A HISTORY OF

King James VI Hospital

on the site of the earlier Carthusian Monastery

Photo: Perthshire Advertiser.

Councillor J. Stewart (extreme left), Chairman of the Perth & Perthshire Mental Health Association, with managers of King James VI Hospital and children of Primary VII, Caledonian Road School, Perth.

This short history of the site of King James VI Hospital is part of a project done by Primary VII Caledonian Road School under the supervision of Miss R. Fothergill. Financial help was given by the Perth & Perthshire Mental Health Association and encouragement and support by the Managers of King James VI Hospital. To all these sincere appreciation is extended.

Best Wishes

Rhona Fothergill

THE splendid building of King James VI Hospital, Perth, was renovated and restored in 1976. It now stands in our city as a fine architectural asset of early Georgian style.

The site on which the Hospital stands has long had historical links with Perth. Our city developed from a small Pictish settlement beside the River Tay which indeed brought much trading prosperity through the centuries to the people of Perth.

In medieval times Perth was surrounded by a stone wall and a lade which made defence much easier. In the 12th to the 14th centuries various orders of monks came to Perth to establish monasteries.

Three of the monasteries of Perth were founded by Kings of Scotland but the fourth, Greyfriars or the Franciscan monastery, was founded by Lord Oliphant in 1460. In 1231 King Alexander II founded the Dominican or Blackfriars Monastery. The Carmelite Monastery of the Whitefriars was a much smaller monastery founded by King Alexander III in the latter half of the thirteenth century while the Carthusian monastery was not founded until 1424 by King James I. Part of this Carthusian monastery stood on the present site of King James VI Hospital.

When King James I of Scotland was captured and held prisoner in England he became acquainted with the monks of the Carthusian order. These monks adhered precisely and exactly to a very strict religious discipline.

The order had been founded in 1084 by St. Bruno of Cologne who settled with a few disciples in the wild mountains of Grenoble at Chartreuse. The monasteries of this order were always later referred to as Charterhouses. The monks led a solitary life living in individual cells which they left for mass and prayers. Resembling hermits they lived in seclusion from the world and themselves. Monks who were craftsmen were allowed to practise their craft in their cells. They rarely met together and a strict rule of silence was observed. This particular brotherhood of monks never became very popular probably because it was so austere but on the other hand it did not later become abusive of privileges and donations and fall into disrepute as other Orders did.

The Carthusian Order had been introduced to England by Henry II in the 12th century and there were nine of these monasteries there by the early 15th century. On returning to Scotland in 1424 James I erected for the white-robed, silent Carthusians a monastery on a site just outwith the west wall of the city of Perth. The charter was granted in 1429 by the king who bestowed large revenues upon the foundation.

The land on which the monastery was built was acquired by agreement with William de Wynde who had a croft in this particular piece of land. He received a sum of money and some land of the St. Leonard Priory in return.

Each Charterhouse branch monastery was given a distinctive title and the one at Perth was known as "The House of the Valley of Virtue" evidently because it was placed in the valley of the Tay.
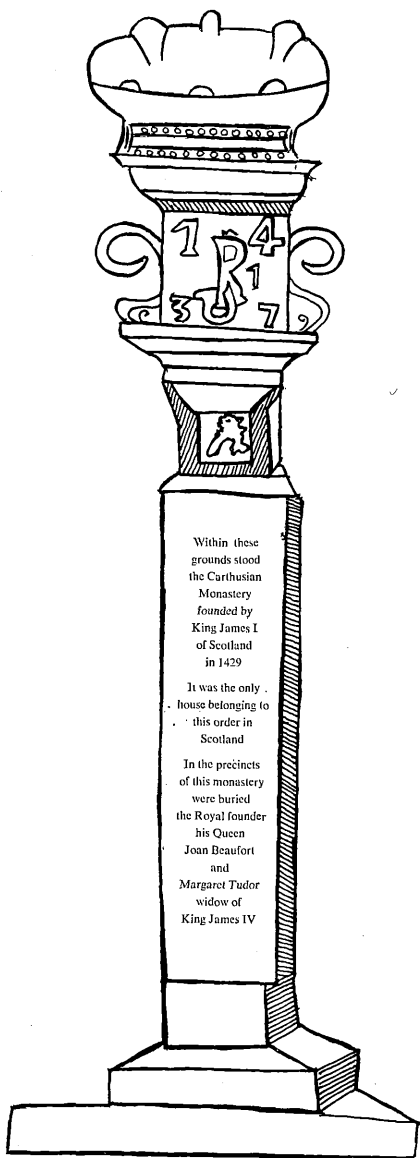
King James I endowed his Carthusian monastery well. Water was to be brought by conduit from the River Almond to the monastery. He allowed them also four horse-carts loading wood from the forest of Birnam for burning or building.

