



## **news**

• No. 5, December 1992

'The time by the goodness of God will come, when the Catholic religion will again flourish in Scotland; and then, when posterity shall enquire, with a laudable curiosity, by what means any sparks of the true faith were preserved in these dismal times of darkness and error, Scalan and the other colleges will be mentioned with veneration, and all that can be recorded concerning them will be recorded with care ...' (Rev. John Geddes, Rector of Scalan 176265)



## Editorial

The whole thing keeps on growing, That applies to the Scalan Association as well as this

newsletter and the one is very nicely a cause of the other. When the Committee held its first quarterly meeting in 1990 and agreed to provide members with a newsletter (in addition to the AGM report) there were only about eighty subscribers, Now there are fully 330 people involved in the work of the Scalan Association.

In another sense than that which the advertising industry uses it is a 'quality readership', Who knows how much spending power you all have? Who cares whether you are at the A/B end of things in these hard times? Each subscriber (often with family and friends also reading *Scalan News*) has heard about this rather unusual Association and decided that the cause is worth supporting. Remarkably, for a subgathering outfit where it is never clear what year we are in or when the sub is due, 260 people have paid their 1992 fivers to Jane McEwan at Gallowhill. Life membership was discussed at the last AGM but there is obviously 'quality' about a club where the members have to make a conscious decision each year to belong to it. All that we can suggest is that you regard this December issue (and 'so for all the years to come') as a reminder.

A simple calculation shows that £5 from 260 paid up members comes to £1,050, so that annual subscriptions play an important part in making the Association's finances so healthy. Members received a financial statement for the year ending 31 May 1992 showing £16,505 in hand, and at the last committee meeting in November we learned that this had risen to £17,075.

Money is now due to Taitt Building for the first phase of the repair and restoration work. Mike Taitt has been busy up at the Scalan but is not quite ready to tell us about it: his own pickup truck needed repair at a key time in the autumn and this delayed the work, but it has begun and the building is weatherproof for a Glenlivet winter. The restorer's account of phase 1 will appear next June in *Scalan News* 6.

It may or may not be as full as this one. Two years ago the newsletter was two folded sheets of A4, to be 'read over breakfast'; a year ago it became a bit bigger, and now we are forced, by offerings from readers, to go beyond that to four folded sheets of A4. Readers will recall that David McNamee's personal pilgrimage from Spey Bay to the island of Lismore (and its seminary) required scope. This time it is a more general range of material from contributors which has caused the pressure on space: an 'association' of members' interests in Scalan and related matters. Read on and find out how one thing leads to another.

*Peter Anson's latest drawing (opposite) comes from 'Underground Catholicism in Scotland', published in 1970 near the end of his life. It is an 'artist's reconstruction', which we may take as a symbol of restoration.*

## Publicity

*Under the heading Heather Retreat an item by Maria Atkinson appeared in the Scottish edition of 'The Universe' for July 26 1992. It began:*

I remember when I was five watching the brown Crombie Burn flow swiftly under the Bochel Farm Bridge in the Braes of Glenlivet. 'Piece' packed in pocket, I was waiting for my

schoolfriends to appear at the top of the rockstrewn road.

We strolled along the mile to school past the shop, the mill and the roadside cottages decked with honeysuckle and old-fashioned roses. We would run the last lap when the chapel came into view and the school bell began to ring down the valley.

Beginning school with my cousins Jean and Gordon from Auchnascraw and Belnoe farms, I soon discovered how my ancestor Grants eked out a precarious living rounding up sheep from neighbouring clans or by selling illicit whisky.

The majority of the Braes people, however, were staunch Catholics and spoke in awed tones about the Scalan. I was unaware as a child that my journey to school was to become the route of a pilgrimage.

