For anyone interested in Scottish castles, two books have recently been published which are worthy of consideration. *The Castles of Glasgow and the Clyde*, by Gordon W. Mason, is a survey listing all known sites of castles, whether still standing or not, within the watershed of the River Clyde. Its first chapter, “The Development of Castles”, provides a brief but informative outline of how the architecture of Scottish castles has developed over the centuries in response to changing military tactics. Most of the rest of the book is in the form of a gazetteer, in which all the castles are listed alphabetically. Each entry includes a symbolic assessment of how much of the fabric of the original castle remains; an Ordnance Survey grid reference where known; and basic directions to the castle site. There follows, where appropriate, an architectural description of the castle; information on its history; and a mention of any legends associated with it. Some castles receive quite extensive coverage. The entry for Bothwell Castle, for example, occupies five pages and features four photographs of the site as well as a drawn plan. In the case of some other sites where nothing of the castle survives above ground and where the historical record is uninformative, all that is known is a (sometimes estimated) location and a bare outline of the castle’s history. Many black and white photographs accompany the text, including some of castles which have since been demolished.
Numerous entertaining details and anecdotes have been provided by Mason, such as the mention of the dungeon-inhabiting ghosts of Knockderry Castle, and the practical warning about the flesh-and-blood German shepherd guarding Auchinvole Castle. There are several maps indicating the locations of the castles, although these are of limited use since very few other landmarks, such as streets, are featured on them. Of much greater usefulness is a section towards the end of the book listing Mason’s suggestions of which castles would be the best to visit, along with their opening times, admission rates, facilities, and telephone numbers. A glossary of terms will aid anyone unfamiliar with the vocabulary associated with castles, and a basic bibliography helps direct the enthusiast who wishes to learn more towards further readings. There is both a family index and a general index. Any castle enthusiast planning a trip to the Clyde region of Scotland would appreciate having this book in his or her pocket, both to give a fuller account of the well-known castles than what is usually printed in guide books, and to alert him or her to the less well-known castles open to visitors.

For the reader who would like a more in-depth examination of a single castle, there is Harry Gordon Slade’s *Glamis Castle*. The majority of this book (ten chapters) deals with the changing physical structure of Glamis from the 14th through to the 20th centuries. The text is detailed but not too technical for the non-specialist, and is enhanced throughout by photographs of physical features on Glamis itself when still surviving and of other castles which Glamis may have resembled at some point, as well as floor plans and drawings of reconstructions of the castle as it might have appeared in the past.

This book is more than just an architectural history. Glamis’ human side is the subject of the initial chapter, which concentrates on the history and varying fortunes of the family of Lyon / Bowes / Lyon Bowes / Bowes Lyon, the inhabitants of the castle for more than six hundred years. The furnishings of Glamis are specifically dealt with in one chapter which uses the evidence of various inventories of the castle taken in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries. Among other things, these inventories tell us that a very colourful Great Chamber in 1639 boasted a purple cloth
bed and covering, a tablecloth of the same with yellow lace, and green hangings; that by 1640 the residents had changed their keyboard instruments from virginals to the more modern harpsichords; and that Glamis residents were enthusiastic participants in the 19th-century love affair with tartan. Gardeners will particularly enjoy the chapter on the policies and gardens, which includes several lengthy excerpts from primary documents, such as an early 18th-century list of what seeds were ordered.

The final chapter, “Glamis: Literature, Legend and Letters” is perhaps a little short, considering the nature and origins of Glamis’ fame for many people. While Slade seems eager throughout the book to avoid or debunk the more sensational myths which have accrued to Glamis over the centuries, stating that “its history is quite startling enough plain without making it fancy”, many readers might well have enjoyed a fuller treatment of the stories behind Glamis’ position in the popular imagination. Also in anticipation of a non-specialist audience, it would perhaps have rendered the book slightly easier to read if the few quotations from historical documents given in Latin, with translations into English found only in the endnotes, were instead in English in the main body of the text, with the original Latin at the back of the book for anyone curious enough to look them up. For the more scholarly reader, some frustration arises from the numerous excerpts from primary sources which go unattributed. This is presumably due to a request from the Trustees, mentioned in the preface, that full details of references be omitted in order to avoid an increase in the number of “casual enquiries” made into the Glamis archives. But even if the readers are a bit coolly discouraged from looking closely into Glamis themselves, they can surely appreciate Slade’s work on this famous and evocative symbol of Scotland.

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