

# Some Forbes Castles

3 April 2022

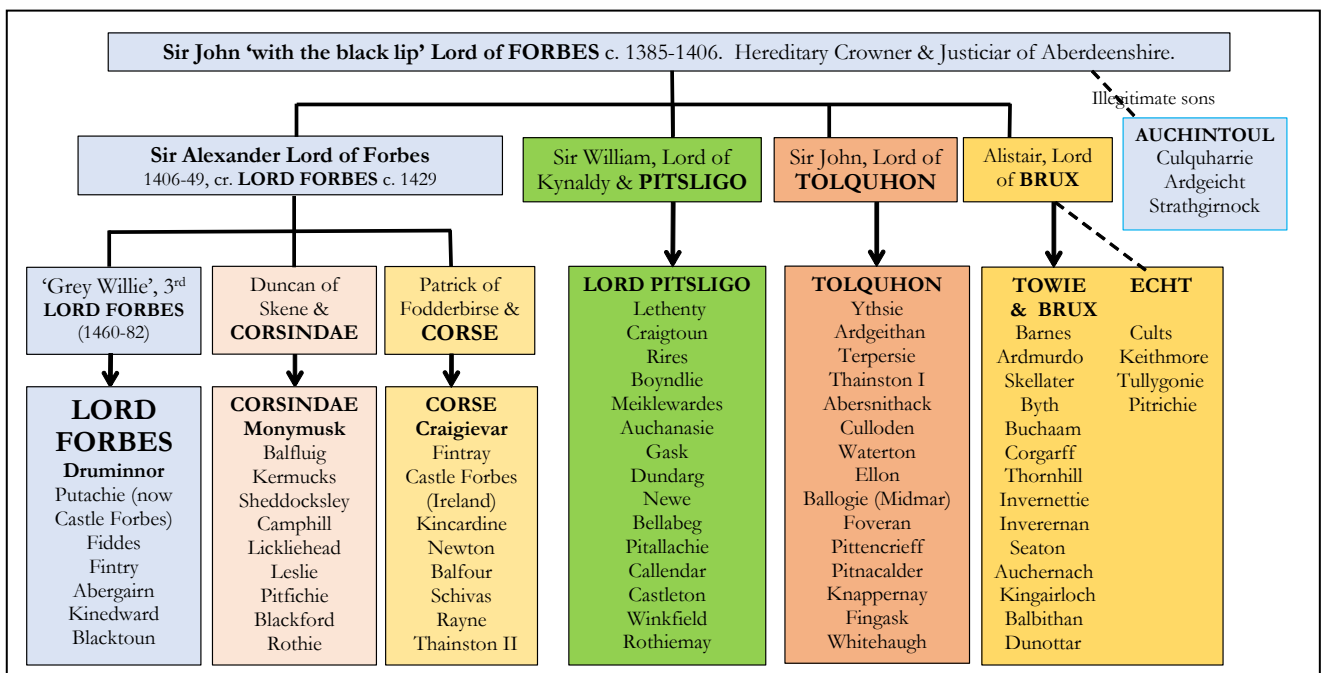
## The Forbes family

The Forbeses have always believed that they are indigenous to the Braes of Forbes on Donside, that the original forebear was “the first man to kindle fire and boil water on that soil”. In a word, they think they are that very rare creature, Picts. Alternative origins stories abound - that they were an offshoot of the royal house of Moray, or of the dynasty which became Earls of Mar, or possibly of Clan Anrias, the tribe which possessed much of Ross before 1200. But all we know for sure is: “No one either in fable or history owned the land of Forbes before us”, as the 14<sup>th</sup> Lord Forbes wrote in 1730.

This sense of place, of rootedness, is extremely strong. In time the Forbeses expanded to absorb almost all of Donside and spread across the North-East and into other districts of Scotland, but the Braes of Forbes have always been the heartland of the family. The present Chief, Malcolm, 23<sup>rd</sup> Lord Forbes, lives there still, at Castle Forbes.

