

The Maxwells will always be linked to the beautiful Caerlaverock Castle. But they have other claims to fame – as royalists nobles and Catholic rebels. Not all were high born. One was a packman, weaver and stonebreaker who made his name as a poet and scorned the efforts of a rival – Robert Burns.



# MAXWELLS WERE CLEARLY ON THE RISE TO PROMINENCE WHEN ALEXANDER II GRANTED THE RICH LANDS OF CAERLAVEROCK TO THEM

Maxwell Clan tartan



Threave Castle



Caerlaverock Castle

## CAERLAVEROCK AND THREAVE

The remarkable triangular moated Caerlaverock Castle is the most famous site linked to the Maxwells.

It was built in the 1270s to replace the family's original castle, sited in a salt marsh on the edge of the Solway Firth just 250 metres away.

The family was first recorded in south-east Scotland in the previous century.

They were clearly on the rise to prominence when Alexander II granted the rich lands of Caerlaverock to Sir John de Maxwell, Chamberlain of Scotland, in around 1220.

When his descendants built the new residence it was a grand expression of wealth, power and confidence during a time of relative peace and prosperity.

All this was shattered by the Wars of Independence when it was taken by Edward I in 1300 and held by the English until 1312.

The Maxwells eventually managed to return and it was the family seat for 400 years.

In 1544 the English took the castle again. They launched another attack on it in 1570.

Much more than a fortress Caerlaverock was a home and in the 1630s, during the peaceful times resulting from the Union of the Crowns, Robert Maxwell, 1st Earl of Nithsdale, created an ornate new Renaissance lodging within its walls.

From 1526 the Lords Maxwell also had control of Threave Castle, on an island in the River Dee, also in the south-west of Scotland.

However the Maxwells backed King Charles I who was at war with the Covenanters in Scotland and the forces of parliament in England.

In 1640 a 200-strong garrison at Threave held out for 13 weeks before a letter from the king authorised the garrison to surrender.

The royalist garrison was allowed to march away but the Covenanters ordered the castle's defences to be dismantled and it was never inhabited again.

## REBEL OR LOYALIST

In his early years the political firebrand John Maxwell was an ardent supporter of Mary, Queen of Scots.

Born in 1553 the future Earl of Morton inherited family properties like Caerlaverock.

In 1585 he converted to Catholicism and was eventually forced into exile.

Maxwell wanted Philip II of Spain to overthrow the protestant James VI.

Disappointed, he returned to launch a Catholic insurrection.

King James VI led an expedition against Maxwell who was caught after a dramatic boat chase and imprisoned in Blackness Castle.

He was later released and returned to favour.



Pollock House

Orchardton Tower



# THE 7<sup>TH</sup> BARONET **BANKRUPTED** THEM WITH OVERAMBITIOUS PLANS FOR A NEW MANSION

**ORCHARDTON TOWER AND POLLOK CASTLE**  
The pretty 15<sup>th</sup>-century Orchardton Tower, near Castle Douglas, is Scotland's only circular tower house.

Sir Robert Maxwell, 1<sup>st</sup> Baronet of Orchardton, took ownership in 1615.

The family lived there until the 7<sup>th</sup> baronet bankrupted them with overambitious plans for a new mansion in the 1760s.

Pollock Castle belonged to the Maxwell's of Pollok – who also built Pollok House.

In the 16<sup>th</sup> century it belonged to Henry, Lord Darnley the husband of Mary, Queen of Scots, but was bought by the Maxwells in 1757.

In 1931 it was presented to the public by Sir John Stirling Maxwell.

Pollok House, designed by William Adam, was gifted to Glasgow in 1967 and its grounds are now home to The Burrell Collection one of Scotland's best-loved museums.

## ENEMY OF BURNS

Not all Scots were fans of Robert Burns, whose 250<sup>th</sup> anniversary is celebrated by Homecoming Scotland 2009.

James Maxwell loathed him.

Born in 1720, and known as the 'Poet in Paisley', he wrote an attack on 'poetasters' especially Robert Burns for bringing shame on true poets.

Maxwell, a strong Calvinist, also condemned organs – indeed any musical instruments – in church.

He lived to 80 and had more than 50 publications to his name.

Maxwell would probably be dismayed that while Burns is celebrated his own work is largely dismissed as doggerel.

Yet his own words were prophetic: 'Let none write poetry but poets born, Or sure they must expose themselves to scorn'.

# MAXWELL SITES

**1** **Caerlaverock Castle:**

The present castle, with its remarkable triangular shape, was built by the Maxwells in the 1270s. In 1634 Robert Maxwell, 1st Earl of Nithsdale, built a new fashionable house within his ancient fortress. The first castle of the Maxwells, built in the 1220s, lies in the woods south of the later castle.

**2** **Drumcoltran Tower:**

Built by a minor branch of the Maxwell family who obtained the lands in 1550.

**3** **Newark Castle:**

A residence of the Maxwells of Finlaystone from the 15th century. The tower and gatehouse were built before 1484 by George Maxwell. Sir Patrick Maxwell, renowned for his culture and infamous for his cruelty to others including his wife, added the spacious mansion in the 1590s.

**4** **Orchardton Tower:**

This unique 15th-century round tower house, built by the Cairns family, passed to Sir Robert Maxwell of Spott around 1600.

**5** **Pollok House:**

Sir Aymer Maxwell acquired the lands of Pollok in 1270. Sir John Maxwell built the present house in 1752 to replace nearby Haggs Castle.

**6** **Sweetheart Abbey:**

The abbey came under the protection of Lord Maxwell after the Battle of Flodden in 1513. The family saved the buildings from destruction at the Protestant Reformation in 1560.

**7** **Threave Castle:**

The Maxwells became keepers of this ancient Douglas stronghold after the Battle of Flodden in 1513 but surrendered it to the Covenanters in 1640 after the siege of 1639.



Newark Castle

Sweetheart Abbey

