

## Camserney

The longhouse at Camserney is the last surviving dwelling on the site of a fermtoun which had existed for several hundred years. It is difficult to say for certain how long it had been there. The building is believed to date from the mid eighteenth century but could be earlier. It has not been possible to date the timbers using the technique of dendrochronology, because of a lack of comparative timber records.

The older, western part of the building has three 'ad' crucks supporting the thatched roof, a bed-outshot and a timber balk extending across the width of the floor, which may have supported a wattle partition. The flagstone hearth is in the centre of the room and has a wattle and daub hanging lum above it.

The eastern part of the surviving building has crup truss couples, a stone hearth with a backstone and a lath and plaster hanging lum. There is a salt store built into the wall to the right of the backstone. On the opposite gable wall, a fire with a chimney has been constructed at a later date. The dresser was located in this part of the building. .

As was usual in fermtouns, there were joint tenants, the McGregors, the Stewarts and the Menzies. There were also a number of cottars.

The McGregors can be traced back to 1745, when, on 30 July, James McGregor married Kathrin (sic) Menzies, the daughter of John Menzies.

The next tenant was their son, Alexander, baptized on 29 October 1746. He married Catherine Menzies (date unknown) and their son James was baptized at Camserney, on 16 February 1786. There were two other sons, Alexander, baptized 4 June 1796 and Duncan, baptized 13 May 1800.

James married Christian Menzies, probably around 1827, and they had six children, Alexander, who died in 1841 aged 13, John, who died in 1845 aged 16, James, Duncan, Robert and Catherine.

On James' death on 13 July 1855, aged 69, the tenancy passed to his third son, James, who didn't marry and died aged 37 on 13 June 1868.

The tenancy then passed to the fifth son, Robert, who also never married, although his older brother Duncan did. He married Annie Dewar on 5 June 1866 but they did not live together and Duncan described himself as a single man when the census enumerators called thereafter. Annie Dewar and her son lived with her brother, James Dewar, Road Contractor, in Milton of Camserney. She described herself as 'married' at census times.

Robert died on 14 May 1914 at Camserney Farm and it was Duncan's son John, born on 23 June 1866 at Camserney, who took over the tenancy.

John married Janet (Jessie) Sinclair of Acharn on 16 July 1895 and they had several children. When John died, aged 69, on 10 August 1935 at Crachin, it was his son, Duncan Dewar MacGregor who became the next tenant.

Duncan was born on 29 October 1898 in Glasgow and he married Margaret (Meg) MacDougall of Tullochville, in 1941. They had no children, and when Duncan died on 4th April 1973 an unbroken link stretching back for 228 years was severed.

The Stewarts were known to have been joint tenants from at least 1841 and could have been there for some years before that, although the Robert Stewart who had the tenancy in 1841 was the son of a weaver, not of a farmer. The Stewart joint tenancy continued until 1895 when Robert and his son Alexander left, to take over the tenancy of Easter Tegarmuchd, which lies to the west of Dull.

In December 1663, a Tack (a form of lease) was granted by Alexander Menzies of that Ilk to John Menzies and his mother Katherine Menzies for a period of five years. The property was described as the Merkland of Camserney. This means the area of land that was expected to pay one merk in taxation. A merk was equal to 13 shillings and 4 pence Scots or 1 shilling and 8 pence sterling (about 8p).

It is not possible to say if there was any connection between that John Menzies and the Robert Menzies who was a joint tenant until 1860. Or indeed between the 1663 John Menzies and the John Menzies who was the father of Kathrin Menzies, who married James McGregor in 1745. It is known that it was common for families who had joint tenancies to intermarry. People did not travel very far from their roots in those days and the opportunities to meet potential partners were limited. The Menzies family were joint tenants from 1841, according to the census returns and could go back many years before that.

In April 1860, a 17 year old girl from Aberfeldy, Margaret Carmichael, was charged with wilful fire-raising at the property of Robert Menzies in Camserney. The case against her was found Not Proven, a verdict peculiar to Scottish Law. The effect is the same as a Not Guilty verdict, the accused is freed, but a doubt remains, as the verdict means that the prosecution failed to prove her guilt to the jury, not that the jury found her innocent.

