

Falkland 1900-2000

Year 1915

(As researched by Jack Burgess)

9th October 2015

Article from *The Fife News*: **Lord Ninian Crichton-Stuart, M.P., Killed in Night Attack:**

“Lord Ninian Crichton-Stuart, M.P., for Cardiff, Hereditary Custodian of Falkland Palace, and Colonel Commanding the 6th Welsh (Territorial) Regiment, has been killed in action. The news came as a great shock to the farmers attending Cupar market on Tuesday. Mr Gavin, Lord Ninian’s factor, who arrived by motor car from Falkland in the forenoon to attend to business, brought the disquieting news that all was not well with his Lordship at the front, and that the worst was feared. The day had not far advanced when Mr Gavin received a telegram stating that Lord Ninian had been killed. In Cupar, and among Fife farmers to whom Lord Ninian was so well known, the distressing intelligence rapidly spread, and caused great pain and profound regret. Since he came to reside at House of Falkland, Lord Ninian devoted himself whole-heartedly to the interests of agriculturists and was so approachable to all that he soon became a general favourite. As President of the Fife Agricultural Society, he spared neither time nor money in the fulfilment of the duties of the office; and it is well known that but for his memorable and eloquent appeal to the members of the Highland and Agricultural Society, that institution’s great national show of 1912 would never have been held in Cupar. How earnestly and enthusiastically he laboured beforehand to make that show the success it was will never be forgotten by those who then came in contact with him. Whatsoever his hand found to do, he did with his might, and his enthusiasm becoming infectious, many willing helpers were drawn to his side.

The sad news was also keenly regretted by everyone in Falkland and district. No one could talk or think of anything else. Lady Ninian is residing at House of Falkland, and on Monday she received a telegram from France, from the transport officer of her husband’s regiment simply stating, “Very sorry; writing.” Her Ladyship wired to her brother-in-law, Lord Colum Crichton-Stuart, who is at the Foreign Office, and her mother, Lady Gormanston, in London. About one o’clock on Tuesday afternoon, Lady Gormanston telephoned from London to Lady Ninian at House of Falkland, saying that Lord Ninian was dead. He was killed during a night attack. On Wednesday morning, Lady Ninian received a letter written by her late husband on the night before he went into the attack.

In Falkland and district, Lord Ninian, with Lady Ninian, did much to brighten the life of the whole community. Football, cricket, and golf found every encouragement at the House of Falkland, where, also, a memorable series of historic tableaux was submitted for the entertainment of all the classes, a few years ago. The inhabitants of Ladybank likewise recall the gift by Lord Ninian of a flagstaff and handsome Union Jack for their public park, and the great demonstration by aeroplanes, Boy Scouts and school children on the day on which the flag was unfurled. His Lordship's participation in these and many other beneficent services has now become a memory. He has been cut down while still young with great prospects before him. When he decided to go to the front he did not tear himself thoughtlessly from a happy home and devoted wife and family. He counted the cost and deliberately chose to take all risks for his country. On his departure he wrote privately to a friend – "I may lose my life; but I will not lose my honour." He has kept his word. He has lost his life; but his honour shines brighter than ever. He is the last of a noble trio – Major Slacke, Captain Hanbury Tracy, and himself – who were so recently associated with each other in all that meant peace and goodwill to Falkland and district; and it is hard to realise that those brave men will no more be seen going in and out amongst us. The greatest sympathy is expressed for Lady Ninian and her three children.