*The article then goes on to describe this year's Scalan Mass. Why not do your bit to make Scalan known? Back numbers of the newsletter and copies of the pink brochure can be obtained on request from Mrs Jane McEwan, Ogilvie Cottage, Gallowhill, Glenlivet AB3 9DL.*

## Scalan Mass 1992

Seven priests were on the altar in front of Scalan that first Sunday in July. A photograph taken by Sister Pauline Sheridan, head teacher of St Sylvester's School in Elgin, shows the line up from left to right:

Frs Briody and Kelly from East Kilbride and Coatbridge stand next to Fr McGregor from Banchory; Mgr Copland is in central position clad in green vestments, in contrast to the others in white; on his left is Fr McQuade, over from A viemore; then Fr Morrow of Humanae Vitae House in Braemar; and finally Fr Mann who heads the Aberdeen diocesan pastoral planning team from his office beside St Mary's Cathedral in Aberdeen.

There is one other halfhidden priest in the photo, not in vestments because he has been rehearsing the music Fr Colin Stewart whose 'parish' includes the three historic churches of Tomintoul, Tombae and Chapeltown of Glenlivet. Later Fr Stewart was assailed for his choice of one hymn. An amateur historian in the congregation claimed that 'Thine be the glory, risen conquering Son' was written to honour the Duke of Cumberland after Culloden blasphemous, if true, as well as offensive to Jacobite Glenlivet. In fact (as later research proved) the hymn is from the pen of a 19th century English clergyman living in Switzerland.

Another of Sister's photographs shows the familiar figure (to the editor's family at least) of a piper coming down from the hills looking hot, red and sweaty. No wonder one enquirer was ready to believe that he had played all the way from the Well of the Lecht. Later the story was going round that it was all the way from Strathdon, although it lies in the other direction and The Ladder which brings you down into Glenlivet is at an angle of 45 degrees. Even on the flat, piping across heather tracks is much harder than heed rumhod rum singers like Andy Stewart would have you believe.

On the way home we stopped at 'Briggies' (the Allargue Hotel at Cock bridge) and got talking

to Jim Stewart, who had been at the mass but left his bagpipes in the car. Fantasies of different parties being piped across the hills to Scalan began to form ...

With so much 'history' behind it, this year's crossing from the Well of the Lecht must be recorded. Thanks to the same young Hansford guide as last year your editor now accepts that the map is correct in showing a path leading up the hill before the Lead Mine. It is where it should be, but only as far as the high ground where our party (two families plus two friends) became scattered as the it petered out. Up there you have a straight choice between keeping to the heights so breathlessly gained, and then dropping steeply down into Glenlivet through heather, or following the wire fence down and up again until you meet a path at right angles. This is certainly the correct one since it comes down between Wester Scalan and Clash of Scalan.

Overcoming natural shyness (!) your piping editor then played his first pibroch 'The Little Spree' in front of the old college after telling (or reminding? See *Scalan News* 2) the waiting crowd that it was originally a gathering tune for mass.

He did this partly because the crowd was indeed waiting, and for the Bishop of Aberdeen who was late for mass. My Lord heard and admired the singing from an unaccustomed seat in the back pew, so to speak. Maria Atkinson put it tactfully in *The Universe* (see Publicity) when she reported that 'Bishop Mario Conti was present for part of the ceremony'. It's a nice thing about the Church today that people certainly editors feel able to tease bishops. Our Bishop's opening gambit, as he mingled with the crowd afterwards, was 'Mea culpa'. Of course it was well within the tradition. Bishop Geddes (the first restorer of Scalan) walked from Edinburgh to Orkney and back no, not including the sea crossing and he was quite often late for mass.

The crowd was well up to last year's. Looking at it from the least spiritual point of view, as even the clergy sometimes have to, the total collected for Scalan, including the offertory and new members signed up by Jane McEwan (and transferred to Bill's Scalanometer) was £540. A pile of newsletters went and welcome to spread the word over Scotland and beyond. Once again there were coach parties from Edinburgh, Coatbridge and East Kilbride.

