

THE SHORT HISTORY OF THE SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY



The steamship Heather Bell arriving at Littleferry

For a short time between September 1858 and December 1863 the steamer **HEATHER BELL** made regular trips back and forth between Littleferry and Burghead. At less regular times she also went up to Helmsdale. At Burghead, passengers could meet the steamers going to Aberdeen, Edinburgh and London, or catch the train on the new railway line between Aberdeen and Inverness. (The nearest station was at Alves, until the branch line reached Burghead Harbour in 1862.)

The eastern sea route across the Moray Firth, between Sutherland and the Moray coast and westward to Inverness, had always been an important one, and the opening of the Caledonian Canal in 1822 brought new opportunities.

There had been steamships going from Littleferry to Inverness, via Burghead and Invergordon, earlier in the century. One example was the Maid of Morven, the steamship made famous on the west coast by her celebrity passengers such as Felix Mendelsson and J. M. W. Turner, which was used on the Littleferry to Inverness route in the early 1840s.

In 1858 there was no useful service across the Firth, and a group of business-minded gentlemen decided to do something about it. In January 1858 a prospectus for a proposed new company was published in newspapers, including the Inverness Courier and the Banffshire Journal, and editorial pieces referred to the proposed scheme:

The Inverness Courier, Thursday, January 14, 1858

PROSPECTUS OF THE SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED.)
NOMINAL CAPITAL, £6000, IN 300 SHARES OF £20 EACH

The want of suitable Communication, by sea, between the North and South Sides of the Moray Firth, has long been felt, but still more so of late, in consequence of the great increase which has taken place in the general traffic, as well as in the number of Passengers.

In the course of a few months, it is expected that the Line of Railway between Aberdeen and Inverness will be opened; and there can be no doubt that the Traffic across the Firth will be still further increased, so that the necessity of having better as well as more regular and constant communication has clearly arisen.

Any one acquainted with the localities will at once appreciate the importance of having direct sea communication across the Firth, as in this way a chain of connection is kept up with the Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and London Steamers, as well as the Railway, which passes within about Four Miles of Burghead; and the Passage from Littleferry, in the neighbourhood of Golspie, to Burghead, may be performed in about Two Hours, at a cost of a few shillings – whereas land travelling between the same places involves a journey of a day's duration, and an expense at least seven times as great.

With the view, therefore, of affording the necessary communication and accommodation, it is proposed that a Joint-Stock Company (Limited), with a Nominal Capital of £6000, divided into 300 Shares of £20 each, should place a new and suitable Iron Steamer, as soon as possible, on the passage between Littleferry and Burghead –

which are considered to be the two most suitable Ports – to run Three Times a-Week from either side, or as often as it may be found the Traffic requires.

It is, however, intended that the Steamer should run Once a-Week to Helmsdale, the trade of which place has for some time been steadily increasing.

It is understood that the Harbour of Burghead is to be immediately extended and improved, and it is also expected that additional accommodation will be given at Little-Ferry, so that the present seems in every way a fitting opportunity for entering into the proposed undertaking.

Accurate calculations have been made of the probable Traffic, and it is confidently believed that the undertaking cannot fail to be highly remunerative to the Shareholders. The Promoters of the Scheme having already signed a Memorandum and Articles of Association, and had the Company registered, in terms of the Act of Parliament, they think it right at once to lay their proposal before the public; and they cannot doubt that it is one which will meet with hearty support, particularly at the hands of all those locally interested, who have this additional inducement to join in the concern, that by travelling by this route they will probably save more in their annual expenses alone, than would be a respectable Dividend on the Shares held by them. The Farmers of Sutherland, and the Purchasers of their Stocks, would be especially benefitted, from the facilities it would afford to them for sending their Stocks to the South.

Though the Capital has been fixed nominally at £6000, it is not probable that so much will be required, and no more than is necessary will be called up.

A Copy of the Memorandum and Articles of Association will hereafter be sent to each Shareholder.

In the meantime, parties desiring to join the Company will please make application for Shares, in the subjoined Form, to Donald Gray, writer in Golspie, the Secretary to the Company.

SAMUEL BATESON, Cambusmore, CHAIRMAN.

(Place and Date.)

To the Secretary of the Sutherland Steam Packet Company (Limited.)

Sir, - I hereby request that my name may be registered as a Shareholder of the Sutherland Steam Navigation Company (Limited), for Shares, or any smaller number which the Directors may have to dispose of. - I am, Sir, your obedient servant.

-----Name.

-----Residence.

-----Address.

The Banffshire Journal, January 5, 1859 (Copied to the Elgin Courant)

Steamer from Burghead to Sutherland. - We are glad to see that a Company has just been formed for getting a steamer to ply across the Moray Firth, between Burghead and Sutherland. The title asumed is the "Sutherland Seam Packet Company," and the capital is fixed at £6000, divided into 300 shares of £20 each. This nominally, but it is expected the whole will not be required. The intention is that the steamer sail three times a-week from each side of the Firth, Littleferry, in the neighbourhood of Golspie, being its destination on the western coast. It is also proposed that the steamer go once a-week, at least to Helmsdale. The prospectus of the company, published the other day, points out the advantage it would be to Sutherland and contiguous counties in their communications with Aberdeen, Edinburgh and London, to have regularly the means of making the passage across the Firth, which, from Littleferry to Burghead, can be accomplished in about two hours, at a cost of a few shillings, land travelling between the same places, involving a journey of a day's duration, and an expense, at least, seven times as great. Such facilities of communication certainly constitute a strong claim upon public support for the project in the districts more peculiarly interested.



**A piece of Sutherland Steam Packet Company china photographed by Peter Laister.
Historylinks Archive 2003_160**

Around the time that the company was set up, there had been arguments and calls for a new harbour at Nairn, and an article, which referred to the new harbour at Burghead and the Steamer between there and Littleferry, appeared in the Nairnshire Telegraph.

The Nairnshire Telegraph, January 19, 1858

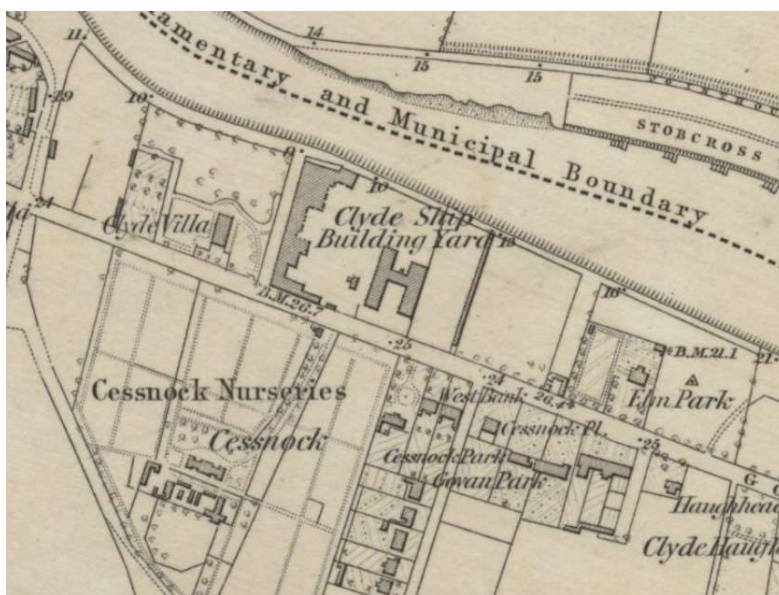
THE HARBOUR AGAIN!

...As with individuals, so with some communities, - nature seems to have placed within their reach advantages which, though they neglect, or are unable to improve, still view it as a hardship, or a usurpation of right on the part of other communities who attempt to profit by their defects. In this light we may, to a certain extent, view ourselves as the wronged parties, for that trade on the acquisition of which hung a heavy share of our hopes of success for a new Harbour, is now all but occupied by another quarter. It is true that geographically we possess advantages over our rival to the east. That point we need not discuss...

...It is a pity that with an object in view generally believed to be fraught with important results to our prosperity, we should have afforded our neighbours, through ostentatious and unintelligible wrangling, an opportunity of profiting to their aggrandizement at our expense. This, however, is not unlikely to be the true state of the case. As most of our readers may be aware, from a paragraph in our last week's impression, the rival port alluded to above is Burghead. A Company has been formed there, entitled the "Sutherland Steam Packet Company," with the intention of running a steamer three times a-week from each side of the Firth. It is easy to imagine the advantage to Sutherland and contiguous counties which will accrue from this communication, as pointed out in the published prospectus of the Company. And when the journey from the opposite shore to Burghead can be made in one-seventh of the time and at one-seventh of the expense the route by land now costs, surely selfishness could never make us such enemies to improvement and enterprise as not to wish the embryo Company good sped. But the Burghead people are more in advance of us than this - they have a very excellent harbour and need no expense in that direction. Their contemplated branch railway to join with the Inverness and Aberdeen Junction, will, it is highly probable too, soon be an accomplished fact. We are not reliably informed as to what the cost of this undertaking may be, but with a ready harbour and an enterprising Company now formed, we may safely presume they are in a position it is all but hopeless for us to endeavour to compete with...

