

= James Ferguson ( Scottish politician ) =

James Ferguson FRSE ( 25 May 1735 ? 6 September 1820 ) was a Scottish advocate and Tory politician and the third Laird of Pitfour , a large estate in the Buchan area of north east Scotland , which is known as the ' Blenheim of the North ' .

Ferguson studied law in Edinburgh , qualifying in 1757 to gain membership of the Faculty of Advocates . He then undertook a tour of Europe throughout 1758 before following in his father 's footsteps by joining the Scottish legal profession . Later in life his interests turned to politics and he became a Scottish Tory politician .

Among the extensive work carried out by Ferguson at Pitfour , he is also credited with beginning work on a canal between the Pitfour estate and the sea at Peterhead in order to transport agricultural produce . Despite planning objections from neighbours , work began in 1797 . He is also credited with establishing the planned village of Mintlaw in 1813 .

= = Ancestry and early life = =

James Ferguson was born at Pitfour on 25 May 1735 . He was the eldest son of James Ferguson ( 1700 ? 1777 ) and Ann Murray ( 1708 ? 1793 ) . His parents were married on 3 February 1733 , and he was born three years later . They had five other , younger children .

Before undertaking a grand tour of Europe during 1758 , Ferguson continued the family tradition of studying law in Edinburgh . After qualifying , he gained membership of the Faculty of Advocates and Society of Writers to the Signet in July 1757 .

Ferguson spent a great deal of time at Pitfour but also had an apartment in St James Place , Westminster , Middlesex . Ferguson became the third Laird of Pitfour on the death of his father , Lord Pitfour , in 1777 .

The Third Laird was a known associate of James Boswell and together with his brother Patrick , who was the designer of the Ferguson rifle , breakfasted with Boswell in November 1762 . Other close associates were William Pitt the Younger and Henry Dundas , 1st Viscount Melville . He was the Rector at Aberdeen University from 1794 @-@ 6 .

In a confidential report titled " View of the political state of Scotland " published in 1788 , Ferguson was described as " a man of real good sense , but indolent . " The document was published in 1887 but covered the personal circumstances of those involved in county elections in Scotland during the previous century . Ferguson was not a good @-@ looking man and appeared plain , small and stocky . His mother once wrote to him :

Never expose yourself , James , to the charge of rape , for your broad shoulders will cause the jury to think it probable that you made the attempt , and your face will make it manifest that it must have been against the will .

He remained a bachelor although there was speculation he yearned for Jane Gordon , Duchess of Gordon . She was born in Edinburgh in 1749 , and was a Scottish Tory political hostess who was shrewd , sharp @-@ witted and humorous but good @-@ natured . In a riddle written by the Duchess , the last two lines refer to Ferguson and confirm that he was not an attractive man . It reads :

Around 1813 , he established the planned village of Mintlaw , and he is also credited with expanding Longside in 1801 .

Prior to his death his Edinburgh address was 30 Heriot Row in the Second New Town .

He died without issue , and on his death in St James ' Place , London , in September 1820 , the estate passed to his younger brother , George Ferguson ( 1748 ? 1820 ) , who was then 72 years old and in poor health . He was said to have died " without a struggle " of " apoplexy " .

= = Political career = =

Ferguson became a Scottish Tory politician . He sat in the House of Commons of Great Britain from 1788 to 1800 , and then in the House of Commons of the United Kingdom until his death in 1820 .

He unsuccessfully contested Aberdeenshire at a by @-@ election in 1786 with the support of the Duke of Gordon . George Skene ? proposed by the Earl of Fife , who held tremendous sway in the political circles of that time ? defeated him . The total electorate for Aberdeenshire was 190 , and Ferguson was defeated by ten votes . Ferguson was again nominated for Aberdeenshire in July 1790 and was appointed after Skene withdrew when his alcoholism began to blight his political career .

Ferguson was elected as the Member of Parliament ( MP ) for Banffshire at a by @-@ election in 1789 , holding that seat until 1790 . He was elected at the 1790 general election as MP for Aberdeenshire , and held that seat until his death 30 years later .

