

Research Notes on the Pringles of Smailholm

by James Bruce Pringle (brother of Sir Murray Pringle of Stichill, 10th Bt).

Feb 2006. Many years ago I corresponded with Christopher J Trabraham and I queried the date the tower was built - at that time it was described as early 16th c - I argued that it must have been built before 1455. He wrote to me and concurred with my historical conclusion on stylistic grounds. It was built late 14th c or early 15th c.

Jan 2012. In my past year's research a document was found that proves Alexander Pringle wrong in his chapter on Smailholm. George, Robert and Alexander were not David of Pilmuir's brothers. In fact, they were not of Smailholm but they were senior to Smailholm and their descendants remain senior to Smailholm.

Robert, Douglas squire, was the first of Pilmuir and parts of Smailholm, including the tower. Both lands were given to him by the Earl of Douglas in 1408. As far as Smailholm is concerned the original charter was dated 16th November 1408 given by Archibald, earl of Douglas, lord of Galloway, Lochmabane, to Robert of Hoppringill, 'scutifero nostro' and Isabella, his spouse, of easter part of demesne lands in the barony of Smalehame, sheriffdom of Roxburgh, a third part of adjoining husbandlands and tower of Smalehame. The charter was later confirmed on 2nd March 1451-2. However, David of Oppringill presented on bended knees to Archibald, earl of Douglas, lord of Galloway and Annandale, a petition on 10th January 1432-3 to have the charter renewed in his favour as son and heir to his father Robert. Witness to which was George of Oppringill. So George, Douglas squire, could not be David's older brother, as he obviously accepted that David was Robert's son and heir. But George was definitely senior to him in the family hierarchy. The Pringles of Smailholm are the oldest cadets of Pringle of that Ilk. And Robert was probably a younger son of William of that Ilk who died in 1390-1. Isabella may have been a Rutherford because of a later marriage between the two families within the third and fourth degree of consanguinity.

It appears that the tower was already there. But it underwent extensive rebuilding because that confused the experts on setting a date of construction. The truth sometimes hurts! I am convinced that the tower was either rebuilt or had a massive rebuild sometime between 1409 and 1455, probably before 1425.

I am convinced that William, constable of Cessford Castle and of Craigleith and Alexander of Trinlyknowe his brother were sons of either George or Alexander, Douglas squires – both later cadets of that Ilk than Smailholm, which makes them senior.

April 2013. I also agree that the Pringles were Douglas supporters, being squires to the nine successive Earls of Douglas and that George Hoppringill,

Douglas squire from 1425 until 1455, continued his support for the attainted Earl into the 1460s and lost both his lands and his office as Master Ranger of the Tweed Ward as a result of his continuing loyalty.

Robert Hoppringill, Douglas squire, who was killed at Verneuil in 1424 obtained from Douglas the lands of Pilmuir, Blackchester and roughly half of the Barony of Smailholm from Douglas in 1408 and despite his son and heir, David's plea in 1432/3 'on bended knee' to be confirmed in the lands of Smailholm in the presence of George Hoppringill, the Earl deferred his decision 'for a while' and later confirmed David in the lands in 1450, some 26 years after David's father was killed at Verneuil.

September 2014. Did I mention recently that I believe it was Robert first of Smailholm that married Elspeth Dishington and not his son and heir David. Reasons: (1) David was referred to as of Pilmuir on 7th December 1457 (Records p. 97), (2) Douglas had not granted David the lands of Smailholm until at least 1452, (3) the timing and prestige fits Robert better (4) I don't think Elspeth would have married David post 1455, (5) it fits in with the later marriage between Hoppringill of that ilk and a daughter of Torwoodlee within the 4th degree of consanguinity, and (6) it's more likely to have been David's mother that the inscription over the doorway relates (Records p. 98).

August 2016. The first major error relates to the early 15th century in which Alexander Pringle in his 'Records of the Pringles' plucks Robert, Douglas squire, out of thin air. This allowed later Pringles to claim that (1) he was descended from the 14th century Pyngles of Whitsome (which he wasn't) and (2) that he descended from a long line of Douglas squires (which he didn't). They then included George and Alexander, Douglas squires and Robert of Wrangholm as the elder brothers of David 2nd of Smailholm (which they weren't). Because David on bended knee appealed to the Earl of Douglas in Newark castle on 10 Jan 1432 asking him to confirm Smailholm on him as son and heir of Robert, Douglas Squire, to which George, Douglas squire, was a witness. So he could not have been David's older brother. The Earl of Douglas finally confirmed Smailholm on him on 2 Mar 1451. This was a vital error as it put George and Thomas, Alexander and Robert as Smailholm Pringles, which they were not.

The second major error was that Alexander the author placed, William first of Craigleith, Alexander first of Trinlyknowe and David in Tynnes as members of the Smailholm line when, in fact, they were younger brothers of Adam of that ilk. This allowed three generations of Whybank to claim that they were the head of the name.

Historical evidence and the DNA project have proved that the South African Pringles descend from Stichill as do a number of Pringles living in Australia and the USA. The Pringles of Clifton, Fernacres, Greenknowe were descended from Craigleith/Stichill, as were nearly all those in Teviotdale, Kelso and Fife.