The House of Fetternear: A History and a Description

by H. Gordon Slade

The ruins of the House of Fetternear[1] lie on the west bank of the Don a mile to the north west of Kemnay, in the SE corner of the parish of Chapel of Garioch (fig 1).

HISTORY

For some eight hundred years there has been a house on this site, associated during the middle ages with the Bishops of Aberdeen and after the Reformation with a cadet branch of the

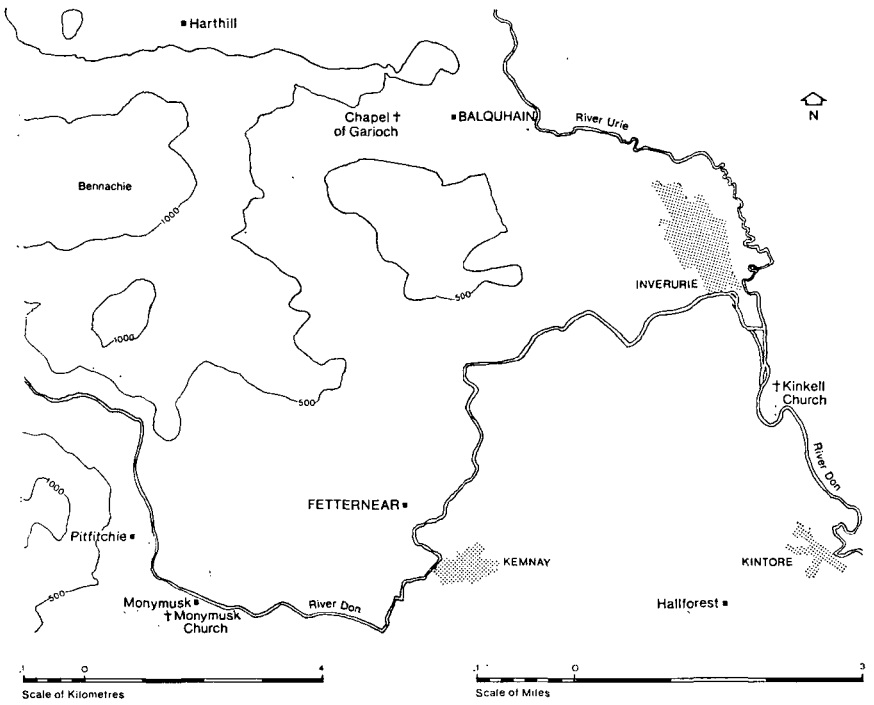

FIG 1 Location of Fetternear

[1] *The Place Names of Aberdeenshire;* William M. Alexander, The Third Spalding Club, 1952, p 276.
'FETTERNEAR, Chapel of Garioch. Stressed on -near. 1157, Fethernier. 1241, Fethyrneir. 1511, Fethirneyr R.E. The first part is the common Fetter-Fodder-; in Scotland only in the place-names. In modern Irish, according to Dinneen, *fother* is a wood, forest, woody swamp. The last syllable -near has been taken by MacDonald and others to be *an iar*, the west. This may be correct, but it is to be remarked that in Eastern Gaelic, certainly in Braemar Gaelic, the direction west is invariably expressed by the word *suas*, i.e. 'up'. With Fetternear cp. Kinnear, Marchnear.'

ancient family of Leslie. Early in the twelfth century a church was built at Fetternear with a foundation for a Warden and Canons and, in a Bull dated 10th August 1157[1], Pope Adrian IV confirmed to Edward, Bishop of Aberdeen, all the lands and churches granted to the Cathedral Church of Aberdeen by the Kings of Scotland. Amongst the places specified were the 'villam de Fetherneir' and the Church with its pertinents. Six years later a similar confirmation was made by Malcolm IV to Bishop Mathew Kyninmund by a Charter, dated at Stirling 20th August 1163,[2] and again the church of Fetternear, together with its lands and pertinents, was mentioned.

Some time towards the end of the twelfth century or the beginning of the thirteenth century the college may have come to an end. Probably the church was left with a parson, and the buildings taken by the Bishop as a convenient place to stop during episcopal journies through the Diocese and later, by tradition, as a summer palace and hunting lodge. This is certainly suggested by a Charter, dated at Kinfawnys 18th September 1242,[3] in which Alexander II granted to Bishop Ralph (Randolph or Radulph) de Lambley the privilege of a free forest in the lands of Brass and Fetternear, thus ensuring that none, without the Bishop's permission, might hunt or cut wood there. The lands of Fetternear continued in the hands of the Bishops of Aberdeen although a decreet, issued in 1485 by the Lords of Council against Thomas (of) Drumbreck and Agnes his wife, suggests that the Bishops were not always in complete control of their lands or tenants:

'At Edinburgh the xiij day of Decembris the yer of Gode MCCCC, LXXXV yers, the Lordis of Consale, decretis and delyueris that Thomas Drumbrek and Agnes his spouss has done wrang in the lawboryng and manuryng of the landis of Fetherner belangin to the bischoprik of Aberdene as wes clerly previt befor the lordis and ordanis thaim to devoide and red the samyn to a reverend fadir in Gode Wilyhame elect confirmate of Aberdene and that thai sall content and pay to sade reverend fadir the malis and profitis of the sade landis of twa yeris bigane as he may prufe befor the schereff of the schyr that thai are of vaile togidder with hyis costis and skathis that he has sustenyt thar throw and ordanis our soverane lordis letteres be derect to the schereff to tak the sade preif befor him and to warne the perty tharto, and the sade Thomas wes lauchfully sommond to this action and oft tymes callit and nocht comperit. Extractum de libro actorum per me Alexandrum Scott rectorem de Wigtone clericum rotulorum et registri ac consillii regis.'[4]

Of the medieval palace of the Bishops very little remains today above ground except for one granite door-cap, which is lying loose in the ruins and appears to be late fifteenth century. To the south of the present ruins are the foundations or lower walls of what seems to have been an L-tower with walls about 7 feet thick: locally they are known as the 'Auld Founds' (pl 19a).