Forbes emerged from obscurity on the death of Thomas, 9<sup>th</sup> Earl of Mar, last of the Celtic earls, in 1373. The earldom passed to Mar’s brother-in-law, the Earl of Douglas, but Earl Thomas’s leadership of the native people of Mar passed to John, Lord of Forbes. This status was implicit in the ancient Celtic offices of Crowner and Justiciar of Aberdeenshire, which were confirmed hereditarily in 1394 to John’s son, Sir John ‘with the black lip’. Sir John had seven sons, from whom all Forbeses are descended. Most of them married heiresses, spreading the Forbes footfall well outside the ancestral heartlands. Most of these branches flourished and expanded, until by 1600 there were over 50 branches of the House of Forbes. They were the backbone of the North-East - as Lord Saltoun wrote in 1570, “they are the key of that country”.

The chart below shows the structure of the House of Forbes, comprising Lord Forbes and the eight main cadet houses, each with its own cadets. Each cadet had their own castle or manor house: some survive intact, of others not even the site is now known. This paper describes the surviving seats of some of the principal branches of the family: Castle Forbes (now **Druminnor**), **Pitsligo**, **Tolquhon**, **Monymusk** and **Craigievar**.



The main theme of Forbes history is their great feud with the Gordons, which raged for most of the 16<sup>th</sup> century. It was an unequal struggle: the Gordons, the Crown's viceroys in the government of the North, could call on the whole might of the State in pursuing their own interests; while the Forbeses' only real asset was the tribal loyalty of the people of Mar. The principal trigger of the feud, among many, was the execution of John Master of Forbes in 1537, falsely accused of plotting to murder King James V. The Earl of Huntly had brought the story of the conspiracy to the King, and the Forbeses believed he did so maliciously, knowing it was a fabrication, to remove an obstacle to his ambitions. The King soon realised he had been duped and compensated the Forbeses. He also ordered Huntly to pay assythement, but Huntly resisted, and though he did eventually pay, as soon as the king was dead he took the payment back. Many other causes of feud had since occurred. It took three generations of ceaseless conflict, and at least three Acts of Parliament, before the feud was officially pacified in 1597 (and again in 1616 and 1621) - and even then the mutual antipathy simmered on for at least a century. The feud severely battered the Forbeses, in particular Lord Forbes, whose finances by 1600 were in a fragile state. This caused the gradual sale of most of the Forbes empire during the 17<sup>th</sup> century - and finally in 1770 the sale of half of the Lordship of Forbes itself, including Castle Forbes.

Thanks to these sales, and the ending of feuds, the family's finances were restored. A new Castle Forbes was built in 1815, where the Lords Forbes have lived ever since.

### **DRUMINNOR (usually called CASTLE FORBES until 1770)**

The history of Druminnor reflects this saga of conflict, destruction and renewal. The 'Old Tower', enormously tall and famously 'dark', may have been built before 1300. In 1430-40 Alexander 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Forbes added a large Hall-house, the only part of the castle which has survived. Over the next five centuries Castle Forbes was constantly changing: it was attacked by the Gordons in 1449, sacked by the Douglasses in 1452, refortified in 1456, captured and "maist barbarouslie rewinit" by the Gordons in 1572, substantially rebuilt in 1577, seized by the government in 1584, raided by Lord Forbes's sons in 1592, captured by Royalists in 1645 and held for two years against Forbes attacks, repaired and remodelled in 1660-61, frequently attacked by Jacobites in 1689-90, besieged by Jacobites in 1746, partly burned by accident in the 1750s, sold to the asset-stripper John Grant in 1770 but luckily spared, mostly demolished in 1800 including the Old Tower and the Kirk, doubled in size and transformed into a modern country house in 1841, altered in 1869, bombed by the Germans in 1916, and finally halved in size again in 1960-66. Since 1966 it has been resting.

