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The Highland Family History Society  
Comunn Sliinntearachd na Gaidhealtachd

# highland family history society



# comunn sliinntearachd na gaidhealtachd

# JOURNAL

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EDITORIAL

Of all the family-history societies in the British Isles there are several smaller in membership than we have, but I doubt that any covers the territory which we lay claim to, whether we look at our home base of the crofting counties and the islands or in the world-wide spread of our membership, but we always have our lecture meetings and committee meetings and library meetings in Inverness. Is it merely because locally our largest concentration of members is in Inverness? Some of us can travel the miles from Dingwall or Tain or Glenurquhart? In your estimation how good an idea would it be to have a regular spot, say a new summer meeting, outwith Inverness? Dornoch perhaps? Fernies are expensive so Stormoway, Kirkwall, Bundoanoo and Toronto are not on, for me at least, at the moment. What do you think?

Our new committee member Lucille Campey has taken over the responsibility for co-ordinating the Society's efforts in recording monumental inscriptions. She was desperate to take over the task and none of the rest of us was prepared to stand in the way of this Canadian tornado when her mind was made up. All the graveyards must be listed and checked in a complete and organised way and we have many years of Sandy Gillies' original surveys still to check, and then index, and then publish. Avoch for instance was done in 1988! Please contact Lucille if she needs volunteers to help check the listings we have done already or to let her know of new ones that you think should be tackled. Summer is a good time to do this sort of thing.

The 1881 census is gradually coming home to roost. We have so far been given in reward for our transcription efforts the fiches for Nairn, Caithness, Inverness, Sutherland and Shetland. These are not yet put out for use in the Farraline Park Library reference room, and nor will they be on open access for all. Only library staff and our members are allowed upstairs where we now have a desk and a nice new fiche/film reader, beside which the fiches will eventually rest once all counties have been received. One reason for the security is that although the Society is surviving pretty well in a financial sense, we cannot afford the £4 per fiche that replacements would cost. As an example Inverness-shire alone consists of 24 fiches and for which we would need the best part of £100 to replace. If we in Scotland had to pay something like 20p per fiche that our English and Welsh cousins pay for theirs then they would be on general access, but there you are.

Our members will also only be allowed up there on production of a current membership card, so please remember to bring it along with you as you may not be able to find a committee member there to vouch for you at the time. Roll on the rest of the counties, and let's hear it for the integrated national set if it ever gets the final go-ahead. The organisation set up to do the work of transcription, data entry and fiche production is starting to wind down now, but it still exists and can do other things. What do you feel fits the bill for future projects? Suggestions so far include all death registers, tax records (such as the hearth tax or the 1697 horse tax), newspaper advertisers and shipping records; can you add to the list?

Some of our members may perhaps have come upon the census returns in their research, and will have noted how sad it is that we only have the ones from 1841 onwards to draw upon. I diffidently mention that I'm in the middle of transcribing a book I discovered in the Dingwall Museum which comprises the original lists for Dingwall for 1801, 1811 and 1821 written out by the schoolmaster (who presumably did the legwork?) Alexander Simpson, father of Dingwall's Arctic explorer about whom we talked in earlier Journals. Before you get as excited as I did when I opened the plain covers of this notebook, all it lists is the name of the head of each household, the number of males and females in the household and a quickie breakdown of their employment in 'Agriculture', 'Manufacture or Handicraft' or the helpful category 'Neither'. Most of the heads are given a calling such as shoemaker or wright so sometimes we

## The Family, Occupation and Social Stratification

This is the title of a major research project that we are carrying out with funding from the Economic and Social Research Council. Its aim is to use information on family histories to help understand much more about the nature of the social order - and the ways in which people and families moved about or stayed put in it - in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The variety of sayings concerned with this issue indicate its enduring interest. 'A self-made man' or 'rags-to-riches' suggest dramatic upward movement, 'clogs to clogs in three generations' that moving up in the social world is only temporary as far as the family is concerned. On the other hand, 'born with a silver spoon in your mouth' or 'following in father's footsteps' suggest that a stable position in the social order may have been relatively common. Family historians all have their own examples of different patterns, but it is difficult to know how typical these were.

