Reminiscences of Glenfarg

Bill Macpherson
We needed to move from our first house in Glenfarg (Birch Lane) as our family were all growing older, we needed a bigger house. This was in about 1988. We didn't want to leave the village so we looked at virtually anything that was available. One we looked at was Abbotts Deuglie. Whilst being shown round the house by the owner, I notice new-looking thin (1/8") copper tubing running along the walls. I mentioned it to the owner. "Oh, yes, that's our new gas lighting system, there is no electricity in the house. I much prefer the oil lamps we used to use."!

From the Minutes of The Glenfarg Development Committee.
Sept 17 1925 – Discussion about the introduction of a sewage plant
Feb 22 1926 – Purchase of the ground for the Wallace Park
Feb 23 1926 – Purchase and creation of Tennis Courts (Hayfield Road)
Feb 2 1927 – The possibility of generating electricity from the Glendy Burn or River Farg to bring electric light to the village.
Apr 19 1928 – The Grampian Electricity Supply in a letter stated that would supply electricity when its scheme came into operation.
Apr 1929 – Fife Electric Power Company stated that it would be extending to Milnathort and Grampian Electricity Supply would be extended to Abernethy and Glenfarg would have to wait until both were completed before any decision on Glenfarg could be taken.

Extracts From the Minutes - To be Continued

From Newsletter June 2002
Letter from Bob Bell

The Railway

One could be excused for seeing a railway as two or four parallel strips of steel laid, wherever possible, in a straight line. It would indeed be boring if laid across a flat featureless landscape, but from Glenfarg going north our line followed the Farg down through the glen becoming part of that exciting place. It cut through black dripping rocks and banks of rough grass, whips, broom, willow herb, wild strawberries and wild flowers that harboured rabbits and provided a breeding ground for several species of bird. It travelled over the wonder of the viaduct before vanishing into the pitch-black hole in the rock that was the first of the two Glenfarg tunnels. Each tunnel had niches in the brickwork along its length to provide refuge for men working inside, and these provided refuge for boys caught in the tunnel when a train came through. When it had passed we emerged coughing and spluttering with eyes streaming, into the daylight. The line reappeared again at Pottiehill where banks of hazel provided a feast of nuts for Hallowe'en. After only a short distance it disappeared again into Balmanno Hill. When it emerged into the valley of the Earn it was no longer ours, because this was the northward limit of our wandering, and we might encounter a hostile tribe from Dron, Aberargie or Abernethy

On its journey southwards it chose to follow that other burn, the Eden, which rose in Glenfarg only a few hundred yards south of the point where the Farg entered the village. The Eden had its own species of trout, cleaner and prettier, I thought, than those in the Farg. The line skirted the bramble brae quarry, went under Pitillock's cart road, and crossed a bridge over the road leading up to Carmore quarry; it was fringed with alder trees and was piped under the line back and forth on its way to Fife. These "Pipes" were really culverts, and a small boy could walk through them comfortably. Just beyond Carmore, where there were short-cropped grassy banks

between the patches of bracken and whins, we dammed the flow to create our own outdoor swimming pool.

There was more to the Railway Station site than two platforms: it provided an extensive shunting yard, a siding for loading or unloading livestock, a coal yard, signal box, storage shed, and a footbridge. On the nearside of the line the platform had a canopy over it, and the building housed the Station Master, and provided a waiting room, a ticket office and toilets. On the other i.e. southbound side was a waiting room, the roof of which was a static water tank, and from the ivy-covered rocks above it boys could be seen swimming in about four feet of water courtesy of the station master.

The coming of the railway, circa 1890, must have been seen as a blessing by most people. Apart from the obvious amenity, it provided steady work for a large number of people, and the rewards would have been greater than those from employment on the land. In addition to the Station Master, who was always smartly uniformed, there was the duty clerk and porter. Signalmen pulled the great levers which, through thin, guided hawsers alongside the line, physically moved the distant signals. There were men, each provided with a long-handled hammer, who daily checked every inch of the line on foot. A squad of "Surfacemen" kept the line clean and in good order. The railway was a very important element in the life of the village. It transported in safety children to school in Perth, it brought the daily newspapers of the time, it brought our letters and parcels. Cattle and sheep bought at the Perth mart would arrive in the goods yard that same evening, and we would happily assist in driving them to their destination, the farmer or shepherd in front and we boys prodding from the rear. On a Saturday evening The Sporting Post came with the 8.15 from Dundee. It was sold from the station barrow to men eager to know the results of the football matches played that day. At about 7.45 p.m. "The Fast" came through from Edinburgh. With mounting excitement we saw it coming round the bend from the south and there were shouts of "Stand back! Stand back! Ye'll be drawn in!" To be safe I clung on to a pillar while the train hurtled through the station causing the canopy to rattle and a wind to raise the dust and ruffle the flowers. We continued to watch until only a tail light and the faint reflection of the furnace on the smoke from the stack remained as it sped on its way down the glen.

How exciting it was when the engine moved beyond the platform's end to take on water. We gazed in wonder at the colossal machine of dinosaur proportions panting noisily and impatiently as it refuelled. We dare not speak, but marvelled at the scene: white steam, black smoke, oily rags, red faces, hot flames and the authority of Station Master and Guard as they compared pocket watches, waved the little green flag and blew the whistle. All the activity erupted in a vertical column of smoke as the monster heaved its tail of coaches into motion. Rail sections were short and were spaced to allow for expansion in hot weather, so the train rattled and swayed as it clattered over the joints. The permanent way fitted happily into the landscape and our lives. Its surface changed little with the weather. It did not intrude, it was always there beside the burn and the road. Wandering boys homeward bound would often choose the railway - it was flat and had a warmth about it. Strides, shortened by fatigue, matched well the distance between the sleepers, and the going was easy.

When recalling the railway of the 1930s names come to mind: Bob Syme, the clerk who incredibly found room to lodge with us, and Renton Kay who succeeded him. He was dapper and efficient, and manned the ticket office, making strange telegraphic noises from within while keeping the waiting room warm and inviting. There were signalmen, Ned Hamilton from the last house in the glen, Sandy McKenzie who let me pull the giant lever in the signal box, and The Bailey (JP), B'iley Hain who jilted, or was jilted by, a lady of the parish, and married an old flame

who returned from the USA in flamboyant mode. He was paraded on the station barrow at great speed down the Kirk Brae and round the village accompanied by a crowd of well-wishers and the accordian of Mac Sinclair the postie. The Greig family had three or four male members in the line maintenance team. One of the perks was free travel, and we were all surprised when the whole family crossed the border into England for a holiday; we were even more surprised when they all returned home safely! On an evening Jim Gourdie or Peter Beveridge, both big men, would arrive, each with a back-breaking load of rabbits, gutted, paired and hung for the London market. They were suspended on parallel rails within big hampers so that they continued to hang while on their journey south. Both men were enormously strong and laboured, sweating profusely, to get the job done before the train arrived. I admired their industry.

It is little wonder that the railway and its station provided excitement for boys like me; with a huge hot fire in the waiting room, strange noises emanating from the office, maybe a calf in a sack awaiting collection on the floor, cattle and sheep complaining in the wagons in the yard, and trains passing pulled by engines with names like Cock o' the North. The sleepers rejected by the railway when past their prime were put to use around the village and on the farm. They were drenched in tar or creosote and seemed to be indestructible. They could be seen in the garage and the smiddy, as a floor or a wall, propping up a shed or pigeon loft, edging a dung midden or compost heap. I am sure some are still in existence today. My verse written on the subject echoes the enchantment of what many might think of as a boring old piece of history, but I was a boy then!

