

The Frasers of Belladrum in Berbice, 1789 to 1832

A research example: placing a Highland family on the plantation map of the West Coast of Berbice, and testing whether kinship followed proximity or preceded it.

WHAT WAS ALREADY IN PRINT

The Frasers of Belladrum have been written about before, and the reader should know where. Alexander Mackenzie's *History of the Frasers of Lovat* (1896) gives the pedigree, the marriages by contract and the sale of the estate.^{1 2} David Alston's *Slaves and Highlanders* (2021) gives the Berbice story from the Reelig papers: the plantation numbered 7 that became Dochfour, the partnership of 1800 in plantation Union with William Fraser of Culbokie, who had married Sarah Fraser in 1797, and Colin Mackenzie of Mountgerald, the sisters' marriages, and the slave-ship captain of the same name;^{4 12} his website adds person pages with their own archive references.^{9 40 43 46} Joseph Bulloch's Baillie pedigree of 1898 gives Hanna Baillie's family.³² The Legacies of British Slavery database holds the men and the claims;⁵ the Register of British Slave-Traders holds the captain.²³ What this example adds is not the story but its evidence: the register entries, the wills, the newspaper notices and the maps that carry it, read in the original, and the generation after 1830 that none of the printed accounts reach.

THE FAMILY

Colonel James Fraser, seventh of Belladrum in the parish of Kiltarlity, Inverness-shire, served in Germany in the Seven Years War and in America in the War of Independence and raised a Fencible regiment in 1794.⁴ He married Hannah Baillie, born 1739, third daughter of Hugh Baillie of Dochfour by Emilia Fraser of Reelig, whom Hugh Baillie had married on 10 June 1730.^{1 32} Her brothers were Alexander Baillie of Dochfour, who died in 1798, James Baillie of Bedford Square, the Member of Parliament who died in 1793, and Evan Baillie of Bristol, who lived from 1741 to 1835; all three are in the Legacies database as brothers of one another, though the database does not join them to Belladrum,^{33 34 35} and Evan is in the Register of British Slave-Traders, which records the three brothers selling "human cargoes arriving from Africa" on St Kitts from 1766.³⁶ The colonel's sister Christian married into Kingillie.³⁹ The colonel died in the last week of May 1808, in the 76th year of his age, as three newspapers reported;³¹ the family history's 1797 is his wife's year.^{2 4} No testament for him was confirmed at Inverness; the one entry of the name in those years, a testament dative for a James Fraser "in Belladrum" of 1815, is a tenant's, given up by his only son John on a farm inventory of £147.³⁰ Of their children the printed family history names four: James, who succeeded; Simon, who in 1790 purchased an estate in Demerara and married Fräulein Battenberg; Emilia, born 1771, who married Major Colin Mackenzie, fourth of Mountgerald, in 1795; and Sarah, "the Colonel's third daughter", who married William Fraser, tenth of Guisachan and Culbokie, by a contract dated at Guisachan and Belladrum on 25 and 26 April 1797.² Two further children appear only in other sources. Evan Fraser of Belladrum, who died in 1813, is recorded in the Legacies of British Slavery database as a brother of Simon,³ and a sister Isabella married Thomas Cuming of Demerara.⁴ The newspapers place both weddings at Belladrum house, not in a kirk or a colony: Sarah to William Fraser, younger of Culbokie, on 27 April 1797, the day after the contract was signed,³⁷ and Isabella, "eldest daughter", to Thomas Cuming on 6 September 1798.³⁸ Neither marriage is in the parish registers; gentry married by contract at home. The surname history follows the land, and the children who left no landed line are absent from it.