By the time of the 1861 census, the Menzies family had left Camserney.

The Account Book of Camserney Farm shows that the crops in the early years of the 19<sup>th</sup> century differed from those of later years. In 1801 they grew flax, which was a cash crop used by most families to pay the rent. There was a lint mill in Crachin, which would have processed the local flax crop, prior to its being spun into linen thread. According to the Old Statistical Account of the 1790s, the farmers in Dull Parish raised 3,000 stone of flax annually, between them. Under the old Scots system of weights and measures, a stone equalled 16 pounds. After 1824 it was standardized at 14 pounds, where it remained until the introduction of metric measures. Therefore 3,000 stone equalled 21.43 Imperial tons or 21,773 kilograms.

In 1805 the Account book refers to the sale of wool, not by weight but by measure, which implies that the wool had been spun before it was sold. The quantity was 40 strings and 40 ells. A string is equal to 24 ells and an ell is equal to 37 inches. In total they sold 1028 yards of wool, or approximately 940 metres.

The Ordnance Survey map of the 1860s shows a limekiln in use at the fermtoun, to burn limestone for fertiliser and to sweeten the soil by raising the pH. By 1900 the limekiln was no longer in use. The remains can still be seen, in the field at the north end of the road through the fermtoun. When the fields were enclosed, they were formally leased, which gave the tenant farmers the incentive to improve their land by draining and liming it. This had not been the case when the runrig system had been

the norm. Then the farmers had no security of tenure and the allocation of the small plots by ballot each year discouraged any individual from trying to improve a particular strip, because, in all probability, he would not be raising crops on that piece of ground the following year.

Through the early and middle parts of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the work on the farm followed a regular pattern.

By March or April the corn threshing had been completed and then they set about sowing the cereal crops and planting the potatoes.

The crops were of oats and bere up until 1829, when barley was introduced to replace the bere. Bere is a primitive form of barley which has a shorter growing season, but lower yield, than modern varieties. However on the principle of a bird in the hand being worth two in the bush, a crop which could mature and be harvested before the onset of autumnal bad weather was worth growing, and still is grown in Orkney, for the same reason. The fourth crop in the rotation cycle was grass. A substantial portion of the farm income came from the sale of hay, to customers near and far. In 1820, Dr John Forbes of Aberfeldy purchased forty stone of hay at eightpence halfpenny (about 3p) a stone. In 1834, James Stewart of Carnbanebeg in Glen Lyon, purchased forty eight stone of hay at seven pence per stone. Angus Stewart and James Dewar, also of Carnbanebeg purchased hay from Camserney Farm in 1834. Carnbanebeg is ten miles from Camserney, a twenty mile round trip for the horse pulling a loaded cart or waggon.

In addition to having the joint tenancy of the arable farm of Camserney, in 1816 Alexander McGregor was renting the hill farm of Lurg, which is Gaelic for the ridge of a hill extending gradually into a plain, which perfectly describes its situation. Later the name was changed to Lurgan. It must have been a particularly desirable property because he was prepared to pay a rent of £30 sterling for the tenancy and he stated, in writing, "that if any of his neighbours would give more, he would match their offer." That was a considerable sum in 1816, when hay was selling for one shilling (5p) a stone. In 1824, double strength whisky could be purchased at three shillings (15p) a pint, from James McDonald in Dull.

In 1805, they got in 27 sheep and 11 one year old lambs. The following year they brought down from the hill (Lurg?) 31 sheep and 13 lambs.

There is no mention of livestock in the Camserney Farm Account Book after that and it is not known if separate accounts were kept for Lurg. The 1861 census return for the McGregor household included a haflin (apprentice horseman) and a herd, who may have looked after livestock, although the term herd could also mean a farm servant. Over the years there was also a substantial trade in dung between the McGregors and the cottars. This would have come from the heavy horses used for the ploughing and other work on the farm but it may also have come from cattle.

The Account Book of Camserney Farm was really more of a journal. Entries include the baptisms of several children in 1746, 1796 and 1800. It is interesting that these entries were in the Account Book and not in a family bible. Neither were they recorded in the records of births/baptisms for the parish of Dull.

