

Hidden Aberdeen Tours for



Rubislaw Den House

The History of Rubislaw Den House, its
lands and people by Dr Fiona-Jane Brown;
April 2019

TIMELINE OF RUBISLAW DEN HOUSE & RUBISLAW ESTATE	
1379	Robert II grants "whole land of the tenement of Rubbyslaw" to the citizens of Aberdeen
1551	Alexander Rutherford, x8 provost of Aberdeen owns the estate
1620	Alexander Forbes owner (initials AF on the old Rubislaw House and the date 1657)
1687	Thomas Forbes, Alexander's descendant sells to George Skene, Danzig merchant, owner of Fintray
1707	George Skene of Rubislaw dies; his estate goes to his great-nephew, George, husband of Catherine Aedie, whose mother, Catherine married David Aedie, the son of Provost Skene's mentor, George Aedie of Danzig. George is Catherine's cousin also through his grandfather Thomas, half-brother of Provost Skene
1721	George and Catherine's son, George marries Helen Thomson, and inherits the estate
1776	George dies, his son George marries Jean Moir of Stoneywood
1791	James Skene, younger son of George Skene & Jean Moir inherits the estate on his brother's death
1795	Alexander Dauney, Advocate and later Sheriff-Substitute of Aberdeen, tenant of James Skene, builds a small mansion called Rubislawden House
1806	James marries Jane Forbes of Monymusk & Pitsligo
1819	James Skene commissions Edinburgh architect, Archibald Elliot drew up a design for the "Damlands of Rubislaw" to be developed, but this took far longer than Skene ever lived to see
1833	Alexander Dauney dies; Harvey Hall, merchant, whose shop is at 29 Union St, takes over tenancy of Rubislaw Den House
1834-39	Harvey Hall lists his residence as Rubislaw Den House
1840-45	No clear resident at Rubislaw Den House - estate still owned by James Skene
1846-60	David Blaikie, of the Blaikie Bros, Ironworks, is resident at Rubislaw Den House, but also has a town house at 253 Union Street
1850-51	Architect, James Forbes Beattie is commissioned by Skene to draw up more plans of the estate
1862	James Skene sells the Rubislaw Estate to Alexander Anderson, Provost of Aberdeen
1863-77	Architect, James Forbes Beattie is registered as tenant at Rubislaw Den House
1875	City of Aberdeen Land Association (CALA) founded by Alexander Anderson, become the owners of Rubislaw Estate as Anderson himself is bankrupt. He uses his new "land bank" to protect his assets of Rubislaw and Torry

1878	Architect, James Alexander Beattie, son of James Forbes Beattie, having joined his father's practice, briefly lives at Rubislaw Den House
1878	William Keith Jnr, Granite Merchant, owner of King St Granite Works moves into Rubislaw Den House (old)
1881	Keith's new house Rubislaw Den House is designed by Duncan McMillan, architect, of McMillan and McKenzie
1882-1903	William Keith Jnr, resident of Rubislaw Den House
1904-1907	no clear resident at Rubislaw Den House
1908-20	Adam Maitland, resident at Rubislaw Den House; Maitland was employed by J&W Henderson, Slate, Cement & Builders' Merchants, of 82 Market St
1920-32	James Fiddes, of William Fiddes' Boxmakers, Crombie Place, Torry, resident at Rubislaw Den House
1933-35	Donald B. Gunn, Town Clerk Depute, resident at Rubislaw Den House, 27 Rubislaw Den North
1936-38	Renamed Gordon House ; residence of Ishbel Gordon, Lady Aberdeen (of Haddo)
1939-64	Unlisted in the street directories, suspect either still in Gordon family ownership, or for war-time purposes
1964-66	Old Dutch Hotel , 27 Rubislaw Den North
1967-83	Gordon House Hostel , owned by University of Aberdeen
1985-2009	Rubislaw Den House Nursing Home - various private company owners
2009-present	Optimus Ltd. HQ

PLACENAME DATA:

Rubislaw – possible derivations of the name: Gaelic element +Scots element

Gaelic:

Ruban: barrel; pronounced *rooban* with hard “b”

Rubha: headland; pronounced *roo-ah*, “bh” being silent in the middle of a word

Rubhag: thong of hemp or flax; pronounced *roo-ack/ roo-vak*

Rùbail: tumult, rumbling; pronounced *rooo-bale*.

Scots:

Law: hillock, mound. From Old English *hlaw* meaning grave-mound

Thus *rùbail-law* – rumbling hill (perhaps stones tumbled down from the Hill of Rubislaw?)

HISTORY OF RUBISLAW ESTATE

“The Freedom Lands” was Crown property given to the citizens of Aberdeen by Robert the Bruce in 1319 as part of his *Great Charter*, giving ownership of the Royal Forest of Stocket, and its revenues, to the city, making Aberdeen the richest burgh in medieval Scotland.



King Robert II of Scots

In 1379, Robert II, first of the Stewart kings, extends royal favour to the city by granting the “whole land of the tenement of Rubbyslaw” to the citizens of Aberdeen, for the annual fee of one silver penny paid at Pentecost, if asked for. This is a form of land gift known as a “peppercorn” or “rose” rent, in that the owner asks a mere token gesture for rent, rather than a large monetary fee. Technically, therefore, unlike Stocket Forest, Rubbyslaw was ultimately still owned by the king.

Over time the council of Aberdeen, ostensibly representing its “citizens”, sub-let the property to make money out of it. Alexander Rutherford and his descendants were the tenants from 1551. Rutherford was eight times provost of Aberdeen, 1591, 1596, 1598, 1600, 1603, 1605, 1607, 1609, 1611 (his ancestor John Rutherford had served six times in the previous century). He died in 1616.

Soon after, Alexander Forbes owned the estate and is the likely builder of the original Rubislaw House (site of 50 Queen’s Road), his initials and the date 1657 were carved above the lintel and remained there when James Skene made improvements to it nearly a century and a half later.

In 1687, Forbes’ descendant, Thomas sold the whole estate to George Skene, who had made his fortune in the little Aberdonian enclave of Danzig, Poland as a merchant. He was trained by George Aedie, another Aberdeen merchant. George Skene’s half-brother, David, also lived in Poland and had probably arranged his apprenticeship with Aedie. George had been back

in the burgh since 1665 and was the landlord of Wester Fintray. He then bought Matthew Lumsden's old house in Guestrow and did a major refurbishment, adding the huge eastern



Provost George Skene

wing we know of today as *Provost Skene's House*.

