

The Gascoigne family and the strange story of the Mistress of Elphinstone

Brian Watters

[Charles Gascoigne](#), that most enigmatic of the managers of [Carron Company](#), has had his career with that firm (1769-1786) and his subsequent exploits in [Russia](#) (1786-1806) recorded over the years and examined in greater detail recently.¹ Even today, his contribution to the advance of technology in the late 18th and early 19th century Russia is studied by academics in this country, in the USA and in Russia. A résumé of his exploits at Carron is given here; however, it is his background and origins that have proved just as fascinating, but mostly elusive.

In 1763, just as the ironworks at Carron were being established, one of the founders, Samuel Garbett, decided to set up another business at [Carronshore](#), for the manufacture of turpentine.² He brought in Charles Gascoigne, who had married his daughter Mary in 1759, to manage this concern and the Gascoigne family, now with the addition of a daughter Anne, born in Edinburgh in 1760, took up residence at Kinnaird House, the home of James Bruce. The firm, known as Garbett & Co., soon diversified by operating a small fleet of ships and mostly handling the freighting of goods from Carron Company. In 1765, Charles became a partner at the ironworks and at the same time took over the lease of the harbour at Carronshore, which had been held by Carron Company; His son Charles was born at Kinnaird House that year. He improved the facilities at the harbour by constructing a new wharf, which he soon promoted, to the detriment of the old harbour; this also led to conflicts with the locals. After the resignation of Carron Company's first manager William Cadell junior, Gascoigne was appointed as his successor and guided the company through a difficult time, culminating in the success of the [Carronade](#) gun. However, Garbett & Co. collapsed in 1772 with debts of around £190,000, the blame apportioned to Gascoigne by his father-in-law. This affair eventually led to the bankruptcies of both men, but Gascoigne continued as manager at Carron. He was finally persuaded to go to Russia to set up a new ironworks and to improve that country's cannon making capabilities. In May 1786, one month after his daughter Anne married the Earl of Haddington, he left for Russia, where he eventually became a member of the Imperial Russian Government.³

Charles Gascoigne's father was Woodroffe Gascoigne, reputedly of the Gascoigne family of Parlington in Yorkshire and described in some accounts written in the early years of the 20th century as having been a captain of the British Army at the time of the Jacobite uprising of 1745.⁴ Woodroffe's connection with the aforementioned family has been extremely difficult to prove, as his name does not

appear in any of that family's pedigrees. He was a member of General Roger Handasyde's 16th Regiment of Foot.⁵ and was commissioned Ensign (the lowest rank of commissioned officer) in 1728.⁶ In those days, commissions could be bought, the rank of Ensign cost £400.⁷ Whilst still holding this rank, he married Grizel, eldest daughter of Charles, 9th Lord Elphinstone; she had been born at [Elphinstone Tower](#) (the Elphinstone Estate was purchased by the Earl of [Dunmore](#) in 1754) near [Airth](#), in 1704. All of the members of the Elphinstone family had their births, marriages and deaths recorded in a "Birthday Book" which spanned the years 1508-1873⁸; Grizel, unlike most of the others, only ever had her birth recorded there. Confirmation of this marriage did appear later in 1808, when the Prince of Wales' genealogist, John Brown, drew up the *Historical and Genealogical Tree of the ancient and noble House of Elphinstone*.⁹ the Gascoigne's first born was Charles but a date of birth or a baptism has not been found, especially in the Elphinstone "Birthday Book". Could it be that Lord Elphinstone had not approved of this marriage and hence the absence of further details in the Birthday Book? Woodroffe Gascoigne was next commissioned Lieutenant in 1739¹⁰ (this rank could be purchased for £550¹¹) and in 1744 at Inverness, where his regiment was stationed, his daughter Primrose was born. She was named after her grandmother Elizabeth Primrose, wife of the 9th Lord. Woodroffe apparently never reached the rank of Captain.

Some other details regarding this family are to be found within the Carron Company archives¹², in an obscure "ledger" entitled "Account Book 1757-1764 (household and personal) Charles Gascoigne?"¹³ The true identity of the owner of this book is not disclosed but the contents refer to Woodroffe (spelt Woodruff), the Honourable Grizel and their son Charles. Charles is shown as being a joint partner in two business ventures: Coney and Gascoigne in 1757 and Jorden and Coney, in 1758. In 1758, Charles leased premises at Fenchurch Street in London and his father provided the money to build a "stack of warehouses". Samuel Garbett's name appears in connection with the supply of plates and candlesticks, in the year 1757; this is the first recorded connection between Garbett and Gascoigne. There is also a reference to money due to the account of Lady Lovatt¹⁴ (Primrose Campbell), who was Grizel's cousin. Other personages include Polly (Primrose?) Gascoigne, Lady Dolly Primrose and Charles Elphinstone (Grizel's younger brother and 10th Lord). The need for wage negotiations with their board of servants is also recorded.

