

The material culture of recusancy at Fetternear: kin and religion in post-Reformation Scotland

Penelope Dransart* & the late Nicholas Q Bogdan

ABSTRACT

The interdisciplinary project reported here combines art history, archaeology and the historical anthropology of religion. It consists of a study based on the material culture of recusancy from the mansion and medieval bishop's palace at Fetternear, Aberdeenshire. After the Reformation, the property became the main seat of the Leslies of Balquhain, a recusant family. A stone plaque bearing the inscription IHS MRA, probably dating from 1691, placed on the façade of the mansion indicates the religious allegiance of the family. This study of the contents of the mansion is based on surviving material culture associated with Fetternear and documentary sources and shows that the Leslies of Balquhain were building up the necessary intellectual and material resources for sustaining Roman Catholic worship and that their property served as the headquarters of the Jesuit mission in Scotland in the late 17th century.

This study of the material culture of recusancy is situated at the intersection of art history, the historical anthropology of religion and archaeology. To explore subtleties of belief concerning resistance to a dominant creed requires no less than an inter-disciplinary endeavour. This article interweaves some of these interdisciplinary strands in order to investigate evidence for recusancy among the Leslies of Balquhain at their main post-Reformation seat at Fetternear in Aberdeenshire (NGR: NJ 7233 1708). This article enquires into the material expression of the family's religious beliefs during the 17th and early 18th centuries, as can be discerned from a study of the architectural remains at Fetternear, combined with the findings from our archaeological excavation of the medieval bishop's palace, the post-medieval mansion and the adjacent garden, and by examining a surviving inventory of the house contents dated 1742.

Before discussing the evidence available from the material culture associated with the site of Fetternear, it is important to look into the historical background to the events that occurred in eastern Scotland. The first reformed Parliament to meet in 1560 in Scotland legalized Protestantism and proscribed Catholicism. Mark Dilworth commented that it was a theological decision that 'enacted nothing constitutional or practical' (Dilworth 1995, 78). Scotland was the last country to undergo a successful Protestant reformation and it was characterized by its outwardly very thorough works of extreme iconoclasm. Hence the study of recusancy is all too often one of working through an absence of surviving material evidence. Under the encouragement of John Knox, writing from the safety of Geneva, a mob removed the image of St Giles from St Giles' Kirk in Edinburgh in September 1556, and the people unceremoniously ducked it in the Nor' Loch before burning it. Knox returned to Scotland in 1559. In Perth, he

* Department of Archaeology & Anthropology, University of Wales, Lampeter, Ceredigion SA48 7ED



ILLUS 1 Fetternear House, Aberdeenshire, in 1995, with the excavated remains of the bishop's palace in the foreground (*Crown copyright: RCAHMS*)



ILLUS 2 Fetternear House before 1919 (*Cormack Collection, courtesy of the Bailies of Bennachie*)

fulminated against idolatry, and a riot ensued, during which various neighbouring religious houses were despoiled of their contents and images burnt.¹ However such destruction did not all occur in the years around 1560. From the

16th to 18th centuries there occurred a mixture of active and passive hostility towards Catholic worship. The repeated enactment of the Penal Laws until 1793 indicates that there was some variation in the application of such laws.

Abbot Dilworth (1996, 127) has characterized the period between 1560 and c 1620 as one in which Catholic worship was all but suppressed, whereas it progressively became more strongly organized between c 1620 and 1697. Despite the considerable material basis for Catholic ritual, architectural evidence for it during these two periods can be surprisingly difficult to find. The legal situation meant that Catholic observance became clandestine, and one has to search for evidence in the homes of Catholic families rather than in buildings specifically designed for public worship.

