Irvine A. Stirling, ‘Mylne Square’,
Book of the Old Edinburgh Club, Original Series, 14 (1925), pp. 45–48.

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Johnne Villsoune, with my hand ; Robert Brwce, with my hand ; Henrie Fethie, with my hand ;

Thomas Measone, David Thomsone, Archibald Pitcathlie, Alexander Blak, Johnne Meggot, Johnne Craig, younger with oure handis at the pen led be the noter wnderwrittin at our command becaus we can not wryte.

Ita est Walterus Broun notarius publicus ad premissis requisitus.

MYLNE SQUARE [1]

MYLNE SQUARE was designed and built between the years 1684 and 1688 by Robert Mylne of Balfargie, the king's Master Mason. The date of the Dean of Guild's warrant is 6th August 1684.

Prior to the erection of the Square all the houses on each side of the High Street were entered by narrow closes. Mylne conceived the idea of an open square. In furtherance of his design he took advantage of an old Act of the Scots Parliament anent ruinous houses in Royal Burghs. This Act authorised Town Councils, in the case of ground which had become waste, or tenements which had been destroyed by fire and were not rebuilt, to sell off the ground at a valuation, and to divide the purchase money amongst the former proprietors. The valuation of the old tenements and ground acquired by Mylne to form a Square is denominated as an 'Appreciation made by fifteen indifferent understanding persons.'

Mylne appears to have been proud of his project, and in certain documents signed by him, he announces his intention in rather exuberant language. He speaks of his intention to build 'A large structure and edifice which might not only

[1] This manuscript was prepared eleven years ago by the late Mr. Irvine A. Stirling, S.S.C. Though consisting merely of rough notes never intended for publication, it contains some fresh and interesting facts regarding Mylne Square, which was demolished on the reconstruction of North Bridge Street. The narrative, which is based on a perusal of title deeds and the Records of the old Dean of Guild Court, makes clear for the first time that Robert Mylne had not (as is generally supposed) acquired the whole of the ground on which the Square bearing his name was built. Some omissions have been found necessary, but the substance of the manuscript is here reproduced. With regard to the builder's name, the usual spelling has been followed.—Ed.

prove to the decorment of the good Town but to the great convenience and accommodation of his Majesty's Lieges therein and resorting thereto.' In another document he describes the property as 'that new stone tenement of land of square area lately built and erected by Robert Mylne of Balfarg, Mason of our Sovereign Lord the King, now and in all time coming to be called Mylne Square over against the Church commonly called the Tron Church.' The Square is described in a third document as 'ane fabrick, the front quherof of polished aisler work of competent thickness, and the back work nixt to the court of good roch meassone work of tuo fute and half foots breadth.'

Mylne's scheme seems to have been successful, many of the houses being sold before completion. Amongst the purchasers were the following:—Archibald Sinclair, Advocate; George Mackenzie, Clerk to the Exchequer; George Drummond of Blair; Sir Robert Colt, Advocate; Laurence Oliphant, W.S.; James Erskine of Barjarg, one of the Senators of the College of Justice; the Earl of Northesk; Archibald Campbell of Succoth; Dame Catherine Skene; Lady Airdry, widow of the Lieutenant-Governor of the Castle of Edinburgh, etc. Mylne appears to have retained one of the houses in the Square for his own occupation.

The prices paid ran from 2700 merks (Scots) for a dwelling-house consisting of a dining-room, three bedrooms, closet and kitchen, to 5000 merks for a house on the first flat, consisting of an outer room, dining-room, four bedchambers, a closet, a garret, and two cellars. A Scots merk was a little over 1s. 1d. sterling, so that the price ranged from £140 to £300. As the properties were all held on free burgage tenure, the prices were moderate. A modern builder would have demanded not only a higher price, but would probably have added a feu-duty and ground annual as well. In this building project Mylne appears to have had a partner, as the contracts for the erection of the various houses were entered into in

joint names. The name of the partner was Andrew Paterson, described as Wright, Burgess of Edinburgh. Probably he did the joiner work.

