

# **The Parish of Nigg**

**COMPILED BY THE NIGG W.R.I.**

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Barbara Scott**

## Foreword

As chairman of the recently formed Nigg & Shandwick Community Council, I am delighted to welcome the publication of the re-print "The Parish of Nigg" by Barbara Scott and Anne Gordon.

Organising the re-print of this local history book was in response to demand from people wishing, but unable to obtain a copy. It has also provided the basis of our historical exhibition planned for 24th June 1994 and we are indebted to the authors for their assistance and support. One or two small corrections have been inserted at the end of the relevant chapters, and are marked with an asterisk. An up-dating chapter has been added at the end.

Liz Whiteford  
January, 1994  
Nigg & Shandwick Community Council

## Acknowledgements

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I would like to offer my thanks for extra special help to:

Miss Rosa Williamson-Ross of Pitcalnie; Mrs. R. Mackenzie, Alderbrae, Tain; Mr. Alec Fraser, Honeysuckle Cottage; and to Mr. Eric Linklater, who by lending us the Statistical Account of 1794 really got us started.

Barbara Scott  
W.R.I. President, 1965-66

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**Anne Gordon died on 29 September 2015 and RCHS wishes to reiterate appreciation of her willingness to share her work, which is a wonderful legacy to leave behind.**

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## Introducing Nigg

Nigg is a parish which is filled, dominated and protected by its hill. On one side cliffs drop steeply in to the Moray Firth while on the other it slopes more gently, in a sweeping curve, to face westwards onto the Cromarty Firth at one end and in a more northerly direction at the other. Unfortunately the west, and some think the best and most healthy, end lies in the full force of the prevailing wind. There is a lot of wind but on the whole the weather is not extreme and is fairly dry. Although on the east coast, Nigg lies further west than one might imagine and in winter gets very little snow being warmed by the surrounding seas and protected by the hills and the great land masses that jut out to the east.



*Nigg Pier, looking towards Cromarty.*

Shandwick, on the east side of the parish, was the largest of the fishing villages and is now the only one left with fishing connections. In the early 19th century it was very prosperous and now, after a decline, things are looking brighter and opportunities for jobs are greater, although mostly outside the parish.

Shandwick, which overlooks the Moray Firth, lies apart from the rest of Nigg and nowadays leads a quite separate existence being more akin to its neighbours of Park, Balintore and Hilton. In fact, church activities are the only things that bring the Shandwick people in to Nigg itself. The fishing villages lying down by Nigg Ferry did not prosper like Shandwick and have greatly declined over the last sixty to seventy years leaving only a few scattered cottages in current use while Dunskaithness has completely disappeared. Many of the crofting town-ships have suffered the same fate and an occasional foundation is all that can be seen of a once thriving community. Among these can be included Torran, Culderarie, a town-ship on Castle Craig golf-course and Ankerville village. To-day visitors are puzzled by the finger-post that still bears the name Ankerville. David Ross of Inverchasley, who owned Shandwick and Ankerville, took the title of Lord Ankerville when he became a Law Lord in the late 18th century.

There are no longer any crofts on the hill and no-one lives on the hill except at Castle Craig farm which is on the North Sutor and, other than Shandwick, is the only place overlooking the Moray Firth.



*Shandwick beach.*

There was a great difference to be found between the fishing and farming communities. The fisherfolk were a resident population who lived a very hard life and usually married among themselves. When they went outside the village they spoke of "going into the country," and people who lived on the low ground "went to the highlands," when they travelled into the hills. The farmworkers, on the other hand, moved around frequently, changing their jobs regularly and seeking re-employment at the annual hiring fairs. This caused a lack of tradition and cohesion among the community. The continual movement was brought to a halt during World War II by the labour standstill order and since then the population has remained much more stable. The family with the longest continuous connection with Nigg is Ross of Pitcalnie who received land in the parish in 1587 and still hold a part of it. Now the estate is broken up the name occurs in two places: Strath of Pitcalnie and Pitcalnie (sometimes called Chapelhill) School near Rarichie, and Pitcalnie House and Pitcalnie Holdings at Nigg. Although they are at least two miles apart it can be confusing. There is also the Red House at Ankerville Farm and Red House, the erstwhile fishing hamlet at Nigg Ferry. Shandwick village also has a namesake across the bay in Logie Easter. Another ground for confusion is the changing of some names; Bayfield was once known as Kindeace but this is not used these days. On the other hand Pitcalzean Farm is still frequently referred to as Westfield.

The church has a long connection with Nigg as the Bishop of Ross had his summer palace there until the Reformation. The monks of Fearn are reputed to have dug the canal which runs along the parish boundary from the Red Bridges to the bay. This canal has been enlarged and deepened since the war, a mechanical digger taking days where the monks must have spent months. The Rev. J. Martin has recently written an account dealing very fully with the history of the Church in Nigg.

There is an example of the work of Hugh Miller, the stonemason, in Nigg churchyard in the shape of a horizontal gravestone showing the scalloped edge so typical of his work.



*Nigg School Sports at Nigg Ferry, 1966.*

The farms of Easter Rarichie, Broomton and Old Shandwick are the nearest to Shandwick and have always shared the postal address of Fearn with it. The other parts of the parish going west, are Nigg Station (although Nigg Railway Station lies in the parish of Logie Easter), Nigg and Nigg Ferry. These form districts which make up the very lengthy parish of Nigg. There is no particular village now but just scattered groups of houses. One group is by the old Post Office which must have been larger than it is now because it contained the shop, cellar, school, shoemaker's shop and smithy. Until the railway was built in 1864, Nigg Ferry was a very real link on the road north. When the Home Fleet came in to Invergordon for their spring and autumn manoeuvres naval personnel used the pier when going to the golf course.

The physical aspect of Nigg has changed a great deal even in the last twenty years. It started with farmers uprooting hedges and was continued by the great gale of 1953 which blew down a great many trees and made it necessary to cut down many more that had been weakened. It is unfortunate that most of the trees in Nigg must have been planted at the same time some hundred years or more ago and that they have not been replaced when they fell. Short term leas have caused great changes in the plant life to be found in the fields and sheep often seem to prefer the edges of the fields where a greater variety of herbage is to be found. Nigg Hill is noted for the number of wild flowers, some quite rare. Larks nest freely in the bents and their singing is a joy to hear, while in winter many flocks of wildfowl and sea birds find shelter in the bay. There has been considerable erosion along the shore of Nigg Bay. Mr. Arthur Skinner remembered when the land extended at least seventy yards out beyond Pleasant Cottage and he said that it disappeared at the rate of a yard a year. A tunnel was built leading from the shore to Bayfield House, possible for claret smuggling. The

entrance from the house was blocked some years ago by Mr. Alec Mackenzie, the carpenter, and now only the mouth of the tunnel can be seen.

## Geography and Geology

The parish of Nigg is a peninsula jutting southwards from the main part of Easter Ross. It is bounded on the east by the Moray Firth and on the west by the Cromarty Firth which cuts in forming Nigg Bay, sometimes called Nigg Sands, which is large and only covered at high tide. The parish is dominated by the Hill of Nigg rising to 666 feet. Its southern end, the North Sutor, juts out to face the South Sutor on the Black Isle and together they overlook and guard the narrow entrance to the Cromarty Firth. The hill takes up about half the parish and slopes down towards Nigg Bay on the west and to the boundaries of the parishes of Logie and Fearn on the north side, making a wide fertile plain lying to the west and north of the hill, while the south and east sides have 300 feet cliffs dropping straight to the sea. Seven counties can be seen from the highest part of the hill - Ross-shire, Sutherland, Caithness, Inverness-shire, Nairn, Moray and Banff. The total acreage of the parish is 7,061 acres. (Y)

The main stone is old red sandstone but Hugh Miller, the Cromarty stone-mason, says that the North Sutor itself is of granitic gneiss with a patch of lias and subordinate sandstones. He found a clay-bed (stiff blue clay used in Cromarty for rendering the bottom of ponds water-tight) in the ebb at half-tide under North Sutor. The soil in the west end of the parish is very sandy. If you scratch the surface it is very black below. The sand is said to have performed its destructive work in the 17th century in one night (as happened more recently in the case of Culbin in Morayshire and Morichmore near Tain.) This may have been the storm which buried the village of which Otta F. Swire writes in "The Highlands and their Legends". The wickedness of the laird of Dunskaith is said to have been the cause of this calamity. As one goes north-east into better arable land it becomes a rich loam with a clay bottom. There are few minerals but there is a little iron in the composition of the gneiss in some places. (C) Lime appears as a crystallized carbonate in small veins at Shandwick, as stalactites on the roofs and sides of caves and, when associated with some of the springs, petrifies the mosses over which their waters flow. After a storm at sea garnet is often found finely crushed and spread over the shores of Nigg so thickly that it gives the sands a deep purple colour. (C) The remains of glacial activity are shown in the moraines at Easter Rarichie where one was considered sufficiently important to become the site of a hill fort. Hugh Miller says that the sandy estuary known as the Sands of Nigg, which are the upheaval of the higher beaches, must have existed at the time of the glacier as a shallow channel, through which the Firth of Cromarty - then a double-mouthed arm of the sea, with the hill of Nigg as a mountainous island in the midst - communicated with the Moray Firth beyond. (Z) Hugh Miller collected fossils on the shores at Nigg with the help of a small boy whom he paid 6d. for each one found.

All along the west coast there is a clearly defined raised beach. At Ankerville in a bank well above sea-level there is a "strata of oyster shell" (W) said by a member of Aberdeen University Survey Team in 1967 to be possibly a Bronze Age kitchen midden.



*The sign-post near Meddat pointing across the ford towards Nigg.*

The boundary between Nigg and Logie is a small river called the Pot which flows in to Nigg Bay and across acres of sands which are exposed at low tide. In the past digging for fishing bait and for shells to make building lime caused pits and dangerous quicksands and "various individuals have lost their lives in them". (C) One particularly dangerous pit called Poll nan Ron (the seal's pool) proved "fatal to everyone that touched its waters." (C) There is a ford, now unused, running from the foot of Pitcalnie Brae straight across to the corner of Meddat Farm in the parish of Logie. It was in constant use before the arrival of motor transport as it cut four or five miles off the journey. A sign-post is still to be seen on the Logie end and although the approaches at each side are completely obstructed the way is indicated by two huts which were built by the R.N.A.S. during the Second World War. A few years ago these sands were pleasantly dry to cross in summer apart from wading through the Pot but latterly they have become wetter year by year and in 1966 all except a strip on each side of the Pot is covered by shallow water in which a slimy green weed grows prolifically. The sands, which at the Ankerville end are really mud flats with a sandy covering submerged completely at high tide, improve as they run towards the Ferry and after Balnapaling they become a lovely golden beach, delightful for tourists. This beach can be subject to great change and what was a lovely stretch of sand can be obliterated with stones after a storm and magically cleared after the next. Shandwick also has a lovely beach with rocks adding interest and there is a pleasant walk below the cliff to the Well of Health.

There are two lochs on Nigg Hill - Bayfield Loch (formerly called Adam's Dam) and Castlecraig Loch, the latter now drained. There was also a small loch on Castlecraig which gradually dried up and disappeared. Bayfield Loch has plenty of trout but the recent increase of weeds has spoilt the fishing. This is attributed to lime leaching off the reclaimed land surrounding the loch.

There are several caves in the cliffs which were used by smugglers and fishers, the King's Cave being particularly large although entered by a "rabbit-hole". One of the caves below Castlecraig has five entrances and although it is flooded at high tide there is an island of rock which is never covered. (Q).



*Bayfield Loch*

The parish is noted for its springs and wells. Some of these listed in W.J. Watson's "Place Names of Ross and Cromarty" are:

Well of Kenneth's hill (Gaelic: Tobar Cnoc Coinnich) above Easter Rarichie.

"The little noisy one" (Glagaig) south of the road at Torran Shuas.

Tobar Cormaig at Shandwick farmhouse.

Sul ba, or Sul na ba, in front of the old curate's house at Easter Rarichie.

Tobar na h'iu at the west of the Danish fort at Easter Rarichie.

Well of the lint pools (Tobar nam puill linn) above Wester Rarichie.

Well of the big leeches (Tobar nan geala mora) between Wester Rarichie and Cullisse.

Jane Sutherland's well (Tobar Sein Sutherland) at Drumdil.

Eppy Gair's well (Tobar a' bhaistidh) the baptismal well above the old U.P. church at Ankerville.

John the Baptist's well (Tobar Eadhain Bhaist)

Colonel's well (Tobar a Chorneil) at Nigg Farm.

Tobar na coille at Pitcalzean.

Sandy Vass's well (Tobar Alaidh Bhodsa) supplied Westfield House.

Dunskaithe well (Tobar Dun Sgath)

Tobar na h-eiteachan was the source of famous water on top of Nigg Hill used by the Nigg smugglers.

Well of Health (Tobar na slainte) was near Shandwick and noted for its healing powers.

Pig's well (Tobar na muc) by the shore west of Shandwick. (M).

\* (Y) (C) (Z) (W) - see references.

There is also a draw-well in the sand near Dunskaithness. (M). St. Andrew's well is near the district nurse's cottage on the Bayfield side of the road and St. David's well still remains at the roadside between Pitcalnie School and Chapelhill Church. The children used to drink from it before going in to Sunday School. The Eagle well at the top of the Bishop's Walk, so called because an eagle is supposed to have nested nearby, provided excellent water.

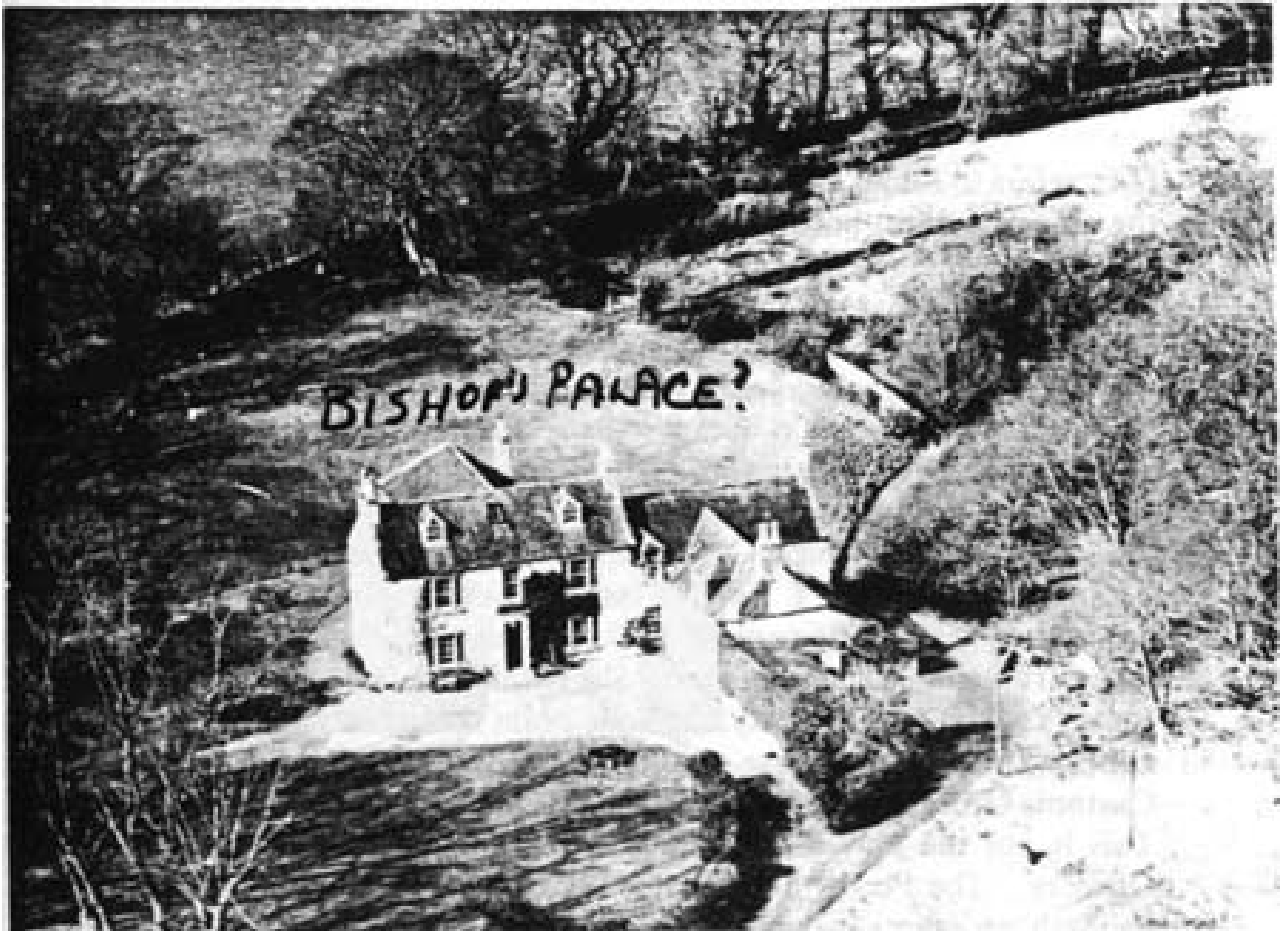


*Nigg Pier looking towards South Sutor.*

## Early Nigg

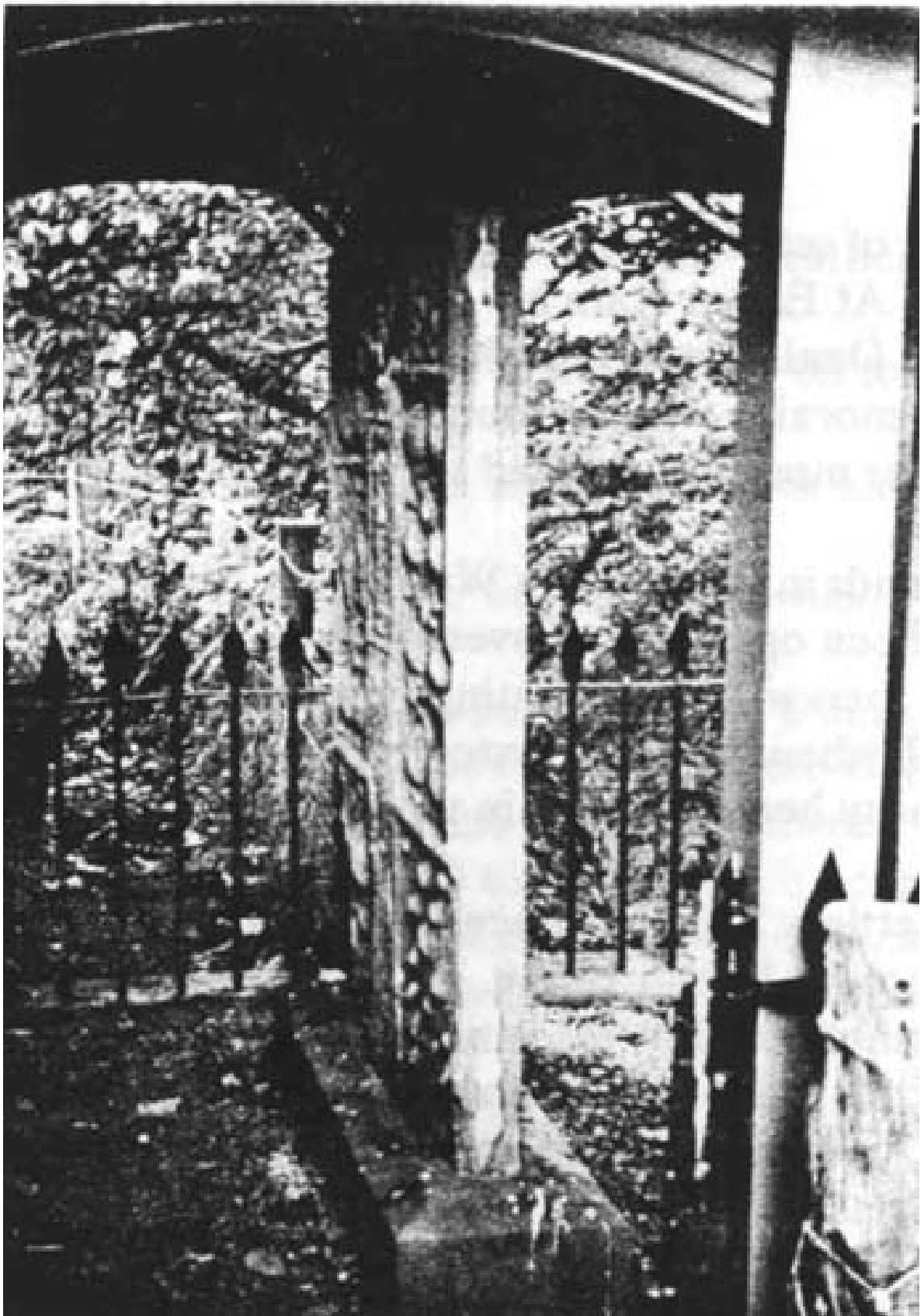
Evidence of settlers from the earliest times is apparent in many ways in the parish of Nigg. At Easter Rarichie there is what is referred to on the Ordnance Survey Map as a Danish fort; but which according to W.J. Watson is a Celtic fort. It is on top of a moraine with its foundations clearly visible and is surrounded by about five smaller moraines reputed to have been hill-forts also.

