

# Nigg - A Changing Parish

by Anne Gordon 1977

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## Law and Order I - The Church in the Community - Moral Standards

In the old days, keeping law and order fell largely on the lairds and the church. In the case of lairds, it appears that they were mainly concerned with large issues and with those affecting their own tenants, workers and estates, and it was left to the church to deal with many matters of discipline in the parish. As seen also in other chapters, the Kirk Session were in many ways the local authority, dealing with education, the poor and the care of the sick, and with many absentee landlords and with no proper police force, it is not surprising that keeping law and order at parish pump level was added to their duties.

First and foremost, they controlled the moral life of the people. This may seem a gross interference with personal liberty but when there was no birth control, no medical care and no benefits for illegitimate children, this was an important aspect of their responsibility, for these if for no other reasons. Much of this side of their work sounds very grim but there is no doubt that their vigilance must have reduced illegitimacy and venereal diseases and so contributed to welfare and health, and when illegitimacy did occur, bringing a case to the Session was a girl's only way of establishing paternity and preventing the child becoming a burden on the parish.

Many of the moral cases came before the Session because of the need for baptism of an illegitimate child, because church privileges such as this were withheld until the people concerned had "served discipline" as their punishment was called. It is noticeable, however, that the minutes often speak of the "privilege of discipline" as though, in some cases at least, it was a welcome form of confession with absolution to follow.

The Session Minutes record all the details of every case that came up. Witnesses were called, took the oath, promised to speak the truth and were purged of malice, though it does seem that their word was taken with little or no corroboration. The facts are set down with all the sordid details and signed by the witnesses concerned. As the witnesses could seldom write, this usually meant that their evidence is signed "with their hands held on the pen" which phrase is written on either side of their X.

Where there were no witnesses, the Session decided the matter as best they might, and in some cases, the accused might prove their innocence by oath. The Minutes speak of one woman being "threatened with Oath of purgation" to establish her innocence, which sounds rather a frightening procedure, and there is a distinct impression of guilt being presumed and the victim having to prove otherwise.

There were standard punishments for offences, laid down by Act of Assembly. The most dreaded was standing before the congregation to confess one's sins and be publicly rebuked for them by the minister. Offenders stood in front of the pulpit on a raised platform or stool, called the pillar, possibly clad in sackcloth. It is not known whether they always wore sackcloth, donned at the church door, or whether this had to be specified in their punishment. Certainly in 1729 the Minutes show that two people had to stand in sackcloth for Sabbath profanation (not a moral offence) and that year the Session appointed their Treasurer to pay £1.6/- Scots to buy sackcloth with a further 5/- Scots "to taylour for making coats of the said sackcloth." (1)

The number of Sabbaths that a wrongdoer might have to stand depended on the sin – it might be three, sometimes six, but for the gravest scandal in the earlier records, it could be as many as twenty-six. For all that the Minutes refer to the "privilege of discipline" it must have been a terrible experience, especially for the comparatively innocent, to face the sniggers and vicarious enjoyment of the congregation as they witnessed their discomfiture and shame.

What is very noticeable is that the people in trouble with the Session were virtually always the working folk. Admittedly, most of the lairds lived elsewhere and so were not there to be found out, if there was anything to find. Where the elders were tenants, it may be that they were more frightened of the laird than of the minister. (2) But even allowing for absentee lairds, there were more substantial farmers and others who never appeared before the Session. Either there was no one prepared to report them, or they were discreet, or else they never committed any sin.

In "Social Life in the 18th Century" W G Graham mentions this matter of ploughmen having to stand before the congregation while the laird, though he might agree to appear privately before the Session, would flatly refuse to stand publicly. The upper classes got away with a fine of meal or money, which went to the poor, and then watched with

everyone else the spectacle of the less fortunate of their fellow-delinquents on the stool. (1) In 1705, it was ordained that a new Session Clerk, Hugh Gair, was to get £10 out of fines, but if there were not fines, there would be no £10 for him. What an encouragement this must have been to fine the better-off, possibly in place of public censure.

There is only one case of a landowner in trouble. In 1736, a servant girl said that Alexander Ross of Ankerville was the father of her child. He was in London at the time and, on his return, the minister "conversed with him" privately, a rather different approach to that meted out to the common people. He was unable to come to the next Session meeting but promised to come to them later. At the following month's meeting, it appears that there was still no execution against him, as it is phrased, and the minute book, conveniently perhaps, closes at this point, and there is no record of what happened in this case. (1)

In addition to helping to pay the Session Clerk, fines for offences went to the poor's box. They were not necessarily an alternative to standing before the congregation – they might well be in addition to that punishment. Time to pay was allowed so long as a cautioner for the fine could be found, something that was difficult in the case of a stranger. One such case occurred in 1720 when the Session remitted half a man's fine because he could find no cautioner, which sounds as if they were not prepared to get into a position they could not get out of. (1)

The first volume of the Nigg Parish Kirk Session Minutes opens in 1705 and for the first few years there is a catalogue of fornication, adultery, relapse in ante-nuptial fornication and so on. This is said to have been a consequence of the Seven Years' Famine from 1694-1701 that was followed by a great lowering of standards and vices of the most abominable kinds. (3) The situation had not been helped by having a very weak Episcopal curate until 1701, one of those who stayed on after the Revolution, possibly because there was no one to take his place. So unsatisfactory was he that the parishioners petitioned the Presbytery for someone more able to do the work, but to no avail. He died in 1701 and it was four years before he had a successor. So not only did the parish suffer a famine along with a weak ministry but immediately thereafter a four-year vacancy. With so much parish administration depending on the church, it is not surprising that standards of behaviour had lowered so badly, and it fell to Rev George Munro and his Kirk Session to try and pull things together.

The penalties for moral offences have already been mentioned as being severe. In 1706, Anna Ross, an adulteress, had to stand for twenty-six Sabbaths before the congregation, along with the man concerned, but because she was "not able to stand (being diseased in her feet) the Session allows her to sit at the foot of the pillar and appoints her to be supported by the Beadle when the minister rebukes her." The wonder is how someone unable to stand managed to get to church at all, and what a picture this conjures up of a penitent struggling to the church in this way to undergo public censure there for a whole six months. (1)

If someone really was too ill to come to church, censure was delayed till they could come. Grisall Lesly, guilty of fornication for the third time, was summoned to appear when she recovered from childbed and there are repeated references to "Grisall Lesly still not recovered," showing that the Session regularly checked up to see whether or not she had yet served discipline. (1)

Nor was leaving the parish an escape. It was customary for Kirk Sessions to refer matters back and forth between them, and delinquents might be sent back and forth too, as when the Nigg Kirk Session wrote to the minister at Nairn "for sending Delinquents to this parish that reside in his." This was in 1705 and referred to a couple, guilty of fornication in Nigg, who had moved to Nairn. In this case, the Session tempered justice with some sympathy because they decided "considering that they are poor servants and ... the distance of the parishes being such that he cannot attend two Sabbaths on end, and seeing they seem somewhat repentant, the Session appoint them to appear publicly next Sabbath and the second when the term comes." (1) The "term" was the farm workers' time for changing jobs or for re-engagement when they might be briefly free to travel elsewhere.

In one case, the Session tried to avoid further trouble with a couple by forbidding them to talk to each other and they did what they could to avoid people having opportunities for bad conduct – in 1706 a married man was delated for "scandalous carriage" for being in a room with an unmarried woman when everyone else was in bed "and for trysting her to his Kiln in the night time."

The worst of all the moral offences was in 1707 when the son of a tenant in Shandwick was found guilty of committing bestiality with a cow and a mare. This came before the Kirk Session who considered it quite beyond

them and referred it directly to the Sheriff in Tain. That they were terribly shocked is evident in the Minutes which record that the Session “considering the abominations abounding in the place, especially the above named gross wickedness does call aloud for mourning and humiliation” and therefore set apart one day of the following week as a “day of solemn humiliation with the parroch to be spent in prayer and fasting and the Acts of public worship.” (1)

But the Session and minister bravely coped with all these cases and by constant watching and punishment, did their best to straighten the parish out, even though George Munro was so frequently away south on his family law pleas that the parish had to complain to the Presbytery.

Considering the watchfulness and severity of the Kirk Session, it is surprising how seldom the common people hit back at them, but in 1708 one man had obviously had enough of them. He had to appear before the congregation “for menacing one of the elders” while another had to stand for “immannerly malicious language to the Session viz. that as long as the Minister believed some of his elders he and his people would not be at peace.” (1)

Though the following case is not a moral one but a case of a man missing a Diet of Catechism, it is given here as an instance of the common people trying to stand up to the elders. This man refused to appear for the offence, declaring that “he did not care a strae for the Session and what they could do to himself.” But the Session won the battle and it was not long before he was expressing his “regrate and remorse.” (1)

Where a case was too difficult for the Session, it was referred to the Presbytery; this also happened if a delinquent refused to submit to the Session. In 1706 a man refused to submit to the Presbytery, saying that the minister had “belyed” him by saying that the Session had ordered him to stand when they had not done so. This sounds rather strange but the Session’s method of dealing with it was to refer him once again to the Presbytery. (1)

In 1729, Rev John Balfour came to the parish and without anything more than diligent parish work, a Revival came about as a result of which the people became “highly reformed and elevated in mind and character” (3); they became diligent and industrious, the Session had few cases of discipline and for several years the magistrates had no crime to deal with in Nigg. (4)

But this time apart, there were always moral offences of one sort or another going on, and fairs were a problem to the Session. In 1782 a case before them was one of misbehaviour at Hugh’s Fair in “the town and village of Rarichies” when the women involved “held forth that promiscuous sleeping at fairs in the country is a common practice.” (1)

These cases already quoted are only a sample of what went on, but after 1782 there is a gap in reports of moral sins in the parish church minutes. It is not clear whether the Session were too concerned with the famine of 1782/3, the Black Year, or whether famine, unlike its predecessor of 1694, prevented such sins. But as the years passed, punishments became less severe and by 1877 ante-nuptial fornication, for instance, merited “a serious rebuke and solemn admonition” after the couple concerned had expressed repentance, whereupon they were absolved from their scandal and restored to church privileges. (1)

Before this time, a solution to some cases of fornication had appeared this was marriage before the Session, sometimes under pressure. Rev J R Martin refers to this as “the presbyterian equivalent of the shotgun wedding.” (4) In 1803, one guilty couple confessed their sin, were absolved, expressed their wish to marry and “were married accordingly coram.” (1)

All the cases mentioned so far come from the Minutes of the Old Parish Church, but due to the Secession of 1756 the bulk of the population moved to the Associate Church and very many interesting cases come from their records.

They also performed speedy weddings – in 1834 a couple admitted fornication and expressed repentance, after which a man from Logie Easter testified to the woman’s previously excellent character and “Wereupon the Moderator proceeded to marry the parties.” In 1838 a similar couple were “forthwith married” and underwent church censure. (5)

But the Associate Church also has a reversal in one instance of the shotgun wedding. In 1856, a woman guilty of fornication, said that she intended to marry the man involved. He had several times previously been in trouble for

the same offence and the Session did not think suitable as her husband and so they “strongly urged her to consider the sinfulness of her conduct in resolving to unite in marriage with a man of such notoriously loose and abandoned character.” (5)

In the records of this church, there are many references to fornication and ante-nuptial fornication, but virtually none to adultery. Right from the start, this Kirk Session seemed more concerned with repentance and reformation than punishment. Generally speaking, they took a very responsible attitude to the congregation, with genuine concern for delinquents in an effort to set them on the right path.

Their attitude appears in the following case. In 1765, fornication warranted a public rebuke one Lord’s Day and the couple were “exhorted to repentance for their sin and ... to betake themselves by faith to the blood of Christ for pardon ...” Furthermore, the man was ordered “to wait on the Moderator on Saturday next for further conversation.” In 1776 a couple’s final rebuke was delayed till they showed evidence of repentance, and like the parish church, they tried to prevent people getting into situations that were likely to lead to trouble. Thus in 1790, they “expressed displeasure at a girl’s imprudent conduct in sleeping in or on a bed with two men.” (5)

They were apparently braver than the parish church about accusing a master, even though in this case he may not have been a land-owner. It was in 1775 that a servant accused her employer of adultery and as a result he had to stand before the congregation for six Sabbaths, with a Sabbath between every two public appearances. (5)

While Kirk Sessions hesitated to accuse lairds and land-owners, they seem to have perhaps been rather more severe on women than was necessary. Back in the parish church in 1705, two girls were accused over scandalous conduct with a soldier at a wedding. During dancing, the soldier had kissed one of them, whereupon she had left him and did not speak any more to him, while the other girl had never spoken to him at all. This case arose from malicious gossip and the Session failed to find any evidence of sin against them. They were refused the oath of purgation and were dismissed with a solemn rebuke for being slandered! But that fate was not so bad as that of two women who, after public rebuke, were “dissolved.” (4)

The Associate Church stood no nonsense in the case of a woman “found in a suspicious place, in a suspicious posture, with another woman’s husband.” She had to stand one Lord’s Day “for her imprudent and apparently sinful conduct” but there is no mention of what happened to her. And in a case of rape, the girl concerned found little consolation. She had been sleeping in a field when a man attacked her, bound her hands, and assaulted her. Because there was no one near enough to help her, she did not cry out and neither did she tell anyone what had happened until she found she was pregnant. For failing to do either of these things, she was considered guilty of fornication and had to undergo the usual public censure. (5)

Because of the later date of its establishment and by its very nature and the deep convictions from which it sprang, it is understandable that there are very few moral cases within the Free Church. In fact, in 1867 their Minutes scrutinized the illegitimate births in the parish, as a result of which it appeared that in eleven years only three were born to local Free Church members, and only two “bona fide hearers” were charged with paternity (6); in fact, in 69 years the illegitimate births remained at 3.

The Free Church produces no instances of people standing publicly before the congregation for moral or any other offences. Offenders names are not given in the minutes, the entries saying something like this one from 1870, “A professed penitent appeared before the Session and being admonished was specially placed under the supervision of the Elder of the district.” (6)

An interesting light on their approach comes later on in 1905 when a couple guilty of ante-nuptial fornication were dealt with thus, “The Moderator having solemnly addressed them as to the nature of their sin and Mr Gordon having affectionately admonished them, were absolved.” (6)

Thus a kindlier and more helpful attitude prevailed, but it has perhaps gone too far as now in the 1970’s, couples live in sin in the parish and so far as the church is concerned it does not apparently matter. It seems that from the extreme severity of the 1700’s, Nigg in common with other parts of the country has now taken several backward steps.

**Law and Order I - References:-**

- 1 Nigg Old Church Session Minutes
- 2 "Social Life in the 18th Century," Henry Grey Graham
- 3 New Statistical Account
- 4 "Church Chronicles of Nigg," J R Martin
- 5 Associate Church Session Minutes
- 6 Free Church Session Minutes

## Law and Order II

### The Church in the Community – Keeping the Peace

Over and above the moral cases dealt with by the church, other aspects of keeping law and order came under their jurisdiction. Fighting, family quarrels, drinking, swearing, theft (though bad cases went to courts of law), grievances, defamation of character and slander, watching out for offences like bigamy and issuing certificates of character were all matters dealt with by the Kirk Session. Such magistrates as there were, were not in the parish and generally speaking, all but the more serious crimes were dealt with locally by the church, with some reference when necessary to the Presbytery; the following chapter refers to cases handled elsewhere.

As said elsewhere, in 1756 the bulk of the population moved from the parish church to join the Associate Church, and as a result most of the cases come from their records.

Fighting seems to have been a common offence. In 1834 the Associate Session rebuked a man for assaulting another and this rebuke was intimated to the congregation. Seven years later, two local men were rebuked for “quarrelling and fighting at Portmahomack during the herring fishing” and this was also intimated in church. (1)

After fighting broke out between a group of men in Balintore, the Associate Kirk Session met there as a committee (bearing in mind that this particular church in Nigg covered a wider area than the parish itself) and investigated the matter on the spot. One man was admonished before the Session, another was denied privileges of the church as a punishment. (1)

Then as now, fighting children caused trouble. In a case in 1862 the trouble arose when a father hit a child who had struck one of his, with the result that the other father hit him back, making the matter even worse by using terrible oaths, not fit to put in the minute book. One of the men was rebuked before the congregation, and the other before the public prayer meeting. (1)

A milder form of fighting was when someone “cast clods at Janet Taylour” which came under the heading of Sabbath profanation. One wonders if this would have mattered if it had happened on a weekday. (2)

Even elders were not immune from behaving roughly. One member of the Associate Church Kirk Session maltreated and beat a woman on whose land his horse had trespassed, presumably because she was angry about it. He was put from his office as elder and denied Communion while she, a trouble-maker, was counselled. (1)

When family quarrels occurred, they too came before the Session. The Associate minutes for 1781 tell how a man struck his wife “which stroke (it was said) hurt her considerably, even to the shedding of blood.” All he admitted doing was throwing a spoon at her and “a slight scratch made slight blood appear on the edge of her mutch.” For this he was admonished and forbidden to attend prayer societies for the time being. (2) It is interesting to see how often prayer societies and meetings occur and to realize that being barred from attendance was considered a punishment.

In the following year, there was a difference between a man and his wife, his mother being blamed for having had some hand in the trouble. Two elders investigated and found it all to be a “groundless suspicion entertained by said ...’s wife that his mother stirred him up against her.” (1)

More in-law trouble appeared in 1860 when a woman complained that her husband’s family were blaming her for causing him to go to the west coast fishing. The Session attempted to settle the quarrel without bringing the people concerned before them, but when their efforts failed, they summoned them to appear before them. (1)

Sometimes family quarrels took a more forceful turn as in 1781 when a father and son quarrelled and “came to handy gripes betwixt them.” The father took the blame, however, and the Session dropped the matter, but not without advising the son to be cautious. (1)

Drinking was the common failing of the time, drinking for celebration and for forgetfulness, but it very seldom appears as an offence on its own because it seems that it was so common as to be accepted. When it appears as an offence in Session Minutes, it is almost always coupled with something else like fighting or swearing. Very often

drunkenness and obscene language, sometimes described as “not proper to insert in the minute book” went hand in hand. In 1706 a man had to stand before the congregation for “vindictive malice and drunkenness” and another for “opprobrious language and drunkenness.” (2)

Unfortunately, elders also drank more than was wise on occasion, and if so they were treated just as severely as anyone else. In 1801, one of them belonging to the Associate Church was in the habit of frequenting tippling houses and missed church for several Sundays, and as a result he was dealt with according to the laws of the church. In 1810 another drinking elder was excluded from his seat in Session. (1)

A drunk woman seldom appears in Kirk Session records but in 1815 there was one such case. She was excluded from church privileges until she showed repentance. (1)

Theft also came before the Session whether it was stealing apples from Ankerville garden in 1720 or stealing pease on a Sunday in 1730. The punishment for the latter case was certainly higher for the day than the deed. (2) Serious cases of theft, while usually coming initially to the Session, were remitted by them to whatever higher authority they thought appropriate.