1757, the date in which that book commenced, was the year in which Grizel's father, the 9th Lord Elphinstone, died. It was in that same year that Charles Gascoigne began a correspondence with members of the Elphinstone family in Scotland. One letter in particular, to Lady Clementina Fleming¹⁵, wife of the new Lord Elphinstone, is written in an educated and mature hand.¹⁶ Charles discusses the proposed career of his young cousin, George Keith Elphinstone,¹⁷ and informs "my dearest Lady" of his intentions to arrange introductions for her son, within the Navy or India House. Is it only coincidence that the Gascoigne's Family's account book commenced that year, possibly signalling a new life-style and that contact was renewed between both families; had the passing of her father ended Grizel's "exile"? On the 19th April 1772, Primrose Gascoigne married John Welsh WS in Edinburgh; he was the only son of James Welsh, goldsmith. The marriage certificate states that her father, Woodroffe, was by then deceased.

Following the collapse of Charles Gascoigne's own business activities in the middle 1770s, his property and other assets were placed in the hands of a Trustee. He then rented accommodation in the New Street, Edinburgh and, in 1786, his daughter Anne (and presumably the whole family) was living at George Square, Edinburgh, prior to her marriage to Thomas Hamilton, 7th Earl of Haddington.¹⁸ Although he spent the remainder of his life in Russia, Charles Gascoigne was once seen at Tynninghame, the residence of the Haddingtons, and forced by his creditors to flee back to Russia via Sweden.¹⁹

Traditions of Edinburgh is a collection of "the romantic things connected with old Edinburgh", written and published in 1824 by Robert Chambers, co-founder of the famous Edinburgh publishing house. His knowledge of the subject astonished Sir Walter Scott, who sent Robert

"all the reminiscences he could at the time summon up, of old persons and things in Edinburgh".

Under the heading, *Blackfriars Wynd*, he recounted a tale of Lady Lovat (the cousin of Grizel and mentioned in the Gascoigne account book). It stated that she had been badly treated by her husband and, after eventually managing to inform friends of her predicament, that steps were taken to obtain a separation.²⁰ After the execution of Lord Lovat in 1747 for his part in the Uprising, concern arose over her jointure (settlement) of £190 per annum, which had not been paid to her for years. Destitute, she had lived with one of her sisters but had refused loans from her numerous friends. Finally, the dispute over her jointure was settled in a favourable manner and she received a lump sum (the amount of past dues), out of which she expended £500 in purchasing a house in Blackfriars Wynd. There, she had a waiting maid, a cook and a footboy. It was noted that one Lady Dorothy Primrose, her niece, had lived with her for many years. (This is almost certainly the Lady Dolly Primrose mentioned in the Gascoigne account book, who was actually one Lady Dorothea Primrose who married Sir Adam Inglis of Cramond in 1766. Her mother was Lady Lovat's sister Mary.²¹)

"There was another desolate old person, styled Mistress of Elphinstone, whom Lady Lovat supported as a friend and equal for many years".

A whist-party was organised every week for the benefit of the Mistress. Alas, the poor Mistress came to a sad end. Lady Lovat's grandson had apparently taken umbrage with his grandmother and added poison to the porridge she ate each evening. However, feeling unwell, she refused this particular offering and the Mistress of Elphinstone took it instead.

It is the author's belief that Grizel Gascoigne and the Mistress of Elphinstone were one and the same person. The eldest son and heir of the Lords Elphinstone was often known as the Master of Elphinstone; Grizel being the first-born, maybe thought that she had a right to be known as the Mistress of Elphinstone.

NOTES and REFERENCES

- 1 Watters, Brian 2010 *Where Iron runs like Water*
- 2 SRO GD 58/8/9
- 3 Gaskoin, Karl Karlovich "Actual State Councillor"
- 4 Steuart, A.F. 1913 *The Scottish Influences in Russia; Cadell, H.M. Story of the Forth*
- 5 United Services Museum Edinburgh Castle
- 6 The Army Lists National Library of Scotland
- 7 Watts, Michael & Christopher 1992 *My Ancestor was in the British Army*
- 8 SRO GD 156/48/0
- 9 Aberdeen University Library
- 10 The Army Lists *op cit*
- 11 Watts, M & C *op cit*
- 12 SRO GD 58
- 13 SRO GD 58/4/24/1
- 14 Burke's Peerage *Lovat*
- 15 Due to a law of entail, she retained her own name for the rest of her life.
- 16 SRO GD 156/6/7
- 17 Later Lord Keith, then Viscount Keith of Tulliallan
- 18 SRO Register of Marriages on the Canongate
- 19 Steuart, A.F. & Cadell, H.M. *Op cit*
- 20 This is confirmed in The Scottish Nation and Dictionary of National Biography, which also state that she was forced into the marriage against her will.
- 21 The Scots Peerage *Op cit*