



## Issue 48: November 2012

### *Events calendar:*

- Events for 2012 have ended but look out for the 2013 schedule in the New Year editions of the e-Bulletin and Follies Magazine. Details are also kept updated on our website [www.follies.org.uk](http://www.follies.org.uk).
- An album of photographs of the Sintra visit is viewable on the website.

### *Next month:*

- Postal Follies



## Fettercairn Follies

### *The Folly Fellowship*

Material for the e-Bulletin, including articles, pictures, comments and feedback, should be sent to [andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk](mailto:andrew@follies.fsnet.co.uk). All other correspondence and membership enquiries should be sent to [membership@follies.org.uk](mailto:membership@follies.org.uk)

*Unless otherwise stated, all pictures in this edition are taken by the editor or from the Folly Fellowship Picture Library. Where images from outside sources are used we do our best to ensure that all relevant permissions have been obtained before use and that publicly-available images and material are free from copyright. We are grateful to all photographers who kindly allow us to use of their pictures. All views and comments expressed in this edition are those of the authors and are not necessarily the opinion or belief of The Folly Fellowship or its trustees.*

The Aberdeenshire village of Fettercairn lies to the north-east of Laurencekirk, about midway between Stonehaven and Brechin. It has a population of around 250 and from the outside is characteristic of many Highland villages with sandstone cottages centred on a Square and a Mercat (Market) Cross.

The original Cross was erected in 1504 but destroyed when the village was sacked and burned in 1645 by the Marquis of Montrose. Its replacement—not a folly but still of interest—was moved from

the nearby village of Kincardine in 1670 but not before the side of it had been notched to confirm the size of a Scottish *ell*—a unit of measure in Scotland until 1824, hence the old expression *Gie 'im an inch, an he'll tak an ell*. In an attempt to stave off abuse the measurement was standardised in 1661 with the original gauge kept in Edinburgh, so its inclusion on the Fettercairn Cross implies that local traders were in the habit of giving short measure.

Today the village is dominated by a red sandstone arch that was

erected to mark the incognito visit by Queen Victoria and the Prince Consort on 20 September 1861. Although it was supposed to be a secret visit, the Queen and Prince travelled with an entourage that included Princess Alice and Prince Louis of Hesse, Lady Churchill, General Gray and a handful of others, all of whom had set out from nearby Balmoral earlier that morning.

The event is recorded in Queen Victoria's diary, saying: 'At a quarter-past seven o'clock we reached the small, quiet town, or rather village of Fettercairn, for it was very small, not a creature stirring, and we got out at the quiet little inn, 'Ramsay Arms,' quite unobserved, and went at once upstairs. There was a very nice drawing-room, and next to it a dining-room, both very clean and tidy—then to the left, our bedroom, which was excessively small, but also very clean and neat, and much better furnished than at Gran town. Alice had a nice room, the same size as ours; then came a mere morsel of one (with a "press bed") in which Albert dressed; and then came Lady Churchill's bedroom just beyond. Louis and General Gray had rooms in an hotel called the 'Temperance Hotel,' opposite. We dined at eight, a very nice, clean, good dinner. Grant and Brown waited. They were rather nervous, but General Gray and Lady Churchill carved, and they had only to change the plates, which Brown soon got into the way of doing. A little girl of the house came in to help, but Grant turned her round to prevent her looking at us. The landlord and landlady knew who we were, but no one else except the coachman, and they kept the secret admirably.'

Travelling incognito was never easy for the Queen but it seemed to work well on this occasion. The following morning, however, a few local people had discovered the secret and met outside the Ramsay Arms to cheer the Royal Party on its way.

By the time the village agreed to commemorate the visit, Prince Albert had died, generating a de-



THE ROYAL MEMORIAL ARCH AT FETTERCAIRN, KINCARDINESHIRE.

bate about the type of monument that should be put up. In the end it was agreed that a triumphal arch should be erected at the west end of the road bridge over the burn, immediately in front of the Ramsay Arms. Nearly £250 was raised by local subscription, with free stone being offered by a Brechin quarry provided it was collected, a task undertaken by local farmers.

