

= Pitfour estate =

The Pitfour estate , in the Buchan area of north @-@ east Scotland , was an ancient barony encompassing most of the extensive Longside Parish , stretching from St Fergus to New Pitsligo . It was purchased in 1700 by James Ferguson of Badifurrow , who became the first Laird of Pitfour .

The estate was substantially renovated by Ferguson and the following two generations of his family . At the height of its development in the 18th and 19th centuries the 50 @-@ square @-@ mile ( 130 km<sup>2</sup> ) property had several extravagant features including a two @-@ mile racecourse , an artificial lake and an observatory . The original mansion house was extended before being rebuilt . The surrounding parklands were landscaped , major renovations were undertaken , and follies such as a small replica Temple of Theseus were constructed , in which George Ferguson , the fifth laird , was thought to keep alligators in a cold bath .

The first three lairds transformed the estate into a valuable asset . Lord Pitfour , the second laird , purchased additional lands including Deer Abbey and Inverugie Castle . Pitfour 's son , James Ferguson , who became the third laird , continued to improve and expand the estate by adding the lake and bridges , and establishing planned villages . The third laird died a bachelor with no children , so the estate passed to the elderly George Ferguson , who was only in possession of the property for a few months . George was already a wealthy man , owning lands in Trinidad and Tobago , but despite not directly improving the Pitfour estate he added considerable value to the inheritance passed to his illegitimate son . The extravagant lifestyles of the fifth and sixth lairds led to the sequestration of the estate , which was sold off piecemeal to pay their debts .

What remained of the estate was sold after the First World War . The mansion house was demolished in about 1926 , and its stone used to build council houses in Aberdeen . In more recent times some of the remaining buildings , including the temple , the bridges and the stables , have been classified as at high risk by Historic Scotland because their condition has become poor . The chapel was fully renovated and converted to a private residence in 2003 ; the observatory was purchased and restored by Banff & Buchan District Council ( now Aberdeenshire Council ) and can be accessed by the public . The racecourse has been forested since 1926 , and the lake is used by members of a private fishing club .

= = Early history = =

The Pitfour estate in Mintlaw extended from St Fergus to New Pitsligo and encompassed most of the extensive Longside Parish . The meaning of Pitfour is given in the 1895 records of the Clan Fergusson as " cold croft " , but the historian John Milne breaks the name into two parts and indicates the meaning as Pit being place and feoir or feur being grass . The Pitfour estate is shown on old maps as Petfour or Petfour . It was formerly one of Scotland 's largest and best @-@ appointed estates and was referred to as " The Blenheim of Buchan " , " The Blenheim of the North " and " The Ascot of the North " by the architectural historian Charles McKean .

Scant early records exist of the lands but Alexander Stewart ( Alexandro Senescalli ) , the natural son of King Robert II of Scotland , was given the Pitfour lands together with those of Lunan by his father in 1383 . However , writing in 1887 Cadenhead states the lands were sold to Stewart by Ricardus Mouet , also known as Richard Lownan . During the next three centuries the lands had several different owners . Transactions show it passed to a burgess of Aberdeen in 1477 from Egidia Stewart ; Walter Innes of Invermarkie gained feudal superiority to all Pitfour lands in 1493 ; and in 1506 the land was purchased by Thomas Innes , who died the following year . His son , John , inherited the property . It remained in the possession of the Innes family until at least 1581 , when it was owned by James Innes and his wife Agnes Urquhart . Between 1581 and 1667 the lands were bought by George Morrison . His son William inherited the property in 1700 , and immediately sold the estate to James Ferguson , who became the first Laird of Pitfour .

The lands purchased by Ferguson were recorded in 1667 in a charter granted by Charles II and were stated as encompassing " the lands and Barony of Toux and Pitfour in the Parish of Old Deer and Sherifffdom of Aberdeen including the towns and lands of Mintlaw , Longmuir , Dumpston in the

Parish of Longside , and County of Aberdeen . " Several other lands , including " the Barony of Aden with the Tower , Fortaliss , Mains and Manor Place thereof and pertinents of the same called Fortry , Rora Mill thereof , Croft Brewerie , Inverquhomrie and Yockieshill " were individually listed . State papers from the reign of Queen Anne in the 18th century record the lands in favour of James Ferguson .

= = Lairds and subsequent development = =

#### 1st laird

James Ferguson ? known as the Sheriff , reflecting the post he held , recognised by the Society of Advocates ? bought the Pitfour estate after selling the lands of Badifurrow . He had inherited Badifurrow after demanding that his uncle Robert Ferguson should appear in court if he wished to contest the inheritance . Robert , nicknamed the Plotter , was in hiding to avoid charges of treachery , and after his non @-@ appearance in court James Ferguson 's inheritance was confirmed in mid @-@ June 1700 . At that time the estate contained only a small country house .

