

Loch Shiel Boat Services 1900 till 1967

This is a summary of records seen by Gordon Barr at National Archives of Scotland - STG2/55, STG2/58 and AF42/9283. The documents numbered can be consulted at Moidart History House, Glenuig.

There is a document (photo 2393) about the possibility of building a canal to connect Loch Shiel and Loch Eil. It is not dated.

"It is said that the Islanders and Northwest Highlanders bring all their Commodities for Sale to Fort William and have thereby a Constant and frequent Intercourse with that place -

In order to come at Fort William they must go down the Sound of Mull, up the Linnhe Loch and up Lochiel -

It appears by the Map that Lochshiel which lyes betwixt Lochmoydart and Lochshiel if Joined to both by a Navigable Communication would offer a more ready quick and Safe Passage from the North to Fort William. -

Mr Butler is desired to Answer the following Questions -

- 1st How far is Lochmoydart from Lochshiel
- 2nd How far is Lochshiel from Locheil
- 3rd What is the supposed height of the water in Lochshiel above the high water in the Sea at Neap tides,
- 4th Is the Ground betwixt Lochshiel and the other Lochs fit for a Cut or Canal of Communication
- 5th Would such Communication Occasion any valuable purpose either to the Highlanders, to Fort William or the Estate of Lochshiel,, and what valuable purpose - "

The canal was never built and the opening of the railway between Fort William and Mallaig in 1901 provided good access to the big world, but access to the railway was very difficult for people living in Moidart and Ardnamurchan, and this promoted the formation of a ferry connection on Loch Shiel between Atharacle and the railway station at Glenfinnan. This ferrying seems to have begun in 1900.

The records contain a number of documents describing the Directors of the Loch Shiel Steam Boat Company Limited. Photocopy 2355 has these details signed on 23rd January 1922:-

- 1) Francis Edward Frizalan Howard, Baron Howard of Glossop, of British Nationality. His "Usual Residence" is given as Glossop, Derbyshire. Other business - none.
- 2) John Charles Stewart, British, Kinlochmoidart. His "Other Business" is called "The New Zealand and Australian Land Company Ltd., The Marine Hotel Company Ltd.
- 3) Keneth Mackenzie Clark, British, from Shielbridge, Acharacle. His other business is "Chairman, North Wales Power Coy., Chairman, Aluminium Corporation Limited".
- 4) James Middleton, British, Braehead House, London Road, Kilmarnock. His other business was "Estate Agent".

The shareholders in 1928 (photocopy 1923) included 2) as above and says that he held 1000 of the shares; 3) as above and says that he held 1,000 of the shares; 4) as above and says that he held 10 of the shares.

This 1928 statement also included as Shareholder "General Real Estates Investment Ltd., 83 Victoria Street, Westminster" and it held 1,000 of the shares.

It also included Alexander Herbert Maguire of Dorlin, Atharacle, A Gentleman, who held 1,000 shares.

1953 and 1954 Lists of Members (Photocopies 2362 and 2363) has 8 members :-

William Ernest Corbett, Dorlin, 1000 shares

John Charles Stewart, (Exrs of), 990 shares

Major General Robert Neil Stewart, O.B.E., M.C., Kinlochmoidart 10 shares

Keneth Mackenzie Clark, (Exrs of), 990 shares

Major Archibald McPhail Fletcher, Resipol, 10 shares

Gen. Real Estates Investment Co., 990 shares

Lady Margherita Howard De Walden, 990 shares

David Thomas Stratton, 10 shares.

In 1900 the particulars of the ferry boat on Loch Shiel show that the vessel was named "Clanranlad II", that it was built in Rutherglen by T.B. Seath & Coy, made of Steel, 70 feet long and 14.05 feet broad, with a depth of 6.7 feet and a Draught 'a little over 3 feet'. The Engines had four cylinders, 12 N.H.P., made by Fisher and Coy., Paisley. The boiler was steel, had a working pressure of 140 lbs and made by Fisher & Coy., Paisley. The vessel was certified to carry 187 passengers.

