

PEOPLE OF THE CANONGATE - THE HISTORY OF THE MUSEUM OF EDINBURGH BUILDINGS AND THE PEOPLE WHO LIVED IN THEM



Introduction

In the last sixty years great clearances have been made in the Royal Mile. Perhaps the hand of the sanitary reformer has been too heavy, but in the period we mention it has probably got rid of three-fourths of Old Edinburgh. Of the remaining fourth we must be very careful, for historical buildings are a real asset to a city to which visitors come from all the world in increasing numbers.¹

In an editorial headed 'Preserving Old Edinburgh', the Edinburgh newspaper, the *Evening News*, complimented the Town Council for restoring the building then known as Huntly House and opening it, on the previous afternoon, as the City Museum. The writer predicted that the new museum would 'hold visitors to our city for a longer period than in the past, and add immensely to the interest of a city of rich renown'.² The collections of Huntly House Museum, renamed the Museum of Edinburgh in 2001, are housed in a series of buildings fronting the Canongate and stretching down the east and west sides of Bakehouse Close. Along with Acheson House on the south east of the Close, they present unique physical evidence of how life in the Canongate and its neighbouring burgh of Edinburgh evolved over four centuries. Earlier building work was incorporated into these late sixteenth-century dwellings and Acheson House, dating from 1633, replaced previous structures. What can be seen on this site is how medieval buildings erected

¹ *Evening News*, 7 May, 1932

² *Ibid.*

on land stretching from the Canongate Street to what is now Holyrood Road, evolved into a series of dwelling houses and small businesses enclosing a private street or close with stables and byre, gardens and orchard. During its history the site also accommodated a well, brewing facilities and a dung(manure) heap. From the written historical records an almost unbroken line of ownership and later occupancy can be traced. These are not buildings and land belonging to Scotland's aristocracy. On the contrary, they present a picture of burgh life in the capital city. Early proprietors were Canongate and Edinburgh citizens of means; affluent or aspiring burgess craftsmen, merchants and their wives; and lawyers investing in land in the Canongate, Edinburgh and in other parts of Scotland or Ireland. There is no direct evidence to prove that they lived in the buildings they owned. Later proprietors demonstrably bought to rent and some records remain of their tenants. That these buildings in and around Bakehouse Close have survived is near miraculous given what happened to so much of Edinburgh's (and Scotland's) heritage. As the writer in 1932 expressed it:

If much that was authentic Old Edinburgh has vanished, it is a pleasure to know that something is being saved, quite a remarkable achievement in these hard times.

Canongate



Canongate – the part of Edinburgh's Royal Mile that runs from the Netherbow to the Palace of Holyroodhouse – was established as a burgh in its own right with trading privileges by David I sometime between 1143 and 1147. The Canons of the Abbey of the Holy Rude were granted the right to establish a burgh between the church and 'my Burgh' (Edinburgh). This gave

burgesses, the merchants and craftsmen, the right to buy freely in 'my market'.³ The constitution of the burgh consisted of a council of two baillies (magistrates), a treasurer, trade deacons and four other burgesses (citizens) with powers to pass local acts, hold civil and criminal courts, elect craftsmen and freemen; and to hold inquests for the services of heirs to determine whether an individual was the rightful heir. The Abbots of Holyrood gave up their rights to nominate baillies, but kept their entitlement as feudal superiors to the feu duties (payments in lieu of military service) and casualties (payments to the feudal superior when certain events happened such as a marriage) from properties in the burgh. They also nominated to the office of baron baillie (deputy of the baron).

After the religious Reformation of the mid- sixteenth century, the grant of superiorities reverted to the Crown but in 1569 these were allotted to Adam Bothwell, Bishop of Orkney. In 1587 an act of Parliament annexed all church lands to the Crown but excluded certain lands including the burgh of Canongate and parts of Leith. These became the Barony of Broughton and were granted to Sir Lewis Bellenden and his heirs; a burgh of barony being a corporation under a feudal superior or baron. In 1627 Lord Roxburgh acquired certain of the lands of Broughton and the superiorities of Canongate from Sir William Bellenden. By this time, a great portion of the lands and barony of Broughton had been accumulated by the Governors of George Heriot's Hospital. Lord Roxburgh transferred his rights as Lord Superior of the burgh of Canongate to them in 1636. Four years later, the Superiorities of the Canongate and burgh of Broughton passed to the Magistrates and Council of the City of Edinburgh. This is the context for the history of the buildings in and around Bakehouse Close and the people who lived in them.

The site and buildings

In 1951 the Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland published *An Inventory of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of the City of Edinburgh*. The survey of 142 Canongate and the adjoining tenement indicated that, while to all appearances the two buildings were

³ Edinburgh City Archives, *Historical Charter No 1*.

substantially of the seventeenth century, both seemed to include remnants of sixteenth-century work.⁴ The dating of Acheson House (146 Canongate) was less problematic. The date of 1633 flanking a monogram of the initials of Archibald Acheson and his wife Margaret Hamilton above the principal entrance, established that the town-house had been begun, though not completed, by Sir Archibald Acheson of Clonekearney, Co. Armagh, Baronet of Nova Scotia, Lord of Session and Secretary of State for Scotland, who died in 1634. The Inventory recorded that work on the house was finished in haste and that there was evidence of earlier building on the site.



When describing Huntly House, also numbered as 146 Canongate in the publication, the Commission endorsed the opinion of architect Frank Mears. Mears, writing in the 1932 official guidebook to the Museum, had referred to the discoveries made during the work of restoration, of two panels dated 1570, 'one on the street front and the other above the fireplace in the principal room on the first floor'.



⁴ Royal Commission on Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland, *An Inventory of the Ancient and Historical Monuments of the City of Edinburgh* (Edinburgh, 1951), pp.164-5 for 142 Canongate, pp. 166-168 for Acheson House, pp. 168-173 for 146 Canongate.

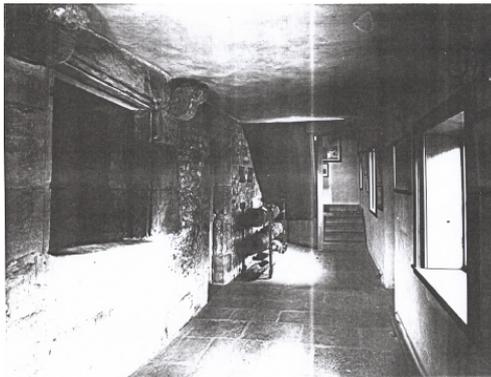
1932 postcard showing 1570 date above fireplace



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Embedded within the main building, however, are considerable remains of an earlier period:

notably part of the front wall with doorway, windows and corbels for a gallery or outside stair; as well as a vaulted room entered by the doorway just mentioned, and the back portion of the entrance hall. Joints in the stonework of the arched passage or pend opening into Bakehouse Close, show the eastward extension of the pre-Reformation frontage.⁵

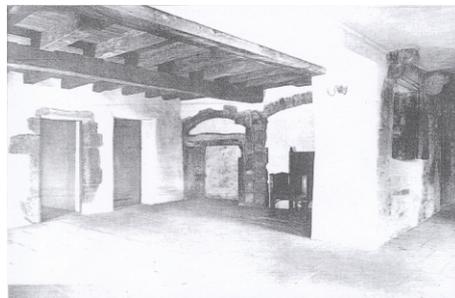


1517 and 1570 walls fronting the street in 1932

⁵ The Guidebook is held in Museum of Edinburgh files.



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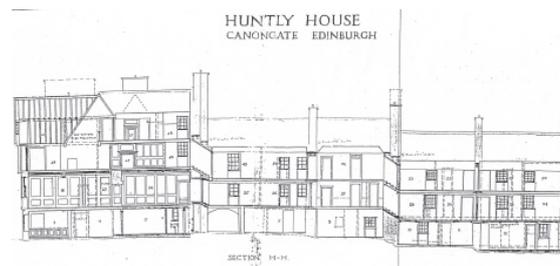
1932 entrance to the museum

The architect argued that the property originally consisted of three narrow garden strips. At the Canongate end of each of these strips was a small dwelling with a gateway at the side or below, opening into the garden or close behind. These dwellings were probably originally constructed of timber, replaced by stone during the seventeenth century. The Commission concurred that:

a row of three such houses is certainly still traceable in the present 'complex', the one in the middle extending a little farther S. than its neighbours, and all three standing back about 10 feet from the present frontage-line.

This present front of the building dates from 1570 when, according to Mears, several of the small houses were unified to form a mansion to a height of two storeys and an attic. He argued that probably at this stage, the vaulted pend was driven through the ground floor of the east house to give access to the back ground. The Commission reckoned that some improvements to the property seem to have been effected in the early seventeenth century but that the main alterations took place between 1648 and 1671. These took the form

of the addition of two timber-framed and harled storeys with three broad gables to the street, jettied out above the eavesline of the existing building with a house on each side of the fore lodging. Further extensions were made by the addition of a pair of three storied tenements with timber-clad projections to the close. These were entered by forestairs leading from the close. During the restoration, walls on the upper floors were opened up to allow continuous access from one building to the next.



Frank Mears restoration plan

The writing of a history of the buildings and the people who lived in them has entailed the piecing together of shreds of evidence culled from a variety of historical sources. No pictorial representation of the buildings has been found prior to the 1817 watercolour by James Skene.



Edinburgh City Libraries

The earlier title deeds to the properties no longer exist and in order to begin

the history, reliance has to be placed on later documents such as the *Inventory of the progress of Writes of three tenements of Land with the yeards and pertinents Lying on the South side of the High Street of the Burgh of Canongate Belonging to the Corporation of Hammermen in Canongate. And Disponed by them to William Wilson writer in Edinburgh and George Innes Cashier of the Royal Bank of Scotland conform to Disposition dated ninth day of September 1762.*⁶ The inventory lists 43 documents in total, and would have been made to concur with the legal requirements relating to the sale of the Hammermen's property in 1762. As will emerge later, the whole area under examination is connected to the Acheson family but as this particular document refers to the property lying on the west side of the currently named Bakehouse Close, it will be investigated first.

West of Bakehouse Close – ‘Huntly House’

In his *Memorials of Edinburgh* Robert Chambers described the building he named as ‘The Speaking House’:

*The mansion on which I venture to confer this title is an old one of imposing appearance a little below Moray House. It is conspicuous by three gables presented to the street, and by the unusual space of linear ground which it occupies. It is a great pity that we should not know who was the builder since he has amused us so much with the history of his feelings during the process of its erection.*⁷

The ‘feelings’ referred to are the inscriptions on a series of panels on the outside of the building.