*Castle Forbes, block plan c. 1750.*

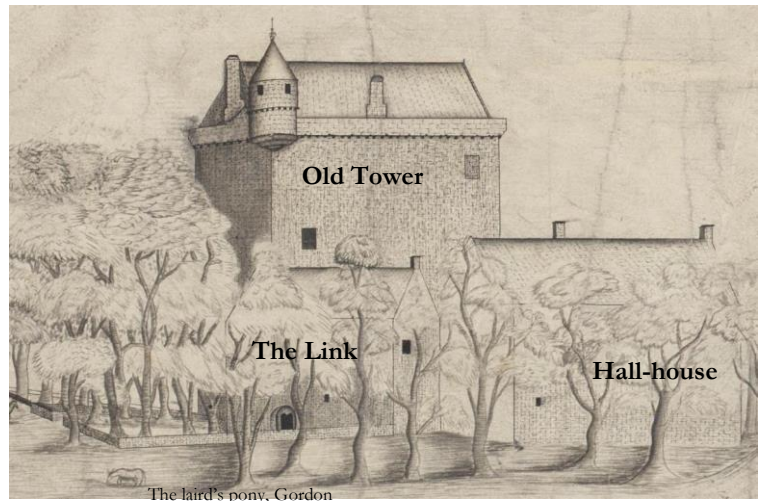


Entrance forecourt on the west side. 'The Close' in the centre, with the Old Tower on the north side, the 1430 Hall-house to south (the present castle), between them the 'Link' wing, with the entrance pend under it. To the east, a lower courtyard of service buildings: stables, brewhouse, bakery, stores, etc. It should be remembered that this is a snapshot in c. 1750, a late point in the castle's history: there may have been significant differences at earlier times in its 750 year story.

*Castle Forbes in 1770, viewed from the south.*

The immense height of the Old Tower dominates the view. The surviving castle, the Hall-house, is the lower building on the right, screened by trees. In the centre is the 'Link': a gallery on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor connected the Great Hall in the Old Tower with the 1430 Hall; under it the entrance pend gave access to the Close.

The entire complex was demolished in 1800, except the Hall-house which was modernised and renamed 'Druminnor House'.



Archaeological investigations have been carried on in recent years, with the objective of finding remains of these lost structures and developing the building chronology. The results have been mixed: the basic accuracy of the c. 1750 block plan (above) has been largely confirmed, but some of the main features, in particular the Old Tower, were so thoroughly ablated that they left 'not a wrack behind'. Also, a key finding from the work is that the castle was subjected to constant alterations throughout its history - partly due to the attentions of the Gordons - producing an archaeological record of great complexity. A geophysical survey in 2018 has been highly beneficial in terms of directing further work, including pin-pointing the well inside the Old Tower. Another milestone was the discovery of a grain-drying kiln under the Link wing: its contents were carbon-dated to around 1150, adding three centuries to the known history of the site.

*View of the Hall-house today, from SE.*



In this view the Old Tower stood behind the Hall-house, and was twice its height. In the background is the Tap o'Noth with its iron age hillfort.

The Old Tower seems to have been five or even six storeys high. It was said locally that the Old Tower was built up to such a height so Lord Forbes could look down on the Gordons in Rhynie. Be that as it may, the Tower of Pitsligo was said to be similar to the Old Tower of Castle Forbes, perhaps giving us a model.

We still have no certain date for the Old Tower. It could have been 15<sup>th</sup>,

14<sup>th</sup> or even 13<sup>th</sup> century. We are on surer ground with the Hall-house, since a receipt survives for "ye makyn of ye housse of Drumynour" dated 4<sup>th</sup> July 1440. The builder was Alexander 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Forbes, crowning a long and illustrious career with a major expansion of his ancestral fortress, to reflect his enhanced status. While the 'Great Hall' in the Old Tower would always be the legal and ceremonial heart of the castle - the 'chief chymmies' of the Lordship of Forbes - the new building housed a much larger Hall, able to accommodate the larger household and retinue



of a Lord of Parliament. (He was made a Lord of Parliament soon after 1428, when the rank was first introduced by James I. Forbes has been the premier Lord of Scotland since 1633.) The dimensions of the new Hall, 56 feet long by 22 feet wide, were almost identical to his wife's brother's new Hall at Tantallon. But both were pipped by the 1<sup>st</sup> Earl of Huntly's Hall at Strathbogie, built by the same masons and architects as Forbes's team, and measuring 65 feet by 24, giving 30% larger floor area. Rivalry may also be suspected in the width of their stairs: the Strathbogie turn-pike stair is 5 feet radius; the Forbes stair is 5½. Both had been rebuilt at least once following the attentions of unfriendly visitors. Both of course were completely out-classed by Seton's extravaganza at Fyvie a few years later.