His Lordship's Career:

"Lord Ninian Crichton-Stuart was born on 15th May 1883 at Dumfries House, Ayrshire. He was the second son of the third Marquess of Bute and the Hon. Gwendoline Mary Ann Fitzalan-Howard, eldest daughter of the first Baron Howard of Glossop, and was thus directly descended on the paternal side from the Royal Stuarts. His early education was received at Harrow, and, contemplating at that time a diplomatic career, he left Harrow and went to Russia in order to study the language of that country. Becoming seriously ill there, he returned home and went up to Christ Church College, Oxford. It was while on this visit to Russia and during the course of his illness there that the lamented death of his father took place. While at the University, his Lordship was exceedingly popular, and took, as he had always done, a keen interest in sport. On leaving Oxford after a successful career, he entered the 3rd (Militia) Battalion Cameron Highlanders, but went straight on from that regiment to the 1st Battalion Scots Guards, in which regiment he served for over two years, leaving it after his marriage in order to devote himself to the management of his estates, and to politics. He was married on 16th June 1906 to the Hon. Ismay Lucretia Mary Preston, daughter of the late 14th Viscount Gormanston. Both the coming of age and the wedding were made occasions of great rejoicings on his Lordship's property in Falkland.

A Peaceful and Happy Gathering:

Imposing and picturesque as have been the scenes enacted within the walls of Falkland Palace, it is doubtful whether the venerable building ever looked down upon a more peaceful, happy, and harmonious gathering than that which met in the Palace Court on Lord Ninian's 21st birthday, 15th May, 1904. Presentations were the order of the day. The freedom of the ancient Royal burgh was conferred upon his Lordship. He was also the recipient of handsome gifts from his tenantry and estate employees; and, at a great banquet, he gave to tenantry, Magistrates, Councillors, and tradespeople later in the day, he let fall a remark which may be regarded as the guiding principle which actuated all Lord Ninian's dealings. "It will be my chief aim in life", he said, "to follow in the footsteps of my father, and to profit by the example which he set me, to make my aim, as it was my father's, to ever bear in mind, that the possession of an estate brings with it the responsibility of watching over all those connected with it." Rejoicings also took place at Rothesay, another of the homes of the late Marquess of Bute. Colonel Stuart as next of kin, spoke of the nobleman's strong resemblance in appearance and particularly in voice, to his father. "I have the idea", said Mr Stuart, "although I may be wrong, that it is his Lordship's intention eventually to go into public life, and I will not be surprised if he should some years hence, endeavour to serve his country by obtaining a seat in the House of Commons."

The Marriage Rejoicings:

The rejoicings over Lord and Lady Ninian's marriage were marked by similar enthusiasm. In social circles, the event excited unusual interest, and its celebration in the quaint little chapel attached to Gormanston Castle, County Meath, Ireland, took place in presence of a large and fashionable gathering, under circumstances of the happiest character. At Falkland the festivities extended over two days, and included a dinner to the tenantry on the Falkland estate, and a large number of local friends, another dinner to the employees, and a dance to the youth and beauty of the district. Once again, a large marquee was erected for the occasion in the Palace Court, garlands of evergreens were hung around, and the old Palace was tastefully decorated with streamers and bannerettes. Lord Ninian could not, of course, be present; but in his factor, Mr George Gavin, who carried out the elaborate programme, he had a capable and much-esteemed substitute.

A Solemn Pathetic Scene:

But shadows as well as lights fell on the House of Falkland, and there were many sorrow-laden hearts in the old burgh when on Friday morning, 4th February 1910, the news spread that Lord and Lady Ninian had that morning lost their first-born, a bright little boy of three, with white and golden curls. Snow fell softly on the funeral day, and as the cortege, preceded by acolytes bearing the cross, wended its way from the

Chapel Royal of Falkland Palace, to a sequestered spot in the grounds, south-east of House of Falkland, where a grave had been prepared, and a religious service was conducted according to the rites of the Church of Rome, the silent, respectful attitude of the townspeople who looked on, and of the large company who followed the remains bore eloquent testimony to the sympathy felt and the impression created by the solemn, pathetic scene.

