

Bonawe & District 1730-45

Charles Hunter, Oban.

The Inveresragan papers in the Archives at Ardchattan Priory, throw much light on the little-documented period before the “forty-five”. All this was shortly before the new Bonawe ironworks and furnace was built on the Taynuilt side of Loch Etive.

The cash customers named in the day books of the shop at Inveresragan and the details of the tobacco mill established there in 1730 make it possible to build up a picture of a community centred on both banks of the loch.

It is convenient to consider Bonawe, Ardchattan and Inveresragan in reverse order.

Inveresragan

Coline Campbell of Inveresragan, an enterprising gentleman landowner, and a widower, was clearly loyal to the Government. He died in 1745 and his only son James was an Ensign in the army by 1747. The household included Coline’s servitor Margaret Stewart – whom he was once rumoured to have married – and his servants Charles, Ann and Cathrine McArtor and Mary Cameron. In Inveresragan there was Duncan McEin oig, ditcher and, with unspecified duties, John McDugall, Malcolm and Kenneth McKinzie and Duncan Livingstone.

The shopkeepers came one at a time in sequence. James Watson served two years from January 1731 to December 1732 and his cash takings in those years – excluding credit sales to named customers - were £173 and £203 sterling. Watson became a merchant in (New) Port Glasgow and was replaced briefly by James Mclae, who was paid four months salary of £3-6s-8d in August 1733, an annual rate of £10.

During 1734 Archibald Campbell was shopkeeper and he may have been the man who went to start up the Oban operation early the next year. George Stevenson served for eighteen months and was paid £15

plus board of £15 in January 1735. He may be the son of Bonawe merchant James and an early member of the noted Oban family. Peter (Patrick) McLaus served for a number of years from December 1734 at an initial salary of £15 plus £15 board. Later shopkeepers up to 1745 included John Grant and John Colquhoun.

The tobacco spinners are also well covered in the records. John Brown was 'relieved at Inveraray' in February 1730 to set up the tobacco mill and he stayed until February 1733 at a salary of £16 plus £1 expenses, his house and yard were to be built by Coline Campbell. He was joined during 1731 by Philip Innes from Inveraray and also by William Glen (for the last eight months) and by Alexander Clemie in November.

Clemie's salary was paid at irregular intervals: after his first month he was paid £7-16s: in August 1734 he was paid £30-13s for two years work plus wages for his three children at 2 shillings a week. His payoff in January 1735, after a quarrel with Coline, was just under £4-10s.

Patrick King was engaged in April 1735 at a salary of £16 and his two children earned two and sixpence a week in the tobacco mill. King was still at Inveresragan in 1744 and the family supplemented their income by Patrick making candles and his long-suffering wife making cheese. In an idle moment Coline Campbell of Inveresragan penned "Patrick King's Daft Days" which have previously appeared in print. Other tobacco spinners made brief appearances including Will Dewart, Thomas Gregory and in 1741-44 another Archibald Campbell.

Whisky was distilled at Inveresragan. Coline Campbell bought a still 'from a passing tinkler' and aquavit was used as a reward for special efforts by the lads, such as working overnight - or 'under night' - on one occasion and for 'chasing a mad dog' on another. John Brown's expenses over four days for bringing smuggled goods overland from Clachan Seil included "a bottle of aquavit at Oban and another at Connel" and "meat and drink to the 4 men when coming home".

Ardchattan

Two miles west of Inveresragan, the community of Ardchattan was centered around the Priory, the parish church and the school.

The landowner, Charles Campbell of Ardchattan, lived with his brother James, his sister Elizabeth and sundry servants. There was also, by 1743, a merchant known only as 'P.C.'. His successful trading in partnership with East Coast merchants has been noted in an earlier issue of Historic Argyll. Nearby lived Archibald Gillies, schoolteacher and Duncan Mcpherson, schoolmaster.

William Campbell was the innkeeper, Mary Campbell a changekeeper while Donald McCallum may have been a whisky distiller.

Donald McLearan was a weaver and Angus dow Mcniccoll was herd to Callum dow McKenzie. Donald Mcallen was also in Ardchattan.

Bonawe

From the shop day books at Inveresragan, a large number of residents can be identified by name in the outlying farms, mainly on the north side of Loch Etive, as well as Irish workers at the remote Glenkinglas iron furnace. Bonawe was a hive of activity on the main overland track to the north-west Highlands in those days

The principal merchant at Bonawe was Mr James Stevenson and his son George, while Baily Steuart and William Park were obviously men of substance. At the Firwood company in Bonawe, Alexander Campbell was Clerk, Charles Caylie or Cayler was storekeeper, Peter McWeir was a sawyer and Donald and Daniel McIlchonnell were at the sawmill. An amazing variety of timber came out of this sawmill for building or marine use. Duncan McNab was an innkeeper – probably one of several – and Hugh Campbell was a snuffmaker. Gilbert Campbell was the Messenger while gaugers Duncan and Patrick Campbell watched out for the Excise.

It is interesting to note that there were at least three quarrymen at Bonawe at this time: they were John Daly, Charles Rynold and James

Morrison. Connecting the population on both shores of Loch Etive there was Nicol McNiven, a ferrier who later became a boatman, his son John and John McIntyre, ferryman. Donald McFarlane the boatman, 'commonly called McAndra', was a long-serving local character who transported legal and illegal cargo to and from Bonawe, as far as Fort William. There was a thriving herring and salmon fishing operation with seasonal exports of salted fish as far as the Baltic ports. Pat Downie was the Post, and he must have known his way from Inveraray through the Pass of Brander or across Loch Awe at Port Sonachan. Donald McIntyre and Donald Broady were workmen and, named with unspecified details, there were William Mouat, Mary Sinclair, Colin Kennedy and many others.