In the Civil War which followed Queen Mary's flight to England, the Forbes-Gordon feud expanded into a major regional war. The Marians, led by Huntly, held Edinburgh Castle but lost everything else in the south; while Huntly's brother Adam conquered the north for the Queen by repeatedly defeating the King's Men led by the Master of Forbes. All the Forbes leaders were imprisoned by Adam and all their castles taken. The Gordons lost the war, finally capitulating early in 1573: but Adam and his men had spent the second half of 1572 systematically slighting all the Forbes castles - Lord Forbes summed it up in 1578: some Forbes castles were 'alluterlie wraikit and brout', while the others were 'maist barbarbouslie rewinit'. Castle Forbes was a prime target, but the extent of the damage is unclear. Surprisingly, the Old Tower seems to have suffered little; but the rest of the castle may well have been 'utterly wrecked'. The basement and ground floor of the Hall-house are largely 15<sup>th</sup> century work, though there are many signs of major repair work. The Hall floor however shows little evidence of the 15<sup>th</sup> century, other than its footprint, and may have been largely rebuilt in the 1570s. The stairtower is clearly 1570s work, and shows signs of Thomas Leiper's hand. The 'Link' wing may have been completely demolished. The 1577 armorial stone commemorates the restoration.

In 1660, as a result of the damage suffered during the Civil Wars of the 1640s, the Hall-house was again repaired. It was also modernised: the Hall was divided into 3 rooms, the largest of which was "the dynen room". Another storey was added on top, lit by dormer windows. It repeated the new plan of the Hall floor, and gave three more good-sized rooms. Higher still was an attic in the roof space. This remodelling of the Hall-house probably enabled a retreat from the Old Tower, whose upper floors were abandoned in this century (as at Pitsligo and Tolquhon).

In 1770 the 16<sup>th</sup> Lord Forbes sold Castle Forbes and half the Lordship of Forbes, transforming his financial situation. In 1800 the new owner, Robert Grant, demolished everything but the Hall-house, which he patched up and renamed Druminnor House. In 1841 the next generation added a large Victorian wing abutting the NW corner - Archibald Simpson *architectit* - and made major alterations inside the Hall-house, raising the floor levels, enlarging almost all the windows and concealing almost all the clues that show that it is an old building. The Simpson wing was 'Jacobethan' in style, not a happy match with the old Forbes castle. It was designed to contain all the principal rooms of the expanded house: the older part was to house guest bedrooms and service rooms.

In 1955 Druminnor House was sold by the Holland-Grants and bought by Margaret Forbes-Sempill, sister of Lord Sempill of Craigievar Castle - which was about to leave the family for the National Trust. In the 1960s Margaret demolished everything built by the Grants and restored the remains of the Forbes Hall-house; and revived its old name, Druminnor Castle. The Hall on the first floor was partly restored, to provide once again a large reception room, but it is still 20 feet shorter than the original Hall of Alexander 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Forbes.

## PITSLIGO

*There are six great barons o' the North,  
Fyvie, Frennet and Philorth.  
And if ye'd ken the aither three,  
Pitsligo, Drum and Finsatvie.*

As this bit of doggerel says, Pitsligo, though always subordinate to Lord Forbes, was a “great baron o’ the North” in his own right. The founder, Sir William Forbes of Pitsligo, was the right hand man of his brother, the 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Forbes, in the government of the North-East and prospered accordingly. He accumulated land all over the

North-East, less than his brother but equally wide-spread - from beyond Inverness down to Dundee. Most of the inheritance of their mother, Margaret Chisholm, came to William. His principal estate was Pitsligo, which he acquired from his father-in-law, Sir William Fraser of Philorth, in 1423, and there he built a stonking new Tower “much after the manner of Castle Forbes”. The dimensions of the Tower of Pitsligo are very similar to those of the Tower of Drum (built 1280s or 1330s). Pitsligo was said to comprise just three huge stone-vaulted rooms: the Kitchen; above it the Hall; and above that the Bedchamber, with the usual mural closets and stairs.



The Tower was the nucleus of the castle, forming one side of a courtyard or Close, just like Castle Forbes and Tolquhon. Ranges were added round the Close in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries making a complete quadrangle. Armorial stones dated 1577, 1603 and 1660 may record building work: 1577 probably records repairs following the attentions of the Gordons in the Marian Civil War.



*The Laird's Loft, formerly in Pitsligo Old Church*

Across the Close from the Tower a modern residential Hall-house was added around that time, with its own grand staircase a little later. This gave onto a long gallery with views over the principal walled garden and the sea; leading to a three-storey wing of secondary or guest accommodation over the entrance pend, possibly including a chapel.

