

The Landmark Trust

FAIRBURN TOWER History Album



Written by
Caroline Stanford,
for the enjoyment of those who stay in the tower.
December 2022

The Landmark Trust Shottesbrooke Maidenhead Berkshire SL6 3SW
Charity registered in England & Wales 243312 and Scotland SC039205

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BASIC DETAILS

Built	c. 1545 with additions c. 1600
Built for	Murdoch Mackenzie
Listing	Category A
Landmark tenure	99 year lease from the Fairburn Estate
Opened as a Landmark	January 2023
Restoration architect	Julie Barklie of Simpson & Brown Architects, Edinburgh
Landmark Surveyor	Linda Lockett
Archaeologists	Tom Addyman, Liz Jones, Kenny McFadden of Addyman Archaeology
Contractors	Laing Traditional Masonry Group Ltd (LTM) of Inverurie
Contract Manager	Steven Laing
Site Managers	Calum Johnstone, Rod MacKenzie, Andy Taylor
Structural Engineers	Steve Wood & Ross Livingston of David Narro Associates, Edinburgh
Quantity Surveyor	Angus Simpson of Ralph Ogg & Partners
Services Engineers	Stuart MacPherson & Finlay Ross of Irons Foulner Consulting Engineers, Edinburgh
Staircase design & installation	Robert Mattieson & Russell Steele of C. A. McPherson

Acknowledgments

We are hugely grateful to the 1,671 supporters who gave so generously to enable the restoration of Fairburn Tower, including those who choose to remain anonymous.



Guardians of Fairburn Tower & other lead supporters

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Gifts in Wills

The late Mr M Braine, the late Miss J Fry, the late Mr W Galleway, the late Mr I
Glover, the late Reverend Grover, the late Mr D Lawrence, the late Mr J Owen &
the late Mr A Peacock.

A gift from the Will of the late Mr D Lawrence included provision for the folding
footpath map & framed map of the area surrounding Fairburn Tower.

Dr R & Mrs E Jurd made a donation towards the cost of the Landmark books.



Fairburn Tower, newly completed in October 2022. (The damp patches on the exterior are caused by the differing porosity of stone beneath the render.)

Contents

Summary	7
History of Fairburn Tower	13
Introduction.....	13
The Mackenzies of Fairburn	16
Murdoch, 1 st Laird (1515-1590) – Groom to the King’s Bedchamber	17
Alexander, 2 nd Laird (d. 1620)	29
John, 3 rd Laird (d.1645)	33
Hector, 4 th Laird (d. 1665)	35
Roderick, 5 th Laird (d. 1673)	36
Murdoch, 6 th Laird (d. 1711)	36
Roderick, 7 th Laird (d. 1731)	37
Alexander, 8 th Laird (d. 1760) – The Drover	44
Roderick, 9 th Laird (1748-76)	51
10 th Laird, General Sir Alexander Mackenzie (1771-1853).....	52
The Macphersons: an Ossianic connection	55
Sale of the Fairburn Estate.....	56
The Fairburn Estate under the Stirlings	61
Mackenzies of Fairburn & the prophecies of the Brahan Seer.....	64
Fairburn Tower before restoration	68
Analysis of the historic fabric	73
The tower	73
The stair tower	86
Discovery of the cobbled surfaces	90
The ruined crofts/dining hall.....	92
Philosophy of Repair	96
Restoration of Fairburn Tower	98
The creation of the painted ceiling	118
De-coding the Fairburn Ceiling	128
Bibliography	132
Appendix 1 – Selection of letters of Alexander Mackenzie of Fairburn, 8 th Laird	134
Appendix 2 – Obituary of General Sir Alexander Mackenzie	137

Research acknowledgements

This account is indebted to Malcolm Bangor Jones’s initial research report on Fairburn Tower, and to the Fairburn Estate website for the Stirling family history,

www.fairburn-estate.co.uk



Drone shots of Fairburn Tower before restoration, in winter 2018. It stood as a completely gutted shell.

Summary

Fairburn Tower was probably built around 1545 by Murdoch Mackenzie, former Groom to the Bedchamber of King James V of Scotland. Murdoch was the natural son of Rory Mor, himself third son of Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail, and was sent to Court with his brothers in the mid-1530s. 'From his Strong and Robust temper of Body [Murdoch was] one of the Strongest Men of his Age' and he was singled out for direct royal service by the king, 'being the most gracefull Youth' of the brothers. James V's court was a sophisticated one, benefitting from all the latest Renaissance trends from France and Italy. James married two glamorous French princesses in quick succession, Madeleine of Valois (who died very soon after her arrival in Scotland) and Mary of Guise. Both brought large dowries and the Scottish royal palaces that would have been known to Murdoch were richly decorated and comfortable. As a Groom to the Bedchamber, he attended to James V's personal needs, a favoured member of the royal household.

Murdoch became a royal tenant of lands at Mydfairbrune' and 'Kirkfairbrune' in 1539. In April 1542, the king gave the lands to Murdoch with a standard condition to build a dwelling and create cultivated land around. The Stewart kings used such land grants to loyal retainers as a means of ensuring loyalty from the notoriously quarrelsome clans; Clan Mackenzie were given increasing sway over Ross-shire and the fertile Black Isle in these decades. Murdoch's grant of Fairburn between the rivers Conon and Orrin provided a forward lookout post in a chain of other Mackenzie castles and tower houses across the neck of the Black Isle, under Mackenzie of Seaforth as clan leader. With the mountains at its back, Fairburn Tower offers panoramic views across Strathconon towards the Beaully Firth and the Black Isle, making its position ideal for a lookout. The grant also prompted enduring loyalty from the Mackenzies of Fairburn to the Stewart dynasty.

As first built, Fairburn was a typical four-storey Scottish tower house, built primarily for defence while also aspiring to some comfort. It is unusual today in having been very little altered since (most were significantly extended and adapted in the 18th century). Its cellar especially is exceptional in retaining its gunports and even a swivel mount for a gun pintle – these were lawless times in the Highlands. Windows throughout were small. The main entrance was to the first floor (today's kitchen) via an external stair, probably made of timber. The two upper floors (a hall and the laird's private chamber) were reached by narrow intramural stairs. The walls of the rooms were peppered with alcoves and closets, all evidence of sophisticated construction.

James V died in 1542 (to be succeeded by his baby daughter, Mary Queen of Scots) and it seems Murdoch then left court to take up residence at Fairburn. We found a cobbled surface surrounding the tower during our restoration, the footings for the cluster of outbuildings, stables and crofts that would have surrounded it. Murdoch died in 1590 and was succeeded by his son Alexander; it is unclear which of them improved the tower, but within about fifty years of its creation, a well-built stair turret was added. At the same time, the garret in the roof space was formalised into an extra storey of living space. We have imagined, and recreated, a painted ceiling as if commissioned as part of the same phase of works. Probably at a later date, and adapting an earlier structure, a single storey dining hall was added immediately adjacent to the tower.



The Fairburn Ceiling on the second floor, created by artist Paul Mowbray as part of the 2022 restoration and based on the Rohaise Room at Delgatie Castle, Aberdeenshire.

The Mackenzies of Fairburn prospered through the 17th century, despite apparently remaining in Ross-shire when James I (of England & Wales) & VI (of Scotland) inherited the throne of Three Kingdoms in 1603 and despite Hector, 4th laird, becoming an 'Engager' for Charles I in 1646. Generations followed on, until the Jacobite uprising in 1715 to promote the claim of James Stewart, (the 'Old Pretender'), to the British throne in preference to George of Hanover. Roderick 7th laird of Fairburn fought with the Jacobites against the Crown, and his estates were therefore forfeited to the victorious regime after the Battle of Culloden. Fairburn Tower was garrisoned by 30 Swiss mercenaries, and repaired in the early 1720s.

In 1731, after a general pardon and clever manoeuvring by the wider Mackenzie clan, Roderick regained title to the Fairburn estates. However, the family fortune never fully recovered again. When the Young Pretender, 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', rose again in 1745, Alexander 8th laird quietly declined to rise for either side, claiming that 'a famer or grasier is all I pretend to' (his wife Barbara Gordon, however, is said to have sold her diamonds for the Jacobite cause). Alexander may have died in a duel in 1760; he left a son who was still a minor and grew up to be a spendthrift. By 1759 Fairburn Tower was left uninhabited. The 10th and last laird became a renowned career soldier, General Sir Alexander Mackenzie. He gradually sold off all the family lands. Fairburn Tower was bought in 1802 by the executors of James Macpherson, populariser of Ossian, the mythic Gaelic bard. There were further attempts to sell it, until it was bought in 1876 by John Stirling, a wealthy ironmaster, who built a fine new residence nearby, Fairburn House (today a nursing home). Stirling's descendants still own the estate today.

Fairburn Tower, meanwhile, had fallen into ruination and stood as a roofless, gutted shaft with jagged cracks running down its masonry. In the mid-17th century it had been the subject of several dark prophecies by the Brahan Seer (a shadowy prophesier of the Black Isle). One, concerning a cow giving birth on the top floor of the tower (unthinkable at the time) came largely true as the tower became used a byre. The dining hall next door became two estate cottages before they too fell into roofless decay.

Landmark was first approached to take on the tower in the 1970s and it was only in 2013 with a renewed approach from the Stirlings of Fairburn that we were finally able to step in and take it on as a restoration project. Fortunately the actual shafts of both the original tower and the later stair turret proved basically sound. Archaeology and building analysis added greatly to our understanding of the building, much of it done initially by drone. After extensive masonry repairs the restoration was, of necessity, comprehensive, renewing floors, bartizans, roofs, shutter-boarded windows and doors. Services were brought in (the electrical supply partly by way of a discreet array of photovoltaic panels) and drainage issues addressed with a 'rain garden' or soakaway. A masterful new concrete stair was inserted into the stair tower to replace the vanished original, once again helping provide additional stability to the main tower. The kitchen was designed and made by Landmark's workshop in Honeybourne. On the second floor, Murdoch's original 'hall' or living room, artist Paul Mowbray has created a painted ceiling using a ceiling dated 1592 at Delgatie Castle in Aberdeenshire as his reference but personalised to our project by adapting 16th-century motifs. After contending with the Covid -19 pandemic, marauding jackdaws and persistent owls, Fairburn Tower now resurrects the thrilling time of the Scottish Renaissance for all who stay there.

TIMELINE

Summary of ownership of the Fairburn Estate

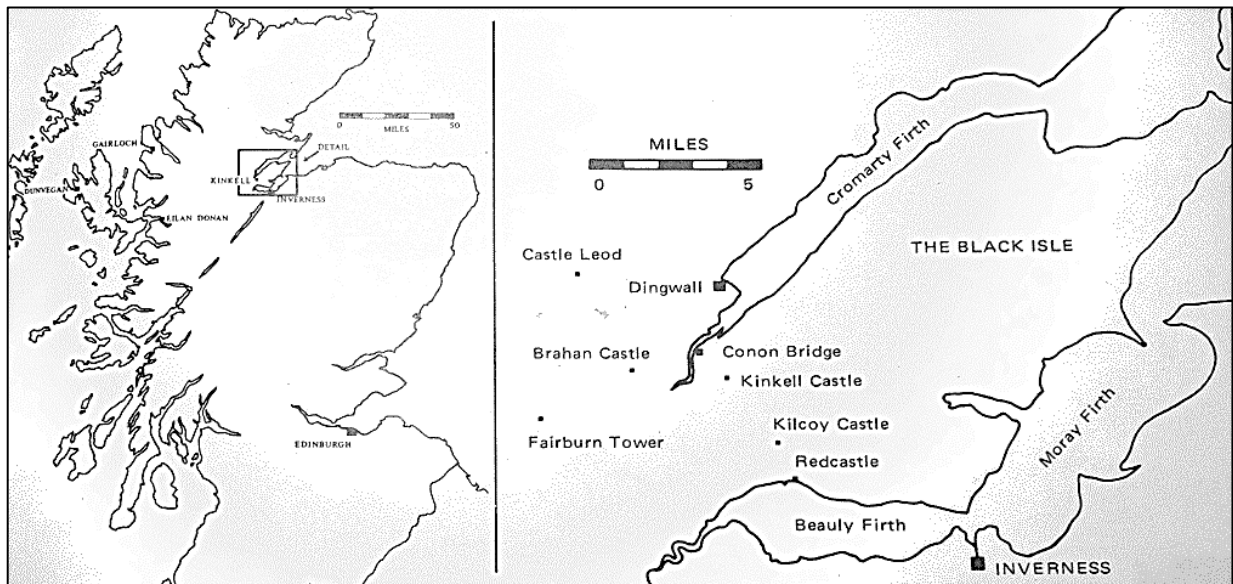
1542 – 1802 Mackenzie of Fairburn
 1802-1837 Macpherson of Belleville
 1837-1847 Mackenzie of Seaforth
 1876-present Stirling of Fairburn

- 1475-6 Forfeiture of the Earldom of Ross and the Isles leads to start of land redistribution and helps the rise of the Mackenzie clan in the north under James III.
- 1488 Accession of James IV.
- 1513 James IV killed fighting against the English at the Battle of Flodden; James V acceded to the throne as a baby, under regents.
- 1528 James V assumed power in his own right as an adult.
- 1539 Murdo/Murdoch Mackenzie, a Groom to the Bedchamber of James V, became tenant of lands at 'Mydfairbrune' and 'Kirkfairbrune.'
- 1542, April Murdoch received a Crown grant from James V of the lands of mid Fairburn, Kirk Fairburn, Archnasoul and Balvaird with instruction to build a dwelling.
- 1542, Dec Death of James V; Murdoch may have left court. Lawless times, clan rivalry.
- 1543 Murdoch known to be resident in Ross-shire.
- 1587 Complaint to Privy Council about attack on Master of Caithness by John, a son of Murdoch.
- 1590 Death of Murdoch Mackenzie at Fairburn. Alexander 2nd laird inherits.
- 1595 Further complaint about John Mackenzie.
- 1603 Union of the Crowns of England & Scotland under James I & VI
- 1620 Death of Alexander. John, 3rd laird inherits.
- 1645 Death of John. Succeeded by his brother Hector, 4th laird.
- 1665 Death of Hector, Roderick, 5th laird inherits.
- 1673 Death of Roderick, Murdoch, 6th laird inherits
- 1707 Act of Union
- c1711 Death of Murdoch, Roderick, 7th laird inherits.
- 1715 Jacobite Rebellion. Roderick was active in the Rebellion and his estates including Fairburn were forfeited to the Crown. The tower was garrisoned by 30 government troops.
- 1723 Repairs carried out to tower and office houses while still forfeited.
- 1724 General Wade sent N to pacify the Highlands. Roderick petitioned Wade to represent his case to the King.
- 1726 Roderick included in a general pardon for treason and 'levying war.'

- 1729 Roderick regains title of estate (through devious legal manoeuvres).
- 1731 Death of Roderick, Alexander 8th laird inherits.
- 1745 Jacobite Uprising. Alexander 8th laird offered a captaincy for George II but declined on the grounds that 'a grazier is all I pretend to.'
- 1748 Window tax: the tower assessed at 16 windows (i.e. inhabited).
- 1750s Alexander not very successful as cattle drover, ran into financial difficulties.
- 1759 Tower stated as 'not inhabited' in the window tax return and subsequent returns.
- 1760 Death of Alexander Mackenzie of Fairburn. Roderick 9th laird inherits as a minor to a decaying estate.
- 1774 Death of Roderick, leaving his children minors and deeply in debt. His son General Sir Alexander Mackenzie 10th laird becomes a successful career soldier, selling off many of the family lands.
- 1802 Fairburn estate sold to executors & trustees of James Macpherson of Belleville, Inverness-shire, the 'translator' of Ossian.
- 1820s Macphersons attempt to sell Fairburn Estate, still little 'improved'.
- 1837 Fairburn Estate bought by James Fowler of Raddery (absentee owner).
- 1847 Fairburn Estate sold by Fowler's brother Henry Mackenzie Fowler to Mrs Stewart Mackenzie of Seaforth.
- c1850 Tower in use as a cattle byre.
- 1853 The line of Mackenzie of Fairburn ended with the death of General Sir Alexander Mackenzie 10th laird.
- 1865 Mackenzies of Seaforth placed their properties in trust.
- 1876 Fairburn estate bought by wealthy ironmaster John Stirling. Stirling demolished Muirton House and built today's Fairburn House.
- 1910 Inland Revenue Survey: 'Old Tower ruinous & of no commercial value.'
- 1930s-50s Cottages still inhabited.
- 2020, Jan Landmark went on site to begin restoration.
- 2023, Jan Fairburn Tower opened for Landmarkers.



Fairburn Tower in its setting at the mouth of Strathconon (Oct 2022), and a map showing the most important castles of the area.



History of Fairburn Tower

Introduction

Fairburn Tower stands on a ridge of land between the rivers Conon and Orrin, a strategic situation that can be most fully appreciated from the road out from Inverness. Fairburn lay at the head of several routeways to the west, particularly through Strathconon, and commanded extensive views of the land to the east, including the routes from Kessock to Brahan and from Beaully to Brahan. This was a place to be seen, and to see out from, across wide tracts of the landscape.

The placename Fairburn derives from the Gaelic 'Farabraoin' from 'far,' over, and 'braon,' a wet place. The particular lands associated with the tower were those known as Midfairburn and Kirkfairburn. In early times, it appeared in many spellings: 'Forbarin', 'Forberin', 'Ferberin', 'Fairbairn' and so on, until it finally settled as Fairburn in the 19th century.

Fairburn Tower was the forward post of a string of castles aligned for the defence of the so-called Black Isle, each unit occupied by a branch of the Mackenzie family. The Black Isle is in fact a peninsular, eight miles wide and jutting east some twenty miles just above the deep notch that marks the upper end of the Great Glen. It is bounded on the north by the Cromarty Firth and on the south by the Beaully and Moray Firths. The Isle is named for its black rich soil, more fertile than the marginal farmland of the foothills or the acid peat of the Highlands proper. Consequently, it has been cultivated for centuries and was never cleared for sheep like the less productive mainland. The Highland mountains begin behind Fairburn Tower, where the arable fields and farmsteads become precarious crofts, hugging the hills below the melt line.

The placing of the area's castles (Kinkell, ¹ Klicoy and Redcastle) emphasise the value of the Black Isle as fertile farmland, forming a protective line across its neck. Other nearby castles - Castle Leod, Brahan Castle, Fairburn Tower itself - also belonged to Mackenzies, helping coordinate the defence of the clan's most valuable estates. Brahan was strongest, straddling the main routes down the River Conon, and occupied by the clan chief, Mackenzie of Kintail (later Seaforth). Fairburn covered the routes from Strathconon and Glen Orrin down which raiders might approach. Both were in sight of Kinkell, with windows that gave sight of each other. Rooftop beacons were probably used to give the alarm.

Fairburn Tower was likely built around 1545, since in April 1542 King James V awarded Murdoch (or Murdo) Mackenzie a Crown grant of the lands of Mid Fairburn, Kirk Fairburn, Achnasoul and Balvraid with the condition that he build a dwelling there. ² The rent was as follows:

'...to the said Murdoch and his heirs, the males, to whom they shall fail, to the elder any of the heirs. without division. To be paid. annually 30 lib. 17 fol. 4 den. [money], 9 bolls of barley, 9 bolls oatmeal, 9 bolls oats, 3 sheep, 3 martes, 23 reikhennis; as well as doubling the said estate at the entrance of the heirs; and by building houses, orchards and the necessary policies [outbuildings].' ³

This was a canny way to combine rewarding a retainer's loyalty to the Crown with military defence of the country and themselves and their goods. The clause requiring the beneficiary to build a dwelling and policies was a standard one which appears in many such land grants by James V. Sometimes it was the grantee's heir who did the building. However, historical context makes it reasonable to attribute the tower to Murdoch.

¹ Kinkell Castle was restored by artist Gerald Lang in the 1970s. His book. *Kinkell : The Reconstruction of a Scottish Castle*, 1974, is in the bookcase at Fairburn Tower and provides a nice parallel study. Brahan Castle was demolished after WW2.

² Gifford, John. *Highland and Islands*. Buildings of Scotland, 2003

³ *The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland*, 1513-46, p. 632. A boll was equivalent to 140 lbs or 63.5kg. A reekhen was a chicken paid in rent.

Murdoch has left few traces in the documentary record, but a construction date for the tower in the middle of the 16th century is consistent with its architectural details, despite remodelling and additions carried out soon after the first construction phase. For all its modesty of scale, the tower's construction was sophisticated. As first built, it was a well-constructed four-storey defensive tower house, its entrance on the first floor reached via an external staircase (most likely timber), and the upper floors by narrow intramural stairs. Its defensive purpose is borne out by the splayed gunports in its cellar, which was accessed only internally. Artillery was still a relatively new development in the 16th century, and the tower must have bristled through its gunports and -slits when fully armed, showing Murdoch as having been up to date with the latest weaponry. The windows look small from the outside, and it was one of the main attractions for Landmark in taking Fairburn on that they were not enlarged, as so often, in the 18th century when times became more peaceable. Unlike the other Scottish tower houses rescued by Landmark (Saddell Castle, Castle of Park, Old Place of Monreith and Ascog Castle were all 'modernised' in the 18th century) here was a true tower house surviving from the Scottish Renaissance.

While clan loyalties held strong, the fact that the Mackenzies of Fairburn received their lands direct from the Crown rather than holding them from their clan leaders was significant. Having benefited as a clan from the Stewart kings' distribution of Clan Donald and Clan Macleod lands from the late 15th century onwards, the Mackenzies were traditionally loyal to the king. This generated fierce family loyalty to the Stewart cause in later centuries, and enmity towards Clan Macleod especially. The Mackenzies of Fairburn's lives and fortunes were thus woven into the rich pageant of Scottish history, which forms the backdrop to this account.

The Mackenzies of Fairburn

These Fairburn lands were formerly part of the ancient earldom of Ross of Clan Donald, who still give their name to the county of Ross-shire. Between about 1436 and 1475, the earldom was held jointly with the Lordship of the Isles, first by Alexander MacDonald of Islay, 'a man born to much trouble all his lifetime', and then by his son John. Alexander MacDonald made Dingwall Castle his headquarters, just ten miles or so northeast of Fairburn (the castle, abandoned from 1625, no longer exists). The lands of Fairburn do not appear to have been included in any grants of land made by the Lords of Ross. The earldom was forfeited to the Crown in 1475-76, when John MacDonald, as Lord of the Isles and Earl of Ross, was found guilty of treasonable plotting with Edward IV of England. The Earl's downfall helped consolidate James III's power base as he sought to unify his kingdom.

This was not to say that the times became peaceable. The MacDonalds continued to raid Ross-shire, culminating in the Battle of Park at Strathpeffer, five miles north of Fairburn Tower, sometime between 1485 and 1491. The Mackenzies prevailed, and many islanders were drowned in the Conon. After James IV came to the throne in 1488, he brought the Lordship of the Isles to a definitive end, in 1493. The Scottish Crown now had vast new tracts of land with which to win their subjects' loyalty. It was partly as a result of this redistribution of land that the Mackenzie clan rose to dominance in the north.