A Revenue Account for year 1st January to 31st December 1903 states that a total cost of £1,047/19/5^d included e.g. Wages (£333/10/4); Coal (£203/8/0); Coal cartage (£28/1//3); Stores of Oil etc (£66); Repairs (£27/14/0); Advertising (£3/11/0); Certification (£1/7/9); Uniforms (£22/18/0); Life buoys ((£3/10/0); Dating machine (£1/9/5); Sleepers (£3/0/0); Postage (£4/16/0); Cartage of Mails ((£52/0/0); Rent of Piers (£57/1/6).

Income included :- Tickets and Parcels (£437/12/3); Live Stock (£1/1/0); Post Office Mail Contract (£100); Cartage of Mail (£50).

A similar estimate of expenditure can be seen (photocopy 2375) about expenditure in 1905. It has estimates on expenditure which include wages ; - Captain 35/- per week; Engineer 30/- per week; Purser 20/- per week; Seaman 24/- per week; Seaman (boy) per week 15/0.

Coal costs are analysed here. "Consumpt. is based on 11cwt. per double run. Allowance has been made for two double runs during July and August. Cost is computed as follows :-

Pithead price (first class coal)	10/6 per ton
Haulage....	7/6 per ton
Cartage.....	3/6 per ton
Total	21/6 per ton

In 1915 there is a statement about the proposed connections of the ferry from Atharacle to connect with trains at Glenfinnan. On Mondays to Saturdays, depart Acharacle 5-0am, Dalilea 5-30am, arrive Glenfinnan 7-20am, to catch the 7-31am train to Fort William or the 10-27am train to Mallaig. Or on Mondays to Saturdays leave from Acharacle at 12-55pm, from Dalilea at 1-20 pm, arrive at Glenfinnan at 3-05pm, to catch the 3.21 train to Fort William arriving at 4-00pm. (Photocopy 2379)

Going in the opposite direction, leave by train from Fort William at 9-47 and arrive at Glenfinnan at 10-27 or from Mallaig at 6-25am, arriving at Glenfinnan at 7-31am. Then on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays the ferry left Glenfinnan at 3-30pm (Dalilea at 12-25 and

Acharacle at 12.50pm) and on Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays the ferry left Glenfinnan at 4-45pm.

If people wished materials to be transported by the ferry, costs had to be paid, e.g. (photocopy 2384) :-

Rates for steam vessels :-

Under 50 tons	0/4 ^d per registered ton
50-100 tons	0/6 ^d per registered ton
100 tons and upwards	0/7 ^d per registered ton

Rates on Passengers and Passengers' Luggage :-

Landing or embarking	0/2 ^d
Luggage less than 56 lbs	0/2 ^d
Luggage exceeding 56 lbs	0/4 ^d per cwt
Parcel not exceeding 28 lbs	0/2 ^d

Rates for Merchandise 0/4^d per cwt.

Photocopy 2358 has an inventory of goods held by Loch Shiel Steamboat Service Company Limited. Steamer "Clanranald II" entry is similar to the one on 1900. It also lists "Steam Launch 'Lady of the Lake' with one vertical tube Boiler, and compound engine. Donkey engine."

"The Pier and Wood Store at Acharacle included :- a cattle gangway, a luggage barrow, a rotary pump with 60 feet of 2" hose, a weighing machine (out of order), a Ferry Boat, 20 feet long, 60 fathoms half inch chain."

"The Pier at Dalilea with store and Open Shed. A Luggage Barrow."

"The Pier at Glenfinnan, including Wood Store, with iron Railing enclosing Site on East side :- Cattle Gangway, Luggage Barrow, 2 Coal Barrows."

The Repairing Shed on the North side of Loch Shiel, opposite Acharacle pier, has the following :- Slipway and Cradle and wire span for some hand winch for hauling up Steamer; 2 Shackles; 1 Coil 4 inch manilla rope; 2 Steel blocks."

Photocopy 2380 has lists of Freight Charges on the Loch Shiel Service. There are cartage charges between Glenfinnan Station and the Pier :-

1 lb to 7 lb - 2^d | | 1 to 2 cwt - 8^d | | 12 to 13 cwt - 1/8^d |

The Steamboat Charges between Glanfinnan, Dalilea and Shiel Bridge Piers :-

1 qr - 4^d | 2 qr - 5^d | 3 qr - 6^d | 1 cwt - 7^d | 5 cwt - 1/9^d | 10 cwt - 2/6^d |.

