

Mastrick: an eighteenth-century Aberdeenshire laird's house

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In the parish of Rayne, Aberdeenshire, stood a distinctive farmhouse, now demolished. Before demolition, a plan was drawn up to which can be added earlier photographs. Combined with documentary evidence, this article suggests that its form appears to point to it having been at the centre of a small late eighteenth-century estate. In contrast to the one and a half storey farmhouses which are the dominant nineteenth century building type in the region, Mastrick has a single storey cottage at its core, extended by projecting wings on each side (Fenton and Walker 1981: 196). It appears to have never been rebuilt in the nineteenth century. As such, it falls into a gap between, on the one hand, the major buildings that are covered in volumes such as the *Buildings of Scotland* series, and, on the other, ethnological or archaeological inquiries into humbler dwellings (Sharpley, Walker and Woodworth 2015; Fenton and Walker 1981; RCAMS 2007). In turn, the material remains form an impetus to explore archival material that reveals something of the process of the growth of civility in the late eighteenth century amongst a broader section of the population.

The farmhouse

The farm of Mastrick sits a short distance from the Kirkton of Rayne, about two miles from the settlement of Old Rayne. It has an open aspect over fields to Bennachie in the south. The farmhouse, when recorded, had white harled walls and a slate roof, apart from a shed with a tin roof (figures 1, 2 and 3). It consisted of a central single storey cottage of two rooms measuring 10.5 metres by 5.5 metres. On each side of this central cottage were wings projecting to the south. Each wing projected to four metres and had a gable topped by a chimney. In each gable end was a window placed towards the right-hand side as viewed. The western wing, joined by a narrow one-metre-long passage to the main block, measured 7.5 metres by 5 metres. On the east side, again joined by a narrow passage that, like the other, was illuminated by a narrow window, the wing, also 5 metres wide, extended further back to give a total length of 11 metres (figure 6). At the rear it was joined to a shed of rubble construction with a tin roof. There was a staircase in this wing to a boarded attic space used as a bedroom. This wing was used for the farm kitchen, with bedrooms in the other wing. Removal of internal plaster showed that the walls were of rubble construction

(figure 4). The L-shaped steading, sitting to the east of the farmhouse, (also now demolished) featured squared stones on its southern gable and window dressings, but was otherwise of rubble construction.

The parish

The parish of Rayne lies at the heart of the Garioch, the fertile heart of Aberdeenshire and an area known for agricultural production (Mutch 2022). Although in the eighteenth century there was one small settlement at Old Rayne, on the road between Aberdeen and Huntly, most of the population was resident in the fermtouns scattered across the parish. In 1696 there were fifteen of these, each supporting a number of tenants (Stuart 1844) The account of the parish supplied by the Reverend Patrick Davidson in 1795 makes no mention of the enclosure of land to make self-contained farms (Sinclair 1795). Rather, the fermtouns were islands of arable land surrounded by moor and peat moss. Only one third of the arable land was infield land, that is, land regularly manured and used for producing grain crops. The remaining outfield land supported a large population of hares, recorded Davidson, 'as there is a great deal of broom in the out-fields' (Sinclair 1795: 113). Despite this, the land was fertile if treated in the right way. 'A better mode of farming,' argued Davidson, 'however, has of late got in among some of the tenants, who bring lime from Aberdeen, and lay down an acre with turnips yearly, and the year after sow it with bear, and red clover and rye-grass seeds.' Despite this, he continued,

the greatest part of the parish consists of crofts, or small holdings, plowed by two horses, and sometimes two horses and two cows, and that very imperfectly. The tenants are at no pains to clean their grounds of a great deal of weeds, such as runches or wild mustard, knot-grass, couch-grass, and wild oats. Indeed, there are too many small crofts; and the occupiers of them are so poor, that their cattle have not strength enough to plow and dress them properly (Sinclair 1795: 107).