'Every individual of each class is constantly striving to raise himself in the social scale': a familiar-sounding sentiment to-day, but actually expressed by Lord Palmerston in 1850. Very little is known about the reality, throughout society as a whole, behind such a belief. On examination, even the question of what constitutes a rise in the social scale is more complex than it at first appears. (It is one that we hope to tackle in an innovative way through an analysis of marriage patterns - one way in which we intend to put more emphasis on the role of women than has usually been the case.) Family histories provide an extremely rich source of information for looking at these issues, but they have been largely neglected until now. It would be prohibitively expensive to try to collect such data on a large scale independently. We are therefore appealing to family-historians to share the information that they have. In return, we shall do all we can to publicise our results and to feed them back in a digestible form.

Our aim is to collect a representative set of experiences, which means that we are as much interested in ordinary families as in cases of a dramatic rise or fall in fortunes. If you would like to help us by providing information for the project, please write (no stamp is necessary) with your name and address to:-

Family History Project  
FREEPOST CB 957  
CAMBRIDGE  
CB2 3BR

(Or telephone 01223 334529 [24-hour]; fax 01223 334550; e-mail kp10@cam.ac.uk)

We will send a set of forms for all your direct ancestors back five generations (i.e. great-great grandparents). We don't necessarily expect everyone to have located all of their ancestors back that far, but we would prefer to hear from those who have located the majority of those earlier than their grandparents. Each form asks for any information that you may have collected on an ancestor's occupation, from a variety of sources, as well as some other fairly standard information. A reply-paid label will be included.

*Overseas members:* Unfortunately, we do not at present have sufficient funds to pay overseas postage. However, we are considering a future study of the effects of migration, and would be happy for overseas members to contact us to register their interest - but please use a stamp.

Dr Ken Prandy  
Dr Wendy Bottero

SENT 2/6/95

can guess what the rest of the family might have done as well as work in the rigs of the infield or outfield beyond the Back Dykes of the burgh. When I'm done, a copy of the typed end result will be given to the Highland Region archivist, or whatever he will be titled under the local authority changes going through the system just now, as well as one in the Dingwall Museum itself.

In response to veiled threats from Our Oz correspondent in Lornadon, NSW, I have to say that we as a Society are not on the Internet yet, but I have my eye on what I think is a redundant modem so may soon have a bash on Fidonet for a chat with him and other family history people who go through their computers to use the digital systems of the world in the way that ham-radio enthusiasts have been using the airwaves for so long. One day, Alistair, one day, but send in your article now.

### QUESTIONS

16. In the November 1994 Journal, Carole Lohar makes note of T-names for members of the MAIN family. What are T-names and how are they derived? (Helen Gain no. 1091).

17. In the February 1995 Journal, Mr Gibbs makes reference to a burial:- "He was buried in the Necropolis in Glasgow, as was his right as a member of the Merchant House of Glasgow." Can you expand on this "right"? My great-grandfather buried his two little girls there. Is the Merchant House of Glasgow a union of sorts? (Helen Gain no. 1091).

18. My main area of research is in the parish of Dull in Argyll. Are there any memorial stones in the Free Church at Dull? (John Morrish no. 1129).

19. I would be very interested to know the meaning of the four carved six-pointed stars, situated on the corners of a slab memorial stone to a young lady of the 1860s. Her husband, father and grandfather were sea-faring people of Plockton, recorded as ship-owners. Also on the memorial is a carved open book and a touching, partly legible inscription by her husband. Nearby, I noted a six-pointed star cut into a design on granite above the inscription of a ship-owning family of the same era. (Deirdre Caughey no. 1065)

### and SOMETIMES ANSWERS

13. *What are the additional sources of information to Parish Registers that have been included in the IGI, and why do these vary so much with each Parish? I find the post-1854 material in some Parishes tremendously useful.* (Jim Mackay, no. 1043)

*Answer:-* The post-1854 material in the IGI has been extracted from the civil registrations of births and marriages for the years 1855 to 1875 and 1881 and 1891. Some years ago the Registrar General permitted the Genealogical Society of Utah to microfilm the actual birth and marriage registrations. The first 21 years had been filmed when permission was withdrawn. I think the Registrar General had changed his mind about how he wanted his information distributed as it was shortly after that that fees for searching the statutory indexes were instituted and charges for certificates began to rise.

