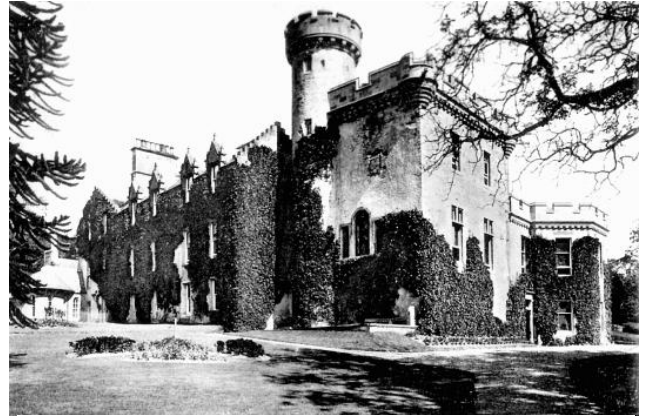


The Davidsons of Tulloch - The Reinvigoration of Dingwall

by Forbes Munro for Dingwall Museum

In 1760, Henry Davidson purchased from the Bayne family the estate and castle of Tulloch, on the hill above Dingwall. The Davidsons came from Cromarty, and their arrival marked something of a new beginning for Dingwall in that their roots and wealth lay in a maritime-based economy linking the Inner Moray Firth to Leith and London, and to seaports around the world.



Tulloch Castle

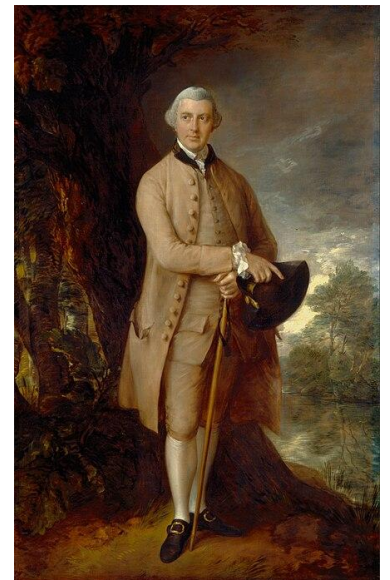
At first the Davidsons had little impact on the burgh. Henry, an army agent in London, was largely content with 'improving' his new estate. However, his younger brother Duncan, who succeeded him in 1781, was more intent upon sharing the family's prosperity. Duncan immediately became a burgh councillor - and put up £500 for paving the streets and building a schoolhouse. He served as provost for two years, between 1784 and 1786, and put in train the construction of a new parish church. He commissioned the architect and provided half of the money required. The new church opened shortly after his death in 1799.

This investment into previously neglected civic amenities had its compensations. It earned the Duncan the goodwill of the council and enabled him to extend his landholdings by acquisition from the burgh lands.



Tulloch Estate, Jamaica

The source of Duncan's funds lay in his business in London. He was a West India merchant, importing sugar and exporting various manufactures. He was in partnership with Charles Graham of Drynie (near Munloch) in the Black Isle, as well as with his own son Henry. Through a relative of Graham's who went to live in Jamaica, the partners also had financial interests in several sugar plantations on the island. The Davidsons, in short, linked Dingwall to slavery in the Caribbean – and made it a beneficiary of that system.



William Pulteney

Duncan was the MP for Cromartyshire from 1790 to 1796. In Parliament he voted against the immediate abolition of the slave trade – following the lead of a friend and associate named William Pulteney. Pulteney, a former MP for Cromartyshire, became MP for Shrewsbury following his marriage to a wealthy English heiress. He supported Duncan through two elections and helped to steer his political career. Pulteney was a patron of the engineer, Thomas Telford, and a leading promoter of the idea of a Roads and Bridges Commission to transform transport and communications in the Highlands. Although the relationship between Duncan and Pulteney remains to be studied, it was clearly close. It seems likely that before he died Duncan was party to the discussions which led to the creation of the Commission in 1803 – and therefore to Telford coming

north to transform the road system around Dingwall.

A continuing connection between the Davidsons and the Commission is also indicated by the proposal that Duncan's son and heir, Henry, brought forward to the burgh council in 1815 - for which he claimed to have secured support from the Commission (probably through Telford). This was to construct a canal along the lower reaches of the Peffery River that would enable small ships to sail up to Peter's Bridge, close to the town centre. In the event, however, the Commission pleaded poverty – and Henry had to put up a 50 per cent share of the projected cost and take on the general supervision of the construction. In return, all the burgh land to the north of the Peffery became part of the Tulloch estate.

Sources and Further Reading:

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