In some cases, traces of post-Reformation Catholic worship can be detected in surviving architectural features in the houses of Catholic families. The ruined L-plan towerhouse of Niddry, West Lothian, had an oratory within a blocked east window on the south wall of the main block's second storey (Proudfoot & Aliaga-Kelly 1997, 792, 794). At some stage the altar was removed, leaving slight traces of its former existence, and a recess containing a piscina was blocked, either by the recusant Seton family conforming to the Protestant church or, more probably, through changes made after 1676 when the Hopes acquired Niddry (Proudfoot & Aliaga-Kelly 1997, 833). However, Proudfoot and Aliaga-Kelly comment that comparisons for the oratory from other Scottish towerhouses are few. They suggest that changes such as those carried out at Niddry might have disguised oratories elsewhere, or that alternatively, portable furnishings might have been used (Proudfoot & Aliaga-Kelly 1997, 833). Other examples of oratories in post-Reformation contexts include those at Borthwick Castle (Small 1901, pl 19), an elaborately decorated one at Towie Barclay (MacGibbon & Ross 1887–92, Vol 2, 9, 51–3, 79; Simpson 1930, 84–5) and Loch Leven Castle, where the chamber used by the chaplain to Mary Queen of Scots was adapted for Catholic worship (Bogdan 1984).

Beldorney Castle, near Huntly, Aberdeenshire, also had a chapel on the second floor of the Z-plan towerhouse, access to it being gained

from a 'corkscrew staircase' (Slade 1974, 272). To date we have not been able to detect physical evidence for an oratory in the ruins at Fetternear. Fortunately other types of evidence are available for studying recusancy there, in the form of material culture associated with the mansion. One of the pieces of documentary evidence that connects Fetternear and Beldorney comes from an incriminating letter written by Mary Gordon in 1746, the mother of the laird of Beldorney, to her second son George, in which she explained that his brother had sought refuge at Fetternear after the battle of Culloden (Slade 1974, 279).

THE LESLIES OF BALQUHAIN

The Leslies of Balquhain are an ancient family who trace their ancestry back to Malcolm, son of Bartolf who, in 1178, was constable of the castle in Inverurie, which he held on behalf of David Earl of Huntingdon (William I's brother).² At the time of the Reformation, Bishop Gordon of Aberdeen leased, then granted, to the Leslies of Balquhain the estate and barony of Fetternear in recognition of their assistance in helping to save St Machar's Cathedral, Old Aberdeen, from destruction by the Reformers in 1560.

Since the Reformation generations of Presbyterians have worshipped in St Machar's underneath a heraldic ceiling that is headed by the Church represented in the arms of Pope Leo X. This shield has a top-central location; it is followed by a series of arms of the bishops of Scotland, ending with the University of Aberdeen. To the north of the middle row is a series starting with the shield of Charles V, the Holy Roman Emperor, at the head of a series representing the monarchs of the Christian world. On the south of this row (to its right, from the perspective of a worshipper in the nave) there is a series headed by James V King of Scotland and St Margaret of Scotland, followed by shields of the main Scottish families. David McRoberts (1974, 3) considered the ceiling to be 'an illustrated lecture on the contemporary

politics of Christendom about the year 1520'. He observed that the ceiling was installed as a visual expression of the spiritual and political unity of Europe at the same time that the Lutheran revolt was taking place in Germany.

Although the coat of arms of the Leslies of Balquhain was not included, the important place accorded to that of St Margaret of Scotland is significant. The authorship of Father William Aloysius Leslie is assigned to *Laurus Leslæana*, the anonymously written history of the Leslie family, which begins with the claim that Bartolf originated in Hungary, like St Margaret, and that he rescued her when she was fording a river on horseback (Leslie 1692, 1–3).³ The Leslies of Balquhain were extremely proud of this legendary family connection and their interest in her cult gained new significance after the Reformation when William Aloysius Leslie and his cousin, William Leslie of Conrack, petitioned Pope Clement X to extend St Margaret's feast day to the universal church (McIntyre 1993, 186–7). In his own history of the life of St Margaret, Father William Aloysius was much more modest, reporting that 'Barone Meneses [Menziess] Caualiere Scozzese' took the petition to the pope (Leslie 1675, 102–3). Father William Aloysius is a very important figure for understanding the material culture at Fetternear in the late 17th century, and we will return to him later.

