

Every old house has a history. It may be only a name, older than the building itself but associated with the traditions of previous owners. We inherited the tradition that Ospisdale had originally been the Bishop's Rest House, a shelter for poor travellers. In old documents the name is, almost invariably written "Hospisdale", and when abroad I saw "Hospisdale" written on a board pointing to a hut where walkers or climbers could find shelter, it had a very familiar look. However, an expert in the history of place names would not accept this derivation. I quote a letter from Dr. Nicholson of the School of Scottish Studies in answer to an enquiry made through the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland, in which he says - "Though he knows of J.B. Johnston's suggestion that a 14th century spelling 'Hospostyl' indicates a connection with hospital, he finds the 's' before 'tyl' difficult in this connection and inclines to the alternative Norse etymology of personal name plus "dalr". There is a similar place name in Norway 'Ospisdalen'. I found this hard to believe, and yet, in 1832, a Norse grave was broken open by the plough and a 'tortoise' brooch and part of a steatite bowl were recovered from the grave in a field to the ^{east} ~~west~~ of the lodge. These are now in the Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh, the safest place for them. This was a woman's grave. A Norse man might die, or be killed, and buried where he lay, but a woman buried with her ornaments and an offering is evidence of a settled domestic existence nine hundred years ago.

It is a long step forward from the days of Norse settlers to the Earldom of Sutherland and the Bishops of Caithness. In 1275, William, Earl of Sutherland entered into an agreement with Archibald, Bishop of Caithness, whereby that portion of the district known on the north side of the Dornoch Firth (known as Ferrin coskarrie was conveyed to the Bishop. Subsequently the Bishops either surrendered Ferrin coskarrie, or were deprived of that part of their possessions, for in 1322 King Robert the Bruce conveyed Ferrin coskarrie within the Earldom of Sutherland, to the Earl of Ross. Sir Robert Gordon, in his history of Sutherland says that these lands included Crieach, which subsequently belonged to that mysterious and romantic character, Paul MacTyre, whose only daughter married ~~Alexander Ross~~ 3rd of Balnagown. Thus we/
Walter 3rd of Balnagown

we find that in 1549 Alexander 9th of Balnagown, conveyed to John Grey of Calrossie, the lands of Hospitel.

Miss Williamson Ross, who was descended from the Rosses of Balnagown, and the last hereditary Chief of the Clan Ross, sent me a pedigree of the Greys. She quotes the Charter of 1549 to John Grey of Calrossie followed by a Charter of 1565 from the Bishop of the lands of Skibo. Sir Robert Gordon says that the Greys were descended from a second son of Lord Grey of Foulls "who was constrained to leave that pairt of the kingdom for killing the Constable of Dundee". * He came north and settled in Ross-shire about 1456. Sir Robert says that John Grey of Culmailly Kirkton was the first of the Greys to hold land in Sutherland. "He exchanged Culmailly for Swordale and Creich and the rest of the church lands which the Greys do now possess in the parish of Crieck". John Grey died in 1586 and in that year Alexander Ross of Balnagown gave a Charter to Neil Augusson and his wife Agnes Ross, of the "Tower and toun of Ospisdail in the Earldom of Ross and the Sherifffdom of Inverness in consideration of certain sums of money paid by Neil at the making of the contract, for payment of one panny annually".

Alexander Ross died in 1592, and was succeeded by his son George, 10th of Balnagown. Gilbert Grey, son of John Grey, received an Instrument of Sasine of the lands of Ospisdalein, signed by George Ross in 1602. He also held the lands of Skibo. When he died in 1624, he had, during his lifetime, bestowed the lands of Ospisdale on his second son Robert Grey. It was Robert Grey of Ospisdale who had a quarrel with Angus MacKenneth McAllister, who was tenant of the lands of Ardinch. Angus had succeeded his father as tenant of the lands, but in one of those complicated operations which involved the holding of land against debts, McAllister's rent was raised; but he refused to pay more than his father paid. Removed from the land, he took refuge in Strathnaver and from there he carried on a feud with those who endeavoured to occupy the lands from which he had been ejected. He had murdered fourteen people when on May 1st 1605, with a band of friends as lawless as himself, he made a raid on Ospisdale during the absence of Robert Grey. They set fire to the wtables and killed some of Grey's cattle. For punishment of these crimes Robert/

* The Earl afterwards named his Heretable Constable of the Castle of Skibo and gave him the feu of the land of Nether Skibo & others. Scottish Antiquary 1893. P.182 appendix G.

Robert Grey obtained a Commission against Angus McKenneth, and with the help of some men sent by the Earl of Sutherland, he pursued him into Strathnaver and killed him at the Cruiffs of Hoip. Even to-day MacAllister's crimes are not altogether forgotten. His story was told to me by one of the Airdens tenants - Walter Chisholm whose people had been settled on the place for a long time. He said MacAllister used to sit on a stone in the burn and from there he threw divots and stones on to the roof of the house. When the occupants came out in alarm he shot them with arrows from his bow. The last of his victims was a man called Finlay Logan. It must have been a descendant of this man, another Finlay Logan, who held a croft on Airdens in 1797. There were still Logans on Airdens in 1913. Now their croft is ruinous and descendants of the Logans live in Ross-shire. Nevertheless a local tradition has survived for over 300 years.

