

The Fetternear Trust Ltd



The Mansion House before the fire of 1919.

FETTERNEAR

A BRIEF HISTORY



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Preface

The estates of the Leslies of Balquhain and Fetternear covered an area of about 9,500 acres in 1838. They extended from the present Kemnay to Blairdaff road northwards almost to Pitcaple, bounded on the east by the river Don, the Manar estate and the present A96 and to the west by the Blairdaff to Chapel of Garioch road and the Pittodrie estate. North of Inch they owned a swathe of land extending up to the Glens of Foundland. These lands would appear to have been sold off during the late 19th century.

The estate was finally sold up at a roup held in the Kintore Arms Hotel on October 5th and 6th 1932, when 5,780 acres, yielding an annual rental income of £3,986 4s. 4d. with insurance premiums of £129 9s. 9d., came under the hammer in 62 lots. This included 412 acres on the Hill of Bennachie, being the southern part of the Mither Tap acquired during the “Rape of Bennachie” in 1859. A stone on the top of the Mither Tap has carved on it the initials B for Balquhain, P for Pitcaple and LE for Logie-Elphinstone, marking the junction of three of the nine estates which “legally” divided up the Commonty of Bennachie among themselves in that year.

This history covers the present Fetternear estate which comprises the old mansion and its policies, the home farm, its woodlands, drives and lodges and the adjoining farms of Nethererton and Ardiebrown.

The production of this brief history of Fetternear has relied almost exclusively on the research and work of many people and the Trust’s grateful thanks are due to one and all of them.

Foremost among them are the Scottish Episcopal Palaces Project (SEPP) and its directors, Dr Penny Dransart and the late Nicholas Bogdan. Without their boundless enthusiasm and painstaking research over many years it is very doubtful if this history would have been written. They have inspired the staff and students from: the University of Wales, Lampeter; the Scottish Castles Survey and the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Scotland; the professional archaeologists employed by SEPP; students from many other universities; and all the local and non-local volunteers who have, and are still, gradually uncovering the history of the ruins.

The Trust’s thanks are due to others who have contributed the results of their own particular research, notably Ann Dean for the chapter on St Ninian’s and St John’s churches and Anne Baxter for the details of the Roman Catholic seminary at Aquhorties. Also to the many friends who have read and commented on the various drafts, to Dr Melanie Jones of Roslyn Associates for the proof reading, and to the Bailies of Bennachie - Cormack Collection for the photograph on the front cover.

The Trust has drawn heavily on “The Historical Records of the Family of Leslie from 1067 to 1868-9” by Colonel Charles Leslie, published in 1869. The majority of the quotations used in the text come from this work.

Chapter 1.

Early History

Fetternear, which means “the land in front of the shieling hill”, lies in a sheltered, well-drained position on the south facing side of a range of hills, conveniently close to a bend of the river Don with ample spring water available. It is not surprising therefore that it should have been inhabited for more than 5000 years. Archaeological excavations which began in 1995 have discovered traces of these early occupations. It was originally forested and early records speak of the hunting and fishing being owned by the bishops. The river Don was almost certainly navigable by boat this far upstream from Aberdeen.

A relatively small (but nonetheless significant) number of flint tools of late Mesolithic (8000 – 4000 B.C.) date have been recovered. These are of sufficient number to suggest that the site was occupied at that time, but more intensive fieldwork is required to establish this.

During the course of the geophysical survey conducted by the archaeological team of the site and its immediate surroundings, a number of circular features were detected lying near the burn. It seems possible that some of these may be the remains of prehistoric roundhouses.

Excavations in 2001 in the field to the north of the ruins uncovered traces of a Bronze Age settlement. Discoveries included postholes, a hearth with burnt bones, and some sherds of pottery. Preliminary dating of these has yet to be carried out.

The reference to a “villa” in the papal bull of 1157 indicates that there was a building there at that time. As the word “villa” then described a mansion more than a simple house, it was clearly inhabited by someone of importance. Evidence is emerging from the archaeological excavations to confirm this.

Chapter 2.

The Bishops of Aberdeen

In medieval times the Church with its bishops was one of the major powers in the land, owing allegiance only to the Pope and the Crown. The Barony of Fetternear belonged to the See of Aberdeen. In 1157 Pope Adrian IV confirmed to Edward, Bishop of Aberdeen, “*All the lands, churches, and others granted to the Cathedral Church of Aberdeen by the kings of Scotland*”. Among the lands and churches specified in the papal bull is “*The villa (country mansion) of Fethernear, and the church with its pertinents (possessions)*”. In 1242 Ralph de Lambley, 8th Bishop of Aberdeen, was granted by King Alexander II “*The privilege of a free forest in the lands of Brass and Fetternear, so that no one could cut wood or hunt there without the bishop's permission, under a penalty of a fine of £10*”.

Early records suggest that there was already a residence at Fetternear, which was re-built by Bishop Peter de Ramsay in 1256, and further records show that the house was extended in 1329 and used as a summer palace by Bishop Alexander Kinninmonth.

Alexander Kinninmonth I (Bishop of Aberdeen 1329 - c.1343) had outstanding ability and royal favour. He had been a papal chaplain and lawyer and was certainly one of the small party that carried the Declaration of Arbroath (Letter of the Community of the Realm of Scotland) to the Pope, in Avignon in 1320. One authority makes the case that he was its author. He seems also to have spent some time in Avignon effectively acting as Robert the Bruce's ambassador to the Pope.

