

VILLAS OF THE ESK

Notes on

Penicuik House, Barony House and Mavisbank

Prepared for a Pre-Conference Tour on 30th August 2012

for

The Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain

TOUR D: VILLAS & LANDSCAPES - PENICUIK, MAVISBANK & BARONY HOUSE

This Pre-Conference day focuses on Sir John Clerk (1676-1756), 2nd Baronet of Penicuik and Baron of the Court of Exchequer, a remarkable figure by any standard, creator of the landscape and many of the garden structures at Penicuik and of the villa and policies at Mavisbank. Other figures come into the story, most notably his sons James (1709-82), 3rd Baronet and the designer of Penicuik House, and John (1728-1812) always referred to as John Clerk of Eldin. The executive architect at Mavisbank was William Adam (1689-1748) and the mason-builder of both houses and most of the other structures at Penicuik, John Baxter senior (c1710-c1770). John Baxter junior (c1735-1798) was supported by the Clerks to study in Rome from 1761-67 and became an honorary member of St Luke's Academy in 1766; he was a fine draughtsman, but his architectural career, perhaps because he was of the same generation as the younger Adams, failed to live up to expectations.

The first John Clerk (1611-74), who had made a fortune as a merchant in Paris from 1634, dealing in everything from mousetraps to fine art, returned to Scotland in 1646 and purchased the Barony of Penicuik in 1654. His son, also John was born in 1649, travelled in France and the Low Countries, was created a Baronet of Nova Scotia in 1679 and died in 1722.

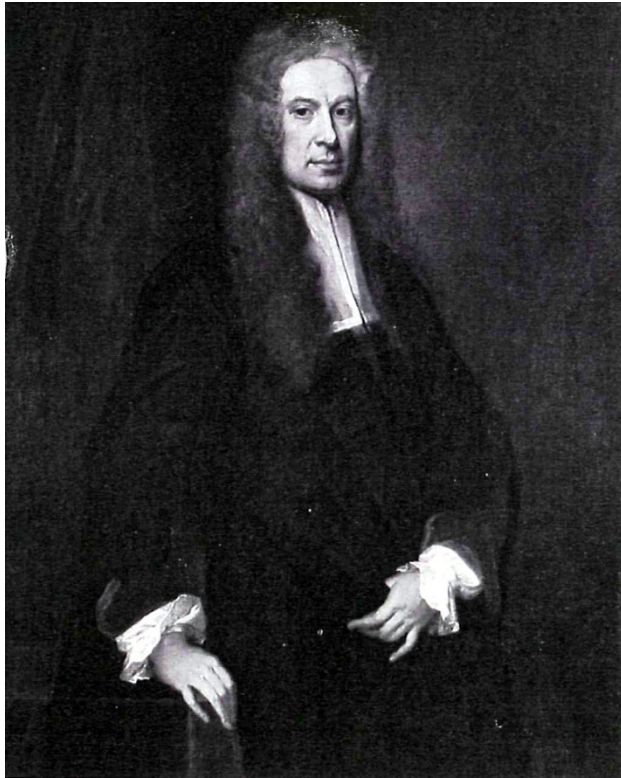
This John Clerk, the second laird and 1st Baronet, designed the family mausoleum in Penicuik following the death of his first wife, Elizabeth Henderson in 1683. According to Howard Colvin, "the vault is contained within a massive rectangular structure surmounted by a pyramid which originally supported an urn-like finial inscribed with the initials EH. That Clerk had the image of an Antique tomb in his mind is obvious, but it is less easy to pinpoint a specific source, for he can hardly have been aware how closely his mausoleum resembled some late Roman examples in Syria. Tombs consisting of a rectangular base with a pyramidal top were illustrated by Pirro Ligorio in his *Antiquae Urbis Imago* of 1561, but it is doubtful whether this somewhat esoteric source could have provided Clerk with a model for his mausoleum at Penicuik as it certainly did for some of the Roman buildings (including mausolea) in the classical paintings of Nicholas Poussin".

The 2nd Baronet (b.1676) learned Latin and Greek at the local school in Penicuik and, when he was sixteen continued his education at Glasgow College – which he didn't rate highly! In 1694, aged eighteen, he went on to study Civil Law at Leyden, where he also sought private tuition in Mathematics, Philosophy, Drawing and Music. At Leyden, he established a lifelong friendship with Herman Boerhaave, who was to become one of the most celebrated physicians, mathematicians and philosophers of his generation. He spent his summers at The Hague, learning to speak French, Dutch and Italian.

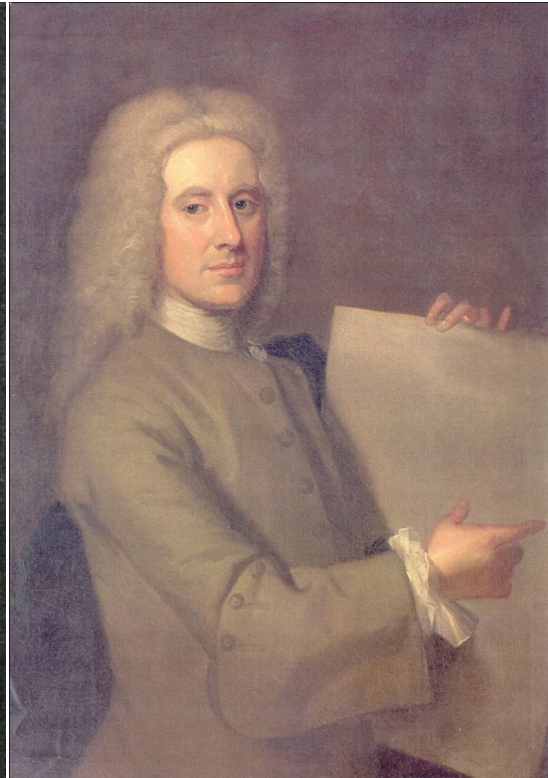
In 1697, now aged 21, he left for three years on what has been described as one of the most ambitious 'Grand Tours' of his generation. He travelled through Germany to Vienna, where he was received by the Emperor, apparently on account of his love of music. He went on to Rome, where his "two great diversions . . . were musick and antiquities". He studied composition and harpsichord under Corelli and Pasquini, under the patronage of Cardinal Ottoboni. He clearly charmed everyone and moved in high circles, only setting off for home in 1698 at the "earnest desire" of his father! He visited Naples and his route took him through Florence, Pisa, Leghorn, and Genoa from where he went by sea to Marseilles and thence to Paris and back to Leyden. He arrived back in Scotland via London at the end of 1699, after five years abroad. "I had studied Civil Law", he wrote in his Memoirs, "I spoke French, Italian very well, but particularly Dutch . . . I had applied much to Classical Larning, and had more than an ordinary inclination for the Greek and Roman Antiquities. I understood pictures better than became my purse, and as to Musick, I rather performed better, particularly on the Herpsechord, than became a Gentleman".