The original design appears to have included a large platform on the top of the tenement, which would have commanded magnificent views, but garrets were ultimately substituted. The Square was looked upon as a fashionable quarter, and it is amusing to read in the Records of the Dean of Guild Court of the efforts of the aristocratic occupiers to have a cobbler (who had dared to set up his stall within the precincts of the Square) ejected therefrom.

In the old records of Mylne Square one comes across curious expressions, such as:—'The turnpike and scale stair,' 'The common shore,' and 'Tirlass the windows,' the last-mentioned being an order pronounced against some unfortunate wight who had transgressed the unwritten law of 'Gardez l'eau.' Mylne frequently refers to the fact that his houses entered from a 'scale stair,' *i.e.* a stair with square landings, as opposed to the turnpike or winding stair. The word 'shore' is the old form of sewer. The order 'to tirlass the windows' involved the fixing of a lattice outside covering the whole window. As this meant a great deal of extra work to the domestics, an application was generally made for its removal after the penalty had been endured a short time.

Although Robert Mylne designed the Square and acquired most of the ground on which the edifice (as he called it) was erected, he did not succeed in acquiring the whole of the ground on which the Square is built. The tenement forming the south-west corner of the Square belonged to Alexander Borthwick, who describes himself as a vintner and the owner of 'ane laigh tavern.' Mylne probably tried to buy Borthwick's property, so as to make his Square complete, but the latter, apparently, refused to sell, though he appears to have employed Mylne to build his tenement. Borthwick's property was entered by a handsome doorway in the south-west

corner of the Square. It bore the initials 'A. B.' and the date 1689. The tavern was approached by a short stairway of rounded steps. Borthwick's property contained the cellar in which a portion of the Commissioners signed the Act of Union of 1707.

When Mylne Square was originally completed, it covered a much larger area than existed previous to its final demolition. North Bridge Street was not then in existence, and an exit on the north side of the Square led steeply down to the Nor' Loch. Previous to 1765 the buildings below the Square to the north-east were demolished, and the Green Market was formed. The Flesh Market, lying to the west of the Green Market, had been in existence some years before. When North Bridge Street was formed, it occupied part of the Green Market. The width of the new thoroughfare was about 40 feet, though at the south end it was extremely narrow, as the east side of Mylne Square projected into it. In 1787 the Town Council acquired this portion of the property, which was partly taken down and rebuilt so as to give a uniform width to North Bridge Street. This accounted for the more modern appearance of the buildings that stood on the east side of the Square.

IRVINE A. STIRLING.

THE SCULPTURED STONES OF THE 'ROYAL MILE'

THERE can be few old trails of traffic and custom along which the prints of time, in the shape of sculptured stones, inscribed with dates, initials, heraldic devices, and pious mottoes, have been stamped more thickly than in the old Edinburgh High Street and Canongate—the 'Royal Mile' between the King's Castle and the King's Palace. They record, on door lintel or overmantel, on dormer or crow-step, the coming and the passing of the years and of former owners and occupiers; and, along with these, something of the ideas and habits, as well as of the language, of the age in which the inscriptions were carved; and they ought therefore to be of considerable value for purposes of history, and especially of local chronology and family genealogy.

Unfortunately the series is far from complete, and what of it remains is not always decipherable. The remarks that have been made in previous articles from the same pen on the *Sculptured Stones of Edinburgh* as to the destruction or removal of our ancient landmarks, are still more applicable to this 'spinal column' of the old city system than to the outer limbs and integuments with which those papers dealt. In preparing, in the fullest form that time and the materials allow, an Inventory of the Sculptured Stones of the central highway and its tributary closes, with a note of the inscriptions, and identification, as far as possible, of the individual possessors, one has constantly to lament the gaps in the record—the extrusion from their original places, or still worse, the total disappearance, of the 'brief chronicles' and 'sermons in stone' with which the citizens of former centuries were