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Scalan News

Official Voice of the Scalan Association. May 2006 issue no. 32

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Old barn, W side of Crombie, Old S



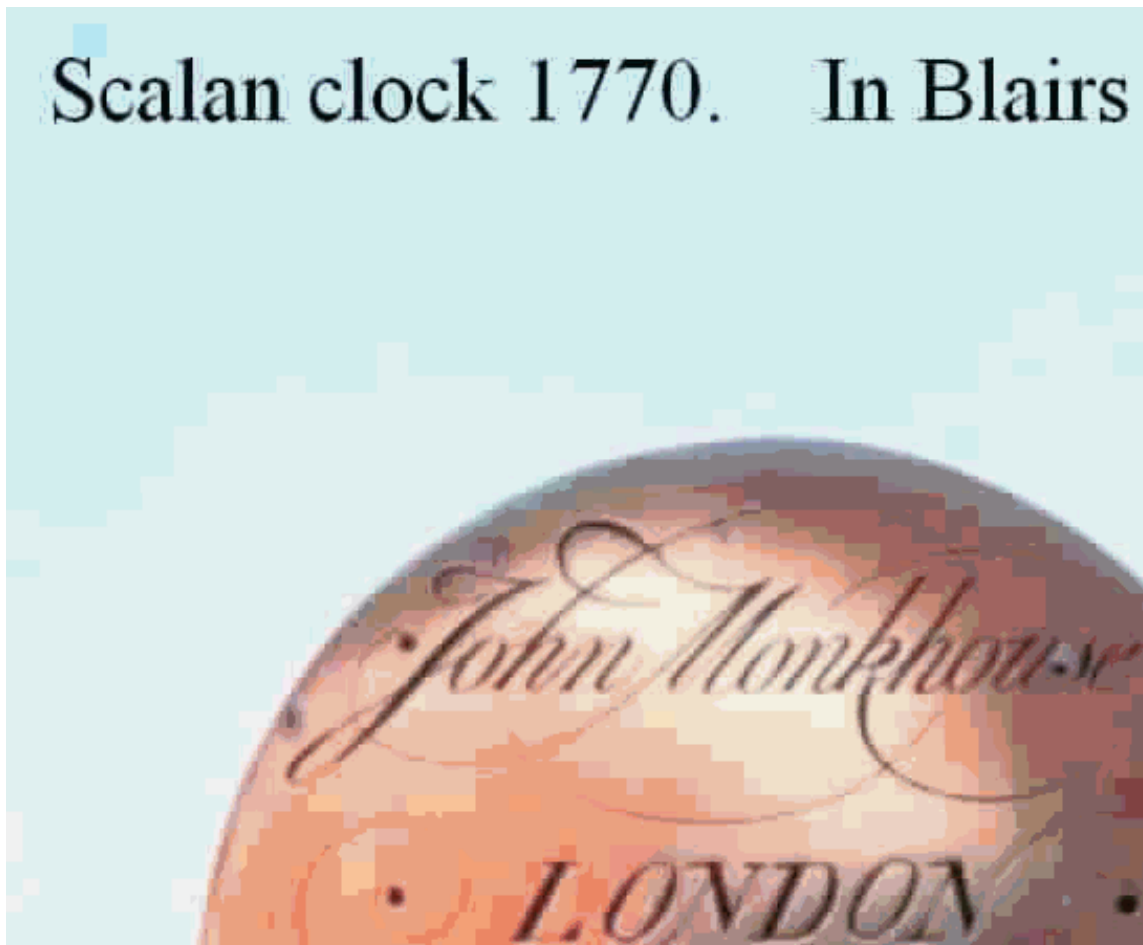
Bread irons to make Commu

Abbé Paul McPherson b1756 d1846

In the mid 17th century two McPherson brothers, John and another, name unknown, had a quarrel with one of the Grants of Rothiemurchus which resulted in the death of a Grant. The brothers were captured and held in Elgin Tollbooth awaiting execution. The Clan McPherson of Badenoch sent twelve of their toughest men to release them while the people attended church. Having achieved their aim, all escaped on horseback to a hiding place in the mountains. After several weeks of harassment instigated by the laird of Rothiemurchus, the McPherson's decided to kidnap him. The plan was successful and with the laird fearing for his life, he agreed to call off the pursuit but the government did not. Capture was inevitable so the brothers decided to leave the vicinity. One travelled to Strathaven, married, and was the root of the McPherson's in that district. John went to Glenlivet and founded the line in that area. He was the great grandfather of Abbé Paul McPherson's father, also called Paul.