Clerk's reputation as a composer of music in the Italian classical manner rests mainly on works written during his time in Rome, or even in Leyden, though he continued to compose after his return home. Boerhaave wrote the Latin texts for several of his Cantatas, including that of the splendid "Leo Scotiae Iritatus" which commemorated the failure, partly due to Spanish and English hostility, of the Scottish colonial adventure at Darien on the Panama isthmus in 1695-1700.

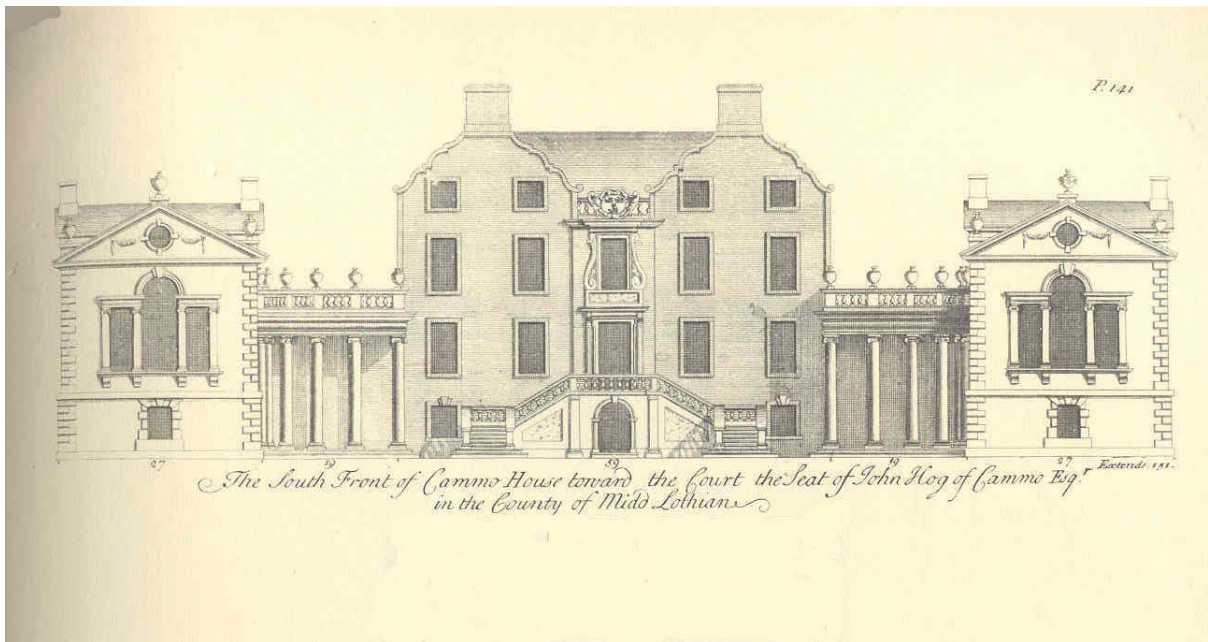
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Sir John Clerk (William Aikman)



William Adam



Cammo House (Vitruvius Scoticus)

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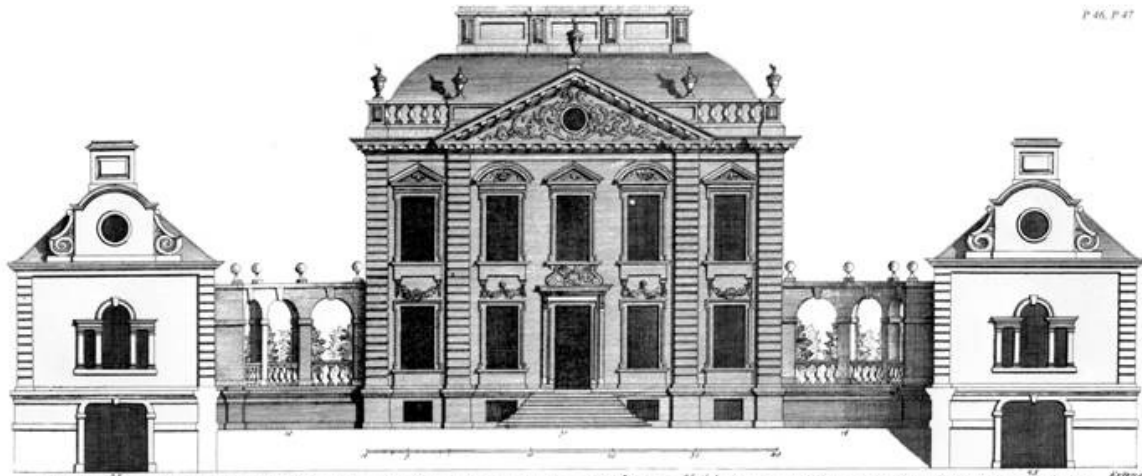
While he had been away, his father had added a number of adjoining properties to the estate, including the Barony of Lasswade. Much of the estate at the end of the 17thC had been little better than moorland, cut into by the river North Esk, with rectangular enclosures and some formal gardens around the old house. These are clearly shown on a plan of 1687 by John Adair, with later annotations in the 2nd Baronet's hand showing his own 'improvements'. Almost immediately on his return, the young John Clerk seems to have applied himself to transforming the landscape: "about the year 1699, when I came from abroad", he wrote, "I took great delight in planting nurseries and, tho' I lived not always with my father, yet in the Spring seasons, I keep't half a dozen men at work for two or three months yearly." Much later, he claimed to have planted between five and six hundred thousand trees. His other early ambition to rebuild the old house came to nothing, however. This may not have been only because of his father's resistance, for in a letter to Boerhaave of 1731 he explained his affection for his childhood home: "it shows an old and wrinkled brow, for here my father and grandfather lived and died: but it is clean and bright and more suited to the wants of my family than if it had been finished with all the arts and ornaments of Vitruvius".

He also set about developing his legal and political career. In 1700 he was admitted to the Faculty of Advocates, in 1701 he married a daughter of the Earl of Galloway, who was also a cousin of the Duke of Queensberry. Through the patronage of his new wife's family, he became Member of Parliament for Whithorn in 1703 and was almost immediately appointed to a Commission to examine the public accounts of Scotland. Being a young man of ability surrounded by 'placemen', he ended up doing much of the work and drafting the reports. His 18 year old assistant in this task, George Drummond, went on to be the Lord Provost of Edinburgh who founded the Royal Infirmary in 1738 and the New Town in 1767. The Commission established his reputation and in 1705 he was appointed one of the Scottish Commissioners for the negotiation of the Act of Union with England. Some historians regard Clerk, though still relatively junior, as having been influential in a process in which he certainly believed. He became one of the first Scottish Members of the House of Commons, but was a year later appointed one of the Barons of the new Scottish Court of Exchequer to administer the financial affairs of Scotland. This was an appointment for which he was well equipped and which gave him a public salary and professional prestige as well as time to develop his own many interests.