Robert Grey of Ospisdale married Bessie Gordon of Sidera, the Cyder Hall of to-day. In 1625 he purchased Crieich from the Munros of Foulis who had held it since 1525. Robert Gray and Bessie Gordon had three sons. Alexander, the eldest, inherited Ospisdale and Creich. In 1648 he bought Over Skibo from his nephew, another Robert Grey. Robert Grey of Ospisdale died in 1649. At that time different members of the Grey family held the lands of Swordly, Skibo, Creich, Ospisdale and Ardens. The boundaries of these various properties never seem to have been very distinct, and when the properties passed into other hands, this was the cause of a bitter lawsuit in the early years of the 19th century.

In the Civil War the Greys were on the side of the Covenanters and they were followers of John, 13th Earl of Sutherland who was a great supporter of the Covenant when convenient to his schemes for increasing his estates. In 1645 Robert Gray of Bellon, afterwards of Skibo, was commissioned by the Scottish Parliament to uplift the rents of malignants in the sherrifdom of Sutherland. This appointment provided a rich source of fines on Royalists, notably on Lord Reay and his family. Between 1649 and 1656, the Earl of Sutherland received large grants of Mackay lands in which the Grays shared. The Earl had planted a garrison in Strathnaver, and in 1649 a force of Gordons and Grays took possession/

possession of Tongue House. Robert Gray received a Decreet of apprising to the lands of Edderachillis on the 27th December 1649, A Charter from the Earl of Sutherland on 15th March 1650 and a second Charter to Edderachillis in 1655. Robert Gray disposed his title in Edderachillis to Sir Ludovick Gordon of Gordonstoun in 1673 and Sir Ludovick passed it to his son in 1677. Finally, in 1680, the lands of Edderachillis were redeemed by Colonel Hugh Mackay of Scourie on payment of 8,000 merks. This was part of the settlement of the Mackay estates by General Munro of Culrain whose daughter Ann was married to the heir of the Mackays.

After the Restoration of 1660, the Grays may have fallen on hard times like many another family that had benefitted under the parliaments of the Covenant. A John Gray, prisoner in the Cannongate, was released on bail in August 1680. The Privy Council minuted on the 15th May 1682, 'King's advocate to raise a process of treason against Robert Gray, prisoner in the Cannongate'.

Among my old papers is a Bond of Provision of a Robert Gray, Commissary of Sutherland said to have died 1724, who owned both Ospisdale and Airdens. It is dated 1716. It states that Sir Ludovic Gordon of Gordonstoun had 'ane right and disposition' granted to him by Alexander Gray of Crieich, of the lands of Ardinh on the 16th day of July 1677, and this right he disposed of to his son, Sir Robert Gordon, younger, in 1678. In the same year Sir Robert Gordon sold and disposed to Mr Robert Gray the lands of Ardinh.

A wadset of the lands of Hospisdail of 4,000 merks was held by Thomas Lindsay, later Baillie of Cromarty. This was taken over by Alexander Clunes of Dunskaith in 1671. Alexander Clunes was married to Bessie, second daughter of Alexander Gray by his first wife Isobel Bayne of Logie. This was another case of land being handed about between different members of the same family, and Robert Gray seems to have bought up this wadset too. His signature on the Provision is shaky, as if he were an old man.

It is confusing that a "Provision" was made by another Robert Gray, 5th of Skibo, who was married to Isabel Munro, third daughter of Sir George Munro of Newmore. The Scottish preference for naming children after their nearest relatives can cause problems when/

when family links have been lost or are only possible to those who can make their researches in the Register House of Edinburgh.

Robert Gray of Skibo died about 1714. Robert Gray of Ospisdale signed his Provision in 1716. The estate he left was much smaller than that of his relative of Skibo. His eldest daughter, Janet, was to inherit 1,000 merks Scots money, but his younger daughter, Sarah Dobbie, would receive only 500 merks. Not a very large sum on which to eke out old age, but all these daughters seem to have married. Life was short for many in those days and marriage a dangerous vocation when too many children were born in conditions that placed the mother's life at risk.

The exact date of the death of Robert Gray the Commissary of Sutherland, is not known, but the next owner of Ospisdale, Airdens and Creich was another Robert Gray. He was the eldest son of a nephew of James Gray of Pitach-gussie the Commissary and his spouse Elizabeth Munro. These Grays are shadowy figures. We know nothing of them, only that by that curious Highland custom by which a man took his name from the land he owned, Robert Gray was known as "Airdens", even though there is no trace on Airdens of any old building bigger than the usual hovel that housed the small tenants of these old estates.

Sir Robert Gordon gives a list of the principal houses standing in his day, of which Ospisdale is among the last four. The Charter of 1568 granted by Alexander Ross of Balnagown to Neil Augusson, grants 'the tower and toun of Ospisdail'. Perhaps as far back as the 16th century Ospisdale was indeed one of these thick walled little towers, capable of putting up some defence against unfriendly callers. Traces of such a building can be seen at Proncy and on the Shin where a shallow depression that could once have been a ditch surrounds the foundations of a building completely overgrown by turf. At Ospisdale a thick wall, once the outside wall of the house before the extra room on the left-hand side was built on to it, might be the wall of such a building. When the harling on the front of the house was removed about the middle of the 19th century, a tiny window was uncovered near the front door. Evidence that callers who might not be welcome could be inspected from within before being admitted.

