

considered an exorbitant figure; yet the people paid it. Furthermore, they were free from debt, law-abiding, and had sent many soldiers to the wars; they raised sheep and black cattle, and grew potatoes and barley. They could trace their tenancies back for 500 years.

The events which followed came to the notice of the London "Times", who sent a special correspondent to the scene. He summarised the general position in the north, with special reference to Glen Calvie:- "....through the actions of factors in the lonely glens, hundreds of peaceable and generally industrious peasants have been driven from their means of support to become wanderers and starving beggars - a brave and valuable population lost.....".

In 1843 Gillanders began his scheme to turn the glen into one large sheep farm at an even higher rent. The first step was to serve summonses of removal on the tenants. Anticipating this, however, and on watch just outside the boundary across the river, the women of the glen intercepted the constables, and, seizing the wrist of the man holding the writs, they applied live coals to the papers until they were destroyed, seeking to prove they had neither been seen nor handled in the glen.

Next year, not to be outdone, the crafty Gillanders invited the chief tenants to Tain for a "friendly discussion". Instead he placed the formal notices to quit in their hands. Decree for removal followed, and the law took its course. Stunned and bewildered, the people began to hunt feverishly for alternative holdings; but, only six families could find a place, and poor ones at that. The others were at last evicted by force, and for a time, while their menfolk were continuing the hopeless search, they were allowed to shelter in Croick churchyard, exposed to the elements, wishing, as it is recorded, that death would come to allow them to join their forefathers beneath the sward. They were helped only by the minister, who did all in his power to ease their conditions.

As the people passed the weary days among the tombs someone among them, scratching idly on the diamond-shaped panes of the east window, left a short pathetic message for posterity. In the unhardened copperplate writing of last century we can still decipher some of the names - "C. Chalmers"; "John Ross, Shepherd, Parish of Ardgay"; and others; and, bowing meekly to what was accepted by a God-fearing people as Divine chastisement - "Glen Calvie people, the wicked generation"; "Glen Calvie people was in the churchyard here May 24th 1845". The words "Church Officer" also appear under the name "Ann McAlister", but it is probable that the designation refers to an illegible name scratched below. It is highly unlikely that a woman would be acceptable as Church Officer in the middle of the last century, in a community such as this was.

Why were they not allowed to shelter inside the church? I suggest that the answer is simple. In those days this would have been regarded as desecration of a holy place, and even under such necessity, and if invited by the minister, they would probably have refused.

When Gillanders died, he was buried near the side gate of the churchyard. For generations afterwards the memory of his cruelty and deceit was kept alive by the casting of stones and refuse on his grave until it became an unsightly, weed-grown mound. I could see no trace of this now. The church is to be left open for visitors and an account of its history exhibited inside.

I left the church and its sad memories and followed the alternative road past Braelangwell Lodge down Glen Carron and its fine salmon river, back to rejoin the busy main road at Ardgay.



CROICK

CHURCH

THE PARISH OF CROICK

During the century following Culloden forty-two churches were built in the Highlands to the plan of the famous engineer, Thomas Telford, designer of the Caledonian Canal. They were known as Parliamentary Churches because the Westminster Parliament not only voted funds for their construction but also made provision for manses, glebes and stipends for the ministers. Croick, which lies some 10 miles west of Ardgay up Strathcarron, was chosen as the site for one of those churches, possibly because it was already a well-established preaching station. The building of it was completed in 1827 and its first minister, Robert Williamson, was inducted in September 1828. He remained there until 1840 when he emigrated to Nova Scotia taking some of his congregation with him.

At first the new Church served a community of some 200 souls. However upon the Disruption of the Church of Scotland in 1843 most of the parishioners followed their then-minister, Gustavus Aird, into the Free Church. Membership of the Croick Established Church was thereby reduced to two families. Croick remained a separate charge until 1946 when it was united with the parish of Kincardine (Ardgay), as it so remains today.

EVICCTIONS

The population of Croick parish at the time that its Church was built was made up, as in many other parts of the Highlands, of small tenants who practised subsistence farming on the patches of arable land in the strath and from their shielings on the hill grazings. By the end of the eighteenth century commercial sheep farming was being introduced into the Highlands in general, and into Ross-shire in particular, by Sir John Lockhart Ross of Balnagown. As it became progressively adopted by the landowners it brought with it a complete change in the lives of their tenants. These changes, known as the Clearances, did not reach Croick parish until 1842 when James Gillanders, factor to the Robertsons of Kindeace, attempted to evict the tenants off their Glencalvie property in order to make way for sheep. His efforts were strongly resisted but he eventually succeeded on the 24th May 1845 when 18 families - some 90 people - were finally cleared from their homes in Glencalvie in which they had lived for generations. Prior to their departure many took shelter in improvised booths erected in the Croick churchyard and their wretched plight is recorded in messages scratched on the outside of the east window of the Church. A special correspondent from the Times newspaper witnessed these sad events and a facsimile of his despatch to his editor in London reporting them has been placed within the Church.

A further Clearance, from Greenyards in Strathcarron in March 1854, which came to be known as The Massacre of the Roses, is also recorded in a message on the window.

PRESENT DAY.

The population of Strath Cuilennach, in which Croick Church is situated, and of Glencalvie is now reduced to less than a dozen families of shepherds, keepers and estate workers although during the summer months visitors add to this number. Strath Cuilennach is part of Forest Farm, an extensive property carrying a renowned North Country Cheviot sheep stock. Glencalvie is a sporting estate with fishing, shooting and deer stalking. Traces of the old farms can still be seen in the runrigs, greens and ruins scattered through the glens.

