

This presentation was given Mr Willie Meston, MVO, long standing Secretary of the Braemar Royal Highland Society, in the Braemar Village on 20th February 2011

BRAEMAR ROYAL HIGHLAND SOCIETY.

1793. First legislation enabling Friendly or Mutual Assistance Societies. Many Societies were formed but few survived more than a few years.

1815. Braemar Wright Society – inaugural meeting 3rd Week July 1815. William Farquharson of Monaltrie suggested “Braemar Woodmen Society”. Constituted Jan 1816. This was six months to the day after the battle of Waterloo and was registered as a Friendly Society in 1817 with the Clerk of Peace, Reg. No.F.S. 1 (Scot). It is now the oldest surviving Friendly Society in the Country. Lonach is Reg.FS.2 (Scot). Entrants to the Society had to pay 10/- (50p) initially, plus 1/- (5p) per quarter. In return for which there was provision for an annuity on reaching the age of 70, sickness and death benefit, and a widow’s allowance. This still continues and members/widows/orphans still received an annuity, at present £40 per annum.

1816 – Duncan Watson was one of the three Key Keepers, and by 1819 was treasurer. His parents had the Invercauld Arms Hotel in Braemar, and his uncle the Spital of Glenshee Hotel. The Watsons were a prominent Braemar Family, and left money to charity. They also carried out the first excavation of Kindrochit Castle (apparently before completion they were stopped by Invercauld Estate) and the two Watson Families between them created the Devil’s Elbow Road, so that coaches could pass between the Spital of Glenshee and Braemar.

John Morgan was Secretary and remained in Office for 50 years. A feat not to be repeated. The Ballater Chemist, Derek Mutch is married to a Great, Great Granddaughter of John Morgan.

1817. It was recorded. A Chist was purchased 10/6: Paper and candles 5/4: By expenses of prosecuting a member 4/-. To a sederant book and paper 15/2.

From 1819 until 1847 The Society dealt in meal. Purchased from the Vales of Alford and Cromar it was sold during the Winter to locals making a small

profit annually. It is recorded in minutes that it was decided to have 2 girels procured as soon as possible, each to contain from 60 to 100 bolls of meal, in order that the Society may take advantage of the present low price to lay in a stock for future emergencies. John Robertson instructed to get the girels made with as little delay as possible. John Lamont the Society's Agent is empowered to purchase to the extent of 100 bolls at or under 16 shillings, if possible before the next meeting. 100 bolls would weigh 6.25 tons at 140lb per boll, and would have required a girel of 10' x 10' x 5' approx. It was noted that the total profit recorded by John Lamont was 4d per boll - £2:6/-.

1826. The name of the Society was changed to the Braemar Highland Society. This was at the suggestion of the Deputy Master (Vice-President) Charles Cumming, Earl Fife's Factor on Mar Estate. Fife was at that time President of the Society, and it seems likely that the idea of change originated with him. At this time, Wrights (both wheelwrights and squarewrights or joiners) were very active in Braemar, and they had given their name to the annual procession culminating in what is now the Braemar Gathering. In 1832 the Braemar Highland Society decided to give £5 for prizes at the Gathering, and from that time on, the Highland Society organised the Braemar Gathering, which became its major undertaking.

1830s. Duke of Leeds (Mar Estate shooting tenant) dressed his retainers in Highland Dress, and so started the Braemar Highlanders:-

Mar - Pikes and Holly.

Invercauld - broadswords and fir.

Balmoral - Lochaber axes and thistle and oak.

1832 - 1836 The McHardys a large local family won a total of 170 prizes at the Gathering.

1848. Queen Victoria attended the Gathering at Invercauld House. From then on she took a very keen interest in the Gathering and in 1866 ordered that the title "Royal" should be added to the name of the Society.

1860 - The famous athlete Donald Dinnie became a member of the Society and was a member until 1880.