The oldest existing map of Ospisdale is dated 1705. This shows/

1715

shows an oblong building - the house with two smaller buildings in front. One of these buildings was the kitchen and all the food cooked for the laird and his family had to be carried across a courtyard. This arrangement was not unusual in old Highland houses. Donald Sage, son of the Minister of Kildonan, describes the old manse there "where two low buildings stretched out in front from each end of the manse - that to the west contained the nursery, the kitchen and the byre. The left hand building contained the barn and stable.

This map shows unmistakably that the Altgarve burn had already been straightened. Considering all one reads about the state of Highland agriculture in the 18th century, this was a wonderful effort at land reclamation. Formerly the Altgarve had wandered through the rough pasture and primitive fields of the old Pulrossie farm. Since the burn was straightened it has formed the boundary between Pulrossie and Ospisdale.

If we could step back in time to the days when this map was drawn, the scene would still be recognisable. The Altgarve burn tumbling down the hill to the west of the house. The enclosure marked 'barns' where the farm buildings stand to-day at the edge of the big field in front of the house. On the eastern side the 'big stone' is marked standing on land not yet in cultivation. This was probably the original site, but its age is unknown. Could it have been a landmark for a road or track which crossed the burn at the spot marked 'foord' where we now cross on a bridge?

Though Robert Gray, the Commissary, had enough money to buy up the wadsets on his estate his successors were not so fortunate. Throughout the 18th century owners of Highland properties had little that contributed to their prosperity. Rents were constantly in arrears and bad harvests threw the responsibility of buying grain for seed for next year's crop on the landlord. The tenant was supposed to repay this out of his profits, but if there was another bad harvest this merely put him still further in his landlord's debt. The lean hungry cattle that survived a Scottish winter brought in little when driven to markets further south, and even then the purchasers might not be able to pay in cash, but the seller must accept a bill in lieu of the cash he himself so badly needed.

I have found many an old bill among my old papers, a proof that they were never redeemed. A widow's jointure of £25 a year from a previous owner, might be a heavy burden on a poor Highland landlord. The '15 and the '45 left a trail of ruin behind them - sequestrated estates, like Skelbo, already overwhelmed by debts that could not be paid off. A notable exception was Sir George Munro of Newmore who also owned Culrain. Sir George was a distinguished Highland soldier who has been forgotten by later generations. He commanded under Gustavus Adolphus at Lutzen and for the King in Ireland in the Civil War. From 1674 to 1678 he was Major General of the Forces in Scotland. ⁽¹⁾ By Highland standards he was a wealthy man and he owned a considerable amount of property in Ross and Sutherland. When he died in 1737, aged nearly 90, he held a wadset over Ospisdale which was inherited by his eldest son, Captain John Munro, who also owned Newmore. Captain John Munro did not intend to spend his life trying to exist on the meagre rents of a Highland estate. He wrote ⁽²⁾ "my inclinations to rise and fall in ye Army is pretty well known", but for this he needed money. He gave a wadset over Ospisdale of 8,500 merks Scots money - to the Revd. John Balfour of Nigg, for 15 years, from 1743 to 1758. Later, in 1745, he wrote William Baillie of Rosehall, factor for Balnagown "to dispose of every four-footed beast on my small farms and estate". During these years it seems that Robert Gray went to live at Creich. He was a Writer to the Signet, but as a lawyer he was far from prosperous. A bundle of old accounts shows such a complication of claims and debts, involving so many Sutherland land owners that it seems profitless to try to follow them. Among many names appearing in these accounts, that of Sir John Gordon of Embo occurs frequently. Sir John was another of these poor highlanders who could not meet their debts during their lifetime and left their heirs penniless.

It is unfortunate that another much larger map than the one drawn in 1705 has no date on it. It has a decorative title "A MAP OF THE LANDS OF HOSPIDALE BELONGING TO ROBERT GRAY ESQ. OF AIRDENS", and includes his Coat of Arms, a Lion Rampant. This map shows the whole estate with the very large fir wood planted over the hill at the back of the house. This wood was cut about 1850 and was then known to be over 80 years old. But a few of these/

(1) Tain & Balnagown Documents.

these old trees survived into the 20th century - trees tall as a shipmast, with thick bark, showing what a fine tree a Scots Fir is, when allowed to grow to maturity, - very different to the skinny poles of a Forestry Commission plantation.