Those who had to walk 'the extra mile' (it's half of that in fact, and many cars made their way up carefully, offering lifts) will be glad to know that Crown Estates have agreed to provide more stone for filling in the potholes before next summer. Car drivers will also be grateful, but there is no intention of making it a road fit for buses. One of the coach parties (who are of course very welcome at Scalan) had lunch at the Pole Inn beforehand and afterwards used the Chapeltown Parish Hall for a cup of tea and a 'break'. There can be practical problems when people who are elderly or handicapped come to the head of Glenlivet:

Portaloos are still under discussion.

Potholes and Portaloos after a report on 'the takings'? Change the subject! There was of course more to this year's Scalan Mass than the practicalities. Those who were there will vouch for it: those who were inside the picket fence sitting close to the canopied altar on the grass or on folding chairs brought along for the purpose; those who were spread out in serried ranks towards the banks of the Crombie all will recall the special atmosphere of prayer in that grassy bowl beneath the heavens. And they will recall the homily unprepared, see above which was

delivered by the chief celebrant: a testimony from the most distinguished Braes priest of our days to his greatest forebear, whose chalice was used at Scalán in 1991.



## **Abbe Paul MacPherson**

Mgr John Copland

Of all the students who attended Scalán the most colourful was Paul MacPherson. Paul was born at the Clash of Scalán just a few hundred yards from the College. His mother died when he was six and he attended school at Clashnoir for a time, and learned to read from a woman who could read but not write; the completion of his study of the three Rs was left to John Geddes, later Bishop and at that time Rector of Scalán, who was to have a profound influence on Paul's life and character.

He entered Scalán in 1767 at the age of eleven and was there for two years before proceeding to the Scots College in Rome. Here his health broke down after seven years and he was sent to the Royal Scots College Valladolid, in Spain, where his former teacher John Geddes was now Rector. Paul was ordained there in 1779 and came home to serve his first mission at Shenval in the Cabrach, commonly called the Siberia of Scotland.

Here he rebuilt the church which had been destroyed by Cumberland after the 'Fortyfive. In later years MacPherson spoke about a sick call which he made during a snowstorm, when his guide had to warn him to keep clear of the chimney of a house over which they were walking on their way to the patient.

The next few years were spent in Aberdeen until another bout of ill health forced a move to Stobhall in Perthshire. After that he acted as 'procurator' or treasurer to the poor mission from a base in Edinburgh. In 1793 MacPherson was asked to represent the Scottish Mission in Rome. On his way there he helped to rescue much of the library of the Scots College in Paris, and in particular the Chartularies of the Archdiocese of Glasgow which had been taken to Paris by Archbishop Beaton at the Reformation.

In 1798 the French Army occupied Rome and made Pope Pius VI their prisoner. That same year Abbe Paul, as he was now known, personally organised the evacuation of the Scots College students and brought them safe to London. Here he was engaged as an agent to the British Government in a plan which would do justice to a James Bond film.

The Pope was imprisoned in Savona in northwest Italy, and a plan was evolved to secure his release. A Royal Navy frigate was to sail into the bay and bombard the town. Abbe Paul was to make contact and ensure that a signal was hoisted on the Pope's villa so that it would be free from attack. In the confusion of the bombardment the Pope was to be taken in disguise to the shore, where wellmanned boats would take him out to the frigate. There was a 'mole' at Downing Stree in the pay of the French Government, however, and the plot failed. The Pope

was moved inland across the border to Valence, in France, where he died the following year.

MacPherson was engaged in a second escapade in 1798. The Stuart Papers of the former Royal Family had been purchased by the British Government and were in the Consulate at Civita Vecchia when the town was occupied by French forces. The Abbe gained permission from the Commandant of the forces of occupation to search for some documents required in a litigation in Scotland. The Frenchman could not read English and the Abbe was able to rescue the entire archive and send it to the Prince of Wales, later King George IV.

After his release from prison Abbe MacPherson returned to Scotland, and was briefly put in charge of Huntly, but by 1800 he was back in Rome as agent of the bishops of England (as well as Scotland) and also as the first nonJesuit rector of the Scots College. No teaching was involved as the College remained closed until 1820, and in 1822 Paul MacPherson resigned and started out for home thinking, at sixtyeight, of retirement and the Braes of Glenlivet. Before he completed his journey, however, the new rector James McDonald died. The Abbe had to return to Rome and resume his former duties.

