West Stormont's Auld Times

#12 Festive Issue 2025

Never too old

Auld Times is the journal of

The West Stormont Historical Society

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CONTENTS

FROM THE EDITOR

Welcome to the Festive Issue of *Auld Times*!

Once again our stalwart writers have produced some crackers.

Mike Lawrence vividly conveys the appeal of our Topic Nights. Honestly, you won't find more entertaining *craic* outside of a Donegal pub during a lock-in. With the bonus being you will not embarrass yourself by asking "when are that lot in the corner going to finish tuning up?"

Jennifer McKay goes slightly off-piste with an article set in Spain. But if not writing about local worthies this time she gives us the next best thing: news of Scots doing very well abroad. (Including Jennifer) And fitba . . .

That's Jennifer on the left. No translator required.

Foto F. Córdoba

The long read this time is courtesy of Ros Pearson and based on years of research going back to when she and Peter had access to the Mansfield archive in Scone Palace.

Mike rounds off this issue with a piece about the Bal Masqué held in Murthly Asylum in 1876. Patients and villagers, the great and good of Perthshire all colourfully costumed in the Asylum's own ballroom.

I look forward to seeing you all at forthcoming Talks and Topics.

A' the very best . . .

TOPIC NIGHTS

MICHAEL LAWRENCE

Do you enjoy hearing stories about your home village, sharing your own memories, or simply listening as others reminisce?

Our topic nights are held at 7.30pm on the second Monday of every month from October until April in the Luncarty Church Centre. There's no set format and no expectation for anyone to be an expert on the chosen subject. Instead, the evening just unfolds as a friendly conversation where anecdotes, questions and sometimes shocking revelations flow naturally. Usually, one small recollection sparks another and before long we find ourselves down a different alley and piecing together fragments of our local history in ways that no book, film or newspaper article could ever reveal.

What makes these evenings special is that everyone has something to contribute. You might have a story handed down by your family, a half-remembered name, an old photograph, an unusual object, or simply a query that you've always wondered about. And there's no pressure to speak. Just sitting quietly can be very interesting as you hear about familiar places, names or local events through someone else's eyes.

Each month we have a different topic but it's always rooted in local life. Housing, doctors, parish manses, hotels, shops, fairs and markets, and public parks are the topics for 2025/2026 and the chat around the table creates some of the most relaxed, informative and enjoyable gatherings that our historical society can offer.

So come along whenever you can and, if you want, bring a friend. If you've never attended a topic night before, expect a surprise at how much you enjoy the chat and how valuable your own memories are to the understanding of local history. Or just listen and have a cup of tea or coffee and some biscuits. Everyone is very welcome.

You can find dates and topics **here.**

Come along and be part of the conversation.

A CHRISTMAS QUIZ?

JENNIFER MCKAY

Name the following Scottish doctors:

The first full-time Medical Officer of Health in Scotland.

The founder of the first football club in Spain.

The man who deserved part of the 1902 Nobel Prize for Medicine.

The producer of the first health education film in the UK.

How were they connected?

All four were descendants of Rev. John Munro Mackay, the first Free Church minister in Lybster in Caithness, and they all practised medicine in Huelva, south-west Spain. They were: John Sutherland Mackay, Alexander Mackay, Ian Macdonald and Halliday Sutherland.

In recent years I have been researching the lives of these doctors and during this time, I have regularly visited the Huelva Municipal Archives. The city hosts a week-long tourism festival in September, entitled Feria del Legado Británico, British Legacy Fair. This year I was invited to deliver a presentation on the theme of British influence on public health provision in Huelva. I chose to speak about John Mackay who was the first Scottish doctor to join the Rio Tinto Mining Company's medical service in Huelva.

The Rio Tinto Mining Company, which became the biggest mining company in the world, was founded by the Edinburgh-born businessman Hugh Matheson in 1873.

John Mackay arrived in Huelva in 1879. In 1885 his bravery in leading the local response to a terrifying cholera epidemic, earned him a knighthood of the Gran Cruz Blanca de la Orden de Isabel la Católica. He practised in Spain for nine years until he was forced by ill-health (malaria) to return to Scotland where he settled in Kirkcaldy and eventually became the first full-time Medical Officer of Health in Scotland. In an era of strong anti-vaxxing feeling, he championed smallpox vaccination.

John invited his youngest brother, Alexander to join the medical team in 1883. Alexander, a keen sportsman and great believer in the benefits of fresh air and exercise, founded Recreativo de Huelva Football Club in 1889 and still going strong. His entire career of 42 years was spent in Huelva, where he opened a private clinic specialising in abdominal surgery. Alexander was an innovator – his hospital was probably the first in Spain to have an X-ray machine and he was widely regarded as the best surgeon in the country.