Clan Mackenzie was led by the senior branch, the Mackenzies of Kintail (later Earls of Seaforth), who acquired lands and then parcelled many of them out among junior branches of the clan. These cadet families came to play an essential role in the rise of the clan and its continuing power.

Murdoch, 1st Laird (1515-1590) – Groom to the King's Bedchamber

It was a sign of particular and personal royal favour that the lands of Fairburn were granted by the King directly to one such future cadet branch, which became known as the Mackenzies of Fairburn. Murdoch Mackenzie (1515-1590) was the first of the family and owed much of his good fortune to his own handsome appearance and personable character. He was the youngest of the natural children of Roderick or Rory Mor, himself third son of Kenneth Mackenzie of Kintail. Murdoch's mother was 'a daughter of William Dubh Macleod.'⁴ Roderick was also of Ross-shire, having received a grant of lands at Achilty and Scatwell to the west of Fairburn in 1529, though it is unclear if he built a tower there.

Roderick had three sons out of wedlock, Alexander, John and Murdoch. Presumably in the mid-1530s, Roderick sent his sons to the Court of James V. Murdoch was in his mid-twenties and according to the Mackenzie genealogy, 'from his Strong and Robust temper of Body [was] one of the Strongest Men of his Age'. Only Murdoch was chosen for royal service, 'being the most gracefull Youth of the two'. In April 1539, he was granted tenancy of Crown lands in 'Mydfairbrune' and 'Kirkfairbrune' when it appears he was already serving the king.⁵ Murdoch clearly found favour at Court for on 1st July 1539, 'The king gave letters of legitimacy to his household servant Murdoch Makcanze the bastard, the natural son of the late Roderick Makenze.'⁶ This came two years earlier than similar recognition for his brothers. In 1540, Murdoch is listed for payment as one of 'lez gromes in camera domini regis' ('the grooms of the King's Bedchamber'), an even clearer sign of royal approval. To understand the times and something of Murdoch's life, we also need to understand what manner of man James V was.

⁴ Mackenzie, A. *History of the Mackenzies: With Genealogies of the Principal Families of the Name*. A. & W. Mackenzie, 1894, p. 514.

⁵ *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland* 1897, XVII, p.674.

⁶ *The Register of the Great Seal of Scotland*, 1513-46, p. 445



**James V of Scotland c. 1536, Corneille de Lyon
(Wikicommons)**

James V was anointed king when he was just 17 months old, after his father James IV was killed leading his army against the English at the Battle of Flodden in 1513, the last British monarch to be killed in battle. James V's mother was Margaret Tudor, elder sister of Henry VIII, just another twist in the complicated dynastic and diplomatic ties between the two kingdoms. Relations were ever fractious, exacerbated by continual incursions and Border raids by both sides. Henry VIII coveted Scotland as part of his own dominions; the Scots were just as sure of their right to exist as an independent nation and increasingly set aside their own clan rivalries to defend this right.

Circling in the background was France, alternately courting and being courted by both the English and the Scots, each for its own advantage. Scotland developed the stronger ties that came to be known as the Auld Alliance. Relations between Scotland and England improved somewhat under James V's regents, the Duke of Albany and then his mother Margaret. After 1528, James took full kingship in his own right. He acted to end lawlessness and rebellion in the Borders and the Hebrides and continued his father's policy of increasing Crown income by enlarging and tightening control over royal estates, and by maximising the profits of justice, customs and feudal rights.

In the 1530s, the rivalry between France, England, and the Holy Roman Empire gave James particular diplomatic weight which he deployed with considerable skill. Protestantism was stirring in Scotland as elsewhere in the 1530s and Henry VIII invested James as a Knight of the Garter in 1535, the highest order of the English knighthood. The effects of Henry's break with Rome also gave James a powerful bargaining position with the papacy, which hoped to keep the Scots in the Catholic faith. James exploited this to increase his control over ecclesiastical appointments and church revenues, and in 1537 the Pope gave him the title of Defender of the Faith, a title first held by his father James IV and from 1521-30 by Henry VIII himself (who appropriated it as a subsidiary royal title after the Pope revoked its grant to him in 1530).



James V's two French wives.
Madeleine de Valois c. 1537. Mary of Guise c. 1537
(both portraits Corneille de Lyon, Wikicommons)



James V and Mary of Guise, artist unknown.

Such political manoeuvring also made James a highly eligible bachelor, and he was named as a potential husband for princesses across Europe. In the event, an undertaking made by Francis I of France in the 1517 Treaty of Rouen came good: that James should have the hand of one of his daughters so long as the Auld Alliance held. In 1537, James travelled to France where he met Francis's eldest daughter Madeleine of Valois. This gave him first-hand experience of the French Court, its practices and its fashions in architecture and the arts. Madeleine and James persuaded Francis to allow the marriage even though the French king feared that his daughter's fragile health would not withstand the Scottish climate. The couple arrived in Scotland in May 1537. Sadly, Francis was proved right, for Madeleine died of tuberculosis in her husband's arms at Holyrood just a month later.

Grief-stricken but undaunted, James immediately set about arranging for another French wife. Francis declined to put forward his second daughter, proposing instead the newly widowed Mary of Guise. Mary landed in Scotland in June 1538 and the marriage took place a few days later in St Andrew's Cathedral. It was celebrated with lavish tournaments, masques and pageants. Chivalric honour was an important part of James's courtly ritual. As for Mary of Guise, James's mother Margaret wrote approvingly to her brother Henry VIII in July, 'I trust she will prove a wise Princess. I have been much in her company, and she bears herself very honourably to me, with very good entertaining'. Beautiful and cultured, Mary also brought her new husband a second huge dowry.

The honour and dignity of James and his courtiers was now emphasised in ever more elaborate pageantry and ceremony, drawing on Burgundian, French and English influences. All royal events and palaces were designed to promote the image of the Stewart dynasty as equal in dignity to the princes of these other wealthier realms, reinforced by the use of classical and allegorical imagery.



BBC still/Fair Use



Left: The Crown of Scotland survives as re-made at James V's command in 1540 and bears his cipher, 'JR5'. It is the oldest surviving crown in the British Isles, testament to the sophistication of the 16th-century Scottish goldsmiths. Right: James V's Garter stall plate in St George's Chapel, Windsor. James was awarded the Garter by Henry VIII in 1535. We have incorporated the crest of crown and sword-bearing lion on a banner in the Fairburn Ceiling.

The decorative arts flowered; for a small and relatively poor country Scotland participated fully in the cultural developments of the period and excelled in a few of them, presenting a vibrant, confident and impressive face to the outside world. Through its links with France and its French queen, Scotland became an early adopter of Renaissance ideas and design in the British Isles. James was a great patron of the arts and spent lavishly on the royal palaces. He remodelled the palaces of Linlithgow and Holyroodhouse and built vast new royal apartments at Stirling Castle (triumphantly restored by Historic Scotland in the 2000s).

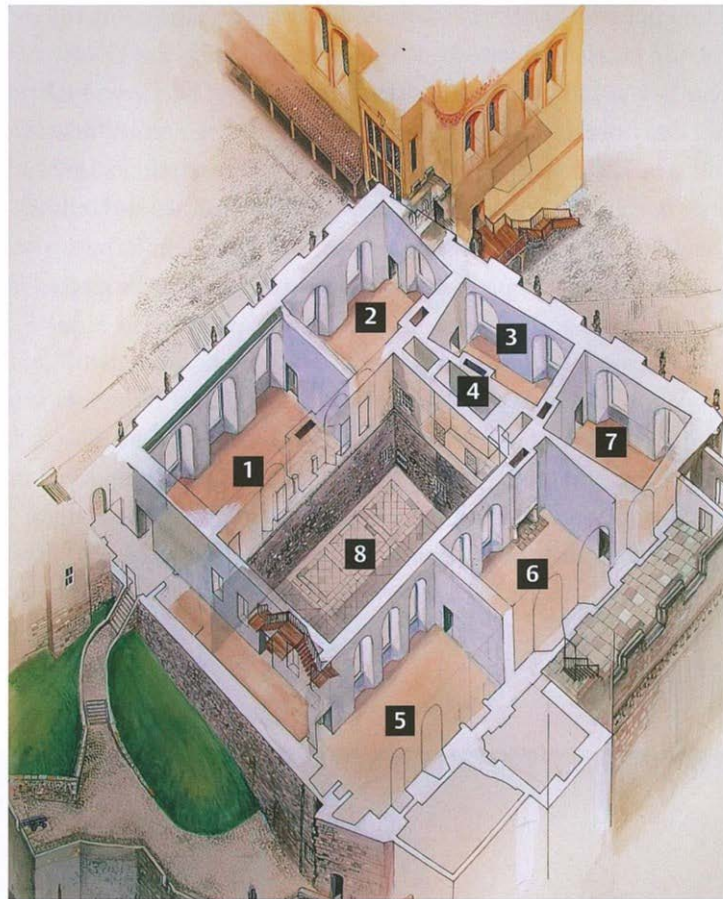
For this, wrote Robert Lindsay of Pitscottie, James 'plenished the country with all kinds of craftsmen out of other countries, as French-men, Spaniards, Dutch men and Englishmen, which were all cunning craftsmen, every man for his own hand. Some were gunners, wrights, carvers, painters, masons, smiths, harness-makers, tapesters, brousters [brewers], taylors, cunning chirurgeons [surgeons], apothecaries, with all other kind of craftsmen to apparel his palaces.'⁷

Just as the King commissioned a profusion of decorative and artistic works, so too the nobles and gentry followed with their own commissions to the best of their means. Only some have survived, but the sheer variety of visual decoration and imagery recorded in the inventories and financial accounts of the period gives a vivid impression of a lost world of colour, dignity and magnificence. Although occasional incidents of savage rivalry between the clans still occurred periodically, the 16th century was one of the most creative, confident and cosmopolitan periods of the Scotland's history.

This, then, was the world young Murdoch Mackenzie entered when he went to Court sometime before 1539, and it forms an important backdrop to his life as a young adult. Fairburn Tower may have been built as a defensive structure in a land of clan feuds and raids, but the sophistication of its features and construction suggests that it doubled in more peaceful times as a comfortable laird's house.

As a Groom to the Bedchamber, Murdoch was among the most intimate of the King's retainers. At Henry VIII's Court in England, ritual was designed around strict control of access to the King and manipulation of distance as the monarch retreated from the public eye. By contrast, the Scottish Court revolved around making sure the monarch remained accessible.

⁷ Lindsay, R., and R. Freebairn. *The History of Scotland* (1728), p. 153..



- | | |
|---------------------|----------------------|
| 1 King's Outer Hall | 5 Queen's Outer Hall |
| 2 King's Inner Hall | 6 Queen's Inner Hall |
| 3 King's Bedchamber | 7 Queen's Bedchamber |
| 4 King's Closets | 8 Lion's Den |

The Royal Lodgings at Stirling Castle, one of the palaces Murdoch Mackenzie attended to the king as Groom to the Bedchamber. The Stirling Castle Lodgings were triumphantly restored by Historic Scotland in the early 2000s after decades of institutional use and, while clearly far more elaborate, formed a useful reference in our thinking about Fairburn Tower. (HES)

James V and Mary of Guise influenced by French rather than English etiquette, instrumental in setting customs that persisted until their grandson James I & VI travelled south to assume the English throne on Elizabeth I's death in 1603. When Sir Henry Wotton visited James VI in 1601, he remarked that 'anyone may enter the King's Presence when he is at dinner, and as he eats he converses with those about him,' which struck him as particularly French.⁸ Such was the Court etiquette established by his grandfather, James V.

The planning of the new royal apartments in the Scottish royal palaces was the setting for such practice. Those at Falkland and Stirling were built by French masons, and many Scottish nobles had spent time in France, where much building of chateaux was underway. The sequence of rooms for James's royal lodgings consisted of a Hall or Guard Hall, a Presence Chamber and a Bedchamber. Beyond lay a Cabinet or study; then a door leading to the Queen's Bedchamber, which was locked and unlocked only from her side. James worked in his Cabinet and slept in his Bedchamber. He dined in his Presence Chamber, chatting informally as he did so with the waiters at his table and lookers-on alike. There was thus no separation, as there was in England, between the public ceremonial of the Tudors' outer chambers and the private world of their Privy Lodgings; and no frontier, like the Privy Chamber, to hold the two worlds apart. Indeed, the Scottish king demanded very little privacy at all. The rule of thumb was that if a door was open, you could pass through it. If it was closed, you went no further.

As one of the four Grooms to the Bedchamber, Murdoch had access to all the king's lodgings. Alongside the Grooms were the Gentlemen of the Bedchamber, generally of higher birth and under the command of that most intimate retainer of all, the Groom of Stool.

⁸ L.Pearsall Smith (ed.) *The Life and Letters of Sir Henry Wotton* (2 vols., Oxford, 1966) I, 314-15.

The Grooms acted as the personal servers of the king in his bedchamber. One might go with the king (plus the Gentleman-in-Waiting) if the king ate in the queen's bedchamber.

The Groom warmed the king's linen bodyshirt in front of the Bedchamber fire, before handing it to the Groom of the Stool or a Gentleman, who would put it on the king. The Groom also 'made the King ready' - that is, helped him on with his underwear as a preliminary to the more formal dressing ritual performed by the Groom of the Stool and the Gentlemen. The Grooms thus performed real and direct services to the king, which gave them numerous opportunities for close access. They also made the king's bed and were in charge of the provision of linen for the king's person and for the Bedchamber. More menial housekeeping tasks like sweeping the floors and making the fires were left to the Pages of the Bedchamber. At night, the Grooms withdrew from the king to sleep on pallet beds in the Presence Chamber, leaving the closest attendance to the Groom of the Stool and Gentlemen.

The Grooms' duties in performing such necessary and functional tasks made their attendance and relationship with the king essential, continuous and familiar. The fine decoration of the king's chambers was their daily experience, where Murdoch had direct access to James V on an equally daily basis; we can assume they were of a similar age, both in their twenties, and that James liked Murdoch's company. For his fee, Murdoch received 'five pounds six shillings eight pence a year and for the food of his horse ten pounds for the year.'⁹ While this was not especially well paid among the officers of the royal household, it was an honour indeed to be selected for the position from the 300-350 retainers at Court.

Further signs of royal favour were to follow. In April 1542, Murdoch received the crown grant of the lands of Mid Fairburn, Kirk Fairburn (where he was already

⁹ John Stuart and George Burnett eds., *The Exchequer Rolls of Scotland (Rotuli scaccarii regum Scotorum)*, Vol. 17, p. 280.

tenant) and also Achnasoul and Balvaird. A further grant in July 1542 included the lands of Moymore, all entailed to his heirs male and female. This grant of the land direct from the king (rather than via Murdoch's clan superiors) gave him direct possession. Most if not all the other lands acquired by the Mackenzies of Fairburn over later years were held of subject superiors such as Mackenzie of Kintail/Seaforth, a more typical arrangement for a man of Murdoch's relatively middling status. In giving the strategic lookout position of the Fairburn lands to his Groom, James V was rewarding a man he knew personally through daily contact and upon whose loyalty he could depend.

Sadly, this relationship was to be short-lived. The death of James's mother Margaret Tudor in 1541 removed any incentive for peace with England, and his uncle Henry VIII declared war again. The Scots won an initial victory at the Battle of Haddon Rig in August 1542. As Mary of Guise was pregnant with their third child (two little princes had each died within a year of their birth), the Scottish ambassadors to London ruled out a conciliatory meeting between James and Henry VIII in England until the child was safely delivered. Henry refused this condition and mobilised his army against Scotland. James was with his army at Lauder on 31 October 1542, where it seems he contracted cholera. He hoped to invade England, but his nobles were reluctant. James returned to Edinburgh, and on 24 November his army suffered a serious defeat at the Battle of Solway Moss. He travelled on to Linlithgow Palace to be with Mary, and then on to Falkland where he again fell ill. Mary gave birth to a daughter on 8th December; James died at Falkland Palace six days later on 14th December 1542, his brilliant reign cut short. He was thirty. His six day-old daughter was declared monarch, as Mary Queen of Scots.

Murdoch probably left the Court following James V's death in December 1542 (though his grant of Crown lands was confirmed in the baby queen's name in 1584). Murdoch appears in Ross-shire from 1543 onwards, serving on various courts of assizes. He married first Mirabell Urquhart in 1548, daughter of the

Sheriff of Cromarty – a good marriage that brought him the lands of Balvaird and Moy – and they had four children. When Mirabell died, Murdoch married again, this time to Christian, a daughter of Rory Farquhar Maclean, with whom he had a further six children. (It is noticeable that the lairds of Fairburn invariably outlive their first wife,an indication of the dangers of childbirth at the time).

As described in more detail below under building analysis, we can imagine the tower by now the most prominent feature of a small complex of buildings, surrounded by a cobbled courtyard, stables, perhaps a gatehouse and other ancillary buildings and crofts. It could, perhaps, be better described as 'Fairburn Castle' in these years, but to avoid confusion, we will stick to its more recent name of Fairburn Tower.

Alexander, 2nd Laird (d. 1620)

Murdoch died at Fairburn on 20 December 1590, aged 65. In his will, dated 13th December, he asked to be buried at nearby Beaully Priory, a traditional burial place for Mackenzies.¹⁰ His son Alexander inherited the Fairburn estate. He was married to Alice, a daughter of Innes of Inverbrekie. This remained a period of widespread clan rivalry, dominated by the struggle for land and power. Fierce tensions between and within families and clans gave rise to general lawlessness, raiding, and violent feud. Cadet families like the Mackenzies of Fairburn provided the military leaders and defended their own lands (and frequently raided others'). Local disputes could easily escalate into violence when legal means failed to resolve them.

An example of such dispute is a complaint made to the Privy Council in 1587 of an incident relating to a long running lawsuit brought by Colin of Kinnock to dispossess Alexander Mackenzie of Gairloch in Wester Ross of his lands. James Sinclair, Master (clan chief) of Caithness and his servant James Paxton were visiting the house of William Robson on the Chanonry of Ross, a spit of land on the Black Isle. Here they found themselves under siege by a gang of Mackenzies, 'to the number of 300, in warlike guise,' seeking to carry off Sinclair in connection with the Gairloch lawsuit.

The attackers were led by John Mackenzie of Gairloch but included Hector Mackenzie of Fairburn Meikle, John his son, and Mr John Mackenzie, son of Murdoch Mackenzie of Fairburn. When Robson's house proved impregnable, the Mackenzies threatened to set fire to it. At this point, Sinclair delivered his servant Paxton into the Mackenzies' hands, who carried Paxton off to the Castle of the Chanonry where they interrogated him.

¹⁰ Today in the care of Historic Environment Scotland and accessible for the public. Reference for will from *The commissariat record of Edinburgh. Register of testaments* (1897).



The stair turret, one of the two bartizans and the dormer with its datestone, all reconstructed along with the inhabitable top storey in 2020-22. They were originally added to the main tower c1600.

They eventually released Paxton but 'secretlie houndit oute ane grite nowmer of throitcuttaris' to have set upon and murdered on his journey homewards, 'quhilk thay had not faillit to have done wer not God utherwayes preventit their doingis'. According to the Mackenzie Pedigree, this same Mr John Mackenzie was the churchman, who eventually becoming minister at Dingwall.

In 1595 there was another complaint to the Privy Council, this time by the Bains, against 'Mr Johnne McKanzie, minister at Urra', who 'forgetfull of that calling and professioun quhairinto he is ressavit, and of the gude example quhilk be his gude lyffe and conversatioun he sould giff to uthiris', had been guilty of many 'insolenceis, oppin and manifest oppressionis', particularly in sheltering in his house of Johnne McGillichallum Rasa 'ane common and notorious theiff' who had come to the minister's house to hide until he had an opportunity to murder two of the Bains. Since then 'Mr Johnne' had again resorted to direct action, coming to the Bain's lands and 'cuttit his plewis and rigwiddeis (harness) whereby the lands were waste.' Becoming a priest was seemingly no barrier to such behaviour.

Alexander of Fairburn's view of his wayward younger brother is unrecorded. It is likely that it was Alexander, or possibly his heir John (who died in 1645), who made the significant changes to Fairburn Tower, adding the stair turret, creating a liveable fifth floor out of the garret storey and adding the parapet and bartizans (corner turrets) to the roof, little watch towers where a sentry might sit keeping an eye out towards Brahan and Beauly. It is as part of these works that we have imagined that they might have commissioned a painted ceiling for their principal room on the second floor. The Mackenzies were clearly doing well from their lands in being able to update their tower at the turn of the 17th century, and the fashion for painted wooden ceilings was at its height in these years. It is entirely plausible that such a ceiling existed but disappeared during the tower's 250 years of dereliction.



View across to The Black Isle and Moray Firth, Jan 2016.

Tenants of the estate farms and crofts paid their rents in kind – usually victuals, grain and livestock – which the lairds converted into money through a complex economic exchange. Lairds often engaged directly with merchants over the sale of grain, live and deadstock, hides and skins, and salmon. The proceeds paid for the importation of necessities and consumables for their household and for the service they owned themselves, whether to the Crown or their clan chief. Goods ordered for Ross of Balnagown near Invergordon in 1553 give a glimpse of what might equally have been ordered for Fairburn: chain mail shirts, hemp, corks, tin wash bowls, pepper, ginger, aniseed, sugar candy, a variety of drinking vessels, lead basins, linen cloth, gunpowder and ‘a small canon that is right fine and shoots far’.

In 1603, as James VI, James V’s grandson and Mary Queen of Scots’ son, became king of Scotland, Ireland, England and Wales jointly, having been King of Scotland nominally since 1567 when he was a baby and in his own full right since 1583. In 1614, John Roy Mackenzie of Gairloch cleverly obtained dispensation from King James against any previous wrongdoing, ‘all rancour, hatred, action and crime whatsoever’ and for ‘the alleged taking and apprehending, slaying or mutilating of the said vagabonds and broken men.’ This gave the Mackenzies carte blanche to pursue their own clan actions under the guise of maintaining ‘the true and loyal obedience’ that all owed to the King.¹¹

John, 3rd Laird (d.1645)

At Alexander’s death in or by 1620, the estate passed to his son John, who married Janet Macleod of Coigeach. Around the same time, John acquired additional lands from the Mackenzies of Seaforth, including Monar and part of the lands of Arcan. Such deals were the benefits of clan ties.

¹¹ *Kinkell Castle*, pp. 70-2.



Edinburgh, 1637. Trouble first broke out when Charles I imposed the Book of Common Prayer, at odds with prevailing Scottish Presbyterianism. From 1644 to 1645 a Scottish civil war was fought between Scottish Royalists - supporting Charles I and led by James Graham, 1st Marquis of Montrose - and the Covenanters, who had controlled Scotland since 1639 and were allied with the English Parliament. The Scottish Royalists enjoyed a rapid series of victories in 1644–45 with the help of Irish troops, but were eventually defeated by the Covenanters.



