

EVANTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

GLEN GLASS

Glen Glass has changed more fundamentally than most places in the area over the past 50 years. What were busy crofts are now mostly forestry plantations. Croft houses are now mostly ruins or wrecks; a few have been transformed into cottages. What was a busy school, with 20 to 40 pupils, is now a ruin. The scenery and the livelihood have altered fundamentally.

At the lower end of the Glen, not strictly part of Glen Glass itself are Ballavoulin, Lagvoulin and Assynt. The latter lies immediately above the **Black Rock Gorge** (or Craig Granda) on the Allt Greed (Ugly Burn), which is a continuation of the River Glass. The Gorge runs for nearly 2 miles, sometimes at a depth of 130 feet and has occasioned the ink in the pens of Hugh Miller and Harry Robertson to flow magnificently, recollecting Virgil's gulph into which Alecto shot herself into the infernal regions.

This, of course, is the abiding home of the **Lady of Balconie**, the witch who sold her soul to the devil, and was once seen chained up in a cave, guarded by fierce hounds. People have long searched for the imprint left in the rock by the keys of Balconie Castle, which she flung out as she was drawn down into the gorge.

The gorge has claimed other victims too, some self-destructive. There have been narrow escapes too. Only a few years ago a son of the MP Russell Johnston escaped serious injury after falling down the gorge. One Evantonian, Dave 'The Grove' MacDonald, a fine athlete, accepted a £1 wager to jump the 19 foot gorge. He lived till 80 to recount the tale, which is well attested.

In Robertson's time at the end of the eighteenth century the chasm was bridged only by tree trunks covered with turf. Within 40 years there existed a more substantial one but between the Wars there was none. Today there are three foot-bridges, one carrying a water pipe. The whole gorge is surrounded by mature woods.

Ballavoulin, as the name suggests, was long the site of a Mill. The house here is in good repair and occupied in 1992 by the Cumberleges. There is a fine photograph of the steading in the 1930s.

Lagvoulin is the 'valley of the mill' and known by recent 'Glenards' as Boghole. The main house is occupied, the two Estate workers' cottages are deserted, the floors rotten.

Assynt House, when occupied by Major and Mrs Munro-Ferguson, boasted a fine garden, which in recent years has been left to return to the wild. It is leased from Novar by Lady Isobel Linda, sister of late Earl of Cromartie and widow of Colonel Linda (Polish army), who died in summer 1991.

It is said that Franklin D Roosevelt and Eleanor spent part of their honeymoon here. The Glen Glass School log indicates visits in 1948 by a grandson of the deceased President and in 1950 by Mrs Richard Derby, the eldest daughter.

Robert Munro-Ferguson, Assynt, married a Miss Selmes, in New York in 1905.

Assynt Mains Farm has changed less in appearance. RJ Munro "DD ", who was brought up at Uig, took over from Kenny 'Assynt' Maclellan who had also farmed Culcairn and Moultaivie, as his father and uncle before him. One of Kenny's brothers was killed by a tractor, another in early youth, from eating frozen plums. Kenny remembers having up to 70 cattle on Assynt's 256 acres and it being *"very steep but a pretty good farm otherwise"*. Donald Maclellan was known as the 'Mester'. The Turnbulls were here at the turn of the century. One was the mother of Willie Munro, Clashnabuiac.

Assynt Farm Cottages, which lie beneath the power line, were sold and converted circa 1989.

Cladh Churadhain (St. Curitan's Graveyard) lies on a wooded mound by a water-tower connected with the Filter Station below. Bard Macra (c1810-1850) hanged himself here (*cf Ferindonald Papers*).

Redburn is farmed by RJ "DD" Munro whose parents lived in the house with the children. There are 50 acres of arable land. The house is now owned by retired surgeon Graham-Stewart, who introduced electricity and extended the building using stone from Balnarge croft.

Glen Glass School which had been in operation since 1875, closed in 1956. The school-house was demolished in the late 50s after a young man living there with his mother had killed her with an axe and set fire to the place. People are quick to give the mitigating evidence in his favour! In 1992 the old school-building is for sale.

The old school log attests to heavy snowstorms in the latter part of last century and many occasions on which the school was closed. Deer used to come down as far as the schoolhouse.