Extracts from "A Report on Loch Shiel Service 7th December 1905" (Photocopies 2367 - 2373). It is headed "North British Railway Company".

"The vessel leaves Acharacle at 8.45 a.m., arriving at Glenfinnan at 11.15 a.m., and returns from there at 11.45 a.m., arriving back at Acharacle at 2.15 p.m. During the months of July and August, in addition to this service, an afternoon run is made, leaving Acharacle at 2.20 p.m. for Glenfinnan, and returning at 4.55 p.m."

"Her crew consists of five men, viz.- captain, engineer, purser, and two seamen. With the exception of the engineer, who lives ashore, the crew live on board the vessel."

"The service as presently conducted leaves much to be desired: for instance passengers for the south leaving Acharacle at 8.45 a.m. have to wait at Glenfinnan from 11.15 a.m. to 2.21 p.m. At 4.40 p.m., the steamer arrived at Glenfinnan Pier just as the afternoon train for Mallaig leaves Glenfinnan Station and a connection is not possible"

"Estimated cost of running two boat services is estimated to be about £1,100 per annum."

Revenue 1903 - £432 3s 7d + 1 guinea for livestock

Revenue 1904 - £437 2s 6d"

"The present fares of 4/0 single and 6/6 return have a prohibitive tendency; and, if the fares were reduced to say, 3/- single and 5/- return, and during the tourist season cheap day fares were put in operation from Fort William and other places on the line, a considerable amount more traffic could be secured."

"Catering. It would tend to secure additional patronage if provision was made for the supply of breakfasts and luncheons on board at a reasonable rate..... The provision for these meals could only be in the nature of meat and ham sandwiches, eggs, tea or coffee, cakes, biscuits, aerated waters; and, if deemed advisable, a license could be obtained for sale of wines, spirits and ales. The cost of the license would be £5 and the wages of a man (or suitable woman) would be 30/- per week, or thereabouts."

"Overhauling of Steamer. Opposite the pier at Acharacle there is a slip on which the boat is hauled by means of a hand winch for the purpose of having her bottom examined and painted. The engineering repairs are at present performed by a firm from Oban, and the overhaul takes a fortnight.....During the time the boat is off, a steam launch takes her place.....I learned that her bearings were entirely of brass and not white metal, and, as the boat runs from 125 to 135 revolutions per minute, the wear and tear on brasses is more than it would be on white metal, and the cost of maintenance bound to be greater."

"Road to Pier at Glenfinnan :- The question of a new road and a new pier is one which would require to be seriously considered, as the present pier, which is in a creek, must be very difficult of access in the summer time through want of water; and the ice is sometimes so strong in the winter time that the boat is unable to get to the pier, and goods and passengers have to be landed on the ice. The contour of the ground to the west of Glenfinnan House lends itself readily to the making of a road which would lead to a sheltered bight where a large boat-shed stands, and which, in all states of the weather, would be easy of access."

Legal Pier Usage

On January 11 1912, William Middleton, a secretary to Lord Howard of Glossop, wrote a letter to the secretary of The Congested District Board (photocopies 2397-8). Part of it reads :-

'For more than 12 years Lord Howard has at his own expense, with one or two subsidies, carried on a steam boat service on Loch Shiel between Glenfinnan - Acharacle. Lord Howard found it necessary to build a strong pier at Glenfinnan on Col Macdonald ground, the rent exacted for this and a small piece of ground enclosed being £40 per annum. The rent paid at the other end of the Loch for a pier he also built on the Riddle property and made a bond to being only 5/- a year. Lord Howard is unwilling to renew his lease at Glenfinnan on the old terms and has intimated this to Col Macdonald. My object in writing this to your board is to enquire if this is a matter they could take up by bringing pressure to bear or otherwise if Col Macdonald is not prepared by private negotiation to accept a fair rent. It might be necessary to get power by act of Parliament to have this pier or to insist on a fair rent being judged by arbitration, the alternative being the closing of this service of mail route to Moidart district - a matter the Congested district board could scarcely fail to take notice of or view ?? as disfavour- The lease ends at Whitsunday 1913 and Col Macdonald writes under date 9 Jany(?) 1912 - "I am not prepared to commit myself at the present moment to a statement of the course (?) I may deem it expedient to adopt at the expiration of the existing agreement in 1913.