James Graham, 1st Marquis of Montrose (1612-1650), leader of the Scottish Royalists with whom the Mackenzies, and Hector of Fairburn, aligned.

However, as the decades roll on and the Stewarts' relationship with the Parliament at Westminster deteriorated, loyalty to their clan chief and their own Royalist persuasion put the Mackenzies of Fairburn on the losing side on several occasions. Clan Mackenzie became known as one of the 'Royalist clans' and, ever mindful that the Stewarts gave them their wealth, the Mackenzies of Fairburn participated wholeheartedly in this leaning.

Hector, 4th Laird (d. 1665)

When John died in 1645, he had daughters but no sons and so was succeeded by his brother, Hector, in whose line the inheritance now descended. Hector married first Anne Chisolm of Kinkell and later a daughter of Mackenzie of Kilcoy. Hector became an 'Engager', joining a group of prominent Scots who declared their support for the imprisoned King Charles I'.¹² Hector and his son Rory Mackenzie of 'Farburne' were both summoned by the Presbytery of Dingwall on 18th September 1649 to confess their participation as Engagers. 'Hector Mackenzie of farburne, c'fessed y^t his men were reddie to go with Seafort¹³ on the unlawfule ingadgement, and went with his sonne to Inv'ness¹⁴ and [the battle of] Balvenie on the late rebellion.'¹⁵ The miscreants were 'censured and classed', meaning publicly rebuked and fined, a relatively mild punishment by the Presbyters.

Nothing more is known of the Mackenzies of Fairburn during the rest of the Interregnum. As military commander in Scotland, George Monck, was

¹² W Mackay (ed.) *Records of the Presbyteries of Inverness and Dingwall 1643-1688* (Scottish History Society) 1896 pp.159, 367-68. Digitised at <https://digital.nls.uk/127046997>

The Engagement was a secret alliance between Charles I and the Scottish Earls of Lauderdale, Loudoun and Lanark, who attended the King while imprisoned at Carisbrooke Castle on the Isle of Wight. Scotland was officially aligned with the Parliamentarians. In this last ditch attempt, Charles sought to regain his lost kingdom with the aid of the army raised by the Earls, in exchange for allowing Presbyterian rule in England, in a complete volte face from his former religious policies under Archbishop Laud. The Scottish kirk did not sanction the Engagement, putting the Engagers on the wrong side of the prevailing regime.

¹³ The clan chief, Mackenzie of Seaforth.

¹⁴ The clans briefly took Inverness and held it for the Royalists cause in 1549.

¹⁵ Balvenie Castle was held for the king. Eighty Royalist soldiers were killed when it was retaken by the Covenantors (the main Scottish army).

instrumental in the restoration of Charles II, who was proclaimed King of the Three Kingdoms in Edinburgh on 14 May 1660.

Roderick, 5th Laird (d. 1673)

Hector lived to see the restoration of another Stewart king. Hector died in 1665 when the Fairburn lands were inherited by his son Roderick, his fellow Engager. Roderick was first married to Margaret, daughter of Grant of Glenmoriston, and from 1663 to Margaret, daughter of Mackenzie of Logie. Rory died in 1673, just eight years after inheriting the title.

Murdoch, 6th Laird (d. 1711)

At Roderick's death in 1673, his son Murdoch inherited. Murdoch was married to Isobel, daughter of Mackenzie of Lochslin.

When King Charles II died in 1685 without a legitimate heir, his brother James II took the throne. James was a Catholic and lasted only three years before he was deposed in favour of William of Orange and his wife Mary, who was James II's eldest daughter and Protestant like her Dutch husband. This 'Glorious Revolution' of 1688 established the principle that sovereignty derived from Parliament. When Mary died (childless), William remained on the throne until his own death in 1702, when James's younger daughter Anne came to the throne.

Roderick, 7th Laird (d. 1731)

Roderick Mackenzie succeeded to the Fairburn estates as 7th Laird in about 1711. He married Winword Mackintosh of Borlum.

When Queen Anne also died without surviving issue in 1714, under the terms of the Act of Settlement 1701, the throne was then awarded by the meandering bloodline of the British monarchy to Anne's second cousin and closest living Protestant relative, George of Hanover. This brought the Stewarts' long reign over Britain to an end. The governance of the Two Kingdoms, meanwhile, had united by mutual agreement under the Act of Union in 1707. This brought England and Scotland together institutionally rather than through the coincidence of the sovereign's person.

This line of succession, however, was highly controversial, being decided primarily by Parliament. It definitively overruled the principle of inheritance by blood or Divine Right, because a son of James II was still alive, called James Edward Stewart, who by blood right should have become 'James VIII & III.' For those comfortable with the emerging Parliamentary supremacy, James was simply 'the Pretender.' Yet even though James was Catholic, many in England as well as Scotland agreed with him when, from exile in France, he denounced George I, noting 'we have beheld a foreign family, aliens to our country, distant in blood, and strangers even to our language, ascend the throne'. In 1715 so-called Jacobites started uprisings across both countries in support of James's claim.



Prince James Francis Edward Stewart in 1712. As the son of James II of England, James had a better blood claim to the throne of the Three Kingdoms than his distant cousin George of Hanover who was placed on the throne by Parliament.

The Earl of Mar initially took the north of Scotland for James, against the Duke of Argyll who was defending the Hanoverian cause. For a brief moment, the future of the kingdom hung in the balance. James himself landed in Scotland in December 1715, but after the Battle of Sherrifmuir in October, the tide had turned and 'the Fifteen' was over, leaving much bitterness towards the English regime.

Along with several other Mackenzie cadet families, Roderick Mackenzie of Fairburn again followed his clan chief Mackenzie of Seaforth in 1715, and rose for the Jacobites. Seaforth intended that Fairburn provide a company of men from Strathconon to be led by Roderick's uncle. This time, the implications for the defeated were more serious, and Roderick's estates were forfeited to the Crown. The Mackenzies of Fairburn's loyalty to the Stewart dynasty and to their clan chief now implied the loss of everything. Roderick Mackenzie of Fairburn was among those attainted (charged of treason). In a fruitless attempt at reconciliation in an undated letter to 'Mr Wade', his name is also mentioned among 'gentlemen [who] do propose to live quietly and peaceably under his majesties government.'¹⁶

By March 1716, Fairburn Tower was garrisoned by the government, as were a number of other Mackenzie strongholds. According to Bishop Forbes in 1762, the 30 soldiers garrisoned at Fairburn were Swiss, and therefore mercenaries.¹⁷ The tower and office houses were repaired in 1722 while the estate was still forfeited. From a surviving building account, this was a major refurbishment, involving re-roofing and some re-building of the surrounding offices.

¹⁶ Macgill, 1909, p. 242.

¹⁷ Cit. Bangor Jones, *Transactions of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club*, 1899-1906 vol. VI p.118.



**The Battle of Sheriffmuir saw the end of the Jacobite advance and brought ruin for Roderick Mackenzie of Fairburn.
(John Wotton, 1715)**

These building accounts suggest that the tower had suffered some damage during the Rising and that its guns saw some action:

'Accompt of debursments laid out by Lodovic Gordon upon repairing the House of Fairburn, and office houses ther to belonging, as Folloues, in the yeares 1722.

<i>[Scots]</i>	
<i>£ s d</i>	
<i>Alexr McInteir wright for work wrought in and about the house</i>	<i>12 0 0</i>
<i>Alexr Munro joyner for geasting and sparroofing of the houses</i>	<i>16 6 8</i>
<i>for Sparroof, geasts, and dealls, to the said houses</i>	<i>41 3 4</i>
<i>John McHomas pionder¹⁸ tuixt meat and wadges</i>	
<i>for the spase of 35 days</i>	<i>8 16 8</i>
<i>Allexr McRob pionder for the Ditto space</i>	<i>8 16 8</i>
<i>Murdoch McCay pionder for the Ditto space</i>	<i>8 16 8</i>
<i>Donald McWorchie pionder also for the Ditto space</i>	<i>8 16 8</i>
<i>Four Meassons for repairing of the rouinous offise housesse</i>	<i>120 0 0</i>
<i>60 bolles lim att one merk per boll</i>	<i>40 0 0</i>
<i>Leding stons, clay, and sand</i>	<i>18 13 4</i>
<i>Leading of the lime from the Shor to the place</i>	
<i>att 1 penny Scots per boll</i>	<i>3 0 0</i>
<i>Nails to the Lathing</i>	<i>3 0 0</i>
	<u><i>289 10 0</i></u>

[£12 Scots = £1 sterling; 1 merk = 13s 4d Scots]

Discharge the measons... 16 July 1723

Andrew Mackenzie meason in Nairn SIG and Alexander Mackenzie meason in Kilbokie INIT

£120 Scots repairing office houses¹⁹

The Crown Commissioners had powers to sell forfeited estates as soon as the claims of creditors had been determined. Eight estates in Ross-shire were forfeited ranging with rental values from £2351 to £26: the Fairburn estate then had a rent roll of £150.

¹⁸ 'Poinder' usually refers to a woodsman, or one dealing with hedges and ditches. However 'poiner' was a term used for a what we might call a sapper today: a foot soldier who accompanied an army to perform such duties as digging, making roads and fortifications etc. Given the context here of a military garrison, this seems a more likely meaning.

¹⁹ NRS E629/8.

However, there were ways around such reprisals and the Mackenzie clan was ubiquitous. A George Mackenzie obtained a charter for Fairburn under the 1717 Act of Indemnity, which issued a general pardon for those willing to submit. In 1723, the Fairburn estate was bought by James Baillie, an Edinburgh lawyer for £1,400, on behalf of George Mackenzie the younger of Allangrange, the lawyer's name being 'only made use of in trust'. The affirmed creditors' claims amounted with interest to £981 of which £412 was paid by the Commissioners to four creditors. The remainder fell to the purchaser who had acquired the claims of the other two creditors. As we shall see, Allangrange was merely acting as a trustee for the Mackenzies of Fairburn, assisted by four other Mackenzie lairds.

As for Roderick, it seems he evaded capture in 1715 and, on the run from King George's men, must be assumed to have disappeared in the Highlands. In 1720 his servant, Donald McEwan 'came with a party of Highlanders and uplifted by force of arms a quantity of meal and some money rents, wedders, lambs, hens'.²⁰ In 1718 it was stated that the Mains of Fairburn (the home farm) had 'not been sett to tenants Since the memory of man but has allwayes been in the possession of the family'. Even if tenants of the wider estate were still farming the Mains, Roderick no doubt considered he was merely taking back his own. The Commissioner's factor was only able to recover these lost rents-in-kind after taking legal measures.

In 1724, General George Wade was sent north by the Crown to suppress the Highlands.²¹ Wade was a highly capable career soldier and he recommended the construction of forts, barracks, bridges and proper roads to assist in asserting control over the country. His building campaign modernised the wild areas by making communications easier, but also made clear that Hanoverian rule was here to stay.

²⁰ NRS E629; St Andrews University Library, Mackenzie of Allangrange, various. Most rents on the estate at this period were of paid in victuals (beer and meal).

²¹ This is the same General George Wade who was responsible for building Landmark's Marshall Wade's House at 14 Abbey Church Yard, Bath, where he also managed to be elected as MP in 1722.

In 1725 Roderick Mackenzie of Fairburn wrote to General Wade beseeching that Wade represent his case to King George. A description of Fairburn in 1725 describes how on the northwest side of the river Orrin, a little above a wooden bridge 'stands the mansion house of Mackenzie of Fairburn, a strong tower with a very fair prospect on a rising ground.' It is significant that Roderick knew the Mackenzie name alone was enough to make him guilty:

'With a true Sense of my past miscarriages I pray leave to address my Self to you & to request your Favours toward me in representing my unhappy Condition to his Majesty.

You know very well Sir, by my name that I have the misfortune to be of the number of those persons who have forfeited the protection of ye Government by takeing up Arms ag[ains]t the best of Kings. It wou'd be a presumption in me rather than a Submission to attempt the Lessening of my Fault unless it may be Some Small extenuation of the Guilt, that we who have the unhappiness to live at So Remote a distance from the Court are most lyable to be Seduced by the Artifice & Insinuations of Designing men. And therefore I shall only pray leave to beg with the greatest Earnestness, that you will be pleased to believe me Sincere in This, as I truly am, That I heartily repent of my past behaviour toward his Majesty King George and most heartily & Earnestly request that he will be graciously pleased to pardon my life & I do with the greatest Sincerity promise to devote the Remainder of it to his Majestys Service & to Endeavour to approve myself to the utmost of my power as long as I live'.²²

This is pragmatically disingenuous at best, but it must have caused a pang to dismiss age-old clan loyalties merely as 'the Artifice & Insinuations of Designing men.' In 1726, Roderick was included in a pardon for the crimes of treason and 'levying war' granted to a number of Highland lairds, including Rob Roy MacGregor. 'Roderick Mackenzie of Fairburn...was a jolly old laird, who lived for more than ninety years, although, as he used to say of himself in regard to whisky, claret, or other potations, he was "a perfect sandbank" – an expression handed down to Sir Roderick Murchison.'²³

²² St Andrews University Library, Mackenzie of Allangrange Papers, Dep.75/2/10 Coppie Fairburns &c Letters to General Wade, 1725.

²³ Geikie, Archibald Sir. *Life of Sir Roderick I. Murchison*, 1875, p. 10. Roderick 7th laird was the maternal (great?) grandfather of Sir Roderick Murchison (1792-1871), the famous Scottish geologist who first trained as a soldier and later became Director General of the British Geological Service. Murchison was named after his grandfather.

Alexander, 8th Laird (d. 1760) – The Drover

Roderick died in 1731 and his son Alexander was finally restored to the family title of the Fairburn estate in 1732, after fifteen years' confiscation. The payment of outstanding creditors required the sale of some lands, but Alexander had recovered the family seat newly repaired, and probably in better condition than before the '15.²⁴

In 1745, the Jacobites stirred again. The English political scene was restless and dissatisfied with the long rule of the Tories under Robert Walpole, and tensions were rising with France. James Edward Stewart's son Charles (the 'Young Pretender', Bonnie Prince Charlie) was scheming in exile in Paris. Impatient, impetuous and funded by France, Charles gathered a flotilla to invade to reclaim the united throne of Britain. Despite being defeated at sea, he landed at Eriskay in the Outer Hebrides in July 1745. His campaign gathered force and with his army he struck deep into England before the English could organise themselves. They got as far as Swarkestone Bridge near Derby before Charles's advisers convinced him that he had to turn back, as it became clear that he was not receiving the anticipated groundswell of support. The Jacobite army retreated north, pursued by the English forces under the Duke of Cumberland and met their definitive defeat at the Battle of Culloden outside Inverness on 16th April 1746.

In September 1745, the Westminster government formed the plan of raising independent companies from the clans loyal to the Hanoverian government to defend against the Jacobites. George II granted a number of blank commissions to be allocated by the Scottish Lord Advocate and Lord President of the Court of Session, Duncan Forbes of Culloden.

²⁴ Warrand, Duncan. *Some Mackenzie Pedigrees*. Inverness: R. Carruthers & Sons, 1965, p.149.

Leadership of two companies to defend the Hanoverian regime was offered to the Mackenzie clan. Alexander Mackenzie of Fairburn was offered a captaincy but he turned it down.

In 1741, Alexander had married a young widow, Barbara Gordon of Inverness, 'une fort jolie person'. They were evidently a sociable couple: in his 1762 account, Bishop Forbes described seeing 'two cupples of a creel house, which the late Fairburn [8th laird] had carefully preserved in their own place, by building up stone and lime walls upon them, and making a dining-room upon the ground where they stand.' Barbara was an ardent Jacobite and it is said she sold her diamonds to raise men.²⁵ There is a traditional pipes tune called 'Lady Mackenzie of Fairburn'; it would be nice to think it was written for Barbara. Alexander, however, was more circumspect in his loyalties than his wife. He turned down the commission, writing diplomatically to the Lord President explaining his reasons (he was not alone among the Mackenzie lairds in choosing such a tack):

'My Lord Seafort[h] is highly displeased, yet I'll convince his L'op I am sincerely his man, as any Mackenzie alive – I was not brought up a Soldier – A Grasier or Farmer is all I pretend to, both which I peacablie incline to notice'.

He explained further:

*'The plain undisguised cause I refused the commission is that I woud bring no tash or imputation to the little family I represent, by shewing that I would oppose the lineall heir male of the Stuart line, as this small mealling I possess was given my predecessor by King James the Fifth in free gift.'*²⁶

While this could be read as a reaffirmation of Alexander's underlying Jacobite sympathies, what we know of the rest of his life suggests it related as much to his steady temperament. James V's land grant to Murdoch three centuries previously was still enough to engender the family's loyalty to the Jacobite cause, but they had learned the consequences of failed rebellion in 1715. In an attempt to appease his clan chief Seafort, who was more willing to comply with the government, Alexander promised he would support Seafort's family 'while blood circulates through my veins'.

²⁵ Garrand, p. 150.

²⁶ Warrand, Duncan. *Some Mackenzie Pedigrees*. Inverness: R. Carruthers & Sons, 1965. Cit. FCB Inv.



**Prince Charles Edward Stewart (Bonnie Prince Charlie)
painted by Allan Ramsay at Holyrood House, in late 1745.**

Seaforth, on the other hand, promised not to give Fairburn a smile when he came to Brahan Castle, adding, 'Some people never forgive or forget.' In the event, Fairburn was with Seaforth in February 1746 (Culloden was fought in April), 'resolved to share in my Fate through the Highlands.' Alexander's brother Kenneth – a schoolboy – also served with his brother-in-law Coll Macdonald of Barisdale in the Jacobite army.²⁷

The chronicler of the Mackenzie pedigrees sums up the effect of this period on Ross-shire thus: 'The shadow cast over the Highlands by the ill-fated Stuart Risings [is] a shadow which has never wholly left them...Some houses were uninhabited, some were half in ruins, some estates had already changed hands, by fortunes made out of the misfortunes of others. A few lairds prospered in the East or West Indies, and had added to their old homes, bringing sorely needed cash to their districts, but on the whole it was a time of want and distress, aggravated by a premature intercourse with richer England. Sheep were, more or less, still to come, to bring additional sorrows to the country. The temptation was great, and many properties were saved, but the glens were desolate, the whole face of the Highlands changed.'²⁸

By now, the Fairburn estate was shedding rather than acquiring lands. It did not provide a significant rental income and it is not surprising that, like other middling lairds, Alexander had become a drover. He was actively involved in the black cattle trade, travelling south to the markets at Creiff and Falkirk, and paying in funds to Edinburgh lawyers or agents. It was a challenging trade attended with significant risks.

²⁷ D Warrand, *More Culloden Papers*, Vol. IV, 1929 pp.69, 118; R H MacLeod 'The Independent Companies of the 1745 Rebellion', *Transactions of the Gaelic Society of Inverness*, LIII 1982-84 pp.310-93.

²⁸ Garrand, p. 157.



Fairburn Tower (Castle) in Roy's Military Map, c1750. This shows large enclosures and some tree planting about Fairburn Tower:

Alexander operated at the regional level. In 1753, for instance, he entered into partnership with MacLeod of Waterstein for the buying and selling of black cattle.²⁹

Alexander was a good neighbour and an upright laird. After Barbara Gordon's death, he married Jean Mackenzie of Darlochmalang. He was also, it seems, something of a character. A few of his letters survive (see Appendix) and reinforce the sense of a decent laird trying to navigate difficult times. He undertook to organise a watch against cattle thieves and was assiduous in this responsibility. His neighbour, Sir Alexander Mackenzie of Coul, who sold cattle to Fairburn, noted in February 1741 that 'There have been likewise since this year began a great number of Cattel stolen out of our Countrey even notwithstanding of Fairburns Diligence and Care and for which he must give Satisfaction to the owners, nor will it save him a Sixpence tho' he should give half a Crown for putting the Loss in Print'.³⁰



Black Highland cattle, as reared and traded by Alexander Mackenzie of Fairburn, 8th laird.

²⁹ At this date, most of the Highland cattle were black. The ginger pelt more familiar today – thanks in part to McCowan's Highland Toffee - is the result of the Victorians' preference for the ginger cows, selectively breeding them to the point that ginger became the predominant colour of the Highland cow.

³⁰ NLS MS1335 f.223, 253; A Mackillop, *'More Fruitful than the Soil': Army, Empire and the Scottish Highlands, 1715-1815*, 2000 p.19.

However, when one of his servants was killed while guarding the cattle in 1742, Alexander relinquished his role. He was also Collector of the cess or land tax for Ross and Cromarty. We also get a glimpse of a more peaceable existence at the Tower these years through a surviving bill suggesting a vegetable garden at the Tower. An 'Acco[un]tt of Gardin seeds for Fairburn. Debtor James Pitkethlie 25 Feb 1744' includes onion sets and seeds for carrots, leeks, parsnips, 'Siliscea Lettuce', 'Indean Cress', cauliflower, early and yellow turnips, radishes and dwarf, 'Sugar' and 'Hotspur' peas.³¹ The name of the gardener in 1751 was one 'Murdo Mackenzie Gairdner at Fairburn' who witnessed a deed alongside (intriguingly) 'Roderick Mackenzie out-Pensioner of Chelsea College, landweller at Fairburn'. A plan of c1800 shows the surrounds of the tower and a possible garden to the north.

By the late 1750s Alexander appears to have run into financial problems. The window tax returns of 1748 record two houses at Fairburn: the tower assessed at 16 windows and a house assessed at 14 windows (presumably Muirton House, as later replaced by the Stirlings with Fairburn House). The family appears to have vacated Fairburn Tower soon after this; by the 1759 tax return, the tower is stated to be 'not inhabited' and also in subsequent returns. The following year, Alexander's life came to an abrupt end. He died, 'much regretted', on 7th May 1760 at Fortrose. 'The corner of the world this gentleman lived in may well say, that few in it will be missed so much. He had a generous spirit, was universally beloved, and being a friendly neighbour, studied to live well with all about him.'³² He may have died in violent circumstances: 'I grieve for Fairburn, and feel for his young family, as one virtually murdered...must ye Dingwall politicks be ever productive of blood: If those who acted as barbarians on the 30th of April...' (incomplete, but appears to refer to a duel).³³

³¹ NRS Warrant of Bught GD23/5/265. Pitkeithly was a market gardener in Inverness.

³² *Caledonian Mercury*, 17th May 1760.

³³ W MacGill, *Old Ross-shire and Scotland*, 1909 p.319.