The earliest remains in the existing ruins show no indication of being older than the late sixteenth century and it is difficult to account for such a total disappearance of what must have been a substantial stone building without any history of violent destruction. A possible suggestion is that the leasing of the lands of Fetternear in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries indicates that the palace was no longer used by the Bishops and that it had become so derelict that it could only usefully serve as a quarry for later building. In the rental of the Bishopric of Aberdeen in 1511 under the entry relating to Fetternear is the following item:

'Ortus Palacij
Assedatur Willelmo Christesoun pro ij bollis ordei.'[5]

[1] *Register of the Diocese of Aberdeen,* Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis: Ecclesie Cathedralis Aberdonensis Registra que extant in unum collecta. Impressum Edinburgi – MDCCCXLV, vol 1, p 6.

[2] *Lives of the Bishops of Aberdeen,* Hector Boece. New Spalding Club, 1894, p 9.
Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis, vol 1, p 7.

[3] *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis,* vol 1, p 17.

[4] *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis,* vol 1, p 318.

[5] *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis,* vol 1, pp 364–367.

This suggests that the Palace may have become ruinous and, although the fishing and forest rights were retained, the gardens and policies were leased out to William Christeson. In this context, 'Ortus' probably indicates an area greater than the immediate pleasure grounds of the house and approximating more nearly to the surrounding policies and parks. It is unlikely that such a lease would have been granted had the buildings still been occupied by the Bishop.

The end of Fetternear as a great episcopal estate really came on 7th March 1549 when Bishop William Gordon granted a lease[1] of the Barony and Shire of Fetternear to his kinsman George, Earl of Huntly, Lord Gordon and Badenoch, Chancellor of Scotland and Lieutenant of the North. The lease was for 13 years and the rent was to be: 'yearly seventeen pounds, six shillings and eight pence usual money of Scotland, three chalders, eight bolls of bere, with a peck to every boll, one mutoun, thirteen dozens of poultry, one barrel of salmon for the fishing, or three pounds in money at the option of the said noble lord, his heirs, subtenants, and helps foresaid, eight shillings and eight pence for bondage with arrage, carriage and other due service.'[2]

The practice of the Crown and higher clergy of alienating church lands and benefices had reached scandalous proportions by the mid-sixteenth century. Led by the King, James V, anxious to find incomes for his bastards, the crown and nobility of Scotland so stripped the church of her possessions that she was incapable, physically or morally, of resisting the outraged and outrageous attacks of the Reformers. Bishop Gordon no doubt was only conforming to the custom of the times. Barely a year after granting the lease to Lord Huntly, the Bishop had the lands of Fetternear back in his hands, as on 22nd October 1550 he granted a lease of the Barony and Shire of Fetternear[3] to John Leslie, 8th Baron of Balquhain, for the same rental, less the one mutoun.

The family of Leslie, so the family history says, of which the Leslies of Balquhain were a cadet branch, is of great antiquity and descends from Bardolph, an Hungarian noble, who landed in Scotland in 1067 in the train of Agatha, mother of St Margaret. Alarmed by the suspicions of William of Normandy, the Princess Agatha determined to return to Hungary, of which country she was a native, accompanied by her two children Margaret and Edgar Aethling. A storm drove their ship off course and they came to land at St Margarets Hope, where Queensferry now stands. The ship-wrecked exiles were welcomed at the court, then at Dunfermline, and Margaret, very sensibly marrying King Malcolm, found positions and appointments for her followers. Bardolph rose in favour, becoming Governor of Edinburgh Castle, Chamberlain to the Queen, and eventually, if tradition is to be believed, marrying Beatrix sister to King Malcolm. The story runs that once when travelling north on the King's business Bardolph was promised all land in hereditary right for a mile round every point at which he stopped to bait his horse. Whether this be true or not, the family became possessed of lands at Fechil in Fife, Innerlessad in Angus, Eskie in the Mearns, Cushnie in Mar, and Leslie in the Garioch. The family name appears to have been taken from the last of these, and five generations later was assumed as the surname.

The arms borne by the family show a belt with three buckles, and the motto 'Grip Fast'. Originally the arms bore only one buckle, but once when the Queen was riding pillion behind her Chamberlain they came to a stream. 'Grip fast' cries Bardolph. 'Gin the buckle bide' returns the Queen, thus enabling the Heralds to add two more buckles to the girdle and the harness makers to add two more buckles to the Chamberlain's belt, which was highly gratifying to all concerned.[4]

[1] *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, vol 1, p 447.

[2] *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, vol 1, p 447.

[3] *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis*, vol 1, p 451.

[4] For these and other interesting details of family history see *inter alia:*

a. *Laurus Leslaeana*, Rev William Leslie, Gratz, 1692.

b. *De Origine Moribus et Rebus Gestis Scotorum*, John Leslie, Bishop of Ross, Rome, 1578.

c. A Restitution of Decayed Intelligence in Antiquities concerning the most noble and

The great-great-great grandson of Bardolph, Sir Andrew de Leslie, one of the signatories to the Declaration of Arbroath, married Mary Abernethy, daughter and co-heiress of Sir Alexander Abernethy of That Ilk, by whom he had five sons. The fifth son, George, was 1st Baron of Balquhain and from him were descended the Leslies of Balquhain and Fetternear. The Leslies had enjoyed the lease of the Barony for sixteen years when the storm of the Reformation broke over Aberdeenshire. William Leslie, 9th Baron Balquhain, was at that time Sherrif of the County and whether from conviction or whether from convenience sided with the Bishop, supporting him and protecting the Cathedral and houses of the Canons from the violence of 'The Congregation', as the band of fanatics, which swept into Aberdeen at the end of December 1559, was called.

In return for this support Bishop Gordon converted the lease into a direct grant as a mark of gratitude for the service done him in those troublesome times, and the Barony of Fetternear, with the palace, tower and fortalice of the same, with the salmon fishing in the river Don and all other pendicles,[1] passed into the pious but willing hands of William Leslie. The Charter is dated 8th June 1566. This was later confirmed by Royal Charter[2] dated 10th May 1602. As a final measure of insurance Alexander Abercrombie who at the time held the Barony in wadsett obtained a Papal Charter, dated 20th September 1670[3] from Pope Clement X, confirming the original grant.

John Leslie, 10th Baron Balquhain, unable to gather to himself more episcopal property was forced to rest content with a tack of the parsonage and vicarage teinds of the lands of Fetternear which were leased to him for eighteen years by Parson Andrew Leslie on 22nd September 1569.[4] Seventeen years later Parson Walter Gordon renewed the tacks on the vicarage teinds and teind-sheaves of the lands of Fetternear on 18th May 1586.[5]

For loyal sons of Mother Church the Leslies had an attitude of enlightened and enlightening self-interest. From 1621 Fetternear ceased to have any ecclesiastical identity; the parsonage was joined to that of Logie Durno; the church was transferred to the Chapel of the Blessed Virgin of the Garioch, and the parish is now known as Chapel of Garioch.

