

Diary of Donald Murray

Donald Murray's account of his three journeys to his native home in Sutherlandshire, in the years 1855, 1859 and 1863.

Donald (1805-1872) was the eldest son of John Murray and Ann Matheson. He was business man, banker and Provost of Rutherglen in 1864-1869.

This diary was in the possession of his direct descendent Dr. Molly (Mary) McN Johnstone of Edinburgh. In 1971 she lent it to Dr R L Mackay of Wolverhampton, of the family of Mathesons, who transcribed it (or had it transcribed) and added some additional notes

The notebook passed to Dr Johnstone's son, AG Johnstone who in 2025 produced this version based on the originals and Dr Mackay's transcription, with some corrections.

Interpolations '(?)' indicate doubtful readings. [page numbers] are editorial. Footnotes by AGJ.

[page 1] Memorandum of a tour through part of the Highlands by Donald Murray City of Glasgow Bank Rutherglen and George William Murray his third son on a visit to his parents in Asdale¹, Parish of Creich², Sutherlandshire.

9th July 1855 It commenced, I left Glasgow on Monday 9 July 1855 by the half past 4 o'clock train for Edinburgh. After making a few purchases in Edinburgh I took the train again to Granton and lodged all night in a Temperance Coffee House where we got a comfortable bed room. 1/6³

Sailed the next morning about ¼ past ten o'clock on board. the Mortello steamer. Every thing went on well and George in good spirits until we were about opposite Aberdeen when we were obliged to stop on account at the mist, and we went on drifting about sometimes very near on the rocks and at other times on land. It was nearly 3 o'clock pm the following day when 20 miles past Banff that we knew where we were and the mist cleared away **[page 2]** about 12 o'clock on Tuesday night George and I went down to our berths, but when half undressed George got sick, and we had to come on deck. when George threw up a good deal then I followed his example, and was sick for a short time but soon got well again and remained on deck the whole night got a rug from the steward with which I covered George (???) shortly before getting sick(??) Which made the sickness not so painful to neither of us. After the mist cleared away we returned Banff and put out and got on a quantity of stuff then set on steam again for Cullen all in good spirits the coast being very beautiful and reaching the village beautifully situated. Put out a deal of goods there. Put on steam again for Lossiemouth. Coast continuing the same arrived at Lossiemouth about 8 o'clock. Put out a good deal of goods and got in some passengers, some ladies who got sick. On again to Burghead. Passengers for the little ferry⁴ left shore.

¹ Ausdale NH 626 956

² Creich Church ruin NH 636 892

³ Here and elsewhere ~ 1/6 = 1 shilling and 6 pence

⁴ i.e. Littleferry near Golspie NH 803 957

[page 3] On again to Nairn about 11 o'clock at night where we had to wait a long time before the ferry boat got off to us. Put out a deal of stuff. Got an steam again for Cromarty where we arrived about 2 o'clock on Thursday morning.

Cromarty is beautifully situated but is not interesting. Had some conversation with a Mr (???) a Ross-shire farmer a very interesting person. Arrived (?) at Invergordon about 4 o'clock in the morning of Thursday, a very beautiful morning. I may mention that during the voyage we had a very delightful conversation with very intelligent gentlemen on Inverness shire. Gentleman an Elder in the Gelic Free church where he is a (???) in (???) all. A Mr Reid from (???) a sheep drover, and also Mr (???) from Liverpool and a gentleman who came from Australia after being 15 years away a native [page 4] of Invergordon. We met with the Agent of the steamer at Burghead who was an old school fellow and told him his father was dead at which he was a good deal affected. Had also chat with the Agent who is a very frank Free Respected Person – I mean the Invergordon Agent. I should have mentioned that we would be in about 2(?) hours before the *Queen* which left about an hour before us.

[page 5] Landed about 4 o'clock an Thursday morning and found a dog cart from Mr Robert MacK... (???) Bonar bridge waiting us. I felt a queer sensation after I put foot on Invergordon Quay as it was nearly 17 years since I crossed the Ferry there before a[nd?] there was a great many people on the quay and there was 3 carts from the Parish of Creich there waiting on persons going there, but they were on the *Queen* Steamer which would be about two hours behind us. We took Hugh Graham along with us in the cart as he was going to a place above Migdale⁵ called (?)

