

EVANTON ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

WYVIS ESTATE

Owners

Wyvis was part of Foulis for many centuries until sold in 1859. 'Wyvis Lodge' appears on the 1875 Ordnance Survey Map, so too buildings at Corravackie, Culzie and Cuilishie. The lodge, of which there is a photograph in the present lodge, was a small one. **Colin Ross**, who was reputed to have been a very fine shot, was there from at latest 1881.

Walter Shoolbred, (born 1842) bought Wyvis from Ross in 1886 and built the current lodge and other buildings. He also bought Kildermorie from Novar in 1890 for £31,500 and rented it to his brother **Frederick**, who remained the tenant until 1911. The Shoolbred's wealth was from furniture, their main outlet at Tottenham House, London. It is said that they also had Guildford Coaches.

Walter had the **Stables** built in Evanton to fit two coaches, by which he would be met at Novar Station. There was little or no road by the loch side so he had a steamer transported to Loch Glass in bits and reassembled in order to transport building materials. It was large enough to take two horses and carts loaded with stone and it was reputedly scuttled in the middle of the deep loch.

On his death in November 1904, Walter was buried at the old burial ground in St Mary's Churchyard, Kildermorie, where the previous burial had been in 1850 of one Mary Mackenzie. Walter, a bachelor, left the estate worth £607,507 to **Lt.Colonel Rupert Wilkin CMG**, a son of his sister and Dr. Wilkin. It was a condition of his inheritance that Wilkin change his name to Shoolbred. A Game Book for the period 1918-25 still at Wyvis and inscribed with the name Walter Harold Wilkin probably belonged to a brother.

Rupert rented the adjoining estate of Garbat from the Earl of Cromartie. He visited his uncle's grave at Kildermorie twice a year. His uncle Frederick, who died and was buried at Brighton in 1922, is also commemorated at St Mary's.

The Shoolbreds used to send whole stags down to the old Church Hall for distribution among the village 'poor'.

Rupert, a bachelor, was followed by **Major and Lady Ursula Abbey**, also from England. They are remembered as having been very friendly; she was reputedly keener on the shooting than he was.

Lord Mountgarret of Nidd Hall, Ripley, Yorkshire followed. Archie Ross recalls that he came up for most of the shooting season. *"He didn't entertain much at all. He had one or two of his own cronies but no big parties. Not like Kildermorie - there were quite good house parties. Lord Mountgarret liked the quiet life."*

Lord Mountgarret was followed by his son, who was less interested in the stalking. Maybe this had something to do with his once having been put off the hill by a keeper. He is the same who was fined £1000 some years ago for shooting at the basket of a hot air balloon passing over one of his English estates.

Giszelbrek, a Dane, took over the estate c 1982, then in 1984 divided it, selling Wyvis to **Coates**, an American, ex bomber squadron commander, of the thread-making concern. The following year Coates bought Culzie and Eileanach. Giszelbrek, who lives on an Aberdeenshire estate, remains the factor.

Wyvis Lodge

Is only occupied for a few weeks a year by the Coates family. He is not interested in stalking. The house and grounds are kept in excellent condition. Coates had an outdoor heated swimming pool built, which he and his wife use regularly when in residence. The building exterior was painted a bright yellow in recent years. Because of its status as a listed building, the planning department obliged Coates to return it to the original colour.

Wyvis Stables

Also a listed building as are the game larders. Walter Shoolbred also built the Stables in Evanton between 1901 and 1905. Kenneth Mackenzie, Evanton Smithy and Garage, was one of the contractors.

Gardener's House

Archie McNiven, whose wife is remembered as a great cook, was here before Donald Fraser. Archie used to drive the brake. The house has been unoccupied for many years.

Keeper's House at Corravachie

Unoccupied since many years but still appears to be in good condition with fine wood panelling. Duncan Urquhart stayed here in 1844 (son of Donald, tenant at Knockmartin). In 1937 Mrs Sutherland nearly drowned when a flood ran through the house.