Skene had retired from politics after serving as provost 1676 - 1684 and Aberdeen Burgh Commissioner to the Privy Council in Edinburgh, when he began his building project. He was Sir George by then, having been knighted in 1671 by Charles II's brother, James, Duke of York, later James II.

His brother David had also since died, so George endeavoured to take care of his two nephews, Alexander and George, and niece Catherine. The boys proved incorrigible drunks and gamblers, whom he soon disinherited and settled his attention on Catherine and the descendants of his other brother, Thomas Skene. Catherine married David Aedie, son of George, the Polish merchant.

Their daughter, Catherine Aedie would marry her second cousin, George, Thomas Skene's eldest son. He became Provost Skene's



**George Skene, 2nd
of Rubislaw**

heir, George Skene, 2nd of Rubislaw. Their son, George Jnr, born 1699, married Helen Thomson, who was actually his step-sister, being the daughter of Catherine's second husband Alexander Thomson.

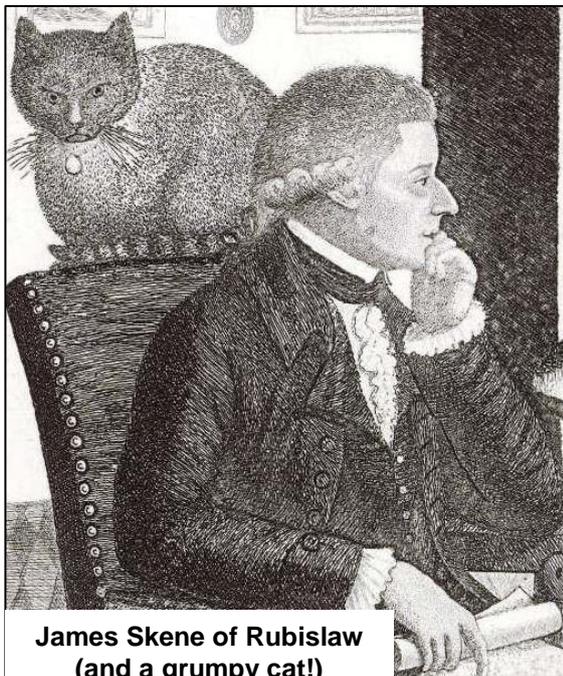


Catherine Aedie

They had a son, George, who married Jean Moir and a daughter Helen who married Alexander Duff of Hatton.

Jean, of the Moirs of Stoneywood, was apparently a bit of an eccentric. She insisted in riding her horse rather than travelling in a carriage, and regularly journeyed to Edinburgh for social events, wearing a bright red tunic. They had six children, the eldest, Catherine, dying in

infancy. George, the heir, died of ill-health not long after inheriting. His own father had also died young. Jean had long ago moved to Edinburgh to ensure the children had a good education, so James (b.1775), the younger son (who also had three sisters, Margaret, Helen



**James Skene of Rubislaw
(and a grumpy cat!)**

and a second Catherine, named for her dead sibling) became James Skene, 4th of Rubislaw.

James lived in Georgian Edinburgh. He was a very great friend of Sir Walter Scott and known as part of the literary set. He married Jane Forbes, whose Jacobite ancestor, Sir Alexander Forbes of Pitsligo, had evaded the government troops following Culloden by disguising himself as a tramp and living in caves around his estate.

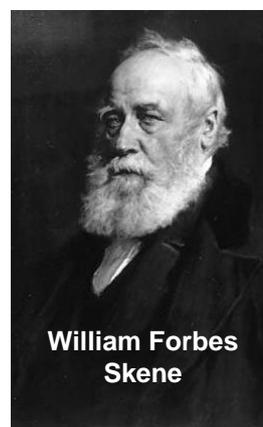
Her other relatives, Sir John Forbes of Newe

(Strathdon) and his nephew, Charles Forbes, Baronet, helped fund the building of Cornhill Hospital, then known as the Royal Lunatic Asylum. The stone colonnade in front of St Nicholas Kirkyard was a memorial for Sir John and his good works. He also founded what is acknowledged as the oldest Scottish-Indian company in the world, the Forbes-Gokak group, hence he was nicknamed “Bombay Jock”.

James and Jane had four daughters and three sons including William Forbes Skene, born 1809, became a famous historian, known for his work *Celtic Scotland*.

James was keen to develop his Aberdeen estate in the same way he saw

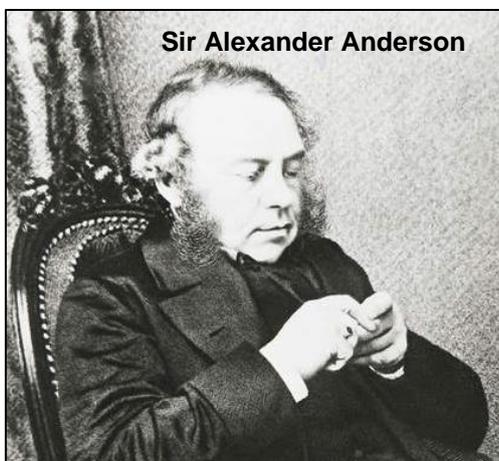
Edinburgh’s New Town being built to the west of the Nor’ Loch. In 1819, he commissioned eminent Edinburgh architect, Archibald Elliot to create a plan for *The Damlands of Rubislaw*, which included the quarry.



**William Forbes
Skene**

So far, no-one knew how valuable Rubislaw Quarry would be. James' father had sold the quarry lands to the city in the early 1780s. They had promptly returned it at purchase price by 1788, declaring it to be of poor quality. The great irony was, that once pneumatic tools were invented, the quarrymen got access to the sparkling silver granite which was used all over the world from the mid-nineteenth to the early twentieth century.

James Skene relied upon his factors, father and son, Charles and Alexander Gordon to run his estate. They experienced great difficulties with the many tenancies using the quarry, and the incursion of new roads across the estate. Once in his 80s, James could no longer cope with the stress of this, as he would not live to see the huge success the quarry would later bring. He sold out to Alexander Anderson in 1862.



Sir Alexander Anderson

Anderson was Provost of Aberdeen 1859-66. Originally from Strichen, he studied law and became an advocate in 1827. He was very much the improver and developer; the creation of the City of Aberdeen Land Association was just one of the many schemes with which he was involved. CALA was set up after Anderson's exit from politics when his precarious

financial position made this new "land bank" a very wise way of protecting his assets. CALA therefore became the owners of both Rubislaw and Torry in 1875. CALA still exists today as a house building company.