James Fraser, eighth of Belladrum, was baptised at Kiltarlity on 26 October 1767, the second child of Captain James Fraser of Belladrum and Hanna Baillie his spouse. The register page carries the family entire: Isobel, baptised 2 October 1766; James; Æmilia, 1768; Sara, 1769; and Hugh, born 13 February and baptised 16 February 1770, with the note that he died soon after.²⁹ Peter Fraser of Fingask witnessed all five; Captain Simon Fraser of Fanellan and Captain William Fraser of Kingillie the earlier ones; and Alexander Baillie of Dochfour stood for Hugh in 1770, the Baillie connection thirty years before the Union purchase. The published date of 1766 for James's birth is therefore a year early, and the family history's 1771 for Emilia three years late; Hugh appears in neither published account. He was the first of the three brothers to reach Guyana, having bought property in Demerara by January 1790.⁴ He bought the superiority of Belladrum from the Lovat trustees on 20 December 1800, with sasine the following year, and was served heir to his father in 1810, two years after the colonel's death.^{2 31} He married Mary, eldest daughter of John Fraser of Achnagairn, at St Mary Abchurch, London, on 17 December 1799.^{5 6} There was no issue.

THE PLANTATIONS ON THE MAP

Berbice plantations along the coast were numbered lots, and the number is the position. On the West Coast the lots run from the mouth of the river towards the Abary Creek, which is the boundary with Demerara. Two charts place the family. Captain Thomas Walker's *Chart of the Coast of Guyana* of 1798 draws the West Coast strip with the proprietor's name on each numbered lot and adds printed lists of proprietors for the Berbice river and for the whole coast from the Mahaicony to the Demerary.⁷ Major von Bouchenroeder's *Kaart van de Colonie de Berbice* of 1802 numbers the same coast from one, at the guard post by the mouth, to fifty-two at the Abary, without names.⁸ The 1802 numbering is the one later records use; it runs about one lot ahead of Walker's on the middle of the coast.

Read together, the two charts give the following. On Walker's West Coast a Fraser holds the lot beside Summersall and Lewis near the mouth, which matches the plantation "no 7, west sea-coast" that the Frasers acquired in 1794.⁹ Lots 27 to 29 in Walker's series are held by "Westrick & Poole", the Dutch owners recorded for the plantation De Unie, numbered 28 to 30 in the 1802 series.¹⁰ Plantation No. 28 was created about 1794 and was managed for some years as part of Union along with Nos 29 and 30.¹¹ In 1800 James Fraser of Belladrum acquired Union in partnership with William Fraser of Culbokie and Colin Mackenzie of Mountgerald, and Edward Satchwell Fraser of Reelig took No. 28 in exchange for his share of the plantation Dochfour.¹² By 1813 No. 29 carried its own name, Trafalgar, and James Fraser and his wife were living on it.¹³ A second Fraser lot on Walker's chart adjoins the Government Land that the Society of Berbice later partitioned among Lord Seaforth, Belladrum, Reelig and William Munro,¹⁴ and a third, at the Abary end, adjoins the lot of van Batenburg, the governor's family into which Simon Fraser married in 1801.

Walker's printed key also places the family in Demerara: "10 J. Fraser junr — Dochfour" in the list from Mahaica to Demerary, and "2 Jas. Fraser junr." on the west side of the Mahaica.⁷ The Legacies database records the same plantation as "Doch Four", number 10 under Mahaica to Demerary, proprietor J. Fraser junior.¹⁵

KINSHIP BEFORE PROXIMITY

The question this example was built to test was whether kinship and legacies formed out of plantation proximity on the West Coast. The dates answer it. Emilia Fraser married Colin Mackenzie of Mountgerald in 1795 and Sarah Fraser married William Fraser of Culbokie in 1797.² Their brother James bought Union with those two

brothers-in-law in 1800.¹² Reelig's No. 28 came out of the same transaction, and Reelig was kin through the Belladrum mother's line.¹ Three contiguous lots, one family, and the ties precede the purchase. One instance in one direction is not a rule. The instrument for the other direction is the same pair of charts read against the slave registers, which are arranged by plantation.

