



Tales from the Tolbooth

Information Booklet

Character Histories and Text Transcripts

**TOLBOOTH
400**



Alexander Fraser



Lillias Skene



Margaret Campbell



Charles Duff



Peter Williamson

Alexander Fraser

9th Lord of Philorth
born 1570



- Crime -

Unpaid debts and
breaking promises.

- Punishment -

Imprisonment in
the Tolbooth from
1625-1631,
but given the keys
and a curfew.



Alexander Fraser was the 9th Lord of Philorth, born in 1570. His father, the 8th Lord of Philorth (d. 1623) had built Fraserburgh Castle around 1570. The 8th Lord of Philorth developed the harbour area of the fishing village of Faithlie, later renamed Fraserburgh after receiving charters from King James VI in 1592. This transformed the village into a Burgh of Regality, which were granted to noblemen, and a Free Port. He also attempted to set up a university in Fraserburgh to rival that of Aberdeen, however this was short lived.

The many investments made by the 8th Lord of Philorth came at great cost. He was forced to sell Philorth Castle, which had been in the family for over 300 years. Philorth Castle only came back into the family in 1934, when the 20th Lord Saltoun bought it back. The burden of debt carried over to his eldest son Alexander when he became 9th Lord of Philorth on his father's death.

In 1595 Alexander married Margaret Abernethy, heiress of the Lords of Saltoun, and so the Lords of Philorth also became the Lords of Saltoun following this union. Margaret died around 1608, and Alexander remarried Isabel Gordon shortly afterwards.

Fraser is the first person listed in the *Incarcerations and Liberations Books* for the Tolbooth. On 9th June 1625 a letter of capture for Fraser was raised by Alexander Annand of Arduthie, and James Innes for non-payment of debts. The debt to each man amounted to £1000, plus

500 merks penalty for non-payment (equal to around £235,700 each in today's money). Fraser also owed money to Alexander and Duncan Forbes of Colquhoun for money borrowed in 1617, again for £1000, plus 500 merks penalty. An order for his capture and imprisonment was raised against Fraser by them on 11th December 1627.

Finally, a letter of capture was raised against Fraser by John Hay of Crimonmogate in 1625 and again in 1629 for oath breaking. This appears to have been related to an obligation on behalf of his father the 8th Lord of Philorth, but which was not carried out.

On 19th August 1631 Lord Provost Gilbert Collinson put Alexander Fraser at liberty, after letters were received from the Privy Council releasing him. This order of release would have been put forward by his influential friends in the City. As a wealthy individual, Alexander Fraser would not have been subject to strict imprisonment in the Tolbooth, as illustrated by the many warrants for Fraser's arrest.

Wealthy prisoners would be given keys to the cells and only have to return at a certain time. Fraser would have continued with his business transactions during his time of incarceration. While the passing of his father's debt is recorded in the family history volume *The Frasers of Philorth* by Alexander Fraser, 17th Lord Saltoun (1820-1886), there is no mention of Alexander's imprisonment in the Tolbooth for this debt. This is possibly due to the stigma attached to being held for this crime.

Transcript from Incarcerations and Liberations Book, 1625-1708.

The register containing a note of all such persons that are committed to ward within the Tollbooth of the Burgh of Aberdeen being also in note at whose instances and for what cause they are committed or are released in the said ward begyannnd the nynth day of June the year of God one thousandth six hundredth twenty-five years.

Fraser and Annand

Imprimis Upon the 9th day of July 1625 Alexander Fraser of Philorth was committed to ward within the Tolbooth of Aberdeen by vertew of letter of caption raised and execute against him at the instance of Alexander Annand sincetye feuar of [illegible] now of Arduthie for not making payment to him of the sums of money after forfeit viz of the sum of ane thousand pundis money as principale and five hundredth merks of liquidat contenit in ane obligation made by unquhyll Sir Alexander Fraser of Fraserburgh which as principal the said the Alexander Fraser the oldest son and Henry Annand of [illegible] as cautioner [illegible] [illegible] and [illegible] to James Innes son to unquhyll James Innes of Mynnonie their heirs and assignories. Item for not payment making to the said Alexander Annand of the sum of ane other thousand pundis as principale and five hundredth merks of liquidate expense by the said unqhuell Sir Alexander as principale and by the said Alexander Fraser his son and George Crawford of Annochie committed and [illegible] to Henry Annand off [illegible].