CALA were listed as the proprietors of Rubislaw Estate until 1878 when granite merchant, William Keith Jnr. bought the land on which a Georgian mansion had been built in 1795 for Sheriff-Substitute, Alexander Daune, Advocate of Aberdeen. This house was called *Rubislawden*.

RUBISLAW DEN HOUSE – HISTORY & OWNERS

WILLIAM KEITH JNR: 1878-1903

The current house was built in 1881 for William Keith Jnr, Granite Merchant. According to the *Dictionary of Scottish Architects*, the architect was Duncan McMillan of Ferryhill. It features the Keith family motto above the main entrance lintel:

they haif sayde, quhat saye they? lat thame saye

An identical motto is to be found in Marischal College on entry to the Mitchell Tower.



George Keith,
5th Earl Marischal

Marischal College was founded by George Keith, 5th Earl Marischal, in 1595, to be a Protestant rival to the Catholic Kings College and to train ministers in the new Presbyterian church. James VI gave what had been the old Greyfriars/Franciscan monastery to Keith when he proposed the idea of a university college. It was the first in Scotland not to be founded with the permission of the Pope as Kings College had been a century earlier.

The Keith family had first risen to prominence in the reign of William the Lion, who gave Aberdeen its royal burgh charter in 1176 AD. Harvey de Keth, a nobleman, had saved the king's life in battle and was made "Great Marischal of Scotland", effectively the king's bodyguard at court and guardian of the royal regalia. The Keiths had chosen Protestantism at the time of the Reformation, but George Keith, 10th Earl, would lose his title and estate for supporting *The Old Pretender*, i.e. James Francis Edward Stuart, son of James II, nephew of Charles II, at the time of the 1715 Jacobite Rising. George Keith and his brother James fled to Sweden for sanctuary.



James Keith's service as a mercenary led him to be Frederick I of Prussia's leading field-marshal. When James died at the Battle of Hochkirk in 1758, mainly due to the king's stupidity in ignoring Keith's military instructions, Frederick used his influence with his cousin, George II, to restore the Keiths' titles and lands which included Inverugie Castle near Peterhead. Tragically, by the time George returned, the castle was a ruin. Seeing it, he wept and told his coachman

to take him away. He never returned.

William Keith, the granite merchant was clearly proud of his ancestry to have had this motto displayed on his house. His ancestor, the 5th Earl, put the motto up to tell the people of Aberdeen that he did not care what they thought of him, knowing he had royal support.

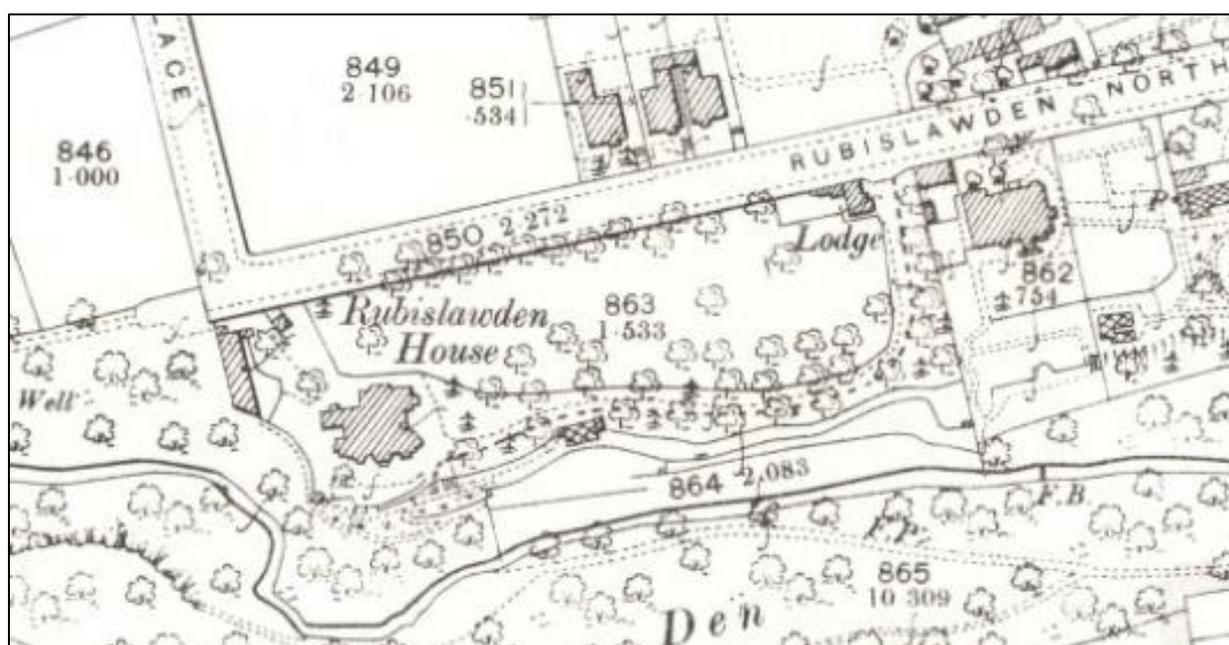


Keith's granite yard was sited at 187 King Street, one of many in the Victorian era. The street directory describes his works as "polished granite and enamelled slate works", thus he was purchasing the materials from the local quarries before dressing and polishing them to suit clients' requirements. Alexander McDonald's granite polishing works, sited at Constitution Street, was the best known in the city; McDonald claimed to have invented the method for polishing granite.

Keith, whose father William had been a granite merchant before him and with whom he was still working in 1878 when he actually bought the old Rubislawden House from CALA. He was clearly charmed with his Scots Baronial fantasy house, rather out of character for Duncan McMillan, who is known for Ferryhill Free Church, now the Church of Scotland on Fonthill Road and the completion of Marine Terrace after Archibald Simpson's earlier design. Keith

is registered as living at Rubislaw Den House long before it ever becomes part of the horseshoe of Rubislaw Den North and South.

By 1905, the house is enclosed behind high walls, but still with its sloping garden down to the Denburn, Aberdeen's vital water source from earliest times. At this point, the river is known as the North Burn of Rubislaw according to the Ordnance Survey Map. The source is acknowledged as the Den of Maidenraig Mill, but historian Diane Morgan has suggested that it may be fed from springs on Brimmond Hill.