In 1898, the Mackays' nephew, Ian Macdonald joined the Rio Tinto Company. The nearby salt marshes were a breeding ground for mosquitoes and he was able to collect specimens for his malaria research. Macdonald collaborated with Ronald Ross who was awarded the Nobel in 1902. Ross believed that all mosquitoes spread malaria but Macdonald proved that it was one particular strain of mosquito. However, Ross was awarded a Nobel and a knighthood and Macdonald was forgotten. He was the last of the family to practise in Spain, working in Huelva until his death in 1932.

Halliday Sutherland, son of John and Alexander's sister, Jane, assisted in the family practice for a couple of years around 1908. He was a flamboyant character who wrote books, made films and pioneered tuberculosis treatments after he returned to the UK. In 1933 he wrote a bestseller, "The Arches of the Years", a loose collection of memories and reflections on his life.

This was my first experience of speaking at a conference in Spain. I knew that Spanish academic discourse, both written and spoken, tends towards the turgid and long-winded; the offer lived up, or rather, down to my expectations. I was the only speaker to keep to my allotted time allowance. One eminent Spanish professor, from a university in the USA, with a one-hour slot, which in itself is too long, spoke for ninety minutes and said very little of interest.

On the plus side, the programme was varied and enticing with presentations from four local archives – municipal, provincial, Rio Tinto Company and the port authority. It certainly helped me decide which archives I will avoid and which I will approach on my next visit. There were presentations about books I had thought I might read – having heard the authors speak, I won't. So, lots of time saved.

There were lectures about mining; talks on British architecture in Huelva, Second World War, espionage, football and cultural identity, the influence of the Scottish doctors and a string quartet concert of British music. The concert was after my bed-time but Spanish friends reported that they enjoyed a rendering of Pomp and Circumstance and the background information supplied by a British teacher at the Huelva Conservatory.

It was fascinating to participate in the event and to see how these things are done in another country. The canapés at coffee breaks were excellent. The weather was wonderful with wall-to-wall sunshine and temperatures around 25 C.

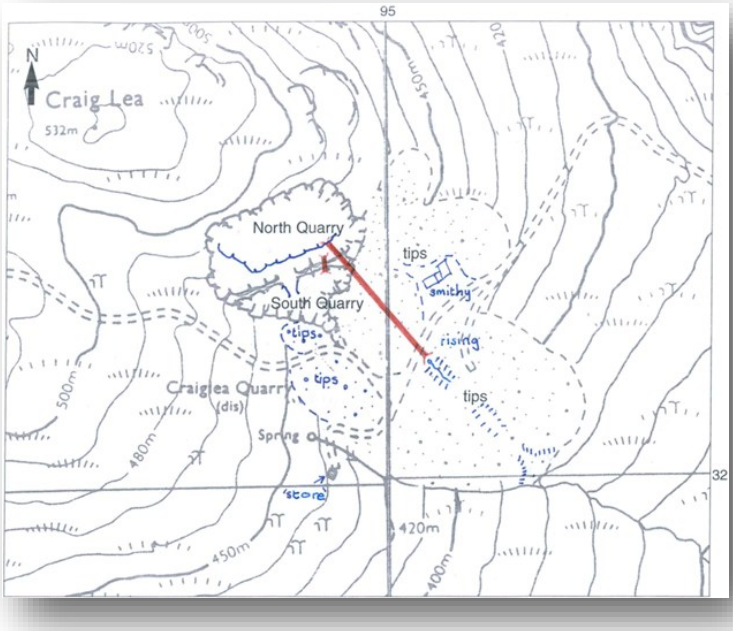
Best of all was the warm welcome from so many friendly local people. I wouldn't have missed it for anything.

CRAIGLEA SLATE QUARRY

ROSALIND PEARSON

Now try the quiz again!

The slate quarry is high on the south facing slopes of Craiglea Hill, near the summit, and adjacent to Crachan Hill. There were a number of smaller quarries along the hill edge and the largest and most active of these in Logiealmond was Rohumman, which was on the slopes above Little Glenshee farm. Craiglea



was in the northern part of Fowlis Wester parish which became part of the parish of Logiealmond.

Logiealmond lies on the transition from the Grampians in the north to the central lowlands in the south. Geologically it is in a significant location as it is on the Highland Boundary Fault, some parts of which are associated with the formation of slate. Pressure and movement in the earth's crust have changed the structure of fine sediments so they can be split along the lines of pressure (cleavage) to give thin plates that can be trimmed into convenient rectangular roofing slates.