“The Farmers’ Friend:

After taking up his permanent residence at House of Falkland, Lord Ninian was elected a member of the County Council of Fife, and at once entered with that whole-heartedness and enthusiasm which were characteristic of the man into the work of the county, and devoted himself especially to the promotion of every interest likely to benefit agriculture and those engaged in it. Much of his best work was done in this connection; so much so that he was referred to in Fife as “the farmers’ friend”. For three years he was President of the Fife Agricultural Society. During that time and since he demitted office, he provided a premium to enable a first-class Clydesdale stallion to travel in the central district of Fife, a gift which has been greatly appreciated by the tenants, and has vastly improved the quality of horses in the district. It was, as President of the Fife Agricultural Society, that he was selected to plead the claims of Fife to have a visit of the Highland and Agricultural Society’s Show, and no one who was present at the meeting of that Society in the Showyard at Dumfries in 1910 will forget the persuasive eloquence with which Lord Ninian championed Fife’s petition, followed, as a result, by the meeting resolving by an overwhelming majority that the show of 1912 should be held either in Fife or Kinross. The choice of the Directors ultimately fell upon Cupar, and Lord Ninian worked unceasingly for the success of the undertaking. The addition of the beautiful cup, known as “The Fife and Kinross Perpetual Challenge Cup” to the already handsome list of the Highland Society’s trophies was a proposal emanating entirely from his Lordship, as also the original idea of laying aside a sum of money to provide annually for the winner a replica of the cup. In recognition of his interest in and efforts on behalf of agriculture, Lord Ninian was in December 1911 appointed President of the National Fat Stock Club.

A Remarkable Political Achievement:

The beautifully situated estate of Falkland, to which Lord Ninian succeeded on the death of his father in 1900, is bounded on the south by the Lomond Hills, and extends to over 6,000 acres. In addition to smaller holdings, there are fifteen large farms on the estate, all let to excellent tenants. It is almost unnecessary to say that his Lordship was an extremely popular landlord. He was adopted as Unionist candidate for Cardiff – in which place much of his boyhood was spent, when his

father was in residence at Cardiff Castle – and, in January 1910, he contested the seat against Mr D.A. Thomas, and lost by 1,555 votes. Undaunted, he took his defeat manfully, and returned to the contest in December of the same year, when he was declared victor by 299 votes. To make such a turn-over in about 10 months was a remarkable achievement, and was the sensation of that General Election. On his return to Falkland after the election, he was met at the confines of the burgh, and escorted to House of Falkland by a torchlight procession consisting of all shades of political opinion, and was welcomed home and congratulated on his victory by Provost Jackson, on behalf of the whole community.

Lord Ninian as a Flock Master:

In 1910, Lord Ninian laid the foundations of what ought in time to be high-class flocks of Shropshire and Border Leicester sheep. The Shropshire flock was founded by the purchase of some choicely bred ewes from Shrewsbury. His Lordship purchased at the Royal Agricultural Show at Norwich in 1911, the first prize shearling ram, Hardwicke Royal Norwich, for 120 guineas. Drafts from the famous Galalaw and Picstonhill flocks were acquired to form the nucleus of the Border Leicester flock, and there are some worthy representatives of these strains in it. His Lordship was the purchaser at the Galalaw sale in 1911 of the famous ram, His Majesty, the price being the big one of £140 for a sheep in his fourth year.

The House of Falkland:

A mile to the west of Falkland stands the House of Falkland, Lord Ninian's Fife residence. It was built in 1841 by the late Mr Onosiphorous Tyndall-Bruce, at a cost of over £30,000, and was described at the time as "one of the most beautiful and princely edifices in Scotland". In the days of his boy-hood, the late Marquess of Bute, Lord Ninian's father, paid frequent visits to the House of Falkland. He found the mansion and its proximity to the ancient Palace of Falkland so congenial to his tastes that, when opportunity offered, he acquired the property, becoming in virtue of its possession the Hereditary Custodian of the Palace. One of the internal features of the house is the wealth of oak panelling which the late Marquess carried out with charming taste. Some of it is beautifully inlaid with mother of pearl. The furnishings, also of oak, are from special designs or are copies of ancient pieces of furniture found in museums or in old and rare collections. The House itself occupies a picturesque situation at the base of the East Lomond Hill, and is noted, externally, for its well-trimmed lawns and its antique approach, formed by an avenue of old lime trees.