The Carthusian building at Perth seems to have been fairly extensive and of architectural elegance. It would probably be built on the usual plan of a courtyard surrounded by a cloistered walk, off which lay the separate cells of the monks. A church adjoined the cloisters. Record has it that the entrance or gatehouse was opposite the New Row. We can only guess at the position of the main buildings in grounds that would stretch south-wards to Marshall Place and the South Inch where the monks apparently had their orchard—hence the name Pomarium Street.

Each monastic cell in this monastery would be sparsely furnished with a pallet of straw and a coarse woollen coverlet also the necessary materials for writing. The door would be inscribed with some Holy Writ and there was a sliding door through which food was passed. From such a solitary life the monks emerged on Sundays and Church holidays but even then speech was allowed with their brethren only by permission of the Prior. Their maxim was 'Ora et Labora'.

Thus was the Carthusian monastery established at Perth. In 1434 the Priory of St. Leonard and the Nunnery, Chapel and Hospital of St. Mary Magdalene were in the hands of the Carthusians. By suppressing these, more valuable land was acquired by the monastery. We are told that the first occupants of this fine monastery were 13 brothers and servants. It is likely that some at least of these came from abroad as this was the first—and indeed the only—Carthusian monastery founded in Scotland. Certainly the first prior, who held office only for a short time, dying in Perth in 1434, was Prior Oswald de Cordia, Vicar of the Grande Chartreuse near Grenoble.

The monks undoubtedly would gratefully offer up prayers for their royal benefactor and his queen, Jane Beaufort, whom he had brought with him from his captivity in England. James, however,

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Within these grounds stood the Carthusian Monastery founded by King James I of Scotland in 1429

It was the only house belonging to this order in Scotland

In the precincts of this monastery were buried the Royal founder his Queen Joan Beaufort and Margaret Tudor widow of King James IV

Monument in Hospital grounds.

was not to live long and was murdered by conspirators in Blackfriars Monastery, Perth, in 1437. It may be that the royal remains were laid to rest in the church of the Carthusian monastery which owed its being to the King. Of this fact, however, there is no conclusive evidence but according to certain records James I had expressed a desire to be buried in the monastery and erected a monument for himself.

Although the king's body may have been interred in the Carthusian church it is believed that the heart of the king was removed before the burial. This heart was to be carried on a pilgrimage to the East. It appears that James' heart fared no better than Bruce's heart and after reaching Rhodes it was brought back to Perth by a Knight of St. John. It is likely that the embalmed heart was laid to rest in this Carthusian monastery and the Knight was suitably rewarded by a payment of £90 for which there is a record. The monks appear to have looked after the tomb of their royal patron well as there are accounts for railings

