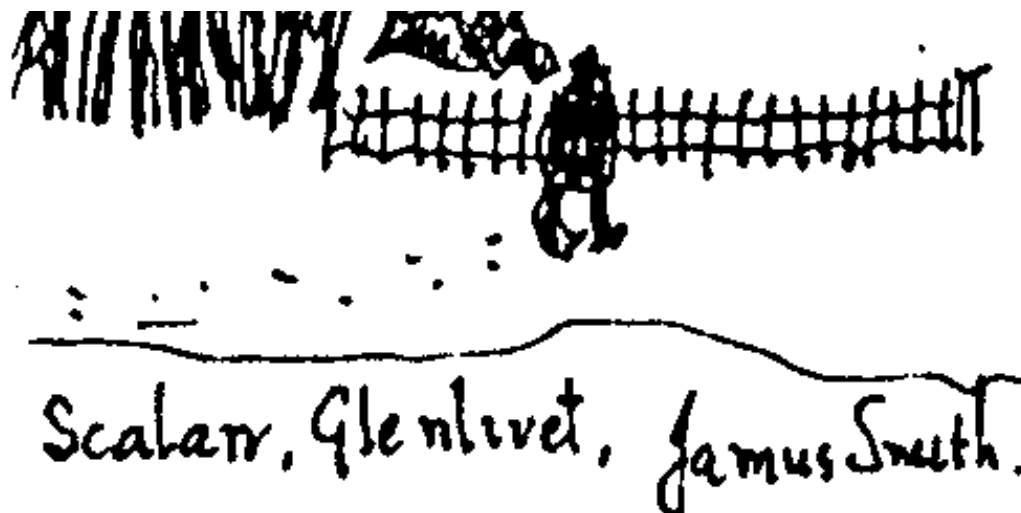


[Home Page](#)

The Scalan News

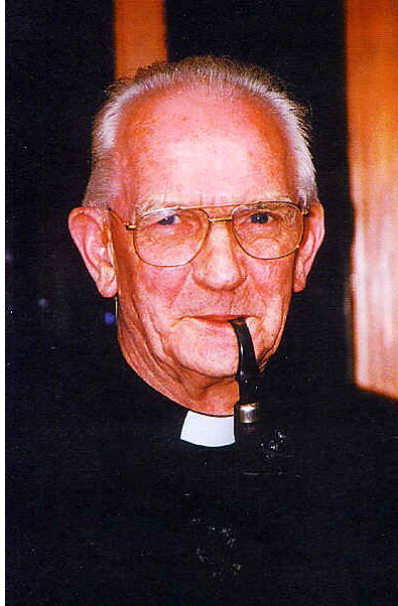
Issue No. 25, November 2002





With the loss of our President following upon the death of Bill Grant, it is good to be able to report that the Committee of the Scalan Association has been strengthened. There is no space, nor would it be appropriate for work 'in progress' (towards 20 March), to report on what was decided at Ogilvie Cottage on 10 October. Since almost every member who could have attended did so, however, members might like to know who visited Bill and Jane McEwan on the day. Dr David McNamee and Mrs Aileen Toft-McNamee came up from Elgin: close to the beginning of Scalan News David wrote 'The Chisholm Trail' in three parts; Aileen has come to Jane's aid with secretarial duties. Father Jim Thomson of Banchory is also fairly new to the committee, while Anne Baxter of Aquhorthies has been a great supporter of the prior seminary of Scalan over the last twelve years. Gordon McGillivray farms at Achnascraw and is a local voice in the spirit of Bill Grant. Your editor, who attends from the west coast when he can, tendered an apology.

Our new President Father Brian Halloran, chosen in June, agreed to introduce himself here with a few words. As chaplain to Catholic students at the University of St Andrews and author of a recent scholarly book on the Scots College in Paris, where some students went after Scalan, he is well suited to the responsibility.



We were all deeply saddened by the death of Monsignor Copland on 6th February 2002. We know how much Scalan meant to him; as he said at one meeting, 'June It's in my bones.' His zeal and indefatigable work has greatly improved the Scalan building and made it more attractive to pilgrims. All will be pleased to know that a commemorative plaque to Monsignor Copland has been fitted close to one of the trees in the grounds.

I feel highly honoured to be asked to succeed Monsignor as President, and trust that together we will be able to carry on the good work. With the hospitality of Mr and Mrs McEwan we have had our first committee meeting in their delightful cottage. Repairs mentioned at the AGM have almost been completed. We agreed to investigate further the likely access to Bishop Hay's room. Looking ahead, we hope in the very near future to undertake some sensitive exploration of the floor of the external chapel with a view to levelling it. We hope too that we might be able to attract young men to spend some time at Scalan to encourage vocations. All your ideas will be most welcome so that together we can face the challenges and continue the great adventure.

The Annual Scalan Mass

Fr Michael Briody

The Annual Mass took place on Sunday 7 July 2002 at 4 p.m. in the open air at 'The Scalan'. Over 200 people came, some from great distances, and the weather was kind. The principal celebrant of the Mass was the new Archbishop of Glasgow, the Most Rev. Mario Conti, who as Bishop of Aberdeen was a consistent faithful supporter of this event.

He was assisted by two permanent deacons of the Aberdeen Diocese, the Revs. Vincent McQuaid and Mark Impson. Concelebrating the Mass were Mgr Matthias Nketsiah, vicar

general of a diocese in Ghana, Mgr Eddie Traynor (Buckie), Mgr John McIntyre (Baillieston), Canon Angus John MacQueen (Barra), and Frs Donald Mackay (Oban), Eddie McGhee (Saltcoats), Joseph Toal ([Scots College, Salamanca](#)), Michael Briody (Moodiesburn), Francis Bennett SJ (Nairn), Jim Thomson (Banchory) and John Kelly (St James, Coatbridge).

Fr Kelly provided the homily in which he spoke of our lives as a Pilgrimage of Faith which necessarily will involve many difficulties for us, as it did for the occupants of Scaln. Our difficulties are simply different from theirs. We can learn from their tenacity, courage and faith to face up to the difficulty of being a Christian in our times. Certainly we must not stop at mere admiration or wallow in nostalgia, but as Pope John Paul told us at Bellahouston:

‘You originate in a glorious past, but you do not live in the past. You belong to the present and your generation must not be content simply to rest on the laurels won by your grandparents and great-grandparents. You must give your response to Christ’s call. . . But we find it harder to follow Christ today than appears to have been the case before. Witnessing to him in modern life means a daily contest, not so quickly and decisively resolved as for the martyrs of the past.’

Readers Write

Isobel Grant’s reference to Italian prisoners-of-war revived boyhood memories. I clearly remember the Italians when we spent summer holidays in our grand-mother’s cottage in the Braes of Glenlivet. My brothers and I were sometimes allowed up to Tom a Voan wood which the P.O.W.s were felling, and I can still smell, and taste, the coffee they brewed and the rabbits they stewed on their camp fires. They wore dark brown tunics and trousers of a heavy material with matching beret. My father, having studied in Rome for several years, spoke passable Italian and a number of them often came across to chat with him. They would accept a cup of tea but never anything to eat, not even a home-made pancake: regulations, perhaps. They were obviously trusted non-Fascists, and permitted a reasonable amount of freedom. I was childishly ignorant of their romantic interest in the local girls. I suspect that it was Father, later Mgr, Murdoch, Father Shaw’s successor who welcomed them to the Braes with potatoes. Some German prisoners also worked in the Braes. One certainly lived at Easterton and another, I think, at Lettoch.