Anyway, faced with an incomplete job, the GSU begged to film the census years of 1881 and 1891 as information in the registers would assist in finding people in the censuses. This request was granted but nothing more. The Mormons back in Utah got busy and extracted all the registration details from the microfilm and entered the information into the IGI. So it isn't that some parishes have better coverage than others; it is that the early years of civil registration were entered while later years weren't. (Mrs Kay Devonshire, no. 1111).



## WATTEN MILLS

From a Manuscript of 1925  
by Robert W Macadam (1850-1933)

It was about the year 1780 that the estate of Watten and Bridgend was bought by Sir Robert Anstruther of Balcaskie, Fife, from Sinclair Manson of Bridgend, Watten, who was obliged to sell owing to his connection with a bank in Ayr which came to grief. Sir Robert, on buying the estate, resolved to take Watten Mains into his own hands for a time, and he resided there during a part of the year to supervise the improvements which he had planned. He took with him from Fife his horses and carts, his ploughmen, blacksmith and miller, the latter being Peter Macadam, my great grandfather. The carts and horses created quite a sensation among the natives of Caithness as the horses were always driven tandem in the carts and made two journeys per day to Staxigoe, the seaport of Wick in those days, the road or track running past Tarroel, through North Bilbster at the Hill O'Reich, Winless, Sibster and Gillock to Wick and Staxigoe. The surnames of the ploughmen were Ireland, Gay, Pryde and Small and the blacksmith was Munro. With the exception of Macadam the other names have all disappeared from the county, Mr Ireland of Georgemas Inn being the last and previous to that the Prydes of Lybster. But I believe that some of these names can still be traced in the female line at Wick or neighbourhood.

My great-grandfather, Peter Macadam, was born in Anstruther, Fife, and served his apprenticeship in the Canon Mills, Leith. At that time there were several mills wrought by the Water of Leith, and all turned by the same water in succession. When the uppermost mill, which had control of the dam, wrought, the others had to work, or else the water was lost to them. In dry seasons the water often ran short, and when the dam filled, be it day or night, Sunday or Saturday, the upper mill started and the others had to follow suit. My great-grandfather had scruples about working on Sundays and refused to work on that day; but, being an indentured apprentice he was brought before the Council and lodged in jail where he lay for a year, and then gave in and completed his apprenticeship. Thereafter he was employed in the mill at Anstruther.

When my great-grandfather came to Watten he was a married man, and his wife, whose maiden surname was Norrie, came with him, but could not be induced to stay in Caithness permanently; their family was therefore educated in Anstruther and went to school with Dr Chalmers, the great orator and preacher. My great-grandfather and my grandfather went once a year to Balcaskie with the proceeds of the Watten Mill. They owned a house in the High Street of Anstruther and a small plot of land at Milton of Anstruther.

I remember going to Anstruther with my father when I was about 14 or so. Of course, there was no railway line up to Caithness then. We went by boat from Wick to Granton and by rail from Edinburgh. The railway was then only available as far as Thornton Junction, from where we were conveyed by horse bus. On that occasion my father sold the plot of land at Milton, but the house property was disposed of at a much later date, when I was sent to Anstruther to sell it and got a train all the way.

My great-grandfather died in middle age and was succeeded by his son, Peter, who became tenant of the mill, and, subsequently, tenant of Bridgend Farm, the latter greatly against his will, as he knew nothing about land and was well up in years; but my father, Robert Macadam, was then a grown man and took over the management. It was then difficult for a laird to get a tenant when a place became vacant as few had the money to stock a farm.

Carts were not common in Caithness at this time; the sheaves were carried off the fields on the backs of horses, a contrivance called a 'clubber' being attached to the back of the animal, on which the sheaves were piled. The first farm cart made in Caithness is reputed to have been made by William Gunn of Caithery, whose daughter Jean, was my grandmother. The wheels of this cart were of wood and had no tires (sic).