1900 OS Map showing Rubislawden House at the end of Rubislawden North

ADAM MAITLAND: 1907-1919

The connection with the building trade remains in Adam Maitland, owner from 1907. He was an employee of J&W Henderson, who advertised themselves as Slate, Cement and Builders' Merchants, based at 82 Market Street. This is the harbour end of Market Street, surrounded by other businesses. Hendersons were perfectly placed for receiving supplies by rail and sea.

In 1907, their neighbours on Market Street included:

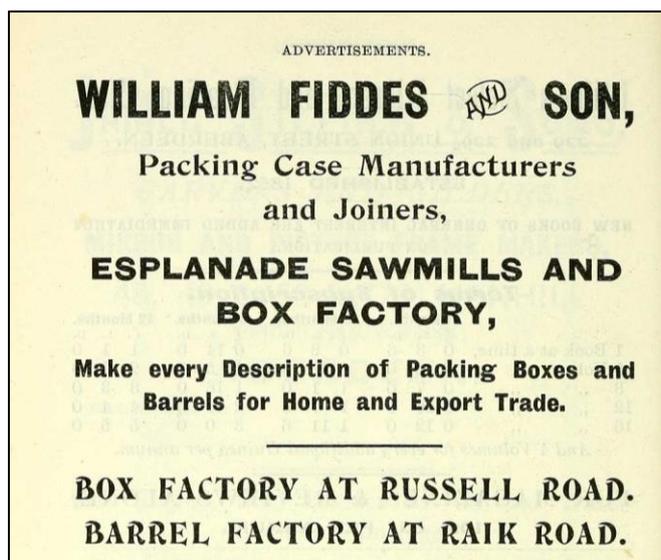
- 70: Forbes & Castle, Grocers
- 80: Harbour Boot Stores
- 82: **J&W Henderson, Slate Merchants**
 - Richard Connon, Reid & Co. shipowners
 - Gray, Kennedy & Dickie, warehousemen
- 86: G. Scott, tobacconist and hairdresser
 - Deeside Railway Goods Station, George Cheyne, agent

Clearly Maitland was a manager of some sort to have afforded Rubislaw Den House!

By 1920, however, he had moved on, making way for another businessman.

JAMES FIDDES: 1907-32

James Fiddes was a son of William Fiddes who operated one of Torry's sawmills and a box-making company in Crombie Place, supplying boxes for various purposes, including grocers, distillers, soft drinks companies, and of course, fish. The company began in 1878, just as the herring fishing industry peaked, coinciding with massive building projects in Torry, as speculators developed Victoria Road and its environs with land feued from CALA.



By 1902. Fiddes was one of the biggest box-makers in NE Scotland. 70 years later, they were still going, having purchased sawmills in Craigmyle (Torphins) and Kemnay. Fiddes & Sons closed in 1977.

Their rivals at the Victoria Sawmills (from 1909) survived and diversified to

benefit from the oil industry. Today they are Cordiners' Sawmill on Crombie/Sinclair Roads.

The following extract is from The Institute of Mechanical Engineers' visit to Fiddes & Sons in 1907, the year when James had moved to Rubislaw Den House.

"These works are situated on the south side of the River Dee, and are only about seven minutes' car-ride from the centre of the city, being within three hundred yards of the car route. They cover over four acres, and consist of two sawmills and box factories, steam-driven, and one factory for the manufacture of barrels by machinery, driven by a suction gas-engine. They contain eighty-five machines for the production of the firm's specialities, consisting of power and hand saw-benches, planing, automatic checking, dovetailing, nailing, handle-holing and stave-shaping machines, hydraulic trussing, and other special machines."

James Fiddes left Rubislaw Den House in 1932.

ISHBEL HAMILTON-GORDON, LADY ABERDEEN, MARCHIONESS OF ABERDEEN & TEMAIR: 1936-39



Ishbel Maria Marjoribanks (pronounced *Marchbanks*) met her future husband, John Hamilton-Gordon (Earl of Aberdeen) when she was 14. They married in 1877 when she was 20. Ishbel's father was a brewer and a Liberal MP, her mother's family, the Hoggs, were rich Irish landowners. Ishbel was raised a Roman Catholic.

After she and her husband had lived in Canada and Ireland, they returned to Scotland. As well as owning Haddo House, which had been in the

Gordon family for generations, Ishbel took up residence at Rubislaw Den House in 1936, just after Aberdeen's Town Clerk Depute, Donald B. Gunn had lived there for approximately three years.

Ishbel was a very active social reformer, feminist and suffragist. Ishbel supported the education of her servants and was probably on very familiar terms with them, unlike other members of the nobility. While in Canada, she had defied the local government and founded the Victoria Order of Nurses in 1898, which provided medical aid for those in remote areas. She had served twice as president of the International Council of Women and was in her second term by the time she was living in Aberdeen. In 1931 she had boldly submitted a petition to the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland for women to be ordained into the ministry! Ishbel partially succeeded when the Church of Scotland allowed for the admission of women deacons. It would be 1968 before women were permitted to be elders or ministers.

It was while in Aberdeen she wrote her memoirs, perhaps seeking inspiration from the bubbling waters of the Denburn in her extensive garden while recalling the family's exploits. Ishbel loved Canada so much she really felt herself Canadian. There are 18 tea sets at her old home, Haddo House, which were gifted to her by the women of Canada. This was a sign of their gratitude for all she had done to better their lot. Advocates of women's suffrage in Britain admired Ishbel's actions so early on in the fight for the vote.

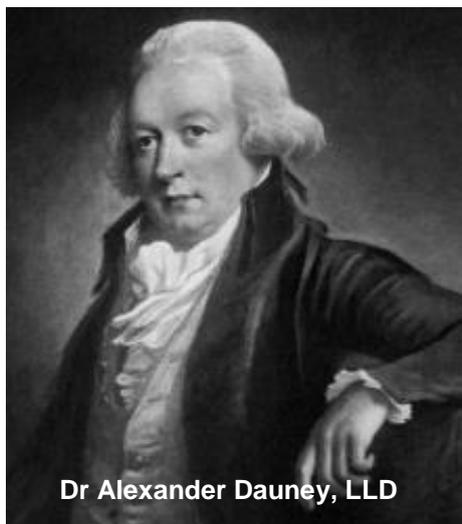


Ishbel, John and their children: Dudley, Marjory, George and Archibald (Archie)

Sadly Ishbel had a stroke in April 1939 at Rubislaw Den House and passed away soon after. She was 82 years old. She had already lost John, who died in 1934, at the House of Cromar, Tarland, and her beloved youngest son, Archie, who had been killed in a car accident in 1909. His ghost is reputed to haunt the chapel at Haddo. Perhaps this explains the long gap in the house's history from 1939-64. There is no record in the street directories, and there is limited access to the Valuation Rolls for this period. The Gordons may have still owned it.