John S. Gallacher, Motherwell.



*Father Murdoch succeeded Fr Shaw at Chapelton in 1938 (and was followed by Fr MacWilliam in 1945) so there is no doubt about it. As usual, this error in **Tales of the Braes of Glenlivet** comes from your editor (and 'compiler' of the book) rather than the main author Isobel Grant. The book has sold out but is available in a new edition at the old price of £6.99. Ask your bookshop to order it in time for Christmas. In the shorthand of Birlinn, the publisher in Edinburgh, it is 'illus throughout' by Ann Dean whose drawings also brighten these pages.*

The article about the lock of Bonnie Prince Charlie's hair (which came to Fr Copland from Hilda Bruce's family while he was a curate at St Peter's) caught my attention. My mother was a Bruce, the youngest of a family of ten. Her parents are buried, along with other members of the family, in the Spital graveyard next to the burial chamber of Sir Michael Bruce of Stenhouse, a well known figure in Aberdeen. I found this beautiful inscription nearby for a boy who died at six years of age:

Plant of my pleasure thou art fled,
 Transported to a nobler soil,
 No more to glad thy mother's heart,
 No more thy mother's grief beguile.
 Submission bids me cease to mourn

And yield thee up a sacrifice,

That He who claims thee for His own

May plant my rose in Paradise.

I am not familiar with Glenlivet and its inhabitants but really enjoyed the article on the Keenan family.

Margaret Cowie, Aberdeen.

At the Golden Jubilee of Aberdeen's 'Priest' Gordon in 1845, 'the whole company reassembled at the School Establishment, Constitution Street, where they were joined by the ladies conducted by Lady Bruce of Scotstoun and Stinhouse.' Scotstoun is in Aberdeen's Bridge of Don district.

The grave of James Keenan is at St Machar's Cathedral, Old Aberdeen. The stone is on the right hand side of one standing on the paved apron at the main door. The inscription reads: 'In memory of James Keenan died 15th Nov-ember 1932 aged 88 years. His wife Mary Martin died 20th March 1906 aged 54 years. His son Stephen died in infancy. His son Patrick died at Edin-burgh 31st August 1934 in the 55th year of his age and 32nd of his priest-hood. RIP.' You ask what a gilder did when not decorating churches? I recall seeing an advertise-ment by William Young (who was latterly an antique dealer with a shop in Belmont Street) when he set up in business for himself as a 'gilder and picture-framer'. The picture frames, mirrors, etc., would have been gilded.

Malachi Mulligan, Aberdeen.

The 'Scots Colleges in Catholic Europe' exhibition [*Edinburgh City Art Centre, behind Waverley Station*] is good. It is interesting to note that the three JK paintings of Scalan, Aquhorthies and Blairs are all attributed to James Keenan 184?-1932. In light of the gravestone which Mallachi Mulligan drew to my attention, sending a photograph, James Keenan was probably born in 1844.

Ann Dean, Inch.

Readers with the St John Ogilvie prayer card to hand will readily associate one piece of exhibition art with our late president. Mgr Copland was devoted to the priest who was hanged at Glasgow Green in 1615, having begun his life at Keith.



I have only recently passed on the May issue to the Abbey library, having spent three months in another monastery. As for the priests who were poisoned while dining at Dingwall, I don't have the missing name but it could be found easily enough. All the dead priests are buried in a row together at Eskadale. Also the event of 22 July 1856 was national news at the time – from *The Times* 'down' – so presumably any good library would give the answer. Canon Bernard MacDonald (Fochabers) tells the story of how he borrowed the set of crockery the priests dined on, when he was parish priest at Dingwall, and used it to entertain the Bishop – Hitchcock sense of humour! I think he got the plates etc. from the Provost.

Fr Martin, OSB, Pluscarden.

*It came as a shock to read in **Open House**, the 'Scottish religious magazine of comment,*

opinion and reflection from within the Catholic tradition', that the wife of the editor Ian Willock had died. It turned out that Elizabeth had slipped away quickly after working in her garden in late July. She was with Ian at the AGM in June (not for the first time) and in cheerful good form. A letter of sympathy conveyed an 'impression of the two of you companionably seeking out the kind of remote chapel-sites which I, and I imagine most members of the Scalan Association, find evocative.' Ian replied:

Yes, she also acquired and then shared my interest in 'remote chapel-sites'. It was actually she who spotted Torgyle. [ScN November 2001] I had walked on ahead and she followed slowly in the car. Yet I passed it and she spotted it. I suppose I expected something a little more churchy in appearance. We also explored Glengairn with the help of your articles. [*Deeside Field*, 1987, *Northern Scotland*, 1990, if anyone wants to do likewise.]

We got from Mgr Eddie Traynor the key of the mausoleum at St Ninian's, Enzie, and I reminisced on the priests buried there I had known. We also admired a carving by Hew Lorimer, whose work was another of our interests, on the façade of a family mausoleum. I wish we had asked for the keys of Preshome and Tynet, for although I had been in both many years ago Elizabeth only saw them from outside. She was steeped in Catholic matters, while remaining nominally an Anglican.

A late memory I have is of her politely declining the offer of a lift with Archbishop Conti from the Eskmulloch farm corner to Scalan because she preferred to arrive as a pilgrim – perhaps also out of concern what effect the track might have on our new car!

Ian Willock, Dundee.

The following extracts are from an account compiled by a member of Canon Peter Moran's congregation at Inverurie. At £3.50 for 115 pages, many illustrated, Mrs Madill gives value for money. Since church-building features elsewhere in this issue it seemed appropriate to quote the Rev. Charles Tochetti (born Aberdeen 1822) writing to Bishop James Kyle who designed the church. The benefactor was Col. Charles Leslie, 26th Baron of Balquhain, who had been baptised by Bishop Hay. The bishop was buried among barons on the Leslie estate of Fetternear, having died nearby at the Aquhorthies seminary which replaced Scalan.

Inverurie Catholic Church

150th Anniversary



Betty Madill

12th June 1851.

My Lord,

I am glad to announce to you that a Site for the Inverury Chapel is no more a problematical question, as these three feus have been sold to us at the expected price of £3. 10/- and that without any opposition. The Colonel is expected sooner than was at first anticipated and would feel much disappointed if at his return the building was not going on. . .

28th August 1851

I have just received George Kemp's offer and specifications for the Inverury Chapel. . . His offer includes the mason's work for the tower. He assures me he cannot do it for less as he has to bring the Stones from the other side of the Tyrebaggarhill. . .