Abbé Paul McPherson was born in a croft situated in the township of Scalan on the 4th March 1756. His parents were Catholic and he was baptised by William Grant. His mother was born Janet Cummin and died when Paul was six years old. His father, was a tenant farmer and along with James Mcalea, Peter Stuart, Alexander Grant and Robert Rattray worked the land in runrig, (tack four). The principal tenant was John Grant of Rothmais who sublet to the five crofters. Young Paul McPherson's father had a brother John who leased land at the Clash of Scalan from Mistress Gordon of Lettoch.

Scalan clock 1770. In Blairs





As a young boy Paul's impression of the area where he was reared could well have been of persecution and oppression due to the Hanoverian soldiers billeted close by. The troops were watching for itinerant priests, at least one was known to be hiding nearby. The burnt out remains of the seminary were a constant reminder that Catholics were not to be tolerated. Despite all the set backs the seminary struggled on in part of the burnt out shell. Catholicism was definitely alive and fighting back. Possibly it was the persecution of the Catholics, and their determination to keep the faith alive, that influenced this young boy to enter the priesthood. It was his own wish to

enter Scalán as soon as he was able.

The seminary was built anew in 1767 on the east side of the Crombie, and in the June of that year, Paul, aged eleven was admitted. Before this he spent a year in the Catholic school at Clashmore. From the age of 7 years he was sent to an old woman in Scalán town who taught him to read but not write (she was unable to write). It was Mr Geddes (later bishop) who taught him to write and gave him tuition in religious studies.

Two years later, at the age of thirteen, he travelled to the Scots College in Rome to continue his studies; Owing to a crippling bout of fever he was sent to Valladolid in Spain where his old teacher Mr Geddes was Superior. It is said that he drank goat's milk to recover his health, a tradition started by Bishop Gordon at Scalán. It should be noted that there is no reference to goats in the Scalán accounts, the milk was probably obtained locally. Paul regained his health and resumed his studies. He was ordained Sub-Deacon in Spain in 1778. On Easter Monday 1779 he was ordained priest by the Bishop of Segovia.

Shortly after his ordination he left Valladolid for London where he met Bishop Hay and together they travelled to Edinburgh. Paul McPherson went to Shenval in Glenlivet to take up his first mission. Mass was held in a barn; throughout the Highlands it was quite common to celebrate mass in the largest building available, be it barn or farm house.

In the first summer after his arrival he had a new chapel erected, the work being carried out by both Catholic and Protestants; changing times! The building was described as a decent place in which to worship but by 1909 there was no trace left.

In 1782 Paul McPherson was called to Aberdeen but the climate was detrimental to his health and in 1783 he moved to Stobhall near Perth. In 1791 he was appointed Procurator for the mission and went to reside in Edinburgh. 1793 saw him nominated by the bishops as agent of the Scottish mission to Rome and in August he left Scotland to take up his duties.

The first time he entered the Scots College was in 1770 as a thirteen year old student. The Rector was Father John Corcedoni, a gentleman he remembered with respect and affection. He was the last Italian Jesuit to hold the post. In 1773 the Jesuit order was suppressed by order of Pope Clement XIV. During their rule the college had become the main source of secular priests on the Scottish Mission. Twenty two out of the twenty nine Highland priests who went to the mission between 1712 and 1765 came from the Scots College, Rome.

The Scots College was to be ruled by Italian superiors drawn from the secular clergy. In the next 25 years only three missionary priests were sent to Scotland. 1773-1782 was a period of total unrest and student revolt. One of the ring leaders was Paul McPherson, who with fellow students, protested formally against the "confusion and anarchy". Antonini, a particularly poor Rector was removed but unfortunately a succession of poor managers failed to control the finances and discipline the students. Every year students were sent to the Scots College only to renounce their vocations and return to Scotland with tales of the horrific conditions they encountered. In 25 years only three missionary priests returned to Scotland.