He came home to Scotland once more in 1827 and set about building, at his own expense, a church and school at Chapeltown. The school was accidentally burned eight years later; again Abbe MacPherson gave the funds for its restoration. Much later in the century his church was also destroyed by fire and rebuilt: there is a picture of the MacPherson church in the Chapeltown sacristy.

In 1834 a second MacDonald rector of Scots College Rome died and the Abbe, now seventynine, set out for Rome one more time to supervise his beloved College. This he continued to do for eleven years. Abbe Paul MacPherson died on 24th November 1846 in his ninetyfirst year.

## **Money Matters**

Mgr A. S. MacWilliam

*It is time we gave some attention to the late 'Canon Sandy' MacWilliam, one of the three priests who formed the Scalan Association in 1947 when he was in charge at Chapeltown. His time in Glenlivet transformed him into a historian, particularly of the seminaries. A short extract from his extensive work on Scalan is enough to show that repairs and funds have always been needed.*

The next Superior was John Farquharson of Glenconglass (*at Achriachan, just across the bridge going north out of Tomintoul*) but he held office for barely a year when he was followed in the summer of 1784 by his second cousin Alexander Farquharson who had been recently ordained in Rome.

It was an unfortunate appointment. At this time various repairs and improvements were in progress, the walls of the seminary in several places rebuilt and strengthened and the roof slated. (*It had been heatherthatched until this point, like the stone and turf houses of the people of the Braes.*) But Fr. Farquharson was utterly incompetent in financial matters and ran so deeply into debt that the work came to a standstill. Writing to Bishop Geddes on the 19th February 1787,

he asks:

'Does your people in Edinboro know anything about the scarcity of money? I can assure you it is a distemper pretty epidemical in this part of the country. Alas! What number of gay concerted plans vanish like the baseless fabric of a vision when money is wanting.'

But more than a number of gay concerted plans vanished where Fr. Farquharson was concerned; when Bishop Hay and Bishop Geddes met at Scalán in August of that year, it was to determine that he and Fr. Andrew Dawson, then priest at the Shenval in the Cabrach, exchange places. (*The penalty for financial mismanagement was exile to 'Siberia' across the Ladder Hills/ See Mgr Copland's article.*)

Bishop Hay remained until the beginning of September at Scalán to adjust the accounts and urge on the repairs. But he who was so cautious and circumspect in matters of finance was horrified to find an amount of debt far beyond what he had expected, and almost total exhaustion of the necessary stores and provisions. Before he left, he had the accounts squared and the work of repair in hand again.

*In a footnote Mgr MacWilliam mentions that John Farquharson was later sent to Glasgow because of his Banffshire Gaelic:*

'Some idea of the change in the Catholic population about Glasgow may be gained from the fact that in the list of five hundred Catholics in and around the city there were not a score who did not speak Gaelic.' *THQ* was in 1795, shortly after Fr Farquharson brought his refugee students home to Glenlivet from Douai, which makes a link with the next item.

## **Arnage and Douai**

*The first and fullest contribution 'from our readers' is by Dr A T Macqueen, who lives at Pitkerro near Broughty Ferry but has a link with upper Banffshire through his house at Ecelefergan. This former manse north of Tomintoul becomes a masscentre when Dr Macqueen's friend Fr Smith of Dundee is there.*

I write to congratulate you on the June issue of *Scalan News*, which stimulated me to tell this true story:

In 1938 two young people went up to the University of Edinburgh to study medicine, and fell in love.

They became engaged in 1941 and married in 1943, both having graduated MB ChB. The young man (myself) was born a Catholic while his wife (Doreen LeithRoss before marriage) was a convert. She always maintained till her death in November 1991 that she could not be certain what proportionate parts love and intelligence had played in her reception into the Church: what is certain is that the life of the Dominican student chaplaincy in George Square and the church of St Francis almost opposite both made significant contributions.

