

From: Brian Munro [REDACTED]
Subject: Re: Glen Grant interview
Date: 21 Jul 2023 at 18:51:16
To: John Barnes [REDACTED]

Hello John,

Yes, I remember very well sitting chatting with Glen. It was the first time that I had used the recording equipment and the fact that the recording didn't work was entirely my fault, I made a basic error in the switching-on and it was just a disaster!

Glen was a neighbour who lived several houses away. Having found the old newspaper articles I had asked his daughter Heather if she thought that he would be willing to be "interviewed" and she said that she was doubtful. However, one day, on total impulse, I took the recorder from the office and just went and knocked on Glen's door. It was early afternoon and initially he didn't like the idea but it was Jessie his wife who persuaded him. It was totally spontaneous. The two of us simply sat at his kitchen table and he had no time to pre-plan anything.

I remember that he started by telling me about the origins of the business and how in the early 1800s John Grant who was a farmer near to Dornoch began slaughtering some of his own cattle and sheep and selling cuts of meat to neighbouring crofters. As time went by his "business" grew and he opened a butcher's shop in Dornoch and John Grant and Sons began. Each generation seemed to produce one or two sons who continued the combination of farming and butchery.

I think it would have been in the early 1950s that Glen joined the business. By that stage his father had died so the others in the business were his uncle (Donald?) and his two cousins Stuart and Donald Jnr. Donald Jnr. throughout his life was a very active Member and past Captain of Royal Dornoch Golf Club.

Glen then went on to tell me about how the others were the butchers but he became more office orientated and took over the running of the business administration and accounts. By this stage the business had grown substantially and their own family farm had extended to some 1000 acres which enabled them to have a constant supply of quality meat from their own herds of both Aberdeen Angus and Highland cattle. They also had sheep.

In addition to running the accounts side of the business Glen began to contact well known establishments far and wide and persuade them to buy meat from Dornoch. He told me that in order to fulfil deliveries to these establishments Grants became the biggest users of the railway shipping meat to the south. He explained to me that every day they had parcels made up by the early afternoon which went on the train from Dornoch to The Mound and were transferred to the mainline train heading south to Inverness and beyond. After the closure of the Dornoch Light Railway in 1960 one of their own lorries or vans took the daily parcels to The Mound to the south-bound train. Their business was of such importance to the train

operators that if there were days when they were running late in making up their orders the mainline train would be delayed at The Mound until such time as Grants goods arrived! Further south the train from Inverness would also be held back, passengers simply had to wait!

By this stage they were supplying beef to the Dorchester Hotel, along with many other well-known hotels, and the House of Commons in London and Glen did a "grand tour" every year by car when he personally visited every customer to thank them for their business, always wearing his kilt! I guess he was into "marketing" long before the word became fashionable.

He explained how having obtained lots of orders from top hotels for the "prime cuts" they managed to come to a deal with Burnetts of Inverness (the early days of what was to become Harry Gow), who bought meat for sausage rolls and pies. They also supplied similar cuts of meat to other companies further away than Inverness.

He also bid for "canteen type" business and successfully obtained contracts to supply widely spread staff canteens including the Oil Terminal in Shetland and the British Leyland car factory in Bathgate.

I also remember him telling me stories relating to Christmas turkeys. They required a vast number of turkeys each year to fulfil their orders and to do this they had arrangements with farmers and crofters all over the North of Scotland who would provide anything from a dozen to several dozen by an agreed date. A couple of weeks prior to Christmas Donald and Glen would do several days of round trips throughout Sutherland and Caithness to collect these birds from each establishment. Glen drove the van while cousin Donald travelled in the back. After they collected birds from a supplier Glen would drive on to the next address while Donald would kill, pluck and gut what they had collected. According to Glen he always managed to complete the job in the allotted time!

Of course, in these days there was much less traffic on the roads and indeed in the north of Scotland roads were almost deserted. He went on to tell me how there were a few sections of road where there would be a straight section going downhill. This enabled him to bring the van up to its maximum speed. At that point he would open the front window and, in the back, Donald would open a door. This would create enough through draught to suck all of the feathers out of the back of the van, leaving a trail behind all along the road! I have a very clear memory of him struggling to tell me this story through his own laughter!

By the 1970s Grant's had its own purpose-built slaughter-house and had become the biggest employer in the area. They also had their own fleet of refrigerated lorries which covered many thousands of miles up and down the length and breadth of the UK.

The slaughter-house side of the business suffered from the ever-increasing amount of "red-tape" introduced by government. That along with the fact that it was so far north and unable to compete with the operations in the bigger towns and cities eventually led to its closure.

My memory tells me that he then diverted into telling me about a great friendship which he developed with a Director of Gray and Adams Ltd. whose name I cannot remember. This was the Fraserburgh based company which built Grant's fleet of refrigerated lorries and continue to do the same to this day. Glen developed a great friendship with this individual, which continued for long after his retirement, and they spent a lot of time together fishing in the rivers of Sutherland.

That is basically as much as I can remember about the interview. It was a pleasure and a privilege to have the opportunity to have the long conversation with Glen. I found him a fascinating man who had a fund of stories. I am just so annoyed that I messed up the recording!!

Cheers,

Brian