In contrast with the survival of the pre-Reformation ceiling at St Machar's is the magnificent, but partially defaced, post-Reformation heraldic panel devised for the Marquis of Huntly at Huntly Castle. Associated with the main entrance, it was carved in 1606 and surmounted by religious imagery including the Five Wounds of Christ with instruments of the Passion and, in uppermost position, a circle of clouds containing the Risen Christ in glory. In 1640 Captain James Wallace chiselled off the Catholic imagery when the Covenanters occupied the castle (Giles & Simpson 1936, 5). According to the parson of Rothiemay the religious emblems 'looked somewhat popish

and superstitious lycke' (Tabraham 1995). Great lords such as the Earls of Huntly and Errol are generally regarded as providing the necessary protection that enabled people to attend Mass openly in north-eastern Scotland during the late 16th and 17th centuries (Dilworth 1996, 131). The findings of the research that has been conducted at Fetternear make it possible to reassess the role of lairds ('lesser barons') such as the Leslies and Abercrombies of Fetternear in providing not only a protective umbrella for local people who remained faithful to the Old Religion, but also in clarifying their contribution to supporting missionary activities in Scotland.

FETTERNEAR

A group of Covenanters also attacked Fetternear in June 1640. The property had been wadset (mortgaged) c 1620 to Hector Abercrombie of Westhall, a grandson of the ninth Baron of Balquhain. He may have been responsible for adding a two-and-half storey hall-house to the late 16th-century towerhouse that the Leslies had previously constructed to complement the surviving pre-Reformation buildings (Dransart & Bogdan 1995, 23). It was recorded:

The laird, feiring sum trouble to follow, displenishis the place, left nothing tursabill within, cloisis up the yettis, and took his wyf, children and servandis with him to sum uther pairt. Bot shortlie thair cum fra Abirdein another partie of soldiouris to the same place, brak up the yettis and durris, enterit the houssis and chalmeris, brak down wyndoys, bedis, burdis, and left no kynd of plenishing on hewin doun, quhilk did thaim litle good, albeit skaithful to the owner (Spalding 1850, 283).

Evidence for this second, more serious, raid survives in the form of two wide-splayed gun ports of a type that dates in Scotland from the first third of the 16th century (Zeune 1992, 80). They were reused in the first half of the 17th



ILLUS 3 The south wing of Drum Castle (*Scottish Episcopal Palaces Project*)

century to fill windows in the uppermost storey of the north wall of the towerhouse.

In the 17th century Walter Leslie (1606–67), second son of Jean Erskine and John Leslie of Balquhain, was made a Count of the Holy Roman Empire. The third Count Leslie, Patrick, redeemed the estate from Hector Abercrombie's son in 1690. Count Patrick and his second wife, Mary Irvine of Drum, then converted the ruinous castle into a mansion (Slade 1971, 186). They used some of the medieval fabric, but other walls they cut down or swept away.

During the Middle Ages the Scottish church held an unusual relationship with the papacy (Watt 2000, 28–30) and it was able to use this link to good effect in the struggle against English hegemony. Alexander de Kininmund I was responsible, as a clerk in the employment of the Bishop of St Andrews, for taking the Declaration of Arbroath to Pope John XXII in Avignon (Barrow 1984, 22–3), and subsequently, as Bishop of Aberdeen, for rebuilding the summer palace at Fetternear. He rebuilt the palace in the 1330s, at the time of the Second War of

Independence between Scotland and England. In this latter activity he was perhaps inspired by the building schemes of the Pope and bishops whose residences he would have seen during his travels on the Continent (Vingtain 1998, 68). Our excavations indicate that the palace's architecture, which had achieved massive proportions in the 14th century, was in step with the expression of the gradual consolidation of episcopal power that was occurring throughout Europe (Rubin 1991, 13–4, 51).

