

# Newton House

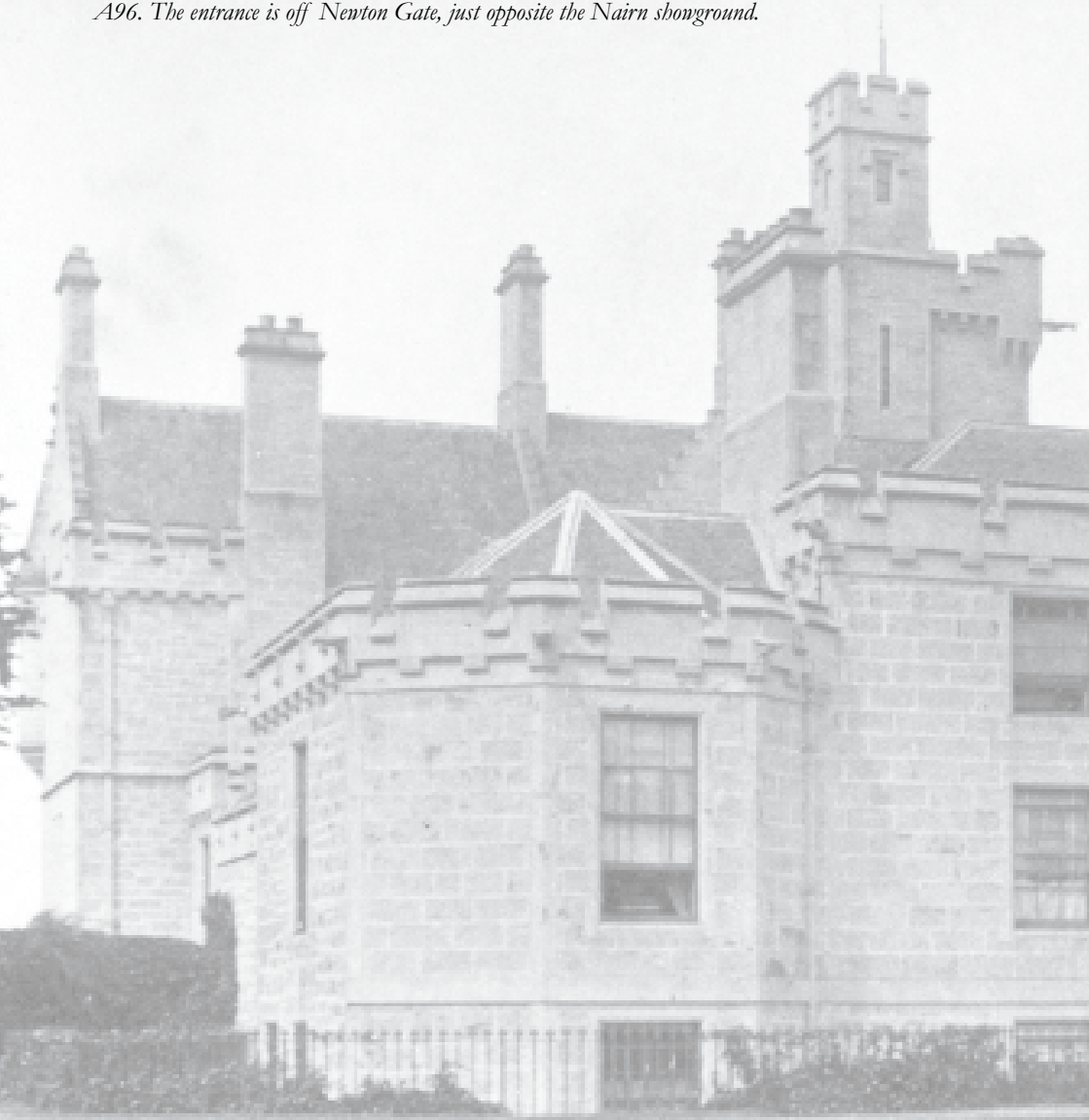


Souvenir Brochure and Guide  
Simon Forder

**bespoke**

*Newton House circa 1890, copyright Richard Dennis*

*The Newton Hotel is within private grounds on the western outskirts of Nairn, on the north side of the A96. The entrance is off Newton Gate, just opposite the Nairn showground.*



A large, multi-story stone building with a prominent portico supported by columns. Two women in long dresses and hats stand in the foreground on a lawn. The building has several chimneys and a decorative pediment over the entrance.