The house on this map is a two storey building, with a window on either side of the front door. A garden called the New Garden is shown rather below that of the earlier map. But the most distinctive change is the wide avenue flanked by a double row of trees stretching across the park in front of the house right down to the Aldgarve burn which is here marked 'bridge' where the ford used to be. Two of these trees survived till after the first War - one of them an enormous sycamore. It showed that some of the big trees round about the house dated from those far-off days of the Grays. Such extensive planting must have entailed a great deal of expense even taking into consideration wages in the mid-eighteenth century were about 6d a day. But it is surprising that, in 1774, Robert Gray as 'put to the Horn' and made a bankrupt for the small sum of £29:13:9d, claimed by a Glasgow merchant who had supplied an outfit for a son of George Mackay of Sidera who was going to America. Robert Gray had stood surety for this outlay and it seems strange that George Mackay, who had considerable success in growing flax for a small spinning industry, should not have met the expense himself.

For Robert Gray the bankruptcy was ruin. Other creditors tried to seize the estates, and though he fought them off for a time, the end came in 1783, when the whole estate was put up for sale. Ospisdale and Airdens were bought by Dugald Gilchrist who had been the principal Factor for the Sutherland Estates for 40 years. He had now retired and lived at Loth.[?] Creich too, passed into other hands, but the price received for these estates did not clear the whole of the debt.

Penniless, Robert Gray went to Proncy, the farm held by his father-in-law, James Sutherland a descendant of the Sutherlands of Duffus. There, on 24th February 1784, he died. A letter from Dugald Gilchrist to a John Gray who lived in London, written after the death of Robert Gray, shows how tragic was the fate of a bankrupt in 18th century Scotland. The letter is torn and the date/

date is missing, but Dugald wrote "the property was seized ...
 "a factor was appointed by the Court of Session, called Ranson.
 "When the debts remained unpaid Hanson took legal steps". In
 "consequence Robert Gray was removed from Ospisdale. At Whit-
 "suntide 1783 all his effects, of every kind, were sold by public
 "roup for payment of these debts. He, being thus reduced to the
 "most distressed situation having no place to go to for himself
 "and his family, nor any means for their support ..."

This John Gray sent a draft of £30 to Robert Gray which enabled
 him to buy "some necessities of which he stood much in need".
 After his death his widow and two children seem to have lived at
 Proncy, but the farm was removed from her as she was said not to
 be capable of managing it.

Robert Gray of Ospisdale and Airdens was the last of the
 Grays to hold land in Sutherland. The last Gray of Skibo was
 Robert Gray, son of George Gray and Elizabeth Munro, daughter of
 Sir George Munro of Newmore. Robert Gray succeeded his father in
 1737 but a disastrous family lawsuit so ruined the estate he
 resigned it to Sir Patrick Dowall who had defended him but whose
 expenses were so great he had no other way to meet them. Robert
 Gray then went back to the army in which he already held a Commission.
 He died at Staten Island while on active service in 1776. The
 only relic of the Grays in Sutherland to-day is the ruinous Chapel
 or enclosure in the old graveyard at Creich. Broken, with a mass
 of ivy growing on one wall it has the most desolate look. Inside
 there is a small tablet on the north wall with the arms of the
 Grays and an inscription stating that the Grays of Creich were
 buried in this Chapel from 1625 to 1767.

The purchase by Dugald Gilchrist of Ospisdale and Airdens made great changes in the management of the estate. Dugald had been principal factor for the Sutherland estate since 1740, and he had seen a gradual rise in the population without any improvement in the conditions of the small tenants who could wring only a bare living from the land. He was one of the Commissioners of Supply for the county of Sutherland - the 18th century equivalent of a County Council. Commissioners were responsible for collecting the taxes paid to the government; for Rogue Money i.e., the search for and arrest of criminals or 'rogues'; for the care of the Tolbooth or County Jail; for the repairs to the roads; and for the payment of awards for the destruction of foxes and eagles. Even maniacs, if violent, came under their care. After the death of Sir John Gordon in 1779, Dugald Gilchrist succeeded him as Collector of Supply - a post equivalent to the more high-sounding title of Director of Finance preferred by our bureaucracy to-day. The Commissioners met regularly, usually in the Tolbooth in Dornoch where provision was made for their 'entertainment' which included a very moderate amount of wine. This was not extravagance as neither tea nor coffee were part of the daily fare of our ancestors in the 18th century.

Dugald had the Tack of Loth Beg and he continued to live there in a house built for him by the estate. There he was at a convenient distance from his greatest friends, the Gordons of Carrol, who lived at Kintradwell. He let Ospisdale, the house, garden and farm to William Munro of Achany, a descendant of the 14th Baron of Foulis, who, like others of the Clan Munro, owned a considerable amount of property in Sutherland. William Munro's father, Hugh Munro, died in 1781. In 1783 William Munro married Catherine, daughter of David Ross of Calrossie, Sheriff-Substitute of Ross. William's widowed mother was still living at Achany and most likely the young people wanted a home of their own.

From letters between Dugald and William Munro which have survived, it is evident that the house was badly in need of repair. A long list, dated 1784, gives a list of charges for repairs; it includes such items as: -

To cash paid George Logan to a new door
for the kitchen, with bands & staples 8... 3d.