Henry Annand for his sessioner and assigner constitute by the to the said James Innes to the obligation and sums of money above written shewlit caused assigned and disponed to the said Alexander Annand the full right and title of the said assignation maid to him by the said James Innes of said sum of one thousand pounds the principal and five hundrteth marks the liquidate the said Alexander Annand assignat and by the said obligation made by the said Henry Annand and to the sums of money.

feuar - leasing a place

unquhell - the late

one merk - two thirds of a pound

Lilias Skene

Poet

1626/27-1697

- **Crime** -

Protestor of her
husband's and
other Quakers'
imprisonment.

Lilias was
never detained,
but campaigned
vigorously for
the freedom
of her fellow
Quakers.





Liliass Skene was born to John Gillespie, Minister of Kirkcaldy and Liliass Simpson in 1626/7. Her brothers included Patrick Gillespie, principal of Glasgow University, and George Gillespie, Minister of St Giles Cathedral, Edinburgh. On 26th August 1646 she married Alexander Skene (1621-1694), Aberdeen merchant, magistrate and author of *Memorials for the Government of the Royall-Burghs in Scotland*. Liliass moved to Aberdeen where she and her husband were fervent covenanters.

In 1669 after the birth of her last child, Liliass converted to Quakerism, breaking with the current faith of her husband. Alexander later followed her conversion in 1672. Locally, Liliass was known as Liliass Gillespie, but in Quaker circles she was known by her husband's surname Skene, after the English style which had been adopted by Scottish Quakers. Liliass was a leading woman in Aberdeen's small but influential Quaker community and appears to have been the only woman who joined the men in adjudicating disciplinary matters. Quaker meetings were frequently held in the Skene's home and in 1678 Liliass helped to establish the first Quaker school in Scotland. It has been plausibly claimed, but cannot be confirmed, that she assisted her husband in compiling the two manuscript accounts of the history of Quakerism in Aberdeen in the early 1680s. Quakerism allowed Liliass a unique degree of female empowerment, due to their belief that God's light was in every person, allowing women to become preachers alongside male members.

Quaker persecution reached its height in the 1670's. Many Friends were fined or imprisoned for their beliefs. Alexander Skene was fined in 1676 when the Scottish Privy Council levied heavy fines against all Quaker men. His fine was increased by half due to the transgressions made by Liliias in her energetic support of her faith.

Between 1677-9 every adult male member of the Aberdeen Quaker group spent time in the Tolbooth, ranging from several months to years. Liliias was never detained, but campaigned vigorously during this time for the freedom of her fellow Quakers. An excerpt from her letter to the Magistrates of 31st March 1677 reads '...honest men that have families wives and children ... in those cold nasty stinking holes where ye have shutt them up, who have been as neatly handled and tenderly educated and as usefull in their generation as any amongst you.'

Liliias Skene's letters and poems are among the few surviving literary works of non-aristocratic seventeenth-century Scottish women. Her poetry features mystical allusions and scriptural images of suffering and salvation. Liliias' only known publication in her lifetime was *An Expostulatory Epistle, Directed to Robert Macquarie*, dated June 1678 who published tirades against the Quakers.

In the 1800s William Walker published (from his own transcription of a manuscript since lost) selections from thirty lyric poems and three anagrams composed by Liliias between 1665 and 1697.

Through the eloquence of Lillas in her writings, she developed close personal correspondences with influential individuals of the time. She was recommended to Elisabeth, Princess Palatine of the Rhine and cousin of the Stuart Kings by Robert Barclay, a fellow Scottish Quaker and an eminent writer. In 1676 Lillas wrote to Elisabeth in the hope that she would intervene on behalf of the Quakers. This developed into a long correspondence with Elisabeth and her companion Countess Anna Maria van Hoorn.'

Lillas died a widow on the 21st June 1697, and was buried next to her husband in an unmarked grave in the Quaker burial ground at Kingswells.