## *Newton House*

*Simon Forder*

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## *Newton House*

### **Introduction**

The Newton Hotel in Nairn is a luxury hotel standing within twenty-one acres of mature parkland and gardens in Nairn. At its heart is a late eighteenth century mansion which has been extended several times throughout its history.

The lands of Newton were the property of a branch of the Rose family of Kilravock. A small farming settlement called Newtown, which may have included an early mansion house, existed somewhere in the vicinity of the Nairn Golf Club. Purchased by Robert Falconer, who built the oldest part of the Hotel, and subsequently the home of members of the Macarthur, Robertson, Fraser and Finlay families, Newton House was sold in 1948 to the Ellis family, who converted it into a hotel which opened in 1951.

Today the Newton Hotel has been much extended from the original mansion, with fifty-six bedrooms, a restaurant and a modern conference centre. Looking over the original lands of Newton towards the Moray Firth, its peaceful surroundings maintain a relaxed feeling of solitude enjoyed by residents for over two hundred years.

### **Nairn and the lands of Newton**

There has been a settlement and town at the mouth of the river Nairn since at least the twelfth century, based around the castle which overlooked the river at Constable Gardens, and along the High Street.

Up until the late eighteenth century, Nairn did not extend much further than Leopold Road. Today this is where High Street traffic can return to the A96, but historically this was where one turned to head for Cawdor or Kilravock rather than Inverness. Also to the south-west of the town was the Gallows Hill; Lodgehill Road used to be called Gallowgate.

Up until 1882, when the county of Nairn was created, the town boundary ran due south through the lands of Newton to roughly the junction of the A96 with Beech Avenue. Here it ran in a straight line towards the sharp curve of the River Nairn by Whinneyknowe .

Outside the town boundary, the land was predominantly agricultural, and was cultivated in many small plots of land, which were measured in roods. There were four roods to an acre, and a rood measured just over a thousand square metres, about the same size as the ground floor of the older parts of the Newton Hotel. Many of these plots of land were held by members of the aristocracy, and farmed by smallholders who paid a rent for

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18th century plan showing strip farming around Newton Park (courtesy Falconer Museum, Nairn)

doing so. Others were owned by wealthy families who lived in Nairn.

During this period, the lands of Newton (the thick gold section of the plan above) were purely agricultural, but those around were farmed in traditional rig and furrow pattern, where field strips were left unplanted every five years to allow the ground to recover.

There were a number of different fields which were farmed in this manner. To the west of the Gallowgate road was the field called “Galls”, or “Galois” – taking its name from the gallows. It was not the only field in this area; between the Gallowgate road and the Kilravock road was the field called “Between the Roads”, between the Kilravock road and the river was “The Mill bank”. Other fields included Delniesgate, Dean, Greschip, Eryn Hill and Skaitraw. Delniesgate at least would also have been to the west of Nairn.

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### **Kinloss Abbey and the Roses**

On 8th April 1525, Abbot Thomas Christal of Kinloss granted a precept of sasine to a burgess of Nairn called John Rose. This included roods of land (called the Ladylands of Kinloss) in the Gallows field, and more roods in the Delniesgate field - amongst others.



*The Abbot's House at Kinloss Abbey*

These fields were therefore the property of the Abbey of Kinloss. A further charter dated 1580 confirming a grant made by Patrick Rose of the same lands shows that the Abbey was still the owner at this date. Both these documents were kept with other, later writs belonging to the Newton estate, which shows that some of these strips of farmland formerly owned by the Abbey of Kinloss were later to be associated with Newton.

Newton is not mentioned by name in records prior to the early seventeenth century, when it belonged to the Rose family of Kilravock. The earliest mention is in 1607, when William Rose, eleventh of Kilravock signed a contract at Newton and at Nairn. This shows that Newton was one of his properties at this date, and possessed a house. After this first mention, there is no reference to Newton for over sixty years, and no contemporary source shows exactly where the house or lands of Newton were.

