

**LADY ANNE HALKETT OF PITFIRANE**  
&  
**ABBOT HOUSE -DUNFERMLINE**



One of the most remarkable occupants of Abbot House, Dunfermline, was Anne Murray, Lady Halkett. Born 1623 in London, she was the younger daughter of Thomas Murray, Provost of Eton College, tutor and later Secretary to King Charles I. Thomas Murray died in 1623. Her mother, Jane Drummond, was Governess to the Duke of Gloucester and later also to the Princess Elizabeth. Young Anne and her brother William were servants to the Royal Bedchamber and despite lacking conspicuous wealth were in day to day contact not only with the Royal Family but also most of the nobility.

Anne and her elder sister Elizabeth were educated by private tutors who taught them to read and write English and French, embroidery, music (the Lute and Virginals) and dancing, all attainments required as basic to the future marital prospects of a young gentlewoman of the court. Anne, however, had a singularly unfashionable interest in medicine, drugs and surgery, she was an enthusiastic if unofficial student of Sir Theodore Ryeans, the chief surgeon to the King.

At the age of 19, she fell in love with Thomas Howard, eldest son and heir of Lord Howard of Escrick. After an on off engagement lasting two years, she was abandoned by him in favour of a titled rival, Lady Elizabeth Mordaunt. In 1647 on the death of her mother she resided with her oldest brother Henry and his wife for about a year. In 1648 she became deeply involved in a plot by the royalist secret agent Colonel Joseph Bampfied to effect the escape of the Duke of York, (the future James VII) from the clutches of his Cromwellian guard at St James Palace. Dressing him in women's clothes, Anne and Bampfied succeeded in smuggling him out of the country to France. Impressed by Bampfied's dashing appearance and apparent devotion to the Royal

Family, she was tricked by him into a bigamous relationship, and being exposed for her part in the Duke's rescue was compelled to flee penniless to Scotland in 1650.

Once in Edinburgh, her Murray relations and members of the leading Royalists families befriended her. Among these was Lord Dunfermline who invited her to Aberdour and Dunfermline. Here she was introduced to King Charles II who had to be reminded of her role in the rescue of his brother.

Following the defeat of the Royal Forces at the Battle of Dunbar in 1650, Anne joined the enforced exodus north to Aberdeen. While on the road she stopped at Cupar to treat the horrendous wounds of the walking wounded. Her resolute courage in such a situation was again reported to the King at Aberdeen who ordered a gift of 50 guineas from the Royal Purse in recognition of her bravery.

During a two-year stay with the Countess of Dunfermline at Fyvie Castle she again demonstrated her force of character by protecting her pregnant benefactor from the ravages of a marauding troop of Cromwellian Dragoons. She returned to Edinburgh in 1652 where she was introduced to Sir James Halkett, a widower with two sons and two daughters. Sir James was deeply impressed by the beauty and by now legendary courage of this Royalist heroine, a legend further enhanced by her dangerous night crossing of the Forth to warn the royalist Lord Balcarres and his wife of their impending arrest, thereby enabling their escape to France. In 1656, having finally shaken off the persistent and unscrupulous Bampfield, Anne married 2<sup>nd</sup> March 1656, Sir James and at the age of 33 and became Lady Anne Halkett of Pitfirrane. Her daughter Elizabeth was born 1656, son Henry born 1658 and son Robert was born 1661, the only one of her children to survive infancy.

Her inability to reclaim her former property in England and the persistence of salacious scandal-mongering regarding her premarital affair with Bampfield combined with her role as stepmother to the Laird's first family made life very difficult for her. After the Death of Sir James in 1670, her ambitious stepson Sir Charles Halkett of Pitfirrane made it quite clear that in spite of the generous scale of Pitfirrane House the continued presence of the 47-year-old dowager under his house would be an embarrassment. Sir Charles Halkett was created a baronet in 1671.

Once again it was her old friends the Setons and their in-law the Marquis of Tweeddale, now in possession of the Lordship of Dunfermline, who came to the rescue by offering the vacant Abbot House to the widow as a dower house. As her surviving memoirs amply demonstrate, Lady Halkett was a very religious woman, haunted by her past indiscretions and viewed her enforced residence in the Maygate as something akin to a free trip to Sodom and Gomorra. It was she rationalised, clearly to be a test of her morality and spirituality, and since she was compelled to go there that she would steel her courage and devote what was left of her life to the remembrance of her beloved husband and to the furtherance of good works. She was to be as good as her word – during the 30 years between her arrival at Abbot House and her death, Lady Anne Halkett acquired a widespread reputation as a teacher, midwife, herbalist and provider of charity and good works. Every Wednesday she ran a free soup kitchen and medical service for the poor of

Dunfermline, while Saturday was devoted to prayer and remembrance of her dead husband and children.

Despite her misgivings concerning the infidelity of Charles II and irresolution of James VII, she remained an unrepentant royalist and Episcopalian, thereby providing a further source of embarrassment to her stepson, Sir Charles Halkett. In the war of the 1690 (Battle of the Boyne) he fought on the side of the House of Orange. Sir Charles Halkett died 1697. Anne's own son by Sir James Halkett, Robert Halkett, came out for King James. Captain Robert Halket served under James II in Ireland, captured and imprisoned in London until he died in 1692. It was this stalwart support of the Stewart cause and her earlier bravery, which singled Lady Halkett out as the ideal governess for the children of the beleaguered Jacobite aristocracy.

Throughout the 1680s and 90s the Abbot House rang with the sounds of children as Lady Anne eked out an often precarious living as tutor and guardian to a succession of aristocratic boarders who, together with their servants and Governors (a combination of manservant and monitor) filled its 12 rooms to capacity. It is clear that despite the patronage of Sir William Bruce, the King's Architect, Sir George MacKenzie, Lord Advocate and many others, the Halkett family continued to disapprove of Lady Anne's educational and charitable endeavours. Sir Charles Halkett, in spite of his debt to her for running his coal mines during his wartime absences, made no effort to assist her in the 30 years of struggle to clear her debts, and by withholding her annuity quite often exacerbated her troubles. Often she despaired of ever being rid of her burdens and in one moment of despair, resolved to sell off her surviving property, abandon her charitable works and retire to live anonymously in England. By this time her furniture, although no doubt derived from Pitfirrane and therefore of good quality, was old and unfashionable and an attempt to sell some of it in Edinburgh proved a disaster when it was returned to her unsold. Finally in 1698 she struck up a deal with Sir Robert Murray, a relative who in return for the signing over of all her property including her still un-reclaimed lands in England, agreed to settle all of her debts. She died in Abbot House on 22 April 1699 at the age of 76. To the very end she had continued to maintain a vigorous lifestyle, attending ordinary and aristocratic patients with her own herbal meditations which have preserved a vivid, albeit fragmentary account of her long and extraordinary life.

The Memoirs of Anne, Lady Halkett  
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