In those days, rents were paid, not in cash but in meal, and the laird had a gimmel at Watten Mains that held over 1000 bolls, besides another large gimmel at Laurel or Claycock, Dunn. This meal was designated 'Farm Meal' and the miller had to attend at stated times to take delivery from the tenants and to issue receipts, which were handed over to the factor on rent day. Meal used to be packed in 280 lb sacks, which had to be heaved by millers, bakers and stevedores, but the 280 lb sacks were eventually given up, as they were so heavy for a man to carry. As payment in kind gradually died out, these gimmels were no longer required; but I remember in the first of my time at the Mill here that the laird still had a gimmel holding over 2000 bolls of 'Farm Meal', most of which was weighed out again in half-bolls or firloits to workmen on the estate, of whom there was then a pretty large squad, under the superintendence of the Ground Officer. Not until the crop of the year 1911 did this practice entirely die out, as 17 bolls of meal were required yearly to pay multure to the Achingale estate. However, the present owner of the Achingale estate cannot produce any written title or deed to show that the customary payment has not expired and the payments have lapsed.

It was this long-standing and now disputed arrangement that explains, as well as I know, the origin of the Mill Of Watten in 1742. In 1742 money was scarce, and of much greater value than now, and a man could not erect a mill, even of the most primitive kind, without what was considered then a considerable amount of capital, and, of course, never started work until he had made sure of his future customers, by having the grain of certain districts thrifted or bound to his mill.

The mill at Achingale seems to have been in existence long before there was any word of a mill at Watten, and the parish at that time was evidently divided up into quite a number of small estates, and it appears that the estates of Bylbster, Bridgend (or Watten) and Cogle were, among others, thrifted to the mill of Achingale.

The laird of Cogle had, however, a peculiar clause in his agreement entitling him to have his grain ground at Achingale mill whenever he pleased to come to the mill, only having to wait until the grain actually in the hopper ran out, even although it was in the middle of another man's parcel.

This arrangement did fairly well as long as all the parties were friendly, and no doubt the crop of Cogle at that time would not amount to much. But by and by the lairds of Bridgend and Cogle began to lay their heads together and saw the possibilities of a mill with a superior supply of water at Bridgend. The laird of Bridgend then opened negotiations with the view of having his estate freed, but his proposals were rejected with scorn. Knowing, however, of the powerful lever held by the laird of Cogle in his peculiar agreement, if judiciously operated, a system of torture of the miller of Achingale was promptly arranged. Day after day and week after week, and very often three and four times a day, the laird of Cogle sent small quantities of grain to be milled, and insisted on his right of precedence, which could not be denied. Not only was the miller tortured, but the other customers of the mill were greatly incommoded and bitterly resented such treatment. Ultimately a bargain was struck with the laird of Bridgend to release his estate and that of Cogle for a yearly payment of seventeen bolls of multure meal; and the first Mill of Watten was then started.

Although mills were then so numerous, it appears that the tenants still stuck to their querns or

hand mills; and my grandfather, when a young man, was sent round with his axe to break up all the querns on the lands bound sueten to the mill of Watten. Except for the grinding of bursten which was made chiefly from oats dried and parched in a big pot over a good-going peat fire by continual stirring with a long wooden shovel, then rubbed, winnowed, ground and sifted into a meal of a most peculiar flavour, there would I fancy, be little use for querns, for, of course, grain cannot be shelled in querns. What, there is no doubt, they were much used for was grinding malt, as the illicit distillation of whisky and smuggling went on in every district.

At the time Sir Robert Anstruther came to Watten the grain was kiln dried on the farms in straw kilns. I have never seen a straw kiln being worked, but have been told, and can readily believe, that these kilns made a first-class job of drying any kind of grain. The kiln bearers or 'simmers' were of wood, no iron being used in the structure. However, Sir Robert had a kiln built a the Mill of Watten for his own and his tenants' use. It was in the shape of an ordinary bottle, all of stone and the drying bed was of brick perforated and laid on brick arches. The object in making it circular was that it could not burn down and it was not connected with the mill building. Down below the bed was the furnace, or 'sornie' and the oats were dried by a fire made from the hulls or hard shells encasing the oat kernels, which needed constant stoking. Much of the drying was done during the night, and the attendant had a lonely vigil. The entrance to the 'sornie' faced the by-burn and the lonely river strath beyond it; the kiln being cut off from the dwelling by the bulk of the mill building. The 'bottle' kiln was for long a picturesque feature of the mill group of buildings, but was taken down about 1872 and the stones were used for the present kiln which is incorporated in the mill building.