A member of the Associate Church was accused in 1768 of stealing peats and “endeavoured for some time with dissembling and shifting language to clear himself ... at last confessed ... was rebuked immediately” and it was furthermore decided that he should be excluded from both public and private prayer society meetings “until he gave evidence of his sorrow and that for this purpose he should afterwards converse with the Moderator and such of the Elders as the Moderator shall think proper to send him to.” This psychological punishment, with the wrong-doer making the rounds of the elders to be reprimanded by each in turn must have been a real deterrent. (1)

When some twenty years later a man stole a piece of timber from his neighbour, he was given a Sessional rebuke and temporary debarment from sealing ordinances and from prayer societies. As seen elsewhere, civil punishments for theft were very severe, but the Sessional rebuke and debarment must have been effective as it was the punishment most commonly used by the Associate Church for small thefts for quite some time. It was used for stealing “a stick of firewood of little value,” for taking a little corn from a kiln, cutting fails without the right to do so, and for not reproving and checking a wife when she was seen taking up potatoes that were not hers to take. (1)

Sometimes publicity about an offence demanded publicity in settling it. When a servant stole from his master at Culnaha, they made it up between them but because it had become public knowledge the Associate Session considered that they “should take cognizance of it” and rebuked the servant before them, and intimated the fact to the congregation. (1)

An interesting example of the Associate Session’s attitude to theft in rather later years came in 1822 when they made efforts to reconcile two men at the Whins of Nigg over a matter of stealing grass, but in addition the men were excluded from the Lord’s Supper. (1)

They were very displeased, however, with a girl who found a watch and took it home although she knew that a man had recently lost one and it might be his. Eventually she returned it to him, saying that she had kept it until then “as she wished her parents to get the watch cried at the church in Tarbat.” The Session considered that it was for the loser to have this done, not her, and for keeping the watch as long as she did, she was suspended from church privileges. A point of note here is how the church could be used as a sort of lost-property office. (1)

In 1860 a fisherman was accused of “improperly appropriating” (a nice euphemism for stealing) a widow’s potato ground at Old Shandwick, but was found not guilty by the Session. Later a man with the same surname as the widow accused the elders of “partiality and having been drawn to the side of the flesh” in the matter, for which statement he was summoned before them and there withdrew what he had said. (1)

An earlier case resulted in a public rebuke for a girl who took a petticoat and apron from what she described as a “broken house uninhabited” on her way home from church. As in an earlier case of fighting, it seems that the rebuke was as much for the offence being committed after public worship as for itself. (1)

An order to get redress for grievances, it was the custom to bring them before the Session. In 1774 there was an argument between two families over riddled barley “and there was strife betwixt the families for a long time.” Although there had already been an arbitration by mutually agreed men, one person disagreed and appealed to the Session, who made it clear to him that all along everyone else concerned said it was all a mistake and not deliberate. When they said they would let him “have it in the write” (ie a written statement) he realized that no harm had been done to his character and all was well. (1)

To keep one’s good name was very important and it was for this reason that several cases of defamation and slander came up, although in a case in 1705, mentioned also in another chapter, two girls appeared before the Session as a result of malicious gossip – and were given a solemn rebuke for being slandered! (2)

In 1775 a man came to the Associate Session about a scandal put around about his daughter, saying that she “was a whore to George Roy.” Witnesses who had said so were brought forward by the father, while George Roy himself denied it. Two of the women witnesses were rebuked for entertaining other people “with such a story on their way home from the public worship of God.” (1)

There was a forma in 1861 when a man told his wife that a man in Shandwick was supporting an illegitimate child in Tain. She spread the tale through the villages but as a result of the efforts of the Session, those involved were admonished and shook hands. Later on, there was a case about this in Tain and it appeared that the man who passed it on to his wife originally had been told the story “in joke” and yet passed it on to her as being true, and had thus deceived the Session over the matter. (1)

Perhaps not surprisingly, women feature quite often in such cases. One had to appear before a Session meeting for saying to a man that his wife was a strumpet, but during the meeting she abruptly rose and left. This action was considered most offensive, and it seems to have been as much for it as for the slander that she was suspended from privileges.

Another woman had to be rebuked before the Associate Session in 1783 for having said that a man and a married woman “were too great together and asserted that it was talked of by many.” The Session considered that this sort of remark could have caused a great deal of trouble.

There was some co-operation between the different churches in the parish over such matters. It was in 1854 that the Free Church contacted the Associate Church about a woman in Balnabruach who was said to have defamed another, but when a deputation of elders went there to investigate they found no blame. (1)

In 1771 the Associate Church had to deal with the matter of a woman who had urged a man to write letters to the minister of Tain, signed with a false name, letters which had given considerable offence. This couple had been suspected but had denied the charge and it was only the man’s deathbed confession in Tain that brought the truth to light. Elders from Nigg were sent to ask the four Tain elders in whose presence the confession was made, if they urged the dying man to do so or whether he had done so voluntarily, as it had been reported that they had extracted the confession from him. The Tain elders replied that this man had been prayed for every Sunday for six months and therefore they visited him frequently as a person in distress, and as he appeared to have something on his mind, they had asked him and he had confessed.

The man said that he had been put under oath by the woman so the Session sent the minister and three elders to see her to tell her of the information from Tain and ask her if she would confess. In their approach to her they agreed “to use all possible lenity to her and to take the most tender and cautious method in dealing with her.” She then admitted asking the man to write the letter but denied asking him to sign them with a false name. She was rebuked and excluded from public and private fellowship meetings and sealing ordinances “until her confession agrees to that of the defunct.” As a result of this treatment, she asked to come before the Session and at long last admitted her full blame – so the tender and cautious method had worked. (1)

The church also kept an eye on standards in the home and there are several references in the Associate minutes to men not rebuking their wives for this or that, and in 1770 when the elders were checking those applying to take the Communion they mentioned one man “who did not keep proper order in the family ... did not sing the praise of God nor read any portion of the Scriptures in going about the worship of God in his family in the mornings.” (1)

Kirk Sessions were also alert for possible crimes like bigamy or even murder. A man had left the parish with his wife and in 1706 returned to it with a new one and immediately the Session were active in the matter. They ordered him "to report Testimonials of his first wife's death and of his being married thereafter" so as to be sure that all was in order, this being of course in the days before there were death or marriage certificates. (2)

A similar case came up in 1729 but the man concerned was able to produce a witness to his wife's death and burial whereupon the Session "found it not necessary to put it to any further probation." (2)

The Kirk Session also issued certificates for various purposes. It was important for people to take a certificate of good character from their former parish with them when they moved elsewhere; they might not be allowed to stay without one. The issue of begging certificates is mentioned in the chapter on poverty.

The Testificate, as the certificate of character was often called, had to be paid for. In 1705 it cost \_ Scots (4d). In 1706 a testimonial "of her behaviour during her abode in this parish" was given to a woman who was moving away and two years later, the Clerk to the Session was instructed to give another woman a testificate of "her well behaviour" for the space of two years. An unmarried woman who planned to emigrate to America received such a certificate, although by that date the cost had risen to 1/6d stg. But one could not leave one's past behind as these certificates sometimes carried a qualification such as adding at the end, "but she fell in fornication and satisfied Discipline." (2)

When one reads of the penalties that could befall vagabonds and others wandering from parish to parish, especially in the earlier days, the importance of having what was in fact a reference to enable one to get and keep work is clear.

When the poor wished to go to law, they had first of all to turn to the Session for a certificate to sue in forma pauperis. The conditions that had to be met were that the person concerned was genuinely poor, was of good moral character and not a litigious person. In 1831 six fishermen applied for permission to sue in this way – a case that is fully dealt with in the chapter on transport.

By 1841, James Cameron, a surgeon in Tain, was able to say that the moral state of the whole of Easter Ross was very creditable, valuables were seldom stolen, and that the principal vices of petty theft and lying were due to love of what is novel and marvellous in the first case, and a poor understanding of English in the second. (3) It appears therefore that the churches performed their task of keeping the peace fairly effectively.

#### **Law and Order II - References:-**

- 1 Associate Church Session Minutes
- 2 Nigg Old Church Session Minutes
- 3 Sanitary Report 1841

## Law and Order III

### Civil Matters

As said elsewhere, the church did sterling work in keeping law and order within the parish but there was much that was dealt with elsewhere.

In the mid-1500's, for instance, much of the parish of Nigg came within the jurisdiction of the Rosses of Balnagown and for a long time such lairds held the power of pit and gallows. Balnagown itself lies in the parish of Logie Easter and there, near the former U F Manse, may still be seen the site of the pit and gallows – the drowning pool for women and the hanging hill for men – as well as the Moot hill, all formerly connected with the barony of Nigg. (1) There is no known drowning pool nor gallows hill in Nigg itself so it would seem that when such punishments were carried out, it was done in Logie Easter.

In 1587, Balnagown was one of the Highland chiefs made responsible for the orderly conduct not only of his own clan, but of any "broken men" living on his lands. (2) In that year, part of Balnagown lands in Nigg were handed over to Nicholas Ross, 1st of Pitcalnie, and from then on that family shared much of the duty of keeping order.

Lairds had the obligation and privilege of holding Baron Courts and it is clear from the Pitcalnie Estate Baron Court Book that there was a form of circuit round various places on the estate so that assemblies might be held at Arbol in the parish of Tarbat; at Culnaha in Nigg; at Amat in Kincardine and so on.

The Baron Court was a centre where the laird gathered his tenants to fix rents, call up arrears, listen to other people's complaints and lodge his own, and finally to dispense justice. He was assisted by various officers of whom he "made choose" on the spot.

At a Court at Culnaha in 1731, Malcolm Ross of Pitcalnie chose David Ross, schoolmaster at Nigg, as his baillie, Hugh Gair as clerk, Robert Ross, Shoemaker at Pitcalny, as fiscal, and yet another Ross as servitor to the fiscal. When the laird was able to choose these officials, mainly of his own clan, it leads to doubts as to the impartiality of the whole business.

At this Court, Malcolm Ross complained about his tenants in Nigg cutting and destroying arable land and summer grass to make divots for thatching houses. The accused were two tenants in Culderary, two other men and a widow. The fiscal asked that those who might be found guilty should be fined as the law directed, but unfortunately there is no mention of the outcome of the case.

Any matter held over from one Court to another meant that the people involved had to travel to the next point on the circuit, which must have caused much hardship. In 1731 also, a Court adjourned from Nigg to Arbol, heard a case to do with threshing corn at night, presumably over suspicion of theft, and the people from Nigg who were accused had to make their way to Arbol for the hearing. (3)

For certain needs, special authority might have been given to lairds as justices (4) and one such case that would have affected Nigg was when David Ross of Balnagown received in 1638 a paper giving him considerable powers. The paper was headed with the written signature "Charles R" and constituted David Ross and his Baillies the King's justices with full authority to fine all tenants and servants found guilty of certain crimes – theft, cutting of green wood, killing blackfish, deer and roe, and sorning (exacting free board and lodging), all of which had become very common. This commission was to last for a year, during which time half the fines were to go to the King, and half to the Justices. (4-M.215 and 216)

There is no denying that the Justices of Ross made short work of problems that trouble us nowadays, such as unemployment. In 1665 they enacted that all people without jobs should take work within eight days, otherwise any JP could have them imprisoned till the next Quarter Sessions, at least till they "ty themselves to actuall service or find securitie ..." (4-M.215) This shows how necessary a certificate of good character from the Kirk Session must have been for without one, it was difficult for a stranger in an area to find work, plentiful though work then was.

A further effort to maintain the law was made in 1682 by the Commissioners of Justiciary in Ross and Cromarty. They ordered the constables of each parish to find and apprehend all persons guilty or suspected of theft, resett, robbery, sorning, taking blackmail, communing with intercommuned persons, or harbouring outlaws and murderers, and present them at the next justice court. That the people might know what was afoot, this order had to be read at each parish church. (4-M.224)

Furthermore, the constables were to "seiz upon" all people travelling and carrying firearms seven miles from home without a pass, dated and valid only for that journey, provided by a "lawit man." One such pass dated 1684 signified that the holder was honest and should not be impeded or molested in any way as he passed and repassed with two work horses, which were identified by colour, one being "wholly yellow and the other black." Though not necessarily from Nigg, this example of a pass is given as an idea of what was required of them. (4-M.225)

One cannot but feel that had these sweeping powers been carried out there would have been no problems left, but they were obviously ineffective as a proclamation of 1684 ordained that all heritors, life renters, wadsetters, heads and chieftains of clans must find caution for their vassals and servants "for suppressing of theft, recpt. of theft and other crymes ordinarlie committed in the Highlands ..." (4-M.233)

This generally lawless and wild state of things continued in spite of very severe penalties. An idea of these is given in "Old Ross-shire and Scotland" by W MacGill and some instances are quoted here which, although they do not refer to Nigg, applied to the whole area of which Nigg is a part.

In 1675 a man who stole 1 boll 2 pecks of bear out of a barn was ordered to be scourged publicly by the executioner from 11 till 12 o'clock, and then to be banished from the shire. (4-M.241)

An indictment before Hugh Rose of Kilravock as Sheriff opens with a disquisition on property and a list of punishments. A thief guilty of stealing bread worth from a farthing to four was to be scourged; for taking bread worth four farthings he should be put in the jugs or banished; from four to eight meant the loss of an ear, "and if the same thief should be taken with thirty-two pennies and farthing he may be hanged." Worse still was that if someone was defamed for theft but could not find caution, he should be hanged. (4-M.240)

In Tain Burgh Court, in 1743, a carrier named Denoon and also mentioned in other chapters, confessed having taken a cask of spirits to Nigg Sands to be shipped to London and there, with the aid of accomplices, he pierced the cask with a gimlet and "embuzzled" some of the contents. For this crime he was ordered to go to "prison 8 days and then stand for an hour at the mercat cross with a paper on his breast inscribed 'For Breach of Trust.'" (4)

Two years earlier a man took four horses from a stable, and also a musket that was not his. For the theft of the musket, the Sheriff in Tain ordained that he should be taken from prison and be given seven lashes on his naked body at four different points about the town, and then be dismissed. This dismissal seemed somewhat premature as his punishment for stealing the horses was to be taken to the common place of execution and hanged till he was dead. (4-M.242)

Apparently, the Burgh of Tain hustled the unemployed out and unless they went by sea, they simply fell into the hands of the constables in other parishes. It cannot have been easy for these people to find cautioners should they need them, yet this they had to do. In 1660 it appears that David McCulloch of Kindeis was cautioner for William – of Voriach to ensure his removal from the burgh by Whitsunday or pay a penalty. As W MacGill says, this was a time of ruthless punishments, dire distress and the weakest going to the wall. (4-M.238)

With such severity meted out so lavishly to the poor and unemployed, it is interesting to know that things were not entirely one-sided.

In a Decree of Arrestment of 1586 it appears that Alexander Ross of Balnagown intended to take the duties of Pitcalnie, Culderarie and other properties to which he had no title, and for this he was to be arrested until caution and surety could be found. Twenty one years later, Alex McCulloch in Nigg was prosecuted for not confirming wills of which he was executor, one of them his late wife's. (5)

Five people were in trouble for debt in 1669, one of them James Fraser of Pitcolian (Pitcalzean). Letters of horning (instructing them to pay) had been obtained and a messenger left copies in the locks of their doors but they “most contemptouslie disobeyed.” Because of this, the messenger then went to the mercat cross of Dingwall and after “thrie several oyesses” denounced them as rebels by “putting them to the horn.” This was done by three blasts of a horn at a cross, and thereafter the messenger pronounced that all their moveable goods and gear were confiscated and to be brought in for His Majesty’s use. (4-M.203)

In 1670, it was the turn of a neighbour of Pitcalzean’s to be in trouble. The Town Council of Cromarty complained that Clunes of Dunskaith was keeping the town’s “evidents” and would not “refer the same,” whereat the magistrates ordered that he should be apprehended wherever he could be found and put in ward. (4-M.780) Ten years later, however, it was Clunes of Dunskaith who was taking action, obtaining an interdict against James Fraser and Don Rioch, portioners of Pitcalzean, from taking turf, peat and bents from his land. (4-M.780)

Even murder was not unknown in Nigg. No one would think that the wording on a tombstone in the Old St Duthus Church in Tain referred to the victim of such a crime as it commemorated Arabella Phipps, wife of Hugh Rose of Glastullich, “who in the act of preparing Medicine for the relief of a sick and indigent Family, suddenly expired on the 9th November 1806, aged 27 years.” Arabella was murdered at Bayfield House by her husband’s quadroon mistress who had followed him from the West Indies and hidden in an attic until the moment was right. Apparently there was no case about this murder, nor is there any documentary evidence about it, yet it caused so much gossip that the tale was authenticated by the late Miss Rosa Williamson-Ross, chief of the Rosses of Pitcalnie.

After this dramatic occurrence, things improved and at the time of the New Statistical Account no one in the parish had been even suspected of a felonious action for twenty years, while according to another source of the same date, writing of Easter Ross generally, “Conspicuous crimes are almost wholly unknown; travelling is perfectly secure; the inhabitants use no particular precaution against nightly depredation ...” (6)

The time came when the law was kept by Tom the Bobby who, about the time of the 1914-18 War, walked his beat from Balintore to Nigg Ferry twice a week. In time, he got a bicycle; and in more time, the local policeman was based in Fearn instead of Balintore, but modern ideas swept away the bobby on the beat in favour of two bobbies in a car. It took the arrival of industry to show that a locally-based policeman – in fact, two – was needed, and a cottage was modernised near Nigg Ferry where they could live and keep an eye on the industrial workers. For some time, security at the site was operated by the firm Securicor whose area extended beyond the confines of Highlands Fabricators’ works. Even so, there has been more crime in Nigg since industry came than for many years before, this crime including house-breaking and fire-raising, and many people regret the days when the local policeman was a familiar figure and really knew the people he was looking after.

