

Foulis Castle

by Barbara Abbot of Dingwall Museum

Foulis (Fo-glais - Gaelic for streamlet, pronounced "Fowls") has been the home of Clan Munro since the 14th Century. It is believed that the earliest Munro of Foulis received his lands in Ross-shire for helping King Malcolm II (1005-34) fight Norse invaders. Munros also fought and fell in the Scottish Wars of Independence, and a Munro chief died defending the Earl of Ross in 1369.



Archaeological excavations were carried out in 2011 as it was thought that the grounds might contain remains of a medieval motte. However, carbon dating revealed that this was an Iron Age site with evidence of burning and quantities of animal bones. As a result, the site of the earliest castle remains unknown.

The current castle was mainly rebuilt in the 18th century after extensive damage during the 1745 Jacobite rebellion and, sadly, plans of the original castle are long since lost. Renovations in the mid-1900s uncovered parts of a building with massive foundations dating to around 1500. A barrel-vaulted chamber in a courtyard building still has 'inverted keyhole' gun-ports dating to this time.

When Mary Queen of Scots was barred from entering Inverness castle by a Gordon constable, the Munros and Frasers gave her loyal support. During her son's minority the Monros governed Crown lands of Ross and the Black Isle and had to keep order and raise men for war when required. Throughout the centuries, Munros proved their courage in battle with several clan chiefs and their men losing their lives in defence of the Crown.

In more peaceful times many Munros chose to fight abroad - some returning to serve in the Covenanting armies, or to join the Royalist cause. Of course, civil war brought divided loyalties. Sir Robert Munro and his brother George supported different sides in the conflicts in the 17th century.

Later, Sir John Munro of Foulis, a devout Presbyterian, supported William and Mary, while Dr Alexander Munro of the Fyrish branch was an Episcopalian. He refused to change allegiance and lost all his offices as Principal of Edinburgh University, Minister of the High Kirk (St Giles's), and Bishop-elect of Argyll.

While the clan largely supported the government during the Jacobite rebellions, there was no Munro regiment on Culloden field.

After the '45 rebellion, the castle was left in a ruinous condition and Sir Harry Munro had to virtually rebuild it. While fragments of the original keep remain in the courtyard buildings, the castle was totally redesigned as the neo-classical Georgian mansion that we see today.

Foulis Castle is still the home of Clan Munro and is open to the public and community for a variety of events throughout the year.



Famous Munros - At Home and Abroad

As the age of the clans passed, many individual Munros achieved distinction in different fields. The following is just a brief list:

Monro Doctors: The clan produced a highly celebrated dynasty of doctors starting with Scottish army surgeon John Monro (1670–1740), who was influential in forming the prestigious Edinburgh School of Medicine. He was succeeded by three more generations of Monros (all Alexanders) who became teachers in the University of Edinburgh Medical School. For fifty years, Alexander Munro II was considered the most influential anatomy professor in the English-speaking world. Together, the family held the Chair of Anatomy for 126 years – and there were many more Munro doctors across the country ... and the world!

Munro Soldiers: Colour Sergeant James Munro V.C. received the Victoria Cross – the highest award for gallantry – from Queen Victoria in 1860. He saved an officer while he himself was badly wounded and under fire at Lucknow, India. Sadly, due to his injuries, he died a broken man in Craig Dunain Hospital, Inverness. Forgotten for a century, he was publicly honoured again in 2002, and his grave restored.

Even the famous Black Watch Regiment was influenced by Monros as they were one of its six original companies. The main responsibility of command during the formative years fell to Lieutenant Colonel Sir Robert Munro of Foulis, who had served under Marlborough in Flanders.

Munro Politicians: In New Zealand, Sir David Monro became Speaker of the New Zealand House of Representatives while his son, Charles John Munro, introduced the game of rugby and is revered as the father of New Zealand Rugby. His cousin General Charles Monro commanded the evacuation from Gallipoli - the only successful part of that disastrous campaign.

Further reading and credits: <https://canmore.org.uk/site/12906/foulis-castle>;

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