Despite its distance from the main roads, Croick Church is visited throughout the year by many thousands of people from all parts of the world, as can be seen from the entries in the Visitor's Books in the Church.

RESTORATION.

Over the years the donations by visitors to the Church helped considerably in the costs of its maintenance, but when it was discovered in 1977 that the weather had caused serious damage to the roof, an appeal had to be made for its repair. The response was immediate, widespread and most generous both from the public at large and also from numerous official bodies, grants being received from the Historic Buildings Council of Scotland (£6,000), from Highland Regional Council (£1,000), and from the Scottish Churches Architectural Heritage Trust (£250). However the scope of the restoration had to be widened as more defects were found both inside and outside the building, so much so that work was not started until 1982. The opportunity was also then taken to install electricity in the Church and the whole project was completed in 1983 at a total cost of a little under £20,000. The architect in charge throughout the work was Mr. P. I. Beaton ARIBA, APIAS of Golspie and local tradesmen were employed on it in every respect.

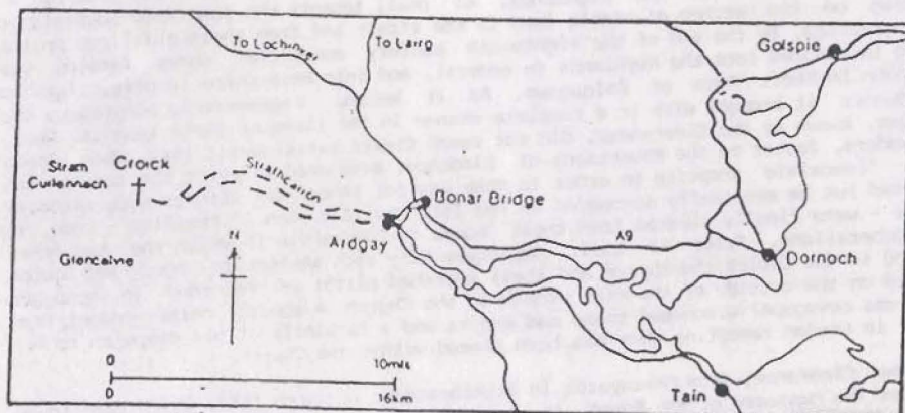
CROICK CHURCH TODAY.

Parish: Croick Church today forms part of the united parish of Kincardine, Croick & Edderton in the Presbytery of Sutherland.

Minister: The Reverend F. W. Hibbert BD, of The Manse, Ardgay.

Services: In July and August, at 3pm each Sunday in the Church. Sacrament of Holy Communion at 3pm on the last Sunday in July in the Church, at which the old style long communion table is used; in other months, at 3pm on the second Sunday of each month either in the Church or, during the winter, in the Mission Hall a mile down the road at the Anathnua turn-off.

THE CHURCH IS OPEN AT ALL TIMES.



THE CHURCH AT CROICK

by
P. A. MacNab

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and now reproduced by kind permission of the Author)

I had long cherished a wish to visit Croick Church, with its sad, strange memories of the Clearances, and last summer I was able to fulfil a promise I had made to myself.

The road began in a familiar enough way. North from the Cromarty Firth up across the heathery moors, past the breathtaking viewpoint of Struie Hill, with the Dornoch Firth, the Kyle of Sutherland, and the sudden mountains, then the sweep down to Ardgay.

But at Ardgay I entered strange country. I turned left off the main road and found myself on the narrow but level road that runs on the south of the River Carron towards a tangle of hills and glens away to the west.

It is a lonely countryside, its emptiness relieved only by one or two shooting lodges and sheep farms, with here and there a clump of woodland and rhododendrons crowding behind sheltering walls. The road crosses to the north bank of the river, and after two or three rough miles peters out at Croick, twelve miles from Ardgay.

Here at last was the church we had come to see. Its adjacent manse is now the keeper's house; its only neighbour a small sheep farm. Although the church and its precincts are well tended, there is a forlorn air about the place. Where are the people and the houses to justify its presence in this remote glen?

Croick Church was built in 1827. It was then a centre of worship attended by a weekly congregation of 200 from the little communities which won a living from the soil and grazings round about. Now they are gone. Nothing remains but old tracks radiating through the heather to green oases on the hillsides and an occasional rick of stones which mark where the houses of a thriving people once stood, mute evidence of the Clearances and subsequent depopulation.

Every year, on the last Sunday in July, a Communion service is conducted in the church by the minister of Kincardine Parish, whose consolidated charges and wide district point to the once large population for whom all those churches were established.

The door stood invitingly ajar, so I went in. Everything is plain and well preserved inside the church. The centre of interest lies, of course, in the east window, where a few words and names scratched on the diamond panes remind us of the whole sad story behind the depopulation, the outcome of one of the later clearances or "Improvements" of the last century.

The incidents which centred on Croick Church are as reprehensible as any of the more widely publicised Clearances, although, in justice to the landlord, Major Charles Robertson of Kindeace, it should be said that they took place on the initiative of his factor, James Gillanders, who lived at Tain. The object of his policy of Improvement was Glen Calvie, which lies quite near Croick, which itself had suffered in the same manner a few years earlier.

In 1843 the people of Glen Calvie, reduced in numbers to no more than ninety by earlier evictions, were described as a happy, self-contained community. Although the glen was poor and rocky, it was rented at £55.10s.