Two mounds in the Bishop's Walk below Nigg House may be cairns but they have not as yet been opened and investigated. There is a story that they cover the bodies of many men who died fighting. Jars were found in an ancient grave just below Broomhill when the water system was laid in Nigg in 1951 but unfortunately no one in authority heard about it in time to save it from being destroyed.



*View of Nigg House showing possible site of the Bishop's Palace.*

Pictish settlers left their traces in the names Pitcalnie and Pitcalzean, the prefix "Pit" denoting Pictish origin. (In the surrounding parishes there are a considerable number of "Pit" place names). On Nigg Hill there occurs the name "Annat" and of this name W J. Watson says "Scottish Annats ... are at any rate of great antiquity, indicating doubtless the earliest Christian settlements in their particular districts."



*Standing Stone at Nigg Old Church*

There are two fine standing stones - one in a field at Shandwick on its original site; the other was first heard of in the graveyard at Nigg Old Church but after being "thrown down by a great wind" in 1725 it was re-erected at the end of the church and has since been roofed over for protection. On one side the Shandwick stone has figures of animals and hunting scenes and what appears to be the "elephant symbol." The other side has a cross. The decoration on the Nigg stone is supposed to show David pursuing the lion with his harp and a sheep close by. There are also little wriggling beasts whose matted tails form conspicuous bosses. (A) Just over the parish boundary at Hilton of Cadboll there was a third stone which is now in the Museum of Antiquities in Edinburgh. Legend has it that in the 11th century when the Vikings were very influential in Easter Ross the Earl of Ross married the Norwegian (or Danish) King's daughter to seal a truce. At first she lived in Balnagown Castle but later, because of her complaints of her husband's ill-treatment she was banished to Ballone Castle near Portmahomack from where she escaped and fled home to her father. Her husband pursued her but was chased back to Scotland by her three enraged brothers. They would have caught up with him had he not led them on to the submerged reef off the shore at Shandwick, now called the "King's Sons" while he sailed safely through a deep channel beyond it. The Princes were drowned and their bodies were washed ashore at Hilton, Shandwick and below Nigg Hill. This last body was carried up the cliff path now known as Ca'an Righ - the King's Path. When they were buried the standing stones are said to have been erected to mark their graves. Mr. Alan Small of Aberdeen University Geography Department states that the Shandwick and Nigg Stones are really Class II Pictish Symbol Stones.



*Shandwick Standing Stone showing "elephant symbol".*

W.J. Watson gives another legend about the Princes saying that they were buried at Nigg Rocks, below Cadha Neachdain (Nectan's Path) where there is a graveyard now covered with shingle. "Their grave-stones came from Denmark and had iron rings in them to facilitate their landing. This most unlikely spot for a graveyard was not chosen without some good reason, the most probable

being that hermits once lived in the caves, whence the place was reckoned holy ground." It might simply have been a more convenient place for burying washed-up bodies. W. J. Watson refers to the reef "The King's Sons" as "The three Kings" or Creag Harail, Harold's Rock, but who is meant by this is not known.



*ite of Dunskaithe Castle*

William the Lion built a castle at Dunskaithe in 1179 and another at Cromarty to guard the entrance to the Firth, to enable him to collect shipping dues and "to suppress robbers". The foundations of Dunskaithe Castle may still be seen above Castlecraig golf course. There was also a castle at Shandwick\* near the site of the old chapel and the mound above Seaside Cottage is shown on an old map as the site of another. About 1512 Andrew Munro III of Milntown, known as Black Andrew, acquired seven properties in Ross-shire and built a castle on each. Culnaha was one of these but no trace of the castle remains. (B).

\* This Castle was built about 1460

## Life in Nigg, 1700 - 1841

In the early eighteenth century fishing was important and herring were plentiful but by 1788 there was one of the intermittent spells when they failed altogether. Farmers were very poor and did not try to improve their land because they were given no leases, and their workers and the crofters on the hill lived in very poor conditions at that time. Peat was the usual fuel but the poorest used whins and broom. As there was no peat in Nigg it had to be collected from beyond Balnagown in the parish of Logie. This was an awkward matter as the people had to cross the ford when the tide suited, whether day or night. But at the end of the eighteenth century coal began to be brought from England and coal boats unloaded on the shore.

There was a bad harvest in 1740 when Cromarty had a "meal mob" taking meal from a ship which had been loaded by Easter Ross farmers for sale in the south. Cromarty was at this time quite an important port and the people of Nigg were in close touch with it so it is probable that they were also involved in this riot. During the period 1712-60 the proprietors built their "gimals" or storehouses. In 1783 there was the particularly bad harvest - the "Black Year" - when the Session Minutes recorded their gratitude to the Barons of His Majesty's Exchequer for help they sent to them at that time. "There are immediately expected to Cromarty twenty eight bolls and one firloft of meal, sent by the Barons of His Majesty's Exchequer for the use of the poor of this parish (Nigg) to be sold to them at eight shillings and eight pence the eight stone".



*The old Storehouse at Ankerville.*

Naomi, Lady Pitcalnie, was a great letter writer. She was the third wife of Alexander Ross of Pitcalnie whose family have held land in Nigg from 1587 to this day. She lived in the second half of the eighteenth century and had many dealings with William Forsyth, a successful Cromarty trader, and his agent, John Mackenzie, Dunskaithness, Nigg. Miss Rosa Williamson-Ross gave an account of these in an article entitled Letters from the Highlands, 1750-90. One of Lady Pitcalnie's letters indicates that emigration had begun before the "Black Year" as in 1773 she writes to John Mackenzie "anent the peoples going to America". The Pitcalnie family had tenants on other estates and she was glad that some of them "asked if they could get what victual they would need for this year as it gives reason to expect they will continue as they are and give over thoughts of going to America at least for some time till they can know more about it". (K)

The "common people" lived frugally and Highland servants mainly ate meal and salt herrings but their employers enjoyed beef, mutton, veal, lamb and goat's flesh and their home-prepared "hames and tongues". These hams were probably mutton as pork is scarcely mentioned in Lady Pitcalnie's letters. In one letter she orders "fifty lbs. of barley for broth, twenty five pounds of powdered sugar, a hundredweight of best single refined sugar and lofe of Double refined". Wine also arrived on a generous scale - 6 dozen Claret with 2 dozen of Port and 1 of Malaga. Claret may not always have been obtained legally as is shown by an account from Miss Ross, Millcraig, Evanton. She has a small green glass disc marked

*I. C. 1756  
Milncraig*

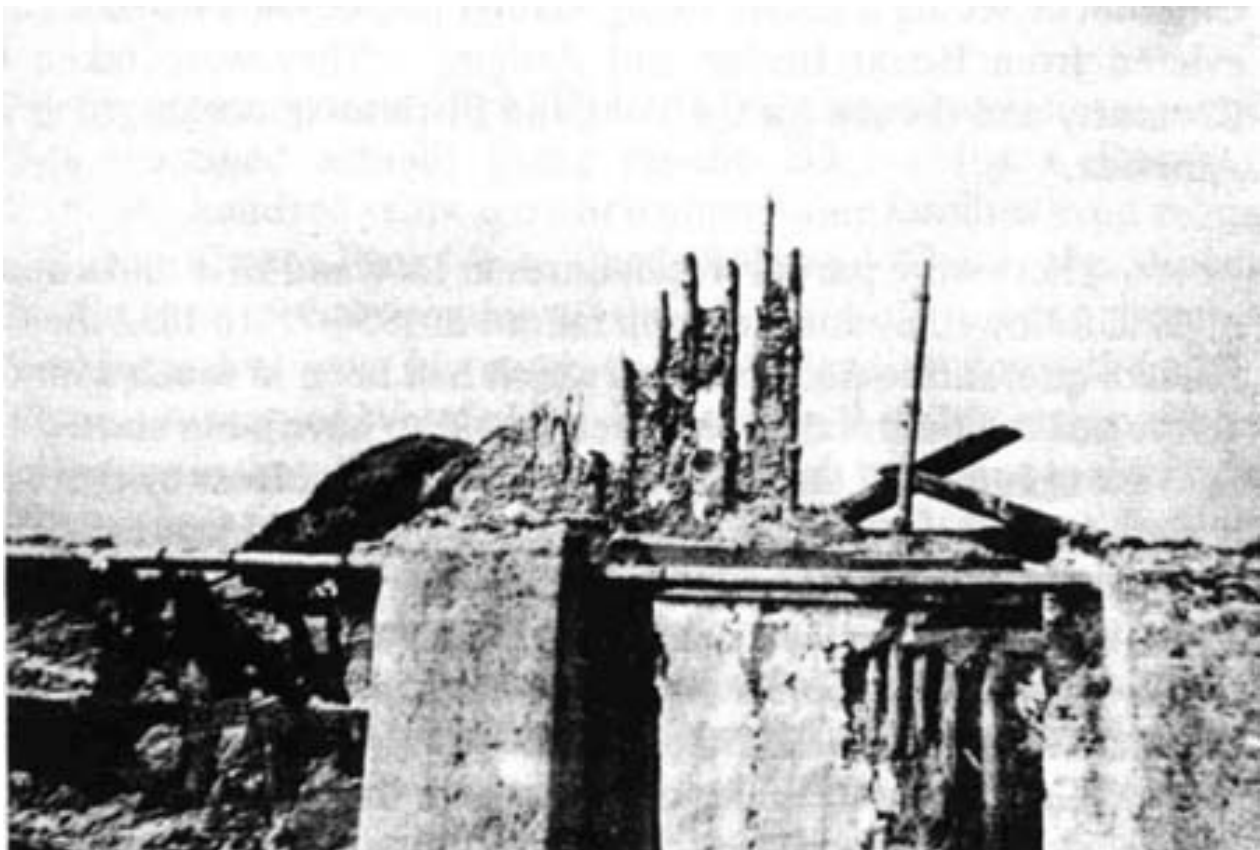
(I. C. refers to James Cuthbert) and this would originally have been incorporated in the side of a claret bottle. It is reasonable to suppose that this claret was bottled at home from supplies smuggled in by the hogshead. This disc was found at Millcraig and a maid of Miss Ross's recognised it as being similar to those she had seen as a child on bottles hidden in the rafters of a house near Cadboll so smuggling was very probably widespread in the area.

Lady Pitcalnie also wrote of gardens (probably not in Nigg) which were remarkably productive with all manner of vegetables - "potatoes, kidney beans, early white turnips, Ice Lettuce, Cucumber, Marrowfat peas, Beets, Colliflower, Spinach, Parsnip and Broccoli". English biscuits were regarded as a "denty" and so was "marmalet." She was very particular about the tea she bought, tea by this time being drunk by both high and low. She obtained many of her supplies from William Forsyth's store in Cromarty. At one point when tea was difficult to procure she wrote, "There is no Course tea here or Expected by any but Fraser ... Starks (the Customs Officer) is such a Divle there is ill bringing anything to this place". (K) This is not the only time there is a reference to the activities of the Customs Officers. The Presbytery had had occasion to complain in 1721 of a "very gross Sabbath profanation committed in the parishes of Fearn and Nigg" when some Custom-house officers and a party of soldiers "pressed horses and carried goods in carts in the time of Divine worship". (L).

From 1750 till 1783 the price of meat was around 3d. per pound which is all the more extraordinary when it is remembered that 1783 was the "Black Year". Another of these letters says "Our meat market Keepes Reasonable 3d. per lb." and goes on "There is nothing so scarce and ill to be got as meal and Flower, and what we get Bad and the Bread so very Bad and the Size so small that it is of no service in a Family and the Cays of the Poore is most Lamentable so that to any feeling heart it is most distressing". Prices of various goods in Lady Pitcalnie's time were: Fine Congo tea 8/- and 8/6 the lb., Cofie 1/6., Starch 6d., Tea 4/6., Loaf sugar 10d., Brimstone 6d., Glew 10d., Carvies 6d.,

Nutmeg 9d., Mace 1/6, Cloves 1/6, Rock Indigo 6d., Saferon 6d. a drop, 2 ozs. black pepper 4d., 2 ozs. Jamaica pepper 3d. (K).

Larger houses as well as humble cottages were thatched in these days, sometimes with heather as was the church in 1706. New methods were being introduced as was shown when William Forsyth wrote to Lady Pitcalnie in 1764 saying "I am of oppinion you should employ John Paterson Slatter to thatch your house with Tyles". Cattle hair "available at a shilling a Ston from any Shoemaker" was to be mixed with the lime for the tyles. Cottages had caber and mott partitions and clay floors while bigger houses such as Nigg House were being built of red sandstone. Cabers were saplings placed side by side to form a wall and mott was a mixture of clay, stones, chopped bent grass, hair etc. used to fill the gaps between the cabers.



*House at Balnapaling showing cabers and mott.*

An aunt of Mr. Alec Fraser could remember as a small girl at the time of the Clearances seeing a smack being loaded just below Pleasant Cottage with people evicted from Bonar Bridge and Ardgay. They were taken to a schooner off Cromarty and thence via the Pentland Firth to an ocean-going vessel en route for America.



*House at Balnapaling showing use of turf in walls.*

There were partial crop failures in 1808 and 1818 and a bad cholera epidemic in 1832 followed by another crop failure in 1836-7. In 1832 the Cromarty Firth was made a quarantine port for ships which had been in touch with the infection in the Baltic but the outbreak in this area is said to have been started by some fishermen in Wick in July 1832 and to have spread to Easter Ross by that August. (J) When a man died of the disease in Shandwick the Nigg Health Board was formed and isolated the area and arranged that no-one might enter the parish without a clean bill of health. They had a quarantine house at Nigg Ferry for any who were suspect which caused the people living near it to organize a petition asking for its removal. The storehouse, now the hotel, was designated as a hospital. The worst outbreaks were at Culnauld and Whins of Nigg where there were dung-heaps right beside the cottage doors. The bodies of cholera victims are said to have been buried under the sand at Dunskaithness but this is doubtful as Clach Caraidh was the official burying ground for the east end of the parish and the hollow below Briar Cottage that for the west end. Nigg people were confined to their infected area and obtained supplies by placing money in a basin containing an antiseptic solution of vinegar and water and retiring some way while the people of Tain came and left food in exchange.



*Pointing to the Cholera Stone. Note that there are no graves nearby.*

Jasper Vass, the Church Officer, saw the cholera floating round Nigg as a small yellow cloud and with great courage caught it in a vast bag of linen and buried it under a stone in Nigg Old Churchyard. This is known as the Cholera Stone and it must never be disturbed lest the cholera be released and it is notable that there are no graves nearby. Miss C. Ross remembers as a child going with her playmates to jump on the stone. If it squeaked they spat, presumably spitting out evil, but one does not hear of this being done nowadays.

## Life in Nigg, 1841 - 1900

By 1841 the greater part of Nigg Hill had been planted with fir trees and only twelve families remained actually living on the hill. Miss I. Ross's father remembered about a hundred years ago when ninety-nine families lived around the base of the hill from Easter Rarichie to Castlecraig and "Danny the Shoemaker" used to speak of seventy people coming off the hill regularly to go to church. One of them, Tom Macandye, gave his name to a path leading down the cliff, Tom Macandye's Caw. A map of Westfield in 1864 shows the little strips of land that went with each house in the village of Balnabruach which belonged to the Pitcalzean Estate. Between each strip there was a narrow "clayton" about a foot wide to enable people to have access to their crops. These claytons were a source of great friction. The greater part of each person's strip lay to the front of their houses with just "the width of a ladder" at the back to enable them to put a ladder up for thatching. Fael dykes can still be seen in Balnapaling where there used to be cultivation.

There was still a village at Ankerville and about this time there were the following working in the parish. The 1794 figures are given for comparison.

1794	1841-1900	Location
9	2 Tailors	at Broomton and Bayfield
12	5 Shoemakers	at Ankerville, Chapelhill, Wester Rarichie, Easter Rarichie and Torran
7	2 Millers	at Bayfield and Balaphuile
4	3 Blacksmiths	Rob Allan at Ankerville, John Matheson at Wester Rarichie, and D. Holm
8	2 Cartwrights	Mackelvery at Ankerville, Jo. Ross and Culnaha
?	1 Boatbuilder	David Macleod, Broomhill
?	1 Forester	Adams, who was also a carpenter and cartwright working on the hill and he had five apprentices.
2	Coopers	none
12	Weavers	none
1	Flax dresser	none

There were six shops, at Nigg Ferry, Balnabruach, Bayfield, Burnside, Ankerville and Easter Rarichie.

Smugglers, as illegal whisky distillers were locally known, were very active in Nigg and the older residents of the parish can remember them while not admitting to knowledge of their precise whereabouts! They set up in many hidey-holes such as under floors and in caves. There are said to have been stills at the Smugglers' Tunnel and at the last three crofts on the hill, Cummings, Adams's, and Francis Hendry's, and the King's Cave was also reputed to have had one and was thought to be very suitable as it had a large bank of sand at the mouth of the cave which prevented the customs officers, who largely worked by sea, from seeing what went on. A still was certainly found under Honeysuckle Cottage along with its "crocken stone" which unfortunately was given away. The blacksmith, John Matheson, mentioned above, was the leader of some smugglers and on one occasion when the customs men paid him a visit he quickly thrust his wife into bed with the cask and explained to the officers that she was great with child. Another woman is supposed to have helped by carrying the casks up the cliff on her back. The local barley-growers felt the pinch when the smugglers were eventually caught.

In spite of Lady Pitcalnie's "slatter" most of the bigger houses were still thatched. Some of the cottages were built with stone walls and thatched roofs while others had the upper part of the walls made of turfs piled upon each other and then thatched. There was a clay hole near the Whins of Nigg and almost all the cottages at Balnabruach had one too. This clay was mixed with bent grass, straw or rushes for thatching; was used for lining fireplaces; and to make floors which were kept clean by sprinkling with water and brushing. A strip of whitening was run round the edge for smartness's sake and can still be seen in one unoccupied cottage at Balnabruach. The cottages were very small and to save space one woman is known to have hung her weekly baking in a cloth from the ceiling which also kept it out of the way of the children. Sometimes it was even necessary to keep barrels of herring under the bed. Some very elementary dwellings were made with pliable saplings placed in two rows, bent towards each other, joined at the top and then covered with turf and thatched. These were known as "boogerie couples". This name probably comes from the term "bougars" referred to in an article in *The Scotsman* of 23rd March, 1967, as arched timbers in the shape of whales' jawbones. There was a "boogerie couple" just behind the White House much to the annoyance of the owner who wanted to build a bakehouse in its place. He had the old woman who lived in it removed to the Poor House in Tain whereupon she cursed him saying that nothing would ever be baked in his bakehouse but that pigs would be kept there instead. His bakehouse was never finished and later a Dunskaith gardener's wife reared pigs at that spot.

A resident of the parish remembers an old woman who had once practised witchcraft. She tells of a girl going to the witch's cottage and finding her baking stones on a girdle. "This is not for you, my dear," said the witch. "Don't turn round but go out the door backwards and it will do you no harm."