For some reason John Leslie, 11th Baron Balquhain, wadsett the lands and barony to his brother-in-law, Sir Alexander Hay of Delgaty, for 1,000 marks in June 1625,[6] who in turn two years later alienated them (with the consent of John Leslie) in favour of Hector Abercrombie of Westhall, grandson of the 9th Baron Balquhain. It was Hector's son, Alexander, who, seeing the hope, or danger, of a Roman Catholic revival with the accession of James VII, obtained the Papal Charter confirming the lands and barony to himself. In the next generation the Barony of Fetternear was redeemed from Francis Abercrombie, Lord Glassford, by Count Patrick Leslie, 15th Baron Balquhain.[7] and, on 23rd August 1690, Alexander Abercrombie of Auchorsk, who was renting the house, gave up possession in favour of Count Patrick.

Count Patrick fitted up the house with great splendour and it remained the chief seat of the family during his lifetime and that of his son Count George, 16th Baron Balquhain. Count George, however, died in 1715 leaving two sons, both infants, to the care of their mother, Margaret Erskine, a woman of strong Protestant views, who stripped the chapel at Fetternear of

renowned English Nation, by the studies and travaile of Richard Verstegan, Antwerp, 1605.

d. *Traditions*, Anon, unpublished and local.

e. *Historical Records of the Family of Leslie from 1067 to 1868–9*, Colonel Leslie, K. H. of Balquhain, Edinburgh, 1869.

[1] *Historical Records of the Family of Leslie*, vol 1, p 114.

[2] *Historical Records of the Family of Leslie*, vol 1, p 114.

[3] *Historical Records of the Family of Leslie*, vol 1, p 114.

[4] *Balquhain Charters* no. 512.

[5] *Balquhain Charters* no. 513.

[6] *Historical Records of the Family of Leslie*, vol 1, pp 115–116.

[7] *Balquhain Charters* no. 489.

many of its valuable fittings.[1] Her eldest son, Count James, died abroad in 1731 whilst still a minor. His brother, Count Ernest, 18th Baron Balquhain, died unmarried, but not, unfortunately, before he had been persuaded to leave part of the estate and all the furnishings of Fetternear to his half-brother James Gordon, the son of Margaret Erskine by her second marriage to Sir James Gordon of Park.[2]

A long litigation as to the succession ensued which was finally decided in favour of Count Anthony Leslie, 19th Baron Balquhain, who lived partly at Fetternear but mostly on the family estates in Germany. His claim was challenged by Peter Leslie Grant on the grounds that Count Anthony was a Papist and an alien. After prolonged legal wrangling the case went to the House of Lords and a decision was given in 1762 in favour of Peter Leslie Grant. Being himself in the Dutch service he did not return to Scotland until 1769, and then was in such embarassed circumstances that he granted a lease of the whole estate and the house to his agent, David Orme, an Edinburgh lawyer. The lease for a small annual rent was for five times nineteen years.

On the death of Peter Leslie Grant in 1775 his cousin and heir, Patrick Leslie Duguid, 21st Baron Balquhain, brought an action against David Orme to reduce the lease. In respect of the house and domaine of Fetternear this was both successful and disastrous. The lease was reduced, and David Orme foreseeing this did all that was possible to destroy the place. The pleasure grounds and policies were wasted, the courtyard wings and office-houses were demolished, the timber and avenues, despite the intervention of some of the gentlemen of the neighbourhood, were cut down, and the house itself was left stripped and almost derelict.

John Leslie, 22nd Baron of Balquhain, on coming into the estate, repaired the house and in 1818 made additions to it which completely altered its appearance. He was succeeded by Count Ernest, 23rd Baron of Balquhain, who lived mostly abroad, and it was not until the coming of age in 1841 of Count John Edward, 24th Baron of Balquhain, that further alterations were made. His successor was his uncle, James Michael Leslie, who repaired the remains of the old chapel of Fetternear which had served as the family burial ground. He was succeeded in 1849 by his brother Colonel Charles Leslie, 26th Baron of Balquhain. During his lifetime a scheme was prepared to 'Balmoralize' the mansion house, but this never went beyond a very rough sketch (fig 2). The history of Fetternear finally came to an end on the stormy night of the 5th December 1919. It was the old story: a servant unwilling to venture out into the cold left a pan of hot ashes in a back store room where kindling, coals and oil were standing. These caught fire, the fire smouldered through the night, and was discovered in the early hours of the morning.[3] Even then the house might have been saved had the door to the store-room not been opened. However it was, and the fresh supply of oxygen caused the flames to break out with renewed force. Open doors, old panelling and a fierce northerly gale combined to destroy the house. The family and servants escaped in their night clothes, and, in spite of heroic efforts on the part of the estate workers to save as much of the furniture and pictures as was possible, the loss was estimated at £200,000 in the value of the day.

[1] *The Fetternear Banner*, Rev David McRoberts, John S Burns and Sons, Glasgow.

Enough, however, of these treasures remained to be exhibited at the British Association Meeting which was held at Aberdeen in 1859. Amongst them was the Fetternear Banner, which at some time subsequent to 1859 was given to the Roman Catholic church of Our Lady of the Garioch and St John, and was thus preserved from destruction in the 1919 fire. This banner, which may have been intended for the Confraternity of the Holy Blood at St Giles, Edinburgh, possibly dates from 1518–1521.

[2] During the '45, although abandoned by the family, Fetternear appears to have suffered no damage, in spite of the tradition that Cumberland's men nearly burnt the Leslie's other house at Balquhain. The only reference I have traced linking Fetternear with the rebellion is one in a letter from Mrs Mary Gordon of Beldorney to her second son, George, in which she says that his brother (John, Laird of Beldorney) was at 'fatternear' (*Jacobites of Aberdeenshire and Banffshire in the Forty-Five*, Alastair and Henrietta Tayler, Aberdeen, 1928, p 248).

[3] *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 6th December 1919.