These read:

HODIE MIHI CRAS TIBI CVR IGITVR CVRAS 1570 – Today to me, tomorrow

⁶ ECA, SL 69.

⁷ Robert Chambers, *Traditions of Edinburgh* (William and Robert Chambers, 1868), pp. 332-3.

to thee; why therefore takest thou thought?



VT TV LINGVAE SIC EGO MEAR(VM) AVRIM(M) DOMINVS SVM – As thou art (master) of my tongue, so I am master of my ears



CONSTANTI·PECTORI RES MORTALIVM VMBRA – Mortal affairs are a shadow to a steadfast heart



SPES ALTERA VITAE – There is another hope of life



The last inscription was inserted in 1932 at the time of the restoration and reads ANTIQUA TAMEN JUVENESCO – I am old but renew my youth

In *Reekiana*, however, Chambers wrote:

*This very antique looking tenement is supposed to have formerly been the town mansion of the Gordon family. It is certain from the statement of Maitland in his History of 1753, that the Dowager Duchess of Gordon then resided in it. It is also certain that George, first Marquess of Huntly, the murderer of the bonny Earl of Moray, had a house in the Canongate in the year 1636 when he sickened in it and on endeavouring to reach his northern territories, died at Dundee.*⁸

This association of the building with the Gordon family was seized upon and embellished by writers and artists throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and the building became known as 'Huntly House'. (The City's Fine Art collection contains nine paintings of 'Huntly House'.) It was not until the 1920s when the Corporation of Edinburgh embarked on its purchase of all the property in Bakehouse Close, that doubts about the original ownership of 'Huntly House' were cast. In an essay in the *Book of the Old Edinburgh Club* volume 14, 1925, William Cowan concluded that there was no satisfactory evidence that the property had ever belonged to the Marquess of Huntly, and drew attention instead to the 1762 inventory of writs which had doubtless come into the Corporation's possession with the 1924 purchase. This inventory is the only evidence of the early ownership of the property as the actual documents are missing.

Sixteenth century

The first of the writs is a charter 'in favours of James Aitchison and Janet Gray his spouse of One Tenement of Land in the Burgh of Canongate' dated 18 June 1517; followed by a sasine of the same date. (A sasine gave legal title and should have been recorded in the notary's protocol book.) Another charter and sasine dated 30 December 1522, granted James Aitchison and his spouse Janet Gray, a tenement of land in the Burgh of Canongate and an annual rent payable out of the said tenement. (Money-lending was forbidden by the Roman Catholic Church, but a way round this was to pay interest on borrowed money in the form of a yearly rent out of land.) There is no mention of who held the lands previously, but a later charter of 10 September 1647 described the tenement of land as containing:

tria tenementa terrarium suorum duo illorum conquesta et acquista fuerunt per

⁸ Robert Chambers, *Reekiana, Minor Antiquities of Edinburgh* (William and Robert Chambers, 1833), p. 245.

- three tenements of land of which two of them were conquest and acquired by umquhyle (the late) James Achieson from umquhyle Malcolm Hall and Gavin Crichtoun and the other by said umquhyle James Achieson from umquhyle James Muir saddler. Who was James Achieson? Here a major problem arises. The surname Achieson and the first names James, John, George, Alexander, Thomas and William appear quite frequently in Canongate, Edinburgh and national records of the sixteenth century; with variations in the spelling of the surname – Acheson, Achesoun, Achesoune, Aitchison for example. (In this text the spelling as it appeared in the document of the time is used.) It is impossible to determine with absolute certainty whether the same name appearing in different documents refers to one person or more; and wording is often ambiguous as, for example, when a father and son with the same name appear together in a charter. Another complication is the description accorded to a person in the various records as John Achieson is designated 'indweller in Canongate', 'burgess of Edinburgh', or 'maister cunyeour.' Is he one and the same, or several persons? By cross-referencing, however, James Achieson goldsmith in the Canongate can be distinguished from his contemporary James Achieson, Edinburgh burgess; as can John Achieson Canongate goldsmith from John Achieson Edinburgh burgess and goldsmith.

Assuming the James Acheson of the 1517 and 1522 charters to have been a burgess of the Canongate and Master of the King's Mint, then he was the son of Alexander Acheson of Salt Prestoun (Prestonpans) and had brothers Alexander, John and David.¹⁰ A contract of 25 November 1629 between James Chalmers and John Menzies divulges an intriguing piece of information. The contract dealt with an annualrent from land on the south side of the High Street beside the Netherbow. This property was 'the tenement once waste and burnt by the English, of the late James Acheson, then to Alexander Acheson of Gosford his brother, then to Alexander his son and now

⁹ ECA, SL149/1/3.

¹⁰ John Balfour Paul, John Maitland Thomson (eds), *Register of the Great Seal*, Vol. III, 1513-1546 (Edinburgh 1883), p. 540, item 2362.

to James Chalmers'.¹¹ James Acheson's first appearance in national records is on 1 March 1525/6 when the Lords of Council in Public Affairs instructed 'James Atzensoune, burges in the Cannongate' to mint 'ane croune of gold and ane grote of silver be prentit, striking and cunzeit, and the sadis croune and grote to have passage throu all the realme'.¹² This was the issue of new coinage which was ratified by Act of Parliament in October with the instruction that James 'shall have freedom and privilege to press gold and silver with the king's Irnis as he did before'.¹³ The description in the text of James Achisone as 'goldsmith maister cunzeor' indicates that he held the position of master of the king's mint but there is no record of his appointment, though the text of the Act implies that he had been undertaking coinage work before 1525. Prior to the issue of new coins, James Achison and his colleagues had to hand over three keys of the assay box of minted gold and silver as well as the coffer containing the old printing irons which would then be destroyed.¹⁴

The Accounts of the various Lord Treasurers of Scotland for the 1530s and 1540s recorded items relating to the work of the mint and James Atkinson maister cunyeor, or when written in Latin, to Jacobus Achisoune Magistro monete.¹⁵ Other entries concerning him ranged from his payments for supplying an ounce of gold to mend the king's crown in May 1532 to delivering to the King (James V) in the Treasurer's name a gold chain, a tablet of gold and a chain and five rubies of different weights for the tablet which he had made (1536).¹⁶ He also took the sword of honour to another goldsmith, Adam Leis for him to mend and the Accounts for 1537 showed his payment for putting unicorns in the King's chain.¹⁷ In 1538, however, Achesoun appears to have refused to coin bawbees and he was replaced by Alexander Orrok Laird of Sillebawby with goldsmiths Richard Wardlaw and Richard Young as coiners. As they failed to perform, James Achesoune by royal

¹¹ ECA, *Moses Bundles II*.

¹² Robert Kerr Hannay (ed.), *Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs 1501-1554* (Edinburgh, 1932), p. 239.

¹³ *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, Vol. II 1424-1567 (London, 1814), pp. 310, 317.

¹⁴ *Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs 1501-1554*, p. 249.

¹⁵ Sir James Balfour Paul (ed.), *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland 1515-1531*, Vol. V (Edinburgh, 1903), pp. 387, 406, 437; vol. VI, 1531-1538, (1905), pp. 16, 244, 378.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

command returned as master coiner in 1540.¹⁸ On the death of James V in December 1542, the succession passed to his infant daughter Mary.

The years 1543- 1551 have been called 'The Rough Wooings' as they encompassed the war between Scotland, England and France over Mary's future marriage. The Treasurer's Accounts reflected the involvement of James Acheson in the upheavals. In 1543 the Treasurer refunded Achisoune the cost of his outlay to James Dog and Patrik Kyncaid for a band of men of war taking the queen's grace forth of Linlithgow.¹⁹ On 27 July Mary had been removed from her birthplace of Linlithgow to Stirling; an operation involving 2,500 horsemen, 1000 armed men and dozens of waggons.²⁰ Then, in 1547, expenditure included payment to James Achison for a 'stane of leid laid in the castle to be bulletis aganis the Inlischen mennis incummin'; and for the cost of the carriage of it from his house to the castle.²¹ It would appear, however, that he and his brother Alexander had somehow been involved earlier in a revolt against the Regent James Hamilton, Earl of Arran who had initially supported an English alliance but then changed his mind in favour of a betrothal of Mary to the French Dauphin. The Earls of Lennox and Glencairn opposed him but were defeated at Glasgow Moor. On 20 March 1551/2 the Regent issued a pardon for James Aitchison of the Canongate and Alexander Aichson the younger, burgess of the Canongate for their treason in consorting with the former William Earl of Glencairn in Glasgow against the Regent.²² Whatever part the two brothers had played in the battle of Glasgow Moor, James had remained in his post as referenced above and in December 1549, the Lords of Council directed immediate delivery to James Atzesone, goldsmith and master coiner of 'all puncheonis for sinking of the irnis to the cunzeing of gold, silver and uthir layit money' which had been in the hands of umquhile Patrik Linday and umquilt Robert Logane of Cotfeld.²³ A later instruction of 22 January 1553/4 ordered 'James Aitchesoun Maister

¹⁸ Ian Halley Stewart, *The Scottish Coinage* (London, 1955), p. 78; R. W. Cochran-Patrick, *Records of the Coinage of Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1876), p. 96.

¹⁹ *Accounts*, Vol. VIII, p. 224.

²⁰ Marcus Merriman, *The Rough Wooings, Mary Queen of Scots, 1542-1551* (East Linton, 2000), p. 127.

²¹ *Accounts*, Vol. VIII, p. 100.

²² James Beveridge ed. *Register of the Privy Seal*, Vol. IV 1548-1556 (Edinburgh, 1952), p. 251, Item 1549.

²³ *Acts of the Lords of Council in Public Affairs 1501-1554*, p. 595.

and in December his house featured in the *Protocol Book of Gilbert Grote*.²⁸ Issobell Gray, spouse of Alexander Achesoun of Salt-Preston protested in the presence of the notary that neither she nor her husband should be liable for four score crowns 'twa les' for the ransom of two English prisoners.²⁹ The memorandum was witnessed in 'the dwelling house of James Achesoun goldsmith in the Canagate' rather than in the notary's writing booth in the High Street of Edinburgh.³⁰ At the same time Johnne Achesone requested a copy of the record. The witnesses included Sir Adam Kilry 'curate of the parish church of Halirudhous', located in the Abbey in this pre-Reformation period. The relationship of Issobell Gray to the Janet Grey of the 1517 and 1522 sasines is unknown; and if the latter's spouse was a Canongate burgher, goldsmith and master of the king's mint then he remarried at some point and had died by 1564. On 18 May Gilbert Grote recorded a transaction relating to Katherine Johnnestoun relict of the late James Achesoun burgher of the Canongate and her husband John Adamsoun burgher of Edinburgh. The Court Book of the Canongate included James Acheson as an absentee in October 1561 and by 1570 named him as 'umquill' (deceased).³¹ He should have appeared on account of his holding lands 'callit Harlaw and Barbourlandis' which lay within the jurisdiction of the Regality of Broughton and Burgh of the Canongate.³² On 16 Dec 1583 a charter under the Great Seal confirmed these lands as being held by James Acheson son of Jonet Heriot and Captain John Acheson, the latter being the brother or nephew of the maister cunyeour.