Coal was still being unloaded on the sands below Pleasant Cottage, at the Ferry and near Shandwick. Sledges were often used on the sands for the loading and unloading of ships. At Red House Nigg already had a "traffic system" as the carts went down by Honeysuckle Cottage and came up by Pleasant Cottage where the rise was less steep. Any crofter who had enough land to keep a cow would sell milk to his neighbours, otherwise the children had to fetch it from the farms before school. Sometimes this meant quite a long walk. Two mills operated in Nigg, one at Balaphuile which closed down in the latter part of the nineteenth century and the other at Bayfield which continued till 1912. People tell of a "kiln at Culnauld" but no-one remembers it working.

Hugh's Fair was still being held in the parish in 1841. It was originally held at Wester Rarichie and latterly at Ankerville on the third Tuesday of November and was called after the Hugh Rose who started it. By this time it was dying out but Mr Alec Mackenzie's father remembered going to it and seeing there a woman who made toffee by working sugar with her hands.

Most of the people were Gaelic-speaking although, according to the *New Statistical Account*, English was on the increase. By the turn of the century it had become the main language although Shandwick resisted the change longer and Mr. Watt, the school-master, found it very difficult to keep order with children who persisted in speaking a different language. Even in 1967 eight copies of the church magazine *Life and Work* in Gaelic are taken in Shandwick and Balintore.

The Romanes family were much loved and are remembered for their philanthropy within the parish. Although most houses had their own wells they provided a piped water supply to Balnabruach, thoughtfully placing taps at strategic points near any cottage with a large family. There is one below Elder Cottage, one at Balnapaling, another at a cottage near the White House and two near Dunskaith.

The New Statistical Account refers to three inns in the parish. The whereabouts of one is unknown but one was at Lower Pitcalnie and the third is still going strong at Nigg Ferry. There was a "cellar" beside the shop at Burnside where alcohol was sold for consumption off the premises.

In 1841 the Post Offices were Parkhill (Kildary) and Cromarty. Mr. Alec Fraser remembers when telegrams were delivered from Cromarty by sailing-boat which did not stop and the telegram was flung ashore wrapped round a stone. Someone was sure to be watching and they would pick it up and deliver it. When the doctor was needed he also came from Cromarty in a sailing boat. Mail from Parkhill was carried by a man across the ford but if the tide was high he used a plank over the canal.

Miss Ross, Millcraig, tells of how her mother at the age of seven travelled from Cromarty to near Dingwall. She crossed the ferry to Nigg, had breakfast at Mulloine, crossed the ford by trap or cart when the tide was right, had lunch at Invergordon and then went on to her destination. Her grandmother travelled on the coaster which plied regularly between Cromarty and London carrying passengers as well as goods but the opening of the Highland Railway Line in 1864 introduced a much quicker method of travel.

Mr. Alec Mackenzie has an account book of 1870 but its origin is uncertain. It appears to be that of a merchant buying supplies in London, Cardiff, Liverpool, Bristol, Hull, Glasgow, Leeds and Dundee. Some of the goods and prices at that time were:

5 yards doeskin @ 5/6.  
20 yards black silk @ 3/6.  
12 yards velvet @ 11/-.  
15 yards linen @ 2/6.  
12 pieces French merino @ 5/6 per yard.  
10 pieces mouse de laine @ 1/3 per yard.  
2 pieces satin ribbon (50 yards) @ 1/9 per yard.  
10 pieces Welsh flannel (480 yards) @ 1/10 per yard.  
24 pairs blankets @ 18/- per pair.  
5 pieces German lawn @ 3/3 per yard.  
12 pieces gingham @ 1/6 per yard.  
10 pieces twilled cotton @ 8Vzd. per yard.  
6 reams Demy printing paper 16/-.  
2 reams wove foolscap @ 13/-.  
60 yards carpeting @ 2/9.  
10 lbs. Black tea @ 3/-.  
1 lb. green tea @ 6/-.  
7 lbs. loaf sugar @ 8d.  
2 lbs. coffee @ 2/-.  
1 box raisins 56 lbs. @ 6.5d. per lb.  
6 lbs. currants @ 7d.  
2 cwts. white soap @ 54/-.  
1 dozen port wine - £1. 16. 0.  
1 dozen sherry - £2. 2. 0.  
6 silk hats @ 11/-.

Mr. Dudley Gordon, Elmbank, Fearn, has several account books of Gordon's Stores which operated in Fearn during the latter part of the nineteenth century and the early twentieth century. They sent a

van round Nigg and some of the prices and goods shown in the books are given below. The main items bought were tea, sugar, bread and butter. A fairly typical account is that of John Macleod, Meddat:

**1884:**

May 15th. Sugar 1/-,  
tea 9d.,  
bread 3d.  
May 19th. Bread 3d.,  
soda 1.5d.  
May 22nd. Tea 9d.,  
sugar 6d.,  
bread 6d.,  
flour 1/6d.  
May 26th. Tea 9d.,  
sugar 6d.

**1876**

1 lb sugar 5d  
1 lb barley 2d  
1 lb butter 1/4  
Quarter lb tea 9d  
1 lb raisins 8d  
1 loaf 4d  
1 lb onions 2.5d  
Half st. fine flour 1/3d  
Half st. fine meal 1/2½d  
1 doz eggs 9d  
1 lb mutton 9d  
1 oz tobacco 3d  
Candles 4d  
Herring 6d

**1884**

Half boll flour 6/- to 8/-  
Half boll meal 10/-  
1 firloft meal 4/3  
1 st. feeding meal 1/-  
1 st. bran 1/-, oil cake 10d.  
1 doz eggs 7d, 8d  
1 lb sugar, 3d, 4d  
1 lb barley 2d  
1 lb cheese 8d  
1 lb butter 1/3  
1 lb tea 2/9  
1 lb raisins 8d  
1 lb currants 6d  
7 lbs marmalade 3/3  
Half st. rice 1/-

**1879**

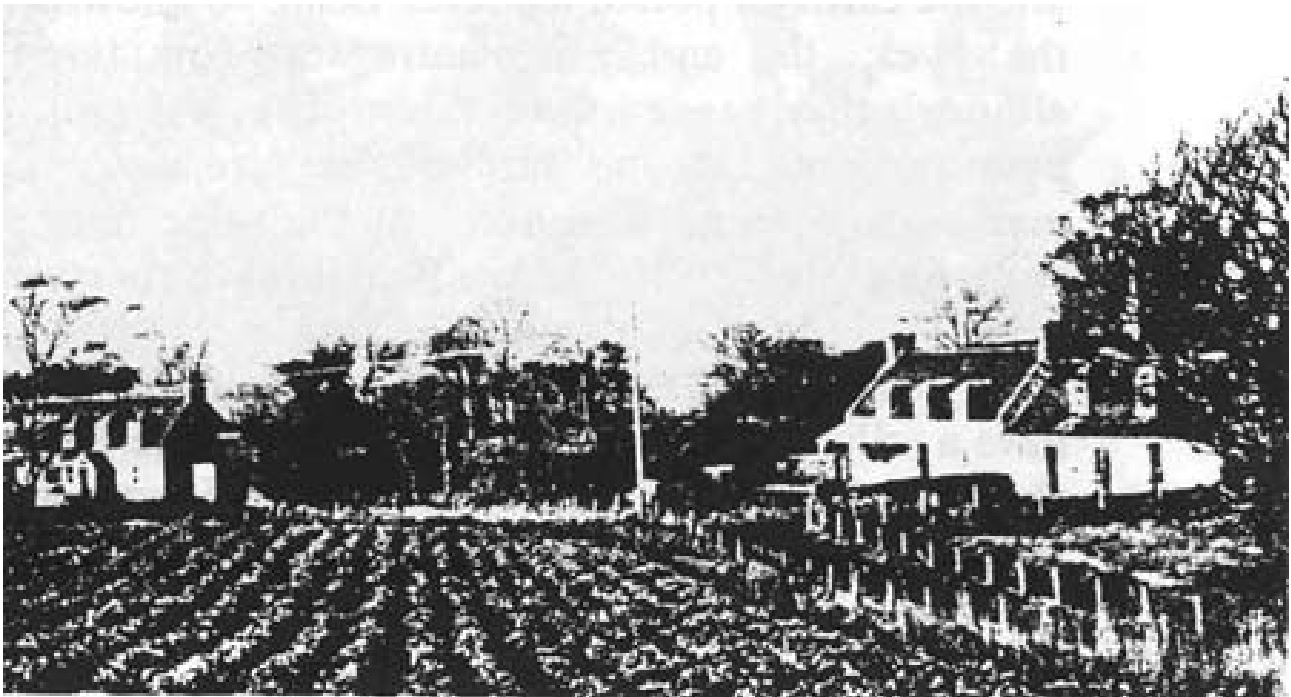
1 lb sugar 3.5d  
1 lb butter 1/1  
1 firloft flour 4/6  
1 st. meal 2/-  
1 doz. eggs 6.5d  
1 lb lozenges 6.5d  
Soda 4d  
1 currant loaf 1/-  
Oranges 1/-  
1 pkt. candles 2/-  
Blacking 6d  
Starch 6d  
1 sheet 3/10  
Jacket 7/9  
Braces 1/-

1 lb mutton 8d, 11d  
Herring 6d  
Codfish 1/1  
1 bar soap 8d, 1/8  
Soft soap 8d  
1 oz. tobacco 3d  
A roll tobacco 4/4  
Syrup  
Coffee  
Starch  
Kettle 3/4  
Frying pan 1/6  
Pans 2/-, 3/3  
Pail 1/10  
Teapot 8d

Biscuits 1.5d, 2d  
 Rolls 2d  
 Cornflour 3d  
 Cream of tartar 5d  
 Jelly 6d  
 Treacle 5d  
 Crowdie 2.5d  
 Suet 6d  
 Salt 6d  
 Tin beef  
 Pair boots 3/-, 4/-, 4/3, 7/9  
 Pair shoes 2/4, 6/6  
 Pair slippers 3/6  
 Hat 1/-, 2/9  
 Felt hat 2/6  
 Cap 2/-  
 Stays 4/-  
 Stay fasteners 6d

Ladle 6d  
 Knife 1/-, 1/6  
 Brush 9d  
 Girdle 19/-  
 Basket 3/3  
 1 pr. carpets 2/4  
 1 cwt. Alloa coal 9d  
 Boots soled 2/-  
 Boots soled and heeled 3/6  
 Suit Clothes £1. 5. 6, £1. 11/-  
 Pair Moleskin trousers 9/-  
 Leggings 6/-  
 Blanket 10/-, 11/6  
 1 yd canvas 6d  
 1 yd print 6d  
 1 yd shirting 1/-  
 1 yd flannel 1/-, 1/3  
 1 yd mole 2/4

(4 firlots = 1 boll)



*The Bayfield shepherd's house, showing Danny the Shoemaker's workshop, and Burnside, formerly the shop and cellar.*

## Life in Nigg, 1900 - 1945

In 1851 the population had been 1,457 but by the turn of the century it had dropped to 892. Many people lived at Balnabruach, Balnapaling and Shandwick and there was still a village at Ankerville which Mr. Alec Mackenzie remembers passing on his way to Pitcalnie School. His memory of the people in this village is that all the women were "old cronies" and that the houses, being thatched, were falling quickly into disrepair whenever they were left unoccupied. He also remembers seeing the site of the Seceding Church there although the stones had been removed. A threshing mill was working at Ankerville about 1900 and an apple tree still standing is all that remains to show where stood the cottage at Ashcroft where Wee Andrew the Dwarf lived with his brother and wrote poetry eulogizing the local countryside. Mr. Adams left his croft on the hill around the turn of the century and he was the last to live there. By the 1930s only four families lived on the hill and they were all lower down at the Whins of Nigg.

More water was piped from local sources although wells were still in use. After Bayfield Mill ceased working in 1912 meal was fetched from the mill at Milton by carts crossing the ford. Mrs. Munro, Rose Cottage, described vividly how when the herring boat came in below Pleasant Cottage everyone bought the herring they needed for the winter and salted them in tubs. Every cottage had its herring barrel and a bag of oatmeal. In many porridge was eaten twice a day and potatoes and milk were a common supper. Many cottages near the shore kept their own boat and fish and rabbits added variety to meals.



*A day out in past times, showing Miss Romanes third from the left (South Sutor in the background).*

Coal was unloaded on the shore till June 1914 and then came to Nigg pier which had been built that year. Mr. Mackenzie, Mulloine, was always very obliging about lending carts for carrying it and farmers sent their own, so many carts at once making a brave show. Mr. Alec Fraser says that in the 1920s best English coal was 19/- a ton and best Scottish 11/- a ton.

In the early 1900s it was the women's job in February to go and cut seaware off the rocks below the cliffs and the men followed later by boat to collect it. A local boat-builder once so overloaded his boat that it sank within sight of his house and his daughter who was with him had to be rescued by her hair. The sea-ware was left to stand in heaps for about three months to let the salt out and was then dug into the earth for potato manure. Some people also collected pigeon manure from the caves; this and hen manure were considered to be good for fruit bushes although they needed to be mixed with sea-ware or other substance for use on potato ground. Sheep's "turdies" were also used as a fertilizer and were sometimes made into a liquid manure. At the same time people remember many carts collecting "grassy ware" below Balnabruach for covering potato pits.

The inn at Lower Pitcalnie was no more, but the seaweed gatherers used to have a jolly good time on the way home at the Ferry Inn. Liquor was still sold at the Burnside "cellar" but it was closed down a few years later while the shop alongside continued till the 1930s as did the one at Balnabruach. No-one is certain when the shop at the Red House at Ankerville closed. There was certainly one shop at Shandwick, if not more.

The cottages had no sanitation but the larger houses had w.c.s and bathrooms and some of the more go-ahead installed electric light plants. Light in the other houses was provided by oil lamps. Housewives made rag rugs, often very beautiful, as floor coverings. All cottage fireplaces were now built into the wall with sides of clay and stone and whitened to match the strip round the edge of the floors. The fires had three ribs on which cooking was done. The furniture was mainly of white scrubbed wood and usually included a dresser with two water pails standing below it. Cottages were thatched until after the Great War when material from the army camps was sold and many people were able to buy corrugated iron for roofing and wood to line the floors. The larger houses had good gardens and when the "Big House" had picked its requirement of fruit for jam-making the farm workers' wives and children came in to pick for themselves using their milk pails as baskets.

A pedlar, Willie Bowlie, used to come round every Monday in a pony-trap with his wife and children. His wife had a pack - a big, red blanket which she tied in a particular way for easy opening to show her goods of dishes, towels, bowls etc. Danny the Shoemaker had his workshop at the west end of the Bayfield shepherd's house and "Danny's boots" are still remembered. A fishwife and a piper came around the houses into the 1930s. The piper was often given a penny to go away but the most effective way of getting rid of him was found by someone who felt sorry for him and offered him work. He never appeared at that house again!

Every Tuesday and Saturday, H. Smith, Grocer, Fearn, from 1910 till the present day, has sent a grocery van through Nigg, originally horse-drawn but latterly a motor-vehicle. Two other horse-drawn vans also came round the houses but people are also remembered frequently crossing to Cromarty to shop. When there was a serious measles outbreak during the Great War some people including Miss H. Macleod's family were attended by Dr. Johnstone from Cromarty while others had a doctor from Tain. A coaster, thought to have been called the Earnholm, plied regularly from Cromarty to Leith carrying passengers and goods till shortly before the Great War. Geordie Gibson the ferryman, who lived in Nigg, occasionally drank rather more than was wise. On one occasion he was advised not to make the crossing but he insisted on going saying that he would be quite safe as "every wave in the ferry knows Geordie". He was followed as ferryman by John Skinner who had a

sailing yawl and Miss Macleod crossed in it. Later on Mr. Watson from Cromarty ran the ferry and his son, Mr. Albert Watson, took over from him and still occasionally makes a summer run for tourists. Early every morning during the Great War a car took sick soldiers from the Nigg camps to the ferry to go to the hospital at Cromarty. Children used to get a lift to school as the car made the return journey. At this time the ferry was very busy and ran every hour from 9.0 a.m. till midday and from 2.0 p.m. till 7.00 p.m. The ford to Logie was falling into disuse over this period as motor traffic became common and it was no longer worth waiting for the tide. The low road to the Ferry was the main road and people can remember in the early part of the century seeing "Danny the Roadman" breaking stones to repair it. The first 'bus service began after the Great War taking passengers to Tain.



*A day out in the "Femie", a yawl similar to the ferryboat.*

Mr. Polson was headmaster of Nigg School from 1906-20. He was a remarkably inspired teacher and is still very highly spoken of by his ex-pupils. He wrote several books on Highland folklore and on Easter Ross from which some information for this book comes. Children went barefoot to school in the summer but during the winter they did wear boots which were bought with the money earned at potato lifting. There was a stone sink at the school and the children drank from an iron cup attached to it by a chain. During the dinner hour they sometimes ran down the Bishop's Walk to bathe in the sea and could just get back with five minutes to spare. On the way they used to drink from the Eagle Well. The Romanes ran a library at Nigg House and a short cut to it from the school was through a gate in the wall of the churchyard. During the Great War Mrs. Romanes ran a soup kitchen at the school. The children used to collect bags of bread from the army camps to eat with it. They paid about 3d. for two portions and about 4d. for three. A child who had brought oatcake and

swapped it for bread was spoken of as exchanging "a bittie hard for a bittie soft". Mrs. Romanes is remembered for her kindness in sitting up all night with Mrs. Munro, Rose Cottage, when she was ill with pneumonia as a child, in order to give her mother a rest. Miss Romanes gave a picnic for the school children during the summer holidays. There were sports to amuse them and for prizes they had to choose between a religious text and a ball! She also gave a tree for New Year's Day and provided a permanent "maypole" at Nigg Feny for the sailors.

Children used to eat skinned young shoots of the wild rose ("cock's cheese"), sorrel ("sookiesoorack") and buttercup roots and they chewed dulse and the stems of "tongued ware". Miss C. Ross tells of how as youngsters they gathered cockles and wilks and boiled them on the sea-shore in salt water but she never remembers them being served for a meal. "Daddy Holmes" the blacksmith, as he was affectionately known, used to make "girds" for the children to play with. This was a metal wheel with a rod attached to it for steering. They also bowled hoops off barrels. The girls played "Fivies" or "Fivacs" - throwing up five white periwinkle shells and catching them on the backs of their hands. Hop Scotch ("Peetlie Pot") was also popular. The boys played marbles and sometimes allowed the girls to join them in a game of "Knucklers," played by flicking marbles off the knuckles into a hole. "Hurlies" were a form of little cart made with a wooden box on pram wheels, occasionally with steering but usually without. After work in the evenings the young men gathered at the "Big Corner" at Nigg Farm to talk, play Pitch and Toss and a form of quoits using horse-shoes. Before the Great War young people used to go to a dancing school or dancing hall in a cottage near Blackspring which had a big sliding outside door.

It was during the Great War that most of the trees on the hill were felled and cut up at a sawmill on Westfield. There was a big army camp of Scottish Rifles between the School and Pitcalnie House, another, The Black Watch, beyond the Territorial Hall, and a gun battery at a fort on North Sutor. Dunskaithe House was made into a naval hospital (H.M.S. Thalia) but was found to be too isolated and became a store for naval supplies. Ranges, the Targets, were built at Culnauld for rifle practice. The guardroom of the Scottish Rifles camp had hanging baskets of flowers and crocuses planted by the soldiers still come up in that field. In 1917 Bostock & Wombles brought a big circus to Nigg for the benefit of the soldiers but local people also went and saw such delights as tigers and a hippopotamus in water! (Pinder Ord's small circus came annually to Nigg Ferry till 1933.) Cowsons of Glasgow began to lay the foundations of a theatre for the troops in the field adjoining the Middle Church (now the hall) but when the war ended the scheme was abandoned. Some soldiers are said to have made a pool in the Bishop's Walk and another in the sea, presumably for recreation. Rather than go to war two of them are said to have hanged themselves in the Bishop's Walk and another on Pitcalzean Hill. In the evenings Mr. Polson ran a small library and shop at the school for the troops and Mrs. Polson organized a work-party of Volunteer Workers (V.W.s) with the older girls to make such things as eye-patches, bed socks, knee caps etc. and Miss H. Macleod had a V. W. badge with the number 73333.