and smith-work to the fabric of the tomb. Later, James' queen was also laid to rest in the Carthusian church it appears. It is believed that the doublet which was worn by the king at the time of his murder, which was said to have its holes where the murderers' daggers pierced it, was given also to the Carthusian monks as a relic. The people of Perth knew and saw little of the Carthusian fraternity who did not come into the city to succour and preach as did their Franciscan and Dominican brothers. However, on certain days the Almoner of the Charterhouse would give alms to the poor at the Gatehouse of the monastery. As the decades passed the foundation became richer with increasing revenues. Not only had the widowed Queen continued to make considerable gifts to the monastery after her husband's death but also many of the people of Perth appear to have made donations to the monks who led such an exemplary life. Gifts continued to be made in the following decades and the lands of Glendochart were also conferred on the monastery. The Carthusian monks often had difficulty in collecting arrears of rent. Rentage was frequently paid in money but it is interesting to note that rent was also paid in pounds of wax to provide candles at various altars.
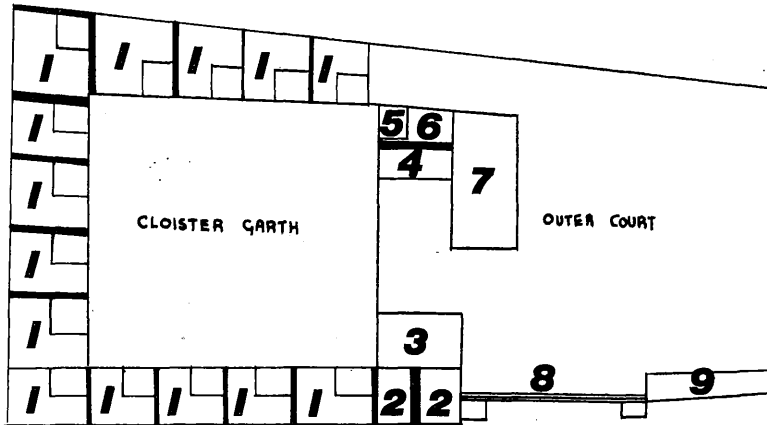
A general plan of a Carthusian Monastery (see key).

Key

1. Garden and Cell; 2. Bakehouse and Brewhouse; 3. Kitchen; 4. Charterhouse; 5. Sacrist Cell; 6 Garden; 7. Chapel; 8. Gate House; 9. Guest House.

The royal tomb in the monastery was opened once again to house the body of Queen Margaret, mother of James V and widow of James IV. The dowager queen died in the castle of Methven in 1541. About 1546 a new Prior was appointed to the Carthusian monastery and was destined to be its last superior as the changing

times of the Reformation were now approaching. In May 1559 John Knox preached in Perth. As well as the monasteries of the Greyfriars, Blackfriars and Whitefriars, the Charterhouse of Perth was threatened by an enraged mob. The Prior called upon the Highlandmen of Atholl to defend his monastery. The gates of the monastery were well barred and the Highlanders stood ready for battle against the disorderly rioters. The Highlanders requested wine but the tight-fisted Prior would only give them "thin drink". Meantime, aware of the garrison of Highlanders at the Charterhouse, the city fathers requested the Prior to give up idolatry and declare for the Reformation. This the Prior refused to do and the mob assailed the gate with battering-ram and scaled the walls into the monastery orchard while the Highlanders stood inactive. The mob despoiled the monastery and the only part of it which escaped destruction was the gateway. This gateway was later taken down and rebuilt at the south-east porch of St. John's Kirk. It had been removed from the church by the end of the nineteenth century however.

King James VI Hospital continues to-day to serve the ends for which it was established shortly after the Reformation. Benefits are still bestowed on the poor, and charities within the city are helped. In early Christian times hospitals were founded to relieve those in want and need and show true Christian spirit. The monasteries too, whatever abuses may latterly have occurred, recognised their Christian duties in maintaining infirmaries for the sick and aged. In Perth there were several of these foundations by the early sixteenth century. The hospital of St. Leonard's dated from the thirteenth century and that of St. Mary Magdelene from the fourteenth century. These properties were passed into the care of the Carthusian monastery of Perth with a request to continue their work. St. Paul's Hospital, situated at the north-west corner of the New Row was founded in the fifteenth century and St. Ann's Chapel also had a place for the care of poor people.

The monarchs of Scotland were conscious of the need to establish hospices in the burghs of their land and this had been done in parts of the realm. During the Regency of the Earl of Moray, James VI being a child, a charter founding the hospital of Perth was granted in 1569. By this charter the hospital at Perth was given all the lands, rents and annuities of the churches, chapels and colleges of Perth, as well as all the property and revenue of the four great monasteries of Perth which after the Reformation fell into increasing ruin. These monies were to be administered by the Kirk Session and a Hospital Master was to collect the rents and keep accounts. For this work he was given a small salary. In July 1587 a second charter was obtained and by then the King had reached his majority. It appears that through time most of the

annual dues and rents were paid to the Hospital—not without much arguing in some cases, however. Indeed the rental of the Blackfriars and Carthusian land now being crofted appears to have found its way into the coffers of the Treasurer of the Town Council! At a later date a suggestion to use this rental to pay a stipend of the third minister for the city was not allowed.