By the time of Davidson's account, ownership of the parish was split between five landowners, only three of which - Alexander Leith of Freefield, Alexander Leslie of Wartle, and Alexander Stewart of Loanhead - were resident in the parish. In 1745 a stent or rate was levied on the heritors of the parish by the Presbytery of Garioch to finance the construction of a new manse for the minister of Rayne (Presbytery of Garioch 1745). The stent roll (table 1) gives an indication of the valuation

Table 1: landowners, parish of Rayne, 1745

Landowner	Valuation	%
Logie	1070	42.07
Freefield	406.66	15.99
Warthill	364	14.31
Rothmaise	140	5.5
Lonehead	70	2.75
Baldychaish	45	1.77
Old Rayne	448	17.61
Total	2543.66	100

Nearly half of the parish (by value) was in the hands of Elphinstone of Logie in the neighbouring parish of Chapel of Garioch and so a non-resident. That factor makes the small estate of Loanhead more significant in the social structure of the parish.

The estate of Loanhead

In 1666 the minister of Rayne, Andrew Logie, is recorded as living at Loanhead (Third Spalding Club 1933: 116). He was firmly committed to the cause of Episcopalianism (that is, to the position of bishops within a Reformed Protestant church) and, as such, fell foul of the Covenanting forces in the bitter religious disputes that wracked Scotland in the mid-seventeenth century. Along with other Aberdeen divines, often known as the 'Aberdeen Doctors', he refused to sign the Covenant to defend Presbyterian ecclesiology. In 1640 he was deposed from his living, having been forced to march on foot to Aberdeen where the case against him was held. He was reinstated in 1641 but deposed again in 1643. In the following year his son, John, was executed in Edinburgh for his adherence to the Royalist cause (Scott 1926: 183). The Reverend John Davidson, in his history of the Garioch, records that:

Logie was a man of talent, and in strong sympathy in all matters of national politics with the general population of the Garioch; circumstances which explain the fact that he continued to act practically as the minister of Rayne though deposed. The people had unanimously, it would appear, refused to subscribe the Covenant; and after the removal of Middleton's successor to Old Machar, in

1661, Logie was replaced in his original charge (Davidson 1878: 306).

Another son, George, succeeded him as the owner of Loanhead. His son, Andrew, became an advocate in Aberdeen and was recorded as the owner of the 'town' of 'Lonhead' in the returns compiled for the imposition of a poll tax in 1696 (Stuart 1846: 280). He was also appointed as a Commissioner of Supply for collecting the tax by the parliament of 1696, suggesting that he might have renounced his grandfather's Episcopalianism (RPS 1696). His own small estate was farmed by six tenants. A law suit raised by his widow Anna Paton in 1708 suggests that he had died sometime in the early years of the eighteenth century (Morison 1811). After that date, the ownership of the estate is not clear; Logie's heiress, Mary, married William Wemyss of Craighall in the parish of Kennethmont (Third Spalding Club 1933: 118).

Alexander Stewart of Loanhead

In September 1786 the Register of Sasines records Alexander Stewart of Mill of Ardo in the parish of Methlick taking possession of the estate of Loanhead, which comprised the farms of Mains of Loanhead and 'Mosstack, called Mastrick' (Sasines 1786). This appears to have been the first mention of Mastrick; the name does not appear in the session records before 1794, when there appeared 'Catherine Alexander late servant to Mr Stewart in Mastrick, and acknowledged herself to be with child. Being suitably spoken to and interrogated she gave up George Bruce, who had likewise been servant to Mr Stewart as the father of her child'

(Session of Rayne 1794). There are still extensive tracts of moss to the north of the parish, although traces of it at Mastrick were eradicated by over one hundred years of agricultural improvement. Intriguingly, Davidson in his compendious history of the Garioch, published in 1878, notes that 'when the house of Mastrick in Rayne, built sometime after 1700, was pulled down, the plastered dividing walls were found to be built of hard peat neatly squared' (Davidson 1878: 383). As well as indicating that Mastrick was settled well before Stewart's ownership, this observation is also given that it occurs in the context of a point made by Davidson about the 'mansion houses' of the Garioch. Such an observation, as well as the reference to the 'house of Mastrick' suggests a dwelling above a mere farmhouse.