One of the barons who signed the Declaration of Arbroath was Andrew Leslie. It seems likely, given their known historical and antiquarian interests, that the Leslies of Balquhain would have valued their ancestor's support for the Declaration, Bishop Kininmund's connections with it, and his reconstruction of the palace of Fetternear. Ongoing research at Fetternear has detected evidence for the incorporation of medieval fabric into the late 17th-century mansion as well as reused stonework. In this way, the use of old features in new buildings at Fetternear goes beyond the convenience of



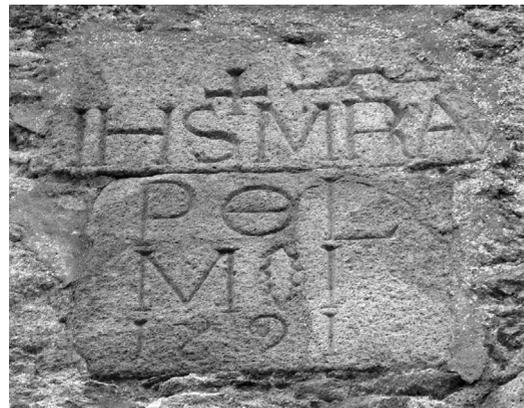
ILLUS 4 Coat of arms with the matrimonial achievements of Patrick Leslie and Mary Irvine of Drum (*Scottish Episcopal Palaces Project*)

using old structures as quarries of serviceable material. It is likely that the Leslie family made conscious efforts to employ material remains from the past to enhance the ancient foundations on which the new mansion was raised, and to stress their long-standing connections with Roman Catholicism. This might help explain the curiously anachronistic narrow door, which is provided with a set of massive hinges perhaps to hang a yett, and the slit-like windows on the ground floor of the main façade of the new mansion (illus 1 & 2).

In its present form, the façade of Fetternear is somewhat austere, as is Balquhain Castle, the original seat of the Leslies of Balquhain

(Simpson 1936). These examples of Scottish architecture contrast greatly with buildings that the Counts Leslie possessed in eastern Europe, especially the Renaissance and baroque architecture of Nove Mesto nad Metuji (now the Czech Republic), Ptuj in northern Slovenia, Pernegg, and Ehrenhausen in Styria (Baravalle 1961, 50–2, 316–8; Baroch & Schmid 1989, 103–5; Ciglencečki 1992, 42–6).

Until 1818 Fetternear had a caphouse on top of the eastern tower and a conical turret on the western one. The uppermost storey had pedimented dormers (Leslie 1869, vol I, 119). The mansion would have been comparable with the surviving south wing of Drum Castle, from whence Mary Irvine came (illus 3). However, there are also architectural features in the late 17th-century building that reflect the Leslies' continental connections. The coat of arms above the doorway presents the matrimonial achievements of Patrick and Mary (illus 4). Above it is an inscription dated 1691 bearing the monograms of Patrick (PL) and Mary (MI). It is surmounted by a plaque incised with the religious monograms IHS MRA (illus 5). These letters stand for *Jesus Hominum Salvator* and *Maria Regina Angelorum*. The combination of the IHS and the MRA monograms is extremely rare in



ILLUS 5 IHS MRA plaque, and monograms of Patrick Leslie and Mary Irvine at Fetternear (*Scottish Episcopal Palaces Project*)



ILLUS 6 IHS MRA plaque at Balquhain (*Scottish Episcopal Palaces Project*)

Scotland, and it is significant, given the links the Leslie family maintained with eastern Europe during the 17th and 18th centuries, that the combination is characteristically used in the Alps (Zeune 1992, 57). A similar plaque survives at Balquhain, their ancestral seat (illus 6). The IHS monogram became associated with the Society of Jesus, founded in 1540; an emblem depicting a monstrance displayed the IHS monogram to represent the transubstantiation (Slade 1971, pl 20; Bryce & Roberts 1993, 368–70).