Poem by Lilius Skene

**Some thinges concerning freindes in Prison,
which came before me in the tyme of my sickness;
to be delyvered to them.**

My freindes, stand fast, lett none affrayed be,
And in this winnowing season faint not yee;
But feel yourselves so fixed on the rock,
That present sufferings may not thence you knock.
O! let your love, your patience, and your hope
Outlive a prison, yea, a whip or rope;
Outlive the malice, and outlive the pryde
Off truth's opposers all on every syde.
For sure the Lord will trouble them at lenthe.
Who still to trouble you employ their strenthe,
As Pharoah's might and host shall by the Lord
Be overthrowne and left upon record
That ages yett to come may see his hand,
And heare and feare to break his just command.
But ere his glorious name shall thus appeare
Freindes, tryalls may encrease more closse and neare;
Freindes, mark it, for it opens in the light
Delyverance comes not by man's help or might.
The tryalls come to diffrence and to prove
What wisdom's from below, what from above.
The zeall, the meeknes and humilitie.
The love and lyffe, the faith and constancie,
His graces all, he ' have in exercise
That which he calleth up may sacrifice.

..... continued on next page

For some who think they stand, may flee the feild,
And to the adversary their weapons yield;
The selfe-denyall and the resignation
Best knowne is, through sutable temptation;
Some may have constancie that wanteth love.
The manly pairt may filshing dissaprove,
Yett something still remaines that proves him nought,
When Gideon's armies to the watters brought.
The meeke and lowly living ones are they
Who shall be overcomers in this day,
And take the kingdome, and obtaine the crowne
Of Glory, victorie, and great renowne.
The living in Jerusalem, I say.
Shall sound the trumpet, and shall take the prey.
So till the Lord your further service have,
You and your present work with him I leave.
Who doth his vnyard watter momently,
And watcheth over it continuallie.

Lilias Skene, the 5th of the 10th mo., 1677.

This excerpt from 'William Walker, bibliophile: notebook' by kind permission of the Special Collections Centre, University of Aberdeen.

The audio version of this poem can be heard whilst standing in front of the Lilias Skene character which is on display in the large exhibition case.

Read by Penny Selbie of the Aberdeen Quaker Meeting House.

Recorded by the Elphinstone Institute, University of Aberdeen.

Transcript of Roberts Barclay's Letter to Princess Elisabeth, 28th October 1676

Dear Friend, I did write to thee about 7 weeks ago from Edinburgh at what time I presented a paper from the King to the Council here in behalf of the Prisoners in which I acquainted thee of its proving unsuccessfull, the Council refusing to release them unless they would pay certain fines and promise not to meet in worship of God again unless according to the religion approved by law, neither of which because for Conscience sake they cannot do, they must remain and patiently wait untill the Lord in whose hand are the hearts of man work their deliverance who will not suffer this exercise to continue any longer than it is needful for us. Therefore I being in daily expectation to hear from thee of the receipt of that letter wherewith I also wrote one in French to Anna doe forbear to enlarge at this time only thou may know that thou are daily in my remembrance and my breathing is that the Lord may not suffer his seed to be unfruitfull in thee but raise it and thee by it over all difficulties that stand in the way until thou arrive at the blessed and which is more desirable than all the glory in this world, my mentioning of your condition to severall of my bretheren and sisters did raise great love in their hearts towards you and frequent breathings for you which though at a great outward distance, I hope, are not without virtue and service to youwards among others one singular woman found herself drawn to write this foregoing letter to Anna which I hope will be usefull to you both. She is a woman of great experience and tenderness of heart and who through great tribulation both of body and mind

hath attained the earnest of the Kingdom, is also deeply engaged in the present tryall both her husband, son and son in law being Prisoners. Let these remember my dear love to Anna to whom I forbear to write apart expecting a particular answer from her of mine. I was glad to hear of thy reception of our Friend from Amsterdam and owe thee so much the more love for it that meeting her at London I did much press upon her to make that visit. My heart bleeds and breathe for Ernestus that the Lord may make way for his deliverance and therefore I have written to him by this post. The Lord of his mercy keep you all sensible until his work be accomplished. My love salutes all in thy Family whose Faces are towards Zion, and I remain, Thy Assured Friend in the Lord,

Barclay

Urie the 28th of October 1676.

