

Aberdour and the slave trade

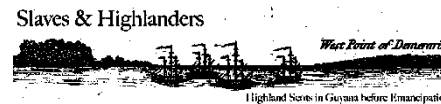
William Fraser owned Hillside House and estate from about 1834 until his death in 1856. Fraser was a gang master and slave owner in Guyana. When slavery was abolished, he received 'compensation' for the loss of his slaves and shortly afterwards purchased the Hillside estate here in Aberdour.

The legacy of slavery and colonialism sits just below the surface of many things and areas, including Fife.

Aberdour
Cultural
Association



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William Fraser
Hillside House

William Fraser began his career as a gang master in Guyana, renting slaves to plantations and government works.

William (1785-1856) and his brother Thomas (1784-1835) were from Artligan, near Beaully (Inverness-shire). They came to Demerara in Guyana some time before 1813 and ran a 'task gang' of slaves, hiring them out to empolder (reclaim land from the sea) and plant new tracts of land along the coast. In 1817 they bought the sugar plantation *Helena & Uplands* and, through their connection with fellow Highlander George Rainy, borrowed extensively from McInroy, Sandbach & Co (in which Rainy was a partner) to finance its purchase and development.

When Thomas died at Lodge Lane (Liverpool) in 1835, William continued the business and bought further plantations (*Providence and Industry*), in partnership with Rainy.

The brothers were for many years highly regarded by the white community as successful planters. As the surviving partner, William later (around 1833)

received compensation of over £17,000 for the emancipation of their slaves.

William returned to Britain and, in 1837, married Helen Colquhoun Campbell of Dunmore. She was a niece of Farquhard Campbell (1760-1829), a plantation owner in Demerara.

William Fraser bought the estate of Hillside in Aberdour in 1834, then Skipness Castle in Argyll, becoming known as William Fraser of Skipness. At Aberdour he employed the architect William Henry Playfair to redesign the house in 1839, but it was never executed and Playfair had to pursue Fraser for payment for the designs.



William and Helen's son William is recorded in the Aberdour parish records as having been born and baptised in Demerara in 1838. When his father died,

William inherited his estate and took over Hillside, but had to sell it when he went bankrupt in 1866 – with a whole raft of court proceedings against him for outstanding debts.

William Fraser senior was running the plantation during the 'Demerara Rebellion' of 1823, a slave uprising which resulted in the deaths of around 250 slaves. At the time of the rebellion Fraser was recorded as owning 389 slaves. Slavery was abolished a decade later.

Fraser sponsored the publication of a pro-slavery account of the uprising. In addition, his overseer subsequently gave evidence for the prosecution during a court case which saw an anti-slavery missionary sentenced to death for assisting and encouraging the rebellion.

Principal sources:

'Guyanese sugar plantations in the late nineteenth century' [published in the *Argosy* in 1883 and re-issued with a commentary by Walter Rodney in 1979]; Wills of Thomas Fraser [PROB 11/1856] and William Fraser [Edinburgh Sheriff Court Wills SC70/4/49]; *Burke's Landed Gentry*.