The HEATHER BELL

The managers of the new company had a new steam ship built at Glasgow. The Heather Bell was an iron paddle steamer, purpose built as a passenger vessel for service between Littleferry (Golspie), Sutherland and Burghead, Morayshire; and to Helmsdale. She was built by James and George Thomson of Govan at the Cessnock Bank Yard 40. (Their steamship building yard was set up around 1851 on the south bank of the Clyde where the Glasgow Science Centre and the BBC studios are now sited.) Her 60nhp engine was also built by J & G Thomson. Her Tonnage was 152grt/95nrt; Length 135.5ft.; Breadth 18.1ft., Depth 8.3ft.



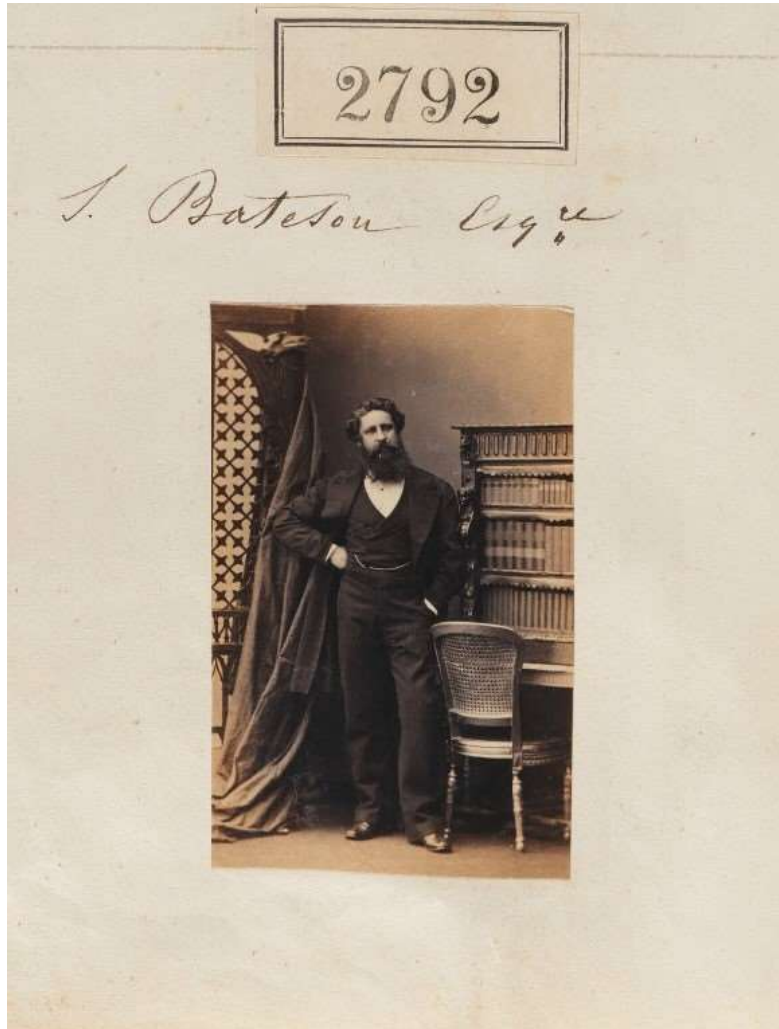
The Clyde Ship Building Yard at Cessnock Bank where the Heather Bell was built, on OS map Lanarkshire VI surveyed in 1858.

Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

The Heather Bell was built during the course of 1858 and launched on the 21st of August 1858, with the official number 22090 and the GBR flag. Her first port of register was Glasgow, registration date 25th of October 1858. She was first registered at Glasgow by the ship owning and management company P L Henderson, who must have had a role in managing her building work.

The ship's first owner is recorded as, 'Christall, Gray & Bateson, Wick, managers of the Sutherland Steam Packet Company Ltd., Littleferry.'

SAMUEL STEPHEN BATESON of Cambusmore was the Chairman of the new Company.



**Photograph of Samuel Stephen Bateson, by Camille Silvy.
In the collection of the National Portrait Gallery, London.**

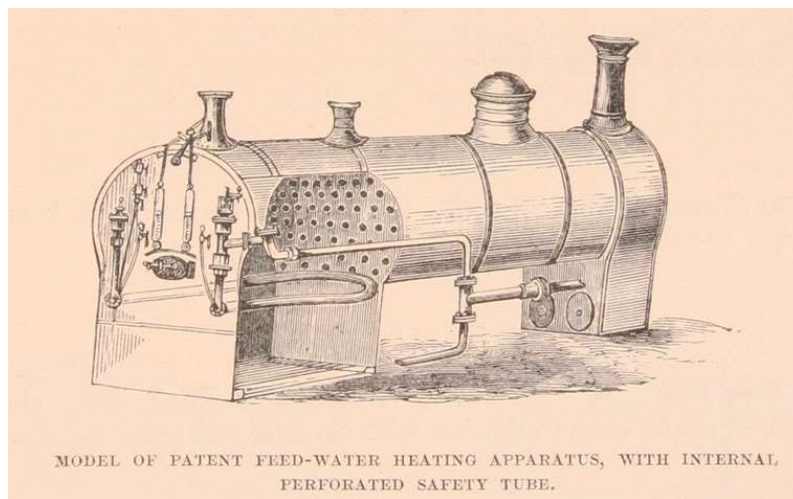
Samuel Stephen Bateson was born into a wealthy Irish family in October 1821, the son of Sir Robert Bateson, of Belvoir Park, County Down, and brother of Thomas Bateson, 1st Baron Deramore. He was educated in England at Rugby School and then attended Trinity College, Cambridge. Bateson made a single appearance in first-class cricket for the Marylebone Cricket Club against Cambridge University in 1844. Batting once in the match, he scored three runs in the MCC first innings before being dismissed by Henry Wroth.

Amongst other business interests, he was a shareholder in the Belfast and Ballymena and Londonderry and Colrairie Junction Railway. He was a student of the Inner Temple and was called to the bar in 1847.

In July 1854, he married Florinda Handcock, the daughter of Lord Castlemaine, of Moydrum Castle. The Batesons spent much of their time at Cambusmore Lodge overlooking the Loch Fleet estuary, which they leased from the Sutherland Estate, although they also had a London home at 17 Bolton Street, Piccadilly.

Their family and social connections must have been a great help to Bateson in his efforts to attract shareholders for the steam packet company. They were frequent guests of the Sutherlands and Queen Victoria visited them at Cambusmore in 1872.

In 1863 Samuel Bateson was made Deputy Lieutenant of Sutherland. He was greatly interested in agricultural science and was something of an inventor. He applied for a number of patents, and these were duly given notice in the London Gazette by the Commissioners of Patents for Inventions. These included 'improvements in generating steam and in heating apparatus employed therein,' 'improvements in croquet mallets,' 'improvements in fumigators for the destruction of vermin, and other useful purposes,' and 'improvements in the treatment of hides and skins.' He is also believed to have been the inventor of the Torbol salmon ladder.



Bateson's fuel saving patent feed-water heating apparatus. His invention was fitted into locomotive engines on the London and North-Western Railway.



Cambusmore Lodge which Queen Victoria called ‘their pretty little cottage.’

Samuel Bateson died at Cambusmore in March 1879, after suffering from acute inflammation of the lungs.

The Batesons do not appear in the early censuses for Scotland or England while Samuel was alive. This may be because they were at one of their families’ homes in Ireland. After her husband’s death, Cambusmore was relet and Florinda Bateson spent the rest of her life at her house in Bolton Street, where she died in 1906 aged 83.

DONALD GRAY was Secretary of the Company. He was born in Halkirk, Caithness around 1825, and at the age of 26 he was already a Notary Public and a Procurator in the Sheriff Court of Sutherland, living in Main Street, Golspie.

By 1861, he was Bank Agent for the British Linen Company Bank, and living in the Bank House in Main Street, Golspie, with his wife 30-year-old Maria from Edinburgh. They had two children, 4-year-old James and 2-year-old Maria Christina. There were four servants at the House, all from Golspie; 37-year-old Daniel Gunn was the Groom and Carriage Driver, 32-year-old Catherine Sutherland was the Cook, 29-year-old Johan Gunn was Nursery Maid and 30-year-old Catherine MacKay was House Maid.



Donald Gray's home at Golspie



The British Linen Company's Bank in Golspie on the OS map Sutherland CV surveyed 1873.

Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

PETER CHRISTALL, the Company's agent and manager at Burghead, was born in Newhills, Aberdeenshire. His wife Marion was from Cromarty. On the night of the 1861 census, she was at the North of Scotland Bank Buildings at 151 High Street, Elgin with their children, Elizabeth, Agnes, Francis, George, Ann and Patricia who had all been born at Burghead. Marion was 46 and described as a Banker's wife. (The Christall's had at least another three daughters; Mary, Margaret, and Agnes.)

