

The Black Knee Chronicles

Volume 5

The Fraser of Brea Theory

From a summary by Wilson Frazer (1874-1963)

When Archibald Fraser, youngest son of old Lovat of the '45, died in 1815, Joseph Frazer of Dunnacliggan urged his father Robert to lay claim to the barony of Lovat and not to lose what rightly belonged to them. His father, in the traditional words "Child, what you never had, you never lost", refused to do anything. His reasons are not far to seek. In the first place to establish a claim and to obtain the removal of the attainder of Simon of the '45 would be a very expensive business, and Robert, affected like very many by the fall in land values at the end of the Napoleonic wars, had three sons and seven daughters to think about. Besides this, the barony of Lovat had been separated from the Lovat estates when these were restored to old Simon's eldest son, General Simon; and General Simon had entailed them according to his own views. All therefore that Robert could have hoped to get, and that at great expense, was an empty title. So no wonder he declined to move.

During the 70 or 80 years following Robert's refusal to take action, though details seem to have been lost to memory, the tradition persisted strongly that the family was of the Lovat Frasers and that the head of the family was the legal heir to the barony of Lovat. Unfortunately about 1874 all the family papers were destroyed in a fire at Dunnacliggan; and whatever traditional history there was about the father of Archibald - and perhaps not much was available for reasons to be mentioned later - was never recorded, though I can remember that my father had much to say which should have been recorded and which, if it had been, would now have been invaluable. The only item which I can recall about Archibald's parentage is that his father married a french huguenot whom he had met while on campaign abroad.

At the beginning of the 18th century the first three families in the succession to the barony of Lovat were those of Beaufort, Inverallochy, and Brea. During the greater part of the century the families of Beaufort and Inverallochy provided a sufficiency of heirs male. By 1796, however, when Archibald of Dunnacliggan died, the male line of Inverallochy had become extinct, while the family of Beaufort had but one male representative, Archibald of Lovat. Consequently, when Archibald of Lovat died in 1815, the male representative of the family of Brea was next in succession; and it was as such male

representative that Robert Frazer had to decide whether or not to pursue his claim.

The family of Brea sprang from Sir James Fraser of Brea (1612-1649) the youngest son of Simon 8th Lord Lovat. Sir James had, besides daughters, two sons, James, a famous covenanting Divine, and David of Mayne. The Rev. James had one son who died in infancy, and two daughters, the elder of whom married a Rose of Kilvarock and carried with her into that family the estates of Brea. David married an Inverallochy cousin and had a daughter and a son, Simon, whom we call Simon of Brea. This Simon who flourished about 1676 to 1734, was, following the family tradition, the father of Archibald of Dunnacliggan; and in so far as he held a commission in Queen Anne's army, was wounded in Spain in 1707, and was a prisoner in France for two or three years, he may well have married a french huguenot whose acquaintance he made while serving abroad.

As I mentioned above, General Simon Frazer, on acquiring the Lovat estates, entailed them; but he omitted from the entail certain families, notably the families of Brea and Ardachy. Why he did so is unknown. In the case of Brea there was indeed the very hostile feeling which old Lovat so often displayed towards Simon of Brea, apparently because Simon was supposed to support the interests of the Atholl Murray - deadly enemies of old Lovat. There may have been something in this as Simon's grandmother was a Murray of the Atholl family. But this old enmity seems hardly likely to have affected General Simon when making his entail some half-century later, and certainly it can be no explanation of his treatment of the Ardachy family. A possible and reasonable explanation is that, when General Simon came to make his entail, the families of Brea and Ardachy had ceased to hold any landed estate in Scotland, and so had no longer an entity from the General's standpoint.