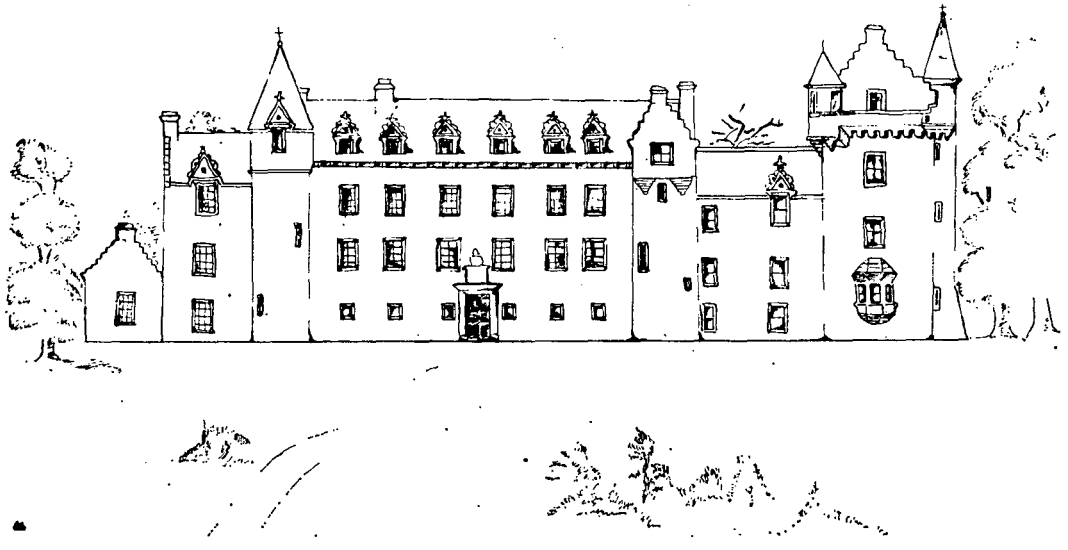

FIG 2 Fetternear: sketch showing proposed 'Balmoralising' of the house. Mid-nineteenth century. Reproduced from the original by permission of Miss Chetwynd.

DESCRIPTION

The first impression of Fetternear is of an immensely long, thin building with a symmetrical elevation designed, early in the nineteenth century, in a mildly castellated manner. Standing in well-wooded policies, the main front, facing SW is 130 ft long, the central division of six bays between two round towers being advanced from the rest of the building. The whole is three floors in height – the main part being surmounted by a battlemented parapet carried on corbels, whilst the two flanking wings had oversailing pitched roofs. Behind the main front is a square staircase tower somewhat higher than the rest of the house with beyond it a two-storied wing, measuring 40 by 20 ft internally, with an apsidal end. At the W end of the main house and at right angles to it is a mid-nineteenth century two-storied wing of four bays, with a gabled return wing at its N end (pl 19b).

The building throughout is of field stone rubble with dressings of freestone and granite. The parapet, corbels and string course on the main front are all carefully worked in a pink granite, but elsewhere the walls have been harled. As in most houses of this type, where dressed stone was at a premium, window and door jambs were constantly being re-used so that their position is not necessarily reliable evidence as to the age or original size of any opening.

The condition of the ruins is dangerous in the extreme: sections of the high walls are in imminent danger of collapse and the lower floors are cumbered with a heavy growth of young trees. Examination of the ruins is a hazardous task and the present proprietors have been obliged to close them. Of the old Palace, Tower and Fortalice of Fetternear, little now remains, except some foundations of what appears to be a small L-tower slightly to the south of the present house, known locally as the 'Auld Founds' and said to be part of it. It would seem to have been in existence prior to 1256, when there is a tradition that Bishop Peter de Ramsey made additions to it[1] and may well have been in use as a hunting lodge in the time of his predecessor, Bishop

[1] *History of the Bishops of Aberdeen*, p 13. 'He retained for his own expenses only the lands of the church along with the house properties.' This would not be at variance with the building tradition.

Randolph, who closed his earthly career after gaining before the King his main contention that the uplands and arable lands of Fetternear[1] should be protected from poachers; he was also a saintly man. This building, and not the Wallace Tower in the new house, must have been where Sir William Wallace lay concealed when, by tradition, he was at Fetternear in 1297. Further alterations were made in the 1330s by Bishop Kyninmund, who completed Fetternear and used it as his summer home from 1329 until 1341.[2] The remains of this were partly uncovered towards the end of the nineteenth century and revealed fragments of carved work of the highest quality.[3] After this it seems likely that the Palace was used less as an episcopal residence until by 1550 it had become so ruinous as to be no longer habitable, and when, in 1566, William Leslie came into final possession of the Barony it was necessary to build a new house from the material available on the site.

Without doubt the most interesting thing about Fetternear is the way in which the first building on the part of William Leslie was the controlling factor in the later development of the house. As it grew from a small tower house into a large mansion, with the need to give architectural consequence and dignity to a number of dissimilar parts, it was this first tower that dictated every move (fig 3).

The oldest part of the house now standing is at the SE end of the main block. At first sight it does not seem to be a separate building but a closer inspection shows that it is a small tower house of the second half of the sixteenth century. It is devoid of any datable features but it is so typical of the smaller houses of this type in Aberdeenshire that there is no reason why it should not be assigned to the years 1566–70. If so, it means that building was probably started by William Leslie, 9th Baron of Balquhain, although it may have been finished by his son, John the 10th Baron. In size the tower is not impressive, and very simple in form: a rectangle some 36 ft long by 20 ft broad with a circular stair tower at the W corner. The tower faces SW with its long axis running SE–NW. The entrance is through an opening in the NW wall beside the stair tower. The original doorway has been destroyed. This entry gives directly onto a short vaulted passage, on the right being the staircase and on the left the kitchen. This latter room is small – 8 ft by 9½ ft – but is complete with its barrel vault and fireplace, and with a small serving hatch giving onto the passage. The remainder of the ground floor is taken up by a cellar – about 13 by 12 ft – but apart from its windows this room is featureless, the vault having collapsed. The window in the SE wall of this room is an enlarged one, done probably for architectural effect in 1818. The remaining windows on the ground floor seem to be part of the original build.

The staircase – a standard stone turnpike – is broken off halfway up to the first floor, and is a right-handed, instead of the more usual left-handed, spiral. The whole of the first floor was given over to the Hall – a room about 14 ft wide by about 28 ft long. In the NW wall an opening was cut in the seventeenth-century alterations, when the new first-floor was designed. The original fireplace, much reduced in size, is to be seen in the SE wall – the upper end of the Hall. On the SW side the two windows have been lengthened as part of the 1818 alteration.