To which Lord Howard has replied asking him if he can consider more fully the question of terms on which he will renew the lease" - "The present rent being prohibitive" and let him know

by the 25th May next, "As owing to mail contracts etc it is impossible to leave the question in any uncertainty beyond that time".

Yours faithfully, Wm Middleton.'

The collection shows (photograph 2366) a plan for the pier on the River Callop. It was stamped with a label which says it was from the "North British Railway Co., Engineers' Office, Edinburgh" and is dated 12/5/14. It is labelled "This is a copy of the plan signed relative to the Lease between John Andrew Macdonald, CB and the Company, and to the Agreement between the Company and Lord Howard of Glossop, dated 5th and 27th March 1913 and ~~16th July~~ and 6th August 1914 respectively."

A document (photograph 2399) , dated 10/1/11 or 10/7/11 states - "1) Lord Howard of Glossop seems to have built a pier at Glenfinnan on land belonging to Colonel Macdonald. 2) The tenure of this site and some adjoining land is by lease at a rent of £40 a year. 3) Lord Howard is unwilling to pay so much under a renewal lease. 4) He wishes to know if ?? can bring pressure to bear on Colonel Macdonald to accept a fair rent for the land. 5) No doubt the steamer on Loch Shiel is a convenience for mail and passengers, but it is difficult to see how ??? can intervene in what is really a private bargain between Lord Howard and Glenaladale. 6) The pier and structure at Glenfinnan are entered in this Valuation Roll as the property of Glenaladale, Lord Howard being the tenant. The value entered is £40. 7) If Lord Howard has only a lease of the site he is probably at Glenaladale's mercy as regards property in the pier.

Running the ferry needed a subsidy to be paid by the Railway Company for the Loch Shiel Steamboat Service. Photocopy 2385 says :-

- "1) Services inaugurated by Lord Howard following on opening of Mallaig extension on 30th March 1901, with a view to 'opening up the Country and making a Mail route.'
- 2) In February 1903 Lord Howard approached Railway to take over services, as loss, not withstanding Post Office Subsidy of £100, was more than he felt inclined to continue indefinitely in public interest.
- 3) An agreement dated 31st March 1903 was entered into between the Company and Lord Howard under which His Lordship was to continue the service, the Railway Company paying half the loss he might sustain, subject to a maximum payment of £250 in any one year. Agreement was for five years - 6 months notice.
- 4) On 22nd February 1907 Lord Howard intimated the service would be given up on expiry of the 1903 Agreement at 31st Decr. 1907, and the service was actually given up at that date.
- 5) An attempt was made by the Railway Company to come to an agreement with Lord Howard under which the Company would apply for Parliamentary powers to take over the steamer etc. and run the service. This fell through.
- 6) The service was resumed by Lord Howard from 1st May 1908.
- 7) The Railway Co. agreed to pay Lord Howard a subsidy of £100 for three years from 1st January 1909.
- 8) Subsidy continued 1912
- 9) Agreement dated 16th July and 6th August 1914 entered into between Company and Lord Howard - duration 20 years from Whitsunday 1913, 12 months' notice - Railway Co. agreeing to pay £100 per annum during currency.
- 10) Notice given by Lord Howard terminating Agreement as at 31st December 1921.
- 11) Decquet dated 6th and 13th January and 10th February, 1922 added to 1914 Agreement, under which the Loch Shiel Steamboat Service Company Ltd. took over Lord Howard's obligations

under the Agreement, the only modification being that the subsidy of £100 per annum would be restricted to five years as from 1st January 1922."

Amounts paid by the Railway Company towards expenses of Loch Shiel :-

1903	£215. 6. 9d.
1904	£120. 11. 5.
1905	£127. 16. 0.
1906	£105. 7. 11.
1907	£131. 5. 6.
1908/1926	£100 per annum

Photocopy 2386, shows that losses of £65, £1,710 and £636 were made on 1924 to 1926.

