

Scalan News

Official Voice of the Scalan Association. November 2005

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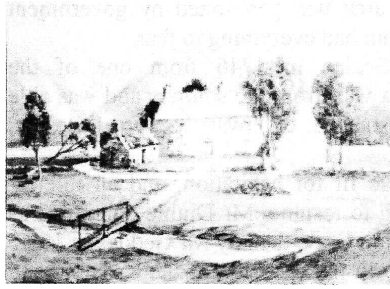
Owing to the retirement of Alasdair Roberts, it was decided at the June AGM 2005 to elect an editorial committee. Alasdair ran the Scalan News for 15 years and I'm sure the members would wish to thank him for his excellent work. As a mark of appreciation he was presented with a crystal bowl engraved with an etching of Scalan. Ann Dean, who worked closely with him, received a straight sided bowl engraved with a similar etching.

This is your newsletter and the committee would welcome your ideas, views and news. Correspondence can be sent to Sylvia Toovey, Chapel House, Chapeltown of Glenlivet, Ballindalloch. AB37 9JS. Tel. 01807590295.

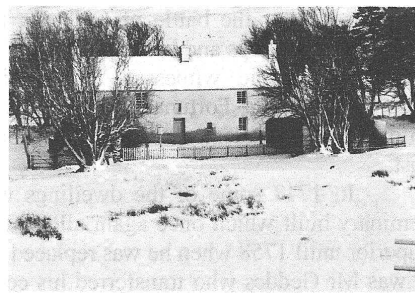
Emailiohnsylvia@braes.fsworld.co.uk

The Scalan Association relies on association subscriptions to maintain the buildings and the grounds. It was agreed at the AGM to raise the minimum subscriptions from £5.00 to £10.00 per person annually. The newsletter is free to members and aims to keep you in touch with Scalan.

Scalan, Past and Present



20th century Painting by John Keenan



Winter2005 .

Through the years people have tended to forget the history of the seminary and the important part it plays in the religious history of Scotland. In the following article I have tried to outline why we should support and maintain this historical building which has survived persecution and neglect. It now stands alone; the Scalán Township long gone. Sandy Matheson, who lived in the cottage where he was born on the south side of the college, now resides in Aberlour. His collie dog, Moss, lives at Achnasraw, a farm in the Braes. This extraordinary gentleman loves Scalán and in a subsequent newsletter I am hoping to compile an article about Sandy with help from others who know him better than I.

Scalán

In 1713 Bishops Nicholson and Gordon conceived the idea of a seminary to educate boys for the priesthood at home and abroad. Prior to 1715 the school was established on an island in Loch Morar on the west coast, but due to the uprising of 1715 the seminary was dissolved.

In that year the old Pretender, Prince James Francis Edward Stuart (son of James VII of Scotland and II of England) tried to claim the throne and in retaliation George 1st sent Hanovarian troops into Scotland.

Around 1716-17 it was decided to establish the seminary at Scalán : a wild and desolate spot surrounded on three sides by hills. A missionary, John Gordon, was living in a barn on the south west corner of the "town of Scalán". It was he who arranged a habitation on the banks of the Crombie. The house was built mainly of turf and stood until about 1737; the dwelling withstood at least three raids. by Hanovarian soldiers but always managed to reopen for peaceful study.

In 1738 a new house was built of stone and mortar by Alex Gordon and was completed about 1739; no trace remains of this new dwelling although a ruin remains where the house may have been sited. The old turf house could have been used as a byre, adjacent to the new house. Alex Gordon remained as superior until 1741, when he

was succeeded by Mr William Duthie.

In July 1745 Charles Edward Stuart (son of the old Pretender) marched into England recruiting soldiers on the way. A large number of men from this area joined up. The involvement of men from Glenlivet and the Braes (a strong catholic area) guaranteed after the battle of Culloden that the area was garrisoned by government (Hanovarian) troops and in the spring of 1746 Scalán had everything to fear.

Mr Duthie witnessed the burning of Scalán in 1746 from one of the neighbouring hills. Fortunately he was expecting a visit from the soldiers and was able to dismiss the students and secrete the books, vestments, etc away, so very little was lost.