From the evidence of the fireplaces, the second floor was occupied by two chambers separated by a wainscot partition. The wall head is at its original level but the gable heads to the windows must have been removed in 1818 in order to achieve a constant eaves-level. In the thick-

[1] *History of the Bishops of Aberdeen*, p 13.

[2] *History of the Bishops of Aberdeen*, p 19.

[3] *St Machar's Cathedral*, Dr William Kelly, Transactions Aberdeen Philosophical Society, vol IV, p 173.
'... but at Fetternear, where parts of the existing house are of ancient date, the foundations of extensive buildings were uncovered some years ago. In the course of the excavations some perfect pieces of advanced first-pointed mouldings and tracery were discovered. The material used appears to be Kildrummy freestone. The workmanship is of the finest kind, and the mouldings even more beautifully profiled than the fragment attributed to Chein's choir'.

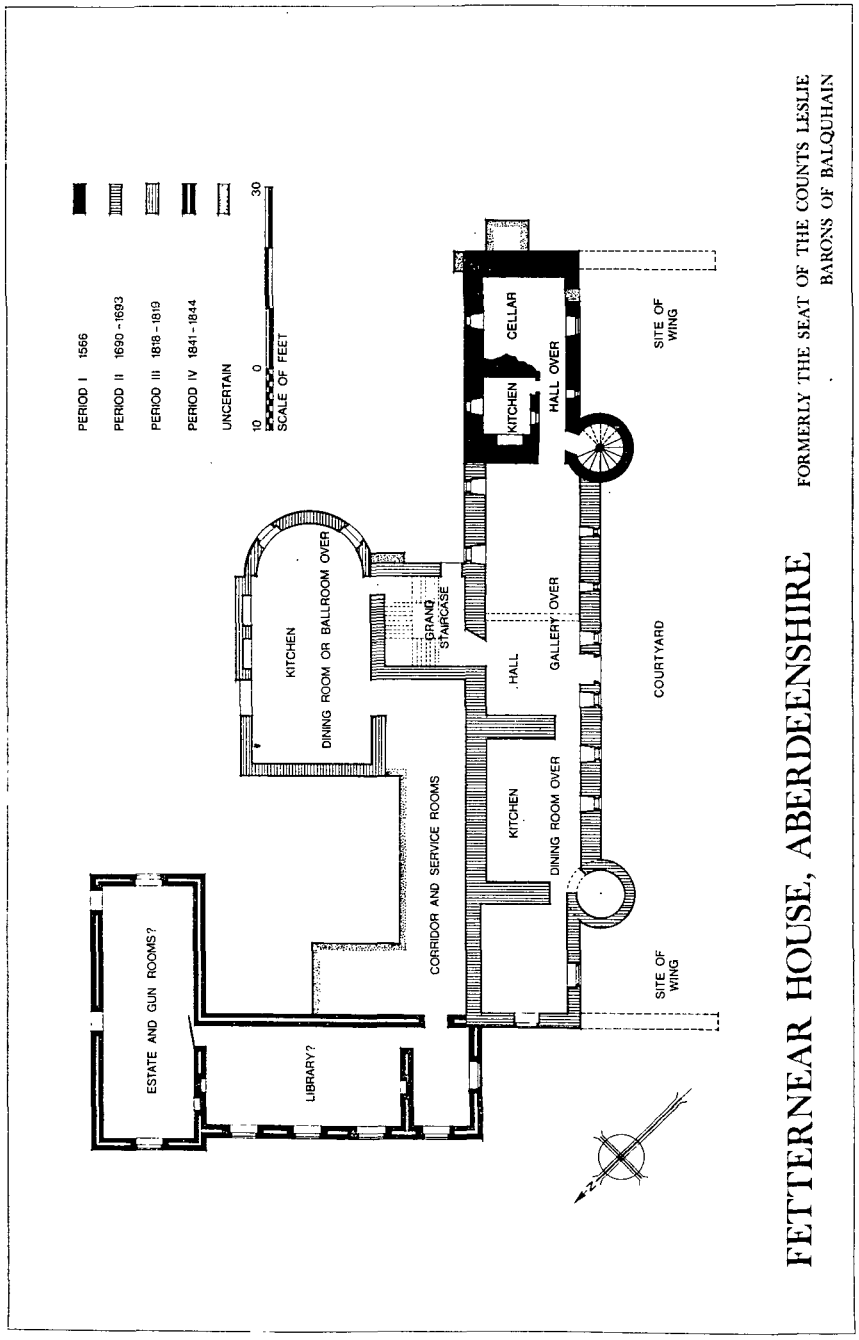
PERIOD I 1566
PERIOD II 1690-1693
PERIOD III 1818-1819
PERIOD IV 1841-1844
UNCERTAIN
10 0 30
SCALE OF FEET
ESTATE AND GUN ROOMS?
LIBRARY?
KITCHEN
DINING ROOM OR BALLROOM OVER
CORRIDOR AND SERVICE ROOMS
GRAND STAIRCASE
KITCHEN
DINING ROOM OVER
HALL
GALLERY OVER
KITCHEN
CELLAR
HALL OVER
SITE OF WING
COURTYARD
SITE OF WING
N
FETTERNEAR HOUSE, ABERDEENSHIRE
FORMERLY THE SEAT OF THE COUNTS LESLIE
BARONS OF BALQUHAIN

FIG 3

ness of the NW gable are the remains of the stairs leading to the cap house which originally crowned the round stair tower. This was destroyed in 1818, and it was this tower that was known as the 'Wallace Tower'. A curious feature of this upper floor is that in the NE wall are two windows partly blocked with what appear to be shot-holes in the blockings. If these are original and not a re-use of material from elsewhere they may date from 1640 when Fetternear was subjected to violence at the hands of the troops of the Earl Marischal, and the Abercrombies who were then in possession forced to flee.[1] The Abercrombies returned and the damage was made good.

The next additions were made from 1690 onwards by Count Patrick Leslie (fig 3). Count Patrick returned from serving the Emperor bringing with him a valuable collection of pictures and a great deal of treasure captured from the Turks, in the wars against whom the Counts Leslie had particularly distinguished themselves. The house was resigned to Count Patrick by Alexander Abercrombie on 23rd August 1690 and work on the new building must have started shortly afterwards. It is possible that the house had already been extended and that Count Patrick's only contribution was to move in and set up his coat of arms over the door. This I think unlikely. There is no indication that the Abercrombies embarked on any extensive building programme and the date – 1693 – which is cut on the carved panel over the doorway suggests that this marks the end of a period of work of nearly three years on the main structure of the house; the task of finishing the interior probably taking some years longer.