There were four Domestic Servants at the Bank, 32-year-old Isabella Munro from Clyne, 23-year-old Jessie Davidson from Nairn and 23-year-old Barbara Forbes who was the Cook from Inverness. A visitor James Hardy was staying on the night of the census. He was a 29-year-old Bank Accountant. (151 High Street is now a 20th century bank building.)

In addition to being a banker and company manager, Peter Christall was tenant of Embo Farm and on the night of the census he was a visitor at Embo House, the home of the James and Anne Davidson.



The second building on the left was the North of Scotland Bank Buildings where the Christalls had their home.

Ten years before, the family had been at Burghead where Peter was a Justice of the Peace and a General Agent. The 'Russell's Morayshire Register, and Elgin and Forres Directory for 1852' shows that he was Harbour Master at Burghead and Agent there for the London, Edinburgh and Inverness steamers, and also for the service to Littleferry at that time. In summer 1852 the steamer Curlew did the return trip twice a week, leaving Burghead at noon on Mondays and Wednesdays and returning the following mornings at 5am. In winter, the Dunrobin Smack went north on Wednesday nights and returned on Monday afternoons.

Peter Christall died in 1866 and he and his wife, and some of their children, are buried in Elgin Old Cemetery.



OS map of Burghead on Elginshire I.15 surveyed 1870
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Burghead Harbour around 1950, much as it would have looked in the 1850s. This photograph was taken by J Pugh ARPS, Edinburgh.
 Courtesy of the University of St Andrews Libraries and Museums. ID: JP-391-2

The first agent at Littleferry was JAMES WATERS.

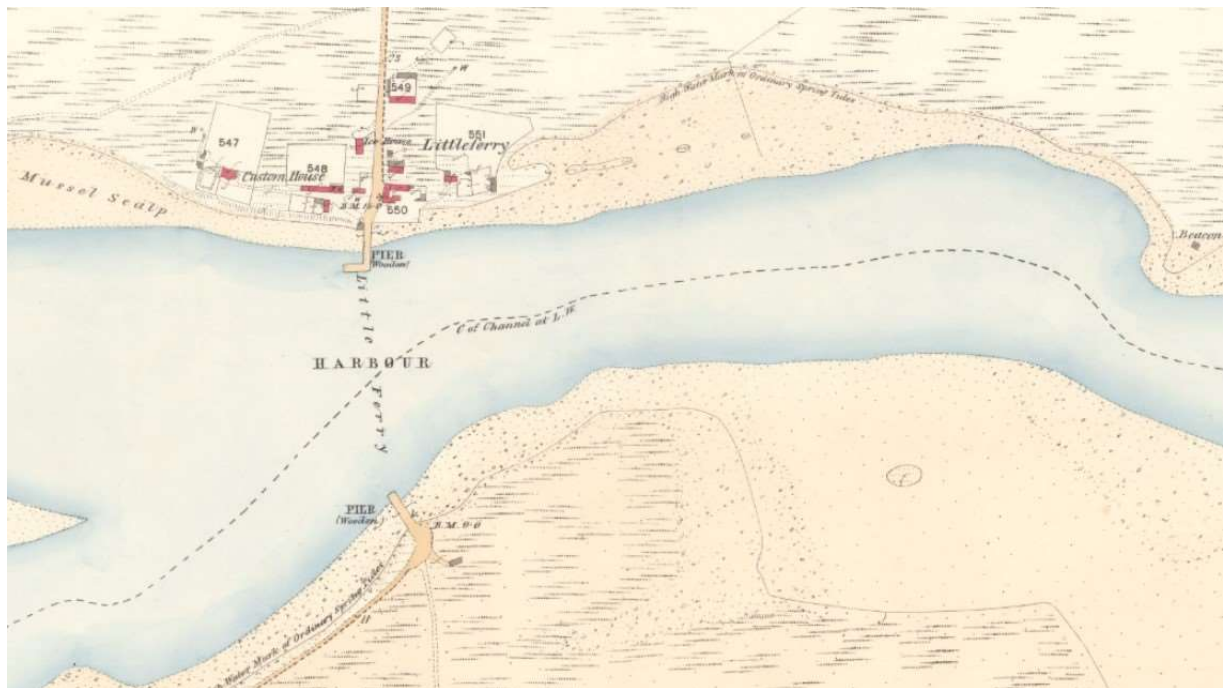
In 1851, the census recorded James at Cambusmore, with his wife and children. He was then 29 years old and an Officer of Customs. He was born at Thurso and his wife Jemima, age 25, was born at Wick. The couple had a son James, aged 4, born at Helmsdale, a daughter Rosanna, aged 2, born at Golspie, and a 1 year old daughter Jemima born at Cambusavie, the farm at Cambusmore Estate. They had two house servants, Dolina McKenzie, 21 born at Tain, and Janet Fraser, 16, born at Dornoch.

In 1861, the family were at the Custom House at Littleferry where James was a Coast Officer, but by then he was no longer acting as agent for the steam packet company. The couple's family had grown to four sons and four daughters, James, Rosana and Jemima, and George aged 9, John aged 7, Robert aged 6, Isabella aged 4, and Jane aged 3.

By 1871 the family had moved to Scrabster, where James was still employed by H.M.Customs as a Coast Officer. The entry shows their son George, born in 1852 at Cambusmore, and three younger children, all born at Littleferry, Isabella and Jane, and their youngest son nine year old Alexander.



The Customs House at Littleferry where the Waters family lived.



OS map of Littleferry from Sutherland CX.6 surveyed in 1874
 Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland



Littleferry in the 1890s

In September 1858, the first notices appeared in the Elgin and Morayshire newspapers with sailing times and fares. Service on the Littleferry – Burghead route commenced on the 22nd of September 1858. Three times a week, the steamer would leave Littleferry in the morning and return from Burghead in the afternoon. Note the use of ‘buss’ as the plural of bus in these notices. These were horse drawn omnibuses.

The Elgin and Morayshire Courier, Friday, November 5th, 1858

LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD STEAM COMMUNICATION.

THE SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED) Beg to intimate that their Splendid, New, and very Fast Steamer, “HEATHER BELL,” R. H. Hudson, Master, built expressly for the Trade, will be placed on the Station, on Wednesday, 22nd September curt.

Her Sailings, until further Notice, will be as under, unless prevented by any unforeseen circumstances:

FROM LITTLEFERRY FOR BURGHEAD,
MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, AND THURSDAY, not before 9A.M.

FROM BURGHEAD FOR LITTLEFERRY,
MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, AND THURSDAY, not before 2P.M.

Freights on Goods and Stock very moderate.

PASSAGE FARES: 1st Cabin 5s.; 2nd Cabin 3s.

First-rate accommodation for Carriages, Horses, and every description of Live Stock, on deck.

An Omnibus runs from the Hotel at Golspie to and from Littleferry, in connection with the Steamer.

An Omnibus also runs between Burghead Pier and the Alves Station of the Inverness and Aberdeen Junction Railway, conveying Passengers to and from the Steamer.

According to the present arrangements, Passengers by the 8A.M. Train from Aberdeen, arriving at the Alves Station at 12.35, are in time for the Steamer, which leaves not before 2P.M.; and Passengers by the Steamer going South get on by the 2.25 Train from Alves Station, which arrives at Aberdeen at 7.50.

These arrangements as to Buss and Trains are stated for the convenience of Passengers, but the Steam Company does not become bound to forward Passengers to or from any particular Train.

Passengers, Goods and Stock can also be forwarded by Steamers for Aberdeen, Edinburgh and London twice a-week - viz. Tuesdays and Fridays. Application for further information can be made to

JAMES WATERS, Agent at Littleferry;

Or here to P. CHRISTALL, Agent and Manager.

Burghead, 13th September, 1858.

Captain R H HUDSON, the first master of the Heather Bell, was a very experienced paddle steamer master. He had been the first master of the paddle steamer Mary Jane, built in 1846 by Sir James Matheson for the route between Glasgow and Stornoway. She was built at Mavisbank by Tod & MacGregor, Glasgow. On her maiden voyage under Captain Hudson, she reached Stornoway from Glasgow in a little over 26 hours.

A long piece in the Inverness Courier of 26th June 1846, described a voyage on the Mary Jane and contained the following, 'The steamer is commanded by Captain R H Hudson, a gentleman who commanded a boat in the Clyde for some time, and who, by his amiable manners and kind disposition to passengers, has already won for himself much esteem.'

The Mary Jane was remarkable little ship. She was bought around 1878 by David MacBryne, and renamed the Glencoe, she was still sailing until her last run on the Portree Mail Service in 1931. 85 years continuous service in Clyde/West Highland waters is considered to be a record. She was broken up at Ardrossan in 1931.)

Captain Hudson does not appear in census records, but this is not unusual for mariners. In 1851 his family were at Point Street in Stornoway. Julia Hudson was 38 and described as Steam Boat Captain's Wife, born in Dublin. Her three eldest children, Jane Emily aged 10, Julia aged 8 and Richard aged 6, were born in Drogheda, Ireland. Her two youngest, Mary Jane aged 4 and Eliza Ann aged 1 were born in Stornoway.

