

This talk was given by Braemar resident, Mr John Duff, in the Braemar village hall, on 9th January 2011. John is extremely knowledgeable and interested in the history of the local area, and on this occasion chose the topic of a local family with 18th century connections to Braemar village.

BRAEMAR'S MYSTERY FAMILY

If you were to take a random selection of present day Braemar residents and ask them if they could name the Braemar family who, jointly or individually, ran hotels in Braemar, Glenshee and Strathdon; who were responsible for the formation of the bends forming the old Devil's Elbow, thus forming the first real coaching and tourist link between Braemar and Glenshee; who carried out the first known excavation of Kindrochit castle; who left a large sum of money in a Trust Fund for the University education of promising scholars in Braemar; who supplied the first Treasurer of the Wright (later the Highland) Society; who contributed Banchory's second feuar, a man who created what was effectively the first Banchory Town Council (The Guild), who also donated more than one piece of land to the town, and whose name is commemorated there in a street name, you would probably be rewarded with a blank stare. The family was the Watson family of the Invercauld Arms Hotel in Braemar. The name is now forgotten in the village, but there are certainly relatives still living here. A few of those present here tonight may know much more about the Watsons than I do, in which case I must apologise for my intrusion, and ask for their tolerance.

On 15th March 1770, a child was born in Braemar to John Watson (born about 1734). His wife, Catherine Craig (born about 1746), is not mentioned, there is no indication of whether the child was male or female, and no name is given. This is the first mention in the Braemar Parish Records of the name Watson, so it seems reasonable to assume that the Watsons were incomers: but from where? There are numerous John Watsons to be found in the 18th century in the East Lothian/Dunbar area, and there was a Catherine Craig born at Stonehaven, in the Parish of Dunnottar on 23rd July, 1745, but I can find no record of their marriage. There is strong evidence that the family was wealthy, so what on earth brought them to Braemar, at that time a remote little highland village, with no claim to fame other than the start of an abortive Jacobite uprising fifty five years before, and a mediaeval connection with Scottish Royalty?

Between 1770 and 1789, John and Catherine went on to have 9 other recorded children – 5 boys and 4 girls.

In 1775, a Hierom Watson, a blacksmith, who, from Braemar Memorial Inscriptions, was of the same family and probably arrived along with them, married Elspet Robertson, a daughter of John Robertson, the Invercauld Estate joiner. Hierom was just possibly a very early son of John's, but more probably a younger brother or perhaps even a cousin. I can find no record of his birth. His son Duncan (whose second wife was Jane Grant) a carpenter, was the first Treasurer of Braemar Wright and later Highland Society, from 1815 till 1830, when he died. (His Grandfather, John Robertson, had been the first joint Ordinary Vice-President and later, "Master" of the Society) In January 1832, the canny lads on the Society's Committee refused to pay his widow £6 sick allowance for her late husband, on the grounds that the claim was not made in regular form as required! They lived in Inverey, and their daughter Mary married Alexander Lamont, a crofter.

In April, 1811, old John Watson died, aged 77, and his widow continued to run the Invercauld Arms Hotel till she died, aged 79, in 1825.

In August, 1824, the same Canny Lads of the Society were discussing the arrangements for a ball they intended to hold that month, and decided to accept a tender from Mrs Watson, Castleton, to supply a substantial plain dinner in Braemar Castle at a charge of 1/6 for everyone who chose to dine, *it being understood that the Society is under no obligation to take any of their drink from her after dinner*. Then they had another think: *Resolved also unanimously that the drink shall be furnished by the Society purchasing the spirits and other ingredients as well as the necessary utensils at the cheapest rate they can.* (and her nephew, or possibly even her grandson, was their Treasurer!)

There is no time to go into details about all of the Watson children, so I'll confine myself to touching on some of them, in order of their birth.

Thomas was the second child, born in 1772. In 1800, he married, in Glenmuick parish, a young lady from Aberdeen, with the unusual Christian name of Douglas (Douglas Mary Mitchell). By this time Thomas was apparently the proprietor of the Invercauld Arms Hotel in Glenshee, and like his father, went on to have 10 children, all born in the Parish of Kirkmichael, between 1802 and 1822. The family was still in Glenshee in 1829, as we shall see later, but by the time of the Census of 1841, there was not one Watson recorded in Kirkmichael, and I have so far been unable to positively trace any one of them, or even the marriage of any of the children. Did they move to some other Scottish hotel? – did they move to England? – did they emigrate? The two latter possibilities could account for no marriages being recorded in Scotland.

Jean came next, born in 1776. Another indication that the family were of some note locally is the fact that she married James Stuart, Earl Fife's factor. They seem to have had no family. She died, aged 90, in Strathdon, where Earl Fife had one of his many landholdings (Glenbuchat).