THE FIRST RUBISLAW DEN HOUSE & ITS RESIDENTS

ALEXANDER DAUNEY, SHERIFF-SUBSTITUTE: 1795-1833



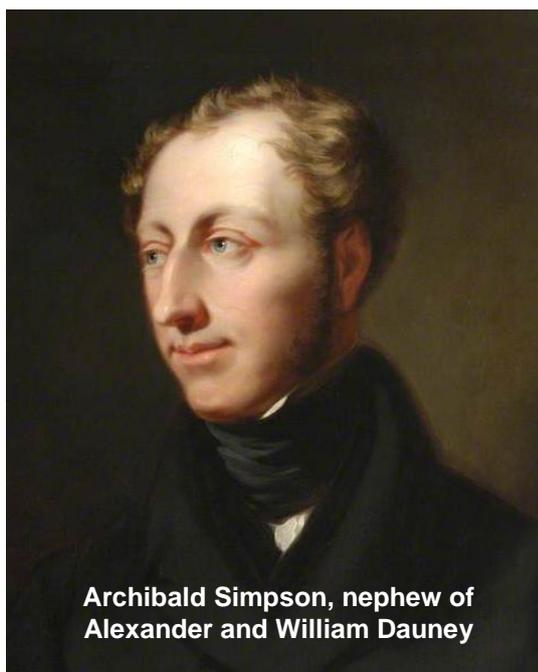
According to the *History of the Society of Advocates*, Alexander Dauneay was born at Banchory-Ternan, 1 September, 1749, to Rev. Francis Dauneay, minister of Lumphanan and Margaret Chalmers. He studied at Kings College 1762-66, married Margaret Pollock in 1778 and received his doctorate in Law, January 1793. Alexander's father-in-law, Robert Pollock, was a minister and Professor of Divinity at Marischal College, as well as serving as principal at the latter. Alexander is quoted as having built Rubislawden House.

He held a number of eminent positions, including:

- Commissioner to Lord Saltoun and Baron-Baillie of Fraserburgh, making him the landlord's representative on Fraserburgh's town council
- Promoter of, and first secretary to the Aberdeenshire Canal Company; i.e. the Port Elphinstone Canal connecting Inverurie to Waterloo Quay in Aberdeen
- Chair of Law, Kings College, 1795-1833
- Legal Assessor to the Aberdeen Town Council, 1807-31
- Sheriff-Substitute of Aberdeenshire 1806-29
- Lieutenant, Royal Aberdeen Volunteer Militia, 1795
- Captain, Volunteers, 1796
- Lieutenant-Colonel, Royal Aberdeen Light Infantry Volunteers, 1799

He was made an honorary Burgess of Aberdon (Old Aberdeen Merchant Guild) in 1793 and served as their treasurer and twice, later as their president. Alexander also owned the estate of Craibstone at some point.

Alexander's brother, William Daune was a master mason. Their sister, Barbara, was the wife of William Simpson, clothier, making them the uncles of Archibald Simpson, Aberdeen's most famous Georgian architect. After William's death, Alexander adopted his son, William Jnr, who was also an advocate. Alexander's great-nephew, also Alexander, William Jnr's eldest son, became a barrister to the Middle Temple in London and presented them with a painting of his great-uncle in 1909 which had been painted back in 1780. Little else is known about Alexander Daune, but he was clearly highly-respected in both Old and New Aberdeen.



**Archibald Simpson, nephew of
Alexander and William Daune**

DAVID BLAIKIE, OF BLAIKIE IRONWORKS: 1846-59

David Blaikie, the next long-term resident of the old Rubislawden House (following the short residency of Harvey Hall, merchant), belonged to one of the most famous families in Aberdeen. His father, John Blaikie, was the city's first master plumber; his brothers, Thomas and James Blaikie both served as provosts of Aberdeen; he himself was a wine merchant (an advert exists for David Blaikie's tea and wine shop which opened in Marischal Street in 1826). He served on the board of his brothers' Ironworks based in Fittie, which was sited right behind East St Clement's Kirk on Church Street. David was also a board member of the National Security Savings Bank of Aberdeen (1846-62).

He was married to Isabella McCombie and they had three children, John, Margaret and Helen. He also owned houses in Aberdeen city itself. From 1835-47 he lived at 194 Union Street, then 253, where he appears in the 1851 census. Margaret presumably had left home by then. She married Patrick Keith. Her sister Helen married three times and had six children in total, John had three children.

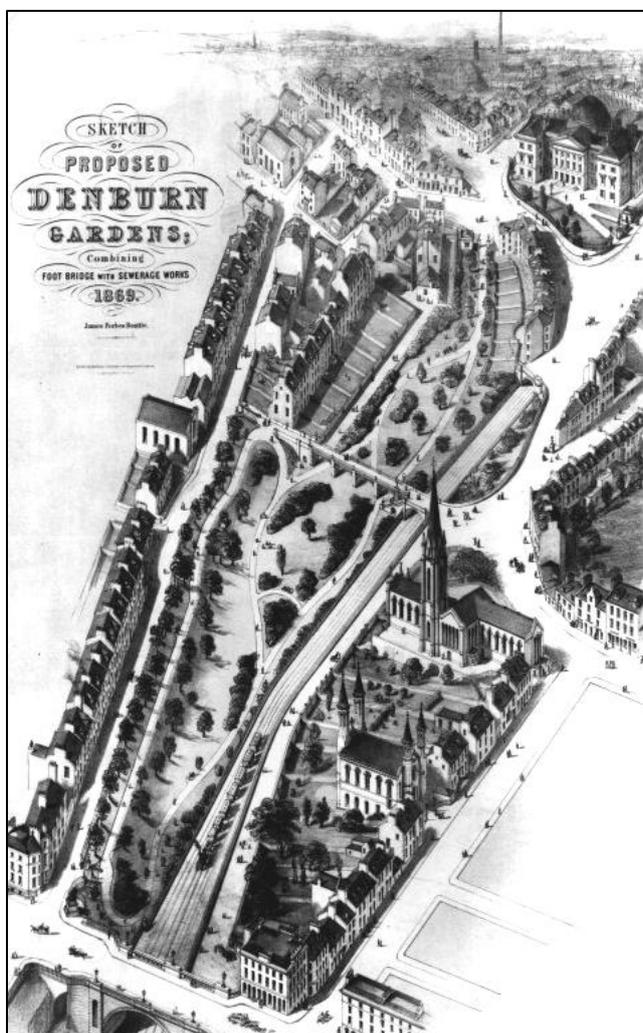
253 Union Street	Age	Status	Occupation	Birthplace
David Blaikie	(45)	Head	Iron Merchant	Aberdeen
Isabella Blaikie	(41)	Wife		"
John Blaikie	(21)	Son	Engineer	"
Helen R. Blaikie	(5)	Dau		"
Sarah Moncur(?)	(20)	Servant	House Servant	"
Elizabeth Pirie	(29)	Servant	House Servant	Fraserburgh
Ann Elrick	(34)	Servant	House Servant	Fetteresso
Helen Stewart	(22)	Servant	Maid	Aberdeen