Her father Lt. Col. William LeithRoss would have been the family's VIIth Laird of Arnage, a castle north of Ellon in Aberdeenshire, had the property not passed out of their hands. When Doreen told her father that she intended marrying a Catholic he demurred only mildly, simply insisting that both partners must graduate in order to achieve their desired end.

When the immature young suitor was told of this his uncharitable reaction was 'a likely story!'.  
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'In 1576, James Cheyne, of Amage, a Scottish secular priest, founded at Tournay the College which, after many migrations, finally settled at Douai about 1612. In addition to the funds provided by the founder, the College received assistance from Queen Mary of Scotland.'

James Cheyne was no ancestor of Doreen's by blood but she was by property inheritance. In the house of Doreen Leith Ross Macqueen's family at Pitkerro is a splendid sideboard from the diningroom at Arnage bearing the crosscrosslet which is the heraldic emblem of the Aberdeen theologian's family, and of one amongst them who did not give up the faith James Cheyne of Arnage.

*Waiter Cheyne was the last laird at Arnage when it was sold, the funds going to what later became Scots College Douai. Called before the Presbytery of Ellon in 1626 for failure to attend the services of the Kirk, he was recorded as 'sum tyme of Arnedge, now in Tilliedesk'. Six years later he was again accused of 'apostacie and defection from ye treuth', Waiter Cheyne represents in his person the shift from castles to hidden chapels (like Scalan) as the old Catholic gentry lost their estates to the penal laws.*

*I was able to track down Waiter's masscentre last year. The farmer's wife at Tilliedesk, a mile to the east of Arnage, confirmed that one of the outbuildings had been a chapel but did not know it was one of ours!*

At the time of Pope John Paul's visit to Scotland when Fr Cheyne's name cropped up in the



official brochure (and again when Blairs closed) I tried to persuade Doreen that it should be recorded that the loyalty of her 'ancestor' to the Church, and the prayers for her family over four centuries, had probably contributed to her return to the Auld Faith.

She was a shy and modest lady and would not permit what might be construed as publicityseeking, and since it was her name that was at stake, not mine, I could not press the matter.

But now that she has, no doubt, met Fr Cheyne it seems worth adding this little story to the historical record,



## Readers Write

*Most of these are extracts from letters sent to the Secretary and Treasurer in response to Mrs McEwan's very personal service (along with her husband Bill).*

Thank you and Bill very much for meeting our group from St Peter's Morningside on Thursday. Please pass on our appreciation to Bill Graht too. We had a good day and particularly enjoyed mass at Scalan. The only slight regret for everyone was that we could not visit the Church at Chapelton because of the pressure of time. However now that we've stimulated an interest some people may return under their own steam. We are all very grateful for the work being done by the Scalan Association, bringing our Catholic heritage to people's attention, and we will certainly be back in the area as a parish group we're already discussing what our next outing will be. *Margaret Fraser, Edinburgh.*

[ was staying with Miss Judith Scott recently and she reminded me about the Scalan Association, which I have been meaning to join for some time. [ shall be staying with my mother at Craigellachie for a few days at the end of June and hope, as usual, to fit in a visit to Scalan. *Donald Fillday, Spitalfields, London.*

[ am just home in Scotland for a short period. [have two sisters in Canada who are ill and will take back the little news sheets to Vancouver when [leave on Friday. Keep up the good work. *Dolina MacPherson, Vancouver.*

[ first was brought to Glenlivet by Cecilia and Valentine Kilbride and subsequently was up with Victor Gaffney and his family in the early seventies. We were amazed when we found out by chance in the late eighties that there was an annual mass. Please add me to your mailing list. *Bridget Gray, Glenrothes.*

We had a very successful outing to Scalan on Tuesday although we had to eat our sandwiches on the bus at Tomintoul, it was so wet. Afterwards it struck me that there might have been a bit of shelter at the St