The Mill of Watten has always been considered one of the best in the north. No doubt the importation of a miller who had served a regular apprenticeship in the Canon Mills of the Water of Leith gave it a certain prestige, but it always had the advantage of a steady supply of water from the loch even in the driest seasons. A barley mill for making pot barley was put in at an early date, and for a long time was the only one in the county. After 1840 there were two pairs of mill stones. Large scale alterations after 1872 introduced sack-tackles, elevators, sifters, conveyers, separators, and other machinery.

Before the introduction of machinery the farmers had to empty their grain from their 'kaises' into the hopper for 'shelling', carry out the hulled grain to the 'shelling' hulloek to be winnowed and back again to the hopper to be ground into meal. There were no sieves attached to the mill, and the work was done chiefly by women with skin sieves, sometimes in the mill, but often at home. The coming of machinery has completely changed the old system, for the farmers can not be trusted to handle the machines, while the miller must pay for more or less skilled labour. For many years now the farmers have been delivering their grain and returning later for their meal.

The millstones were generally about four feet in diameter, and were mostly taken from Dunnet Head. The stone got there was of firm texture and fine in the grain, not well adapted for either shelling or grinding purposes; but when we consider that these mills had, as a rule, only the one pair of stones for both shelling and grinding, and that most of the grain grown was bere, this stone was perhaps as suitable as could be got for the operations.

There being neither carts nor roads in the country in these early days, the stones were trundled on their edge from the quarry to the mill, a stick of wood being passed through the eye to keep it in balance, and relays of men, taking in turn their places at the stone, very soon brought it to its destination. I may here relate an amusing incident that took place in my great-grandfather's time, when Watten Mains was in the occupation of Sir Robert Anstruther, shortly after his purchase of Watten estate. When Sir Robert came to the county, the ordinary pay for a

labouring man was fourpence per day; but he, having brought his own men with him from Fife, raised the labourers' pay to sixpence per day. One of these labourers was David Dunnet, a cottar in Tails of Watten, who was regularly employed at Watten Mains, and who was much respected and trusted by all his neighbours, as well as by his employer. David, however, had not acquired the art of writing, but adopted a very ingenious plan of his own for keeping the account of his time. When he was employed working with a spade, he drew a sketch of the implement, with 'strokes' for the number of days; and so with hammer, shovel, tuskar. He presented his account-book regularly at paytime, and the factor had ordinarily no difficulty in understanding his hieroglyphics. One payday, however, the factor was fairly puzzled by one entry in David's book, and had to call him in for an explanation. The book presented a rough sketch as usual, thus: O 1111. This, on being interpreted, meant that David had been engaged four days in bringing home a new millstone! He did not fail to express his surprise that the factor was so stupid as not to understand.

Now as regards the Dunnet millstones, I have already mentioned that they were close and even in texture and free from flints and pebbles, but occasionally small pockets of fuller's earth were met with. These stones got a very rough-and-ready dressing at the quarry and an eye of nine inches in diameter was put in as near the middle as possible. The miller faced them, put in the rhynd (I speak of the runner), and having got it on the spindles, marked and dressed it according to taste. The stones had to be dressed to an even plane, which is called 'facing'. The back is slightly rounded, all this is called 'backing'. The rhynd is of iron and is fitted to the spindle for turning it. In the bedstone (the nether millstone) the bush was formed with three pieces of beech wood, on which three bushes were roughly fitted, backed by iron wedges and the whole pinned up very tightly. In the bush the spindle revolved. The neck of the spindle never saw a lathe, but came from the smithy straight from the file; so it may be easily imagined that the millstone could never run true, and bush troubles were the order of the day. The stones had to be lifted and dressed very often, and this gave an opportunity to sort the bushes.

The custom was to shell all day, and to begin to grind when darkness set in. After the grinding was finished, and any considerable quantity of bere ground, the stones had to be dressed anew before they would shell again. This dressing was done by steel implementis called 'picks' and facets were cut in the stone; narrow at the spindle and broadening as they rayed out to the circumference. The edges of these facets broke off the shells from the grain in shelling and crushed and granulated the kernels when grinding.