To Andrew Leslie for glazing a window in
the/

the low room & several panes for others: 12. 6d.
To 3 timber windows for garret and kitchen 3. 0
To paid Donald Munro, wright, from Tain for flooring a closet, 3 steps, stairs & mending the low room floor in different places 18. 0
To Donald Munro for thatching the house..	£3. 10.0
To cash paid Donald Mackay for building a barn; The mason work	£2. 5. 6
To cash paid John Munro, Smith, for repairing locks & several keys. Airdens having left few in or about the house 5. 9d.
To two large strong doors for the new barn, with bands & hinges, staples & door cases, etc. 13. 4d.

Even by 18th century prices, £3:10/- for thatching the roof seems moderate, although the heather used was cut from the hill above the house and so cost nothing. The rent for Ospisdale, house, garden and farm, was £50 a year, plus a share of the stipend of the Minister of Griech, and the rates levied by the Commissioners of Supply for the County of Sutherland. Achany, as William Munro was always called, also farmed his own estate. He had the tack of Gruids, and until it was purchased by George Dempster in 1786, Achany had, for some years, the farm of Pulrossie.

Not only was the house of Ospisdale in a bad state of repair, it had also to be furnished. For this the house of Achany was drawn on, and Achany supplied some very good furniture - Chippendale chairs, four-poster beds, hall chairs of oak with the crest - a dove with an olive branch in its beak - painted on the backs. Long afterwards a pair of urn-shaped knife boxes of coloured woods were sold in Inverness. It was known that these had originally come from Achany.

The 'low room' which required plastering and whitening as well as having the floor mended, became the nursery for the children of William Munro and his wife. They had altogether twelve children, so the nursery must always have been well-stocked.

In these days the drawing-room was on the first floor, one of its two windows looked out on the garden. This room had a nice mantelpiece/

mantelpiece carved with Lord Nelson's Coat of Arms. Perhaps this relic of 18th century patriotism and its heavy old-fashioned grate have been removed; few people, perhaps, would recognise Lord Nelson's Arms.

Old Dugald Gilchrist died in his house at Loth Beg on January 1st 1797. To the end he kept his accounts and his last entry is dated December 13th 1796. Looking through the entries which run from 1770 to 1796, one sees money sent regularly to his niece Sally Gilchrist, the daughter of his half-brother the Revd. James Gilchrist, Minister of Thurso. Other names appearing are, Miss Charlotte Gordon of Embo, left almost penniless after the death of her brother, Sir John Gordon in 1779. Money was also sent to her by a brother who was in the army in Holland, and paid through Dugald. "Miss Baby Grey's account" appears regularly, sometimes it is as much as £15, or as little as £3. She seems to have had some property, perhaps a farm, but her name is not on any of the Gray pedigrees that are known. What a different world it was, yet perhaps no more secure than that which we know to-day. In 1772 an anker of rum cost £2:15/- - an anker was 10 gallons, so it was 5/6d. a gallon. In November 1778 an anker of gin cost only £1:18/-. Gin, brandy and rum were all bought in these measures. 2 lbs. of snuff cost 7/-, a leather cap 10/6d. There are many entries for tallow, used for making candles. How dark a winter's evening must have been with only tallow candles for illumination!

In December 1780, John Sutherland was paid 16/10d. for weaving 19 yards of carpet. Mrs. Shewie received 3/6d for carpet dyes. In December of the same year John Sutherland was paid 7/- for a stone of tallow. November 1st. to Willie Macpherson, for Philabeg and hose 5/6d., and on November 8th Willie Macpherson had furniture and 3yds of tartan at 5/2d - he was probably a recruit. A more tragic reminder of Highland poverty is an entry on Sept. 31st of the same year - 'To William Brebitter's widow for his coffin: 6/-.

Wages were low and there is no indication in the accounts of what they stood for. In 1780 Alex. Ross, Grieve, had £5 wages. In December of the same year, Donald Sutherland, Herd, had wages and shoes to Martinmas 1780 of 6/- only, but this almost certainly meant that he had board and lodging in the house. The Grieve would/

would probably have a small croft, or enough land to keep a family. Shoes, as an addition to wages, were entered in most cases. Usually they were priced at 3/-, sometimes 4/-. Women servants, too, received shoes in addition to wages. Even women working at the harvest were paid 1/- extra for shoes. As shoes are shown so often in the accounts they cannot have lasted very long! The shoes would be made by a travelling shoemaker, who went from house carrying with him the tools of his trade. In 1785, the first purchase of tea is entered. It came from London and cost £8: 0: 6d. At the same time some tea was bought by Captain Clunes of Crakaig at a cost of £5: 19/6d.

There is no trace of the house that Dugald Gilchrist lived in at Loth Beg. After his death, his furniture and silver were removed to Ospisdale. In his Will he had left Ospisdale and Airdens to his great-nephew the son of his nephew John Gilchrist who was also called Dugald. An interesting part of this legacy was a large collection of papers packed into six large wooden boxes. They contained old letters, accounts, much county business and a multitude of other items. These boxes were stored in one of the farm buildings of Ospisdale where they were forgotten and would have perished from neglect had not the eldest daughter of Daniel Gilchrist discovered them. She had all the boxes removed to the house where they were placed in one of the bedrooms. She spent two years of constant work going through the papers and docketting them.