As ships of the Home Fleet came through the Sutors after the Battle of Jutland on their way to the floating dock at Invergordon, Miss Macleod was among those who flocked to the pier at Nigg Feny to see them pass. She particularly remembers that the women were wearing shawls and that the ships were badly scarred and the holes in their sides appeared to be circled with paint or something similar. She also tells of a group of German prisoners of war who after the scuttling of the German Fleet at Scapa Flow were brought on H.M.S. Lion to Invergordon and thence by boat to Nigg to spend one night at the army camps before being transferred elsewhere. It appears that they took as much food as possible when they abandoned ship because as they walked from the Ferry to the camp in front of the school they left an astonishing trail of coffee beans. One of them dropped a parcel, obviously from his mother, containing long alpaca pants with straight legs which tied with a

tape at the ankle, while another dropped a book called *Meine Kindheit* containing a postcard addressed (when translated) to "Seaman Torpedoboat Mechanic Hans Roth, Torpedo Boat S. 136, II Flotilla, Interned in England." Miss Macleod still has photographs of them - the men smiling, but the officers turning their backs on the camera.



*German prisoners of war, 1914-1918 war*



*German prisoners of war, 1914-1918 war*

During the Second World War there was again considerable military activity in Nigg with a gun battery on North Sutor, with an observation post and a radar post nearby. There was an army camp on the golf course, a naval mine base at Nigg Ferry, a small R.A.F. radio station at Castlecraig, a bomb range marker's hut near the old ford and a small naval unit on Easter Rarichie. Quite a large contingent of Norwegians were stationed at the army camps. Part of the R.N.A.S. aerodrome lay on the parish boundary. Members of the Women's Land Army lived in the "Hostel," the house that had belonged to "Danny the Shoemaker". Mrs. Douglas, Nigg, ran a W.V.S. canteen once a week in the small hall of the Middle Church. The service-men paid 6d. a night for whist and tea and then usually provided some entertainment themselves.

After the Great War "Blind Benjie," a fiddler in Cromarty who used to play round the town and particularly in the pubs on a Saturday night, got smallpox. He and various other cases from Cromarty were sent to Nigg to be isolated at the specially built "Smallpox Hut" on Pitcalnie Brae just above the Nut Woodie. Not unnaturally this caused great indignation in Nigg. The first three burials in the new Chapelhill cemetery were smallpox victims from Cromarty.\* On one occasion a telegraph came for one of the nurses at the Smallpox Hut and the postmaster, George Rose, loath to deliver it himself, summoned "Tom the Bobby", the policeman at Balintore, to do it for him. Tom the Bobby refused in such language "that the air was blue around George Rose's head that day!" In those days Tom the Bobby walked his beat twice a week from Balintore to Nigg Ferry but later on he got a bicycle. There has been friendly rivalry between Cromarty and Nigg for many years with Cromarty people referring to those in Nigg as "N-----s" [see note] or Peculs" (peculiar) and Nigg people calling them "Crownpachs."

(\* In fact Chapelhill Cemetery was opened in 1922)

[Note: While recognising that the derivation of the name came from the community of Nigg, 21st century connotations require that RCHS should avoid a term that has become insulting.]



*Mrs. Christina Ross, landlady of the Ferry Inn, and her son "Tom the Bobby" and daughter Grace.*

There was a golf-course at Nigg, thought by some to be the best natural course in the world. In Mr. Polson's book "Easter Ross" he says that the course could be reached by ferry from Cromarty or "by conveyance from Nigg Station" but it was really the visits of the Home Fleet to Invergordon for manoeuvres twice a year which kept the club going and also caused it to be open for Sunday play. The officers flocked from their ships to it, among them Admiral Beatty, Admiral Jellicoe, Lord Fisher, Lord Louis Mountbatten, the late Duke of Kent, and a Japanese prince who was a midshipman at the time. During the Great War while some officers from the Black Prince were eating at the hotel the sailors who had been caddying for them were given a meal by Miss Macleod's grandmother. By the end of the week they were all drowned when their ship went down.

The Golf Club used to organize trips to Nairn on Mr. Watson's boat Ailsa and Miss Macleod remembers these well. Often they had to wait for some time to return as the tide fell leaving the boat high and dry. Ailsa used to run from Invergordon to Nairn Games via Nigg Ferry. During the Second World War several of the greens were taken to build an army camp and this, combined with the damage done by rabbits during the war years, ruined the course and although vigorous attempts were made to revive it these were of no avail and it is now rough pasture.



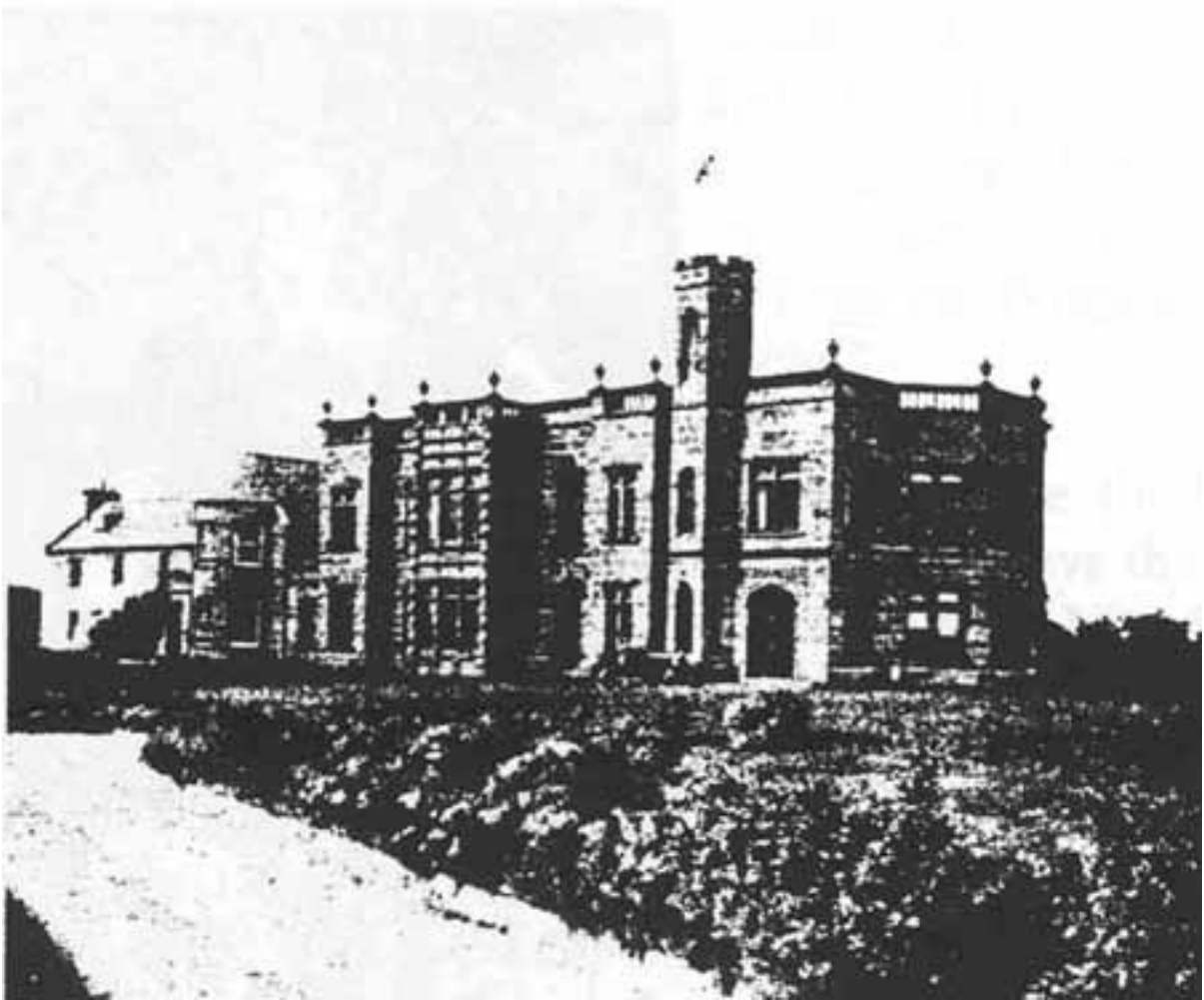
*Nigg Ferry about 1910, showing North Sutor beyond.*

During the 1890s mail came to Nigg Station by train and was delivered by pony and gig. Miss Macleod remembers people running out to meet George Rose to see if there were any letters. She has a postcard written by her mother in 1910 to her husband to say that she would send a pony and trap to meet him at the station. It is thought that the Post Office gig was used for this. A bicycle service followed this, succeeded by a motor van. The first telephone was installed at the North Sutor camp during the Great War with the number Nigg 1. Castlecraig took over this line in 1924 with the number Nigg 2.

There were plenty activities within the parish for the people. The Rev. N. D. Mackay, minister of Nigg Old Church from 1901-48, ran a very successful Young Men's Club up till the Second World War. The T.A. hut provided a meeting place not only for the Territorial Army but also for Girl Guides, the Rifle Club and the W.R.I. One of the last functions held there was the "Welcome Home" party for service men and women in 1945 or 1946.

The formation of the District Nursing Association was a great boon and having built a cottage near Blackhill they engaged the first nurse in 1922.\*\* By this time the doctors came from Fearn and Tain and no longer made the crossing from Cromarty .

A local horse named Blucher had such adventures, including falling into a well, that to the amusement and interest of all they were featured in a national newspaper.



*Dunskaith House before the fire.*

Washing of clothes was still sometimes done out-of-doors until 1956. A pot of water was boiled and poured into a big tub although some people preferred to keep a fire burning under the tub. When blankets were washed everyone helped to tread and then wring them. Rinseing was called "sineing."

(\*\* The Nurse's cottage was built in 1933)

Prices for the years 1909-12 are given in some more of the account books of Gordon's Stores for these years. These show that Widow Munro bought 2 ozs. snuff for 7d. fairly regularly and a fortnight's shopping list for Morrison, Coachman, was:

## **1910**

July 5th. Rolls 4d., butter 7-1/2d., wool 4d., soap 1/-, tobacco 1/4, sago 6d, pins 1d, safety pins 1d, darners 1d.

July 8th. Bread 3-1/2d, sugar 1/5, buns 2-1/2d.

July 12th. Butter 7-1/2d, loaf 3-1/2d, salt 3d.

July 14th. Butter 7-1/2d, paper 1d, mustard 1d, sugar 5-1/2d.

July 19th. Butter 7-1/2d, sugar 1/5, loaf 3-1/2d.

## 1909-12

1 st meal 1/9, 1/10, 2/- 1 lb pandrops 6d 1 st wholemeal 1/10 1 lb biscuits 2/2 1 boll meal 7/- tin biscuits 3/- 1 firlot meal 5/- grapenuts 7d 1 st barley 1/6 1 tin cocoa 9d 1 lb onions 2d lemons 2d 1 lb sago 2-1/2d, 3d pepper 1d 1 lb sugar 2-1/2d crowdie 2d 1 st granulated sugar 1/4, 1/6 puddings 6d 1 st preserving sugar 3/- jam 7d, raspberry 9d, plum 7-1/2d, gooseberry 1/3, mixed 1/1 1 lb tea 2/2 1 lb carvies 8d 1 lb tip tea 1/9 salmon 7d 1 lb ground rice 2d herrings 6d 1 lb lentils 2-1/2d kippers Quarter lb cream of tartar 3-1/2d ham 1 lb suet 6d bacon 8d, 11d, 1/- 1 lb peasemeal 2-1/2d beef 1/- 1 lb raisins 7d gigot 5/3 1 lb currants 6d shoulder of mutton 4/2 Quarter lb cloves 6d mutton 9d, 10d, 1/5, 1/7 1 lb baking soda 1-1/2d. lamb 1/2, 1/4 loaf 3-1/2d pluck 8d sponge cake 1/6 1 gallon oil 8d cream puffs 2 lbs whitening 1d cask apples 22/- 2 lbs washing soda 2d tin of tongue 3/- 1 yd cotton 5d 1 tin brasso 3d 1 yd deep white lace 4d 1 cake bath brick 2d 3 yds white flannel 1/4 1 doz starch 9-1/2d 1 yd gingham 6d 1 moth ball 1d 1 yd shepherd's tartan 6d 1 pkt candles 2/6 card darning wool 1d 1 pkt envelopes 6-1/2d 1 cut 3-ply wool 7d 1 pkt writing paper 4-1/2d 2 candle-sticks 6d 1 pkt jampot covers 1d lamp 1/- newspapers lamp glass 3d shoes 5/-, 5/6 wick 1d Sunday shoes 7/6 1 china breakfast cup 5d girl's wearing boots 5/6 clay flower pot 4d men's wearing boots 15/-, 16/- table knife 5d 1 symet 4/3 table fork 2-1/2d drawers 3/6 brush 1/- wearing vest 3/6 scrubbing brush 6d, 1/- strong wearing shirt 3/6 rug 2/- shirt 4/6 tea flask 6d corset 2/6, 3/3 pipe 1/- brown corset 2/6, 2/9 milkpail 3/4 sweater 4/6 enamel milkpail 1/8 apron 1/- dustpan 1/4 overall 2/3 weighing machine 20/- girl's pinafores 1/-, 1/3 girdle 1/3, 1/4 sateen blouse 3/- shovel 6d lustre blouse 4/- iron 2/6 plain blue blouse 3/6 axe handle 8d rubber collar 6d spade 2/8 moleskin trousers 6/6 cycle bell 1/8 leggings 4/- 3 casks 7/- suit 24/- 1 roll wall paper 1/- blanket 14/-, 15/- chintz 2/4 quilt 7/6 carbide 6d bedcover 6/- small bottle turpentine 1d grey flannelette sheet 2/- Christmas cards 6d thimble 1d chaff bed 3/6, 4/4 needles 1d scissors 6d



*The old smithy at Culnaha during the 1914-1918 War.*

## The Church

The place name "Annat" on Nigg Hill indicates that there was a very early Christian settlement there. (M) After 1066 the influence of the Shrine of St. Duthus at Tain would have been felt as many pilgrims to it crossed the "King's Ferry" from Cromarty to Nigg on their way to Tain. One of these was King James IV. With the building of Dunskaith Castle in 1179 and the establishment of Fearn Abbey in 1238 Nigg must early on have been a reasonably settled place.

James II founded the Chaplainry of Dunskaith between 1456-58. (O) The lands of Dunskaith and two merks from the profits of the King's Ferry at Nigg were given for the maintenance of a chaplain in Tain. (N) The first known chaplain of Dunskaith was Alexander Ross in 1500 and in 1549 his son Nicholas was presented by Queen Mary to the provostry of the collegiate church in Tain becoming in 1567 the 19th Abbot of "Ferne." (O)

Before the Reformation Nigg was a mensal church of the Diocese of Ross (E) and according to an article on the Gayre family in Scotland's Magazine was "an ecclesiastical barony or manor of considerable dimensions and importance, with the Bishop's Hall of Nigg, and the Mensal Kirk of the Bishop, and in the high ground overlooking the rich farms of Nigg the Bishop's Hunting Forest". This was the Bishop's summer palace and he is believed to have sailed from Rosemarkie round the Black Isle to the shore below Nigg House. There he landed and approached his palace by the path which is still called the "Bishop's Walk". According to the Statistical Account of 1794 "one vault of the Bishop's House remained entire in 1727" and the foundations of the house, ninety feet long, could still then be seen. To this day there is a field known as the "Bishop's Field" on Pitcalzean and when the Rev. N. D. Mackay came to Nigg in 1901 the tiends were called the "Bishop's tiends".

After the restoration of Episcopacy in 1606 the Covenanters are said to have met at the rocks below Castle Craig close to the fishermen's bothy, at the tall standing rock sometimes called "The Temple". They are reputed to have a graveyard there but this may be the one sometimes called a Viking graveyard.



*Nigg Old Parish Church*

The present Nigg Old Church was built in 1626 on an older site and the bell, dated 1624, bears the inscription "Michael Bvrgerhvys, me. f. 1624. Soli Deo Gloria". The story goes that the people of Nigg and Fearn were expecting bells for their churches from Holland by the same vessel and deputations from both congregations went to Cromarty on the same day to carry them home. After some jollification they were both crossing to the Nigg side by the same boat and during the passage they quarrelled and one of the bells was thrown overboard. Both sides were determined to bring home a bell and had a regular fight which it is said the Nigg men won and this Dutch bell still rings the parishioners to worship. (P) The bell-house of Nigg Old Church was "thrown down by a great wind" in 1725 and the bell was cracked. The Nigg Stone which stood at the gate fell at the same time and was broken, but it was re-erected in its present position at one end of the church.

A new bell-house for the church was commissioned in 1730 to be built "after the form and dimension of the bell-house at Cromarty". The Session thought in 1729 that "a common loft was wanting in the Wester end of the Kirk" and they decided to build one using some of the poor's money to do so on the understanding that pews were to be set there for the poor. The heritors built two more lofts and in 1730 there was a meeting for selling the lofts, bringing in £115 Scots. (S) The centre loft was removed at an unknown date and the side lofts have been closed up. There is a staircase giving access to the loft over the boiler-room where the high, narrow seats may still be seen. The woodwork here shows the marks of the adze (locally pronounced "eetch") and is presumably original.

James Mackenzie, the last Curate of Nigg, died in 1701. (The Presbyterian church had previously been urged to receive all Episcopal incumbents who were ready to accept the Presbyterian form of Government.) It appears that there was a gap until the appointment of Mr. George Munro as minister in 1706. At this time, following the appalling Seven Years' Famine of 1694-1701, there was a startling decline in morals in Nigg, so much so that it was remarked upon in the New Statistical Account of 1841. It appears also to have been something of a reign of terror on the part of the Kirk Session. People were "rebuked before the congregation six Lord's days" for fornication; had to confess ante-nuptial adultery; were reprimanded for drinking on the Sabbath or for taking in water that day. One unfortunate woman, Grisall Lesly, was summoned to appear for adultery when she recovered from childbed and there are repeated references to "Grisall Lesly still not recovered" showing that the Session did not easily let up on those it sought to punish. An elder was appointed to stop "the common people breaking the Sabbath by worldly and vaggish converse"; and several elders were appointed to take inspections "every Saturday's evening Sunday's morning" to report who profaned the Sabbath by coming to the well of Rarichies. This had to do with witchcraft and holy places. On another occasion several people had to stand publicly in the church for "playing and sporting" and a man was ordered to stand in sackcloth on the Lord's Day for Sabbath profanation, while yet another was delated for stealing apples out of Ankerville garden. One was "sharply rebuked, long and seriously dealt with and earnestly exhorted to repent" of some crime. It is little wonder that in 1708 there is an entry that a man had to appear publicly before the congregation "for menacing one of the elders" and another for "immannerly malicious language to the Session viz. that as long as the Minister believed some of his elders he and his people would not be at peace". (S)

There is an entry in 1706: "The Session considering that by Act of Assembly every Session is appointed to have particular registers of children's births and baptisms and of person's marriages, have appointed their clerk to provide therefor Registers and carefully fill them up from time to time". (S) Nevertheless Baptismal records only begin in 1865 and Proclamations in 1885.

The Session Minutes say in 1707 ... "considering that their session minutes will be shortly revised by the Presbytery and that by Acts of Assembly ... every session are obliged to have their minutes written in a fair hand, and have a register of births and baptisms, and in regard our present clerk does not write so fair a hand as we would require, the session went on to choose a clerk". Oddly enough, the writing in the Minutes gets rather worse after this entry.