The castle was the centre of a 3 x 3 matrix of nine walled enclosures: four survive. These compartments housed gardens, orchards, woods and a large doocot, demolished in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Also the “Nine Maidens Well”, a vigorous spring of fresh water, famous long before the castle was built, and which may explain why this site was chosen for the castle in 1423. An ornamental piece of water, a canal, flanked the principal approach (probably a fish pond).

For three centuries the Pitsligo Forbeses played their role as 'barons o' the North' and leading chieftains of Clan Forbes. They produced a large number of cadets, several of which were important in their own right - Rires, Newe, Boyndlie, Callendar.

The 9<sup>th</sup> laird, Sir Alexander, acquired a peerage in 1633: Lord Forbes of Pitsligo. He also paid for the creation of a new parish of Pitsligo, and built a new church to serve it and to be his mausoleum. The interior of the new kirk was dominated by his family pew, the Laird's Loft (above), the finest of the few such laird's lofts surviving in Scotland. Festooned with his arms and those of his wife, Jean Keith, this is the only remnant of the rich furnishings and fittings once at Pitsligo.

As at Castle Forbes and Tolquhon, the primitive and impractical Tower was superseded by the 'modern' Hall-house across the Close. By 1700 the Tower had been abandoned altogether, and its top storey - once the family bedchamber, containing seventeen beds apparently - was removed having become dangerous. So the ruined Tower today is only two-thirds of its original height.



The family's glory days did not last long. Alexander 4<sup>th</sup> Lord Pitsligo succeeded to a shrunken and bankrupt estate in 1691. He was to 'reign' for 70 years, and to become a legend in his own life-time. A life-long Jacobite, he was 'out' in both the 15 and the 45. After the 15 he joined the Jacobite Court at Rome, but was expelled by James VIII when he warned the king against some of his favourite courtiers. He moved to Paris, where his portrait was painted (left); and then returned home. There he lived quietly, leading a pure religious life, cultivating a wide circle of friends and publishing two slim books of Christian philosophy. He became one of the most admired men of his time. In 1745, despite his age of 67, he raised a regiment of cavalry, mainly of his friends and neighbours, and commanded it throughout the campaign until Culloden. Most of the Jacobite leaders then sailed away into exile, as they had done after the 15, but Pitsligo went into

hiding on his own estates. He was forfeited as a rebel, his title attainted, his estates seized by the state and a huge price put on his head. A regiment was posted to Fraserburgh, whose main task was to catch him. Despite this he was protected by his former tenants for sixteen years, dying in 1761 aged 84. Thousands attended his funeral, in defiance of the military and their curfews, the numbers so great that the troops did not dare intervene.

The castle and half of the estate were bought back by his son, John Master of Pitsligo, in 1760, but he was forced to on-sell the castle, to Alexander Garden of Troup, who within two months had dismantled the roofs. Soon after, the east gable of the Tower collapsed.

John's heir was his cousin, the Edinburgh banker, Sir William Forbes, 6<sup>th</sup> baronet, formerly of Monymusk, who inherited from John the 'Upper Barony' and the Pitsligo portraits and heirlooms. Sir William bought back the ruined castle from the Garden family. He built the village of New Pitsligo, 'the largest village in Scotland', on the 'Upper Barony' to reverse the trend to depopulation of the area. He also bought Pitullie and other neighbouring estates, holding eventually over 10,000 acres around Pitsligo. He hoped to make Pitsligo his country seat, but his (Peeblesshire) wife flatly refused to leave Edinburgh and he ended up building Colinton House instead. The Pitsligo estate continued with his descendants until 1955, when the residue was sold, including the castle ruins. The lands had passed by descent for over 800 years - if you conveniently ignore the Jacobite hiatus.



Malcolm Forbes (of Forbes Magazine) bought the ruins in 1980, intending to restore them and make a Scottish base there - he was probably a Pitsligo scion. He did some valuable consolidation work to the Tower, but was refused permission to make any kind of accommodation out of the ruins, and lost interest. The castle was sold on his death in 1990 and is now owned by a charity, Pitsligo Castle Trust.



