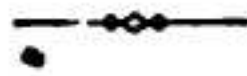


## THE FRASERS OF FAIRFIELD, INVERNESS.



ABOUT a year since, when certain repairs were found to be necessary at the Chapel-yard of Inverness, the state of a once handsomely-carved tomb, at the north-east wall, was declared dangerous. It was reported that not only did no one claim right to the ruined tomb, but even its original owners were unknown, and after some discussion the tomb was repaired and pointed at the town's expense, but has only been partially restored.

The tomb was that of the once well known and influential burghal-county family, the Frasers of Fairfield, and the above circumstance shows how completely they are forgotten. Some of the Fairfield papers are in my possession, and from them and other sources, the following notes have been framed:—

The first of the family I can trace was Andrew, styled in 1594 Vic-Coil-vic-Homais Roy. Thomas Fraser the Red, grandfather of Andrew, probably came from the Aird, and settled near Inverness when the Barony of Kinmylies was acquired by the family of Lovat. In 1595 Andrew was possessed of a rood of land bewest the River Ness, and in that year acquired from William Paterson, burgess of Inverness, another rood adjoining, described as bounded by the lands of Robert Neilson on the north, the miln lade at the west, and Andrew's own lands on the south. The lands are described as holding of the Kings and the reddend is five pennies. Two of the seals of the charter and sasine are in good preservation. The granter, William Paterson, could not write.

Andrew Fraser had a charter of four ox-gang of land, or one-fourth of the lands of Merkinch, with commonty and common pasturage used and wont granted by the Magistrates and Council, dated 1st June 1605. Amongst the witnesses to the taking of Sasine passed thereon by James Cuthbert, Bailie of Inverness, were James Cuthbert elder, burgess of Inverness; Jaspard Cuthbert, burgess there; Andrew Vic-William-Mor, burgess there; and Findlay dhu-Vic Phail, burgess there.

Upon the 31st of July 1631, the Provost and Bailies pronounce a decree that the commonty of Merkinch was common



to the whole burgh, as against Andrew Fraser's contention that it belonged exclusively to the owners of the four-quarters of Merkinch.

The burial ground has over the door the date 1685, and inside

|       |       |
|-------|-------|
| F. F. | I. R. |
| D. F. | C. D. |

The initials "F. F." refer to Finlay Fraser, son of Andrew Fraser, and "I. R." to Isobel Robertson, his wife, to whom he was married in 1656.

The right to a seat in church was held of great moment in old times, and Finlay Fraser, who became a considerable owner of property in Inverness, and filled the office of Provost, got 'an Act of the Session in regard to a pew in the High Church, more particularly referred to hereafter, dated 20th January 1662, and a decree arbitral, dated 29th May 1663.

The dispute as to the commony of Merkinch again arose in Provost Finlay's time; for I find that he, as heir served to his father, Andrew, raised letters of Suspension before the Lords of Council and Session of the above-mentioned decree against his father, dated 11th September 1678; and again in June 1690, Alexander Fraser complained to the Provost and Magistrates that Finlay Fraser, late Provost of Inverness, had interrupted Alexander's servants from casting, binding, or leading fuel in the Carse on the west side of the Merkinch, which is commony to the Town of Inverness; and assuming the heritable right thereof to belong to him, the said Finlay Fraser. This question of commony was disputed all through the eighteenth century, but finally determined in favour of the late Hugh Robert Duff of Muirtown, who had become sole owner of Merkinch.

The initials "D. F.," "C. D.," refer to David Fraser, merchant in, and one of the Bailies of, Inverness, younger son of Provost Finlay Fraser, who married in July 1693 Christian Dunbar, eldest lawful daughter of Umquhile John Dunbar of Bennetsfield. David Fraser had as cautioner for his obligations under the marriage contract his eldest brother Andrew Fraser, burgess of Inverness, and the lady had her mother, Christian Mackenzie, Sir Alexander Mackenzie of Coul, and Simon Mackenzie of Torridon.



David Fraser was the first styled of Fairfield, and in his time the family was at its highest point. His elder brother, Andrew, probably died without issue. The fine old house of Fairfield, part of which remained till recently, was built by either Finlay or David Fraser, and is a prominent object in Flezer's view of Inverness. David Fraser gets an Act of the Session in regard to the pew, in his favour, dated 14th October 1703.

David Fraser was succeeded by his son Alexander Fraser. John Maclean, the Inverness centenarian, says that the downfall of the Fairfields' arose from their exertions on behalf of the Stuarts.