The church required repair in 1706 and the Session appointed "three firlots victual to be given to Alexander Fraser for mending the holes on the roof with heather" .. and the officer .. "to acquaint the parroch to carrie their proportion of heath to the kirk". Again in 1707, "The Session recommends to every oxgate within the parroch to carry .. heather to repair the kirk and that instantly." (S)

That Nigg was outward-looking is shown by the fact that when the churches of the Presbytery of Tain contributed in 1720 "towards the ransom of Alexander Stewart, shipmaster in Inverness, and his crew, who are slaves in a Galley", Nigg contributed £18. 7/- Scots. The following year they gave money for new erections in the parish of Durness in Strathnaver. (L)

Mr. George Munro, minister from 1706-28, was closely related to the Lairds of Culcairn and Culrain whose worldly affairs were so mixed up that Mr. Munro was frequently in Edinburgh for law-suits, so much so that in 1724 the Presbytery Clerk was appointed to "search the Presbytery Records and inform the Brethren the time Mr. Munro spent in the South anent his Law Pleas". It turned out that he had been away for two years out of nine. Finally some of his parishioners petitioned the Presbytery about the unsatisfactory state of affairs and a Presbyterial Visitation was held in Nigg on 27th April, 1725. Mr. Munro was admonished and seriously exhorted to do better but nevertheless it was in Edinburgh that he died three years later. (L)

His successor was Mr. John Balfour of Logie-Easter whose own parishioners did not want to lose him to Nigg. This "weighty matter" was referred to the Presbytery who decided finally that he should transfer to Nigg. One of their reasons showed remarkable sympathy and understanding - "Because of the difficult access which the people of the Parish of Nigg in the winter-time have to attend upon ordinances in the neighbouring parishes, whereas the people of the parish of Logie-Easter have easier access". (L) Mr. Balfour was a very fine man who did a lot to suppress witchcraft in the parish and his influence on the people was such that the magistrates seldom had trouble with Nigg for many years.

In 1729 the Session made arrangements to buy privately-owned mort-cloths for the benefit of the poor. These were hired out at 2/- a time and were used as a covering for a poorly-made coffin. One mort-cloth was used in this century and then lay disused in the church until it was burnt in 1948 by Mrs. N. D. Mackay. The mort-bell was known as "Little Bell" and it was hired out not only within the parish but outside it as well. In one instance money from its hire was given to a "poor indigent person". (S) The Rev. J. R. Martin keeps this bell in the Mid Manse and believes it to be of pre-Reformation date.

After the Battle of Culloden the Presbytery of Tain - and presumably the minister of Nigg - met in 1746 "for Thanksgiving to the Lord for the signal and seasonable deliverance He was pleased to give unto these lands from Popery and slavery by the overthrow of the rebels at Culloden". (L) In fact, almost all the people of Easter Ross stood by the Government in the '15 and '45.

Church Patronage was restored in Scotland in 1712 and it was this that in 1752-56 had such an unfortunate consequence in Nigg. The church as a whole very much resented patronage and after

Mr. Balfour's death in 1752 the people of Nigg were very indignant to discover that the young man whom they had chosen as his successor was set aside by the imposition upon them of a Mr. Lewis Grant. Then Mr. Lewis Grant's name was withdrawn and another minister, Mr. Patrick Grant, was presented to them with the announcement that "His Majesty has been graciously pleased to present Mr. Patrick Grant, minister of Duthil, to the Parish of Nigg". Unfavourable reports of intemperance had reached the congregation and they resolved to do all in their power to prevent his settlement in Nigg. In his book *Easter Ross* Mr. Polson gives this account of what happened. "The majority of the members of the Presbytery sided with the congregation in their opposition and refused to induct him. A minister was sent to Nigg to explain the Assembly's decision. He reported on his return that he found only two servants and therefore he did not preach but that he left the edict in the keyhole of the church door. On hearing this the Presbytery determined to disobey the Assembly's order. Again it went to the Assembly which threatened the Presbytery. The latter in alarm agreed to induct Mr. Grant, but when the day came only four members were present, and according to Scott's *Fasti* two of the four men were found at six o'clock in the evening to have withdrawn in fear, leaving the Presbytery without a quorum and nothing was done. A third time Mr. Grant appealed to the Assembly and a motion was made that the whole Presbytery of Tain be deposed instantly, but this was lost as against one that the Presbytery be solemnly rebuked, and the obnoxious presentee was inducted to the "bare walls" of the church of Nigg. One of the parishioners, Donald Roy, who had been an elder for sixty years, told members of the Presbytery "that the blood of the people of Nigg would be required of them if they should settle a man to the walls of the Kirk". (J) He led the consequent secession of the congregation from the Old Church and they built a meeting house at Ankerville on the seaward side of the road just opposite Ankerville House. For a time they were without a minister and crossed the sands of Nigg to hear Mr. Porteous of Kilmuir Easter. Mrs. Grant, the Nigg minister's wife, is reputed to have said to her husband, "Why do you stay in this place? Do you not see the sands black with the people going to Kilmuir?" "Oh, let them go," was the reply. "They're no' taking the stipend wi' them." (B)

This whole affair was most unfortunate and MacNaughton says in his book on church life in Ross and Sutherland that "the Presbytery were weak and vacillating, mistrusted by the people, and rebuked by the General Assembly ... The people were self-willed, self-assertive and self-satisfied, and above all the Presentee's demands were inexorable; his one object was to be admitted minister of Nigg parish and in order to accomplish that end he was prepared to sacrifice everything except the living."

Mr. Patrick Grant ministered to his depleted congregation but soon fell foul of them due to his having in his possession the poors' money given into his keeping in 1759. On 15th May 1783 "Mr. Grant's accounts of the poors' money lay open to inspection and it was agreed that he should pay in £20 of the acknowledged balance arising against him, in a fortnight or three weeks, to be applied to purchasing victual to be distributed among the necessitous poor ... And as difference has arisen 'twixt Mr. Grant and the heritors as to the statement of the poors' funds by his accounts it is likewise agreed by Mr. Grant and them that all these differences shall be referred to the determination and adjustment of Mr. Macleod of Geanies and Mr. George Balfour, minister of Tarbat, with power to them to examine said accounts and to determine what balance is or may be still due by Mr. Grant, if any." (S) This was the famine year of 1783 - "this time of dearth and scarcity" as the Session Minutes put it - and various tenants who had borrowed from the poors' funds were "advertised immediately to pay it in ... and retire their bills". Mr. Grant, it appears, never did return all the poors' money for after his death there is the following entry: "17th Nov. 1788. It was further represented to the Minister (Mr. MacAdam) that in the month of June 1759 there was the sum of sixty-five pounds, fifteen shillings sterling of the poors' money delivered into the hands of the late Mr. Patrick Grant,

minister here, that no part of this money was distributed ... except £16. 12/- in June 1763 and the further sum of £20 in the year 1784." (S)

There are many reference to the poor in the Session Minutes of 1783-4 as it was the Kirk Session who were responsible for the distribution of the poors' money. In 1783 one hundred and thirteen people received in the first instance half a crown, then forty "greater objects" were selected to receive a further two shillings each and the balance of £1. 15. 6d. was given to "still the greater objects". The Statistical Account of 1794 says that those belonging to the Seceding meeting house received no public charity as the weekly collections of that Society were appropriated to another purpose and they had to subsist by begging from door to door.

The Session Minute book covering the years 1705-1709, 1729-1736 and 1777- 1789 is full, especially in the two earlier sections, of references to adultery, fornication, Sabbath profanation and so on but only twice in the whole book is there any mention of the celebration of the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper.

It was in 1760 that the Seceders got their first minister, a Gaelic speaker from Inverness. "While there he had run into debt and only three years later his landlady found out where her erstwhile lodger was. She set the machinery of the law in motion and a messenger-at-arms was sent out to arrest him. The men of Nigg were in Logie that day cutting peats, but the women on hearing of what was to happen to their minister, met in a body at the Red Bridges with their pockets full of stones and chased him to within two miles of Tain." (P)

The Presbytery of Dunfermline and Perth (there being no Secession Presbytery further north) inducted Mr. Buchanan from Callendar to the Secession Church at Ankerville in 1765, the year the church is thought to have been built. During the last year of his ministry the heritors of the parish resolved that he must have no successor and thought that the best way to achieve this was to deprive the congregation of their church.\* A day was appointed for demolishing the building but no one in the parish would do it. Next day, however, a squad from Logie came and knocked it to pieces. As it was known that the church stones were to be used in the building of the Shandwick Mansion House in Logie one of the people pronounced a curse on the proprietor and his mansion; and the remarkable thing is that the mansion was never finished as it was said that no clay or lime would stick to the stones. (P) The Pitcalnie estate provided a site at Chapelhill for the Seceders to build a new church. Ancestors of Mr Alec Fraser helped to build it in 1803, using creels to carry stones and rubble from the original site to the new one. This church stood sideways to the road but when it was rebuilt in 1882 it was made to face the road.  
(\* The lease of the church site ran out at that time.)

In 1843 there was the Disruption and the formation of the Free Church when there was another split in the Old Church congregation. Those who left it then built the Middle Church in 1844.

The original Seceders were called the Associated Presbytery and changed this name to Associated Synod when they healed various schisms within their church as a whole. The Associated Synod and Relief Church (there was no Relief Church in Nigg) joined to form the United Presbyterian Church and it was as United Presbyterians that the Chapelhill Church joined with the Free Church congregation of the Middle Church in Nigg to form the United Free Church. (The prospect of this union had caused some people to leave the congregation and form the Free Presbyterian Church.) Those who did not agree with this union of 1900 remained out and became what was called the "Wee Free" Church. In 1922 the Middle Church united with Chapelhill. At the 1929 union of the Church of Scotland and United Free Church some people left Chapelhill and joined others from

Fearn to form the United Free Church Continuing in Balintore. In 1949 Chapelhill Church and the Middle Church separated, the Middle Church joining with Nigg Old Parish Church. When it ceased to be used the Middle Church became the village hall in 1952. With the retirement of the ministers of Nigg Old and Chapelhill Churches these congregations were united under one minister in 1966 after two hundred and ten years. The morning service is now held in Nigg Old Parish Church on the first Sunday of the month and in Chapelhill on the remaining Sundays, with evening services in Balintore. Communion services are held in June and November.

Long before this there had been three chapels in the parish. Of one at Cullisse the Statistical Account of 1794 said, "scarce a vestige of the building remains", although a field there was known then as Chapel Park. Another was at Shandwick and of it the same account said, "the walls ... stood pretty entire till within these few years". The third was at Easter Rarichie. According to W. J. Watson there was an old graveyard below Nigg rocks where legend says the Norwegian princes were buried although this may be the Covenanters' graveyard or Viking graveyard, according to different versions; another was near the curate's house at Easter Rarichie. All suicides and unbaptized children were buried around the Shandwick Stone.\*\* (N) Beside Old Shandwick Farm one can still see the remains of a graveyard, now partly made into a silage pit, with gravestones protruding. There is said to have been a small one in the corner of the field at the foot of Cormack's (Stairack's) Brae, on the right going down. (R) There is a small private cemetery in the grounds of Pitcalzean House. Nigg Old Church is surrounded by its graveyard where many from other parishes are buried also. The enclosed grave at the gate is said to have been to prevent body-snatching although this is doubtful. Chapelhill Cemetery is the one now in use and here there is the War Memorial commemorating twenty-one people who gave their lives in the First World War and thirteen in the Second World War.

\*\* Recent excavations seem to disprove this statement.

Nigg Old Church had a meeting house at Balnabruach where not so long ago the Wednesday evening prayer meetings were a feature of life. Sunday evening services were held there once a month till 1960 since when it has been unused. A small church-like building in the grounds of Dunskaith is said to be a small church which the Romanes family built for the local people but it was never finished. The Manse and glebe of the Old Church were sold in 1949 and the Middle Church manse was used till the union of 1966. It was here that the Rev. J. R. Martin gave a garden party for the visit of the Moderator of the General Assembly in 1959. It was a lovely day, the garden looked beautiful and it is remembered as a very happy afternoon. The Chapelhill Manse is now the one used.



*The Garden Party for the visit of the Moderator of the General Assembly in 1959, showing the Moderator and both the Nigg ministers.*

The church for many years had to do with the provision of schools. In 1646 an Act was passed saying that the heritors must provide a school and stipend for the master. Nigg must have had a school by 1716 because in that year the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge asked the Presbytery of Tain to send them up a list of places where it would be desirable to have schools erected and in their reply the Presbytery said of Nigg, "There is a legal school in the Parish of Nigg. The parish is four miles, and has a thousand catechisable persons above eight years of age. A new school is required at Easter Rarichie, which is three miles distant from the legal school. In this district and the neighbourhood there are one hundred and twenty families. The proposed school should be ambulatory to other parts of the parish." Of all the parishes in the Presbytery they said " ... the common people, except a few, are illiterate and speak nothing but Irish". (L) The Statistical Account of 1794 records that there was a parochial school but no schoolhouse although the heritors had ordered one to be built. It went on to say that the master's salary was only £8. 6. 8d. - "a paltry consideration to induce any young man, who has been at the expense of a liberal education, to undertake an office of all others the most slavish and fatiguing". It also recorded that the Society for the Propagation of Christian Knowledge had recently appointed a schoolmistress to educate the young girls who otherwise would receive no education. This school is thought to have been in Mr. and Mrs. Macleod's house at Strath of Pitcalnie. Until the present schools at Nigg and Pitcalnie were built the boys' school was the top floor of the old Post Office house and Miss I. Ross's father went to it as a child. The New Statistical Account refers to these two schools and to two "unendowed schools". One of the latter is believed to have been at Pleasant Cottage but the other is unknown.



*The old Post Office, formerly the school.*

## Fishing

Nigg once had three fishing villages. The only one still active is Shandwick, at the east end of the parish, which adjoins the other fishing villages of Park, Balintore and Hilton in the parish of Fearn. Vass, Skinner and Ross are the most common names in Shandwick, the Vasses claiming to be of Viking descent. The other fishing villages are Balnapaling and Balnabruach in the west end of the parish and according to the New Statistical Account of 1841 "the original seat of these fishing colonies was at the foot of the hill, immediately below Dunskaith Castle. But there is no plausible tradition as to the time or occasion of their having come to the parish." A ruined house can still be seen on the shore below the castle site. Some say that this was the village of Dunskaithness, others that Dunskaithness is another name for Balnapaling or Nigg Ferry. Balnabruach runs from the dyke beside "Big Hugh Macleod's" house to the front of Ivy Cottage; from there Balnapaling runs to the Ferry. The group of houses on the seaward side of the road from Pleasant Cottage formed a hamlet known as "Red House" but this name is not now used except for one cottage which retains "Red House" as its address. (Q)



*Looking from below North Sutor towards Nigg Ferry showing ruined house - Dunskaithness?*

In the 19th century Nigg Bay was a rich source for fishing. According to the New Statistical Account, "Here are to be found in abundance in their respective seasons, cockles and mussels and flounders and sand-eels; and it is here, likewise, where the fishers of Nigg, Fearn, Cromarty and many of those of Banffshire find the bait wherewith they catch cod and haddock and whiting ... The neighbouring friths (sic) abound with fish - salmon, turbot, cod, haddock, mackerel, whiting, cuddies, crowners, soles, flounders, skate, dog-fish, and herrings in their season ... There were many lobsters fifty years ago; but the greater part of them were then conveyed to London, and now the race is almost unknown." There were also many crabs on the shore, and the number of oyster-shells found indicates that there must have been plenty of them also. For a long time a neighbouring estate

claimed the mussel beds of Nigg Bay as theirs and employed two "guagers" to guard them. This ended in a court case won by Nigg. The village of Avoch in the Black Isle is said to have contributed towards their legal fees and in consequence were able to continue their profitable bait-gathering and winkle-fishing in Nigg. (Q) Bait was dug with a "kype" (shaped like an adze) which was used walking backwards, razor-shell fish being particularly good for this purpose.

Herring proved to be a very fickle fish. Hugh Miller records that they were very plentiful between 1702-14 but by 1788 they had failed. They must have revived again, because the new Statistical Account refers to another failure only a few years before that account was written. There was a big curing yard in Balintore at the time of the successful herring fishing and boats from as far away as Lossiemouth brought their catches there. A man whose family have lived in Shandwick for several generations maintains that one of the reasons for the decline of herring fishing was the unwonted prosperity provided by the curing yard, leading to heavy drinking and carelessness and laziness about fishing. The New Statistical Account says that the herring fishing had enabled the men to build nice cottages and improve their furniture, but that "debt was incurred, high ideas raised," and that the herring failure produced a lamentable degree of poverty in the fishing villages. When the curing yard was dismantled its stones were used to build Lairg Post Office.

The fishers of Shandwick and Fearn were said to sell fish in Kildary about 1838 (B) and to go to the Feil Maree (fair) after it moved from Contin to Dingwall in 1830. They sailed to Dingwall and moored their boats at Peter's Bridge. They took their fresh and smoked haddock and salt cod to the appropriate markets in the town and sold home-made fish oil for lighting direct from the boats. (E)

Before Balintore harbour was built, the Shandwick boats used to land on the shore at Park. The farmer at Balintore considered the shore to be his and therefore he appeared every morning and helped himself to the largest haddock out of each creel until he was stopped from doing so by a fish-curer who demanded that he should pay for what he took. (F)

Seven boats worked out of Balintore and Shandwick for white fish until the mid-1920s. The men used to go out between 1.00 a.m. and 3.00 a.m. and return about 10.00 a.m. They sold their fish to fish-wives or to fish-merchants, of whom the Patersons in Hilton were one. They then cleaned the hooks, after which the women took over and baited the six hundred hooks on each line with lug worm in the summer and with limpets and mussels during the winter. Mr. Nicholas Vass in Shandwick tells of how he and his father used this method of fishing. The women used to carry the men to the boats and launch them, a necessary precaution to save them from getting wet at the start of a night's fishing. (F) A fisherman's proposal was said to be arranged by his mother, who would go to the mother of the prospective bride and ask, "Can she bear my son's burden?" (weight). Life was very hard for the women who often died young, so it was not uncommon for the men to marry more than once. The fisher people inter-married as country girls would not have them because of the intolerable work. The daughters of fishermen often married farm-workers but it was usual for at least one child of such a union to hanker for the sea. (F) It is said that if fishermen met someone with flat feet when they were on the way to their boats they would not put to sea.

Well into the 1930s one of the Shandwick fish-wives went round Nigg selling fish from a creel. She was usually paid with money but sometimes accepted flour or oatmeal in exchange. Having sold her fish along the road to Nigg Feny she would go to Pitcalzean Wood and collect sufficient "toppies" or "tourkens" (fir cones) to fill her creel. These she used for smoking fish in a small shed beside her cottage. A fishwife with creel and headband was seen in Balintore as late as 1964.\*

(\* Creels were normally carried around the shoulders.)

The Cromarty fishermen were said to have been remarkably skilled in the days of sail but they were sometimes unable to make their way between the Sutors in bad weather. When this happened they took refuge in the cave with five entrances which is near the searchlight huts below North Sutor Camp.

Mr. Alec Fraser remembers seeing foreign fishing ships - largely Scandinavian - wintering in the Cromarty Firth up until the time of the Great War. The last ship was repaired by Mr. John Watson of Cromarty, who was a shipwright.

Herring boats used to come in to the "docks" opposite the White House and also lay up on the shore near Pleasant Cottage, but after a great gale which did considerable damage to them they gradually moved away to below Foulis where the hulks of some of them can still be seen.

Older people in Balnabruach remember when almost every cottage had a boat for its own use and a boat-house. The fish they caught was dried overnight hooked to a hake (a triangular or square board) fixed to the end of the house. There is no commercial fishing in Balnabruach or Balnapaling now. Flounder-spearing was a popular sport in Nigg Bay and was said to be best about fifty minutes after high tide. In summer Nigg Pier is lined with both children and adults fishing for saithe or "cuddies," an occasional sea-trout and, in the second half of August, for mackerel. Some people put out nets for sea-trout or lines for flounders. Crabs come in with a May mist (cuckoo mist) and during May they can be hooked out from under stones along the shore to the east of Nigg Pier.



*Salmon nets drying at Shandwick.*

Commercial fishing is operated by the Patersons and the Vasses who have salmon nets around the cliffs. There is still an old fisherman's bothy below Castlecraig where the salmon-fishers used to live for a few days at a time, but now that they have motor-boats they can go out to their nets three times a day from either Balintore or Nigg Ferry. Two boats from Balintore started fishing for Kessock herring in 1966 which turned out to be a bumper year. One boat went prawn-fishing and some lobster fishing was done. Some of the boats are not owned by traditional fishermen but by people anxious to revive fishing but this has not been as successful as was hoped. A sea-angling club formed recently at Balintore gives the young men with a boat a little additional income, and

most of them are never happier than when "messaging about in boats". Most of them, however, are employed on contractors' schemes or other work outside the villages.