We left Invergordon about 5 o'clock after partaking of a little whisky and enjoyed the drive very much as the morning was beautiful only that we were a little sleepy. Called on MacPherson on the Stru(?)⁶ who would not admit my family 3 years ago when passing the way but found that he had left and that it was [page 6] a son that was in the House. Gave the horse corn and a drink and left again. Met only three on the road and 2 farmers going to the Inverness wool market.

What a sensation it created in my breast when I got my first view of Dun Creich and Sp(inn)ingdale and the whole coast to Dornoch. There is no one can have any idea of it but one that has been a long time absent from his native country every thing looked beautiful enjoying the scenery much and knew every hill as we came in sight.

Arrived Bonar about 8 o'clock where we met my sister Janet who was waiting us from 5 o'clock in the morning as grandmother would not let her come home until we arrived as she was afraid of something ???? ???? ??? ??

I need not describe my feelings when I landed at Bonar Village. [page 7] Mr MacK--- (?) sent his machine with us to Inch(?) in Airdens⁷ and we left our trunk there and Janet sent Donald

⁵ NH 628 921

⁶ ?? Likely Struie. There's a fine viewpoint at NH 652 857 looking over to Dun Creich etc

⁷ Airdens NH 622 937

MacKay with the cart for it and we walked home and met Grand Father and Grand Mother at the end of the house waiting. It was about 9 o'clock when we arrived – got some breakfast and talked away for a while. I then had a turn through the Farm where we found things very much improved. Crops and cattle looking nice (well?).

I was sorry to see Grand Father much reduced but still smart and his memory as good and as sound as ever it was and can speak on any subject. Grand Mother was looking much better than I expected to see her. She looked as she always did, clean and neat and smart. She says that her feet fails her but I saw no symptoms of that as she was very active the time we were there. She was disappointed that she could not get George to take more meat. Went to bed [page 8] early we were tired and slept soundly until 7 o'clock next morning when Grand Mother had breakfast ready for us and after partaking of it very heartily we started to the bridge on the river near to the end of Loch Laggan⁸ where the Gig was to meet(?). We did not require to wait very long when it arrived.

The morning was very misty so we had no view any distance, but we had a good road, and on went up to Loch Buie⁹, and than along side of it until we came to Broie¹⁰. There was in my young days a very kind shepherd at Loch Buie of the name Munro but there was neither house nor man there now that we could see with the mist so on we went.

Braie is a beautiful spot. We saw the trees that Mr John Matheson of Kirn Park Dunoon¹¹ planted when he was a boy and having ??? of the ruin of the house where he was born and also Grand Mother.¹² We felt grieved that there was nothing there but sheep now. It was a beautiful spot. We left the place with a sore heart at it being such a beautiful spot under sheep.

[page 9] We continued an through Torboll¹³. It is a beautiful spot i never saw a prettier spot than it. We had some talk with an old man that we met with on the Road. He knew some of our friends(?) and knew that it was Mr Matheson that planted the trees. We then continued our rout until we came in sight of Morvich¹⁴ and Mound¹⁵ and Drynoch¹⁶ and some other places that I did not know the names of. On going along to the Mound George had a chase after a rabbit but did not catch it.

After arriving at The Mound I was so grieved and vexed at the desolation that I saw through the beautiful country we had travelled that we could not think of going to visit the Castle of the Family that caused such ruin to such fine country where were found the brave men that

⁸ NH 641 956. Loch an Lagain at NH 659 956 on old 6-inch map

⁹ NH 656 984

¹⁰ Elsewhere Brea: believed to be the ruined croft near the broch marked at NH 704 988

¹¹ John Matheson, Donald Murray's uncle, the author of two other autobiographical notebooks