### **Law and Order III - References:-**

- 1 “Book of Ross,” Macdonald and Polson
- 2 “Tain through the Centuries,” R W Munro and Jean Munro
- 3 Pitcalnie Estate Baron Court Book 1731
- 4 “Old Ross-shire and Scotland,” W MacGill. Some, but not all, numbers given.
- 5 “Gayre’s Booke,” Lt Col G R Gayre
- 6 Sanitary Report 1841

## Wars and Strife

The parish of Nigg has had its share of the effects of wars and strife, and one of the earliest references to battle in the parish says that Winn, a Norseman, came with his warriors and did battle on the shores of Dunskaith. (1) Dunskaith Castle was built as a result of insurrection; William the Lion, King of Scotland, came to Ross with an army to quell a rebellion in Ardmeanach (Black Isle area) and built and fortified the two Castles of “Etherdover” (Redcastle) and “Dunscath.” (2) “Suppression of robbers” is also given as a reason for its building and there is no doubt that it, along with Fearn Abbey, established about the same time, meant that “civil and ecclesiastical powers were united to subdue and civilize the wild inhabitants of the country.” (3)

An indication of troubled times appears in an agreement made in Edinburgh in 1555 between Alexander Ross of Balnagown and Jhone Ross of “ye toune of Dunskyt.” This provided for Jhone Ross to deliver a variety of goods at Cromarty including chained mail coats with sleeves and linen padding to the value of £20, and “ane Culvering yat beis tyt fyne and schotes fur four ferynks of fine culvering poudyr.” The culverin was an 18-pounder cannon that was to be delivered with a supply of powder and shot. (4-M.673)

Landowners were required to contribute to military supplies, a most unwelcome burden. The scroll of casting the provision for the garrison of Inverness about 1649 shows the goods required – plaids, cogs (wooden bowls), loads of peats, pots and pans. Varying amounts of these articles had to be supplied by different estates and individuals including “Nigg, Culnald, Pitkulean...Pitcalnie...Alex and Thos. Gair...Mickle Kindease...Sandwick...Little Kindease...Milnes of Kindeas and Pitkylean...” (4-M.566)

When troops passed through the countryside and were quartered in a district it was a great expense and hardship to the people concerned and everyone either tried to get out of it, or at least ensure that everyone else shared it with them. Thus it was that in 1655 Tain and Edderton complained that the parishes of Fearn, Nigg and Tarbat were not willing to accept the order given by Colonel Morgan that they should share the loss suffered by Tain and Edderton when the Colonel’s troops were quartered on their way south from Caithness. A letter was sent from the Burgh of Tain asking that Fearn, Nigg and Tarbat should be ordered to obey (4-M.572) but if they contributed at all it does not seem as if it was much help as the following year Tain was begging the Commander in Chief of Scotland to help their plight as the “poor towne is ruined...” (4-M.573). It may also explain some of the items from Pitcalny’s accounts in 1653 – “To the trouperis to Balnagown in meall and oats 2 firlofts...kidds, capons, henns and eggs given to the trouperis...”

About the time of the Restoration only those vouched for by a loyal chief were allowed to have guns. David Ross of Pitcalny was one of thirty-six people for whom the Laird of Balnagown vouched enabling them to have hagbuts, which were a clumsy type of gun of an earlier time. (4-M.699)

An account of strife in the early 18th century which affected the parish is given by Col. Gayre who says, “In the Balnagown documents there are some interesting letters concerning a French warship which in March 1709 had seized a Queen’s ship and was threatening the coast. The first letter was written by Sir Kenneth Mackenzie of Cromarty to Colonel the Hon. Charles Ross, MP, of Balnagown, Chief of the Clan Ross:-

‘Cromartie at night. 23rd March.

Much Hond.

Being informed that you have a brass gun and yr (there) being present accasion for it this or your syd of the ferrie for obloidging the privateer to surrender Her Majesties shipp seized by him in this road. It is expected and intreated you will order it to the other syd...a batterie being erected yr for that purpose alreade...’ ”

These being the days when landowners were expected to help to defend the country, Sir Kenneth Mackenzie had apparently erected a battery on his side which had been sufficiently effective to make privateers move from the Cromarty side of the coast towards to the Nigg shore and hence the need for Balnagown’s brass cannon there. At the same time the principal figures in Nigg were themselves writing to Ross of Balnagown for certain “blow guns” which they felt would be of use to them in the battery they had themselves erected. (5) No more is known of this incident, but it must have caused the greatest excitement.

There was a strange occurrence in 1721. That year the Presbytery were informed “that there was a very gross Sabbath profanation committed in the parishes of Fearn and Nigg upon the Lord’s Day...by some Custom House officers and a party of soldiers who pressed horses and carried goods in carts in the time of Divine Worship from the Port of Hilton in the parish of Fearn to the Ferry-side of Cromarty in the parish of Nigg.” The matter was dropped because the Presbytery could not discover to what Kirk Sessions the soldiers belonged – but what can these men have been doing and under whose orders were they acting? It would be most interesting to know. (6)

Cattle reiving was a form of strife from which Nigg, in common with other lowland parishes suffered. There seems to have been a burst of this in the early 1720’s – “frequent attempts made of late on the low country people’s cattle,” (4-M.234) and on one occasion a band of armed caterans descended from the hills and swept the parish of its cattle. It was on this occasion that Donald Roy, that grand old man of Nigg’s religious life, showed a dash of his warlike spirit and helped to recapture the cattle after a considerable fray. (7)

But it was not just cattle that raiders took. In 1740 there was a severe famine combined with a fog that completely ruined what had promised to be fine crops, so that by 1741 there was very great hardship. Nevertheless, farmers in Easter Ross scraped together what meal they could by pinching and scraping and loaded a ship from Gourack that lay on the sands of Nigg. The sight of carts going to and fro was too much for the people of Cromarty who could see them so easily so they raided the ship, boarded her and took the meal, an event known as the Cromarty Meal Mob. (7)

Master Ross was generally anti-Jacobite in the wars of 1715 and 1745. In 1715 Malcolm Ross, 5th of Pitcalnie, raised 500 men from his various estates to oppose the Pretender and there was sufficient trouble in the area at that time to prevent all but three ministers attending the Presbytery meeting in October that year. One of these was George Munro of Nigg; it is probable that the sea and the marshes saved the parish from immediate contact with the fighting. (8)

Although Malcolm Ross’s grandson was a Jacobite in the ’45, the attitude of the area was clear – after the Battle of Culloden the Presbytery of Tain, including the minister of Nigg, met to give thanks “to the Lord for the signal and seasonable deliverance He was pleased to give unto these lands from Popery and slavery by the overthrow of the rebels at Culloden.” (6) By the following year, however, they had to give “thought to the dismal situation” brought about by the troubles.

But while the people would rally to their laird’s call they did not like the activities of the Press Gang which went on in varying degrees around the coast. In the fishing villages stories are still told of dramatic escapes, and also of those who did not escape.

The Disruption which led to the formation of the Free Church in 1843 led to strife as well. The former Presbytery had insults hurled at them, and in some cases threats of violence. This happened in Easter Ross where things became so bad that H M Greyhound, a cruiser, was sent to Cromarty Ferry (Nigg) to quell any disturbance that might arise. It appears that the authorities were helpless in the hands of a lawless rabble although the Presbytery said that they were either unwilling or unable to maintain the peace in any case connected with church matters. Troops were sent to Invergordon but even then the Presbytery told the Lord Advocate that they could not agree to the withdrawal of the cruiser until the troubles should have properly subsided. (6)

Thomas Pennant writing in 1769 said he thought that the Cromarty Firth was the most capacious and secure anchorage of any in Great Britain, whose whole navy might lie there with ease. His opinion foreshadowed official thinking and the Cromarty Firth did indeed become a naval base. Before the 1914-18 War, and after it, the ships of the Home Fleet came there for their spring and autumn manoeuvres, adding much excitement to local life. Even after the 1914-18 War, there were large fleets; the Ross-shire Journal of 27th June 1931 reported that two parent ships, Lucia and Adamant had come in, along with twenty-two submarines and four minesweepers.

“There was a modest connection between Nigg and the beginnings of the Royal Naval Air Service through Lt. (late AVM) Longmer who in 1913/14 had hangers on the links at Cromarty and one or two rudimentary seaplanes. His flights in these were of great interest to the local children, as were the frequent visits to the Nigg jetty of the beautiful little varnished mahogany motor boat which then provided the air-sea rescue service.” (9)

And war was coming. The Admiralty had built the large pier at Nigg by June 1914 and bought land on North and South Sutors from W C Ross of Cromarty to build gun batteries to protect the entrance to their naval base in the firth, with searchlight huts on the rocks below, whose corrugated iron buildings are there still. Directly below North Sutor there are two of these huts on rocks which had to be connected by a suspension bridge. To enable the men to get down the cliffs to these various huts, paths were made, or possibly developed. Steps were cut, faced with wood; hand rails were erected the whole way, and a comparatively easy walk was made. These were in good order well into the 1930's but by the 1970's very few of the hand rails still survive although a few of the steps with their wooden facings are still discernible. One path is from North Sutor to the huts with the bridge; the other lies at the western extremity of the forts.

The 1914-18 War made a visual impact as well as a social one on the parish, as not only were there large camps for the troops but the trees on a large part of the hill were cut and sawn at a sawmill above Pitcalzean. Long after it had gone its site was marked by a large pile of sawdust.

Troops arrived in the parish almost immediately the war started – by September 11th 1914 Nigg School was feeling their impact with the children greatly distracted by their presence, a distraction which continued while the war lasted. It was no wonder that the children were aware of the service men. There was a battalion of the Scottish Rifles encamped between Nigg School and Pitcalnie House (the farm was taken over for the war) and a battalion of The Black Watch between the Middle Church and Bayfield. As already said, there was a gun battery known as “the forts” on North Sutor, and ranges for rifle practice were built at Culnald and their high banks are still there and the name “The Targets” is still used for them.

Dunskaithe House, under the name HMS Thalia, became a naval hospital but had an inadequate water supply which made it unsuitable for this purpose, with the result that it was demoted into a store for naval supplies. A gravestone in the Old Parish Churchyard shows the resting place of a man at HMS Thalia who died in 1916.

To provide some recreation for the men there was a Salvation Army hut in front of the Pitcalnie farm cottages west of Pitcalnie House, and a church organisation from St George's East Church. Edinburgh was established at Bayfield House. Mr Polson, headmaster of Nigg School, made the school available to the men as a reading and writing room and ran a small library for them, as well as a little shop for such things as sweets.

The camps in the parish were for training men for going to the front – it is said that two soldiers hanged themselves in the Bishop's Walk and one on the Hill, rather than face the horrors of active service. Men from the camps also did sentry duty at Balintore harbour, living in a bothy there during their tour of duty. There was a comparable battery to North Sutor on South Sutor, with the result that there was constant coming and going between Nigg and Cromarty; there was also a hospital at Cromarty. Throughout the war the ferry boat ran every hour from 9 am until 7 pm except for a break at 1 pm. A car went from the camps at Nigg taking any sick men who had to go to hospital via the ferry, and any officers crossing over on army business – and the Ferry children kept an eye out for its return as with luck they might get a lift to school. (10) So important was the ferry that the local military commander recommended that D McLeman, ferryman at the time, should be exempted from military service in order to run it. (11)

A local resident has a touching story of these war years. The officers from the naval ships in the Firth used to come and play golf at Nigg, taking sailors off their ships as caddies. After their game, the officers stopped at the hotel – they were said to go into the kitchen and take the pancakes off the girdle as they were made, so good were they – but the sailors had to fend for themselves. Several of them one day came to a cottage door one Sunday (there being Sunday play at Nigg) to ask for something to eat. The woman of the house gave them eggs, scones and oatcakes, refusing any payment. Within a few days all these men were drowned when their ship “Black Prince” went down. (10)

The same person speaks of the sinking of HMS Natal in the Cromarty Firth in 1915 after an explosion during a children's party given by the officers. This explosion has always remained a mystery. There was considerable loss of life and it was she who found the first body from Natal washed up on shore at Nigg. (10)

The troops brought and gave a lot of entertainment to the parish, including the opportunity to visit Rostock and Wombles circus in 1917, which is mentioned in Recreation. Cowsons of Glasgow began laying the foundations of a theatre for the troops in the field adjoining the Middle Church but when the war ended the scheme was naturally

abandoned. Some of the soldiers made a pool for themselves in the Bishop's Walk, and another at the edge of the sea, for bathing or paddling. There was double benefit in the concerts they ran for the soup kitchen, entertainment combined with real help for the parish. A concert for this cause in 1917 raised £14.0.8d, and another the following year provided £31.11/- for the kitchen. With no school meals, this kitchen was a real benefit to the school children.

The parish church was affected by all this army activity and presence. Extra hymn books were obtained and the Rev N D Mackay was appointed "officiating clergyman to the Presbyterian troops in Nigg." In 1916 he held four Communion services, admitting seventy men for the first time. The following year he held Communion seven times, and three hundred and forty-nine men took part, sixty of them for the first time. (8) The Free Church meanwhile decided in 1915 to try and make its evening service more attractive to the troops by having "instrumental music." (12)

The war brought some surprising sights and the first time one fish-wife saw an airship she thought it was a flying whale. There was a slight flurry in the number of illegitimate births (13) and at least one woman obtained a nickname thanks to the presence of two barges that lay for some time at the docks. So friendly was she, that she became known as "- the Barge!"

Because the Cromarty Firth was a naval base, it was there that the ships of the Home Fleet came in after the Battle of Jutland in 1916, on their way to repair in the floating dock at Invergordon. The memory of these ships passing is very vivid to those who saw it. Apparently everyone who could do so flocked to the pier at Nigg to see the ships coming through the Sutors, and everyone was appalled to see how badly their sides were scarred with the marks of battle. This was emphasized as the holes seemed to be circled with paint or something of the sort. (10)

But time was passing and the war ended and the troops left Nigg. But it must be mentioned what a happy relationship they established with the local people while there, so much so that in 1917 a deputation of Nigg people met Col. Luard of the Scottish Rifles at the regimental hospital for a little ceremony. Rev W Johnston of the U F Church "expressed the kindly feeling which existed between the people of the district and the soldiers" and eight beds subscribed by the public were presented. Furthermore £60 had been raised to provide a shelter shed for military drafts waiting at Nigg Station to be erected subject to railway approval. (11)

In 1919 the school children were being taught hymns and songs for the Peace Celebrations, just at the time that there was a surprising aftermath of the war. That June the German fleet was scuttled at Scapa Flow where it had been interned, and prisoners taken from the ships were brought on HMS Lion to Invergordon and thence by boat to Nigg Ferry to spend one night in the camp in front of Nigg School before being entrained for the south. These men were photographed; the men look quite cheerful, but the officers turned their backs on the amateur photographer. They walked from the Ferry to the camp, and it would seem that they took what food they could before abandoning ship, because along the way there was an astonishing scatter of coffee beans. One of them dropped a parcel, and another a letter addressed to "Seaman Torpedo boat mechanic Hans Roth, Torpedo Boat S.136, 11 Flotilla, Interned in England." (10)

All that remained physically of the war in Nigg were the graves of two men of the Black Watch and one navyman from HMS Thalia, the Dunskaith hospital, in the Old Churchyard; the ruined forts at North Sutor; the Targets; and two huts, one of which became the Territorial Hall and the other which was briefly used as a smallpox hospital in 1920. The camps were dismantled and the people began to face the prospect of peace.

But while many men came to the parish to train for the war, others had left it to serve their country. Many of them returned, but many did not and by 1920 a move was afoot to erect a suitable memorial to the fallen. The Parish Council formed themselves into a committee to choose both memorial and site and in 1921 they accepted an offer from Henry Hutcheon Ltd of the Aberdeen Granite Works for a Memorial in the form of a Celtic cross to be erected in the new cemetery at Chapelhill which was opened in 1922. The cost was to be £220, the foundation work to be done locally. The committee had some second thoughts about their decision and at their next meeting considered an alternative suggestion of putting up an army hut as a hall in lieu of a Memorial. This was rejected on the grounds that it would not commemorate the dead of the parish suitably; that it might cost more than could be raised; that to draw back from their agreement might land the Parish Council in breach of contract; and lay them open to interdict by those who had contributed to a Memorial. (14) As a result, the original plan was adhered to and commemorates the following who did not return from the 1914-18 War:-

Capt. Budge	Pte. James Forbes
Lt. Edmund Romanes	Pte. Andrew Ross
Sgt. Maj. Alexander Polson	Pte. Roderick Ross
Sgt. Alexander Mackenzie	Pte. John Skinner
Lc. Sgt. Dugald Bannerman	Pte. Andrew Vass
Cpl. John Gunn	Pte. Kenneth Vass
Cpl. Alexander Ross	A B Andrew Ross
Pte. Thomas Campbell	NDM David Macleod R N R
Pte. Alexander Christie	A B David Morrison
Pte. William Mackenzie	A B John Vass

The census of 1921 shows that there was a rise of 40 in the population in the ten years covering the war, one of only three rises in the parish population since records began.

After the war, the Home Fleet continued to use the Cromarty Firth as a naval base and every spring and autumn held their manoeuvres there. The Fleet coming in was a great sight and everyone turned out to admire aircraft carriers, battle ships, cruisers, destroyers and submarines. Indeed, the Home Fleet was lying in the Firth at the beginning of September 1939 when war was inevitable and it was a sombre spectacle when the ships sailed out to lie off the Sutors awaiting orders. This may well have been because by then the obvious defects of the Firth had become apparent. The narrow entrance could be too easily closed by enemy mines and any ships lying within could be trapped there indefinitely. Thus the Firth lost its naval importance during the 1939-45 War, the whole surrounding area was full of service activity and a considerable part of this again centred in Nigg.

The gun battery on the North Sutor was rebuilt and manned by the Royal Artillery, men who to start with anyway came from Wallasey. Later they were followed by Norwegian naval personnel as in Norway coastal defence comes under the navy. Associated with the forts was an observation post at the corner of Anne's Wood and a radar post on the cliffs some half a mile farther east. The purpose of these guns was to fire on ships attacking the Firth; the only time they were really needed was when a German plane flew in and bombed the oil tanks at Invergordon. With great skill and audacity it skimmed through the Sutors just above the sea, too low for the guns to be trained upon it.

Later in the war another gun battery was built on part of the golf course. Known as Nigg Camp it never appeared to serve much useful purpose and latterly was used for Italian and German prisoners of war working on the land, as well as being manned by Norwegians at some point. One of the gun emplacements was sited on top of the foundations of Dunskaith Castle, proving the strategic value of the spot chosen by William the Lion about seven hundred years earlier. Four holes of the golf course were lost to this camp, the beginning of the end for golf in Nigg.

The navy opened at Nigg Ferry a mine base for torpedo-filling and the pier was enlarged by a section added at right angles. There was a R N A S training aerodrome at Fearn, part of which overlapped into the parish of Nigg. In connection with the aerodrome, there was a small wireless station on the cliff at Easter Rarichie, and a bomb-range marker's hut near the old ford below Pitcalnie Brae. This hut was used for checking the accuracy of the naval airmen's torpedo bombing over the bay. Barracudas were the planes most frequently used and they seemed notorious for not coming out of dives. Many lives were lost in this way.