One of his first alienations was the church pew which his father and grandfather had so much prized. In respect of a sum of £10 sterling, Alexander Fraser of Fairfield sold to John Fraser, junior, merchant in Inverness, "All and hail these two pews now made ane desk, situated on the east side of the north aisle of the High Church of Inverness, bounded by Provost Alexander Fraser his pew at the north, and the common entry twixt the said two pews, and Commissar Fraser, deceased, his pew at the south, with free ish and entry thereto by the common passage leading to the said aisle." The disposition is signed by Fairfield "att the House of Kinmylies," 19th July 1738. There is a deed also signed by his mother at the House of Kinmylies, whereby it may be inferred she lived there in her widowhood, after the fall of the Polsons'. By disposition dated 17th July 1739, Alexander Fraser sold to the said John Fraser two acres of his ten arable acres of his land of the Carse.

Alexander Fraser sold, by deed dated 14th May 1743, to Duncan Fraser, merchant in Inverness, son of the said John Fraser, the two roods bewest the Ness, which had pertained to the family since 1596, also roods and acres in St Thomas's Chapel, roods, riggs, and acres in the Carse called Lochnagaun, Gairbread, Knockandow, Little Carse, Whinbush Carse, and Sandy Acre. Christian Dunbar, Fairfield, mother and liferentrix, renounced her liferent by a deed, the witnesses being John Fraser, her brother-in-law, and Alexander Fraser, her son. The deed is dated 28th May 1745.

Upon the 1st day of September 1743, Fairfield disposes the lands of Wester Ballifeary to Robert Fraser of Phopachie.



Prior to 1754 he had disposed of his quarter of Merkinch, as in a list of "The Burgage Maills and Feu-duties of the Burgh of Inverness," prepared in that year, William Duff of Muirtown appears as owner "from Fairfield, from Bailie David his father," the feu being £1. 6s. 3d. Scots. Fairfield still appears in the list of 1754 as feuar of various subjects, amongst others the owner of "Shop under the Tolbooth, the fourth from the east from Bailie David his father."

Alexander Fraser of Fairfield, as heir of the deceased Alexander Fraser, gets a precept of clare constat from the Provost and Magistrates of Inverness, dated 30th August 1755.

The decay of the family continued. Alexander was succeeded in 1794 by Andrew Fraser of Fairfield, Captain in the H.E.I. C. S. Andrew Fraser still possessed some lands, for he is charged with nearly four bolls of victual for stipend. He continued selling, disposing of the grounds called the Hard Croft to Colin Munro of Grenada, on which Mr Munro erected the large house known as the Blue House. In 1809, Captain Fraser disposed to Lachlan Mackintosh of Raigmore for a consideration of £500, "All and whole these three roods of burgh bigged land, with houses, biggings, garden, dovecot, and office houses, sometime pertaining to, and possessed by, Alexander Fraser of Fairfield his grandfather, with the parts, pendicles, and pertinents of the same, lying on the west side of the River Ness, bounded between the garden sometime pertaining to the deceased Jaspard Cuthbert, thereafter by progress to Alexander Duff of Drummuir, and now to Colin Munro at the west and north, by the road leading to the River Ness at the east, the lands sometime belonging to the deceased John Kerr, burgess of the said burgh, thereafter by progress to Robert Robertson of Shipland, thereafter by progress to the deceased Alexander Fraser, my grandfather, his now by the vennel at the south and the old waulk miln lade, now the King's high way, at the west parts respectively."

Captain Fraser was dead prior to 1814, and though some fragments remained to his minor children, he may be said to have been the last of the Fairfields. His character may be inferred from the following letter, viz.—A man of good education and business habits, determined to have his own, but without a spark of family pride or intention to re-establish himself:—



“ Blairgowrie, 30th January 1809.

“ Dear Sir,—Upon receipt of this I beg the favour of you immediately to advertise the house and garden for public sale on the 15th of February next, unless previously sold by private bargain, also the three acres (English measure) at the north end of the Park, at present set to Cameron, and another man whose name Dallas will tell you. You will of course take steps if any be requisite to nullify Cumming’s lease and prevent any trouble from that quarter. Shall, if possible, be North myself in 10 or 12 days. In the meantime, if you receive an offer of 600 guineas for the house and garden you may close with it. I suppose you must place 26s. of each feu charge to my account, but as I shall be North soon, we can arrange the matter then. The advertisement will be time enough for next Friday, and the Friday following, and is not after that to be repeated. Make it as short as possible.

“ I am, &c.,

(Signed)

“ ANDREW FRASER.

“ P.S.—The ground in the Park will be sold in acres or half acres to accommodate those who may wish for a small piece.”

And so the Fairfields have disappeared, and in 1884 the Town Council of Inverness knew not even their tomb. One of the last acts was to “sell out” a poor widow paying a rent of 30s. who is called “Widow Subley Thomson,” no doubt her then usual designation. What a fall for Miss Sibilla Barbour, a descendant of the Barbours of Aldourie!

C. FRASER-MACKINTOSH.