Falkland House Staff c1900
The Avenue, Falkland House c1907

The Heir to the Falkland Estate:

The news that a son and heir was born in London on Sunday, 14th March last, to Lord Ninian, gave great satisfaction to the inhabitants of Falkland and to the many well-wishers of the House of Falkland throughout the county. On receipt of the intelligence, the Magistrates of Falkland met next day and dispatched a congratulatory telegram to Lady Ninian. By their instructions, Falkland's town bells were also set ringing. The House of Falkland and the venerable Royal Palace were bedecked with flags, and the absence of his Lordship on duty at the front seemed to invest the event with deeper interest. A cake and wine banquet for the employees on the estate, the home farm, and the Dunshalt tile works was held in the Bruce Arms Hotel in the evening – Mr Gavin, the factor, presiding. The Rev. John Joyce, private chaplain to Lord Ninian Crichton-Stuart, was also present. "The Health of the Son and Heir" was given by Mr Gavin, and heartily responded to. "The Healths of Lord and Lady Ninian Crichton-Stuart" was given by Father Joyce, and enthusiastically pledged. A telegram of congratulations was despatched from the meeting to Lady Ninian. The son was christened privately at 43 Bryanston Square, London, receiving the names Michael Duncan David. The godparents were Lord Colum Crichton-Stuart and the Hon. Mrs Herbert Stourton, and the Marchioness of Bute and the Dowager-Viscountess Gormanston were among those present. The other two members of Lord and Lady Ninian's family are girls – namely, Ismay Catherine, born 23rd December 1909, and Claudia Miriam, born 24th June 1913. At

the end of August, Lord Ninian was home at House of Falkland on five days' leave from the front.

Speech on Leaving for the Front:

On 28th October 1914, Lord Ninian and his regiment left Swansea for the front. Lord Ninian, with his officers grouped round him, addressed to his men a few sentences as noble, as fine-hearted in their tone, as could have been expected from a soldier of long standing. Their manner of delivery and the spirit behind them will not soon be forgotten. Each sentence was punctuated by a few seconds' silence, and this was how it sounded: -

"You are going on active foreign service.

That is all you need to know.

The greatest honour a man can receive is that he has been provided with a chance to give, if need be, the greatest that he has – which is his life – for his country.

I do not doubt every man in this parade will give it, and give it as willingly as I mean to give it myself.

I want you to remember that your discipline counts.

Your life may be pretty hard sometimes, but it is great deal better to have a hard life for a short time, than to have no life at all.

The mittens and the wristlets that were given you this morning were a present to this battalion from my wife."

J.P. Court Tribute:

Hon. Sheriff-Substitute Thomson presided at a J.P. Court at Cupar on Wednesday, and paid a fitting tribute to Lord Ninian Crichton-Stuart. The other Justice on the bench was Mr G.M. Stewart. Prior to the commencement of the business of the Court, Hon. Sheriff Thomson said –

"I desire in a word to refer to the death in action at the front of Lord Ninian Crichton-Stuart, one of our Fife Justices of the Peace. We all deplore his death, which has terminated what promised to be a brilliant career in the political world. His Lordship took a keen and intelligent interest in the affairs of this county; he was one of those always anxious to serve to the best of his ability his fellow-men. I came in contact with his Lordship as a member of our District Licensing Court, and in connection with the Fife Agricultural Society, to which he was indeed a tower of strength. What has always impressed me was his pre-eminent fairmindedness and the tolerant and

unprejudiced spirit his Lordship brought to bear on any public question that came before him. Now that he has with so many of our brave and gallant sons made the great sacrifice for his King and country, and we shall for many a day miss his cheery and inspiring presence, and as our thoughts go out to Lady Ninian and his Lordship's family, we can only extend to them our deep, heartfelt sympathy."

A requiem mass is to be said for the late Lord Ninian at Falkland Palace Chapel this (Friday) forenoon at eleven o'clock.