

THE
BARONY
OF
KELLY

Fermartyn of Old

Tolquhon Castle

birthplace of Mary Forbes of Tolquhon,
wife of Sir John Gordon of Haddo, Laird of Kelly, the Royalist martyr

The House of Waterton

home of Jean Gordon of Haddo, daughter of Kelly's revered defender,
after her marriage to her cousin-german Sir John Forbes of Waterton

Fermartyn Today

Fyvie Castle

The ancient *caput* of the Thanage of Fermartyn,
a royal castle held through the centuries by Prestons, Meldrums, Setons and Gordons,
and now in the care of The National Trust for Scotland

Haddo House

Built by the Gordons after the House of Kelly had been destroyed by the Covenanters,
and owned by the Earls and Marquesses of Aberdeen
until acquired by The National Trust for Scotland

[Fyvie Castle and Haddo House each have a large furnished apartment available for rent.](#)

The Barony of Kelly

Fermartyn

THE THANAGE OF FERMARTYN, sandwiched between the River Ythan and the River Don, and stretching from the eastern seaboard almost as far inland as Huntly, emerged during the period of great change that saw Scotland's Celtic structure replaced with the Flemish-Norman society imported by David I, *the Saint*, when he rode north from the English court in 1124 to claim his throne. (The Thane was a tribal leader, inferior in rank to the Mormaer, and just as the latter became absorbed into the feudal system as the Earl, so the Thane became a major Baron.)

Like its southern neighbour, the Garioch district, "Aberdeen's granary", Fermartyn enjoyed prosperity based on its rich soil, and just as the Garioch was the jewel of the Earls of Mar, so was Fermartyn for the Comyn Earls of Buchan. But ambition and blood ties ranged the Comyns against Robert the Bruce in the Wars of Independence, and led to the forfeiture of their estates and titles, the King then using them to reward his victorious supporters. The last Earl's heir of line, the Countess Margaret, held onto part of Fermartyn, but her lands passed eventually to the Lindsays of Crawford.

Among the first principal beneficiaries of the King's gratitude were the Gordons, whose lands on the border with England were now supplemented with the Lordship of Strathbogie to the west of Fermartyn. From this base they spread through the centuries to cover much of northeastern Scotland, and in Fermartyn they began with Haddo, then Methlick, and then part of Kelly, but initially the Crown retained the superiority of Fermartyn, granting half to Lady Margaret, daughter of Robert the Bruce, on her marriage to William, 5th Earl of Sutherland, whose father had fallen at Bannockburn.

The Lindsay share of Fermartyn passed eventually to Sir James Lindsay of Crawford, who had married Egidia, half-sister of Robert II, but his two co-heiress granddaughters, Margaret and Euphemia, sold it to the famous warrior Sir Henry de Preston. Sir Henry, who made a profitable business of warfare, benefitting from various ransoms plus a substantial gift from Charles VI, King of France, and had married their aunt Elizabeth Lindsay, eventually acquired the whole of the Thanage of Fermartyn. His two co-heiress daughters divided the lands, Mariota taking her half, now known as Tolquhoun,

into the Forbes family, while her sister took the other half, which included Fyvie, to the Meldrums.

At the time of Sir Henry's death in 1433 the Baron of Kelly was Sir Robert Erskine of that ilk, later 1st Lord Erskine, who granted some of its lands to Sir William de Forbes of Kynnaldy, brother to the 1st Lord Forbes. In 1482 the lands of the Park of Kelly were granted to Patrick Gordon of Methlick, grandson of Jock Gordon of Scurdargue, the second son of John de Gordon, Lord of Strathbogie, and later, in 1553, the Master of Erskine, with the consent of Lord Erskine his father, granted to Patrick's son James Gordon of Haddo and Methlick, the Mains of Kelly.

The Gordons

The Gordons now held an attractive territory on the banks of the Ythan comprising most of Kelly together with Haddo and Methlick, and continued to add to it. In 1580 they were reported to have built "a House called Kelly", which was to achieve fame later when in 1643 James's great-grandson Sir John Gordon of Haddo, the 1st Baronet, defended it against the Covenanters. Sir John, a Royalist, was eventually forced to capitulate, and surrendered to the Earl Marischal on honourable terms, but the Marquess of Argyll overruled this and had him taken to Edinburgh for trial, where he was beheaded. (After the Restoration, Argyll was himself beheaded at the same place.)

Sir John's second son, Sir George, who succeeded his brother as the 3rd Baronet, was a distinguished scholar who was called to the bar, elected to Parliament, became a Lord of Session as Lord Haddo, and was subsequently appointed Chancellor and raised to the peerage as the Earl of Aberdeen. His great-great grandson, George Hamilton-Gordon, 4th Earl, was a Knight of the Garter and the British Prime Minister from 1852 to 1855. Haddo House, built to replace the House of Kelly after the Covenanters had destroyed it, is now in the care of the National Trust for Scotland.