Roderick, 9th Laird (1748-76)

Alexander's son Roderick was just twelve when his father died in 1760. His curators (executors) found that while there were extensive moveables, there were also considerable debts on the estate. Straight after Alexander's death, the Mains of Fairburn (the home farm) was advertised to let. It was described as 'Mains of Fairburn, with fine hill grazings, mostly inclosed, very extensive, and convenient for any gentleman who deals in black cattle.' A lease of the Mains and Grazings to be auctioned that year included the 'whole of the present crop, corns, and hay, labouring graith and utensils, with a great number of black cattle, and young store, together with the whole of the household furniture, a set of fine horse furniture, pistols &c'.³⁴ It is clear the farm assets were being liquidated. The main dwelling and houses on the estate were also in poor condition. The curators also provided:

*'That as the Houses in Fairburn are said to be in disrepair, and not water tight, the Factor in Concert with such of the Curators as are at hand may consider what repairs are necessary for keeping the houses from going into disrepair, and as there are slates purchased, and that the Thatching of the Tower with such cannot be of great Expencc it should be so done, and the other necessary repairs be set about in the most frugal manner during the Currency of this Season, and that such overplus of Slates and Wood as may remain after making the above repairs be sold by the Factor to the best advantage.'*³⁵

It is not recorded whether any of this work was undertaken, but it is interesting that this passage possibly implies that the tower was reed- or turf-thatched in 1760 ('thatching' can however also mean 'roof covering' in a generic sense). If the tower was never (re)slated, failure to do so may have been a key reason for its eventual descent into total ruination.

The curators of Alexander's will determined that the family should be still be maintained in a 'decent and frugal manner' at Fairburn and at the inland holding of Richraggan. However, it seems frugality did not prevail. A letter of 1764

³⁴ *Caledonian Mercury*, 30th July 1760.

³⁵ Highland Archives BC/4/1/1.

refers to 'Fairburn and his governor – his governorship is a farce, but he would be better anywhere than at Fairburn, where he keeps up a perpetual racketing and puts the family to great expense.'³⁶

Roderick married Katherine Baillie of Rosehall in 1768, and took up his inheritance when he came of age in 1769. He died in 1774, still in his twenties, leaving four young children. His heir Alexander was three years old, and Alexander's tutors referred to the 'narrowness' of the heir's funds.

Alexander's sister Barbara went on to marry Kenneth Murchison of Tarradale and was mother of the renowned geologist, Sir Roderick Murchison who was given the courtesy title 'of Fairburn' after his grandfather.

10th Laird, General Sir Alexander Mackenzie (1771-1853)

After attending Edinburgh High School, Alexander turned elsewhere for his livelihood like so many others in the Highlands at the time, and became a career soldier. At the start of the Napoleonic Wars, he was a Major in the 78th Foot in 1793 and served in Flanders; the following year he was made Lieutenant-Colonel and commanded the 2/78th Foot from 1794-1796. He served at the Cape of Good Hope in 1796 and was mentioned in despatches for his 'able conduct'. In 1797, he transferred to the 36th Foot as Lieutenant-Colonel. He was promoted to Major-General in 1803 and commanded a full Division in Italy in 1806, finally rising to be General in 1821.³⁷ In his youth he was said to be 'perhaps the handsomest man in the British army' and was a companion of Arthur Wellesey, later Duke of Wellington, at Angers. At his death at 83 he was described as 'venerable and benevolent', perhaps the oldest General in the army.³⁸

³⁶ McGill, p. 319.

³⁷ https://www.napoleon-series.org/military-info/organization/Britain/Infantry/Regiments/c_78thFoot.html
[accessed 20/10/22 14:36]

³⁸ Obituary, *Inverness Courier* 27 October 1853. This is appended in full.

Although an absentee laird, Alexander was a generous landlord. Returning to Scotland in 1811 after eight years' absence, he 'magnanimously drew his pen through' a long list of arrears from his tenants, instructing his factor to grant discharges to all concerned. A letter to the *Inverness Courier* enlarging upon Alexander's obituary contains a glimpse of life on estate at the last 'set' (muster) of his lands in 1803, apparently at the point of sale of the estate:

'The last set which the General made of his lands was in 1803, at the village of Contin, now all but extinct, and the scene was highly characteristic of that period. Two or three hundred fine Highlanders, in the array of their country, and full of the happiest anticipations, were there to greet their lord, for whom they entertained the warmest affection; and among the group might be seen widows representing minors, and old men, come to take a last look at him. These kindly feelings were reciprocal, the General mixing familiarly with his people, and making impressions which, alas, have died with the times.

This set, which lasted for three days, being agreeably concluded, the tenants gave themselves up for a time to conviviality and entertainment. Wrestling and putting the stone, at which the men of Strathconan greatly excelled, were practised. On the 4th morning tartan plaids were at a discount; and my friend Macdougall, had he lived then, might have found patterns which his tartanic genius cannot now invent! The many beautiful songs composed to the family of Fairburn were enthusiastically sung in all the corners of the hamlet, and the couplet

S'laidt Monar go Fladhagh,
 Agus Conin go iasgach,
 E' Hoid.
 S'oigh chalain n' m' ba lait,
 Gheote Braddan vhon Anich,
 Gu d' bhord.

showing the extent and character of their territory, rung in every ear.

This remarkable meeting and parting must ever awaken sweet recollections in the bosoms of those who took part in it, now almost gathered to their fathers; and being then twelve years of age, and an eye witness, I participate in them, but not without pain.' ³⁹

The Gaelic verse is written in a form not easily translatable by present-day Gaelic speakers, but seems to refer to Monar, the Conon for fishing, a milkmaid (dairy produce), and salmon for the table.

³⁹ *Inverness Advertiser* 1 Nov 1853

In 1797 Alexander sold four portions of the estate adjoining Fairburn and in 1798 advertised Fairburn, Monar and Strathconon for public roup (auction). In the event Fairburn was not sold until 1802; Monar in 1815 and Strathconon in 1824. Alexander's career, while successful in military terms, did not in itself make him noticeably wealthy so he relied instead on sale of land

An assessment of the changes in Highland property made in 1827 referred to Mackenzie's sales as follows:

'General Sir Alexander Mackenzie of Fairburn, in Ross, succeeded, in 1787, to his paternal estate of Fairburn, which then only yielded a gross annual rental of £700 Sterling. He transferred a pendicle of this estate, called Moy, to Mackenzie of Seaforth in 1791-92 for £3500.⁴⁰ A year or two afterwards, he disposed of other parts of his property for £18,000. Mackenzie of Ord [sic], and Gillanders of Highfield, purchased another portion for about £6000; and Mackenzie of Lentron a further division for £3500. In 1813-14, the General sold an extensive grazing to Mr Fraser of Eskadale, for £9000 odds. After all these sales, he still retained the district of Strathconan, which itself; in 1802, yielded a rental of £1700, when a new set was made. In 1824, this remnant of his old estate was sold by General Mackenzie for £40,000 making a grand total received for it, of £80,000. It should be mentioned this last part was entirely pasture land.'

However, there is another aspect to Alexander's income in later life. His name appears in the database for those compensated after the 1833 Abolition of Slavery Act. His brother William became the owner of a Caribbean plantation, Tourama on St Vincent. When William died in 1820, he left his residuary estate to Alexander. This included Tourama and meant that, applying through his attorney, Alexander was compensated with the considerable sum of £10,358 6s 7d for 385 enslaved people.⁴¹ General Mackenzie never married and retired to Bath, where he died, childless, at 4 Royal Circus in 1853. So the line of the Mackenzies of Fairburn came to an end. By 1850, the tower had been empty for almost a hundred years and was being used as a cow byre. The estate had simply become land to be traded.

⁴⁰ A pendicle is land or property that is a subsidiary to an estate, and rented separately.

⁴¹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/26550> [accessed 20/10/22 14:59] The roughly equivalent sum today according to the National Archives currency converter would be some £750,000.

The Macphersons: an Ossianic connection

When the core of the Fairburn estate was sold in 1802, it was bought by the Executors and Trustees of James Macpherson of Belleville in Inverness-shire. Macpherson is renowned as the 'translator' of *Ossian*, a cycle of poems that achieved international success and purported to be a translation of an ancient work in Gaelic, hailed as the Scottish equivalent of Homeric myths.⁴² The purchase of Fairburn qualified under the terms of MacPherson's will, which was that his money be used to buy land in Scotland.

Macpherson's beneficiary was his son James junior who had succeeded to Belleville. He, however, experienced legal difficulties and for a time was forced to shut up Belleville. This may have been behind the attempts to sell the Fairburn estate in the 1820s. Macpherson was optimistic, stating in 1825 that the Fairburn estate was 'so capable of great improvement that I may expect a high price.' Adverts the following year stated, in rather inflated terms, 'The situation of the Lands, lying between two Rivers, renders them susceptible of being highly improved and embellished; and the judicious application of Capital in the improvement of a large tract of the Lands of Fairburn, would enhance the value of that Property very considerably, and at the same time yield a certain return of at least 20 per cent, on the Expenditure.'⁴³

James Macpherson died in 1833 when his sister Ann inherited the estate. Macpherson's lawyer reported that 'About two years ago a considerable quantity of moor ground was let out on 31 years leases for improvement – but no rent is payable for it for some years to come' (the rents being waived while the tenants improved their holdings – a more modest version of the same task James V had set as a condition for Murdoch in his grant of 1542).

⁴² The authenticity of Ossian was hotly debated. Present-day consensus is that Macpherson collected ancient Scottish and Irish ballads but also added much of his own.

⁴³ *Inverness Courier* 5 April 1826, 8 April 1829.

The lawyer considered the property 'highly susceptible of improvement'.⁴⁴ One 1836 advert for the sale of the estate suggested that 'The old Castle of Fairburn might be made to form part of a modern Residence. It is distant about four miles from the mineral waters of Strathpeffer'.⁴⁵ Although the Macpherson family planned to sell Fairburn, Sir David Brewster⁴⁶ was tasked with the management of the estate in the interim.

Sale of the Fairburn Estate

The Mackenzies of Seaforth, meanwhile, had been trying to purchase Fairburn for some time. The Fairburn property, along with Arcan, contained much of the 'prospect' (view) from the Seaforth family seat at Brahan. Seaforth had been negotiating to buy the estate from General Mackenzie as early as 1797 and his daughter attempted to purchase Fairburn from James Macpherson in the 1820s. Presumably the Seaforths were unable or unwilling to pay the asking price in 1833, but Brewster was mindful of their interest. He wrote to Seaforth that it was 'the universal opinion of competent judges that the Rental value of Fairburn would be greatly increased in the hands of a Proprietor who could look after it & do it justice, which Mr Macpherson never attempted'. His sister-in-law had received 'a Petition from all the Tenants for regular leases, as they do nothing at present in the way of improvement'.⁴⁷ He also wrote ominously that 'I shall be most happy if in letting the farms I can in any way promote your Political interest in Ross-shire'⁴⁸.

In the event (and excluding some upland grazing), the estate was not sold until 1837, to a Ross-shire landlord, James Fowler of Raddery who lived in the parish of Rosemarkie on the Black Isle. James was absentee proprietor of Lottery and Grange plantations in Trelawney, Jamaica, having travelled there with his two

⁴⁴ NRS GD46/1/68 A Shepperd to Sir D Brewster 17 July 1833.

⁴⁵ *Inverness Courier* 10 August 1836. Strathpeffer was then beginning to develop as a spa.

⁴⁶ Ann's brother-in-law, a leading physicist, inventor of the kaleidoscope, historian of science, and principal of the universities of St Andrews and Edinburgh. Brewster took an interest in the destination of the estate.

⁴⁷ NRS GD46/1/68 Sir D Brewster to J A S Mackenzie 5 August 1833.

⁴⁸ NRS GD46/1/68 Sir D Brewster to J A S Mackenzie 20 June 1833.

brothers in the late 18th century. James was the only one to return, in 1797; the others dying in their 40s in Jamaica. One brother, John, had a daughter with a free woman of colour, Sarah Williams Fowler, who both came to live in Scotland after his death. James later received some £10,000 under the Slave Compensation Act.⁴⁹ At James's death in 1842, Fairburn passed by inheritance to another brother, Henry Mackenzie Fowler of Fairburn and Raddery. Improvement began with a survey of the estate by the well-known northern land surveyor George Campbell Smith from Banff. Several farms were advertised for letting in 1838 with the new boundaries as laid out by Smith. It was stated that

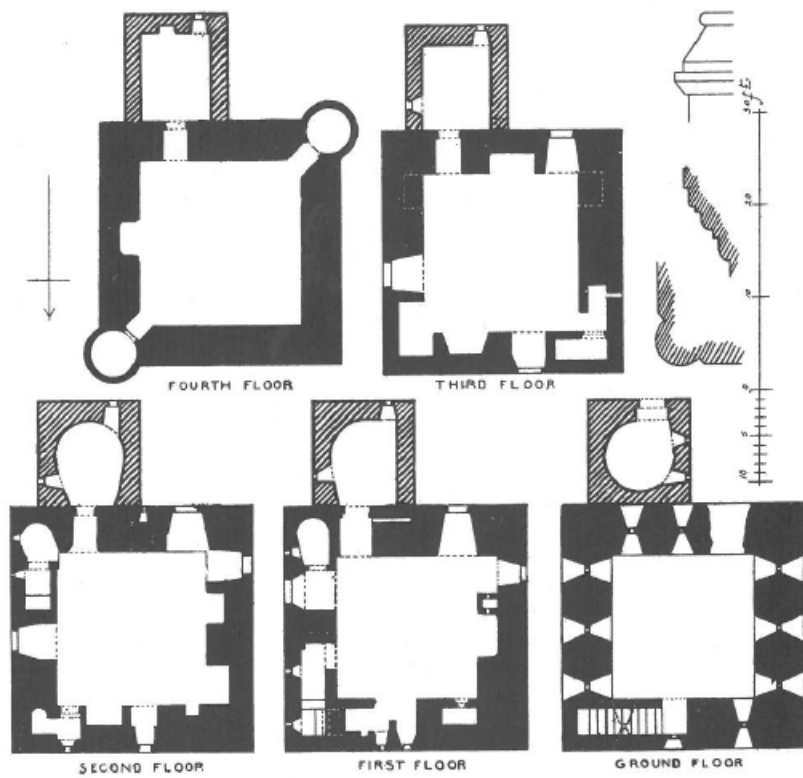
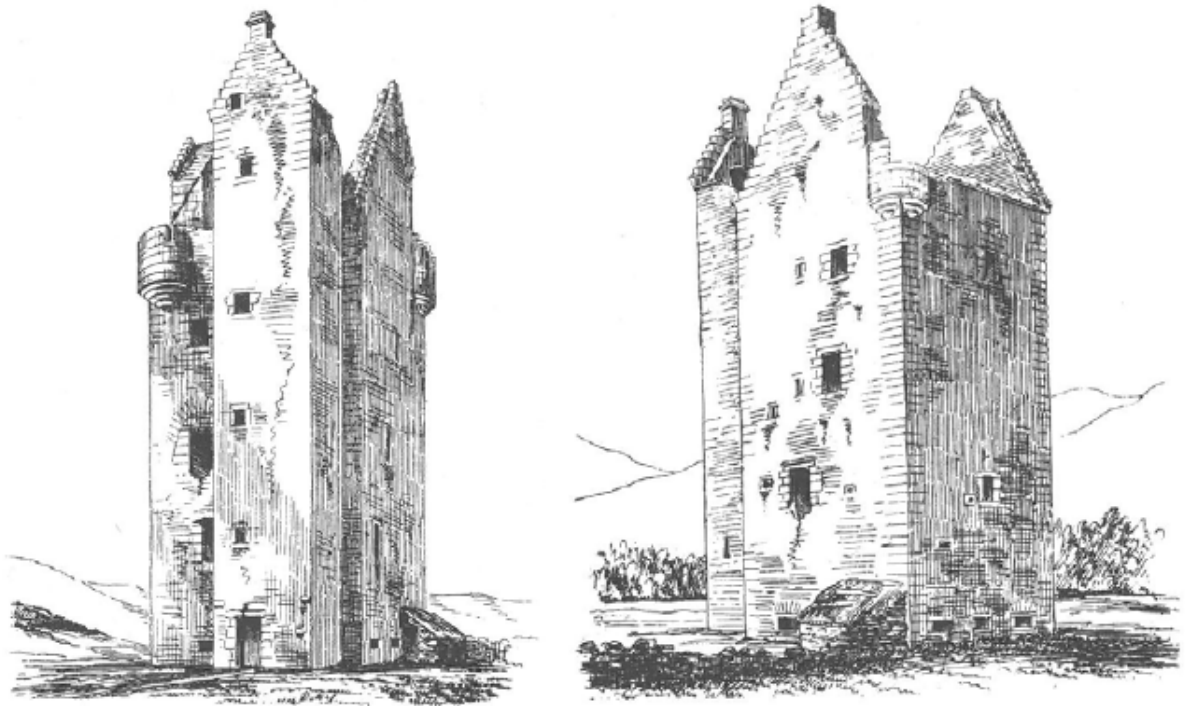
*'The improveable ground is of an excellent quality, and can be brought into cultivation at little expence. The Proprietor proposes immediately embanking the Fairburn side of the River Conon, and will give liberal encouragement for the improvement of waste ground, and the erection of suitable steadings, as well as for enclosing with stone fences, &c.; so that these farms will be found well worthy of the attention of persons of skill and capital, to whom alone they will be let. Fairburn is within six miles, by good roads, of the seaports of Dingwall and Beauly, where all kinds of produce can be readily shipped, and coal, lime, and bone dust imported. The erection of a distillery in the immediate vicinity [at Ord], now in progress, will improve the facility of disposing of barley.'*⁵⁰

A note of outlays on the estate between 1838 and 1841 includes the survey, planting and the construction of an embankment. The persistence of the Mackenzies of Seaforth was rewarded in 1847, when Henry Mackenzie Fowler sold the Fairburn estate to Mrs Stewart Mackenzie of Seaforth. By 1853, the Seaforths had carried out extensive planting of upwards of 2 million native pines across more than 600 acres. The Fairburn plantations were reported in the *Journal of Agriculture* where their value was said to be 'greatly enhanced by their being prominently in view of Brahan Castle.'⁵¹ New farm steadings were also built by Seaforth into the 1870s. However, the finances of the Mackenzies of Seaforth became overstretched and a trust disposition was executed in 1865.

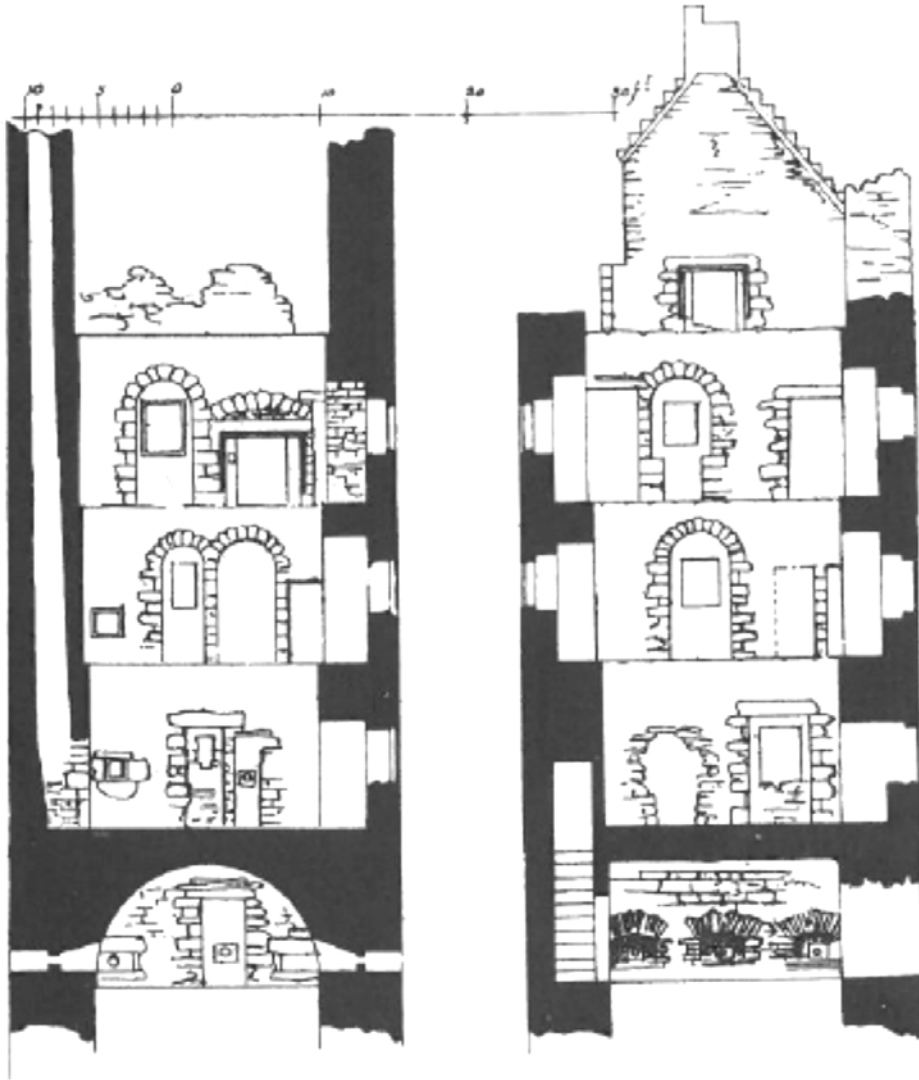
⁴⁹ <https://www.ucl.ac.uk/lbs/person/view/16183> [accessed 16:59 5/12/22]

⁵⁰ NRS Mackintosh of Mackintosh Papers GD176/1328 Fairburn outlays since 1838/9 till 1841.

⁵¹ *Inverness Advertiser* 15 Nov 1853; *Inverness Courier* 11 January 1855.



Fairburn Tower illustrated in MacGibbon & Ross, *Castellated & Domestic Architecture of Scotland*, 1889, Vol III, 463-5.



Fairburn Tower, MacGibbon & Ross, Vol III, 462.

In 1876, the trustees agreed that Fairburn, Bridgepark and Arcan could be sold again, some 4,615 acres, made up of 1,871 acres of arable; 1,634 acres of grouse moor and pasture; and 1,110 acres of thriving timber plantations, yielding a rental of £3011.

The advert stated that 'There is no Mansion-House, but there is on the Property a magnificent site for one, commanding splendid views of the Cromarty and Beaully Firths'. The site was said to be near the old Tower.⁵² The lands were bought by a wealthy ironmaster, John Stirling, originally from Ayrshire.



Early 20th-century photo of Fairburn Tower, showing the dining hall in good repair and in use as two estate cottages.

⁵² *Inverness Courier* 2 March 1876.

The Fairburn Estate under the Stirlings⁵³

Stirling had iron ore works at Cleator Moor in Cumberland. In 1871, he had become tenant of the shootings of Castle Leod near Strathpeffer on the Cromartie estate. In 1875 he bought Muirton House in Wester Fairburn just adjacent to the Tower lands, and in 1876 as 'John Stirling of Muirton' he bought some adjoining moorland, 'part of the lands and grazings of Auchonancie and Bunleoid'. He took title to the Fairburn estate the following year. The estate had finally found another owner who would be committed to it as a resident landowner, albeit in a house on lands conjoined to the old estate. From then on, Stirling designated himself 'of Fairburn', adopting the ancient Mackenzie moniker.