Balintore harbour was built in 1890-96 and improvements were made to it in 1965. The ex-Admiralty pier at Nigg Ferry was built in 1914, the builder saying that he would make a pier to last a hundred years. It was enlarged during the Second World War for the mine base there. The little broken jetty alongside it was built in 1912, by Mr. Fraser of Udale in the Black Isle. Large red sandstone blocks lying nearby are the remains of an earlier pier of which the date is not known. (Q)

# Agriculture

From the time of the Picts elementary farming would have been carried on to a greater or lesser degree in Nigg but apart from the Seven Year's Famine from 1694-1701 it is difficult to find accurate information about early agriculture in the parish. In 1657-8 Franke visited Easter Ross and referred to the "abundance and cheapness of provisions there", saying also that the soil expelled rats. (G) (It doesn't now.) Early on Nigg had several large estates and some small ones. The estate of Pitcalnie has remained in the hands of the same family, the Rosses of Pitcalnie, from 1587 although parts of it have been sold fairly recently. There were small farms and crofts on these estates, with crofting townships at Torran and Culderarie and possibly another at the top of the old Castlecraig golf course.

It is known from a letter exhibited in Tain's ninth-centenary exhibition in 1966 that flax was grown in the 18th century at the Carse of Bayfield and there is the "well of the lint pools" above Wester Rarichie where it was steeped. The dovecot at Pitcalzean is dated 1666 so this estate must have been reasonably well-established by that time. The three girnals or storehouses where proprietors stored their produce and grain-rents were built early in the 18th century. The Ferry Hotel was one of them and is dated 1712 and the others are the Ankerville farm cottages and the Bayfield granary. The Session Minutes refer in 1706 to a Kiln at Kindeace (now Bayfield) and later to another at Culnauld. The "Decreet of the Division of the Commonty of Nigg" in 1770 mentions Milns at Kindeace and Pitcalzean and "new barns at Culnauld". This Decreet details the division of the hill of Nigg between the various proprietors. Certain of these were given the right - "that they shall severally have and retain the privilege of winning and carrying away Mill Stones for the use of their own respective milns only out of the Millstone quarry of Portintruy which falls within the foresaid allocation in all time coming". The right of making kelp on the shores was also given to some in the Decreet. This is also referred to in a letter written by William Forsyth of Cromarty to Lady Pitcalnie in May 1764: "As I get the priviledge of some Shoares on this Coast for burning of Kelp - I hope for your giving me yours in the Parish of Nigg upon equal terms with any other, as I will give you as much as any other will offer you."

The term "oxgate" meaning a "one-pair farm" is used in some accounts i.e. "the oxgate lands of Nigg called the Dam and the Easter and North Oxgates of the lands of Nigg". (In the neighbouring parish of Fearn there is a place name, Midoxgate.)

By 1770 fir plantations are mentioned and at the time of the Statistical Account of 1794 Nigg Hill had large plantations, although there were still many people living on the hill and there can still be seen the ruins of crofts and the small green patches and fael dykes showing where cultivation once took place. Part of the hill was said to abound with medicinal herbs "where some time ago a number of goats were kept whose milk for that circumstance was remarkable for its good qualities in restoring health". (W) The Statistical Account of 1794 goes on to say that in winter much of the parish was wet largely due to the many springs but in spring these dried up and oat sowing began about 10th March. One end of the parish sowed its barley at the beginning of April, the other not till the middle of that month. Vegetation was slow to start with, owing to the strength of the soil and northerly exposure, but later on it speeded up and usually harvest was early, from about 20th August to mid-October. The usual crops were best quality barley, oats, pease, rye and potatoes. Wheat had been tried but "for want of inclosures" it had been discontinued, "barley being almost as profitable and far less scouring to their fields". There were many horses of a "very trifling and diminutive kind;" and a large number of black cattle used for tilling, but "it is supposed that they will soon have

to adopt a different method, because hills for summer cattle grazing are being converted into sheep farms". This summer grazing must have been outside the parish. In the parish, however, the sheep population was already decreasing before 1794 owing to the plantation of fir trees thus causing considerable loss to farmers as sheep had provided manure, clothing and something towards their rents. In this case the "clearance" was caused by trees rather than sheep. The population was declining owing to the fir plantations and the enclosure of farms and by 1794 several places where cottages had once stood had been used for this purpose. In 1755, according to Dr. Webster, the population had been 1,261 but by 1794 it was down to 1,133. Farming was the chief occupation in the parish and there were four blacksmiths, eight wrights, seven millers, one flax dresser, two coopers, as well as twelve weavers, nine tailors and twelve shoemakers. (W) Tain had the right of all tanning in Easter Ross. (Y) Day labourers earned 6d. to 8d. a day but farm servants' wages were more difficult to ascertain as they had many perquisites but they were equal to 12-14 bolls of victuals annually. Maids received £1. 6/- to £1.12/- annually and all other tradesmen were paid by the piece of work they did. (W)

Rents were paid sometimes in kind and sometimes in money. Some examples of rents from an "Account of Customs paid by tenants of Pitcalnie 1785" are:-

"from Francis Hendry - 8 hens one wintering two wedders  
3 pints honey in all - 18/9½d  
from Hugh Ulin - 10 hens 2/6 wintering 1/1½d.  
two wedders 6/6 40 eggs 20 yards  
plaids for the Lady 10d. - £1. 7. 8.  
from Geo. Munro - 2 hens 100 eggs 4 wedders  
2 swine - £3.  
from Widow Gow 2 hens."

The valued rent of the parish was £4,205. 11/- Scots (H) and the real rent, mills included, amounted to 2,000 bolls, partly meal, partly barley (10/- to 13/4 the boll). The Account says, "The rent of a considerable part of these lands has not been augmented for 200 years back, and is yet as high as the land can possibly bear". Unfortunately all the landlords were absentee and the Statistical Account notes other handicaps to farming - that farmers were poor and had no leases so that they did not improve their land; but nevertheless it is pointed out that they employed more servants than necessary. They also had to pay a high multure to the mills, leaving one boll for every eight they sent. A great hardship was the lack of fuel in the parish. The only trees were the young firs and there was no peat so the people had to go across the ford over Nigg Sands to Logie to cut peat there. This was a distance of six or seven miles and being only able to cross the ford at suitable times of the tide, they had to work very irregular hours, so that the "cutting and carrying .. in summer takes so much time that the farms are neglected". (W) The condition of the roads in 1794 also caused great expense in harness and in a wet season they sometimes found themselves unable to harvest the peat at all. The Account continues however: "It is with the greatest satisfaction they learned that it is intended to bring a Bill into Parliament to repeal the duties payable on coals carried coast-wise to the North as it will enable them to procure fuel at a cheaper rate, and with less drudgery, and at the same time it will permit them to direct their attention to agriculture which at present from the above-mentioned cause, is too much neglected by them." (W)

Farming in Easter Ross as whole progressed quickly at this point and in 1810 Sir George Stewart Mackenzie, writing on farming in Ross and Cromarty, was able to say: "The proprietors of the eastern districts of these counties are very spirited in improving and following every species of good husbandry practised in the south. Farmers of the superior class begin to imitate their example;

but the smaller tenants are far behind. The usual grains cultivated on the arable lands are bear, oats, potatoes, pease and beans, and along the shore, wheat. Every rotation customary in the south has been tried; but the want of markets within the county has induced many to lay their farms down with grass. The grasses generally sown, both for hay and pasturage, are red and white clover, with a mixture of rye grass and rib grass. The ordinary rotation practised by the small tenants, and which they have uniformly pursued for centuries, is bear, or bigg with manure, followed by two crops of oats, or sometimes pease, and always a quantity of potatoes, on which root their families are chiefly maintained during nine months of the year. For the most part, the horses and cattle employed in the labour of the farms are sent, as soon as seed time is over, to graze during the summer on some hill pasture, for which five or six shillings per head are paid. The gentlemen, and better sort of farmers, possess from 300 to 800 acres which are in general inclosed; but the rest of the country is almost entirely open-field." (I) The chief exports in 1810 from Easter Ross as a whole were black cattle, sheep and wool and a considerable quantity of wheat and oats. (I)

By 1841, however, there were only twelve families living on the high part of the hill although ninety-nine families are said to have been living on and around it till about a hundred years ago. Some of these families are thought to have included Forbes at Port-an-Righ; Ross; Tom Macandye near Castlecraig; Robert Adam, near Bayfield Loch; Francis Henry, near Robert Adam; William Cumming, Castlecraig; Donald Duff; Kate McCulloch; Donald Gair and Hugh Gallie. What are now the larger farms still had a considerable number of crofts on them. For instance a map of Nigg Farm in 1864 shows ten crofts tenanted by the following: James Mackenzie, 2 acres; Jasper Graham, 1 acre; Catherine Macdirmid, 1 acre; John Macleod, 1 acre; Alexander Munro, 2 acres; Mr. Holmes and Jane Fraser, 18 poles; Alexander Fraser, 3 acres; John Macleaman, 2 acres; Andrew Ross, 13 acres in one croft and 2 acres in another. This, together with cut wood on the hill, 39 acres, and growing wood on the hill, 95 acres, and public roads, 4 acres, came to 453 acres, 3 roods, 3 poles, equalling in Scotch measure 359 acres, 3 roods, 7 falls. A map of Westfield (now Pitcalzean) of the same date shows eight crofts on what is now one farm. Only two of these were on the hill - Simon Fraser's and James Macdirmid's, but neither is shown as having any land. Those on the lower part of the farm were held by Alexander Ross, 116 acres; William Duff, 6 acres; Alexander Fraser, 42 acres; Hugh Gallie, 7 acres; Donald Gair, 26 acres; Alexander Ross, 8 acres; and Roderick McCulloch, 5 acres. The cholera epidemic of 1832 has been suggested as the cause of the gradual movement off the hill. It is more likely to have been tree-planting and enclosures which were followed by the formation of larger units, which were farmed by tenants. When Mr. Adams left the hill he brought his heuk and flail, the mill-stones that had been turned by a horse and querns for grinding barley.

The New Statistical Account of 1841 noted the improvements that had been made in draining - about 1823 Bayfield had reclaimed 120 acres - but said that there remained much yet to do in the way of roads, fences, trenching and still more draining. Around 1860 the Government laid draining tiles which measured 2 inches across and 15 inches long and were laid 7-11 yards apart, 4-5 feet deep and ran straight up and down hill. This draining was very well carried out. Most of the farm-servants were recent immigrants from the south. Only three of the seven proprietors lived in the parish. The cottages of the poor people had been built "without regard to cleanliness and freedom from damp". There were 2,500 acres cultivated, 100 acres undivided common 1,000 under fir wood, and a further 1,000 which might have been tilled but were lying waste. When the trees on the hill were fully grown, they were sawn and sold in the neighbourhood or else shipped to Caithness and the thinnings were sent to Newcastle. (C) Considerable trade seems to have been done with Newcastle. Schooners brought coal from there and on their return south took grain and potatoes, and harl and marl for building which was dug from the beach below Seaside Cottage. Loading and unloading was done off the shore and two of the ships were the Bonny Lass and the Lily.

The few sheep that there were in 1841 consisted of Southdown, Cheviot, and the "small country kind". (C) The father of Mr. Alec Macrae (who farms one of the Pitcalnie holdings) used to say that Robert Adam had the finest flock of grey-faced sheep running on the hill that he had ever seen. In the Castlecraig rocks there were upwards of a hundred goats feeding on the herbs. A few of these were still in the cliffs about 1910. By 1841 not much attention was being paid to the rearing of black cattle but the horses were of a superior breed and well fed. When the harvest was gathered the farmers bought young Highland stock to eat the straw and these were sold when summer came. Fresh butter was selling at 9d. per lb; cheese at 6/- per stone; and warm milk at 3d. per Scotch pint. Not long before, the parish had been noted for the high quality of its barley but by 1841 little of it was grown. It had been no uncommon thing for the barley to weigh 56 lbs. the bushel (could this have been because it was fairly damp?) and when distilled to give 3 Scots gallons (24 English quarts) of good whisky per boll. (C) The Nigg smugglers would have provided a good market for it and it is said that their suppression proved a considerable loss for the barley growers. Chevalier barley had been introduced about 1840, Angus and potato oats were quite common and Hopetoun oats were coming into fashion. Wheat, however, was by now the farmer's mainstay, with the quality as good as the quantity. But the Account goes on to say "... owing to the high rents, the low price of wheat of late years and the little demand for other kinds of farm produce the land has been too much scourged by wheat crops". A four-, or even three-, shift rotation was practised and "beans are much attended to now by high and low". (C) In fact, on a neighbouring farm, in 1833, twelve women hoed beans every day for seventeen days which represents a great many beans. (X) Swedish turnips were grown and bone manure was used successfully on them. (C)

From mid-April to mid-May potatoes were planted, using sea-ware as manure. Some people gathered it off the shore while others preferred the ware from the rocks. The potatoes were cabbled in the beginning of June and two or three weeks later weeded. Then they were hoed twice and lifted in October. "The people pay from L 3 to L 4 per acre, besides manure and labour, to the tenants for potato land." (C) Potatoes became the staple diet of the poor after the herring failure until they in their turn failed during the Potato Famine of 1846.

A farm account of 1831-32 records the work done daily by the staff. The women worked very hard and even though it notes that they were at the mill "at wheat day and night" they only received pay for one day - 6d. They shawed turnips, spread dung, dressed rye grass seed and ordinary grass seed, cut seed potatoes and afterwards planted them, hoed beans and turnips, coiled hay, threshed turnip seed, carried seed, "attended thatchers," made ropes, pulled heather and thistles! (X) During harvest they cut the grain, working on their knees with heuks. Mr. Alec. Fraser's aunt worked like this. The coming of the scythe was a great boon as harvest could then be cut standing up. (Q) The men, who received 1/- a day, ploughed all year, it seems. December, February, May, June, July and September all have entries about ploughing. They also carted vast amounts of stones to the farm from Alness, Balintore and elsewhere, which may have been for building but it is thought that they were for stone drains and, if that were so, perhaps the heather pulled by the women might have been for laying on top of the stones before the drains were filled in. Alternatively the heather might have been for thatch. There are references to "carting marl and lime from Nigg Sands". Marl is used in building, and for putting on heavy land to break it up. The lime was possibly sea-shells which were crushed and also used for building. In January 1832 there is an entry: "Remark - Finlay Munro Millwright killed accidentally by coming in contact with the machinery of threshing mill while at work". Next day the farm carpenters made a "coffin for his corpse". (X)

By 1841 farmers had 19-year leases which made improved farming worthwhile and by then the formation of larger farms was really becoming established. Farms in the parish varied from 30-400 acres, although one farmer had three farms, bringing his total to 1,000 acres in all. There were five

farms of 200 acres each and two of 100 each. The farm-buildings were generally good, especially at Nigg, where they had been built by the former proprietor. There were four threshing-mills driven by water, at Nigg, Bayfield, Cullisse and Pitcalnie. There were meal mills at Bayfield, Balaphuile and probably Culnauld, but they seldom had water in summer or harvest and the culture was so high that they were avoided as much as possible by those not thirled to them. (C) Mr Hugh Rutherford's lease of Culnaha on the Pitcalnie Estate just after the First World War "thirled" him to Bayfield Mill although it had in fact closed in 1912. The Balaphuile mill closed before the turn of the century. Handicaps to farming in 1841 were that two of the largest estates were entailed under unusual conditions which did not encourage tenants to improve. The main objective seemed to be to get as much rent as possible. Other estates had judicial factors, restricted to the letter of instructions perhaps unwisely given. Some farmers had done well a few years before while prices were high and had become careless about improvements. Roads had been neglected and the Rev. A. MacAdam who wrote the Account complained that thousands of pounds had been taken from Nigg to make and repair roads in Fearn and Tarbat, the three parishes being constituted into one district. Cottars were not encouraged to build or improve, and as there was no market for hay nor much demand for fat cattle, the land was not allowed to lie long enough under lea. (C) The last crop grown on the Castle Craig hill above the golf-course was pease for peasemeal, called "peachacks". It was harvested and stoked but a great gale came and blew it all away, after which this piece of land was put down to grass about 1865. (Q)

By 1900 the farms were more or less in their present form, apart from Pitcalnie where "Land-leaguers" came in after the First World War and were given holdings. The 20th century saw the buying of farms, cutting of plantations in the First World War and the reclamation of the hill with a consequent increase in production and decrease in trees. By 1966 all but two farms are owner-occupied and only five crofts remain.

The "horse-mechanical" age brought hay-mowers, binders - Mr. D. Adams, Balaphuile, had a binder as early as 1910 and was still using it forty years later - and horse-drawn bogies to carry stock. A haulage contracting business began in the late 1930s. The introduction of rubber-tyred carts was a great help. The last ploughing match took place at Nigg Farm in the late 1930s. There was a blacksmith living and working at Culnaha Smithy till 1937 after which a visiting smith came till about 1953. Horses were used for farm work well after the war but there is not a single horse in the parish now although there are several riding ponies.

Widening and deepening of the Canal took place after the Second World War and has improved the low-lying land by carrying away the water from field drains. Till recently corn was harvested with a binder and each farm had a well-filled stackyard. The sheaves were threshed at their own water-mills or by mobile threshing machines, drawn and driven by a steam engine, and very imposing, and to the children awe-inspiring they were too. The stacks were always full of rats and catching them caused great excitement. Many farms now have a combine harvester and grain drying facilities, leaving the stackyard empty. Most of the grain is sold in bulk and, with the aid of an auger, a lorry can load anything from seven to forty tons an hour. A little grain is still cut by binder, stoked and stacked, but this is usually only if it is wanted for feeding in the sheaf. Straw is baled and stacked in long "sow-stacks" although it is sometimes burnt in the field to save the cost of labour and binder twine. Hay used to be coiled and stacked but is now usually baled in the field and stored in sheds. A considerable amount of silage is made and pits are placed conveniently for the feeding of cattle. Silage-cutting, topping of grass, spraying of crops and straw burning have killed many young birds and the lack of suitable cover has discouraged many others. There is a certain amount of agricultural contracting - combining, fertilizer-spreading, crop-spraying, mechanical draining and fencing. Potatoes used to be dug by machine and lifted by women and children but

now some farms have a potato harvester. Some are stored in pits but more often now in sheds. After dressing they are sold to potato merchants. There is a potato-dressing plant where seed potatoes are washed, dressed and treated to prevent the diseases of gangrene and skin-spot, before being sold to England. The rest are washed and placed in 56 lb. bags for sale as ware to greengrocers. Land is contracted out for potato-growing at about £30 per acre.

When rabbits, which were such a scourge in the parish, were decimated by the myxomatosis outbreak of about 1954, Nigg farmers were "very spirited in improving" and led the way by forming the Nigg Rabbit Clearance Society to employ a trapper to "police" the area and kill all rabbits re-appearing. This Society was the model on which all later societies in Britain were formed. Previously trappers had been employed by farmers or rented the trapping. The rabbits were sent south by rail in crates. They bred freely in the cliffs and sand-dunes and were quite unmanageable. Reclamation had already been started on the hill but after the myxomatosis outbreak it became more worthwhile and a large acreage on the hill has been taken in and is now very productive with silage grown on it and fed to cattle on the hill during the winter. More cattle are out-wintered as a result.

Shepherds from various farms used to join together to clip each farm's flock in one big day's effort. Nowadays they use little outside help and do it gradually themselves, some using electric shears. Very few farmers or farm workers keep poultry and most get their milk in a bottle delivered from Tain by the Milk Marketing Board.

The produce of the farms has not varied much this century although Ankerville formerly had a dairy and Castlecraig a pedigree Aberdeen Angus herd and then a cross beef herd. At present it is:

Castlecraig - Dairy, Friesians.

Pitcalzean - Potatoes, commercial cattle, pedigree North Country Cheviot sheep, barley.

Nigg - Potatoes, barley, South Country Cheviot sheep, half-bred ewes for fat lambs, commercial cattle.

Pitcalnie - Pedigree Blackface and Leicester sheep, barley, milk and eggs.

Culnaha - Potatoes, wheat, sheep, commercial cattle.

Bayfield - Pedigree North Country Cheviot sheep, cross cattle, wheat, barley.

Ankerville - Pedigree Suffolk sheep, fat lambs, cross cattle, barley, wheat.

W. Rarichie - Cross sheep, fattening cattle, barley.

E. Rarichie - Potatoes, wheat, barley, cross sheep and cross cattle, pigs.

Cullisse - Pedigree Aberdeen Angus cattle, pedigree Suffolk sheep, cross sheep, cross cattle, barley, potatoes.