Transcript of Letter from the Countess Hornes, Lady in Waiting to Princess Elizabeth to Robert Barclay of Urie II, 1st December 1676.

Translated from the original French

Très Cher Ami, Very Dear Friend,

I have received yours with great joy I read it with satisfaction and consolation, it has given me new proof of the Christian Charity that you have for my soul which answers to yours: the Lord for having touched my soul with feelings of love towards you the last hours that I had the happiness to see you, which love having had the divine love for principle could only end in him as this dignified

object is Eternal. I hope that what proceeds from it will also last eternally changing in purity and strength. I hope you will ask grace to the Lord for the one whose only wishes is to belong to him, to know its light and to follow it in simplicity and faithfulness; I am most obliged that you ask from the all powerful hand the grace to help me over all difficulties which I have found many in the way that I have to pass internally and and externally, so much that sometimes I fear to not be successful; other times it seems to me that the Divine Clemence would end such great desires and would see the anguish of my poor soul who ask only the faith of the Lord Jesus (not imaginary but effective) without coming to my help and give victory above enemies who try to prevent the coming out of their nets. I adore and bless the Lord to have brought you here by his Providence as he has make me understand many things that I could not see before; Oh how good and merciful he is. I was well able to read and understand your agreeable letter, how well you neglect eloquences of the world; they could not please me either, the simplicity of Gospel is well above it. Please God may I gain that Simplicity and that I could not only say truly that, I am your very affectionate friend but also your Sister in the Patience and tribulation of Jesus.

M. de Hornes

Transcript of Letter from Princess Elizabeth to Robert Barclay of Urie II, 6th September 1676.

My Deare friend I have received your letter from Urie dated 28 October and of the same tyme information from BF that you have bin clapt up though I am sure that your captivers are more captive than you are, being in company of him that admits no bounds and is abel to breake all bonds. It is a comfort to me that I shall not want your prayers and that other true members of J.C. joyne with you therin, for that raising of that wich is still very smale and weake in me though it be not without some manifestation. I have translated or rather red LS letter unto French for she is now abel to translate any Englishe into her native language but not to read an English Hand with abbreviations. You will see by her answer for it perchance will need another interpreter what sence that letter raised in her. I doubt not but your lettre to Ernestus will be of use to him as that copy of it (sent by BF) has bin to mee, but ther are still great mountains in our way wich God in his infinit mercy will remove in his due tyme, that he may breake all over bonds is the sything of your true friend,
E.

Margaret Campbell

Mother

date of birth unknown



- **Crime** -

Murder

- **Punishment** -

Imprisonment in
the Tolbooth
for several years;
then transportation
in 1742.



Margaret Campbell is listed as a prisoner held in the Tolbooth in the Enactment Book of 1741-45.

She was imprisoned in the Tolbooth for the crime of infanticide, the murder of her own children. On 14th May 1742 she was sentenced to transportation to the Americas. She had already been held in the Tolbooth for several years, and was sentenced along with Anna Durward, who was also accused of infanticide. Colonial plantation owners preferred to receive young, male transportees, as life and work on the plantations was incredibly harsh. Some colonies even refused to take on women and children as they were seen as a burden on the developing colonies. As a result, female offenders were often given lesser sentences for minor crimes than their male counterparts, with many receiving a whipping and a discharge where men were transported. Women were generally only transported for very serious crimes.

Transportation to the American colonies was used as a punishment in Scotland after the Union of Parliaments in 1707, which allowed Scotland contact with England's American colonies. The Transportation Act of 1717 established a 7 year convict bond service for minor crimes, and a 14 year service for more serious crimes, such as murder. An estimated 50,000 British criminals were transported to the Americas. The journey to the Americas would have taken 6-12 weeks in overcrowded, unsanitary conditions, not all passengers would survive. The American Revolution in 1776 and subsequent independence of the

American colonies from British control meant that transportation of prisoners to North America was no longer possible. Sentences of transportation were still passed, but convicts were held in prison while the government tried to find somewhere else to send them. The prisons soon became overcrowded and extra accommodation had to be provided in old ships called the hulks which were moored in coastal waters. The solution to the crisis was to develop a new penal colony, and on 13 May 1787 the First Fleet set sail for Australia.