Cottages at Corravachie

The bothies are unoccupied and in need of repair.

Culzie Lodge

Percy Barbour, cousin of the Shoolbreds, came here annually in the 1890s, bringing his staff up from Cheltenham.

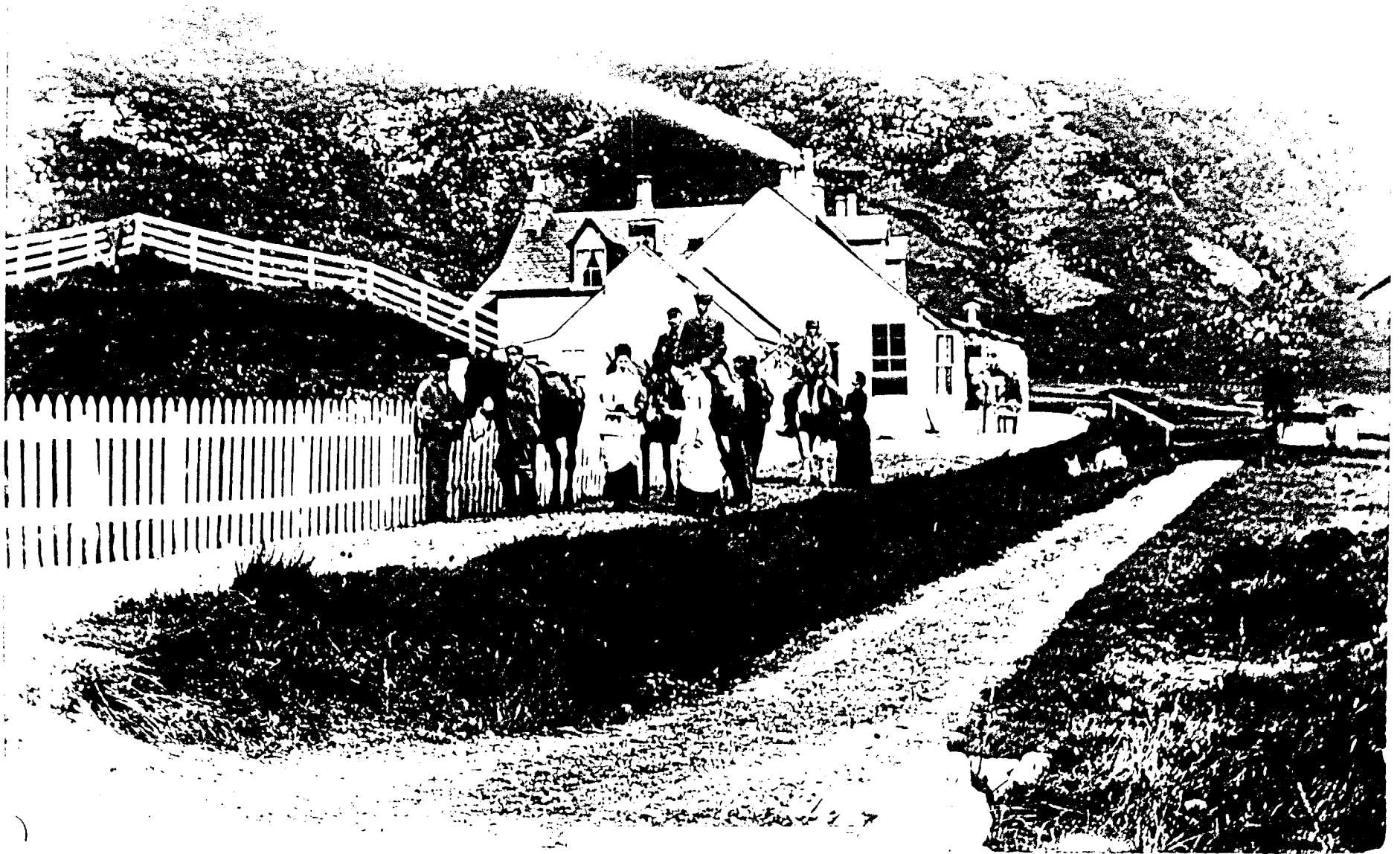
It has been leased since 1990 by Paul Waites, an English property developer who comes up regularly with his family for the stalking. His father was a Lord.