At the end of a short design competition, the preferred solution was a free-standing Gothic arch designed by John Milne, an architect from St. Andrews who grew up in Fettercairn. Only after Queen Victoria had approved the design was he declared the winner and the project started with Sir John Forbes Bt laying the foundation stone.

Milne's proposal was for a semi-circular arch flanked by octagonal towers in the Rhenish Gothic style of Prince Albert's homeland. He topped these with high-pitched gablets and iron finials on each of the four cardinal faces and

crowned them with low octagonal spires and foliage-enriched terminals surmounted by gilded finials. The deeply moulded arch spans 5.5 metres and its keystone is 4.8 metres above the level of the road, allowing the words 'Visit of Victoria and Albert in September 1861' to be inscribed on one side and the completion date of 1864 on the other.

The detailing on the structure is impressive with spandrels set between the arch and the cornice, all topped by a cusped projection course that is continued round the towers. Centred above the cornice is a royal crown beneath a coping that is finished with embrasures terminating against the weathered intake of the octagon, and where the four national emblems are similarly carved in high relief. Also above the crown is a semi-circular weathering supporting four intersecting gablets that are again finished with a gilded finial.

The project was considered to be significant enough to make the



pages of the *London Illustrated News* in April 1866, from which it has been possible to confirm most of these details.

John Milne was clearly pleased by his win and for the opportunity to give something back to his home village. When it was agreed that the bridge should be widened to enhance his design, Milne paid most of the £60 needed to replace the old stone parapets with a set of cast iron railings, and he also waived his fee for designing and supervising the whole project.

**T**he Queen's destination on that trip was the newly completed mansion at Fasque, set a couple of miles to the north of Fettercairn.

Fasque is an impressive mansion built in the popular castle style much liked by Robert Adam. It replaced an earlier one called 'Fesqay' (gaelic for 'House') that had been built by Sir Alexander Ramsay Irvine on a site about 50 metres away. Reusing the stone from the old house and from the nearby Balfour House, Sir Alexander was able to complete the new development in 1809 for £30,000. The architect is believed to be the comparatively little known John Paterson, who had been a pupil of Robert Adam and one of his site agents, but who had set up his own practice by then designing buildings to impress—one of his other works was the striking Eglinton Castle in Ayrshire.

By 1820 the estate presented an impressive scene, with its new mansion and a pleasure grounds that contained at least three follies and what was often described as the finest walled garden in the Mearns. An account of it appears in Francis Douglas's *General Description of the East Coast of Scotland* (1782) including its long drive and its being 'partly eclipsed by a large group...of old Gothic buildings, churches, abbeys, &c. As the antiquary approaches, with reverence and high expectations, how cruelly is he disappointed to find them a mockery! Mere patchwork



on the ends and sidewalls of common offices! What an indignity...to the venerable remains of antiquity! Chagrined by this disappointment, it is well if he does not mistake a fine octagonal tower which lifts its head above the trees, on an adjacent mount for a pasteboard cage. The house fronts south and makes three sides of a square; there are many good apartments in it, especially the dining-room and library. Just by the west end, there is a den or hollow, with a Chinese bridge thrown over it, and a small brook in the bottom. It is planted and laid out in serpentine gravel walks.'

All this building work came at a cost, and it was one that the Ramsay family could not afford, so in 1829 they sold the estate for

£80,000 to John Gladstone, a Liverpoolian whose family had been farmers in Biggar before becoming wine merchants in Leith in 1745.

By the time of Queen Victoria's visit in 1861, Sir John had died and the estate had passed to his son Thomas, the elder brother of Prime Minister William Gladstone. Thomas's wife, Louisa Fellows, was a distant relative of the Queen so it is not surprising that a visit took place—it is assumed that the secrecy simply added to the sense of adventure. The Queen had also spent much of her early childhood at the old house so it presumably had pleasant memories for her.