15th September 1851

I now send you a list of the workmen who have given me some estimates for the building and finishing of the Chapel. [*Names and sums follow for Mason, Carpenter, Joiner, Glazier, Slater and Plaster Work.*] . . . I am told that this man from Old Rain is indeed cheaper than the others but I am also informed by good and disinterested judges that very often his work does not give satisfaction. . . My reasons for beginning without any lapse of time is that I really detest being obliged to go to that Fetternear house and also because it would be quite impossible for the Priest of this Mission hereafter to pay £3. 10/- as Feu Duty and £5 as rent for his house and only receiving from the Colonel £40; for this is all I receive from him now. . . Kind Mr and Mrs Gordon came down to Inverury this morning to take me to Wardhouse but . . . I am very anxious about the Chapel.

Col. Leslie was generous towards Catholic church-building and in 1859 paid for Our Lady of the Garioch and St John's on the estate, including a fee to the architect George Goldie – see ScN 8. There was also a domestic chapel at Fetternear. By 19th February, four months on, Mr Tochetti's anxiety had shifted to the last things:

With the exception perhaps of the Slater, a lazy fellow who has yet more than half the Chapel to do, the workmen are giving great satisfaction. The slate is on the whole of the house, the Carpenter is also ready for the Plasterers in the Chapel. . . I wish very much your Lordship would apply to Mr Reid in Elgin for the Plans of the pulpit which he promises will be given with the Mouldings which he intended as Mr Allan requires immediately and I would like to have a neat Pulpit.

Should there not be a door from the Sanctuary to the staircase leading to the Pulpit? The specifications do not speak of such a thing. However it is quite evident there should be one, as the opening is opposite to the Door on the side leading from the vestry to the Altar.

Fully slated, with plaster dry and paint applied, Inverurie's Catholic Church was opened on 1 August 1852.



Doors Open Day, Moray 2002

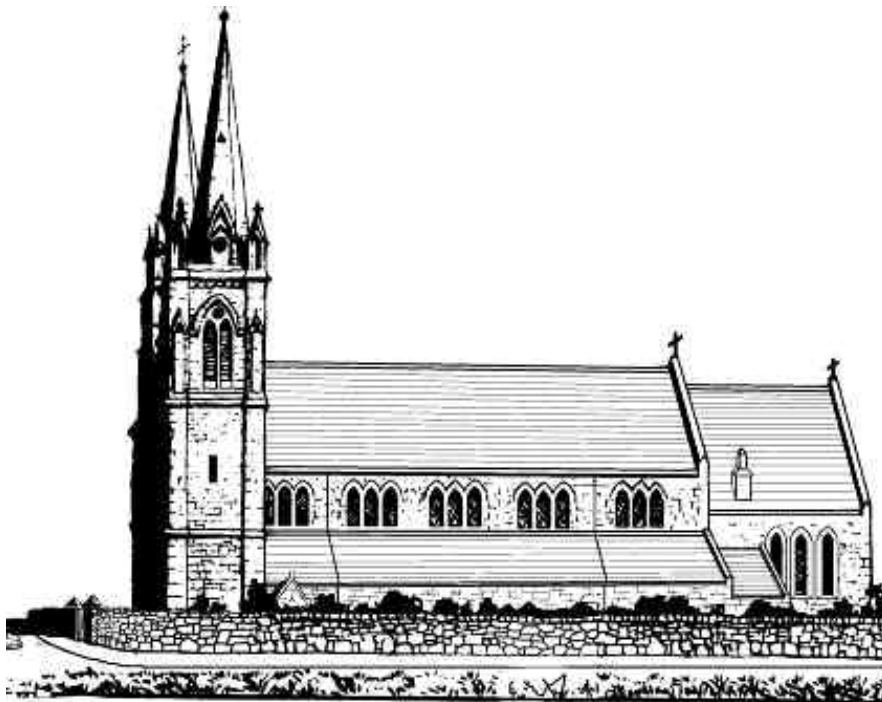
Elizabeth Beaton

Doors Open Day is a Council of Europe initiative enabling people to see inside buildings not normally open to the public, in Scotland taking place in September. Moray DOD is run by the Moray Society. It requires nearly a year to plan and thirty kind volunteers on the day itself, besides the even kinder folk who open their respective doors. This year we concentrated on the coastal area between Fochabers and Cullen, taking in a varied series of buildings. There was a striking contrast between Gordon Castle and a sea-town cottage. The Catholic churches were Tynet (1755), Preshome (1788), Fochabers (1826-28) and Buckie (1850-57).

Historically and architecturally these churches span an interesting period. Tynet is the first surviving Catholic chapel for public worship (as opposed to a private domestic chapel) in Scotland and probably the UK. It was opened long before Catholics legally had the right to worship in public, incorporating a single-storey clay-walled cottage. Though lengthened, Tynet continues to blend into the domestic landscape without attracting attention.

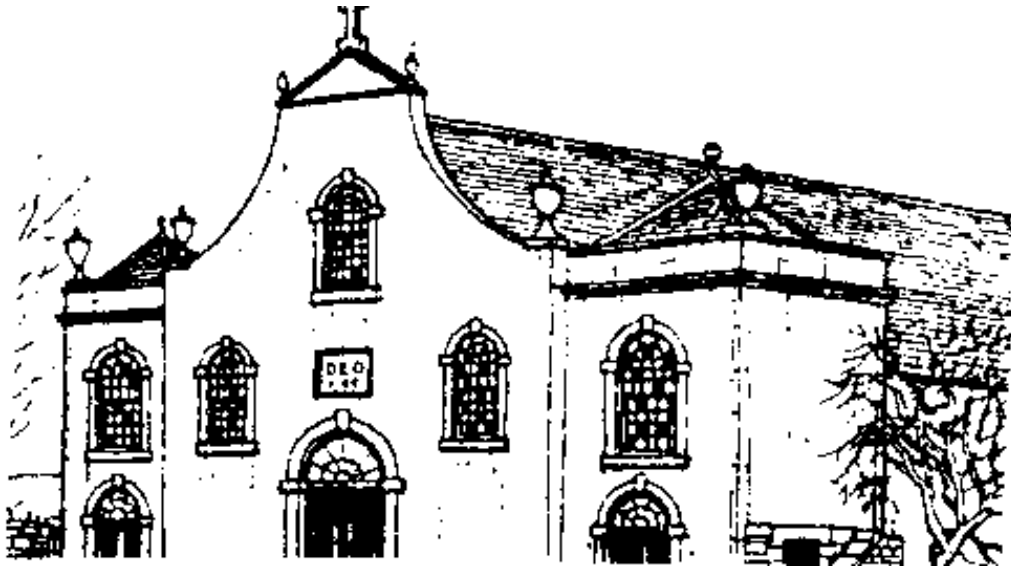
On the other hand, Preshome was the first Catholic chapel built in Scotland to proclaim its identity architecturally as a place for worship, standing proud in its Banffshire landscape, although the first Scottish Catholic Relief Act of 1793 came five years after Preshome was completed. Unusually Baroque in design, its curved-gable frontage is flanked by stair towers crowned by classical urns.

Catholics were building their own churches openly by the time St Mary's Fochabers was built to a Gothic design by James Gillespie Graham of Edinburgh, who was also responsible for the equally Gothic cathedrals of St Mary's in Edinburgh and St Andrew's in Glasgow – besides Dr Gray's Hospital in Elgin. Lastly there is St Peter's Buckie, affectionately dubbed the 'Buckie Cathedral', with its twin spires punctuating the skyline and visible over a wide area.