In 1613, John Rose, the fourth son of William Rose, eleventh laird of Kilravock, purchased the lands of Broadley, to the south of Nairn, from his distant and childless cousin, Provost Patrick Rose. John thus became the fifth laird of Broadley, although he had probably had other lands of his own prior to this date.

By 1626 the Reformation meant that the former Abbey lands no longer belonged to the church. A charter of 27th November 1626 issued by Thomas Bruce, Lord Kinloss, to John Rose of Broadley confirms the grant made by Abbot Christal to Burgess John Ross. This charter proves that Provost Patrick of Broadley is the Patrick Rose of the 1580 Abbey document, and that his father John, who had also been provost of Nairn, was the John Rose of 1525.

As outlined above, Newton was known by this name in 1607. However, the 1626 charter does not refer to Newton, so the old Abbey lands in Galls and Delniesgate later associated

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with Newton can not be the lands of Newton owned by the Roses of Kilravock in 1607, the earlier history of which cannot be determined.

John Rose, the fifth laird of Broadley, had a younger brother, David of Earlsmill, and in 1669 David granted one quarter of the lands of Newton, including the Smiddy croft, to his son the Reverend Hugh Rose, who was the author of “A Genealogical Deduction of the Family of Rose of Kilravock”.

Who previously held this part - or the remainder - of the Newton lands is not known, although Hugh Rose of Kilravock or John Rose of Broadley are the most likely candidates.

On 6th June 1670, John of Broadley disposed seventeen roods of land in the Gallows Field to his brother Hugh Rose in Cantraybruich, and Hugh was issued an instrument of sasine a week later. John the fifth laird of Broadley only had one brother called Hugh, and as that was the laird of Kilravock, we can



*Kilravock Castle*

assume this reference is to the sixth laird of Broadley. The brother of the sixth laird of Broadley was to be referred to as Hugh of Newton.

The Reverend Hugh, who held a quarter of the lands of Newton, last appears in records in 1684, and there is no evidence of his having been married. On his death, his quarter of the lands of Newton would have reverted to the laird of Kilravock. Given that the rest of the Newton lands were held by a member of the Rose family, it would have made sense for them to be united under one laird.

Hugh, referred to as Hugh of Newton, had died in 1682, two years earlier. It is likely that the first laird of the united lands of Newton was John Rose of Newton, his son. John was possibly underage at the time, perhaps even born after his father's death, since the 1703 documents (which also included his sasine) were not issued until twenty-one years after the death of Hugh of Newton, and are the first written reference to him by that name.

Three years later John Rose of Newton married Anne Houston, and was able to grant her some of his lands of Newton as part of the marriage contract. On 2nd April 1725, John resigned the seventeen roods of land in the Gallows Field to his son John, reserving his

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own life rent. The sasine of the lands was issued to a John Rose on 5th October 1735, possibly indicating that John Rose of Newton had died by this date.



*Hugh Rose Geddes, 17th of Kilravock (1705 - 1772), and his wife Elizabeth Clephane*

The Newton documents contain a record from 20th February 1750 declaring that John Rose was the lawful heir of his uncle Hugh. On 12th March 1766, John Rose then disposed the seventeen roods of land and his other estates (still not referred to as Newton) to Hugh Rose, the seventeenth laird of Kilravock (above). The first document seems to cause a problem, since John Rose junior of Newton did not have an uncle Hugh.

However, this is resolved by the possibility that the John Rose the son in 1725 and the heir John Rose of 1750 are not the same person. If the Hugh mentioned in 1750 is Hugh of Newton, he did have a nephew John – the son of John, sixth laird of Broadley. This may suggest that John junior of Newton died without an heir, or had been exiled in the 1745 Rising since the laird of Kilravock and the Roses as a whole had Jacobite sympathies.

Whatever his ultimate fate, the closest male heir of the last John Rose of Newton was John Rose of Broadley. This John Rose also had no male heir, but his daughter Jean had married the sixteenth laird of Kilravock. The 1766 disposing of land to the seventeenth laird of Kilravock by John Rose could therefore be from John of Broadley to his son-in-law, reserving his own liferent.