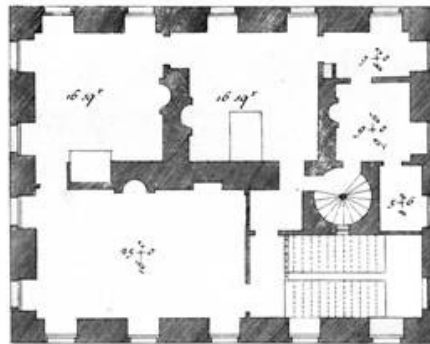
John Clerk's wife had died in childbirth in the first year of their marriage and in 1709 he married Janet Inglis, of the Cramond family. 1710 he bought the villa estate of Cammo on the West side of Edinburgh, not far from Cramond, and from which he could ride easily to the town. In parallel with his on-going planting at Penicuik, he immediately set about creating a new landscape setting for the villa, which had been built by John Menzies, merchant, to a design possibly by Robert Mylne, in 1690. Conveniently, he described his work there in a memorandum and plan dated 1722, the year in which his father died; the Cammo estate was sold and he returned to take up his responsibilities at Penicuik.

Once again, he decided not to rebuild the old house at Penicuik, but instead to build at Mavisbank, where the family had coal interests. His father had entertained the idea of building there at least since 1696 and a number of drawings survive in the Penicuik collection, including two apparently drawn by the 1st Baronet himself and an elevation with a weather vane pierced with the initials I.S. - possibly by James Smith. The site, close to the village of Loanhead, was between Penicuik and the town, near enough to permit daily riding to and from the Court, when it was sitting, and convenient for scholarly pursuits and entertaining, free from dogs, children and the daily business of the estate!

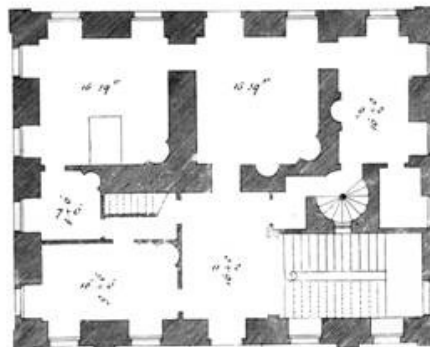
The site for the villa was carefully chosen on a natural terrace above North Esk and immediately in front of a prominent prehistoric earthwork, which appealed to Clerk's antiquarian interests. Clerk and Adam worked on the design of the villa over the winter of 1722-3: "In May 1723 I not only finished my design for the House of Mavisbank, under the correction of one Mr Adams, a skilful architect . . . however the architecture may please or displeas, it is chiefly owing to myself". The foundations were laid by John Baxter in the same month.



The East Front of Mavisbank House toward the Court in the County of Mid Lothian one of the Seats of J^{ts} John Clerk of Penningock Baron of his Majesty's Exchequer
Edinb^o 1747



Plan of the Second Story or principal floor



Plan of the Vestibule floor of Mavisbank House

Johⁿ Adam inv. et delin

R. Cooper Sculp.

Mavisbank (Vitruvius Scoticus)

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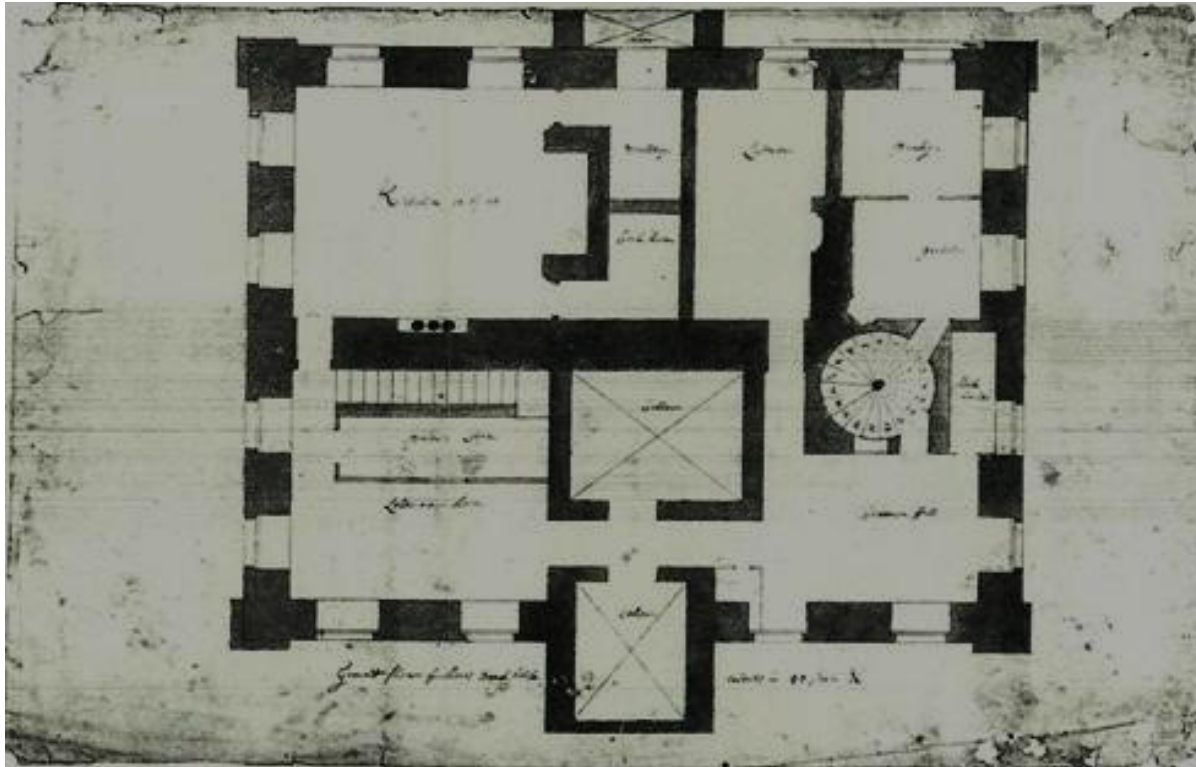
Clerk's claim to have been the principal author of the design may be supported by the very Dutch character of the architecture: 'Dutch Palladian' was the term used to describe it by Colin McWilliam. On the other hand, Adam is also known to have visited Holland. Nicholas Uglow has recently identified a series of late 17thC Dutch houses: Duinrell was on the road from Leyden to The Hague and Der Voorst towards the German border. Clerk is likely to have seen both of them. Possibly even more influential is an unexecuted design by Daniel Marot: Adam owned a copy of Marot's "Oeuvres . . ." and the sharing by the two men of books and drawing equipment is recorded in their correspondence.

A plan of Basement or 'Ground Storey' in Clerk's hand survives at Penicuik. Otherwise the plans of the Entrance and Principal floors are only recorded in Richard Cooper's engravings of Adam's drawings for his book of designs, *Vitruvius Scoticus* - in which *Adam* claims authorship of the design!