The survival of an inventory of contents at Fetternear dated 1742 shows that some of the contents of the mansion came from eastern Europe.⁴ It also provides a wealth of information about the interior of the building and gives us an insight into the religious background of the Leslies of Balquhain. Abbot Dilworth (1996, 127–8) reminds us that the celebration of Mass is the most important aspect of Roman Catholic worship, during which the priest consecrates the elements of bread and wine on the altar in order to make present the body and blood of Christ. However the Eucharist, as one of the seven sacraments, depends on the availability of priests (and indeed bishops to ordain priests in the sacrament of Holy Orders) in order to ensure the continuity of all the sacraments. Regulations stipulated the use of vestments and the nature of the bread and wine used in the Eucharist (Rubin 1991, 83–98; Dilworth 1996, 128). Dilworth (1996, 131–2, 136) stresses the difficulties that Scottish Catholics encountered in both the

availability of priests and the material items such as vestments and chalices that were needed to maintain regular worship throughout the 16th and 17th centuries.

The 1742 inventory was drawn up after the death of Count Ernest Leslie in 1739. In 1715 his mother, the honourable Margaret Elphinstone, the widow of Count George Leslie, had, in the words of a 19th-century Leslie Laird, ‘sent for the popish priest and desired him to pack up all the popish trinkets, vestments, baubles and many popish books and to convey them away, which he accordingly did’ (Leslie 1869, vol I, 122). Probably it was too dangerous for a known Catholic household to retain many such items; 1715 was the year of the first Jacobite rising. As a consequence, the 1742 inventory does not specifically mention chalices and vestments. However, some of the items listed in it, as well as other items and literary sources that relate to the Leslies of Balquhain provide an insight into the Catholic resources that were being collected at their Fetternear seat. In the years between 1697 and 1702 it was reported that ‘there is mass or popish meetings ordinarily kept in Count Lesly’s house by the sd. Count’s Brother, Mr Lesly, and priest Abercromby’ (AMS 1952).

Another important documentary source is to be found in an anonymous pamphlet published in 1714, which specifically named ‘George Lesly’ for being ‘a Popish Gentleman’, who harboured priests and missionaries in his house at Fetternear. The author added:

... for his House at Fetterneir has been the ordinary place of Residence of the Superior of the Jesuits in Scotland for some time past, by him and his Family. The Popish Youths are recommended when they come from abroad to his House, and ther they receive their Directions, when they begin to act as Missionaries, and are dispersed throught the Country: At his House there is a Chappel consecrated, which is put to no other use but the Idolatrous popish Worship, and in which there is an Altar, Rich Vestments, and other Costly and Superstitious Appurtenances of their Service (Anon 1714).⁵

THE 1742 INVENTORY

Among the religious imagery listed in the 1742 inventory is a carved statue of the Virgin Mary. It has survived in a private collection and the first author has identified it as a sculpture of the Immaculate Conception of the Virgin from Andalucía. Measuring 1.087m in height, the statue is carved in wood, which was painted in polychrome and gilded.⁶ According to the doctrine, Mary is regarded as unblemished by original sin and her conception was without sin. The statue portrays her before the birth of Jesus. She holds her hands in an attitude of prayer, with the right thumb crossed over the left. The crossed thumbs of Mary Immaculate feature in paintings by Zurbarán (Trens 1946, fig 81; Brown 1974, 95; Alcolea 1989, pl 14, 21, 55). The clothing of the statue is closely comparable with that of a sculpture entitled *Virgen de los Favores* in Granada Cathedral by Pablo de Rojas, c 1560–? (García 1988, pl 64). The figure also bears a general similarity to the sculpture carved by Juan Martínez Montañés and polychromed by Francisco Pacheco and Baltasar Quintero that was commissioned for the Chapel of the Immaculate Conception in the Cathedral of Seville (Stratton 1994, fig 63). These comparisons suggest that the sculpture once held at Fetternear was carved in Andalucía during the first half of the 17th century.

By the 17th century, artists had developed various visual means for conveying the perfection and purity of the Virgin. The belief in the Immaculate Conception and representations of it in art can be traced back to the beginning of the 11th century (Levi D’Ancona 1957, 20). In 1474 a Franciscan pope, Sixtus IV, approved a new office for the feast of the Immaculate Conception of Our Lady (Levi D’Ancona 1957, 3). In the mid-16th century, the Council of Trent declared Mary to be exempt from the decree of universal original sin, although it was not until 1854 that the belief in Mary’s Immaculate Conception was elevated to the status of dogma in the Bull *Ineffabilis Deus* that Pope Pius IX

proclaimed on 8 December of that year (Levi D’Ancona 1957, 3; Warner 1983, 245).