The grain was passed once through the shelling stones and then carried out to the shelling hulloek to be winnowed. The sieves were circular, made of sheep-skin, punched full of holes and stretched over a wooden frame. A great deal of skill and practice were required to manipulate the 'wecht' or small blind sieve which was used to stream the grain in the wind. The 'coom' or finer dust-like particles, was of course, blown far enough away, and few cared to carry home any of the husks, except a few cottars near by who had little or no straw, and depended on these husks, 'leaped' (scalded), to bring the cow through the short winter days. The husks, or shellings were used for the fire in the kilns, and some skill was required to feed the fire just enough and not too much, so as to keep up a steady, moderate heat. Given a moderate and suitable breeze, the grain could be shelled quite clean, and the 'tails' (the light and imperfect kernels) could be separated.

The place where the meal fell from the stones was called the 'troch' (trough). The meal was seldom left in the mill for any time. Indeed, there was little room provided for storage, and generally the horses were waiting at the door to carry it away when finished.

Of course, the miller had no work to do but tend the stones, and take the multure, or toll for

grinding, dipped out of the top of each sack, for the farmers themselves did every part of the manual work; but he had a long day and often a weary vigil at night, perhaps snatching sleep if the mill was going well.

There was always a fire-place and a good fire of peats, around which those waiting their turn were usually congregated, telling stories and discussing the questions of the day. Those who came from afar - for the Mill of Watten from the start attracted customers from distant parts of the county and far beyond that - came well supplied with their own food and drink. Orkney men landed their grain at Wick and paid carters to bring it to Watten and back again. They accompanied the grain and did all the manual work associated with the milling. Their staple drink was 'sour whig' a form of sour milk which they carried with them in casks. I understand my grandmother, Jane Gunn, was very kind to them, as indeed to all who frequented the mill.

Being in Orkney about 35 years ago, I had occasion to cross from the Mainland at Ham to Burray, and had two old men as boatmen. I was the only passenger and got into conversation with them. They knew I was from Caithness by my tongue, and asked my name and if I knew a place called Watten. When I told them I was miller in Watten and my name was Macadam, I was never so overwhelmed with kindness in my life, and they came a long way after landing to point out my destination at the other end of the island. These men, when young, had often been at Watten with grain, and had never forgotten the kindness shown them.

From my description of the millstones, it can be understood that the shelling process was a very imperfect one, even with the best of grain, and when ground and sifted out there was a large proportion left of meal 'sids' or 'sowan sids'. The sids are the outer shells of the grain kernels, and much of the gluten adheres to them. These sids were always more or less 'fat', according to the trim of the stones for grinding, but nothing that could contribute to the sustenance of man was lost. In every house the sowans barrel was an institution, in which these sids were steeped in water and the gluten dissolved. When the sids were wrung out through a cloth nearly every vestige of meal was recovered from them.

I had already said that, in the earlier time, bere was the chief grain grown, and from the beremeal were made the scones or bere-bannocks, which formed the staff of life. The sids of the bere could be sifted cleanly from the meal as the meal was finely ground; consequently it was from the oatmeal sids that sowans was made. Comparatively little oatmeal was used in any house, the oatmeal being nearly always sold in the towns, the farmers milling nearly all their grain and selling the meal directly to householders or consumers. Sowans was therefore the principal stand-by in the country house. At a certain stage of the steeping process it made a very good drink in its raw state, and could be thinned down with water to taste, but usually it was cooked as 'broonplet' or 'gauan-thegether', a very strong and sustaining diet, which would, as the saying goes, "stick to ones ribs". The broonplet was of a more delicate and digestible nature, and is still considered an excellent food for those of a weak digestion.

'Brochan', a kind of gruel made from oatmeal, milk, butter, pepper and salt, was often taken for supper, along with beremeal 'scoorags', which were very thin tough scones. They were very good and well-flavoured when newly baked, but became leathery after twenty-four hours. During the late summer and the winter months the kail-pot was a good deal in evidence. A leg of smoked goose served to make kail soup for a large family. The 'goodman' as a rule monopolised all the meat, and the family had the benefit of the flavour! A patch of 'size' or chives, and a plot of cabbage was all that was cultivated in the kail-yard, although a bunch of Southern Wood, a species of wormwood, esteemed for its sweet and pungent odour was often to be seen growing in the shelter of the boor tree or elderberry.