Slates give a durable, repariable and fireproof roof, though they are heavy compared to traditional thatched roofs. Scottish slate roofing is distinctive as the slates are made in many sizes and laid in diminishing courses with the largest at the bottom and the smallest at the top. This is an economical use of the material with much less waste than in the single size English and Welsh slate traditions. The varied sizes and colours of slates also enables more elaborate roofs, such as became fashionable on Scots Baronial buildings in the nineteenth century. Scottish slates are fixed to roof boards with a single nail, which allows a slate to be moved aside for repair work, and to be taken out and trimmed down a size. English and Welsh slates use two nails.

A description of the quarry

Here is a description of Criaglea quarry as it was in the 1930s, 20 years after it closed. 'The quarry takes the form of an approximately circular excavation in the hill-side about 400 feet [122m] in diameter or nearly three acres [1.2ha] in area at the top, its mean depth may be 150 feet [46m}, its maximum and minimum depths may be 200 feet and 100 feet respectively [61 x 31m]. It has been worked in two floors [or levels] of which the upper is about sixty feet [18m] above the bottom of the excavation, but these floors are not now continuous throughout the quarry. … During its eighteen years of idleness the sides and floors of the quarry and the surrounding surface have been affected by the weather to such an extent that it is impossible to form an accurate impression of the conditions which prevailed when the quarry was at work.' It is not very different now, though even more weathered, but still impressive for its scale and its views. The author of the report, Charles Higson, had been commissioned by Scone Estates to assess the potential to reopen Craiglea. He recommended against it as the investment he considered necessary made the chance of good returns risky. (Scone Estate Archives)

How long was it worked?

Craiglea had been quarried for at least 200 years at its closure in 1915. The earliest known reference is 1695. When the architect William Bruce was building Kinross House he had a contract ''to win scailzie in the Crag of Logie', though he eventually gave the work to the slate quarries at Aberfoyle. (Neil Grieve, Dundee University)

In the Old Statistical Account of 1799, the Minister for Fowlis Wester Parish comments that 'on the estate of Logiealmond is a valuable blue slate quarry, let at 50 guineas yearly; from which 500,000 slates are supplied to be sold annually, at 13s 4d the thousand.' He comments that despite this, few roofs in the parish were slated although thatch was 'greatly inferior in elegance and duration'.

The Drummonds

The Drummonds owned the estate of Logiealmond from 1670 until the 1840s. Few of the estate records survive from this time but there are some references in the newspapers. In the Drummonds' time the lease of Craiglea quarry, sometimes known as Crachan, was advertised several times in the Perthshire Courier and Perthshire Advertiser. An 1811 advertisement was repeated in May 1812 to let Crachan and Rohumman quarries 'for such

period as may be agreed to. … The quality, size, colour, and durability of this Slate, are too well known to require to set forth in Advertisement.' Craiglea was next advertised in 1822 without mention of Rohumman.

The quarry manager was Robert McLaughlane whose father managed the Newtyle slate quarries at Dunkeld. Robert took 99-year leases on two plots in the new planned village of Harrietfield in the 1820s, building a 2-story house on one which he sold to the estate, and 3 cottages on the other. He died in his 50s in 1848, at the time that the estate was changing hands from the Drummonds to the Mansfields.

When the laird, William Drummond, died in 1828 the estate passed to his sister Catherine who was married to Sir George Stewart of Murthly, and then to their sons. It was run from Murthly until sold to the Mansfields of Scone in the 1840s.

Mansfield estate

The Mansfields put the management of the quarry in the hands of Thomas Jack of Newtyle and Dunkeld who continued until 1865. Although the newspaper advertisements state that the quarry was 'situated almost ten miles west of Perth' the road distance to Perth from the quarry is nearer to 14 miles than 10. The cost of transport to market was a major factor in the quarry's profitability. Drainage was also a problem as quarrying followed the most valuable stone and dug down into the ground. The slate cut from its sides also had to be removed from the deep pit. In 1826, the Perthshire

Photo by Henry Coats, Trinity College Glenalmond, 1897

Courier advertised for estimates to cut a drain. This, the first tunnel at Craiglea, allowed both water and slates to be removed from the lower level.

The slates produced had to be transported to the markets, and although they continued to be used on the buildings of the estate and nearby, most were taken by road to Methven or Perth for use there or beyond. The job of transporting them was valued by the local farmers. The heavily laden carts damaged the rural roads and in 1850 the collector of road taxes took the tenant of the quarry to court for not paying his dues. He claimed he was not liable and the court agreed on the grounds that all the owners of the carts had paid their taxes and were entitled to use the roads.