*The castle from the north, and the surviving 4 of the original 9 walled compartments.*

## TOLQUHON

The first laird of Tolquhon was Sir John 'le belame', younger brother of Alexander 1<sup>st</sup> Lord Forbes and Sir William of Pitsligo. His by-name, 'le belame', is believed to be 'le bel-aimé', the well-beloved. He married Mariot Preston in 1420, who brought him half of the Thanage of Formartyne as her dowry. They chose a new site, Tolquhon, where they built a scaled down version of the Towers of Druminnor and Pitsligo (now called the 'Auld Tour').

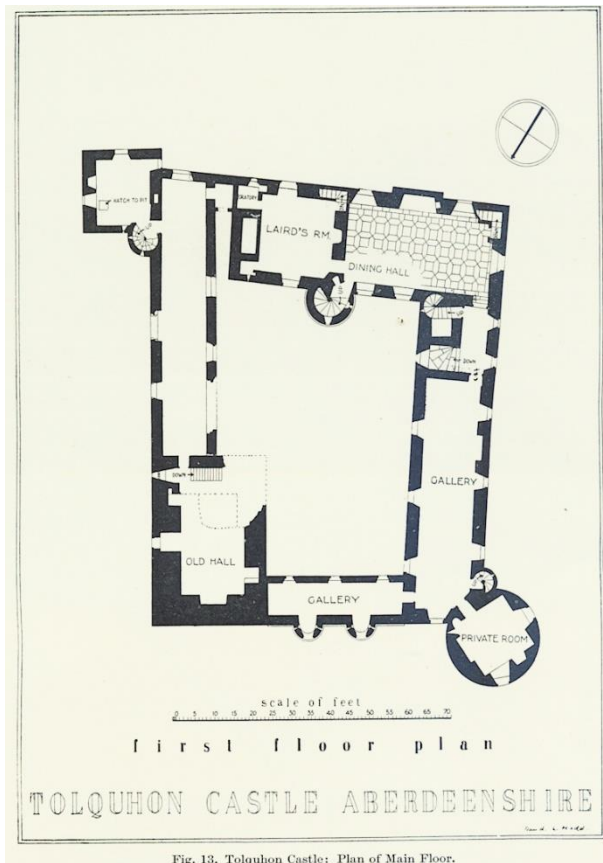


Fig. 13. Tolquhon Castle: Plan of Main Floor.



Tolquhon was always the least 'Highland' of the main Forbes branches, being entirely seated in the rich farmland of Formartyne. Indeed the Lairds of Tolquhon would protest noisily when ordered to pay for mayhem committed by their hairier, tartan-draped kinsmen in the hills. They married well and



produced a large number of prosperous cadets, the best known of which was Forbes of Culloden. They flourished, often as lawyers, but also as soldiers, merchants, colonists. Their diaspora settled in Sweden, France, and the USA.

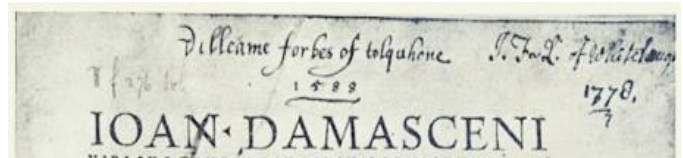
Like Castle Forbes and Pitsligo, the essential structure of Tolquhon is a courtyard of buildings ranged round a Close. The nucleus is the 'Auld Tour' (1420). The Lairds of Tolquhon must soon have expanded outwith the ancestral 'Tour', but all the other surviving buildings round the Close were built by William the 7<sup>th</sup> laird in 1584 to 89. Probably replacing earlier buildings slighted by the Gordons in the Marian Civil War, William's buildings comprise: a residential Hall-house across the Close from the Auld Tour, with a palatial Hall and private family rooms; a gallery connects the Hall with the main guest accomodation in the large round tower; other galleries and lodgings complete the circuit.

William's architect is believed to have been Thomas Leiper, who may also have done the 1577 work at Druminnor. His trade-mark triple gun-loops adorn the walls of Tolquhon, and the exuberant carved stone work everywhere lifts the spirit. Even the paving of the Hall is a work of art (shown in the Plan).

William was a true Renaissance man, highly active, educated, cultured (some of his books survive, signed by himself - *right*), and fortunate.

