

WARDLAW MAUSOLEUM KIRKHILL, INVERNESS



Introduction

In 1632 Simon, Lord Lovat died and his son, Lord Hugh, “*resolving to desert their burial place in Beaully Minster, interred Lord Simon’s corpse in Kirkhill, at the east end of the church, with a pale of curious timber work above his grave, and created that aisle and steeple there as their tomb, which now we see joined to the church*”. (Master James Fraser, Minister of Kirkhill 1662-1709, and author of the Wardlaw Manuscript).

The building was completed in 1634/1635 by William Ross, master mason. A copy of the contract between Lovat and Ross was discovered at the end of the nineteenth century. Upon completion of the building, Lovat and four other heads of Fraser families agreed to share the burial place. These four were Thomas of Stichen, Thomas of Struy, William of Culbokie and Hugh of Belladrum.

In 1722 Lord Simon of Lovat (Lovat of the '45) raised the height of the Mausoleum by some three feet and installed the pedimented reredos at the eastern end of the interior.

During 1997-98 the building, which was in a sad state of decay, was completely refurbished by the Wardlaw Mausoleum Trust after a local appeal and with substantial grant assistance from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, Historic Scotland and Inverness and Nairn Enterprise. CIMG.

A Suggested Tour around the Building, Highlighting the Main Items of Interest

Internally

A number of important features within the Mausoleum were only discovered during the recently completed restoration and these are highlighted with an asterisk (*).

1)* Immediately to the left of the entrance door, high on the south wall, is the outline of a door once used to give access to the Mausoleum gallery and to the Laird’s Loft in the earlier church.

2)* On the adjacent west gable may be seen a magnificent medieval window dating from about 1350 and installed on the orders of Julia, the Dowager Lady Lovat, widow of Simon, 3rd Lord Lovat who died in 1347. The recesses for the glazing bars and the checks for the glass still remain, although no fragments of glass were found by the archaeologist. The discovery of this window-head intact and in good condition was the biggest surprise during the whole restoration period, and hence the ceiling of the Mausoleum was raised specifically to allow clear viewing. It should be remembered that this window is now as if seen from the outside of the east gable of the original church, and that its central mullion would originally have been full height. It must have been so imposing in its day, when most people lived in low turf-roofed hovels.





3)* Below the lancets and quatrefoil there was the former door from the Mausoleum gallery to the Laird's Loft in the church. Evidence of the lock keeper can still be seen.

4)* Below that is another door leading to the church at ground level. The purpose of the inscribed lintel above this door has not yet been ascertained nor the names established (Thomas Fraser? Hugh Fraser?). It is most likely to have been a grave marker, as there are coffins immediately below the threshold stone.

5)* Note the line of the 1634 wallhead on the north wall, represented by a slight change in the line of the wall and in the lime-wash colour. The original roof of the Mausoleum was thatched and even steeper than the current roof, which dates from 1722. This was higher than that of the adjacent church. Although the walls were white when found, fragments of the earlier blue colour remained and this delight has now been restored.



6)* A number of mural plaques in memory of the various branches of the Fraser family are to be seen on the walls. The only exception is the plaque facing the front door into the Mausoleum. This is the memorial to the Reverend James Fraser of Phopachy, the author of the Wardlaw Manuscript, an exceptionally detailed account of the neighbourhood written circa 1674. The grave of the Reverend Fraser is outside the Mausoleum to the west.





7)* The 19th Century tiled floor kerbing sub-divides the various family lairs. The floor tiling had subsided severely and was re-laid to level over the existing coffins. The last known burial in the Mausoleum was in the late 19th Century.



8)* The four recesses or “bowls” on the north and south walls may originally have held memorial slabs, but no evidence of their use has been found. The last “bowl” on the south wall has a delicately carved scalloped sill* and may well have had like sides.



9)* The arched recess on the north side, whose base level matches that of the other bowls, holds two medieval fragments (C15th?), perhaps remnants of the earlier church or brought even from Beaulieu Priory. Below this area there were at least nine disarticulated skeletons revealed but not disturbed during the strengthening of the balustraded platform.

10) The dominant feature internally is the main pedimented memorial surmounting the balustraded dais and dating from 1722. This elaborate structure, which was erected by Simon the Fox in memory of his father (but reading more in praise of himself) is surmounted by a stone cartouche bearing the Lovat Arms. Note also; set into the front of the balustrade, an

exquisite relief again carrying the Lovat insignia, with the detailed representation of a castle, perhaps a stylised version of Castle Fraser.



