

## Sluices at the Mound – by Donald Goskirk\*

After Telford's second attempt at putting sluice gates at the Mound in order to control the two-way flow of water in Loch Fleet, a house was built to accommodate a sluice-keeper to oversee the operation of the gates. During most of the time the gates operated-as they do now- in an automatic valvular manner whereby as the tide ebbs and flows on the seaward side, so the differing weights of water open and close the gates, thereby effectively damming the outflow and inflow of water within the Fleet/Carnaig river systems.

All this worked reasonably effectively, without recourse, on a constant basis, to human intervention, but in those days the slowness of communication meant that the successful operation of the process could not be monitored on a regular basis from afar as it is nowadays. Accordingly there would have been a Sluice-keeper in residence virtually from the beginning. Given that the last two such persons would have been there over a period covering the greater part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, it is quite possible that there were no more than 5 or 6 such incumbents in total since The Mound embankment was built in the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The last two were Malcolm Fraser (who was born in the house, his mother having been his predecessor as sluice-keeper) and William (always <sup>known</sup> by his by-name of Wallace) Mackay from 1936 until the early 1980s.

Wallace Mackay's duties included keeping a general watch over the sluices to check for any faults in the gates or signs of problems with the bridge structure. As an employee of the roads dept of the County Council and thus indirectly of the Scottish Office Trunk Roads Authority it was his job to keep his superiors advised of any problems arising which he could not actually deal with himself e.g. broken chains, damaged gates, bridge structural problems etc. He himself regularly scraped seaweed from the gates, either using chest waders to gain access, or by use of his boat, which was supplied for the purpose (and which was the best fisherman imaginable, frequently having at least one salmon per day land in it during the annual run of fish in July/August!) He also had to open the gates manually as wide as possible at low tide if there was a large spate, something which occurred much more frequently in those days when there was much greater snow melt and greater run-off of water from the hills up-stream before the days of the present large tree plantations (a mature tree drinks in the order of 80 gallons of water per day) This of course meant having to get up during the night to attend to the gates as the tides demanded.

It is interesting to note that the present day contractors had to sub-contract a substantial strengthening of the bridge foundations at the north end a few years ago due to water infiltration undermining the piers. This is something that has happened on more than one occasion within my memory. One hopes that the very thorough job that was done this time with full use of modern technology, will have solved the problem.

Donald Goskirk is the nephew by marriage of the late Wallace Mackay referred to in this article, and spent all his holidays at the Mound for the first 20 or more years of his life and was there on a virtually daily basis thereafter until the early 1980s-a period of 40 years.