Following James Acheson and Janet Gray, the 1762 inventory of writs next listed documents concerning John Aitchison and Margaret Hamilton his spouse. Firstly, there is a sasine in their favour, dated 18 June 1568, of five tenements of land lying in the burgh of Canongate. Next is their sasine of 28 July 1574 of a piece of land and yeard sometime pertaining to James Mure,

²⁸ National Archives of Scotland, *Calendar of Deeds 1554-1561*, Vol. I, item 338.

²⁹ Scottish Records Society, *Protocol Book of Gilbert Grote 1552-1573* (Edinburgh, 1914), p. 16.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ Maitland Club, *Miscellany*, Vol. II (Edinburgh, 1840), p. 284; *Court Book of the Regality of Broughton and the Burgh of the Canongate 1569-1573*, trans. Marguerite Wood (Edinburgh, 1937), pp. 297, 377, 412.

³² *Ibid.*

sadler in the Canongate, followed by a charter by the said James Muir dated 31 July 1574. Finally comes a sasine in favour of John Aitchison and his spouse in liferent and John Aitchison their son and apparent heir in fee of six tenements lying in the burgh of Canongate, dated 15 April 1575. Determining the identity of John Acheson senior is more straightforward as his position of master of the king's mint is confirmed by the wording of a contract of 15 April 1576 between John Warrok and his wife Elizabeth in Innerask and Johne Achesone Master Cunyeour to our soverane Lord and his spouse Margaret Hammeltoune for the sale of Warrok's lands in Innerask.³³ Whether James Acheson maister cunyeour was his father, grandfather or possibly uncle is as yet undetermined.

In April 1548 John Acheson received a letter issued under the Privy Seal (4 April) making him 'sinkar of the irnis' of the cunyeouse for 'all the dayis of his life'; and granting him the sum of 'thre scoir of pundis' (five pounds) every month for life.³⁴ This post meant that he engraved the dies for making coins; and he is credited with engraving the earliest testoon, a silver coin worth four shillings with a 'tête' on the obverse.³⁵ On 21 October 1553 'Jehan Acheson tailleur de la monnaie d'Ecosse' exhibited the first testoons to the French Court, having received permission to make dies with a portrait of Mary Queen of Scots.³⁶ Subsequently when the Treasurer's Accounts for 23 December 1558 recorded him as delivering to the 'Quenis grace' 'new cunzeit testonis' he was described as 'maister cunzeour; and the *Register of the Privy Council* noted his resignation as 'sinker of irnis' on 20 November 1559.³⁷

Masters of the Mint received and gave out bullion in accordance with the various acts of Parliament; and they paid the fees and salaries of the workmen and kept accounts of the issues of coinage. Along with the warden, the maister cunzeour superintended the minting of coins and held one of the keys of the chest in which the money was kept. In his new office Acheson gave a year's contract to James Hart and John Hunter to forge and melt a specified quantity of silver at agreed rates as well as providing

³³ NAS, *Calendar of Deeds 1573-1578*, Vol. XV, item 234.

³⁴ *Register of the Privy Seal*, Vol. III, Item 2704, p. 432.

³⁵ Ian Halley Stewart, *The Scottish Coinage* (London, 1955), p. 83.

³⁶ *Proceedings of the Society of Antiquities of Scotland*, Vol. IX, 1870-1872, p. 506.

³⁷ *Accounts of the Lord High Treasurer of Scotland* ed. Sir James Balfour Paul, Vol. X (Edinburgh, 1913), p. 405; *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. V (Edinburgh, 1957), p. 159.

accommodation for them and their servants where they could sit and eat as was customary.³⁸



Palace of Holyroodhouse from Grant, *Old and New Edinburgh*

On 13 July 1559, however, the Earl of Glencairn and the Prior of St Andrews 'with the congregation' went to Holyroodhouse, and removed 'the quenis irnis of the cunzehous' and took them to the earl's lodging in Edinburgh, 'quhairat the quenis grace regent was verry difcontentit'.³⁹ The Lords of the Congregation were a group of Protestant Scottish nobles who supported a reformation of the church according to Protestant principles and a Scottish-English alliance as opposed to those who favoured the Franco-Scottish relationship of the Catholic Regent Mary of Guise, mother of Queen Mary. Glencairn's father (the fourth earl) had fought the previous Regent the Earl of Arran at Glasgow Muir in 1544 but was subsequently pardoned. An agreement made on 23 July between the Lords of the Congregation and the forces of the Queen Regent ensured the return of the 'conyeit money tackin be thame with the coye irins' to the mint at Holyroodhouse.⁴⁰

A degree of mystery occurs around the next few months as John Hairt became master of the mint on 7 June 1561 and according to the Hopetoun papers, John Achesoun 'was displacit of his service quhill he was compellit to pas in France to the quene's maiestie the kingis grace mother' (Catherine de

³⁸ Hopetoun Papers quoted in *Records of the Coinage of Scotland*, p. 89.

³⁹ *A diurnal of remarkable occurrents that have passed within the country of Scotland, since the death of King James the Fourth till the year M.DLXXV*. From a manuscript of the sixteenth century in the possession of Sir John Maxwell of Pollock (Bannatyne Club, 1833), p. 53.

⁴⁰ John Lesley, *The History of Scotland*, (Bannatyne Club, 1830), p. 276.

Medici who was Regent of France).⁴¹ She reinstated him and sent him a letter of gift under her 'greit seill'. On his return from France he recommenced his work and while the Lord Treasurer's Accounts record the amounts coined from 1560-1562 but the Hopetoun papers state that there was nothing coined between 23 December 1562 and 18 December 1565 due to the fall in the price of silver. Acheson, however, did claim from the Treasurer the amount paid to William Makdowgale, 'maister of werk' for the 'bigging of the cunzie hous' within Edinburgh Castle and the beting (repairing) of the cunze hous within the palice of Halierudhous'.⁴² In December 1562 Mary, Queen of Scots and the 'Lordis of Secrete Council' summoned Acheson and others to appear before them with their contracts and licences to win (quarry) lead ore; and on 23 January 1562/3 he and John Aslownane received a licence to 'work and wyn in the leid mynis of Glengoner and Wenlok' with a view to the export to Flanders, or 'ony utheris partis', of 20,000 stone weight of lead ore.⁴³ There is no explanation, however, for the request made three months later in a letter dated 23 April 1563, from Mary Queen of Scots to Queen Elizabeth of England. She asked for a 'safe conduct' for her master cunzeour and three or fewer companions to pass and repass through Elizabeth's realm to France for a year.⁴⁴ Whether he made the journey or not, John Achesone was certainly in Edinburgh in December 1565 when Queen Mary, her new husband Henry (Lord Darnley) now entitled King and the Privy Council instructed the general and the master of the mint and their officers to mint a silver penny (30 shillings) 'callit the Marie ryall' with the inscription 'Maria et Henricus Dei gratia Regina et Rex Scotorum'.⁴⁵ The King and Queen faced each other with Henry's name coming before Mary's. The coin was not in circulation for long and successive issues showed Mary taking precedence over Henry.

⁴¹ Hopetoun Papers quoted in *Records of the Coinage of Scotland*, p.101.

⁴² *Accounts*, Vol. II, p. 250.

⁴³ *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. I, ed. John Hill Burton (Edinburgh, 1877), p. 232.

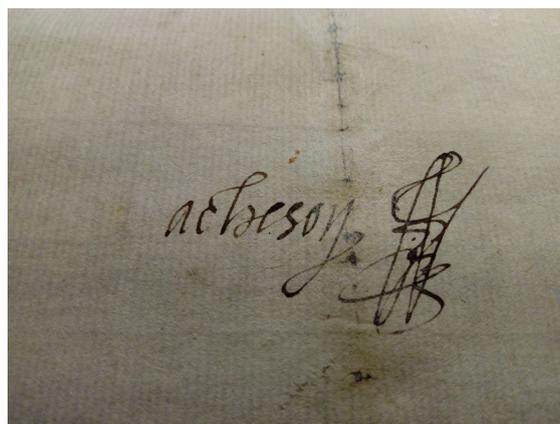
⁴⁴ *Calendar of State Papers relating to Scotland and Mary Queen of Scots 1547-1569*, Vol. II, ed. Joseph Bain (Edinburgh, 1900), p. 6.

⁴⁵ *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. I, p. 413.



National Museums of Scotland

In August 1565 John Acheson suffered a setback over his contract to mine lead ore in Glengoner and Wenlok. As he and his partner John Aslowane had exceeded the quantity allocated to them to export, their licence was revoked and given to the Earl of Athole along with the excess amount already mined.⁴⁶ The two men appealed unsuccessfully against the decision.⁴⁷ The matter, however, did not rest there as John Acheson, John Aslowane's widow and her son took their case to the Privy Council on 1 September 1574.⁴⁸ The Council continued to debate the matter and no decision had been recorded by 6 May 1575; but the licence for Glengonar appears to have been granted to others not involved previously.⁴⁹ On 4 June 1572, however, John Acheson reached an agreement with Robert Richardsoun, commendator of St Mary's Isle with the consent of the Regent for James VI, the Earl of Mar, whereby the master coiner would receive silver to produce half mark and 40d pieces. The contact bears the signatures of Mar and Acheson.⁵⁰



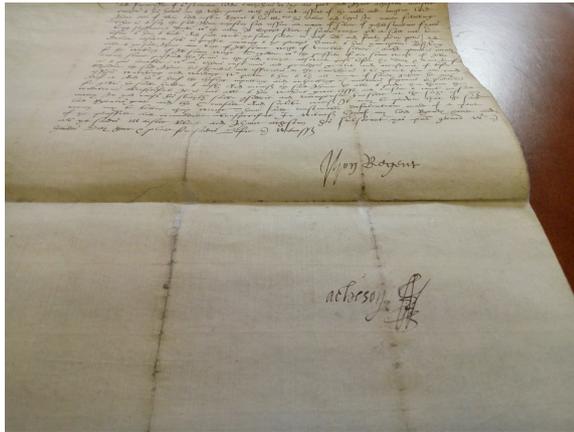
⁴⁶ *Register of the Privy Seal*, Vol. V, part I, James Beveridge and Gordon Donaldson (eds) (Edinburgh, 1957), item 2290, p. 658.