Margaret's sentence as recorded in the Enactment Book 1741-45 was to be transported, never to return to Scotland. The penalty for returning was to be imprisoned and publicly scourged every day for three months. A scourge was a whip with multiple thongs and was used to inflict severe beatings, and was used in Roman times to punish those who killed a close family member, as Margaret had done. The further details of Margaret's punishment have not been recorded in the City's records, but it is likely she was transported within a few months of the sentencing in 1742.

Transcripts from the Aberdeenshire Commission for Military Impressment Appeals, Vol. 1.

At Aberdeen the fourteenth day of May One thousand seven hundred and forty two years

In presence of the Magistrates of the said Burgh

Compeared Anna Durward and Margaret Campbell who have been for these severall years past in the Tolbooth of Aberdeen for being accused of murdering of their own Children and Conform to Warrands of the Lords of Justiciarie mett at their Circuit Court At Aberdeen the Eleventh day of May Instant Band and enacted themselves Each of them for themselves to depart furth of Scotland and transport themselves to some of his Majestys Plantations in America and that they shall never return ther from or be found in Scotland after the first day of November Next under pain of being again apprehended and imprisoned in the Next sure prison to the place where they or either of them shall be so found and apprehended and therto be detained for the space of three moneths and publicly scourged upon a market day of each of the said moneths by the hands of the comon hangman at the usual Places and with the ordinar Number of strips.

William Gordon Baillie

At the desiring of the before mentioned Anne Durward and Margaret Campbell who declare they cannot write and hauing touched my pen I Walter Cochran Notary Publict doe Subscribe for them

Walter Cochran Notary Publict

Charles Duff

Farm Hand

date of birth unknown



- Crime -

Not enlisting in
the Army.

Wearing tartan.

- Punishment -

Imprisonment
in the Tolbooth
in 1757.



Charles Duff was imprisoned in the Tolbooth in 1757. Whilst ploughing the fields of his master William Robertson, Duff was forcibly taken by a Mr Fraser of Frendrach and press ganged into the army. In 1756,

following the outbreak of the Seven Years War between Britain and France, an Act was passed in Parliament to allow a quick recruitment campaign to be started throughout the country. The Act allowed able-bodied, unemployed men of 17-45 years of age, with no form of monetary support or employment to be forced or 'press-ganged' into the Army. Charles was threatened with imprisonment in Aberdeen if he did not agree to the impressment, and so when he refused to join he was transported to the Tolbooth and held there.

While appealing the reason for his incarceration he was also accused of wearing tartan. The wearing of tartan, or plaid, had been banned by the Dress Act of 1746, following the defeat of the 1745 Jacobite uprising at the Battle of Culloden. The sentence for being found wearing tartan was, in the first instance, to be imprisoned without bail for six months. Upon a second transgression the offending party was to be transported overseas to work on a plantation for seven years. Tartan was seen as a symbol of Highland pride, of the Stuart Dynasty and of Scottish Independence. The Act singled out Highlanders, many of whom had been on the side of the monarchy or had kept out of the conflict entirely.

The main aim of the Act seemed to be to destroy the distinctive identity of the Highland people. Highland tartan was only permitted to be worn by those who were serving in the King's army, possibly as an incentive for men to join the newly formed Scottish regiments.

The outcome of Duff's appeal and the case against him for wearing tartan is not recorded in any surviving documents. It is likely that he would have been imprisoned for the six month period as set out by Parliament before being set at liberty.

Transcript from the Aberdeenshire Commission for Military Impressment Appeals, Vol. 1.

Thereafter there was given into the meeting a Petition from Charles Duff servant to William Robertson in Lumphanan Setting Forth That the Petitioner was sometime ago forcibly taken from his Masters Plough by Mr Fraser of Frendrach and others his Assistants and threatened to be carried Prisoner to Aberdeen if he would not Inlist with Captain Simon Fraser which your Petitioner Refusing to do he was carried prisoner accordingly and was incarcerated in the Tolbooth of Aberdeen where he presently remains Contrair to all Laws and Equity and therefore Craving that it might please their Honours to take their Petitioners Case under their Consideration and to order his liberation acording to Justice as the said Petition signed by the said Charles Duff bears.