THE GHOST TRAIN

It came soundless through the cutting
Where the willow herb stood tall
Where for years the wagtail nested
Beneath the waterfall
And all the trash and weeds of years
Gave it right-of –way
As it floated on the shimmer
Of a scorching summer day.

Though the spectre train was driverless,
No number and no name
Connecting rods were flashing
In the sunlight as it came.
Every curve was harmony
And every line was true
From the brilliant engineering
Of the loco works at Crewe.

I saw it as I knew it then
A thousand years ago
When I wrestled with the tiger
And outran the buffalo.
Then I smelt the tar of sleepers
And walked barefoot on the line
Clutching daisies, ragged robin,
Purple vetch and columbine.

Bob Bell

From Stewart Smith

Golf Club

Inspired by Bob Bell's article in the last edition about Golf in Glenfarg, Stewart Smith has given me the following, which he found among his late father's papers (Alex. Smith, mentioned in the text). It was published on 16 November 1933. One wonders what became of all the trophies mentioned — it is hoped that they are preserved safely somewhere. I would be delighted to hear any memories stirred by this article. Ed.

Golf Club Whist Drive The members of the Glenfarg Golf Club held a whist drive in the Public Hall on Thursday evening. During a short interval the trophies etc., won throughout the past season, were presented by Miss Jessie Anderson, Perth, the British Girl Champion. Mr. Forbes, captain of the club, introduced Miss Anderson and Mr. Joe Anderson, who was also present, and the Rev. Dr. Jack announced the winners. The Marindin Quaich, presented by Major General Marindin, Fordel, was won by Mr. Alex. Smith, who also won the Watson Medal and the Captain's Cup, presented by Mr. Forbes, captain. In each case the runner-up was Mr. Richard Hume, vice captain. The Piper Cup, presented by Mr. W.G. Piper, was won by Mr. Richard Hume, and the runner-up was Mr. Piper. The Monthly Medal was won by Mr. W. Piper after a tie with Mr. Alex. Smith. The medal for those who had just begun golf this season was won by Mr. James Sanderson after a tie with Mr. James Bell.

Dr. Jack proposed votes of thanks to Mr. Anderson and Miss Anderson, and remarked on the great pleasure it was to have such famous golfer hand over the prizes. Miss Anderson suitably replied, and wished the Glenfarg Golf Club every success in the future. The prize winners for the whist were as follows: Ladies — 1. Miss Muirhead 2. Miss McArthur 3. Mrs. Slimmer. Gentlemen — 1. Mr. Beath 2. Mr. C. A. Marshall 3. Mr Wm. Sanderson. Spot prizes — Ladies Mrs. Richard Hume; Gentlemen Mr. R. Duncan. Booby prizes — Ladies Miss Mayne, Gentlemen Mr. Robert Robertson. Travelling prizes — Ladies Miss Brown; Gentlemen Miss McGlashan (playing as gent). A novelty consolation guessing prize was won by Mrs. C. A. Marshall. Mrs. McKarsie, to whom Mr. Forbes proposed a vote of thanks, handed over the prizes. Mr. A. Henderson proposed thanks to Mr. Forbes, who acted as cardmaster.

The same publication also refers to three competitions, two against Perth bankers, and one against Lochgelly — two matches were won by Glenfarg, and the third (against the bankers) was tied.

The Glenfarg people involved in these are: Alex. Smith, J.R. Simpson, A. Smith (?Alex), W. Sanderson, Jas. Sanderson, Jas. Bell, R. Hume, W. Brunton, T. Muirhead, R. Buist, J. Smith, W. Deas, D. M. Broadhead, And. Smith, Jas. Smith, W.D. Wiltshire and J. Greig,

From Newsletter February 2002

Perthshire Advertiser 1904

A short time ago a public meeting was held in the Corbett Memorial Institute for the formation of a Glenfarg Golf Club. The Rev. J. W. Jack was called to the chair, and explained the object of the meeting. It was unanimously agreed to proceed to the formation of a club in the hope of making a course on the Easterton Estate, both the tenant of the farm, Mr. James E. Bett, and the trustees of the late John Christie Esq. of Easterton, being willing that a lease of about seventy acres of ground of a most suitable nature should be granted. The following office bearers were thereupon elected: Mr. R. R. Simpson, W.S. Edinburgh, Hon. President; Mr. William Deas J.P., President; Mr. Charles Mackarsie, Vice President; Rev. James W. Jack M.A. Captain; with a secretary, treasurer, a Committee of Management and a Green Committee. Rules and a constitution were adopted, and a lease of the ground was submitted and approved of generally.

At a subsequent meeting of Committee it was agreed to spend £100 on the making of the course, and to advertise for a competent man to attend to the making of it, and act as greenkeeper during the summer months. The annual subscription has been fixed at £1 for gentlemen, 10s for artisans, 10s for ladies and 7s 6d for youths under 18. Summer visitors can play over the course at a much smaller figure, monthly, weekly or daily. The course is to be round the Easterton hills, the starting place being about 800 feet above sea level, and commanding a magnificent view. The entrance is to be along the old right-of-way, and thence by a footpath up to the top of the hill.

The course has been laid out by Willie Auchterlonie of St. Andrews, and will eventually make one of the best inland courses in Scotland. It has the great advantage of being hilly instead of flat, as too many are. With the combined assistance of the residents and visitors the club bids fair to be a great success.

Memories of the Course — from Bob Bell

I had always known that the golf course was created in 1904, but I had no idea that a formal account of the proceedings existed until I stumbled across it in a report quite separate from the "Glenfarg news" of that issue. (PA 1904). I recognise the names of the office bearers, but I do not recall the distinction between "Gentlemen" and "Artisans".

My father served his apprenticeship as a joiner and golf club maker in Lower Largo in the 1890s, so it was not surprising that we had old golf clubs kicking about the house. They were no doubt used to club rabbits at harvest time. My brother was already playing the game, so it was quite natural for me to pick up two of the clubs and join him. We joined the club as a family for £1 per year. The Smith family had the best bargain for their pound, because the father, four sons and one or two daughters, were all good golfers!

I would have been about nine years old when I started with a rusty old "Fore" iron and a "Cleek". The shafts were somewhat bent, and the leather grips just would not remain in place, but I was content with them and soon added a "Brassie", a "Mashie" and a "Niblick" of the same vintage. As time went on I added a putter and a tattered old bag to give them respectability. I did not own a steel-shafted club until the war was over. The Club did not restrict the liberty of the villagers to wander on the course, and old General Marindin saw to it that his sheep continued to graze on it as they did on the school playing field, so he suffered no loss. Players took a liberal view of etiquette, and the interpretation of rules: had a boy like me gone barefoot I don't think he would have been asked to leave.

Golfers had a fair walk to the clubhouse, through the rather grand wrought iron gates beside the Institute, past the Lodge, which was home to Granny Smith, and along the avenue, apparently going nowhere until they reached the first gate, where they crossed a stile on the left, and proceeded up the hill to the clubhouse. In the avenue was a mounting stone for horse riders, and beyond the gate at the end was a rather pleasant area which was landscaped and planted with laurel hedges in a geometric design. I knew that Roman legions had passed here, and in my childish way I associated the laurels with them. I thought if we dug there we might find some Roman coins or artefacts. The truth was of course much more mundane: the gates, the lodge, the avenue and the laurels were all that remained of the preparations for the building of a girls' school abandoned at that stage, I think, when war broke out in 1914. I could be wrong about that date, because I note that Dr. Jack gave the avenue the status of Right of Way in 1904. The clubhouse was an attractive little building positioned so that it basked in the summer sunshine, and provided a superb view southwards over the village. It had an intoxicating aroma of pine.