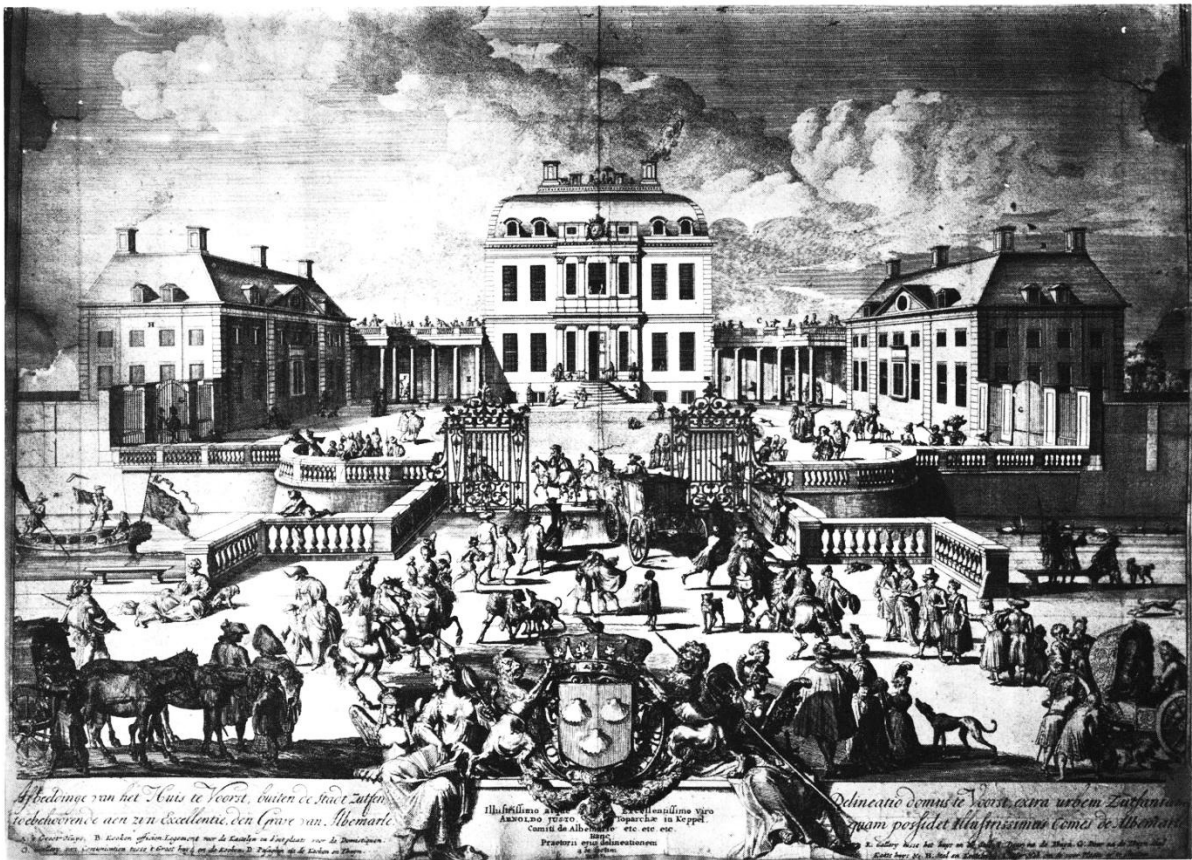
Acknowledgement must be made to Ian Gow, in connection with Mavisbank, on two counts: firstly for his Cambridge dissertation on the 'villa' in the context of Edinburgh and, secondly, for his invention of the term "parade-planning in a box" to describe the principal floor of Mavisbank. Gow concludes that the term 'villa' in the British context, denotes function, not style. A villa, according to Gow, is a small house close to a town usually built by an aristocrat, whose estates are distant and who required - in the context of London and Edinburgh - a house close to the Court, or a successful city merchant escaping to the country. These early villa estates were truly rural, though not agricultural like their Venetian prototypes, nor were they independent economic units, but dependent on money from elsewhere; the suburban villa, more closely associated with the town, came later. The villa idea was also closely associated with Stoic concept of 'rural retirement' promoted by Pope and others and also with the enthusiasm for all things classical: the Plinian villa was illustrated in Castell's "Villas of the Ancients" of 1728, to which Clerk was a subscriber.

With the foundations laid in 1723, the house was dated 1724; the main body of the house was completed in 1727 and the wings were added in 1728 and 1729. There is extensive correspondence between Clerk, Adam and Baxter as well as accounts which describe the building process in detail. The wings were designed to be connected to the body of the house by quadrant arcades in the Palladian manner, though in execution these became communicating passages with round-headed windows. The body of the house was just fifty by thirty feet and was structurally a 'double pile', with all the flues gathered into a single chimney stack rising through the platform, parallel with the main façade. This was of five bays and two storeys over a basement, with a three bay pedimented frontispiece. The corners were marked by channel-jointed pilasters and the slated roof was of convex form with an upper platform, all in the French/Dutch manner of Daniel Marot. The façade was enriched with a cartouche of arms over the door, swags and shells between the upper and lower windows and boldly modelled foliage in the pediment, all executed by Isaac Sylvestyne.

The plans of the body of the house are known, but those of the wings are not and require more research and physical examination of the fabric, which has long been inaccessible. The Ground Storey contained all the usual offices and is well annotated on Clerk's drawing; a small service stair provided a direct link to the Entrance Hall. The Entrance Storey contained the Hall and Principal Stair, a Garden Parlour, what may have been a Business Room and two apartments each of Bedchamber and Dressing Room or Closet. The Principal Stair is known to have had a mahogany balustrade with a Corinthian column at the newel and a 'sky ceiling' with a 'gilded sun' at the centre. The Principal Floor was a complete apartment of Great Dining Room, Great Drawing Room, Principal Bedchamber, Dressing Room and Closet, worked around the plan in a clockwise direction - Gow's 'parade planning in a box'. There would have been additional Bedchambers in the attic and all four floors were connected by a turnpike service stair. It is clear from the correspondence that Clerk kept the finishes simple and that he disliked the sort of rich plasterwork with which another of William Adam's villas, The Drum at Gilmerton, on the southern edge of Edinburgh, was being finished at about the same time.



Mavisbank Basement Plan (RCAHMS)



Duinrell

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Clerk also began work in 1723 on the planting and the laying out of the grounds. The walls of the great circular garden - said to be of the same dimensions as the Coliseum in Rome - were built in 1724 and fruit trees planted. Planting continued in subsequent years and the North drive up to Loanhead was formed in 1726. . The braes, which had been previously been “covered only with broom and whine” were fully planted and the earthwork was ‘enhanced’ by grass ramps leading to the top, which was shaped with circular terraces. The centrepiece of the landscape was a ‘goose-foot’ of radiating avenues on the level terrace, focusing on the house, with the prehistoric fort behind, a formal canal in the central avenue and a circular ‘doo’cot’ terminating the axial view from the house, the last built by Baxter in 1738. The layout is best recorded in General Roy’s military survey of 1745-57.

