

There are also other four castles upon one bay, on the east side of the country nigh to Wick, which belonged to these earls. The bay is called Rice-Bay, and is two or three miles broad, the entry whereof is to the east, but dangerous for ships to come into, because of the many blind rocks that lie therein; upon the south side of the bay next to Wick have been two strong castles, joined to one another by a draw-bridge, called Castle Sinclair and Girnego, the former hath been the strongest house, but the latter they ordinarily had their dwelling in; their situation is upon a rock disjoined from the land, environed for the most part with the sea, to which castles from the land they passed also by a bridge which was drawn up every night, whence there was no access to them. I found the year of God upon the lintle of a window in Castle Sinclair to be 1607; which hath been the year wherein this castle was built, or at least repaired. Some account these two castles to be but one, because of their vicinity. They say, there was much sin committed here, as drunkenness, uncleanness, &c. For which a righteous God hath turned them into a ruinous heap. Opposite to Castle Sinclair, and Girnego, on the other side of the bay is Kice another castle, but also ruinous. On the west side of the bay is the castle of Hakergil, a strong house, at present possessed by a gentleman, who hath a great interest in the country, but is not descended of the family of Caithness. There are also the ruins of the old castle of Beradél to be seen, situated on a rock near to the sea, at the mouth of a river of that name, to which also they have passed from the land by a draw-bridge: such naturally strong situations for their houses they sought out of old, that they might be the more secure, and safe from all violence, nature as well as art contributing to their fortification.

About a short half mile to the west of Thurso are the ruins of an old castle, where the bishop in the first times of Popery is said to have had his residence, particularly there was one Adam said to be last bishop who lived in that house, who having greatly oppressed the people by his rigorous exacting of the tithes; the people complained thereof to the earl, who is said in passion to have answered them, "Go and seethe him, and sup him too if you please," whereupon they went to the bishop's lodging and apprehended him, and setting his house on fire, they actually boiled him and supped off the broth: which being known, enquiry was made for the barbarous actors of this tragedy; and being apprehended were put to death, so suffering condign punishment for this horrid villainy. And this earl is not the only the great person who hath given forth an inconsiderate sentence, upon which barbarous and inhuman actions have ensued. Buchanan writeth this to have been about the year 1222 in the days of Alexander II. king of Scots; and saith only, "That they having killed the monk who attended him and his servant, they wounded himself, and drawing him to the kitchen, they set the house on fire about him." A little to the west of this, is the house of Screbister the residence of the late bishops, where I think their lordships had but a mean accommodation; the revenues of the bishoprick here are among the smallest in Scotland, which they report thus came to pass, one of the bishops at the reformation sold the church's revenues far below their value [some say at thirteen shilling Scots per boll,] to the earl, knowing that but for a short time he could enjoy the same.

There is a hill in the parish of Wick called Stony Hill, the reason of which denomination is said to be this; in the days of William king of Scots 1199, as Buchanan hath it, there was one Harald earl of Orkney and Caithness, who being offended at the bishop, as having insinuated something to the king against him, apprehended the bishop, cutting out his tongue and putting out his eyes, which being represented to the king, he sent his forces into Caithness, and having defeated the earl in several engagements the earl flying was pursued, and being apprehended, his eyes were first put out, and then he