Culzie (Cuilishie) House

The pink house was built by Gisselbrek who planned to live in there. It has yet to be completed. The ruins of old Cuilishie house, a slated building, are nearby to the west. One informant tells that this (or Culzie?) was a holiday house for Balconie.

Eileanach Lodge

A "whipping bell" some few hundred yards below Eileanach would be struck in passing with the whip by the coachman. This would ring a bell in the lodge and ensure that the lodge occupants opened the gate for the arriving gentry. Margaret Maclennan (née Gordon), who followed her mother in doing this for the Shoolbreds recalls that the gentry were quite different in those days. One bedroom at Eileanach Lodge was kept for Rupert Shoolbred. Duncan Gordon followed Angus McGillivray who retired to a house on Station Road.



Old Wyvis Lodge

Eileanach Farm

Kenneth Mackenzie (Kenny "Eileanach"), keeper, worked for Walter Shoolbred and Colonel Rupert Shoolbred and received the Highland Agricultural Society's medal and certificate. The presentation was made by Donald MacLennan, Assynt, who remarked on the perfect order and taste of the Eileanach steading and surroundings. With his wife Susan (née Stewart) they had 5 children. William the eldest son took over.

A William Grey lived at the farm in 1845.

The farm house is currently occupied by 2 families, but neither work for the estate.

The **Forester's House**, now left to go to ruin, was once occupied by Rogie, chauffeur/handyman. He used to tie rope around the back wheel of his motorbike to get up the Glen in the snow. Archie Ross stayed in the bothy, where there were some good parties.

Employees

John Sutherland, keeper at Corravachie, was a good piper. He played for the Shoolbreds, he was the piper at the opening of the Diamond Jubilee Hall in 1898, and there is a photograph of him playing for a group of revellers by the loch side.

Archie Ross, ex keeper (kennels), recalls:

"When I went there (post WW2). Donald Fraser and the wife, Duncan MacLennan and the wife, Donald Green and his wife and one baby, then myself - that was all. Those people were up the top end. Down the other end there was Tommy Gordon and the wife and 4 of the family, Peter Ross - he was shepherd, his brother John - another shepherd and myself."

In 1992 the only employee is the keeper Gordon Beattie at Eileanach Lodge. His wife Mhairi is house-keeper of Wyvis Lodge. Gordon took over from Smith, who worked for Giszelbrek. Bill Munro, his predecessor with Mountgarret was there for around 16 years and still works for the same.

Game

The Wyvis Garbat sheep fence was begun in 1873, in order "to keep the sheep out, not to keep the deer in." (*Game Book*)

In 1879 Culzie ground was cleared of sheep and opened to deer.

The Shoolbreds built the deer fence over Meall Mor to Kildermorie, which they also owned.

In 1925 Rupert Shoolbred shot his 500th stag.

In the stalking season the keepers would have to climb Wyvis daily. Margaret MacLennan recalls that one deer used to follow him regularly. The staff would be given a certain amount of venison and at the end of the season would share a hind between them.

There are currently around 700 hinds and 300 stags. The annual cull is 60 stags and 100 hinds, all of which are taken by the Waites family. The deer are fed in the winter.

There have been no grouse for over 20 years. In 1918 there were 241 brace of grouse shot on Culzie, 136 on Wyvis.

Coates introduced 'wild' pigs but they were disposed of in 1991 because of the mess they were causing to the trees and ground.

Goats were kept at the farm until 1991.

There are remnants of a short-lived fish farm up beyond Wyvis.