Pork was not at all common, but everybody of any standing killed a grass-fed 'meat' or cattle at Marlinmas. The meat was salted for winter use, but the quality was usually very poor. Potatoes and salt herring came by and by into vogue, generally as dinner; but when meal was scarce, as it often was, the potato served for breakfast as well. Dried dogfish and cod were common articles of diet, especially near the coast, but the poorer families often had to be content with 'potatoes and point', boiled potatoes dipped in a little milk as they were eaten. Tea was a great rarity, a cup on New Year's Day or when sick being the general rule, and in better off families a cup on Sunday for the goodman and the goodwife.

Home-brewed ale or illicitly-distilled whisky was, however, no rarity, the ale taking the place of tea, cocoa, and coffee of the present day. Any householder can now obtain a licence to brew, but none of the amateurs seem able to turn out a palatable brew, and the art of properly making malt has been lost. I have dried and ground the malt after the tax was changed from the malt to the ale, but it was miserable stuff, and the ale made from it tasted more like vinegar than beer!

When a new dwelling-house was built at the mill fifty-eight years ago, the mill lade, or race, which ran in front of the site, was covered over so as to form a garden. The brae at the north side was over twenty feet high, and there was a lot of grading work in forming the slope. It was the estate workmen who did the work, and in doing so they came across two graves, containing cists or stone coffins formed of rough flagstones, two at each side and one at each end. They contained bones, which were reburied. Later, in carting away earth from the same brae, and a little further west, another grave of the same construction was found, and also an iron spearhead in pretty good preservation. This spearhead may now be seen in the Museum of Antiquities, Edinburgh.

When first started, the Mill of Watten had the most lasting and adequate supply of water in the county, but this is not the case now, as the level of the loch has been reduced. A spender or spillway eighty feet across has been put in, which reduces the level of the loch, even after a spate, in three days to its ordinary level. The fall from the loch level to the mill being only four feet, a large quantity of water is needed, and now during a dry season the power is not sufficient to drive the stones and machinery which has been added to the mill.

Conditions since the war (First World War) have altered very much to our disadvantage. The mill has been doing badly for the last few years and the smaller mills in the north are being closed one after another, as the revenue will not meet expenses of rent, rates, insurance, and the wear and tear on machinery, not to speak of wages. The bottom has gone out of the commercial side of the business owing to the rapid disuse of oatmeal over the northern counties. The land in Caithness is being gradually laid out in grass, and farmers have little grain to market, preferring to feed any oats they grow directly to their stock. The wholesale trade is nearly finished as the people have ceased to use oatmeal.

Compare this with the conditions I have written of when my great-grandfather came to Watten.

Extracted from the John O'Groats Journal, October 1933

We regret to record the death of Mr Robert William Macadam, J.P., late farmer and miller at Watten. Mr Macadam, who was 83 years of age had only been seriously ill for a week or so prior to his demise and, although he had been failing for some months, his death was entirely unexpected. He passed away on Tuesday evening at his home at Angle Park, Wick.

Mr Macadam was a respected member of a well known and highly honoured family, who occupied Watten Meal Mill and the adjoining farm for about 150 years. That mill,

picturesquely situated near the outlet from Watten Loch (from which it derives its power) dates from 1742. It is on the estate purchased by the Anstruther family about the year 1780, in which year that family placed Mr Macadam's great-grandfather (who belonged to Fife) in charge of the mill and to collect the proportion of rents payable in those old-time days in oatmeal. From then until 1927 the mill was held by the same family, Mr Macadam's great-grandfather, grandfather and father preceding him as tenants, while his own son, David, was associated with him in the business prior to and after the Great War, until he died from the after-effects of poison gas to which he fell a victim while serving with the 5th Seaforth Highlanders. Mr David Macadam's death, therefore severed a connection extending for five generations with Watten Mill, which for 80 or 90 years - following the discontinuance of part payments of rents in grain - had been held by his forebears as tenants.

