



This map guide was produced in 2022 by a Sydney-based writer, Dr Davina Jackson, in honour of her mother and grandfather's Meldrum family in New Zealand. Information is from online historical research, and a visit to the Meldrum sites in Scotland.

INTRODUCTION

If your direct family lineage includes someone with the surname Meldrum, you belong to one of Scotland’s oldest baronial clans.

This genetic line began with the arrival from France of a Norman knight named Philippus, who in 1236 was given a large area of land around today’s Oldmeldrum village in Aberdeenshire. His son, also named Philip, was knighted as the Baron of Meigdrum. He received more land near Tarves and the Balcormo estate near Largo in Fife.

Meigdrum, later spelt Meldrum, originated from the Gaelic words *meall*, meaning a bare, rounded, lumpy hill, and *druim*, meaning back, or ridge). Perhaps this relates to some of the low bare hills around Oldmeldrum.

Early Meldrums, and many descendants, built and occupied various stone castles and tower houses. This map guide shows where they lived during the clan’s heyday between the mid-1200s and mid-1700s.

Gradually the Meldrums lost their estates; sometimes because male owners focused on other priorities and because (under old Scottish law) heiress daughters resigned their lands to their husbands. Meldrum ownership gradually transferred to men from the Seton, Urquhart, Innes, Lesley, Melville, Forbes, Leith and Gordon families.

VISITING MELDRUM HERITAGE SITES

The two largest Meldrum-occupied castles – Fyvie near Turriff and Meldrum House near Oldmeldrum – are still publicly accessible. Smaller ‘laird’s manors’ – Cleish near Kinross, Crombie at Marnoch, Earlshall near Leuchars, Farnell near Brechin, and Kincaple near St Andrews – are privately owned and can only be viewed from roads or visited by arrangement. Another former Meldrum mansion, Eden near Banff, is a picturesque ruin. Two former tower houses, Tullibody in Clackmannanshire and Dumbreck near Ellon, were demolished, and there is no known record of how the buildings looked when they were occupied by Meldrums.

A SELF-DRIVE TOUR

Only two days are needed to drive around the main places in East Scotland where Meldrums lived. But allow more time in Edinburgh and other key cities. Tap place names in a satnav app for exact locations and directions. See more historical information about each site at clanmeldrum.net.

EDINBURGH

Arrive here to see Edinburgh Castle, traditional shops along the Royal Mile, modern shops in New Town and the St James Quarter, the Royal Yacht Britannia at Ocean Terminal and hip restaurants around Leith. Also consider visiting:

Meldrum House (former office building), 15 Drumsheugh Gardens, Lynedoch Place, West End. Built in the early 1960s, this was a three-storey office building occupied by the tax and customs department. In the early 2020s, it was redesigned as a seven-storey hotel named The Resident Edinburgh (open 2024).

GLASGOW

Catch a train or take a rental car from Edinburgh Central to Glasgow Central (less than an hour). Prebook online to visit the Willow Tea Rooms at 217 Sauciehall Street. This mostly white venue was designed by Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his artist wife, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh in 1903. Meticulously restored, it remains a gem of the ‘Glasgow Style’ of early 20th century modernism.

TOUR DAY 1

GLASGOW–ST ANDREWS–ABERDEEN

Five Meldrum sites can be seen by car in one day of driving between Glasgow and Aberdeen. Perhaps visit Stirling Castle (promptly after it opens); then you might look at these Meldrum-specific places:

Tullibody House (demolished)

Tullibody was a stone tower house built by Robert Meldrum in the mid-1600s. It was next owned by his brother, Major George Meldrum, whose family sold it after he died in 1676. In John Adair’s 1681 map of Clackmanan Shire, it was shown on land north of the Tullibody Inch (an island marking a bend in the River Forth); about halfway between today’s towns of Cambus and Alloa. It was demolished c1710 by a subsequent owner, Alexander Abercromby.

Cleish Castle (privately owned)

Cleish is a 16th century, Grade A heritage-listed L-plan tower house that was built on baronial lands near the Cleish hamlet in today’s Kinross-shire. The estate was inherited in the early 1500s by William Meldrum, the heroic warrior and doomed romantic subject of Sir David Lyndsay’s duet of poems: *The Historie* and *The Testament of Squyre Meldrum*. During the 1530s, this estate was transferred to Sir James Colville, and the castle was gradually built by several generations of his descendants. More alterations and additions were completed in the 1970s and 1990s.

Earlshall (privately owned)

Earlshall Castle was built near the village of Leuchars by successive earls of Fife, from the Bruce and Leslie clans, between the 15th and 17th centuries. It is a three-storey,

L-plan building with a circular tower at the north-east corner and a smaller stair tower at the north-west corner of the courtyard. From approx. 1510 to 1522, Margaret Meldrum of Seggie was the mistress of this property, as the first wife of William Bruce. Above the substantial fireplace in the original ‘painted gallery’ drawing room, a central panel depicted the Bruce and Meldrum arms, with the carved initials W.B. and M.M.