In the centre of the main elevation are two carved panels which are associated with Count Patrick. The older of the two (pl 20a) is the smaller and on a level with the cills of the second floor windows. It consists of two stones and is without a frame. The upper stone is carved with the sacred monograms I H S (Jesus Hominum Salvator or J[E]H[U]S), and M R A (MARIA Regina Angelorum, or M[A]R[I]A), a cross being cut centrally above the S and M. The lower stone is inscribed with the initials P L (Patrick Leslie) and M I (Mary Irvine), the date 1691, and a roughly carved buckle and holly leaf. Whilst the carving of the initials of the owner and his wife, together with the building date, is not in any way unusual, the use of the sacred monograms is somewhat out of the ordinary. The cult of the Holy Name, although known in the later middle ages,[2] had gained immensely in popularity in counter-Reformation Europe and especially in those areas subjected to the activities of the Jesuits. Both Count Patrick and his father in fighting in the Emperor's service, especially in Bohemia, against the Turks, and in the conquered and re-converted Protestant lands would have been in contact with the Jesuits and likely to fall under the influence of the cult. In placing the symbol on his house front Count Patrick was probably using it for its talismanic virtues. It is treated quietly, for, in spite of the general toleration of

[1] *Memorials of the Troubles in Scotland and in England. AD 1624–AD 1645*, John Spalding, The Bannatyne Club, 1850.

The same Sonday (7 June 1640) about 11 houris at evin, their cam out of New Aberdein about 200 soldiouris with there commanderis. At the brig of Done thay divydit in thrie partes, quhairof one went in tovardis Foveran and Knockhall, another by Whitecarns tovardis Wydny and Fudness, and the 3 tovardis Fetterneir . . . These who went to Fetterneir fand the yettis keipit cloiss, the Laird himself being within, and began to persew the entress yet, quhilk was weill defendit, and ane of thir soldiouris schot out thairat, quhairof he deit schortlie thairefter. The rest leaves the persute and thair hurt soldiour behind thame, and returnis to Aberdein without more ado. The Laird feiring sum truble to follow displenishes the place, left nothing tursabill within, cloissis up the yettis, and took his wyf, children and servandis with him to sum uthir pairt. But schortlie thair cum fra Aberdein another partie of soldiouris to the same place, brak up the yettis and durris, enterit the houssis and chalmeris, brak doun wyndois, bedis, burdis, and left no kynd of plenishing on hewin doun, quhilk did thame little good, albeit skaithful to the owner. Sic as they culd carie with thame they took, syne returnit bak to Abirdein; bot the Laird fled the cuntrie, and to Berwick goes he, folio 207, suffering this gryt skaith . . .'

[2] *Cartalarium Ecclesiae Sancti Nicholai Aberdonensis*, New Spalding Club, 1892, vol II, p 128.

John Arthur, burgess of Aberdeen, built and endowed an altar in St Nicholas Church in honour of the Name of Jesus, 1520.

Vol I, p 194. 'Item domino andrea gray et helena gawit matre eus pro missa de nomine ihesu . . .' (this foundation was in 1493).

the religious vagaries of the gentry, the too-conspicuous flaunting of roman symbols was not encouraged. At some time this panel may have been given a timber or stucco frame; in a pre-fire photograph something of this nature is shown, but it has perished without trace.

If Count Patrick had some reserve about the display of sacred symbols this doubt did not affect his display of more secular ones as is shown by the treatment of his Arms.

This magnificent panel (pl 20b), measuring some 6 by 3 ft, is set centrally in the elevation, at the level of the first-floor window cills, as it would have been before the 1818 alterations. It is carved in freestone in two square panels with a separately carved moulded frame, the date 1693 being cut on the inner moulding of the frame at the top.

At the base of the panel is an elaborated scroll, more architectural than heraldic, above which is the shield, bearing the Arms, with supporting gryphons. The Arms on the dexter side are those of Count Patrick, and on the sinister those of his second wife, Mary, daughter of Alexander Irvine of Drum,[1] whom he married in 1679, the whole being surmounted by a coronet of a design not known in Scots or English heraldry, and therefore presumably that of a Count of the Holy Roman Empire. The upper half of the panel is filled with the helmet, mantling and crest, with the motto on the scroll above all.

The interest of the upper panel and the quality of the lower panel make it imperative, should Fetternear be in danger of destruction, that they both be saved.

The 1690–3 extension is curiously anachronistic in many ways and shows very little knowledge of what was being done of the first quality elsewhere in Scotland at that period. The only external concession to contemporary fashion was the introduction of a symmetrical elevation. This can be explained by the speed at which Count Patrick may have wanted his new house completed – a building period starting in late August 1690 and finishing in 1693 is not, when allowance has been made for the Aberdeen winters, a long one and by adopting the chosen plan it was possible to incorporate the old house into the new, keeping it in use the whole time, and relying on local men versed in the vernacular.

The plan adopted extended the house another hundred feet beyond the old tower and the centre section was designed to incorporate the old stair tower, which was matched by a further tower, making the centre-piece 85 ft long. At its further end was another wing, some twenty feet long, designed to balance the old house, the whole of the centre being advanced 4 ft from these wings. At the same time the forecourt was enclosed on two sides by low ranges built at right angles to the ends of the main house, but not apparently joined to them as there are no signs of roof raggles. The remaining side of the court was closed by a low stone wall surmounted by iron railings. Entry to the court was through a gateway opposite the main entrance of the house. A similar arrangement can still be seen at Traquair House.

The front was of three stories, as it is today but not as high; the upper windows having, according to an old account, pointed tops with eleven representations of the family arms carved upon them. This shows that the wall head was lower than it is today, and that the windows were treated as gable-headed dormers. There would have been nine on the front, the remaining two being either on the gable ends or the cap house.

[1] *Public Register of all Arms and Bearings in Scotland*, vol 1, Folio 178. Leslie of Balquhain:

> Argent, on a fesse Azure, three buckles Or. Above the Shield ane helmet befitting his degree mantled Gules doubled Argent. Next is placed on ane Torse for his crest a Gryphon's head erased proper. The motto in ane Escroll 'Grip Fast'.

(These arms were matriculated by Count Alexander Leslie *c* 1672.)

