

Buntait

There is evidence of human habitation in Buntait lands from very ancient times. In "The Glenurquhart Story", Alastair MacKell records:

"Not far from the Corrimony Burial Cairn, on Buntait lands, was a settlement of some considerable size where clearly marked hut circles and cairns suggest a community practising primitive agriculture and a boundary wall, which can still be traced, may have served to protect domestic animals from prowling wolves or other marauding wild animals. Some of these circles are 30 feet in diameter and in the centre of at least one, is a depression which may have been a fireplace. These circles are low banks of stones covered with grass or heather about 2 feet high and 4 feet wide at the base. It is difficult to imagine one large roof covering such an expanse, but if so, it would probably have been formed of wattles and thatched with heather or turf, giving, when complete, a dome - shaped appearance. In each case there is a break in the circle at the south east which indicates the entrance. In other parts of Scotland where these structures have been carefully examined, hearth paving stones have been discovered, but we are unable to reconstruct much of the everyday life of the people of these long bygone days, and we can merely conjecture that they combined hunting with their primitive agriculture, for the Highlands were rich in wildlife - deer including reindeer, wild oxen, bears and wild boars being sufficiently abundant to counterbalance the poverty of the soil. It is not unreasonable to connect these circle dwellings with the chambered cairn at Corrimony, for it is known that hut circles go back to the Early Bronze Age, though they were still being built centuries later, and indeed were not so very unlike the circular thatched houses of the 18th Century. It can never be proved that the chambered cairn at Corrimony was the burial place of some renowned chief of the Buntait settlement, but it may easily have been so, and the proximity alone between the caims and the circle is about half a mile, and the proximity alone suggests a connection. Buntait, however, is not the only place where hut circles occur. At Shenval, on the other side of the river, there are two circles of diameter greater than those at Buntait, and others may be seen in the moor behind Beamock and Balnalick, and further east near Culnakirk. They all follow the standard pattern with an entrance facing the south-east though they vary in size. Some have argued that large solitary circles in the moorland were really man-made shelters for animals in storms, as the entrance facing south opened in the direction least exposed to winds. Sheep and cattle, it has been pointed out, soon get to know the place of greatest safety in storm and can seek out shelter without the assistance of man."

Buntait also has its associations with the ancient Christian saints. The earliest saints associated with the Glen are St Ninian and St Drostan whose main activities appear to have been in the lower reaches of the Glen. Regarding the spiritual wellbeing of the folk in the Braes, tradition exists that the people were evangelised by two Gaelic saints: Curadan (whose name is commemorated in "Croit Churadain" - Curadain's Croft, and "Tobar Churadain" - Curadain's Well, both on the lands of Buntait); and Gorman whose name is even better known, for "Suidhe Ghuirmain" the high peak above Shewglie, the seat of Gorman, was that saint's favourite hill, from the summit of which he may often have surveyed the Braes of Urquhart.



"Tobair Churadain", Curadain's well at Buntait

"Contemporaneous with St Adamnan was Curadan, or Kiritinus, surnamed Boniface, an Irishman who for sixty years preached to the Picts and Scots, and who became bishop and abbot of Rosemarkie, where he died at the age of eighty. To him was dedicated the old chapel at Corrimony Clach Churadain and after him is called **Croit Churadain (Curadan's Croft) , and Tobar Churadain (Curadan's Well), both on the adjacent lands of Buntait.** The neighbouring, churches of Bona and Struy were also dedicated to him. According to tradition, he and Gorman, a saint who gave his name to the hill called Suidh Ghuirmein, or Gorman's Seat, near Corrimony, were the first to evangelise the people of the Braes of Urquhart. Whether that be true or not, these dedications and place-names show how intimately associated he was with the district." *Mackay – Glenurquhart and Glen Moriston*

Buntait does not feature again in the history of Glenurquhart until the lawless period in the middle of the seventeenth century. The Earl of Moray, who was the Sheriff of Inverness-shire, did his best to establish respect for law and order but he was not very successful. He did, however, succeed in capturing and putting an end to Hector MacLean, a notorious cateran (cattle thief) and murderer who had committed crimes in various parts of the North.

Hector's three sons and some sixty others from Badenoch reached the Croichal and Mauld lands of the Chisholm in Strathglass in May 1663 and, in dead of night, lifted forty cows belonging to the Chisholm and his tenants and set off with them, by Glenmoriston and Fort Augustus, to Badenoch. The Chisholms gave chase and caught up with the caterans as they were going over the Corrieyairack. They succeeded in recovering twenty of the beasts, but the raiders escaped with the remainder into the mountains. In November of the same year

(1663), the MacLean gang appeared on The Chisholm's Glenurquhart estate of Buntait. under cloud and silence of night, and put four great barns, full of com, and two houses to the flames. But the villains did not stop there. On 24th March 1664, they returned to Buntait and burned twenty four houses and barns and also the cattle, sheep and goats within the buildings. Many of the Buntait folk were wounded trying to defend their possessions.