John Stirling came to Fairburn with his wife Marian (Mary) and ten children.



Muirton House in Wester Fairburn, demolished by John Stirling to make way for Fairburn House.

Unsurprisingly, old Muirton House was too small and outdated. John demolished it and commissioned architects Wardrop & Reid to build Fairburn House in Scottish Baronial style, completed in 1880 (today a nursing home). He also commissioned a Home Farm at the entrance to the mansion, with the usual ancillary buildings of the time. In 1898 John brought electricity to the house

⁵³ The Fairburn Estate website https://fairburn-estate.co.uk/?page_id=701 [accessed 21/10/22] has a wealth of fascinating detail and photos of the Stirlings and the estate, compiled by Charlotte Hingston.

powered by a turbine house at Orrin Falls. Around the house and in the policies he planted a renowned collection of exotic Silver Firs, Spruces and Pines, which today include a number of 'Champions' (the largest of their species in the country).

John Stirling died in 1907 and his son Major William Stirling inherited at the age of 48. He was married to Charlotte Eva Mackintosh of Daviot and they had eight children. While in the army William travelled widely and became an excellent rifle shot. On his return he threw himself into public service and was a generous and popular landlord. He served as JP and Deputy-Lieutenant and was for many years on the board, and then chairman, of the unfortunately named District Board of Lunacy and the Ross Memorial Hospital. He died suddenly of heart failure in November 1914, just as the Great War began.

The estate then passed to his eldest son, John Stirling who had just turned twenty-one. After Harrow and Magdalen College, Oxford, John joined the Lovat Scouts (a unit formed during the Second Boer War as a Scottish Highland yeomanry regiment of the British Army) and was in England at the time of his father's death, prior to embarkation for Gallipoli and the Dardanelles the following year. On leave in 1915, he married Marjory Kythe Mackenzie of Gairloch, who travelled out to see him when he was serving in Egypt.

During the war the estate was run by their experienced factor, William F. Gunn. It must have been a challenge without the tens of young men from the area called up for the army. In May 1917, Fairburn House became the Fairburn Auxiliary Hospital for convalescing soldiers (a full list of patients is on the Fairburn estate website). The drawing room and library were filled with hospital beds and many local women served as nurses. John Stirling was by now serving in Greece, and later southern Russia. His letters home provide a fascinating eye witness account of the experiences of a young Captain, attaché to the generals.⁵⁴

⁵⁴ See https://fairburn-estate.co.uk/?page_id=52 [accessed 10/11/22]

On Friday 11th July 1919 the Ross-shire Journal reported that:

'Captain John Stirling of Fairburn, MBE, Lovat Scouts, has returned from service in South Russia. On his arrival in Fairburn with Mrs Stirling, he was greeted by the employees on the Estate, who were out in force to welcome him home. The main approach to Fairburn House, which was spanned by a triumphant arch, was lined on both sides by employees and their friends. On their arrival at the House, Mr Jackson, the oldest employee on the Estate expressed great delight in having Captain Stirling safe home.'

John continued to serve in the Lovat Scouts until 1935. He was also county councillor for Ross and Cromarty County Council 1919-1970, and was Convener from 1935 -1961. He was a Forestry Commissioner from 1948 to 1962, and Chairman of the commission's Scottish National Committee from 1950 to 1959. In 1956 he was appointed a Knight of the Thistle and served as Lord Lieutenant of Ross and Cromarty from 1964 to 1968.⁵⁵ He died in 1975. As John's eldest son John Michael (1925–1940) predeceased him, his second son, Sir Roderick Stirling inherited the estate and later also served as Lord Lieutenant. It was Sir Roderick who first approached Landmark to take on Fairburn Tower, as long ago as 1974 and again in 1993. In both cases, our regretful response was that Landmark was too heavily committed to take on the Tower and had insufficient funds. The Tower had stood silent sentinel through all the events of the past two hundred years, by now floorless as well as roofless. Thanks to the skill of the masons who built it, and despite the cracks that now ran almost its full height, it had reached a kind of 'stability in decay'. Its significance was acknowledged by its Category A listing but its repair was far beyond the means of a private owner.

In 2013 Landmark was approached again in 2013 by Charlotte (eldest daughter of Sir Roderick Stirling and his wife, Penny) and her husband Peter Hingston. As we investigated it further, the Historic Scotland building inspector said to us, 'Fairburn Tower is a building just waiting to be asked to dance.' This time, we were indeed able to invite it to dance.

⁵⁵A lord-lieutenant is the British monarch's personal representative in each lieutenancy area of the United Kingdom.

Mackenzies of Fairburn & the prophecies of the Brahan Seer

Fairburn Tower is associated with several of the prophecies of Coinneach Odhar Fiosaiche (Dark Kenneth Mackenzie), known as the Brahan Seer. Coinneach is reputed to have lived in the 17th century and gained notoriety from his apparent ability to predict the future. He is said to have been born on the Isle of Lewis (owned by the Seaforths) and, becoming famous for his powers of divination, he came East to work as a labourer for the 3rd Earl of Seaforth at Dingwall. This caused his downfall: at the command of Lady Seaforth, he was allegedly burnt in a spiked tar barrel on Chanonry Point on the Black Isle, for prophesying that her absent Earl was philandering with women in Paris.

In 1877, one Alexander Mackenzie published *The Prophecies of the Brahan Seer*, which ran into several editions. Coinneach prophesied in Gaelic so his prophecies are best known in this English translation: there are no contemporary 17th-century manuscripts or accounts of his predictions. Some debate whether he existed at all, but like Nostradamus, the Brahan Seer's predictions still cause discussion today, and several of them concern Fairburn Tower. He has become part of the folklore of the area, his name a magnet that has accumulated other local traditions to itself.

Here is Coinneach's most compelling prophecy, including a somewhat unlikely description of 17th-century Fairburn Tower by the imaginative 19th-century editor, Alexander Mackenzie:

“The day will come when the Mackenzies of Fairburn shall lose their entire possessions, and that branch of the clan shall disappear almost to a man from the face of the earth. Their Castle shall become uninhabited, desolate, and forsaken, and a cow shall give birth to a calf in the uppermost chamber in Fairburn Tower.”

‘The first part of this prophecy has only too literally come to pass; and within the memory of hundreds now living, and who knew Coinneach's prophecy years before it was fulfilled, the latter part – that reference to the cow calving in the uppermost chamber – has also been undoubtedly

realized. We are personally acquainted with people whose veracity is beyond question, who knew the prophecy, and who actually took the trouble at the time to go all the way from Inverness to see the cow-mother and her offspring in the Tower, before they were taken down. Mr Maclennan supplies the following version: - Coinneach said, addressing a large concourse of people – ‘Strange as it may appear to all those who may hear me this day, yet what I am about to tell you is true and will come to pass at the appointed time. The day will come when a cow shall give birth to a calf in the uppermost chamber (seomar uachdarach) of Fairburn Castle. The child now unborn will see it.’

‘When the Seer uttered this prediction, the Castle of Fairburn was in the possession of, and occupied by, a very rich and powerful chieftain, to whom homage was paid by many of the neighbouring lairds. Its halls rang loud with sounds of music and of mirth, and happiness reigned within its portals. On its winding stone stairs trod and passed carelessly to and fro pages and liveried servants in their wigs and golden trimmings. Nothing in the world was more unlikely to happen, to all appearance, than what the Seer predicted, and Coinneach was universally ridiculed for having given utterance to what was apparently so nonsensical; but this abuse and ridicule the Seer bore with the patient self-satisfied air of one who was fully convinced of the fulfilment of the prophecy.

‘Years passed by, but no sign of the fulfilment of the prophecy. The Seer, the Laird of Fairburn, and the whole of that generation were gathered to their fathers, and still no signs of the curious prediction being realized. The Laird of Fairburn’s immediate successors also followed their predecessors, and the Seer, to all appearance, was fast losing his reputation as a prophet. The tower was latterly left uninhabited, and it soon fell into a dilapidated state of repair – its doors decayed and fell away from their hinges, one by one, until at last there was no door on the main stair from the floor to the roof. Some years after, and not long ago, the Fairburn tenant-farmer stored away some straw in the uppermost chamber of the tower; in the process, some of the straw dropped, and was left strewn on the staircase. One of his cows on a certain day chanced to find her way to the main door of the tower, and finding it open, began to pick up the straw scattered along the stair. The animal proceeded thus, till she had actually arrived at the uppermost chamber, whence, being heavy in calf, she was unable to descend. She was consequently left in the tower until she gave birth to a fine healthy calf. They were allowed to remain there for several days, where many went to see them, after which the cow and her progeny were brought down; and Coinneach Odhar’s prophecy was thus fulfilled to the letter.’

The editor of the most recent edition of the 1970s added:

*'During the mid-seventeenth century [Fairburn Tower] was the property of Roderick Mackenzie, fifth laird of Fairburn, who was one of the richest and most respected chiefs in Ross-shire at the time...by 1851, when the cow calved in the garret, it was being used by a local farmer to store hay. The prophecy was so well known that special transport was laid on from Inverness to Muir of Ord to enable curious sightseers to witness the fulfilment of the prediction for themselves.'*⁵⁶

When the Inverness Field Club visited Fairburn in 1901, architect Alexander Ross stated that 'he could himself vouch for the Castle having been used as a cow-byre. He did not see the cow and calf, but claimed that 50 years ago, on his first visit, the Tower was occupied as a byre, and the cattle were located in the lower chamber'.⁵⁷

There is a variation in this tale from Sir Archibald Geikie in his biography of Murchison. Geikie tells of a tradition in the district to the effect the lands of Fairburn would pass out of the hands of the Mackenzies, and that 'the sow should litter in the lady's chamber.' In 1827 Professor Sedgwick and Sir Roderick Murchison turned aside to see the ruined tower while travelling in the Highlands. "The Professor and I," says Murchison, "were groping our way up the broken stone stair-case, when we were almost knocked over by a rush of two or three pigs that had been nestling up-stairs in the very room in which my mother was born."⁵⁸

Alexander Mackenzie also recorded various versions of an unfulfilled prophecy by Coinneach associated with a standing stone, Clach an t-Seasaidh near Muir of Ord, from the top of which he said ravens would drink their fill in the blood of the Mackenzies. And:

'As a sign whereby to know when the latter prophecy would be accomplished, Coinneach said "that a mountain-ash tree will grow out of the walls of Fairburn Tower, and when it becomes large enough to form a

⁵⁶ These extracts from Mackenzie, Alexander, Kenneth Mackenzie, and Elizabeth Sutherland. *The Prophecies of the Brahan Seer, Coinneach Odhar Fiosaiche*. London: Constable, 1977.

⁵⁷ *Transactions of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club*, 1899-1906 vol. VI p.116.

⁵⁸ Geikie, p. 141.

cart axle, these things will come to pass." Not long ago, a party informed us that a mountain-ash, or rowan tree, was actually growing out of the tower walls, and was about the thickness of a man's thumb.'

A different version of this prophecy is known locally, which stated that a bird would plant a rowan tree on the top of Fairburn Tower and that when it grew to the thickness of an axle tree, the glory of the Seaforths would rise again. Such a tree was growing on the north west face of the tower at the turn of the twentieth century, and achieved some girth by 1921, when Stewart Mackenzie, a descendant of the last Lord Seaforth through his eldest daughter, was rewarded for his wartime services by the revival of the old Seaforth family title. This title also expired in due course with the failure of the male line, and the rowan tree too died in the drought of the summer of 1957.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ Sutherland, pp.41-43.

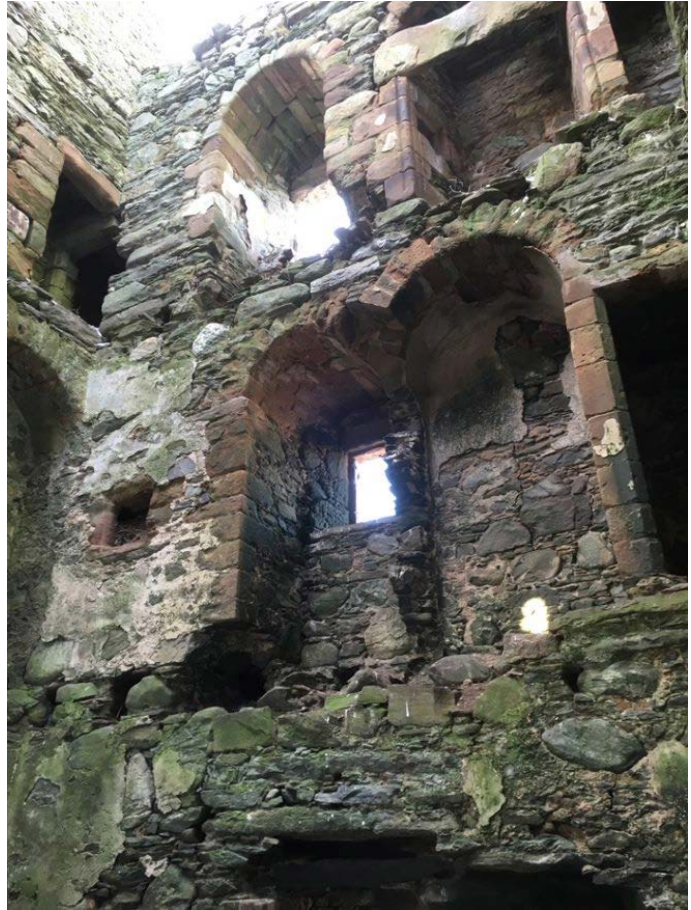
Fairburn Tower before restoration



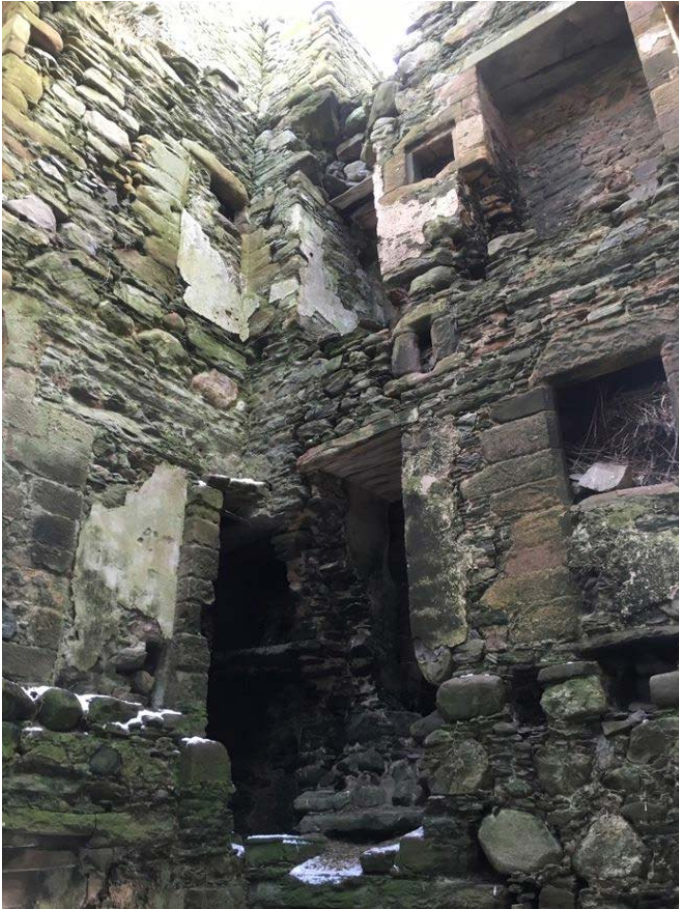
Top: Winter 2018



Below: the following summer. The tower had changed remarkably little since recorded by MacGibbon & Ross in the 1880s.



Inside the gutted, floorless shaft the tower stood open to the sky, its walls tantalising covered with features waiting to be interpreted. Remarkably, there was still plaster clinging to the walls in some places.



View from today's kitchen of the main entrance.

Below: the gunports of the S side, blocked when the dining hall was built.





The main tower had serious cracking as well as the stair tower. The mixed quality of the rubble stone is apparent, as are some traces of the original render. Note too the window with the relieving arch, possibly used for materials access during construction.



**Top: the cellar with its gun ports and finely constructed vault,
off which the tower is built.**

Below: the first floor (today's kitchen).

Analysis of the historic fabric

Landmark's work at Fairburn Tower began in earnest early in 2017 with, as always, detailed building analysis, led for us here by archaeologist Tom Addyman. This section represents a summary of the 2020 report on the building analysis carried out during Tom's watching brief on the project.⁶⁰

The tower

The initial survey of the tower presented a considerable challenge given the precarious masonry and lack of physical access. A combination of digital and hand recording techniques was used in these early stages. Drone-captured imagery and modelled photography were employed to produce a point-cloud image of the tower, to which was then meshed uncompressed digital photographic imagery to generate a high-resolution three-dimensional model of the tower with photographic resolution. From this model, two-dimensional orthographic projections of walls and cut-throughs were generated to produce sections and plans, which were digitised by hand. The drawing set was then checked for accuracy on site and with hand measurement where possible.

It was clear from the fabric that the original tower was the earliest part of the surviving structure. The architectural details on the surprisingly intact shaft chimed with the documentary evidence in suggesting a mid-16th century date. The tower is almost square in plan, measuring some 8.2m by 7.9m, and built off a well-constructed, vaulted basement with three floors of accommodation above, these all un-vaulted. The original cap-house and parapet arrangement had not survived.

The tower is mostly built of rubble stone, which includes a variety of other field-stones such as small granite boulders, pieces of whin, etc., clearly using

⁶⁰ Addyman Archaeology, *Fairburn Tower Historic Building Record*, 2018. A summary is offered here; a copy of the full report is in the bookcase in the tower.

whatever was to hand locally from the rivers and fields. Irregularities were filled with multiple small pinnings. The masonry was bedded in a slightly reddish-brown lime mortar, with a coarse aggregate. Large sandstone or schist slabs were used for the quoins (corners). The dressings of the doors and windows are generally of a different, more fine-grained sandstone, mostly of an orange or deep pink hue, sometimes pale green or buff and likely to have been imported from considerably further afield. This sandstone was used throughout the interior for the many openings, recesses and features, all defined by well-dressed, tight-jointed ashlar.

The bedding mortar for the masonry had been brought up flush to the interior and exterior wall faces. On the exterior, it was smoothed over the high points to form an even finish, as an integral harl (protective weather coating of fine gravel mixed with lime mortar). The tower appeared to have been harled 'as you go', i.e. keeping pace with the upward progress in construction. There was no evidence in the original build for an overlying *thrown* harl coat (a technique whereby the harl is hurled at the building, rather than trowelled on), and nor had any evidence for an external limewashed finish survived, although it is likely such a finish existed.

The tower's original defensive purpose is clear from its peppering of gun-ports and shot-holes. The cellar is unusual for the survival of a complete array of twelve gun-ports, three to each side. The cellar is barrel-vaulted and aligned north-south, its vault constructed of unworked or roughly shaped narrow slabs of sandstone bedded side-on. The gun-ports are generally well preserved (except for the western port on the south side, which is a later reinstatement). Internally the ingoes of the ports to the east and west are taller, rising up into the springing of the vault and detailed with arched heads. Those to the north and south are lower and lintelled. Externally the ports present as rectangular and lintelled, often with a relieving arch over, but there is considerable variation in their detailing.



Gun port on east side of cellar with very rare surviving timber beam and pivot support for a firearm.



Masons' marks on the jamb stones of the early principle entrance.

The central port on the west side has sockets that indicate two staggered horizontal timbers, one set higher than the other, and the only example at Fairburn of a squared throat. Several others preserve sockets for squared horizontal timbers, which were pivot-blocks for the mounting of small firearms, set low down and a little back from the throat of the port. On the east side one of these timbers survives complete, still preserving a socket in its upper surface for the pivot of a small swivel gun such as a hackbut or arquebus, the timber also intended to absorb the recoil of the gun. This is an exceptionally rare survival. Except for the squared example, the throats of the gun-ports are all circular apertures some 17cm in diameter. This unaltered cellar, the final redoubt in the defence of the tower, is a very rare survival and we have done as little to it as possible.

The cellar can only be reached internally, via a narrow stair descending steeply within the thickness of its north wall. This stair also had a small gun-port on its north side and two shot-holes to the east. The only external entrance to the tower was at first floor level (today's kitchen), accessed from an external timber stair that could be pre-emptively destroyed in time of need. This stood off-set to the east in the south wall, more or less where the later stair turret now stands.

Evidence for the original external timber stair exists in the survival of two corbels a little below the threshold level of the first-floor entrance on either side. The corbels are well preserved, though now embedded within the later masonry of the stair tower walling. They evidently supported a horizontal timber member at the upper part of the stair. More curiously, but seemingly associated, are two boulders projecting from the south wall face of the tower house slightly below the level of the corbels – one directly below the entrance threshold and the other off-set further west. How these functioned and how they may have related to an external stair remains unclear; their position may indicate that the timber stair rose from the west.

The surround to this doorway to the **first floor** has a broad quirked angle roll. Masons' marks were also found here, and evidence internally for a double-rebate, indicating both a door and a yett (a defensive gate or grille of wrought iron bars). There is also a substantial draw-bar socket extending into the thickness of the wall.

The internal walls of all the tower's storeys hold many openings, recesses and other mural features, underlining the dwelling's high status. On the first floor, there are lintel-headed window recesses on the west and south walls; a centrally positioned window to the north, and a fourth, off-set to the south in the east wall. The windows in the west and north are well-preserved and unaltered, the former square in shape. The windows in the south and east walls each showed later widening of one of their jambs. All these windows have sockets for iron bar-grilles, additional protection on this more vulnerable lower level.

The internal entrance of the cellar into the today's kitchen was very damaged and many of its dressings were missing. There are two large recesses at the top of the stair, one above the other, with a horizontal slab-shelf between. A garderobe (lavatory) closet occupied the eastern part of the north wall, accessed by a narrow entrance detailed with a chamfered surround and lit by a single shot-hole. There was no evidence for a garderobe chute, only the seating arrangements at its east end. The final feature of the room is a small recess in the north wall.

A large fireplace stands in the west wall. Though damaged, this retained a lower jamb-stone detailed with a narrow, quirked angle roll detail at the inner splay. There is an aumbry (cupboard) at the west end of the fireplace, detailed with a door rebate. There is also a curious salt-box or aumbry (wall cupboard) that has openings into both the fireplace interior and the jamb of the adjacent window recess; both these openings have rebated surrounds for doors.



Occasional well-preserved areas of internal lime plaster survived, here at second floor level. These have been carefully incorporated into the new lime plaster where possible.



Third floor – interior arrangements to the north-east including fireplace and large mural recess at the angle.

