

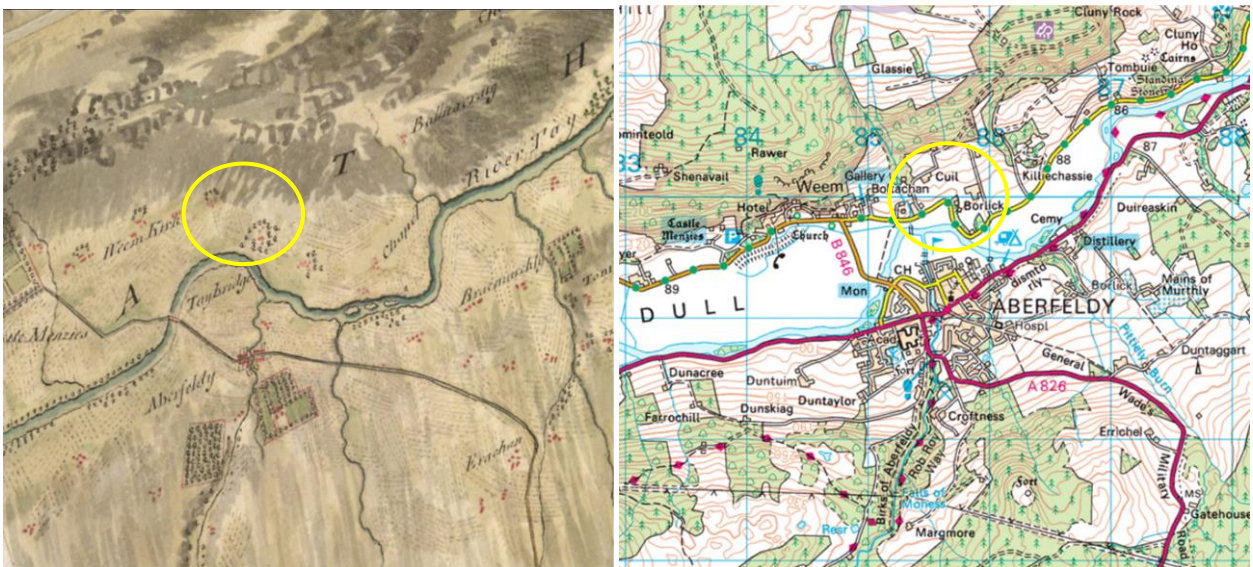
James Dewar – c1783 – 1868

In the landscape

Preface

It is difficult to imagine what your ancestor might or might not have felt emotionally, or what they did on a day-to-day basis. In the following story some elements are portrayed by the author, using facts and anecdotes from the historical era, to enhance what would otherwise be a dry repetition of historical fact.

The days of cattle raiding by Rob Roy MacGregor were fifty years past but tales of his exploits in the local vicinity were still told around smoky firesides. Tales too of the Bonnie Prince Charlie who, only thirty years before, had landed at the island of Eriskay to lead a Jacobite rebellion in what has become known as the ‘Forty-Five’ [Jacobite Rebellion], to distinguish it from previous rebellions. This culminated in humiliation for the Scots at Culloden field and resulted in Charles fleeing to France. With the death knell of Jacobitism ringing in the ears of the population, the clan system began to crumble and the old clan chiefs became landlords where, driven by profit, they began to evict thousands of people from their homes and native glens, replacing them with sheep. The first wave of Highland clearances began, probably as early as the 1780’s¹.



Roy Military Survey of Scotland 1747 – 1755, Courtesy of National Library of Scotland alongside PastMaps Ordnance Survey map of 2023. The Yellow circles is the approximate location of the hamlet of cùil

Imagine...

In an early morning of Spring in 1793, Robert Dewar raised himself from his bed and dressed. His working clothes were rough and patched but suited his job as a labourer on the Killiechassie Estate.

Moving slowly in the darkness, he groped for the indoor shoes he had discarded the night before and slipped them on. Outside the birds were stirring and the gentle “coo-COO-coo” sounds of

local wood-pigeons, which he regularly enjoyed, made his stomach rumble; It was time for breakfast.

His wife Margaret, of the clan Macintosh, rose and placed some porridge on the small peaty fire Robert had lit.

The couple, with their son James, a lineage is shown at appendix 2, lived in a small hamlet on the Killiechassie Estate, almost a mile north of the hamlet of Aberfeldy, as shown on Roy's Military Map of 1755. Anyone wanting to find Robert was directed to the 'Cùil of Killiechassie', which when translated from the Gaelic means, they were looking for a corner or nook by 'the church of the steep face'.

Donning his outdoor shoes at the door, Robert stepped outside in the cool of the morning and looked south towards the majestic River Tay although the geography of the land hid the water in the shallow valley below. Instead, he looked out across the roofs of the few houses in the settlement of Aberfeldy, to the wooded hills of Craig Formal, Monach Nam Mial, Meall an Lochain and the bare top of Grand Tully Hill.