¹² Ann Matheson Murray

¹³ Torboll NH 752 989

¹⁴ NC 754 008

¹⁵ NH 778 983

¹⁶ Uncertain, but hill An Dróighneach at NC 719 007

never turned there back on a Foe and if the country had been left peopled instead of sheep Britan would have been in possession of Sebastopol er this time. These were my thoughts as when getting along to the road that leads to Golspie. So that I could [page 10] go any further so I turned and entered ??? Strath Fleet. Passed Morvich and came to Put Thrail¹⁷ where Robert Matheson lives. His sister was married to my Uncle William that was at Earltown, Pictou¹⁸, North America, and whose Family lives there still. We called for Mr Matheson but found he went to Lairg to the Communion. Came along a beautiful road and scenery. Passing the Free Church manse and they are both very neat(?) buildings and stand on as fine a spot as in the Parish. I am told that the church contains about 1000 and that it is full on the Sabbath when the weather is anything fine.

We passed on until we came to Blairach¹⁹ and called for Hugh Murray, an old workman but he had also gone to Lairg to the Communion. Blairach is a lovely spot, and there is a fine house building for one Hall who is the tenant of a large sheep farm there.

[page 11] Opposite Blairich is Rossall²⁰ where once stood the mill and there lived one of the happiest and respectable and most hospitable families in the Parish of Rogart. The mill is levelled to the ground and so is the house. The family that lived there in my boyhood days are all I believe in America now and have mills there. John and Neil MacKay have each a mill about Earltown Nova Scotia America and have brought up very respectable families. I believe that each four sons coming out as ministers of the Free Church in Halifax College. I have heard it said that when John Mackay and William Murray my uncle left the country for America that they did not have 2 men like them in the Parish, but I am happy to learn that they did well and have each brought up a respectable families. "A nephew of John Murray was in Rutherglen in 1867 a Mr Mac???"²¹

I passed on from there with a heavy heart to Muie²², and came to the spot at the east end of Muie where I spent a winter at school and where at [page 12] play one day a William MacKay and a young man of the name of Murray from Rossall and some one or two others and myself loosed a large stone out of the brae face and rolled it down the Brae until it rested on the road and we got a fright about as the people and especially Alexander my Uncle made us believe that we would be sent to prison, but we got some assistance and got it rolled off the road. I stopped for a while and looked at the spot.

Muie is a lovely spot. We came on to the miller's house and loosed the horse where I left the gig and took the horse over to Achaily²³ to where my Grand Father and Mother lived and where I spent many happy days and where lived as respectable a family as was in the country. My Uncle Alexandar lives there now. He was expecting us and was looking out for

¹⁷ Pittentrail NC 722 022

¹⁸ Nova Scotia

¹⁹ Blarich NC 692 042

²⁰ Rossal NC 687 035

²¹ *This phrase a later insertion*

²² NC 672 043

²³ Acheilidh NC 663 038

us and he soon got his eye on us and John his son almost jumped over to meet us. We were very [page 13] kindly received by my uncle and his wife and family they were like to kill us with kindness in viewing(?) the old house, It brought many old associations to my recollection. I observed the bed on which I slept many a night between my two uncles, and also the Wright Shop in which my Grand Father and Uncle William used to work and where I received many marks of kindness from other members of the family that are no more such as Aunt Jennet who married John of Lairg and also Ann who went to America. I could not enjoy myself as I otherwise would of thinking on old friends who are dead and scattered abroad. Uncle Sandy seems very fortunate in having got such an industrious well-doing wife. She is really a very superior person. The family seems all well-doing especially those that have grown up of them. So after partaking of a sumptuous dinner George and I left about 3 o'clock towards Lairg, viewing the place where George Mackay was [page 14] lived previous to coming to Glasgow the name I cannot mind at present.

We then came on to where I was born myself. Roin²⁴ a beautiful spot but there was only the ruins of the walls of the house standing or rather to be seen. I spent fully an hour about the place when a great many old friends appeared before me as fresh as it was yesterday. I also passed the spot where Mr Gordon lived whose daughter married a Mr Balfour and whose son is now Free Church Minister at East Kilbride. Went on still(?) our way to Lairg. Saw no one in Roine but 3 masons building a shepherd's house. Passed a well on the road where I used to get a drink out at when young and coming to and from Lairg with my Father and Mother.

