

29 March 2024

### **343-YEAR MYSTERY SOLVED AT ABERTARFF HOUSE**

A 343-year mystery has been solved at one of the oldest residential buildings in Inverness, Abertarff House.

Dating back to the late 1500s, Abertarff House, which is cared for by the National Trust for Scotland, reopens to members and supporters for the season this Friday 29 March. Ever since the building came into the Trust's care just over 60 years ago in 1963, the conservation charity's heritage experts have been intrigued by a mystery surrounding the beautifully carved marriage stone which sits atop of the house's main fireplace. Now Black Isle historian Dr Jim Mackay has helped to solve the puzzle.

Perplexing visitors and historians for years, the initials AS and HP, alongside the date 1681, are worked into the marriage stone. There had been much speculation but their identities were unknown until now. Through his extensive research, Dr Mackay, who chairs the Kirkmichael Trust in the Black Isle, discovered that the daughter of a Cullucudden minister, Reverend Charles Pape, married an Inverness sea captain and merchant, Alexander Stewart – and they lived in what is now Abertarff House.

It is thought that Alexander married Helen Pape, and they resided in the house from 1681 until his death in 1720. Thereafter his son John, the subject of the antiquarian history *The Letter-book of Bailie John Steuart*, lived at Abertarff House until he died in 1751.

It was finally sold in 1771 on the death of Bailie John's daughter Margaret. The Stewart family owned the building for three generations during a time of unrest and turmoil, notably the 1715 Jacobite Rebellion.

Gail Cleaver, the National Trust for Scotland's Operations Manager for Culloden, Abertarff House and Hugh Miller's Cottage, said: "We are grateful to Dr Mackay who has helped us to solve a puzzle more than 300 years old, adding further colour to the history of this significant building and the stories we share with our visitors.

"As Scotland's largest conservation charity, we are privileged to protect, care for and share the heritage of places like Abertarff House, which has witnessed huge moments in our country's history: the Covenanters' era, Jacobite risings and two world wars. An example of Scottish domestic architecture of the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, it makes an important contribution to the historic streetscape of Church Street in Inverness and to what we know about the city's heritage.

"We look forward to welcoming our visitors, members and supporters as we reopen the doors to Abertarff for the coming season."

Abertarff House is open from Friday 29 March over Easter weekend from 10am until 4pm, and thereafter Tuesday to Saturday 10am until 4pm.

For more information, visit: <https://www.nts.org.uk/visit/places/abertarff-house>

## **ENDS**

### **Notes to editors**

#### About the National Trust for Scotland

Established in 1931, the National Trust for Scotland is Scotland's largest conservation charity and cares for, shares and speaks up for Scotland's magnificent heritage.

Over the last 90 years the Trust has pioneered public access to and shared ownership of some of the most magnificent buildings, collections and landscapes in Scotland. It cares for more than 100 sites, from ancient houses to battlefields, castles, mills, gardens, coastlines, islands, mountain ranges and the plants and animals which depend upon them.

In March 2022, the National Trust for Scotland launched *Nature, Beauty & Heritage for Everyone*, its ten-year strategy which sets out the ambitions of the charity over the coming decade. From speaking up for Scotland's heritage which doesn't have a voice, to improving the lives and wellbeing of people across the country, and responding to the climate and biodiversity crisis, the Trust will build on its work in recent years to grow its impact and conserve and restore more of Scotland's heritage, as it moves towards its centenary in 2031.

Scotland's largest membership organisation, the National Trust for Scotland relies on the support of its members and donors to carry out its important work.

For more information on the National Trust for Scotland visit [www.nts.org.uk](http://www.nts.org.uk).

The National Trust for Scotland is a charity registered in Scotland, Charity Number SC 007410.