

F R I E N D S   O F   S K E L B O   C A S T L E

To

Dornoch, 4 March 1987

Dear

PETITION FOR GUARDIANSHIP TO SECRETARY OF STATE FOR SCOTLAND

Given the precarious condition of the castle and the recent demolition proposal from the Owners, it was decided at a public meeting in Dornoch, 24 February 1987, that a Petition should be addressed to the Secretary of State for Scotland to ask for his intervention and for rescue action by means of an Agreement for Guardianship.

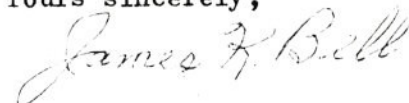
This form of management agreement would mean that the Owners would keep the landownership and the Nation would accept responsibility for the castle. The agreement would enable the Secretary of State to create facilities for public access and enjoyment, including any display of information about Scottish Heritage for the area centred on the castle.

Duffus Castle and St Peter's Kirk in Moray, both being closely related to Skelbo by ancient historical connections, are now in the care of the Nation by means of an Agreement for Guardianship. This means that the sites and the ruins are being kept to an exemplary standard of management and with good provisions for physical maintenance, safety, public access and information.

On behalf of all friends of Skelbo Castle, I write to invite your support for this Petition. The attached copy of the Petition will explain our case. It is hoped that you will add your signature on the back of this document and that perhaps you will collect as many signatures as possible from other friends of Skelbo and so help with this rescue action.

Please return the signed Petition to Friends of Skelbo, c/o James Bell, Rhian, Evelix Road, Dornoch, Sutherland, IV25 3HR, before 7 April 1987.

Yours sincerely,



James K Bell

## SKELBO, HISTORICAL NOTES

The long history of Skelbo in Sutherland and the North is linked with the history of Scotland, England and Europe. This is a brief summary.

1. The name of Skelbo shows that it was an important farmstead of the early Viking age, built around 850.

2. In 1211 Hugo Freskyn gave Skelbo to his kinsman, Gilbert of Moray, later to become St Gilbert. He made it over to his brother Richard in 1223; Richard was probably killed in the Battle of Embo in 1245, when a band of pirates landed at Little Ferry.

3. In 1290 the Scottish and English Commissioners were at Skelbo, to meet the young Queen of Scotland, the Maid of Norway, who was to marry the heir to the throne of England. It was at Skelbo that they heard of her death in Orkney. This link to the history of both Scotland and England would justify the preservation of Skelbo as a National Monument.

4. In the 15th century Skelbo passed by marriage from the clan Moray - the lineage of Hugo Freskyn - to the chief of Kynmaird, whose possession caused dispute with John, 8th Earl of Sutherland, Over-Lord of Skelbo. His spouse was killed near Skelbo.

5. In 1529 Skelbo passed from the Kynmairds to the Sutherlands of Duffus, kinsmen of the Earls of Sutherland. Alexander Sutherland of Duffus was knighted by Charles I, before 1643. Lord Duffus accompanied Charles II returning from exile in the Netherlands to Scotland, 1650. That same year Skelbo was reinforced as a garrison of the Earl of Sutherland, whose army came from Skelbo and elsewhere to partake in the battle of Carbisdale which ended the fatal campaign of Montrose and its army marching south from Caithness. Montrose was captured in Sutherland and executed in Edinburgh.

\* 6. In 1654 General Middleton stored army supplies in Skelbo Castle after his landing near the castle at Little Ferry. Lord Duffus, supporting Charles II, joined General Middleton and the Earl of Glencairn in the rising against Cromwell which was centred on Dornoch but defeated at Dalnaspidal. In the 17th century, Skelbo was frequently at the centre of feuding between the clansmen of Gordon and Sutherland.

7. In 1715 at Tain, Kenneth 3rd Lord Duffus with hundreds of Jacobites proclaimed King James VIII. After the defeat of the Jacobites Skelbo was forfeited. Lord Duffus fled through Caithness to Sweden. Seized in Hamburg and imprisoned in the Tower of London he was freed without trial in 1717 returning to exile. In Russia Lord Duffus served the Czar as a naval commander. He died in St Petersburg in 1734. His son Eric lived at Skelbo. A fine painting of the 3rd Lord Duffus, the exiled laird of Skelbo in Highland dress is kept in the National Museum of Scotland, Edinburgh.

\* 8. In 1746 the Earl of Cromarty and his Jacobite army occupied Skelbo Castle. They captured four Hanoverian ships with arms at Little Ferry and moved to Dunrobin where the Earl surrendered to the Earl of Sutherland's militia. This prevented them from partaking in the battle of Culloden which may have influenced the outcome.

9. In 1747 at Skelbo Lady Duffus wrote to the Earl of Sutherland about his motherless daughter. The child in her care was making good progress. This letter gives a vivid impression of domestic life at Skelbo Castle. In 1757 the laird of Duffus and Skelbo wrote to the Earl of Sutherland's factor about the condition of the Mansion House, the kiln and the girnell. The roof at the north end of the house was beyond repair. By 1769 the castle was ruinous. Skelbo was sold by the 4th Lord Duffus in 1787, to whom the forfeited title was restored by Parliament, 1826. The baronial title of Skelbo reverted to the Countess of Sutherland, 1804.

(From Sir William Fraser, 'The Sutherland Book', Edinburgh, 1884; and other sources).



F R I E N D S   O F   S K E L B O   C A S T L E

To *Mrs. L. O. Williams,*  
*520, West Georgia Avenue,*  
*Louisiana.*

Dornoch, 4 March 1987

Dear *Mrs. Williams,*

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Yours sincerely,

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