THE REGISTER OF 1818

The Berbice slave register of 1818 is indexed by owner. Under James Fraser the index lists 386 enslaved people, among them Archy, the man James Fraser of Belladrum took to Britain and brought back to Berbice in 1812 or 1813.^{16 17} Duncan Fraser of Fingask, his co-owner at Golden Fleece, has five;¹⁶ Simon Fraser has two entries, of 77 and 73;¹⁶ Evan Fraser, who had died in 1813, has entries of 96 and one, which are returns for his estate;¹⁶ and three William Frasers have 150, 26 and 8.¹⁶ The Legacies database gives 213 people on the 1817 return for Golden Fleece alone,¹⁸ so in 1818 more than Golden Fleece stood in James Fraser's name.

The return of the following year, 1819, lists 374 people under James Fraser's name, twelve fewer.⁵⁴ The Berbice registers of 1825 to 1834 are not in the index that was searched, so the count cannot yet be followed to emancipation from the fleet of records consulted here.

THE SALE OF BELLADRUM

James Fraser's West Indian business failed. The household furniture, plate and china at Belladrum were sold by roup on 26 October 1812,¹⁹ and the estate was advertised from 19 March 1813 for auction at the Royal Exchange Coffeehouse, Edinburgh, on 28 April, in one lot or four.²⁰ The family history gives the advertisements as 26 March and 13 August 1813 and the final sale as 1827, for £80,000, to John Stewart of Carnousie.² By December 1832 Stewart was "of Belladrum and Carnousie" and the candidate for the Inverness Burghs.²¹ James Fraser died at Abary, Demerara, on 4 October 1832; the Inverness Courier of 19 December reprinted an elegy from the Demerara Courier "on the death of the late Fraser of Belladrum".²² His widow died at Windsor on 5 January 1854, aged 72.² The civil death index confirms it, under the spelling the registrar used: Frazer, Mary, aged 72, Windsor Union, March quarter 1854.²⁷ The marriage of 1799 is in the St Mary Abchurch register at the London Metropolitan Archives.²⁸

TWO RECORDS FROM KEW, READ IN THE ORIGINAL

Both of the records the two databases rest on are digitised, and both were read for this example.

The will of the captain is registered in the Prerogative Court of Canterbury.²⁶ It opens: "In the Name of God Amen. I James Fraser Mariner and Commander of the Ship Pilgrim of Bristol in her now intended Voyage to Africa and America make this my last Will and Testament viz. I give and bequeath to my Cousin Edward S. Fraser of Rilig and to his Children the principal and interest of a debt due to me from an Estate called Dochfour situated in the Colony of Demarara in Guiana which will amount in the course of this present Year to a Sum little short of two thousand two hundred pounds. I do likewise give bequeath and devise whatever share or reversion of the said Dochfour Estate shall devolve upon me by right of succession after my late Brothers debts are all paid in equal shares to all the legitimate Children of my said Cousin Mr Edward S. Fraser of Rilig." It goes on to leave one thousand pounds to the children of his sisters Isabel and Mary, five hundred pounds to "Mr Evan Baillie of this City", one thousand pounds to "the legitimate Children of my late Cousin James Baillie of

London", one thousand pounds to Miss Elizabeth MacBrair, five hundred pounds to "Mrs Emilia Mackenzie of Mountgerald", five hundred pounds "in equal shares to the other legitimate Children of Colonel James Fraser of Belladrum", one hundred pounds to "my Cousin Isabella Robertson", fifty pounds each to a list of cousins that includes "John Fraser of Achnagairn" and "the Rev. James MacLauchlan Chaplain to the Fraser Fencibles", and fifty pounds each to "the Children of my Bastard Brother John Roy". Twenty pounds go to the Bristol Infirmary and twenty to the Captains' Society; his watch, arms, books and wearing apparel to his cousin Evan Baillie, whom he appoints sole executor. The will is dated at Bristol on 31 July 1797, the day the Pilgrim sailed, and was proved in London on 15 November 1798.

That single document settles three things. The testator's cousin of Reelig, his cousin of Achnagairn, Emilia Mackenzie of Mountgerald and the "other legitimate Children of Colonel James Fraser of Belladrum" are all named as kin of the captain, so the Bristol mariner belonged to the same Inverness-shire cousinhood as the laird of Belladrum, which is why the databases confused them; the Colonel's children are named as a class distinct from the testator, so the testator was not one of them; and the debt on Dochfour, with the reversion "after my late Brothers debts are all paid", is the share of that plantation which Alston records passing to Reelig.