⁴⁷ *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. I, ed. John Hill Burton (Edinburgh, 1877), pp. 433-6, 483.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, (Edinburgh, 1878), pp.396-7.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 448, 507.

⁵⁰ NAS, GD124/10/35.



National Archives of Scotland

On 18 February 1575/6 the succeeding Regent, the Earl of Morton contracted with Abraham Peterssoen, 'Flemyng' to mine gold, silver, copper and leid within the bounds of Craufurdmure, Robertmure and Hedirland with the exception of Glengonar and Orknay. The detailed terms included specified amounts to be delivered to the Mint at Holyroodhouse where Abraham and his workmen were to be lodged; and the witnesses to the contract included John Achesoun who would receive five parts of the profits and who would be one of the overseers of the work. He also became 'be common consent', treasurer of the enterprise.⁵¹ Subsequent agreement on 5 March between the Earl of Morton, John Acheson 'maister of his Hienis cunye' and Abraham Petersoun hammered out the fine detail with regard to the coining of silver into half merks and 40 penny pieces and the minting of gold.⁵² Five shillings for each merk weight of coined money was allocated to Acheson for the expenses of coining from which he had to give Petersoun two deniers weight of silver for each merk melted; two shillings being allowed to the master of the mint for each ounce of coined gold from which Petersoun would receive nine pence.

In March 1577/8 the eleven years' old King James issued a proclamation that the Regency of the Earl of Morton had ended and that he now accepted the burden of the administration. Morton subsequently became President of the Privy Council and on 4 August 1578, the Counsellors renewed the appointment of John Achesoun as 'magistrum nostre monete'.⁵³

⁵¹ *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. II, pp. 506-14.

⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 598-601.

⁵³ *Register of the Privy Seal*, Vol. VII, ed. Gordon Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1966), item 1608, p. 255.

He then had to play his part in tackling the lack of Treasury funds, by the manipulation of the coinage as the government had decided to enhance the face value of coins already in circulation. A proclamation of 29 July instructed people to bring certain coins to the mint to be countermarked – ‘stampit’– and reissued at a higher face value. Thus the 30s piece struck between 1565 and 1571 was received at the mint for 32s 6d and reissued at 36s 9d making a gross profit of 4s 3d on each coin, part of which went to defray the master coiner’s expenses. In December 1578 therefore, Acheson received £38 from the gross profit of £2,559.⁵⁴ Refusal to accept the countermarked coins became a capital offence although the whole process took longer than expected and deadlines for taking coins to the mint had to be extended.

On 5 October 1580 John Acheson on behalf of the Treasurer Lord Ruthven, contracted with George Hay ‘sclaitter’ that Hay among other work, should mend and point the east quarter of the palace and mend the ‘eist syde of the counyehous’.⁵⁵ However John Acheson’s tenure as master of the mint had not much longer to run and he became embroiled in events beyond his control. The master of the mint not infrequently paid accounts owed by the Treasury on the promise of reimbursement from future mint profits. For example, Acheson had to wait for two years (1567-1569) for the sum of £1,100 to be repaid to him. On 24 December 1579 the Privy Council pressed him to lend money from the mint to pay the Keeper of Liddesdale the sum of £1000, the treasurer being directed to see to his repayment.⁵⁶ Next Acheson undertook liability for other official debts including a total of £4,036 17s 6d due to eight merchants and burgesses of Edinburgh to whom he gave a bond on 8 February 1582 for payment, receiving in turn Ruthven’s own bond to pay him by 1 August. All might have been well had not the government decided to hand over the mint operations to a syndicate led by the Lord Provost of Edinburgh who promised, unsuccessfully as it turned out, to issue a new coinage and to pay a ferm of 100,000 merks over three years, much of which would pay off the king’s debts including £40,000 owed to Ruthven.

⁵⁴ *Accounts of the Treasurer of Scotland*, Vol. XIII, Charles Thorpe Innes and Athol I. Murray (eds) (Edinburgh, 1978), pp. xxiii-xxiv, 249.

⁵⁵ *Accounts of the Masters of Works for Building, and Repairing Royal Palaces and Castles*, Vol. I, ed. Henry M. Paton (Edinburgh, 1957), p. 308.

⁵⁶ *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. III, p. 252.

Acheson had refused to join the syndicate and on 25 April 1581, declined to relinquish the keys to the cunyie house, workhouses and dwelling houses unless 'he be compellit'.⁵⁷ Subsequently Ruthven defaulted on his repayment to Acheson who now had creditors pressing him for a total of £10,000 with the result that he first sought sanctuary beyond the Girth Cross and then entered into ward in Dumbarton Castle until 29 September.⁵⁸ While there he received a daily allowance of 40s from the treasury 'for himself, horse and boy'.⁵⁹ He remained in office until replaced by Thomas Acheson the assayer on 15 February 1581/2.⁶⁰ John immediately took issue with his successor over the outstanding debts and raised a complaint before the Privy Council on 14 April 1582. The Lords directed Thomas Acheson to pay off the sum owed from 'the reddiest of the proffite of the said cunyie for the said John's relief' but only after paying the wages and arrears of the king's guards, the 'twa thousand pundis to Johnne Robertson, merchant for his Heines clothing' and four thousand pounds to Robert Abircrumby his Highness' sadler.⁶¹ Ruthven gave John Acheson another bond for the sum due to him but the likelihood of his recovering the money owed to him receded when Ruthven, now Earl of Gowrie, conceived the 'Ruthven Raid', namely the kidnapping of the 15 years' old king. The conspirator lords held James VI for 11 months with Gowrie as head of a government which devised a programme of cost cutting measures to curb court extravagance. When James escaped, he pardoned Gowrie but due to his continued plotting, the Earl was eventually executed for high treason in 1584.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 375.

⁵⁸ The Girth Cross marked the western point of the five mile sanctuary circumference of the Abbey.

⁵⁹ *Accounts*, Vol. XIII, p. xxx.

⁶⁰ *Register of the Privy Seal*, Vol. VIII, p. 112.

⁶¹ *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. III, p. 480.



James VI in 1595, National Galleries of Scotland

Meanwhile, John Acheson remained out of pocket but not out of determination to recover his losses and on 10 December 1585 he petitioned Parliament in the knowledge that his sovereign was not unaware of 'his miserable state' and how 'he is fallin in this calamitie not by his awin deid nor default'.⁶² He rehearsed the facts citing that he had been induced to take upon himself several debts which were set against the security of the cunzie but that he had been removed from office because he refused to be a partner with certain merchants in 'the making of such money as proved thereafter unprofitable'. With the fall of the Earl of Gowrie he had no hope of relief, becoming a debtor compelled to flee his own house and to seek sanctuary in the girth (the sanctuary area of Holyrood Abbey) and 'is wreikit bayth in body and guides his bairnis remaning unhelpit'.⁶³ As the king was restoring their inheritance to the Earl's heirs, he petitioned that he be repaid the sums they now owed to him on their father's account. Parliament agreed and reaffirmed the decision in 1587; and in July of that year established a commission for the setting of the quantity of bullion to be brought to the cunyeouse, the committee consisting of the depute treasurer, the general of the mint, Thomas Acheson present master cunyeour and John Acheson last master cunyeour. However, following numbers of decrees by the Court of Session, it took another act in 1594 in favour of John Acheson, son of the now deceased John

⁶² *The Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, Vol. III, (London, 1814), p. 402.

⁶³ *Ibid.*

Acheson, to have the latter's debts discharged.

During his lifetime John Acheson accumulated wealth not only through his work as master of the mint. On 2 July 1564 he received the gift of the marriage of Margaret daughter of the late Johnne Murray which meant that he, rather than the crown, would have some influence in her choice and would receive increased revenue as a result. The Privy Council gifted him the fruits of the chaplainry of St Anthony in 'his hienes park beside Edinburgh' on 9 October 1575; these having been unpaid since the death of the pre-Reformation incumbent of the chaplainry.⁶⁴ He also practised his craft as a goldsmith, supplying, for example, a silver basin and laver (ewer) for the Lord Regent in December 1568; and there are several accounts of him being involved in financial transactions such as contracts and obligations.⁶⁵ Meanwhile he accumulated a property portfolio. As well as his acquisition of the six tenements of land on the south side of the Canongate street and the land in Inveresk, he also seems to have owned property on the north side of the Canongate according to several citations in the *Court Book of the Regality of Broughton and the Burgh of the Canongate*.⁶⁶

Between the years 1561 to 1582, John Acheson appeared on several occasions as a member of the Canongate burgh council or as one of the two baillies elected annually to hear cases in the burgh court. The tollbooth of the Canongate provided the setting for a mini drama in October 1566, when Robert Stewart, commendator of Halyrudhouse appeared with a letter under the signet instructing:

the pretended baillies to cease from usurping office and the inhabitants to obey the baillies nominated by the commendator and to desist from making baillies by election or voting. Whereupon he showed that it was the queen's will that John Acheson master coiner, John Oiswald and Thomas Hunter should serve as baillies for the ensuing year and they accepted office protesting that it should not be 'prejudicial to the liberties of the said gait'.⁶⁷

This incident appears to have occurred in this year only, as on 3 October 1567, the burgh court ordained that in future the new council would be chosen

⁶⁴ *Register of the Privy Seal*, Vol. VII, ed. Gordon Donaldson (Edinburgh, 1966), item 296, p. 45.

⁶⁵ *Accounts*, Vol. XII, ed. Charles Thorpe McInnes (Edinburgh, 1970), p. 181; see for example, *Calendar of Deeds*, 26 April 1563 and 19 June 1571.

⁶⁶ *Court Book of the Regality of Broughton and the Burgh of the Canongate*, transcribed Marguerite Wood (Edinburgh, 1937), pp. 44, 180.