By 1861 Julia had emigrated to Ontario. She appears in the census living in a two-storey frame house in Queen Street, South Side, St. David's in Toronto, with an older daughter Anna aged 24 and the five children who were recorded at Stornoway. Her three eldest daughters were all music teachers and the census records that her son was deaf and dumb, and that the family's religion was Irish Presbyterian. While her husband is not recorded in the census, Julia is described as married and not as widowed, so it is likely he was at sea.

Captain Hudson is named in the newspaper postings throughout 1861 and was definitely still the master of the Heather Bell in February of that year, but it is probable that he left to join his family before the beginning of April that year when the ship had a new master.

The Elgin And Morayshire Courier, September 24, 1858

LOCAL NEWS

...LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD. - The Sutherland Steam Packet Company have placed the beautiful steamer, "Heather Bell," on the passage between Littleferry and Burghead. The Heather Bell made her first passage on Wednesday. We have no doubt that this steamer will tend largely to develop the traffic of the northern counties. A 'bus runs in connection with this vessel between the Alves station and the pier at Burghead, and another between Golspie and Littleferry.



A detail from Stansford's map of Scotland, ca. 1854, showing the wide curve around Tarbet Ness required on the voyage between Littleferry and Burghead.

Reproduced with the permission of the National Library of Scotland

At the end of September, 1858, there was an accident at Burghead:

The Elgin Courant, Friday, October 1, 1858

ACCIDENT TO THE STEAMER "HEATHER BELL." - On Monday, while this vessel was entering the harbour of Burghead, she struck the wooden pier smashing her paddle boxes, and at the same time injuring the pier. The damage, however, was soon repaired, and the vessel left on Wednesday for Littleferry.

It took less than two days to repair the damage, but a report in the Inverness Advertiser notes the 'distinguished parties' on board and the reputation of the Company must have been damaged to some extent by the accident.

ACCIDENT TO THE "HEATHER BELL."—We regret to state that an accident happened to the fine steamer "Heather Bell," on Monday last. While entering Burghead harbour she was driven by the strong tide running out on to the wooden pier, and had one of her paddle wheels severely smashed, and a part of her bulwarks torn away. The damage done will not be under £100, but we are glad to learn that she was able to resume her passage on Wednesday. It is to be regretted that an accident should have happened so early to this beautiful vessel—a perfect model of elegance and workmanship. Mrs Gladstone, the lady of the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, and other distinguished parties, were on board at the time.—*Ibid.*

The accident reported in the Inverness Advertiser, 5th October 1858

Special trips were arranged for the Sheep and Wool Fair at Inverness, with adverts placed in the Inverness Courier and the John o’Groat Journal:

The Inverness Courier, June 30, 1859

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED).
INVERNESS SHEEP AND WOOL FAIR.
SPECIAL TRIP.

For the convenience of Parties attending the SHEEP and WOOL FAIR at INVERNESS this year, the “HEATHER BELL” will make a SPECIAL TRIP from LITTLEFERRY to INVERNESS, on Thursday the 14th inst., leaving LITTLEFERRY at 11 o’clock forenoon; and, for the convenience of those returning from the fair, she will also make a SPECIAL TRIP from INVERNESS to LITTLEFERRY, on Saturday, the 16th inst., leaving INVERNESS not before 6 o’clock in the evening of that day.

PASSENGER FARES – Each trip, Cabin 10s.; Steerage, 6s.

Littleferry 1st July 1859.

The Inverness Courier, July 11, 1861

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED).
INVERNESS SHEEP AND WOOL FAIR.
SPECIAL TRIP.

For the convenience of Parties attending the SHEEP and WOOL FAIR at INVERNESS this year, the “HEATHER BELL” will make a SPECIAL TRIP from LITTLEFERRY to INVERNESS, on Thursday the 11th July., leaving LITTLEFERRY at 9 o’clock A.M. And, for the convenience of those returning from the fair, she will make a SPECIAL TRIP from INVERNESS to LITTLEFERRY, on Saturday, the 13th July, leaving INVERNESS not before 7 o’clock in the evening.

The “HEATHER BELL” will call at CROMARTY on her way up and down.

Passenger Fares each Trip, Cabin 10s.; Steerage, 6s.

Littleferry 24th June 1861.

Notices for the Inverness and Edinburgh Steam Packet Company advertised the connection, for carrying goods, between their steamers and the Heather Bell:

The Elgin Courant, Friday, July 22, 1859

...The Company have made arrangements for carrying Goods to Sutherlandshire, via Burghhead, in connection with the Heather Bell, at through rates.

An addition was made to the September notices when it was decided to provide a once-a-week service to Helmsdale and back.

P. CHRISTALL, Agent and Manager.
Burghead, September 13, 1858.

P.S.—It is intended, in the event of there being sufficient Traffic, that the “Heather-Bell” shall, till the end of, November next, make a weekly trip (weather permitting) from LITTLE-FERRY to HELMSDALE on Tuesday at at Ten o'clock A.M., returning from Helmsdale the same day at Two o'clock P.M., conveying Goods and Passengers via Little-Ferry to and from Burghead. Robert Rutherford, agent at Helmsdale.

Inverness Courier, 11th November 1858



OS map of Helmsdale showing the Harbour and Dunrobin Street, where Robert Rutherford has his home and business. Sutherland sheet XC.
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ROBERT RUTHERFORD was a merchant and farmer born at Helmsdale. In 1833 he began a coal importing business and this grew into Robert Rutherford and Sons, Drapery and General Merchandise. He married Christina Ross in 1836, and in 1861 they had two daughters and four sons with them at Dunrobin Road, Margaret aged 18, Isabella aged 13, Alexander aged 11, Richard aged 7, Andrew aged 6 and Robert aged 4. Another son, 21-year-old Donald, lived nearby.



Robert and Christina Rutherford photographed around 1857.

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LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD
STEAM COMMUNICATION.

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY
(Limited.)



THE Splendid, New, and very Fast
Steamer,

"HEATHER BELL,"

R. H. HUDSON, Master,

Built expressly for the Trade, will, until further Notice,
Sail as under, unless prevented by any unforeseen
circumstance :—

FROM LITTLEFERRY FOR BURGHEAD,
MONDAY and WEDNESDAY, not before 7.30 A.M., and
FRIDAY not before 6 A.M., meeting the Edinburgh
Steamers at Burghead.

FROM BURGHEAD FOR LITTLEFERRY,
On MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, and FRIDAY, on the arrival
of the Buss from Alves Station, but not before
1.30 P.M.

Freights on Goods and Stock very Moderate.

PASSAGE FARES: 1st Cabin, 6s; 2d Cabin, 4s.

First-rate accommodation for Carriages, Horses, and
every description of Live Stock, on deck.

An Omnibus runs from the Hotel at Golspie to
and from Littleferry, in connection with the Steamer.

An Omnibus also runs between Burghead Pier and
the Alves Station of the Inverness and Aberdeen
Junction Railway, conveying Passengers to and from
the Steamer. According to present arrangements,
Passengers arriving at Alves Station by the 11.45
Up, and 12.20 Down Trains, are in time for the Steamer,
and Passengers by the Steamer from Sutherland, are
(weather, &c., permitting) landed in time to proceed
by the same Trains east and west. These arrange-
ments, as to Buss and Trains, are stated merely for
the information of Passengers, but the Company do
not undertake to forward Passengers by Omnibus.

Passengers, Goods, and Stock can be forwarded from
Burghead for Edinburgh and London by Steamer every
Friday Morning, and for London direct every alternate
Tuesday. Application for further information may
be made to

Mr HILL, Innkeeper, Golspie;

Mr GUNN, Innkeeper, Dornoch;

P. CHRISTALL, *Agent*, Burghead;

At Littleferry to J. DAVIDSON, *Agent and Manager*.

Littleferry, by Golspie, September, 1859.

Clipping from the Elgin Courier, 4th November 1859

The regular newspaper notices were kept to the same basic format, with seasonal changes to the times of sailings and to reflect any personnel changes. In March 1859, James Waters was no longer Agent at Littleferry, and inquiries were to be directed to Mr Hill at Golspie, or to Mr Gunn at Dornoch:

The Elgin Courant, Friday, May 20, 1859

LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD STEAM COMMUNICATION.

THE SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED)

The Splendid, New, and very Fast Steamer, "HEATHER BELL," R. H. Hudson, Master, built expressly for the Trade, will after 1st April, until further Notice, Sail as under, unless prevented by any unforeseen circumstances:

FROM LITTLEFERRY FOR BURGHEAD,

MONDAY and WEDNESDAY, not before 7.30 A.M., and FRIDAY mack), not before 6 A.M., meeting the Edinburgh Steamers at Burghead.

FROM BURGHEAD FOR LITTLEFERRY,

On MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, AND FRIDAY, on the arrival of the bus from Alves Station, but not before 1.30 P.M.