When Roger Gale, English antiquarian, visited Mavisbank in 1739, he wrote to their friend Dr William Stukely in the following terms: “We went for two days to Mavisbank, four miles distant from the city to the South. It is a seat of Baron Clerk’s, built by himself in the true Palladio taste, one of the most elegant villas I ever saw for structure, situation, woods and walks. Behind it on the top of a small steep hill was an ancient trench or agger, not big enough for a town or camp, but probably a place for Druid Worship. This he has enclosed and made a winding ascent up to it with hedges planted from the bottom to the top. The kitchen garden is great circle, walled in at the bottom of a steep valley, surrounded with a fine rapid river, and gives a most beautiful prospect to the house and other gardens above it. You would think yourself rather in a valley near Tivoli than Edenborough”.

Cut into the plinths of the outer pilasters are two inscriptions, clearly drafted by Sir John. At the left side of the façade is a text recording in fairly simple terms the building of the house:

*Hanc in Gremio resonantis Silvae
aquis hortis avium garritu
caeterisque ruris honoribus
undique residentem villam
non magnificam non superbam
at qualem vides
commodam mundam genialem
naturae parem socians artem
sibi suisque
O vitam placide
et tranquille agendam
designavit instruxitque
D
IC
aerarii tribunus
MDCCXXIV*

A translation by Professor Alastair Small reads as follows: “*Sir John Clerk, Baron of Exchequer, associating with himself and his family art, which is the equal of nature, designed and built this villa, in the bosom of the surrounding woods, resplendent everywhere with waters, gardens, the chattering of birds, and other delights of the countryside, neither magnificent nor proud, but as you see it: comfortable, orderly and congenial. Oh for the quiet and peaceful life! 1724.*

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Roy's Map showing detail of Mavisbank



Painting of Mavisbank

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The other inscription on the right pilaster base is verse, composed by Clerk in the manner of Horace. With some minor corrections by Professor Small, it reads as follows:

*Parva Domus Nemorosa Quies Sis tu Quoque nostris
Hospitium Laribus Subsidiumque Diu
Postes Flora tuos Ornet, Pomonaque mensas.
Conferat Et Varias Fertilis Hortus Opes.
Te Volucres Pictae Cingentes Voce Canora
Relia Sola Canant Quae Sibi Tendit Amor.
Floriferi Colles Dulces Mihi Saepe Recessus
Dent, Atque Hospitibus Gaudia Plena Meis.
Concedatque Deus, Nunquam Vel Sero Senescas
Seroque terrenas Experiare Vices.
Integra reddantur Quae Plurima Saecula Rodant,
Detur Et Ut Senior, Pulchrior Enitas.*

In translation this reads: “Little house, wooded retreat, may you be a lasting home and a safe place for our household gods. May Flora decorate your doorposts and Pomona your tables, and may the fertile garden contribute its varied riches. May the colourful birds that surround you sing with tuneful voice only the songs of love. May the flower-covered hills often give me sweet recreation and great pleasure to my guests. And may God grant that you change and grow old either never or late. May the decay of great age be restored intact, so that the older you become, the more beautifully you may shine!” How wonderfully appropriate this is!

It has long been argued that Mavisbank, while far from being the largest, is the most significant and potentially the most beautiful country house of the early Georgian period in Scotland. This is not just for its own sake, but because of its association with the two most important architectural figures of the period, Sir John Clerk of Penicuik and William Adam. Clerk was an influential patron of Adam’s, it is clear that their collaboration over the building of Mavisbank was a fruitful one for both men and that the process was the catalyst for two other projects: Clerk’s poem “The Country Seat” and Adam’s book of designs “Vitruvius Scoticus”. The text of the former complements the plates of the latter and both were conceived while the two men were working together on Mavisbank. Indeed, they both visited London in 1727 and, as they travelled from Stamford in the same coach, Adam had with him his drawings for Vitruvius Scoticus to give to the engraver, Richard Cooper, and Clerk had his text of The Country Seat. They were both painted by William Aikman and Clerk dined with Lord Burlington at Chiswick, by which he appears not to have been entirely convinced: “Chiswick is properly a villa”, he wrote, “and much the best in Britain, yet this house is rather curious than convenient”. How true!

*“Wou’d you, my Friend, avoid the noisy Town
And from the Cares and Toils of Life be free?
Wou’d you unbend your Thoughts and thus acquire
Fresh Oyl to lighten up the vital Flame?
Choose then a rural Life in such a Field
As Eden’s Garden best resemble can
Where first th’almighty Power establish’d Man”*

So begins “The Country Seat”. The manuscript of the transcript by Samuel Boyse, annotated by Clerk in his own hand, runs to thirty pages of blank verse followed by ten pages of author’s notes, in which Clerk sets out his entire theory of the British country house and its landscape setting. He deals in order with four types of house: the ‘Royal Palace’, the ‘House of State’, the ‘House of Middle Rank’ and the ‘Little Villa’ He concludes the work as follows:

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*“Now stop my Muse your bold and Arduous Flight
And dare no more the vast Pierian Height;
On Esca’s flow’ry Bank there is a Grove,
Where the harmonious Thrush repeats his Love;
There I’ll observe the Precepts you indite
But never anymore attempt to write.
Some may perhaps amidst the num’rous Throng
Of Swains, attentive to your Song
And from your Rules Instruction take
What Edifice to raise or Gardens make.
But others are on whom those Rules you waste,
For Goths will always have a Gothic Taste”*

Mavis is the Scots word for thrush, and ‘Esca’ is the North Esk. In effect, Clerk commits himself to putting all his theories into practice at his own villa. Mavisbank, therefore, is more than just a small country house like many others: it represents the architectural ideal of Baron Clerk and William Adam: the two most significant architectural figures of their generation in Scotland.



Mavisbank derelict

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After his father's death in 1756, Sir James Clerk, 3rd Baronet, had no real use for his father's villa and, having finally decided to rebuild the family house at Penicuik, he sold Mavisbank to his cousin Colonel Robert Clerk in 1761. The house was rented to Graeme Mercer for some time before Robert Clerk's death in 1814, when he bought it. On Mercer's death in 1841 it was bought by George Clerk Arbuthnot and on *his* death in 1876, it became an institution: a 'Retreat' for sufferers from 'Mental and Nervous Disorders'. It remained an asylum until 1954 when it was bought by Dr William Harrowes, its last Medical Superintendent, who obtained one of the first grants from the Historic Buildings Council, newly established under the 1953 Historic Buildings Act, to demolish the extensive additions it had acquired in the 19thC and to restore the original villa. Dr Harrowes was unable to complete the task and the house was sold in the late 1950s to Mr Archie Stevenson. It suffered settlement damage from coal extraction at Bilston Glen Colliery in the 1960s and in 1973 it was gutted by fire. Mavisbank came close to being demolished by the local authority under a Dangerous Structures Order in 1988; this was only prevented by the obtaining of an 'Interim Interdict' in the Court of Session in the early hours of the day on which the demolition was due to start. On his death, as an act of deliberate and cleverly calculated obstruction, Mr Stevenson left the building to three non-existent people, supposedly resident in the United States. Eventually, Historic Scotland intervened and used emergency powers to secure the site and support the structure. In 2012, an agreement was signed by Historic Scotland, the Midlothian Council and the Mavisbank Trust, the declared intention of which was to resolve the ownership impasse through a Compulsory Purchase Order and to enable the Mavisbank Trust to raise the funds to repair and restore the house and its landscape. Preparations for this have at last begun and intention is that the work should commence in 2014, on completion of the consolidation of the ruin of Penicuik House.