Vol 1, Folio 168. Irvine of Drum:

> . . . his Shield being blazoned Argent, three small sheaves of holly, two and one Vert, each consisting of as many leaves slipped, banded Gulles . . .

(These arms were matriculated by Alexander Irvine of Drum *c* 1672.)

The same account refers to the east tower being finished with a pepper-box top and lofty conical roof and the west tower being finished with a cap house.[1] This appears to be an inadvertent reversal of the towers. The cap house would almost certainly have been on the east or old tower. The sketch for the proposed 'Balmoralizing' of the house which is an attempt to return to a rather grandiose version of this description shows the two towers in the position which I have suggested (fig 2).

There is an awkwardness in the handling of the central elevation. The fenestration of the upper floors is of six bays; because of this the entrance, which is in the centre of the front, is under the pier between the third and fourth windows. As the door is surmounted by the carved panel bearing the arms of Count Patrick this has had to be squeezed between the windows. Externally the ideal solution would have been to have designed an elevation of seven bays so that the arms could have taken the place of the fourth window – the only reason apparent for this not being done is that it would have upset the pattern of window openings on the inside of the main rooms on the first floor.

Internally the planning of the new wing was more advanced than the exterior would suggest. The main block with the entrance door placed centrally on the long side was divided by a thick cross wall into two main areas, one 24 and the other 43 ft long, and both about 16 ft wide. On the ground floor the larger of these apartments appears to have been further partitioned to provide an entrance hall at one end, 16 ft square. The entrance door was placed centrally in one of the shorter sides, flanked by two small deeply recessed and splayed windows. The eastern end of this divided room communicates with the lower floor of the 1566 tower and was probably used for storage purposes.

The other room which lies to the left of the main entrance was designed as a kitchen, replacing the one in the old tower which was far too small for the new house. The stairs in the new round tower opened directly out of this kitchen. There is no indication of either stone treads or a newel which suggests that the stairs were of wood – an unusual feature for this type of stair at this period. They do not seem to have risen above the first-floor level and must have been only for service purposes.

Immediately behind the entrance hall although not on its axis is a square tower measuring about 16 ft across. It was considerably altered in 1818 when it was gutted to take a new stone staircase and when large new window openings were formed. In its walls are a number of smaller blocked windows. This tower has probably always contained the main staircase but it is unlikely that the original one took up the whole of its area. Half the space would have sufficed for a very handsome wood scale and platt stair; the remainder being taken up, as the windows suggest, by small chambers or closets.

The arrangement of the first floor gave a set of state-rooms of considerable dignity, arranged *en suite*, which was a considerable advance on the planning of the main floor of Leslie Castle built by William Forbes thirty years earlier on the N side of Bennachie. Even so this narrow single-room width house was unusually late in style although there is a somewhat similar type dated *c* 1680 at Gallery in Angus.

From the staircase, entrance was into the largest of the four rooms on this floor – the Gallery. This was 44 ft long and lit by four long windows on its SW side. Opening off one end of it by way of a doorway cut through the outerwall of the old tower was a with-drawing room. This had formerly been the Hall of the 1566 house; the original fire place was reduced in width and the two windows on the SW side were enlarged.

From the other end of the Gallery opened the dining room, 24 ft long and 16 ft wide. As

[1] *Historical Records of the Family of Leslie*, vol 1, p 120.

has been previously noticed, this connected directly with the new kitchen by way of the service stair, and again it was lit by two long windows in the SW wall. Beyond it was a smaller room, 18 by 15 ft which may have been either a small dining room or a library. This too was lit by a long window on the SW side.

The effect of these four rooms, 120 ft from end to end, flooded with sunlight, richly panelled and filled with the pictures and treasures brought home from Europe by Count Patrick, must have been startling.

Indeed the desire for effect was the key to the entire plan. The front was designed to form a back drop to the courtyard and the main floor to be a setting for a life of continental formality where nothing but sunlight was let in. No attempt seems to have been made to do anything to the NE front. Except for the extrusion of the stair tower it presented an almost unbroken and unmodelled harled face to the NE winds.

The destruction wreaked by David Orme at the end of the eighteenth century left little standing but the main house. In 1818 John Leslie, 22nd Baron of Balquhain, cleared away the ruined remains of the fore buildings and courtyard and repaired and extended the mansion house (fig 3). Unfortunately the repairs went hand in hand with improvements, and these were of such a drastic nature that the character of the building was completely destroyed. The wall head of the front between the two towers was raised, destroying the carved and gabled window heads, and was finished with a neat castellated and corbelled parapet in the new baronial manner; the cap house was removed from one tower and the pepper pot from the other, both towers were then raised to master the new parapet and finished in a similar style but with the addition of an elegantly simple gothic lancet in their new upper stages; the windows on both the upper floors were enlarged, those on the first floor being lengthened out of all proportion; and a light single-storied portico was added to shield the entrance.

In order to emphasise this dreadful flatness the window heads on the wings at either end were removed and a straight eaves line substituted. If the end gables had been finished with corbie steps these too would have been removed.

Internally, no doubt, what remained of the late seventeenth-century fittings would have been destroyed. The stair tower was completely gutted and a magnificent stone staircase cantilevered from the walls; this rose in three flights to a landing, also in stone – which gave access to the Gallery and to a new dining-room, which was built beyond the tower and over a large new kitchen. This new room, which was also referred to as the Chapel and the Ballroom, measured 40 by 20 ft, its SE end forming an apse lit by two windows. The oddity of there being no window on the main axis together with the existence of a recess on the outer wall from which a stone marked with a cross, and now lying on the ground below, has fallen may have given rise to the belief that this room was intended for religious uses.

The identity of the designer of the 1818 alterations is not known. For any unidentified country house work of this period in Aberdeenshire two names always spring to mind, Archibald Simpson and John Smith; these architects were working in the immediate district at this time. Both were involved with the transformation of the old House of Putachie into the much grander Castle Forbes for Lord Forbes. The foundation stone was laid in 1815, and 'The Architect of the Castle was a Mr Simpson of Aberdeen, but he made some mistakes in the construction of the north staircase which, being communicated to Lord Forbes, led to an architect (whose name I do not remember) being sent from Edinburgh, and Mr Simpson was then discharged and succeeded by Mr Smith of Aberdeen under whose superintendence the building was completed in about six years.'[1] Castle Forbes is about seven miles to the W of Fetternear. Four miles to the E

[1] *The House of Forbes*, Alistair and Henrietta Tayler, Third Spalding Club, MCMXXXVII, p 284.

is Kintore, where the church, built in 1819, was designed by Archibald Simpson. If either of these two architects were responsible for the alterations to Fetternear, Simpson is the more likely choice in that the almost classical severity of the embattled cornice is only relieved by the thinnest of gothic lancets in the turrets, and that once out of site the design returns to the unashamedly domestic classical in the form of the new dining-room. Smith would have been more likely to have lived up to his nickname of 'Tudor Johnny'.