That Alexander Stewart was a man of some standing is indicated by his appearance in various taxation rolls. In 1789 he appears together with Alexander Leith of Freefield, one of the major landowners in the parish, as paying tax on a private carriage, one of only two taxed in the parish (Scotland's Places 1789a). In the same year he is one of only four people paying tax for a carriage or saddle horse. The minister, Peter Davidson paid tax for one horse, as did the other major landowner, Alexander Leslie of Warhill. Leith of Freefield paid for three horses, while Stewart, significantly noted as 'Mr Alex Stuart of Mastrick' paid for two horses (Scotland's Places 1789-90a). He also employed a driver, Nathaniel Davidson, for whom he was liable to tax from 1789 to 1797 (Scotland's Places 1789b). This suggests a person of some standing in the district, as does the fact

that he paid a tax for the servant Mary Watt in 1789. (Leith paid tax for two female servants, Leslie for one) (Scotland's Places 1789-90b). As a further means of extracting money, the ever-inventive British state imposed a tax on clocks and watches in 1797. Stewart paid tax on a clock and a silver watch, while the Leiths at Freefield had a clock and three gold watches (Scotland's Places 1797).

All this evidence suggests that by 1789 Alexander Stewart was established at Mastrick with some pretensions to social status. His house at Mastrick first appears in the window tax records in 1787, that is, in the year following his purchase of the estate, as paying tax on seven windows. (at the same time, Leith of Freefield was paying tax on thirty-two). Two years later, two additional windows have been added (Scotland's Places 1788-9; 1789-90c). There are four windows in the main block, with a further three in the west wing. Does this suggest an order of building? We can, at this point, draw on some further evidence from the presbytery records that might indicate some practical reasons why Mastrick took the form in did, at least in part. When manses were built they were inspected by the presbytery to make sure that they were suitable for someone of the minister's social standing. When the presbytery inspected the manse of Kintore in 1728 they recorded, amongst other features, 'a Kitchen on the west side of the close, commonly called the stone chamber, betwixt which and the principal house there is a communication' (Presbytery of Garioch 1728). It would appear that while the main house (which was of one storey with attic rooms) was

slated, the kitchen was thatched. Given the ever-present risk of fire, especially in buildings thatched with heather, it was clearly prudent to set the kitchen to one side. In 1737, revisiting the same manse, the presbytery recorded that in the 'communication' between the kitchen and the main house was 'a little press with Door, lock, key and bands', suggesting something more than a narrow corridor (Presbytery of Garioch 1737). Similar separate kitchens were also recorded at Inch in 1730, Chapel of Garioch in 1724 and Premnay in 1745. Given that the eastern wing of Mastrick was used as the kitchen, joined by a corridor to the main house, perhaps this had its origins in this practice. What is distinctive is the balancing of this chamber by a matching wing on the west.

At some point, Alexander married Christian Leith of Freefield. In 1797 she was recorded as being liable to tax on a gold watch at Freefield, which suggests a marriage after that date (Scotland's Places 1797). Alexander Leith of Freefield was the principal resident heritor in the parish. The Loanhead estate marched with the policies at Freefield, although much of Freefield's landholdings were in the neighbouring parish of Culsalmond, where Alexander Leith was an elder of the Church of Scotland (Session of Culsalmond 1790). This was clearly a prestigious match for Stewart, as the much smaller landowner. Freefield's policies feature a mile-long drive to the house, well treed in a parish which is generally open. ('There are at present but a few acres planted with trees in the parish, and these are the common Scotch firs. There are also a few ash,

elm, and plane trees, on different spots of ground' recorded Davidson in 1795) (Sinclair 1795: 108). According to Sharples, Walker and Woodworth (2015: 629), Freefield (Figure 5) is a 'Palladian villa reinterpreted for North-East Scotland ... Main block and its advanced pavilions, symmetrically composed, are mid-C18, with linking quadrants added in the late C18 or early C19, all built in rubble and formerly harled'. Is there an element of emulation for his new bride? If so, perhaps it was not sufficient, for in 1798 Stuart put the estate up for sale. The advertisement in the *Aberdeen Journal* claims an estate with 'excellent early soil, and capable of great improvement'. More significantly for our purpose it also proclaims that there was 'on the premises a suitable Mansion-house and office houses' (*Aberdeen Journal* 1798). In 1799, Alexander disposed of his estate to Alexander Gordon of Newton, in the neighbouring parish of Inch (Sasines 1799). He moved to the farm of Mastrick on the outskirts of Aberdeen. There is no mention of a farm called Mastrick in the farm horse tax records for 1797-8 for that location, so it would appear that Alexander took the name with him. He died there in 1808, the executor on his will being his brother-in-law John Ross Leith (Later Leith Ross) (*Aberdeen Commissary Court* 1808).

