

The Story of Dorlin House, by 'North Argyll'

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The stately estate houses of the Loch Sunart and Loch Shiel areas are disappearing. First it was Shielbridge House that was blown up, then Glencripesdale Castle and now Dorlin House, built just exactly one hundred years ago.

Though the less pretentious in appearance and situation of them its links with Scottish and English aristocratic families were much more pronounced. No doubt the many visitors to its district and those who made a pilgrimage to the ruins of Castle Tioram, ancient stronghold of the Clanranald which stands not far away could hardly have been aware of this for since being occupied during the last war as a Commando headquarters it had been empty and uncared for.

To obtain a clear picture of its aristocratic associations it is necessary to go back to the days of the last Clanranald to possess the Dorlin estate property. Reginald George, grandson of the Clanranald of the '45. When he succeeded to his vast estates extending from Moidart to South Uist and Benbecula, they were in a prosperous condition, estimated to yield him an annual income of over £20,000, but apparently he succumbed to the extravagant spirit of the times which the Prince Regent is said to have encouraged, so bit by bit portions of the estate had to be sold.

About 1811 Dorlin or Lochshiel Estate as it was called, and Eilean Shona were acquired by Alexander Macdonald of Glenaladale, the chieftain of that family responsible for erecting what is called The Prince's Monument at Glenfinnan.

At his death the property passed to his kinsman Archibald Macdonald of Rhu, Arisaig, whose son, Alexander, known locally as Locheil, took up residence on it at Daililea. It could have been at this time that the first part of Dorlin House, a one storey building, was built for Miss Bell Macdonald, who I recognise, though it may be open for correction, as a daughter of Donald Macdonald of Lochans, as the present Glenmoidart was then known, and on the maternal side, a great grand-daughter of Angus Macdonald, Aonghus Beag of Daililea, elder brother of Alasdair Macmhaighstir Alasdair, the Jacobite bard.

Local Information

Following that, according to local information, a house in the Georgian style was built by Aeneas R. Macdonald of Traigh, Arisaig, a nephew of Lochshiel and, I believe, for some time his factor.

According to accounts Lochshiel was not a business man, and so got into financial difficulties. The historian of Moidart, Father Charles Macdonald, for many years its beloved parish priest, says that it was on account of this, to facilitate the sale of the estate, that the house was built, but I have been informed through another source, that after the house was completed Aeneas, being under the impression that he would eventually succeed to the estate, had planned an extensive clearance scheme of the estate tenantry commencing with that nearest Dorlin, Scardoish. This coming to the notice of the Lochshiel family, one of the sisters Miss Joan went off quietly in the early part of 1855 to see an agent in Edinburgh with instructions to sell Dorlin estate.

Eilean Shona had been sold in 1853 to Captain Swinburne, Royal Navy, who I believe was largely responsible for establishing the cannery at Dorlin.

Dorlin was bought for £24,000 by James Hope Scott, a grandson of the second Earl of Hopetoun. The representative of this family was further elevated to the peerage in 1902 by the title Marquis of Linlithgow.

It derives from Sir Thomas Hope, a celebrated lawyer and statesman of the 17th century whose immediate ancestor, John de Hope is said to have come to Scotland from France in the train of Princess Magdalene, queen of James V in 1537.

Sir Thomas Hope favoured Presbyterianism and in 1638 gave his advice in framing the National Covenant. He died in 1646, and left a family of nine sons and five daughters, the sixth son James, becoming first of Hopetoun.

Though a lawyer by profession he was also a keen mineralogist, and by his marriage to the only daughter of Robert Foulis of Leadhills, acquired that valuable mining estate, working it with a good deal of success. Among his managers was the father of Allan Ramsay the poet.

James Hope Scott married in 1847, Charlotte Harriet Jane, daughter of Charlotte Sophia, the favourite companion of her father, Sir Walter Scott, novelist, poet and writer, who on the death of her brother without issue succeeded to the estate of Abbotsford and in consequence of which her husband assumed the additional name of Scott. From 1855 till her death in 1858 her Highland home was at the Dorlin House built by Aeneas R. Macdonald.

Benevolent Landlord

Hope Scott, as he was locally referred to, proved a benevolent landlord and did much to improve the property, constructing roads, improving the dwellings of tenants and erecting a church and school at Mingarry.

As already mentioned his wife died in 1858 and he married his second wife in 1861 Lady Victoria Fitzalan Howard, daughter of Henry Granville, 14th Duke of Norfolk. At her christening, Queen Victoria, in honour of whom she was named Victoria, was one of the godmothers.

It can be here mentioned that her distant kinsman Thomas, 8th Duke, was the principal shareholder in a company formed in 1724 to operate the Strontian Lead Mines, in the neighbouring district of Sunart.

It was after his marriage to her that Mr Hope Scott erected the three storey Dorlin House familiar to residents and visitors for a century. According to information given to me by Mr Alexander Macdonald, estate overseer at Dorlin, it was built on a time and stuff agreement by and Inverness firm. The supervisor of the work was a Mr Pearson, and the foreman joiner, Mr John MacLellan (Iain Ban Saor) who married and settled at Mingarry.

The stone for it was quarried in the rock just behind, but most of the other material came by sea to Salen, Loch Sunart from where most of it was carted by Mt Thomas MacLean, well known for many years as the tenant of Nether Lochaber Hotel, who worked two horses and carts single handed. He resided then at Gobsheallach, Acharacle, of which his father, James MacLean, was tenant. I notice among my notes that his lease expired at Whitsunday 1863.