A large aeroplane base at Invergordon required a R A F wireless station somewhere on Nigg Hill and the original one was right on top of the hill above Pitcalzean. Unfortunately it caught fire and the replacement was built on Castlecraig, the site they had really wanted in the first place.

Members of the Women's Land Army lived in "The Hostel," the house that once belonged to Danny the Shoemaker and is now occupied by the Bayfield shepherd. From there they went to work on various farms.

There was a detachment of the local Defence Volunteers and Mrs Douglas, Nigg, organised a WRI canteen once a week in the small hall of the Middle Church where for 6d a night, the men could have tea and play whist. Perhaps best of all was the opportunity to hand their socks to kind-hearted local women for darning.

With all three services represented in the parish in this war, it may seem that there were more men than there had been in the 1914-18 war, but this is not so. There were in fact far fewer, but as before they were welcomed into local homes and themselves contributed to the scanty entertainment of the times. The navy men at the mine base twice gave Christmas parties for the children and friendships made during the war still continue.

The minutes and accounts of the WRI show what a lot the women did for the war effort, and what a large amount of wool was bought and knitted by members into comforts for the services generally, and the war charities they supported – Red Cross Ambulance Fund, Services Canteen in Dingwall, Mrs Churchill's Aid to Russia Fund, Relief to Russia and China etc, as well as sending Christmas parcels to service men and women from the parish.

As before, local men joined up to serve their country. For many years men in the fishing villages had been in the habit of joining the Royal Naval Reserve, spending some time annually training in Inverness, and when war broke out these reserves were called up. The local detachment of the Territorial Army was also called up, while other people went to the Merchant Navy and the Air Force. Many of the girls joined the women's services. For those who returned there was a "Welcome Home" party in the Territorial Hall in 1946, one of the last functions held there. Those who did not come home again are commemorated on the side sections of the War Memorial:-

Sgt. Donald Mackenzie, R A F  
Sgt. Hugh Macleod, Tank Corps  
L.Cpl. Charles Ross, Seaforth Highlanders  
Pte. Charles Taylor, Seaforth Highlanders  
Tpr. John Mackenzie, Recce Corps  
Pte. Elizabeth Mackay, A T S  
A B David Ross, R N  
A B Hugh Vass, R N  
Seaman David Vass, R N  
Seaman Bertie Vass, R N  
Capt. Donald Ross, M N  
3rd Officer Donald Ross, M N

The physical remains of the war were again the ruined forts, as well as the mine base, aerodrome buildings and so on. But another legacy was the introduction of such names as Schoebella, Mutinelli and others, as German and Italian POW's who worked on the land married and settled in this country.

There is one particularly noticeable feature of war that must be mentioned. In spite of losing loved ones in both wars, the people of the fishing villages speak of war time as a time of prosperity when, in many ways, things were good. This is not seen in the landward areas where people were usually in regular employment and so what might be called the benefits of war were not so necessary. It is a comment on the bitter experience of unemployment and poverty that the construction work which war time brought was in itself welcome; that apart, everyone in the parish, fisherfolk or landfolk, were all deeply aware of the tragedy of war.

### **Wars and Strife - References:-**

1. "Finn and his Warrior Band."
2. "Book of Ross," Macdonald and Polson.
3. New Statistical Account.
4. "Old Ross-shire and Scotland," W MacGill. Numbers are given.
5. "Gayre's Booke," Lt Col G R Gayre.
6. "Church Life in Ross and Sutherland," Rev Colin MacNaughton.
7. "Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland," Hugh Miller.
8. "Church Chronicles of Nigg," Rev J R Martin.
9. Mr Leslie Gilsland.
10. Miss H Macleod, formerly of Ivy Cottage, Nigg.
11. Ross-shire Journal.
12. Free Church Session Minutes.
13. Baptismal Register of the U P Congregation.
14. Minutes of Nigg Parish Council.

## Heating and Lighting

The problems of heating and lighting were very terrible to the common people. There was such a lack of fuel and so many restrictions on what was available, that it is a wonder how they kept warm and managed to cook at all in earlier days.

MacGill describes the position in the late 1600's when the country was denuded of trees, when only wood or peat was used as fuel, and the poor people were desperate for the want of it, and meanwhile the lairds were intent on replanting and protecting what they planted.

The laws made to protect plantations and trees generally were stringent and in 1615 those who destroyed green wood "if not taken reid hand shall be persewed before the shirreff and if convict shall pay to the owner of the wood the avail (value) of the skaith (damage) together with £10 for the first fault and £20 for the second ... whose shall cut or break any trees planted or enclosed by any heretor shall pay £20 for every tree ..." (1-M.211)

Seventy years later, in 1685, the position was much the same and an Act of Parliament decreed that "No one shall destroy a tree under ten years of age under paine of 10 punds Scots or above ten years ... paine of £20 Scots ... If he be insolvent he shall work for his fyne at half a merk a day to the heretor." Furthermore tenants and cottars were required to preserve plantations on their holdings and were liable for the actions of their households in this regard as well. (1-M.212)

In 1724 the penalties for breaking down, cutting and spoiling green wood were severe indeed. The men who were guilty of this offence had to pay £20 and spend eight days in prison, after which they were to be taken to the market place and stripped down to their breeches and, with a rope about their necks, be led up and down three times by the hangman with a paper on their breasts, saying, "This is for my first fault in cutting ... and I promise I shall no do ye like under paine of being whipt once every moneth of 3 months ..." (1-M.255)

Pitcalnie Estate took the same attitude over their tenants and wood cutting. About 1731 those in Amat were warned about "meddlin with the timber," and were told that if they did so they would be fined £5 stg. And imprisoned for ten days in the vault of the barn at Arboll with their legs in the stocks. (2)

These cases come from outside the parish, but within Ross-shire, to indicate the general position with regard to wood cutting, and to give the background to the fuel problem.

It is always said that there is no peat in Nigg; it might be more accurate to say that there is hardly any peat, and certainly no good peat. It seems however that back in 1593, when Nicholas Ross of Pitcalnie brought in several men to act as judges to decide the marches of the commonty and his own property, peat was a matter also considered. The judges specified the land "in common loaning" where occupiers of Nigg, Pitcalnie, Culnaha and Kindeace (Ankerville) might not only pasture their stock but also "lead their fewal therefrae." (3) It is reasonable to assume that this "fewal" was peat, but generally speaking the people of Nigg had to go outside the parish for their supplies of this form of heating.

As late as 1793 the Statistical Account said that the principal disadvantage, and the one that most retarded agricultural improvement, was the want of fuel. There was none whatsoever, it said not entirely accurately, apart from young fir trees which by then were being sold at such a rate that they were beyond the pockets of the people. The people mainly used turf and peat, often having to carry it five or six miles, and this task took up the whole summer so that everything else on their farms and crofts had to be neglected. More than this, many had to go across the sands of Nigg Bay to Logie Easter to dig their peat in the moss there. This meant crossing by the ford so that they had to "therefore by night and by day watch the opportunity when the tide is out, so that it is no unusual thing to see them set out for the moss at the time when others go to rest." (4) The roads and the distance took a heavy toll on carts and harness and often at the end of it all they had "but most uncomfortable fuel." In a wet season their efforts might be wasted if they could not carry the peat out of the moss, and sometimes what they took home was so wet that it would not answer for fire. (4)

It is little wonder that people tried to get fuel closer at hand, and if necessary resorted to theft. In 1680 Clunes of Dunskaith had to get an interdict against James Fraser and Don Rioch, portioners of Pitcalzean, for taking peat, turf and bents. (1-M.780). And in 1776 there was a complaint that tenants of Nigg among others had gone within the boundaries of Tain and cut turf and fuel. This resulted in officials from Tain being appointed to perambulate their bounds and near St Catherine's Cross they discovered, with what sounds like horror, "great quantities of turf cast in all parts, in general by the inhabitants of Nigg and Fearn." (1-M.1242) Thus it would appear that for people living at the east end of the parish it was easier to go towards Loch Eye for fuel. (It must be pointed out that turf was also used for thatching, as was bent grass.)

The church records also give cases of theft of fuel. In 1769 a man appeared before the Session of the Associate Church "accused of carrying off for his own use peats belonging to James Vause. He endeavoured for some time with dissembling and shifting language to clear himself" but at last confessed and was "rebuked immediately." His punishment was exclusion "from both the public and private society meetings until he gave evidence of his sorrow" and that for this purpose he should converse with the Moderator and elders in turn.

In 1799 another man came before the same Session confessing "having taken a stick of firewood of little or no value." The fact that such a little theft took him before the Session shows not only their strictness, but the importance of a "stick of firewood."

With growing wood forbidden to them, and peat difficult to get in the parish, the very poorest people largely used whins, broom, fallen twigs and "rokins," which are thought to be fir cones. A man who gathered rokins for firewood on a Sunday found that he had to stand before the congregation for doing so, although the Session cannot have thought too badly of him as they were otherwise satisfied with his conduct, and that of three other men, "providing their deportment for the future be inoffensive." (5)

No wonder that the list of disadvantages in the Statistical Account already quoted, ends with, "It is therefore with the highest satisfaction they learned that it is intended to bring a bill into Parliament, to repeal the duties payable on coals carried coastwise to the North, as it will enable them to procure fuel at a cheaper rate, and with far less drudgery, and at the same time will permit them to direct their attention to agriculture, which at present, from the above mentioned cause, is too much neglected by them." (6)

Their hopes were not immediately realized, for some fifty years later the New Statistical Account said that though coal from Newcastle was the main fuel for the more opulent and the farm workers, whins, broom and whatever they could find was, as before, the firewood of the common people. They could not afford to pay 1s. per imperial barrel for coal that was unfortunately not good anyway. (6)

One source of fuel was the whins that had been burnt by gamekeepers and in particular the Shandwick women used to go, early on summer mornings, to Shandwick Hill where they gathered bundles of these sticks. They tied heaps of them with a rope with an iron ring at one end, and with them thus looped together, heaved them on their backs, and home they went. Every wood was scoured for what might be lying fallen below the trees and the shores were a source of driftwood for those living near the sea. Long after coal was available, people were still relying on local sources of fallen timber, driftwood and so on.

Coal had been available by the 1820's – the Kirk Session was paying for coal for the poor in 1822/3, and again in 1842 at a cost of 9d. per cwt. (7) And when it came, it did indeed come "coastwise." Before harbours were built, the boats sailed in and beached on the sands at Shandwick, below Pleasant Cottage and at Nigg Ferry, (the little jetty there at that time not being adequate.) Coal was sometimes dumped overboard for collection when the tide fell; sometimes a frame was built so that unloading might continue on to it when the tide came in; and sometimes unloading waited till low water. Sledges were used on the sands and creels carried many a load home. Lines of farm carts came from the farms, and sometimes gave a hand to those who had none. Many people near Nigg Ferry remember how obliging Mr Mackenzie, Mulloine, used to be about lending carts for this purpose. It is thanks to the coal carts that there is a right of way to the shore behind Pleasant Cottage – it was part of a "traffic system" whereby carts went down to the shore near Honeysuckle Cottage and came up by Pleasant Cottage, where the incline was not so steep.

It was 1896 before the Balintore Harbour was completed which meant that coal no longer had to be landed on the shore at Shandwick; and in June 1914 the first loads of it came to the new pier at Nigg. The improved facilities may not have pleased everyone, however. When the boats discharged on to the shore there was the chance of free coal for some, as entries from Nigg School log (also given in Education) show: "Bad attendance from the Ferry again this week. Two vessels are discharging coals on the beach and the children are employed gathering coals that fall from the ships and carts ... two ships on shore discharging and they watch the emptying of the barrels into the carts to pick up any coals that miss the carts and claim them as their own." No wonder their parents did not always encourage school attendance!

In the 1920's the best English coal was coming in at the cost of 19/- a ton, and best Scottish at 11/- a ton. The coal boats usually left the Cromarty Firth carrying loads of harl and marl to Newcastle, or possibly potatoes in their season. Ships which local people particularly remember are those of an Invergordon firm, "Surprise and Despatch;" and Captain Maclean's "Bonny Lass" and "Lily."

But transport systems changed and by the 1930's and 1940's coal came by rail. As soon as it was known to be at the railway station, all farm work stopped; coal was one of the workers' "perks" and must be supplied immediately. It was a great advantage to employers then farm workers decided that they no longer wished to have perks in their wages – they would prefer a higher wage and to get their coal themselves – as this meant that they no longer had to stop work to rush transport to the station for coal. Gradually everyone began to depend on coal merchants who delivered from house to house and this is still the method of delivery but, because it is usually a frequent delivery service, people tend to rely on this and buy less at a time and are thus very vulnerable in case of strikes. They have also suffered from a shortage of coal since the industrialization of the 1970's caused a shortage of drivers and consequent lack of deliveries.

Wood is bought from wood merchants, but is largely burnt by those with access to their own supplies. Electricity and calor gas have provided further alternative supplies of power for heating and cooking.

In the old days one system of lighting was provided by the crusie, an open iron lamp with a rush wick, fed by home-made oil which was no problem to obtain in a seaboard parish. In fact, it was exported elsewhere by the fisherfolk of Shandwick and neighbouring villages who used to sell it in Dingwall during the Feil Maree, the market which moved there from Contin in 1830. (8)

Home-made candles were commonly used and equipment for making them was to be found in all houses until superseded by bought candles, and then paraffin lamps of various sorts. The Old Parish Church had lovely hanging brass lamp holders, which were unfortunately disposed of in the 1960's, although one of them can still be seen in the dining room at Ashcroft, near Cullisse; and Chapelhill Church still has, along the pews, the holders for lamps.

Several farms had private electricity generators by the 1920's but electricity only came generally to the area with the Hydro electric schemes of the 1950's. It has been the greatest boon, providing heating, lighting and power for domestic, farm and business life. Industry meant that a new power line was brought in early in the 1970's.

By the 1960's oil heating had begun to be attractive on the grounds of cost, and a few new houses put in this form of central heating (Mulloine, Wemyss House, etc). Later on, it was put into existing houses (Pitclzean, Castlecraig, Easter Rarichie). It is interesting that one farm now supplies all the workers' cottages with central heating – back to perks! (9)

Things have changed vastly since the days, not really so very long ago, when one of the main causes of illness was caused by damp and cold. Workers constantly got soaked in bad weather and found it impossible to get dried properly because of poor fuel, or no fuel. (10) What a very great improvement modern sources of heat and light have been.

### **Heating and Lighting - References:-**

- 1 "Old Ross-shire and Scotland," W MacGill. Numbers are given.
- 2 Pitcalnie Estate papers
- 3 Decreet Arbitral of 1593 (Nicholas Ross of Pitcalnie)
- 4 Statistical Account
- 5 Associate Church Session Minutes
- 6 New Statistical Account
- 7 Nigg Old Church Session Minutes
- 8 "History of the Ancient province of Ross," R Bain
- 9 This is Castlecraig
- 10 Sanitary Report 1841

## Water

Of all the parishes in Ross-shire, Nigg is for its size the richest in wells and springs (1) which shows very clearly on OS maps.

Many of these wells had names and W J Watson, writing in 1904, gave a good number of these although even by that date several no longer rose to the surface at the proper place. His list of them follows:-

Tobar Cormaig, Cormac's well at Old Shandwick farm house.

Tobar na slainte, well of health, near Shandwick village, and noted for its healing powers. (See Health)

Tobar na' muc, pigs' well, west of Shandwick by the shore.

Leisgig, the little lazy one, near Shandwick, with water which comes in very small quantity.

Tobar a' chladheimh, well of the black sword in Erin facing the sun in the Druid's port (or, that rose in the Druid's port). The water does not, in fact, rise, but gushes out of the rock and is of excellent quality. Port an Druidh is west of Shandwick. (The well is still known as the Sword well, with the Gaelic name given as Tobar n' Claidh. (2)

Tobar Cnoc Coinnich, well of Kenneth's hill, ie the hill above Easter Rarichie.

Sul ba (or Sul na ba (3)), cow's eye, ie well-eye at which cattle came to drink, in front of the old curate's house at Easter Rarichie. It was described as "a copious spring" (4) and contained magnesia (3).

Tobar na h-iu, at the west side of Wellwood hill, ie Fairyhill or the Danish Fort at Easter Rarichie. (This is thought to be the well later known as Danny Gair's.) Hard by this well once stood a tree whose branches bent over the water, and while the tree stood the well cured "white swelling." But when the tree was cut down the well struck, and a rhyme in connection with this tale showed the strong feeling with which such wells were regarded:

"Well of the yew, well of the yew!  
To thee it is that honour is due;  
A bed in hell is prepared for him  
Who cut the tree about thine ears." (1)

Glagaig, "the little noisy one, to the south of the road at Torran shuas.

Tobar nam puill linn, well of the lint pools, above Wester Rarichie. (See Farming)

Tobar nan geala (or deala) mora, well of the big leeches, between Wester Rarichie and Cullisse.

Tobar Sein Sutharlain, Jane Sutherland's well at Drumdil.

Tobar a'bhaistidh, baptismal well at Ankerville, otherwise called Tobar Eapaig Ghearr, Eppy Gair's well. The site of this well was just above the old U P Church.

Tobar Eadhain Bhaist, John Baptist's well, beside Chapelhill Church. The site has long since been filled in.

Though the origin of the name is said to be unknown (4) it is most likely to be a Catholic dedication. (See Early Days.) This and Cormac's Well were holy wells. (4a)

Tobar a' Choirneil, the Colonel's well (Colonel Ross) at Nigg Farm.

Tobar na coille at Pitcalzean, at the north end of the Bishop's Field; said to be the second best water in Scotland (5) which may explain why it was concreted over and continued to supply Dunskaith House until at least 1970.

Tobar Alaidh Bhodhsa, Sandy Vass's well, supplying Pitcalzean House for some time. Two places are mentioned as the site of this well, one near the Targets at Culnald, the other a spring in the March Field between Nigg and Pitcalzean.

Tobar Dun Sgath, Dunskaith well, possibly the other well of health, below the castle. (See Health)

Tobar na h-eiteachan, on the top of Nigg Hill, "famous water used by the Nigg smugglers." (1) Few springs are shown on maps of the Hill and it seems likely that this well was the one lying to the east of the arable land at Castlecraig. It was so plentiful that it supplied not only the farm but, during the 1914-18 Wars, the forts at North Sutor as well; and in the 1939-45 War it provided the supply for these and in addition, for Nigg Camp and the Admiralty base at Nigg Ferry. In return for its use, the Admiralty piped water to troughs for every field on the farm. Tobar cadha n'ruigh, caan ruigh well. Although this spelling is more suitable to nearer Port an righ, the well is just north of the salmon bothy near the King's Cave.

These wells are all mentioned by W J Watson, but there are several others which also deserve a mention:-

Downy well, the site of which is not known but which people resorted to in the month of May, thereafter walking across a strip of land to a headland in the sea. (6) (See Folklore.) See note on page 4 of this chapter.