⁶⁷ NAS, GD214/192, 25 October 1566.

by the old and that both old and new councils would select the baillies and the rest of the officers 'so that they be all of the Kirk of God'.⁶⁸ As a burgh counsellor, Acheson was involved in the measures which had to be enacted on the outbreak of plague in Edinburgh in 1568. In October he had responsibility for visiting diligently every morning 'the houses and persouns quha ar seik' from 'Cuthbert Fergusson passand to Sanct Johnes croce on baithe the sydis of the gait'; and in the next month, was among those chosen 'for sustenatioun of the puir on the hillis', the group being instructed to convene at nine 'houris or thairbye in Johnne Achiesion foirland'.⁶⁹ Plague victims were banished to Holyrood Park, a practice reiterated by James VI on 22 February 1602 in letters commanding the baillies of the Canongate to keep order and hold courts for that purpose, should the plague come and to place the infected persons in the part of 'our park of Edinburgh' which they have been accustomed to do'.⁷⁰



Canongate Cross 2018

Some indication of the complexity of post Reformation reallocation of former church lands can be seen in two examples dealt with by the Canongate burgesses. In August 1569 John Acheson participated in the granting of a piece of land pertaining to the altar of the Virgin Mary in the parish aisle of the Abbey of Holyroodhouse where the parishioners of the Canongate worshipped before and after the Reformation.⁷¹ Then on 9

⁶⁸ Maitland Club, 'Extracts from the Records of the Burgh of the Canongate' in *Miscellany* Vol. II (Edinburgh, 1840), p. 302.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.313-4.

⁷⁰ *Book of the Records of the Ancient Privileges of the Canongate*, ed. Marguerite Wood (Edinburgh, 1955), p. 35.

⁷¹ NAS, RH6, *Calendar of Charters*, Vol. X, item 2158.

September 1580 he, along with fellow Baillie Johnne Hart and minister John Brand, petitioned the Privy Council in a complaint they raised against William Robertson, schoolmaster of Edinburgh. The complainants protested that the burgh of the Canongate had had grammar schools 'not onlie sen the Reformation of Religion bot also in tyme of papistrie and past memorie of man'.⁷² However William Robertson 'be sum particular solistatioun' had purchased from the king the confirmation of 'ane papisticall gift gottin in tyme of blindnes' by which he had now prevented the Canongate schools from operating.⁷³ The Privy Counsellors, however, found themselves not competent to judge the matter which they remitted. The Canongate burgh seems to have won its case as they appointed James Davidsoune as its 'schoolmaister' on 26 June 1584.⁷⁴

The Canongate Court Book recorded the name of John Acheson in various capacities including being a witness to a contract on 20 May 1569; valuing a ring with regard to the payment of a debt in June; and verifying a silver piece in September. On 28 June 1570 he took action for injury against Johnne Moresoun gardinar who promised that he would 'nevir in tyme cuming injure the said Johnne Achesoun in worde or deid under the pane of ten pundis money'; and in the following month the Court ordered Johnne Richesoun culteller to pay his debt to the maister cunyeour.⁷⁵ In 1574, in a list of accounts relating to the burgh of Canongate, two payments were made to Acheson for his fee; and in October 1578, the baillies and counsall ordered the principal charter of the burgh 'to be tane furth of the box and delyverit to Johnne Achesoune to the effect my Lordis Regentis grace mey have inspectioun thair of'.⁷⁶ There is, however, a puzzling case pursued in the Court Book in 1569-70 by John Acheson maister cunyeour for the non-payment of an annual rent from a:

tenement of land of the late William Mure burgess of Edinburgh now pertaining to James Mure burgess of the said burgh and Marioun Murray his spouse and to John

⁷² *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. III, ed., David Masson (Edinburgh, 1880), p. 305

⁷³ *Ibid.*

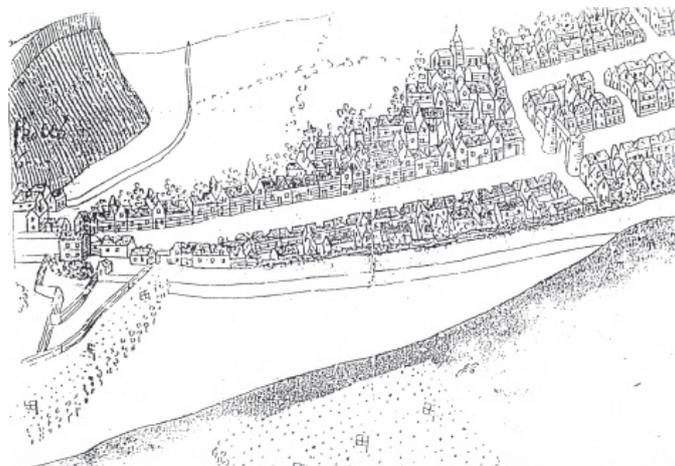
⁷⁴ Maitland Club, 'Register of the Burgh of the Canongate' in *Miscellany*, Vol. II (Edinburgh 1840), p. 353.

⁷⁵ *Court Book of the Regality of Broughton and the Burgh of the Canongate*, 1569-1573, transcribed Marguerite Wood (Edinburgh, 1937), pp. 227, 232.

⁷⁶ *Extracts*, p. 344.

Mure their son and heir lying in the said burgh of the Canongate on the south side of the High Street thereof.

It would appear that John Acheson's father (first named George and thereafter John) had died in July 1534 and his son and heir had not been paid the annualrent (interest) for 35 years, because of his non-entry. That is, he had not been recognised as the heir and paid his fee to the feudal overlord, Adam, Bishop of Orkney and Zetland and Commendator of the monastery of Holyrood. The reason given for the non-entry of John Acheson was that 'at the birning of Edinburgh the hail tenement libellit wes brint be the auld inemeis of Inland'. The assault of Hereford's army on the Canongate and Edinburgh with the subsequent burning and looting took place in May 1544. The tenement in question was described as lying on the south side of the High Street between the lands of the late Elizabeth Barker, widow of the late Thomas Glen on the east, the land of the late Patrik Mcturk on the west, the Strand and a piece of backland of the late Robert Rannald on the south and the High street on the north. A John Acheson was one of the named masters who petitioned for the granting of a Seal of Cause to the Canongate Hammermen in 1535/6 but the late John Acheson mentioned above had died in 1534.⁷⁷ If he were the son of James Acheson then John Acheson master of the king's mint would have been the latter's grandson. Whatever the facts John Acheson maister cunyeour won his case in 1570 for the payment of the arrears.



Canongate from Calton Hill, 1544, Bannatyne Club Miscellany

⁷⁷ *Ancient Privileges*, p. 36.

At which point in his life John Achieson embraced the Protestant faith is unknown but by 1564, he had become an elder of the Canongate congregation worshipping as in pre-Reformation times, in an aisle of the Abbey of Holyroodhouse. Designated as an elder in August 1564, he was assigned to the visiting of the sick and for burials. The 'gait' (street) being divided into four, Achieson had in his care the 'fourt quarter from the Abbey yet(gate) to Sanct Johnnis Croce'.⁷⁸ In December, he was present at a hearing of a complaint by James Hert against John Brand the minister; and in February 1564/5, participated in the reconciliation process. He donated to the poor fund and attended the hearing of grudges at the tollbooth in December 1565. In the trial for slander of James Hart and Robert Mure, the latter took Achieson as a supporter. On 18 August 1566 the kirk session instructed John Achison and Cuthbart Fergison as elders, to inform the bailies why 'the haill gait aboundis with harlottrie' and charged them 'in the name of the Lord Jesus' to put order therein 'as they wald be jugit memberis of his kirk'.⁷⁹ Later in the year, a trial took place of two harlots for not having obeyed the sentence of banishment; the punishment being branding and head shaving. Baillie Acheson and his colleague demonstrated some leniency on this occasion, responding to the pleas for mercy of Issobell Hill and Katherin Linston who promised to go from the burgh within three hours. On 21 December 1566, however, Acheson himself stood accused by the kirk session of condoning 'harlottrie within his own household'; the culprits being his servants Johne Wolson and Elyne Purdie.⁸⁰ He defended himself by declaring:

I knew nocht that thay had carnall deill afoir marriag, nor knew nocht the said Elin to be with barn(child) at the completing of the said band, and gif I had knawin it I suld have schavin the same to the kirk.⁸¹

He was absolved of blame. John also appeared several times as a witness at baptisms and weddings and he himself registered a child called David on 20

⁷⁸ *The Buik of the Kirk of the Canagait*, 1564-1567, ed. Alma Calderwood (Edinburgh, 1961), p. 5.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

January 1564/5; and on 1 November, 'ae m(adin)'.⁸²

Before being described as 'umqhuile' in the 1594 Act cited above, John Acheson's last appearances in the records occur in the 1580s. Robert Scott 'writer before the Lordes of our souverane Lordis Counsal' contracted an obligation to Johnne Achesoun Burgess of the Cannongait' on 15 October 1586; and on 29 July 1587 Parliament named Acheson as a member of a bullion commission.⁸³ In October 1583 Acheson had stood as surety for George Newtoun, Inglisman but when on 5 March 1587/8 the Lords of the Privy Council heard an action of George Newsoun, servitor to the English ambassador and Johnne Achesoun of the Cannogate against Robert Prestoun, burgess of Edinburgh and factor for Rannald Blanche, Frenchman and against the bailies of the Canongate, John Acheson's son and heir John represented him. While there is no indisputable proof that John Acheson, master of the mint and burgess of the Canongate ordered the 1570 renovation of the property sited on what is now the west side of Bakehouse Close or that he lived there; yet that is the most likely explanation and he certainly owned the property.

Interestingly, Maitland's 1753 *History of Edinburgh* claimed that:

anno 1567, the Mint-Office of Scotland seems to have stood on the southern side of the Canongate, Opposite to the present Canongate Church and Tolbooth, which now I have discovered to be the House in the High-street, wherein the Duchess Dowager of Gordon at present resides.⁸⁴

While totally erroneous, this notion may have arisen because of the early ownership by the Acheson goldsmiths; and certainly John Acheson and his wife Margaret Hamilton were people of considerable means, well able to afford a house with 'speaking inscriptions'.

The property remained in the hands of the Acheson family for the remainder of the sixteenth century but underwent some division. John Acheson son and heir of the former maister cunyeour, disponed to James Acheson his brother his easter tenement of land on the south side of the

⁸² Ibid., pp. 79, 99.

⁸³ *Calendar of Deeds*, Vol. XXVI, item 22; *Acts of the Parliaments of Scotland*, p. 517.

⁸⁴ William Maitland, *History of Edinburgh from its foundation to the present time* (Edinburgh, 1753), p. 156.