Although the main house at Fasque has been well maintained, the gardens had fallen into ruin but are gradually being restored as

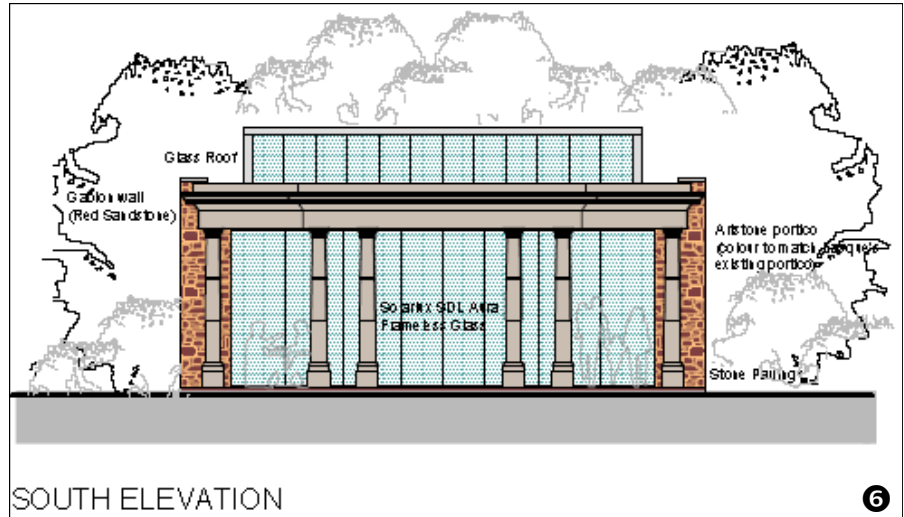




part of a masterplan for the estate. The Apple House in the walled garden has already been restored and is used as a luxurious bridal suite for couples who hire Fasque as an up-market wedding venue. It remains an important example of its type, and although it was altered during the early years of the nineteenth century, its original pyramid-shape roof is still evident.

It is likely that the Apple House provided accommodation for the gardener and possibly one other, something that was common at the time. Tim Buxbaum, however, compares it with the twin octagonal pavilions built in 1795 at Preston Hall (Edinburgh), which he argues are among the most pleasant garden pavilions in Scotland. He goes on to describe how they are built into a wall that subdivides the garden, with one pavilion containing an elegant staircase and the other acting as a fruit room, tea-room, library or small horticultural museum. He also highlights that rooftop weathervanes at Preston Hall project through the ceilings to inform those inside about the state of the weather, and that rust markings at the centre of the domed ceiling over the Apple House stair tower may suggest the same.

The tower mentioned by Douglas still exists but is a single-storey Gothic folly standing on a small raised mound to the west of the walled garden and surrounded by a ha-ha. Architect Paul Fretwell



believes that it was intended to be seen across the estate and that the mound has only recently become wooded.

Popular opinion is that the folly is by Paterson and dates from the 1790s, but it must be earlier than that to have been included in Douglas's book. This earlier date may begin to explain its present uncomfortable relationship to the present house in so far as it must have been orientated to the previous one about 50 metres away.

The folly has been on the *At Risk Register* for some time but is more impressive and more important than its photograph suggests. There is evidence that the walls were harled (rendered) like the present house, but with stone castellations, water spouts, a fireplace and small cupboard recessed into the north-west wall. Many sources tell us that it was used in the sum-

mer months as a place to play cards but Queen Victoria's diary tells us instead that it is 'Sir J. Gladstone's Shooting House'. When it is restored that will be its new function providing a venue shoot lunches.

Plans also exist to restore the fountain and Chinese Bridge, both of which are surrounded by woodland. Again Queen Victoria gives it a different name describing it as the 'Spittal Bridge', and to be fair it does lack the drama normally associated with Chinese Bridges.

Today the house and its follies face a brighter and hopefully more certain future. Its owners have even been confident enough to commissioned a new folly by their Forfar-based architect Paul Fretwell, although the purists among us will prefer to call it a pavilion and allow the distinction of 'folly' to be acquired with age.



### Picture Credits

1. The Royal Arch at Fettercairn—Photo: Stanley Howe on Wikimedia Commons.
2. Drawing of the Royal Arch—from *The Illustrated London News* of 21 April 1866.
3. The Apple Store at Fasque—Photo: Paul Fretwell of @rchitects Scotland Limited.
4. The Octagon at Fasque—Photo: RCHAMS Historic Scotland's At Risk Register.
5. The Chinese Bridge at Fasque—Photo: Paul Fretwell of @rchitects Scotland Limited.
6. The New Pavilion at Fasque—Drawing: @rchitects Scotland Limited.