Today as most of the building lies a blown up heap of stones it is difficult to realise that for a period of close on six years a goddaughter of the reigning monarch of Britain's extensive and far-flung territories acted as hostess to members of her best known aristocracy.

Before the erection of the Catholic Church at Mingarry there was one at Dorlin, in which it is said two priests were buried. Hope Scott had their remains lifted and re-interred in St

Finan's Isle. Mr Alexander Macdonald, already referred to, informed me recently that this church building is still intact and used as a workshop.

I never got, but that perhaps is my own fault, any information relative to the identification or period of burial. It may have happened when Catholic priests were subject to prosecution, and such Irish surnames as O'Byrne, O'Shiel, Carolan and O'Duggan were found among the West Highland ones. Perhaps some of these laboured in Moidart in the 18th century.

In 1871, Hope Scott sold the estate to the first Lord Howard of Glossop. This may be described as a sort of family transaction, as he was the second son of the 13th Duke of Norfolk.

I believe Hope Scott kept a small islet in Loch Shiel opposite Druim-an-Laoigh which he had planted with fir trees. Some years ago a descendant of his second marriage the Hon. Peter Hope visited the locality and made enquiries relative to this and the purpose of reviving the family claim.

Rural Development

The first Lord Howard was an enlightened landlord advanced beyond his time in regard to Highland rural development. He took a deep interest in the social and economic welfare of his tenantry, continuing with energy the works of improvement and land reclamation started by his predecessor.

In this era of prosperity for Moidart matters were helped considerably by the fine understanding and approach of Mr Macintosh, the factor. The story has been told to me how during a severe frost some workmen employed at drains, and idle in consequence, went to see him about getting started on a job. When they were speaking about this a thrush or blackbird flew out of a bush uttering a warning call. "What did it say?" remarked Mr Macintosh, "Thig Thig (Come, Come), Well you can come tomorrow".

Lord Howard was probably the last person to use a team of oxen for ploughing and there are still living in the Mingarry district a son and daughter of the person who worked them.

The twelve years he lived as proprietor of the estate were prosperous ones as far as improvements and maintenance went. This was maintained, perhaps a little less energetically, by his son and successor, till the start of the 1914-18 War, an event which started a decline in the gaiety at Dorlin House, which it never recovered, and a movement of depopulation and decay on the estate.

I remember when a boy that Moidart had its cattle show and Highland Games annually, I think, in August, while none of the neighbouring estates had either.

At the Games, some of the best known pipers of the day in the West Highlands played and judged such as the Macdonald brothers of Arisaig and Mr MacLennan of London House, Strontian, ex-piper to the Earl of Fife.

The first Lord Howard had issue by his first wife (with others) Frances Edwardm who succeeded Gwendoline Mary Ann who married the 3rd Marquis of Bute, Angela Mary Charlotte who became the wife of the 14th Lord Herries, and Alice Mary Elizabeth who married the 11th Earl of Loudoun. They, their families and other friends among the peerage and landed gentry frequently visited Dorlin House.

It was a gay place with house parties at the fishing and shooting season, and both the River Shiel and Loch Shiel yielding splendid catches of salmon and trout, thirty pounders among

the former, all of which gave a high reputation for the skill in the art to the fishing ghillies of the district.

Heavy Fish

I have a vague recollection of reading many years ago in a periodical of a huge salmon of between 60 and 70 lbs being caught on the river. Perhaps Mr Alex Macdonald has records in his archives of heavy fish which went into the Dorlin House larder.

The second Lord Howard, who succeeded in 1883 married firstly a daughter of John Greenwood of Swarmcliffe Hall, Yorks. She died in 1887 leaving issue a son and daughter. The son, who in 1914 married the Baroness Beaumont in her own right, was a Captain in the Lovat Scouts Yeomanry, Territorial Army, in which most of the young men of Moidart served, if I remember rightly, as members of "A" Company. Of those serving and mobilised on the 4th August 1914 there were some who did not return to Moidart and as I write these notes, I can think of only three pre-1914 "Terriers" lining in their old homes.

Lord Howard married again in 1891 Hyacinthe, daughter of William Scott Kerr of Sunlaws, Roxburghshire. Here comes in a connection with the first wife of James Hope Scott, for the Scott in the Sunlaw family derives from the Scotts of Thirlestane in Roxburghshire, not Thirlestane in the county Selkirk which did also have a family of the name. The county of Roxburghshire one springs from the great family of Scott of Sinton, from which come in the female line the Ducal House of Buccleuch, and in the male line those of Harden and Abbotsford.

By his second wife he had also a son and daughter, Philip Granville James, and Frances Alice Mary Fitzalan Howard.

The son, and officer in the Welsh Guards, died of wounds in 1918, leaving issue by his wife, Gladys Cecily Clara, daughter of Lt. Col. Charles Norton, a daughter Phillipa Gwendolene Mary, born posthumously.

Did his death cast a shadow over the future of Dolin House and estate, I wondered one afternoon a few years ago as I looked at the monument to his memory in an isolated and secluded spot between Dailelia and Cuill, or if he had survived would he have been the owner of his youthful Highland home, interested in maintaining vitality on his property and the retention on it of the children of Moidart preventing them to the best of his means and ability from adding more and more to the scattered race of Clanranald?

Lord Howard died in 1924. The property was some time after sold to Sir Alexander Macguire.

Of him and his successor Mr Corlett I have little to write. If I remember right, the latter, for several years before it was taken over for a Commando headquarters during the war, never occupied it.

On its centenary year of being built it has been demolished except for a small wing and so its story ends. Who knows but on its site another story might begin some day.