Large numbers of paintings and sculptures depicting the Immaculate Conception produced in Andalucía and elsewhere during the 16th and 17th centuries were important in propagating acceptance in the belief. Count James Leslie, the elder brother of Count Patrick, had played an important role in defending the city of Vienna from the Turks in 1683. He would have known that the Viennese people attributed the Turkish defeat to the religious protection that Mary Immaculate had granted them (Leslie 1934, 96–100; Geese 1998, 336).

There is another reason why the belief in the Immaculate Conception would have been held to be important at Fetternear. The Society of Jesus advocated the belief and promoted visual imagery that gave it prominence. William Aloysius Leslie (1641–1704), mentioned above, brother of Count Patrick, had a particularly distinguished career with the Society. He was professor of philosophy at Perugia, Rector of the Scots College Douai, Superior of the Jesuit Mission in Scotland, and he served twice as Rector of the Scots College in Rome (Hay 1956, 61–2). His *Vita di Santa Margherita regina di Scozia*, originally published in 1675 and cited above, was reissued in 1691, 1717 and 1878, indicating its popularity. In it he cited the *Polydori Vergilii Vrbinate Anglica Historiae*, one of the books in the Fetternear inventory (Lesleo 1675, 5). He would have been the source of the copy of *Regulae Societatis Jesu* in the Fetternear library, and perhaps also of the legal texts: the 1516 edition of the *Codex Justiniani* and Paolo Sarpi’s *Historia della sacra Inquisitione* (1638). It is likely that he provided the intellectual input into the collecting activities behind the Fetternear library and art collections.

The Leslies retained or regained some of the religious equipment, including church vestments that are now in the collections of Blairs Museum (McIntyre 1987, 86). In relation to the statue of Mary Immaculate, it is interesting to note that one of the chasubles associated with the Leslie



ILLUS 7 Detail of late 15th-century embroidered orphrey repaired in the 19th century, depicting the embrace at the Golden Gate, Jerusalem, Blairs Museum T8001 (*Scottish Episcopal Palaces Project, by courtesy of Blairs Museum*)



ILLUS 8 Detail showing the IHS panel on the back of 17th-century chasuble Blairs Museum T8002 (*Scottish Episcopal Palaces Project, by courtesy of Blairs Museum*)

family bears late 15th-century embroidered orphreys depicting the life of the Virgin.⁷ David McRoberts (1956, 84, n51) reported that the Life of Our Lady orphreys were in the possession of Bishop George Hay at St Mary's College, Aquorthies. The college stood on land that belonged to the Fetternear estate, and Bishop Hay was laid to rest in 1811 in the burial ground of the ruined former medieval parish church dedicated to St Ninian, which also formed part of the estate (Dean & Roberts 1995, 536). In 1848, James Michael Leslie, the 25th Baron, had a chapel built adjacent to the medieval ruins, and the ancient chancel enlarged. The chapel was extended in 1878, incorporating the medieval remains. It was in this chapel that Dom Odo Blundell wished to celebrate mass when he visited Fetternear in 1906. At the time, he reported that Bishop Hay's altar furniture was kept in the chapel (Blundell 1907, n40). It is likely that the Leslie family also kept the vestments, and they might earlier have been responsible for preserving them in their care.