In 1865, Mansfield estate took the quarry in hand for four years and brought in a new manager. John Whyte (or White) had at least 20 years' experience of managing the slate quarries in Easdale, which had even greater challenges than Craiglea as they were on the coast, were quarried to below sea level and so needed pumping.

John Whyte spoke Gaelic as well as English as did many who worked in the quarry. He lived in Easter Kipney, which is now called Bonella's cottage. This was one of an L -shaped row of cottages by Kipney Farm. It was slightly larger than the others, and it continued to be the manager or foreman's house.

When John Whyte retired, Craiglea was leased to William and James Anderson and they remained the lessees for the next eighteen years. In 1885. the form of the lease was changed to enable more investment. The estate would invest in the quarry and the lessee pay for this over ten years. Instead of paying rent they paid a royalty that was based on a proportion of the year's profit. The Andersons installed rails, wagons and other machinery. A contractor, Henry Creber of Edinburgh, was commissioned to make a new tunnel that would run 60 foot (18 m) below the original tunnel; 198 yards (181 m) long in total, 6 foot (1.8 m) wide and 7 foot (2.1 m) high. The Grampian Speleological Group explored the tunnels in 2004 and published maps and photos in their Bulletin the next year. As the Explosives Act of 1875 required a license for the use of dynamite, and its safe storage, a small square building was erected west of the quarry for this.

The impact of slate production and quarry traffic on the local roads was again in the newspapers in 1877. Slates were being transported by traction engine, and at one time two were in use. They were hard on the surface and one broke through the surface of the steep bridge over the Almond at Millhaugh, but the main complaint was their width of 9 feet, a problem for oncoming vehicles, 'so that the traffic was impeded and life and limb endangered' .

More detailed records are available from Scone Estate's years of ownership and they were consulted in 2008. In the year ending November 1886, 542,800 slates were produced; sales amounted to £1314, wages £1017, transport and sundries £230 giving a net profit of £67 (estimated as about £5,500 today) of which the estate was due a third. The best full-sized green slates sold for 75/-

per thousand at this time, undersized at 27/6, and the best full-sized blue slates at 65/- and undersized at 25/- per thousand.

The Andersons arrangements with the estate did not prove satisfactory. The estate took it back in hand in 1899 and employed Angus Whyte, the son of John Whyte, as manager. The list of equipment at the quarry at this time included a 1-ton crane, 10 wagons and bogies, 10 slate workers' sheds, 940 yards of railway, and a stock of finished slates. The buildings at the quarry included the office, bothy, stable, smithy and the powder magazine.

Peak production

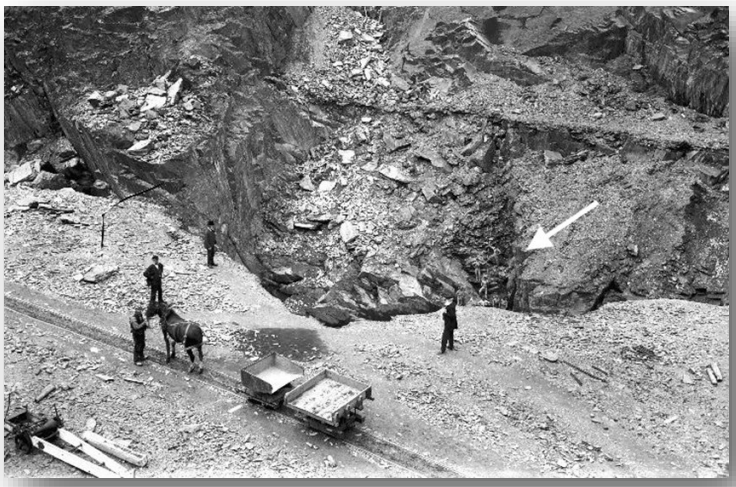
Through the decade before 1890 slate production had varied from year to year, below and above 100,000, and sales had fallen. In the following decade production climbed from just under 100,000 to over 870,000. Sales peaked in 1902 at £2783 for 742,000 slates.

Craiglea slates were being used on new buildings in the Perth area, such as St Stephens Church Craigie 1895, the Guild Hall in the High Street 1906 and the new hall in Almondbank, and such prestigious buildings used the more expensive green slates. In 1887, Logiealmond and Glenalmond held an Industrial Exhibition. The Perthshire Advertiser reported 'Various specimens of slab slate was shown by Mr James Anderson, taken from Craiglea Logiealmond, and illustrative of how slates be cut and finished. Articles made from slate by Welsh workers were also shown, comprising - inkstands, candlesticks, watch stands, whistles, top of enameled table, &c.'