The layout of the course was unusual, if not unique, in that it had ten holes: one played the first hole up the hill, played eight holes round the top, repeated the top eight, and then played the last back down to the clubhouse, so completing the eighteen.

In addition to golf, the course held, for wandering village boys like me, the same fascination we had for the whole countryside within a circle of some three miles radius, roughly bounded by Heatheryleys, Loch Mundie, Clochrat Law, the Kennels, Balvaird, Newton, Carmore, Southfields, Birnie Hill, the Temple Rock, Shirend, and the Plains. It had trees, whins, bracken, rough grass and bits of heather and all the local flora and fauna. In the wood on the right of the path going up a sparrow hawk nested in a tall spruce, and I still recall my exhaustion as I struggled to get past the huge nest, and the sheer magic of the two beautiful eggs that lay on the rough twigs. There were lapwing, buntings, finches, skylarks and many other birds; on the dam were mallards, tufted duck, teal, noisy redshank and little sandpipers. A curlew nested in the rough on the high side of the seventh fairway, and a tawny owl attacked me when I sliced my ball into the wood that skirted the ninth.

I retraced my footsteps some four years ago, and was shocked to find a network of electric fences and thousands of pheasant poults which I feared were destined never to get off the ground. They had attracted buzzards, a species which did not exist in the area in the thirties, in spite of the existence of millions of rabbits.

In hot weather sheep will seek out areas of bare earth or the shortest grass to lie on, so they habitually congregated on the greens. When they were chased off by approaching players, they would rise and immediately defecate on the green surface, adding a fresh hazard to the age old putting problem. I would get 6d or 1/- from my brother for an unmarked ball, and 1/9 or 2/- for caddying.

It was, in truth, a rough old course, and it was sad that the active young men who could have rescued it had more serious matters to attend to in the shape of a war from which thirteen of them failed to return.

From Newsletter October 2002

Memories of Peter Davey as a boy in Glenfarg in the 30s

The Railway LNER - the Flying Scot passed our house "Rathlaw" on its way to Perth - you could set your watches by it! The Station - I too remember (as Bob Bell recalled) the shouts of "stand back" when an express was due, the shunting yard and the two engines pulling a loaded goods train up the Glen. The tunnels - when I travelled to Perth to attend the secondary school, Balhousie Boys, we had fights "Mammies" on the way home, when the train was in the tunnels, by pulling the bulbs out! Homework done on the train on the way to school in the mornings!

The School The name of the 1930s headmaster escapes me (it might have been Henderson), but he taught well, particularly his talks on the formation of the Earth. In those days we were taught gardening on plots in front of the school, and to this day the good advice to clean spades, forks etc before putting them away, still holds good. My brother, Stuart, 3 years my junior, and who died over 20 years ago, also attended the school.

The Village of Glenfarg When we came to live in Glenfarg there was no electricity in the village - our house "Rathlaw" had a coal range, oil lamps and candles in the bedrooms. I remember the Baker delivering morning rolls, and the Grocer coming to the house to take Mother's order. Fishing in the Farg, "guddling" for trout, and we dammed up the Farg to make bathing pools. In the winter the Curling Rink - if we boys cleared the snow for the curlers we could skate on the rink after play. On Sundays I remember the Kirk, late breakfasts, no Sunday Dinner but High Tea

- long sermons, blinds drawn in the village. At tea the ladies pouring tea in the cups - no milk first - then asking "Do you take cream'?", meaning milk. The Bein Inn 3 miles from the village, where "bona fide travellers" could drink!

From Newsletter December 2002

Memories of the Burn, by Bob Bell

I was born in the grey stone cottage where the bridge crosses the Farg as it approaches the bowling green. It was said that if you stood on that bridge you could have one foot in Perthshire, one in Kinross, and you could give a "Scud on the lug" into Fife. The wall and the parapet were warm to the touch in summer, and I would run along its length and jump down at the old toll house. On the parapet or on the road I would always pause to gaze into the waters of the burn to see what trout were there and to see if one might be big enough to provide a breakfast. One dreaming boy walking the parapet stepped over the edge and crashed onto the stones below. He was lucky to escape with slight concussion and several stitches. On the downstream side a big ash tree grew on the bank bending outwards over the water, and on the upstream side grew a tall sycamore, every leaf spotted black by a fungus or invading insect. We collected its winged seeds and sent them, one by one, spinning over the water. In winter its leaves dropped silently, carpetting the bank or being whisked away in the water.

From my bed I could hear the chatter, the whisper, or the roar of the burn as the seasons changed; it was at its noisiest when the water was low and had to plot its course over and round the stones in the river bed, splashing against obstacles or murmuring in the deep against the wall. In the autumn, when in spate, all that could be heard was the roar of the falls a hundred yards or so up the burn. The big brown water was frightening, but in the darkness I would descend from the house and edge ever closer to the bank. Only in the moonlight when a beam struck the water surface could one see how fast it was moving. I would cling to a branch of a rowan transfixed by the scene. Next day we would walk down to the bottom of the glen to watch the falls at Ayton Lodge, and to witness the sea-trouts' frenzied leaping, confirming that nature had kept her promise and the fish would soon arrive in the village as they had done for centuries . The trout came laden with countless millions of pink semi-transparent eggs, so the harvest of flesh exacted by hunting boys like me would be no more than nature, with her sense of balance, had allowed for.

I had an early inkling of the power of the burn. I am only a toddler standing on the pavement in front of our home; my mother and my big brother Jim are there. Jim is downcast, he is barefoot, he has a stick in one hand and hanging from the other a long grass stem threaded through the gill openings of five big speckled trout. On my mother's face is an expression mixing regret, love, and a vague amusement ; she is saying " Oh laddie! did ye forget the Sunday school trip " ? She was explaining how the charabanc for the event of the year had waited while friends had moved up the burn calling his name. They had failed to make contact, and the charabanc with its cheering children, its streamers and its balloons had reluctantly left without him. Jim remained silent. It is here that my memory fails me, but it is likely that he had a scone and jam, and returned to the burn. I was soon to learn how, in the excitement of the chase, all else can be forgotten. If a trout has sought refuge far under a rock, a bank or a tree root, and little fingers are trying patiently to move it to a holding position, the hunting boy, his head close to the rushing water, is lost in his own sweet world of the moment.

Catching trout by hand from a river like the Farg has to be the most primitive means of hunting them for food, and maybe for pleasure too. Our forebears some 2000 years ago would surely have adopted this method, or else would have used rocks and turf to dam the river's flow, and then travel downstream collecting the stranded fish as we did when we were building a pool.

Another, more futile method, was to attach a snare of single wire to a slim stick and to pass the noose over the head of a basking trout. In addition to trout there was a large population of eels in the Farg. One day I tasted jellied eels from a stall in Whitechapel Road in London and, finding them very tasty indeed I wondered why we had rejected them as food in Glenfarg. Eels could be guddled, but they were very slippery, squirming and tying themselves in knots. Spearing them with an open safety pin helped, but there was little incentive to struggle with them. When I caught one I would skin it and hang the skin up in the cellar until it was dry. I wrapped it round my wrist and secured it with thread. Some men wore a neat little wrist strap with two buckles where one would wear a watch so, in the jargon of today, I thought my strap was "Cool" !