Newton then does not appear in the records under any name for ten years, and it was not until 1776 that we finally know the laird of Kilravock had possession of the lands in the



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Gallows field, when he placed them up for sale. Regardless of the identity of the last John Rose to hold Newton, this sale shows that he died between 1766 and 1776.

To the north of the Gallows field lands, and close to the coast, was a small settlement called “Newtown”, which is shown on Roy’s map of c1750. The map shows that Newtown



*John Rose, Colonel Hugh Rose and Captain William Rose of Kilravock, probably the children of the 17th laird. Miniatures painted by Francis Lindo, 18th century.*

lay at the base of a slope, and between two indents in this slope. The westernmost of these now contains the burn which flows across the middle of the Nairn Golf Course, and the eastern lies to the south of the clubhouse. This suggests that the site of the mid eighteenth century settlement of Newtown lies beneath the Golf Course today.

Hugh of Kilravock had decided that he did not want the lands of Newton, putting them up for auction at a “public roup” on 14th August 1776. On 21st November a disposition was issued in favour of Hugh Falconer, of the seventeen roods of land “commonly called ‘Newtown’”. This is the first written reference to the lands on the Gallows field being called Newton, although they had clearly been called that for some time previously.

Seventeen roods of land is just over four acres, which can be visualised as a square piece of land about a hundred and thirty metres a side. This is still far smaller than the size of the grounds of the Newton Hotel, perhaps only one sixth of the eventual extent. Clearly Mr Falconer had not purchased as much land as might have been thought. In fact the size closely corresponds with the size of the field used for the Nairn Agricultural Show for many years, historically land associated with Newton.

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### **The Falconers and Newton House**

Hugh Falconer was a merchant in Nairn and the third son of Robert Falconer, who was a tenant of land at Inshoch, and at Maverston, east of Elgin. Hugh was a local dignitary, having been a councillor for the town of Nairn, but his exact descent is unknown. The Falconers of Halkerton had extensive lands in the area from the sixteenth century. Samuel of Kincorth, born about 1600, was the third son of Sir Alexander Falconer of Halkerton, and his son the Reverend William produced six sons from his two marriages.

It is suggested by Bain in his History of Nairnshire that Hugh Falconer was descended from this Samuel of Kincorth. If so there are no hints as to which of William's sons was Hugh's father - or more likely - grandfather. It is interesting to note that Samuel's nephew Patrick was known as Patrick of Newton, alive in 1656, but this designation relates to lands held by the family since at least 1473 in Aberdeenshire, not Newton House.

Hugh Falconer is said by Bain to have been the first man to "improve and enclose" the lands of Newton, but it is still not known exactly which lands he enclosed at this time. The first plans date to just after his death in 1794, when he had been succeeded by his younger brother, Major James Falconer.



*Close-up view of the 18th century farm of "Newtown"*

During the eighteenth century, changes in agricultural techniques had meant that the old rig system was no longer the most efficient method of farming land. As the result, the many small plots of land in the fields around Nairn needed to be consolidated into larger units. The major landowners around Nairn had submitted their estates to a legal process that would enable them to exchange and divide lands to create these larger units.

It may have been the case that the old laird Hugh had not wanted to carry out the exchange of lands, because it was not even two months after he gained the lands that Major James entered negotiation with the other landholders. He disposed the lands that he was relinquishing by early July, and on 7th July he made a declaration that the excambion of lands would not alter the succession to Newton itself.

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On 12th August, James Falconer received disposition of lands that had been held previously by the laird of Cawdor in the field adjoining Newton called Lodgehill. This was followed on 1st September by a disposition from the laird of Cantray of lands in the fields of Galls and Lodgehill.



*Steading buildings on the site of the old farm of Newtown*

Plans were issued to all parties, and the set issued to the Rose of Kilravock family is on permanent loan to the Nairn Museum. This clearly shows that by the time the plan was drawn up, the “Park of Newtown” extended from the main road to the edge of the farm steading of Newton, then consisting of three small buildings, two of which were probably barns. It stopped to the north at the access track to the steading, and to the south at an existing field boundary. In both cases this boundary was roughly where the modern grounds stop.