Mr Robert W. Macadam was admired and esteemed in his native county, throughout which he was widely known and had numerous close friends, especially among the agricultural community, of which he was a most popular member. His homely nature, cheerful disposition, and quiet, gentlemanly kindness endeared him to all who made his acquaintance - and they were many, as he was free and open-hearted with everyone.

Mr Macadam's varied and exacting private duties with the mill and farm did not blind him to matters of a more general nature, and he always took a deep interest in current affairs and in the welfare of the community. He was a valued member of the old School Board and Parish Council for many years - practically, in fact, from the formation of these bodies until they were recently superseded - and was also a respected Justice of the Peace for Caithness. Just three weeks ago he was on the bench at a J.P. court at Wick, a position he had often filled during recent years. Always a staunch churchman, he had, since his retirement, been a valued and most attentive member of Wick Central Church.

Mr Macadam, as already stated, lost his son David, through the effects of war injuries. Another son, George was killed in action while serving with the Canadian Army. His wife predeceased him in July last year, and he is survived by a son Robert, who is farming in Alberta, Canada, and a daughter, Mrs Sutherland, whose husband is also a farmer in Alberta.

The funeral takes place today (Friday) to Watten Churchyard.

PETER MACADAM  
FARMER & MILLER AT WATTEN

*Born in Anstruther in Fife 13th Aug. 1775; Died at Watten 16th Dec. 1856.  
A man widely known and universally esteemed for his integrity, sagacity,  
benevolence, and general usefulness in society as a member of the church,  
a business man, a neighbour and the head of a family;*

*Also for his wife Jane Gunn, a native of Watten born 1782, died 23rd Sep.  
1852, much respected in all relations of life, a true help-mate to her husband  
and a most affectionate mother to their numerous family, by whom this  
memorial is raised. [Inscription in Watten Parish Old Churchyard]*

Extracts from the Parish records of Anstruther Easter in Fife

1765                      May 30                      Patrick McAdam died (He is designated miller)

1769	May 13	To Peter McAdam and Alexandrina Norrie a son, Robert
1771	February	To Peter McAdam and Alexandrina Norrie a daughter, Anna
1773	June 10	Anna McAdam, daughter of Peter McAdam, miller, died of the smallpox
1777	March 28	George McAdam, brother of Peter McAdam millmaster, died of consumption aged 28 years
1777	August 13	To Peter McAdam and Alexandrina Norrie his spouse, a son, Peter. Baptized August 18
1788	February 21	To Peter McAdam, brewer here, and Sandy Norrie his spouse, a son, named William

Though there is no proof, it must be a fair assumption that the Patrick McAdam, miller, who died in 1765 was the father of that Peter, millmaster, who was married to Alexandrina Norrie and came to Caithness with Sir Robert Anstruther.

250th ANNIVERSARY OF THE '45

Our 14th volume of journals will be published over the precise period which has a scattering of 250th anniversaries of the excitement of the '45 when Prince Charles Edward Stuart selflessly voyaged to Scotland to endeavour to take the English throne for his father and himself. His adventure failed in its object, but has had a success which he couldn't have expected in after years when alcohol was helping to dull the pain of all the deaths: how many around the world have not heard about 'Bonnie Prince Charlie', and compare with the numbers who know intimate details of the king he came to supplant? We would like to join in the international furor and publish pieces which illuminate the lives of our Highland forbears. Have you any anecdotes or heirlooms relating to the period? The article you write for us does not have to be long or 100% serious nor even deeply-annotated History (although that would be nice) but it ought to touch however indirectly on that time and our places. Given that 'our places' include the 10,000 square miles of Scotland from the north of Shetland down to Argyll, and also includes the places to which Highlanders went (which is everywhere else) there must be *something* on which most of us could write.

STRAYS INDEX

The first group of strays have been fed into the Society's computer and an index of roughly 600 entries has been produced. A printed copy listing, for each person on the index, basic information such as name, place of birth and age can be found in the reference room at the Library. A reference number which refers to the original document should be noted. Any new entries and requests for a search of the index and/or a copy of the full details should be addressed to Mary Murray. She holds the file of original entries which in some cases, like obituaries, can contain considerable additional information useful to family historians.