#### 2nd laird

James was laird until his death in 1734 , after which the estate passed to his eldest son , also called James , who was born at Pitfour soon after it was purchased . A solicitor like his father , he was promoted to the bench in 1764 and became Lord Pitfour . He continued to expand and improve the estate until his death in 1777 , and set up the planned village of Fetterangus in 1752 .

Lord Pitfour purchased the lands of the last Earl Marischal , George Keith , which were adjacent to Pitfour , in 1766 . They were considered the Earl Marischal 's most significant property and had been forfeited when the Earl Marischal fell out of favour . He had bought it back from the York Buildings Company for £ 31 @,@ 000 , but Pitfour only paid £ 15 @,@ 000 for it . The 8 @,@ 000 acres ( 32 square kilometres ) of land included Deer Abbey and Inverugie Castle , but consisted predominantly of peat bogs , woods and uncultivated land . This addition made the Pitfour estate the largest in the area , at more than 30 @,@ 000 acres ( 120 square kilometres ) stretching from Buchanhaven to Maud along the course of the River Ugie .

#### 3rd laird

The third laird , also named James , inherited the estate in 1777 ; he was usually referred to as the Member to differentiate him from previous generations . Like his forebears , he was an advocate but also became a Member of Parliament . He too continued to expand and improve the estate ; he constructed a lake and a canal , and built the new mansion . He also expanded and altered Longside at the start of the 1800s , founded Mintlaw in 1813 , assisted in the extension of New Deer and extended Buchanhaven .

The Member died unmarried , childless and intestate in 1820 . In normal circumstances his brother Patrick would have been his heir , but he died in battle in October 1780 .

#### 4th laird

In 1820 the estate was inherited by the Member 's younger brother , George Ferguson , who was by then in his seventies . He was known as the Governor , reflecting his appointment as Lieutenant Governor of Tobago . He was laird from September 1820 , but died in December that year . The Governor had spent most of his life in Trinidad and Tobago , where he was a principal landowner , and had inherited the Castara Estate on Tobago from Patrick . George was appointed Lieutenant Governor of Tobago in 1779 , and after a battle with the French in 1781 surrendered the island to the French on 2 June . The Governor returned to Britain , although the terms of the surrender meant he still owned the Castara estate and all the slaves who worked on it . George had illegitimate children with an unknown woman . He continued to buy estates in the Caribbean and returned there in 1793 , staying until 1810 .

#### 5th laird

The estate started to deteriorate after it was inherited by the Governor 's illegitimate son George Ferguson , known as the Admiral because of his naval career . He was already heavily in debt when he became the fifth laird in 1821 , but he still enjoyed a lavish lifestyle and undertook much extravagant construction on the estate , including the erection of follies . To cover his substantial

gambling debts , he began to sell parcels of estate land , and upon inheriting Pitfour he began selling furniture , books , farm equipment and other items , realising more than £ 9 @, @ 000 .

#### 6th laird

After the Admiral 's death in March 1867 , the estate passed to his son , George Arthur Ferguson , the sixth and final laird . He served in the Grenadier Guards and eventually became a captain . He married Nina Maria Hood , the eldest daughter of Alexander Nelson Hood , 1st Viscount Bridport , in February 1861 . Later that year Captain Ferguson was posted to Canada , where he was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel and where his first two sons , Arthur and Francis William , were born . His eldest son , Arthur , became Inspector of Constabulary for Scotland . Returning to Britain in 1864 , the family had a nomadic lifestyle , but the sixth laird and his wife were extravagant and habitual gamblers . In June 1909 , a trust deed was registered , and what remained of the estate was put on the market . After large parts of the land had been sold under the ownership of the sixth laird the estate was listed by Bateman in 1883 as being just over 23 @, @ 000 acres ( 93 square kilometres ) with an income of £ 19 @, @ 938 ; at the height of its development the estate had occupied 50 square miles ( 130 square kilometres ) , and was valued at £ 30 million .

The last laird died in 1924 and is buried in Luton .