By 1861, the family had moved to Balgownie Lodge. David himself died a year later.

In 1862, landlord, James Skene sold Rubislaw to Alexander Anderson, and architect, James Forbes Beattie took up residence at Rubislaw Den House, while still having his office and another house in town.

JAMES FORBES BEATTIE: 1862-77

James was born in 1801 in St Cyrus, Kincardineshire to Dr Peter Beattie and Janet Jopp. He was articled to David Walker, Surveyor and would later go into partnership as Walker & Beattie. He was trained in quantity surveying, civil engineering, architecture, and garden design. From 1839-45 he was in Australia, as manager of the Kaawa Copper Mining Company, which was owned by an Aberdeen business consortium. He returned in 1845 and by the end of the decade had recommenced his architectural practice on his own account. Most of the buildings he designed or surveyed were agricultural. His landscaping knowledge was what probably brought him to the attention of James Skene of Rubislaw. The latter's grand plan for the Damlands with Elliot had so far not materialised, thus Beattie was commissioned in 1850 to draw up new plans specifically for the Rubislaw estate.



Nearly two decades later, Beattie would be presenting the plan for *Denburn Gardens*, a development for the Denburn Valley, four years after the coming of the railway. Union Terrace Gardens differs from Beattie's plan only in that Rosemount Viaduct altered the top of the design in Gilcomston when it was added in 1883.

Meanwhile, Beattie was constantly creating plans – he proposed Riverside Drive as a grand carriageway along the undeveloped Deeside. He also designed Deeford House around 1853, which is the only house remaining from his original

design. It is unsurprising to find that Beattie divided his time between Rubislaw Den House, his office in Bon-Accord Square and his townhouse in East Craibstone Street, as all were near at hand, or at least a short carriage ride apart.

As Alexander Anderson's tenant, it would not be too much of a stretch to believe he was engaged in work for the ex-Provost. As a civil engineer and valuator, Beattie was an ideal person to aid Anderson in his grand plan for the City of Aberdeen Land Association. However, as yet there is no obvious evidence to support this. Beattie moved out in 1877 and died in 1914, his son, James Alexander Beattie is recorded as resident in 1878 when William Keith purchased the property.

It is even more intriguing that when Keith arrives, he does not engage Beattie Jnr or Snr as architects for his new home, which he was evidently planning, but goes instead to Duncan McMillan, who only arrived in Aberdeen in 1861, the year David Blaikie died.



1865 OS Map showing the old Rubislaw Den House

Nearby is Hirpletillum, a crofting township, the quarry is just out of sight to the lower left. Rubislawden House appears to have two protruding bays north and south. No images so far have been found of its Georgian form.

DUNCAN MCMILLAN – ARCHITECT OF THE NEW RUBISLAW DEN HOUSE ?

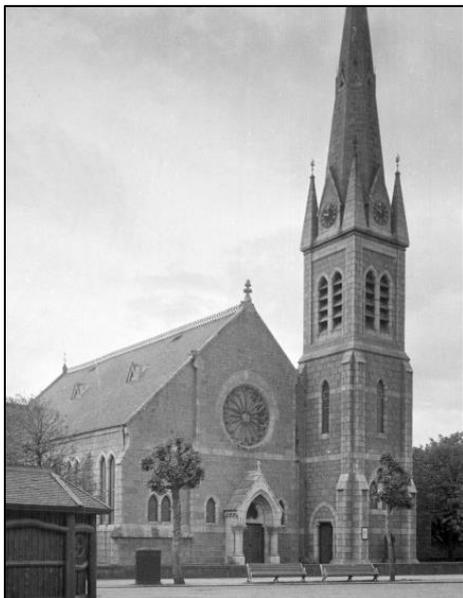
McMillan was an Invernesian; born 1840, apprentice to Alexander Ross, whose daughter Sibella he subsequently married once established in Aberdeen. In 1861 he came to work for James Matthews, who had an office in Inverness, run by his partner, William Lawrie. By 1868, two years after his marriage, Duncan had begun his own practice. His first major job was the design of a new school in Fittie, built in St Clement's Street, opposite East St. Clement's Church in 1869. Nine years later, he was in practice with James Russell McKenzie, which ended in 1883 due to McKenzie's bankruptcy.

By the time William Keith met him, Duncan had designed seven churches, five schools, worked on an extensive refurbishment of the old Gilcomston Chapel of Ease in Summer Street (1771, William Smith, Snr, father of John Smith, City Architect), carried out repairs at Fyvie Castle and was about to complete Archibald Simpson's original plan for Marine Terrace in Ferryhill.



The above is a masterpiece of simple, sharp, dressed granite and clean Classical lines, nothing like the second Rubislaw Den House. Little is known about Dauney's house, but we can

perhaps speculate that it did not have the ornate features that Keith would eventually want on his new home.