Take off your boots and stockings or change them for a pair of cast-off boots without laces, toes, or the tongue {which would have been used in the making of a catapult), wade out into the middle of the burn. Now your perspective has changed; as you walk against the flow, any disturbance clouds the water behind you leaving the track ahead always clear. You are on a path few have followed; you can view both banks from the centre. For centuries the water has been carving out this bed for itself, and now everything in it is within your reach. You may be scratched by the hawthorn or pricked by the bramble, but the bramble will reward you with the best berries out of reach of the walker on the bank. The willow fronds will brush your face, and the dull but homely alder will provide refuges for trout among its well-washed roots. Nettles and thistles on the bank cannot sting your legs. All the flora and fauna living there can be seen:, the reeds and the rushes, the wild flowers, the nest sites of birds like the wagtail, the wren and the water crow are there under the banks. When you lift a stone you will expose many strange and fearsome looking creatures in different stages of their development from egg to insect, and when the water crow hops down from its stone to walk beneath the surface of the water you will have seen the food it seeks. In places where the banks are high, lined with trees or dense vegetation you will find yourself cut off from the rest of the world. Sit under an overhang on the bank and, unseen, you might doze, listen to the rain on the leaves above, or simply watch the creatures of the burn go about their business unafraid. There may be a nest of the water hen out of reach from the bank. The eggs taste wonderful for breakfast. With your hands you can explore every possible refuge for a trout: under a rock, a stone, a bank, a wall or a tree-root. If you contact a fish clumsily it will flee, so a very gentle approach is essential. You will be amazed when a trout accepts your fingers as a harmless intrusion, so you must move it up, down, around or whatever to get it into position so that the fingers can close on the gills and the thickest part of the body. If the trout is large or is a sea-trout you must advance the other hand to control the lashing of the tail. The fish will emerge from the water peacefully, and will only struggle when aware that it is no longer in its natural element. The skill, of course, is in the touch. The English call it tickling, but that is misleading. It is really a gentle manipulation, a caress which disarms the victim. Ask the young lover who wishes to touch the object of his affection, but fears she might run away. Our catch was always eaten fried.

"The Burn" was not just the Farg, it was really whole river systems including the Eden, which ran southwards then east toward Fife, and others like the Slateford and the Kelty that fed the Water of May up by Path of Condie. Every water, however small, had its own native trout population, and we would walk many a mile to catch them. The Farg gathers in the marshes and springs between West Deuglie and Berryhill, and feeds the loch at that end. The loch is also fed from Craigfarg, from Woodside, and from a few other trickles on the opposite bank. Between the loch and Aberargie there are about twelve tributaries, and we knew every inch of every one of them.

It is well known that sea-trout, like salmon, return to spawn in the burn of their birth. It is the spate and the scent of it that sparks off the final stage of their migration, sending them far up to the clearest water and their spawning beds Their passage is fast and frantic, as seen by their

leaping at the falls at Ayton Lodge, at Fieldie and at the end of the path through the Earnside Bus Garage, where the falls had a drop of some five feet. But they need more than a flash flood. In early days, when we washed less and had just one tap in the house, the overflow from the loch was always flowing, and a spate would maintain the volume of water long enough for the fish to reach the most remote part of the remotest burn. So I have seen and caught sea-trout in the Lilywell Strand as far up the Deuglie road as Easterton road end, up past the old manse at Arngask just short of the cemetery, and in the Fieldie burn just short of the East Fordel cottages on the Wicks o' Baiglie road. They invaded the Glendie burn up to Langside, the Candy burn, the Blair burn up close to Annie Lowrie's Fordel burn, Brunton's burn, and the burns at the Bein, the Binn and Pottyhill. In the clearing water these big fish were seen as ghostly-shapes in a mist . If we spotted a really big one we would follow it, running along the bank hoping to see where it came to rest and might be caught. Bill Deas, armed with a shrouded torch and a gaff; would wade up the burn, and would hook and land the fish trapped in the torch's beam. Notable boyhood catches stay in the memory, one being of a Saturday afternoon accompanied by my friend Bill Davidson from the smiddy, when we had 25 big sea-trout, the biggest weighing 31/2 lbs. No sooner had I laid out my share of the catch on the wall than the policeman came round the corner from the post office; he simply nodded to my mother and averted his eyes. Such was the nature of the feast that all were fed, and all were conspirators, because it was illegal to catch the fish by any means. I recall having a big catch with Bunt Deas at the top of the Fieldie burn. A full moon was shining and there was snow on the ground, but my arms were red and hot with the excitement of the chase. Not everyone realized that the trout in the loch itself were migratory, and the only feeder stream they could access was the infant Farg, so the fish that evaded the fly-fishers on the loch were received with thanks by barefoot village boys when the trout ran to spawn up and under the Deuglie road by West Deuglie Farm.

My passion for the burn remained into manhood. In 1952 I was home in Glenfarg; it was late October or early November and the sea-trout were up in large numbers and freshly run. Our first child was due on the last day of the year, so my wife's pregnancy was well advanced, but she was keen to witness the guddling. She was provided with gumboots and an old Burberry coat tied at the waist by binder twine. My sister came along too, and we went up Smiddyhill to Barleymill where I set to work. We had problems going to and fro across the burn in the darkness, but we had no mishaps. The excitement was sharpened by the fear that the law might be watching. My mother would have felt totally disgraced had I been caught, but I think I would have enjoyed defending the ancient art. I soon located several fish together under a tree root; I selected the three biggest and brought them safely to the bank. There remained the problem of returning through the village with the fish, but I had prepared for this. I asked my wife to remove the twine and open the coat. We strung the twine through the gills of the fish and tied it securely around the waist, the three fish dangling in front. We walked down home daring anyone to ask for an explanation of the swelling under my wife's coat. Today Nancy swears we actually met the policeman but I am not sure of that.

I don't know if anglers fish in the Farg now, but they came from far and near then. We fly-fished in the loch and, because of the vegetation that bordered the burn making casting difficult, the bait used in the burn was invariably the worm. The bram'le worms were considered the best, dug from Sanderson's dairy dung heap about 100 yards along Deuglie road on the left. Jimmy Lackie who was a very popular deaf mute was a master of the art and, without saying a word, he could describe in exciting detail how he fought the big one and how it got away.