The Berbice register of 1818 was read at the return for Golden Fleece.¹⁶ Its heading: "Return of Slaves attached to Plantation Golden Fleece, situate in the West Sea Coast, the Property of James Fraser Esquire. This Return made by Lewis Cameron." The columns are name, colour, age, employment, sex and place of birth. The first entries read: "1 Fingal, Black, 50, Driver, Male, Africa; 2 Vaughn, 42, do; 3 George, 40, do; 4 Alves, 43, Sick Nurse; 5 Philip, 48, Carpenter, St Kitts; 6 Adam, 50, Boatman, Africa; 7 Abraham, 60, Invalid; 8 Adam, 34, Field, Berbice; 9 Aaron, 50, Invalid, Africa." The return runs to 302 names across three openings of the volume, and the preceding return on the same page, for plantation Kilcoy, is signed by John Sutherland as attending attorney and dated 24 October 1817. Most of the people on Golden Fleece are recorded as born in Africa; a minority, mostly the children, as born in Berbice; one man in St Kitts.

THE OTHER JAMES FRASER, AND HIS FIFTEEN VOYAGES

The Register of British Slave-Traders holds the man the Legacies database has confused with James of Belladrum, and holds him well. James Fraser of Bristol, mariner, born 1740, was master of fourteen slaving voyages between 1772 and 1798 and outfitted one more as a merchant; his page in the Register lists every crossing, and each crossing carries the voyage number of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, so the two can be read together.^{23 24} On the fourteen voyages that embarked people, 5,632 were taken aboard on the African coast and 5,066 were landed, 566 having died at sea. His cousin James Baillie of Bristol invested in the Emilia, which Fraser commanded in 1786 and 1787, and the Register names Evan and James Baillie as his cousins.²⁵ The Baillies of Bristol were the Baillies of Dochfour, the family of James of Belladrum's mother, which is how two unrelated James Frasers came to sit one link apart in three databases.

Voyage	Vessel	Years	Embarked at	Landed at	Embarked	Landed
17800	Catherine	1772–73	Malembo	Charleston	260	237
17830	Catherine	1773–75	West Central Africa	St Kitts	350	300
17888	Alexander	1776	Bight of Biafra	Lucea, Jamaica	355	325

Voyage	Vessel	Years	Embarked at	Landed at	Embarked	Landed
17895	Valiant	1777–78	Bonny	Jamaica	500	399
17902	Tartar	1780–81	Cape Coast Castle	Jamaica	250	229
17913	Tartar	1782	captured by the French before any people were embarked			
17920	Emilia	1783–84	Bonny	Kingston	380	340
17933	Emilia	1784	Bonny	Dominica	490	450
17952	Emilia	1785	Bonny	Kingston	393	360
17967	Emilia	1786	Bonny	British Caribbean	414	379
17990	Emilia	1787	Bonny	West Indies	359	328
18071	Hector	1790–91	Bonny	Jamaica	764	700
18144	Hector	1792–93	Bonny	St Vincent	596	558
18206	Hibernia	1795	Sierra Leone estuary	fate unknown	119	93
18222	Pilgrim	1797–98	Cape Coast Castle	Demerara	402	368
Fourteen voyages that carried people, 1772 to 1798					5,632	5,066

Voyage numbers are those of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database, carried by the Register's crossing entries. The Tartar of 1782 was taken by the French before embarkation. Places are given as the database records them.