Compeared Thomas Mossman Procurator Fiscall and Represented that the Petitioner was Incarcerate for wearing the Highland plaid which he offers to prove and Craves a teim (sic) may be assigned for that purpose. Which being Considered by the meeting they Grant diligence for summoning Witnesses to prove the above Alledgeance against the seventh day of March Current and Appoints the Petitioner to remain in Prison untill that time or find sufficient bail for his Appearance the said day.

Peter Williamson
(Indian Peter)

Tavern Owner
1730-1799

- **Crime** -
Slander

- **Punishment** -
Imprisonment
and
banishment
in 1758.





Peter Williamson was born to crofters in Hirnley, near Aboyne in 1730 and was sent to live with his aunt in Aberdeen in 1743. As a child, Williamson was snatched by two men while playing with other children at the harbour quayside. In 1760, in Edinburgh, John Wilson, a farmer, from Hirnley testified that Peter's father, James, and brother had searched extensively for him when it became apparent that he was gone.

They located children who were being held in the Green, however the children were quickly moved with the help of Bailiffs, who were involved in the kidnapping scheme. The children who were kidnapped were held in the Tolbooth or barns in the city until enough had been collected to fill a ship. Musicians often played, both to entertain the children and to drown out their noise. This practice was widespread in Aberdeen from 1741-44, and involved influential merchants and magistrates, who turned a blind eye to the trade.

Peter left Aberdeen on a ship named *The Planter*, bound for Philadelphia. The ship wrecked on a sandbank off Cape May and was quickly abandoned by the crew, leaving the distressed children on the ship to their fate. The ship did not sink overnight. When morning came the crew returned to retrieve their human cargo and soon continued on their way to Philadelphia. Peter was purchased by a fellow Scot and former slave Hugh Wilson for around £16. Wilson was a good master to Peter, and taught him to read and write. When Peter was 17 years old Wilson died.

With no children of his own, Wilson left Peter £120, his best horse, his saddle, and all his clothes. Peter worked as a free man until he was 24, when he married the daughter of a plantation owner and settled down on a piece of land.

On 2nd October 1754, while his wife was visiting family, Peter's farm was attacked by Native Americans and he was once again kidnapped. He was kept alive by the Native Americans, but was tortured and witnessed many attacks on other farmsteads. Four months after his capture he managed to escape and returned home, only to learn his wife had died. Peter testified to the Philadelphia Assembly about his ordeal, passing on information about his kidnappers. Peter did not wish to return to his homestead, and instead joined the British Army to fight the French and their native allies. In 1756 he was taken prisoner by the French near Quebec, and transported to England along with 500 other British prisoners of war as part of a prisoner exchange. On his arrival in Plymouth he was deemed unfit for service due to a wound in his hand and discharged with a gratuity of six shillings.

Peter then started the long journey back to Aberdeen. He got as far as York before running out of money, so to make some money he proceeded to tell his story to audiences, hungry for tales of the Frontier. His story gained interest and he published *French and Indian Cruelty, exemplified in the Life and various Vicissitudes of Fortune of Peter Williamson, who was carried off from Aberdeen in his Infancy and sold as a Slave in Pennsylvania*.

Peter continued on his journey to Aberdeen, selling his book while doing talks dressed as a Native American and demonstrating war cries.

The book sold over 1,000 copies and he made enough money to finally reach Aberdeen in 1758. Upon his return to Aberdeen he was arrested by the authorities for slander for the story he told of his kidnapping in his book. The books were burned at the Mercat Cross, and Peter was imprisoned in the Tolbooth before being banished from Aberdeen. Peter then settled in Edinburgh where he became acquainted with a lawyer, who took on Peter's case against the Magistrates who were implicit in the kidnappings. After a trial with many witnesses supporting Peter's claims, including those who had lost children to this trade, Peter was awarded £400 and his banishment was lifted. Peter chose to return to Edinburgh, rather than stay in his home town, where he opened a tavern and became a local celebrity.

Peter also started the Penny Post service in Edinburgh and published the first Edinburgh Directory in 1773. In 1799 Peter died and was buried in his Native American costume in an unmarked grave.