But the benefit of the water was not just its fish; the water was put to work in other ways. Near Shuttlefauld the Glendie burn was diverted along a lade at the foot of the big Candy field to drive the mill wheel at Glendiemill. I was too young to know what was going on there, but I

certainly saw much activity with horses and carts and saw the mill wheel turning. Further down at Barleymill the burn flowed through what we called Spinky Den. It got its name from the "spinks" i.e primroses, which grew in profusion in the open grassy areas between the huge beeches. It was our favourite picnic spot. About a third of the way up, the burn was dammed to raise the water level and to send it along its lade to the mill. I remember the wheel well, but it was always still. It was the same at Hayfield. About 150 yards upstream from the cottages the water was controlled, not by a dam and waterfall, but by a man-made gradual slope up to a sluice gate which built up the water level and diverted it along the bottom line of the wood of huge spruces that led up to Smiddyhill. The water was channelled to a very big wheel in its pit behind the mill. The wheel was in good condition, but its life of service had ended. The old mill was a playground for us because we had access right up to the top floor. All the machinery was there: the fire at the bottom and the roasting grid at the top. There were wheels lying about, and we used to hack lumps of chalk out of them to draw peever boxes on the road for our game. About 200 yards further down, was the falls I have described where the water in front of them was diverted into the lade. A big sandstone block could be raised or lowered to control the flow of water. The lade ran straight alongside the sawmill to Hollybank, under the track and appearing briefly before disappearing under the road and under the cottages in front of the post office. It flowed through our coal-cellar, and I could climb into it and walk along a ledge for a few yards where the rats lived to trouble us and eat the potatoes we stored in the cellar. The lade emerged again in front of the post office garden, and flowed just below road level to the joiner's shop where my father worked. The joiner's shop was owned by Bunt Deas's father, and his uncle Sandy. The wheel that drove the circular saw in the base of the shop was in a pit walled off from the road. I remember well the wheel splashing and turning before the water it had borrowed returned to the burn. In earlier days before I lived and before the railway came, the lade continued along the Ladeside, under the Great North Road, along the foot of the hill going up to Arngask, and northwards to feed the important Hay's Mill which was destroyed by fire in 1864. When the railway came the burn itself was diverted. From the point where it crossed under the main road it was held to a straight line by a wall alongside the railway down to the last house in the village. This stretch interested me because its trout population had not recovered from the burn's diversion. So the lade was blocked off and the pipe carrying the water that came down from Arngask can still be seen on the east side of the bridge. The Arngask Hotel was built where the old lade had crossed the road..

One day, while up the burn with three other unwashed boys of the parish, we were joined by a boy of similar age. He was Thomas Boyd, whose parents owned Glendeuglie House and estate. Although he did not look like us or talk like us we accepted him as a playmate. A few days later, however, he told us with great sadness that his mother forbade him from any further contact with boys like us. I did not see him again. But death and war are no respecters of rank, and Thomas eventually joined boys of the parish on the war memorial. His death came early in the war when the ship in which he was serving sank with all hands. He was a 19 year old Midshipman who had followed his father into the Royal Navy.

BOY IN THE AUTUMN SPAWNING RUN

Arrows of advancing winter
Pierce the flesh and chill young bones,
Comb the bracken hiss through hedges
Crisp the moss on dry wall stones.

Probe the clamps that hold potatoes,
Wheat-straw hugging earthy fruits
Sweet the labour of whose picking
Bruised his back and bought his boots.

Stark in trees the brittle branches
Spring from boles as black as pitch
Night is filled with foxy voices
Rabbit smells within the ditch.

In the shadows by the river
Hearing geese that cross the moon
Hunting boy who reads the water
Knows the fish are coming soon.

Bullet-bodied wound for wedlock
Taut and muscled up they wait
Sensing nearness of the trigger
In the mountain water spate.

Spate that drives them frantic upwards
Black within the blackening night,
Reckless, plunging, brave, ecstatic,
In their frenzied spawning flight.

Knows that with the rain subsiding;
Knows that with the torrent's wane;
Knows he'll crook his fingers round them;
Knows he'll taste their flesh again.

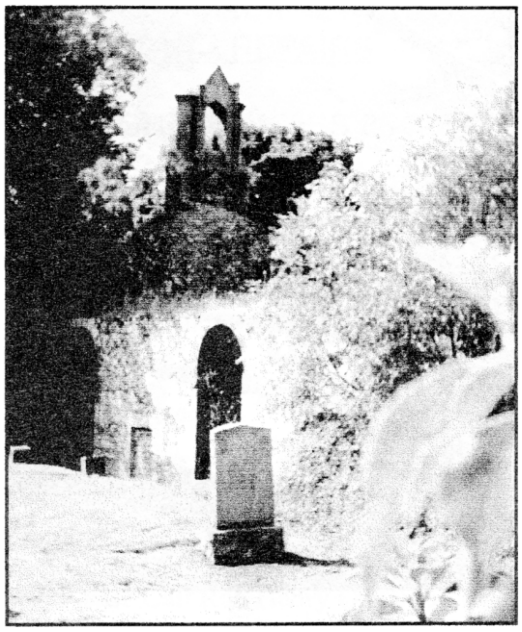
From Newsletter 148 August 2003

The following was taken from issues of The Magazine of Arngask Church of Scotland dating from Summer 1966 Spring 1967.

THE AULD KIRK OF ARNGASK

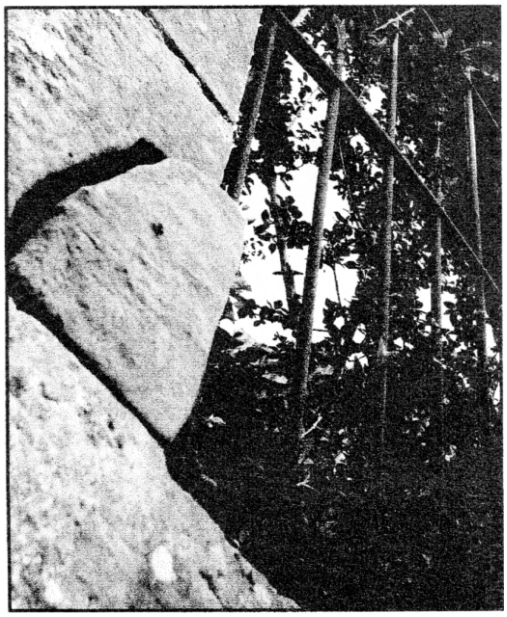
By

Iain MacDonald



Do you ever take a walk up by the auld Kirk and Kirkyaird on Arngask hill? Maybe you have never given the ruined walls a second glance. As they stand they may not be very eye-catching. When complete this Kirk must have been a squat, unpretentious, nae whigmaleeries building. In the words of the writer of the second statistical account of our parish in 1842, it was "a plain but substantial edifice." The little belfry and bell — carefully saved from an earlier kirk, for the thrifty parishioners of Arngask were not the people to throw money away recklessly — added a light touch to one gable, while white-painted windows and painted doors added a touch of colour to the exterior. And yet, in its own quiet way this little kirk is full of character, and if we can look at it with a sympathetic eye it will in return tell us something of the way our forefathers worshipped.

First of all, count the number of doors it had at one time. There is the door into the wee session-house, and the main entrance makes two, and the one to the galley makes three. Then if you walk round the back you will find a fourth door blocked up in the middle of the west wall, and yet another in the south wall, making five altogether. Five doors into one kirk, that's a bit odd. Aye, and gae draughty too. Surely there must be a reason for that.



Look at the colour of the stones forby. The builders have brightened up the walls by introducing a pinky-red sandstone at each corner — I'm sure they may have borrowed this idea from Balvaird Castle where coloured stones are used to good effect. Look closer, though, at the doors and windows. In contrast to the corner stones the two huge windows in the south wall and three of the doors are carried out in yellow sandstone. But the door into the gallery, the two small windows in the north wall below the gallery and the door and window of the session-house are all in red sandstone. This seems to be a clear indication that all these red sandstone features have been tagged on as

afterthoughts. The original building, therefore, had no session-house, and no gallery. That means that when erected the kirk was lit only by two very large windows on the south wall. There was one door each on the east, south and west walls, but neither doors nor windows on the north.

Let us look at the parish it was meant to serve. What was this parish like in the year 1806, the year it was built?

On the basis of figures given in the Statistical Accounts we would not be far wrong in placing the population at just under the 600 mark. (But remember that not all of these were members of the parish kirk: there were quite a few Seceders.) When you come to think of it, this figure of 600 isn't really so very different from that of the present day. What is equally striking is that this population was much more widely scattered than at present.