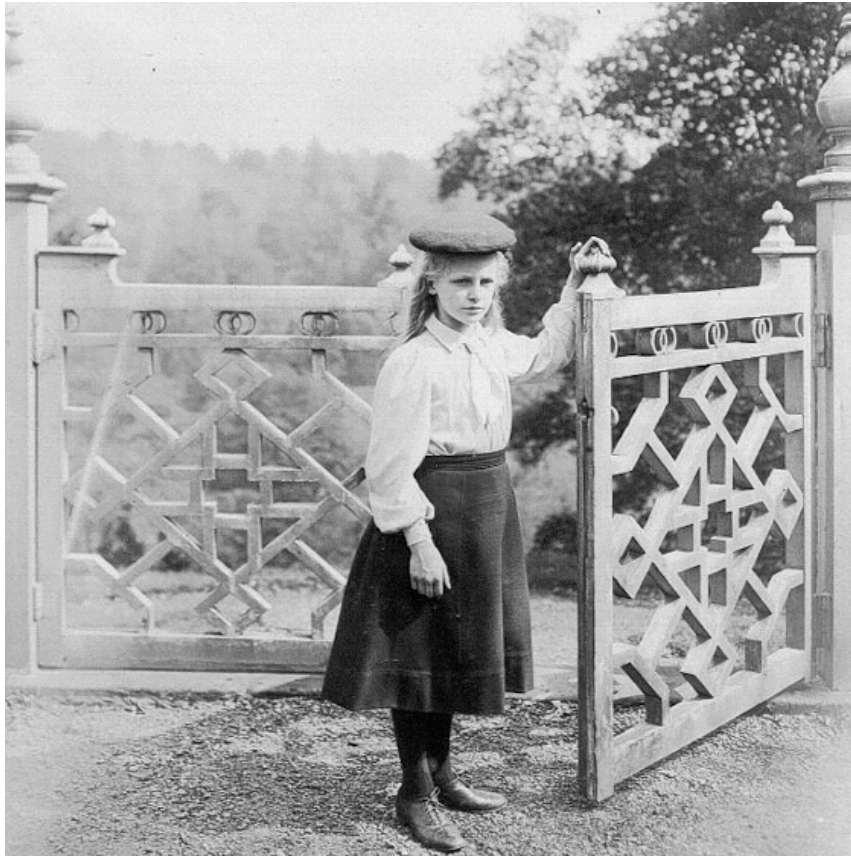
On his return from five years abroad, mainly in Leyden and Rome, at the very end of the 17thC, John Clerk, later to become Baron of the Court of Exchequer and 2nd Baronet of Penicuik, took on the responsibility of planting and laying out the grounds at Penicuik. Until his father's death in 1722, however, his energies were mainly deployed elsewhere at Cammo and at Mavisbank. In addition, he became recognised as an authority on antiquities, architecture and landscape and spent much time advising others, becoming known as 'the Scottish Burlington'. The Exchequer Court was in one sense the predecessor of the Ministry of Works in Scotland and had charge, for example, of the remains of the mediaeval cathedrals, which had passed to the Scottish crown at the reformation. Clerk took control of these activities, which included significant work at Rosslyn Chapel. In the 1720s, however, he began to create a completely new landscape at Penicuik, which he continued to improve and embellish throughout his life.

The Penicuik designed landscape is regarded as the finest in Lowland Scotland, comparable with the remarkable Highland landscapes created by the Duke of Atholl at Blair, the Duke of Argyll at Inveraray and the Marquess of Breadalbane at Taymouth. It is usually characterised as being 'transitional', that is with elements of formality, principally the broad straight avenue to the South of the house, but mostly naturalistic in the manner of Repton and Brown, very much following and enhancing the natural landform - fairly flat at the upper level, but deeply cut by the valley of the river North Esk - creating spaces, views and glimpses from the house and walks through changing scenery. The theory of all that he did is recognisable in a reading of 'The Country Seat', in which the combination of 'utility and beauty' and 'enhancement of nature by art' are recurrent themes. He built ha-ha walls to separate the parks around the house from the terrace on which it was set, and to create the 'Long Walk', which extended from a circular bastion at the point at which the South East Avenue dropped to the river, curving past the South West front of the house round the rim of the Blackpools Park to the High Pond, constructed in 1733 and apparently inspired by something he had seen at Raynham in Norfolk.



Landscape plan of Penicuik

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Dora Ranken Chinese Gates 1899



Chinese Bridge

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Down by the river in the Blackpools Park the Baron created another pond, the 'Low Pond', which became a popular curling place and acquired an octagonal rustic curling hut with a curling stone finial! Also in the Blackpools Park is the Walled Garden, created in 1714-16 by the side of the river in a 'D' or crescent shape, the inside face of the walls of brick, the outside of rubble stone. In 1730, he added an extremely pretty brick pavilion or garden house at the head of the garden, which he called 'Eskfield'. Much later, in the early 20thC, the main room was given a frieze inscription: "Ici bas, les lilacs meurent et les chants des oiseaux sont courts; rêve aux étés, qui demeurent, toujours, toujours, toujours!" So say all!

