



Aldourie Castle, Loch Ness

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Aldourie Castle dates back to the early 17th Century, when Donald Macintosh of Kyllachie built the first home at Aldourie in 1626. The Macintosh clan had held land on the River Findhorn since the 12th Century and Kyllachie is situated in the Findhorn valley some 12 miles (20 km) east of Aldourie. It appears that Macintosh acquired Aldourie from the Dunbar family who had held it since around 1470. Salmon fishing could be an important source of commercial income and, in 1655, Macintosh controlled the haaf, or net, fishing of Aldourie and Lochins. In 1667 we have a record of a "Donald McIntosh of Aldourie" showing that the house had been built and was important enough to be recorded in his name. Donald's daughter, Jean, married William McBean of Kinchyle, a property lying 1½ miles from Aldourie, close to a modern memorial to the McBean clan. A Kathrin Macintosh married John Barbour in 1700 and their daughter, Jean, was Christened in 1702 and styled "of Aldourie", a title John himself also used. This presumably means that John Barbour had acquired the

property from the Macintoshes, either by purchase or marriage. At this time marriages were not merely love matches for, while love was certainly a factor, marriage was also about financial and social advancement and about forming and maintaining bonds between families. This was certainly the case with Highland clans and families, where intermarriages between families, and frequently between cousins, were common. In the first half of the 18th Century another Jean Mackintosh of Kyllachie married Alexander Fraser of Balnain. Interestingly, one of their sons, Simon, became a general in the British Army and was killed during the American Revolution - at the Battle of Saratoga in 1777. In around 1754 Captain Daniel Barbour of Aldourie sold the property to William Fraser of Balnain. However, while Frasers now owned Aldourie, the Macintosh connection remained strong and in 1765 Aldourie was the birthplace of renowned Scottish jurist, politician and historian, Sir James Macintosh, who spent most of his childhood at Aldourie. William had three daughters and Aldourie passed to his eldest, Anne. She married Alexander Tytler from Edinburgh

in 1776 and, as was the custom among the landed classes of the time, they merged surnames, becoming the Fraser-Tytlers. Alexander Fraser-Tytler was a product of the Scottish Enlightenment and became a very eminent lawyer and writer, rising to become a Scottish Court of Session law lord and taking the title Lord Woodhouselee in 1802. The Fraser-Tytler family owned Aldourie until 1948 when Mrs Fraser-Tytler sold the property to a cousin, Colonel Angus Cameron. Colonel Cameron died in 2001 and his widow decided to sell Aldourie the following year and move into an Inverness. However, the family retained some of the Estate and is still active locally. Throughout the 17th and 18th Centuries and into the first half of the 19th Century, Aldourie was a typical plain, unadorned rectangular house befitting a wealthy local laird of the period rather than a family of national importance. However, the world was changing, the Highlands was changing with it, and Aldourie - as with many properties across the Highlands - was about to become a Castle. To understand why Aldourie became a castle one has to understand the forces at work in the Highlands at that

time. The Highlands had always been a world and a law unto itself: from a Southern perspective a wild, untamed and frightening landscape populated by a wild, untamed and frightening people. Highlanders loved it but, unless forced, few Lowland Scots or English ever ventured north. However, the Battle of Culloden in 1746 was the last, forlorn hope of a dying way of life. The defeat of the Jacobite forces was the death knell of the Stuart dynasty's hopes of regaining the British throne and its bloody aftermath was the death knell of the old Highland clan system. Ironically, while Highlanders were no longer a threat to Britain, it was obvious that they could pose a severe threat to Britain's enemies and so large numbers were recruited into the British Army and went on to play vital roles in wars with America, France and Russia, and in the creation of the British Empire. The Fraser, Fraser-Tytler and Cameron families all played very active military roles, as revealed on the grave stones in Aldourie Castle's fascinating burial ground. By the 19th century the old clan system had been consigned to the history books, many chiefs had forfeited their

estates or sold up, and former clan lands were changing hands fast as a new breed of landlord moved in: people with an interest in the land from an economic or recreational standpoint but with no real interest in, or loyalty to, the people. This new class of entrepreneurial landowner saw the high price of wool during the Napoleonic War and, recognising the opportunity to grow sheep in the Highlands, set about removing the local populace from prime land to make way for great flocks of Cheviots. This remains hugely controversial and much debated and is known as the "Highland Clearances". The wool boom did not last, but by the time it finished the Highlands had been transformed. Large numbers of people had left their traditional lands to move to the cities of the south or to emigrate, especially to Canada and New Zealand. Despite major projects to encourage industry, like the construction of the Caledonian Canal through the Great Glen, the population was declining and the area was economically and socially depressed. However, all was not lost, for the dawn of tourism was beginning. The newly pacified Highlands brought curious

travellers from the South north to see what all the fuss was about, including notable writers like Dr Samuel Johnson and James Boswell, Robert Burns and Sir Walter Scott. Their writings transformed the image of the Highlands in the popular imagination from frightening wilderness to beautiful, wild, romantic and rustic idyll - and the Highlanders likewise. Then, to cap it all, Queen Victoria and her new husband, Prince Albert, put the official seal of approval on the area when in 1842 they started holidaying in the Highlands, subsequently buying Balmoral Castle in 1848. What the Queen did, society followed, and the aristocracy and nouveau riche industrialists flocked north to buy their own Highland estates so that they could hunt, shoot and fish in the Season, vying with each other to host the most impressive house parties in the most impressive houses, or castles. This was the birth of the Highland Sporting Estate and of the Scottish baronial castle. Given Alexander Fraser-Tytler, Lord Woodhouselee's, rank, it is not surprising that he and his family were influential people in Scotland and beyond, and Fraser-Tytlers played their part in the creation of the British Empire, and

particularly in India. With this increase in family fortunes came a desire to improve Aldourie, and the first of four building phases was completed in 1839 with the creation of a new drawing room wing. Between 1852 and 1860 the second phase saw the creation of the two main towers, resplendent with crenulations and corbelled bartizans and rising to four storeys, possibly to designs by the great Scottish Baronial architect, David Bryce. Scottish Baronial architecture was part of the Gothic revival of the Victorian period and drew its inspiration from the castles, mansions and tower houses of the Scottish Renaissance (roughly 1400 to 1625), then considered to be a "golden era" of Scottish architecture. Scottish Baronial mansions and castles were first designed to be comfortable buildings for their owners and were then embellished with towers and turrets, split roofs, battlements, crow's foot stepped gables, lancet windows, heraldic shields and more to create emphatic statements of power and wealth. Impressive they were. David Bryce, based in Edinburgh, was arguably the leading exponent of Scottish Baronial and he seems to have been responsible for the major, third phase

transformation of Aldourie between 1861 and 1864, though another firm of architects, Peddie and Kinnear of Edinburgh, were also heavily involved. The third phase saw the creation of an entrance tower, the extension of the drawing room, the raising of the level of the first floor, the raising of the roofs and the creation of children's quarters in the attics and the extension of the servants' quarters. In addition, numerous turrets were added to a very complicated roof structure and myriad details were added to the facade to create an ostentatious display of wealth, while the creation of a wine cellar in the basement proved the case. Finally, the fourth - and final - phase took place between 1902 and 1904 when Sir Robert Lorimer built the new dining and scullery wings and also increased the ceiling height in the Laird's Room (the Smoking Room at the time). By this time tastes and architectural styles, influenced by the Arts and Crafts movement of the late 19th Century, had changed and the new additions to Aldourie were lighter, simpler and less ostentatious as a result.