Lairg is very much improved in farming and also in houses. The houses are much more comfortable than they were in my young days. [page 15] We arrived at the inn without meeting with anything particular or worth noticing, only a beggar woman who asked charity from as who told us she was often attending the preaching at the Free church being the fast day ?? ????? the Free Church but when we enquired for the Parish Minister she began to praise him and run down the Free Church Party.

After leaving the horse at the Inn(?) we went down to where the Minister was preaching and there found in a beautiful spot opposite the River Shin and also opposite the Free Church manse and a large number of people assembled to whom Mr McLeod(?) of Rogart was preaching. It brought to my mind at once the scene that Mr Hugh Miller describes of a Highland communion. The appearance of the women with their beautiful white clean mutes and white napkins about their heads It was really a treat to see them. We remained until the service was over and then met Alx Murray from Acheily [page 16] my cousin and Hugh Murray from Blairich went up to the inn and had a glass of whisky. Some talk about auld lang syne with Hugh Murray. We parted and after they left George and I went and called on the Parish Minister my old friend Reverend Torchal (?) Matheson who received us very kindly and I had a friendly chat for a few hours and also the best tea we got in the county. We then left him against his will, he conveying us down as far as the village.

²⁴ Rhaoine NC 648 051

We left next morning about 7 o'clock and drove down along the river by Achany²⁵ until we came to Shin and Invershin.

When we put up our horse in Mr Young's stables who received us very kindly and ordered one of his men to put a sloop across the river in the fishing coble as we were going to Baddarach²⁶ to visit my brother-in-law Donald Rose and his family. The day was warm and hot(?) and both George and myself very tired before we reached the House, and to our great disappointment [page 17] found my sister²⁷ was away to Lairg to the Sacrament but Donald Rose was exceedingly kind and his daughter Ann made ready some breakfast for us and some salmon of which we took a very hearty meal since we were hungry by the time we arrived at Baddarach. The children seemed clean and tidy and everything in good order both out of the house and in the house. The crops look well and so did the cattle and horses. After resting ourselves Donald saddled two horses for us and we rode to Invershin again himself and his son Donald accompanying us to the ferry. We found a man ready to put the horse in the gig. It was very kind of Mr Young to put up our horse and take nothing for his trouble.

We then rode on the road to Bonar Village, but I can safely say that I observed more change for the better on that road than I have seen anywhere in the country. The hills above Meikle²⁸ is all planted and the wood is all growing to a great height since I left the country. [page 18] Meikle is really a beautiful place. I was really struck with its beauty more than any part I saw in the country and I well remembered some kind families that used to be there and also some school companions which are scattered through all parts of the world. We arrived at Bonar about 3 o'clock tired and a little wet but well pleased with all we saw and met with.

Mr MacKenzie and Jim R??? told us that a gig (?) and traveller a Mr Allan, a native of Rutherglen, had just left Bonar about ½ hour before we arrived. We then rested in Mr MacKenzie's house and sent (?) for William MacKay tailor at Rowbreak(?)²⁹ and had some excellent whisky and water from Mr MacKenzie and some conversation about our schoolboy days after which George and I proceeded on our way to Asdale and called on our way at Andrew MacKay's³⁰ house and got some dinner and had some pleasant conversation. Then proceeded on our way home which we reached about 8 o'clock on Saturday night well [page 19] pleased with our excursion.

²⁵ NC 567 019

²⁶ Badarach NH 525 981

²⁷ Annie

²⁸ Meikle NH 599 940 (different from Meikle Ferry)

²⁹ Uncertain: there's Breakwell at the head of Loch Migdale NH 631 918 and Ribreak NH 697 837 near Edderton

³⁰ Footnote by original transcriber 'Husband of Elspeth MacKay at Lonachuan' Lonachuan unknown but likely Achuan NH 623 951

Went to church on Sabbath with William MacKay and Grandfather³¹ and heard Mr Kennedy of Rosehall³² peach a Gaelic and an English sermon. There was a very large attendance but very few that I knew of the whole congregation but there was some old familiar faces that I could not mistake. Walked home again and got dinner and spent the evening in reading and talking.