THE CAPTAIN'S KIN

Who the captain was to Belladrum is answered by Duncan Warrand's *Some Fraser Pedigrees* (1934), as reported on Alston's page for him: the son of Alexander Fraser and Marjory, with roots in the parish of Kiltarlity, and a cousin of Evan Baillie of Dochfour, which makes him a cousin of the colonel's wife.⁴⁰ His brother Alexander was part-owner of plantation Dochfour, and his nephew Alexander bought Ballindoun, in Kiltarlity, in 1824 on Essequibo money.⁴⁰ That nephew's will, made in Essequibo on 8 May 1818 and registered at Inverness after his death at Phoineas on 22 March 1829, names his mother Isobel Fraser, his brother Captain James Fraser and his sisters Marjory, Margaret and Hannah, and leaves ten thousand pounds to "my Coloured Children Margaret, Marjory, Hannah, John and Isobel" and the child their mother Peggy was then carrying, to be placed in the Royal Bank of Scotland so that they might be raised in Scotland "in a decent and genteel manner", with the wish that "none of them ever return to this Colony or the West Indies"; "any Slaves that I may be possessed of at my death" he left to Peggy and the children.⁴¹ It names no one of Belladrum. The link between the captain and the laird runs through the Baillies, and through the captain's own will.²⁶

THE CREDITORS' LEDGER

How the Belladrum money ended is told by a creditor. Duncan Fraser of Fingask, who managed the Belladrum estate from 1813 when James Fraser went back to the West Indies,⁴³ died at Fingask in the parish of Kirkhill on 4 December 1833, and the inventory his executors gave in to the Inverness commissary carries as its twelfth item "Debt due to the deceased by the late James Fraser Esquire of Belladrum, stated to amount with interest on 10th July 1832 to £4,381 11s 6d", of which £467 had been recovered "out of the proceeds of certain poided effects", leaving £3,914 "of which it is doubtful what part may be recovered"; the executors valued the whole at £100.⁴² Fingask's personal estate in Scotland was £5,096, most of it a share in an Inverness hemp factory and the stock of his farm; his interest in Berbice was recorded as "the only property belonging to him out of Scotland", unvalued.⁴² His trust deed of November 1833 opens with "various losses and disappointments arising partly from cautionary obligations and partly from the insufficient returns, diminished value and present precarious state of my colonial property and claims", and conveys "my share in the property of, interest in, or claims to, or affecting certain estates or plantations named Ross, Paradise, Belladrum and El Dorado, with the negroes and other slaves" on the West Sea Coast of Berbice.⁴² Golden Fleece, which the Legacies database gives him jointly with James Fraser from 1825, is not among the four he named.

THE MOUNTGERALD SHARE AND THE GENERATION AFTER

The Belladrum share of Union passed to the Mackenzies. The Legacies database holds Colin Mackenzie, fourth of Mountgerald, as a previous owner of Union and his son Colin, fifth of Mountgerald, as joint owner from 1817 and the awardee of the Union claim in 1836, with four Jamaica claims besides;^{44 45} Alston's page for the family gives the 1795 marriage from a contemporary letter, the son's memorial in Spanish Town cathedral, where he died on 1 December 1837 aged 35, and the compensation: over £9,000 for 176 enslaved people, of which £7,000 was owed in mortgages to J. T. & A. Douglas of Glasgow.⁴⁶ The share moved on debt.

Two of Emilia's daughters died unmarried, and their death entries carry the Belladrum name into the statutory registers. Jemima Mackenzie died at Elgin on 28 December 1860, aged 52, daughter of "Colin Mackenzie, Landed Proprietor" and "Emilia Mackenzie, M.S. Fraser";⁴⁷ Sarah Fraser Mackenzie died at Bridge of Allan on 3 July 1889, aged 82, daughter of "Colin Mackenzie of Mount Gerald, Ross-shire" and the same mother, her niece Emily Gordon of 29 Melville Street, Edinburgh, informing.⁴⁸ A third daughter, Isabella, married Archibald Dick, who died at 29 Melville Street on 6 August 1864, aged 86, "West India Planter", "Married to Isabella McKenzie", his son Alexander of Liverpool informing;⁴⁹ the Legacies database, which holds him for his Jamaica estates, has the day as the first. Their daughter Emily, born about 1836 at Fortrose, married George Freer at Elgin in 1859 and, widowed, Dr William Eagleson Gordon of Bridge of Allan at Melville Street on 12 July 1865, the entry naming her parents as "Archibald Dick, West India Planter" and "Isabella Dick, M.S. McKenzie";⁵⁰ in 1891 she was head of the Melville Street house, a widow of 55, with a son by each marriage and a daughter;⁵¹ her Gordon children were born at Bridge of Allan between 1866 and 1871, the second of them named Archibald Alexander and the third Emily McKenzie.⁵² Isabella's brother-in-law David Dick of Glenshiel, who married another Mountgerald daughter, is in the Register of British Slave-Traders as a partner in slave factors at Kingston and co-owner of three slaving voyages in 1799.⁵³