Canongate on 4 May 1592.⁸⁵ This may have been the reason for the creation of the pend which now separates east and west Bakehouse Close. Both brothers had connections with the mint but John had land in Inveresk and frequently received the description 'portioner of Inneresk'. A portioner could indicate someone who occupied part of a property originally divided among co-heirs, or who possessed a small portion of land so the use of the word here is intriguing, given that his parents had bought land in Inveresk from John Warrok in 1576. The area of that land amounted to four oxgangs (around 60 acres) with various houses and buildings according to an Instrument of Resignation dated 7 June 1596. In this document John Scott, son and heir of the late Robert Scott, writer and the late Margaret Achesoun, his spouse, declared that John Achesoun, son and heir of the late John Achesoun, burgess of the Canongait had paid 3,600 merks for the redemption of the lands of Inneresk.⁸⁶ This repurchasing of the property probably related to the earlier 'obligation' Robert Scott had given to Johnne Achesoun senior. On 30 November 1602, the Lords of Privy Council heard a complaint by Johnne Achesoun, 'portioner of Inneresk' and other tenants there, against George MacIngyllar for 'damage to their grass and corn'. The 'said Johnne Achesoun' appeared for himself and the other pursuers but the defender did not turn up and was 'denounced rebel'.⁸⁷ In addition to this property, between 1611 and 1616 'Joannes Achesone portionaries de Inveresk, haeres Johannis Achesone Magistri Numismatis Regis patres', acquired 10 acres of land near the monastery of Sante Crucis near Edinburgh, namely Holyrood.⁸⁸

Various records refer to the portioner of Inveresk often in connection with a bond of relief – an obligation entered into by a debtor to repay a guarantor – or the discharge of a debt. Thus on 29 July 1597 George Fawsie and John Aitchison portioner of Innerask were named regarding such a bond to George Heriot and Thomas Cunningham burgesses of Edinburgh in respect of a further bond by Fawsie, Achesone, Heriot and Cunningham to Margaret Ochiltree relict of an Edinburgh burgess, for 500 merks.⁸⁹ George

⁸⁵ NAS, GD421/2/1.

⁸⁶ NAS GD90/1/213.

⁸⁷ *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. VI (Edinburgh, 1884), p. 487.

⁸⁸ ECA, *Moses Bundles*, 333.

⁸⁹ NAS, GD421/1/2/19.

Mureheid, Merchant Burgess of Edinburgh registered his discharge to Johnne Achesoun, Portioner of Inneresk on 9 July 1617.⁹⁰ On 12 July 1604 the Privy Council recorded the names of those standing as financial security for Johnne Achisoun should this be necessary; and a few days later Mark Achiesoun, portioner of Prestoun gave caution on pain of 1000 merks for Johnne Achiesoun, portioner of Inveresk not to harm James Richardsoun elder of Smetoun or James Richartsoun his son.⁹¹ Promising not to harm a named individual under pain of a fine was a common occurrence and involved the portioner of Inveresk on another occasion. On 18 July 1606 Mr Johnne Hairt the elder, bailie of the Canongate and others including Johnne Achiesone portioner of Inueresk, pledged sums of 1000 merks and 500 merks not to harm Edmond Smyth tailor burgess there.⁹²

Like their father, John and James Acheson were both goldsmiths and in common with him had an involvement with mining ore. On 17 December 1607 'Sir Bewis Bilmure, knicht, Johnne and James Achesonis and Edmond Doubledae, esquyer' appeared before the Privy Council with a missive letter from King James VI and I. The Achesons and George Cunnyngname, another goldsmith received an order for digging out of the silver mine (apparently just discovered by the Lord Advocate) a certain quantity of ore, to be transported by sea to London 'for the better assay thereof'; Sir Johnne Arnott, knight, 'thesaurair depute' and Thomas Achiesoun, 'maister of oure cunyeehous' being assigned to accompany them.⁹³ From 1595-1602 John Acheson had held the position of warden of the mint. As warden he had custody of the irons and dies and attended the allaying of metals, entering in the registers the amount of bullion brought to the mint and the money coined. His duties included the supervision of sizing, making and weighing the money and taking custody of one of the keys of the chest in which the money was secured until tested.⁹⁴ In 1608, however, Acheson became general of the mint after the death of Sir Archibald Napier of Merchiston and he seems to have held that position until the 1630s. As general he supervised all the mint officials,

⁹⁰ NAS, *Calendar of Deeds* Vol. 29, item 131.

⁹¹ *Privy Council*, Vol. VII pp. 558, 559.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 644.

⁹³ *Privy Council*, Vol. VIII, pp. 22-3.

⁹⁴ *Records of the Coinage*, p. xxv.

checked their work and the weight and fineness of the coin; audited the books, registers and accounts and attended the trial of the pyx – the testing by a panel of judges of coins selected at random which afterwards the general of the mint could claim. Soon after his appointment, John Acheson, Thomas Acheson master coiner and other officials raised an action against John Napier of Merchiston for the restoration of certain warrants and other articles which his father Sir Archibald had borrowed from the cunyiehouse.⁹⁵ Among the documents handed over to the Clerk of Council by Napier, was a warrant dated 26 July 1577 under the hand of James Earl of Morton, regent, deciding the difference between Johnne Achesoun, master cunyeour and Abrahame Patison, metter ‘anent the inlaik of metals’.⁹⁶ As seen earlier, the two men had been in partnership in 1575/6.



John Napier, National Galleries of Scotland

John Acheson portioner of Inveresk married three times; his first wife being Alison Fawsyde whose family had land in the Tranent area and with members of whom Acheson had financial dealings.⁹⁷ Alison’s testament was registered in the Commissariat Record of Edinburgh on 3 February 1603 by which time her husband had remarried.⁹⁸ According to the *Edinburgh Register of Marriages* Acheson wed Rachel Mawer, daughter of Walter Mawer of

⁹⁵ *Register of the Privy Council*, Vol. VIII, pp. 400-402.

⁹⁶ *Privy Council*, p. 676.

⁹⁷ NAS, GD421/1/2/19.

⁹⁸ NAS, CC8/8/37.

Mawerstoun on 12 May 1602.⁹⁹ A third wife named Rebecca Ramsay was named in a charter of 13 February 1637 along with John his son and heir.¹⁰⁰ Another son named Alexander became an apprentice to Mark Achesoun, tailor on 15 March 1620.¹⁰¹ Years before this event, however, John Acheson, Portioner of Inveresk had sold his property consisting of a 'Great Tenement, Yeard and others' to Mr William Sharp of Ballendoch. Three documents were cited in the 1762 Inventory, namely a contract of sale by John Aitchison dated 21 June 1609; an instrument of sasine following thereon, dated 22 June 1609; and a charter by John Aitchison Portioner of Inveresk, in favour of Mr William Sharp, dated 1 July 1609.

As has been seen, James Acheson was a goldsmith and Canongate burgess. On 10 December 1586, an audit of the cunyiehouse was delivered to King James VI and his Council by Sir Robert Melville of Murdocairny and Mr David Carnegie of Culluthy. They reported that, accompanied by Michael Gilbert, goldsmith burgess of Edinburgh, James Achesoun, son of Johnne Achesoun, sometime maister cunyeour and certain utheris, they had met in the mint and examined the boxes and assays in them; and were confident that the general, warden, counter-warden, the said Johnne and Thomas Achesone, the assayers, sink, melter, forger of the gold, silver and alloyed money and all other officers of the cunyiehouse 'have dewlie, truelie, faithfullie and uprichthie discharged their duties touching the said assay'.¹⁰² In the following year on 29 March 1587/8, Thomas Foulis, 'sinker of the cunyiehous' brought a complaint against James Acheson to the Privy Council. (A sinker cut the die or stamp for coining money.) Foulis argued that James Achesoun, son of Johnne Achesoun in the Cannogait, having lately obtained a licence for 'prenting of countaris', was interfering with his rights of office. The Lords found that Acheson's licence in no way prejudiced Foulis' gift of the office of sinker and dismissed his complaint.¹⁰³ The documents delivered up by John Napier in 1611 included a warrant of the king and treasurer commanding the officers of the cunyiehouse to receive from James Acheson goldsmith the irns and

⁹⁹ Scottish Records Society *Edinburgh Register of Marriages* (Edinburgh, 1905), p. 1

¹⁰⁰ *Register of the Great Seal*, Vol. IX, p. 231.

¹⁰¹ SRA, *Edinburgh Register of Apprentices, 1583-1666* (Edinburgh, 1906), p. 2.

¹⁰² *Privy Council*, Vol. IV, pp. 127-8.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, pp. 265-6.

other instruments whereby he had licence to print.

James Aitchison was listed as the King's goldsmith in the Lord Treasurer's Accounts for the years 1591-1595 and on 30 October 1598, under the description of 'his Majesty's goldsmith', he and Gavin Smyth, an Englishman, received the exclusive privilege for 21 years, of making and using certain pumps invented by them for raising water out of mines and quarries. They warranted the grant because they had 'bestowit thair haill age, bigane in the studie of guid and profitable sciences'.¹⁰⁴ On 15 February 1602/3, 'Sir Archibald Napier of Edinbillie, knyght, waived his right to the grant of the contents of the year's assay box in favour of the relief and support of 'distressit and indigent personis' within the burgh of Edinburgh and to James Acheson, goldsmith in the Cannagait; but with the proviso that a precedent should not be created for the future rights of the general of the cunziehous.¹⁰⁵ Acheson had already received a royal warrant gifting him the assay pieces for the sum due to him 'for his pane and travell tane in mending and repairing of the tua milnis and the cuttar thairof quhilk wrocht the lait pennie and tua pennie peces of copper'.¹⁰⁶ He had suggested that the king should visit the cunziehous which greatly required repair.

On 4 May 1592 John Acheson conveyed to his brother James his easter tenement of land on the south side of the Canongate. James seems to have been involved in various financial transactions in the 1590s which may have been related to this acquisition or to his activities as a goldsmith of the Canongate. He gave George Heriot the younger an obligation for £325 12s as payment for 'certaine jewellis and goldsmith work' on 3 December 1596.¹⁰⁷ Previously on 21 July 1596, he signed a heritable bond to Heriot for 600 merks which meant that he had borrowed this amount from the Edinburgh goldsmith.¹⁰⁸ He must, however, have been attempting to raise further sums as Heriot petitioned the Lords of Council on 24 January 1598/9 for an inhibition against James Acheson's alienating the tenement from which the annualrent was security for the 600 merks owed by the bond; alienation being

¹⁰⁴ *Privy Council*, Vol. V, p. 490; *Acts of the Parliament of Scotland*, vol. iv, p. 176.

¹⁰⁵ *Privy Council*, Vol., VI, p. 540.

¹⁰⁶ NAS, RH4/13, 12 January 1602/3.

¹⁰⁷ NAS, GD421/1/2/18.