The Chisholm did his best through the legal system to bring the vagabonds to justice and get compensation for his devastated, destitute tenants. A Commission was set up which included local leaders such as Lord Lovat, the Chisholm himself, Hugh Fraser of Foyers, Lord Duffus, Hugh Fraser of Belladrum, John Chisholm of Buntait, John Grant of Glenmoriston and John Grant of Corrimony. Their brief was to pursue the 'rebels' and bring them to justice, but there is no evidence that they succeeded in their objective and the villainous MacLeans went unpunished.

It is possible that some of the MacLeans are still at large in the Glen!



A famous son of Buntait was Buchanan MacMillan who was bom in 1758 and rose to be printer to George the Third, to the Prince Regent, and to the House of Commons. His name is commemorated in a well close to Corrimony Bridge - Buchanan's well. Buchanan was the son of Finlay MacMillan, who was tenant of the small farm of Midton, Buntait and his wife Christian (nee Mackenzie). She was a daughter of Roderick MacKenzie, the Laird of

Applecross. Her sister, Elizabeth, had married Alexander Chisholm of Chisholm in 1740 and Christian accompanied her to her new home in Strathglass, which was how she met with her future husband across the hill at Buntait. Although Finlay was an impoverished small farmer, his two sons, Buchanan and John, had an expensive education in London. The explanation of this apparent anomaly is that the boys were educated along with their cousins, the family of their Aunt Elizabeth and the Chisholm of Chisholm. Towards the end of his life, Buchanan

returned to the Highlands - to Belladrum — “so that he might revive, or expire, in his native air.”

The MacMillans originally came to the Glen from Inveraray in Argyll via Loch Arkaig. They first settled on the farm of Ceanerish in Kiltarlity, and later members of the family gained tenancies of the small farms of Corrish, Milton of Buntait, Oldtown of Shewglie and Balnallick.

Two of the MacMillans, one from Corrish (The Braes) and the other from Oldtown of Shewglie, fought at Culloden and feature in William Mackay’s account of those who escaped from the disaster of the battle in his book ‘Urquhart and Glemnoriston’. This account starts by describing the feats of Alexander Grant, a cousin of Alexander Grant of Shewglie, also referring to “Corrimony” i.e. Alexander Grant of Corrimony. Mackay writes, “Alexander Grant, notwithstanding a wound in his head, made good use in the flight of that skill which had already won for him the name of The Swordsman. He saved Somerled Dubh MacDonald by severing a trooper’s arm which was raised to strike him. Wishing to avoid the streets of Inverness, he and his companions passed by the town, and forded the Ness above the Islands. William MacMillan, from the Braes, was being hard pressed in mid-stream by a trooper, when Grant stole behind, and with a stroke of his sword brought horse and rider into the water. His next stroke cleft the Englishman’s head in twain. At the same place, a trooper shot Donald MacMillan from Shewglie in the thigh, and was himself shot by a Lochaber man, who, mounting his horse, and placing MacMillan before him, galloped off to Glenurquhart, can’ying with him the first tidings of the disaster. Donald Fraser, DnImbuie, saved himself by slaying a horseman who pressed hard on him in the flight. Corrimony, suffering from two severe wounds, was carried off the field by John Garbh Cameron, Carnoch.”

The MacMillan family continued to multiply in the Glen and their presence and influence are still with us. Through the ages they married into various other Glen families including the Camerons of Upper Buntait, the Grants of Inchvalgar, the Cummings and Frasers of Culnakirk, the Rosses of Garbeg, the Cummings of Achtuie, the Frasers of Achmonie and the Frasers of Lennie.

At least one of this MacMillan family, Duncan the Soldier, had fought in the American War of Independence, received wounds “which never healed”, but still lived until eighty two years of age. This Duncan was aged fourteen at the time of the Battle of Culloden.

Many of the family emigrated before and after the potato famine of 1846 - to diverse locations including Pictou, Nova Scotia, to America and Australia.

The family were staunch supporters of the church in the Glen. Before the Disruption in 1843 they were members of the Parish Church, but joined the Free Church after its establishment and served it with great faith and dedication. One of the family, Alexander MacMillan, established a well known draper’s shop in Inverness, which many older Glen folk will remember.

MacMillan genes are still with us in the Glen and beyond, such as William MacMillan, Oakbank; Betta MacMillan in Aberdeen; Allan MacMillan, formerly of Balnalick (now resident in Invermess); and Billy Ross of Strone.

From "A Bridge to the Past: An Oral History of Families of Upper Glen Urquhart" by Peter R English