Freights on Goods and Stock very moderate.

PASSAGE FARES: 1st Cabin 5s.; 2nd Cabin 3s.

First-rate accommodation for Carriages, Horses, and every description of Live Stock, on deck.

An Omnibus runs from the Hotel at Golspie to and from Littleferry, in connection with the Steamer.

An Omnibus also runs between Burghead Pier and the Alves Station of the Inverness and Aberdeen Junction Railway, conveying Passengers to and from the Steamer.

According to the present arrangements, Passengers arriving at the Alves Station by the 11.45, up, and 12.20 down Trains are in time for the Steamer; and Passengers by the Steamer from Sutherland are (weather &c. permitting) landed in time to proceed by the same Trains east and west.

These arrangements as to Buss and Trains are stated merely for the information of Passengers, but the Company do not undertake to forward Passengers by Omnibus. The HEATHER BELL will not stop off Portmahomack after the 4th May.

Passengers, Goods and Stock can be forwarded from Burghead for Edinburgh and London by Steamer every Friday Morning, and for London direct every alternate Tuesday. Application for further information may be made to

Mr HILL, Innkeeper, Golspie;

Mr GUNN, Innkeeper, Dornoch;

The COMPANY'S OFFICE at Littleferry;

Or here to P. CHRISTALL, Agent and Manager.

Burghead, 16th March, 1859.

In 1861 ROBERT HILL was inn keeper at the Post Office and Inn Golspie. (A branch of the Aberdeen Town and County Bank also seems to have been located at the inn before the bank house was built further up the road.) He was 50 and had been born in England. His wife Margaret, 38, was from Perthshire. They had four sons, all born in Golspie. James John, aged 19, was a Clerk in the Bank Office. Robert Robertson aged 14, Charles Henry aged 11 and Edward Roussel aged 6 were scholars.

There were nine servants living at the Inn. Joanna Matheson from Dornoch was aged 24 and a Waiting, Jessie Munro from Creich was 33 and a House Maid. Margaret McKenzie from Rogart was 27 and the Cook. Ann Macdonald from Kincardine, Ross & Cromarty was 24 and a Dairy Maid. Kate Mackay from Lairg was 24 and a Nurse. Betsy Matheson from Dornoch was 18 and the Bar Maid. Robert Calder from Clyne was 21. He was the Letter Carrier for the Post Office. There were also two Stable Men, 22-year-old Alexander Bruce from Clyne, and 20-year-old John Williams who had been born in Jamaica in the West Indies. (Ten years before John had been a scholar, and a boarder with the Anderson family at Main Street Lane, Golspie.)



The Golspie Inn (known as the Sutherland Arms Hotel) was kept by Robert and Margaret Hill.

Postcard in the collection of Golspie Heritage Society.

In 1861 ALEXANDER GUNN was inn keeper at the Sutherland Arms in Dornoch. He was also a farmer of 250 acres employing 8 servants. Alexander was 55 and both he and his wife, 47-year-old Elizabeth, were from Latheron in Caithness. The couple had five children at school, and they had all been born in Dornoch. John aged 15, James W. aged 13, Elizabeth aged 11, Alexander aged 9, and William S. F. aged 7.

There were three maids at the Inn. 23-year-old Ann Sutherland from Midlothian was the Kitchen Maid, 22-year-old Ann Gilchrist from Kildonan in Sutherland was the Table Maid, and 32-year-old Christian Ross from Creich was the House Maid. There were two young farm workers living at the Inn. 14-year-old John Johnson from Rogart was a Shepherd and 11-year-old Norman McDonald from Dornoch was a Cattle Herd.

There were also two lodgers on the night of the census. William Brodie was a Tea merchant and Traveller from Forfarshire, and Hugh Cameron was a Commercial Traveller from Ross & Cromarty.



The Sutherland Arms in Dornoch where Alexander and Elizabeth Gunn lived. The crenellations at the front of the old building were probably added in 1895, when the much larger and more elaborate north extension was built

When the sailing times were posted in June 1859, James Davidson had taken over the job of Agent and Manager at Littleferry:

The Elgin Courant, Friday, July 29, 1859

LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD STEAM COMMUNICATION.

THE SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED)

The Splendid, New, and very Fast Steamer, "HEATHER BELL," R. H. Hudson, Master, built expressly for the Trade, will after 1st June, until further Notice, Sail as under, unless prevented by any unforeseen circumstances:

FROM LITTLEFERRY FOR BURGHEAD,

MONDAY and WEDNESDAY, not before 7.30 A.M., and FRIDAY, not before 6 A.M., meeting the Edinburgh Steamers at Burghead.

FROM BURGHEAD FOR LITTLEFERRY,

On MONDAY, WEDNESDAY, AND FRIDAY, on the arrival of the Buss from Alves Station, but not before 1.30 P.M.

And on WEDNESDAYS, after the arrival of the Edinburgh Steamers, when not much behind their usual times.

Freights on Goods and Stock very moderate.

PASSAGE FARES: 1st Cabin 5s.; 2nd Cabin 3s.

First-rate accommodation for Carriages, Horses, and every description of Live Stock, on deck.

An Omnibus runs from the Hotel at Golspie to and from Littleferry, in connection with the Steamer.

An Omnibus also runs between Burghead Pier and the Alves Station of the Inverness and Aberdeen Junction Railway, conveying Passengers to and from the Steamer.

According to the present arrangements, Passengers arriving at the Alves Station by the 11.45, up, and 12.20 down Trains are in time for the Steamer; and Passengers by the Steamer from Sutherland are (weather &c. permitting) landed in time to proceed by the same Trains east and west.

These arrangements as to Buss and Trains are stated merely for the information of Passengers, but the Company do not undertake to forward Passengers by Omnibus. The HEATHER BELL will not stop off Portmahomack after the 4th May.

Passengers, Goods and Stock can be forwarded from Burghead for Edinburgh and London by Steamer every Friday Morning, and for London direct every alternate Tuesday. Application for further information may be made to

Mr HILL, Innkeeper, Golspie;

Mr GUNN, Innkeeper, Dornoch;

P. CHRISTALL, Burghead;

At Littleferry to JAMES DAVIDSON, Agent and Manager,
Littleferry, by Golspie 10th May, 1859.

In 1861 JAMES DAVIDSON was described in the census as Steamboat Agent and Manager. He lived at Embo House with his wife and two daughters. James was 33 and born at Ardclach, Nairn. Ann Davidson was 28 and from Morayshire. Their eldest daughter Jeanette had been born eight years before in South America, while their 6-year-old daughter Donaldda had been born in Dornoch, most likely at Embo House. The household also included a Domestic Servant, 18-year-old Margaret Innes from Banffshire.

The census also shows a visitor at Embo House. Peter Christall, the Steam Packet Company's Agent and Manager at Burghead. He was aged 58, and it is the census which reveals that, in addition to being a Bank Agent in Elgin, and Steam Ship Agent at Burghead, he was the tenant of the 300 acre Embo Farm.



Embo House, home of James Davidson and his family.

Sailing times from 1st December 1859:

The Elgin and Morayshire Courier, March 23, 1860

LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD STEAM COMMUNICATION
WINTER ARRANGEMENT

THE SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED)

The Splendid, New, and very Fast Steamer, "HEATHER BELL," R. H. Hudson, Master, Built expressly for the Trade, will after 1st December, and until further Notice, Sail, weather and tide permitting:-

FROM LITTLEFERRY FOR BURGHEAD,

On WEDNESDAY, not before 9.30 A.M., and FRIDAY not before 6 A.M., meeting the Edinburgh Steamers at Burghead.

FROM BURGHEAD FOR LITTLEFERRY,

On FRIDAY, on the arrival of the Buss from Alves Station, but not before 1.30 P.M.

And on WEDNESDAYS after the arrival of the Edinburgh Steamers, when not much behind their usual times, but not before 1.30 P.M.

Freights on Goods and Stock very moderate.

PASSAGE FARES: 1st Cabin 6s; 2nd Cabin 4s.

First-rate accommodation for Carriages, Horses, and every description of Live Stock, on deck.

A Conveyance runs from Golspie to and from Littleferry, in connection with the Steamer.

A Conveyance also runs between Burghead Pier and the Alves Station of the Inverness and Aberdeen Junction Railway, conveying Passengers to and from the Steamer.

According to the present arrangements, Passengers arriving at Alves Station by the 11.45 Up, and 12.20 Down Trains, are in time for the Steamer, and Passengers by the Steamer from Sutherland, are ((weather, &, permitting) landed in time to proceed by the same Trains east and west. These arrangements as to Conveyances and Trains are merely for the information of Passengers, but the Company do not undertake to forward Passengers by these conveyances.

Passengers, Goods and Stock can be forwarded from Burghead for Edinburgh and London by Steamer every Friday Morning. Application for further information may be made to

P. CHRISTALL, Agent, Burghead; At Littleferry to J. DAVIDSON, Agent and Manager. Littleferry, by Golspie, November 1859.

In June 1860, the Heather Bell was withdrawn for painting and temporarily replaced by a sailing ship.