TWO DATABASES, AND WHAT EACH HOLDS

The Legacies of British Slavery database holds all six of the men named above as separate people and connects only Simon to Evan. The brothers, the two brothers-in-law and the Union partnership are not among its stated relationships, and its tentative association of Union with the Dutch "Nos 28, 29 and 30 De Unie" is confirmed by the published account and by the chart.^{10 11} The Register of British Slave-Traders, published in September 2026, holds a James Fraser of Bristol, mariner and master of the ship Pilgrim, buried at Bristol on 11 December 1799, with a will proved in November 1798.^{23 26} That entry is linked to the Legacies record of James Fraser younger of Belladrum, who married six days after that burial and died in 1832.⁵ The two men are distinct: the master of the Pilgrim is the James Fraser from whom Reelig inherited a share of Dochfour, and James of Belladrum was the plantation's other owner.¹² The captain's own will names the children of "Colonel James Fraser of Belladrum" as a class distinct from himself.²⁶ A search of the Register under the names of this family found seven entries of Scottish surnames linked to the Legacies database: six are right, one is this confusion, and one man who should be linked is not, Evan Baillie, whose Register entry carries no link to his Legacies record.^{36 33}

OUTSTANDING QUESTIONS

The questions below are the ones the records read so far do not settle. Each is stated with the record that would answer it.

1. How did Belladrum's share of Union pass to the Mountgerald nephews: by sale, by debt, or by inheritance through Emilia? The compensation papers for the Union claim and its counter-claims at Kew would say;⁴⁶ the claim papers have been requested, and the counter-claims volume awaits conservation before it can be copied.
2. What became of the 386 people under James Fraser's name in 1818? The return of 1819 gives 374;⁵⁴ the returns of 1825 to 1834, and the Golden Fleece claim of 1836, are at Kew and have been requested.
3. Where were Simon and Evan Fraser born, and where did they die? Neither is in the Kiltarlity register, and the family history omits Evan.³
4. When and where did Isabella Cuming die? Her daughter Hannah was raised at Guisachan by the Culbokie Frasers after her death, so she died young, most likely in Berbice.⁴
5. When did Hannah Baillie die? Alston gives about 1797; no notice has been found in the newspapers under the estate's name between 1795 and 1806, and the Kiltarlity and Kirkhill burial registers do not cover the years.⁴
6. What was the exact kinship between the captain and the Baillies? Warrant's page, which Alston cites, has not been read in the original.⁴⁰
7. Which of the four plantations Fingask named in 1833, and which of the unnamed Fraser lots on Walker's chart, were Belladrum's? The Berbice Court of Policy minutes and the Register of Deeds are the records.^{42 7}
8. What became of Emily Gordon's children, born at Bridge of Allan between 1866 and 1871, and of Alexander Dick of Liverpool? The census returns of 1901 and 1911 and the death registers after 1900 would carry the line into living memory.^{52 49}

The sources beyond those already read are the Berbice Gazette and the Court of Policy minutes at the Nationaal Archief; the Register of Deeds and the Court of Session productions at the National Records of Scotland, with

the Seaforth and Bught papers there; the Fraser of Reelig papers at the Highland Archive Centre, Inverness, which are the spine of Alston's account; the Edinburgh Gazette for the sequestration notices; and the Bristol muster rolls for the captain's crews.

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