Monday went over to Ardgay³³ to see Mr Ross and called at Bonar again. Came home and had dinner in Alex Calder's house³⁴ and spent the evening fighting our battles over again. Went home and spent the night at Asdale.

Tuesday went to the market at Bonar where I saw a number of horses and cows and also a number of people I had not seen for seventeen years. I was like to be drowned with drinking and whisky. Walked home with [page 20] along with Sandy my Uncle and his two sons and some others. Got dinner and then Sandy and his sons went away home. Hugh Murray was also there.

Spent the whole of Wednesday with my Father and Mother³⁵. There was a number of old friends visited us such as Cornal(?) Munro and Hugh MacKay, Mack and Rob Big³⁶. Had tea at night with our neighbour John MacKenzie and his family where we were very kindly entertained.

We left again on Thursday for Glasgow. We left my Father's house about 2 o'clock and walked to Bonar, and George and Donald MacKay with our luggage in a cart to Bonar. On my way down I called at Achuan and then at Andrew Mackay's house³⁷ then on taking the old road at Airdens the burn was so large that I could not get across. George Logan the wright(?) in Airdens caught one of his horses and I got on the back of it and got across [page 21] the burn then went away down to Tulloch³⁸ and called on Donald Matheson then went from there to Bonar and meeting George and Donald MacKay and spending a few minutes in drinking the health of a few old friends and shaking hands with them we got into Mr MacKenzie's gig and set off for Invergordon where we arrived without meeting with anything worth mentioning about 9 o'clock on Friday night. We enjoyed the drive exceedingly well. We got some excellent salmon and tea and a sound sleep in MacKenzie's Inn at Invergordon and we saw two small whales out of a hundred and fifty that was driven on shore about a mile from Invergordon. George got a piece of the skin of one of them.

³¹ John Murray

³² NC 469 022

³³ NH 599 904

³⁴ Achuan

³⁵ i.e. John Murray and Ann Matheson

³⁶ Sounds like translation from Gaelic 'Rob Mór'

³⁷ Lonachuan

³⁸ NH 610 927

I forgot to mention that George had a little black dog he got from George Murray my cousin and a hen he got from his aunt Jennet along with him and brought them [page 22] safe to Rutherglen.

We got on board the Mortello steamer about 6 o'clock on Friday morning. It was a beautiful morning and we enjoyed the scenery exceedingly well. The shores of Cromarty and the Sutors³⁹ that Hugh Miller of the Witness⁴⁰ describes. The steamer was very much crowded with luggage. A deal of confusion but the weather was fine and George was not very sick. We landed at Granton about 9 o'clock on Saturday morning and got the train for Glasgow at 11 o'clock and arrived home in Rutherglen at ¼ past 1 o'clock on Saturday 21 July 1855 being about 11 days absent from home, We found everything as well as we could have wished them and we enjoyed ourselves exceedingly well the whole time we were away. The country was beautiful and everything looked well and the people kindly.

³⁹ Sutor Stacks NH 806 675

⁴⁰ The Witness – 'An Fhianuis' Gaelic periodical of the Free Church of Scotland

[page 23] 2nd Tour to Sutherlandshire and back again in August 1859

Left Rutherglen in company with Alexander my youngest son on Tuesday morning. Took train to Wishaw⁴¹ and waited there until the train for the North arrived. which was one hour behind its time. Went on then to Stirling and Perth, found when we arrived at Perth that the North Train was away ½ hour before we arrived so that we had to wait there until 5 o'clock in the afternoon when we set off again for Aberdeen where we arrived at ¼ past 9 o'clock evening. After some searching got James stopping with a Railway Guard, a friend of Mr Findlay. We stopped all night in Crackshank Hotel. Met at breakfast with Mr John Graham of Turner's Barrhead **[page 24]** and joined us in the train. Went with us to Burghead where we got a Heather Bell steamer for Little Ferry, Mr Graham accompanying us the whole time. The steamer was small and rolled much of the way very uncomfortably. She(?) landed us very well in good time. We left Aberdeen at 8 in the morning and arrived at Little Ferry about 5 o'clock p.m. Took the carr to the inns at Golspie where Mr Graham gave as our dinner. He stopped there all night as he was to go next morning to Altnahara by the mail gig which was to leave in the morning for Lairg. We were much(?) delighted with Mr Graham's company.