The Elgin and Morayshire Courier, June 8, 1860

NOTICE

LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD STEAM COMMUNICATION.

The Steamer "HEATHER BELL," is to be WITHDRAWN from the Passage to get Painted, and will be off the Line from the 9th to the 19th June, on which day she will RESUME the Passage, Sailing from BURGHEAD not before 1.30 P.M.

A Sailing Vessel will sail between LITTLEFERRY and BURGHEAD, in place of the Steamer. Littleferry, 31st May, 1860

The sailing times for June 1860 appeared beneath the withdrawal notice:

The Elgin and Morayshire Courier, June 8, 1860

LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD STEAM COMMUNICATION.

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED.)

The Splendid, New, and very Fast Steamer, "HEATHER BELL," R. H. Hudson, Master, Will, after the 10th inst., Sail as under, weather and tide permitting, unless prevented by any unforeseen circumstances:-

FROM LITTLEFERRY FOR BURGHEAD,

On TUESDAY and WEDNESDAY, not before 7.30 A.M., and on FRIDAY not before 6 A.M., meeting the Edinburgh Steamer at Burghead on Tuesday and Friday going South, and on Wednesday coming North.

FROM BURGHEAD FOR LITTLEFERRY,

On TUESDAY and SATURDAY, on the arrival of the Buss from Alves Station, but not before 1.30 P.M.

Freights on Goods and Stock very moderate.

PASSAGE FARES: 1st Cabin 6s.; 2nd Cabin 4s.

First-rate accommodation for Carriages, Horses, and every description of Live Stock, on deck.

Conveyances run between the Alves Station of the Inverness and Aberdeen Railway and Burghead, and between Littleferry and Golspie, in connection with the Steamer.

Passengers arriving at Alves Station by 11.45 Up, and 12.20 Down Trains, are in time for the Steamer, and Passengers by the Steamer from Sutherland, are (weather, &c., permitting) landed in time to proceed by the same Trains east and west.

These arrangements as to Conveyances and Trains, are stated merely for the information of Passengers, but the Company do not undertake to forward Passengers by these conveyances.

Passengers, Goods and Stock can be forwarded from Burghead for Edinburgh and London by Steamer every Friday Morning, and to Aberdeen, Edinburgh and London, every Tuesday Morning. Application for further information can be made to

P. CHRISTALL, Agent, Burghead;

At Littleferry to J. DAVIDSON, Agent and Manager

Littleferry, by Golspie, 1st June, 1860.

Sailing times from 1st August 1860:

The Elgin and Morayshire Courier, September 21, 1860.

LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD STEAM COMMUNICATION.

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED.)

The Splendid, New, and very Fast Steamer, "HEATHER BELL," R. H. Hudson, Master, Will, after the 1st of AUGUST, Sail as under, weather and tide permitting, unless prevented by any unforeseen circumstances:-

FROM LITTLEFERRY FOR BURGHEAD,

On TUESDAY and FRIDAY, not before 6 A.M., meeting the Edinburgh Steamer at Burghead going South, and on WEDNESDAY, not before 7.30 A.M., meeting the Edinburgh Steamers at Burghead coming North.

FROM BURGHEAD FOR LITTLEFERRY,

On TUESDAY, on the arrival of the 'Buss from Alves Station, but not before 1.30 P.M. And on WEDNESDAYS and SATURDAYS, after the arrival of the Edinburgh Steamers, when not long behind their usual time, but not before 1.30 P.M.

Freights on Goods and Stock very Moderate.

PASSAGE FARES: 1st Cabin 8s.; 2nd Cabin 6s.

First-rate accommodation for Carriages, Horses, and every description of Live Stock, on deck.

Conveyances run between the Alves Station of the Inverness and Aberdeen Railway and Burghead, and between Littleferry and Golspie, in connection with the Steamer, but on Fridays the conveyance from Burghead goes to Elgin direct, not to Alves.

Passengers arriving at Alves Station by 11.45 Up, and 12.20 Down Trains, are in time for the Steamer, and Passengers by the Steamer from Sutherland, are (weather, &c., permitting) landed in time to proceed by the same Trains east and west.

These arrangements as to Conveyances and Trains, are stated merely for the information of Passengers, but the Company do not undertake to forward Passengers by these conveyances.

Passengers, Goods and Stock forwarded from Burghead for Edinburgh and London by Steamer every Friday Morning, and to Aberdeen, Edinburgh and London, every Tuesday Morning. Application for further information can be made to

P. CHRISTALL, Agent, Burghead;

At Littleferry to J. DAVIDSON, Agent and Manager

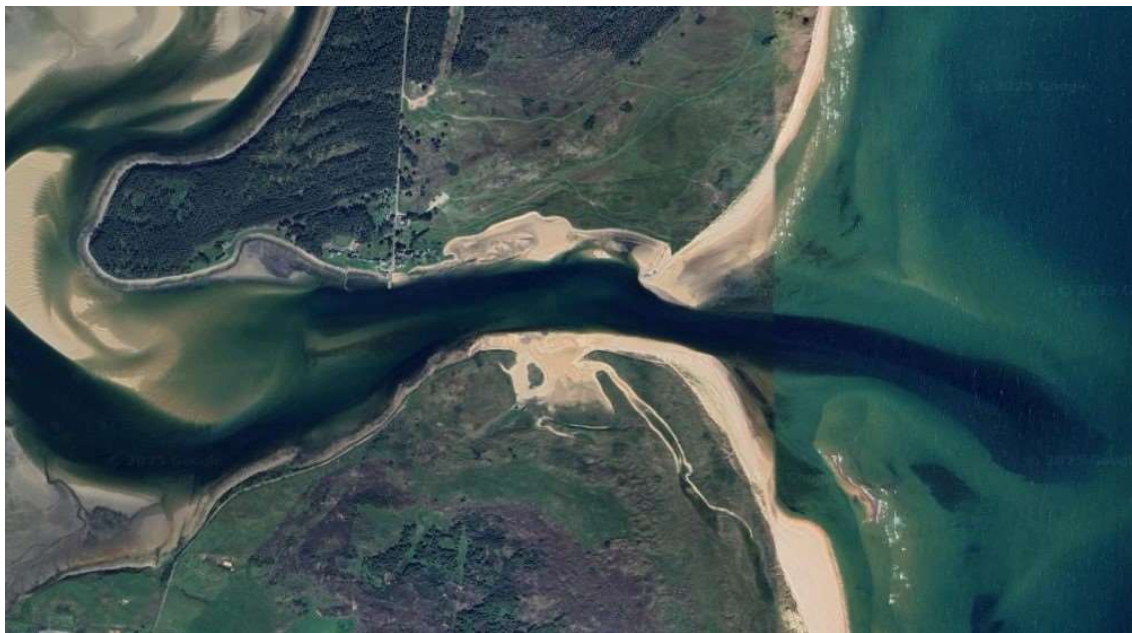
N.B. - On Mondays and Thursdays, the "Heather Bell" may be engaged on Special Charter.

Littleferry, by Golspie, 25th July, 1860.

At the beginning of 1861 the Heather Bell met with another accident:

John o’Groats Journal, Wick, March 7, 1861

ACCIDENT TO “HEATHER BELL,” STEAMER. – An accident occurred to the “Heather Bell” when on her voyage from Burghed, on the 27th Feb. last, to Littleferry. When attempting to enter the narrows of Littleferry harbour, with full steam on and sails set, she was unable to stem the very strong ebb, took a sheer in the tide and grounded on the south side before being able to back the engines. It was found that the vessel had come into contact with some large stones which had perforated the engine-room, which immediately filled to the tide level and put out the fires. When the vessel ebbed dry, the passengers walked ashore, and all the cargo was landed – none being damaged. On the next flood tide she floated off by her fore and aft compartments and was brought to the beach at Littleferry pier, and at the next low water the damage was found to be such that she will require to be repaired before taking her station again. No blame attaches to Captain Hudson. The accident arose entirely from the steam-power of the vessel being insufficient to stem the strong tide.



A satellite view of the entrance to Loch Fleet and Littleferry Harbour, notorious for the speed at which the tides can flow through the narrow inlet.

Despite the opinion that no blame was attached to Captain Hudson, the sailing times in May 1861 show a new master in command of the Heather Bell.

The Inverness Courier, July 11, 1861.

LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD STEAM COMMUNICATION.

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY'S (LIMITED.)

New and Fast Steamer, "HEATHER BELL," ROBERT NESBITT, Master

Sails as under (weather & tide permitting), unless prevented by any unforeseen circumstances:-

FROM LITTLEFERRY FOR BURGHEAD,

On Tuesday and Friday, not before 6 A.M., meeting the Edinburgh Steamer at Burghead going South.

FROM BURGHEAD FOR LITTLE-FERRY,

On Wednesday and Saturday, after arrival of the Edinburgh Steamers (when not much behind their usual time), but not before 1.30 P.M.