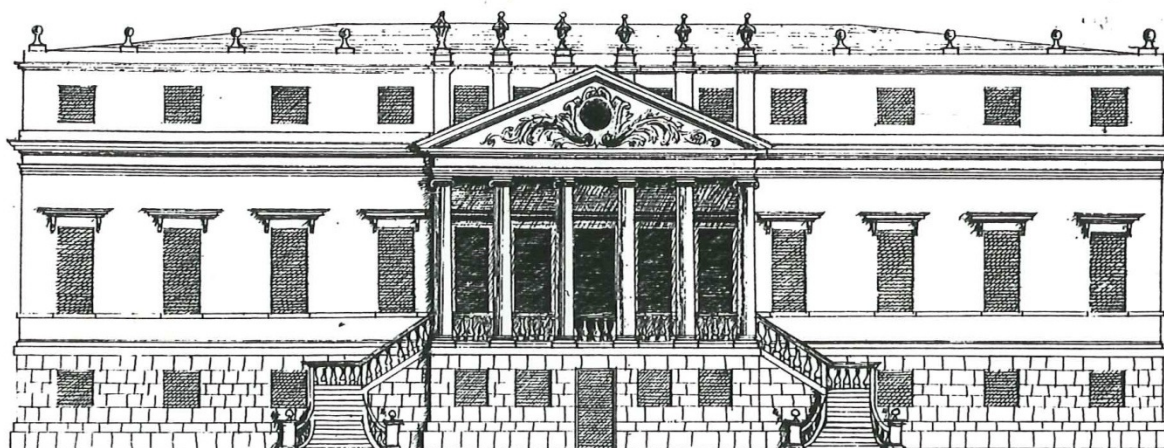
Other garden structures include the Knight's Law Tower (1748-51), a Doo'cot in the form of a Roman outlook tower, on the top of a small hill on the North East axis from the front of the house, and the so-called 'Centurion's Bridge' (1738) over the river, actually but not visually on the axis of the North East Avenue. However, it was his final creation, the Hurley scheme of 1740-8 which was the most romantic of all. Here, up-river beyond the Walled Garden and the Blackpools Park, he made ingenious use of an unusual topographical formation to form a tiny valley which curved through 180 degrees round a little hill which he called 'Claremont'. In this valley he laid out a series of four ponds, each cascading into the next. He then arranged that this secret valley could only be approached by a wooden bridge across the Esk to a rusticated arch which led into a tunnel fully sixty yards long through the enclosing fold in the ground. In the middle of the tunnel, hollowed out was a small domed chamber with a seat cut from the rock and a panel inscribed "TENEBROSA OCCULTAQUE CAVE" - 'beware of dark and hidden things'! In his last days, the Baron used to walk daily to his cave at Hurley, where he said 'he took great delight'. He described the experience in these words: "No-one can get to it but by the mouth of a frightful cave. To those who enter, therefore, first occurs the memory of the Cuman Sybil, for the ruinous aperture, blocked up with stones and briars, strikes the eye. Then comes on the wayfarer a shudder, as they stand in doubt whether they are among the living or the dead. As indeed certain discords set off and give finish to musical cadencies in such a way as to render the subsequent harmony more grateful to the ear, so does the mouth of this mournful cave with its long and shady path followed by the light and prospect, make the exit more delightful. For suddenly the darkness disappears and as it were at the creation of a new world".

When the Baron died in 1756, he was succeeded by his son as 3rd Baronet. Sir James was also a cultivated man and a keen amateur architect, but he was not the great intellectual or the energetic public figure his father had been. He studied at Leyden in 1731-2 and, like his father, went on to Rome in 1732-4. He continued the Baron's improvements at Penicuik, maintained the connection with the Baxters, father and son, and designed a number of buildings including the parish church in the centre of Penicuik (1771). He added Chinese rails to the bridge immediately behind the house at Penicuik, Chinese Gates at the end of the North East avenue and, beyond it on the high ground called the 'Cauldshoulders', a monument in the form of a tall pierced obelisk to the poet Allan Ramsay, all in the late 1750s. Ramsay, like many other distinguished figures of the Scottish Enlightenment, had been a frequent visitor to Mavisbank and Penicuik.

Sir James' greatest contribution, however, was the replacement of the old house of Newbigging with a grand, austere, new classical house. John Baxter senior, builder of Mavisbank, laid the foundations in 1762, working to his own drawings of a design by Sir James. The house was to be a single block of nine bays by five with principal and chamber floors over a basement with a prominent hexastyle Ionic portico at the centre of the main front to the North East. The roofline was exceptionally plain, with no balustrades and a flat lead roof. At the centre of the South West garden front, overlooking the Blackpools Park, Sir James designed an unusual three bay advanced centre section with a 'canted attic' in place of the more usual pediment. He made use of thermal windows and Serliana and cornices over the windows of the 'piano nobile'. The three centre windows of the garden front were remodelled by John Baxter junior as what Alistair Rowan has described as 'curious arched aedicules' in 1778. The quality of the Craighleith sandstone masonry was exceptionally fine - as one has come to expect from Baxter: it is hardly possible to insert a blade between the stones!

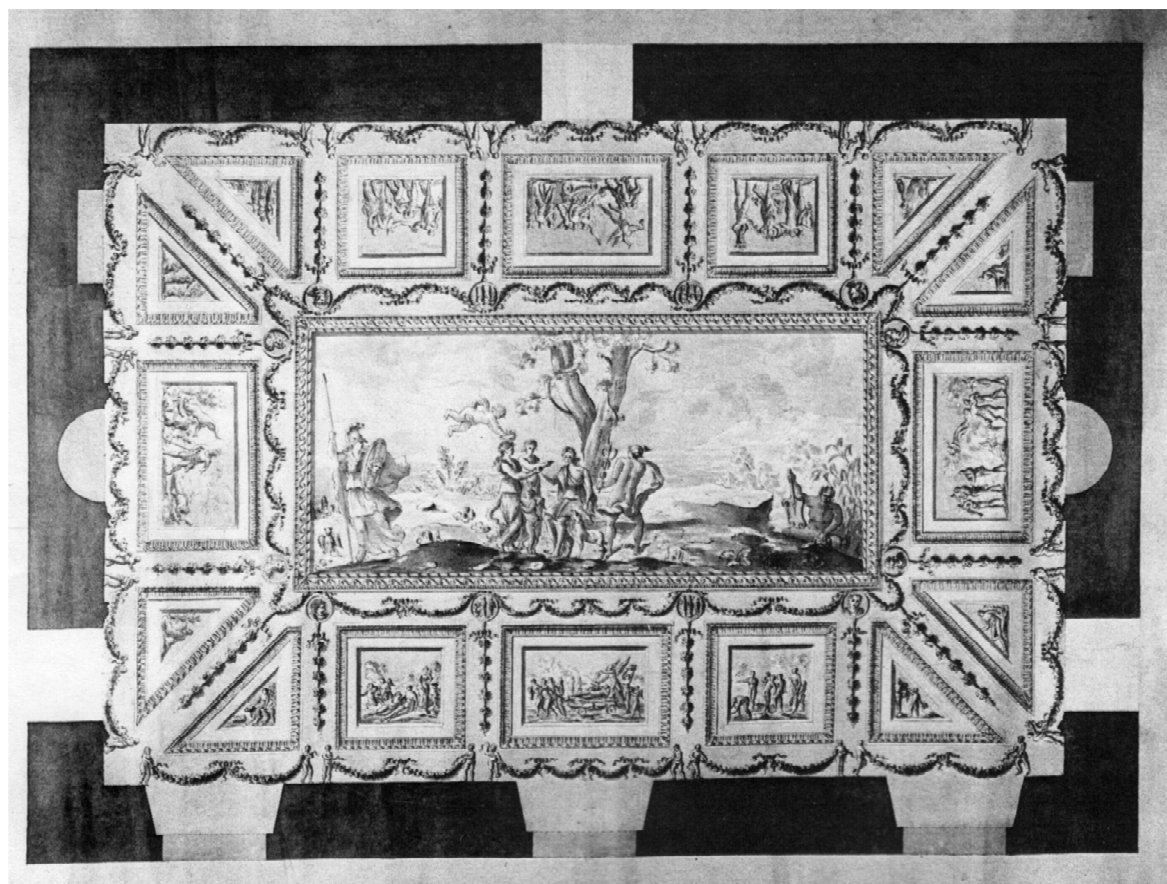
There are 31 drawings for the house, as well as a full set of accounts and other documents in the Penicuik collection. The process appears to have been the same as that followed by the Baron at Mavisbank: Sir James produced designs himself, which were then redrawn professionally by John