To the north had been a wide strip of land owned by the laird of Cantray, two very narrow strips and then a further strip of land owned by the Falconers. To the south had been a number of thin strips owned by Cantray and tenanted. Once the exchange was complete, Falconer had gained a large strip of land to the north outside the “Park” and to the north of the Show field, and a thin strip to the south of the Show field. The strip to the north had been exchanged away.

This resulted in a strip of land as wide as Newton being the northern neighbour of the Falconers, belonging to Lord Cawdor, a strip twice as wide belonging to the Earl of

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Seafield beyond that, and a piece of land to the south about the same size as the Seafield piece, held by the laird of Cantray, although his financial troubles would result in the block of land being broken up and sold on.

The statement about no alteration to the succession of Newton made by James Falconer in July 1794 was reissued, possibly because of a challenge to possession, on 2nd September 1801. It was not until 12th October 1802 that sasine was granted to Cawdor and Cantray of the lands previously held by Falconer. By this date James Falconer was described as “late” and his heir Hugh was sasined in Newton at the same time.



*An early photograph of Newton House c1890*

The plan showing all the strips of land to be exchanged and the subsequent landowners does not show any building in the “Park of Newtown”. This demonstrates that the first possible builder of a mansion house at Newton on the site of the hotel was James Falconer. This house was definitely in place by 1821, when a detailed plan of Nairn was

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drawn up by John Wood. Since Major Hugh Falconer sold Newton in 1823, the first Newton House on the site of the Hotel today was definitely erected by the Falconers.

The ghost of this house can be made out when looking at the south front of the Newton Hotel. The first house had two single storey wings to each side and a two storey house between, all above a sunken basement. The entrance to the house survives, a set of stairs leading up to the main door beneath a porch. Inside is a small entrance porch, with the stair lobby behind leading both down to the basement and up to the first floor. It is likely that to either side of the hall was a single large reception room, beyond which was a private withdrawing room or study. Downstairs would have been the kitchen and staff quarters, and upstairs would have been the bedrooms and bathrooms.

### **The Baronial mansion**

On 19th December 1823, Major Hugh Falconer disposed “Newton of Galls or Newton” to Peter Macarthur of Firhall near Nairn, for the sum of £2,800.00. Major Hugh seems to have retired to England, and died in Sussex in 1827. Peter Macarthur was a doctor, and already had property nearby, but emigrated to Australia by 1834. By 1839 Newton was occupied by Harry Robertson, who lived in the house with his family for over thirty years, eventually selling it to Colonel William Fraser of Kilmuir, descended from the Frasers of Lovat, in 1872.

Between 1874 and 1877, Colonel Fraser commissioned the first major expansion of Newton House, building the large Baronial residence that now forms the main front of the Hotel. It is likely that he castellated the old house to fit stylistically with the new building, and above the old front door, now relegated to the rear, he placed a heraldic stone, with the Fraser motto “JE SUIS PREST” (I am ready) above the stag crest of the family.



*Colonel William Fraser of Kilmuir,  
courtesy of the Nairn Museum*

Beneath this is the name he was referred to in Gaelic “Mac Uistean”, a patronymic harking back to Hugh Fraser, second of Guisachan (Colonel William was the eleventh

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*The Baronial mansion added to Newton House*

laird of Guisachan - until he sold it). He took a very active part in local affairs, commanding the Highland Bridge Artillery Volunteers. He was also heavily involved in court cases involving his estate in Skye, where he was responsible for a number of evictions as part of the Highland Clearances in the 1880s. In 1887 he sold Newton house and estate to Robert Finlay QC.

Robert Finlay was the founder and patron of the Nairn Golf Club, building the original club house, and developing its reputation as a top quality venue through his connections in London.

At the time he purchased Newton, he had represented Inverness as a Liberal MP since 1885. He lost his seat between 1892 and 1895, and in the year of his return to Parliament was knighted and appointed Solicitor General. In 1900 he became Attorney General for England and Wales, and was made a Privy Councillor in 1905.