The Member became a close associate and political friend of the Prime Minister William Pitt the Younger . After Pitt 's death in 1806 , Ferguson did not so easily retain his seat in Parliament . In the elections of 1806 , he retained the seat by just two votes , and his opponent General Alexander Hay demanded he be investigated for bribery and corruption . Ferguson again beat Hay in the contest for the seat in June 1807 , but this time with a more convincing majority of 54 to 39 votes . Ferguson was unopposed in the next three elections . Some records indicate that Ferguson never spoke in the Commons except to complain about a broken window behind his seat causing a draught . He is actually recorded as speaking on at least five occasions over the years .

The diarist and fellow lawyer Henry Crabb Robinson gave an indication of Ferguson 's political party affiliation when he recorded in his diary of 1826 :

Late at the Athenaeum . Hudson Gurney was there . He related with great effect the experience of Ferguson of Pitfour , which he used to repeat when an old man , for the benefit of young Members : ' I was never absent from any division I could get at . I have heard many arguments which convinced my judgement , but never one that influenced my vote . I never voted but once according to my own opinion , and that was the worst vote I ever gave . I found that the only way to be quiet in Parliament was always to vote with the ministers , and never to take a place ' .

It was not until after 1832 and the introduction of the Scottish Reform Act 1832 that control of Scottish politics was taken from the hands of landowners and a small number of merchants . The Friends of the People Society in the 1790s was opposed by those landed gentry politicians . After the Act came into effect , the constituencies were changed , and this raised the electorate from under 5 @,@ 000 to 65 @,@ 000 .

= = Pitfour = =

The Pitfour Estate beside Mintlaw in the Buchan area of north @-@ east Scotland became one of the country 's most extensive and lavish estates during the 18th and 19th centuries . The Pitfour estate is shown on old maps as Petfour or Petfour . The estate was purchased by Ferguson 's grandfather , the first Laird , in 1700 and was developed and extended by both the Sheriff and Lord Pitfour . Covering a large area of Buchan , the policies stretched to around 50 square miles and would be valued at £ 30m at its peak in the 18th century . The third Laird is attributed with much of the development work on the mansion house which was designed by architect John Smith in 1809 . In his architectural guide to Banff and Buchan , Charles McKean describes the estate as the " Blenheim of Buchan " and " the Blenheim of Northern Scotland " .

Pitfour 's canal and lake

Ferguson was Laird of Pitfour during the period known as the Industrial Revolution in Britain . He began work on a canal between Pitfour and Peterhead in 1797 despite major opposition from adjoining landowners . The canal was proposed to cover about ten miles following the course of the River Ugie . References also refer to Pitfour 's canal as the St Fergus and River Ugie Canal . A project Ferguson had considered since 1793 , it was never completed owing to " difficulties in effecting the necessary arrangements with neighbouring heritors . " The objections were particularly 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 did not feel it had a strong enough case . However , four months later when two miles of the canal had been dug up to where the north and south Ugie joined , the Hospital did apply for an interdict , and

this was granted in July 1797 .

A few years after starting work on the canal , the Member had an artificial lake built on a flat piece of 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 gave help with the work at Pitfour . The lake extends to almost 50 acres and was based on the artificial lake at Windsor Great Park .

#### Later history of the estate

After the death of the Member intestate in 1820 , the estate was inherited by his younger brother George Ferguson ( 1748 ? 1820 ) , who died shortly after inheriting the estate . He was succeeded by his illegitimate son George Ferguson who , despite incurring severe debts , continued to develop the estate by adding a stable block , race course , an observation tower and other follies . He had huge gambling debts , and although the estate had been valued at £ 300 @, @ 000 when he inherited it , he sold off many of the farms and other parts of the estate to raise funds . Despite these injections of funds , when he died the estate was mortgaged to the extent of £ 250 @, @ 000 . It was further decimated by his son , George Arthur Ferguson ( 1835 ? 1924 ) . George Arthur was sequestrated , and what remained of the estate was marketed in 1909 . It was eventually sold in mid @- @ 1926 , and the mansion house was knocked down .