In 1781 the Scottish Bishops decided to appoint "national superiors". Bishop Hay was sent to Rome to arrange the matter; arriving at the college in October. His proposal that a Scot should be appointed both Rector and Agent was met with opposition from the Italian Superiors of the Scots, Irish and English Colleges. Bishop Hay was promised a Scottish rector when the time was right; meanwhile he could send a secular priest from Scotland to assist the ailing Abbé Grant, the Scots agent in Rome. The man chosen was John Thomson, an Aberdonian, who once taught at Scalán. An unfortunate choice as his manners were unpolished and he was too forthright for his fellow missionaries. He lived in Rome for 10 years and was at loggerheads with the Rector Francesco Marchioni throughout. He died suddenly in 1792 and was replaced by Abbé Paul McPherson, a born diplomat.

He quickly established good relations with Cardinal Albani; quietly taking over the responsibility of disciplining the students from the rector, Marchioni. McPherson worked with the Irish and English agents to try to obtain national superiors but met with no success. By 1796 he only had two students in the college.

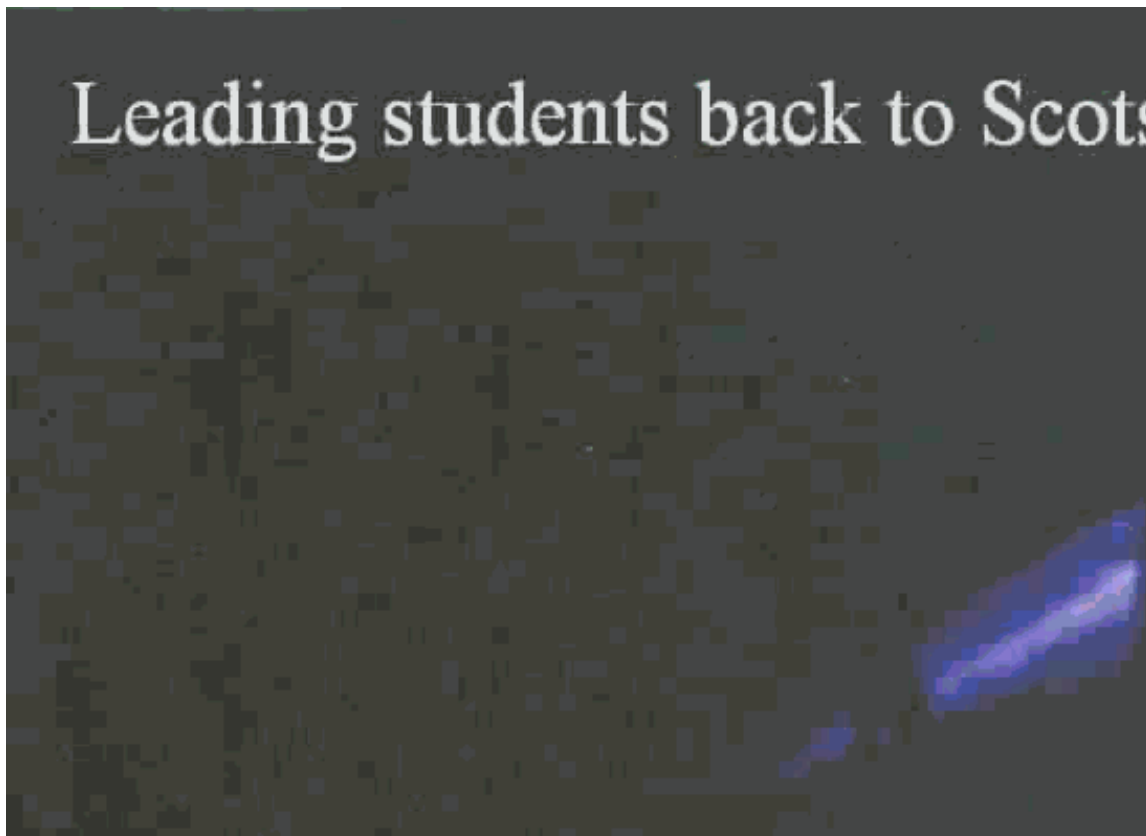
The college was now facing new dangers; the invasion of Rome by the French. The first two attempts failed but the third in February 1798 succeeded. General Berthier declared Rome a republic, Pope Pius VI was captured and held prisoner, dying a year later in captivity. All British property in Rome was sequestered including the college.

