who were celebrating the feast. King David II delighted at ridding Scotland of the last of the English, rewarded Sir Alexander de Ramsay by appointing him constable of Roxburgh and Sheriff of Teviotdale. These appointments had aroused strong feelings of jealousy in Sir Alexander's former friend Sir William Douglas who, exacted revenge by seizing Alexander in May 1342, at Hawick and carried him off to Hermitage Castle. Sir Alexander was incarcerated in a dungeon and was left to starve.

Four and a half centuries later, some masons who were engaged in clearing up part of Hermitage Castle discovered Sir Alexander's remains and his horse furniture.

The local minister, who had heard of the discovery, was fortunate enough to recover the curb bridal and a stirrup. These were sent to Sir Walter Scott the famous novelist and historian who was a close friend of the ninth Earl of Dalhousie to whom the relics were given. Although this sad event marked the end of Sir Alexander's glorious contributions to his family's history, his successors have been attributed with equally chivalrous and glamorous contributions to the family and to Scottish history.

Sir William Ramsay of the Dalhousie is recorded by Fordun as having defeated the English at Nisbet Moor in 1355. In 1400 a later Sir Alexander Ramsay withstood a six month siege at Dalhousie laid by King Henry IV of England.



Dalhousie proved to be the last castle in Scotland to be besieged by an English king in person. However, Sir Alexander himself was killed two years later at Homildon Hill, a battle mentioned in Shakespeare's Henry IV (part 1). His great great grandson, also Alexander, was slain at Flodden in 1513. When Mary, Queen of Scots, escaped from her imprisonment at Loch Leven, and raised her standard, the Laird of Dalwolsley is mentioned by chroniclers as one of those who met her at Hamilton and fought for her at Langside.

The family received Royal recognition in 1618 through a charter granting Sir George Ramsay of Dalhousie, his initials can be seen on the wall of the keep. His brother John was a favourite of King James VI of Scotland. In 1600 this John saved the King's life by killing the Earl of Gowrie, who in the famous "Gowrie Conspiracy" was plotting to kidnap the King. As a reward John was granted the titles of Earl of Holderness and Viscount Haddington by King James. In 1633 George's son William was raised to Earl of Dalhousie and Lord Ramsay of Keringtoun. Eight years later he appears to have changed his allegiance, for he fought on the side of the Parliamentarians in the civil war, and commanded a regiment of horses at Marston Moors in 1614. Cromwell himself spent some time at the Castle, using it as his lowland headquarters, with dispatches dated from there in October 1648.

The act of union in 1707 had a slow pacifying effect on Scotland's quarrels with England and the

Ramsay family turned gradually from warfare to politics, although some descendants made notable appearances on battlefields. In 1710 the 5th Earl served with a brigade sent to aid Archduke Charles in the wars of the Spanish succession, another Ramsay was signatory to the capitulation of Quebec to General Wolfe in 1759.

The 9th Earl George, Captain-General of the Grand Order of Archers, appeared prominently in public life, beginning as a colonel in the Cameronian regiment and ending as Governor-in-Chief in North America. He was present at Waterloo, where Wellington having watched him outflank the enemy, was moved to comment "By God that man has more confidence in him than any other general officer in the army".

In 1816 he was appointed Lt-Governor of Nova Scotia and though he continued in this post for only four years, he found time to sow the seed for what now has become one of the finest educational

establishments in Canada - Dalhousie University in Halifax.

Meanwhile, Dalhousie castle had fallen into disrepair. The Civil War, 150 years before, had proved a lasting drain of the family's finances, and when the 8th Earl brought his bride home she had to pick her way to the accommodation across bare beams. The Earl and his lady made considerable improvements, unfortunately not in the best of taste.