Kinninmonth was actually chosen to succeed Bishop Lamberton as bishop of St Andrews on his death in 1328, only to find himself thwarted by a fellow-clerk of the late bishop's familia (household), Mr James Ben, who had the advantage of being at the papal curia (court) when news of the vacancy arrived. Nevertheless, Pope John almost immediately compensated Kinninmonth with the vacant See of Aberdeen, without the formality of an election.

Based on research by SEPP, it is believed that Kinninmonth's additions to the palace at Fetternear were on a very palatial scale as it is said that he wished to rival the palace of the Bishop of St Andrews.

Tradition states that Sir William Wallace spent a night in the palace at Fetternear in 1297, and that one of the towers was named “The Wallace Tower” to commemorate this event. The visit would have been just before he raised the flag of rebellion against the English, and it is likely that he visited all the major landowners and magnates to assess the support which he could amass. Bishop Cheyne, in fact, refused to support Wallace.

The house and the estate remained in the possession of the church until in 1550 William Gordon, Bishop of Aberdeen, granted a lease to John Leslie, 8th Baron of Balquhain, “*Of the barony and Shire of Fetternear for nineteen years, paying therefor yearly seventeen pounds six shillings and eight pence, usual money of Scotland, together with three pounds foresaid for the fishing of the same*”.

Chapter 3.

The Leslie Family

William Leslie, 9th Baron of Balquhain, was Sheriff of Aberdeenshire under the Queen's Lieutenant of the North, the Earl of Huntly. He gave great assistance to the Bishop of Aberdeen in protecting St Machar's cathedral from the "ravages of the Reformers", and he supported the bishop when all the other bishops in Scotland were being persecuted. In 1566 the bishop, William Gordon, as a reward for the services rendered "*bestowed on him the barony of Fetternear, with its palace, tower, and fortalice, with the salmon-fishing in the river Don, and all other pendicles*¹". This was confirmed by a royal charter in 1602,

In 1625 John Leslie, 11th Baron, wadsett² the lands and barony of Fetternear to his brother-in-law, Sir Alexander Hay of Dalgety, for the sum of 11,000 merks (A merk or mark was about 13 shillings and 4 pence). Two years later they, with the consent of John Leslie, transferred the ownership of the lands and barony of Fetternear to Hector Abercrombie of Westhall, grandson of William Leslie, the 9th Baron. This was confirmed under the Great Seal in 1628 by Patrick Forbes, Bishop of Aberdeen and by a papal charter by Pope Clement X in 1670.

Fetternear was attacked during the Covenanter revolt of 1638-1645 against the re-introduction of "popery" into religious services. The laird, Hector Abercrombie, had, together with his wife, tried to keep their fidelity to the Church of Rome a secret. But to no avail, as in 1640 a force of about 70 of the Earl Marischal's soldiers from Aberdeen appeared before the gates which they found barred and well defended. As they were mainly interested in loot, the death of one of their number caused the whole force to retire forth-with; but the laird, anticipating another attack, immediately packed up his possessions and with his family took refuge in Berwick. Another party of soldiers returned later and sacked the house. The cause of this attack was, according to Spalding, none other than religious antagonism. "*Thus all sort of people who would not swear and subscribe the covenant, and contribute to the good cause, was grievously overcome and oppressed, without law or authority of his majesty.*"

During this period William Leslie and his son, Count Patrick Leslie, 15th Baron, both rose to rank and prosperity through military service in central Europe. Patrick Leslie returned as a Count of the Holy Roman Empire and regained possession of the estates in 1690. He transferred the family seat from Balquhain to Fetternear and carried out major alterations to the house, converting it into a mansion.

"Francis Abercrombie, Lord Glassford, and Dame Anna Sempill, his spouse, disposed (assigned) the lands and barony of Fetternear in favour of Patrick, Count Leslie of Balquhain, and Mary Irvine his spouse, and granted a charter of the same to them, in life rent, and to their son, George Leslie, and the other heirs of entail specified, in fee, 20th August 1690".

¹ Pendicles – dependant parts of the estate.

² Wadsett - There is no exact modern equivalent, a combination of a mortgage and a long lease.

George Leslie succeeded his father, Count Patrick, as 16th Baron in 1710 and died five years later, leaving two sons who were infants. His widow, the Honourable Margaret Elphinstone, brought them up.

Her eldest son died in 1731, while still in his minority. His brother, Count Ernest Leslie, 18th Baron, was persuaded by his mother to leave all the household furniture at Fetternear to her son by her second husband, James Gordon of Cowbairdy. This was sold by auction in 1742, an inventory of which is in existence. "*Thus Fetternear House was stripped of all the relics of former ages which are so highly valued by ancient families*".

On the death in 1739 of Count Ernest Leslie, who was unmarried, the succession to the estates was disputed. A lengthy litigation followed which was decided in favour of Count Anthony Leslie; 19th Baron, who resided for some time at Fetternear House, but whose chief residence was on his family estates in Germany.

Some years afterwards, Count Anthony's claim to the possession of the estates was challenged by Peter Leslie-Grant, great grandson of Count Patrick. Several more years of litigation followed. This was finally ruled in his favour by the House of Lords who, in 1762, declared Count Anthony unfit as "*an alien and of the Popish religion*". For the first few years, Peter Leslie-Grant lived in Holland and occasionally visited Fetternear. About 1769 he retired and took up his permanent residence there. At this period the mansion was in a reasonably good state of repair and the gardens and wooded domains were in very good order. But he was forced to lease off the whole estate, including the mansion and domain to his agent and relation, David Orme, a lawyer in Edinburgh.