. Michael Centre. However when we got up to Eskmulloch it was fair, and the rest of our

pilgrimage went off extremely well. It is wonderful to see how interest has increased and, with the interest, the funds. Keep the good work going. *Daniel Boyle, Rosyth.*

[ would very much like copies of the Scalan pink leaflet (with chalice) to add to the eight family history albums I have distributed to relations at East Achavaich, Chapelton, and elsewhere which confirms my Scalan history. This winter [ will try and piece together the anecdotes brother James has given me from time to time about the Braes. *Frances Stuart, Aberdeen.*

Thank you so much for your last letter and much information. It helped me quite a bit. Alasdair, you would be amazed at the Australian interest in the history of the Catholic Church in Scotland. I tried every church avenue and every Catholic bookshop in Sydney. There is abundant information on the Church in Italy, France, Spain and Ireland but nothing at all on Scotland. However every source I tried said that I was the sixth or seventh person that day to inquire about Scotland. By chance I was glancing through a magazine listing world periodicals and discovered the Innes Review, the Journal of the Scottish Catholic Association, and have become a subscriber. *Dennis Prentice, North Curl Curl, NS W.*

You too can become a member of the Scottish Catholic Historical Association and get copies of the journal twice a year: 185 pages of scholarly writing in 1992 at a cost of £14. The Autumn issue is mainly four lectures which were given this year in Glasgow City Chambers to celebrate 500 years of the Archdiocese. A cheque to 'SCHA' will bring both Spring and Autumn to you. The cost is only £7 if you live a student, but £15 if, like Dennis Prentice, you live outside Britain. Write to the Treasurer, *The Innes Revue*, 25 Finlas Street, Glasgow G22 50S.

## Scalan Account Book

X.. Miscellaneous Articles for the use of the boys at *ScaLan*.

From Novr. 1 1789 to 1 Novr. 1790.

'To pen knives at 7d	1. 9.
'To slate pencils	2.
'To three ink glasses 3d. +	
a Ream of paper 11sh .6d.	11. 9.
'To 100 quills at 2sh 4d.	
+ 100 more at 1sh.8d.	4.
In all ending	17.10

## St Joseph's at Scalan

*The Primary 7 class of St Joseph's School, Queen's Cross, Aberdeen visited the old seminary last summer term as part of their preparation for Confirmation. They were able to have mass indoors in the former library to the right of the front door with Canon Symon of the Cathedral (now in Dingwall, when he's not serving Ullapool and the northwest of Scotland). Judging by the strong impression made on them other teachers might think about using Scalan in this way: it is after all linked with Blairs and vocations which may emerge much later in their lives rather than by a simple choice for junior seminary. Thanks to the following youngsters whose thoughts have been merged by the editor (though not in this order) so as to give a continuous account:*

*Antonia Baxter, Cormac Booth, Krystina Coiling, Keith Crombie, Sarah McLean, James Daniel, Hannah Rochford, Daniel Gorry, Debbie Taylor, Rebecca Walsh, Andrew Slaven, Laurence Tayler.*

We set off on a two day retreat to Tomintoul at 8.30 a.m. and got there about 10.30. After a long walk from the bus to Scalan (what a smell of cow droppings!) we got there. I thought it was a village but it was just a house. There was an old man there he was nice.

After a few photos we were let into the house. As Canon Symon opened the door I had a peek inside. We all gathered in a small room. The wood looked rotten, and the walls were bare stone, crumbly as if the building was going to fall down. It was very dimly lit, with only two small windows and two candles on the altar. We were all silent looking round at what would have been the boys' study.

There was something about that .. place that made me feel quite strange I think it was the fact that there were boys studying to be priests here in this same room hundreds of years ago. I got a very strange feeling to see where the priests had worked with their students. The room was misty and cold, but there was a warm feeling like we were all together. When you're with your grandparents you get a peaceful nice feeling. It was the same there because it's old and peaceful. Scalan has everything you need to have mass. When I received

the Body and Blood of Jesus I felt very close to the spirits of these long gone priests and students and it was comforting. It felt like no other mass I had ever been to.