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*Designed for Penicuik
by
J. Clerk*

Penicuik - Elevation as proposed by Sir John Clerk



Ossian's Hall ceiling (RACHMS)

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Baxter senior. Sir James' completely symmetrical plan caused much controversy at the time: In what was something of a family rift, Sir James' cousin Colonel Robert Clerk - who had bought Mavisbank in 1761 - sought an opinion from Robert Adam who considered the palladian symmetry of the plan inconvenient and old-fashioned. Sir James defended his design vigorously! Since the principal floor is entered directly from the portico, there is no 'state stair', but a pair of identical top-lit geometrical 'pencheck' stairs flanking the double volume Hall. The building took until 1769, by which time all but the Hall, the 'Egyptian Gallery' and the Great Dining Room had been decorated. The most important room was the Great Dining Room on the garden front; this room, usually referred to as the Saloon or the Ossian Hall, was decorated in 1773 by the distinguished painter Alexander Runciman with scenes from Ossian, inspired by James Macpherson's 'discovery' and publication to great acclaim of the bard's epic poetry in 1760. Runciman had recently returned from Rome, where, as correspondence makes clear, he had, like John Baxter junior, been supported by Sir James.

Sir James was also responsible for the design of Penicuik Parish Church, built by Baxter in 1771. It has a three-bay Doric portico, with flaming urns on the corners of the pediment, facing down the High Street. The church was enlarged at the rear and sides in 1880. There is an apocryphal story that Sir James had designed his Gibbian steeple for the church and that, when his was rejected, he built it on his stables instead! While this is an architectural tale worth telling, there is no evidence whatsoever that it is true!

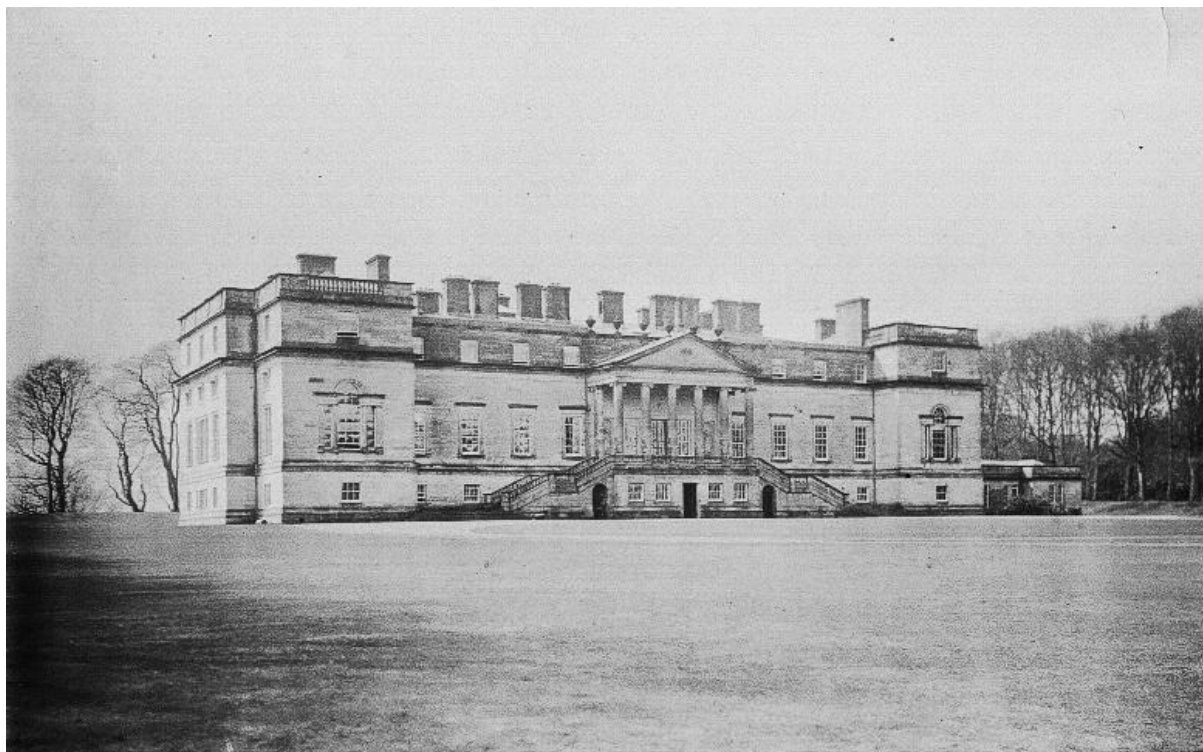
Penicuik House was extended in meticulously matching style by David Bryce in 1857. Its interior, including the Ossian Saloon, was destroyed in a fire in 1899, which burned slowly, but which, by the time the horse-drawn fire engine from Edinburgh arrived, could not be extinguished. Much was salvaged from the interior as the fire burned including the Penicuik Papers, which are the most important source material for Scottish 18thC architectural history, and for much else. The principal loss, apart from the house itself, was the books which were in the Library above the Saloon.

Sir James and Baxter also designed the extremely handsome stable court, built between 1763 and 1767. The courtyard is entered through what Alistair Rowan has described as a 'palladian farm portico' surmounted by a clock tower and steeple, clearly after St Martins in the Fields and derived from James Gibbs' Book of Architecture. On the opposite side of the courtyard, Sir James built a doo'cot in what was a remarkable gesture of respect to his father's antiquarian interests. The original 'Arthur's O'on', or oven, was a Roman temple on the Antonine Wall, which had been surveyed and drawn by Sir John in the company of his antiquarian friends William Stukely and Roger Gale. It was destroyed in 1743 by the landowner, Sir Michael Bruce, who used the stone to improve the fishings on the river! Clerk, Gale and Stukely were incensed and the last drew a splendid cartoon showing Bruce being prodded by devils with tridents into the burning river Styx - perhaps the first conservationist campaign! Recreated from his father's drawing, the 'O'on' stands proudly over the Penicuik stable court.

Following the loss of the house in 1899, the family decided not to rebuild, but instead to occupy the stables. Under the personal direction of Aimée Lady Clerk, the former loose boxes and coach houses were converted into a most comfortable house, where the family continues to live in greater convenience, almost certainly, than in the big house. Much of the Clerk collection, including portraits, sculpture and even chimneypieces and doorcases are there.

In the Clerk collection at Penicuik House, is a sketch book containing designs for rustic thatched 'cottage ornés' by one of the Adam brothers. Barony House is such a cottage orné on what was the Lasswade part of the estate. It is believed to have been designed by Sir James Clerk and built right at the end of his life in 1781. It is thatched, with a single bow of droved sandstone ashlar and a dormer buried in the thatch above. Its other claim to fame is that it was the home of Sir Walter Scott following his marriage in 1797 to Charlotte Charpentier.

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Penicuik as extended by David Bryce, 1857



Penicuik Stable Block viewed from the portico of the main house

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Penicuik Church



Clarke mausoleum