Abbé Paul McPherson had to return to England with his two students plus twenty English and Irish students

whose agents had deserted them. He carried with him important historical papers from Rome and those that remained in the Paris College. These documents are now in the archives. The party were given travelling expenses and safe passage by the French authorities. Throughout their journey through France the party received nothing but courtesy. They arrived in London in June 1798. Paul McPherson, this quiet unassuming man, was hailed as a celebrity; presented to the Prince of Wales and Government ministers. It should be noted that at a later date he was instrumental in saving the Stuart Papers for the Prince of Wales, now held in Windsor.

Later that year he returned to Scotland serving as priest in Huntly. Pope Pius VII was elected in Venice in 1800 and, not long after, Paul McPherson returned to the Scots College in Rome. The French had withdrawn in 1799 leaving devastation behind. The college was home to squatters, horses had been stabled in one section and the vines left to go wild. Through tenacity and sheer hard work he brought order out of chaos. The squatters paid rent, the vineyards were tended and the resulting revenue put towards restoring the college. In 1801 a Papal Decree recognised the right of the British colleges to appoint national superiors although they were banned from the administration of temporal affairs. Paul McPherson became the first rector of the college from the ranks of the Scottish secular clergy. The uncertain political situation meant that no students were admitted.

In 1809 the college was caught up in the quarrel between Napoleon and Pope Pius VII. The latter was taken prisoner and held in Savona. McPherson stayed long enough to lease the college and the vineyards to two Italian laymen as in June 1811 he was expelled from Italy and by December returned to Huntly. In the spring of 1812 he was asked to return to Rome to act as agent for both the English and Scottish bishops. The British Catholics wanted the penal laws abolished but the Crown and Government would not grant their removal without some form of reassurance that the Catholics were loyal to the state. The Holy See had granted to other governments the right of veto in the selection of bishops. This proposal was acceptable to the English and Scottish Vicars Apostolic represented by Bishop Poynter, London but not by the Irish Catholic bishops represented by John Milner or the Vicar Apostolic of the Midlands area. Stale-mate ensued and Abbé Paul McPherson, a born diplomat, accepted the task to resolve it; not an easy one, as Europe was in conflict and Pope Pius VII a prisoner in Savona. In addition to being a diplomat he was asked to act as a go-between to inform the Pope about a rescue attempt by the Royal Navy. But before the plan was executed the French learned about it and moved the Pope to Fontainebleau.





He finally arrived in Rome at the Scots College in November 1812 and managed to obtain assurances that it would not be sold. Once again he sorted out the vineyards and made the buildings suitable to receive students. This took a number of years, and despite numerous illnesses he opened the college doors again. In late 1819 James Macdonald from Scotland arrived to act as his assistant. In 1820 five Scottish students arrived. Abbé Paul McPherson had succeeded through sheer hard work and determination to keep the Scots college functioning. Once more Scottish students would have their own college in Rome and return to their homeland to serve their people.

To return to the "veto" situation he was handling. In February 1814 he returned to London with a brief stating that Bishop Paynter's acceptance of the veto was approved in Rome. Those opposed to it (The Milnerites) set off for

Rome, as did the pro veto representatives. The political situation was settling down and Pope Pius VII returned to Rome. Both sides appealed to him for guidance, resulting in a modified veto acceptable to all.

Abbé Paul McPherson wished to return to Glenlivet but it wasn't until 1827 after his replacement, Mr Angus Macdonald the new Rector, arrived that he was able to leave. At the age of 70 years he arrived home to fulfil his dream of building a chapel for the people of the Braes.

Since 1808 when James Sharp left Scalan for Aquhorties there had only been

one chapel and one clergyman serving the district. This was at Caanakyle on the north side of the Livet above where the Crombie joins it. This chapel was washed away in a flood in 1829 but a new chapel had been started at Tombae in 1827 and consecrated on Candlemas day 1829. The area was large, 14 miles in length, and the dwellings scattered. Those living in the remote areas found it near impossible to attend chapel regularly in the harsh winters. There was no bridge over the Livet and many walked bare foot to cross.

Whilst working abroad Abbé Paul McPherson managed to save a considerable sum of money and he used it to build and furnish a chapel for his people of the Braes and Scalan. He obtained about 10 acre, The Faevait, from the Duke of Gordon and on this land St Mary's chapel was erected in 1828. The building was able to seat 300 people.