Tobar Alastair Ross, in the upper fields east of Easter Rarichie farm steading. (2)

Tobar na Creich, in the carse below Bayfield. (7-M.888)

Blackspring well, near the cottage of that name. (See Folklore)

St Andrew's well, near the District Nurse's cottage on the Bayfield side of the road. (2)

St David's well, which still remains in a little enclosure at the roadside between Pitcalnie School and Chapelhill Church, on the farm of Chapelhill. Here the children drank before going in to Sunday School. (2)

Eagle well, at the top of the Bishop's Walk, so called because an eagle is said to have nested nearby.

Simon's well, on the Pitcalzean hill ground near the Dutch Barn, said to be named after Simon Fraser.

In addition, there was a draw well described as being in the sand at Dunskaithness but shown on 1872 Ordnance Survey maps as lying to the front of the two semi-detached cottages at Dunskaith. It deposited a sediment of silica (3). At the western end of the mill-dam at Culnaha there was in 1841 a spring of chalybeate water of considerable strength which it was thought at the time might have been of public benefit, if properly kept and there were other sulphurous springs and some containing a small amount of magnesia. (3)

And there were many others – the old well at the White House is still there, under a tangle of ivy; the sites of wells, close to the cottages Altnadavan and Caan righ (as above) can still be seen; a well which supplied the shepherd's cottage at Castlecraig into the 1930's is still providing water for animals, although it is now cemented; and as O S maps show, there were still more, especially at the Ferry end of the parish.

Shandwick, however, was not so well supplied. Of the wells mentioned the only comparatively convenient one was Tobar Cormaig, at Old Shandwick Farm, but even it meant a considerable walk. There was a well behind the village itself but it was not popular as it tended to get very dirty with debris and dead rats, so much so that every now and then the menfolk had to clean it out with lime. The fact that the fisherfolk usually kept pigs in sties close to their homes contaminated the wells and was a source of ill health and infection.

Carrying water home from the well was a job for the women and bigger children; it was an exhausting and time-consuming task, especially where there were youngsters or illness in the home. No wonder that there was little time for delinquency or vandalism in those days. Animals found what they needed when they were outside, but when they were kept inside in winter water for them had to be carried by hand as well. There was a gadget which slightly lightened the load – people used a square hoop called a "gird" which they stood inside, holding its edges against the handles of the buckets, thus keeping them from bumping their legs and spilling the water.

Water was still carried from wells into the 1930's. Culnaha House used to send the maid, complete with gird, to a well above the house until about 1930 (9) and there were others similarly placed. The next stage in the supply of water was using pumps and there were several of these. The Old Post Office house had one and used it until the 1960's – its site is now a little rockery. There was one in use till very recently at Honeysuckle Cottage near Nigg Ferry, and a pump still stands near the fank at Pitcalzean. But even with pumps the water had to be carried for the last stage of its journey.

Carrying water on the Sabbath used to be a great sin in the eyes of the church and the resultant ban on doing so was a great trial to the people. No water was allowed to be carried between Saturday night and Monday morning which meant heavy pressure on the wells at the last minute, so that they often ran dry or else ran so slowly that everyone had to wait a long time to get what they needed. An added difficulty was that few people had sufficient buckets to hold adequate water for such a long time. There were many cases of Sabbath profanation for carrying water – they are mentioned elsewhere.

Until thatched roofs gave way to other forms of roofing, they were a source of wasted water. This was because they did not have roan pipes to catch the rain which just dripped off as it pleased, but once roans were added this source of water was collected in a barrel at the corner of the house. Though it was not usually used for drinking, it was a very great boon for family chores.

Gradually water was piped from springs and wells, either to taps at vantage points for a house or community, or else right into houses. Early in the 1900's the much-loved Romanes family provided a piped supply from Tobar na coille to the Nigg Ferry area, thoughtfully placing taps at places near any cottage with a large family. There was one below Elder Cottage, one at Balnapaling, another at a cottage near the White House and two at Dunskaith.

Each farm had its particular source of water for piping – Castlecraig used the generous spring already mentioned; Sandy Vass's well supplied Pitcalzean; Nigg got water from a spring on Culnald which at some point supplied Pitcalzean also (10); and so on around the hill. The farm houses had this piped water taken inside to provide modern conveniences early in the 1900's though farm cottages were far behind – they had taps at their doors by the 1930's, while Shandwick folk went to a tap near the roadside in Park. And meanwhile, wells were still being used where necessary.

Gradually Bayfield Loch became the major source of water for the Nigg Ferry end of the parish, which continued until the arrival of a public supply to the parish about 1952, whereupon there was a burst of modernisation and virtually all houses were properly supplied with water, although there are a few exceptions still. (See Buildings.) A small reservoir for this new supply was built on Pitcalzean but it did not supply Castlecraig, due to the expense of pumping it up the hill. However, the establishment of a dairy there about 1964 justified the expense of pumping water from this reservoir up the hill to a small new one, specially built for the purpose on Pitcalzean hill. By the early 1970's, an increased supply for the dairy was needed and a second water main was laid up the hill and new pumps installed in the lower reservoir to achieve this.

With the arrival of Highlands Fabricators, a further supply was required for them, and a complete new 8" water mains was laid through the parish to a larger reservoir on the flat land below the Blue Gates in the early 1970's. This 8" main was so planned that a spur could be taken from it for the Balintore area when needed, and this work began early in 1976 and is being carried out simultaneously with the building of the new Ankerville-Balintore road.

#### **Water – References:-**

- 1 "Place Names of Ross and Cromarty," W J Watson
- 2 Mr A Vass, Shore Street, Shandwick
- 3 New Statistical Account
- 4 "Name Book of Nigg Parish in Ross-shire," 1872, Ordnance Survey
- 4a "Fasti" of the Church of Scotland
- 5 Mr H Fraser, late of Lower Bayfield, Nigg
- 6 "Folklore of Scottish Lochs and Springs," 1893, J M Mackinlay
- 7 "Old Ross-shire and Scotland," W MacGill. Numbers are given.
- 8 Sanitary Report 1841
- 9 Mrs H Rutherford, Culnaha
- 10 Mr T D Scott, Nigg House

**Note:** According to "Dawson's Abridged Statistical History of Scotland, 1853," there was a parish of Nigg at that time in Kincardineshire and it seems likely that this well (Downy well), described as in the parish of Nigg, was there.

## Folklore and Witchcraft

A book on Easter Ross, written in 1914, says that there was a lack of folklore in the area, attributing this to the fact that there is not much marshland, moor and mist, all of which are an encouragement to tales of ghosts and kelpies. (1) It is possible that any such lack was more due to the area being a farming one with workers constantly moving and never giving themselves a chance to build up a store of tales of folklore and superstition.

Nevertheless, such stories did develop and the people of Nigg are said to have been full of superstition. (2) The fisher folk are a great source of folklore, in this parish as elsewhere. This is most probably because they were a resident population enabling stories to be perpetuated, and because their work was so close to the elements that beliefs and customs about them grew up and were passed down from generation to generation. Many of these beliefs have already been mentioned in "Down to the Sea," Shandwick in the parish of Nigg, being one of the villages concerned in that book.

Folklore is often based on geographical features such as hills, streams, wells and springs, and the very striking Sutors of Nigg were a natural source for legends. There is a story of a young man comparing them to two suitors advancing towards each other – but his girl replied contemptuously that they were "tongueless suitors." Other stories are connected with giants.

Two giant brothers are said to have offended against some primaeval law and as punishment were changed into these great cliff guardians of the bay. (3) Another tradition says that when the country was peopled by a race of giants these headlands were their workstools, used by two giant "sutors" or shoemakers. They only had one set of tools between them and apparently flung these across to one another when necessary.

Giants are also said to have visited the parish. These were the Fionns who lived at Knock Ferril and came to do their hunting on the Hill of Nigg. (4)

Strange tales are told of the Sands of Nigg which have been the scene of many accidents, usually due to people crossing the ford at night or when the tide was wrong. The Pot was infamous "for its death-lights and its wraiths and for the strange mysterious noises which used to come sounding from its depths to either shore previous to a drowning." (4)

This description of the sands given by Hugh Miller, ties in with a story told by Otta F Swire of a small village which was buried, complete with its church, when the sea swept in between the Sutors and submerged what had been a low-lying and fertile valley, many centuries ago, to form the present Sands of Nigg. Many years ago signs of buildings and great stones were to be seen beneath the sea on clear days, but for some considerable time these have been shrouded in sand and no longer visible. Fishermen used to listen before setting out to sea, saying that if danger threatened the fishing fleet the submerged bells of Nigg would sound a warning. "About four centuries back," in other words about 1560, a man out at sea heard a sound like great horns coming from the stones, not as bells from the church – and though he immediately returned to harbour, he was drowned three days later. (3)

Another forerunner of death was seeing phantom funerals and there are still those who speak of such a sighting on the road near the Shandwick Stone. Hugh Miller's account of that grand old man of Nigg, Donald Roy, tells of his gift of second sight – this is recounted elsewhere.

A large boulder lies on the raised beach above Blackspring Cottage, known as the "giant's stone" or the "grey stone" and said to have been dropped by a giant. (5) Others say that it is merely a fossilized whale. (6)

Nearby is the "soldier's grave." No one knows who he was or when he was buried but they remember spitting on stones before adding them to the cairn (7) and one mother insisted that her children must always add a stone every time they passed that way. (5) Saliva was a powerful source of protection, being the very essence of oneself, and spitting was common for this reason. Doubtless it was for protection that children spat if the Cholera Stone in Nigg Churchyard squeaked when they jumped on it. (8)

And of course there were ghosts everywhere. Each farm had its quota, arising from tales put about by disgruntled workers to dissuade others from taking employment, or just passed on to tease and frighten people, only to become established as true stories. At Castlecraig, for instance, well into the 1930's there were five ghosts. One was in the grieve's house, one was near the taps of the main water trough in front of the steading, another sat on the gate of the well near the present pigman's house, and so on, but none had any basis of fact. Ghosts were reputed to haunt Nigg Old Parish Churchyard and the Red Bridges (9) and the Carnjeek (8) and no one cared to pass these places at midnight, but again there was no basis of fact.

There are however two more authenticated ghosts in Nigg, a Green Lady at Pitcalzean House and a White Lady at Bayfield House. A Green Lady is an accepted type of ghost, according to F Marian McNeill, and may be regarded as a guardian spirit of the house, always having been in life a woman of honourable position and usually a former mistress of the house. Such ghosts are seen at dusk, gliding through the grounds, or the corridors and rooms, often putting things in order. That is the official description of this type of spirit – see how well it ties in with those who experienced the presence of Pitcalzean's Green Lady. A former housekeeper (10) who was there until the 1940's with Col. Romanes saw her, all dressed in green, in various places – at the front door, on the main staircase, in her bedroom, and one night the Green Lady ran her fingers through the housekeeper's hair. She believed that the Green Lady "lived" in the chapel room. None of the Romanes family ever saw her but the housekeeper apparently believed that she had some special affinity with her, as she told another woman in the house to hold her hand in the Green Lady's presence and that would ensure a sighting. (11)

Bayfield House's ghost is a somewhat less benign figure. It was the scene of the murder of Arabella Phipps (Rose) and as a result has a White Lady to haunt it and a blood stain at the foot of the stairs. (12) The story of the murder is told in Law and Order. This ghost had not been seen for very many years until the members of Nigg WRI began making inquiries in connection with their parish history in 1966. At once, the White Lady was seen and as a result, a family living in the house asked to be rehoused (12), which all shows how much is in the mind.

Hugh Miller tells a story of two women who, in their youth, had been upset by the manner in which the body of an orphan had been prepared for burial, and as a result they made a pact agreeing that whichever of them survived the other would dress her friend's corpse. But when that time came the survivor found that she had too much to do – she had a baby to care for and her maid had just left, and so she did not carry out her promise. She was by then "mistress of a solitary farmhouse on the Hill of Nigg" and it was there that a figure appeared, all wrapped in a winding sheet from head to foot, moving past the cattle. One of them kicked out at the figure and the following day, when the woman managed to go to the lykewake for her friend, what did she see but the marks of a cow's hoof on the body. (13)

Wells often feature in folklore because anywhere with water bubbling forth gave an impression of life, and where there was life there was a spirit, and thus running water was venerated for its inner power. (14) So strong was this veneration that early Christian missionaries dedicated wells to saints and according to "Fasti" two such holy wells in Nigg were Cormac's Well near Old Shandwick and John the Baptist's Well near Strath of Pitcalnie. Furthermore, as many wells contained healing elements this gave a certain magical quality to them.

In the olden days the well, Sul na ba or Sul ba, flowed through the trunk of a tree, four hundred yards to the south-east of the present site, but after some insult or injury was done to it, the water disappeared and later came forth as the present well, with the same name. The water contained magnesia and while it flowed through the tree many diseased people from far afield flocked to it for healing (15) and the New Statistical Account's report makes it clear that this was the well which "even in comparatively modern times" was much resorted to by people, with Sabbath profanation the consequence. The Session Minutes for 1707 said, "In regard many out of the parish of Fearn and several other parishes...profane the Sabbath by coming to the well of Rarichies" elders were "appointed to take inspection every Saturday evening and Sunday morning of such as come to the well, and to report the same accordingly." According to Rev J R Martin, this is much more likely to have been a case of superstition about a holy well than Sabbath breaking, and it is the basis of fact behind the tradition that the minister and an elder lay in hiding to take the names of those who came to the well. (16)

This well's magic properties may partly account for a case of Sabbath profanation, also in 1707, when a man carried water from it to Edderton; why carry water all that way unless it had special properties? (17)

Another healing well was Tobar na-h-iu, just to the west of the Danish Fort. As said in “Water,” a tree stood close by and while it over-hung the water, the well cured “white swelling.” The well struck when the tree was cut and a rhyme, quoted by W J Watson, shows the feeling with which such wells were regarded:-

“Well of the yew, well of the yew!  
To thee it is that honour is due;  
A bed in hell is prepared for him  
Who cut the tree about thine ears.” (18)

The Well of Health below Dunskaith Castle is mentioned in the chapter on health but in addition to healing properties, it was a wishing well. So effective was it that when two girls drank its water from mussel shells, what was wished for was provided. The first wish was for a wrist-watch and the second for a piano, and both were shortly forthcoming. (5)

The well at Blacksprings used to run dry and it was not uncommon for people to drop pennies into it to encourage it to run again. This piece of superstition was based on the old idea of making votive offering to the well, and it happened within living memory. (5)

According to F Marian McNeill, certain holy wells were thought to be particularly effective on Quarter Days, but due to the cold weather of winter, were usually visited at Beltane, in early May. These local pilgrimages were great occasions (14) and it appears that there was one well in Nigg where this happened. The Downy Well in Nigg Parish was resorted to in May by people to drink the water and then to cross by a narrow strip of land called the “Brig of a’e Hair” to Downy Hill, a green headland into the sea. (19) The description of this well is baffling as there is now no narrow neck of land to a headland in the parish, but as there has been much erosion around the coast, it is reasonable to believe that though this well and headland have now disappeared, they once were there. Again according to F Marian McNeill, the custom of visiting certain wells at certain times of the year may be traced to a pagan water cult of pre-Druidic origin. (14) As said, this may well be in Kincardine.

Water from certain wells had special magical powers and was used to counteract the Evil Eye. Such a one was the Well of Health at Shandwick that had, in addition, healing powers. If there was reason to suppose that the bad eye had been put on someone, an antidote was to go to this well (to other ones as well, but this was the best for the purpose) for water, speaking to no-one going or returning. While it was not essential to do so, people liked to lift some of the water in a wooden ladle for “silvering,” but if no ladle was available they did without. “Silvering” was the placing of a silver coin, a wedding ring and perhaps copper in the water, which was then used to treat the patient. He could drink it, be washed with it, or have it sprinkled upon him.

This was still being done in living memory – an elderly resident of Shandwick tells of how her small sister collapsed one day in the village shop. Someone ran to tell her mother, who asked not “What happened?” but “Who was there?” On hearing a particular name, she knew the Evil Eye had been put on her daughter – but she also knew what to do and resorted to the Well of Health. (20)

So close is belief in the Evil Eye in Shandwick, that even nowadays one can be given advice on other ways also of dealing with it. If you suspect that the bad eye is being put upon you, you can wish it right back at the person concerned. Hot ashes can be flung after anyone thought to have put the eye, or any curse, on you, an understandable protection when one remembers that fire is a religious symbol with the power to purge evil. And people are still speaking of “certain women” or “certain people” meaning that they have the evil eye.

Water from special wells was used in other strange and evil-sounding cures. There was a lot of epilepsy in the Highlands and a suicide’s skull, often filled with water from a holy well, was a well-known cure, but usually used only when all else failed. According to a book on Highland folklore by Anne Ross, one example of this cure was used in the parish of Nigg in the last century. In an effort to cure a fifteen year old boy who had epileptic fits, his family began by trying to cure him with a charm of moles’ blood. A plate was put on his head, a live mole held by the tail above it, and then beheaded. The blood was allowed to drip onto the plate, but even though three moles were sacrificed one after the other, there was no result. They therefore resorted to trying the effect of a suicide’s skull. They went sixty miles to get a small piece of bone from such a skull, crushed it to dust into a cup of water, and this the boy swallowed, without knowing what it was. The results were not recorded, unfortunately. (26)

What is puzzling in this case is why they went so far for a suitable skull when there was a burying ground for suicides at the Shandwick Stone, close by the holy well of St. Cormac. Perhaps it was not regarded as seemly to dig up such a grave in one's own area.

And while some may think that the days of the fairies are gone, not so in Nigg. According to the New Statistical Account, there was a spring about half a mile east of Sul na ba, which was a favourite of the fairies. If the little people stole a human child and left a puny bantling in its place, the child might be got back by leaving the elfin near the well, late in the evening, with perhaps an offering of some sort for the King of Fairyland. All this, says the Account, was before the fairies were driven from the parish – but if so, they must have come back again because they have been seen comparatively recently.

Belief in fairies was very common in the old days, but there are people alive today who have seen fairies in Nigg. They have been seen looking like young girls, dressed in colourful finery, dancing and skipping their way into a gully near Wester Rarichie, and also at the Well of Health at Shandwick. (21) A less likely tale says that a man was once thrown right over the Hill of Nigg to the Well of Health by the fairies. (22)

There is no record of any witch being burnt in the parish – this may be because the parish came under different jurisdictions and any drownings would have taken place outside its bounds. Near the old U F Manse in Logie Easter lies the drowning pool, formerly connected with the barony of Nigg (23) and for all that is known, witches of Nigg may have perished there.