On 7th May 1716 in France whither he had escaped from imprisonment in London, Simon of Brea writes: "Though I left a small family behind me, I shall be very easy providing that I may be useful." The precise meaning of these words is a little doubtful. Simon may have had his family in France under the protection of his wife's relatives and meant that he would feel pretty happy about them if he had to leave France on the "King's business". But on the whole I think he means that he had left them somewhere in the British Isles, and probably somewhere among the huguenots. I wish I knew where. Nothing further about this small family has yet to come to light in contemporary documents except indirectly in some correspondence of Old Lovat with his lawyer about an incident in a lawsuit he was pursuing against the Chisholm in the early 1740's. The Chisholm had apparently threatened to produce an heir to Sir James of Brea to claim certain lands in dispute. Lovat did not deny the existence of such an heir, but became obviously alarmed and threatening as if he knew it was quite possible for such an heir to be produced. Further research may at any time throw more light on the "small family". Particularly the great M.S. collections at Edinburgh and the Stair

M.S.S. at Oxenford House, especially the "Bolingbroke" volume which contains the records of Lord Stair's activities against the Jacobites in France while he was Ambassador there, may well yield something of value. There can be little doubt however, that Simon of Brea kept his domestic affairs very close, and most likely even such good friends of his as George Lockhart of Carnwath and Colin Campbell of Glendaule, knew little or nothing of the Simon's private life. All the same rumour or tradition of the survival of the family of Brea seems to have persisted in Scotland. In 1808 Mrs Grant of Laggan writes that when Archibald of Lovat dies, Fraser of Brea will be his successor: and though the old lady seems to have mixed up in her mind Brea and Strichen and the Lovat peerage and the Lovat estates, the important point is that over 70 years after Simon of Brea's death she should mention Brea at all. It seems most improbable that she would have done so if she had not heard somewhere of the existence of descendants of Simon of Brea as lawful successors to the Lovat peerage.

Again, when Thomas Alexander Fraser of Strichen was pursuing before the Committee of Privileges for the restoration of the Lovat peerage - he already had the estates under the entail - it became evident that there was the strongest doubt whether the family of Brea was extinct - a doubt strengthened apparently by something discovered in the Hardwicke papers, an immense collection of Family archives now in the British Museum. My search in these papers has been confined to some of the earlier volumes between 1745 and 1750. I now think that any reference to the Brea family is more likely to occur in correspondence about the year 1774 when General Simon recovered the estates or about 1784 when question was raised in Parliament about the restoration of various forfeited titles and estates. However that may be, the doubt raised was strong enough to hold up a decision on the Strichen petition for many years. And when ultimately a decision was given in the Petitioner's favour, it was based not upon any evidence of the extinction of the Brea family but upon negative arguments and upon general considerations that display an astonishing ignorance of the facts and circumstances of Simon of Brea's life. A copy of the final speeches of the Lord Advocate and of the Lord Chancellor are included in the volume called "Fraser's of Lovat".

One might expect, however, to find a full and complete family tradition about Simon of Brea. Why is there not one? Partly no doubt from a natural loss of interest following Robert's refusal to act, enhanced by the mere passage of time and by the difficulties into which the family gradually fell in the middle quarters of the last century, and partly owing to the destruction of the family papers; but chiefly, I think, because Archibald had good reason to keep quiet about his father's identity and probably encourage inquisitiveness. Simon of Brea had been a very ardent Jacobite and was one of the half pay officers who joined James III's standard in 1715. At Preston, where he was wounded, he escaped being shot summarily as several other half-pay officers were, but was ultimately taken prisoner and brought to London. he escaped from prison