The Perth photographer, Magnus Jackson, visited Craiglea in 1888, and took some memorable photographs. They show the scale of the industry, its position high on the hill

Bothy and slate production, photo by Magnus Jackson, 1888

above the valley of the Almond, the permanent buildings, the slate makers' sheds at the edge of the tips, the stocks of slates of varied sizes, the railway lines, wagons and horses, the huge excavation and the levels within it, and the men working on ropes part way up the quarry face.



Craiglea Quarry working face., Arrow indicates 5 men on ropes.

Photo by Magnus Jackson 1888.

How many worked at Craiglea?

A list compiled under the Quarries Act recorded that Craiglea quarry employed 70 men in 1895, 40 worked within the quarry and 30 outwith it. This put it sixth in size

in Scotland behind Ballachulish, Ellanabeich, Cullipool, Aberfoyle and Breadalbane. At the time of the fatal accident there in 1897 the newspapers reported it employed 90 men. It is possible that boys under 18 were not included in the official statistics.

None of the census returns, even in 1891 or 1901, when the quarry was at its most active, recorded as many as 70 slate quarry workers living in Logiealmond parish. Some 'labourers' may have been employed there rather than in agriculture or other occupations. Some men lived outside the parish and lodged locally, and April, when the census was taken, was early in the main season for quarrying which was April to October.

Where did the slate workers live?

Each census recorded four or five men housed in the bothy at the quarry. They had no journey to work, but most had an uphill walk of a kilometre and many far more. The estate rented out several cottages at Kipney and Tomalia (also called The Reisk) adapted or built to let to a leaseholder or directly to the quarrymen, but many rented other properties in the village or on the farms. Some settled down with their families and stayed for generations.

In 1901, there were three labourers and a blacksmith living in the Craiglea bothy. The manager's house was at Kipney and had four rooms. Adjacent to it was the row of five workmen's cottages of varying sizes accommodating eleven quarry employees. There were nine men at Tomalia; four in the Groan cottages and at Kendrum; three at Morningside Farm; two in Coryden, and Mount Herriot; and one each in Montreal, Wester Hill, Milton Cottage, and Logie Cottage, and twenty-seven in Harrietfield village.

About half were local to Perthshire, but as many came from the slate making areas of the west coast of Scotland or from Inverness-shire and a few from Ireland, Wales and England. Most of the men from the Highlands and west coast spoke Gaelic, as did their families.

How was the work organised?

The men worked in several teams that were made up of three skills plus labourers. The quarrymen were responsible for breaking blocks of rock off the working face with dynamite. The splitters produced thin sheets from the blocks and the dressers worked them into the various sizes of slates. The labourers moved the rock around the quarry, the slates to storage and the debris to the tipping face. Magnus Jackson's photographs show men working on the rock face on ropes, and the dressers working at the edge of the tip in shelters, which could be moved as the wastage gradually extended the tips.

Carters transported the slates to market, initially usually to Perth, but from the 1850 to the railway stations at Methven or Luncarty. A photo taken in Station Road Methven shows a farmer's cart with a load of slates. Most of the carters were farmers on the Logiealmond Estate. It was useful part-time work for them generating cash income that offset their rent. Eleven local farmers are listed between 1896 and 1898 receiving up to £226 a year (about £18,000 today by the National Archives Calculator).

Producing slates could be dangerous

The Perthshire Courier reported that in 1832 Archibald Peddie who lived near Millhaugh fell thirty feet. He was badly injured but survived. In 1907 Archibald McLellan who lived in Harrietfield was injured when dynamite exploded prematurely. But the worst accident was in 1897 when three men were killed and seven injured. When blasting the men as usual took cover in the tunnel entrance, but at the blast a one-and-a-half-ton block hurtled across 35 meters to the tunnel entrance and 9 meters into it. The men who died came from Skye, Luss and Bankfoot, and two of the injured from Easdale, and the others from Argyll (perhaps Ballachulish), Harrietfield, Milrodgie, Glenalmond and Buchanty. Several of the injured eventually returned to work at Craiglea. The Fatal Accident Inquiry investigated what had happened and concluded it was due to unknown fissures in the rock. (*Auld Times* 2018)

