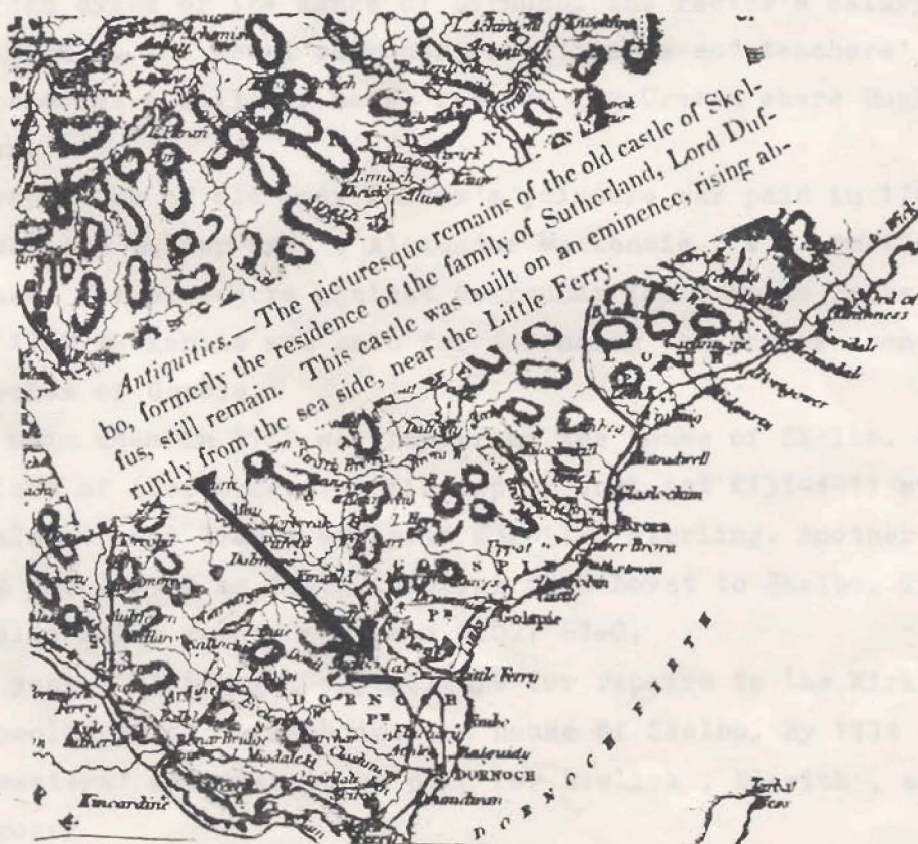


# Skelbo Accounts

1756 ~ 1787





SKELBO      ACCOUNTS

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The fortunes of the estate of Skelbo fell on evil times in the 18th century following upon the forfeiture of the estate when Kenneth Lord Duffus supported the Old Pretender. Lands were mortgaged and the Duffus family were deep in debt.

The Court of Session appointed James Maclean as factor for Skelbo for a period of thirteen years 1743 - 55 inclusive. Dugald Gilchrist of Ospisdale followed Maclean . In 1756 the money rent income was £1315-12-0 . Rents came from the Brae of Dalnamain , Wester Aberscross , Invershin , Achinduich and its pendicle Achimore. In connexion with the last three properties there was a wintering income. Pittentrail was let to Donald Sutherland and Invershin to Donald Ross.

The victual rent of a little more than 200 bolls at £7 per boll brought in £1404-16-3 . Expenses included stipends and schoolmasters' salaries for Dornoch , Creech , Rogart , and Golspie . There were also payments to the woodkeeper at Achinduich , dues for herrying hawks at Kinnauld , and passage dues at Ferryoons . In 1758 repairing the mill of Skelbo cost £96-17-2 . Another account was £12 for raising bulwarks against water at Dalnamain and there was inclosure expense of £54 at Auclea Padrick .

In 1760 John Sutherland's account of £126 was for building the office and garden dykes of the manse of Dornoch. The factor's salary was £120. In addition to the usual payments for stipends and teachers' salaries in 1761 there was a bill for manse repairs for Creech where Hugh Rose was minister.

A proportion of old Lady Duffus's jointure was paid in 1763 to Lieutenants John and Walter Gray . Alexander Mackenzie , W.S. in 1765 rendered an account for procedure against Rearquhar for surplus rents of Kinnauld and in 1768 Mackenzie was paid for defending the process concerned with the marches of Grubie.

The main item in 1769 was repairing the house of Skelbo. William Sutherland of Aberscross for his repair work got £131-4-11 sterling and Hugh Falconer for timber was paid £32-11-0 sterling. Another repair account was £5-3-0 as freight charge from Lovat to Skelbo. The total for the Skelbo house repair work was £2027 -7-0.

The year 1771 brought expenditure for repairs to the Kirk of Dornoch, the schoolhouse of Dornoch and the house of Skelbo. By 1774 there were schoolmasters' salaries to be paid for Evelick , Blarick , and Easter Aberscross/



Aberscross in addition to those for Dornoch , Rogart and Golspie.

The accounts for the following year 1775 noted that the wadset lands of Meikle Torboll had been redeemed and sequestrated and brought in money and victual rents worth £434-9-4 . Tenants had also to pay fox dues and there was the repair of the cathedral of Dornoch repaid by the Exchequer £300-7-11 . Rebuilding the manses of Dornoch and Rogart were the main items of expense 1775.

For 1778 income included the rent of thirty six seats in the church of Rogart charged on the tenants and expenses were incurred in repairing the kirk and schoolhouse of Golspie. Improvements were made in 1780 at Knock Arthur and Altivuilt . Two years later 1782 the estate had to distribute 738 bolls seed victual because of the " uncommon failure " of that year's crop but this was recovered later from the tenants.

The rebuilding of the mansion house of Blairich in 1784 was paid by the tenant as additional rent. In 1785 the mill of Meikle Torboll had to be repaired . Arrears " considered as desperate " were listed in 1786: those named were - Charles Sutherland , William Innes and Donald Camp , all in Wester Aberscross ; Donald Ross , Invershin ; Christian McKay , Milntown ; John Grant , Easter Aberscross ; Robert Mackay , John Sutherland and James Sutherland of Pronsy , all in Knock Arthur; Alexander McKay , Moriness.

By Whit 1787 William Keith , accountant at Edinburgh , had made up the accounts and the scheme of division of the estate of Skelbo among the creditors of the deceased James and Kenneth , Lords Duffus . Keith was one of the family of Keith of Ravelston in the parish of Corstorphine now the western suburb of Edinburgh.

In the final settlement the Countess of Sutherland paid Alexander Mackenzie , the lawyer who purchased Skelbo for her , the sum of £21,400. The accounts of Skelbo estate 1743 - 1787 are one of the byways of Highland history.

But Skelbo Castle is a great landmark on the highway of Scottish history from its association with the Commissioners awaiting the arrival of the Maid of Norway to its occupation by the Earl of Cromarty and his Jacobite force.

To-day it is a sad ruin faced with the threat of demolition. Yet the spirit of the thin red line is stirring in the North and the Friends of Skelbo are petitioning the Secretary of State for Scotland for an agreement for Guardianship to ensure survival for Skelbo. May success smile upon the efforts of the Friends of Skelbo.

A.S.Cowper , Edinburgh 1987

The writer thanks the Keeper of the Records of Scotland , Register House , Edinburgh , for access to the Skelbo accounts.