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The 9th Earl, with the aid of the architect Burns, undid much of the previous Earls work and restored the building in keeping with its original form. Inside the front door there was formerly an open courtyard across which one went to gain access to the main building through a low door in the keep and up a turnpike stairway. The courtyard was roofed in and converted into an entrance hall; further buildings were added

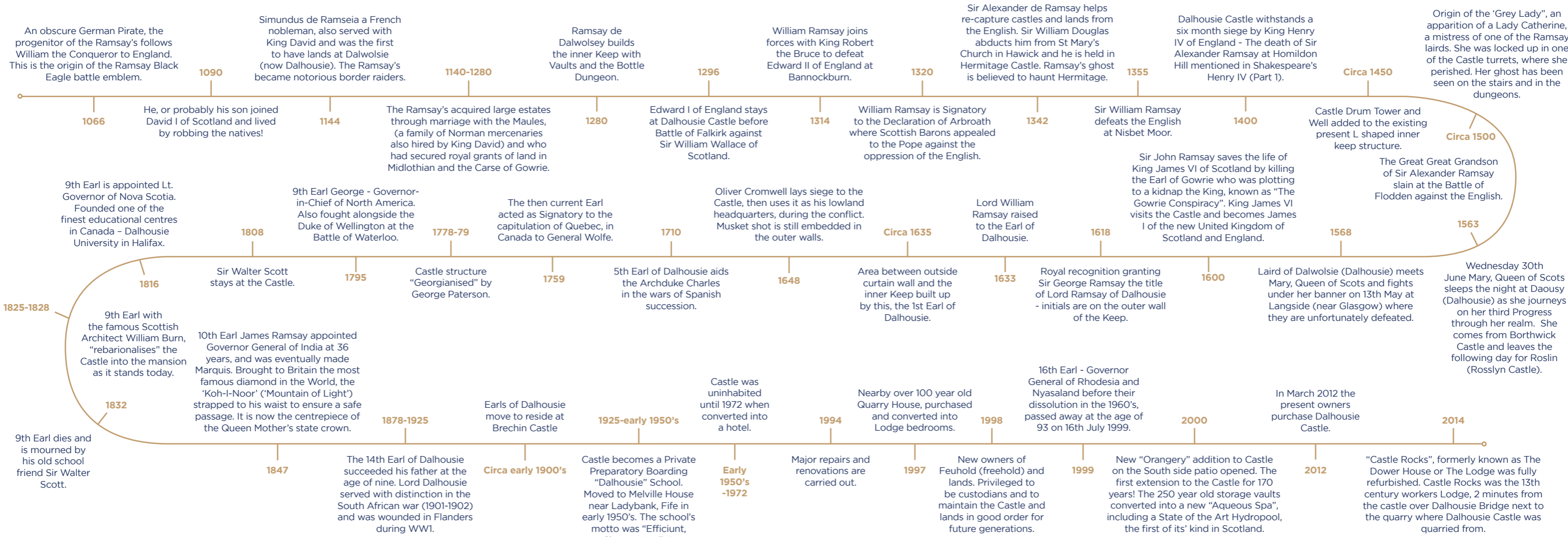
between the keep and outer wall. The 9th Earl died in 1832 mourned amongst others by his old school friend Sir Walter Scott. However, his youngest son James, the first and only Marquis, was to prove to be every bit as accomplished as his forebears. Prominent in debate in the House of Lords, he became President of the Board of Trade at the age of 33, and three years later travelled to Calcutta as the youngest ever Governor-General of India. He died in 1860 still only 48. His remains are buried in the family vault at Cockpen church a few hundred yards from the castle. His life was summed up by Lord Curzon, representing the British Government in India, with the words "No man ever gave his life to his country, more completely or with more consuming devotion". Queen Victoria visits the Castle in 1840 "to take tea with her devoted servant" the 10th Earl.

The Marquis, having no son was succeeded by his cousin Lord Panmure, as 11th Earl. Since the turn of the century, the Earls of Dalhousie

have resided at Brechin castle. The 16th Earl, Governor General of Rhodesia and Nyasaland before their dissolution, passed away at the age of 93 on 16th July 1999.

Dalhousie Castle itself has been leased to a series of tenants. Before its conversion to a hotel in 1972 it was a private Boarding School. The present owner believes that the long tradition of service and hospitality associated with the Castle should continue, and with this in mind much has been done to restore the Castle to its former glory, whilst providing the comforts of living in the later half of the 20th century.







# *Dalhousie Castle*

HOTEL AND AQUEOUS SPA

—— *part of* ——

THE ROBERT PARKER COLLECTION

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