Around 600 sheep were kept on Wyvis Estate in the 1950s, requiring a team of up to eight people at the gathering, each with their dogs. There was a large fank at Eileanach.

Transport

In 1896 a nasty accident occurred when Major and Mrs Jackson were driving home to Swordale from Wyvis Lodge with Percy Barbour. Their horse shied and their carriage overturned. Major Jackson was hurled into the loch and Mr Barbour was seriously hurt. A plaque marks the spot.

Lord Mountgarret introduced a small bus, referred to as a brake, which carried about 12 people.

Services

A private telephone used to link Eileanach and Wyvis.

A diesel generator was introduced to Wyvis Lodge by Walter Shoolbred. Mains electricity was introduced to Eileanach in late 1970s.

Weather

Geordie Mackenzie, Hermitage Street, recounts that his grandfather Alexander once crossed Loch Glass, when it was frozen, by horse and cart.

In 1937 a violent storm created a flash flood at Corravachie which swept through the houses. It is said that Mrs Sutherland was only saved by the gillies. Hens and livestock were drowned and Margaret MacLennan remembers fearing for the safety of her husband Duncan on the mountain, while listening to the frightful crackling of the telephone line.

After their marriage in 1938 Duncan and Margaret MacLennan moved to the isolated house of Strathrannocho to the west of Wyvis. It was to here, once when they were cut off, that a relief party including Kenny 'Assynt' MacLennan and Ken MacDonald 'The Torren' from Evanton trekked up with food supplies. The Sunday Pictorial photographer was there to record the dramatic occasion. Maggie recounts, however, that the only thing they were short of was marmalade. The photographer caught the party celebrating with a dram (or two).

Schooling

In 1906 children from Wyvis made up one third of the pupils at Glen Glass School. Alness School Board required a contribution from Kiltarn Board accordingly. Maggie Gordon (Mrs Margaret MacLennan, born 1904) remembers walking the five mile return trip daily with her brothers and the children of Kenny 'Eileanach' Mackenzie. There were no cars and little chance of a lift from the gentry's coaches - none if the gentry were inside - but Kenny 'Eileanach' would sometimes give lifts with his horse and cart. Maggie Gordon did all her schooling at Glen Glass, while at least one of her brothers went on to Kiltarn school, where he boarded through the week.

In 1923 the Area School Management Committee agreed to pay Mrs Sutherland to educate her own children, subject to the inspection of the headmaster of Kiltarn. In 1929 a Betty McAuley was appointed teacher.

Janette Macleannan recollects that : *"There were Frasers living up there and they were a big family and they had a side-school teacher, the one that I remember came from Alness and she went home every week-end but every time that she passed down - it was supposed to be a Side-School from Glenglass - she came into the teacher in Glenglass to get all the news instead of the teacher from Glenglass having to go up there, because that teacher had a bicycle - no such thing in those days as cars or motorbikes. She cycled up weekly and went home every weekend. And when the inspectors came round at the end of the year, the children from Wyvis used to come down to the school, it was a big family - about nine of them. My mother, Georgina Mary (Glen Glass teacher) was in charge so she had that school also to attend to, but there was no school there, the children were all in the house and the teacher would have a room of her own likely."*

Distilling

Frank Macleannan recounts the story in the 'Ferindonald Papers' of whisky distilling in Wyvis area, where there used to be four stills in operation. A whisky bothy used to be situated in the Creag a' Bhara burn and many years after it had ceased operating a pidgin of whisky was discovered by a pony's hoof going through the soil. "A stalker, who had some previous experience in the illicit distilling, was engaged by Mr Walter Shoolbred, laird of Wyvis, about 1890. One day he remarked to Mr Shoolbred that he might start a still there. "So far as I'm concerned, Sandy "said Mr Shoolbred, "you can do what you like." On second thoughts Sandy decided not to as it would be cutting into the business of a man Macleannan, who was at that time working a still in the area."

The Estate used to be kept immaculate. Rupert Shoolbred strictly forbade the dropping of so much as a used match.