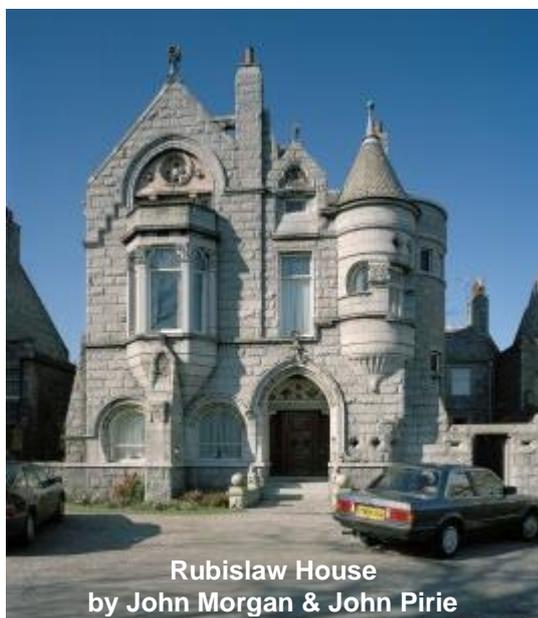


Ferryhill's Free Church at the junction of Fonthill, Polmuir and Ferryhill Roads, which Duncan designed in 1874, does have some medieval elements, like the buttresses on the gables, and the stepped tower. The spire itself is quite grand, so it would appear he was capable of the Gothic baronial style which characterises the second Rubislaw Den House.

The *Dictionary of Scottish Architects* records McMillan as the designer, but Dr William A. Brogden of RGU's School of

Architecture believes that no-one knows who it was, and, in his opinion, it was too garish for any decent architect to want to claim ownership of it.

Dr. Brogden is unduly harsh in his assessment, as the client was a granite and slate merchant, he was knew that there were masons capable of great things with this hitherto unworkable, unyielding stone; he probably employed some of them! Thus it is entirely proper for Duncan McMillan to have designed a building, not just a building, *a home*, for a granite merchant who



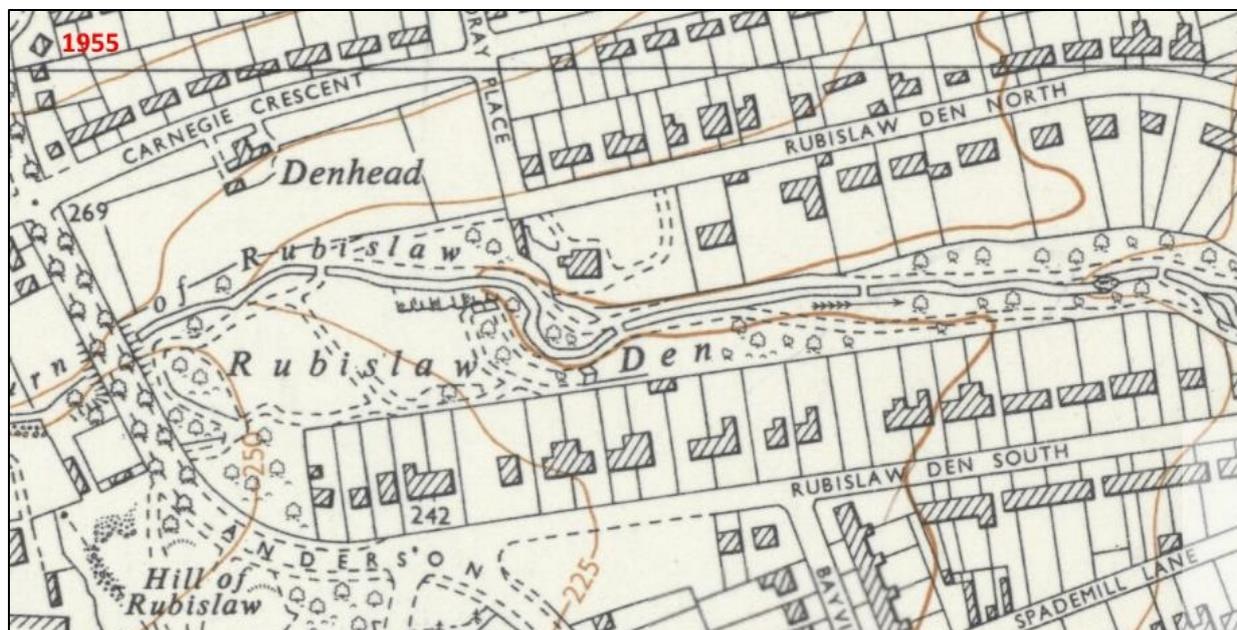
Rubislaw House
by John Morgan & John Pirie

bore the worthy name of Keith, of the Earls Marischal of Scotland, which was very much in the Scots Baronial, Gothic revival style.

Looking at John Morgan's new Rubislaw House, 50 Queen's Road, which was erected six years later, Rubislaw Den House is *tame* by comparison. Morgan and his architect, John Pirie, employed both ecclesiastical and domestic elements with multi-

coloured granite resulting in a fantastical creation, which was only bettered when Morgan was master mason on the new Marischal College frontage in 1906.

William Keith Jnr evidently loved his house, as he lived there for twenty-two years.



1955 OS Map showing Rubislaw Den House surrounded by properties, but still in its own little valley by the Denburn/ North Burn of Rubislaw. Below, Rubislaw Den House today (2019).



RUBISLAW DEN HOUSE (NEW): Architecture

Text taken from Historic Environment Scotland Portal – from 1986 survey.

Rubislaw Den House is a B-Listed Property

Possibly Duncan MacMillan, dated 1881. 2-storey and attic, 5-bay villa with Scots baronial and gothic details. Tooled **coursed** grey granite with contrasting light grey finely finished dressings. Battered base course; raised margins to basket-arched openings; ground and 1st floor cill course; dividing band course; **machicolated parapet**; **crowstepped gables** with inset segments.

SOUTH (ENTRANCE) ELEVATION: near-symmetrical; entrance bay advanced to centre, curved outer angles corbelled to form right angles at **crenellated** parapet; roll-moulded basket-arched doorway, decoratively carved 2-leaf panelled timber door with small-pane fanlight, windows in curved angles to left and right, Italianate **pilastered** round-arched bipartite window to centre of 1st floor, **corbelled** stone balcony with tooled pink granite panel reading *They Haif Sayde Quhat Saye Thay Lat Thame Saye* (motto of Marischal College), bipartite windows flanking to left and right, with polished pink colonette forming central **astragal**. Regular fenestration to flanking bays to left and right at ground and 1st floors, gabled timber dormers to attic floor above; 3-light canted window advanced to ground floor at left, window to 1st floor, gabled timber dormer to attic floor; 5-light rectangular-plan window advanced to ground floor of bay to right, single window to 1st floor above, wallhead stack to attic. Modern addition to outer left.