One form of witchcraft was imprecation or invoking evil, and this appears frequently in the early Session minutes. In 1706 a man appeared before the Session for wishing another “might wither at a wallside,” and the same year a woman came before them for saying to another, “Mischief on you,” for she wanted her sheep. Two years later a woman imprecated a man, saying that she wished him an ill end and would pray on her knees every day an ill meeting to him. (17)

In 1729 two women were rebuked for “giving alms to a poor person as hire for imprecation for their vindication for theft alleged against them.” This complicated wording means that a witch had been hired to lay a spell on the accuser. (17)

Much later, in 1864, Communion rights were stopped for a man who said that he wished another would “suffer dreadfully in this world or that the Lord would cut him off suddenly and that without mercy.” (24)

Trying to get someone to perform ill-wishing continued till comparatively recently; in one case, a mentally handicapped girl was asked to curse someone but for all her affliction, she had the right spirit and would not do so. (20a)

A case of counter-charming occurred in 1731 when Christian Ross in Toran accused Christian Wallace of drying up her cows and to even matters up, she had come and milked the latter's sheep, and all the while “they did scandalously scold and imprecate.” One woman paid another to imprecate mischief on whoever had stolen her wool and another prayed to God that he would send a scarcity of fish to the fishers of Pitcalzean. (17)

The church took a very poor view of those who wished evil to others – in spite of the fact that their own process of excommunication included consigning sinners to the devil.

It appears that the Parish Church played down witchcraft as much as possible by using obscure phraseology when referring to it and bringing it under different headings, such as Sabbath profanation. In 1708 several girls admitted that they “did upon the Sabbath day and in a profane manner treat and handle Donald McAlesterraig.” What they had done was to make a ring of straw and give it to another girl who tried to put it on him. The Session considered “the heinousness and obscenity of this crime” and ordered them to be rebuked. It all sounds most trifling and not warranting such concern on the part of the Session, but this case is more likely to have been one of witchcraft rather than of Sabbath breaking as a straw ring was a form of magic circle and there was very probably much more to this story than meets the eye. (17)

The Associate Church had no such inhibitions and came out openly with the word “witch.” In 1790 a member of that congregation consulted a woman who, it was said, could tell him either who had stolen his watch or where

it now was. He denied, however, having done this “under the notion of a witch.” The Session considered that anyone so described must have intercourse with familiar spirits. This matter had recently come up from the pulpit – in other words, the minister had preached against witchcraft in any form – and therefore the man was rebuked before the Session and his rebuke intimated to the congregation. (24)

An earlier case came up before the same church in 1775 when a man found pieces of horse flesh in his land and accused the only owner of a recently-dead horse of doing this so as to pass on disease. There was an obvious implication of witchcraft, but the Session backed up the horse-owner in his denial and when it was apparent that the case would go to a civil judge for defamation of character, “the Session dismissed the affair for them.” This sounds as if this particular case did not greatly worry them – but one does wonder about it. (24)

In 1863 a woman on the Hill of Nigg stole potatoes and refused to appear in church to answer for the offence, saying that “good had followed from it as her brother was now better.” She was suspended from all church privileges and this was intimated to the three-weekly prayer meeting. This case was certainly one of witchcraft involving the belief that something taken by night could be used as a charm. (24)

These are just a few cases taken from church records, but obviously there was much more going on than came to the surface. It is said that the Westminster Confession with its stress on “the elect” did not help matters and that people, not knowing whether or not they were “elect,” hedged their bets and, while genuinely supporting the Christian religion, still kept in with their old ways of superstition, charms and witchcraft, just in case...

And people still speak of witches, but not often. It is said that witches used to meet at the Bayfield waterfall on the low road to Nigg Ferry and at the White House; and that a witch used to live behind a little hump in the Doocot field at Cullisse (25); and a former resident describes the parish as being full of witchcraft. (20a) The grandmother of a man recently died was known as a witch (20b) and another former resident actually remembers a witch working her spells. As a little girl she went to a cottage and was surprised to see the woman of the house baking stones on a girdle. The witch, for such she was, turned to her and said quite kindly, “This is not meant for you, my dear. Don’t turn round, but go out the door backwards and it will do you no harm.” (5)

An interesting piece of folklore is the Curse of Shandwick, something rarely mentioned, and which for various reasons is given in the Appendix.

### **Folklore and Witchcraft - References:-**

- 1 "Easter Ross," Alex Polson
- 2 Miss M Mackenzie, formerly of the Bungalow, Nigg
- 3 "The Highlands and their Legends," Otta F Swire
- 4 "Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland," Hugh Miller
- 5 Miss H Macleod, formerly of Ivy Cottage, Nigg
- 6 This was said to be an ancestor of Miss M Mackenzie, formerly of the Bungalow, Nigg
- 7 Late Tom Macleod, uncle of Miss H Macleod, formerly of Ivy Cottage
- 8 Late Miss C Ross, Seaside Cottage, Nigg
- 9 Late Alex Cumming, Dunskaith, Nigg
- 10 She was Mrs Macdonald, housekeeper at Pitcalzean House, Nigg
- 11 Mr J Christie, Cullisse, referring to Mrs MacCrum, Seaside Cottage
- 12 Late Mrs H Budge, Bayfield, Nigg
- 13 "Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland," Hugh Miller
- 14 "The Silver Bough," F Marian McNeill
- 15 New Statistical Account
- 16 "Church Chronicles of Nigg," Rev J R Martin
- 17 Nigg Old Church Session Minutes
- 18 "Place Names of Ross and Cromarty," W J Watson
- 19 Ordnance Survey card information and "Folklore of Scottish Lochs and Springs," 1893, J M Mackinlay
- 20 See Appendix
- 21 They were seen by Mrs Currie, Balnabruach, Balintore, and her mother, Mrs Mackenzie
- 22 Mr H Ross, Shandwick Shop
- 23 "Book of Ross," Macdonald and Polson
- 24 Associate Church Session Minutes
- 25 Mrs C Mackenzie, Cullisse, Nigg
- 26 "The Folklore of the Scottish Highlands," Anne Ross

## Buildings I

Poor though early buildings were, the parish of Nigg was at least fortunate in having plentiful supplies of the necessary materials, so that the level of construction was probably as good as, though no better than, that in similar rural parishes.

There were plenty of stones, clay, lime and thatch, though wood essential for the couples of the roof and partitions, was more difficult to obtain as lairds were very jealous in guarding their timber.

Solid houses and even ruined cottages bear witness to the amount of good stone that was available. For cottage building, surface stones were gathered and carried to the site, sometimes in creels. Earlier cottages had a part-stone and part-clay wall – this could be seen at a cottage at Caanrigh in the 1940's, and can still be seen at a ruin at Caanruidh. In such cases, the walling came up to about three or four feet and on this was built the clay wall, made of clay mixed with small stones, chopped grass, hair, and whatever might strengthen it.

An alternative to this clay mixture for the upper part of walls was turf, cut rather like peat and layered into a solid and warm wall. Ruins at Balnapaling still showed this work as late as 1967 but since then the turf has collapsed.

Later cottages had all-stone walls made from what was available, but there were also a number of quarries where stone could be hewn into more acceptable forms for better quality building. There was a fine sandstone quarry at Balintore that supplied the wherewithal for many good houses; there was a smaller quarry below Dunskaith Castle, one between Nigg House and the Churchyard, and another at Strath of Pitcalnie. So stone was no problem.

There were also ample supplies of both red and grey clay. Red clay was good for binding stones and sometimes used for floors, although generally speaking, people preferred grey for floors as it set harder and was not so messy. Many cottages had their own clay hole and even if they did not, one was sure to be accessible – behind Shandwick Village near the Well of Health, above Balnabruach, at the Whins of Nigg and so on. It is not so long ago since there were these floors, and very practical they were for baiting lines as they were easy to clean with a sprinkle of sand and a good brushing. (1)

In this area, clay had an extra use as it was used to bind thatch. The result was a very heavy roof as thatch was the last stage. First of all, there were the couples; on these were laid fir slabs, and on top of them were overlapping divots (turfs). It was on to this base that the thatcher laid his thatch, working from top to bottom and laying red clay in between. This system of applying clay to thatch appears to be unusual outside Easter Ross.

The better the turf, the better and warmer the roof and the house, and fairly long journeys were made to places to find it. But getting it sometimes got people into trouble. In 1860, Clunes of Dunskaith got an interdict against James Fraser and Don Rioch, portioners of Pitcalzean, to prevent them taking turf and bents (along with peat), and in 1776 there was a complaint, as said earlier, that tenants from Nigg had gone along with other people and cut turf within the boundaries of Tain. While this case could be partly to do with fuel, both turf and bent were regarded as building materials. This was not the only case of such complaints, however. In 1731, Malcolm Ross of Pitcalnie entered complaints against his tenants and their servants in Nigg for cutting and destroying his arable land and summer grass and turning it into "mudding" and "Divots for thatching houses." In 1735 another tenant paid rent for his home with a further small amount "to support his own house in fael and Divot." Both these instances appear in a Pitcalnie Baron Court Book.

The earliest thatch, of course was heather that was used for all buildings, great and small – there are references to thatching the church with heather in the chapter on church buildings. In the early days, straw was too scarce and too valuable for feeding stock to be spared for roofing. (3) Bent grass was also used and made the best thatch as it was very strong but it required more labour to cut, and sometimes it was rather too short. Sometimes people from as far as Shandwick went to Nigg Ferry for what was considered to be the very best, so much so that the top thatchers from Cromarty and elsewhere came for it. (4) But as improved farming methods made better quality straw more plentiful it was more practical to get it from nearby farms and tease it at home by hand. (1)

Warm though thatch was, it was liable to lift in a gale and it was no unusual sight to see it roped down, besides having large stones attached to each rope. In Balnabruach, where the cottagers also had little strips of land, these usually lay to the front of their houses, but they never failed to have the “width of a ladder” behind the house also so that they could put their ladder up and get on to their roofs to do any rethatching needed. (5)

The change-over from thatch to modern roofs was very gradual although as early as 1764 slating was being suggested for larger houses. That year, William Forsyth, a Cromarty merchant, wrote to Lady Pitcalnie saying, “I am of the opinion that you should employ John Paterson Slatter to thatch your house with Tyles as he has more experience in this Branch than any other Slatter in the north.” Presumably he used the term “thatch your house” as one might say “roof your house.” (6)

Lime was another building material of which there were plentiful supplies. About a foot under the surface of the Sands of Nigg lies a layer of shells that were made into good building lime for both building and plastering. So good was the supply of shells that every year many boat loads were dug by fishermen from Nigg and also from the other side of the Bay. They sailed out at high tide, waited for it to fall, dug up what they wanted and sailed home when the tide rose again. (7) According to the New Statistical Account, until supplies began to be imported from the south, the only lime used “in this country” for building was made from the shells of the Sands of Nigg.

Plaster made from this lime was put directly on to the inner surface of stone walls. This was done in the big house as well as the cottage, and remnants of it can still be seen in ruined cottages at Balnapaling and in the old house at Ankerville. It was also used, apparently, in conjunction with tiling and William Forsyth included advice on this in his letter to Lady Pitcalnie in 1764. To prepare it, he suggested that it should be put through a “bear ringe” (possibly a riddle for bear) and that three stones of cattle hair should be mixed with it. This hair could be supplied by any shoemaker at “a shilling a Ston.” (6)

Timber, however, was a problem. People got what they could from various local woods – Shandwick Hill, the Hill of Nigg and so on, but there were serious penalties for cutting green wood, as mentioned in the chapter on heating and lighting. Its value is emphasized by the fact that a man who stole a piece of it from a neighbour got a sessional rebuke and was debarred from praying societies for some time. (8)

It appears from a letter written to Lady Pitcalnie in 1763 that when a cottage changed hands, compensation was paid for the timber in its construction. This case refers to a cottage that was built by one of her tenants, and when he left he was paid for the cottage, and the timber in it. His successor had paid for the timber, and a new applicant for the holding would be required to do so too. The writer of the letter was asking Lady Pitcalnie “that he be allowed payment of the timber he leaves there at his removal.” (6)

It must have been a great benefit to the common folk when, in the changing period after the 1730’s, dealers at fairs could supply the housebuilders of the time with split lath, made of moss fir, for thatching roofs and for partitions, something that must have eased the timber situation greatly. (9)

Where split lath was not available, partitions were made with cabers, which were 2” saplings. In either case, lath or cabers were placed side by side to form a wall and filled in with mott. Mott was a clay mixture, similar to that used for upper walls of buildings. Together, cabers and mott made a strong wall, but it was almost always used internally. There is one example at Balnapaling, however, of a cabers and mott outer gable wall, which latterly had wire netting and harling added to it to make it more weather-worthy.

Turf has been mentioned in connection with thatch and as part of upper walls, but even as late as 1841 some habitations were constructed wholly of turf, the smoke being allowed to find its way out wherever it could. (10) One of these elementary dwellings, made of pliable saplings placed in two parallel rows, bent towards each other, joined at the top and covered with turf and thatch, used to stand just behind the White House. It was known as a “boogerie-couple,” a name that may come from the term “bougars,” arched timbers in the shape of a whale’s jawbones. (11) Primitive though this dwelling was, the old woman who lived there loved it and resisted firmly when the owner of the White House wanted it removed so that he might build a bakehouse in its place. He had her removed to the Poors’ House in Tain whereupon she cursed him, saying that nothing would ever be baked in his bakehouse, but that pigs would be reared there instead. This came true – the building was never finished and the Dunskaith gardener’s wife ultimately reared pigs on the spot. (5)

The mention of the Poors' House dates this hovel in the mid-19th century and James Cameron, in his report on the sanitary conditions of Easter Ross in 1841, already quoted above, found similar conditions at that date.

He was very concerned about housing. The chief defect was lack of ventilation, as the windows, often made wholly of wood, were far too small and too seldom left open. He realized that this was largely due to the need to conserve warmth. The turf hovels, already mentioned, had virtually no provision for admitting light and air. (10)

Farm workers' cottages at that date were usually built in a line, in the immediate proximity of the farm steading, forming as it were one side of a short street. Some had a pavement or causeway immediately in front and their roofs were usually thatch made of straw and clay, "generally kept water tight." They were built of stone or mud-work, floored with a mixture of earth and clay, wood being seldom used. Their site was usually dry, but too often they were too close to folds and many had pig-sties either in front or behind, but fortunately not usually attached to them. Inside, these cottages were whitewashed with lime. (10)

The homes of crofters and day-labourers were generally inferior to those of farm workers. They were also less clean and in many cases they and their cattle lived under the same roof. Many of these lived in the all-turf dwellings and in many of them the "domestic fowls" perched around the roof, above the heads of the inmates. (10)

Writing of the fisher cottages, he said that "some time ago" they lived in "miserable cabins of the lowest description, receptacles of filth and nauseating effluvia." Nevertheless, he was happy to add that there had been great improvement to this class of cottages, particularly on the shores of Nigg and Fearn, where the homes of the fishermen were well and comfortably built, many of them being superior to most of those of the rural population. (10) According to the New Statistical Account, this improvement came with the successful herring fishing about 1820, which enabled many fishermen to build nice cottages and improve their furniture, adding "that there was abundance of need." Though there was great poverty yet to come when the herring fishing failed, building and improving had been achieved, and it is very noticeable that in times of prosperity the fisher folk always turn it to good use in house improvements.

By this date, many of the larger houses were being gradually slated. James Cameron found that many of those on large farms had tiles or blue slate (10), possibly because by that date slates were being imported, along with lime, in to the Sands of Nigg. (12)

Nevertheless, James Cameron said that the poor housing contributed greatly to ill health, and the New Statistical Account considered that in very few cases were the cottages of poor people built "with a regard to cleanliness and freedom from damp" and that the prevailing complaints of nervous disorders, cough and asthma were partly due to the damp of the houses, the situation not being helped by no encouragement being given to cottars to build and improve.

James Cameron's Report shows what a wide variety of standards of housing there was a mere hundred and thirty years ago – turf huts, stone or mud-work farm cottages, clay floors, better quality fisher cottages, thatch being superseded very gradually by tiles, pig sties and indeed dung-hills too close to houses, ill-health resulting from bad housing and a wide difference between the rich and the poor.

Nevertheless, it was around this time that the situation began to mend. As said, the fisher folk used the herring boom to improve their homes but even so, there and elsewhere, thatch continued to be used for a long time. In Shandwick, it gave way to tarred felt, of which there is still an example at 10 Shore Street, between the Wars, but even after the 1939-45 War there were three thatched cottages left in the village. It was not long, however, until all were either tiled or slated.

One old lady who died in 1975 aged ninety (13) remembered clearly when all the cottages at Nigg Ferry were thatched, indeed, Dunskaith House was too until its rebuilding between 1901-6. The change-over in that area from thatch to other forms of roofing coincided with the end of the 1914-18 War when the dismantling of the army camps at Pitcalnie gave people the opportunity to buy cheaply corrugated iron which they used for roofs, as well as wood for floors and partitions. In some cases, the corrugated iron was laid directly on top of thatch, and it may be that Ivy Cottage is an example of this. One thatched cottage survived at Nigg Ferry until 1966. This was Honeysuckle Cottage, belonging to Mr Alec Fraser, who in that year covered the thatch with black polythene and wire netting. This roofing lasted warmly and well until the whole cottage was modernised by Highlands Fabricators in the early 1970's.

After the successful improvements and building prior to 1841, Shandwick's next chance to continue this work came with the building of the North Sutor forts in 1913 and the construction of oil tanks at Invergordon. The work brought considerable prosperity to the Seaboard Villages and enabled the fisher folk to improve their homes still further. The main result was often the addition of an upper room or rooms, usually reached by a ladder, greatly easing the problems of large families, (1) and also the introduction of cement floors in place of clay.

Several cottages at Nigg Ferry and at least one in Shandwick (14) have a little upper window in the western gable, lighting an attic that is or was, reached by a trap door and stairs. These are relics of this stage in home improvement.

Whether or not upper rooms were also added, it was about this time that ceilings were introduced. People still remember when the rafters were visible above their heads and an ideal place to store nets, lines and creels. Dried fish hung from them and even the week's baking could be slung up in a cloth well out of the way of the children, an excellent form of space-saving. The earliest ceilings were made by tacking on split sacks, sometimes covered with paper and whitewashed (1) but with the passage of time these gave way to modern ones.

An interesting feature of these old cottages was the fireplace, and many people remember the "hanging chimney" or "praze" as it was called. These seem to have been more common, or used longer, in Shandwick where many people speak of them, but they also existed at Nigg Ferry where at least two people can tell of them, (15) and say that one could be seen formerly in a cottage at Balnapaling.