11) Below this is the heavy wooden trap door, with its superb wrought-iron work giving access to the private burial vault of Simon the Fox (reputedly) and his immediate family. Lord Simon Fraser was the last peer of the realm to be beheaded in the Tower of London in 1747. The barrel-vaulted crypt contains six lead-lined or double-lead-lined coffins, including a particularly poignant one of an infant, John Fraser, who died in 1779 and represented the end of this line of the Fraser family. The diagonal flagstone floor in the chamber is unusual.



12)* The recess on the south side of the east wall was discovered very late in the project. Its purpose is unknown, but it had a wooden door and could perhaps therefore have been an aumrie, a repository for keeping vestments, sacramental vessels, etc. used during funeral services.



13) The wooden window shutters on the south wall dating from 1722 are almost original.

14)* Please note the re-used moulded stone lintel above your head as you pass through the door from the Mausoleum. As the moulding is the same as that on the external lintel of the door, it is possible that this was a first attempt, which was discarded because of the presence of the rogue pebble therein.



Externally

1) Note the outline of the blocked doorway above and to the left of the main entrance. This door and its associated fore-stair, the foundation stones of which may still be seen, gave access to the gallery inside the Mausoleum.

“anno 1635 Lord Hugh finished the oakden loft in the church of Wardlaw, and made also a stare up to it, and a small gallery to enter it in, but an ceiling above was not entered upon because of the death of the carpenter, Rory Bain, after the materials were provided, and so delaying it pro-tempore.” (Wardlaw Manuscript.)



2) The one-piece semi-circular stone window heads on the south wall have been raised from their 1634 original position. This is indicated by the glazing check in the arch stones matching those in the lower window ingos.



- 3) At the south-east corner is found a unique decorative feature, the beautiful strap-work or buckle quoin-stones of 1634, quite exceptional in this area and again indicative of the original wall head level. The “buckles” bind the gable to the side walls of the Mausoleum.



- 4) On the south side of the Mausoleum, and indeed throughout the graveyard, are a number of recumbent grave slabs of late medieval dates. These portray the traditional symbols of death, e.g. the grave-digger’s tools, the hour glass, the skull and crossbones, the mort bell etc., and sometimes an indication of the deceased’s profession. This is exemplified by an early grave-slab to the west of the front door, which carries a splendid broadsword, possibly signifying high status and a military connection.



- 5) The fore-stair on the east gable gives access to an anti-clockwise wheel stair leading up into the most distinctive feature of the Mausoleum, its unique belfry. This conical or pepper-pot design with its four bartizans (or decorative turrets) is highly reminiscent of that at Kilmuir Easter, Easter Ross and Tain Tolbooth, and may well be the work of

the same Stronach family of stone-masons. Note the date, 1722, on the south-facing lucarnes on the upper cone. The copper flags bearing the crown and strawberry flowers of the Fraser crest are but an educated whim of the present Architect. However the orientation of the north sign, now pointing nearly south, is not, as this was replaced as found.

- 6) The original bell, re-cast from the Beaulieu Priory bell but broken when it fell down from the belfry many decades ago, has now been replicated in form as closely as possible by John Taylor of Loughborough, one of the only two bell founders left in Great Britain at this date.



- 7) On the west gable of the Mausoleum are the remains of the walls of the original church, built in 1210 and demolished in 1790-1792, much of its stone being re-used in the present-day church you passed to the west coming along the road to the Mausoleum. The old church is now used as the burial enclosure of the Frasers of Reelig.



- 8) As you walk round the burial enclosures to the west of the old church you return past the headstone of the three Fraser Ministers of Kirkhill, grandfather, father and son, 110 years in the parish.

- 9)* The threshold of the old church door was discovered by the archaeologist but because of great disturbance no evidence was found of the original, probably earthen, floor. The outline of a possible porch or vestry of the original church is being investigated at present. A geophysical survey was carried out over the whole churchyard but because of the turbation of the ground no evidence was found of earlier buildings.



The Consultants who advised the Wardlaw Mausoleum Trust were Frederick Geddes Chartered Architect, Gordon King Chartered Surveyor, Kenneth Cantlay Chartered Engineer, Jonathan Wordsworth Archaeologist, Monica Clough Historian and the Scottish Lime Centre Trust. The Main Contractor was Hall and Tawse Scotland Ltd.

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