In 1916 he became Lord Chancellor under David Lloyd George, and was also created Baron Finlay of Nairn. When he retired in 1919 he was created Viscount Finlay. In 1920 he was appointed a member of the Court of Arbitration at The Hague, and the following year became a Judge of the Permanent Court of International Justice.



*The vertical extension of Viscount Finlay*

Newton remained the country seat of Viscount Finlay until his death in London in 1929, during which time he had extended the old Falconer house upwards so that it was more regular, with the profile that it shows today, retaining the original crenellations for reuse. The difference in masonry can still be clearly seen, showing the outline of the original eighteenth century house. His son William, second Lord Finlay, sold the Newton estate

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and house to the husband of his cousin Edith, who had happy memories of the house from her youth.

### **New purpose for an old house**

Edith and her husband Alexander Buchanan Dick-Cleland kept the house as a country retreat, but spent most of their time in London. During the Second World War, part of the house was lent to a boarding school for children to stay in. Alexander and Edith added the large sun room at the west end of the house in 1930, and also donated the large field at the southern end of the Newton grounds for the use of the Nairn Agricultural Society. In 1948, Newton was

sold to the Ellis family, who had previously owned the Golf View Hotel. Alexander and Edith moved to Seabank House, where Edith died on 24th March 1952, and Alexander on 6th September the same year.



*The “chapel” added by Viscount Finlay*

The Ellis family, who had already converted the Golf View from a private residence in 1912, set to work converting Newton House.

The work took three years in

the end, and the Newton Hotel opened its doors for the first time in 1951. A further alteration was the addition of the restaurant to the rear.

The Ellis family eventually sold the Newton Hotel to William Ewing Edie, a Glasgow accountant who had risen through the ranks of Burmah Oil, which he joined in 1921, to eventually become chairman in 1957. He retired in 1964 but remained on the board, and retained ownership of the Newton until he died on 23rd June 1976.

It is an amusing coincidence that the Newton Hotel, owned by William Ewing Edie the oil magnate was a favoured haunt of Larry Hagman, who played JR Ewing in the television series “Dallas” from 1978 - 1991. After Edie’s death, the hotel was sold by his estate to John McGregor Builders, who renovated the former stables and workers cottages, and converted them into Newton Court, now 14 bedrooms and occasionally used as staff accommodation. It is quite likely that within the buildings of Newton Court lie parts of the earlier Newtown buildings shown on the plan of the 1790s, but these are not visible today.

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In 1979, the Newton Hotel was sold to Clan Hotels, who retained ownership until 1983. It was then sold to James Duncan, who in his turn sold it to the Sword family in 1996, who already owned the Golf View Hotel. This was the third time in their history that the Newton and Golf View had belonged to the same owners. At this point it was closed for a complete refurbishment. Under the Swords came the most recent substantial extension to the Newton Hotel, the addition of the large 32 bedroom wing to the north, and the Highland Conference Centre. This opened at the end of 1999 at a cost of £2.7 million.



*The modern 32 bedroom extension to the Newton Hotel, and conference centre*





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In 2004 Swallow Hotels purchased both the Newton Hotel and the Golf View, and sold the leaseholds to the properties to different companies, retaining the freehold. When Swallow went into administration in 2006, Oxford Hotels and Inns, the existing leaseholder, took possession of the freehold, and the hotel is now managed by Bespoke Hotels on behalf of Oxford Hotels and Inns.

### **Tour of Newton House**

The main entrance of the Newton Hotel today is part of the 1999 extension of the Sword family, but access to the older part of the hotel is straight off the modern lobby. The double doors lead into what was part of one of the three main front reception rooms, but



*The Kilravock Room*



*Hallway serving bar, lounge and chapel*

now divided in two. The surviving part of the room is called the Kilravock Room, used for meetings and as a lounge area. The main stairs to the left lead up to accommodation upstairs.

At the base of the stairs is an open lobby area. To the right is the main entrance to Colonel William Fraser's Baronial mansion dating from the 1870s. Directly in front, the long corridor accesses the remaining two main reception rooms of Fraser's mansion, now the bar and lounge. These reception rooms retain the original plaster mouldings and high ceilings, as well as a substantial part of the nineteenth century wood panelling.