In 1747 some of the dwellings were made fit for habitation, and an inferior seminary built which once again allowed studying to resume. Mr Duthie continued as superior until 1758 when he was replaced by William Gray, then by Mr Geddes in 1762. It was Mr Geddes who transferred his community to the east side of the Crombie and about 70 yards up from the burn; this land had been granted to the seminary by Mr Grant (the Duke of Gordon's factor in 1728) and which had been laid out as a garden before 1745. The new house was built inside this rectangular garden in 1767. The north wing was added in 1770, in 1772-3 it was changed into a kitchen, then in 1786-88 it was converted into a public chapel. In 1785 a byre on the south side of the seminary was converted into a kitchen with a thatched roof, and in late 1786 after a fire, the roof was slated.

When the house was built in 1767 there had been no provision made for a kitchen, and it has been suggested that the kitchen built adjacent to the old house on the west side of the burn was used until about 1773, when the north wing of the new house was converted

Until about 1786-88 Catholics attended mass in the chapel, entering the building by means of the outside staircase on the north gable. The door can still be seen today but the stairs have long gone. When the seminary was designed it incorporated the school, residence, and farm. The old dwelling on the west side was used as a steading and store room for hay etc. All that remains is one ruined building.

Mr Geddes left Scalán in 1767 and in his five years as master had put the seminary on a firm footing. Before he departed he asked his successor, John Thompson, to find a place for Paul McPherson, a young lad who had been born at the Clash of Scalán in 1756. In 1768 he was admitted to the seminary at the age of twelve; up until then he had received a basic education in the area.

John Thompson was replaced by John Patterson in 1770. He was able to put the seminary back on a sound financial footing; but had problems with some students who were, in his eyes, unsuitable for the priesthood and two servants who were not suitable for working in the seminary. These problems he could overcome but he couldn't help the weather. The winter of 1770-71 proved to be worse than the previous three; lives were lost and cattle died owing to the cold and hunger. Many families sold their possessions and gave up their homes and land because they had no way of paying the rent.

By late summer he had the right kind of students and servants, the former were young and eager to learn. The winter of 1772 proved to be as horrific as the previous two; the first six weeks were one continuous storm - the water mills were frozen solid and what grain that could be found was ground in querns by hand.

There was a chronic shortage of priests throughout Scotland but Scalán was still able to recruit boys into the seminary, in fact in 1774 two were lodged in the Scalán farmtown as there was no room in the college. There was talk of amalgamating Scalán with the lowland seminary to cut costs; Scalán was considered too remote and not suitable in the changing times.

Scalán struggled on despite a couple of extreme winters. Many boys wanted to enrol and the college was able to send students to Rome. After thirteen years as head Mr Paterson died in 1782 having sent 24 boys to serve the mission as ordained priests.

Once again, however, Scalán was in financial trouble mainly due to mismanagement and extreme winters. In 1788 Bishop Hay came to reside there and it would be at least three years before ordinations would provide a new master.

It was Bishop Hay who decided to raise the roof to create more space in the upstairs rooms, eliminating the rafters and allowing the addition of an attic to accommodate a new dormitory in 1788-89. He hadn't sufficient funds to

slate the roof so it was re-thatched.

Under his leadership the reformation of the college progressed rapidly. New students arrived, were educated and left for the Scot's College in Rome. It was his wish to make Scalán a college of excellence. He enhanced the land on which the seminary stood; he created "the Bishop's Walk", with its long straight lines and hedge of trees, remains of which can be seen today. He took an active interest in the seminary farm and worked closely with the manager, John Williams. He brought in specialist labour to carry out ditching, dyking, planting of trees and turf cutting. Working under supervision each student gave ten days work a year.

Bishop Hay's aim was to raise academic standards; he created the Scalán library and tightened up the standards of behaviour giving the boys tasks on a rota system.

Owing to pressing duties in Edinburgh, Bishop Hay arranged for Bishop Geddes to take over the leadership of Scalán in 1793; unfortunately it was seven months before he was free to take over. Once again standards slipped in both the college and the farm and for the second time Bishop Geddes had to pull the college up. James Sharp was appointed in 1793 to help the ailing Bishop. Sharp remained at Scalán after the move to Aquhorties in the Aberdeenshire lowlands in 1799.

For a number of years some of the superiors had voiced concerns about the remoteness of Scalán, the harsh winter conditions and the smallness of the college. Scalán was never the "all through" seminary that Bishop Gordon had hoped for. It remained a junior seminary for boys who finished at other colleges in Scotland and abroad. There were about 63 students who became priests of the Scottish Mission, young boys who worked in the harshest of conditions and achieved their dream of becoming a priest; one such boy was Abbe Paul McPherson who spent his time in Rome, but always remembered his people in the Braes and built their first church in 1829.