Freights on Goods and Stock very moderate.

PASSAGE FARES: 1st Cabin 7s. 6d.; 2nd Cabin 4s.

First-rate accommodation for Carriages, Horses, and every description of Live Stock, on deck.

Conveyances run between the Alves Station of the Inverness and Aberdeen Railway and Burghead, and between Littleferry and Golspie, in connection with the Steamer, but on Fridays the conveyance from Burghead goes to Elgin direct.

Passengers arriving at Alves Station by 11.45 Up, and 12.20 Down Trains, are in time for the Steamer; and Passengers by the Steamer from Sutherland, are (weather, &c., permitting) landed in time to proceed by the same Trains east and west.

These arrangements as to Conveyances and Trains, are stated merely for the information of Passengers.

Apply for further information to P. CHRISTALL, agent at Burghead; or here to JAS.

DAVIDSON, Agent and Manager.

Little-Ferry, by Golspie, May 1861.

N.B. - On Mondays and Thursdays, the "HEATHER BELL" may be engaged on Special Charter.

CAPTAIN ROBERT NESBITT

On the census night in 1861, Robert Nesbitt was on board the Heather Bell at Golspie (Littleferry). The census reveals that he was aged 50 and born at Tweed in Berwickshire.

His wife Mary was at Findhorn. She was born in Airdrie, and was aged 36.

In 1871 the couple were running the Harbour Inn at 8 Granary Street, Duffus.

Mary's 72-year-old mother Janet Hogg was living with them. She had been born in Berwickshire. 21-year-old Jessie Rose, from Elgin, was a General Servant at the inn. By 1881 Robert had died and Mary and her mother were at 3 Grant Street, Duffus, both described as Retired Inn Keepers.

Robert and Mary Nesbitt are buried in Elgin Cemetery. Their memorial stone bears the words:

Hear My Prayer O Lord

Erected by MARY BRYSON PAUL in memory of her beloved husband,
ROBERT NESBITT, formerly Master of the steamer Heather Bell, who died
at Burghead on the 10th of September 1878 aged 68 years.

Also of the above MARY BRYSON PAUL, who died at Burghead, 22nd
November 1885, aged 60 years.

When sorrowing o'er this stone I bend,
Which covers all that was a friend
And from his hand, his voice his smile,
Devides me for a little while.

My Saviour marks the tears I shed,
For Jesus wept o'er Lazarus dead.

THE CREW OF THE HEATHER BELL

It is probable that the crew changed during the five years that the Heather Bell was in service between Littleferry and Burghead, but we have the snapshot of the census in 1861. That night there were five men on board the steamer. In addition to the Captain, there were two Seamen, James Brown and Norman McKay; a Fireman James Nicol; and a Steward. John Hudson a 60-year-old man from Belfast, was the Steward. It is possible that he was related to the previous ship's master Captain R H Hudson. With the possible exception of John Hudson, the men on board all lived on the Burghead side of the route, so there may have been other crew members who lived near Littleferry.

JAMES BROWN was born at Burghead on the 6th of February 1814 to parents William Brown and Helen Ross. On the 12th of October 1840 he married Elspet Sandison. On the night of the census 1861, 49-year-old Elspet was at King Street in Burghead with 28-year-old Elspet McDonald, a Domestic Servant. Elspet Brown is described as 'Merchant Seaman's Wife & Publican.' She was born at Duffus, the little town near Burghead which gave its name to the Parish.

NORMAN MCKAY was born at Clyne in Sutherland and was aged 60 in 1861. Ten years before he had been a Ship's Master himself, and living at Burghead with his wife Janet who was born at Garmouth in Morayshire, their three daughters Catherine, Jess and Margaret, and their son Norman. In 1861 Janet was at Grant Street in Burghead with Catherine, a Dressmaker, Margaret who had previously worked as a Housemaid, and Janet and Norman's granddaughter baby Margaret.

JAMES NICOL was born at Roseisle near Burghead on the 6th of September 1819. His father was William Nicol and his mother Margaret Ross. (It is possible that he was the farmer at Old Roseisle who married Jesse Anderson of Bank of Roseisle in 1851). In 1853 he married Julia Rose who was working as a Domestic Servant at Charleston by Roseisle. She was born at Cawder in Nairnshire. On the night of the 1861 census, 31-year-old Julia was at Dunbar Street, Burghead with her children 7-year-old Julia, 5-year-old William and 2-year-old Margaret. She was described as 'Stoker in Steamer's Wife.'

The notices for 1863 give information about the new branch railway line from Burghead to Alves. The first train ran on 22nd December 1862. (The last passenger service ran on 12th September 1931.):

John o’Groat Journal, Wick, Thursday, November 12, 1863

OPENING OF THE BURGHEAD RAILWAY.

LITTLEFERRY AND BURGHEAD.

STEAM COMMUNICATION.

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY’S (LIMITED.) New and Fast Steamer, “HEATHER BELL,” ROBT. NESBITT, Master, sails as under Weather and Tide permitting (unless prevented by any unforeseen circumstances.)

From LITTLEFERRY for BURGHEAD,

On TUESDAY and FRIDAY, not before Seven A.M., meeting the Edinburgh Steamer at Burghead going South.

From BURGHEAD for LITTLEFERRY,

On WEDNESDAY and SATURDAY, after the arrival of the Edinburgh Steamers (when not much behind their usual time), but not before 1.30 P.M.

FRIGHTS ON GOODS AND STOCK VERY MODERATE

PASSAGE FARES: First Cabin 6s. 6d.; Second Cabin 4s.

First-rate accommodation for Carriages, Horses, and every description of Live Stock, on deck.

Conveyances run between Littleferry and Golspie, in connection with the Steamer.

Passengers arriving at Alves Station by 11.37 Up, and 12.14 Down Trains, get the Train to Burghead at 12.20, and are in time for the Steamer; and Passengers by the Steamer from Sutherland are, (weather, etc., permitting) landed in time to proceed by the same Trains east and west, leaving Burghead by the Train at 11.10 A.M. These arrangements as to Conveyances and Trains, are stated merely for the information of Passengers, but the Company do not undertake to forward Passengers by these Conveyances.

Passengers, Goods, and Stock forwarded from Burghead for Edinburgh and London by Steamer every FRIDAY Morning, and to Aberdeen, Edinburgh, and London every TUESDAY Morning.

Application for further information may be made to P. CHRISTALL, Agent at Burghead; or here to JAMES. DAVIDSON, Agent and Manager.

Littleferry, by Golspie, July 1, 1863.

On Mondays and Thursdays, the HEATHER BELL may be engaged on Special Charter.

In June 1863 the Heather Bell was withdrawn from service for an overhaul:

Inverness Courier, June 4 1863

NOTICE TO PASSENGERS AND SHIPPERS.

BURGHEAD AND LITTLE-FERRY STEAM COMMUNICATION.

The “HEATHER BELL” Steamer will be WITHDRAWN from the Passage from 8th to 17th June, to get an overhaul. She will resume the Passage again on 17th June, leaving BURGHEAD for LITTLE-FERRY at the usual time. A SAILING VESSEL will sail between Burghead and Little-ferry in place of the Steamer.

Sutherland Steam Packet Company’s Office,

Little-Ferry, 1st June 1863.

Annual General Meetings of the Company were held on the last Tuesday in October and notices placed in the Inverness Courier and the John o’Groat Journal. The first AGM was in October 1858 and the last AGM was in October 1863:

The Inverness Courier, Thursday, October 21

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED).
THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of SHAREHOLDERS will be held within HILL’S HOTEL, GOLSPIE, on Tuesday, the 26th day of October curt., at 12 o-clock, noon, in terms of the Articles of Association.
D. GRAY, Secy.
Golspie, October 15th, 1858.

John o’Groat Journal, Thursday, October 20, 1859

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED).
THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the SHAREHOLDERS will be held within HILL’S HOTEL, GOLSPIE, on Tuesday, the 25th current, at 12 o-clock, noon, in terms of the Articles of Association.
D. GRAY, Secy. Golspie,
October 14th, 1859.

In the following years, the notices for the Company’s AGM were placed in the same format and Donald Gray remained Secretary of the Company throughout.

In 1860 the notice was placed on October 8th for the AGM on Tuesday 30th October. In 1861, October 12th for 29th October. In 1862 October 6th for 28th October. In 1863, when the last AGM took place, the hotel at Golspie was under new management:

Inverness Courier, Thursday, October 8th, 1863

SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED).
THE ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING of the SHAREHOLDERS will be held within MACDONALD’S HOTEL, GOLSPIE, on Tuesday, the 27th October next, at 12 o-clock, noon, in terms of the Articles of Association.
D. GRAY, Secy. Golspie,
September 25th, 1863.

In 1863 the tenancy of the inn/hotel at Golspie changed hands and Mr Macdonald took over from Mr. Hill:

Inverness Courier, Thursday, 8th October, 1863

GOLSPIE HOTEL, SUTHERLAND.

