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Dr Aonghus MacKechnie (Historic Scotland)

Architecture and Absent, Intermittent and Satellite Courts: The Case of Seventeenth-Century Scotland

After 1603 there were only four visits (1617, 1633, 1641 and 1650-1) by reigning Stuart monarchs to Scotland. Edinburgh's role as a court city could no longer be taken for granted. Yet Aonghus MacKechnie's theme was that the Stuarts retained a strong interest in architectural developments in their northern homeland for much of the remainder of the seventeenth century. Both before and after it, James VI and I's visit in 1617 prompted the rebuilding of the Mercat Cross in Edinburgh, as well as important alterations at Holyrood, Edinburgh Castle and Linlithgow. The Chapel Royal at Holyrood, the old abbey church, was also thoroughly repaired for Charles I's visit in 1633, when it was used as the location for his controversial Scottish coronation. The new Parliament House was then built. True, Charles I's second visit in 1641 and that of his son, Charles II, in 1650-1 took place at times that were especially unfavourable to major architectural ventures. But, although he very deliberately never went back, Charles II would later embark on the most important building constructed in Edinburgh throughout this period: Holyrood, as rebuilt by Sir William Bruce, was one of the few new palaces begun by Charles II that was ever finished. This was the moment when Scottish Classical architecture finally came of age. Moreover, between 1679 and 1682 the new palace housed the court of the heir presumptive, the Duke of York. It also had in James Smith its own rising architect. Once York succeeded as James VII and II in 1685, the momentum of his cultural patronage in his Scottish capital was maintained, not least because the Chapel Royal at Holyrood was transformed into the new Catholic chapel for the 'revived' Order of the Thistle. This brief resurgence of Edinburgh as a court city was not to last. In the decades after 1689, and more especially after 1707, few imagined that the Scottish royal palaces would ever be used as such again and so, over time, they were turned over to more mundane uses. **AB**