To-day Glenfarg is by far the largest community in the parish. This was not always so. In the early 19th century there were two main villages, Duncrievie, a pretty little place in a fine setting, and Damhead, only slightly larger, and the nucleus of the present Glenfarg. In addition there were three hamlets, Abbotsdeuglie and Newton of Balcanquhal both happily still with us, and Lustylaw, though this last was now on a sad decline but still important enough at this date to be the scene of an annual cattle fair.

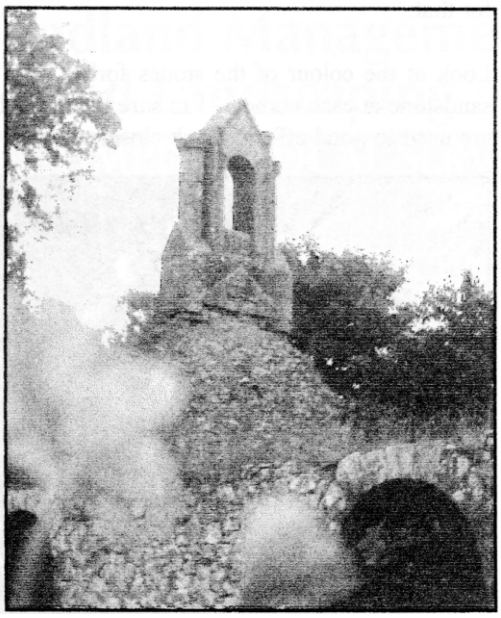
Duncrievie, Damhead and Lustylaw were strung out along the length of the road leading North to Perth. At the time that the walls of Arngask Kirk were rising no doubt there would be rumour of a "new road" leading to Perth, just as we hear of a new road that will by-pass Glenfarg in some wonderful age of the future.

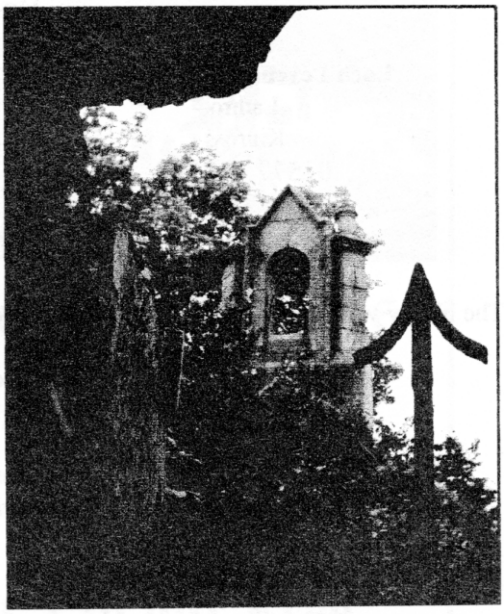
The new road eventually came, of course, and is now the main road to Perth. After that, and with the coming of the railway, Damhead grew, while Duncrievie and Lustylaw were left out on a limb. Perhaps, though, the wheel will come full circle. Our new road when it comes apparently will by-pass Glenfarg and cut over the hills, roughly on the line of the old route to Perth. And who can tell? The time may come when the ghost village of Lustylaw may rise anew, a village of filling-stations, motels, and houses commanding one of the finest views in Scotland over Strathearn to the ice-blue Grampian mountains beyond.

All these developments, however, lay in the future, and as it was, the Kirk enjoyed a fairly central site. Not that there was ever much doubt about where the new Kirk should be built. A Kirk and Kirkyaird had stood on Arngask hill for centuries, and it was natural that the same site should be used again.

At this point we might ask ourselves why it was that the parishioners of Arngask decided in the early years of the 19th century to "ding doon" the existing kirk and erect the one which now stands on the site. Possibly a search through the extant documents might give us an answer, but until that is done we can guess at the reasons. This period was, first of all, a

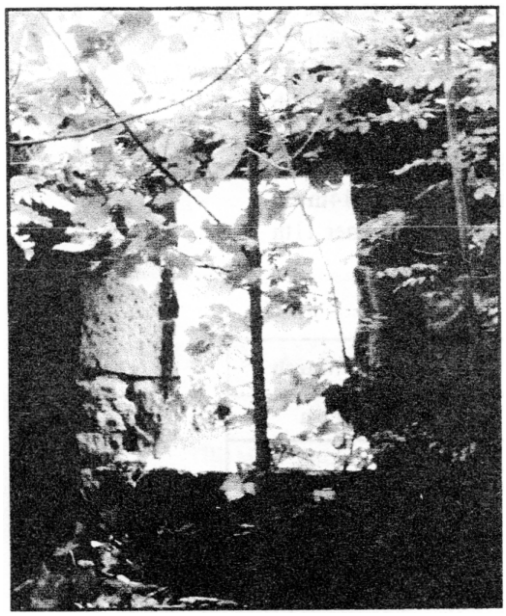
great period in kirk-building. Not just in Arngask but all over Scotland many new kirks were being erected, many of which (e.g. Comrie Old, St. Paul's, Perth) are among the most delightful features of our towns and villages. There was the background factor that many of the old pre-Reformation kirks that were in use never did (and still don't) make very satisfactory buildings for Reformed worship. Certainly the new kirk that was built here in 1806 was admirably adapted for Reformed worship, as we shall see. Again, we mustn't forget that the population was increasing which often forced congregations to provide themselves with a bigger kirk, but since the Arngask kirk was bursting at the seams from the moment it was built that can hardly be the reason here. Very often, too, the local laird might take the notion to rebuild the parish kirk in the latest, up-to-datest style, usually "elegant Gothic". However there is nothing stylish about the Arngask rebuild. The most likely reason in fact seems to be quite simply that by the opening of the 19th century the kirk of Arngask was old and worn out, and was beyond repair.





Here we are on thin ice indeed. Our knowledge of the pre-1806 kirk is extremely limited. Our only clue appears to be that most enigmatic remark in the First Statistical Account where the minister of the time, Lang, makes the comment that, "Part of the church, at least, must have been built before the Reformation, as there is a place in the wall for the font....". Just what are we to make of this statement? Mr Mackie, a most cautious and careful historian, wisely refuses to commit himself. We, less wise, will continue to skate further on to the thin ice.

Lang was writing about 1791, a time when not much was understood about the mediaeval styles of architecture. Generally speaking, in Scotland within a mediaeval kirk there was no architecturally defined space to contain a font, such as Lang believes to be the case here. It could be that he is merely describing a holy water stoup, or a piscina, a little stone sink for washing the altar vessels, such as you will see in St. John's Kirk, Perth. There is, however, one other, much more exciting interpretation. It is just conceivable that the "place in the wall for the font" of Lang's description is an apse. An apse is an extension to the East end of a kirk, rather like a bow window, built usually to contain the High Altar. Now an apse of a kind that could be mistaken by Lang as "a place in the wall for the font" in Scottish mediaeval architecture is a feature only of the Romanesque or Norman period. Our sister nation down south has been celebrating with postage stamps, pageants and television programmes the famous Norman Conquest of England 1066 (rather oddly: after all the English lost!) It was



only later that the Scots were to be directly affected by this Norman intrusion, one visible symbol being the building of kirks in an international style closely associated with the Normans. The splendid kirks at Leuchars and Dalmeny are our best examples built under the patronage of the powerful Anglo-Norman family of de Quincy. Mr Mackie has shown how this family owned estates in this area. It is possible to speculate, therefore, that through the example or influence of the de Quincy family, the parish kirk of Arngask might have been a faint echo of the splendours of Leuchars. If this is so then the Kirk that was pulled down and replaced by the present structure may have incorporated the apsidal east end of an earlier Norman structure, and would have been already at least 600 years old.