The Twentieth Century

At peak production around 1900 Craiglea was the sixth largest slate quarry in Scotland employing at least 70 men and producing about 800,000 slates a year. But it was not making a profit and the deficit was increasing. C R Bonn from Glasgow was commissioned in 1902 to suggest changes. The slate was good and the quarry well run, but the height, exposure and distances limited productivity and resulted in high wage and cartage costs. He recommended that the splitting and dressing work be moved downhill to Milton on the main road, and that the rock from the quarry should be transport there by rope traction on an incline, powered by electricity from the water fall below the shooting lodge. He also suggested a light railway to run the eight miles from Milton to Luncarty Station. (Scone Estate archive)

The development of an incline and traction to a Milton depot did not go ahead. The estate was worried about its effect on the shooting lodge and other economic activities. But in 1903, the Perthshire Advertiser announced 'it is stated that arrangements are almost completed for the laying down of a small line of railway on the estate of the Earl of Mansfield at Logiealmond for the purpose of developing the Craiglea State Quarries. The railway is proposed to be run from a point near Methven to the quarries, and will pass Harrietfield, Logiealmond, and Trinity College en route to the quarries.' But this was postponed as the market for slates was changing fast.

The Scottish slate industry was always a small part of the British total, about 8%. Expansion through export was difficult as Scottish slates required a different roof surface and skilled workers to lay the slates. Imports of the single size slates produced elsewhere were easier to use and demand for them grew. Neil Grieve, University of Dundee, considered the reduction in the industry in the new century was due to the high cost of production, lack of investment, shortage of labour, the dominance of imported slates and concrete tiles. (*Building Scotland: celebrating Scotland's traditional building materials, Historic Scotland,* 2010) The First World War reduced demand and led to the final closure of Craiglea quarry. Producing slates was not essential war work and most of the men went into the forces.

The Perthshire Advertiser announced on 25th November 1915: 'Recently intimation was made that Craiglea Slate Quarries were to be more or less closed. Building operations in the country is nearly at a standstill, and consequently the demand for slates has been of little account of late. It is said that the quarries have been for some time worked at a loss. … Craiglea slates are well known for their good qualities, and possibly when the war ends and trade revives the quarries may be reopened.' But they did not open again after the war. The proposal for a light railway was finally abandoned in 1920.

Re-opening the quarry has been considered several times since then. In 1932, Donald Clark, Managing Director of Forth Quarry Co. Ltd, Inverkeithing, applied to lease it. He planned a fairly small operation employing about 40 men which would not affect the amenity of the shooting estate. Demand for slates was high, production low, and unemployment high. The Estate commissioned the report by Mr Higson, already quoted, who thought that the great investment that would be needed made the future of the quarry speculative and the prospects very risky.

No slate has been produced in Scotland since the mid 1950s, but in the 1990s concern about conservation of listed buildings stimulated demand for slates for repair

and for sympathetic new building. Historic Scotland commissioned two studies and they resulted in Technical Advice Note 21 which included reviews of former slate quarries. Craiglea was recommended for further appraisal, as the most promising slate quarry on the Highland Boundary Fault. No roofing slate has been produced for over a hundred years, though abandoned buildings offer opportunities for re-use, and the slate waste is used to firm up unsurfaced roads and tracks .

Two photographs of the men who worked at the quarry have been found. Their dates are not known but probably round 1900. The first one below shows 52 men, Only one man has been identified. He is John Cameron, second from the left one row from the back. His family farmed at Murrayfield, but he had polio as a child and got the job of timekeeper and clerk at Craiglea. He lived in Harrietfield – how did he get to work?

There are 48 men and two women in the second one. Were the women visitors, wives, or perhaps helped to manage the bothy?