I enjoyed welcoming visitors at Preshome, beautiful inside as well as out and, though now

little used, in good order after a major restoration in 1990. The warm gold, white and rose pink stencil-decorated chancel, with marble altar and communion rail, glowed in the warm September sunshine. Over a hundred came and went, some of them locals who were glad to re-visit (whether Catholic or not), others from further afield. All appreciated the chance to see this remarkable church originally built for a congregation of six hundred. All sensed its beauty and felt the continuing spiritual atmosphere encapsulated by datestone above the door simply inscribed DEO 1788.



*Illustrations are by Peter Anson, the first taken from the cover of his booklet of about 1950 'The Banffshire Bethlehem': St Ninian's, Tynet, Scotland's Oldest Post-Reformation Church. Of course there was no cathedral until the Aberdeen Diocese was created (along with the other Scottish dioceses) at the restoration of the Episcopal Hierarchy in 1878. Aberdeen's Huntly Street Cathedral was merely a large church (still awaiting its single spire) when opened in 1860. Bishop James Kyle resisted Vatican pressure to move to the city and stayed on at Preshome near the hamlet of Clochan. In these circumstances Kyle was able to claim high status for the new town church nearby, as the **Banffshire Journal** of 7 August 1857 reported: 'The new Catholic Cathedral at Buckie was opened on Sabbath week by the Right Rev. Bishop Kyle, assisted by the Rev. William Clapperton who is to be the first missionary therein.' Dean Clapperton, who would now have been regarded as the Bishop's Cathedral Administrator, was in charge at Buckie until his death in 1905.*

*No illustration of the Fochabers church is available. The following account comes from **Churches and Places of Catholic Interest in Moray**.*

St Mary's, Fochabers

Canon Robert A. McDonald

Gordon Castle was the mainstay of the old faith in Banffshire. A chaplain was nearly always in residence and the castle open for meetings of the clergy. In 1728, however, after the death of Alexander the second Duke the Duchess brought up the children in her own Protestant religion. For that reason there is no record of a Mass-centre in Fochabers, but after the rebuilding of the town at the end of the eighteenth century a church became necessary. It owes its foundation to the Rev. George Mathison, then missionary at Tynet. It was built in 1826, three years before the final Act of Catholic Emancipation in Britain and Ireland. Like so many churches of the period which followed, it consists of a hall-like interior lit by pointed windows with a Gothic façade. The Sanctuary is a later addition.

Alexander Geddes

Earlier this year a conference was held in Aberdeen University on the Rev. Alexander Geddes (1732-1802), 'Pioneer Biblical Critic, Poet, Political Radical'. In a December 1993 issue of this magazine use was made of a Biblical pastiche by Geddes, 'The Book of Zaknim' for the sake of its identification of an upper room at Scalan as 'The Hole of the Snorers'. Four years later a rather emaciated portrait of Geddes in his later years served to illustrate an article on 'Mortlach, Robieston and Scalan'. The healthier image of Geddes presented to the conference is reproduced here, linked with the two colleges of his youth: Scalan and the Scots College Paris.



*It seemed worth reproducing part of 'Catholics of North East Scotland' from a 1984 **Leopard Magazine**.*

Another impression of Glenlivet comes to us through the mists of time, from a student of the Scalan seminary who asked a classmate, as he left on a trip to the Moray coast: 'Pray be so kind as to make inquiries after the health of the Sun.' This was the young Alexander Geddes, brought up on the Authorised Version and later, as a very ecumenical Catholic clergyman, a Bible scholar of European fame. He was a fine poet too, in English and Scots, and Burns himself praised this lament for the last of the Jacobite Gordons:

Oh! Send my Lewie Gordon hame,

And the lad I daurna name:

Although his back be at the wa',

Here's to him that's far awa'.

Very different from the strict Lachlan McIntosh [*who died in 1842 having served Glengairn for 64 years*] Alexander Geddes was nevertheless a familiar type of Scottish priest. He returned from the Scots College Paris to his beloved Braes of Enzie in 1769. These were difficult times for Catholics even here, and the chapel he rebuilt at Tynet, still almost invisible from the main road, resembles the barns which usually served as mass 'stations'. But among local people the feeling was for religious toleration, and Mr Geddes could exchange a joke with his Protestant neighbours. One farmer, learning that his pony had died asked if it had received extreme unction: 'No,' the priest replied. 'He turned Protestant before he died and I buried him like a beast.'

Parish records show that mixed marriage was very common in the Enzie, and indeed the North-East has never known anything like the Orange and Green bigotry of the South-West. Alexander Geddes went too far (for his times) and attended Presbyterian services at Cullen. This led to a row with the bishop and he soon left for England. On his tombstone in London are these words:

Christian is my name and Catholic my surname.

I grant that you are Christian as well as I.

I embrace you as a fellow disciple in Jesus,

And if you are not a disciple of Jesus,
Still I would embrace you as my fellow man.
They belong not just to a gifted individual but to a whole tradition.

Tomnavoulin Glenlivet

Hetty Milne

Subtitled 'A Collection of Poems by Local Writers', this lively booklet published earlier in the year at Elgin for £4.95 is much more. Mrs Hetty Milne the compiler (flooded to shoulder height in her home near the River Lossie when she came to the phone) describes the village across the Livet from Tombae, where neighbours lived in perfect harmony although they worshipped separately and sent their children to different schools.

The One Roomed School which stands on the green hillock of Tamo'ol was opened in 1862 when Mr Murdoch Beaton was in charge. It was the principal school in Glenlivet until 1877 when the new school at Croftness took its place. . . After years of falling numbers, Tomnavoulin School was finally closed in 1958.

The Catholic School at Tombae also had a large number of pupils who walked through the village. A path led them past the Milton Cottages and the wool mill, over a wooden bridge which spanned the Livet, then along a cinder track which brought them to the road-side near the Chapel of Tombae. Knee high grass now covers the track and the school is closed. A new iron bridge, probably made when the Mill became a Visitor's Centre on the Whisky Trail, now crosses the water where the Allt-na-Coire joins the Livet at Pot o' the Mill. This was always a favourite spot for the young people of Tomnavoulin where they went swimming together in the long summer evenings.

The Rev. R. H. Calder combated depopulation with a legacy for the youngest local bride married at Achbreck Church every year. He is one of the poets, as too is Alexander Grant of his congregation who was decorated for bravery on the Somme in 1916. Clearly the Old College was held in affection by former pupils of both schools.