Janette Maclellan recollects that *"the school had such a big bit for a playground. There was never any trouble in those days. There was no falling out with anybody. Parents allowed their children to roam more freely then. Up at the school-house - we had about a dozen places where you could jump across the burn - you know it was really dangerous in a way but I never heard of anybody getting hurt, just the one boy, Jim Jackson from Tighnacraig. That used to be a lovely burn with fish in it and all. Now you can't get anywhere near it with the trees."*

It was quite a friendly community?

"Oh it was, even although we would have our differences."

Were there get-togethers?

"The Free Church minister used to come up perhaps once in the month for a service - all the people in the Glen, the 'Glenards' as we called them, were Free Church except us, but we always went into that service and Mr McQueen was just as nice to us as he was to others - he had a wee pocketie up here and he took a sweetie out of it and hand it to you - and then he would be up there two Sundays and then Mr Brown or someone from Alness would come up the other two, especially in summer and autumn - they used to come by horse and trap."

(For information on Glen Glass School see 'Schooling' and the School Log)

In the river plain above the gorge is **Lynechorc**, known as 'The Lyne', was home to Donny Campbell, whose sister Margaret married William Munro, 'The Bishop' of West End, and Minnie married Donald MacNair, whose mother sued Donald Kemp in a paternity suit. The Croft house is deserted but intact, the Steading is used by 'DD' Munro and his brother Ivy. Janette MacLennan speaks fondly of the Rosses who were possibly the last crofters there. It is the site of two recent tragedies, one a car suicide, the other the death of local financial consultant Colin Temple between the bales, after a lengthy disappearance.

Janette again: *"All the crofts were active then. There was Redburn, Sockach, the third one called it had a Gaelic name (Lariebhuidhe) - so we never tried to remember it, Auchnagaul was another one, Knockan was another one and then you came to West End - West End was a farm - they were all in use and there was children from most of them, so that was why there was so many children in Glenglass school and they also came from Eileanach down at the school there. There would be about six from Eileanach when I was young there, and at that time there was a Side-School up at Wyvis."*

Knockmartin (a corruption of the Gaelic - below) is today a holiday cottage. It is also sometimes referred to as Rhidorach, although this is the name of land to the west, where there used to be a house. (see below)

A Donald Urquhart was tenant here in 1845. A large family of Urquharts were there in the early 20th century. 'Little' Donny Urquhart was shepherd at Swordale. Donald Mackenzie, another shepherd here, is remembered by his grandson at Lismore, Donald Menzies, who writes about the area.

Cnoc a Mhargadaidh, (Market hill) is the cone-shaped hill clearly visible from the Firth and as such a good venue for markets. People came from as far as the West coast to barter herring for grain.

Rhidorach is the flatter land below where the Allt an Caorach joins the River Glass. A George Maclean was here in 1845.

Moving up the old road, Uig is the first croft, now deserted in the forestry. The house, dated 1883, is still standing, the roof of the steading deteriorating.

Ivy Munro recalls life at Uig:

"As far as I can mind out it was quite good. There was nothing to do at nights. There were children in Sockach up the road a wee bit. There was half a dozen orphans - Stewarts and Fletchers. The Calder brothers were in Knockan. Bunty and her brother were in Auchnagaul then there were 3 lassies in West End, the Munros. There was 3 boys in Tighnacraig, the Mackays -Mackay was shepherd in them days. I think there was about 30 children in Glen Glass school when it was turned from a side school into a public school - they had to get a qualified teacher then."

"The croft was 50 acres of arable and there was a good bit of hill ground...Oh it was hard work alright - you'd be out in the field all day - hoeing turnips and at hay-time you had to cut the hay and had to turn it with the fork. Then you raked it and put it into stacks. It was hard-going at the turnip time and the hay-time, then there was a wee bit lull until the harvest time but at that time you went out and cut the peats for the winter."

Were there any particularly bad years?

"Well if you listen to all the crofters every year was a bad year!"

Of **Sockach** only an overgrown heap of stones remains.

Latter day tenants were Tom Ross, with a daughter Annie, of whom a photograph in the garden is available.

Roy's Map of 1750 shows Taiky (Tochy) and E.Torky (East Tochy). Ruins behind Sockach may mark the site (*FP*)

Lariebuidhe is now merely a pile of stones, masonry and corrugated iron. An old tree platform and ladder are nearby as is a Harrison McGregor, Albion Leich 928 Delivery Reaper. Latter day tenants were the Macintoshes - 'Baldie Macintosh'; hence the name local children used in place of its difficult name - it was known as "Baldies". Mrs Macintosh is remembered for her heavily sugared tea.