For a great part of old Dugald Gilchrist's life as principal factor to the Dunrobin Estate Britain had been at war. He had seen Dunrobin occupied by a Jacobite force under the command of Lord Cromarty in 1746. He had been factor for the dequestrated estate of Skelbo for years after he had retired as factor for Dunrobin. The wars meant a constant demand for men to serve in the army and navy. The first record in his papers of men from Sutherland being drafted into a Scottish Regiment was in 1757, a company being drafted to Montgomery's Highlanders marching south. This regiment saw much service in Canada. Three Fencible regiments were raised from the Sutherland estate between 1759 and 1793. The Sutherland volunteers, raised in 1793, were so called because every man who joined them was a volunteer.. It was commanded by Col. Wemyss of Wemyss and it was reduced in 1797.

Old/

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Old Dugald's heir was only 21 when he inherited his uncle's estate. His parents died when he was still at school. His mother, Margaret Ross, was the last of the Rosses of Tollie and Achnacloich, a branch of the family of Balnagown, whose lands were granted to them by James V. in 1528. Her only brother, Captain John Ross, was in the 71st Highland Regiment, taken prisoner by the Americans when they captured the army of Lord Cornwallis at Yorktown in 1781, and held until peace was declared in 1783. Captain Ross would have tried to help his sister left badly off after the death of her husband, but he died in London not long after he had returned to England. The only other near relative of Dugald seems to have been John Mackenzie of Highfield.

It was probably old Dugald's influence that procured for his great-nephew a Commission in the Fencible Regiment raised by the Countess of Sutherland in 1793. Dugald was a Major in this regiment and after it was reduced he joined the Ross-shire militia. He was stationed at Aberdeen where, in March 1800, he married Catherine Rose a niece of William Munro of Achany. She was a youthful beauty, only 16, who handed on her looks to several of her descendants. Her father, Captain Hugh Rose of the Black Watch, died in India some years before his widow came to live in Aberdeen where her husband's family had relations - Middletons of Seaton, a family long established with a history of strong Royalish and Jacobite sympathies.

Only a few months after his marriage Dugald was ordered to Shetland where he commanded Fort Charlotte. He remained there for two years until peace was declared in 1802. His young wife did not accompany him to Shetland. Her mother was desperately ill and Catherine was probably already in the family way. In letters which have survived she describes how she would go down to the harbour every day in the hopes of seeing a ship from Shetland which might bring a letter from her husband "my dear Gilchrist" she called him, following that 18th century custom of calling your husband by his surname. She wore a red cloak and always carried his last letter in the pocket until she received another.

In the meantime, the death of old Dugald and the arrival of his heir meant that the Achany family must leave Ospisdale which had been let on a year to year basis. They had lived there for thirteen/

more

thirteen years and were loath to ~~leave~~. However, William Munro did not go back to Achany. He went to Uppat where he lived for twenty five years until his death in 1825. The Munros and Major Gilchrist and his family, counting themselves as near relatives, were very great friends.

By 1800 Major Gilchrist had taken over the estate and the farm. He installed a man called George Herkes as Grieve. Herkes sent regular reports on the work of the farm to his employer. He remained at Ospisdale for many years. His letters, beautifully written, in good English and with complete understanding of his work, show the nonsense talked about the primitive Highlanders who speak Gaelic only. In 1800 our Highlanders might speak Gaelic in the glens among themselves, but business was carried on in English. In the hundreds of documents and letters left by old Dugald Gilchrist dating from 1736 to 1797, there is only one mention of Gaelic: "that a new manager was wanted for the Inn at Brora and he must be able to speak Erse".

George Herke's farm accounts are marvels of neatness, with delightful flourishes over his signature and grumbles about the weather, the hard frost of that March 1800. He could not get on with the ploughing but the cattle and horses were all well. Major Gilchrist is said to have been the first man in Sutherland to plough with horses instead of oxen. Herkes complains that the horses found it heavy going ploughing up to Rhaivich.

Catherine Gilchrist's first child must have been born in Aberdeen, but by 1803 she and her husband were settled at Ospisdale where her second son, Daniel, was born. These two sons were followed by four daughters. The eldest, Margaret, inherited her mother's looks and was the beauty of the family. Her portrait, with golden curls beneath an enormous hat, and an elaborate dress with puffed chiffon sleeves, hung in the dining-room at Ospisdale. It must have been a good likeness since it had a strong resemblance to other members of the family, notably my own mother. Strange how a likeness survives generations, even if a family has not inherited features like the Hapsburg chin or the Duke of Wellington's nose.

It may have been the prospect of providing for his growing family, or just that he had a fund of energy, unusual in a Highland laird, but as the years went by the Major was increasingly involved/

involved in County business in addition to farming.