He also had a dwelling house built for the clergy plus substantial farm buildings; a cemetery was laid out. In 1832 a school for girls and boys was built and when this burnt down in 1835 he paid for it to be rebuilt. The first headmaster was John Farquarson who rests in the cemetery. As well as furnishing the chapel he supplied the vestments and a number of friends gave gifts. Pope Leo XII gave a silver gilt chalice in recognition of his service to the Papacy; this is now at Blair's Museum.

In 1834 Abbé Paul McPherson returned to Rome at the age of 78 years and in poor health. The Scots College needed him; the rector Angus Macdonald died suddenly; the college was closed and the students transferred to the College of Propaganda. This old man, with the spirit of a young one, shouldered the responsibility of reopening the college, and did so in a year. He carried the weight of the administration until Dr. Grant relieved him in 1841.

Although very frail he maintained a keen interest in his students until in his 92nd year on November 24th 1846 he quietly slipped away. He was buried in the Church of St. Andrews of the Scots.

This quiet man known for his diplomatic skills and determination, kept the Scots college Rome going despite numerous set backs. He never forgot his people in the Braes. The whole of his wealth was spent for the benefit of religion. He did everything in his power to ensure that the Catholic faith flourished and grew.

Why was he Abbé? Abbé is a French clerical term which was given to those who spent a long time on the continent.

In the porch of the chapel in the Braes is a memorial stone to Abbé Paul McPherson. His church was demolished and re-built in 1897 dedicated to "Our Lady of Perpetual Succour" but known to many as St Mary's.

HEARSAY

When he was living in Glenlivet he was too infirm to walk round supervising the building work and visiting his people. He travelled round on a "bit sheltie"—Shetland pony.

He brought the first rosary beads into Glenlivet and the young girl he gave them to thought they were an ornament and hung them round her neck. She was corrected—"Don't wear them over your clothes, my dear, but underneath them, and when tending the cattle, just talk to your beads and all sorts of good will come to you".

Written by editor

Points of interest.

On the 9th December 2005 Alexander Sharp Matheson died in Aberlour, Sandy of Scalan was in his 90th year. Requiem Mass was led by Colin Stewart in Our Lady of Perpetual Succour, Braes of Glenlivet. He rests in the Braes grave yard. Appreciation of his life page 6.

On December 26th 2005 Sister Mary MacPherson died peacefully in an Edinburgh hospital after a brief stay. In her early nineties she had a full and active life as a Sacred Heart Nun. Requiem Mass was led by Bishop Logan and she now rests in Mount Vernon Cemetery Edinburgh.

On August 25th Sister Catherine with her carer made a nostalgic return visit to the Braes of Glenlivet and Scalan. She lives in a home for retired nuns in Dundee. Having trained at the Sisters of Mercy Convent in Elgin she loves to return there for a few days. After completing her training she spent a number of years at the Convent of Mercy in Tomintoul, now Saint Michael's outdoor centre, and was the last nun to leave. Whilst there she visited the Braes and got to know its people. Sixteen years were spent in Keith from here she regularly attended the annual Scalan Mass. She clearly remembers the first pilgrimage organised by Monsignor McWilliam and that Monsignor Copland set the date. Thank you Sister Catherine for sharing your memories with me. *Editor*

Mid August. Who says youngsters don't care? One afternoon a young boy (watched by his mother) asked me if I could help a young frog which had fallen down an upright stopcock pipe. He explained that his arms were too short to reach it, and his mum wouldn't put her hand in. Would I please help or it would die. Fortunately, by lying down, I managed to reach one large brown frog. With great care he carried it to the edge of the mill stream in two wet hands. We both watched as it hopped into the shallow water. This was one boy who cares for wildlife; may he always be that way.

September onwards. Scalan seems to have its resident tawny owl roosting above the front door. What a mess it makes! It must enjoy the peace and quiet; long may it continue.

15th November 2005. First fall of snow on the Slocht behind Scalan; is this the start of the bad winter to come?

16th November 2005. Had a very small visitor in Scalan, Jenny wren. Two young lads helped to chase her out. She finally left by an open window in Bishop Hay's room but not before landing on a head or two.