I thought how it must have been on a cold winter evening two hundred years ago, with a small fire burning in the large fireplace. I got an imaginary picture of ten people, boys and men, sitting around the fire and they all looked worried. That was because they were risking their lives learning to be priests.

As I explored the house and walked down passages I thought of two hundred years ago and people walking down these same passages. It was scary and interesting at the same time. When I was in one of the bedrooms I could picture whoever was sleeping there walking to his bed. I felt scared because of the darkness and the floorboards creaking. It was as if I had been through all the years of hiding, learning to be a priest, and building the place back up again after the

redcoats came.

Outside it was very nice. There were lots of signs of wildlife like birds and rabbits as we started walking back to the bus. Overall it was a great experience. I really enjoyed my trip and would like to go back to Scalan again. If you can go you will like it.



## **Time and Tidelessness**

*This poem was sent in by David McNamee. It forms part of a slim volume 'by Martin Marroni called 'Seminaries ' published in 1988 at £2.60 with postage. You can get it from The Ciaran Press, 16 Mearns Court, Kelso.*

Islands seal their past, Eilean Ban,  
uninhabited and green,  
stamped on Morar's black wax,  
tiny island in a tideless loch,  
deep as time's throat,  
and in its stormy whisper wild as a Galilean sea.  
Children walked here. Changelings  
from the black hearths,  
plaid students for a heather priesthood,  
walked in the stained glass  
cloisterings of holly tree and birch  
circling the soft lagoon,  
catching their adolescent breaths between

dark water and the watchful eyes  
walked prayers until the soldiers came  
scouring the heather for a prince and those  
who saw him walk their way  
levelling these bare foundations  
of a kingdom yet to be.  
Moss absorbs the shock, the years,  
the language of the undergrowth does not translate,  
figures in the light are leaded only by the wind,  
a herring's wing pulse psalms the office of the day.  
The empty hillsides and the crumbled hearths speak too loud for words.  
This was their island and their time,  
far from Rome and an exile's court,  
they knew their space between the vaults  
and the lichened margins of eternity.  
I stand here and sense how green complete and green it is  
and know perception on its own has changed.  
To carry this from here unfixed in artifact or tale  
would be to walk upon the loch  
or quell its waters in a storm.

*Your editor risks the charge of egocentricity, or at least of having a finger in too many pies during the last year or two, by linking this with his 'seminal' paragraph (a visit to the site of the Highland seminary started the whole thing off) in 'Midges a modern scourge? The evidence of early accounts' by Alasdair Roberts, in ROSC: Review of Scottish Culture, for the National Museums of Scotland, 1991:*

Some of the factors which may be relevant to the presence or absence of midges are suggested by a particular instance. At the west end of Loch Morar Eilean Ban (the fair isle, after its sandy beaches) is nowadays notorious for midges. The island is densely wooded, but in one clear area the raised beds of a former kitchen garden emerge from a marshy halfacre beside vestigial walls. Until it was destroyed by Hanoverian soldiers in 1746 the island served as a headquarters for Highland Catholics ... The example may serve to introduce the notion of changed land use while providing evidence, by implication, that biting insects were not a problem in one very specific locality, now midgeinfested, during the first half of the eighteenth century.

*Another way of putting 'the midge argument' is that the Scottish Highlands used to be full of people, and nowhere more so than Glenlivet in the 18th century, so there is a real argument at the heart of the conservation debate when people talk of preserving areas of 'natural wilderness'. The back page (over) is relevant to this, with the well known wilderness lines of the Jesuit poet Cerald Manley Hopkins overlaid upon the map of Scalan.*

*It is the work of someone who cares deeply for the area in its solitude, and who (so far) has avoided our public gatherings round the old seminary. Ann Dean is an artist who has become interested in 'the crofts of Scalan' the ruins of small farms in the area and the wild flowers to be found there, along with an important balancing point the people who lived in them. She has agreed to let some of her writing and drawings appear next year.*

The clipart below is *not* hers.