¹⁰⁸ NAS, GD421/2/5.

an act whereby one person transferred property to another. Clearly Acheson had already done this, or was about to do so, as letters of reversion in favour of James Acheson goldsmith burgess of the Canongate by Francis Galbraith servant to the king and Agnes Bowie his spouse bear the date of 27 May 1600. Acheson had redeemed his debt of 1000 merks and therefore reclaimed his heritable property described as being on the south side of the Canongate between the tenement of John Achesone his brother on the east and west, the high street on the north and the great yard and orchard of John Achesone on the south.¹⁰⁹

At some point James and his daughter Margaret (assuming him to be the same James Acheson) received grants of Crown pensions from James VI and I, for they and many others including Sir Archibald Napier, were summoned in 1625, to appear before the new king Charles I, to account for the reasons for these pensions 'out of his Majesties cofferis' – 800 merks for James and 400 merks for Margaret.¹¹⁰ Like his father, however, for many years Acheson bore the brunt of an unpaid debt, namely £4120 lent to Patrick Stewart, Earl of Orkney who had been executed for rebellion in 1615. Acheson petitioned King James who indicated his intention to allow him the office of 'keeping a tole booke in all the 'fares and mercats of this kingdome in full satisfaction of his said debt'.¹¹¹ This grant had been confirmed by Charles I but unfortunately for James Acheson, the Edinburgh magistrates on behalf of the royal burghs, objected as being prejudicial to them. Acheson tried again and on 31 March 1631 the Privy Council, including Sir Archibald Acheson, wrote to Charles on his behalf, stating that the 'poore man' was 'utterlie undone for want thereof these manie yeeres bypast'.¹¹²

On 19 July 1624 the Lord Deputy of Ireland Lord Falkland wrote to the Duke of Buckingham from Dublin Castle in favour of James Acheson 'coming over to attend his Majesty for the confirmation of his allowance and for direction to proceed in the erecting of a mint in Ireland'.¹¹³ In his enclosed petition the said James Acheson recited his 'labour and expense these eight

¹⁰⁹ NAS, B66/25/278. This document is held by Stirling Council.

¹¹⁰ *Privy Council*, second series Vol. I, pp. 187, 204.

¹¹¹ *Privy Council*, second series, Vol. IV, p. 196.

¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹¹³ *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland in the reign of James I 1615-1625*, Charles W. Russell and John Prendergast, (eds) (London, 1880), p 520.

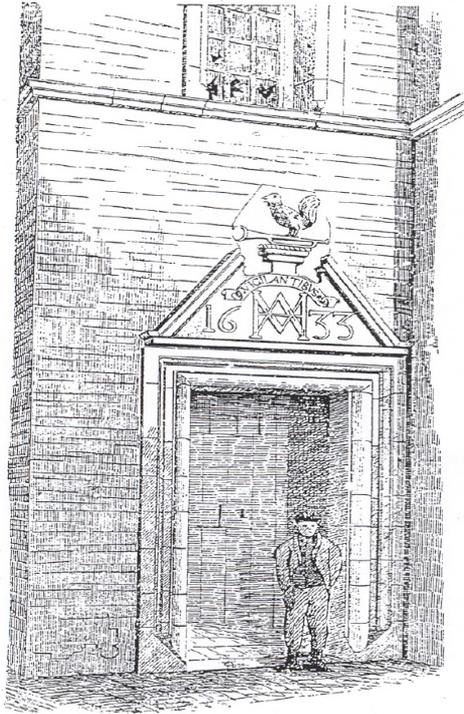
years past in attending the business for the erecting of a mint in Ireland' and desired that 'the same work may be performed' stating that 4000l. of bullion might be brought into the mint every year.¹¹⁴ This James Acheson may be the Canongate goldsmith, given his involvement with the Scottish mint and his connection with Irish landowner Sir Archibald Acheson but there is no evidence.¹¹⁵ Nothing happened, however, and complaints to the Irish Committee of the Privy Council in 1641 included a plea to establish a mint in Ireland.¹¹⁶ Whether James Acheson ever resided in Ireland is unknown but Archibald Acheson, one of the two Secretaries of State for Scotland, must have purchased Canongate property from him before or around 1630. The 1630 tax roll for the burgh of the Canongate lists James Acheson and John Sharp but against these names are placed Sir Archibald Acheson, Patrick Hart and the heirs of Sir John Sharp indicating that these men now owned the lands; and all three paid stent money for the building of a manse for the minister of the Canongate.¹¹⁷ The first two proprietors were located on the east of what is now Bakehouse Close and the latter on the west side. Sir Archibald Acheson commissioned the building now known as Acheson House which bears his initials, those of his second wife Margaret Hamilton, the Acheson crest of a cock standing on a trumpet and the date 1633.

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ He appears to have had a son Thomas who petitioned against being confined in the Gatehouse in 1625. Ibid., p. 586.

¹¹⁶ *Calendar of State Papers relating to Ireland of the reign of Charles I*, ed. R. P. Mahaffy (London, 1901), pp. 286, 383.

¹¹⁷ *Ancient Privileges*, pp. 24, 32.



D. MacGibbon and T. Ross, *The Castelled and Domestic Architecture of Scotland* (1887-1892)

The relationship between Archibald Acheson and the Acheson goldsmiths is confusing with much contradictory information to be found in conflicting sources, especially with so many family members bearing the same forenames but the Canongate branch was undoubtedly related to those having land in east Lothian, in particular, Alexander Acheson of Gosford. Archibald was not, however, a son of Alexander Acheson of Gosford as alleged in 1875 but rather of Captain Patrick Acheson.¹¹⁸ An Inquisito de Tutela (inquiry about safeguarding) of 6 November 1584 refers to Alexander Acheson of Gosford as next of kin to Archibald Acheson son of the former Captain Patrick Acheson.¹¹⁹ A Captain Patric Acheson received a licence from the Privy Council to levy troops for the Low Country on 22 October 1577, as also did Captain Henry Acheson.¹²⁰ Patrick may have been the son of Alexander Achesone of Prestoun who married Isobel Grey and whose testaments were registered on 1 and 2 February, 1568/9. He married Martha

¹¹⁸ Charles Rodgers, 'Sir John Scot of Scotstarvet, The Staggering State of Scottish Statesmen from 1550-1650' in *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, Vol. I (London, 1875), pp. 348-352.

¹¹⁹ *Notes and Queries*, 5 October 1913, p. 330.

¹²⁰ *Privy Council*, Vol. II, p. 709.

Drummond and died at Markethill Co. Armagh in 1617. His eldest son Archibald, born in Edinburgh in the early 1580s, became an advocate on 31 January 1606/7.¹²¹ On 22 June 1608 he acknowledged receipt of a legacy of 300 merks from the estate of Sir John Schairpe of Houston who had married Euphane Achesoune daughter of Alexander Acheson of Gosford; and he seems to have attempted to gain favour with the king on behalf of Sir William Scharpe, son of the deceased John Schairpe¹²²

On 13 September 1608 Andro Auchmuchtie merchant burgess of Edinburgh gave surety for £500 and £400 respectively for Mr Archibald Atcheson advocate and Harie Atcheson his brother 'not to harm Johnne Richardsoun' a fellow merchant.¹²³ At some point subsequently, both brothers decided to invest in property in Ireland and on 25 July 1609 Harie Achesoun in Edinburgh enrolled for shares amounting to 2000 acres in the Plantation of Ulster.¹²⁴ In 1607 the estates of the Earls of Tyrone and Tyrconnel had been confiscated by James VI and I, who, in 1609, invited 'undertakers' to apply for allocations of land on which they undertook to settle English or Lowland Scottish inhabitants. Demand exceeded the land available, with a few peers and lords competing with lairds in Ayrshire, central Scotland, Fife and East Lothian, as well as Edinburgh and Glasgow burgesses. Approximately 81,000 acres were distributed among 59 Scottish 'undertakers'. Henry Acheson received Irish denization (citizenship) on 30 July 1610 and the grant of 1000 acres at Coolemalish in the barony of Fewes, County Armagh.¹²⁵ Archibald Acheson seems to have acquired 1000 acres called Corodownen or Carrowdownan from John Brown the first patentee. A letter from King James to Lord Chichester dated 21 April 1613 instructed the latter to accept from John Browne of Gorgienull in Scotland a surrender of the manor of Corodownen, to make a new grant to Archibald Acheson and also to settle a controversy between the Primate of Armagh and Henry Acheson over a

¹²¹ *The Faculty of Advocates in Scotland*, ed. Francis J. Grant (SRS, 1943), p. 2.

¹²² NAS, GD30/1138. GD30/1695. Euphane died on 9 July 1590 and Shairp on 17 October 1607.

¹²³ *Privy Council*, Vol. VIII, p. 672.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 330.

¹²⁵ David Dobson, *Scottish-Irish Links 1575-1725*, part 3 (Baltimore, 2006), p. 2.

certain 'balleboe of land'.¹²⁶ Henry also purchased 2000 acres called Clancarry from Sir James Dowglas on 11 May 1611 and sold it to his brother Archibald. According to Pynnar's *Survey of Ulster* in 1618-9, Archibald Acheson had 2000 acres called Clancarry on which a castle had begun to be built.¹²⁷

It is uncertain how much time Archibald spent in Ireland for he continued to practise as a advocate in Scotland and had a 'dwelling house in Edinburgh'.¹²⁸ He married twice, his first wife being Agnes Vernor of Edinburgh with whom he had a son Patrick, made a denizen of Ireland along with his father on 12 February 1618. Margaret Hamilton, daughter of Sir John Hamilton of Claude, first Lord Paisley, became his second wife, probably in 1622; George being the son of this second marriage.¹²⁹ Knighted on 1 April 1620, Sir Archibald was made a Master of Chancery (Ireland) on 27 June 1621 and gained admittance to King's Inn Dublin on 16 November. When Charles I succeeded to the throne in 1625 Sir Archibald Acheson became Member of Parliament for Haddington Constabulary and a Senator of the College of Justice, indicating that he must have continued to work in Scotland. A letter from the Earl of Winton to the new king on 16 February 1626, informed him that Sir Archibald Aitchison of Glencairn, who had been appointed a Lord of Session, was absent from Scotland, but that his place was reserved until he returned.

Further duties awaited him as a Commissioner for the Surrenders and Teinds, for Charles I had, under an edict of Revocation, cancelled previous grants on 3 February 1627.¹³⁰ More honours and responsibilities followed with Acheson's appointment on 6 November 1627 as a Privy Councillor, a Commissioner of the Exchequer and Secretary of State, along with Sir William

¹²⁶ *Calendar of the state papers relating to Ireland of the reign of James I*, C.W. Russell and John P. Prendegast (eds) (London, 1877), p. 338: *Calendar of Patent Rolls of the Chancery of Ireland* LXXXL-45 (Dublin, 1800), p. 251.