James Sharp remained in Scalán to serve as missionary for the Braes and maintain the farm. In 1803 the "tack" was transferred into his name. In 1807 he was given a teaching post in Aquhorties. The tack was transferred to Bishop Cameron and sublet to John Stuart of Balevalair; Miss Helen Cameron (the Bishop's sister) remained in the house until she died in 1832.

The tack then expired in 1823 and the church gave up nearly all its tenancy which was divided into Easter and Wester Scalán and Fuarandearg and redistributed to local people:

1 James Michie; schoolmaster at Achnascraw until
he turned to whisky smuggling;

2 John Lamb; and

3 Widow Gordon.

In 1825 John Lamb took over Widow Gordon's portion. Since Mr Sharp's departure from Scalán, the chapel had never been used as planned, the local people having to travel to Tombae for mass.

When Scalán student Abbe Paul McPherson returned to his birthplace from Rome in 1827, the Duke of Gordon offered him the lease of Faevit and on this land was built the Braes chapel and presbytery in 1829. Three years later he built a school for girls and boys close by. There are still McPhersons alive who are related to the families who lived and farmed at the Clash of Scalán or in Scalán farmtown.

After 1799 the college became a farmhouse and the chapel was converted into accommodation for two families. I was recently told that Sandy Matheson remembers the families so I am assuming it would have been in the late 1920's or 30's.

When the harling was removed from the seminary/farmhouse walls in 2003 two small doors were revealed. These open from Bishop Hay's room into the chapel. It is said that he liked to look into the chapel to see the sanctuary lamp burning at night.

I would like to hear from anyone who has stories of the people who once lived and worked at the Clash of Scalán, Scalán farmtown, or the seminary. I feel that a number of our readers would be interested in life at Scalán and the surrounding area, and over time, with your help, I would like to try to form a picture of how past generations lived and worked.

After the college closed, the land continued to be grazed by sheep belonging to local farmers. They rent the land from the Crown Estates who own Sandy Matheson's cottage and the two large buildings nearby. They do not own Scalan or the ground within the fence. This is owned by the Scalan Association who are responsible for its maintenance.

The township has disappeared except for a ruined croft on the west side of the Crombie bum. It is possible that the farm buildings containing the old water wheels and threshing drums were built from stone once belonging to the old houses in the township.

When you pass through the small entrance gate to the college and look to your left, you will see growing by the chapel wall a tall plant with dark green shiny leaves and yellow flowers. It fights with a very large rambling rose and nettles growing profusely in the shelter of the wall. This plant is Lovage, a member of the Umbelliferae family. It is a useful culinary and medicinal herb going back to the Roman times. Was it once part of a herb garden planted by the Priests, or did it arrive by a seed deposited by birds? The only other place it grows in the area is in the Braes chapel grounds.

Lovage can be used as an antiseptic to cleanse wounds or as a tea to cleanse the kidneys. It can be used a substitute for celery; chopped it adds flavour to stews etc. Boiled alone it is a vegetable in its own right.

"Being drunk it eases the pains of the guts and the swelling of the stomach." (John Gerard)

Close by mint is growing, which leads me to consider a herb garden. An infusion of mint tea can aid digestion, and also relieve tired feet, a stronger infusion can act as an astringent. Sylvia Toovey

Further reading concerning Scalan.

The Forbidden College 1716 to 1799 by Dr John Watts

Published by Tucker Press and obtainable from a good book shop.

Points of Interest

1. Apologies

In the previous newsletter it was stated that Sister Mary McPherson, a Sacred Heart nun had passed away. This was incorrect and I am glad to report that the lady, concerned is alive and well and has reached the grand age of 93 years. Sister McPherson once lived at Mount Royal in the Knockandhu and is related to Abbe Mcpherson.

When sending items to the newsletter it would be a great help to us if you could ensure the facts are correct. Thank you.

2 Altar

Father Eddie Traynor of St. Peters, Buckie, has given an altar to Scalan. It is light oak with four large round feet and stands on a plinth covered in dark red carpet. There is a black cross on the front. The crucifix that hung above the fireplace in the dining room is now hanging on the west wall above the altar. A Jesuit priest from the Czech Republic expressed his appreciation at finding an altar in the chapel.