The hanging chimney was set not in the gable wall, but against an inner wall, with a canopy overhanging the fireplace. This canopy was a wide wooden hood projecting over the hearth connected by a wooden flue to the chimney, the whole thing made separately and attached to the wall. (1) How they did not catch fire is extraordinary, and is perhaps a comment on lack of fuel and its poor quality. The fireplace was on the floor flanked by two "cheeks" or hobs of rough stones and clay. The chain and crook (hook) for the cooking pot hung from a wooden beam across the flue and could be hooked up or down to raise or lower the pot, depending on how fast it had to boil. (1)

An example of the hanging chimney is thought to exist still in No. 2 New Street, Shandwick, and there was until recently a slightly modernised version in a house just across the parish boundary, in Park Street. The presence of these fireplaces can be distinguished by their very distinctive little wooden chimneys that often show clearly in old photographs.

According to James Cameron (10) the cottages on farms had well-made fireplaces although all cottages were filthy with smoke, due to lack of ventilation. It was about the turn of, and just into, this century that the praze gave way to a fireplace in the gable wall, with a high mantelpiece with perhaps a brass rail in front of it. Ovens set in grates could be bought from Wallace & Fraser, Tain, at the beginning of the century and cooking and baking became much easier.

Generally speaking, sanitation in fisher and farm cottages was non-existent until after the 1939-45 War, but that did not mean that hygiene was neglected. Well into the 1930's, these cottages had a bucket in a shed, sometimes with a seat, which was emptied and the contents buried, or else washed out in the sea. Some of the men made use of the cottage folds. During or just after the war, chemical closets outside the cottages were introduced and were regarded as a tremendous boon. One of these still stands outside a cottage at Nigg Ferry.

Sanitation of a sort came to large houses much earlier, in the form of the privy. There is still an example of this at the Old Manse. It was the servants' privy apparently, in a shed adjacent to the stables; the household privy was somewhere closer to the house. This privy has two raised sides to hold a flagstone slab seat, which is now missing though it was intact only a very few years ago. The outflow, if such it could be called, was via a flat flagstone sloping backwards to an opening at the foot of the wall behind. There is no drain, so presumably the effluent dissipated itself into the ground or was cleared from behind at intervals.

By this century, however, the larger houses all had indoor sanitation with hot and cold water, baths and lavatories. It was not until about 1951 that farm cottages were fully modernised, with all mod cons, due to the introduction of a public water supply, which was quickly followed by a public electricity supply.

The 1939-45 War again brought prosperity to the Seaboard Villages with the building of Fearn Airfield, and once more they used this to improve their houses, but even so it was not until the public supplies just mentioned became available, that full modernisation could be completed. Many of their menfolk found work on the Hydro-electricity schemes so this was a dual benefit, bringing their supplies of power, and the money to pay for their installation.

It must not be thought that the Seaboard Villages saw wars as a time of prosperity, only. Like everyone else, they suffered and lost men at those times, but they are a provident people and are also owner-occupiers and they have followed a policy of improving when the going is good. It is very noticeable that they are continuing to do this in the oil boom of the 1970's.

As in many fishing villages, the streets of Shandwick are one-sided and facing south, so that the people could have any sun that was going as they did many of their tasks out of doors. There are vennels between every three of four houses to give access down to the sea, or up to the old road along the top of the raised beach.

The lie of the land at Nigg Ferry did not allow for a streeted fishing village, and instead the houses stand in ones and twos, but again facing south, with their gables to the sea.

Sheds are very much a feature of fishing villages because there were many things that needed to be kept in them – creels, nets and so on. In New Street, the sheds lie behind the houses but in Shore Street they are in front of them, largely obliterating the view. These sheds were once vital to the people's way of life, at a time when work was more important than a view.

There has been a certain amount of new building in the parish since 1950. Several farmers built new farm cottages (16) and all others were brought up to standard. Several private houses were built (17) all with central heating and six Council houses, intended for agricultural workers, were built in 1951 at Pitcalnie (Chapelhill). With the introduction of Government grants for renovating old property, there has been a welcome increase in the number of local people acquiring such old houses and turning them into most desirable dwellings. (18)

With the advent of Highlands Fabricators, there is a call for housing to replace the plethora of caravans that appeared without planning permission on the dunes at Nigg Ferry, and to enable other workers to live near their work, and to make the two ship hostels at Nigg pier no longer necessary.

There has been a basic desire and need for a small number of Council houses in the parish, and promises made that there would be such houses in Nigg by April 1974 were well received. Plans were shortly shown of four possible sites for such housing, two on Pitcalnie Farm, one behind the Hall and one at Chapelhill. In 1974 a public meeting was held to discuss plans for about 139 Council houses at Pitcalnie and land was bought by the Council from Messrs A Macrae and A Munro. When it was learned that 139 houses were not viable by themselves, and the number would have to increase to 500 or so, there was less enthusiasm as it was felt that such an increase would swamp the local community.

A similar lack of enthusiasm was felt in the Seaboard Villages where enormous population increases were also suggested. So far no new Council houses have been built in the parish, but in August 1976 there is a proposal for a very moderate number to be erected, which should meet the small local demand.

In addition, industry caused the Cromarty Firth Development Co to apply for permission to build 700+ houses at Bayfield, but this was turned down, but permission was granted to the owner of the land (19) to build just over 20 private houses there. In addition, Bayfield House is being converted into six luxury flats for executives from industry. So many proposals have led to uncertainty in the community as to what so much building might lead to. As fast as each proposal fails to materialize, more come forward and at the present date, the position is very fluid.

It used to be the custom, perhaps when one of the family got married but could not afford a house, to divide the family home in half, producing two "half-houses." Such a house might have its own front door, or share a joint one with the other half. There are still several occupied half-houses in the parish.

Even where cottages have been modernised, old features remain which is nice to know. Seaside Cottage still has caber and mott in its inner construction as do other cottages in the Ferry area. Ivy Cottage is a surviving example of others nearby which were built and then the floor dug out for a depth of 2” to 3” to make a “down-step” and a very storm-proof house. One cottage that only has a corrugated iron roof by way of modernization and has lain empty for some time, still has a clay floor in one room where until recently the strip of whitening round the sides, put on for smartness sake, still showed. This is Primrose Cottage, sometimes known as Big Hugh’s.

Building costs have now soared so much that it may be interesting to include some cheaper ones. In 1847 the Session of Nigg Old Church built two widows’ houses at a cost of £3.10/- each, which even allowing for changing costs, sounds staggeringly little. (20) But even in 1902 the costs of repairing the Ferry Inn sound very modest. The work done by H Mackay, Cromarty, includes the following:-

To roofing house as per contract	£21. 0/0
To extra couple put in	£0. 2/6
Wood and workmanship	£8. 2/0
Corrugated iron	£13. 6/0
To extras:	
9 ceiling joints 15’ 6” x 17”	£0.11/3
664 feet lining for ceiling and partition	£3. 9/2
Workmanship and nails 2/-, 4 days for 2 men	£1. 2/0
4 standards 8 feet	£0. 3/4
4 standards 10’ x 21’ x 21	£0. 1/11
1 plate 17 x 21 x 17	£0. 0/6
18 upright pieces for wall	£0. 1/8
2 doors with locks, stops, hinges	£1. 2/0
1 door with suffolk latch, stops, hinges	£0. 9/6
Outside door redwood doorposts, Rum lock, hinges, bolts	£1. 2/6
Carriage for wood	£0. 1/6
<b>Total</b>	<b>£29.6/111</b>

With all this in mind, and remembering that the parish now houses one of Britain’s newest industries, it is all the more remarkable that not everyone is housed as well as they might be. In 1974 there were five households with no inside water, one of them without electricity either.

### **Buildings I - References:-**

- 1 "Down to the Sea"
- 2 "Old Ross-shire and Scotland," W MacGill. Numbers are given.
- 3 "Church Chronicles of Nigg," Rev J R Martin
- 4 "A Backward Glance," Class III (1965), Hilton School
- 5 Mr Alex Fraser, formerly of Honeysuckle Cottage, Nigg
- 6 Pitcalnie Estate Papers
- 7 Statistical Account
- 8 Associate Church Session Minutes
- 9 "Scenes and Legends of the North of Scotland," Hugh Miller
- 10 Sanitary Report 1841
- 11 "The Parish of Nigg," Nigg WRI
- 12 New Statistical Account
- 13 Late Miss M A Macdonald, Elder Cottage, Nigg
- 14 The cottages are Blackspring, Woodside and Primrose Cottage near Nigg Ferry, and 1 Shore Street, Shandwick
- 15 Miss M Mackenzie, formerly of the Bungalow, Nigg, and Mr J Munro, Rose Cottage, Nigg
- 16 Nigg, Pitcalzean and Castlecraig
- 17 Bungalows at Culnaha, Cullisse, Bayfield, Mulloine, and a house at Dewings; also a house in Mid Street, Shandwick
- 18 Lower Bayfield, Wester Rarichie Smithy, etc
- 19 Mr D Budge, Easter Rarichie
- 20 Nigg Old Church Session Minutes

## Buildings II

Many of the early buildings in the parish have long since disappeared such as the Castles at Dunskaith and Old Shandwick (though the foundations of the former are still visible), the Bishop of Ross's summer palace near Nigg House, and the original Seceeders' church at Ankerville, so what they were like we do not know.

A map in Inverness Museum dated 1725-30 shows the various houses in Nigg at that date. There are two symbols to indicate size and status, either a small square or a square with the addition of chimneys. (1)

There are three in the first, smaller category – one at Nigg Ferry, one by the shore west of where the White House was to stand later, and one at Old Shandwick, simply called Shandwick in this case.

The group of larger houses has four – Colnol, which is Culnald and of which no trace remains, Kindeis (Bayfield), Rofekeys (which appears to be Wester rather than Easter Rarichie) and Anchorvell (Ankerville).

A later railway map that must be mid-19th century as it shows no railways in spite of its title, shows more houses by that time. (2) It also has two categories of symbol showing larger houses at Cullisse and Old Shandwick, and smaller ones at the Ferry, Castlecraig, Nigg, Bayfield, Wanby (near Chapelhill, and now disappeared), and Rarichies.

The house at the Ferry has been there for some considerable time. It is now incorporated with three other buildings into the Ferry Inn, a most attractive long, white, harled range, with an old grain store at one end with crow-stepped gable and skewes. At the eastern end of the grain store, a low door has the date 1712 above it.

The Ferry Inn has been the site of a tavern for a long time; it may indeed have been the site of the "change house at the Ness" in 1731 which is mentioned in church records (3). One of the buildings in the group was a Ferry House established in association with the ferry to Cromarty by 1792 (4) and which still appears under that name on an 1825 map. (5)

While this inn has now been modernised, it still had earthen floors in 1913 but it did at that date have indoor sanitation, cold water and a bath. This was not so good as it sounds – in order to have a hot bath water was heated in a boiler outside and conveyed to the bath by a bucket via a convenient window. (6)

There was a proposal that this building, or group of buildings, should be listed in category "C" in the Scottish Development Department's list of buildings of architectural interest, but unfortunately this has not materialized.

There is another grain storehouse in the parish, at Ankerville crossroads. It is still called The Storehouse although it was converted into three farm cottages around the 1930's or 1940's. Like the Ferry Inn, it has crow-stepped gables and from its style, appears to date from the same time. It is listed "B" and is very attractive with its six half raised gable dormers on the upper storey and an old ridge slate roof. These storehouses were built for the storage of proprietor's produce and grain rents.

The house at Ankerville (Anchorvell) which is shown on the 1725 map, still stands very close to the farm steading at Ankerville. It is a tall, narrow building, facing north, originally of three storeys. An interesting feature is a narrow stone ledge running round the outside of the two long walls, and extending about a foot on to the gable walls, not very far below the slates. It must have been a handsome house in its day. There was a central doorway in the north, and the rooms to the west, above and below, still have shutters. While there had been improvements made to the house at various times, it is still possible to see where lime plastering was put directly on to the stones on the inside walls.

A cottage, dated 1870, has been added at the eastern end, and it and the house are now just used as farm buildings, with double doors made in a gable wall.

A map of 1759 (7) shows this house with a most elaborate drawing to illustrate it. Although a former owner, Ross of Invershassley, took his title of Lord Ankerville from this property, one can hardly believe that the house was ever as elaborate as the illustration would have one think, so it was perhaps artist's licence at work.

Old Shandwick House appears on the 1725 map. It has traditional Scottish mono-pitch dormer windows, similar to those in the Old Post Office House that was formerly the parish school, believed to be the same one as began by 1716. (8) Old Shandwick was built in three stages; there was originally a one-storey building at the back, with the mark of thatching still showing. This was enlarged to two storeys, and finally the principal part of the house was added at the front. It has handsome rooms, a small walled garden and adjacent paddock.

The farm steading which stands nearby appears to have older parts, later 19th century additions and modern roofing on some sections, but the older parts still have latches on the doors.

The 1725 map shows the Kirk of Nigg but does not mark the Old Manse that lies more or less across the road from it. Perhaps it was at that time too small to be worth mentioning. Certainly, a book on Scotland in the 18th century, said that manses were usually small, low roofed, and heather thatched, but that they usually had a stable, brew house and small giral or storehouse. (9) Whether the original manse fulfilled these conditions or not we do not know, but certainly it was in such bad condition by 1755 that the heritors petitioned the Court of Exchequer of Scotland for permission to use the stipend not needed for two years due to a long vacancy to “repair the manse which is ruinous.” (10-M.104)

According to the official listing which gives this building a “B” category, it was built in 1758, but as the heritors’ request refers only to repair, it is very probable that parts of the present house are older than that. It has crow-stepped gables and skews, and has been extended at one end and a lower office wing added at right angles to form an L-shaped range. In Victorian times, a two-storey addition was added in front of the original building and the main entrance made in the corner. It is harled and is the only building in the parish with blocked-up windows, a relic of an unpalatable tax. The walls are built straight on to the ground without proper foundations. There are shutters on the windows of the principal rooms, and the owners have retained latches on several doors, as well as a flagged passage. It stands in a walled garden with a walnut tree near the gate, something that is unusual to find so far north.

The Old Manse stables date from the time when the minister’s glebe was an important part of his income. What is presumably the oldest part consists of three adjacent sheds with a little walled yard in front. Higher buildings of a later date lie on two sides. One of the early sheds is the privy, already described in the preceding chapter. Its measurements are 3’ wide, 5’ deep, and 6’ high. It and the immediately adjacent shed have slab stone roofs, each slab 7’ x 3’ x 3”, remarkably similar to table stones in the nearby graveyard which are 7’ x 3’ x 4’”. The slab roof on the privy leans to the north, that on the adjacent building to the south. The inside of the privy is of small red sandstones of uneven size and its floor is made of large, flat stones. Outside, all three sheds are harled over dressed stone, but the stone of the third shed appears to be better finished, although it appears that all the three sheds in the group were built at the same time. (See plan)

This is an attractive little group of buildings and it would be interesting to know whether any of them was a brew house or giral, although one would suppose that such buildings with a domestic role would be closer to the house.

The 1725 map showed a considerable house at Kindeace, now Bayfield, and one that had fine furnishings if an inventory of 1738 is anything to go by. (10-M.356) It was replaced in 1798 by the present Bayfield House (11), a rather gaunt building listed “B” and described as a “square box-like stone house of 3 storeys with piended roof and tall chimneys; 1 storey flanking wings make a striking symmetrical composition.” (12) The New Statistical Account described it as the only building in the parish at that date which was worthy of mention, adding however that it had an “awkward appearance owing to the floor fronting the north, and the naked and unimproved appearance of the surrounding grounds.” Its stark appearance is more probably due to its being a 3-storey building standing on top of the raised beach, without much in the way of surrounding trees to soften the outline. Although imposing, it still has a naked look. In the mid-1970’s it is in the throes of being converted into flats and will doubtless be made most attractive, a first step in this direction being washing the outside walls over with a sand-coloured material which has greatly modified the rather forbidding stone walls.

This house is Georgian in style, and fireplaces and mantels have been found in it (and in Nigg House) that are possibly the work of the Adam brothers, and if not, are faithful copies. The Adam brothers were at one time at Fort George and Robert Adam prepared plans for a new parish church at Cromarty, though they were in fact never used. (13) It seems quite possible that they may have crossed the ferry at Nigg to give advice on such a building at Bayfield.

There is a coach-house near to Bayfield House, and a granary near the farm buildings. The latter stands above the raised beach and no one seems certain of its original purpose. It is unlikely to have been a storehouse and does not look like one, but it may have been associated with the old Bayfield mill below, although the last miller's son does not remember if this is so. (14)

The 1725 map shows Rofekeys, on the site of one or other of the Rarichies, but it is more likely to be Wester Rarichie which has an interesting farmhouse and which was the site for the only fair in the parish. While there are several blocks of farm cottages in the parish, Wester Rarichie's is the most interesting. The original farmhouse and cottages were built in one L-shaped block, with the cottages facing inwards, and the farmhouse, which is on the corner, facing outwards.

The 2-storey farmhouse has a nice range of upper windows with trefoil-shaped finials, while there used to be the fleur-de-lys (the Gair emblem) above the door. This was harled over about 1968. The immediately adjoining cottage has an upper floor and dormer windows, while the rest of the cottages are 1-storey. A newer farmhouse, however, on the other side of the road, has been in use now for a good many years.

Easter Rarichie had an attractive farmhouse at one time, now made into workers' cottages. It is in the form of a wide U, with the main part the 2-storey base of the U, and two small, 1-storey wings. This house lies on the road to Balintore, but there is another farmhouse nearer the sea, strikingly situated on top of a hillock, and now used by the shepherd. As already said, any one of these may be the original of the 1725 map, but it seems likely that Wester Rarichie is what is meant.

The present Nigg House stands beside the probable site of the Bishop's summer palace (see church chapter), the foundations of which could still be seen in 1790 (15) A Manor Place, Mansion and Moothill are mentioned in a charter of 1581. According to one source, the present house is actually on the site of the ancient manor house of the Bishops, which was perhaps inhabited into the 17th century by the Gayre family. (16)

Whichever is right, the present house, listed "B", is L-shaped, and built of roughly dressed sandstone of different sizes which probably came from a quarry between the house and churchyard. The stone is held together with lime, and harled.

It is of three storeys, and has three sash windows, those to the right and left being triple. It has a ridge roof, two hipped dormers, and end stacks. A lower office wing extends at the side and projects in front, while another 2-storey wing with pined roof was added at the back. (12) The oldest part appears to be the office wing, with a newer part added to form the principal house as it is known nowadays. A very thick wall between these two parts indicates that there might have been two houses, side by side, at some time, while the free standing wall projecting in front may be part of an even earlier house. (17)

The house has an upstairs drawing room and the centre pilastered front door has a lintel stone marked: T.G.M.B. (Thomas Gair and Margaret Brebner) 1702

Although the New Statistical Account said that Bayfield House was the only building in the parish worthy of mention, it nevertheless refers to Nigg House as "the kind mansion house of Nigg," because this was where the parish idiot, Angus from Sutherland, was given a home.