Yours Seasonally, 1784

Many letters from Scalan have survived (now in Edinburgh) which show the severity of Glenlivet winters in the 18th century. Here is an extract from one:

'Most desparate days. The 2nd instant (2 January 1784) will be ever memorable;

a furious easterly wind laid all level;

several houses were overturned;

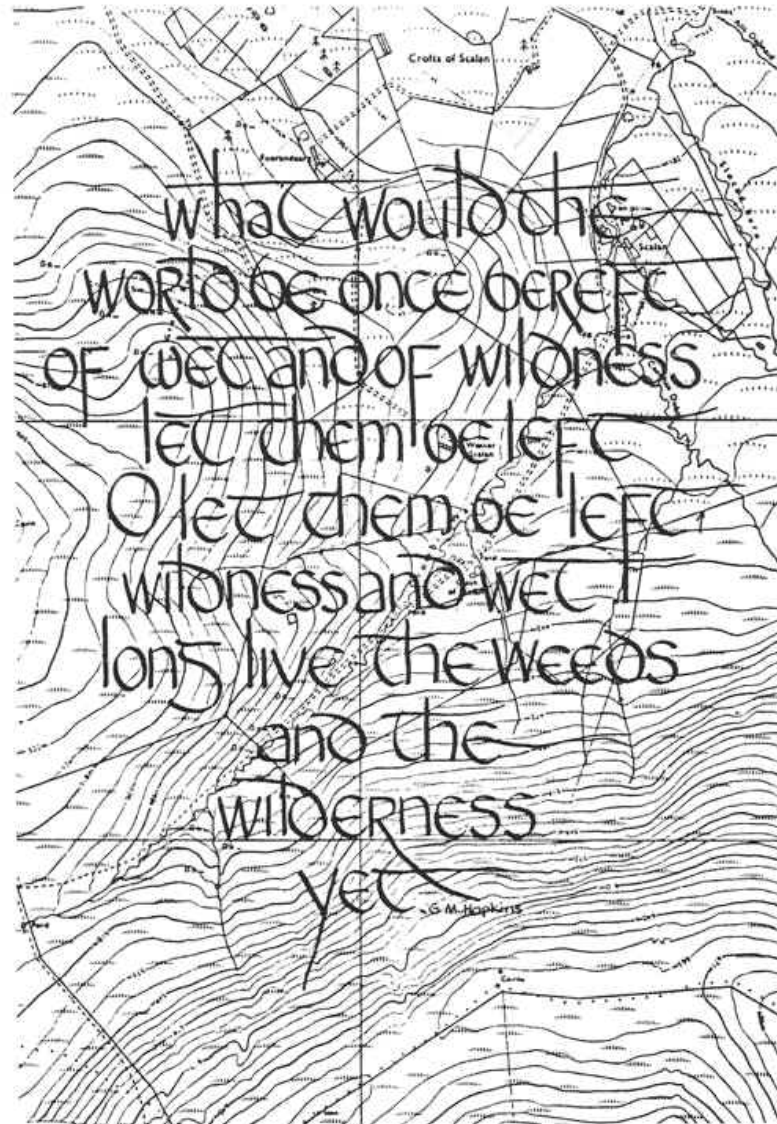
no less than twelve sacks of corn driven

God knows where;

the poor people prodding the snow with poles for their sheep

buried fifteen to twenty feet below. "

The editor is glad to end (truly) with a thank you to the team of Aberdeen Scalanites who in June took charge of the final phase by collating, folding, enveloping, stamping and finally posting batches of the newsletter. This time, if still willing, they will be contributing to the Christmas rush. Happy Christmas to them and you!



What would the  
world be once bereft  
of wet and of wilderness  
let them be left!  
O let them be left  
wilderness and wet!  
Long live the weeds  
and the  
wilderness  
yet.

G. M. Hopkins