The College o' Scalan

Twa hunner years hae come and gane
Since in this quate sequestered neuk
The students toiled frae nicht till dark
An' pondered ower the Sacred Beuk.
Frae far Loch Morar cam' the seed –
The 'Fifteen there had spoiled the ploy.
A saintly man fresh courage took
An' in this Glen found peace and joy.
The wark took shape, nae grandeur socht.
A simple, hamely but an' ben
Gya shelter as they toiled and vrocht.
The loons grew up tae be gran' men.
Nae glorious too'ers, nae soarin' spires,
Nae pomp nor circumstance o' pride,
But juist roch divots, trees an' stanes,
A canty hoose whaurin tae bide.
But nae for lang; the sodgers cam'
And brunt it a', but man nor fire
Can ne'er prevail ower tasks like these
Which Heaven's ain promises inspire.
It rose again, hard toil an' tyauve
Reared the stane biggin' ayont the burn.
The fields were tilled, the place made snod,
The fortunes tide had ta'en the turn.
For mony a day it flourished there,

Gran' work was dune an great names made.
Baith far an' near they made their mark,
Wha learned here in Ladder's shade.
Disciples o' the perfect man,
They little socht but muckle gied,
From day to day their only aim
Tae help their neebor in his need.
Cam' time they flitted ower the hill
Tae Blairs in Deeside's kindly clime,
But Scalan's aye a sacred spot
Tae a' wha think on auld lang syne.
The College stan's; it's silent noo;
Nae mair it hums wi' busy life.
The Bishop's trees are aye as green,
The hills wi' beauty aye as rife.
The road's gye roch, but gin ye hae
An 'oor or twa laid by ye spare,
Seek Scalan oot, it's worth yer while
Tae think on them that laboured there.

Alexander Grant MBE, MM (1893-1975)

The next item follows on naturally from what has been written and discovered about James Keenan. Its author found us through Mike Morrison's Scalan Trail web site.

John Russell (1820-93):

Church Painter

James Russell

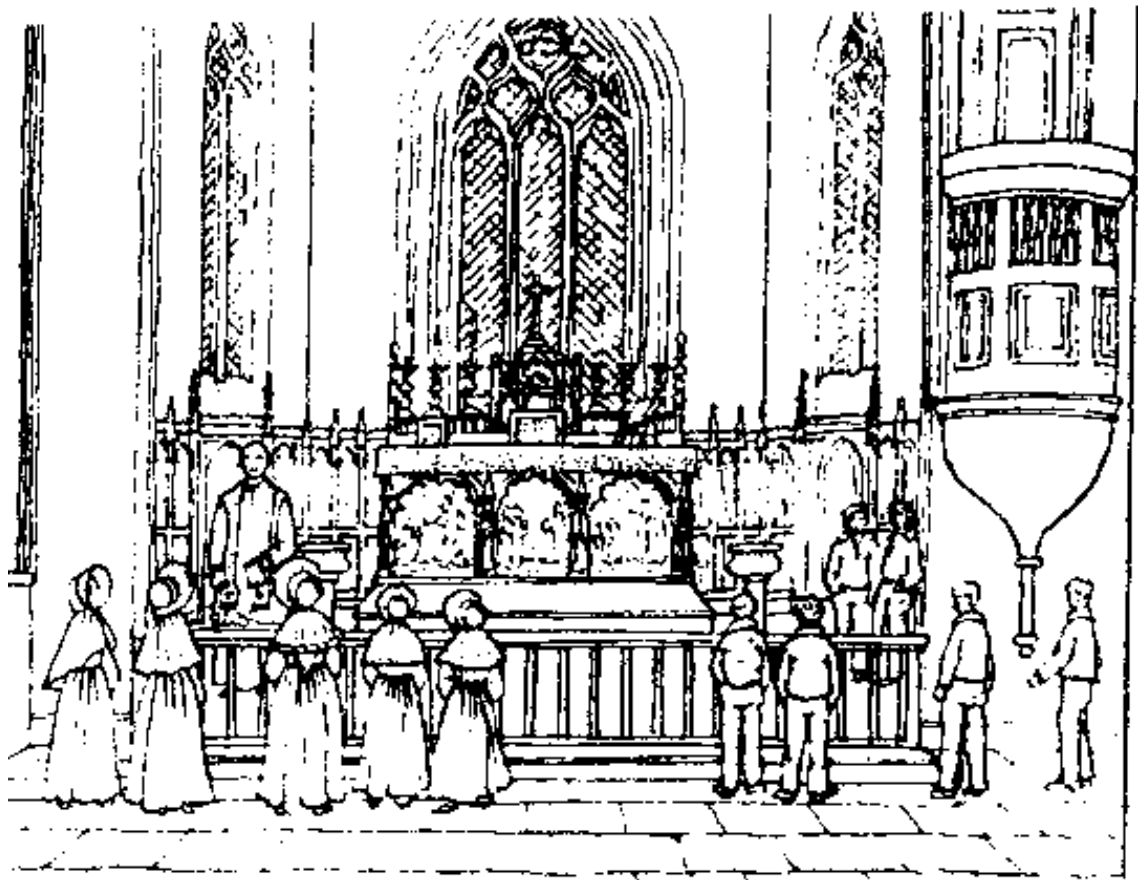
My great-grandfather John Russell grew up in Aberdeen to become a decorator of Catholic churches. He was the son of Joseph Russell, Confectioner, and of Jean Fraser who was born and baptised at Strichen in the 'double house' - two rooms of which served as a chapel. There is no trace of it today. Her sister Margaret, who became a nun at Princethorpe School, wrote an account of worship at Strichen before the erection of another chapel (no longer used) outside the village.

She claimed that John was descended from Lord Lovat of the 'Forty-five and his second wife Primrose Campbell, although another line of descent has been suggested through the Frasers of Lonmay in Buchan. He was certainly the grandson of Aberdeen confectioner William Russell, and his uncle was the sculptor George Russell. John's father died when he was a year old, and the widow turned her hand to dressmaking at 2 Chapel Court. John had two older sisters both of whom made their homes in the neighbourhood: Isabella married Sandy Gordon, Quilldraper of Justice Lane, while Helen married James Coutts, Surgeon, and also lived near the chapel on Castle Brae. The 1841 census shows John Russell as a painter in Justice Street, so they were – in every sense - a close family.

The Artist

It is a mystery where John Russell trained as an artist, although he later said that an assistant had 'served his time in the same shop as myself.' We know from letters to Bishop Kyle and from the Aberdeen Directory that he began as a house painter, but by his early twenties Russell was working as an artist who also carved in wood and worked in lithograph. Perhaps there was some help to rise in the world from his fourth cousins the Gordons of Wardhouse.

The earliest known painting, in oils, is dated 1841 and signed 'J. Russell': his later work was always signed 'John Russell' (not 'J. B. Russell', as some suggest; that was his son). This shows the Rev. Charles Gordon, otherwise 'Priest' Gordon, catechising children in St Peter's, Chapel Court. *[The painting, which still hangs there, has been reproduced in Constance Davidson's **Priest Gordon**. Peter Anson's line drawing was used for the cover of his **Underground Catholicism**.]*



John Russell moved about a lot on painting contracts – astride a big white horse, according to Jeannie his youngest daughter. At various times he worked at Aberdeen, Glasgow, Edinburgh, Inverness, Port Glasgow, Buckie and Fochabers. Russell wrote regularly to Bishop Kyle between 1847 and 1856. Subjects covered included his mother's state of health; the financial difficulties of an artist waiting to be paid; his first marriage to Margaret Bennet; and the children, John and Charles, who became the responsibility of his mother when their mother died.