In 1841 John Edward Leslie, 24th Baron of Balquhain, came of age; he made a number of improvements to the estate, and added a new wing to the house. This he built facing NW and at right angles to the main building; it was two floors in height, the upper floor being lit by gabled dormer windows, with a cross wing at its N end. Internally it seems to have been arranged as an ante-room of one bay leading into a library of three bays, measuring 34 by 17 ft, with fire-places at both ends. The cross wing probably contained estate and gun-rooms. The design of this wing is straightforward and simple without any of the gentility which makes the 1818 work so distressing (pl 19b).

Between this wing and the stair tower, running against the back of the main house are the remains of a corridor. This was probably built in 1841 to link the new wing with the main house, but it is so ruined and overgrown, and so devoid of any feature that it could be of almost any date.

This was the end of building at Fetternear, which was perhaps as well. In the possession of Miss Chetwynd, the present proprietor, is a most extraordinary little sketch, in ink on cream paper (fig 2). Whether it was an idle doodle or whether it was a preliminary sketch showing how the house might be restored to more than its vanished splendours I do not know.

It shows the SW front of the house with the two towers restored to something like their original shape – one with a cap house and the other with its pepper pot. The carved gables have returned, but on the main house not to the second floor. Instead they crown a new third floor and spring from the roof which rises from a richly carved and corbelled wall head. The corbie steps have returned to the gables and the entrance is encased in a portico, possibly classical and certainly inappropriate.

All this is, by Victorian standards, a conservative restoration, but the same cannot be said of the immense new tower that is proposed for the S end of the house, and which is attached somewhat tenuously to the old tower.

The new tower seems to be about 30 ft square with a circular stair turret built onto one side and rises above a cellar and three floors to a corbelled parapet. The cellar is suggested by the level of the bay window which lights the ground floor. The corbelled parapet encloses a wall walk somewhat above the level of the roof ridge of the old tower, and a further upper stage rich in corbie steps, turrets and pepper pots. Plate glass is used extensively in the glazing.

The date of this sketch is certainly later than 1841 as it shows the new wing built by John Edward Leslie. From the style of the additions a date between 1855 and 1865 seems most likely, and is possibly the work of Colonel Charles Leslie, who disliked the 1818 alterations.

Fetternear, unless it is deliberately demolished, will gradually become more ruinous. It is beyond the means of most private persons to restore and it is not of enough architectural or archaeological importance to arouse the interest of any of the nationally-minded preservationists in its protection. This will also ensure its protection from over exposure to the public in general and the amenity providers in particular. In its own right it deserves to survive as an unusually interesting example of the transformation of a Laird's Tower into a Nobleman's Palace and thence into a Gentleman's Seat, and as a study in how long the old style lasted in parts of the north-east when it was fast disappearing in the rest of Scotland.

In preparing this account of Fetternear the absence of any family papers has been a handicap.

For the earlier history of the house during the time that it formed part of the estates of the Bishops of Aberdeen, information is available both in the *Registrum Episcopatus Aberdonensis* and in Boece's *Lives of the Bishops of Aberdeen*: this, although neither extensive nor detailed, is adequate in that it makes an interpretation possible. But for the period from 1550, when the estate came into the possession of the Leslies of Balquhain, until 1919, when it was destroyed by fire, it is necessary to rely heavily on the *Historical Records of the Family of Leslie*, which were published in 1869 and written by the then Laird, Colonel Charles Leslie, K.H., 26th Baron of Balquhain. Although the author lays no claim to being an historian, this admirable work is an excellent example of a family history from the pen of an educated man of independent means. Unfortunately Colonel Leslie was more concerned with the family than with its houses and so references to the architectural qualities of Fetternear are slight. This is particularly sad as he must have known the names of the architects of both the 1818 and the 1841 alterations.

Of the various Balquhain Charters to which he refers, and the other family papers which must have existed, there is now no trace. There is no record at the Register House; probably they were still in the Balquhain and Fetternear Charter Chests at Fetternear in 1919, and were lost in the fire. The reference numbers for the Charters are those quoted by Colonel Leslie.

In the National Monument Record Library there is a reproduction of a view of the main front with its portico[1] showing some festive gathering, but it is not known where the original is. There is also the drawing, already referred to, in the possession of Miss Chetwynd.

This paper would not have been written without the help and encouragement of Miss Chetwynd and Miss Berry, both of Fetternear, who made the ruins available to me.

NOTE

Mr David Walker has suggested that the architect for the alterations to the main elevation was James Massie. This work is credited to Massie in an article on Archibald Simpson, written by G M Frazer and published in the *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 19 April 1918; unfortunately there is no record of the source of this information. Massie, who was a Roman Catholic, and to whom Archibald Simpson had been apprenticed, died in 1816. According to Colonel Leslie the work at Fetternear was not carried out until 1818. It is possible that the design may originally have been Massie's, but that it was amended and executed by Simpson.

Mr Walker has also drawn my attention to the similarity between the 'Balmoralisation' sketch and the work of Thomas MacKenzie and James Mathews at Ballindalloch, the home of the MacPherson-Grants. These architects also worked at Warthill, the property of the Arbuthnot Leslie family on the other side of Bennachie. If the sketch is by Colonel Leslie, either a copy of a scheme prepared by these architects on which he improved, or, as I suspect, a scheme of his own incorporating features of their work, which he admired, it probably can be dated between 1849, when Colonel Leslie succeeded to the estate, and before 1854, in which year MacKenzie died.

[1] There is a photograph from a similar angle showing the front before the fire; the portico still surviving. *Aberdeen Press and Journal*, 6th December 1919.

a Fetternear from the S, showing the 1560 tower house; Auld Founds in foreground

b 1841 wing

Crown copyright: RCAMS

a Stone incised JESUS MARIA, 1691

b Panel carved with the Arms of Count Patrick Leslie, 1693

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