Despite the decades standing open to the elements, there were significant survivals of internal lime wall plaster on many surfaces within the tower at all its original floor levels. Much of it dated to the original 16th-century construction phase. The walls of today's kitchen preserved extensive remains of this original lime plaster (particularly to the north, north-east and north-west) and these have been incorporated into today's plaster finish wherever possible. In the south-west window recess of the second floor, we were excited to find traces of yellow ochre limewash, a colour that has been matched for the sitting room walls.

An entrance within the south jamb of the window recess in the east wall of today's kitchen led to a circular chamber that was clearly once the lower part of a short turnpike stair that rose within the thickness of the wall, clockwise to first floor level. However, all except the upper part of this stair was subsequently removed, and its lower lobby remodelled (today, this serves well as a pantry). A small opening in the east wall seems originally to have been a circular shot-hole, subsequently modified.

The **second floor** was reached from this turnpike stair through a narrow entrance off-set to the south in the east wall; this was later blocked with a skin of mortared rubblework and then plastered. This floor was later accessed off the later stair tower, as today, by means of a new entrance broken through at the east end of the south wall.

This second-floor room was the 'hall' (living room) for the tower, the scene of most household activity. Remembering that the tower was a floorless shaft when Landmark came to it, the floor level of the second storey was indicated by the narrow off-set of the internal wall faces and the presence of sockets for eight common joists, aligned north-south.



Interior of the former turnpike stair that wound up inside the walls of the upper storeys. A few stone stair treads remained at the upper level (left). The entrance vestibule to the second floor (right).

In this second-floor interior there are substantial window recesses in the same positions as those on the floors below in the north, south and west walls though at this level they are arched rather than lintelled, indicating the ascending status of the tower's rooms. There is a further recess to the centre of the east wall. These larger windows vary in form, each detailed with a chamfered surround and with evidence for bar-sockets. One window was later altered to provide a garderobe closet in the north east angle, similar to the one on the floor below. This was accessed by an entrance at the east end of the north wall and lit by a narrow window opening. Between this closet and the window recess is a substantial arched recess, possibly a press (a clothes cupboard). Beyond the west side of the window recess is a further aumbry, its surround rebated for a door.

The other significant feature at second floor level is a blocked entrance at the centre of the south wall, detailed with a chamfered surround. This led to the original means of access to the floor above, an intramural stair that rose to the east in a straight flight. This was confirmed by a narrow opening: a small rectangular stair light or 'laird's lug' set just below ceiling level on the east side of the stair entrance. There was also a narrow window in the exterior south wall to light the lower part of the stair, also blocked at a later date.

The **third-floor** level (today's master bedroom) was probably Murdoch Mackenzie's private chamber as originally built. The original intramural stair emerged through the entrance at the south end of the east wall, later blocked and plastered over. The floor level was again indicated by a narrow off-set of the internal wall face and sockets for eight common joists, again north-south aligned.

Tall arch-headed window recesses lit the room on each wall, one now blocked. The windows themselves were generally well-preserved, all large and square or near-square and each detailed with a chamfered surround and bar-sockets.



Upper parts of the early tower on the south side, showing the junction with the stair tower; location of former dormer window indicated.

A well-preserved fireplace is off-set to the east in the north wall, detailed with narrow quirked angle rolls. There was a projecting chimneybreast above and a small salt-box within the west splay of the fireplace, its surround rebated for a door.

An entrance detailed with a chamfered surround in the north west angle gives onto a small lobby lit by a small loop in the west wall, from which a second entrance provided entry to a closet to the north. This was at first thought to be another garderobe, but it has also been suggested that it was more likely a strong room. In the north-east angle of the room is a large lintel-ceilinged recess that may have been intended for a bed or box-bed arrangement. A further large recess to the centre-west of the south wall may also have been bed-related, or possibly a private oratory. It has an aumbry on its east side, its surround rebated for a door. This was clearly a high status room of sophisticated construction, the laird's 'inner sanctum'.

At this stage, little evidence was apparent for the original parapet arrangements on the **upper floor** of the tower. There was evidence for bartizan turrets at the south-west and north-east angles but once on site, it became clear that these were secondary. As for the upper stage of the tower, a break between it and the walling of the original tower was discernible in most areas. It seems likely there had originally been a parapet which was reduced in height when the top floor was created. Truncated corbels at the centre of the north side indicated the former presence of a small box machicolation (an opening between the supporting corbels of a projecting parapet, through which stones or burning objects could be dropped on attackers). This may also have been a latrine.

All this evidence suggests that fairly soon after the initial construction phase, probably 1600-20, the parapet was heightened to form the additional garret storey and that the bartizan watch towers were added at the same time.

This replaced an original parapet and, presumably, a gabled cap-house by reducing the original wall heads and then extending upwards to form a full garret storey. Flue-bearing crow-stepped gable walls were formed to the east and west, detailed with hollow-moulded skew-putts (sloping stones at the gable base with a check to hold the coping stones in place); the crow-stepped detail of the gable heads respected the bartizan turret at the south-west and north-east angles, the gable head stopping short at vertical stands to accommodate them. To the south and north, the wall head was re-formed and detailed with a hollow-moulded cornice course. The bartizans themselves were formed of ashlar walling set upon neatly dressed corbel courses as part of this same later phase.

There was probably much recycling of stone, and the masonry of the new work proved difficult to distinguish from the original construction. However, the rubble stone employed for the secondary work tended to be of slightly smaller size and the lime surfacing of the later work somewhat better preserved, especially on the east side. It was also noticeable that the masonry of the stair tower, which abuts the earlier main tower with a straight joint up to its third-floor level, had been fully tied in to the secondary masonry of the rebuilt upper stage of the early tower, suggesting a single design intention and programme of works for both stair tower and the addition of the extra storey. The details common to both stair tower and upper level support this conclusion (such crow-steps, skew-putts/corner stones and hollowed wall-head cornice courses are all characteristic into the 17th century).

As to how the 16th-century masons built the original tower, it is suggested that two larger windows in the west and south walls of the second floor with well-formed relieving arches (the only such examples in the tower) were a feature of the construction phase, temporary larger openings provided to enable access for building materials. Today's contractors faced similar challenges during restoration getting building materials to the upper levels.



Interior of the stair tower.

The stair tower

The slender **stair tower** located at the east side of the south wall of the main tower and is built of similar rubble stone to the original tower, its masonry brought to a flush face. As above, the stair tower rises to a gabled, crow-stepped top with hollowed skew-putts upon a hollow-moulded cornice course. Its chimney served a small garret chamber and has a moulded coping of characteristic profile.

The entrance to the stair tower is on the south side and is detailed with a quirked roll. Regular stair lights with chamfered surrounds light the stairs at each level on the south side, with smaller lights on the east side. Many of the windows preserved timber lintels internally. There is a single pistol loop at first floor level on the east side and, a little below this and close to the entrance are the remains of a small spout of uncertain function. On the west side there are two more pistol loops, a small light at the lower level and a large ground/first floor window that was subsequently blocked with mortared masonry.

The stone turnpike stair originally held within the stair tower had been almost entirely robbed out, with only a few broken stumps and stair-key fragments still *in situ*. The stair's interior within the ground floor entrance was curved on the north side where its masonry abutted the earlier tower but was squared off internally to the south. From first floor level upwards, the interior of the stairwell is fully rounded until the upper third floor level; at this point there is an off-set above which the stair tower is again squared off internally.

The stair rose all the way to the threshold level of the fourth-floor entrance into the main tower, lit at this level by windows to the south and west. A large slab marks the upper end of the stair at the north-east angle, effectively forming a landing. There had probably been partitioning or a balustrade along its south side or, possibly, a very small chamber beyond. An upper chamber was accessed from this 'landing' by means of a small turnpike flight of steps located the north-east angle of the stair tower.

This cap-house room rose up into the roof space of the gable. There was a fireplace in the gabled south wall and a small window to the south-west – the highest lookout point of the tower.

As described already, adding the stair tower required a number of modifications to the main tower. At basement level the central and eastern gun-ports on the south side were blocked off and new entrances made off the stair tower at second and third floor levels, disrupting the pre-existing arrangements at the SE angle of the main tower. The original intramural stair from first to second floor levels was removed and the lower part of this stair became a small circular chamber in the wall, plastered over internally. The pre-existing pistol loop in the east wall was enlarged to form a small window. The upper part of the turnpike stair was blocked off, and the entrance to the upper level walled up. The straight stair rising up from second to third floor levels was similarly blocked off .

The new upper storey of the main tower included a fireplace set slightly south of centre in the east gable wall. Entrances were formed to the bartizan chambers to north-east and south-west. A broad splayed recess in the centre of the south side related to a dormer window whose sill and a single jamb stone still survived, and which has now been reinstated.

Some of the early tower's windows saw enlargement in the same phase. The right-hand jambs of two windows at first floor level, and the left-hand jamb of one window at second floor level, were expanded, their jamb-stones re-set and timber lintels substituted.

Possibly in the early 18th century while the tower was garrisoned after the 1715 Jacobite rising, the stair tower was modified, presumably to address structural instability, as the masonry of the stair tower was only minimally tied into the fabric of the south side of the main tower except at the uppermost level. It seems that the two towers began to separate at an early period. At the junction on both the east and west sides of the stair tower a notable gap was apparent, and on the west side the stair tower wall had also shifted slightly eastwards. A series of interventions seem to represent a response to these problems. The large stair

tower window at first floor level on the west side was blocked off with rubble masonry, and there is possible evidence that a further window on the floor above on this side was similarly blocked. The widening cracks at the junctions with the main tower were packed out and infilled with mortar. The exterior of the stair tower was harled over in a high-lime mix, creamy tan in colour using a marine (shelly) aggregate that varied considerably in aggregate size.

There was some evidence too for localised later repair of the tower after it had been abandoned in the late-18th century, possibly with the arrival of the Stirlings in 1876. The internal parts of the east jamb of the ground floor entrance to the stair tower were repaired with neatly executed and well-tooled sandstone dressings. A section of the rubble walling on the outside of the entrance was also rebuilt, no doubt in response to the alarming crack that had opened up on the south side of the tower, a significant feature from at least the late 19th century (it is apparent in MacGibbon and Ross' engraved view published in 1889). The crack probably developed after the dismantling of the stone stair within, which had given the stair tower internal stability. Our structural engineer employed the same stabilising role for the new concrete staircase inserted as part of Landmark's restoration.

Other than the later kitchen range (see below), it seemed initially that little evidence remained of other structures that must once have clustered around the tower. Estate maps of c.1800 and 1837 illustrate a range running east-west a little to the south of the tower that may or may not have been of early date, though little trace of this remains. A range or compound wall extending south from the tower was suggested by southwards-projecting tie-stones at the south-east angle of stair tower at low level. The two estate plans also show a wall or boundary running southwards from the south-west angle of the kitchen range, as if closing off the western side of a compound area.



View of the tower from the south after excavation of the cobbled surfaces, March 2020.

Discovery of the cobbled surfaces

When seeking footings to place the considerable scaffolding needed to restore Fairburn Tower in January 2020, we made the exciting discovery that extensive and well-laid cobbled areas survive on the site some 20cm below the surface, especially to the south of the tower. This was a surprise, as a preliminary geophysical survey had not thrown up any particular anomalies.

Working in foul winter weather, over the next three months the doughty archaeologists excavated twenty-two trial trenches by hand and later uncovered an extensive area south of the tower, measuring some 12 metres north-south and 16 metres east-west.

The existence of a walled court enclosing kitchens, stables and store houses with further enclosures beyond providing shelter for garden areas and orchards would be entirely typical of a tower-house. That such existed at Fairburn is strongly suggested by Roy's military map of c.1747-55, which shows belts of shelter trees, walls and what appears to be an axial approach rising to the tower from the southeast. 19th-century estate plans suggest similar enclosures, the same axial approach, and possible early garden areas closer to the core of the site, where 'Murdo Mackenzie, Gairdner' perhaps planted his seeds in 1751. Most of this has been obliterated by subsequent farming activity, but now we had discovered evidence of at least some of these associated structures.

The cobbling was remarkably well preserved, laid in panels of smaller cobbles defined by edgings of larger cobbles. There were differing qualities – the pebbles were very fine in front of tower and coarser elsewhere. Every single cobble was traced from high-res imaging. While most panels were laid roughly north-south, one panel came in from the east on an east-west alignment, perhaps indicating a causeway entrance into a likely barmkin or courtyard, leading off what is now a farm track but which old maps reveal as a long established route.



Trial trenches west of the tower dug to investigate the extent of the cobbled surface.



The full extent of the cobbles revealed.

Whether there was also some form of gate-structure remains unclear, but a gated entrance seems probable given the defensive nature of the tower.

Walling remnants identified on the north and south sides of this panel may be the remains of flanking walls or ranges of buildings, perhaps stables, byres and other outhouses. A further trapezoidal panel splayed out as it ran up to the south side of the early tower, perhaps deliberately aligned with the early external timber stairs (it showed no particular relationship to the later stair turret, suggesting that the cobbles predate the construction of the stair tower). Later farming activities had cut across edges of the main cobbled area, especially to the south-west.

The area to the east of the tower was also excavated, revealing a coarser cobbled surface, perhaps a working area, and probably relating to a later modern shed (since demolished).

The discovery of these cobbled areas adds much to our visualisation of what Fairburn Tower looked like in its heyday, before loyalty to the Jacobite cause undermined its prosperity.

The ruined crofts/dining hall

Today, the remains of a cottage-like structure abuts Fairburn Tower's western wall, which, having no need for it for the Landmark accommodation, we have consolidated as a ruin. This structure is well built of rubble stone and, like the main tower, detailed with sandstone dressings at the openings. Its rubble construction is clay-bonded, pointed or flushed up in lime mortar.

Early photos show the structure intact, as two crofts, each neatly thatched and whitewashed, and in use until the early to mid-20th before falling into dereliction and then ruination. As built, it had two compartments of equal size, each accessed by an entrance off-set to the east in their south wall and each with a single window, also in the south wall. A photo of the rear of the building in 1879 suggests a further tiny window under the eaves of the eastern compartment.



The kitchen/'dining room' range in January 2016. The position of the buried cruck frame is indicated.

The internal cross wall (now partly collapsed) and west gable wall each contained a flue. The remains of a small chimney in the west wall, has a projecting thackstane (a stone at the base of a chimney that extends over the roofing material).

An Inland Revenue Survey of c1910 recorded the structure as:

*'House with rubble walls & felted roof, containing Kitchen Ground floor & 1 Room in Attic. Very old but in fair repair.
Adjoining house has rubble walls & thatched roof & contains 1 Room Ground floor. House is old, the thatch is done, & the house in poor repair.
Wood shed at end of No 88.
Old Tower ruinous & of no commercial value'.*

Internally, the eastern compartment (nearest the tower) is dominated by the broad-arched kitchen fireplace in the cross wall. This is finely constructed with sandstone jambs and voussoirs that preserve crisp diagonal tooling in places. The sandstone is fine-grained and of varying hue. The fireplace has an integral salt-box within its south side, later blocked. There is a much smaller fireplace within the west wall of the western compartment.

This is an intriguing range, its surviving fabric seeming to date from the late 17th or early 18th century. However, both compartments have a vertical slot at about the centre-line of their respective south walls. There were probably corresponding slots in their north walls, but these are unclear given the extent of ruination. Such slots demonstrate that the roof structure was once supported by cruck-framed trusses, suggesting that the surviving fabric enclosed an earlier building.

Indeed, in 1762 Bishop Forbes described seeing 'two cupples of a creel house, which the late Fairburn had carefully preserved in their own place, by building up stone and lime walls upon them, and making a dining-room upon the ground where they stand. They are of oak, and near a yard in breadth.'⁶¹ Fallen timbers in the main tower were also found to be of oak, very unusual in Scotland for the

⁶¹ *Transactions of the Inverness Scientific Society and Field Club*, 1899-1906 vol. VI p.117. Creel or basket houses were supported on cruck couples, had inner walls of stakes and wattle, and an outer skin of turf and thatch.

date when pine from Norway was more often used for construction, and the Bishop clearly thought them noteworthy.

The range as it stands today is clearly secondary to the tower, and its construction must have necessitated the blocking of the western gun-ports. The huge kitchen fireplace is a particularly fine feature and, if a dining room, clearly offered a significant improvement in domestic facilities for the lairdly occupants of the tower. The western compartment perhaps acted as a service room.

Philosophy of Repair

Whenever the Landmark Trust takes on a building, one of the first things we do as we begin the scheme development is to agree a philosophy of repair. The project team looks at the available historical evidence to define how best to present the restored building. This agreed approach then steers the way through the many decisions needed once we are on site.

For Fairburn Tower, our agreed approach was to restore the tower externally and internally to its appearance following the late 16th/early 17th century phase of improvement. The main implications of this were:

- Stair tower and bartizans kept intact and restored.
- Reinstatement of the fifth, parapet floor (added early 17th century).
- External access remains to first floor level via the external stair turret, with intermural stair to undercroft.
- Intra mural turnpike stairs to other floors left unrestored.
- Walls to be re-plastered
- The 18th-century crofts left consolidated but unrestored as an outside sitting area and for their archaeological interest.

A later deliberate element of our approach has been to leave the ancient masonry 'unfinished' and visible in areas where full restoration was not necessary, for example the cellar, and the various recesses and alcoves. In these areas the modern brickwork has also been left unpainted and the services left deliberately exposed. For all the comforts of 21st century, the unrestored spaces act as atmospheric reminders of the tower's original craggy walls and of the long history they represent. In the beautifully constructed cellar we have left the vault just as we found it, with no need for repointing, and the gun ports are left open ready for action (as well as necessary ventilation). Here especially, we hope you can time travel. The kitchen range has been consolidated but left as a soft capped ruin and sitting area.



The completed scaffolding on a drear day in January 2021. The scaffold tower took more than three months to erect. It was carefully designed and placed to avoid damaging the newly discovered cobbled surface and stabilised by massive water-filled gabions.

Restoration of Fairburn Tower

After some six years of fundraising and project development, site preparation began at Fairburn Tower early in January 2020 under the overall guidance of architect Julie Barklie of Simpson & Brown and Landmark Surveyor, Linda Lockett, as project manager. Our contractors were the Laing Traditional Masonry Group, a well-known Scottish conservation firm with a good reputation for training – indeed, the site team at Fairburn included a number of apprentices throughout the project. The first tasks for LTM were to encase the tower with sheeted scaffolding and scaffold the internal shaft ready for masonry repairs. On digging foundations for the scaffold the archaeologists discovered a cobbled surface, which interrupted the process while this was excavated and understood. The external scaffolding of the stair turret had to be properly founded and widely buttressed as the masonry had lost its connection with the main body of the tower and was falling away. Large water-filled tanks provided ballast to hold the the large scaffold down.

The scaffolding of the interior of the main tower was particularly complex due to the fragile and unstable state of the stonework on the gables. Before anyone could safely work inside the tower, a suspended scaffold platform had to be inserted at the top of the tower so the stonework could be stabilised.

Under current legislation, a site's ecology necessarily forms a large part of most restoration projects. Nesting boxes were erected nearby to tempt the owls that nested in the tower. We did all we legally could to deter the owls from returning to the tower (including tying carrier bags to the scaffolding). Despite this, in April 2020 during the first Covid-19 lockdown, the owls returned to nest in the NE corner of the tower and owlets had hatched. This meant work could not restart immediately after first lockdown until after the owlets had fledged at the end of September 2020, when site cabins and facilities were put in place and the scaffolding finally complete.



With the scaffolding in place, the views from the tower could finally be fully appreciated here at roof level.

The archaeologists came back to begin the necessary recording of high-level stonework as well as the cobbles, and to excavate floor of the first floor so that internal scaffolding could be put in. A plan of action for repair and pointing of the stonework was agreed, the painstaking but essential first stage of the works. The wall heads were in worse condition than expected, but this was somewhat balanced by the walls of the lower storeys being in better condition than feared.

Precarious lintels were secured and the wall tops and gables were wrapped in hessian and weighted down with sandbags to prevent loose stone falling. A steeplejack was brought in to secure inaccessible areas of the stair tower. Outside, foul drainage routes were carefully installed after percolation tests and consultation with the archaeologists, and also underground electricity supply and connection to mains water. Surface water proved more tricky to deal with as there was significant run-off from the farmyard to the north in danger of swamping the tower's drainage. The most effective solution was to create a 'rain garden' or soakaway to the north west of the tower, a pit of cobbles where rainwater can drain safely away.

Meanwhile, after analysis of the stone, Lazonby and Dunavarig stone were agreed as the best for any replacement blocks. The owls still circled outside, despite our attempts to deter them. Thankfully, the bats had departed elsewhere and after the Christmas break, work could begin on the masonry repairs. First the masonry had to be steam cleaned at 150 deg C to clear the lichen that had grown inches thick on the masonry, in order to ensure that the render bonded fully. The original mortars were examined, both for their composition and their layering. The aggregate was found to include crushed mussel and oyster shells, and shells had been used to pack and level between stones, which our own hot lime harling therefore also included.⁶²

⁶² Hot lime mixes combine quicklime directly with sand and is then used straight away. Heat is generated as the lime reacts with the water in the sand. Fairburn is included in one of HES's technical papers on the subject.



**By summer 2021, masonry repairs were well underway onsite (top).
Inspecting a new chimney flue carefully built around the surviving stump (below).**

Hot lime mortar expands with the heat for some time after mixing, and its use here meant that the huge empty voids in the masonry formed after two centuries of weathering were better filled and stabilised. As many as ten masons were on site at a time, filling the deep voids and carrying out deep pinning inside and out, despite the weather being so cold that the water froze in the steam cleaning equipment. The wide jagged vertical cracks running almost the length of the tower were carefully pinned, packed and filled, areas of loose masonry rebuilt and voids filled until the masonry heart of the building was again structurally stable.

Once the exterior walls were repaired, the masons moved inside to begin work reforming the internal features and partitions. New masonry work was built of brickwork identify the new work from the original and to save on cost. Now entering the second Covid lockdown of spring 2021, the number working on site had to be reduced. The site stayed open but there was increasing uncertainty and delay around materials supply and labour availability with obvious impact on timing and costs. The archaeologists excavated floors of the cellar and bartizans but without finding anything of significance. The stone floors of both the bartizans were found intact and have been left as the final finish.

By April 2021, all the stonework consolidation and repointing were completed and it was time to take delivery of new dressed stone to begin rebuilding the lost chimneys ('Each chimney has its own character', said our architect Julie Barklie, 'they're like three little people...each with their own story'). The flues also had to be cleared of the debris from generations of jackdaws, done by removing and then replacing a stone every so often. Also reinstated were the crow step gables, coping stones, cornice and window surrounds. Inside, door surrounds and fireplace lintels were installed. As it would have been originally, it was often a challenge hoisting materials up to the upper levels. Even though there was an outside lift to get materials to the roof, some things like stone fireplace lintels still had to be manhandled and winched up inch by inch.



Roofing repairs underway, August 2021.