Peter Leslie-Grant died in 1775, and was succeeded by his cousin, Patrick Leslie-Duguid, 21st Baron. He, together with his son, John Leslie, brought an action against David Orme to reduce the lease. They succeeded in reducing the lease as far as it included the mansion-house and domain of Fetternear. However Orme, anticipating this result, did all he could to dilapidate and destroy the estate. He ordered all the timber to be cut down, the gardens, orchards, and shrubbery's were destroyed and the two side wings of the mansion-house and the extensive stables and office-houses were allowed to go to ruin, and were then pulled down. The main mansion house was left in a very poor state of repair.

In 1781 John Leslie, 22nd Baron, on recovering Fetternear from David Orme, took up his residence there, but it was only when Orme became bankrupt that he was able to buy up all the leases with loans from friends and take control of the whole of the estate. It was 1813 before they were finally paid up. Initially he repaired the mansion house to make it habitable, and had the ruins of the two wings cleared away. In 1818 he made some additions and alterations to the house.

Count Ernest Leslie, 23rd Baron, did not spend much time at Fetternear, but lived chiefly abroad. He was succeeded by his son, John Edward, Count Leslie, 24th Baron, who, on coming of age in 1841, took up residence at Fetternear, which he furnished in a very superior style. He was succeeded by his uncle, James Michael Leslie, 25th Baron, who repaired the old chapel at Fetternear. He died unmarried in 1849, and was succeeded by his brother, Colonel Charles Leslie, 26th Baron, who was known as the "Kornel" by the

estate workers and who died in 1870. His wife left him the estates of Hassop in Derbyshire and Slindon in Sussex. He died in 1870 at Slindon.

Under his son Charles Stephen Leslie, 27th Baron, the estate probably reached its zenith. Over 60 men were employed on ditching and dykeing alone and the estate was kept in apple pie order. He died in 1916. His son, Col. Allen Charles Leslie, 29th Baron, concentrated all the family possessions from their other estates at Fetternear. The house was burnt down in 1919. The fire was said to have been caused by a kitchen maid who did not wish to carry a wooden bucket-full of hot ashes out into the wind and rain late at night, and left them in a store room in the house. All those living in the house escaped without injury, except for a maid who broke her leg jumping from a first floor window, but the majority of the contents were lost, including one of the finest collections of Chippendale furniture in the U.K. The laird whilst opening the strong-room door was beaten back by the flames and was unable to close it, so all the family valuables and papers were lost. For many years afterwards there were traces of molten metal on the walls from the collection of weaponry which had hung there.

After the fire the family moved to the House of Aquhorties, which had been used as a dower house. Severe financial difficulties caused the estate to be run down and finally his creditors caused the estate to be broken up and sold in 1932. He died in London in 1948. The family subsequently emigrated to New Zealand.

Chapter 4.

Architectural History of the Ruins and Estate Buildings

It had always been assumed that the oldest part of the house still standing was the south east end of the main block, and was probably built by William Leslie in 1566–1570 as a tower house using the stonework obtained from the old Bishop's Palace. However as a result of the archaeological excavations and the survey by the Royal Commission and SEPP, it is practically certain that the original tower house of the 1560's and the extension of 1690-1 are built on the foundations of, and include part of the walls of, the original medieval palace.

The central part of the building, together with the grand staircase tower, was added by Count Patrick Leslie in 1690–1693, and his coat of arms is still displayed over the main entrance. Above the coat of arms are two plaques, one with the initials PL and MI 1691, being those of Count Patrick Leslie and his wife, Mary Irvine. The other one contains the letters IHS, MRA. (See Chapter 7 for further information).

John Leslie, having inherited essentially a ruin, repaired, extended and made "improvements" to the house in 1818–1819. *"The small house on one tower and the peaked roof of the other were taken down, as also were the pointed tops with the carved arms above the windows of the upper storey of the main building. These were replaced with battlements not only on the towers, but also along the whole front of the building. A handsome dining room was built at the back of the house"*.

The north west wing was added by John Edward Leslie, 24th Baron in 1841-1844. A tower to the north east of the house is shown on the 1838 estate map and also appears in a sketch entitled "Fetternear House before 1818" of which the authorship is unknown. This tower seems to have been demolished between 1838 and 1867. However there is some doubt that it actually existed and only archaeological excavation will show if any foundations exist.

After the fire of 1919 no attempt was made to repair the mansion and over the years it stood empty. In 1968 it was used as the back drop for a floodlit historical Pageant. It was very much a community affair and traced the history of Fetternear through the ages. It began with the arrival of St Ninian, included the visit of William Wallace and a wonderful torch-lit procession up from the "white bridge" as Count Patrick returned from the wars. It ended with a spectacular re-creation of the fire with flares, fireworks and smoke effects. In 1991 some emergency repair work was carried out to prevent a catastrophic collapse.

Although no records of any of the architects employed on the various alterations to the ruins have been found, a certain amount of circumstantial evidence is available:

1690-93 Extension by Count Patrick Leslie

This extension is attributed to James Smith. Although James Smith was a very common name at this time, it is very likely that the James Smith of Morayshire, who was admitted to the Scots' College in Rome in 1671, was the James Smith who became the well-known architect. At that time William Aloysius Leslie S.J., Count Patrick's younger brother, was

the rector of the Scots' College and it is a reasonable assumption that Count Patrick would have tended to employ an architect known to his family.