At Ospisdale, the Major's nearest neighbour was George Dempster, M.P. for Perth Burghs, who had purchased Skibo in 1784, and Pulrossie two years later. Dempster had family misfortunes. He had no children of his own and the loss of his brother, and his brother's child at 9 years of age, left him without an heir. He never allowed private disappointments to distract him from the main object of his life, which was to persuade the owners of Highland estates that "the first proprietor who shall adopt a proper system of encouraging the tenants in the Highlands, will add much to his own wealth and their happiness". The pamphlet I quote from was written in 1787. It included "Some thoughts on the present emigration from the Highlands" by George Dempster, Esq. He was deeply concerned, as were many others, at the tide of emigration which was sweeping the Highlands but he saw that nothing could be done to "improve the lot of the Highlanders without an improvement in the system of roads of communication". "It is not to be doubted, when once it is known that the western parts of Inverness-shire, Ross-shire, Sutherland and Caithness are still utterly inaccessible to carriages, and almost to horsemen, that the Government will adopt some system of making of roads through these countries."

A good many years were to pass before the English government took up the problem of emigration from the Highlands. Urged on by Scottish M.P.s and the owners of large Scottish estates, a Parliamentary Committee of Roads and Bridges was set up in 1801. The Commissioners employed the genius of Telford in making a general survey of the Highlands, and his Reports and recommendations enabled them to direct successfully the greatest public works yet undertaken in the North. Nevertheless, many difficulties were encountered in laying the foundations of a road system in the Highlands. There were no large contractors, such as we know to-day. Contracts were taken up by proprietors and large farmers who knew nothing of road-making themselves but made sub-contracts with masons and others who had not always sufficient knowledge of their business to avoid difficulties in the payment of their men and in collecting materials.

Major Gilchrist was one of these proprietors. With a partner called Christie who had worked for Telford in Aberdeenshire, the Major took a contract to make a new road from Tain to/

to Bonar Bridge. This he carried out successfully. Then, without Christie, who had been a very unsatisfactory partner, the Major contracted for a continuation of the new road along the Sutherland coast which had just been completed as far as Golspie. The continuation of this road was to run by Drumvie down to the Little Ferry, and from the Ferry over the hill to Evelix. The Major's bridge over the river Evelix still stands. It has been preserved as a relic of the road that first carried our ancestors in their new gigs and smart chaises along the coast. A long narrow map, hand drawn in ink, has on it a note "Road approved by County Meeting 18th August 1808". From Evelix, the road ran to Skibo, past Ospisdale and Spinningdale to Criech. As first planned, this road reached the shores of the Dornoch Firth just below Criech House, where there was a favourite crossing for cattle on their way to the markets in the south, but Telford, after a careful survey, decided on crossing the Firth at Bonar.

The first Report of the Local Committee for superintending the work on the Criech road is dated May 16th 1810. The members of the Committee, who included a Mr. Cowie representing the Commissioners, met at the side of the intended new bridge at Evelix where the contractors had proceeded "no further than the quarrying of stones for it". Proceeding westwards, for the road from Evelix to the Little Ferry was as yet hardly begun, the Committee examined the work in progress. They found fault with the foundations of the road which had too large a mixture of clay, with the road drains, which they complained were too narrow, and with the workmen who, they said, were not careful enough to separate the sand from the gravel they were laying on the surface. Finally, they objected - with some reason - to the unfortunate Mr. Cowie having taken up his residence at Golspie, at such a distance from the work in hand that his inspections could be neither frequent nor effective.

Large gangs of men were employed on the road. One wonders who were John Smith, James Fraser, Alexander Campbell and many others whose names appear on the pay rolls. Were they local men, or had they come from a distance attracted by the regular work and the wage which averaged 1/6d to 2/- a day? A typical account of the wages earned is that sent in by John Hay, Mason - For work done on the bridge over the Aultgarve burn at Ospisdale:-
April 29. 1811/

April 29. 1811. Hewing 120 feet of coping at 9d. per ft.	£4: 10/-
Time wrought at the bridge - 5 days at 3/4d	16/8d.
Two Journeymen - 3½ days at 3/-	£1: 1/-
A labourer - 2½ days at 1/6d	3/9d.

This bridge lasted until the increase in cars made it unsuitable for the traffic it carried.

Tools had to be provided for the men and local smiths were kept busy making new tools and sharpening old ones. The workmen had also to be fed. Oatmeal was the main part of their diet. For men working from Evelix to Criech it was stored at Cyder Hall, in the care of one Alexander Ross who signed himself "woodkeeper".

With so many responsibilities it might be thought that Major Gilchrist had enough on his hands, but in 1809 he took a lease of the sheep farm of Rhynie from the Sutherland estate. From old account books this farm carried about 800 ewes. The Major had also become one of the Commissioners of Supply for the County. All these activities meant that the Major must have often been away from home all day, and at home he left a young wife and two small children, a wife who had been brought up in Aberdeen where she had cousins and many friends. At Ospisdale there were no near neighbours. The nearest country house was Skibo, where there had been great changes in the last few years. George Dempster, grieved by the death of Captain Hamilton Dempster's little son whom he had hoped to make his heir, had news of an even worse disaster, the death of Captain Dempster himself. His ship, the Earl Talbot of the East Indies fleet, had been overwhelmed by a storm, with the loss of all her crew. News of this tragedy was not received until a year after it had taken place.