Further down the corridor, a door on the left opens into the Chapel, beneath which is the service access to the old courtyard. Now used for weddings, the Chapel is also of nineteenth century date, and was probably used as a dining room when the house was a private home. At

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*The main bar and lounge area - main reception rooms of Col. Fraser's baronial mansion*



*The Chapel, perhaps originally a family dining room*

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the end of the corridor is the conservatory/sun room area, now used as the Chaplin Restaurant, and dating to the 1930s.

The restaurant in the Ellis Room occupies part of the ground floor of the Falconers' house, and has been extended outwards with a single storey to increase the capacity. Between the restaurant and the main staircase is the kitchen. The corridor leading to the kitchen also accesses the hall area of the Falconers' house, and the staircase, with its cast iron banisters.

The first floor of the Falconers' house only consisted of two large rooms, one to either side of the staircase, and possibly a small room with a window over the front door.



*The breakfast room, one of the reception rooms in the Newton House of the Falconers*



*The staircase of the old house*

The additional first floor rooms belong to the extensions of Viscount Finlay. These alterations, as well as the later changes involved in converting a domestic home to commercial use, mean that the internal layout of the Falconers' house, as well as much of the upper layout of Colonel Fraser's house, have been lost.

The first floor of Colonel Fraser's house, accessed by the grand wooden staircase, originally consisted of just three or possibly four rooms; one above the Kilravock room, a smaller above the entrance hall, another large room above the bar and then one or two above the bar lounge. The smaller stair leading to the second floor may not belong to Fraser's house, but to Finlay's as it extends into a part of the building that would not have been built prior to Finlay's extension of the old Falconer house.

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How the second floor was originally accessed is unknown. The second floor would have consisted of two or three rooms above the main stair and the Kilravock room, and more space above the bar and lounge area, with the tower room offset half a storey higher, and a turret at the top providing fine views in all directions.



*Corridor linking old house and baronial mansion*

It is most likely that when Viscount Finlay extended the house upwards, he also built new first and second floor links between the two houses. The external walls in the area between the main stair and restaurant are thinner than those in either of the Falconer or Fraser phases, but consistent with the upper storeys above the original house.

The Chapel does not appear on the photograph taken in 1890 before the Finlay modifications were carried out, although a low castellated wall can just be made out. This wall is definitely lower than the current wallhead, and the Chapel roof cannot be seen behind the Falconer roofline, which shows that the Chapel was perhaps originally a service wing, and that the conversion into a tall roofed room was carried out by Finlay until perhaps the early twentieth century.

Newton Court is not occupied at the time of writing, but has been used as staff accommodation by the Hotel in the past. It is understood that there are plans to revive this use following further renovation works. The Court is a rectangular range of buildings, with single storey barns converted into accommodation around three sides, completed by a cottage at one end that is noticeably higher than the rest of the range. A central gate opening facing south is flanked by a pair of matching ice houses and rectangular towers which were almost certainly used as doocots. To the rear is a large arched entrance gate, and part of this range was



*Outbuildings of Newton Court, with cottage behind*

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originally open plan, with a row of three arches providing access to a sheltered area, probably used for carts or farm machinery. Above this was the hayloft. This is the location of the building that stands aside from the others on the plan of the 1790s, which suggests that this building, at least, was agricultural. The other two buildings marked on the plan are on the western side of the Court, one of which today is taller, and may have been the farm cottage. A second opening in the Court quadrangle faces the hotel and a small gated enclosure now used for storage, which is contemporary with Newton Court.