We were delighted to find the owls had taken up residence in the owl boxes, but returning jackdaws now became a concern, wheeling persistently around the building. The contractor and the ecologist put deterrents in place, but they still attempted to get in under the sheeting. The building had to be sealed and unsealed daily. More owlets hatched in May, which meant noise restriction and a delay to groundworks at the south end of the site until they fledged.

Owl pairs roost separately and there was a further twist to the saga in June when the homeless jackdaws evicted the male owl from his nesting box. He now attempted to return to the tower. The ecologist was called to put up a further nesting box, which seemed to do the trick. In total, five owlets fledged from the site during the construction works.

In June, work also began on reinstating the dormer window and rebuilding the bartizans. Once all the masonry work was complete, it was time for the next big phase, re-roofing. The scaffolding was reduced to eaves level and a covered workshop was created at ground level where timber was worked before being hoisted into place and reassembled on the roof. A new joiner foreman, aptly named Rod MacKenzie, managed this next stage of work, taking over from the mason foreman who had overseen the services installation and masonry consolidation. Rod now led the setting out of the complex geometry for the intersection of the main roof with the bartizans. So too were the cap rooves on the bartizans themselves – it is much harder to set out a true cone than an octagon or hexagon.

Discussions also turned to the form of the finials for the bartizans. Such finials were often as wide as their base, and made of single block of stone. They can be quite elaborate, formed as open basket work, or even figurative people or beasts. In later 'Baronial period' restorations such finials were often beefed up and elaborated even further. We had no conclusive evidence at Fairburn and it was agreed that simple round stone balls would be most appropriate. However, getting the scale correct can be difficult to judge in advance from ground level.



By August 2021, the roof structure was sarked and ready for tiling, the dormer rebuilt.

The slates for the roof were salvaged as no Scottish slate quarries are still working. They all had to be sorted by size, trimmed to re-use at a smaller size if they were broken. Note the list in the foreground for taking materials to the upper levels.



Andy Taylor, who had taken over as site manager from Rod following completion of the joinery work, came up with the inspired idea of bringing in three of his children's footballs in differing sizes from home, which he mounted in turn on a bartizan while the design team looked up from ground level and chose the size that looked correct. There was also careful discussion of a datestone for the reinstated dormer, to record the date of our restoration. Inside, with floors now reinstated at their historic levels, thoughts were turning to first fix electrics, furnishings manager John Evetts being closely involved for placement of bedside lamps etc. There were careful discussions about the thickness and detailing of plaster and its method of application over new masonry. We were excited to find a few traces of yellow ochre on the plaster of a second floor window reveal, a hint of the colourful interiors of the past. We also began to research and lay plans for a painted wooden ceiling, which deserves its own account (see below).

Externally, a tack (base) coat of lime render was applied to level out the uneven masonry surface, before the full base coat. These layers were applied mechanically, the plasterers working their way up the tower one level at a time, incorporating historic render where it survived and was still sound. The final 'harl' coat was then applied by hand as it would have been in the 16th century. The harl coat is a watered-down render containing a lot of large aggregate and gravel which is thrown onto the basecoat, first by the right hand then the left, across whole surface of the tower, to give a rough textured finish. Harling also enables the wall face and its finishes, inside and out, to bond in common breathability. The external colour also had to be addressed. Tower houses were generally given a shelter coat of limewash, extra protection against the harsh Highland weather. Our archaeologist suggested that the limewash was often coloured to match the dressed stone. We did not find any evidence of the original limewash colour at Fairburn, but the stone used on the dressed elements was a salmon pink. Visiting Delgatie Castle while researching, we were struck by its soft pink colour, and this inspired us to colour the limewash to match the pink of the sandstone. Five coats were applied to the tower. Its hue will soften as it weathers.



How to move a fireplace lintel? The time-honoured way. August 2021.



Project architect Julie Barklie sketching ideas for a drain water hopper; Landmark's Regional Surveyor Linda Lockett consulting a colour chart for the concrete stair.



Top: Site Manager Andy Taylor brought in his children's footballs to help us decide the correct size for the bartizan finials.

Below: Debating how to finish the top floor ceiling: organic plaster on a membrane/lathe and plaster finish was used , to flow down over the coombs (slanted eaves).

The roof space is insulated with Rockwool and a hatch in the floor allows furniture to be brought in. The carpentry was done by Jimmy McKinnan, a fourth generation joiner (far right).



Designing the new concrete stair in autumn 2021 involved fiendish in-situ geometry. Specialist Robert Mathieson (left) admitted to scratching his head at times but relished the task. First, the newel post had to be cast in sections to ensure it was centred the whole way up. Then a forest of steel reinforcing rods was positioned alongside timber formers, tying the stair into the turret walls, just as these walls had already been tied into the main tower. The concrete for the treads was mixed and poured on site, lightly coloured to tone with the stonework. Each tread is carefully scribed along its outer edge.



Meanwhile, with all floors reinstated, work was well underway with plastering the rooms of the tower.



A section of the completed concrete stair.

As it is lime-based, the harling is breathable but the mix of underlying stone means this breathability is variable. It is this that causes the patchiness of appearance after rain.

The stage was now set for another remarkable feature in the restoration works: the new staircase. The structural engineer Steve Wood had already specified the outline design and principles for a reinforced concrete stair that would both stabilise the stair tower and offer additional stiffening and bracing for the main tower. This approach also meant more of the stair turret walls could be retained: installing a new staircase stone would have been both prohibitively expensive and more destructive of the original fabric. With just a few stone treads surviving as a template, it was a highly complex exercise in geometry to execute the concept against the rough walls, perfecting the rhythm of the treads to arrive correctly at the thresholds of the ascending entrances and respect the door heights.

Fortunately, our concrete specialist Robert Mathieson relished the task. First the reinforced central post was created and then the craftsmen worked their way up, casting one tread at a time on site, each tread later individually pointed in. The concrete was slightly coloured by adding a carefully judged amount of pigment, to tone with the natural stone without attempting to mimic it. The resulting spiral staircase is a work of art in itself. The wrought iron handrail that runs the length of the stair is a similar a tour de force of the blacksmith's craft, made by Tony Morell.

By early 2022, the roof scaffolding could finally begin to be taken down. A lightning conductor was installed to be as visually unintrusive as possible. By June, the rest of the scaffolding could come down, but quietly so as not to disturb the next generation of owlets. The ecologist had already asked that the site radios be turned down; now he requested that the scaffolders used rubber hammers and instructed that there was to be no shouting. The scaffolding was to be dropped by hand, pole by pole. The scaffolders' reaction to this is not recorded. It almost doubled the time it took to strike the scaffolding.



By August 2022, the tower was finally emerging from its chrysalis of scaffolding.

We had discovered the first windows were originally rebated rather than direct glazed as we had assumed, which meant more window frames were needed than anticipated. Supply took an unexpected amount of time, as Covid waves continued to occur periodically. Landmark's own joiners began work on the shutters, for which we used those at Stirling Castle as our basic pattern. Distorted plate glass was used for the glazing. Our in-house joiner Mark Smitten was well underway with kitchen design and production far to the south in the Landmark workshop at Honeybourne, with a brief that this particular kitchen was not to look too 'fitted.' The 'pod' bathrooms in the bedrooms were constructed and the sanitaryware fitted. We seemed to be in the home stretch but then there was an unfortunate mishap. Departing on a Friday evening, a plumber forgot to switch off the water and a faulty joint in the plumbing leaked out. By Monday, plastered walls and floor structures had all suffered from the resulting overflow and water was puddling on the kitchen floor. There was a lot of drying out to be done, and a lot to be remade.



One of the flexible, practical shutter boarded windows.

All was eventually put right. Outside, now that scaffolding was down and site huts cleared, landscaping of the site could get underway. The area of cobbles in front of the cottages was excavated, completing the work from the previous year. The whole area of cobbles was power washed to remove dirt and debris. Missing cobbles were replaced, using salvaged cobbles from the outlying areas where the surface was fragmenting. The edges of the cobbled area were covered over with soil to protect them from further collapse. The painted ceiling was completed in early October and later that month, the furnishing team could finally arrive with their vans.

The building that once sat waiting to be asked to dance was at last ready to waltz into a new future.

The story of Fairburn Tower's restoration was followed by TV production company Boomerang, for a Channel 4 documentary featuring Landmark's Director Anna Keay and Furnishing Manager John Evetts, representing the deeper Landmark project team that executed the restoration week by week.



Left to right, Sam Grace (Series Producer), John Evetts (Furnishings Consultant), Landmark Director Anna Keay and Ludo Graham (Director/Camera) on their final day of filming in October 2022. The programme is to air in 2023.



Artist Paul Mowbray at work on the ceiling.

The creation of the painted ceiling

Scottish tower houses can appear dour dwellings, which is perhaps why, in the 15th and 16th centuries especially, those who lived in them and could afford to, took pains to introduce colour to the interiors. As in England, this fashion for painted decoration was geographically and socially widespread, enriching the homes of great nobles, provincial lairds, merchants and craftsmen alike. In Scotland there was a particular fashion for painted ceilings in the best rooms, whether the ceiling was timbered or plastered. The walls were generally left plain and covered by wall hangings (unlike in England, where it was the walls rather than the ceiling that tended to be painted). Given both countries' connections with the Continent, the influences of the Italian and French Renaissance were common to both.

Although 250 years of dereliction at Fairburn meant that the only evidence of interior decoration were a few patches of faded yellow ochre on a window reveal and a couple of beams, we felt it would be justifiable to do the same at Fairburn Tower to introduce some colour and give those who stay a better flavour of a wealthy 16th-century laird's life. We chose the second storey chamber (today's sitting room), as the original hall and the room in which Landmarkers are likely to spend most time, and we imagined Murdoch or perhaps his son Alexander the 2nd laird commissioning such a ceiling in the 1590s, around the time that the stair turret, top floor and bartizans were added, and when the fashion for such ceilings was at its height.

As at Fairburn, the typical hall of a wealthy Scotsman at the turn of the 17th century was a large, moderately-lit room with paved or boarded floor, plastered walls, stone fireplace and an open timber ceiling of exposed joists spanning the room at intervals and supporting both the ceiling and the walking floor above. The ceiling boards were tongued and grooved and nailed down onto the joists from above. These ceiling boards formed the artisan painter's canvas.



**Top: Linda Lockett and Paul Mowbray consulting over the colour palette.
Below: Paul's cartoons for the foliate cornice frieze.**

Great imagination and variety were used on these ceiling boards, which depict all manner of decorative elements: Classical references both human and animal; plants and fruit, grotesques. Family iconography or heraldry did appear, but only as relatively minor elements. It was an age that loved emblems and coded references that could be decoded by the viewer.

The joists were also decorated. Their narrowness made them especially suitable for arabesque patterns and chevrons and, along the downstands, for morally instructive texts and mottoes. The ceiling was presented almost like the open page of a book to the room's occupants.

Much of the decoration, both emblems and texts, came from the engravings and wood blocks in pattern and emblem books imported from the Continent, that the artist absorbed and modified to suit the needs of the site and its patron. Identified 16th-century pattern books used in Scotland include Claude Paradin's *Devises Heroïques* (Lyons 1551, London 1591) and Geoffrey Whitney's *Choice of Emblemes* (1586), and these have also been part of our inspiration at Fairburn.

We also looked at a number of surviving examples in other castles. Most surviving examples of such ceilings are centred upon Edinburgh and Aberdeen, in merchants' houses as well as royal palaces and castles. As there is a recognisable style of 'Aberdeen joinery' we considered survivals in Aberdeenshire and Ross-shire were the most relevant to us, given Fairburn's northerly location. We were also keen to make sure that the ceiling was correct for the social status of Fairburn, so neither too refined nor too mercantile. We studied several contemporary examples of painted ceilings, including Crathes Castle at Blanchory (too elite) and Huntingtower near Perth (not figurative and perhaps a little early). Then we visited Delgatie Castle in Turriff, 100 miles due east in Aberdeenshire. Delgatie provided a perfect reference for us. It is one of a group of four late-16th century Aberdeenshire castles (Craig, Gight, and Towie Barclay are the others) that are almost certainly the work of the same master-mason.



The Rohaise Room at Delgatie Castle, thought to have been painted by John Melville in 1592.

Delgatie probably dates to between 1570 and 1579 (Fairburn is considered c1545 after grant of lands 1542 but not yet dated more precisely). Although Delgatie was considerably extended in later centuries, the primary floor plan of the tower house at its core is very similar in scale to Fairburn, including adjacent service rooms akin to the crofts at Fairburn (albeit built off the stair turret at Delgatie).

On the second floor is a chamber known today as the Rohaise Room, which has an exceptional surviving painted ceiling. The decoration includes a date of 1592 or 3 and is initialled 'JM' by the painter. This is thought to be John Melville of Aberdeen (fl 1587-85). His son Andrew was also decorating a ceiling at Dunottar Castle (now derelict, also in Aberdeenshire) in the same years.⁶³ The Rohaise ceiling was probably lightly restored in the late 19th or early 20th century, when an antiquarian article was written on it that also helpfully transcribed the texts on the joists (now very faded). Here was a lively, appealing and credible decorative scheme for the right modern-day artist to adapt for Fairburn, both historically plausible for Fairburn's context and status and also one that met our desire to brighten and enliven the room in a manner appropriate for Murdo Mackenzie's career.

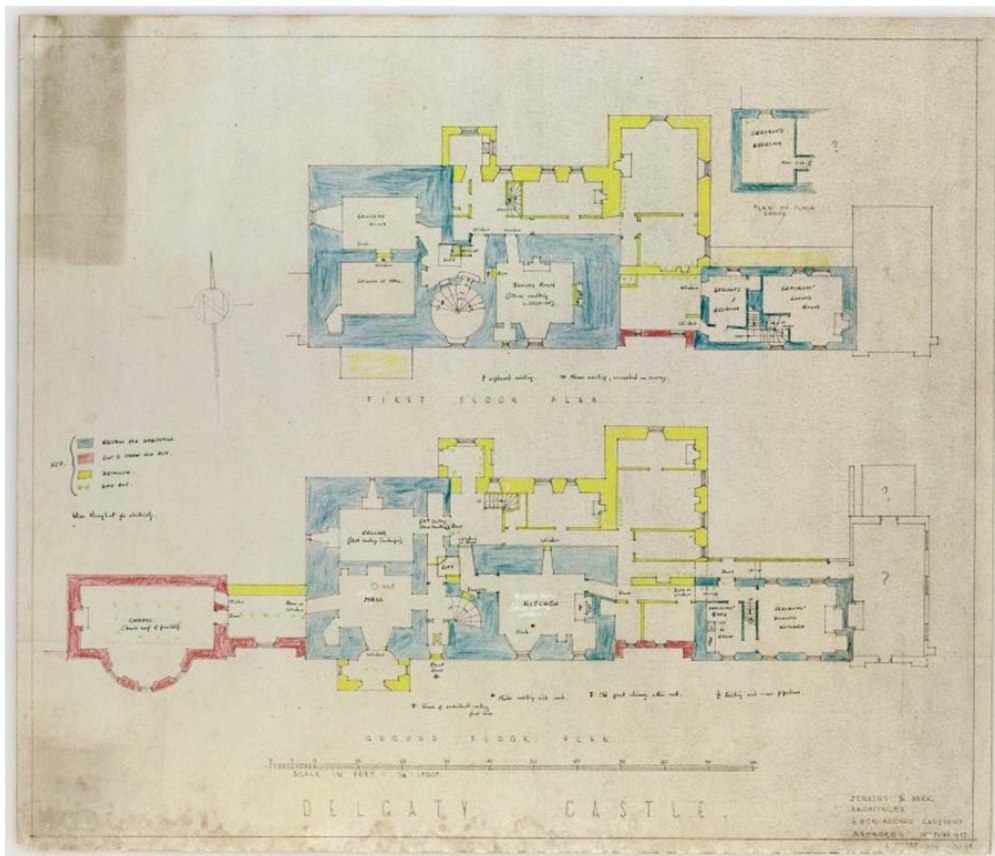
Early in 2022, we were lucky to find Paul Mowbray, an astonishingly versatile artist, craftsman and designer, who had already executed one full Renaissance ceiling in the style of Delgatie. Paul has carried out decorative restoration and conservation in Scottish castles since the mid-1980s and was therefore already well-versed in painted ceilings styles and colour palettes.

Through the early summer of 2022, Paul and Landmark's historian Caroline Stanford worked closely together to agree the layout and emblems for Fairburn's sitting room. It was a wonderful project to work on together, despite finding that the original joists were not evenly spaced. Paul spent some ten intensive weeks at the tower painting the ceiling.

⁶³ Apted, M. R. Hannabuss, Susan '*Painters in Scotland 1301-1700: A Biographical Dictionary*', 1978.



Delgaty Castle has been considerably enlarged over the centuries, but at its heart is a tower house very similar to Fairburn, shaded blue below.



He used Lefranc Bourgeois vinyl emulsion paint, a modern formulation much used for conservation work and (despite its vinyl content) sharing the breathability of historic paints. Historically, ceiling decorations were executed in pigments mixed with glue size (fish- or rabbit-bone glue) on a thin coat of whiting (chalk and size mix). The painter first drew the designs in bold black lines and then filled them in in colour. The colours generally fade over the centuries, but we felt our recreation should more honestly reflect the colours as first painted.

In the past the pigments themselves were mostly earth-based. Successful blue and green pigments were harder to create and therefore more expensive in being imported. Blue pigment was originally made of ground azurite from Germany or Ireland, but from the 15th century smalt started to appear, imported from Amsterdam via Aberdeen, and made of finely ground cobalt oxide glass or glaze. Green pigment was initially malachite, brought from as far away as Afghanistan.

Here are Paul's own words about the creative process and his method, beginning with site visits:

[Early in 2022] On this route up to Fairburn, I took in Delgatie as my first stop. I wanted to spend a generous amount of time studying the ceiling at Delgatie. In particular I needed to study the original artist's style. Although Delgatie had been restored, the black outlines that define the forms, emblems and heraldic content survives in reasonable condition, or has been quite faithfully traced by the restorers.

Scholars generally agree that this outlining was performed by the artist and the blocking in of colour would likely be the work of the artist assistant(s). It is from these outlines I can really study the movements of the original artist's hand, what the artist liked to do, even what the artist didn't like to do and avoided doing within his style. For me this study helps me see what will come naturally when painting the ceiling, and what will need to be conscientiously focused on and imitated.

As well as the distinctive draughtsmanship the Delgatie ceiling displays a stunning array of earth pigments. For me it was an entirely natural process to relay these colours for the ceiling at Fairburn, as I could clearly identify the ochres, umbers, green earths and siennas that are part of that wonderful gentle earth palette we see there.

The next physical stage was a full photographic survey of the Delgatie ceiling, inch by inch. After the photography, I started taking notes on a

large colour chart to help me reference accurately the colours and tone strengths for our ceiling at Fairburn. Of course, the ceiling at Fairburn was specified to look as it may have done back in 1595, when the colours would be strong and fresh and without the environmental aging historic ceilings endure from fire smoke, candles as well as the break down in the animal proteins that hold together the gesso ground on the wood and bind the pigments in place in the tempera paint.

Next stop the following day was Fairburn and to meet Linda Lockett on site. Taking the tour was ideal as always, as the supplied photographs only managed to communicate so much. I was impressed with the efforts by the team in all aspects of Fairburn as we explored the Tower. We finally moved to view what would come to be my 'blank canvas', the 'sitting room' ceiling, around 5 metres square and not too high a climb to reach on scaffolding.

A central part of my practice is to show the client a visual of how their completed project will look. This may be by sketches, drawings and watercolours or by creating a 3D model of the room, faithful to scale and with designs, materials and colours faithfully in place. In the discussions stage agreements are made, but when a 3D visual of these decisions is produced, it tends to be the starting point of a rethink of the design. This is the switch from seeing in our own minds, to having a 3D virtual reality of the design as it will look on completion.

From the stage of the 3D that helped give a fair impression of how the finished ceiling would appear, we then needed to finalise the composition of the content in a language that would correspond to the room's configuration, with viewing priorities given to the hearth area, entry through the door, above the largest window and the centre of the room. The strongest and most relevant material would be placed above these defined areas.

I then progressed with visuals of 5 different ceilings compositions with our agreed content. From these 5 ceiling layout variants, Caroline and Anna, could focus exactly how they would like to see Fairburn composed and added valuable input on scale of details, emblem priority and enhancing foliate ornament.

With the design stage now concluded my next task was to draw out the whole ceiling in full scale on a large continuous roll of paper in my studio. My full-scale drawings were first made in pencil, then studied for accuracy and style and finally inked in. The ink line bleeds through to the back of the paper, and this provides a guideline on the reverse side I follow with a stick of willow charcoal. At Fairburn I then carefully applied the drawing up in place on the ceiling and followed my ink guidelines with a fine agate-tipped burnisher which has the effect of transferring a faint charcoal line directly

from the paper onto the gesso surface of the ceiling. I evolved this transfer technique from an elderly lady who worked with the Wemyss school of needlework in Fife. She showed me the many different patterns the school held and showed me the laborious process of taking a pin and repeatedly piercing the lines of the pattern drawing on paper, then laying it over the material and using a pounce bag full of charcoal dust to transfer the design drawing to material. This is a very old technique and traces of its use have been found on early-17th century painted ceilings in Scotland. To take it a stage further I used a pricking wheel to set out the lines on paper, then around 10 years back found that an agate burnisher worked well.