In the letters he specifically mentions painting at Blairs, Preshome, Huntly, Inverness, Buckie and Dumbarton; also lithograph work at Arradoul House near Buckie - engraving on stone and printing from it on to paper. As Russell was a house painter too, it is not clear what he was doing in the various churches. At one point he writes to Kyle from Dumbarton, 'It would be well to send the size of rooms to be papered and their uses etc. I would get paper here for little more than half the price you pay in the North.' We can be certain that he was responsible for art work in what became the Cathedral, and reasonably sure that he made a similar contribution at Buckie. Russell gave Kyle details of figures he painted in the Inverness chapel: St Margaret, St Andrew, the Resurrection, Jesus falling under the Cross, the Agony in the Garden, the Last Supper, the Nativity, Baptism in the Jordan, and the Epiphany.

Family Matters

Shortly after writing this letter Russell asked the Bishop to officiate at his marriage to Margaret Bennet, a farmer's daughter at Mains of Buckie. Banns were called at Inverness and Rathven, and the marriage took place in the bride's home on 31st January 1850 before Bishop Kyle. 'Poor Maggie' died of consumption (or TB) in 1855. John and Charles now went to live with their grandmother in Aberdeen. On 12th August 1861 John Russell married Isabella Craigen in the newly completed church of St Mary in Huntly Street. The priest was John Sutherland. There were to be six children of this marriage, and three of them – in addition to John of the first marriage - followed their father as artists: Charles, Isabella (Dhuie) and James – my grandfather.

When his second wife Isabella died in an Edinburgh smallpox epidemic, John Russell took the children to an island in the Forth to escape the plague. Some time after this he received a lucrative contract to make wooden carvings of – and then paint – fish which had been caught in the Spey. The family moved to Spey Cottage, Fochabers, and the work was done in a studio at 16 West Street. Assisted by three of his offspring, Russell produced a large number of painted fish, although many were destroyed during a renovation of Gordon Castle.

A locally produced book speaks of 'the great John Russell whose salmon paintings now fetch many thousands of pounds at auction.' Baxter's of Fochabers is a good source for his paintings.

'Assumption of the Virgin'

From letters to Bishop Kyle it appears that Russell carried out much work for him at Blairs College and had to transport scaffolding out from Aberdeen. I went there in May 2002, and David Taylor gave a marvellous tour round 500 years of history. Looking for paintings, I came up with a start in front of one which hangs at the end of the corridor outside the college chapel. It was a 19th century painting based on Titian's 'Assumption of the Virgin', and I immediately felt it to be the work of John Russell.

Apart from feelings there are reasons for thinking this, and that he also carved the elaborate frame. His 'Aesop's Fables' in the oak-panelled walls of Haddo House may serve as a comparison. The Assumption of the Virgin was his favourite theme as a mature presenter of religious subjects and he was responsible for the main feature in the Cathedral of St Mary of the Assumption, Huntly Street: '[The wall-painting] which rises over the High Altar – the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin – covers a space of 50 feet by 15, and was executed by a talented member of the congregation, Mr John Russell.' This soaring altar-piece gave way to Dean Stopani's rose window.

Last Days

In the 1861 census John Russell was described as a widower (40) and artist living at 12 Diamond Street behind St Mary's with his mother and two sons. He died at Fochabers of an

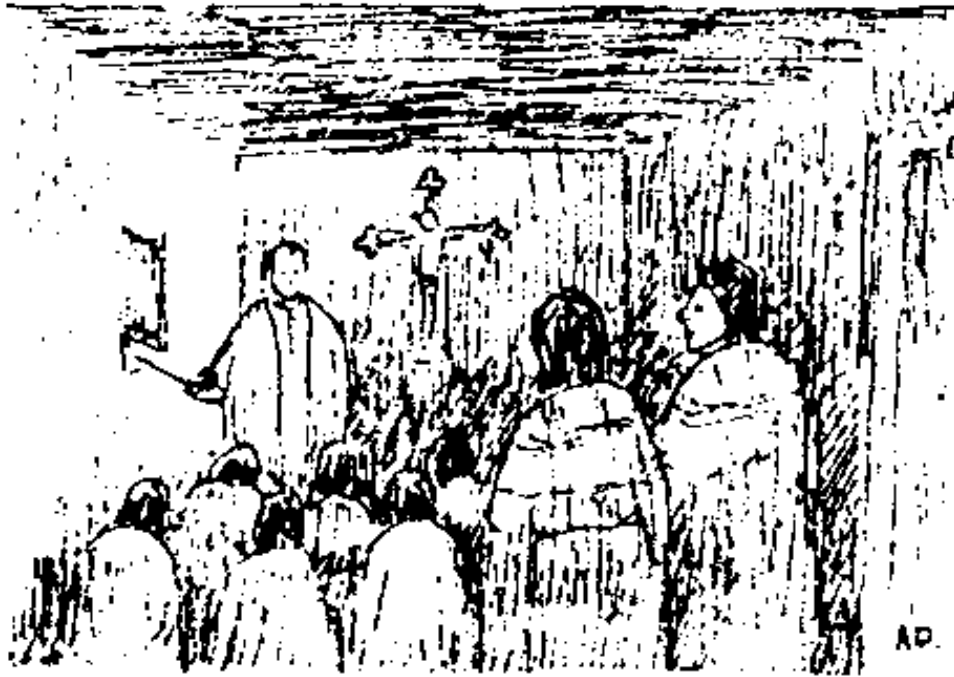
ulcer on 4th May 1893. Throughout his working life John Russell had financial problems, confounded by large outlays for contracts and having to wait for bills to be paid. His debts were finally painted away by members of the family.

*The following extract is from **Hugh MacDonald: Highlander, Jacobite and Bishop** by John Watts, just published by John Donald/Birlinn at £14.99. The book is already being bought - and borrowed! - in the district of Hugh MacDonald's birth. On 'Eilean Bàn, Lord Lovat and Prince Charlie' in the last issue, Dr Watts makes a good case for the library of 'two hundred books in Scots, English, French, Greek and Latin', as reported by the French lieutenant, being at Guidale in Arisaig (where the seminary then was) rather than the Bishop's house on the island. Ann Dean's illustrations have already been used in December 1996 for an extract from the author's historical novel **A Cairn of Small Stones**.*

Seminary on Eilean Bàn

John Watts

The dense, barely penetrable growth of timber that covers Eilean Bàn today is the result of planting in the nineteenth century. In 1714 the island was largely bare of trees, and used for grazing. The house they were to live in had been Mr Cahassy's [*an Irish priest*] until his death ten years before, and had been occupied only occasionally since then. It must have been a building of one or two rooms, built of turf upon a course of stones, with a roof of turf overlay and heather thatch, much like those at Meoble. Remains of the course of stones, as well as a garden wall of earth and stones, may still be traced today among the membresia, moss and self-seeded birch that cover this corner of the island.



In time seven students were enrolled, and the community soon outgrew the house. They saved space wherever they could – clearing the beds away during the day to create their classroom, for instance, but given the master's need for privacy, and the routines of cooking, dining, prayer and religious services, they found a house of three rooms their very minimum requirement. So there must have been some early building.