Frank MacLennan in Ferindonald Papers speaks of a croft called 'The **Camalltan**' which had existed between Lorgbuidh and Achnagall. It is shown on Roy's Map (circa 1750) as Cambleton. The last tenant was 'Big Robert' Munro, who died in 1875; "then the croft was incorporated into Achnagall." MacLennan had heard that when crofters in Glenglass gave up distilling, they buried their pots in Camalltan ground, at the same time asking the landlord for a reduction in rent.

The house at **Auchnagaul** is still intact. The byre roof is on.

It was occupied by Water supply engineer after the MacDonalDs left in the 50s. Frank MacLennan recounts that a Munro family, the 'MacUisdeans' were tenants for 5 generations until about 1910, when William Munro left it to go to Redburn.

The MacDonalDs came there from Tighnacraig, where Bunty's grandfather was shepherd. They had the adjoining croft too, which had not been worked for many years. They usually kept 60 sheep and 4 cows. There was a dairy built into the house. Bunty recollects living on rabbits, eggs, milk, crowdie, scones, venison, with oats only for breakfast. She would shoot marauding deer herself. They sent their oats to Culcairn mill

The buildings at **Cnocan**, on the edge of plantation, house, byre, steading in 1991 were in reasonable shape, the house floor covered in sheep's carcasses. Hugh and Andrew Calder (Teandallon) were brought up here by the Rosses/Downs. Unlike the aforementioned croft-houses, it was linked latterly to the electricity mains.

Balnarge house is in ruins, the steading still standing. Stones from Balnarge were used for an extension on Redburn house. The last occupants were the Downs. John Granville Paterson, a Glasgow orphan, was brought up by Kenny Ross, Known as 'Jock the Glen', he always wore a kilt and demanded lifts up the glen by lying in the middle of the road.

The house at **West End (Bruachdian)** is in reasonable condition, the steading has a roof and there are two buildings without roofs. Ivy Munro rears sheep on this croft. Hector Macleod was last to have worked the croft in the 70s. Ina Campbell (Sunny Holme) and sister Margaret Campbell (Fraser St, Beauly) née Munro were born there. Their father William had 13 children. Ellen Deitch née Macleod (Maryburgh) says her great grand-mother was born here.

Tighnacraig is now a rented cottage. Murdo Macleod (Teandallon), the last shepherd, from 1949 to 1964, reflects *"Tighnacraig was the healthiest place I have ever seen, it was lovely, we got the sun all day... There were another two shepherds at Ardoch and Boath and I was responsible for the whole lot. We carried about 300 ewes each, and the hogs as well. -Some of my happiest times was in Glen Glass and my saddest as well"*

West of Tighnacraig Roy's Map (c1750) marks **Achtunnagan** (Duck field), which had a mill. The now deserted **Hall** at Achtunnagan on the South of road was a keeper's house. Latter occupants were Angie and Maggie Richmond (née Maclellan). They kept a lovely garden. It was subsequently used as hall by the Wyvis keepers and people in Glen Glass.

Of **Balnacoul**, marked on seventeenth and eighteenth century maps, no sign remains. It was part of Wester Glens, sometimes church, sometimes Foulis property stretching up to Refarquahar on Loch Glass side. (FP)

All the crofters in the Glen had a peat-bank and would transport the peat by horse and cart.

William Campbell was the Glen Glass school-teacher from 1884 to 1900, His son, **Alec Campbell**, reflects: *"The saddest part of any is the way that Glen Glass has been destroyed by planting trees. I never go up there today because it is just a sad place. But when you used to go up and see all the crofts and see all the people that were there and they're just all destroyed - that's one thing that grieves me very much. Janette Maclellan's brother Frank and I used to walk up there with a squeeze box, playing around the old crofts."*

Don MacMaster, who in 1919 started as walking postman up the Glen, before being allowed to use his own bicycle, remembers the Glen and its occupants fondly; the cups of tea with Annie Ross at Sockach and with Kenny, Kirsty and Ron Ross at Balnarge. He is amazed and saddened at how it has been transformed.

Ivy Munro was involved in the planting of his old family croft of Uig, as well as of Lariebhuidhe and Auchnagaul. *"It felt very odd"*. But such were the times - *"it's all changed today."*

Tree harvesting has now begun.

Adrian Clark
June 1992