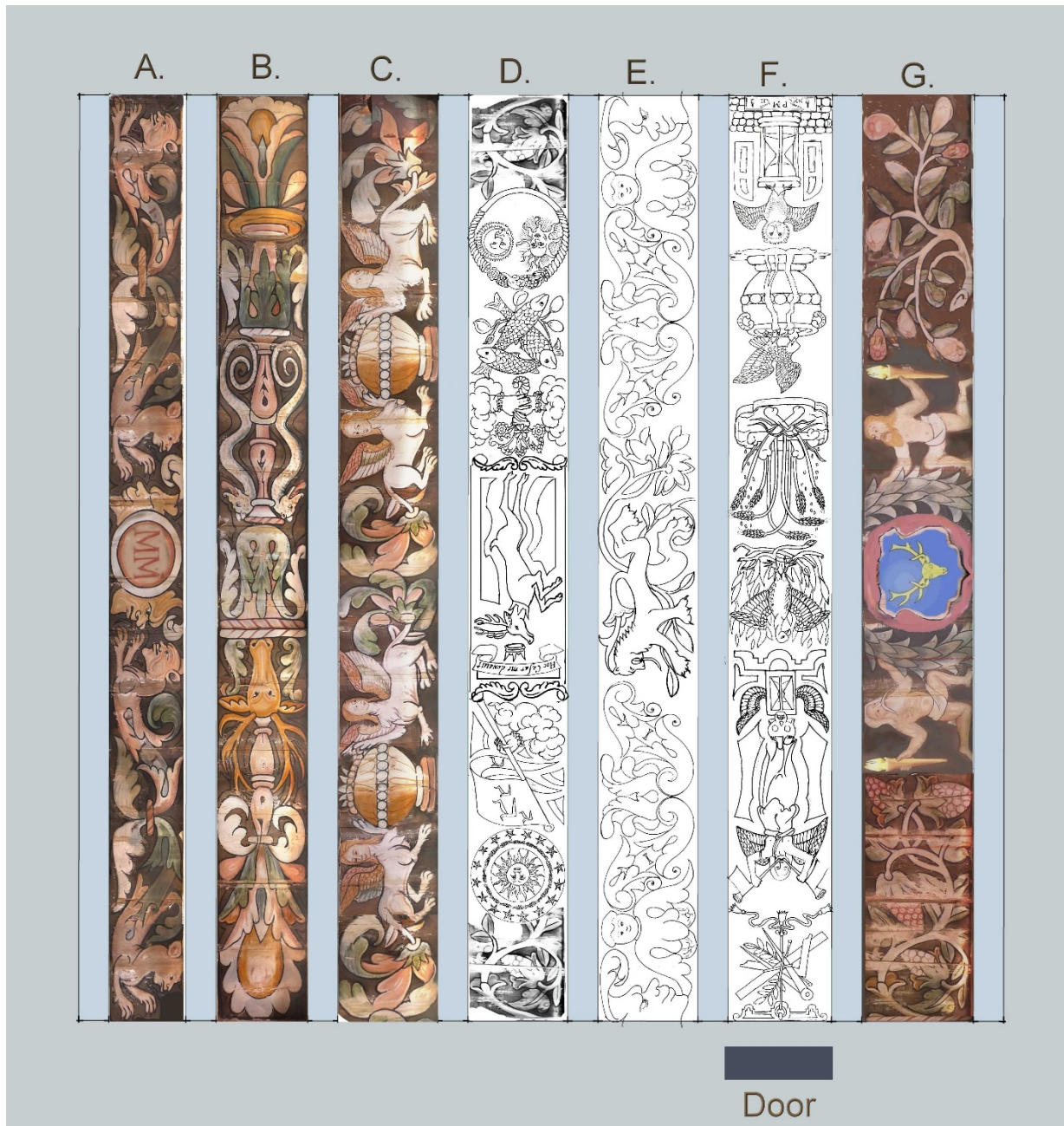
With most of the charcoal lines transferred up in place on the Fairburn ceiling the next stage was to mix my paints to match fresh 1595 versions of the Delgatie palette. These colours were carefully mixed up in glass jars to match the colour chart examples I had made at Delgatie Castle and a colour chart made up in my Fairburn notebook along with notes on the colour compositions, all vital in case more paint of the same colour had to be made to complete the ceiling.

For the Fairburn ceiling I used 'Lefranc Bourgeois Flashe' paint. The French company Lefranc was founded in 1720 and my paint 'Bourgeois Flashe' was developed in the 1950s, and is well established for use in historic restoration projects. Importantly, it offers the complete matt finish inherent to the casein and glue tempera paint that historic Scottish ceilings were generally painted in.

What lay ahead was to try and maintain a high level of concentration in the execution of the painting to get it right, keeping in check my own personality in the paint applied, making what must have been hundreds of visits to my tablet to zoom in on my Delgatie photography and never to lose a grasp of the nature of the historic inspiration for Fairburn.

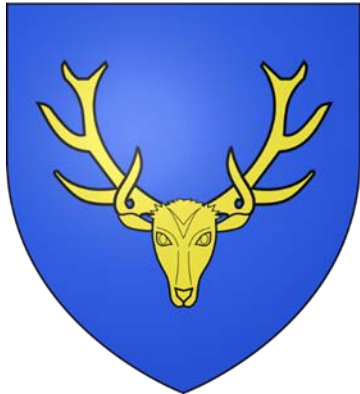
The design stage guidance received from Caroline has given the ceiling a real fusion of its parts with a unity and awareness that communicates at an optimum level. As an artist who studies these ceiling and deploys my knowledge conscientiously, I would like to think that I can take on most layout scenarios when recreating for a client, but as I walk round beneath the completed ceiling today, I believe having this input has taken the ceiling a stage further, for the viewer today, and for posterity. My time at Fairburn has left me with many memories that will endure. The surrounding drama of the landscape in changing light, along with a rich variety of wildlife. The feeling of peace on those pitch-black nights when I would work late, alone, with classical or atmospheric music playing. Going outside late at night and looking back at Fairburn Tower with the interior lights on and witnessing that giant leap from it being a building site, to feeling like a home. All details to take stock of and commit to that file in the mind marked 'best times'.



De-coding the Fairburn Ceiling

In designing the Fairburn Ceiling, we had seven runs between the joists to fill. As at Delgatie, these alternate between transverse and linear layouts. Some are more or less direct reproductions of what is at Delgatie; as we imagined our itinerant 16th-century painter John Melville coming to Fairburn, we felt it was quite likely that he had stock motifs he would repeat. This is true of runs A, B, C and G above, although A and G have been adapted for Murdoch Mackenzie as the tower's builder. The Mackenzie crest is a stag's head, making Delgatie's B run

especially appropriate here. The 'wodewoses' supporting the Mackenzie shield under the window in G are the same supporters as used by the Mackenzies of Seaforth.



**The arms of Clan Mackenzie and Mackenzie of Seaforth
(the senior branch)**

The remaining three runs have been customised for Fairburn after detailed study of Renaissance emblems in works like Paradin and Whitney, as follows.

D: The room's central run: the King's generosity. At the middle is a leaping stag under a crown and a banner that reads 'Hoc Caesar me donavit' ('the king gave me this') as a reference to James V's grant of the Fairburn lands. The motif is based upon on in Claude Paradin's *Les Devises Heroiques* (1551).



**The leaping stag in
Claude Paradin's *Les
Devises Heroiques* (1551)**

Below the stag's feet are hands of friendship (a motif also in Paradin and used by Mary Queen of Scots in her embroidery); fish for the rivers Orrin and Conon, and the sun and moon for the passing of the days. (In the best tradition of Renaissance artists, the face of the sun, with its beard lock, is a subtle self portrait of Paul himself. The moon's face, he says, 'is a mystery.')

Above the stag is a banner bearing James V's crest from his Garter stall in St George's Chapel in Windsor, created when Henry VIII made James a Knight of the Garter as part of his diplomatic outreach in 1535. The 'hand from the clouds' also comes from Paradin.

E: Scotland The chief motif here is a lion rampant from Paradin. Of course, it is very close to traditional Scots lion rampant that featured on the royal banner of Scotland from the 15th century and is still Scotland's national symbol.

F: The story of Landmark's restoration, as told through 16th-century emblems and motifs. Above the entrance door are mason's setting out tools, then the goddess of Fame triumphing over Death (the skull) and Time (the hourglass). Next comes a phoenix rising from the flames (from Whitney, for the building rescued), then wheat growing from bones, another emblem of rebirth. The crafty Fairburn jackdaws are acknowledged next, dropping stones into an urn to make the water level rise. Finally, Paul was allowed one motif of his own devising: an owl with outstretched wings based on one from Étienne Delaune, a 16th-century French goldsmith and engraver. The owl stands on an hourglass that in this case represents the delays caused by the owls. The hourglass stands on cobbles, another surprise during the project. Also incorporated is a small monogram, 'PM' and the date, just as at Delgatie. Paul has also added his mark, which is based on the mark of the Master of the Die (a 15th-century engraver who signed his works with a small stamping block or die) and a paintbrush and carving chisel, which are much the same tools used by Paul today.

The cornice frieze of scrolling leaves is taken directly from Delgatie and plays an important role in such schemes in 'anchoring' the ceiling to the wall hangings. The painted rope edging to the open hearth adapts surviving examples elsewhere.

The arabesques and foliated designs on the underside of the joists are based on Delgatie, as are most of the texts used on the joist downstands.

The Fairburn Ceiling Texts

The Fairburn Ceiling texts are mostly from Delagtie and are written in Old Scots and are as follows, in order from the fireplace wall:

1. A) *Flie covetousness & also from prodigality For neither of them agreeth with honestie. / He suld hae a langshankit spune that wad sup keil wi the deil*

[Fly covetousness and also from prodigality. For neither of them agrees with honesty / He who sups with the devil needs a long spoon]

B) *God resisteth the proud in everie place. But to the humill he gives his grace. Trust not therefore to ritches bewtie or strength. All these be vaine & sall consume at length.*

[God resists the proud in every place But to the humble he gives his grace. Trust not therefore to riches, beauty or strength All these be vain and shall consume at last.]

2. A) *Quhair that he heris or seis. Quidder they be truth lawis or lies. Qhuair ever he ryddis or gois he shall have few friends & many fois.*

[Where that he hears or sees Query they be true laws or lies Wherever he rides or goes he shall have few friends & many foes]

B) *Thou quhilk health of bodie do have. The best earthlie gyft that evir god gave / Have pitie on them that suffer affliction. So sal thou enjoye deathie salvacion*

[You (that) have a healthy body The best earthly gift that ever god gave. / Have pity on them that suffer affliction So shall you enjoy salvation after death]

3. A) *Gyf a gude turn into the hes bein wrocht. Remember there upon, And forget it nocht; For god, law, & natur, condemnis the Ingrat. / He gangs lang barefoot that waits for dead men's shuse.*

[Give a good turn to one who has done one [to you] Remember it And forget it not; For god, law and nature condemns the ungrateful. / He goes long barefoot that waits for dead men's shoes]

B) *Do gude unto strangers evir be myn advice. For in so doying thy honesties all arise. For quhy it is a far better thing. To have freindis than to be a king.*

[Do good unto strangers is ever my advice For in so doing thy honesties [reputation?] all arise. For why, it is a far better thing To have friends than to be a king]

4. A) *The freindis whom posyt or lucre Increase, Quhen substance fayleth their withal will se[se] But friends that ar coupled with hart & love Neither feir, nor force, nor fortune may remo[ve].*

[The friends whom post [position] or lucre [riches] increase When fortune fails their income will cease. But friends that are joined with heart and love cannot be taken away by force or fortune.]

B) *Quhen men be auld, they usen oft to tell, Of their dedes past, other gude or bad. Therefore in thy youth order thyself so weill. That of thy dedis to tell thou may be glade.*

[When men are old, they often tell Of their past deeds, either good or bad. Therefore in your youth, live so well That you may glad to tell of your deeds.]

5. A) *Go labour in thy youth to conqueris sum rent, To support the puir, the nedy and pacient. Thou art more blest to gyf, not to take. The puir man's cause is aye put abake.*

[Work in your youth to secure some income To support the poor, needy and patient. You are more blessed to give, not to take. The poor man's cause is always put last.]

B) *Gyf thou be afflicted be one that is riche. Either be vexed or be a man of might. To suffer it quietlie think it not muche. For oft be suffering, men cum to their richt.*

[If you are afflicted consider yourself rich. Either be vexed or man up. Think it little to suffer it quietly For often by suffering men fulfil their potential.]

6. A) *Flie sone all naughtie company. From fools no freindship crave. Keip fellowship with such as be Both wittie sage and grave. / Bees that hae honey in their mouths hae stings in their tails.*

[Fly, son, from all naughty company. From fools no friendship crave. Keip fellowship with those who are witty, sage and grave. / Bees that have honey in their mouths have stings in their tails.]

B) *For tyme neher was, nor nether I think sall bee, That treuth on shent sall speik in all thyngs free. Ane just man treu & leill, His saw sud be his seill.*

[For time never was, nor I think shall ever be, That truth [ancient?] shall speak in all things free. Any just man, loyal and true, his word should be his seal.]

Artist Paul whimsically maintained that sitting beneath such improving inscriptions 'morally refines you'.

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Appendix 1 – Selection of letters of Alexander Mackenzie of Fairburn,
8th Laird

NLS Lauriston Castle Collection MS1341 f.85 A Mackenzie to J Mackenzie 8 January 1742 Fairburn

“Our Chief [Seaforth] is variouslie spoke of here as to his behaviour in Parliament for by everie post there are Severall letters writ to certain people in this Countrey by Sir Wm Gordon [of Invergordon] [Ross of] Balnogown McLeod &c. who magnifies the least Slip he committs to a greatt height, poor fellows like me must be silent, ignorant of ther Severall behaviour.”

NLS MS1341 f.86 A Mackenzie to J Mackenzie 26 January 1742 Fairburn

“I received yours covering a leter from Craighernett, whose money I am glade has now answerd. It seems my Lord Seaforth dreads me when he woud not entrust me with the buying of his Tennants Cattle this ensuing year, as I took last year the refuse or Shots of them, besides it was on the faith of my being preferred to Another made me launch out in the droving way; meanwhile tho my Lord has disappointed me.”

NRS GD23/6/152/1 A Mackenzie to G Gordon 17 July 1742 Monar

“I wrote you a few days ago which I believe did not come to hand, I was so hurried the few hours I stayd in the low Countrey, that I coud not write you. I was obliged to make use of the Pounie for that jant so that he has not had time enough of the Grass. If we have the luck to get venison again the middle of the week we’ll send you some in order to treat your Chief. I wish Cosie may not be the worse of his ride to Fort Augustus.

I am Glade to hear that John is well, did he hear as yet of Mrs Newton’s Slip? I am sorry we wont have the pleasures of your Company here this Season, we’ll go down in a fournight & then we’ll see you I hope: Babie is Cloth’d but I trust Hee’ll get safe to Fairburn. I have ordered Murdo to reimburse you in Six pounds & I thank you.

Send us first Shoes for Babie.”

NLS MS1341 f.110 A Mackenzie to J Mackenzie 3 July 1743 Monar

“The Accounts you give of Droving disheartens me yet I know grass never grew better in England than this Season, why woud not Cattle then sell. As I made a promise of Some Oxen to Mr Graham Drover who had your letter of credit to Belmaduthy, I will endeavour to fullfull my promise to him, he Assured me he woud loge £200 Sterling for my behoof with you, it will disappoint me if it is Otherwise as I laid press on it. If so please remitt £100 in notes with post....

I am, Dear Sir quite happy in this retirement, we have a fine Season, & ye wife does not oft anger us &c.”

NRS GD23/6/152/2 A Mackenzie to G Gordon 17 October 1744 Fairburn

"Tomorrow God willing I intend to have the Child baptized, So be here early & bring with you my Current Cash Accountt, & Some money. Remember, I beg you, my New boots & cause your Kenny bring them here & 1 dozen Small wine glases. I dine before one a Clock."

NLS MS1341 f.142 A Mackenzie to J Mackenzie 5 April 1745 Fairburn

"I know not how to begin this letter as I have already Almost forfeited my promise in not remitting you Cash you paid John Bailly & y[oung] [Mackenzie of] Redcastle on my Account. The Cause is, the Severe bad Season, West Highlanders are Scrupulous to advance Money for Cattle in May as they were wont to do, because it's more than probable few Men will be able to Sell any Number of Cattle this year as the loss is become so general ...

"for my part I never am to deal So deep in Droving as I have done, I design God willing to deal Soly by myself, & only in few of the best Cows if I can come at them, Such as my Lord Seafort's Mainland Cows Loch Broom & Coggich [Coigach] Cattle, & Such Sell in the worst of times for ready money & little loss – as my poor Livelyhood is Such, yt I must keep a great Stock of black Cattle..."

"The weather is dreadfully bad we can't Sow the Grownd, which alone is Sufficient to ruin us"

NLS MS1341 f.198 A Mackenzie to J Mackenzie 26 October 1752 Fairburn

"[Mackenzie of] Applecross deliverd me your friendly letter with a just Accountt of the manner the funds I sent you from Sterling were laid out, I Shall endeavour for the future to observe your friendly Caution in not taking for Large Summs, Notes of hand that will not regularly protest; yt I deal Considerable in Black Cattle is true, yt I did So Some years ago when I neither had Such Grasings &c or Intelligence as I now have. I will own, att the Same time let me assure you I never had loss by Droving Since I began Anno 1741, but one Season Anno 1747, & then my reall loss was not £100 Sterling, In these years I do abundantly well; & tho' prices of Cattle fall, which Soon I look for, I could demonstrate to a friend I must by following my present & determin'd System of Grasing & dealling in none but true Cattle, yt it is impossible (If a Contagious Distemper keep off) to Suffer."

NLS MS1138 ff.129-30 Alexander Mackenzie to J Mackenzie 17 November 1752 Fairburn

"I was for Some days in the County of Murray..."

Balmeanich is foolish, I can with truth assure you, Waterstein & I have MacLeodin write fixed for preference to his whole Rent Cattle, & he has writ his different Factors, & they have corresponded with me accordingly. The day fixed by us for Our Moyety of payment of £200 Sterling advances – I woud not chose to be found backward.

Ross-shire politics:"by slender Management our Clan were never in a way, they can easier be tuned to vote unanimously; by Seaforth's presence. It's certain Our Unanimity; & Even by his properly asking his friends for you, they will acquiesce – I know their

different pulses as well as any of my neighbors – his presence If you can bring it so about again next Summer or Autumn will avail much The Kilrauks [Rose of Kilravock] assure me they'll always stand by ye McKenzie Interest – I can say no great matters, but neither person nor endeavours will be wanting as far as you shall ask me in this matter"

Appendix 2 – Obituary of General Sir Alexander Mackenzie

“DEATH OF GENERAL SIR ALEX. MACKENZIE.⁶⁴

We announce with regret the death of the venerable and benevolent General Sir Alexander Mackenzie, Bart., of Fairburn, who died on the 17th of October, in the 83d year of his age, at his residence in Bath. Sir Alexander is said to have been the oldest General officer in the army. He was a Grand Cross of the Orders of Hanover and of St Januarius in the kingdom of the Two Sicilies. As young ‘Fairburn’ (his father being then dead) he entered the service in 1787, after a preliminary education, in which he was the schoolfellow of Sir Walter Scott in Edinburgh, and the companion of Arthur Wellesley at Angers, in France; and here we may record an anecdote respecting the ‘Great Duke’ which has not been published. The young soldiers, Wellesley and Mackenzie, leaving Angers together and travelling to Paris, their *cabriolet de poste* broke down in the Bois de Boulogne, and though so near the gay city, they were obliged to pass the night in a *guinguette*, or country public-house, and make their entrance next morning in their patched-up vehicle. At the close of the last war, and after the battle of Waterloo, Sir Alexander, going to one of the Duke's great receptions, said to him – ‘Your Grace will admit that your last entrance into Paris was somewhat different to that which we made together in the last century.’ ‘You are right,’ was the Duke's reply, ‘and you know I've been trying hard to make out where that house was that we slept at;’ adding, ‘Ah! I was a poor devil then, and worth nothing. It was India, which ruins most men, that made a man of me!’

Young Fairburn served nearly five years as an Ensign in the 1st Royals, the Colonel of his regiment being Lord Adam Gordon. Promoted into the 42d Highlanders, he was the Lieutenant of the Grenadier Company, which was commanded by the Marquis of Huntly, so long beloved by every one of our countrymen, and who to his last day, as Duke of Gordon, cherished the warmest regard for the Fairburn of his youth. Then came the terrible war of 1793, and the young soldier who had been five years an Ensign sprung up in less than two years from a Lieutenancy in the 42d to a Lieutenant-Colonelcy, and the proud command of the two battalions of the Ross-shire Highlanders, the 78th, raised by Lord Seaforth. This noble regiment was commanded by him at the first capture of the Cape of Good Hope, in 1795, under Generals Craig and Alured Clarke; and Lieutenant-Colonel Mackenzie was specially mentioned in the despatches for his spirited and able conduct. In 1797 he became a Colonel, and being then commandant of the 36th Regiment, he shortly afterwards, when in the Mediterranean, rose to the rank of Brigadier-General. It was with this rank that he visited Italy and France during the peace of Amiens; and the handsome young Highland General of five-and-twenty was a subject of some admiration among the foreign ladies. It was then that he made the personal acquaintance of Talleyrand, Cambaceres, and all the celebrated characters of the day. When the war broke out, he was made Major-General, at only twenty-eight years of age; and from that day to the close of the war in 1814 he was continually employed, either in the Mediterranean army or in different parts of the United Kingdom, both as a Major and as a Lieutenant-General. At one time, indeed, he was named second in command to Sir Arthur Wellesley in the expedition which was assembled at the Cove of Cork in the year 1808. That force was destined to retrieve the honour of the British arms in South America after the inglorious conduct of Whitelock, and was, by a singular turn of political

⁶⁴ *Inverness Courier*, 27 October 1853.

fortune, eventually sent not to act *against* but *for* Spaniards, in the great cause of the independence of the Peninsula. This change involved of necessity the transference of General Mackenzie to the Mediterranean army, under the hero of Maida; for Brevet General Spencer, who was ordered to co-operate with Wellesley, and who was already serving on the coast of Spain, was slightly junior to Mackenzie. Such is the fortune of war, and thus by so slight an accident did we of the north lose the distinction of having a Highlander second in command to the illustrious Duke during the Peninsular war; for Hill, Beresford, Graham, and others, were all junior to Fairburn, and consequently he could never be employed in the Peninsula. Sir Alexander Mackenzie succeeded to the baronetcy, as second baronet, on the death of his maternal uncle, Sir Evan Baillie (grandson of Alex. Baillie of Dochfour) in 1820. Evan Baillie having attained the rank of a Major-General in the army, with the Colonelcy of the 23d regiment of native infantry in Bengal, and being sometime Commander-in-Chief of the forces there, was created a baronet in 1819, with remainder to his nephew, Alexander Mackenzie. The only living person who was born in the old tower of Fairburn is Mrs Massie, now resident at Bath, the youngest sister of the veteran General. His eldest sister, Barbara, who was married to Mr Murchison of Tarradale, left two sons one the distinguished geologist, Sir Roderick Murchison, called after his grandfather of Fairburn, and who, during his early military life, was several years Aide-de-Camp to his uncle; the other is Kenneth Murchison, Esq., formerly Governor of Singapore and Malacca. These gentlemen are, we understand, left as residuary legatees of the good old General, who, in bequeathing several thousand pounds to charitable purposes, has not forgotten the land of his fathers, and has left about eleven hundred pounds to the institutions of Inverness, and one hundred pounds to the poor of Dingwall. We may well say, *the land of his fathers*, for the royal forests of Monar and Strathconan were granted to Sir Alexander's ancestor, Rorie More, by James V. of Scotland." [not so!]

The General is buried at Bathampton along with his sister Barbara and her first husband Kenneth Murchison of Tarradale.⁶⁵ There is, however, a memorial to him in St Clements in Dingwall at the family burying place which commemorates his connection with the ancestral lands. The tablet somewhat erroneously states that the General was "The last possessor of the ancient family estates of Fairburn Strathconon and Monar conferred upon his ancestor RODERICK MACKENZIE by JAMES 5th of Scotland."⁶⁶ .

⁶⁵ Bangor Jones, Pers comm. Dr Eric Grant

⁶⁶ <http://gravestones.rosscromartyroots.co.uk/picture/number14441.asp> [accessed 19 June 2016].