/to be continued in Number 150 December 2003

Murdo lain MacDonald was a schoolboy in the village while his father Murdo MacDonald was minister in Arngask from 1959 - 1967. lain, a history graduate of St Andrews University, is at present an Archivist in Argyll.

The following was taken from issues of The Magazine of Arngask Church of Scotland dating from Summer 1966 Spring 1967 and reproduced with kind permission from Murdo Lain MacDonald.

THE AULD KIRK OF ARNGASK

By

lain MacDonald

continued from newsletter 148

Our knowledge of the pre-1806 kirk is extremely limited. Our only clue appears to be that most enigmatic remark in the First Statistical Account where the minister of the time, Lang, makes the comment that, "Part of the church, at least, must have been built before the Reformation, as there is a place in the wall for the font....". Just what are we to make of this statement? Mr Mackie, a most cautious and careful historian, wisely refuses to commit himself. Lang was writing about 1791, a time when not much was understood about the mediaeval styles of architecture. Generally speaking, in Scotland within a mediaeval kirk there was no architecturally defined space to contain a font, such as Lang believes to be the case here. It could be that he is merely describing a holy water stoup, or a piscina, a little stone sink for washing the altar vessels, such as you will see in St. John's Kirk, Perth. There is, however, one other, much more exciting interpretation. It is just conceivable that the "place in the wall for the font" of Lang's description is an apse.

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The money for the building of the kirk would come mainly from a body of people known as the heritors. These were generally the local landowners, some of whom were absentees. This was fine so long as the heritors were wealthy and generous, for then you would get a fine kirk with all the trimmings. And this is exactly what Arngask did NOT get. Maybe the harvests were bad, maybe there was uncertainty due to the French Wars, maybe the heritors were downright stingy, but nothing is clearer than that the building of the Kirk was scrimped from the start. No tower, no session house, (unless the little roofless structure in the kirkyard served both as a detached session house and a watch-house), no vestibule, no gallery, and even the belfry was second-hand. It was far too wee in any case, since the heritors were forced to build a gallery within 20 years of its completion to accommodate everyone comfortably. Probably, to save money, as many pews as possible would be crammed into the available space, with nasty hard little seats fitted with even nastier, harder, relentlessly unyielding backs.

Simple though this structure might have been, however, several centuries of tradition lay behind its final shape. The completely blank north wall, for instance, occurs commonly in Scotland both before and after the Reformation — Mr. Inglis's old kirk at Carnbee has the same feature. It was as though the kirk had turned its back on the cold north wind and looked towards the south and the sun. Accordingly on the south wall we find two very large windows to light up the whole kirk. Traditionally the pulpit was always placed in the middle of the south wall between the windows so that the sun flooding in would warm the members of the congregation, lighting up their faces before the eyes of the minister. You will notice how the minister here was provided with his own special door which opened, rather surprisingly, from the kirkyard straight into the pulpit. The pulpit no doubt would be provided with a grand sounding-board in the traditional manner, and would probably have a little lectern (the small pulpit, as it was known) in front for the precentor. In the centre of the kirk, too, would be a special pew for the "penitents", those men and women who for a breach of ecclesiastical discipline and of the moral law, had to sit before the face of the whole congregation while rebukes and admonitions poured down on them from above.

The arrangements made for the celebration of the Lord's Supper are also interesting. Communion was celebrated in the traditional Scottish manner with its wonderful emphasis on fellowship, fellowship with God through Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit, fellowship with all the Church in heaven and earth, and fellowship with each other in this act of communion. Accordingly, as the redeemed family of God, they sat as a family round one common table, using a common cup and a common piece of bread. Clearly, however, only a small portion of

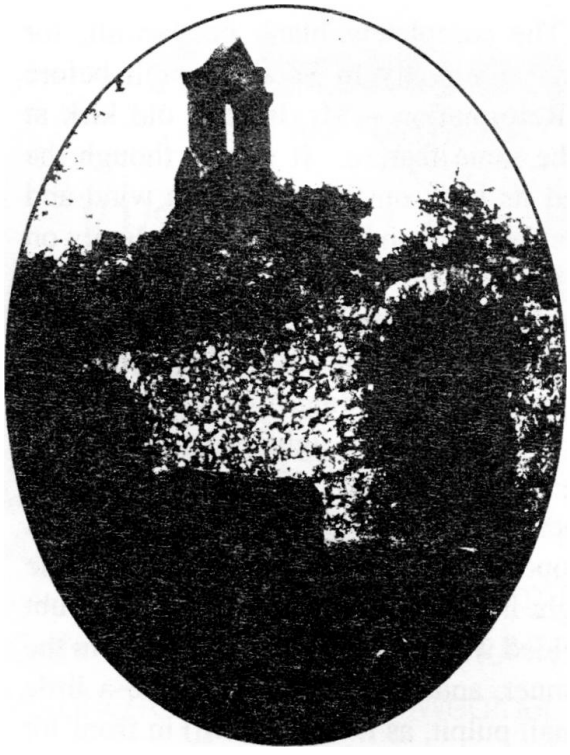
the congregation could participate at one time, and so, while one group of people sat round the table the rest of the congregation generally stood outside in the kirkyard. When the first "table" was finished they went out and the next group of communicants took their place and so on until all had communicated.

Now, with one group of people going out and another coming in, there could easily be a lot of delay and congestion. So what was to be done? The answer was quite simple: build two doorways.

Thus at Arngask, and elsewhere, we find two doorways, in this case facing each other from opposite walls. The presence of this second door in the west wall (i.e. underneath the belfry) does seem to indicate that the kirk once enjoyed a much more open and commanding site than is now the case. As we remarked earlier, the kirk was "ower wee" and about 1823 a horseshoe gallery was fitted inside. Space was so tight that access to the gallery had to be by means of an external forestair, a rather charming and unusual feature. The new gallery darkened the interior and two windows had to be pierced in the formerly blind north wall. The session house appears to have been tagged on at the same time.

Changing fads and fashions in kirk design left their imprint on Arngask. When the common communion table went out of fashion the need for the west doorway disappeared, and it was subsequently blocked up as was the minister's door. Later, too, the heating apparatus was installed where the west door had been and a new belfry was added, which also contained the disguised chimney of the stove.

Taken from issues of The Magazine of Arngask Church of Scotland: News Sheets:Summer 1966, Sept — Oct 1966 ,Nov — Dec 1966, Jan — Mar 1967 and April — May 1967



***A**nd so we leave it there upon the hill,*
this little kirk.

***S**ilent now, those walls that sheltered once the slow uplifted psalm.*

***S**ilent, though the chattering sparrow darts through empty round-arched windows.*

***L**eave it, floored deep with dark-green nettles,*
its walls lit by the yellow glowing lamps of ragwort
its skews softened by the wispy purple stalks of willowherb.

***L**eave it, to the quiet, all concealing hands of ivy, that stretch out slim clutching fingers over stone and mortar.*

***L**eave it, to its past,*
its unheard memories and silent echoes.

Murdo Iain MacDonald was a schoolboy in the village while his father Murdo MacDonald was minister in Arngask from 1959 - 1967. Iain, a history graduate of St Andrews University,

is at present an Archivist in Argyll.