1818-1819 Extension by John Leslie 22nd Baron

An article by G.M. Fraser in the Aberdeen Weekly Journal on 19th April 1918 indicates that James Massie was the architect employed. However Massie, who was a Roman Catholic, died in 1816 and according to Colonel Charles Leslie writing in 1869, the works were commenced in 1818. Fraser was a very accurate and meticulous scholar and he undoubtedly visited Fetternear. It is possible that the works were carried out in two phases, with Massie completing the first phase in 1815/16, and another architect the remainder. It has been suggested that this architect was Archibald Simpson who had been apprenticed to Massie, leaving him in 1810. Simpson set up in practice in Aberdeen in 1813, having worked previously for Robert Lugar in London, who was one of the first architects to introduce the castellated gothic mansion style into Scotland. However Simpson's first commission in this area, the remodelling of Castle Forbes in 1815, ended with him being replaced on site by John Smith. It was not until 1822 that it is known that he worked on country mansions again.

1841-1844 Extension by John Edward Leslie 24th Baron

No clues point to the identity of the architect. Clearly whoever designed the extension was very competent. It is possible that it was either Archibald Simpson or John Smith, who was the prominent architects of this period and worked on many of the large houses in the area. The architect could well have been a Catholic.

The ruins have been listed Grade B since 1971. With additional information being discovered during the excavations and the survey, the ever increasing historical importance of the site has been recognised and in 1998 Historic Scotland put forward a proposal to schedule it as an Ancient Monument. This proposal is being held in abeyance at present.

Netherton

It is not known when the steading and the two storey building at Netherton, recently converted to a business centre, were built. The two-storied one would appear to be the oldest and is believed to date from the early 18th century. The steepness of the pitch of its roof is very uncommon in the north east of Scotland. They both appear on the 1838 estate map. The farmhouse was probably built in the 1870's or 80's. The Netherton cottages were built in the late 1940's.

The Stables, Laundry and Lodges

These were built in the early 1840's by John Leslie. The North and South Lodges were built with the lavish architectural style befitting the two main entrances to the estate. The architectural style of the Stables with its tower and houses is as lavish as that of the two lodges and could well have included the Factor's residence as the main dwelling. All these buildings bear a stylistic resemblance to the Farm Building designs published by John Starforth in 1853. The West and Whitehaugh Lodges and the Laundry were of a much plainer style as befitting less important buildings. It could well be that the same architect was used on all these buildings and the 1841-44 wing to the mansion as they were all built during the same period.

Chapter 5.

Archaeological Investigations

In the late 19th century Charles Leslie carried out some archaeological investigations into the ruins of the Bishop's Palace which lay immediately in front of and to the south of the mansion. Unfortunately a report on the excavation was never published and no records pertaining to it have been discovered. It seems probable they were all destroyed when the mansion house burnt down in 1919. However the well known Aberdeen architect and architectural historian, William Kelly, later recorded that during the excavation Charles Leslie recovered "some perfect pieces of advanced first-pointed mouldings and tracery". In retrospect, it seems likely that these should be associated with Kinninmonth's reconstruction of the palace in the 1330's as the detection of tracery on a Scottish castle site is unusual.

In 1995 the University of Wales, Lampeter, together with SEPP was given permission to carry out a new archaeological investigation into the ruins of the Bishop's Palace. Excavations have been carried out every year from 1995 to 2003. With the changes in university funding over the last few years the composition of the archaeological team has gradually changed from mainly students to mostly local volunteers. In 2000 they were joined by some 80 amateur Dutch archaeologists from the Werkgroep Archeologie "Philips van Horne". Thirty four volunteers participated in the excavations for the 2003 season.

Ground resistivity and topographical surveys have been carried out by the University of Wales, Lampeter and local volunteers on all the accessible areas around the ruins, including the park and the field behind them. The results of these surveys showed a number of areas of disturbed ground, which could indicate possible structural remains. Some of these have been investigated, but the rest await investigation in the future. In 1995 and 1996 a survey of the ruins was carried out by the Royal Commission of Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland and SEPP.

As the archaeological excavations proceed, more and more indications are appearing that the original palace was a very substantial building and that it could rank as one of the largest buildings to be found from the medieval period in Scotland.

A sketch presumed to have been prepared in the 1840's gives details of a large ditch which had been encountered when the 1818 wing was built and which ran centrally beneath it. Archaeological excavations in 2000 revealed that this ditch ran due east and appeared to curve round under the east wing of the ruins. Excavations in 2002/3 revealed traces of it to the east and south of the ruins. However traces of other and later ditches have also been found in that area and only further research will clarify the sequence. It had long been suspected, and was confirmed in 2003, that some of the walls showing above ground level were not original. Nineteenth century agricultural drains running beneath them showed that they had been rebuilt in part by Charles Leslie in the 1890's.

Finds have included fragments of medieval stained glass, clay pipes dating back to the 17th century, some from abroad, pottery, roof tiles and fragments of wine bottles with the Leslie family crest embossed on them. The most exciting find in 2003 was a small carved bone figurine depicting a priest or king which probably had formed part of the decoration of a casket. Stylistically it is medieval and preliminary dating has given it a date of cc 1300. Close to it were found some half round sections of bone with fine holes drilled in them. These have been provisionally dated to not later than the 12th century.

Chapter 6.

The Grounds, Formal Gardens and Approaches

The Grounds

Whilst the earliest map available, William Roy's Military Survey of Scotland (1747-55) shows the house and some of the surrounding hills, it shows no recognisable details of the grounds or gardens. In 1690 when Count Patrick Leslie moved from the castle of Balquhain to Fetternear House the approach to the house from the south was through a magnificent avenue of three rows of trees on each side.