John was perhaps the greatest character, and was born in 1778. He married Ann Gordon. They had no family. John became a merchant of some sort, and was clearly very wealthy, as well as having a touch of eccentricity. He was the second feuar of Banchory, which of course then was a small village, and he had quite extensive land holdings there. He was very community minded, and set up the first Town Council or Guild, later known as the John Watson Guild. It was under his guidance that projects such as a coal fund, the building of the town hall, the building of the gas works and supplying street lighting by gas, came to be instituted. He declined nomination as Provost in favour of a baker in the village. Watson Street commemorates him in Banchory. All this is dealt with in Buchan Watt's *Book of Banchory*. His Will is intriguing, and as well as leaving various legacies; money for the poor; three parcels of land in trust for the town of Banchory, and instructions for the building of a folly in his garden, he includes instructions about the folly, as well as his philosophy as to how the Earth was formed:

The way I dispose of the residue is thus:- I am to build a tower on the rock in the northeast corner of my property and which is the march separates it from the other land of Arbeadie. As the publick is to have free access and egress to the top of this tower for their benefit and amusement they may perhaps contribute to the building of it. This Tower is to be built with a strong arched room at the bottom. This room is to receive a large Iron safe for the purpose of holding the choice of my books and all my papers, both written and printed for preservation and Dr. John Forbes Watson, my nephew (his brother George's youngest child) is to have the Key of his safe during his life. At his death the Key will fall to be kept by the Reverend George Hutchison, Minister of Banchory, or the Minister of the Established Church in Banchory for the time being and to his Successors in Office in all

time coming. I should fain hope my papers will give a true account of the stages our earth has gone through in its Creation. The Earth is the child of the sun. The Sun took the earth (as it were) by the hand and learnt it at the first to revolve once on its axis in each revolution of its orbit. After a long period the sun made it to revolve daily on its axis.

At another stage of the Will he includes a homily to the Minister:

Banchory Decr. 1, 1857. To Reverend K Hutchison of Banchory Ternan. My Dear Sir, I here enclose one Pound to your Church Scheme. I also state that at my death you may charge my estate with Five Pounds to the same object. Still I have no faith in deathbed legacies to the Church it smells too much of the Church of Rome and of our free Kirk. A sinner on his deathbed with horrible dreams, is assured of a Passage into Heaven if he will but leave his Estate to the Church. Strange Doctrine:- To leave an Estate just at the time he has got nothing to leave he is induced to deprive his legal heirs of their estate to save his soul. Is this Hypocrisy or is it not? Your obedient servant (signed) John Watson. PS, Prayers may be spoken or they may be acted. I approve of the former and I approve more still of the latter. To Practice the Virtues is better than to speak them. We are all born to be servants although none of us aspire to be masters. We are all born to earn our bread with the sweat of our brow. The man who earns his bread honestly Practices Charity and worships fervently is the man whose Prayers are most acceptable to Deity. Although with reluctance I object to the the Poors rates. They do more harm to the mind of the the Poor than they do good to their bodys. Our Divines should instill into the minds of the People the duty of self support. Subscribed with my very best regards to you and yours.
(Signed).

Then, nine years later, sadly, the tower was not to be built:

To my Executors. Sirs, it is with extreme sorrow I have to state that from fallen and falling fortune I have not the means to execute the schemes I had in view, which you will see in my papers. You will give up all thought of building an outlook on the rock in the north east corner of my ground. You will reduce the number of legacies, and grant those which remain only to persons of necessity. You will give the residue to Mrs George Watson (his sister in law) and her son in law Reverend James Grant. I write this letter to make it fast a Codicil to my letter of Will on this third day of April in this year Eighteen hundred and sixty five in my own house in Banchory. (Signed) John Watson. To my Executors Aberdeen 19th March 1866. Referred to in my deposition of this date (Signed) John Webster John Morrison JP. (There was a serious bank crash in 1866, and it appears probable that he lost his money in the run-up to this).

John died in 1866.

Charles was born in 1782, and was 43 when his mother died. He died himself at the age of 46, so he only ran the Invercauld Arms Hotel at Braemar for three years or so, although he must have been heavily involved long before that. The Watsons are credited with carrying out the first excavations at Kindrochit castle, and it is likely that Charles was the driving force behind this venture. They apparently found nothing of any serious interest, but removed over 70 loads of spoil before the laird stopped them.

Charles, during the last year or so of his life, was also involved with his brother Thomas at Glenshee in trying to create a road fit for coaches to pass more easily between Glenshee and Braemar, in what must have been the very first local attempt to cultivate a tourist industry. The crux, of course, was

the steep slope at the head of Glen Beg, and this necessitated the formation of what became known as the Devil's Elbow bends. After Charles died in 1828, his sister Margaret, who took over the hotel, continued to cooperate with Thomas, and the Devil's Elbow was opened to coach traffic in 1829 (see *respective timetable for the coach service between Braemar and Perth, in folder 'Braemar Local Businesses'*). It was to survive till 1972, when the road was realigned.

Charles never married, but he did have a natural daughter, Mary, whose mother (unnamed) he obviously came to dislike intensely. He had a touch of the same eccentricity as John, and it shows in his Will.

To see my natural daughter Mary Watson paid annually, during all the years of her life, the sum of twenty pounds sterling as an annuity for her maintenance and support to be paid half yearly at the terms of Whitsunday and Martinmas.