The Erskines

The Erskine family, known to be Barons of Kelly from at least 1433, took their name from their lands in the great lordship of Renfrew, then the principal territory of the Stewarts. Their advancement is owed to succeeding generations distinguishing themselves in battle, and to grateful sovereigns

rewarding them accordingly. In 1346 Sir Robert Erskine of that Ilk was appointed to the post of Great Chamberlain, and in 1357 he was in England negotiating the terms of the ransom to be paid for King David II. His son, Sir Thomas Erskine of that Ilk, was twice a hostage in England for the King.

Sir Thomas was Keeper of Edinburgh Castle and Sheriff of Edinburgh, but in the light of subsequent events his most significant contribution to history was his protest to Robert III on behalf of his wife's rights to the Earldom of Mar. These had been threatened by the possibility that Isabella, the Countess of Mar at that time, might divert the succession to the title or resign some of the Mar lands, but the King agreed that he would not consent to such an act. His son, Sir Robert, subsequently inherited his mother's rights, was promoted to the peerage as Lord Erskine, and then in 1438 adopted the title of Earl of Mar.

The Crown eventually chose not to accept this. Some twenty years later, King James II granted the Earldom to his youngest son, Lord John Stewart, and when he died his eldest brother, then King James III, granted the Mar estates, and possibly the title also, to Thomas Cochrane, a favourite who had fomented much trouble between the King and his three brothers. Cochrane, having offended several peers by his presumptuous conduct, ended his life on the end of a rope, hanging, with six other unpopular royal favourites, from the bridge at Lauder, in the sight of the impotent King.

The next Earl of Mar was the King's eldest brother, Alexander Stewart, Duke of Albany, but he was forfeited within a few months, and then the King granted the Earldom to his youngest son, Lord John Stewart. When he died unmarried in 1503 there was a gap of nearly sixty years before the Earldom was granted again. The successive Lords Erskine retained such estates as the Barony of Kelly, but they received nothing from their Mar estates. However, with the return of Mary Queen of Scots from France they had a new chance to plead their case, and in 1565 Mary restored to John, 6th Lord Erskine, all the lands and titles the Crown had wrongfully appropriated and still retained.

The restored Earl of Mar turned against the Queen, imprisoned her in Lochleven Castle, and became Regent for her infant son, James VI. His only son, John, the 19th Earl, a great favourite of the King, completed the recovery of the Mar lands that had been sold by the Crown. His son succeeded him in 1634, loyally supported the Royalists in the Civil War, had his Scottish estates sequestrated and went blind before his death in 1653. This began

the Mar financial distress that never ended. His son John, 21st Earl, lived in a small cottage until the Restoration, but although the Scottish estates were then recovered, they were too heavily burdened with debt and fines incurred during the family's support of the King.

The 23rd Earl, when succeeding his father in 1689, was described as the "heir to more debt than estate". Nevertheless, although technically insolvent, he played a key role in the politics of the time, pushing strongly for Union with England, and then becoming Secretary of State for Scotland in the new British nation. However, his loyalty to the incoming King George I was ill-rewarded, and he was dismissed by the new monarch so harshly that he went over to the Stuart cause. He then began to recruit the Scottish aristocracy to the support of the Old Pretender, and in the late summer of 1715 he fatefully raised the Stuart standard in Braemar.

The ceremony began well, but when the gilt ball fell from the top of the flagstaff on which the standard flew, it was an ill omen. On 13 November 1715, at the head of around 12,000 men, and with no plan of action at all, he met and was defeated by a Hanoverian force of 4,000. He subsequently fled to France, his honours were attainted, and his estates confiscated. In 1724 two members of the Erskine family, Lord Grange and the Laird of Dun, bought most of the Mar estates from the Government to be held in trust for the Earl's son, Thomas, and the title of Earl of Mar was eventually restored to the family in 1824, but the Erskine family was never to win back its pre-1715 eminence.

The Duffs

Large parts of the Erskine lands were acquired by William Duff of Dipple and Braco, and these included the Barony of Kelly. The Duffs now set out to become major landowners in Aberdeenshire and, together with their estates along the coast of the Moray Firth, one of the richest families in Scotland. They claimed descent from that Chief of the Macduff clan who in the year 1056 AD, in Malcolm Canmore's army, allegedly slew Macbeth. He is said to have been the Thane of Fife (although there were no such thanes), and, as such, a very distinguished figure in Scottish history whose powers and privileges his successors in the Earldom of Fife believed they had inherited.

The senior line of the Macduffs died out towards the end of the fourteenth century with Isabel, daughter of Duncan, the 8th of the Macduff Earls

of Fife, after four husbands had failed to give her an heir, and in 1757 the Lord Lyon declared that the representation of this line was to be vested in the Earls of Wemyss whose seat was appropriately in Fife. However, a long way north, other members of Clan Macduff had been flourishing, the first of these on record being John Duff of Muldavit. Surviving family tradition insists on his descent from the famous “Thane”, and that his descendant two hundred undocumented years later was Adam Duff of Clunybeg in the parish of Mortlach, Banffshire.