J. MACDONALD (late of the COMMERCIAL HOTEL INVERNESS) begs to return his sincere thanks for the patronage bestowed on him while in Inverness, and to intimate to the Nobility, Gentry, Tourists, and others visiting the County of Sutherland, that he has become Tenant of the GOLSPIE HOTEL. The Hotel is a First-Class one, and it has now been NEWLY-FURNISHED and fitted with every modern convenience that can give comfort and ease to those making a Hotel their temporary abode. The WINES, SPIRITS, and MALT LIQUORS will be found of the very best qualities, and it will be J. McD.'s anxious endeavour, by studying to meet the wishes of visitors, to merit an extensive public patronage.

THE ROYAL MAIL COACH-OFFICE is on the premises, and Carriages and Post-Horses can be had on the shortest notice.

N.B. - The DEFIANCE COACH leaves the Hotel every morning (Sunday excepted) at half-past Nine o'clock, for Invergordon, returning again at Ten o'clock.

An OMNIBUS runs to and from the Hotel to LITTLEFERRY in connection with the Steamer from BURGHEAD.

John Macdonald had been hotel keeper at the Commercial Hotel in Inverness, on the corner of Castle Wynd and the High Street next to the old Town House. They overlooked the Exchange, a wide area of pavement used for meetings, announcements and market stalls. In 1861 the census recorded John aged 37 from Urray near Muir of Ord, a hotel keeper employing two men and three women. His wife Elizabeth was from Dorset, and they had five children, William aged 12, Mary Elizabeth aged 11, Susana aged 7, John aged 6 and Alfred aged 1.

By 1871 they were still at The Inn, Golspie, with six of their children. Susan and Wiliam, who was a bank clerk, and four younger sons, Fredrick aged 10, Charles aged 8, Theophilus aged 5 and Albert aged 4.

Passengers could make travel arrangements, and catch the omnibus to Littleferry, at the Inn, but by the time the Macdonalds arrived there were only a few weeks left for the Sutherland Steam Packet Company.

Soon after the last AGM, the Heather Bell had been put up for sale. A piece in the John o’Groat Journal, copied from the Banffshire Journal and reporting the end of the Company, also mentioned Captain Swallow’s Steamer, which had plied between Burghead and Littleferry some years before:

John o’Groat Journal, November 12, 1863

THE SUTHERLAND STEAM PACKET COMPANY (LIMITED)

For some time back a rumour has been prevalent that this Company intended to dissolve itself, not finding its steamer, the Heather Bell, a paying speculation. That stem vessel is now advertised for sale, having sunk, it is said, a considerable sum during the last five years. The Heather Bell was specially built by Messrs Thomson & Co., Glasgow, in 1858, for the Burghead and Littleferry passage, and a finer finished boat it would be needless to wish for. She has made her trips with remarkable regularity, and actually shortened the voyage across the Firth from four hours (the time occupied by the former steamer) to two hours and a-half ! While under the management of her first captain, the Heather Bell was singularly unfortunate, and we presume it is the misfortunes of her early days that have brought the Co. to the present state of affairs. Whatever may be the fate of the Heather Bell, we cannot believe that the passage will be long unoccupied. Both the North of Scotland Steam Shipping Company and the Inverness and Aberdeen Junction Railway Company have their eyes on the doings of the Sutherland Company; but we understand that his Grace the Duke of Sutherland, who is the largest of the Heather Bell shareholders, is decidedly in favour of an independent company like the present. The people of Burghead and Morayshire generally, are anxious for the return of Captain Swallow, who successfully plied a steamer of his own, the Streanaballh, between the two ports for some years previous to the formation of the present company, during which period he became a great favourite with the general public. – Banffshire Journal.

In February 1864, the Northern Ensign reprinted a piece from Blackwood's Magazine, which contained an out-of-date mention of the steamer:

Northern Ensign, Thursday, February 11, 1864

A RIDE THROUGH SUTHERLAND
(From Blackwood's Magazine.)

...Unless the traveller happens to come, like the red-haired Scandinavian conquerors, from Orkney and the further isles (in which case he may be safely left to his own devices, as he is much too far north to be instructed by me), the easiest way of entering into Sutherlandshire and approaching Cape Wrath is by the Heather Bell, which runs from Burghead, at the entrance of the Moray Firth, to a place a little beyond Dornoch; and though this steamer is of very small size, that deficiency is amply redeemed by the enormous dimensions of the captain. Beautiful are these northern firths in a bright calm autumn day, with their clear air, flocks of sea-fowl, green shores, bold precipices, and the rolling hills around, rising in the distance into the more lordly mountains of Ross and Sutherland. It would be well, however, had the steamer to Little Ferry a little more horse-power, so that it might ascend to the quay without the aid of the tide, and never be kept for two hours, as we were, at the mouth of the Fleet, running round after its own tail like a frolicsome puppy, or circling like a duck in a horse-pond. This movement maybe amusing to the Heather Bell, but it is wearying to the passengers, and gives them a very confused idea of the scenery...

In June 1864, the John o'Groat Journal reported a new steamer service between Burghead and Littleferry:

John o'Groat Journal, June 16 1864

SUTHERLAND GOSSIP

...We have got another steamer between Littleferry and Burghead, bearing the classical name of 'Xantho.' The Messrs Creal and Ellison have also a steamer plying across the Meikleferry in connection with the train from Invergordon. Arrangements are also being made for placing regular carriers and other conveyances on the route between Meikleferry and Golspie. Grave doubts are entertained whether the Littleferry steamer will pay in the face of so much opposition. By prudence and proper management, however, I have not the semblance of a doubt but it will pay - and in the end pay well. Mr Barnes, the proprietor, deserves every encouragement for the promptitude with which he has stepped forward to supply a desideratum. Since the ill-managed 'Heather Bell' was withdrawn traffic with the south was precarious and uncertain. But now we have - thanks to Mr Barnes - the way open before us.

THE SUBSEQUENT HISTORY OF THE HEATHER BELL:

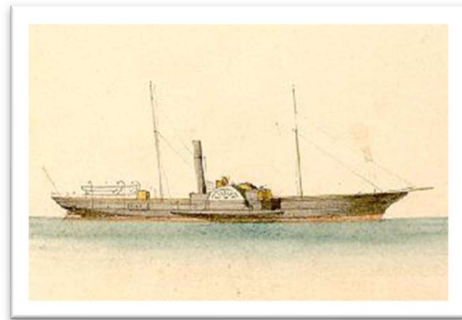
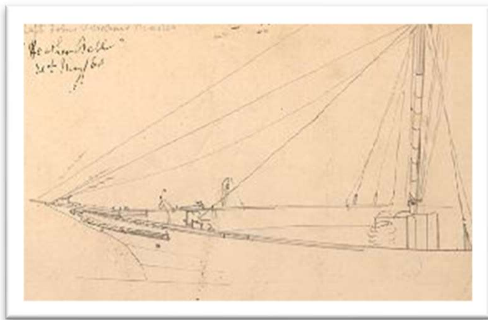
The last sailing from Littleferry was in December 1863 when the service closed, and the operator wound up.

On the 26th of April 1864, the Heather Bell was bought by the Burnham Tidal Harbour Company of Glastonbury. She was registered at Bridgewater and was in service between Cardiff and Burnham on the Bristol Channel, and also used for excursions in the area. A photograph exists of the Heather Bell at Watchet Harbour, about 16 miles west of Burnham, in 1864.



**The Heather Bell at Watchet Harbour
(© Mikebisson, Jerripedia.org)**

On the 13th of July 1867, the Heather Bell arrived at Gorey, on the east coast of Jersey, from Burnham. She had been purchased by the Jersey and Continental Packet Company for use on a new service linking Gorey, Portbail the nearest French port to the east, and St Brieuc in Brittany. The steamer was taken out for a trial run on Wednesday the 17th of July, and the service started the next day. It took just under three hours for the Heather Bell to travel from Jersey to France.



Sketch and watercolour of the Heather Bell, by Philip John Oules
In the collection of Jersey Heritage (SJA/0000/00881 & SJA/0000/01023)



**Painting of the Heather Bell passing by Mount Orgueil Castle, Jersey
by an unknown artist (possibly P.J. Oules)**

This image is from the website www.channelislandshipping.je/page77.html#HEATHERBELL

In 1869, the Heather Bell was bought by James John Stark of Tower Hill, London, and registered there. The following year she was bought by George Burt of Swannage and registered at Poole. She was then used for the excursion trade, sailing out of Swannage, with regular trips to Bournemouth Pier. (In 2007 Bonhams of London sold a pair of paintings by the Canadian artist Salvatore Colacicco. One was the 'Steamship Lord Elgin,' the other 'Paddle Steamer Heather Bell.' Both ships were connected with Bournemouth, so the painting may well be intended to represent the Sutherland Heather Bell.)



**The Paddle Steamer Heather Bell, by Salvatore Colacicco
© Bonhams, London**



Postcard showing the Heather Bell departing from Bournemouth Pier

The Heather Bell was finally broken up in 1877.

Researched 2025 Heather C Martin