
Bitesize History - People

The HARVEYS of Castle Semple

Unlike the previous owners they were not from a landed gentry family. Their story begins with John Harvey, schoolmaster at Midmar for fifty-seven years, was born at Kintore in 1690 and died in 1767. His sons (Alexander, John, Robert) acquired large fortunes in Antigua and Grenada. The three brothers divided their wealth among a wide range of relatives. To ensure the continuity of the family name, there were stipulations on at least some of the gifts to adopt the name Harvey. Their sister Elizabeth benefitted the most from her brothers. Two of her brothers died unmarried and the son of her third brother sold his inheritance to his uncle Robert who had acquired the estates of his deceased brother. On Roberts death in 1791 the estates were divided between Elizabeth's son John Rae from her first marriage and Robert Farquhar her son from her second marriage to Alexander Farquhar. On his inheritance John Rae became John Harvey and purchased Castle Semple in 1813.



He had three children, James, Margaret and Elizabeth who married the Earl of Buchan and had a daughter Elizabeth. James died young and Margaret inherited the bulk of the Scottish estates in 1820.

She married James Lee and had three son's two of whom died without issue and two daughters. Her third son, Henry Lee Harvey (1823-1882) married his cousin Elizabeth in 1855 and inherited Castle Semple in 1872. Sadly, their only child, Alice (1862-1871), died aged nine and the graves of

Henry, Elizabeth and Alice are side by side at the entrance to the Collegiate Church.

The estate passed to a nephew, James Widdrington Shand, in 1883, the son of Henry's sister Margaret (1825-1877) who had married her second cousin Charles Farquhar Shand (1812-1889) who was the son of Robert Farquhar mentioned above. It was quite common for cousins to marry at this time. Charles was Chief Justice of Mauritius in 1860, died in 1889 and is buried in the Collegiate Church.

James was living on the family sugar plantations in Mauritius at the time of his inheritance. Like islands in the West Indies, the Mauritian economy was dependent on sugar plantations. When the slave trade with Africa was abolished, prosperity continued in Mauritius, using indentured labourers who came mainly from India.

For the Harveys, the good times were not to last. Nothing is documented, but by the early years of the new century, the family became penniless allegedly due to Mr Harvey's gambling habits. His son (Shand) was interviewed on 8th March 1967 and says his father lost a lot of money due to a cyclone in Mauritius. He says his father had to find £50,000 which in today's money would be several million pounds. The estate was put on the market in 1908. Apparently, the National Trust Company (which had been formed in 1895) was interested in purchasing it for open country to create a park. Seventy years later it did become part of the Clyde Muirshiel Regional Park. Ultimately the estate was taken over by the Department of Agriculture for Scotland in a sale dated 11th August 1937 and broken up into small holdings for farming. The area around the old mansion became overgrown and the house was burnt out in 1924 and the shell was finally demolished in the 1960s.