The gardens and wooded domains were in perfect order when Peter Grant Leslie obtained possession of the estate from Count Anthony Leslie in 1762. However during the lengthy but successful litigation to reduce the length of the lease granted to David Orme, the estate suffered badly. Orme, anticipating that he would lose, did all he could to dilapidate and destroy it. He ordered all the wood to be cut down, including the ornamental timber and the superb old avenues. *"Some of the neighbouring gentlemen, anxious to save the ornamental trees from destruction and to preserve them for the family, bought them and left them standing. David Orme insisted that this was a breach of bargain, as the trees were sold under condition of being cut down, regained possession and had them felled. The fine old gardens, orchards, and shrubberies were destroyed"*.

Although John Leslie had recovered the right to live at Fetternear in 1781, it was 1813 before he had funds available to spend on the estate. It had been neglected, broken up into fields and exhausted by over cropping. The agricultural system was re-organised and brought up to date, being mainly laid down to grass for the herd of Galloway cattle which he brought up from his wife's home at Nithsdale. Extensive replanting of the avenues and woodlands took place, shelterbelts on the hills behind and to the north of the mansion were planted and clumps of trees were interspersed throughout the estate.

John Edward Leslie, 24th Baron, built a new steading of office houses and handsome lodges at each of the gates, and made other improvements during the 1840's. Further replanting of avenues and woodland was carried out during the late 19th century. As a result the present landscape essentially dates from that time.

"The mansion-house of Fetternear is beautifully situated in a finely-wooded domain, at a short distance from the bank of the river Don, commanding a view of the river and of the surrounding country. From it are seen in the distance the hill of Corrennie, the hill of Fair, the hill of Bennachie, and others, which form a picturesque boundary to the landscape".

During the First World War a company of about a hundred and twenty Canadian lumberjack troops were billeted in the stables and in various huts, with their officers living in the mansion. They extracted timber from the extensive forests in the estate. The timber was brought out to a saw mill in Kemnay using a narrow gauge railway running through the estate. These woodlands were never replanted but were allowed to revert to birch.

After the mansion was burnt down in 1919 no alterations were made to the estate until it was broken up and sold. Three ladies, Miss Berry, Miss Chetwynd and Miss Arbuthnot-

Leslie bought the centre of the estate in 1934 and the adjoining farms of Nethererton and Ardiebrown in 1943. They carried out some replanting of trees in the avenues and elsewhere. During the Second World War they ran the estate as a mixed farm including an accredited poultry farm, a pedigree dairy herd and arable. Italian prisoners of war helped on the farm. After the war the farming was changed gradually to beef and arable and “commercial” planting of conifers was carried out, mainly at the Kemnay entrance and in Fountain wood. Replanting of specimen trees is being carried out by the present owners in the parkland around the ruins.

The Formal Gardens

The estate map of 1838 and the first two editions of the Ordnance Survey maps show the formal gardens lying to the east of the house only, with the walled garden to the north of the house by the stables. The layout of these gardens is different in each of the maps, although they all appear to have incorporated formal walks and hedges. The formal gardens were allowed to go wild after the fire and are entirely overgrown at present. The walled garden continued to be used for vegetables and herbaceous borders up to the 1970's.

The Approaches to the Estate

It is just possible to reconcile William Roy's map with the *“approach to the house in 1690 from the south being along a magnificent avenue of three rows of trees on each side”*. This would infer that the bridge crossing Marshes burn directly south of the ruins (“white bridge”), dates from this period or earlier.

In 1818-19 a new approach to the mansion from the north east, or Inverurie side, was made through the woods from Whitehaugh (Burnhervie) along the bank of the river Don forming a beautiful drive two miles long. This drive swung round to the south of the formal gardens to run past the east end of the house to the porch.

The estate map of 1838 gives a very detailed picture of the drive from Whitehaugh and the drive from Kemnay via the ferry or ford, crossing the Marshes burn over the “white bridge”. There was also a back drive following the route of the burn to the west.

Prior to the opening of the bridge over the river Don to Kemnay in the 1860's, there were two options for crossing the river. One was by ferry at a site near the present bridge; the other was the ford at Garmonend, beside the existing sewage works. The road from the ferry followed the route of the present drive until it met the road from the ford on the estate. From here it turned left and ran to Blairdaff, joining the present road at the point where there is a bend just past the turning to Boatleys.

By the time of the 1st edition of the Ordnance Survey map was published in 1867 the road to Blairdaff had been diverted to its present course. The main gates and the South Lodge had been built, and the drive followed its present route. A lodge was built in the 1860's at the point where the old ford road crossed the drive (Ford Lodge). A new bridge over Marshes burn to the east of the “white bridge” was also built at this time. This bridge is believed to have carried the narrow gauge timber railway during the First World War. By 1900, when the 2nd edition of the Ordnance Survey map was published, the drive through to Nethererton had been made and, also the avenue south of the “white bridge”, leading to the Ford Lodge, had been planted. The Ford Lodge was demolished in the 1960's

Burnhervie or Whitehaugh as it was formerly known

A “Haugh” is the alluvial land lying in a corner or nook in the bend of a river. Originally the whole area was called Whitehaugh, and in the “List of Poleable Persons within the Shire of Aberdeen” of 1696 William Smith, miller was registered at Whytehaugh. During the early 19th century the name Burnhervie appeared to come into use for the buildings alongside the Hervie burn, with Whitehaugh being used for the buildings within the estate walls. At this time Burnhervie was a small settlement containing a meal mill, a woollen mill, a blacksmith shop, and a fully licensed general store with the North and Whitehaugh Lodges and a saw mill being in Whitehaugh, The remains of the water driven saw mill can be seen just upstream of the “Shakin’ Brig”. The general store was used for illicit drinking with the estate staff and local farmers being accommodated in a store room and others, including the quarrymen from Kemnay, outside. It eventually lost its licence as a result of rowdiness. The first of the “Shakin’ Brigs” was probably built in the late 19th century and complemented the Whitehaugh ford just downstream of the mill intake which continued in use until just after the First World War, mainly for bringing timber to the saw mill. The smiddy continued in operation until the mid 20th century.