Kincaple House (privately owned)

In the 1590s, King James VI granted the Kincaple estate to a noble Meldrum who had helped the monarch to negotiate his marriage to Anne of Denmark. After ownership by other families, the estate was purchased by Thomas Meldrum around 1745. His son, an unmarried minister named Alexander Meldrum, built the original Kincaple House (the central building of today’s tripartite ensemble) as an architecturally plain, three-storey residence. Skewed end walls are inscribed ‘Alexander Meldrum 1789’. Two new wings were added by architect J. Donald Mills in 1928. The ensemble was Category B heritage-listed in 1973.

Farnell Castle (privately owned)

Currently painted salmon pink, Farnell Castle is a three-storey bishops’ residence built of rubble and slate in the 15th century. Sited about six kms south of Brechin, it was occupied by Bishop William Meldrum (of Seggie), who referred to it in 1512 as *Palatium Nostrum* (our palace). In 1566, it was sold to Catherine, Countess of Crawford, who renovated the interior. Exterior features include a corbelled staircase tower on the south façade and a *garderobe* (stack of toilet chambers) projecting from the east end of the north wall.

Day 1 of your Meldrum architectural tour could conclude with one or two nights in Aberdeen – or you might decide to stay at another clan landmark: the stylish Meldrum House Country Hotel and Golf Club near Oldmeldrum.

TOUR DAY 2

OLDMELDRUM–TURRIFF–BANFF

Meldrum House (country hotel and golf club)

The first Baron of Meldrum, Sir Philip de Phendarg, built the original stone tower house in the mid-late 13th century. Several generations of Meldrums lived there until the mid-15th century, when the last Meldrum clan chief, Sir William Meldrum of that Ilk, died. His only daughter resigned her ownership to her husband Sir William Seaton (Seton). They founded a new dynasty known as the Seatons of Meldrum, which owned and occupied Meldrum House for seven generations until 1635. William Seaton added the prominent staircase and current front entrance to the house, as well as the stables block. Another dynasty, the Urquharts, owned Meldrum House from 1635 to 1898; they extended the manor eastwards.

Dumbreck (demolished)

This stone tower house was built by a Meldrum in the early 16th century, on the Mains of Dumbreck farmland near Ellon. The building was said to have been designed by Thomas Leper, architect of nearby Tolquon Castle. Dumbreck was demolished by later owners.

Fyvie Castle (open to the public)

Fyvie Castle is one of Scotland’s Grade A historic, and haunted, monuments. Located near Turriff, north of Oldmeldrum, it is an L-plan palace that incrementally replaced a much smaller residence thought to have been built by Scottish king William the Lion in the 13th century. Today’s castle is distinguished by impressive towers that were built by successive owners: Sir Henry Preston, Alexander Meldrum and descendants (south-west corner), Sir Alexander Seton (the old entrance towers, one incorporating a great wheel staircase), General William Gordon and Alexander Leith (Baron Leith of Fyvie). Leith’s descendants, the Forbes-Leiths, sold Fyvie to the National Trust of Scotland in 1984. The trust conducts tours of the castle interior; telling legends of a curse and several lady ghosts.

Eden (ruin)

Eden is the picturesque ruin of a stone tower house, presumed built by a Meldrum in the early 16th century. Its remains are crumbling at a country crossroads about 6.5kms south of Banff.

Crombie (privately owned)

Crombie lies off the road behind a small wood and beside the Crombie Burn (stream) in Banffshire. It is a three-storey L-plan tower house initially constructed in 1542 by John Innes of Crombie, with additions built in the early 17th, 19th and 20th centuries. In the early 16th century, it was owned by John Meldrum of Laithers and his wife Margaret (Duff). They gave it to their second son, Rev. George Meldrum, who became the minister of Glass and the laird of the local area of Marnoch. Crombie was sold in 1744 to James Ogilvy, the 3rd Earl of Findlater.

FAQS

Do the Meldrums have a tartan?

No because tartan fabrics and kilts only became fashionable in the 19th century. During the Meldrums’ heyday, from the 13th to 18th centuries, tartan fabrics were not worn as items of clan identity.

Do the Meldrums have a coat of arms?

The earliest baron, Philip Meigdrum, was granted a silver and black shield design (blazon) featuring a ‘demi-otter issuing from a fess wavy’. The otter is thought to honour his participation in the Battle of Otterburn, 1388. Later Meldrums, and relatives with other surnames, incorporated the otter into their coats of arms, which became more ornate and imaginary in the 19th century.

What is the Meldrum clan motto?

The original Latin motto was ‘Per Mare et Terras’ (by sea and land). A later motto was ‘Mens Immota Manet’ (the steadfast mind endures).