EAST ELEVATION: near-symmetrical; 5-bay; roll-moulded reveals to windows. Engaged entrance tower to centre, battered base, crenellated parapet enclosed by angle turrets; round-arched doorway to ground floor, glazed replacement doors with fanlight above; bipartite window to 1st floor, central column and paired columns flanking, scalloped capitals; 3-light oriel window to 2nd floor; circular-plan angle turret to re-entrant angle to left, rising above roofline with crenellated parapet; narrow recessed bays flanking entrance bay, single

window to 1st floor of each. Gabled bays advanced to left and right, 3-light bowed window advanced through ground and 1st floors with parapet forming balcony to attic floor, Y-traceried pointed-arched bipartite window to attic floor; deeply **chamfered angles** at ground floor, with window to each; finial to apex.

NORTH ELEVATION: asymmetrical; 3-bay; regular fenestration to centre bay; gabled bay to left with regular fenestration to ground and 1st floors; gabled bay stepped forward to right, link to modern addition at ground floor, pointed-arched window to centre of 1st floor with stained glass and cusped tracery, rose window set in gablehead, finial to apex, angle turrets with conical roofs flanking to left and right.

WEST ELEVATION: ground floor predominantly obscured by later 20th century additions; gabled bay advanced to centre, with 3 narrow round-arched windows inset, near-regular fenestration to returns; recessed bay to left, lean-to addition to ground floor, pair of windows to 1st floor; gabled bay recessed to right, near-circular-plan 5-light window to ground floor, window to 1st floor above, round-arched pediment above flanked by consoles.

Predominantly 2-pane timber sash and case windows. Grey slate roof with lead and felt ridges. Stone **skews** with beaked **skewputts**. Coped gablehead, wallhead and ridge stacks with decorative square-plan cans. Cast-iron rainwater goods.

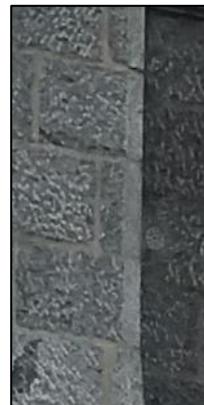
INTERIOR: central 2-storey hall, arcaded and galleried at 1st floor; imperial marble stair with elaborate cast-iron **balusters**; coved ceiling; glazed inner ceiling light. Variety of period decoration to main rooms; cellar below terrace with window opening onto Rubislaw Den (seen 1986).

FOLLY AND TERRACE WALLS: late 18th-early 19th century; curved terrace to SW of house, with pierced balustrade surmounted by recumbent lions; circular-plan folly viewpoint to S, with crenellated parapet.

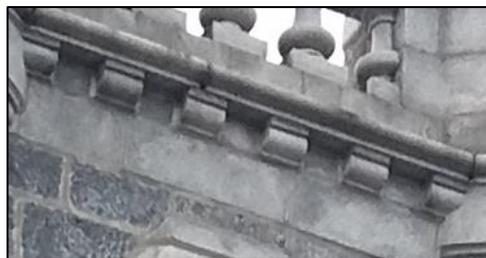
GATEPIERS AND BOUNDARY WALLS: 2 pairs of square-plan ashlar gatepiers to NE and NW of house, chamfered angles and corniced necks, flanked by shallow quadrant walls; high rubble walls to N, simple square-plan piers with shallow pyramidal caps.

Glossary:

Coursed: A course is a layer of the same unit running horizontally in a wall. It can also be defined as a continuous row of any masonry unit such as bricks, concrete masonry units, stone, shingles, tiles, etc. Coursed masonry construction is that in which units are arranged in regular courses, and not irregularly.



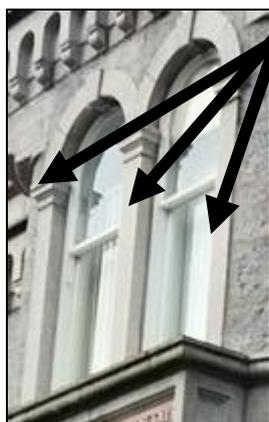
Machicolated parapet: A machicolation is a floor opening between the supporting corbels of a battlement, through which stones or other material, such as boiling water or boiling cooking oil, could be dropped on attackers at the base of a defensive wall.



Crowstepped gable: or corbie step is a stairstep type of design at the top of the triangular gable-end of a building. The top of the parapet wall projects above the roofline and the top of the brick or stone wall is stacked in a step pattern above the roof as a decoration and as a convenient way to finish the brick courses. Common in Scotland from the 16th century.

Crenellated: A wall with battlements is said to be crenellated or embattled.





Pilaster: A rectangular column with a capital and base, projecting only slightly from a wall as an ornamental motif – “an Italianate pilastered bipartite window”

Corbelled/ corbelling: a piece of stone, wood, or metal, often in the form of a bracket, projecting from the side of a wall and serving to support a cornice, the spring of an arch, etc. (*Old French - corb, from Latin, corvus,*

raven – shaped liked a raven’s beak). See below, corbelled balcony above the main door.



Astragal: a moulding profile composed of a half-round surface surrounded by two flat planes. It can be an architectural element used at the top or base of a column, but is also employed as a framing device on furniture and woodwork. See here the “colonette” or little column which splits the window frame forms an astragal.

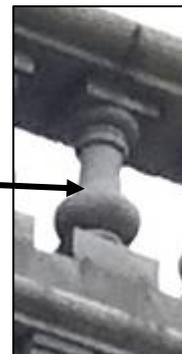
Chamfered: a cut that is made in wood or some other material, usually at a 45° angle to the adjacent principal faces.



Skew (arch): an arch whose jambs are not at right angles with the face; a masonry construction (usually curved) for spanning an opening and supporting the weight above it.

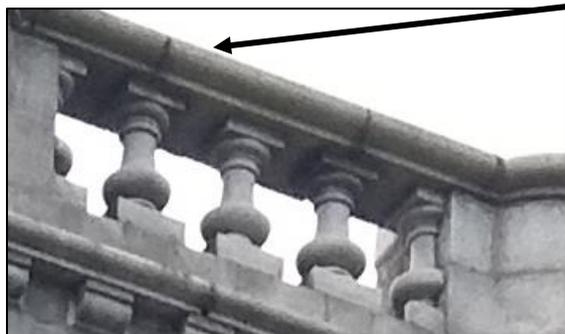


Skewputt: a stone at the foot of the slope of a masonry gable cut with a sloping surface and with a check to hold the coping stones.



Baluster: a short decorative pillar forming part of a series supporting a rail or coping. A **balustrade** collectively

describes the complete structure of balusters and the supported rail.



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