Beside the drive to Burnhervie near the ruined St Ninian’s Church there is one of the old railway goods sheds. This was purchased and re-erected for use as a cattle shelter in the 1960’s when the railway to Kemnay finally closed,

There is a spring (noted on maps as a well) beside the graveyard to St Ninian’s with a small flight of steps leading down to it. Local legend asserts that it was found by St Ninian, and the chapel was dedicated to the saint as a result. Its water was tested by the Rector of St Anne’s Episcopal Church in Kemnay in 1947 and found to be “Fit for domestic use”.

Chapter 7.

The Leslies and Catholicism

During and after the Reformation the Leslies were one of the major families in the north east who clung to their Catholic faith. This may have been one of the reasons which forced many of them to seek fame and fortune on the continent. It was Count Patrick Leslie who evidently felt sufficiently assured of his position to return and take up his position in Scotland in 1690.

At this time the Leslies had strong links with the Society of Jesus and Count Patrick's brother had been Rector of the Scots' College in Rome. Both Balquhain and Fetternear have a plaque with the letters IHS MRA carved on it. IHS is an early Christian representation of the initials of *Jesus Hominum Salvator* and MRA stands for *Maria Regina Angelorum*. Individually they are quite common, but the combination is very uncommon and can be found on many of the old Leslie palaces and castles in Europe.

His son, George Leslie, succeeded him in 1710 and at this time it appeared that Fetternear was used by the Jesuits as the following extract from a letter from a gentleman in Edinburgh to his friend in the country dated 1714, which was found in a New York library, shows:

“One George Lesly of Lalquhyne, a Popish Gentleman, Brother to Count Lesly in Germany.... the Ground of this Gentleman's Prejudices against the Minister is, that he was lately put on the Porteous roll³, by one whom he could not know for harbouring and resetting of Priests and other Popish Missionaries; But what wonder if he was, for his House at Fetterneir has been the ordinary place of Residence of the Superior of the Jesuits in Scotland for some time past, by him and his Family. The Popish Youths are recommended when they come from Abroad to his House, and ther thet receive their Directions, when they begin to act as Missionaries, and are dispersed throught the Country: At his House there is a Chappel consecrated, which is put to no other use but the Idolatrous popish Worship, and in which there is an Altar, Rich Vestments, and other Costly and Superstitious Appurtenances of their Service”.

This state of affairs did not last for a long, however, as George Leslie died in 1715 and his widow, Margaret Elphinstone, “*shared in the bitter anti-catholic spirit of the times, and resolved to bring up her sons as protestants. She disposed of all the valuable chapel furniture and all the catholic books*”. Both of the sons died early and this led to the lengthy disputes over ownership of the estate which occupied most of the 18th century. During this time the claimants remained Catholic, even if at times an adherence to the Protestant faith was affirmed for political reasons.

During the proscriptions in the 18th century Lowland Catholic priests had been trained in a tiny seminary at Scalan. As the need for secrecy relaxed and life became less oppressive for Catholics towards the end of the 18th century, there was an urgent need for larger

³ Porteous Roll – A roll of the names of offenders prepared by the Justice Clerk from information laid.

facilities. In 1796, Bishop Hay, who had been trained at Scalan, concluded with Peter Leslie-Grant a lease of Aquhorties (now spelt Aquahorthies) to the Catholic Church for the building of a new Lowland seminary for Roman Catholic priests. Aquhorties means “the field of the standing stones” and the Aquhorties stone circle is on a field behind the house. The new college was completed in 1799 for the sum of one thousand and seventy six pounds, seventeen shillings and sixpence. A farm and a small loch were added later and the seminary benefited from their produce. Bishop Hay died there in 1811 and was buried at St Ninian’s. During the 30 years of its existence 168 priests were trained at Aquhorties. In 1829 the seminary moved to Blair’s College on the river Dee as Aquhorties had become too small for the number of students. The family regained possession of the whole property and it was used as a dower house for elderly members of the family.

During the 19th century the Fetternear estate was wholly Catholic, and at times non-Catholics were neither employed on nor even allowed to reside on the estate.

Chapter 8.

The Church of St Ninian and the Church of Our Lady of the Garioch and St John the Evangelist

Historical records indicate that in 1109 a collegiate church was erected at Fetternear, with a foundation for a warder or dean, and canons. This is most probably the Church of St Ninian, lying about a mile from the ruins. A spring nearby is also called after St Ninian.

From the 12th to the 16th century, the Church of St Ninian was the place of worship for those people who lived in the Fetternear portion of the parish of the Chapel of Garioch. The lands of Fetternear belonged to the Church, and it was here that the bishops of Aberdeen spent the summer months. Within the Episcopal palace which they erected, there was no doubt an imposing domestic chapel used exclusively by the bishops and their visitors.