Conclusion

With the purchase of the Loanhead estate by Alexander Gordon of Newton in the neighbouring parish of Inch, Mastrick became just another farmhouse. There was an associated croft and it is interesting to note that when the farm was

advertised for let in 1812 it was as 'The Mains of Mastrick'. By this stage it possessed a 'central and commodious Steading, mostly slated' (*Aberdeen Journal* 1812). Whether this was incorporated in the surviving L-shaped steading would require further investigation. By the time of the 1851 census the farm was recorded as being of fifty-two acres in extent under the tenancy of Alexander Diack (Rayne 1851). It features in Helen Beaton's account of the parish in the nineteenth century as 'amongst the first water mills in the district was the one at Mastrick Farm, and, to the great amazement of the on-lookers, the drum revolved the wrong way!' (Beaton 1923: 125). The farm, by now a holding of seventy acres, was purchased by the sitting tenant, Alexander Mutch, from the Newton estate after the Second World War. The house was lived in until the late 1960s. However, being judged too small and inconvenient for modern living it was abandoned and a new house built nearby. The land has been amalgamated into

a bigger holding and the house of Mastrick was demolished c.2019.

Although the evidence does not allow us to draw definite conclusions, it points strongly to the distinctive built form of Mastrick, with its two wings in imitation of grander Palladian exemplars, being the consequence of its rebuilding as the main house of the laird of a small estate. Whether similar small houses, perhaps disguised under later accretions, were built in other parts of Scotland is an open question for further research. Combining the examination of material remains with archival evidence helps reveal the growing civility of a prosperous section of the population in the late eighteenth century. In the changing nature of the built form amongst this group ministers and their manses might have been the forerunners. The extensive records of the Church of Scotland, especially the approval of rebuilt manses by presbyteries, might form a useful source for further investigation.



Figure 1: house from south east (Alistair Mutch).



Figure 2: house from south west (Alistair Mutch).



Figure 3: house from east showing rear shed (Alistair Mutch).



Figure 4: Mastrick, interior of east corridor wall (Alistair Mutch).



Figure 5: Freefield front elevation showing projecting wings (Alistair Mutch).

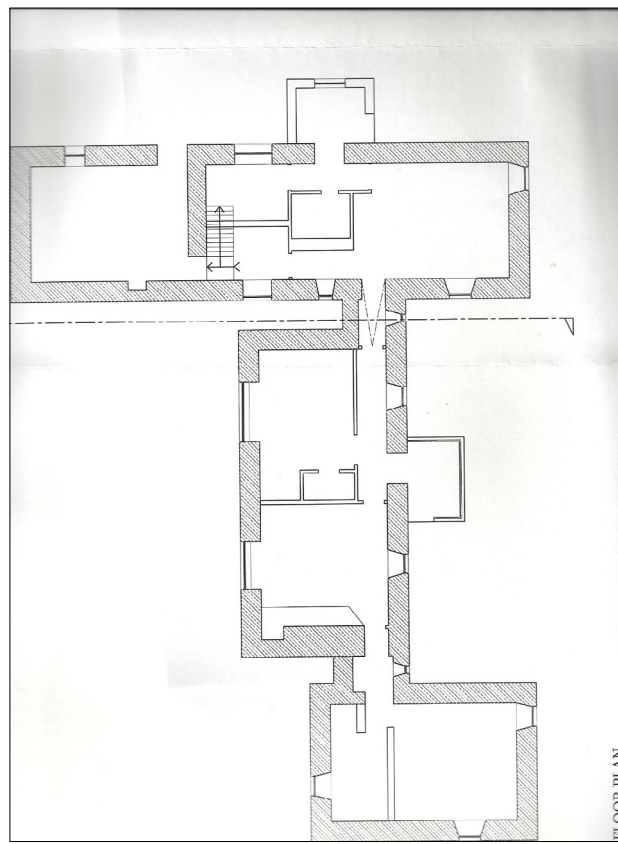


Figure 6: floor plan (drawn by Emma Gibb of Annie Kenyon Architects for Alistair Mutch).

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