Monsignor Eddie Traynor, parish priest for Buckie died on the 8th March 2006 after a long battle with cancer. He has supported Scalan for a number of years. Last year he donated a wooden altar which now stands in the Scalan chapel.

Dates to note. AGM, Braes hall, 6th June 2006 contact treasurer for details

Scalan Mass, 2nd July 2006 at 4.00pm.

Alexander S Matheson- An Appreciation

February 16th 1916 - December 9th 2005

Sandy was born in the Scalan farmhouse, adjacent to the Old College, on February 16th 1916. Apart from the last two years, when he became infirm, he spent his whole life there, alone since January 1967. Now, to our sorrow, he is gone, and the place that knew him so long, knows him no more. Alone, but he never lacked the company of a well-loved collie- Tweed, Sam, Bessie, Glen and Moss come to mind. Moss survives him and is being looked

after by Marjory and Gordon McGillivray at Auchnascraw.

Sandy became joint tenant of Scalan farm with his uncle Willie Matheson in the mid 1940's. Willie died soon afterwards and Sandy worked the farm with his uncle Fred Matheson (another bachelor) till 1967, when Fred died, and then on his own till he retired from active farming in 1981.

Many who read this will have their own memories of Sandy. Mine reach back to earliest childhood, through boyhood, manhood and old manhood. In the course of all these years he seemed unchanging as the hills that look down on Scalan. Yet he was changeless not only in his physical appearance, but also in his constant kindness, courtesy and hospitality – no visitor could leave his house without of tea and Joseph Walker's baking, and often a dram or two as well, with Creamola Foam for children. Although never married Sandy had infinite time patience for youngsters. He would fix bikes and cheap wristwatches, put them up on the horses back for a "shottie", construct rafts to sail on the old mill dam, cut pea-shooters from the stalks of wild celery (lovage) that grew in the garden, and supply the barley for ammunition. Just to be with Sandy, "helping" him, was pure happiness.

Sandy was the last link in the Braes with a way of life that has gone. He took part in the hand sowing, reaping, stooking, harvesting and threshing of the corn, when the dam water was released and the mill wheel turned. He cast and barrowed and set and carted peats home from the moss. He built the corn and peat stacks that stood in the farmyard, where hens clucked around the barn door. His was the last voice that spoke the dialect words, that told the Gaelic names of wee burns and hillocks, and human habitations that are now nameless ruins. Surely his kind spirit will be forever in Scalan's wild winter winds, and soft summer zephyrs, and the poignant call of the curlew.

The esteem and affection Sandy was held in is evidence by the number who came to honour his memory. People came from Munich in Germany, from Glasgow, from Grantown, from Tomintoul, Dufftown, Elgin, Aberlour, and Aberdeen, and his native glen. They came to the little church at Chapelton in the Braes of Glenlivet where he himself had faithfully attended mass all his life. He came in all weathers, on foot, by bike, on his DIY skis and even by tractor.



Speaking of bicycles, I wonder how many thousands of miles Sandy covered in his lifetime. He and his bicycle literally went together, and in his eighties he ranged far and wide on social and other business, which usually involved the repair of wirelesses and clocks, in which he had an unrivalled expertise.

It is difficult to encapsulate a man's life in a few paragraphs. Perhaps Shakespeare has done it more eloquently than I ever could-"His life was gentle and the elements so mixed in him that nature might stand up and say to all the world, 'This was a man!'"

Sandy was modest and unassuming and would not have wished me to speak of him as I have done. He knew in his heart that deep memories need no epitaphs. God be with you Sandy and thank you for everything, thank you for being the person you were.

PS. I must record that a great debt of gratitude is owed to Gordon and Marjory McGillivray in particular, and also to the two "posties" Betty, now retired and Marlene. It was their kindness and good deeds which enabled Sandy to stay in his home longer than he could have otherwise have done. They too recognised that he was a human being of great worth.

John Gallacher (cousin)

Doors Open Day (D.O.D) Glenlivet and A'Anside Upper Moray. 24 September 2005

D.O.D is a Council of Europe initiative enabling people to see buildings (mainly listed) free of charge, many of which are not normally accessible to the public. It is a way of introducing folk to their own or neighbouring areas; to discover buildings and settlements of which they might not have been aware or have visited. D.O.D takes place throughout September and in Scotland is co-ordinated by The Scottish Trust. For Moray the event is organised by Civic Committee of the Moray Society, a voluntary body. Moray Council regularly designs and finances the programme.