The dates the children attended the school in Dull were also noted. Fortunately there were no schools attendance officers then because the boys were out of the school as often as they were in it. Their labour was required on the farm when the crops were being sown and planted, for instance, Alexander, aged 7, came out of the school on

16 April 1804 and went back again on 16 June. He must have been out for the harvest because he returned again on 29 November 1804. In 1817, Duncan went to school on 23 December and left again on 11 April 1818.

On 26 June 1833, Alexander and John went to the school. The shearing (harvest) began on 27 August and finished on 17 September and both boys went back to school on 28 October.

Another event which found its way into the account book was the receipt, by Adam Menzies, of the sum of five pounds and five shillings (£5.25) on 10 August 1823 from "my good mother-in-law in the presence of James McGregor and Duncan McGregor, my brothers-in-law." Adam Menzies signed the entry in the book.

One of the cottars, Duncan Deor (Dewar) a tailor, paid fourteen shillings (70p) annual rent for his house in 1805.

The shearing (harvest) was dependent on the crops having ripened and the start date varied from mid August to the end of September. It was usually finished within 2 weeks or so, although in 1836 it was compressed into a few days at the end of September and the beginning of October. The following year it took the entire month of September to gather in the crops.

The wages of a ploughman in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century consisted of six shillings sterling, (30p), per annum, plus 4 pairs of shoes or brogues, 2 pairs of hose, 4 yards of tartan for a philabeg or kilt, a short coat and a vest (waistcoat) of some kind of coarse cloth, i.e. homespun. A woman received three shillings (15p), per annum, with no mention of clothing being provided.

The people of Camserney spoke both Gaelic and English until the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

In addition to the families who shared the joint tenancy, there were a number of cottars living in the fermtoun. A cottar is someone who has a house and some land but no livestock. They work for the farmer when required and he tills their land for them. They usually have some other form of employment as well. The 1841 census lists eight women as cottars. They lived in eight separate properties and their ages ranged from 50 to 86 years of age. Ten years later four of these women were still living in the fermtoun and one cottar family, the Dewars, appear to have lived there from 1841 to 1881.

As well as the agricultural workers, ploughmen, hafllins, herds, labourers, etc., there were a number of other occupations followed by people who lived at the farm. There were masons, tailors, shoemakers, milliners, grocers, sick nurses and a steam loom weaver, who presumably worked at the carpet manufactory in Crachin, which was originally water powered.

The Account book also gives us some information about the occupations of the people who lived at Camserney in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. There were tailors, masons, millers, shoemakers, weavers and daysters (dyers). At that time the dyes used would have come from plants and other vegetable sources.

Over the years, the number of occupied buildings gradually reduced, from nineteen in 1841 to fifteen in 1851, then fourteen in 1861. By 1871 there were eleven, nine in 1881, eight in 1891 and only seven in 1901. By 1910/11, apart from the farmhouse, there were three occupied properties but by the following year some buildings must

have been repaired because there were then five occupied properties, in addition to the farmhouse. The numbers fell away again until 1933/34 when there was only the farmhouse, the bothy and a longhouse, one end of which was occupied by James Butters and the other by John McCallum. This longhouse was demolished in the mid 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The longhouse you see today is just over half the length of the original building. After the agricultural revolution in Scotland, land owners actively discouraged their tenants from sharing their living quarters with their livestock, a tradition which had persisted for centuries. Many tenants wished to continue the practice as the animals provided a source of heat for the entire longhouse, even if they were a bit smelly. They could also be tended without the man, or woman, having to go outdoors in the dark or in poor weather. Pressure from land owners prevailed and the livestock was eventually housed in a separate byre. In the case of Camserney longhouse, the now demolished eastern section of the house may have been the byre end. For reasons of drainage, the byre was always at the lower end of the building.

During the conservation work a child's shoe was found within one of the stone walls of Camserney longhouse. It had been worn, there is grit embedded in the leather sole, and the upper is woven, like basketry. It has not yet been accurately dated, but is believed to be from the 19<sup>th</sup> century. During that century there were a number of men, living at Camserney fermtoun, whose occupation was that of shoemaker.

The earliest known, in 1820, was a Duncan McGregor. This may, or may not, have been the same Duncan who was the youngest brother of James, the third tenant. Duncan would have been 20 years old at that time but there were other families of McGregors in the immediate area, at Tullicro and Crachin, so it is possible that one of them could have had a Duncan who was a shoemaker.