After the Reformation of 1560, when Catholic worship was forbidden, “*Tacks (tenancies) of the parsonage and vicarage, teinds (tithes) and teind sheaves of the lands of Fetternear*” were granted by the various parsons of Fetternear to the Leslies from 1569 until 1606 when Mr. Alexander Patterson, minister of Chapel of Garioch, was collated to the benefice of Fetternear. About 1621 it was annexed to that of Logy Durno, and thence to the ancient Chapel of the Blessed Virgin of the Garioch, from which the parish takes its present name of Chapel of Garioch. St Ninian’s Church was abandoned and the Kirk at Chapel of Garioch became the only place of worship in the parish.

The Leslies of Balquhain and Fetternear remained staunchly Catholic. Within Fetternear House there was a domestic chapel which was used by local families until the building of St John’s Church. St Ninian’s Church was allowed to fall into ruin but the graveyard was still used by the local people. They had access to the graveyard by a track called *The Old Burial Road* which ran through the estate from near Netherton. The Leslies buried their own dead in the ruinous St Ninian’s Church. When George Leslie, 16th Baron, died in 1715, leaving a widow Margaret Elphinstone and two young sons, she built a commemorative arched gateway leading into the graveyard. The inscribed keystone from the centre of the arch can be seen inside St John’s Church.

Bishop George Hay, a respected and revered Catholic priest of the second half of the 18th century and close friend of the Leslie family, was buried beside the Leslies at St Ninian’s in 1811.

The year 1848 saw momentous changes at St Ninian’s Church. James Michael Leslie, 25th Baron, built a new St Ninian’s for public Catholic worship, adjacent to the remains of the pre-reformation chancel, the Leslie burial-place. On the outside of the east wall of the church are the initials IMI (*Jesus, Mary, Joseph*) under the IHS (*Jesus*) monogram. He also made additions to the old chancel, which was the family burial place, which was roofed in, and formed into a vault.

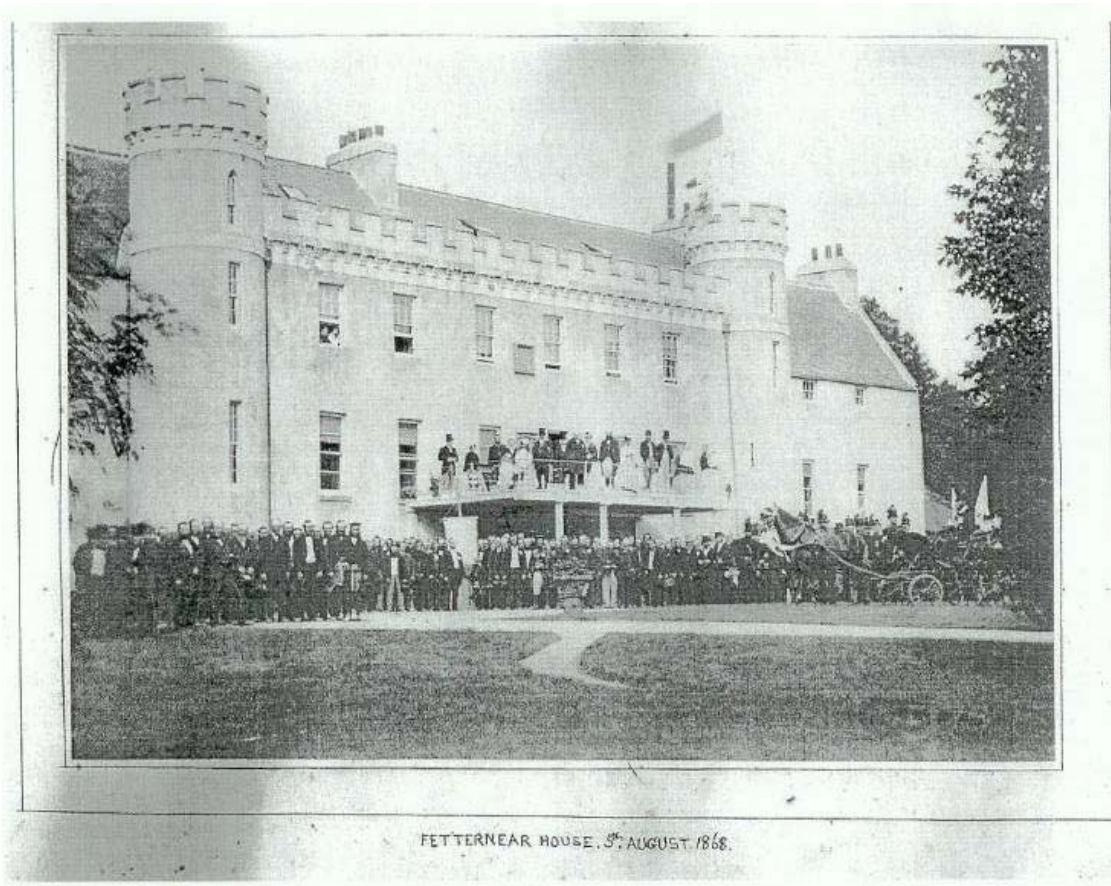
The 25th Baron died before the completion of his plans and his successor Colonel Charles Leslie, 26th Baron, had quite different ideas for St Ninian’s Church. He closed it

before any public service could be held there. At the opposite side of the estate, easily accessible from the Burnhervie road, he built St John's Church with its own graveyard. Designed by the well known architect George Goldie, responsible for many 19th century Catholic churches throughout the UK, and begun in 1859, it became a public Catholic chapel in 1869.