This year the location for D.O.D was in or near the newly established Cairngorm National Park; the location changing yearly. This year's programme included The Braes of Glenlivet where the Chapel of Our Lady of Perpetual Succour (grade A listed) was open. Further up the glen is Eskmullach car park and from here about seventy people walked the track to Scalán (grade A Listed) on a bright but chilly day. Two gentlemen from Keith and from Aberdeen were the first visitors. One, a wheelwright, took a great interest in the waterwheel housed in an outbuilding (grade B listed). This wheel once powered the thresher and also charged batteries which gave Sandy Matheson electricity in his house (grade A listed) adjacent to the Seminary. The other was a violinist who thought Scalán Mass would make a fine setting for music.

Those who attend the annual Scalán which takes place on the first Sunday in July at 4pm know how marvellous the bagpipes sound echoing round the hills. The Buckie Choir and musicians set the hills "alive with the sound of music". Come and hear for yourself. No matter what the weather is like I'm sure you will have a memorable experience.

Why not combine your visit to Scalán with a visit to the Braes Chapel. The first chapel and school founded by Abbé McPherson in 1828 and 1832 respectively were designed by William Robertson of Elgin. In 1896 the chapel was demolished due to damp and immediately replaced by the present one of pinkish granite, designed by John Kinross, and financed by The Marquis of Bute, a Catholic benefactor. The interior glows with coloured stencil decorations. The pulpit was carved to designs drawn on woodwork in King's College Chapel, Aberdeen.

Other churches open on the 24th September were Tombae and in Tomintoul, both the Catholic and Church of Scotland. The latter was one of thirty two churches built to more or less the same design together with forty one manses under the direction of Thomas Telford.

Bridges, farmhouses, the gate lodge at Ballindalloch Castle, Drummin Country Museum and The Lecht Ski Centre were all included as buildings of note opening for D.O.D 2005.