One of the orphreys in question includes a depiction of the embrace of St Anne, mother of the Virgin, and Joachim at the Golden Gate, Jerusalem (illus 7). In popular belief of the 15th century, St Anne was thought to have conceived at the moment when Joachim kissed her, 'Anna concepit per osculum Joachimi' (Anne conceived through Joachim's kiss') (Stratton 1994, 21). The story derived from the apocryphal Protevangelium and although the Council of Trent accepted theologically incorrect but traditional and popular images as long as they committed no serious error, the use of the theme in art declined. In 1677 Innocent XI forbade the depiction of the embrace at the Golden Gate (Stratton 1994, 28). The iconography of the Immaculate Conception that was being developed in the late 16th and early 17th century contributed towards an intellectual climate in which the embrace at the Golden Gate became redundant. It is therefore significant that the mansion of Fetternear, given its role in serving as a resource base for the Catholic mission, should have housed the Spanish sculpture of the Virgin demonstrating the newer artistic treatment of the theme.

Blairs Museum also has a set of 17th-century high mass vestments formerly known as the 'Mary Queen of Scots Vestments'. David McRoberts (1956, 84, n51) considered them also to have come from the safe-keeping of the Leslies. According to family tradition they were embroidered using gold and silver wrapped threads taken from materials captured from the Turks in the 1683 siege of Vienna. The 19th-century family history of the Leslies mentioned 'rich silk and gold and silver brocade stuffs, which were made into church vestments, and some of which still remain at Fetternear' (Leslie 1869 vol I, 120). The priest's chasuble has a magnificent IHS monogram couched in metallic threads on the back. It might have been worn by Father William Aloysius when he celebrated mass at Fetternear. Presumably it continued to be used after his death in 1704; the priest's and deacon's vestments in the collection

might well have been the ‘Rich Vestments’ mentioned above in the pamphlet of 1714 (Anon 1714). It is worth noting that the carved stone IHS monogram at Balquhain (illus 6) also has the cross rising from the middle bar of the letter ‘H’, as does the embroidered version (illus 8). Another version of the monogram occurs in the conclusions of the doctoral thesis of William Aloysius Leslie (1666), printed on silk and preserved in Marischal Museum at the University of Aberdeen. In this example, the cross bar of the letter H consists of two lines that converge upwards, and the cross springs from the point where the lines meet.

Among the books listed in the 1742 inventory were titles concerned with ancient Egyptian religion. The Alexandrian writer Horapollo was represented in at least two of the books in the Fetternear library by the authors Valeriano and Caussin.⁸ The library also contained books of Iamblichus of Apamea (fl CAD 315), an author who cited Hermetic texts in *De mysteriis* (1.1 and 8.1–4). William Aloysius Leslie was probably the source of these books, given Jesuit interests in linguistics, hieroglyphics and ancient religion.⁹ He might have encouraged his brother and sister-in-law to acquire a series of ‘Eight fine large prints of Poussin’s landscapes in the Louvre’.¹⁰ These were late works by Poussin, perhaps significantly some of them containing visual allusions to Valeriano’s treatment of ancient Egypt (Wildenstein 1957, 231–42). Poussin is noted for producing visually dense and symbolically rich works of art, which has provoked art historians to produce strongly contrasting interpretations of his oeuvre. Paola Santucci has suggested that an intellectual strand that typified Jesuit thinking in the 17th century influenced his painting, particularly his pictures of the infancy of Moses, who seems to act as a prefiguration of Christ in Poussin’s canvases. She argues that Poussin wished to assert Christ’s Egyptian origins, Egypt being the source of *prisca theologia*, or ancient religion (Santucci 1985, 51–2). Patricia McTighe does not accept such an argument, stating that Santucci makes

‘Poussin seem as pious a Counter Reformation artist as Bernini’ (McTighe 1996, 16). She prefers to see Poussin as being influenced by his associations with clandestine atheist thinkers known as *libertins*.¹¹ Regardless of the merits of these different modern interpretations, it is likely that Poussin’s work was viewed through the lens of Jesuit thinking in a house where the dominant intellectual force in the late 17th century came from Father William Aloysius and his associates. Sometime after his death, during the life of either Count Ernest or his elder brother Count James (between 1721/22 and 1739), someone acquired an Egyptian mummy from Colonel Lethieullier and had the specialist knowledge to place it next to the Poussin prints.¹²