The Master

George Innes was thirty-one, and had spent his whole adult life in the urbane, intellectual life of the Scots College Paris. He was a devout young priest and a scholar. But he was useless with his hands, too otherworldly to deal in practical affairs, so inept in money matters that he could not be trusted to look after them alone, and inclined to be easily rattled. By no means the ideal man, in short, to build and take sole charge of an enterprise in which he must be master, spiritual director, house-keeper, and guardian of the purse. On the other hand it would have been hard to find one more apt for giving boys leadership in the two most important aspects of their training – piety and learning. Thankfully also, the all too common problem for incomers, the upsetting effect of the West Highland climate on their health, seems not to have touched him, and he was able to settle well and quickly to his task.

The Curriculum

The bishops' original intention was for the seminary to prepare some of the boys for the Scots colleges, and to give others their entire training up to ordination. Apart from the two oldest none had more than a rudimentary education before they arrived. They would therefore have started at or near the beginning of a Latin course planned to last five years, similar to that taught in all grammar schools in Scotland at this time, but with certain additions – Scripture, spiritual writings, lives of the saints – appropriate to their calling. The intention was that those transferring to the colleges would do so at the end of this course, while those staying on would progress to a further five years of philosophy and theology similar to that taught in the colleges. But events would overtake these plans, and during Eilean Bàn's brief existence most of the boys never got beyond the first half of the Latin course.

Paris must have provided the blueprint for almost every aspect of Eilean Bàn. Both Bishop Gordon and George Innes had been educated there, and the latter remained very much under the influence of his uncle Thomas, the prefect of studies at Paris, in regard to matters educational. But the bishops were determined that the new seminary would avoid what they saw as the over-theoretical learning of the Scots colleges abroad – mere 'intellectual trifling', Bishop Nicolson called it – which they believed offered a quite unrealistic preparation for the rigours of the Scottish Mission. Its purpose, as Bishop Gordon saw it, was to teach 'true, solid & zealous piety, . . . the knowledge of things not nice, sublime and speculative, but practical, popular and edifying, . . . and [also] the skill of the Western language.' With George Innes in charge he knew he could count on the first. As to the second, he urged the young master, to whom the practical did not come as second nature, to adapt the Paris courses and make them more relevant. Regrettably, 'the skill of the Western language' was not a possibility in the present circumstances: Mr Innes had little or no Gaelic, so that the languages, inside or outside the class-room, would of necessity be confined to English and Latin.

The Regimen

Following the timetable of Paris, Hugh and his classmates were roused from their beds at 5 a.m., and began their studies at about 5.45, with Mass shortly after 7.00, breakfast at 8.00, lessons thereafter until lunch and again (after some recreation) until mid-afternoon, supper at about 7.00, and bed at 9.00 or 9.15. Such a routine fitted well with a self-contained community like Eilean Bàn, where the students lived as well as learned. And it seemed natural enough to Scottish boys, for an early start and long working hours were normal practice in the burgh schools at this time, where it was quite usual for pupils to begin lessons at 6 a.m. and to endure up to ten hours at the desk.

The seminary was wholly dependant on others for its provisions. The boys were not allowed off the island – the site after all had been chosen precisely to shield them from the outside world – so George Innes either made the journey to 'the Mainland' himself for their weekly supplies, or arranged to have them ferried across from Camus Ruadh, the nearest point on the South Morar estate.

In its hours, its Spartan comforts, its set-apartness, Eilean Bàn was conscious-ly placing itself in the centuries-old mon-astic tradition, and we may guess that it even adopted certain particular practices of the monasteries. The monks' Great Silence between evening recreation and morning breakfast, for example, and silence at the main meal of the day, would have been especially appropriate in a seminary, and were already the practice in the Scots colleges abroad. But it was not so much the quasi-monastic regimen as the strict limit on freedom set by the island itself, and by the primitive buildings, that was the boys' chief penance. The latter must have taxed them and their anxious master to the limit on the many days of rain that Morar enjoys.

In the summer of 1838 the Rev. Coll MacColl wrote to his bishop from the new chapel-house which the Lovat family had built at Bracara: 'The whole of the flat part of the country from Arisaig to Loch Morar is one lake and the rain continues with very little abatement. I am happy to say however that the windows of the chapel & house resist the rain surprisingly & that very little water is taken in by them. Few in these countries are occupying a house freer of rain, and I may say damp and smoke if attention be paid to cleaning the chimney. I have no reason at present to complain of damp in the Taber-nacle since I put red hot irons into it. Mr Neil MacDonald of Knoydart suggested this plan & it can be done with little risk with care taking.'

The Bishop's Palace, Fetternear

Members of the Scalan Association will associate the estate of Fetternear with the burial of Bishop Hay, when his body was taken from Aquhorthies and the students 'all dressed in mourning accompanied the hearse and made a very decent appearance.' The ruins of Fetternear House are at the other end of the estate, and it is there that the archaeologist Nicholas Bogdan has been leading a 'dig' since 1995. Sadly he was cut off in middle age this summer (RIP) and is praised in an obituary:

'Bogdan demonstrated that Fetternear is one of the most important medieval sites in the British Isles, whose extraordinary archaeological detective story he has helped to unravel. Thus this Lost Palace of Fetternear is slowly becoming recognized as a place of national importance across five centuries from the Wars of Independence to the Jacobite Risings, with links to Hungary, Austria and Slovenia. . . He recently indicated that the scale of the palace and the quantity of material recovered meant that work on site would continue for many years.'

Nicholas Bogdan's Fetternear project encompasses the estate, from end to end, and the wide-ranging interests of the family. The Leslies who became custodians of the Bishop's Palace at the Reformation sent young men abroad to become priests and soldiers. One was made a Count of the Holy Roman Empire for his part in saving Vienna from the Turks, and he came home to Scotland rich enough to ignore the 'Glorious Revolution' of the Whigs. There are Leslie palaces in Europe which dwarf Fetternear House, but when Count Patrick Leslie brought his

wife Margaret Irvine there in 1691, more was expressed above the entrance than the joining of his heraldic buckle (motto 'Grip Fast') to her Irvine holly leaf.



In the next year his cousin Fr William Aloysius Leslie SJ became rector of the Scots College Rome for the second time. It seemed appropriate to risk the Presbytery's wrath by adding the IHS or Jesus symbol, associated with the Jesuits, along with MRA for Maria Regina Angelorum – Mary Queen of the Angels.

Thomas Brockie

The Benedictine priest Thomas Brockie is buried at the Walla' kirk beside Beldorney Castle. The 19th century epitaph-collector Andrew Jervise provided a translation of a full Latin inscription there (which praised his linguistic ability and his reputation as Father of the Poor) before proceeding to a bio-graphical sketch. The fact that the exiled Bishop Hugh MacDonald kept in touch with his Highland District from what priests referred to as the 'Siberia of Scotland' gives Shenval a particular interest.