*Farm buildings of Newton Court*

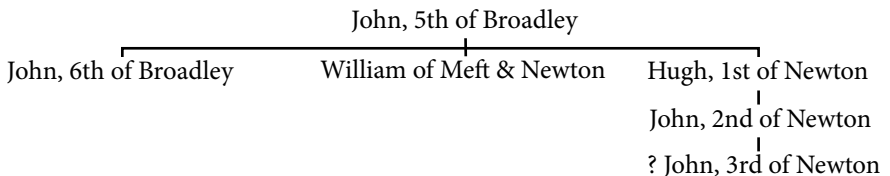
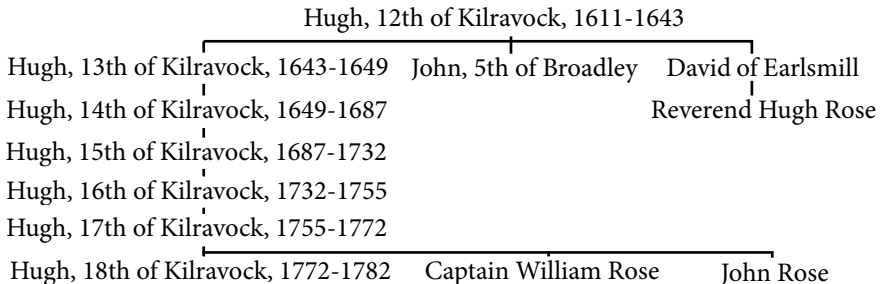
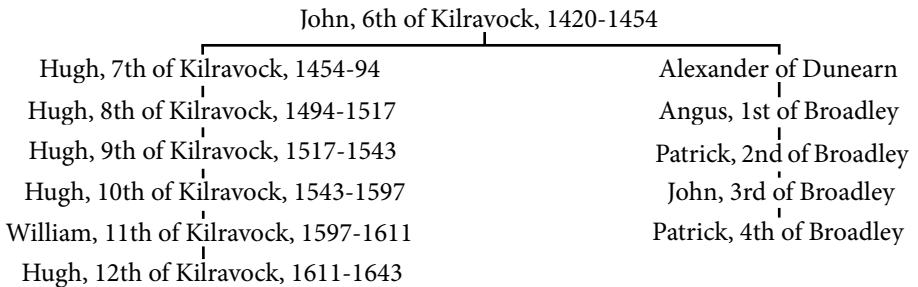
To the south of the Hotel, between the Falconer house and the road, is the Park of Newton. This was originally the formal garden area of the house enclosing the drive

which ended at large decorative gates, and would have been lined with large trees and decorative plants. Most of this area is now overgrown and scrubby, but close to the hotel is a remnant which faces the front door of the old Falconer house. This tranquil oasis, now the rear of the hotel, hides the old fountain, and a lawn, and is surrounded by plants, including the rhododendron bushes so typical of Scottish stately homes.

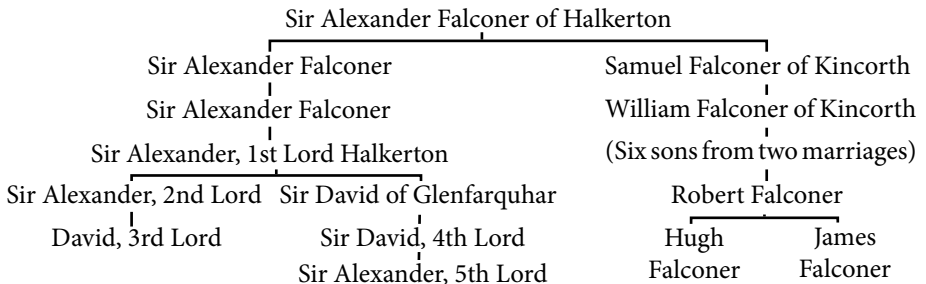


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**Family Tree of the Roses of Kilravock, Broadley and Newton**



**Family Tree of the Falcons, Lords Falconer and Falconers of Newton**



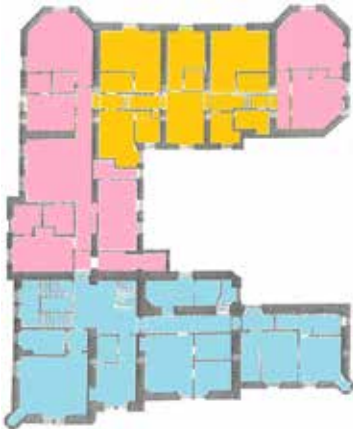
## *Newton House*

### **Ground floor plan (to follow)**

Falconer's Newton House in gold

Fraser mansion in blue

Finlay extension in pink



### **First floor plan**

Falconer's Newton House in gold

Fraser mansion in blue

Finlay extension in pink



### **Second floor plan**

Fraser mansion in grey

Finlay extension in pink



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