

15. THE COLLEGE OF ELGIN

A TOWN WITHIN A TOWN

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In many of the Cathedral cities of Scotland, the area around the Cathedral was a separate jurisdiction from the more secular part of the city. From a family history perspective, though, this may mean that some of the very early records may not always be so easily accessible.

Elgin Cathedral is one such example. The area around the Cathedral is variously known as the *Precincts*, the *Chanonry* or the *College of Elgin*. McKean in his Illustrated Architectural Guide to Moray, notes that "The Bishop of Moray was king in his own city, and, being one of the most powerful prelates in Scotland, had the Chanonry enclosed with a wall.... over half a mile in circuit". It is this area, rather than the Burgh to the west, which may have been the original 'City of Elgin'.

The College contained the Cathedral, the Chapter House and the manses and dwellings of many of the church dignitaries and was enclosed by a Curtain Wall some twelve feet high and over six feet thick. This walled 'city' met with the east end of the Burgh of Elgin at the Little Cross, the finial of which may be part of a 1402 cross erected by Alexander MacDonald of the Isles in penance for his sacrilege of the Cathedral. The pillar of the present cross dates from a rebuilding in 1733. The walls of the College of Elgin enclosed much of what are now Cooper Park, North and South College Streets, King Street and Cathedral Road. Within it lived various important people; eight dignitaries such as the Dean, Precentor, Chancellor, etc., 16 Canons, 22 Vicar's Choral and a similar number of Chaplains, many of whom had livings elsewhere in the Diocese, such as at Duffus and Unthank. Also inside this curtain wall lay the Cathedral and the Chapter House, both enclosed by a smaller stone wall, outside which ran a roadway for the full length of the perimeter of this central area. The other buildings within the College, and their inhabitants, are unsurprisingly much less well-documented.

Only one of the ports or gates into the College of Elgin has survived, this being the Pans Port, also known as the East Gate or the Water Yett, implying access to the College from the River Lossie, obviously navigable at that time. The Pans Port itself is in a fair state of preservation, having been restored in 1857. The groove or *chase* for the lifting of the portcullis is still visible in the wall of the broad, pointed Gothic arch flanked by arrow loops. Only a few small fragments of the Precinct Wall remain, most notably the section adjoining the Pans Port.

Outside the walls of the College lay the crofts, each of about 2 acres each in extent and covering about 50 acres in total, providing lands for the occupants of the manses who lived within the walls, hence the names Deans Haugh, Moy Croft, Subchanters Croft, etc.

To the west of the central Cathedral area lay the Bishops Palace, and to the north were the Deans Manse (now North College), the Chancellors Manse, the Treasurers Manse, and the manses of the 'parsons' of Inverkeithny, Botarie and Croy. To the east, on either side of the road leading in from the Pans Port, were the Duthil Manse and the Subdeans Manse.

The Bishop's House, immediately opposite the west end of Elgin Cathedral, was supposedly built by Bishop John Innes in about 1406 or 1407. It is also variously known as the Precentor's Manse, the Chantor's Manse or the Alves Manse, showing the changes of use and occupation over the centuries. Judging from its quite small size, and also by the presence of the much larger Bishop's Palace nearby at Spynie, it was probably only used by the Bishop as a temporary residence at times when he was required to be at the Cathedral in connection with the business of the Diocese or at the great festivals of the church. To the north of the Bishops House is the Deans Manse, now North College, built to an L-shaped plan in 1520. It is a substantial building which was modernised in 1858.

Almost all of the manses were demolished by the end of the 18th century, one of the survivors, the Duthil Manse, being demolished to make way for the Elgin Brewery in the early 19th century. The Brewery was itself demolished in the early 20th century.

To the south of the Cathedral lay many of the other manses associated with the Cathedral. Among the dignitaries who occupied these manses there was much diversity in both rank and in duties. The Dean was the head of the Chapter, and had responsibility for the running of the Cathedral and its College. All of the canons, vicars and chaplains associated with the cathedral were under his control. His responsibilities included not only the general smooth running of the Chapter, but also punishment of the delinquencies of the vicars and clerics, the installation of canons, he also conducted services in the cathedral in the absence of the bishop, and was treated with an honour and reverence awarded to none of the other dignitaries. Next to the Dean in rank came the Archdeacon, or Archdean as he was sometimes (inaccurately) titled in old charters and records. He was in practice the judge in the Episcopal Court. He had the right to delegate his legal duties to a deputy who was described as the Official.

The Precentor or Chanter was entrusted with the care of the music in the cathedral. He admitted members to the choir, instructed them and kept them in order. He was responsible for the care and maintenance of the valuable music books which were used. The sang-schule over which he presided as a rule afforded not only musical knowledge to the boys, but also a more general education, and after the Reformation many of the sang-schules in Scotland were converted into the grammar school for the Burgh. The duties of the Chancellor were many and varied, he was rector of the theological school, and in charge of all of the preaching. He looked after the readers and servants and had custody of the Chapter seal, which was safely locked away in the Treasury under double locks. He was also responsible for all written communications and for the care of the theological library. The Treasurer was responsible for the care of the ornaments and relics, the keeping of the clocks,

provision of the necessary utensils and supplies for the smooth running of the establishment, the payments of wages, and a multitude of other tasks.

Each of these dignitaries had a deputy, and no doubt a fairly large staff to conduct the daily routine of the work. They were well-rewarded for their efforts with the revenues they enjoyed from the lands in which they were invested by virtue of their offices (their temporality), and from the income they received from the church for the discharge of their duties (their spirituality).

There must have been many other smaller dwellings in the College, to house the servants of these men of the cloth, and the tradesmen and artisans who serviced them. Many of these people, especially in pre-Reformation times, were never identified by name, only the more prominent ones being mentioned in the records.

Many of the people who lived within the walls of the College of Elgin before the Reformation were men associated with the life of the Cathedral, including Friars, a Glassmaker, also John Kyntor, Musician and Cantor – a good example of an occupationally-derived surname, a scribe and various Chaplains.

After the Reformation, from 1560 onwards, things were to change. The Protestant Church wiped away much of the hierarchy of the Catholic regime, the cathedral was abandoned to the elements, and the manses of the vicars and canons gradually became adapted for secular use. The Protestant ministers lived in their manses, in their own parishes and near to their church. The Presbytery became responsible for the running of the church, and the status of the College of Elgin declined rapidly.

The cathedral gradually fell into ruin, but from the number of gardeners mentioned in the records it is obvious that the more substantial houses were put to good use as private dwellings. The isolation of the College from the Burgh of Elgin, which had been such a feature of life prior to the Reformation, was now ended, and the people of the Burgh were free to live and work in the College. From the 17th to the 19th century most of the area, especially the cathedral grounds, became a dumping ground for the town. The narrow lanes of Lazarus Wynd and Weavers Close became home to all manner of artisans and tradesman, and it was not until the activities of John Shanks in the 19th century, in the clearing of the rubble and refuse from the area, that any semblance of dignity was again restored to the College of Elgin.

In the fifteen years following the Reformation of 1560-1568 many of 'indwellers' of the College still had a religious connotation, but by 1575 the religious life of the Cathedral was at an end. We now find men whose occupations are much more secular, the areas around the manses, now in the hands of local merchants and burgesses, were cared for by numerous gardeners, and there were also many weavers, tailors and other artisans. Also, of course, there was Miss Barbara Reid, a well-kent lady of the night, who was banished from Elgin on grounds of being "a naughty person". How times had changed in the College of Elgin.