

Auchincruive House

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The estate of Auchincruive was owned successively by the Wallaces (-1374, the Cathcarts (-1758), a Mr. James Murray (-1764), and the Oswalds (-1925). Its policy grounds, woodlands and mansion house were purchased in 1925 by the late Mr. John Hannah of Girvan Mains and gifted by him two years later to the West of Scotland Agricultural College. Since 1931 it has served as a centre for agricultural education and advisory work and its mansion house was used as a women's hostel.

That there were earlier mansion houses, there can be no doubt. Sir Duncan Wallace, the last of his line, had strong local connexions and it is not improbable that at times he lived at Auchincruive before acquiring near-by Sundrum estate, the castle of which became his ultimate domicile. Not until 1532, however, is a house specifically mentioned, and then in a charter granted to the second Lord Cathcart. It is again on record in 1541 when the third Lord Cathcart, following a period of resignation, had the charter restored in recognition of his services to James V. In the latter case the house was described as a "castell," but there is reason to question the aptness of this title and certainly, fully half a century later, Timothy Pont, the noted cartographer, gave it no such prominence in his map of the area.

The fifth Lord Cathcart died at Auchincruive in 1628, thus confirming the existence of a mansion house at this later date. It seems not unlikely, however, in view of the greater importance of Sundrum Castle, that Auchincruive was in the main reserved for the use of cadet members of the family.

Sir William Fraser, the eminent nineteenth-century biographer, states in the "Lennox," a production embodying, *inter alia*, researches into the lineage of the Oswalds, that the present mansion house was completed in 1767 and that "it occupies the site of the former mansion house which was destroyed by fire about the middle of the (18th) century." In the light of recent evidence the implication of this statement, namely that the present house rose, within a few years, from the ashes of the manor house referred to is unacceptable, it being now established from a copy of a deed of sale of 1758, entered into between the Commissioners of the 9th Lord Cathcart, acting on his Lordship's behalf, and James Murray of Broughton, the then purchaser of Sundrum and Auchincruive, that the latter estate possessed a "Tower Fortalice Mannor Place." This manor place, it may reasonably be assumed, was the immediate forerunner of the present mansion house. As for the old manor house mentioned by Sir William Fraser, not improbably it was

burned at an earlier date than that noted by him. Equally one may suppose that the "Tower Fortalice Mannor Place" enjoyed a longer tenure than a mere decade and a half.

It is generally assumed that the building of the present mansion house was begun by Richard Oswald when, in 1764, he purchased Auchincruive, but doubt is cast on this by a letter contributed to one of the local papers in 1853 by someone claiming to be conversant with the details of the Oswald family. In this the correspondent avers that when Richard Oswald made his purchase from James Murray (Sundrum and Auchincruive were sold separately) some slight progress had already been made with the new building and that it was on the former's instruction that the brothers Adam were called in as architects. Be that as it may, the work was completed in 1767, the date on the front of the building bearing witness to this. Further additions were to be made later.

The writer has in his possession an engraving of the mansion house and foreground giving a view from the Coylton road and bearing as a water mark the date 1808. Under it is the caption "Auchincruive, the Seat of Richard A. Oswald, Esqr." This member of the family, a grand-nephew of the aforementioned Richard Oswald, occupied the mansion house from 1793 to 1842, and although he did not succeed his father in ownership until 1819—the latter lived first at Scotstoun and later in Glasgow—he was virtually *de facto* landlord during that period of almost fifty years. Because of this it is possible that the engraving may actually have been made between 1808 and 1819 instead of after the latter date. By this time, at any rate, the mansion house had not as yet taken its present form.

No information is available as to when the subsequent alterations and additions were made, though, if a guess be hazarded, the likeliest period would seem to be before or around 1830. Prior to that date Mr. Oswald spent money lavishly on a number of his farm steadings and it is not unlikely that he exercised the same inclination towards his mansion; in later years he suffered some measure of financial embarrassment and was presumably not in a position to bear the cost involved. Moreover, his son and heir, who pre-deceased him by nine years, was still alive in 1830.

In the engraving referred to no west wing is shown, nor is there a verandah at the main entrance, while the east wing, longer than the present one, has deep narrow windows, four separate chimneys, and a high wall extending towards the river. Connecting it to the main building and surmounted by a balustrade is a slightly higher section with ornamental windows. In the reconstruction that followed, this part of the wing was raised to the same elevation

as the main building and merged into it, thus extending the frontage of the latter and reducing the length of the wing. At the same time the balustrade, common also to the main building, was exchanged for solid masonry. The general effect seems to have been to increase accommodation at the expense of beauty of outline, this the more so by reason of the addition of the less attractive west wing.

When Auchincruive was gifted to the West of Scotland Agricultural College in 1927 the mansion house was empty and alterations were soon under way to fit it out as a women's hostel. Fortunately few external changes were necessary, other than the lowering of the carriage-way in front of the main entrance and the removal of some out-houses beyond the west wing, while the main structural change within involved the introduction of a new stairway from the basement facing the river to the ground floor above. The mansion, as we now know it, is therefore pretty much as it was a century or more ago and though, for its present purpose, it lacks the convenience of a modern structure, there is compensation in its general appearance of dignity and stability, both reminders of the more spacious days of its earlier occupants.

It may be apposite to add that in one of the alcoves in the dining room there is a beautiful statuette of the first of the Auchincruive Oswalds. It bears the simple inscription—on the one side "Richard Oswald 1705-1784," and on the other "Peacemaker." Apart from the epitaph, there is a point of interest in the dates given, which are those commonly alluded to in the public prints. The date of death (4th November, 1784) is indisputable; on the other hand, the particulars on Mr. Oswald's tomb in St. Quivox church show clearly that he died "aged 84 years," a fact that would indicate his year of birth as 1700 and not 1705.