¹²⁷ Nicholas Pynnar, *Survey of Ulster 1618-19* reproduced in George Hill, *An Historical Account of the Plantation of Ulster* (Belfast, 1877), p. 568.

¹²⁸ *Privy Council*, Vol. IX, . p. 670, vol. X, pp. 694-5, 706,707, 778, 780

¹²⁹ *Complete Peerage*, Vol. II (Exeter, 1902), p. 334. Other sources give 1619 as the date of the second marriage.

¹³⁰ *Privy Council*, New Series Vol. I, ed. David Masson (Edinburgh 1899), pp. lii, 236, clxxxii, 511.

Alexander who was designated 'principal Secetar'.¹³¹ Created a Baronet of Nova Scotia on 1 January 1628, the Town Council of Edinburgh honoured Acheson by making him a burgess and guild brother, along with the Earl of Monteith, and on 19 December 1628, hosted a banquet for them. A further emolument came in 1629 with the resignation by John Earl of Carrick of a yearly pension of £6000 (£500 sterling) which the king then granted to Sir Archibald Acheson.¹³²



Sir Archibald Acheson, National Galleries of Scotland

As a Secretary of State and Privy Counsellor, Acheson's work in 1628 included examining proposals concerning the fortification of Leith, revising and printing statutes and receiving all copies of a suppressed sermon; and in keeping with his office he had to attend the king at Whitehall.¹³³ In the period from 8 January 1628/9 to 27 July 1630 he attended meetings of the Privy Council on 32 days. Examining persons accused of witchcraft involved him in January 1628/9 when he and colleagues interrogated Alexander Drummond, prisoner in the Edinburgh tollbooth, who levied allegations against Lady Samuelson of 'compassing the death of her husband by witchcraft'.¹³⁴ Possibly around this time Archibald acquired the eastern Acheson tenement

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, Vol. II, pp. 107-8.

¹³² NAS, GD220/6/1823 (2).

¹³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-8, 366, 444.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, Vol. III, pp. 2, 563, 584.

of land with the purpose of building a residence suitable for his elevated status. Following his appointment to the newly formed Privy Council on 27 March 1631, Sir Archibald Acheson objected to being called Second Secretary and succeeded in having the word deleted, but with the proviso that he should have no vote in Parliament during the principal secretary's lifetime.¹³⁵ Further work involved the consideration of the 'plantation' of Nova Scotia; and discussions with the master of the cunyhous regarding the issue of copper coinage. The subject of Charles I's proposed visit to Edinburgh for a Scottish coronation, involved much discussion over the arrangements. Acheson undertook an inspection of Holyrood kirk in January 1632/3 and in May served on the commission to investigate the privileges due to the High Constable, the Earl of Erroll, at the coronation ceremony.¹³⁶

The date of 1633 on the outside of Acheson House might imply the completion date of the building, although the renovation work of the 1930s seemed to indicate that the house had not been entirely finished. There is no evidence that Acheson took up residence, although he continued to fulfil his state duties until August 1634. These included attendance on a committee concerned with trade and fishing; and another dealing with the punishment of the slayers of deer, roe and wild fowl.¹³⁷ On 31 July 1634 he and other Privy Councillors examined proposals for the establishment of a hospital for old and lame soldiers – with the result that they decided that a license should be given to Colonel Robert Munro to collect voluntary contributions from all colonels and officers.¹³⁸ Grievances from Zetland (Shetland) were considered on 1 August. Sir Archibald subsequently departed for Ireland where he died on 9 September 1634 at the house of Sir William Sempill at Letterkenny County Donegal. He was buried on 8 October 1634 at Mullaghbracke, County Armagh, Ireland. A letter from the king to the Privy Council, dated 8 January 1635/6, ordered his widow to deliver up the seals, warrants and papers concerning the office of Secretary to the Earl of Stirling. Consequently Sir Lewes Lawder, Acheson's son-in-law, delivered two signets in gold and one in

¹³⁵ Ibid., Vol. IV, pp. 188, 273, 276.

¹³⁶ Ibid., Vol. V, pp. 7, 107.

¹³⁷ Ibid., pp., 177, 323.

¹³⁸ Ibid., pp. 323, 336, 349, 349.

silver and four keys of four presses which contained the writs and warrants.¹³⁹ Sir Archibald's testament was registered in the Commissariat of Edinburgh on 1 April, 1635. Sir Patrick Acheson as first son, inherited the property and promptly received letters of charge dated 14 August 135 from Mr John Sharpe fiar of Houston, advocate, ordering Dame Margaret Hamiltoune, relict of Sir Archibald Achesone of Glencairn and Sir Patrick Achesone his son, 'to remove from the yard belonging to the said Mr John lying against the tollbooth in the burgh of Cannongait'.¹⁴⁰ Sharp had inherited the property once owned by John Acheson and considered there to be encroachments on his land. At some point before his early death in 1638, Sir Patrick sold his Edinburgh inheritance to Patrick Wood, an Edinburgh merchant burgess and guild brother, (entered 20 December 1623, by right of his wife Issobell, daughter to the late James Speir), thus ending the Acheson family ownership of this part of the Canongate.



Main Doorway. Photograph taken in 1855
by Dr. Keith, kindly lent by the author

Earliest photograph of Acheson House, taken by Thomas Keith, 1855

West of Bakehouse Close

¹³⁹ *Privy Council*. Vol V, p. 484.

¹⁴⁰ NAS, GD30/1023.

At some point in the 1590s or early 1600s, John Acheson disposed of the property on the west side of what is now Bakehouse Close to the Scharp family. John Scharp had forged a highly successful career as an advocate in the second part of the sixteenth century, with a range of clients over Scotland; and a portfolio of loans given on security of land. He purchased property in Whitehorn and in Angus where he settled the lands of Ballindoch on William, one of his sons. In 1590 he bought the estate of Houston in Uphall parish, Linlithgowshire, where around 1600, he began building a tower house. Knighted in 1604, while in London as a commissioner for discussions on a parliamentary union between Scotland and England, Scharp married three times, his second wife being Euphane Acheson, daughter of Alexander Acheson of Gosford and Helen Reid.¹⁴¹ When his eldest son James became mentally ill, his second son John, also an advocate, was named heir to the Houston estate and designated 'feuar of Houston'. Sir John Sharp died at Houston on 10 October 1607. In December of that year Sir William Sharp of Ballindoch married Margaret Dundas but by 29 May 1611, he had died, leaving a son John.¹⁴² A precept of Clare Constat of that date in John Sharp's favour, followed by a sasine of 3 July, recognised him as heir to his father's property on the west of Bakehouse Close.¹⁴³ John Sharp feuar of Houston, William's brother and Helen Sharp his sister acted as executors of the estate with John being a 'tutor' to his nephew; that is his guardian and administrator of his estate.¹⁴⁴ As such, on 28 April 1618 Sharpe of Houston paid Dame Margaret Dundas, relict of the deceased Sir William Scharpe of Ballindoch, 500 merks for the board and schooling of her son.¹⁴⁵ Subsequently, however, there appeared to be issues regarding debt as, in both 1624 and 1627, letters of horning and pounding were issued against John Sharp, son and heir of the deceased Sir William Sharp of Ballindoch and John Sharp his tutor.¹⁴⁶

By 1628 John Sharpe of Ballindoch himself had died and the next few years saw various dealings among his numerous next-of-kin as to their share

¹⁴¹ NAS, GD30/766, 14 December 1574.

¹⁴² NAS, GD30/387.

¹⁴³ 1762 Inventory

¹⁴⁴ NAS, GD30/1236; GD30/984.

¹⁴⁵ NAS, GD30/1176.

¹⁴⁶ NAS, GD30/992, 8 June 1624; GD30/999, 31 July 1627.

of the inheritance.¹⁴⁷ Some indication of the occupancy of John Acheson's former tenement occurred on 29 June 1630, when Colonel Harry Bruce and the tenants of the lodging and tenement of land lying on the south side of the High Street of the burgh of the Canongate, issued letters of charge against Helen Sharp, Margaret, Jean, Isobel and Elspeth Dunbar and Patrick Dunbar spouse of the said Margaret, heirs in line of the deceased John Scharpe of Balindoch, to produce titles showing them to be invest in the said lands and tenement.¹⁴⁸ Two years later, on the resignation of the other heirs of their interests, Mr John Sharpe younger, of Houston received 'a new infeftment' of the lodging and tenement lying in the Canongate on the south side of the High Street.¹⁴⁹ The heirs had obviously settled for a cash payment for in 1634, Margaret, Jean, Isobel and Elspeth, heirs portioners of the deceased John Shairpe of Ballindoche, son and heir of Sir William Sharp, with the consent of their spouses, acknowledged receipt of 375 merks from Mr John Sharpe younger, fiar of Houston, advocate, in the name of Mr John Shairpe elder, of Houston, his father.¹⁵⁰ Mr John Sharp, feuar of Houston, Advocate, received an instrument of sasine dated 28 February and registered 23 April 1635.¹⁵¹ John Sharp elder died in 1638, his son John being acknowledged as heir on 30 October 1638; a sasine following on 15 January and 13 March 1639. John Sharpe younger, feuar of Houston unfortunately also inherited debts; and an 'Inventory of writs of the great tenement in the Cannongait belonging to John Scherp 1639-1649', charts the process of actions against him by Richard Guthrie, writer to the signet, on behalf of himself and other creditors.¹⁵² By a Decreet of Apprising dated 21 July and recorded 7 August 1646, Guthrie acquired 'the whole foresaid Heritage Lying on the Southside of the Cannongate and others'.¹⁵³ On 3 and 24 August 1647 (registered 11 September, with a charter dated 10 September and a sasine of 14 September 1647), Richard Guthrie sold the property to the 'Trade of the Hammermen of

¹⁴⁷ NAS GD30/1007.

¹⁴⁸ NAS, GD30/1011.

¹⁴⁹ NAS, GD30/173, 5 July 1632.

¹⁵⁰ NAS, GD30/1283, 18 August-21 December 1634.

¹⁵¹ 1762 Inventory.

¹⁵² NAS, GD30/592.

¹⁵³ 1762 Inventory.

the Burgh of Canongate and their Successors in the same trade'.¹⁵⁴

¹⁵⁴ Ibid; NAS, GD30/592.