1864. First Open Competitions. Until then all competitions were for Society members.

1869. This was the first record of Donald Dinnie competing and he won the stone, 22lb hammer and Caber.

1906. The first Gathering to be held in the Princesss Royal Park and the first year there was an admission charge. This area was donated to the Society by Mar Estate, reportedly to save the Fifes having to travel to other local estates, Invercauld & Balmoral. The area was apparently a bog and required a great deal of work before it could be used.

1924. This was the first year that the Book of the Gathering was produced and this still continues to be produced.

1926. Duff Highlanders lunch – 70 lunches: 57 bottles whisky: 72 bottles beer: 330 sandwiches + unspecified beers and mineral waters (Fife Arms Hotel).

1932 Approach road to park tarred, also inside (2040 sq.yards) £262.8/4.

1933 750 cushions hired for Gathering at a cost of 2p each plus transport (Same cushions later bought outright and are still in use).

1936 Last march-past of the Highlanders.

1938 John Ewan built covered stand for £295:18:6.

1939 Private Enclosure built.

1938 Gate pillars erected and gates hung.

1952. Braemar Gathering Charitable Trust set up. Under covenant, all money due to be paid in entertainment tax must be paid into Charitable Trust. Deed of Covenant and Deed of Trust apparently June 1953.

1952. 31099 admissions to Gathering. 437 buses, 2536 cars. (Year Queen acceded to the Throne).

1953 19,990 Admissions. 437 buses, 1749 cars. (Coronation year).

1954 16,274 Admissions.

1953 Motor mower bought for £176:8:0.

1953 Bridge over River Clunie built for £236:14:2

1953. Name of park changed from Princess Royal Park to Princess Royal & Duke of Fife Memorial Park at Princess Arthur's request.

1954 £522 paid to Aberdeen County Council for levelling the park.

1958 Consent by Council for Caravan site in park.

1959. Society Hut (Office) bought from Invercauld Estate for £100, but ground only rented for 20 years at 5/- per annum. Lease renewable after a further 20 years. Feu later bought.

1971. The Lord Lyon King of Arms granted Letters Patent to the Society, which thereby became armigerous, or bearing its own coat of arms.

Braemar Royal Highland Society has now no function other than as a Friendly Society,

Cancellations of Gathering – 2 W.Wars + 13 other occasions, latest Diana in 1997.

Venues Mar Castle, Cluny Park, Mar Lodge, Invercauld House, Balmoral (5 times)

19 Presidents to date – longest serving so far – John Lamont 1832-1882.

Gathering was switched from a Thursday to the first Saturday in September in 1968.

During the years of Queen Victoria's patronage the Gathering was held when the Queen came to the country.

Braemar Royal Highland Gathering Ltd. The function of this Company, set up in 2002, is to run the annual Braemar Gathering, which is one of the oldest and biggest highland gatherings.

The Gathering which predates the disastrous 1745 uprising was forbidden by

law for over 30 years after Culloden, but by the year 1800 it was again up and running. Since 1848 it has been regularly attended by the reigning monarch and members of the Royal Family.

The foot races at the Gathering are the Worlds oldest, having been organised on a regular basis by the same body since 1832.

Braemar Royal Highland Charity. The company was set up in 2006 to replace the Braemar Gathering Charitable Trust, and has ownership of the Games Park.

The objects of the Charity are, briefly, to organise recreational facilities for members of the public, to foster and promote community development in the local area, and to promote the education of the public about the history, traditions, sport, language, culture, heritage of Scotland. The Charity, funded entirely by accumulated past profits from the Braemar Gathering, maintains the 12 acre Princess Royal & Duke of Fife Memorial Park as a public amenity, and in cooperation with a parents' committee it runs the local highland dancing class: with financial assistance from local businesses it organises pipe bands which play in the Village in Summer: It gives financial support to the independent Braemar Charitable Trust, and finally, it annually distributes money to eligible charities and others.

*William Meston MVO
20th February 2011*