If the steamer service ceased to run, the annual value that the railway company would lose was estimated from the value of goods managed between January and June 1927 :-

Goods Train Traffic - £1,425; Parcels Traffic - £525; Passenger Traffic £516.

The Post Office

Photocopies (2387-2390) have been made of an agreement made between the Postmaster General and The Loch Shiel Steamboat Service Company Ltd., whose registration office was at Resipole Strontian Argyllshire. The document was completed on 14th November 1939 and it was signed on 26th February 1940 by the witnesses - H.S. Lothian; W.Buchanan; J.M. Calderwood; M.B. Johnston; W.Hy. Hoban; D. Noonan; Morag MacColl; Catherine Livingston; H.E. Boyce on behalf of the Postmaster General; David Stratton, Director; W. Ernest Corlett, Director; A.M. Fletcher, Secretary.

An allowance of £200 per annum was made (photocopy 2392).

(From Photocopies 2395-6)

"WE THE LOCH SHIEL STEAMBOAT SERVICES COMPANY LIMITED incorporate under the companies Acts 1908 to 1917 and having our registered office at Acharacle Argyllshire for certain good causes and considerations but without any money considerations being paid to us therefore DO HEREBY ASSIGN AND MAKE OVER to and in favour of DAVID MACBRAYNE LIMITED incorporated under the Companies Acts 1908 to 1917 and having its registered office at Forty-four Robertson Street Glasgow, the Contract entered into between His then Majesty's Postmaster General on the one part and us on the other part dated Twenty-sixth February and Fifth and Thirteenth March Nineteen hundred and forty for the conveyance of Mails between Achanellan and Glenfinnan Post Office as therein mentioned and with the rights and subject to the conditions and obligations therein expressed, surrogating and substituting the said David MacBrayne Limited in our room and place: AND WE the said David MacBrayne Limited hereby accept said Assigment and agree to perform the services stipulated in said Contract: they (the previous page) are sealed with the Common Seal of us The Loch Shiel Steamboat Service Company Limited and are subscribed on our behalf at Acharacle, Argyllshire, on the First day of May Nineteen hundred and fifty-four by Willaim Ernest Corlett and Robert Neil Stewart, two of our Directors, and Donald Cameron, our Secretary; they are sealed with the Common Seal of us David Macbrayne Limited and signed on our behalf at London on the Twenty-first day of June inthe year last mentioned by Keith Douglas Jackson, one of our Directors, and Frederick Richard Hooker, our Secretary, before these witnesses John Sidney Velton, Chartered Secretary, Sixty-two Aberdale Gardens, Potters Bar, Middlesex, and Albert Edward Mahoney, Shipping

Clerk, six Amberley Road, Buckhurst Hill, Essex; and they are subscribed on behalf of Her Majesty's Postmaster General William Taylor, Finance Officer, an Officer of the Post Office duly authorised in this behalf, at Edinburgh on the Ninth day of July in the year last mentioned....."

Photocopy 2364. "EXTRAORDINARY RESOLUTION of The Loch Shiel Steamboat Service Company Limited, Passed 12th April 1955.

At an Extraordinary General Meeting members of the above named Company, duly convened and held at Acharacle, Argyllshire on the 12th day of April 1955 the following Extraordinary Resolution was duly passed:

"That it has been proved to the satisfaction of this meeting that the Company cannot, by reason of its liabilities, continue its business, and that it is advisable to wind up the same, and accordingly, that the Company be wound up voluntarily."

Dated this 12th day of April 1955.

XXX, Chairman."

The collections also had three photographs, available to see at the History House Glenuig :- (1) "The Pier Acharacle, Loch Shiel", which also shows the second service boat; (2) "The launch *Lochailort* at Acharacle pier in 1967, her final season"; (3) "Clanranald II, Loch Shiel Steamer at the Pier at Glenfinnan".

The last ferries ran in 1967 when the opening of the new road from Lochailort to Glen Moidart made access to the railway station at Lochailort easy for the inhabitants of Moidart and Ardnamurchan and for the increasing number of visitors there.