Thank you Father Eddie for your generous gift.

3. Toilets

The toilets have been re-slatted, so you no longer need Wellingtons and an umbrella. Please note though that the toilets are shut during the winter months because the water has to be drained off due to severe frosts. The seminary itself, however, remains open 52 weeks of the year.

4. Mass in the ruined chapel. 2005

In June, members of the Association met at Scalan for the celebration of Mass before the AGM at Chapeltown. It was a warm perfect day and a decision was quickly taken to celebrate Mass in the old chapel. Chairs appeared from the house, the altar was prepared and Canon Halloran commented on how moving it was to be celebrating

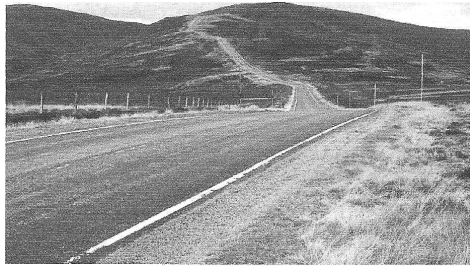
Mass in the actual building used by the seminary in the 1790's.

James Sharp said the last Mass in the chapel before he left for Aquhorthies in September 1808. The next mass held in the ruined chapel in June 2005 was almost 200 years later.

Extract from a piece by Ann Dean

5. Annual General Meeting

It took place after the Mass mentioned above in the Braes hall, Chapeltown of Glenlivet. A fuller AGM report will be produced ahead of next year's meeting as is the custom, but one matter which will be of immediate interest to members is the news that the Crown Estates Commission has come back with a price of £135,000 for its proposal that in addition to passing over the tenancy of Sandy Matheson's house, the Association might appreciate the surrounding 7 acres which includes the building close to Scalan. The amount is well beyond the association. The Crown Estates have a responsibility towards "heritage issues" and there was a feeling that they were trying to get us to do their job and pay them at the same time, especially in regard to many of the other buildings which would be of no use to us. It appears that the Crown Estates Commission has suffered some bad press in recent times and was now under pressure to become a stronger entity, to become profit-making in the market-place. It could hardly do their reputation any good if they were seen to be demanding sums of money from a small heritage association like ours which we could ill afford. The membership voted that we continue negotiations. At the same time we explore the possibility of fundraising and grants.



The pilgrims road to Scalan, at least for some, leads over the Lecht.

6. Annual Scalan Mass, 3rd July 2005

The mass was held, true to tradition, on the first Sunday in July. It was dry but very windy; the wind blew the midges away and anything else that was not firmly anchored.

The piper was Jimmy Stuart whose music could be heard well before the bridge was reached giving encouragement to those who walked.

Mass was celebrated by The Right Reverend Peter Moran, Bishop of Aberdeen, assisted by Rev. Vincent McQuaid, deacon, Canon Brian Halloran (Association President), Monsignor John McIntyre, St Bridget's Baillieston, Fr Ivan Boyle, RAF Chaplain Kinloss, Fr Jim Thomson, St Joseph's, Stepps, Fr Michael Briody, St Michael's, Moodiesburn, and Fr Joseph Toal, from the Royal Scots College, Salamanca who preached the homily.

Fr Toal encouraged us to believe that, just as young men and boys found the impetus to go to Scalan in the 18th century to prepare for priesthood, new vocations would come to the church in Scotland to face the challenges in the 21st century. Despite, and possibly because of the problems of our times, people would come forward to help our society find its way out of the spiritual and moral deserts back to realising the irreplaceable position of God in our lives.

Later in the mass presentations mentioned earlier were made to Alasdair Roberts and Ann Dean.

The choir and musicians came from Buckie and coped well with the wind.

Thank you to those who attended the mass; about 220 men, women, children, and even a couple of well behaved dogs.



7 Addresses.

In updating the mailing list I have come across a number which are incomplete; please can you ensure that your details are correct and amend where necessary when sending your money to Jane.

8 Membership

If you would like to become a member of the Scalan association please make out a cheque, money order or banker's order for £10.00 and send it to:

Mrs Jane McEwan,
Ogilvie cottage,
Gallowhill,
Glenlivet, AB379DL.



I lift up my eyes to the mountains;

From where shall come my help?

My help shall come from the Lord

Who made heaven and earth.

Psalm 120