Before his death in 1870, the Colonel had turned St Ninian's Church into an impressive Leslie family mausoleum; he was buried there beside his ancestors. His son Charles Stephen Leslie had even more grandiose ideas. In 1878 he added an extension to the 1848 building in order to increase the size of the actual family burial area. This extension followed the outline of the pre-reformation church. He strongly disliked the public going through his estate to visit the graveyard or to attend interments. He considered the possibility of closing the graveyard but was advised that it was a public one of the parish and no local person could be excluded from it; neither could it be shut up, except on serious health grounds. He was buried there in 1916.

In 1941 St Ninian's Church and a small area of ground on its north side were purchased by the Catholic diocese of Aberdeen for the sum of £20; the graveyard remained a public parish burial ground. In 1955 the roof was taken off and the 1878 addition was taken down by the Catholic Church, the stones being used in the erection of a new church at Mastrick, Aberdeen. The keystone of the arch was also removed and taken to St John's Church. In the interest of safety, the ruinous upper walls of the 1848 building were demolished in 1994 by the Fetternear Estate with the approval of the local council. The commemorative arched gateway, which was a listed structure, was blown down in the gales of March 2002.

The Fetternear Banner, one of the earliest church banners in existence (cc 1520) and now one of the highlights of the exhibits in the National Museum of Scotland, had come into the possession of the Leslies in the early 19th century, and had been kept at Fetternear, being moved to St John's Church when it was built and retained there until its removal to Edinburgh in 1957.



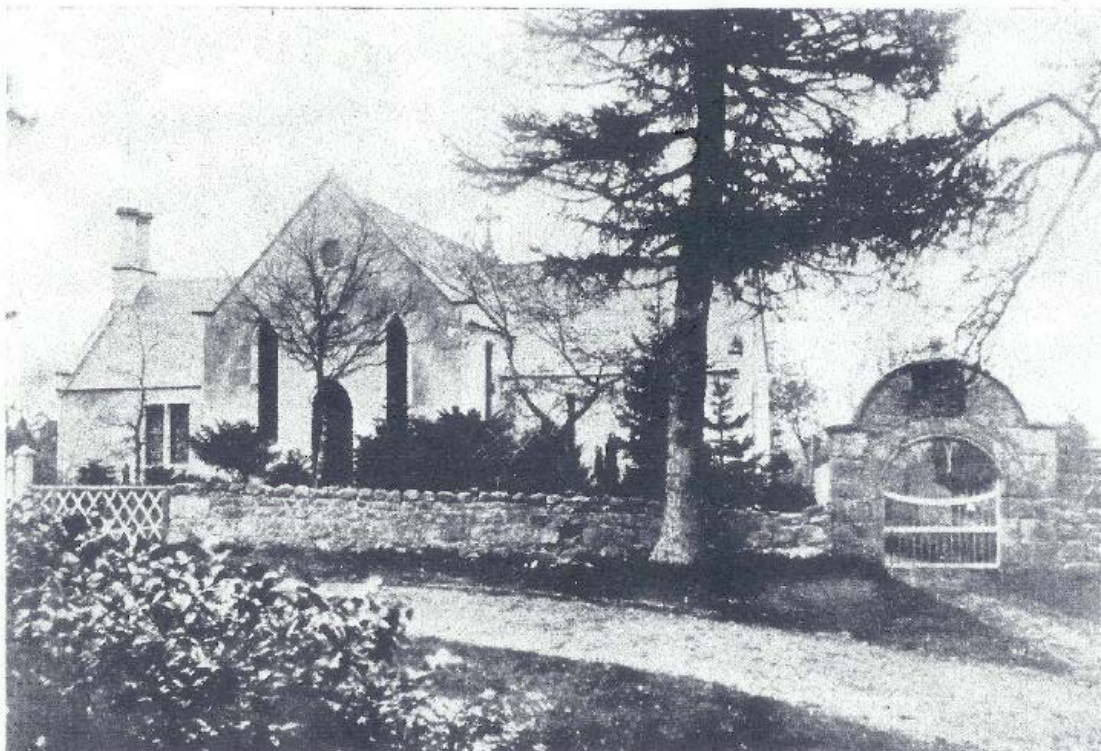
The Family and Staff in 1868



*Aerial view of the Ruins and Archaeological Site in 2000 with the Dutch camp
By courtesy of the Aberdeenshire Council Archaeology Service.*



The Ruins from the South West in 2000



Appendix.

Main Historical Events

BC	6000–4000	Mesolithic encampment or possibly settlement.
	2000–1000	Bronze Age settlement
AD	Dark Ages	Possible settlement and villa built?
	1157	Possession of Fetternear by Bishops of Aberdeen confirmed by the Pope
	1256	Re-building by Bishop Ramsay.
	1329	Rebuilding of palace by Bishop Kinninmonth
	1566	Estate given to John Leslie. East wing rebuilt.
	1625	Mortgaged to Sir Alexander Hay
	1627	Estate transferred to Hector Abercrombie
	1690	Count Patrick Leslie regains possession. Main front and stair-tower built onto the mansion.
	1742	Contents of the mansion sold.
	1780-1781	Estate laid waste by David Orme.
	1781	John Leslie regains possession of Fetternear.
	1813	All outstanding loans and mortgages paid off.
	1818-19	Battlements and rear wing added to the mansion.
	1841-44	West wing built onto the mansion.
	1840's	The Stables, Laundry and Lodges built.
	1890's	Charles Leslie's archaeological excavations.

- 1919 Mansion burnt down.
- 1995 Archaeological excavations by SEPP started.

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