*One of William's set of 4 cannons, bearing his coat-of-arms and motto and the date 1588.*

*William's tomb, with his and his wife's arms and their portrait busts.*



*'Vilicame forbes of tolquhone'*

The Tolquhon family flourished to the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, but then ran out of money, like so many Forbes branches in that difficult period:



in this case due to the Darien Scheme. The creditors closed in and in 1718 the

estates were sold pursuant to a court order. The laird (William 12<sup>th</sup>) believed he was the victim of fraud and refused to give up his ancestral home. Eventually title to the estates was acquired by the Earl of Aberdeen, who sent a company of soldiers to eject Forbes. They attacked and captured the castle, wounding the laird, and carted him off the premises. William went abroad to console himself, with his wife, Anne Leith. They returned to London and were buried in Westminster Abbey. Their son John inherited Anne's family estate, Whitehaugh, near Keig, and his descend-



ants, the Forbes-Leiths of Whitehaugh, continued the line unbroken down to the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.



Tolquhon was absorbed into the vast estates of the Earls of Aberdeen, comprising almost the whole of Ythanside. It ceased to be occupied as a house, but under the custodianship of the Aberdeens, it was beautifully maintained as a picturesque ruin (*right*). It was this enlightened care which ensured that the castle came down to us so complete - the dressed stone was never robbed, unlike other ruined sites.



*The formal entrance court in front of the twin-towered entrance, and the enormous walled gardens (or 'pleasance').*

## MONYMUSK

Corsindae was the closest branch to the Lords Forbes in the 16<sup>th</sup> century and therefore often appeared in the role of their 'heirs', for example in court proceedings. They produced a large number of cadet branches, which tended to be based in and around Aberdeen and were distinguished as merchant-bankers, divines, academics and lawyers. Still they had their share of thugs and murderers too.

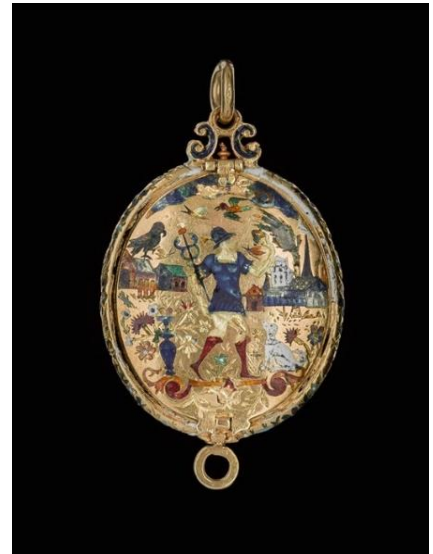
However towards 1600 they made two cardinal errors. Firstly, they reverted to being Catholic, some of them even becoming pro-Gordon. Secondly, and more importantly, they ran out of money. When William the 6<sup>th</sup> laird died around 1620, his sons were unable to renew the tenancy

of Corsindae, and the landlord, Arthur Lord Forbes, installed another Corsindae cadet, John 3<sup>rd</sup> of Balflugh, in their place. Leadership of the Corsindae branch passed to their senior cadets, Forbes of Monymusk, who had already outstripped them in material terms, and in 1626 acquired a baronetcy (rather cheekily called the 'baronetcy of Forbes'). It was the 20<sup>th</sup> to be created, and today it is the 2<sup>nd</sup> oldest Scottish baronetcy.



*The House of Monymusk, with the Don quietly flowing by ..*

The first laird of Monymusk was Master Duncan Forbes, younger brother of James 3<sup>rd</sup> of Corsindae. Duncan was proud of his university education, and the title of 'Master' it gave him. He was a prominent lawyer, businessman, politician and diplomat. He was probably the recipient of the Fettercairn jewel (*right*), a reward for his largely secret services to Queen Mary and her mother the Queen Regent in the 1550s. He also acted as a peacebroker in 1568-73 between the Marians (Huntly & co.) and the Government in attempts to negotiate an end to the Marian Civil War, being trusted by both sides. He was Tutor of Corsindae (1543-c60 and 1563-c80), and of Tolquhon (1547-c56), giving him considerable power and influence, in both material and 'clan' terms. Both Corsindae and Tolquhon benefited from his care.