Following its 20th @-@ century decline the estate changed hands several times until local farmer Hamish Watson purchased it in December 2010 . The local historian Alex Buchan summed up the demise of the estate : " They thought the estate was here to provide them with money , to gamble , to travel , to simply fritter away and very quickly , within a couple of decades , they had wasted the whole lot . " He added , " Eccentricity amounted to just squandering money . "

#### = = Mansion house = =

The original small country house was first altered during the early 18th century . In 1809 the Sheriff 's grandson James Ferguson , the third laird , employed the architect John Smith to design new accommodation . The resulting three @-@ storey house , 98 feet ( 30 metres ) square and 33 feet ( 10 metres ) high , is reputed to have had 365 windows . When the fourth laird , George ( the Governor ) , died in 1820 , the estate was worth £ 300 @, @ 000 with almost £ 35 @, @ 000 of moveable assets . George Ferguson , the fifth laird ( the Admiral ) added a large , glazed gallery when he inherited the house . The Admiral had a lavish lifestyle and despite having a healthy income incurred heavy debts .

When the Admiral died after 46 years of managing the estate it was mortgaged for £ 250 @, @ 000 , despite the sale of a number of the lands originally included in it . The house fell into disrepair under the ownership of George Arthur , the sixth and final laird , who had inherited his father 's lifestyle . The entire estate was put on the market in September 1909 but remained unsold until after the First World War ; the house and what remained of the estate were finally purchased by a speculator , Edgar Fairweather , from London in 1926 . Fairweather bought several other Scottish estates , including those nearby at Auchmeddan and Strichen ; he habitually reduced the estates into smaller holdings that he then sold on or rented out . The house was sold to an Aberdeen building company and was demolished sometime between 1927 and 1930 . After demolition , the mansion 's veranda was installed at the front of Kinloch Farmhouse in St Fergus . Other remains from the mansion have been discovered at the farmhouse , including a crest above the conservatory door and tiles inscribed with the Ferguson of Pitfour family crest . The stone from the mansion was transported to Aberdeen and used in the construction of council houses .

#### = = Chapels = =

The Fergusons were Episcopalian , and in 1766 , the second laird , Lord Pitfour had a small Qualified Chapel built on the estate at Waulkmill . It was a large , plain building that could accommodate up to 500 people . Saplinbrae , a house that was initially used as a coaching inn after it was built under instruction from Lord Pitfour in 1756 , was used as the minister 's manse for the first chapel .

A more modern chapel was built in 1850 after the Admiral had an argument with the Reverend Arthur Ranken , the minister at Old Deer . This was a small , private chapel for the use of the Pitfour estate . It was built in the Gothic style from rubble but was recast in 1871 . A 60 @-@ foot ( 18 @-@ metre ) tower with a battlemented top is at its western end . The chapel fell into disrepair , and by the 1980s it was a roofless ruin .

In 1990 Historic Scotland said that Kinloch Farmhouse , in St Fergus featured a bench and chair salvaged from the Pitfour Chapel . In 2003 , the second chapel was renovated and converted to a private residence . The chapel restoration won a " Highly commended " award for craftsmanship from Aberdeenshire Council in 2010 ; the council said the craftsmanship " allowed for the retention of the ecclesiastical spirit and integrity to remain prevalent both internally and externally . " It was also " Highly Commended " in the conservation category .

= = Stables and riding school = =

The stables were built in 1820 , during the early part of the Admiral 's ownership of the estate , based on a design by John Smith ; the buildings are sited to the rear of the mansion house . Built in a horseshoe @-@ shape , neo @-@ classical design , the two @-@ storey building was constructed in pinned rubble with granite dressings ; grey granite was used for the parapet and quoins . The main buildings were originally harled . A corrugated asbestos hipped roof was at some point substituted for the original slate roof . It features a columned rotunda above a timber clock tower , which has a finial and domed copper roof . The pedimented centrepiece of the symmetrical front elevation is a segmental arch and has three panels set back between columns . Each side is bordered by wings of three bays with single @-@ bay pavilions .

The stables are connected to an adjoining two @-@ storey house . They provided accommodation for ten horses and included four loose boxes , a harness room and a coachman 's house ; six bedrooms above were for servants . Two coach houses were later used as garages . The stables building was marketed in 1997 for approximately £ 70 @,@ 000 . Charles McKean describes the stables as " straddling the skyline like a palace " . The stables are listed by Historic Scotland as being at very high risk , and were described in 1997 sale literature as unused and dilapidated .

An indoor riding school slightly to the north @-@ west of the stables measured 98 feet ( 30 metres ) by 49 feet ( 15 metres ) . It was used to entertain guests when the facilities at the mansion house were not large enough . More than two hundred local farmers and other landowners celebrated the wedding of George Arthur , the sixth laird , in the riding school in 1861 . In 1883 it was again used to entertain ; on that occasion it was decorated with flags and Chinese lanterns , and pine flooring was laid . Later , it was used as indoor tennis courts before being demolished .