At the end of the 16th century in north-eastern Scotland the General Assembly blamed Jesuit priests for ‘seducing everywhere in Buchan, Garioch, Aberdeen and Mar’ (Davidson 1878, 156). In the 1620s the Erroll family home at New Slains served as the headquarters of the Jesuit mission in Scotland (Forbes Leith 1909, 74). By the end of the 17th century Fetternear played that role. The study of the contents of the mansion demonstrates that the Leslies were building up the intellectual and material resources to carry out such a project. We are convinced that the Leslie family held high hopes for Catholicism to triumph in Scotland, as it had in Slovenia, a Catholic area that turned to Protestantism and reverted to Catholicism. However, it became clear through time that Scotland was not going to return to the Old Religion quickly. At the end of the 17th and the beginning of the 18th centuries the Leslies were lending their support to the associated Jacobite cause.

CONCLUSION

Our work at Fetternear demonstrates the commitment of a particular family to Catholicism, as given material expression through architecture, heraldry and fine art. The Leslies were able to display their coat of arms as a visual expression

of their descent from an ancient family that was associated with St Margaret of Scotland. They used their affinal relationships, including the Gordons and Irvines, to succour Catholicism in Scotland. This study of the Fetternear material culture has addressed the fusion of the sacred and the profane, and how these forms of material expression were sustained through a particular family's connections with the Holy Roman Empire.

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NOTES

- 1 For a graphic account, see Prebble (1973, 187–8).
- 2 The castle survives as a motte and bailey (Davidson 1878, 2; Simpson 1924, 41; Barrow & Scott 1971, 28).
- 3 For modern perspectives on this family legend see Dukes (1983) and Leslie (2001).
- 4 We wish to thank Mrs Ann Dean for bringing the inventory to our attention in the National Archives of Scotland (GD 345/1379).
- 5 We are grateful to Prof Allan Macinnes for bringing this pamphlet to our attention.
- 6 An illustration of the sculpture was published by Patullo (1967, 103).
- 7 Blairs Museum accession number T8001 BLRBM. The orpheys were crudely repaired using brightly-hued silk floss probably in the 19th century, and mounted in the form of a chasuble on watered white silk fabric. The first author wishes

to thank Rev John Woodside, Mrs P A King and Mr David Taylor for granting permission to study the vestments.

- 8 For a modern evaluation of the work of Horapollo, see Boas (1993).
- 9 For a background study of Renaissance interests in hieroglyphics, see Dempsey (1988).
- 10 The framed prints at Fetternear after paintings by Nicholas Poussin (1594–1665) are likely to have included *Le Printemps, ou le Paradis terrestre* (Spring or earthly paradise), showing humanity before the ten commandments, *L'Été, ou Booz et Ruth* (Summer or Boas and Ruth), demonstrating the law of the Old Testament, *L'Automne, ou la Grappe de la Terre Promise* (Autumn or the bunches of grapes – *la grappe* – of the Promised Land), depicting the arrival of Christianity, and *L'Hiver, ou le Déluge* (Winter or the flood), showing the moment of the Last Judgment before redemption. Engravings of these paintings by Etienne Baudet are numbered 178 to 181 in Wildenstein (1957). The remaining four prints might well have been:

Paysage avec Polyphème, ou Paysage sicilien
Paysage avec Diogène, ou Diogène jette son
écuelle

Paysage au Serpent, ou les effets de la terreur
Paysage avec Eurydice piquée par un serpent

Engravings by Jean Pesne, attributed to Jean Audran, are numbered 231 and 233–5 in Wildenstein (1957). These identifications are based on the Poussin prints known to have been published prior to 1742 and on their captions which state that the paintings were in the Louvre.

- 11 Anthony Blunt first suggested that Poussin could have been a *libertin*, or a clandestine aesthetist, but he later dropped the idea (Blunt 1960, I, xxii–xiii; McTighe 1996, 26–7).
- 12 For an account of the collecting activities of the Lethieullier family, see Bierbrier (1988). The Lethieullier mummy that passed into the collections of the British Museum seems to have been a different item from the one the Leslies bought.

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