From Newsletter 150 2003

A chance encounter with a postcard!

My name is Willie Reid and I spent the first 22 years of my life between 1949 -1971 at Folda in Glenfarg. In December 2002 I signed up as a member of Ebay the internet auction house - and through its search engine I found that a 1907 postcard from Glenfarg was being sold by someone in Ayrshire. In order to find out how the website operated I bought this PC and about 10 days later it duly arrived. It was written from Bountree Hall by Peggy Deas to a girl in London on Feb 1 1907 and the Glenfarg postmark showed the same date.

The day after the PC arrived I was out cycling when I suddenly remembered that my father had told me that at one time Folda had been known as Bountree Hall many years before. Incredibly then this chance encounter with this PC threw up the possibility that it was written in the same house where I had been brought up. I just had to find out.

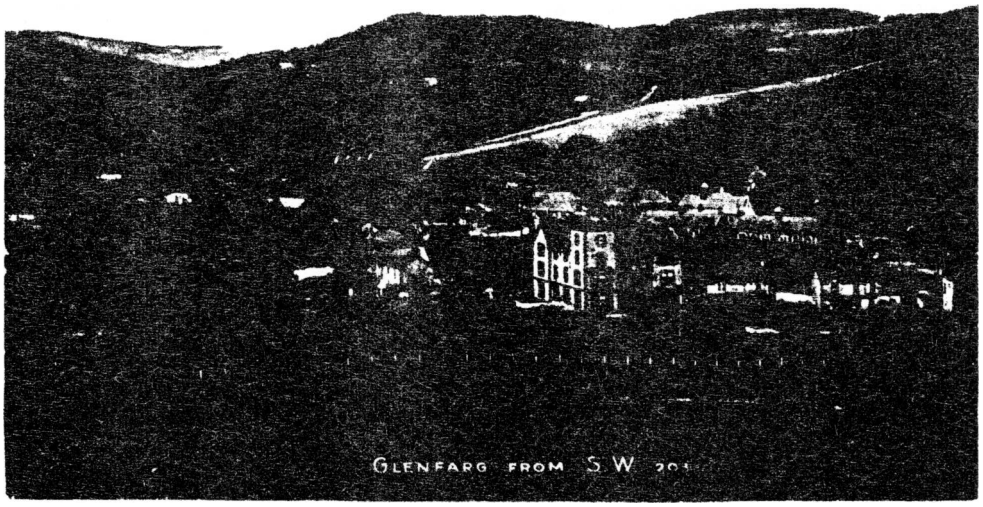
My first foray into detective work was to look at the 1881, 1891 and 1901 censuses for Glenfarg and there I found that William Deas occupied Bountree Hall in Smiddyhill Road. He was married to Eliza and he was a mason employing 4 men and 2 boys in 1881. By 1901 his family had grown to 5 children including Peggy, the youngest aged 8, the writer of the P C, who attended the village school.

So Bountree Hall existed at the time the PC was written but was it the same house as at present up Church Brae next to two similarly built houses, Ochilree and Culmore.

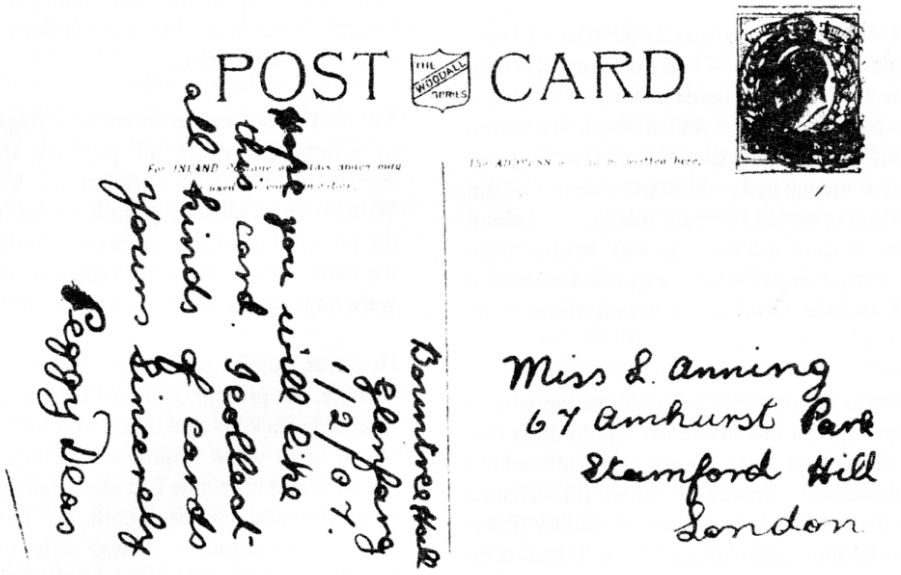
My next effort was to contact the Register of Sasines in Edinburgh where all property transactions are registered. But this surprisingly led nowhere as William Deas seemingly built all the houses between the present Earnside Coaches and Smiddyhill Farm in the early 1900's and only rented them out. So there were no property sales to be recorded.

However, surely the answer had to lie in visiting Mr Lambie, the present owner of Bountree Hall, to ask if he could check his title deeds which should surely give a date as to when Bountree was built. Alas another negative and in fact he had also been trying to find out when Bountree had been built. But this visit did have one compensation - I was able to look at Mrs Lambie's superb collection of old Glenfarg postcards. And then incredibly 2 days later Mr Lambie received a visit from a lady from S Africa who just happened to be the niece of Peggy Deas who wrote the PC.

From her he discovered that part of the Deas family had emigrated to S Africa to find a kinder climate after one of its members had been severely gassed during the First World War. And this lady was also able to confirm that when the present Bountree was built it was known as New Bountree Hall and Folda became known as Old Bountree Hall. So I was not following a red herring.



Front of postcard



Back of postcard

I next considered if there was such a thing as rates or council taxes that might have been payable by house occupiers in the early 1900's. On phoning the council offices in Perth to check this out they pointed me in the direction of the A K Bell Library in Perth where the old Valuation Rolls were kept which assessed all properties for rental values.

There I found the whole Deas estate of properties mentioned above which interestingly were all moved from Kinross-shire to Perthshire in 1909. But although all the Deas houses were there all of them were un-named (except for Ochilree which was first recorded in 1905). Every house named William Deas as proprietor with different people named as occupiers except for the one lived in by the Deas family. And all the properties had different rental values.

New valuation rolls were completed annually and as the 20th century progressed house names slowly began to appear and by 1938/39 all the Deas houses were named individually.

So using this 1938/39 Valuation Roll I thought I could perhaps work back to 1907 using the occupiers and rental values to guide me as to which house was which.

This took some time but peeling back the years was really exciting even though I knew that the chances of linking the PC to Folda were probably remote as Ochilree had been built by 1905.

Taking the layers off year by year I moved from the 1930's back through the 1920's and into the 1910's and then suddenly there it was - William Deas had taken his family up to the present Bountree Hall around Martinmas 1910 after it had just been built.

And so that meant that unbelievably my serendipity postcard from 1907 had been written in Folda, then named Bountree Hall, in the house I had been brought up in. That really was an exciting discovery!

But the coincidences didn't stop there. Both the postcard (through the Royal Mail) and I (by the Royal Bank) had at different times been sent to London! And also the date on the postcard was Feb 1- the same date as when my father died in 2002.

Finally there is one more claim to fame for Folda. Uniquely its name is captured on the stained glass window in Arngask church which overlooks the house

Just another amazing coincidence!