= = Canal and lake = =

James Ferguson , the third laird , owned the estate during the Industrial Revolution in Britain . He began work on a canal between Pitfour and Peterhead in 1797 , despite fierce opposition from adjoining landowners . The canal was proposed to cover about ten miles following the course of the River Ugie . Pitfour 's canal is sometimes called the St Fergus and River Ugie Canal . Ferguson had thought about building the canal since 1793 , but it was never completed because of " difficulties in effecting the necessary arrangements with neighbouring heritors . " Objections were raised by the Merchant Maiden Hospital , which owned the land on the south side of the Ugie . Despite being advised to take out an interdict to prevent the work , in January 1797 the hospital thought its case was not strong enough . The hospital applied for an interdict four months later however , when two miles ( 3 @.@ 2 km ) of the canal had been dug to the point where the north and south Ugie joined ; it was granted in July 1797 .

A few years after starting work on the canal , Ferguson had a lake built on flat land to the front of the mansion house . The landscape gardener William S. Gilpin was carrying out work on the adjacent Strichen estate at about the same time , and it is assumed he helped with the work at Pitfour . The lake extends to almost 50 acres ( 20 hectares ) and is 174 feet ( 53 metres ) above sea

level . Designed in the same style as the lake in Windsor Great Park , the lake was stocked with trout , both rainbow and brown ; there were three bridges and four islands . The siting of the lake meant the driveway had to be moved , and ornate bridges were constructed to cross the water . Built from granite , the northern bridge has three arches with ashlar starlings , the southern bridge has a single arch and the third , smaller bridge crosses a large stream that drains into the lake .

The neighbouring Russell family of Aden were concerned their land would be flooded when the lake was built , and their animosity was fully demonstrated when a bridge had to be jointly constructed by the two landowners over the River Ugie . It was wide enough for carriages on the Pitfour side but too narrow on the Russell 's half .

= = Theseus temple = =

Alongside the lake was a six @-@ bay Greek Doric temple , a small replica styled after the Temple of Theseus . Its exact date of construction is unknown ; it may have been built during the time of James Ferguson , the third laird , or under the instruction of George Ferguson , the fifth laird . The local historian Alex Buchan attributes it to James , the third laird ; according to Historic Scotland , it was built " probably circa 1835 " . Like the mansion house , the temple is credited to the architect John Smith . Measuring 8 metres ( 26 ft ) by 16 metres ( 52 ft ) , it has six columns at both ends and thirteen columns down each side . It had a flat roof with an ornate wooden entablature and contained a cold @-@ water bath in which George , the fifth laird was believed to have kept alligators . As of 2013 the temple is in a ruinous state ; it has been held up by scaffolding since 1992 and is listed by Historic Scotland as being in critical condition .

= = Racecourse and observatory = =

George Ferguson ( the Admiral ) had a racecourse about 2 @.@ 2 miles ( 3 @.@ 5 kilometres ) long and 52 feet ( 16 metres ) wide built near White Cow Woods , an area which is quite flat . This led to the estate being called the " Ascot of the North " .

In 1845 the Admiral had an observatory built , again designed by the architect John Smith . It is an octagonal tower with a crenellated parapet and is symmetrical in design . The observatory stands at the top of a hill 396 feet ( 121 m ) above sea level . The tower is 50 feet ( 15 m ) high and is more than half a mile ( 1 kilometre ) from the racecourse . It has three storeys with square windows on the upper floor , and was fully renovated by Banff & Buchan District Council ( now Aberdeenshire Council ) in 1983 .

= = Twentieth century = =

Sales of country estates became common around the 1920s . The annual tax payable had spiralled and was twenty times greater than in 1870 resulting in the break @-@ up of many larger land @-@ holdings . Pitfour was no exception and the dispersal of the estate continued piecemeal after the sequestration of George Arthur , the sixth laird . The main estate policies including the lake and other land were purchased by Bernard Drake in November 1926 when he bought Saplinbrae , the former minister 's house . Drake was a partner in the electrical engineering company , Drake and Gorham .

Sixty years later , in 1986 the BBC Domesday Project does not give any ownership details but indicates many of the buildings are in poor condition . Other surviving structures are used for storage by a farmer who also " manages the land " .

= = Recent times = =

At the end of 2012 Aberdeenshire Council gave the go @-@ ahead for the present owner 's planned restoration work on the temple and bridges , which he hoped would enhance existing facilities at nearby Drinnies Wood surrounding the Observatory , White Cow Woods and Aden

Country Park . The lake is used regularly by local fishermen , and a fishing club with about 120 members was established in 2011 . The rest of the estate is seldom used by local residents , many of whom are completely unaware of it .