In 1841 there were three shoemakers all living in one house, Alexander and Donald Anderson (possibly brothers) and an Alexander McQuarrie. In 1861 there was a James Walker, shoemaker, aged 26, living in a cottar house at the fermtoun and in 1881, Robert Docherty, age 49, and his son, John, age 18, were both shoemakers at Camserney. The census returns differentiate between Camserney, the fermtoun, Milton of Camserney, to the east of the burn and Crachin, to the north of the burn.

Life in the longhouse was hard, particularly for the women, who had all the housework to do, in addition to their share of the work in the fields and at harvest time. The floor was partly of flagstones, which could be swept clean and partly of trampled earth, which would be difficult to keep clean. The original hearth was in the middle of the floor of the western part of the building, with a hanging lum of wattle and daub above it, to draw the smoke out through the thatched roof. A later hearth was built against a backstone in the slightly newer eastern part. This also had a hanging lum, this time of lath and plaster. Later still, a stone fireplace with a proper chimney, was built into the eastern gable wall.

Cooking was originally done over the open fire on the floor, then the pot or girdle was suspended from a beam in the hanging lum and finally the pots were placed on ledges at the side of the stone fireplace. There were no ovens, baking was done on the girdle and the bannock was finished off on a baking stone, or metal rack, set by the side of the open fire.

Lighting may originally have been fir candles, which are pieces of resinous pine which burn brightly, or rush lights. These would have been followed by cruises,

which are both smoky and smelly. Next would have come oil lamps and candles. Even in the 1930s there was no electricity at Camserney, only paraffin lamps.

There was no running water and no indoor toilet. It is possible that the first beds were of heather, tightly packed and placed on the floor. There were two box beds in the room at the eastern (later) end of the building and, at some time a wooden stair had been built, leading to a sleeping platform above. In 1861, James McGregor, his brother Robert and sister Catherine, their elderly aunt, a female servant, a haflin and a herd were all living there. Despite this, life expectancy was quite good. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century the main ailments were rheumatism and pleurisy, caused by a combination of damp housing and working outdoors in all weathers without waterproof clothing and footwear.

The washing of clothing and bedding was usually a communal effort, the women would assemble at the Camserney Burn and light a fire. In earlier times, stones would be heated in the fire and then dropped into a wooden tub of cold water, to raise the temperature. Some very old tubs still show the scorch marks arising from this practice. Later, a metal cauldron would be placed over the fire to heat the water. The dirt was removed by climbing into the tub and tramping the clothes with their bare feet. Next the clothes were rinsed in the burn before being wrung and then placed over bushes to dry.

Around 1956 the dresser and its plate rack were removed to the Highland Folk Museum for storage. Unfortunately the years have not been kind to it and there is now fairly extensive woodworm damage. It is a substantial piece of furniture, standing 75 inches (191cm) tall and almost 76 inches (193cm) wide. The working surface is just over 40 inches (103cm) above floor level, compared to today's kitchen work surfaces which are around 36 inches (92cm) high, suggesting that it may have been built for someone of above average height.

There are filled-in holes where cup hooks were screwed into the front of the shelves of the plate rack. There are four small rectangular drawers extending the full depth of the dresser and a central cupboard, the door of which has an open grill of wooden rods, for ventilation. This could have been used to store butter, cheese or meat. The surface area above this cupboard is darkly stained by greasy fingers.

Compiled by Patricia Macinnes, Callander, Perthshire, 2005.

## Camserney Sources

Census Returns	1841 to 1901	A K Bell Library Archives
Valuation Rolls	1855 to 1975	do
Account Book of Camserney Farm	1746 to 1869	RH4/54 NRAS
Stobie's Map of Perthshire	1783	
Ordnance Survey maps	1860s 1897 1900	
Old Statistical Account		
New Statistical Account		
Perth and Kinross Heritage Trust – Camserney Longhouse Conservation Project		
Childhood Memories of Camserney - Eva Jeffrey, Bob Jeffrey, Cathie Petrie		
Highland Folk Museum, Kingussie		
Scotlands People website		
National Archives of Scotland website		
My own collection of photographs		