He bought the whole parish of Monymusk, piece by piece, starting in 1549. This was old 'Clan Forbes' land. But he also bought several non-Forbes estates, mainly south of Aberdeen - Torry, Nigg, Balnagask, Portlethen, Banchory-Devenick. Monymusk had been an Augustinian Priory, but it was largely defunct: indeed the buildings had been ravaged by a fire a few years earlier. Master Duncan built a new house nearby, by an important ford across the river Don. The plan of the central block is similar to Crathes, built at the same time - they are both L-plan but with the re-entrant filled in. (The 'Gight school' castles are also comparable, but distinguished by the long internal passage on the ground floor leading to the main stair, whereas at Monymusk and Crathes the main stair is beside the front door.) 1589 is given as the date of completion of Monymusk, by which time Duncan's son William was laird. If true, this may be the result of damage inflicted by the Gordons during the Marian Civil War - despite Master Duncan's role as peacemaker and an associate of Huntly. The mural paintings in the Hall (below) have Duncan's arms and initials as well as William's, and the illustrations in the window embrasure illustrating scenes from Homer's *Iliad* show pride in a University education more likely to be Duncan's than his son's. Therefore the castle was probably largely complete before Master Duncan's death in 1584.





Monymusk was yet another of the Forbes courtyard castles. Long wings projected south and east from the central block, and other buildings - now removed - almost completed the quadrangle. Later owners added service wings at the back and made the house higher. But most of it remains as it was in 1600.

The 6<sup>th</sup> laird, Sir William, became bankrupt and sold Monymusk in 1712. He had been hammered by ‘King

William’s Seven Ill Years’, the Darien fiasco and inflation, and had sold all his estates one by one. Pitfichie had gone to his brother, ‘Glasgow’ John, who then bought half of Boyndlie (Pitsligo land) rather than support his brother at Monymusk. The final straw seems to have been when Sir William’s only surviving son (John) died in 1711, leaving two sons under 4. Sir William promptly sold Monymusk, moved to the town house in Old Aberdeen and died soon after. His eventual successor, Sir William the 6<sup>th</sup> baronet, inherited very little from his parents but became a hugely successful banker in Edinburgh. In 1781 he inherited what was left of the Pitsligo estates from his cousin, John Master of Pitsligo, and changed his name to Sir William Forbes of Pitsligo.

## CRAIGIEVAR

*The icon*

Perfectly proportioned, “lightly-poised”, a sort of miracle, the apotheosis of Scottish renaissance architecture. The interior is exceptional too, the exuberant plasterwork showing what you can do if you try, and if you are one of the richest men in the country.

That man, Master William Forbes, was the second of seven brothers, arguably the most exceptional band of brothers in Forbes history. Their father was William 4<sup>th</sup> of Corse: their mother a Strachan of Thornton in the Mearns, a family at the heart of Reformation politics in the later 16<sup>th</sup> century. The Corse family tended to marry brains rather than land - Paniter, Lumsden, Strachan - and it bore fruit in this generation and the next. Brothers 1 & 3, Bishop Patrick and Master John, were among the leading churchmen of their era, though on opposite sides of the fierce ideological debate. Brother 6, Sir Arthur, was a distinguished soldier who acquired a large estate in Ireland and a baronetcy: and was then killed in a duel. His son, an even more distinguished soldier, became Earl of Granard (in Ireland).





Master William, the 2<sup>nd</sup> brother (*left*), became an Edinburgh merchant, trading mainly in timber from the Baltic, and spent time there, hence his by-name 'Dantzig Willie'. It took a while but in time he prospered, and was able to buy a large number of Scottish estates, particularly from the bankrupt Lords Saltoun and Lindores. He bought Craigievar from the last Mortimer laird and decided to make it the site of his new HQ, probably for the simple reason that it was next to Corse, his family home.

The Corse family ended before 1700, leaving the baronets of Craigievar - Dantzig Willie's son bought a baronetcy in 1630 - as head of this branch of the family. The 8<sup>th</sup> baronet became also 17<sup>th</sup> Lord Sempill in 1884, through his grandmother Sarah Sempill.

The sheer mass of Dantzig Willie's mighty 6-storey block seems more like an entire village than a single house (*below*). Extraordinarily active, as if wrestling with its earthly bonds.

Its exceptional preservation is mainly due to the family's main seat being Fintray House near Aberdeen, meaning Craigievar was only occasionally occupied by the family.

It was gifted to the National Trust after the death of William 19<sup>th</sup> Lord Sempill, brother of Margaret Forbes-Sempill, the restorer of Druminnor.