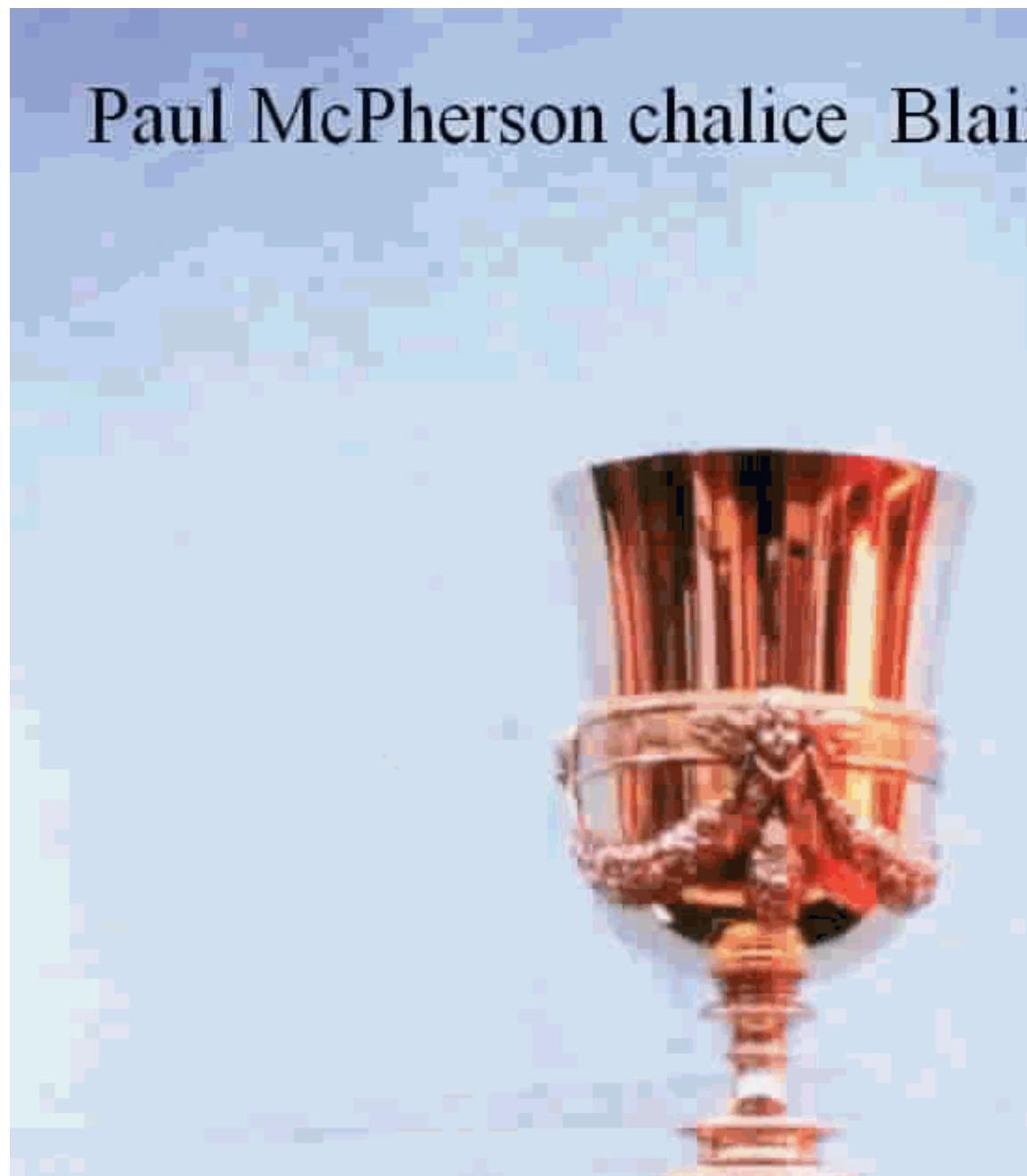
Written by Elizabeth Beaton 2005

Apologies to John Watts for spelling his name wrong in the November issue. It should have read

The Forbidden College 1716 to 1799 by John Watts published by Tuckwell Press

Letter from Pope XII to Abbé Paul McPherson

The esteem in which Abbé Paul McPherson was held is indicated by this letter of thanks to him from Pope Leo XII, signed by his secretary





Dear son, greetings and Apostolic Blessing. If there is anything which gives Us no little consolation among the great evils suffered by the Church, it is certainly that in your kingdom the Catholic cause has for some time now started to be in much better circumstances, and seems to be making daily progress.

We realise that this is confirmed by your letter in which you indicate that you have undertaken the building of an elegant church, which is already almost complete and is to be dedicated very shortly according Catholic rite, and that not only Catholics but even Protestants themselves have contributed to the costs of this building. Praise and thanksgiving be to the Lord who *forgets not to show pity, nor in anger constrains his mercies* and raises Us up into the most joyous hope that in your country faith and piety will daily make more fortunate advances.

Yes, and would that We were able to add to your enthusiasm for the progress of such an achievement some contribution commensurate with our own wishes: but, since the present limitations of our own resources forbid a bigger donation we are doing what we can, and as a token of our (good) will and congratulations we send a silver-gilt chalice to be dedicated to be used in the Sacrifice in the new church, consoling ourselves with the hope, confirmed by yourself, that to some extent our gift may prove to have considerable influence in achieving veneration for our most holy religion and our sacred rites among those not of our faith [*lit: the heterodox*] to say nothing of those linked to Us by the bond of true faith and charity, and in filling souls with sentiments of piety.

But we congratulate You, Beloved Son, on your zeal and your devout generosity, anticipating – we hope – that we

shall congratulate you face to face at no distant date here (in Rome) to which we think the very love of your College calls you back. Meanwhile, we commend to God You and all those who with you have contributed from their own resources to your undertaking, and with the word of his grace** we most lovingly impart to You the Apostolic Blessing.

Given at Rome at St Peter's on the 20th September in the Year 1828, the 5th Year of our Pontificate.

G. Gasparri, Secretary of our most Holy Father for Latin correspondence

*** Note: the exact meaning of the passage underlined and asterisked is uncertain.*

Translated from the Latin by Rt Rev Bishop Peter A Moran, Bishop of Aberdeen







April 2006

The Slochd Burn entering the Crombie: Scalan dwarfed by Carn Liath

The wall is the old Scalan Croft Boundary

You make springs gush forth in the valleys:

They flow in between the hills.

On their banks dwell the birds of heaven:

From the branches they sing their song.

Psalm 120