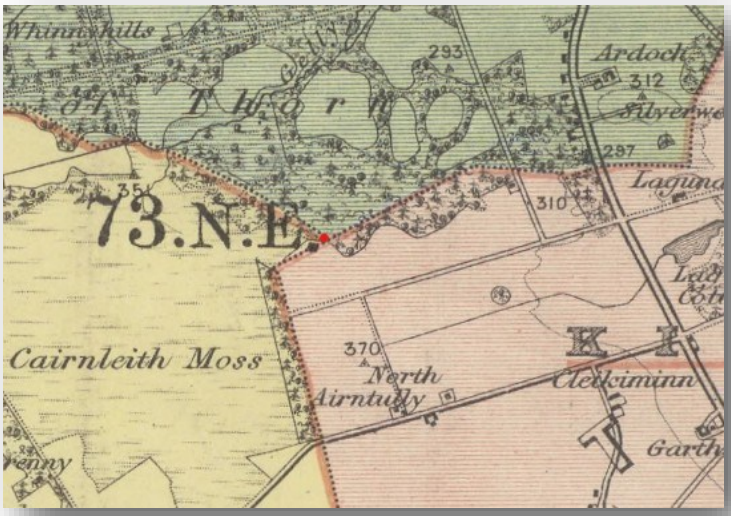
Photo courtesy of Culture PKC

Quarry workers, photo from the Drumtochty Tavern

3 PARISHES ABUTTING

PAUL MCLENNAN

Murthly estate stretches across three parishes – Auchtergaven, Kinclaven and, mostly, Little Dunkeld. Their boundaries meet at a particular point. And I had a pretty good idea as to where that would be. Thanks to the National Library of Scotland's excellent digital mapping service (www.maps.nls.uk) I was able to mouse my cursor over the exact spot and read off both the grid ref (NO086370) andGPS co-ordinates (56 31 00 N, 3 29 09 W). It was the work of minutes to transfer these to my OS 1:25000 and Garmin.



There can't be many estates where three parishes meet: Would anyone have bothered to mark the spot? I didn't bother asking Moss "Shall we find out?", just reached for my boots, and she was *boing boing* like Zebedee at the back door.

The place we were heading for is less than two miles away. As satellites fly. But as ground pounders we would take several tracks and make four right angled turns. One of the tracks follows the route of the pre-turnpike Dunkeld to Perth Road that passed through Douglasfield (Home Farm) heading towards Airntully. Another turn and we were on a track parallel to Stewart Tower Road, leading to the Drum Strip. When you get there a short digression through the trees will bring you to the edge of Cairnleith Moss, which falls away southwest to the A9, and you'll realise you are on a ridge. Hence the name: Drum/Druim (Scots Gaelic for 'ridge').

One more turn takes us past the site of Drumm of Airntully, formerly a small farm of just 78 acres (14 arable; 64 pasture) but so thoroughly 'improved' there are only a few hummocks to indicate it ever existed. It was mapped and recorded on the folio of estate plans hand-drawn by James Chalmers for Sir George Stewart (1750 – 1827) in 1825. Made the 1st edition OS map of 1865 (but lost an 'm' along the way) and was dropped altogether by the 2nd edition, revised in 1889. Sir George's second son, William (1795 – 1871) continued his father's agricultural improvements across the estates, amalgamating farms into bigger (for the time) units. Drum is/was a bit out of the way. A more obvious example of Sir William's work can be seen at Pittensorn farm, which now stands alone having swallowed two others, Hillhead and Tathyhill.

My Garmin wasn't beeping yet, but I could see we were closing in on the spot. The land to the north and east of Drumm of Airntully was given over to plantations of trees even earlier than 1825 . The Harris family who farmed there for generations would have had a solid wall of green obscuring, if not entirely blocking their view of Birnam Hill. A lot of timber has been extracted recently, and a new gate marks the start of the soon to be wooded anew area. Moss dashed over to investigate a large cardboard box strapped to a pallet that had been delivered just inside the gate. A medley of seeds and saplings addressed to Scottish Woodlands. Precisely delivered to a what3words location, making a mockery of grid refs and GPS co-ords.

I was beginning to fret now as I had my own green wall to deal with: thickets of gorse with a covering of blown over conifers. There's never a Stihl saw when you need it. Aye, ah ken a boy who has yin (who disnae) . . . back in the village. What to do here. Now. Sos, Lady Serendipity, muse of local historians and responsible for so many of my discoveries, whispered 'Walk away'. Which made sense. Early on you learn not to slavishly follow the arrow on the Garmin screen. It zeroes on co-ords and knows nothing of terrain.

That arrow will walk you off a cliff . . .

Or, in this case, off the edge of a ha-ha. Ok, only three feet or so into a sunken ditch. More of an embarrassment than life threatening, but not a good look.

So, walk away. Step back; get the bigger picture. It looked like the end point might be off to the left, other side of the gorse. Not entirely clear of the windblow, but still . . . achievable. And with some crouching and stepping over, backing up and going around (while Moss kept well back, looking puzzled) I was there.

The point where Auchtergaven, Kinclaven and Little Dunkeld butt-up *is* marked. With a simple iron corner post, set securely into stone. More than that. When the field (now Keepers Long Field) was first enclosed, by that ha-ha, the northern edge was curved. And the wall bellies in to meet that post.

Who by? Likely Sir George, who acquired the land as part of the New Delvin estate in 1820. But that's a guess. For as I often must admit . . . there are gaps in the record.