Adam’s sons Alexander and John fought under Montrose and also suffered in those troubled times, but the family began to prosper. Alexander’s wife Helen, daughter of Alexander Grant of Dallachie, brought him a rich dowry and he acquired the lands of Keithmore, matriculating arms in 1676 as Duff of Keithmore. His elder son, Alexander Duff of Braco, was a Writer to the Signet in Edinburgh where he specialised in feudal law, and, when he returned to his ancestral country, he used that to good effect. He was active in national politics, and on his death the riches and lands his canny legal expertise had accumulated passed to his brother, William Duff of Dipple.

This inheritance added new power to an already successful businessman then prospering principally as a banker, or old-fashioned money-lender, but active also in every aspect of foreign trade, both import and export, north of Aberdeen. He was ever ready to help local lairds with their liquidity problems, and was even faster when foreclosing on the lands they had given him as security. His only surviving son, William Duff of Dipple and Braco, inherited £30,000 in cash, a rent roll of £6,500 a year, and unencumbered estates, in all totalling substantial wealth at that time. Following his uncle he entered Parliament as the Member for Banffshire. In 1735 he was raised to the peerage with an Irish title as Baron Braco of Kilbryde, and in 1759 he was promoted to be Viscount Macduff and Earl Fife, which titles, although in the Irish Peerage, appeared to reinforce the family’s claims to descent from the Macduff Earls of Fife. This appearance was further strengthened in 1760 by the addition of the ancient Fife lion rampant as the first quarter in the new Earl’s arms, the Duff of Braco coat being relegated to the second and third quarters.

James Duff, the 2nd Earl Fife, Member of Parliament for Banffshire and then later for Morayshire, inherited all the characteristic traits of his family. He was an enthusiastic politician, a clever and acquisitive landowner, and he worked hard to earn a good local reputation and the influence that brought.

When he died in 1809 leaving no children, his brother Alexander became the 3rd Earl Fife, but he held the titles for only two years before dying, his son James inheriting as 4th Earl Fife and replacing his family's political interests with an enthusiasm for military life, fighting with considerable distinction in the Peninsular War. He was twice wounded in action, and became a General in the Spanish army, but later followed tradition and became the Member of Parliament for Banffshire.

When he died childless in 1857 at the age of eighty, his nephew, another James Duff, inherited the titles as 5th Earl. He, too, was Member of Parliament for Banffshire. (As Irish peers the Duffs could sit in the House of Commons at Westminster, but this was not possible for James Duff after he was created Baron Skene in the Peerage of the United Kingdom.) His wife, a daughter of the 18th Earl of Erroll, was through an illegitimate daughter a granddaughter of King William IV, so when his only son Alexander, the 6th Earl, in 1889 wedded Princess Louise, eldest daughter of the Prince of Wales, the future King Edward VII, (and the granddaughter of Queen Victoria), it was a marriage of third cousins.

Two days after his marriage, the 6th Earl Fife in the Irish Peerage, who had earlier been created Earl of Fife in the Peerage of the United Kingdom, was created Marquess of Macduff and Duke of Fife. Subsequently the ducal title was given a special remainder in favour of his daughters, so that despite not having a son his senior peerage honour continues. His elder daughter, Princess Alexandra, became Duchess of Fife in her own right when he died in 1912, and, as her only son, Alastair, had died prematurely in 1943, under the terms of his will the Barony of Kelly together with other estates passed on her death to her nephew Alexander Ramsay of Mar, who thus became the most recent Baron of Kelly. He married Lady Saltoun of Abernethy, Chief of Clan Fraser, and died three years ago.

Barons and Lairds linked with Kelly

Cheyne
of Fermartyn

Comyn,
Earl of Buchan

Earl of
Sutherland

Lindsay
of Crawford

Preston
of Fermartyn

Meldrum
of Fyvie

Barons and Lairds linked with Kelly

Forbes
of Tolquhon

Erskine
of that Ilk

Gordon
of Haddo

Erskine
Earl of Mar

Duff
of Braco

Duff,
Earl Fife

Barons and Lairds linked with Kelly

Kelly's Gordon owners — the Baronets of Haddo,
raised to the peerage as Earls of Aberdeen,
then promoted as Marquesses of Aberdeen.

The armorial achievement above is that displayed by
John Campbell Gordon, 7th Earl of Aberdeen, KCMG,
before he was raised to the rank of a Marquess.
The arms of the Gordons of Haddo featured on the previous page
(as blazoned in a MS in the British Museum)
bear a crescent as a difference for cadency. Here the crescent
has been replaced by a unique double tressure
flowered and counterflowered with thistles, roses and fleurs-de-lys.

Barons and Lairds linked with Kelly

The most recent Baron

These arms feature in the 1st and 4th grand quarters Ramsay of Dalhousie quartering Maule of Panmure and differenced by a bordure of pean.

The 2nd and 3rd grand quarters display the royal arms with the label of the Baron's mother, Lady Patricia, granddaughter of Queen Victoria.

(Lady Patricia was born a Princess, but relinquished her royal title and the style of Her Royal Highness on her marriage to a scion of the Ramsays of Dalhousie.)

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