

On This Day – 25th February 1809

Death of John Murray, 4th Earl of Dunmore and builder of the Pineapple



The Pineapple. Photo: David Palmar

John Murray was born near Taymouth, near Aberfeldy, in 1730 to local nobility, and would later come to purchase the land near Airth at the age of 24 for £16,000. He soon changed the name to Dunmore, referencing a place in Perthshire connected to his family, from Elphinstone Pans, a sign of its history as a location of a small but profitable salt-making industry. Murray spent much of his life both as a peer in the House of Lords, and as a colonial governor in America, and is an important figure in the history of pre-Revolutionary America for giving his name to the Dunmore Proclamation, which offered freedom to slaves if they signed

up with the British redcoats against the forces of American independence. It was during one of his return visits to Scotland in 1776 that he decided on the Pineapple design, one of the most interesting, and certainly unusual, buildings the Inner Forth has to offer.

The Dunmore Pineapple is best known for the 14m tall carved stone pineapple which sits on top of it, although other elements like the Italianate entranceway below the fruit fixture make it an unusual mishmash of incongruous architectural styles. When it was built pineapples, due to their rarity in Scotland, were seen as a sign of wealth, and well-travelled people who had just returned from abroad would often leave them on the gateways of their house to indicate that they were able to receive visitors, so it's possible that Murray envisaged his concrete pineapple as an exaggerated version of this old custom. It was built to serve as a walled garden, in which a microclimate could be maintained that could grow more exotic fruit.

John Murray later return to the House of Lords, serving until 1790, as was also appointed the governor of the Bahamas until 1796. Several places in America are named after him, including Lake Dunmore in Vermont and Pennsylvania's Dunmore borough, as well as Dunmore Street in Norfolk, Virginia – although it's said this was named in celebration of the last place he set foot in the city, as his fleeing during the War of Independence marked the end of British colonial rule in the state. Murray died in Kent in 1809.

The Dunmore Estate remained in the ownership of Murray's decedents until 1911. The Pineapple is now owned by the National Trust and can be rented as a holiday home.

More information:

[John Murray's bio on the Falkirk Local History Society](#)

[National Trust for Scotland](#)

Nearby IFLI projects:

[The Hidden Remains of Higgin's Neuk](#)