Second to see paid to Ann Thom who has been a faithful and industrious servant to me, an annuity during all the years of her life, the sum of eight pounds Strlg.

Codicil 2nd it is also my desire and request that my said daughter Mary Watson shall immediately after my decease be removed from her mother's house (if not before) and placed under the care of management of my brother Thomas's wife, who is to have the sole charge of her & of the annuity formely specified until she come of age. And in the event of her not going under the management of my said Sister in Law, Douglas Mary Mitchell alias Watson: the said Mary Watson, my daughter shall be wholly deprived of teh benefit of the foresaid annuity to which she would otherwise be entitled after my death. I further Desire, nominate and appoint my sister Mary Watson to be joint Executor along with my brother John Watson, with equal power and authority to act and determine, in the management of my affairs as specified in the preceding Will and in the Codicils thereto annexed. And lastly as Ann Thom, the annuitant already mentioned has since my will was wrote changed her mode of behavioutrto me & my affairs & property, I hereby appoint that in place (of) eight pounds she shall receive only four pounds annually so long as she lives.

After detailing various bequests, he stipulates:

The principal sum remaining always untouched as a fund which cannot be interfered with for ever after the decease of these different parties my desire and will is that my said Trustees shall lay out annually the free income or interest which may arise from said property in forwarding the education of deserving young men who may have talents to receive education. The exact mode in which this end is to be attained I leave to the future Regulaiton of my said Trustees. But I desire whatever regulation they may adopt, it may embrace the affording at least three years education, at one or other of the Universities in Scotland. That such as can prove their relationship to me, may in the first place be preferred. Next the name of Watson to have a preferable claim and thereafter the best scholars who may be found at the school of Braemar; at a Public competition held before a deputation of the Presbytery of Kincardine O'Neill, as I am convinced the education of youth in the principles of teh Christian Religion and receiving instruction in the necessary branches of learning is the greatest benefit which can be bestowed on them. Providing always that such principal sum shall at no period whatever be reduced below the sum of Three Thousand five Hundred pounds Sterling.

Although the amount of the principal sum is not, and could not, at that time, be specified, it is safe to assume that Charles Watson calculated that it would be well in excess of the stipulated minimum

of £3,500.

This Will was made out in 1828. Using the Safira Historical Inflation and Price Converter gives a multiplier of 81, so the purchasing power of £3,500 in 1828 is the equivalent of £283,500 in 2010. It should be noted, of course, that the educational fund was only to be created and applied for that purpose after the death of Charles's various annuitants, so have no means of knowing when, or if ever, it came to fruition.

Archives somewhere might give some clue as to what finally happened to Charles's legacy to the village, but I have contacted the archivists of both the Bank of Scotland and the Royal Bank of Scotland without success. There was no bank branch in Braemar at that time. It is certainly a possibility that the educational fund may have been lost in the bank crash of 1866. The chance of there being some dormant fund with a lot of money in it seems very slight.

Margaret was two years younger than Charles, and in 1807 married Andrew Clark, the farmer at Invergelder. They had seven of a family. After Charles's death in 1828 Margaret seems to have taken over the running of the Braemar hotel, and in the 1841 Census she is recorded in Castleton, described as an Inn Keeper. She died in 1854. By 1851 her second child George had taken over as Inn Keeper, and was also described as a farmer of 100 acres. He married, in 1852, Isabella Davidson of Arbeadie, Banchory, and eventually became local factor to Earl Fife, thus succeeding his uncle, James Stuart.

Margaret's sixth child Jane, born in 1815, married Dr. John Hugh McLaren, who lived at Crathie Cottage (Crystals). They later moved to Blairgowrie, and Dr. McLaren died there in 1881.

George was born in 1786, and married a Jean McHardy from Pannanich Lodge, Ballater. He took over the Colquhannie Hotel in Strathdon, and in 1851 was running the hotel and farming 130 acres, employing three labourers. He seems to have died before Death Registration became compulsory in 1855, and Jean died in 1870 at the Manse of Fordyce in Banffshire, at the home of her son in law, the Rev. James Grant, the husband of their daughter Catherine.

Of the other children of old John and Catherine Watson, the nameless first-born in 1770 was probably an infant death: James, the second child, died at the age of 21: Mary, the sixth, never married, and in 1841 was living with Dr McLaren and his wife at Crathie. (Mrs McLaren of course was her niece). Catherine, the youngest of the family, married James McKenzie, a blacksmith in Braemar, and had two children, James and Henrietta. She died in 1868, aged 80.

So there we have it: a great many questions; all, so far as I know, unanswered.

Where did the Watsons come from to Braemar?

What happened to Charles's Educational Fund, and were any Braemar boys enabled to go to university by means of it?

What happened to Thomas in Glenshee and his family?

Did Charles's natural daughter Mary go to stay with her aunt in Glenshee?

How did John in Banchory make his money?

How did he lose it?

Did another Watson relative take over the Invercauld Arms Hotel in Braemar after the Clarks?

John Duff
9th January 2011