The figures below for 1938 and 1965 show the difference made by reclamation:

	<b>1938</b>	<b>1966</b>
Wheat - acres	116	227
Barley - acres	271	1070
Oats - acres	855	215
Potatoes - acres	257	195
Turnips and swedes - acres	486	255
Grass for mowing - acres	459	572
Grass not for mowing - acres	1676	2335
Rough grazing - acres	2976	1936
Woodland - acres	?	100

	<b>1938</b>	<b>1966</b>
Dairy cattle	87	258
Beef cattle	665 approx.	1127
Breeding ewes	2504	3512
Total sheep	7092	10302
Pigs	272	6
Poultry	2887	884
Working horses	126	-

Labour:

	<b>1938</b>	<b>1966</b>
Men over 21	68	56
Men under 21	12	5
Women and girls	7	2
Casual and part-time men	7	3
Casual and part-time women	3	3

In 1965, 5,703 acres were owner-occupied and 1,358 acres rented from a landlord, making a total for the parish of 7,061 acres. (Y)

## Fauna and Flora

In the parish there are roe deer, weasels, moles, a few rabbits returning after myxomatosis and there has been a notable increase in the number of hares, which are said now to be going underground. Ermine are occasionally seen - one at Cullisse about 1960 and another in February 1967 at Nigg House. There were a few wild goats in the cliffs till 1910; a white deer, thought to have strayed from Langwell in Sutherland, was shot at Castlecraig in 1926; and a wild cat measuring more than three feet in length was shot there in 1936 since when no more have been seen. Adders are sometimes seen on the hill in hot weather. There are a great many porpoises in the Firth and seals which do considerable damage to the salmon fishers' nets. A wide variety of shells is found on the shore and in 1967 whole sea-urchin shells have been found after a lapse of several years. There are many starfish to be seen at low tide. Trout are to be found in Bayfield Loch. There are no foxes.

Trees include: oak, beech, ash, rowan, elm, elder, chestnuts, hazel, alder, sycamore, willow, Scots pine, larch, birch, fir, gean and yew. There is a walnut tree at the Old Manse which produces nuts every year. There are also Burnet roses, dog roses, hawthorn, juniper, gorse, broom, brambles, wild raspberries and blaeberrys. There are aspens at Pitcalzean House.

### Birds:

Buzzard, Blackbird, Bluetit, Blackcap, Bullfinch, Blackgame (1966), Bittern (rare; one was found exhausted at Cullisse in 1965 and died.) Capercaillie (pre-war), Crow, Cormorant, Curlew, Corncrake (pre-war and it has appeared again very recently.), Cuckoo, Chaffinch, Coalit, Com bunting, Crossbill, Duck - mallard, teal, widgeon, pochard, shelduck, Dunlin, Fieldfare, Fulmar, Greenfinch, Gulls - black-backed, herring, common black-backed, Geese - greylag and pinkfeet, Guillemots (unusual: seen at Nigg Ferry 1966), Great spotted woodpecker (rare) , Grouse (pre-war), House martin, Heron, Hedge sparrow, House sparrow, Jackdaw, Jack snipe, Kittiwake, Lapwing, Lark, Magpie (rare), Meadow pipit, Moorhen, Owl - short-eared, Oystercatcher, Partridge, Pigeons - wood and rock, Peewit, Rook, Razorbill, Redshank, Ringed Plover, Robin, Redwing, Sandpiper, Swans - mute and whooper, Sparrow-hawk, Snipe, Starling, Swallow, Swift, Sand martin, Stonechat, Tern - arctic and common \*\* Thrush, Tree creeper, Woodcock, Wren, Wagtail- pied, Winchat, Willow warbler, Whitethroat, Yellow-hammer

\*\* Terns are locally called "scaickack" or "santy"

### Flowers:

Amphibious persicary, Bugloss, Bloody cranesbill \*\* Black bindweed, Broad-leaved willowherb, Broad-leaved dock, Bell heather, Black bryony, Bird's nest orchid, Bluebell, Bird's foot trefoil, Bog myrtle, Butterfly orchid, Creeping crowfoot, Corn poppy, Cuckoo flower, Charlock (scelag), Cow parsnip, Cleavers, Corn marigold, Cornflower, Corn camomile, Chickweed wintergreen, Comfrey, Common mouse-ear chickweed, Common sandwort, Corn spurrey, Chicory, Cat's ear, Corn sowthistle, Clustered bellflower, Cross-leaved heath, Corn Gromwell, Cow parsley (hemlock), Daisy, Dandelion, Daffodil, Dove's foot cranesbill, Early scorpion grass, Evergreen alkanet,

Eyebright, Early purple orchid, Fat hen, Fumitory, Fragrant orchid, Field heartsease, Field scorpion grass, Forget-me-not, Foxglove, Field scabious, Figwort, Goldilocks, Goodyera, Groutweed, Greater bindweed, Greater field speedwell, Germander stitchwort, Ground ivy, Great plantain, Groundsel, Hairy bitter cress, Hearts-ease, Hairy willow herb, Hoary whitlow grass \*\* Heath milkwort, Herb Robin, Horseshoe vetch, Hairbell, Knapweed, Knotgrass, Lady's bedstraw, Lesser celandine, Lesser mouse-ear chickweed, Lesser stitchwort, Lesser burdock, Meadow buttercup, Marsh marigold, Marsh sorrel, Mair's tail, Marsh cudweed, Meadow cranesbill, Meadowsweet, Milfoil, Marsh cinquefoil, Nipplewort, Ox-eye daisy, Pepperwort, Periwinkle, Primrose, Rosebay, Red dead nettle, Ragged Robin, Red spurrey, Rest harrow, Ragwort (Stinking Willie), Ribwort plantain, Scurvy grass, Spring whitlow grass, Shepherd's purse, Sea rocket, Sea parsley, Sweet Cicely, Sea aster, Sneezewort, Scentless mayweed, Scarlet pimpernel, Sea campion, Silene Gallaica, Spear thistle, Scottish heather, Sea lavender, Self heal, Spotted persicary, Sorrel (sookiesoorack), Sheep's sorrel, Sun purge, Stinging nettle, Tansy, Twayblade, Tufted vetch, Thrift, Thyme-leaved sandwort, Tormentil, Wood anemone, Watercress, Wood dog violet, Wood sanicle, Wild chervil, Wild thyme, Wood sorrel, White clover, Wood avens, Wild strawberry, Wild garlic, White goosefoot, Variegated hemp nettle, Vetch, Zig-zag clover

\*\* Bloody cranesbill (*Geranium Sanguineum*) and Hoary whitlow grass (*draba incana*) are mentioned in the New Statistical Account as being rare.

## Folk Lore

In 1914 Mr. Polson, in his book *Easter Ross*, remarked on the paucity of folk-lore in the district, attributing this to the lack of marsh, moor and mist which encourage tales of ghosts and kelpies. The farming population moved so frequently that stories never had a chance to evolve.

Various stories are given about the Sutors of Nigg. One says that two giant brothers who had offended against some primaeval law were changed into these great cliff guardians of the lowlands behind. (D) Another tradition says that when the country was peopled by a race of giants these promontories served as work-stools for two who worked as sutors or shoemakers. Having only one set of tools between them they used to fling these across to one another when necessary. There is also a story that a young man compared them to two suitors advancing towards each other, but the girl replied that they were "tongueless suitors". Cromarty used to have many shoemakers, which may have given the name. (B)

The "giant's stone" above Blackspring Cottage was dropped there by a giant. Nearby is the "soldier's grave", where into this century anyone passing placed a stone on the cairn. Finn and his warriors are said to have done battle on the shore at Dunskaith.

A princess, grieving for her lover, wandered across the hills and white heather grew wherever her tears fell.

Ghosts were reputed to be at Nigg Old Parish Churchyard and the Red Bridges and no-one would pass these places at midnight. There is said to be a "Green Lady" at Pitcalzean House and a "White Lady" at Bayfield House. Another ghost was said to haunt the Carnjeek, a bend in the road between Pitcalzean and Mulloine. Every farm was reputed to have several ghosts but these stories were sometimes put about by disgruntled employees who did not wish other people to work there. Witches used to meet at the Bayfield waterfall and at the White House.

The well Sul na ba, or Sul ba, flowed in olden times through the trunk of a tree four hundred yards to the south-east of the present site but after some insult the water disappeared, and came forth as the present well at Sul na ba. While the water came through the tree, many diseased people came from distant parts of the country for healing. (C) Half a mile to the east of Sul na ba is a spring noted as a favourite of the fairies. If any of the little people stole a human child and left a puny bantling in its place, the human child might be recovered by leaving the elfin near the well late in the evening and, perhaps, offering some presents to the King of Fairyland. (C)

Otta F. Swire says in *The Highlands and their Legends* that a small village and its church were buried during a great storm under the sea in Nigg Bay. Fishermen used to listen before setting out, saying that if danger threatened the fishing fleet the submerged bells of Nigg would sound a warning. One man heard the sound when he was at sea, not like bells but like great horns, and immediately returned to port. It is said that he died three days later. Many years ago signs of buildings and great stones were said to be seen beneath the sea on clear days but they are now shrouded in sand and have disappeared. (D)

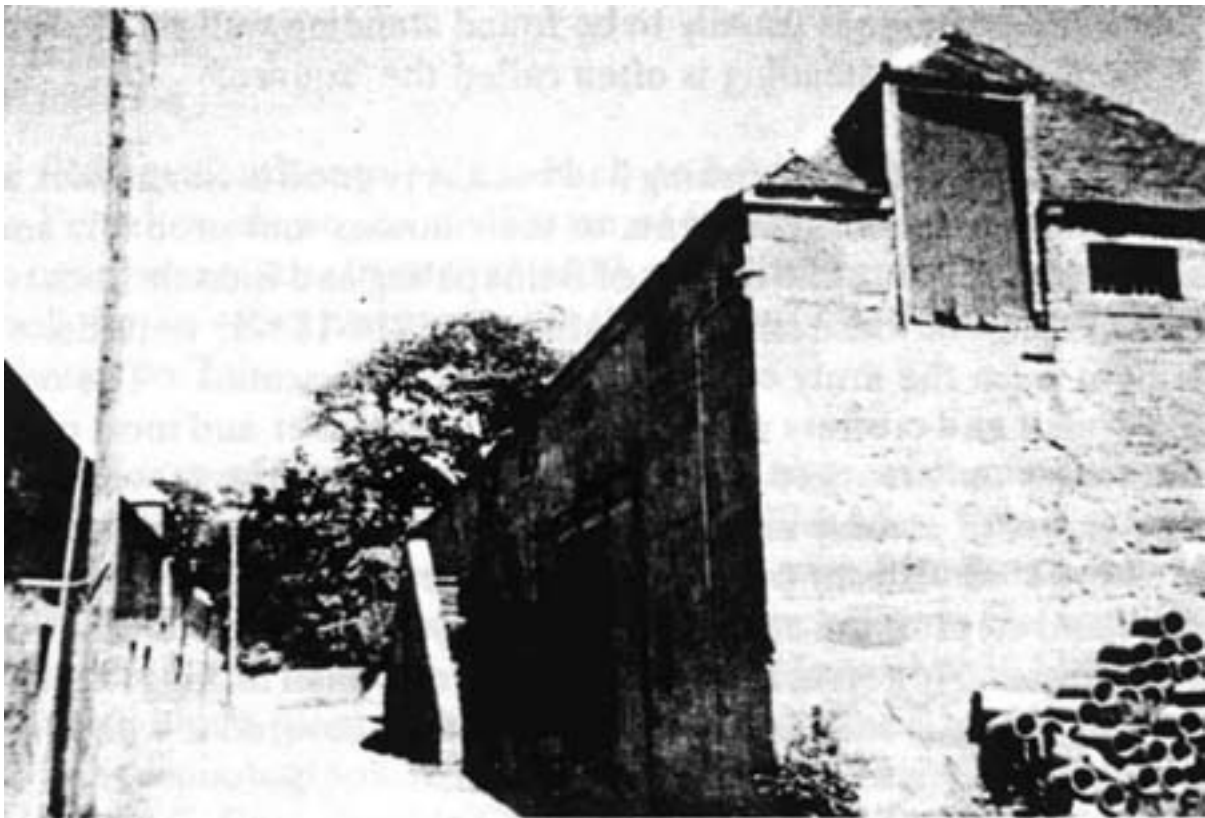
## Houses and Buildings

One of the most important buildings in Nigg in the early days must have been the Bishop of Ross's summer palace. There are no visible remains of it or the large granary which is said to have lain alongside the road. When some trees in this spot were blown down in 1953 great blocks of sandstone were brought up in their roots. The present house stands beside the probable site of the palace. The lintel stone over the front door is marked

T.G.M.B.

1702 (Thomas Gair and Margaret Brebner)

It is built of roughly dressed sandstone of no special size, which probably came from the quarry between the house and churchyard, held together with lime possibly made of crushed sea-shells, and then harled. This method seems to be that used for the bigger buildings.



*"an excellent square of offices . . ." (C).*

Nigg Old Parish Church, which lies near the house, was built in 1626 on an old site and is the oldest building still in use. It is surrounded by a small cemetery and then the ground drops away sharply on three sides. Brae Cottage, which was occupied till about 1950, and the doocot at Pitcalzean Mains were both built in 1666.\* In the former the date can be seen on a stone on the top left hand corner, and in the latter it is to be found on the keystone at one corner.

Nigg Ferry Hotel is a long, white, harled range, incorporating the old grain store which has a crow-stepped gable, skews and the date 1712 over the door. It can be assumed from the similar style of

building that the block of farm cottages at Ankerville, which was also a giral, was built about the same time. The only other place in Nigg with crow-stepped gables is the Old Manse which was built about 1758 and has Victorian additions. It may have been slated right from the start but it is not clear when houses started being roofed by other methods than thatch although Lady Pitcalnie was being given advice on the choice of a "slatter" in 1764.

\* Brae Cottage was built in 1777.



*Doo cot at Nigg Mains.*

Pitcalzean House may be 18th century but the principal facade is Victorian. Bayfield House was built in 1798 of stone blocks and is very definitely Georgian in style. Fireplaces and mantles have

been found in Bayfield and Nigg Houses that are possibly Adam and, if not, certainly faithful copies.



*Doo cot at Pitcalzean Mains.*

Chapelhill Church was built in 1803 and rebuilt in 1882 in Norman style with a square tower. The Middle Church, sometimes called the "Big Church" and now the hall, was built in 1844 after the Disruption, and has a three-stage tower of unusual design. The two schools - one at Nigg and one at Pitcalnie (Chapelhill) - probably were built simultaneously in the late 19th century.

At Wester Rarichie the farm house and cottages were built all in one block forming two sides of a square. The cottages face inwards while the farmhouse, which is on the corner, faces outwards. A fleu-de-lys is carved above the door. A new farmhouse has since been built on the other side of the

steading. The older farm cottages were often built in a row and known as the "street", while the shepherd's cottage is usually to be found standing well on its own at the other end of the farm. The steading is often called the "square".

Prior to 1841 the fishing had been very good in Shandwick and the fishermen had made many improvements to their houses and probably some of them were slated at this time. The houses of Balnapaling and Balnabruach were not improved at this time but those still in use after the 1914-18 war were done up with material bought from the army camps which had been vacated. The cottages of both the fishermen and crofters were stone-built with caber and mott partitions. On some the stones only reached a certain height and then turves were used up to the roof. The floors of some were dug below ground level making a small step down and creating a very storm-proof cottage. A few cottages in Balnabruach have a trapdoor and steps to the attic and a tiny window in the gable wall facing the sea. Mr. Alec Fraser, Honeysuckle Cottage, is the only man in Nigg with the ability to thatch and his house is still thatched but in 1966 he covered it with black polythene held down by netting to keep the weather out.

After the second world war a lot of building was done. Council houses were built at Pitcalnie (Chapelhill) and were meant for agricultural workers. Several farmers built modern homes for their men besides putting bathrooms into their older cottages. Four new private houses have been built, the first being the bungalow at Cullisse followed by a very modern erection at the Old Smithy at Culnaha. The other two, at Bayfield and Mulloine, were built on more traditional lines but are as labour-saving as possible.

\* Brae Cottage was built in 1777

## Royal Visitors

The first royal visitor to Nigg is likely to have been James IV as he crossed the "King's Ferry" on his way to the Shrine of St. Duthus in Tain. He made this pilgrimage nearly every year from 1493-1513, sometimes going by Inverness, Beaully and Dingwall, but at other times crossing the ferries of Ardersier and Cromarty to Nigg and thence to Tain.

Prince Henry of Prussia, brother of the Kaiser and grandson of Queen Victoria, was "washed ashore" below Dunskaith on 27th May, 1891, during a storm. He went with a companion to Dunskaith House to ask for help but when his bedraggled condition was seen he was sent to the back door. He went instead to the Ferry Inn where the landlady, not knowing who he was, took him in, dried his clothes and gave him a meal. Only later did she discover his identity when she received a signed photograph recording the event. This photograph is in the possession of Miss C. Ross, Seaside Cottage, a grand-daughter of the kind landlady.

In 1935 Princess Olga, a cousin of the Tsar of Russia, spent a holiday in Nigg and stayed in Brae Cottage for two months.

In the early summer of 1957 H.M. Queen Elizabeth reviewed the Home Fleet in the Cromarty Firth. Although this was a naval occasion and not a visit to Nigg, it aroused the most tremendous enthusiasm and North Sutor made a splendid grandstand for people from all over Easter Ross to watch H.M.S. Britannia leading the ships of the Home Fleet through the Sutors to anchor for three days in the Cromarty Firth. Crowds of people were at the Ferry; children had a half-day off school to watch and everyone who could stopped work for the afternoon. At night, too, crowds went to watch the beautiful sight of the ships which were ablaze with lights. The Queen made a spectacular departure which unfortunately was seen by very few. She was aboard the aircraft carrier from which, as it passed through the Sutors, pairs of aircraft were taking off one after the other, making a thunderous noise which echoed and re-echoed between the headlands, making the legend of the giants almost believable.

On the 25th June 1964 H.M. the Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh paid an official visit to Ross-shire and on their way from Tain to Cromarty crossed the "King's Ferry". The pier was gaily decorated and crowded with visitors who had a splendid view of the Royal party.

THE EMBARKATION OF HER MAJESTY THE QUEEN from NIGG FERRY PIER on THURSDAY, 25th JUNE, 1964
--

Invitation to the Pier for the Queen's Visit.



*The older people waiting for the Queen.*



*The Queen and Prince Philip leaving for Cromarty.*

## Modern Nigg - 1967



Nigg Hill which twenty years ago was brown with heather or yellow with gorse is now almost entirely green. This remarkable change of colour is significant of this area in modern times, the farmers having re-shaped the appearance of the countryside. The removal of undergrowth, reclamation and the extensive use of insecticides and fertilizers have changed the balance of much of the wild life. There are no regrets for the rabbits which were swept away by myxomatosis in 1954 but Nigg Rabbit Clearance Society requires to be very vigilant to prevent their re-appearance. The difference this has made to the countryside is particularly noticeable in the spring when the primroses are blooming as they grow profusely in any spot where sheep cannot reach them.

Most crofts have been absorbed in the larger farms. There are only five left - Carse of Bayfield, Lower Bayfield, Broomhill, Lower Pitcalzean and Lower Pitcalnie. The difficulty of getting good labour into farming, together with high wages, has forced farmers into using agricultural machinery with more efficiency so that the farms are run with less men. Some farm cottages are now let to

non-agricultural tenants and holiday-makers and a few people take in holiday visitors, many of whom come year after year.

The Admiralty sold the pier to a local farmer together with the enclosure and sheds of the mine base. It was used for housing cattle but now a group of farmers have set up a dressing and packing plant for seed potatoes. The ferry no longer plies regularly between Cromarty and Nigg but the steps of the pier were repaired by the County Council in 1963 to facilitate its occasional use by summer visitors. They were further improved for the visit of H.M. the Queen in 1964.