It was in 1730 that the Town Council was ordered by the Court of Session to return the revenues of Blackfriars and Charterhouse to the Hospital Master. The collection of rents due was no easy matter as some at least of the monastic lands about Perth had been feued in the time between the Reformation and 1569, to various citizens of the town. Rights of ownership were difficult to establish and unfortunately there were many rent defaulters.
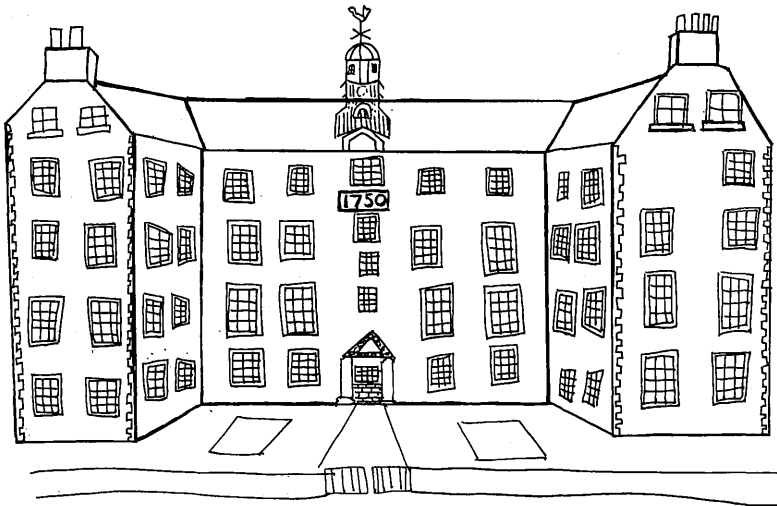
King James VI Hospital.

Although the charters of 1569 and 1587 founded a Hospital in Perth there was for many years no specific building for King James' Hospital of Perth. It appears that a building at the foot of the High Street—possibly the Chapel of Our Lady—was used to carry on the work of caring for the sick, poor and aged. This building was pulled down by Cromwell during his visit to Perth at the time of the Commonwealth, and in 1743 record has it that the Managers of the Hospital were trying to erect a building specially for their purposes, which were to include a Charity school. The lands of the Charterhouse were considered to be a suitable site for the building, whose foundation was laid in 1749 under the Provostship of James Crie. The building we see to-day cost in all £1,614 10s 7d when completed in 1750.

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No record was made as to whether any evidence of the royal tombs was found during the building of the Hospital. Difficulties continued for the Hospital managers in the collection of their due rents, and indeed on one occasion they took the Town Council of Perth to the Court of Session in order to demand payment due to them by the said Council. In 1764 the original cupola of the building was replaced by the gift from the Duke of Atholl of the clock tower from Nairne House which had been demolished.

A detail above the door on the North.

The Hospital was used mainly as a hospital and refuge for the poor and needy but it has also housed a school and orphanage. Soon, however, it became rather too small for the growing population of Perth and the large building of County Place was built in 1836 to serve the needs of Perth city. King James VI Hospital was converted into flats which were rented. In 1973 a programme for renovation and restoration of the Hospital was undertaken. The architect for this project was Mr. J. Morrison, Perth. There was much internal reconstruction but the external appearance remained unchanged apart from a fresh coat of paint. The costs of the restoration were largely met through generous support by the Gannochy Trust and the work was aided also by a State Grant. Now there are within the building 21 well-appointed flats. The Managers of the Hospital are drawn from the Kirk Sessions of three churches within our city, namely the mother Kirk, St. John's, with the churches of St. Paul's and St. Mark's.

Perhaps most interesting historically within the building is the Meeting Room for the managers of the Hospital. It is a fine pine-panelled room and bears the names of the donors to the Hospital Trust round the walls. The earliest recorded donation here is 1587. Many gifts were made in merks or pounds Scots. Some of the donors' names are accompanied with the appropriate guild sign, giving an immediate link from the present to the past. It is indeed fitting that a building of such historical and architectural interest has been preserved for us.

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