George Dempster then transferred Skibo to his brother's illegitimate daughter, Harriet Milton, who had recently married Colonel William Soper of the Pay Corps. Colonel Soper and his wife added the name of Dempster to their own and took up residence at Skibo. It may have been, that, finding himself the owner of a fine estate in the Highlands rather went to Colonel Soper's head, or perhaps he had a natural tendency to litigation which made him an uneasy neighbour. As long as George Dempster himself held Skibo there were no disputes about boundaries, but when Colonel Soper Dempster/

Dempster was settled in he laid claim to lands that would have completely altered the boundaries of Skibo, Ospisdale, Criech and Airdens. The argument developed into a long drawn out lawsuit, involving the Depositions of witnesses declaring where their grandfathers and even their great-grandfathers had grazed their cattle.

Where the relations between the Major and his neighbour were so difficult, it is not likely that their wives were on friendly terms. Catherine's mother must have died very shortly after her daughter's marriage and Catherine's first child was born in 1801, when she was hardly more than seventeen. Between 1801 and 1811 she had seven children. She may often have felt sick and lonely at Ospisdale, and she was still so young. Her only relations in the north were the Munros of Achany living at Uppat, twenty miles away, too far for those visits of near relations with whom there is both sympathy and understanding. By 1811, Catherine's marriage, which had seemed to promise so much happiness, had finally borken down. This story is made sadder by the harsh social conventions of the times. We know only that the children grew up without their mother, but that they seem to have been devoted to their father.

For Major Gilchrist the breakdown of his marriage meant that he had a family of six children dependant on himself alone for their upbringing. Yet he seems to have been a very successful parent. His daughters grew up elegant young women, well educated, studying music and languages. At Ospisdale there were old pictures of fine wool-work, testifying to their skill with the needle, as well as piles of music which once tinkled from the ~~spinnet~~ in their drawing-room. The education of their day was to fit them to mahage a houseful of servants and to entertain and amuse their guests. Toiling in the garden, climbing mountains sitting on Committees or organising Sales for good causes, was not expected of them. The two sons were sent to Inverness Academy where many sons of Highland lairds were educated. The eldest son was destined for the Law. Daniel, the younger, became his father's hardworking partner in his extensive farming interests.

But apart from family troubles, the Major's business contracts had to be honoured. The Criech road was completed as far as Bognar/

Bonar and Telford's graceful bridge across the Kyle was opened in 1812. It delighted the people of Ross and Sutherland who could now drive from Tain to Dornoch without crossing the Firth at the Meikle Ferry. For the heavy travelling carriages of those days crossing the ferry was a hazardous business and might entail wading ashore with all the discomfort of wet feet for the passengers.

In 1813 the Major was made Collector of County cess and assessments, a post he held till 1834. He succeeded Captain Kenneth MacKay a descendant of the Reay family who lived at old Embo House. Old Dugald Gilchrist had held his post from 1770 until his death in 1797 and during his lifetime and that of his two successors, the amount of the salary never altered, but remained at £50 a year.

II blue eyes who married
 Catherine has only a very com-
 plicated by a Frenchman or their honey-
 she is holding a pair of worms in
 hands - since ~~that~~ of the fact that in
 later life she developed Cataract - a was
 operated by - one of the earliest doctors
 to carry out successfully an operation &

Myself
 know
 being a Cataract
 2 sons, the Mayor seems to have been obvious
 educated that it was impossible to
 so he had a really brilliant idea - the
 being a house in town - engaged to the
 looking home again & sent them to train
 academy - then it was possible to learn English
 language - Italian & Latin! who lived at Comat
 (who) married George Ross, who the first time they
 chief of the Comat Ross, the Gilchrist were
 since they had no children - & since up the
 all devoted to her - & when in my mind off
 road that passes Comat, I see the small
 figures on horses, which home made

His eldest son dying of the fever in
Vidembourg almost prosper -

of the Wagner family.

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Mag. Elisabeth Hilb an B. Hilb.

as the money became a bit tighter his style
~~but~~ altered. ~~The~~ ~~life~~ of his eldest son
~~was~~ died before his father. One gathering
 from family letters that he had not
 interfered in the business. Since then a part
 of the Sutherland estate - there were complaints
 about his extravagance. While still young he
 took to gambling life - spending money on
 his own amusements rather than trying to
 make a living - borrowing when he could
 not pay - but profitable at dinner where he
 gave out ten shillings. A ~~most~~ ^{most} ~~little~~ ^{little} bit
 of folded paper - some of the ~~most~~ ^{most} ~~little~~ ^{little} bit
 records - They certainly would not have passed
 the censor to-day

when it was imposed to carry the road on
to Tongue - This meant crossing some of the
wildest country in Scotland. Needless,
yet it carried traditional footpaths.
One took materials for surfacing the road
could have to be carried on the backs of men
a time when building - to shelter men
who must camp out in wild weather, with no
hot food to keep up their health - much less
any possibility of drying clothes soaked with
rain on the previous day.

Such conditions were common in the
highlands at the time - Dr Thomson &
knew all the discomforts & tribulations that
but they even received no honorarium for
& given the best accommodation the country
could afford - No such amenities awaited
the gangs of men working on the road to
Tongue - ~~So~~ Nevertheless the plan was
made & was displayed with examination by
possible those brave enough to carry on work
under such hazardous conditions.

To-day we can take up a