I met with the Revd Mr McDonald, Free Church minister at Helmsdale on board the steamer and a Mr McIntosh from Rogart and was much pleased with their conversation. **[page 25]** We left Mr Graham at the inn where we dined as they could not give as good beds and we went to Mrs ????? inn where we got excellent(?) beds and every accommodation that we could wish. Mr. L----- son kept us company until bed time. After breakfast next morning we could not get a horse and gig in Golspie as they were all engaged beforehand that day being the 12th August.⁴² We were obliged to hire a horse and cart from a man of the name Alexander MacKay who drove us across the Mound and round to Spinningdale. We enjoyed the route very much. It was not the road from my boyhood days. Although it was wet in the morning it cleared up a very fine day. We made some calls on the way such as Joseph Bethune Spinningdale, Hugh Graham. **[page 26]** Discharged MacKay near Spinningdale well pleased. We arrived home at my father's house about 7 o'clock p.m. Found my sister Mrs MacKay⁴³ milking the cows.

Remained at home until Wednesday the following week when we left after cart to Dingwall D.M Mackay driving us with W(?) MacKay's cart. We were much pleased with the country as we passed along, the name of some beautiful places whose names I forget for instance. Matheson's Place at Ardross⁴⁴ is improving the moor land hills(?) and is building good houses on the land. Much struck (?Mud track?) with glen where the bridge crosses at Alness.

[page 27] Dingwall is a very pretty clean town and some beautiful gentlemens' seats about it. Splendid new Inn finishing(?) at the railway station. The road from Dingwall is really

⁴¹ Wishaw

⁴² i.e. start of the grouse shooting

⁴³ Janet

⁴⁴ Implies he went by what's now the scenic route over the hill to Alness

beautiful, well wooded and good deal of fruit on the road side in gardens.

...

(Two random notes)

Merry Place called ... is very beautiful.

Inverness Abbey is really pretty, and the country round it is ...

[page 28] Memoran[dum] of second⁴⁵ journey to my native country from Rutherglen.
10 July 1863

Left Rutherglen at 6 o'clock a.m. and Glasgow at ¼ to 7 for Perth 3 class and Perth 2nd to Aberdeen. 1 class Aberdeen to Keith 3 class, Keith to Inverness, Inverness to Invergordon 9 o'clock(?) at night. Stopped all night in Mr Gilchrist's Railway Inn. Coach next day to Tain 2/6. Gig from Tain to Bonar, 10/- clear of all expenses. Beautiful ride enjoyed it much. The driver to Tain was a very intelligent young man very kind and obliging. Cost of the journey going north 33/-, coming back 23/- in whole. The above expense does not include the gig from Tain to Bonar nor the gig from Bonar to Alness.

Thursday 16 July left Invergordon at 7 morning and arrived Aberdeen at 4 o'clock p.m.

[page 29] Left Aberdeen at ¼ to 5 o'clock for Perth. Stopped at Perth all night and started by the first train in the morning for Glasgow and arrived. in Glasgow at ½ past 9 o'clock a.m. Got beautiful weather the whole way, enjoyed the trip very much. I could have been back in Glasgow on Thursday if I had taken the first class from Aberdeen to Perth at 4 o'clock but I found that I was cheaper to stop at Perth all night than to do that so I remained all night at Perth in the Railway Inn, charge very moderate.

The new line of railway now through the Highlands curtails the distance and appears you do not require to go to Aberdeen which will be a saving of expenses and a pleasant drive in summer.

Here ends the diary of Donald Murray. He died in 1872, the cause of death stated to be apoplexy.

⁴⁵ Third?