and went to France where for some years he was active in jacobite affairs. Returning subsequently to Scotland he acted informally for a while as one of King James' "Trustees" in Scotland. There is nothing, however, to indicate that he was living with his family in Scotland - rather the contrary. On his death in 1734 his family put in no appearance in Edinburgh to claim his effects and it looks probable that the family were left dependent more or less on their huguenot relatives or friends who, no doubt none too pleased with the burden, seem to have disposed of the boys as soon as possible in cavalry regiments, perhaps in the case of the eldest, Archibald, exercising some influence with General John Ligonier, himself a huguenot - to secure his appointment as Adjutant in the famous Black Horse. Well it was bad enough for the son of an ardent jacobite to find himself in a regiment devoted to the Hanoverian cause and destined to be called on one day to provide an escort for his father's notorious cousin and namesake on his way to London and the scaffold. But Fate also decreed that Archibald should meet and marry the widow Ruth Whitehead and settle down in a part of Ireland of a more than ordinary protestant and hanoverian bigotry. Here Jacobites were ranked with infidels and Roman Catholics as outcasts and criminals. Already no doubt Archibald was regarded with none too friendly eyes by his country neighbours because he had a french air about him and is said to have spoken french with rather more facility than english; and the French were at that time bogey-men to protestant civilians in Ireland. To have admitted his jacobite parentage and a relationship with the execrable rebel, Lovat of the '45, would have meant almost certain social ostracism, if not something more violent. Then there was possibly another inducement to lie low. It would seem that the "intremissions" of Sir James Fraser of Brea with the Lovat estate when he had control of it had never been fully accounted for. Anyhow in the correspondence with his lawyer on the Chisholm affair mentioned above old Lovat threatens that if an heir to Sir James of Brea is produced he will have to pay up the intremissions on the estate.

For these reasons Archibald, as it seems to me, might well keep silence about his antecedents. He appears, however, according to Aunt Ruth's chronicle, to have told something to his wife Ruth. The grandchildren to whom she refused to communicate whatever it was Archibald had told her, must have been, I think, the children of her daughter, Anne Dunwoody. In 1789 Ruth was so infirm and ill that she could not sign her name to the joint will with Archibald - there is no reason whatever to suppose that she was illiterate - and her grandchildren, the children of her son Robert, were not of an age to take much interest in family matters until twenty years after 1789. In fact I think that Ruth died before her son married in 1798, if not before Archibald died in 1795. I have no doubt, however, that, before he died, Archibald told the facts to his sons Joseph and Robert, and that Robert in his turn told his eldest son Joseph.

Then there was Marie Fraser. In the latter part of the 18th century this lady was living in and around Soho in close friendship with huguenot families. In

1814 she died aged about 94 years and was buried in the huguenot burying-place at Portarlinton in the Queen's County, Ireland, at the opposite corner of the county to Dunnacloggan. From her age she was contemporary with Archibald, and it is just possible that she was a sister who had remained with the huguenot relatives but came to Ireland towards the end of her life to find her brothers. If Archibald had kept silence to the end, perhaps it was she who supplied the information that agitated the family about 1815. I have not been able, however, to find out anything more about her and must leave the matter there.

There was another matter which people frequently bring up as if it threw doubt on the connection with the family of the the Frasers of Lovat, that is, that we spell our name with a Z and not with an S. My answer to this is always that there is nothing in it: but as that seems generally to fail to convince, I am setting down briefly my grounds for saying so. Simon Fraser of Brea as will be seen from the copies of his signature spelt his name with an S in the old form: but in his commission, in the Half-pay Lists, and in the copies of his signature to powers of Attorney his name is always spelt with a Z. In the Lockhart Papers except in one instance, his name is always spelt with a Z: and though in the Stewart Papers S prevails, there are at least two instances when the writers - Stewan Robertson and Father Graeme - spell his name with a Z, and later while Allan Cameron uses the S, the Duke of Mar uses a Z. I have heard, from my father I think, that it was by Archibald's express wish that his family adopted definitely the Z: anyway I think that it will be noticed that Archibald himself signed his Will with an S. So I think that I am justified in saying that there is nothing in it.

This is only a small summary of the study of Simon of Brae carried out by Joseph and Wilson. At the completion of their studies, they were probably the worlds leading experts on this particular highland gentleman.

There are many other snippets of Brea research, which I hope to publish in due course.

- [Next Page](#)
- [Previous Page](#)
- [Chronicles Home Page](#)