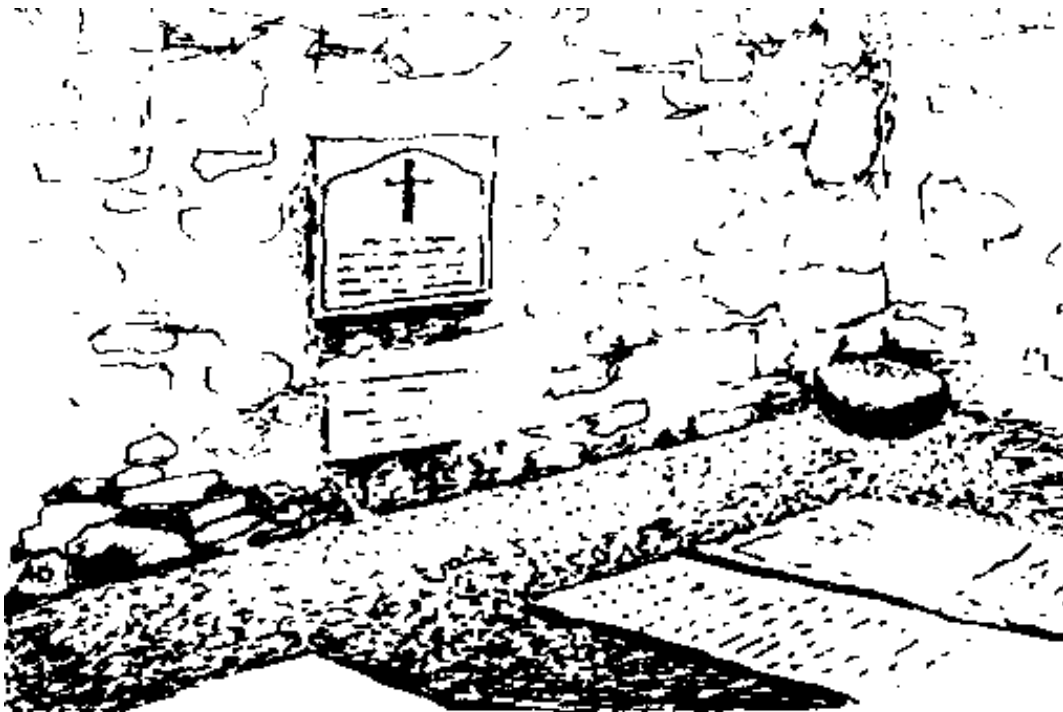
Rev. Thomas Brockie was born in 1701, his father Protestant and his mother a Catholic of the family of Farquharson of Finzean. He was sent to study for the priesthood at the seminary attached to the Scotch Monastery of St James at Ratisbon, of which his elder brother Daniel

was a professed monk of the Order of St Benedict. For some reason his name does not appear in the list of Scotch students at Ratisbon.

He was ordained priest before the middle of June 1731, when he returned to Scotland and was placed in charge of the mission of the Cabrach. Shenval and the surrounding districts subsequently came under his jurisdiction. After the rebellion of 1745 he was exposed to considerable danger. The country was constantly raided by troops of soldiers who were urged to deeds of violence by those whose duty it was to preach the message of peace!

Mr Brockie had to undergo his full share of the peril. In June 1750 a party of soldiers searched his house at Shenval but fortunately he was absent at Aberlour. His safety, however, was precarious as the soldiers were stationed only three-quarters of a mile away. During these troubles divine service was held occasionally in various parts of the mission, but always with the greatest secrecy and often during the night – a strict watch being kept to raise the alarm if any soldiers were seen.

In his later years Mr Brockie was subject to severe illness. Bishop Hugh MacDonald, residing at Shenval, wrote to Bishop Smith [*at Preshome*] on 8th March 1759: 'Mr Brockie, who is now beginning to recover of a dangerous sickness, offers you his respects.' But the recovery was of brief duration. He died 3rd May, aged 58, having declared by a holograph will that his body should be buried in St Walloch Chapel.



Mike Morrison is a breath of fresh air, just what we need at this stage. The word 'Scalan' is so specific that you need only type it on the internet line of the computer screen and a sunny coloured photo of the seminary invites you to explore many related topics. Mike added falling snowdrops but then, realizing that winter would come soon enough, changed them to falling leaves! Committee member David McNamee, who knows about these things, assured the AGM that it was a very good web site indeed.

The Scalan Trail

www.scalan.co.uk

Mike Morrison

The internet site called the Scalan Trail at www.scalan.co.uk has now had 2858 visitors including quite a number from abroad. Initially the site was aimed at consolidating the excellent brochures relating to churches in the north of Scotland and covering the restoration of Scalan. I owe a debt to Mgr John Copland and to the indomitable brothers Sandy and Lewis MacWilliam for their support and knowledge, their scholarship and their vision.

Things develop, and the site has now an online version of Scalan News that is available to a wider audience. There are links to research resources that have pulled in requests from Canada, Australia and Ireland, with extremely favourable results posted on a Forum.

I have visited many of the churches and added photographs to illustrate their splendour. I have also linked to many excellent web sites that are part of the Scalan Trail; many better than mine. I hope that the subscription information which has just been given prominence on the home page will swell the membership of the Scalan Association.

Thanks to one member there is a marvellous new booklet with 160 years of Blairs College 'in words and pictures'. The back cover map could help you to buy it on site, but there is a phone number for those who are too far away. Phone anyway to check opening hours.


Blairs: A Journey of Faith

Bill Harris

During the mid to late 1800s, the number of students at Blairs averaged around 50, with each paying £20 a year for board. As a rule they were taught by three priests or 'professors', who

each earned £35 a year, with one in overall charge.

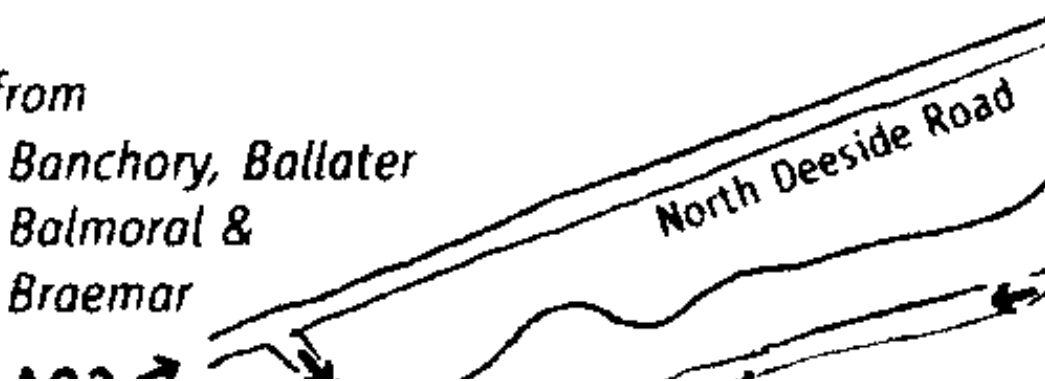
Blairs' first rector was John Sharp who had taught at Scaln 30 years earlier. Sharp had firm ideas on the importance of traditional education. For example he made it plain to his young charges exactly what he thought of modern writers such as a certain up and coming young Charles Dickens. Any student found with a book by Dickens would have it confiscated or, if Sharp was in a lenient mood, it might be kept 'for holiday reading'.

A944 → 

ABERDEE

from
Banchory, Ballater
Balmoral &
Braemar

North Deeside Road





THE BLAIRS MUSE

Scotland's Catholic Treasures

phone 01224 86376

Correspondence

Alasdair Roberts, 3 Bracara, Morar PH40 4PE

alasdair_bracara@hotmail.com