CHRISTMAS IN THE ASYLUM

MICHAEL LAWRENCE

It was a White Christmas across West Stormont in December 1876. Towards nightfall on Boxing Day, the wind increased to gale force and was accompanied by another heavy dump of snow. By the morning of Wednesday 27 December, the fresh flakes were lying across the fields about a foot in depth and, in many places, there were deep drifts. As the day progressed, however, the weather became much fresher and soon turned to torrential rain which melted most of the snow and caused widespread flooding.

The weather outside made no difference to Dr William McIntosh and a group of his patients who were hard at work in the spacious ballroom of the Perth District Asylum at Murthly preparing for the Bal Masqué that evening. It was mid-afternoon when they had finished decorating the walls and galleries with flags, flowers, evergreens and pictures. Among the screens of fir trees which fenced off the entrance doorways were papier-mâché deer, monkeys, tigers and other animals while ivy cascaded from the side lights and numerous birds of considerable plumage from across the world were hanging from the timbers of the great octagonal cupola. By five o'clock all was ready.

From 6.30 pm, the patients began arriving from their rooms and dormitories around the asylum. The women came from the Smythe, Stirling Maxwell, Laycock, Birnam, Tay and Greig galleries. The men strolled in from McDuff, Kinnaird, Morrell, Dunsinane, St Andrews, Druids and Murthly. In total, 230 patients filed into the ballroom, all in fancy dress with their faces hidden behind a half mask. Many wore traditional Highland garb while others chose the national costumes of Ireland, Spain, France, Italy, Germany, Switzerland and other European countries. The more adventurous had opted for an African or Chinese masquerade. And there were also soldiers, sailors, pirates and highway robbers. Most impressive were a King and Queen in scarlet robes edged with ermine fur who were seated as if to the manner born on their thrones at the south end of the dance hall.

Many friends of the Asylum were invited as guests for the evening. These included the Rev Theodore Marshall of Caputh, Rev Matthew Howieson of Auchtergaven, and Rev JJ Brown of Kinclaven. The medical fraternity was represented by Dr McMillan of Stanley, Dr Mackay of Dunkeld, Dr Daniel of Bombay, and Dr McDermid of Durham. All the guests arrived in their fancy costume and mask.

The orchestra struck up the notes of the first Quadrille shortly after 7pm. Dr McLeod of the Indian Army and Miss Agnes McIntosh opened the ball and they were soon joined on the floor by all the Asylum residents and their guests. The patients executed the intricate moves of the Triumph, Schottische, Lancers, Circassian Circle and a selection of Scottish reels with precision, grace and elegance. The Courier reported that "a stranger entering the hall could scarcely have imagined that many of the several hundred assembled faced daily demons."

Politeness and proper decorum were scrupulously observed. Partners bowed, took each other's hands with gentle care, danced with smooth flowing steps, and thanked one another after each set. Weekly dance instruction was a normal part of the "moral treatment" given to patients at Murthly and those attending the Bal Masqué were all highly proficient in the complex step routines of the most popular dances.

Mid-way through the evening, supper was served at well stocked tables in the dining hall and the fine fare included cold meats, pies, sandwiches, jellies and syllabubs. The gents escorted the ladies to the supper room and masks were removed as they ate.

The programme for the second half of the ball included the Valse, Haymakers, Polka, Galop, and the Spanish Dance. Around midnight, the Reel of Tulloch terminated the proceedings. All the dancers took leave of each other after a vote of thanks from Dr Robertson and there was a succession of cordial "good evenings" as the patients headed back to their sleeping quarters.

Perth District Asylum for Pauper Lunatics.

South facing view, 1883. Photo courtesy of Archive Services , Dundee University .

TALKS
2025–26

Monday 29th September 7.30 pm

Luncarty Church Centre

Finding Historic Perth

By David Bowler

Monday 27th October 7.30 pm

Pitcairngreen Village Hall

Perthshire Witches

By Irene Hallyburton

Monday 24th November 7.30 pm

Bankfoot Church Centre

The History of Tartan

By Peter McDonald

Monday 26th January 7.30 pm

Bankfoot Church Centre

Scots Evening

Featuring the Cream of Local Talent

Monday 23rd February 7.30 pm

Murthly Village Hall

Dealing with the Poor in West Stormont 1745–1845

By Michael Lawrence

Monday 30th March 7.30 pm

Kinclaven Hall

Crossroads of Empire: Stanley Mills, Slavery and the Global Cotton Industry

By Frankie Aird

Monday 27th April

Chapel Hill Hall

George Patton, Lord Advocate and Solicitor General for Scotland

By Syd House

Topic Nights in Luncarty Church Centre at 7.30 pm

12th Jan : Hotels 9th Feb : Shops 9th Mar : Fairs & Markets