There is a cottage in the grounds of Nigg House, adjoining the coach house. It is of one storey, harled, with three small hipped dormers, and was proposed to be listed "C" but this proposal came to nothing.

Nigg's farm buildings, however, (an un-listed "B") are an attractive courtyard range in red sandstone. Over a pend, a raised pediment contains a pigeon loft (18) and an outside stone stairway leads to an upper granary. These buildings were erected in the early part of the 19th century and though now in poor condition, were particularly mentioned in the New Statistical Account as being "an excellent square of offices."

Nigg House is surrounded by fine deciduous trees. Until the last ten years or so, they continued down the Bishop's Walk to the low road, but at that time, those nearest the sea were unfortunately cut, but plenty remain surrounding the house and the parish church, and they add greatly to the pleasant grouping of the house and its associated buildings, the church and the Old Manse.

The house on the low road, now known as Tigh na Mara, was formerly called The Lodge, a corruption of the Porter's Lodge which stood at the foot of the old drive from the low road to Nigg House.

Cullisse House merited a "little house" symbol on the railway map that has already been mentioned. It is not a listed building but is an imposing house with an interesting history of development. It appears to have started as a but and a ben on the hillock there, certainly two hundred years ago. An addition turned it into a T-shape and a further one placed the main door at the side. By 1872 it was described as a "substantial residence," and about 1900 it was further improved when the present drawing-room was added and the front door made in its present place. The various stages are visible and the old cottage door of the original was found during alterations.

Although it no longer remains, there was at one time a summer house south-east of the old mill dam. (19)

Castlecraig is marked on the railway map. It has an 18th century core (20) that perhaps explains its fine banister rail, as it was a comparatively plain farmhouse, described in 1872 as a "neat, modern residence" (19), until it was enlarged about 1922. At that time, attractive bay windows with curved glass were added, rooms were extended, and with a superlative view across the Moray Firth, it is one of the most pleasing houses in the area. Until after the 1939-45 War, it had Caithness flags on the kitchen floor.

Above the old stable door at Castlecraig, now part of the dairy, there are three sets of initials and dates. These are to commemorate each occupier who rebuilt the farm steading at these times, each occasion being after fire.

Although it does not appear on either of the maps mentioned, Pitcalzean House is listed "B." It was described in 1872 as a "spacious modern mansion with offices, pleasure grounds etc. attached," which the official listing phrases as "a fair sized rambling house in spacious wooded policies." (19 and 12) Its core may be 18th century, the principal facade is Victorian, and it has a twin gabled front with bay windows, centre recessed columned porch and verandah, and harled walls. (12)

It has an upstairs drawing room and a lovely view westwards over Nigg Bay towards Ben Wyvis.

One of its main attractions is its setting amongst fine trees. Along with Nigg House, it was at one time in the hands of the Murray family and it seems possible that the fine beech and other deciduous trees at both these houses were possibly amenity planting by them, but unfortunately no records of these tree plantings have been kept. (21)

The tree-lined drive runs down to the low road and is very attractive although since the 1950's it has been closed to traffic. A hundred years ago there was a summer house half way down the drive, just above the raised beach. (19)

Behind the house there lies a coach house, proposed to be listed "C" although this proposal was not carried out. It was described as a "compact rectangular range in pink harling to match the house; one end gable contains a small pigeon loft." (12) Since the house and grounds were bought by Highlands Fabricators, both house and coach house have been cream washed.

The farm steading at Pitcalzean Mains is listed "B" and said to have been built about 1820 (12) although the date 1666 appears on the keystone of a corner of the south-west wall, nearest the doocote. It is described as a "low courtyard range, harled and limewashed. The raised gable pediment over the pend contains a pigeon loft." (12 and 18)

Culnaha is said to have been the site of one of Black Andrew of Milton's seven castles in Easter Ross (11) but no vestige of a castle remains, nor any mound to show where it might have been. The house that is there now is attractive, with very thick walls, and unusual square 2-storeyed porch which looks rather like a tower. The house was enlarged and improved in the later part of the 19th century, but no one appears to know its age. Notes of the specifications for improving the farm steading are attached, along with those for the house.

Dunskaithe was described as a "spacious modern residence" in 1872 (19), but it was still thatched until the Romanes family rebuilt and enlarged it in 1901-6. While it is said that the stone for this work came from Balintore quarry, local sources say it came from the rocks below Dunskaithe Castle and that it was all dressed by a stone mason, Sandy Mackenzie from Barbaraville, with the help of one more man. More men were brought in later to complete the building, but this explains the long time taken to rebuild the house. It then became a handsome place, with an

“old” and a “new” part. The new was much embellished with ornate stonework and had interior walls of plain stone, which while impressive were very chilly. The house was burnt down in 1960, leaving the servants’ quarters of the new part standing. (22 and 23) These were then turned into a shop and Post Office, house and dog kennels, but it has now been sold for industrial purposes. There was a fine walled garden, the walls of which were breached to make access easier for industrial traffic in the early 1970’s. A small chapel-type building stood in the corner of the garden and, though the walls remain, it is in a sad state of repair.

An attractive house is known as the Old Post Office, which was formerly the parish school. Assuming that this school remained on the one site until the 1872 Education Act, this dates this house as being in existence in 1716. Its upper windows are similar to those of Old Shandwick House. It is still occupied.

Brae Cottage, a ruin standing on the raised beach above Seaside Cottage, was the original Mullineoin farmhouse. The date 1777 is on a stone at the western gable and simple though it was, it was occupied by a farm worker until the 1950’s. The walls are 18” thick, the inner surface of these held together with mott, and also faced with mott, which has then been plastered. It was superseded as a farmhouse by a red sandstone house on Cormack’s Brae, known as Mullineoin until its name was changed to Mount Canisp in the 1960’s. It has an attractive small steading range behind, consisting of a rear sheltering wall and two wings, in red sandstone.

On the Hill of Nigg, just east of the burn Allt nan Damh and overlooking the Moray Firth, there are the remains of the small farm of Caanruidh. Behind the ruins of the cottage there lies the farm steading whose rear wall is of beautifully placed, even stones, cemented in with clay in what was obviously a labour of love and pride. From three or four feet high, the upper part of this wall is of clay that was still in remarkably good condition in 1975, as photographs show. The lay-out is similar to that of Mullineoin with this rear wall and two wings, but built of stones and mott. A plan is attached which shows how, ruin though it now is, the whole gives a most pleasing effect, the steading tucked cosily in behind the house, and in front of a glorious southerly view of the Moray Firth. A hollow between the steading and the house gives the appearance of perhaps having been a well at one time.

Further west, near the Bayfield-Castle Craig march, lies the ruin of the farm of Caanrigh, of which the plan is also given. In the 1940’s it was possible to see that its upper walls were also made of clay. Part of the buildings had a causeway in front edged with kerbstones, while a raised and curved turf wall seems to have backed a well.

Nearer to Bayfield Loch, what was Francis Henry’s croft has a surprisingly long line of ruined buildings, 40 yards by 6 yards, with a well alongside.

The farm cottages of Wester Rarichie have already been mentioned – it was customary to build them in a row or “street;” the farm steading was often called “the square” and the farmhouse was usually known as the “big house.” For some reason, however, the shepherd’s cottage always stood away on its own, often at the other end of the farm. An example of this was the shepherd’s cottage at Castle Craig that stood on the face of the hill above Nigg Ferry. It was a familiar landmark and many people were sorry when it was demolished in the late 1960’s.

In some cases, however, a cottage or cottages might be attached to the farm steading. At Nigg, there is a cottage on each side of the pend; the gardener’s cottage at Wester was connected to, but not within the steading group; Culnaha had a one-room cottage adjoining the cart shed. There is also no denying that 19th century farm steadings were far better than workers’ cottages and it may be that Nigg’s cottages at the steading may have been an attempt to raise the standard of employees’ accommodation.

The later years of the 19th century saw the building of Nigg and Pitcalnie Schools, well built of red sandstone and neatly finished with attractive finials. In the early 1890’s, Mr T W Burt built Craig Lodge, which should more properly be called Castle Craig Lodge, and gave parts of the building modern crow-stepping as a finishing touch.

The list of buildings of special architectural or historic interest is:-

Nigg Old Church and graveyard, "A"  
 Free Church, now the Village Hall, "B"  
 Old Manse, "B"  
 Nigg House, "B"  
 Pitcalzean House, "B"  
 Pitcalzean Mains steading, "B"  
 Bayfield House, "B"  
 Ankerville Storehouse, "B"  
 Shandwick Stone, "A"

Several of these are mentioned in other chapters, rather than in this one, but the list is relevant here.

### Appendix to Buildings II:-

Notes on plans and specifications for buildings and alterations at Culnaha on the Estate of Pitcalnie – from Mrs Rutherford, The Old Smithy, Culnaha

1891. Specification of Carpenter, Slater, Plumber, Lath and plaster and concrete work to be done in making alterations and additions to Culnaha Farm House conform to accompanying drawings:-

Carpenter work: "The contractor is to provide materials and workmanship and to carry the materials to Nigg Station and the Tenant will carry them from thence to the House. The new inner doors and finishings to be of yellow pine, the border round dining room floor to be of pitch pine, and all other timber (unless otherwise specified) to be of first class Swedish red, the whole to be the best quality, free of sapwood – large or loose knots – shakes – and every other blemish – full squared and thoroughly seasoned."

The rafters and sarking of the bay window in the dining room, the couples and sarking and doors and door frames of the porch, the sleepers and flooring of the dining and drawing rooms and staircase, skirting boards to be given to the Tenant "but the contractor can have the use of any of it that will suit for scaffolding... The old rafters above Mr Goodbrand's bedroom to be supported on an old railway rail (which the contractor will provide) ... the border round dining room to be of pitch pine narrow deal not exceeding 4" broad from the feather (?) and polished with bees wax."

There is considerable detail about the roofing of the bedroom above the porch and its finial was to be "Macfarlane's No. 52, 4' 9" high of cast iron relieved with painting and gilding, the tail rod to be fixed at bottom with nut and washer."

Slater work: The contractor was to provide materials and workmanship and carry all materials to Nigg Station – slates, nails, lime and hair – from where the Tenant was to fetch them.

Lath and plaster and concrete work: Same conditions about carrying materials that included lath, lime, stucco, nails, hair and portland cement, and in addition the tenant was to "carry sand and gravel from the nearest places where they can be got to suit." The sills and frames of windows were to be "bedded with lime and pointed round the outsides with portland cement ... Keith of Dufftown lime to be used and run into boiled putty, the first and second coats to be mixed with proper proportions of clean sharp sand and fresh hair, the last coat to be of putty.

Plumber work: It appears that there was already a bath and WC as these were to be shifted to new positions.

"Each contractor is to uphold the word executed by him for two years after completion, make good any failures that may appear and leave his work at the expiry of that period in a perfect state."

Specifications for Servants' cottage; no date given but approximately the same as for Culnaha Farm House.

Specifications for quality were much as for the house, including wood that had to be first class Swedish red, free from all blemishes. There were two bedrooms with wood floors, a living room, and pantry with three tiers of

shelving, but there is no mention of a bathroom or any form of plumbing work. The outer door was to be made in two leaves with framed backs. One floor, living room presumably, was to be portland cement tinted blue.

1888. Specification for new farm steading.

“The tenant of the farm will provide sand, and carry lime and drain pipes from Nigg Station, and corners scuntions and rubble from Bayfield quarry, and sills and lintels from Balintore. Stones for rubble work corners and scuntions to be taken from Bayfield quarry and ... lime from Keith or Dufftown.”

Rubble work ... the new walls to be carried up to the dimensions figured on the drawings and to be of good random rubble work built up with hammer dressed stones ... the walls to be close packed and hearted up, and all the stones including those afterwards specified to be full bedded and jointed with mortar composed of one part lime to two of sand riddled together, soured and worked with a down beater so as no particles of unmixed lime shall appear in using ...” There is mention of “pick dressed scuntions and lintels.”

Underfounding was to be done with hammer dressed stones and lime. The Wheelpit for the mill is fully described, the description ending “If suitable stones for the wheelpit and covers of tail race cannot be got from Bayfield they will be taken from Balintore.”

“Causewaying. The floors of the feeding byre and west byre to be made up to the height for causewaying with hard rammed excavations and to be causewayed with land stones not more than 4” diameter laid on sand – close packed – and beat down to an even surface. The present causeway stones to be reused so far as they will go and are suitable ... The gutters to be 12” wide ... close hammer jointed flag bottoms.”

In all, the steading specifications include seven drawings to show how certain work was to be carried out, ie how joists were to be morticed together.

### **Buildings II - References:-**

1. Plan of the Moray Firth, 1725-30, by Joseph Avery
2. Map of Ross and Cromarty with the Railways (but not showing them).
3. Nigg Old Church Session Minutes
4. New Pilot of the East Coast of Scotland, 1792, M Downie
5. Outline Map of Cromarty Estate, 1825
6. Mr Leslie Gilsland
7. Plan of part of ye Lands of Ankervil and Meikle Allan, 1759
8. “Church Life in Ross and Sutherland,” Rev Colin MacNaughton
9. “Social Life in the 18th century,” 1899, Henry Grey Graham
10. “Old Ross-shire and Scotland,” W MacGill. Numbers are given.
11. “Kilmuir Easter,” Helen Myers Meldrum
12. Scottish Development Department’s List of Buildings of Special Architectural or Historic Interest
13. Mrs J Durham, Scotsburn, Kildary
14. Mr J Munro, Rose Cottage, Nigg
15. Ordnance Survey card information
16. “Gayre’s Booke,” Lt Col G R Gayre
17. Mrs B Scott, Nigg House, and Mr A Thoms
18. See “Old Dovecotes of Scotland,” A Niven Robertson, p 404
19. “Name Book of Nigg Parish in Ross-shire,” 1872, Ordnance Survey
20. Messrs Bell, Ingram, Edinburgh
21. Sir Kenneth Murray, Geanies, Ross-shire
22. Miss M Mackenzie, formerly of the Bungalow, Nigg
23. Mr Alex Fraser, formerly of Honeysuckle Cottage, Nigg

**NB** Since these chapters were written, the cottage at 2 New Street, Shandwick, has been saved from demolition and is being turned into a small folk museum, mainly because it contains a good example of the “hanging chimney.”  
Furnishings

Those people who remember the early days of this century, think that cottages were poorly furnished compared to what they are nowadays. That is indeed so, but they were plentifully equipped in comparison with what had gone before.

An early inventory of a small farmer or crofter who died in Inver in 1649, is included here to show just how low the standard was at that time. Though he owned a cow, a stirk, a horse and three merks in money, all he had in his house was “ane greitt kist, a litill coffer and ane pott.” (1-M.334)

The poverty of furnishing is made clear in the declaration of some fishermen in Balnabruach in 1832 that all they owned was “the little old furniture in the house.” It sounds pathetically meagre, and indeed these men were appealing for permission to sue in forma pauperis, or as paupers, so their lack of worldly goods was plain. (2)

A box bed, a few stools, bowls and horn spoons and a few buckets for water completed the furniture of many a cottage, until the later years of last century by which time home-made rag rugs, a chaff-filled tick bag (mattress), cloutie-covers for the beds made from rags, some ornaments brought home from the fishing all contributed to a more home-like appearance. A dresser in the kitchen and a roomy chest of drawers in the best room were the two principal pieces of furniture. All were made locally and people still remember stools, chairs and beds made by George Mackay in Balintore. There were many other local craftsmen, however, and one did not need to go far to get simple household equipment.

From then on, progress with the box-bed giving way to an ordinary bed, which was sometimes embellished with posts fixed to the corners to make a four-poster with a frame at the top from which hung a valance. Colourful distemper went on the wall and round the edge of the floors, even when they were still of clay. Such bed linen as had to be bought was obtained during the eagerly-awaited visits of the chapman or pedlar. One of these was George Rainy who visited the parish in the latter years of the 18th century (2); a much later one was Willie Bowlie who came round the parish every Monday prior to the 1914-18 War. His wife and children accompanied him in his pony-trap – it was his wife, if fact, who mainly displayed his wares which were carried in a pack made from a red blanket, tied in a particular way for easy opening. Towels, dishes, bowls, all appeared to go into this pack, and apparently none got broken.

Gradual progress was made, and one great boon was American cloth on the kitchen table which saved the formidable task of scrubbing white wood. Even so, cottage furniture was of a fairly simple standard until the house-improvements of the post-1945 years. From then on, the standard is as high as anywhere in Britain.

The larger houses, however, always were better equipped. Even in 1727, the widow of Donald Denoon in Rarichie had household goods including “6 table knives with forks, a waned (basket work) chair in the chamber ... stools ... knocking stane with tree belonging ... large timber fork.” This higher standard of domestic life went along with a small farm with sixty sheep, five milk and three “yell” cows. (1-M.349)

Kindeace House had much more elaborate furnishings still. In 1738 Mrs Grizell Forbes, Lady Kindeace, made up an inventory of the household furniture after her husband's death. It included:-

1 silver tankard  
 3 mutchkins  
 2 silver jugs  
 2 silver salts  
 1 dealing spoon marked DF and GR  
 12 silver spoons  
 6 ivory hafted knives  
 6 ivory hafted forks  
 6 brasill hafted forks  
 4 dozen "peuter" plates  
 6 roast dishes (covers)  
 2 "broath" dishes  
 4 ashets  
 flagons  
 candlesticks  
 crystal decanters  
 12 new fashioned chairs with Russia leather bottoms  
 new eight day clock Dunlop's make  
 14 pieces large Indian painting  
 map section of a first rate ship  
 6 new ash Chairs with Point 'Angle sewed backs  
 "and a parrat cage." (1-M.356)  
 standing towed bed  
 "cain" chairs  
 looking glass 20 inches  
 press and 18 pairs sheets  
 dornick and damask napery  
 wainscott folding tables  
 4 mapps  
 new fashioned standing bed, green  
 "stampit hingings"  
 folding (dining) table  
 18 chairs  
 1 longsaddle bed

The kitchen furniture was similar to that in comparable houses of the time, with apparatus for salting salmon and meat, for brewing and distilling, for candle-dipping and for baking, all the home industries that made households largely self-sufficient. (1-M.331, 336)

In this case, the value of the furnishings outweighed that of the farm stock – the first came to £861 Scots, the latter to £616. (1-M.356)

Wide though the difference was in those days between big house and cottage, the gap is now entirely closed, to the advantage of all.

#### **Furnishings - References:-**

1 "Old Ross-shire and Scotland," W MacGill. Numbers are given.  
 2 Nigg Old Church Session Minutes