A fire in 1960 destroyed the new part of Dunskaith. The old part which was undamaged became a house, shop and boarding kennels, and now the Post Office is also there. The only other shop is in Shandwick. A caravan park was established in the grounds after the rubble was cleared. Nearby is the Ferry Hotel and visitors enjoy the fine beach, sand dunes and cliffs of Nigg Ferry. At the weekend, when the weather is warm, it is common to see two hundred or more cars at the Ferry where pre-war forty cars were quite remarkable. There are ponies to ride at Dunskaith, fishing off Nigg pier is popular and more ambitious fishers can hire a boat at Shandwick to go sea-angling. The beach at Shandwick is also very popular with its lovely sweep of sand and rocks and it is handy to the Shandwick Bay Caravan Site at that end of the parish.

The two primary schools at Nigg and Pitcalnie (Chapelhill) had until recently two teachers but are now reduced to one-teacher schools. Children have lunch at school and since the building of the new school at Hilton food has been prepared in its kitchen and taken from there to Nigg and Pitcalnie in large containers. Before that the meals came from Portmahomack school kitchen. A few children from the parish of Logie attend Pitcalnie school as it is closer to their homes and Shandwick children go outside the parish to Hilton School. On leaving primary school the children go to either Hilton Junior Secondary School or to Tain Academy. They can later go to Duncraig Castle School to learn domestic science or to Balmacara Farm School. Any that go on to university usually go to Aberdeen. They train for a much greater range of jobs than previously and go into the forces, Merchant Navy, nursing, teaching, secretarial work, banking, engineering and various trades and Government service.

1966 saw the final amalgamation of the churches, two hundred and ten years after the original secession in 1756. The Middle Church, which became a Public Hall in 1952, has been used for various social activities including drama, whist, dances, a youth club, badminton and concerts but it is now mainly used by the Badminton Club and W.R.I. There are still occasional concerts and sales of work but with the advent of television and the increase of motor cars local entertainment and social occasions have sadly diminished. Two social occasions which are still greatly enjoyed are the W.R.I.'s Christmas party for the children and their annual Social Evening and Bulb Show when they entertain their husbands and friends. The Hall Committee aided by the W.R.I. (almost synonymous!) run a Christmas Bazaar each year to augment their funds.

Mains water and electricity were brought in 1950-51, the same time as the building of the agricultural council houses at Pitcalnie (Chapelhill). One cottage still used a water pump till 1965 or 1966. Seaside Cottage and The Lodge on the low road have no electricity owing to the line not going that way. The County Council began to operate a weekly scavenging service in the early 1960s. Previously each house had a rubbish heap or midden, emptied at intervals to some convenient dump, often on the shore - a very unsightly and unhygienic habit. The County Library used to keep books for the public in the schools but in 1965 a mobile library service was started instead, which calls every fourth Friday, stopping at various points in the parish.

Public transport was seriously curtailed in 1962 when Nigg Railway Station was closed as the nearest station, Fearn, is not on the bus route. There is a school bus to Tain which adults may sometimes use; but the normal service for the public is on Wednesdays and Saturdays when it takes passengers to Tain at midday, returning at 5.00 p.m., with an additional evening run on Saturday. This lack of public transport makes visits to the doctor, and especially the dentist, very difficult. The doctors visit the parish twice a week but will come on other days when needed. Mobile food vans make a regular shopping expedition to Tain unnecessary. Buses are not much used as many people have cars and anyway T.V. keeps them at home in the evenings instead of going to the cinema in Tain. Most farms have their own petrol pumps. The nearest public petrol supply is at Arabella cross-roads outside the parish.

Nigg Station used to be the main Post Office for all the parish except Shandwick. The area is now divided between Tain and Fearn Post Offices, Tain delivering from Ankerville and Bayfield to Nigg Ferry and Fearn delivering from Shandwick to Chapelhill. Mail is delivered twice daily by motor van but only in the morning to certain outlying places. Originally one man served the area but now several postmen take it in turns and are very obliging about taking away letters and parcels and stamping them. Telephones in the parish are on Nigg, Nigg Station and Fearn exchanges. Two policemen are based at Fearn using a motor van to do the rounds of their area from Portmahomack to Nigg Ferry.

Nowadays people have very little need for rights of way although there must have been very many of these when there were more crofts on the hill and on farms. They are remembered down the side of the Pitcalzean wood to the meeting-house; to Brae Cottage; near Broomhill; to Bayfield Loch both through Culnaha and Nigg Farms; and the original road to the pier at Nigg Ferry between the mine base and Dunskaith cottages.

At the Shandwick end of the parish the village is noticeably improved by the introduction of lighting. There has been no development of industry there since the war. The only employment is salmon fishing followed by casual work at harvest and potato-lifting; or else with building contractors and hydro-electric schemes outside the parish. Invergordon Distillery provides more opportunity for jobs.

The population in 1966 was 451. Of these there were 45 primary school children, 38 pre-school children and 78 old age pensioners. There are two organisations working in Nigg for the elderly of the parish to show that they are still remembered - Nigg Benevolent Committee which administers the District Nursing Association funds and the Friendship Committee which raises money by an annual raffle.

After the war some prisoners of war remained in the area with the consequent introduction of the names Tonberg, Schoebella, Mutinelli and Salvatore.

High wages make it impossible for most people to employ a maid and in any case a girl on her own in a big house finds this work too lonely. The only alternative employment for girls is outside the parish. Very few boys wish to go into farming and their wages are not much less than those of experienced men so that most farmers would rather employ the latter. In these days of mass production there is no call for traditional craftsmen and, apart from Shandwick, none is now to be found in the parish except for Mr. Alec Mackenzie who recently retired from active work as a carpenter. The W.R.I. encourages the women to pursue their traditional crafts such as knitting, embroidery and rug-making and some fine work is produced.

One of the greatest changes is the difference in living standards. No man will put up with a house which lacks modern conveniences. They all have radio, most have television and many labour-saving gadgets. In most cases the coal range is done away with in favour of solid-fuel or electric cookers. There is a greater variety of diet with oatmeal not so popular as it once was. Good mass-produced clothes at reasonable prices enable everyone to dress well although it is remarkable that the idea of always dressing in one's Sunday best has died out and the Sunday walk appears to have lapsed.

All workers get holidays with pay and many go to friends and relations, camping and sometimes abroad. Mr. and Mrs. Alec Macrae have visited her sister in Canada, Mrs Robertson her daughter in Egypt and a few years ago Mr and Mrs Sidney Mackenzie went to see her family in Germany.

Nigg is becoming a popular place for retirement and some new houses are being built and two houses which previously had farming connections and might have fallen in to disuse, were bought for this purpose. This, combined with tourism, makes a brighter picture for Nigg in future years.

In 1938, coal cost 2/2d. per cwt. but the price had risen to 3/8d. by 1946. Prices have continued to rise and in 1967 some of these are:

3 lbs wholemeal flour 2/7d  
3 lbs white flour 2/1d  
1 loaf (2 lbs) 1/6d  
1 lb raisins 2/-  
1 lb tea 3/6d  
1 lb sugar 9d  
1 lb lentils 1/6d  
1 lb Scotch butter 4/-  
1 lb cheese 3/6d  
1 doz. eggs 3/6d  
1 lb salt 3d  
1 lb bacon 6/-  
1 lb potatoes 4d  
1 st oatmeal 7/-  
1 pint milk 10d  
1 ton coal £14.11.6d



*A Nigg W.R.I. summer outing.*

## Nigg in the Nineties

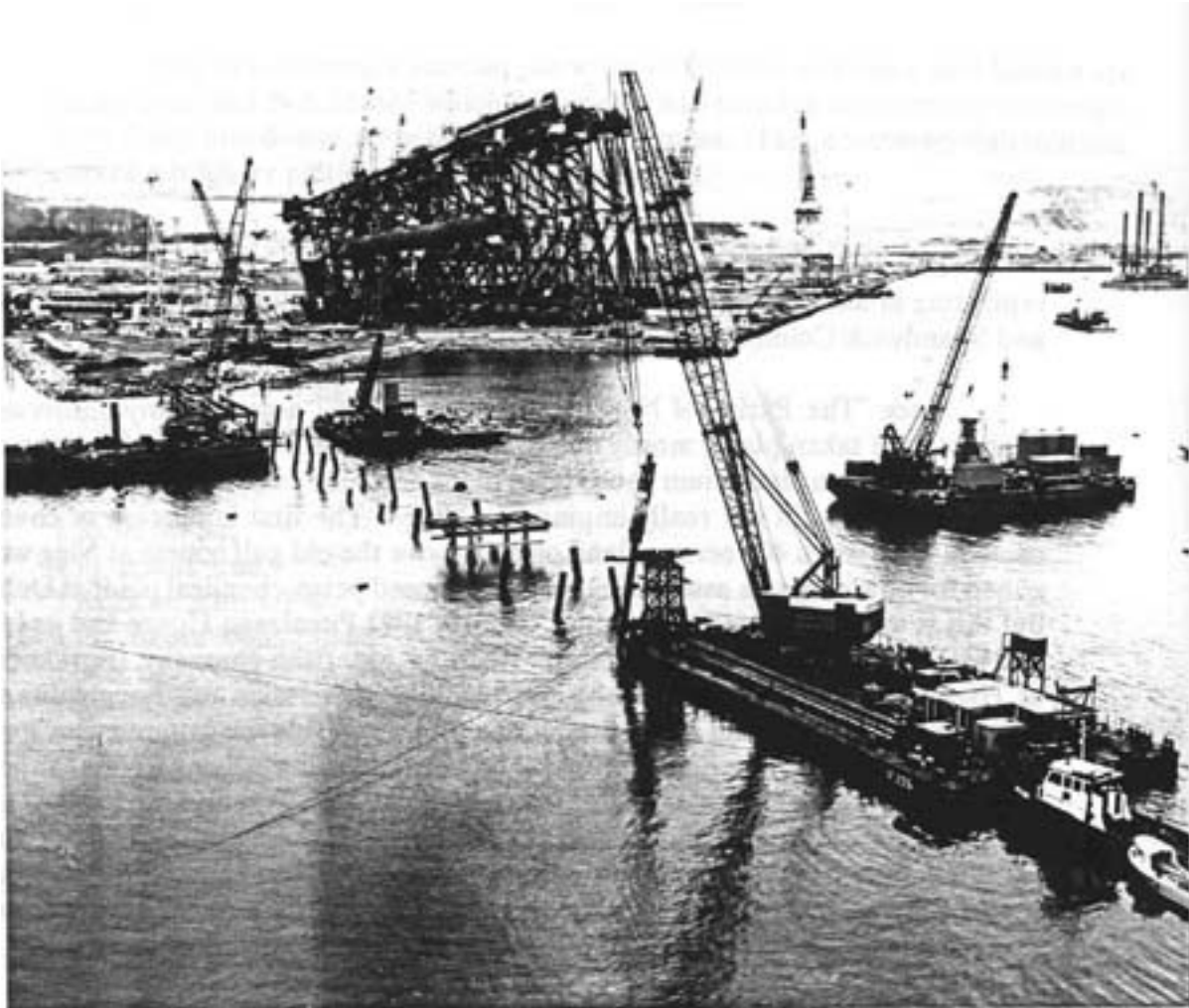
This chapter has been added to The Parish of Nigg in anticipation of its reprinting in association with an exhibition on Nigg in 1994 arranged by the Nigg and Shandwick Community Council.

Since The Parish of Nigg was written in 1967 a great many unforeseen changes have taken place, mostly due to the discovery of North Sea oil. Although a distillery and an aluminium production plant had been built near Invergordon in the 1960s, these did not really impinge on Nigg. The first indication of change came in 1968 when 400 acres of land on and above the old golf course at Nigg were zoned for oil storage, in association with a proposed petro-chemical plant at Delny, but this in the event came to nothing. Then in 1971 Pitcalzean House and its land and foreshore were bought by Brown & Root, an American company (now known as Highland Fabricators or Hifab), and planning permission was sought for the creation of a yard to build an oil-production platform. This was granted with speed and enthusiasm and a period of great trauma began for those living at or near Nigg Ferry. The name Nigg soon became synonymous with jobs and high wages and benefited Easter Ross in general but the social effects on the parish of Nigg itself were less than happy. A number of local people got jobs at the oil rig yard, and some benefited by taking in lodgers, but in the end a greater number of people than these left the Nigg Ferry end of the parish because of the developments.

Construction and reclamation work, including piling and suction dredging, went on by day and by night, there was mud in wet weather and blowing sand in dry weather, as well as brilliant lighting throughout the night and constant noise. Workers' accommodation was provided in two ships moored at Nigg Ferry pier, as well as in an on-site camp; and caravans on the dunes housed still more. This influx of men required the establishment of a 3-man police house at Balnabruach from January 1974 until 1980. The only nearby public amenity for these men was Nigg Ferry Inn which did a thriving trade. All this caused great loss of amenity to the mainly elderly residents of Balnapaling and Balnabruach, and the burning of the White House by one of the construction workers increased their distress and fear. Most of these people ultimately moved elsewhere, moves generously assisted by Hifab in accordance with an unrecorded agreement with the Council of Social Service. In time, the tiny hamlets of Balnapaling and Red House were demolished and much of Balnabruach has now gone too. However, once the construction period was finished and the yard settled in to building the platforms, life in Nigg became more bearable.

Virtually everything needed for building Hifab's site came in by the single-track-with-passing-places low road, and no one who had occasion to use that route then is likely to forget the experience, nor the traffic volume during shift changes.

However, in time a fine new road was built from the A9 to Nigg Ferry, as well as improvements made to the Hilton - Ankerville road, and the former dangerously narrow west entrance to the village of Shandwick was altered to make a wider and safer access. The existing telephone system was initially totally unable to cope with the increased load caused by Hifab - not even emergency calls could get through - but provision of a new telephone exchange put that right, and a new water supply and electricity lines were also installed, specifically for the Nigg Ferry developments. A workers' ferry began to run from Cromarty to enable Black Isle people to share in the work at Nigg.



*Jetty Piling Operations with Fulmar Jacket in background.*

Over the next few years the national excitement about North Sea oil resulted in the arrival of many land speculators, wanting to buy land or options, unsettling people and causing great worry. Land was sold and re-sold as companies changed hands or names. It is impossible to record all the companies that came to, flirted with or flitted through Nigg during that time. As well as various planning applications for quarries, two of which opened, there were proposals for labour camps, for fairly large scale private housing and for huge Council housing schemes, both for Nigg and for Shandwick Farm, the latter including two proposed new schools. This was when "the planners" began to talk about "Nigg Village". None of these grandiose schemes came to fruition, apart from 10 Council houses at Pitcalnie.

In the mid-1970s Cromarty Petroleum received planning permission for an oil refinery and underground storage on the old golf course and Pitcalzean Mains. This followed a hard-fought public inquiry as a result of which strict conditions were placed upon it and any future developments. As a result of this and the necessary infrastructure being in place, the building of Britoil's terminal and pier to the north of Hifab's site, with an associated pipeline from Shandwick, which came on stream in 1981, as well as developments at Fearn Airfield, were not nearly such traumatic experiences as the construction of Hifab's site. Highland Hydrocarbons obtained planning permission for developments on the shore below Nigg but neither this proposal, nor that of Cromarty Petroleum has come to anything. Although there is often great concern about oil-rig

orders, it is hoped that they will continue to be forthcoming so that the facilities at Nigg Ferry may be used and the present high unemployment reduced.

Even although the coming of industry to Nigg in the 1970s brought jobs and prosperity to most of Ross-shire, Nigg as a community was almost destroyed by it. The formerly thriving WRI closed down due to the loss of various key members; the District Nurse was moved out of the parish and, for a while at least, regular activities in the Hall, such as the Badminton Club, ceased. Nigg Friendship Committee, founded in 1958, was the one organisation to keep going and plays an active role in the life of older people in the community. The shop, Post Office, caravan site and dog kennels at Dunskaith closed, the Post Office now being at Burnside. The number of children attending Nigg and Pitcalnie schools - 25 and 12 respectively in 1972 - dwindled so much that both schools were closed in 1991 and primary school children now attend Fearn and Hilton schools. There is no bus service for the public; most people use cars for travel.

Now, in the 1990s, a new spirit has arisen like a phoenix from the ashes and Nigg is vibrant with new life. The parish is beginning to look trim and well cared for. Several new families have come into the parish. Some have built new houses and others have improved existing buildings and their surroundings. The Hall has been extensively renovated and is now in regular use with dancing classes, toddlers' group and many other functions.

Apart from industry at Nigg Ferry, farming is still the most important occupation in the parish - beef cattle, sheep, pigs and grain. Tourism is of little importance as the lovely beach west of Dunskaith, once very popular with people from a wide area, was lost to Hifab, and the smaller one to the east became undesirable for a time due to unauthorised caravanners on the dunes. However, the beach at Shandwick is still attractive, the Ferry Inn at Nigg is still open and once again is serving meals, while the workers' ferry at Nigg has now become a 2-car ferry to and from Cromarty.

Some years ago, the Nigg Pictish Stone was removed, with practical help from Hifab, from its unsatisfactory site outside the Church into what was formerly the boiler room; and the Shandwick Stone has also undergone conservation work and has been enclosed in perspex housing on its original site. In both cases the work was done with the help and advice of experts.

In keeping with the General Assembly's policy on amalgamation of parishes, first the congregations of Chapelhill and Nigg were united then later, in 1979, the Parishes of Nigg and Fearn united. Sadly, Nigg Old Church has since closed. However, a Trust was formed in 1991 and bought the Church from the General Trustees of the Church of Scotland so that it could be looked after by the community. The interior has been restored and the roof repaired and it opened to the public in 1992. People are coming from far and wide to see it and the Nigg Stone. The money for both the Hall and the Church was raised partly by grants and partly by holding sales and dances and many other enjoyable activities. This has largely proved possible because newcomers have integrated so well and are so enthusiastic and willing to help and to contribute fresh ideas.

There are plenty of schemes for more projects and the rest of the Nineties looks very promising for the community of Nigg.

Barbara Scott  
Anne Gordon

December 1993

# Statistics

## Population

1755	1261	(W)
1794	1133	(W)
1801	1443	(Rev K Macleod)
1851	1457	(Rev K Macleod)
1901	892	(Rev K Macleod)
1911	827	(Rev K Macleod)
1921	867	(Rev K Macleod)
1931	726	(Rev K Macleod)
1939	725	(Rev K Macleod)
1950	540	(Rev K Macleod)
1966	451	(Public Health Department)

Trades etc	1794	1860 approx	1900	1966
Blacksmiths	4	3	1	-
Wrights	8	3	-	-
Millers	7	2	1	-
Flax dressers	1	-	-	-
Coopers	2	-	-	-
Weavers	12	-	-	-
Tailors	9	2	-	-
Shoemakers	12	5	1	-
Boatbuilders	?	1	-	-
Shops	?	6	3	2

Names in Nigg from the Electoral Roll	1914	1965
Ross	34	64
Mackenzie	10	12
Munro	9	14
Mackay	2	5
Macleod	11	12
Macdonald	6	1
Fraser	6	8
Sutherland	3	6
Campbell	2	2
Vass	Not listed	31
Skinner	Ditto	7
Robertson	Ditto	15
Morrison	Ditto	9

The 1914 list gives 50 "others".

The 1965 Roll has four each of Bain, Beattie, Bremner, Christie, Corbett, Gordon, Smith; three each of Budge, Calder, Finlayson, Linklater, Macintosh, Macrae, Paterson, Rose, Whyte; two each of Adams, Campbell, Clark, Dryden, Henderson, Hendry, Martin, Matheson, Murray, MacCrum, Macgregor, MacRitchie, Ricketts, Rutherford, Scott, Shand, Stewart, Swanson, Tait, Tipping; one each of Cowie, Collyer, Cumming, Dick-Lauder, Finlay, Lunn, Marquis, MacAskill, Macfarlane, Macdonald, Mutinelli, Macpherson, Palmer, Robson, Rugg, Schoebella, Tonberg. (The name Salvatore is also in the parish but is not on the Roll.)

<b>Recent school figures</b>	<b>Nigg Primary</b>	<b>Pitcalnie Primary</b>
1950	30	44
1955	26	37
1960	21	43
1965	21	24

Old-age pensioners in 1966: 30 Male, 48 Female

Due to the falling number of pupils, both schools were closed in February, 1991.

Nigg School Roll: 3

Pitcalnie School Roll: 4

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