The grass seemed greener today and the sun was up. Squinting to his left he could see smoke rising from the chimney pots at the mansion house at Killiechassie some 800 yards distant. Built some seventeen years previously and, where according to legend, Bonnie Prince Charlie was reputed to have sheltered in a sycamore tree on his retreat to Inverness in 1746 during the Jacobite rising. The prince had certainly stayed at Castle Menzies less than two miles to the west.

The estate owner in 1793 was James Stewart-Fleming, who had owned the property since inheriting it from his grandfather, the Reverend Robert Stewart, whose remains 'lay sepulture'² [in a grave] in the family burial ground where the sasines, a legal document that records the transfer of ownership, note the family "reserving the burying ground to the heirs of his ancestor, Rev. Robert Stewart".

The undulating land in front of him may have almost rippled before his eyes but its features were prominent; A wood here and there, some open grazing land and the tops of the trees that lined the river. Most of the fields were enclosed by dry stane [stone] dykes, some of which had been in place for hundreds of years and many of which bore the hallmarks of the feeding sheep, that had arrived recently.

The history of the Killiechassie Burial Ground goes back to 1727 when the Killiechassie Estate was owned by Rev Robert Stewart. In his will of 7th October 1727, Rev Robert left money for the building of the 'Chapell of Killiechassie'. When he died in 1729, he was buried there with much ceremony. The burial ground was restored in 1995 and is open to visitors.

Killiechassie (the 'Church of the Steep Face') takes its name from a church which once stood on the hill face. Part of the earldom of Atholl for upwards of a thousand years, Malcolm, earl of Atholl, granted the church to Scone Abbey c.1165. The estate was acquired in 1699 by John, Earl of Tullibardine from his brother Lord Mungo Murray who had acquired it in 1688 from William Murray, son of the Minister of Logierait.

'Good fences make good neighbours' he might have thought when he considered the skills he needed to build these mortarless walls that were made with some carefully selected stones that ultimately created a sturdy barrier between the local fields.

His son James, now ten, came up beside him and looked out, emulating his father. He had been born in the house at Cùil in

1783 at roughly the same time as the first emigrant ship "Hector" left for Nova Scotia bearing

its cargo of 189 ‘cleared’ Highlanders. James had grown quickly and showed a natural aptitude with his hands, often helping his father but education was also important. The Scottish Parliament’s ‘Act for Settling of Schools’ from 1696 had decreed that there should be a school in every parish, provided and paid for through the church. Teaching would consist mainly of the 3R’s and religion but there was no coherent system or centralised control or organisation so standards of education varied widely across Scotland. The nearest school for James would have been a considerable distance from his home, although still in Logierait Parish, but the exact location has yet to be discovered.

The land of the Killiechassie estate³ covered some thirteen hundred and forty-two acres which

152 13.4	D. of Athole for his p ^a of Tullimeth	660. 3. 10
108 13.6	9 ^e for Auchnasholier	247. 9. 6
51. 2	Killiechassie w th Gormochs fern & Balvairds wind	396. 4
45	D ^e for Pitcastle	216. 5
123	Pitnacree	492. 13. 4
340. 2. 2		

Land Tax Rolls for Perthshire (Killiechassie highlighted) 1645 – 1831, Land tax rolls for Perthshire volume 02 – Scotland’s Places.gov.uk

in rent could bring in almost four hundred pounds a year. In the area of Logierait, in Perthshire, it was considered the fourth largest in size but still only a quarter of the scale of the Duke of Atholl’s estate nearby.

The hills behind the house were tree covered and provided a fine hunting ground for rabbits, squirrels and wood pigeon, as well as perhaps the odd grouse Robert might catch. The estate is described in the First Statistical Account of Scotland as ‘being bounded by the river Tay to [near] the Tay Bridge and having a good deal of natural wood, game and trout and salmon fishing. There is a mansion house built in 1777’. The land included; 211 acres of arable land, 300 of grass, 2 of wood and 825 of hillside.

In the 1780s, Scotland had experienced various social, economic, and political changes and like much of the rest of the land was engaged in an Industrial Revolution, seeing advancements in industries like textiles, coal mining, and iron production. There were improvements in farming methods and land management practices and a growing interest in Scottish culture and heritage but Robert, and others around him, continued to repair walls, dig ditches, plant crops and do all manner of other tasks for small return, and generally by hand.

Towards the end of the century, the area surrounding Aberfeldy, where there was a plentiful supply of wool, became a popular place for the weaving trade and tweed, a durable and rough-

for a Vote for a Member of Parliament. This Estate is a very desirable situation for a summer residence; and for its natural beauties is not exceeded by any in the Highlands; as to which, reference is made to Pennant’s Tour, Vol. 3d, p. 37, 4to. Edinburgh.

S E C O N D.

The Lands of KILLIECHASSY, in the parish of Logierait, which hold of a subject superior, consisting of

Acres.	R.	Falls.
211	3	15 Arable.
302	1	28 Grass.
2	1	8 Wood.
825	2	7 Hill.
1342 0 18		

The present free rent is 205l. 17s. 11d. 2 12ths. Sterling, exclusive of a Salmon Fishing. This Estate lies on the north side of, and is bounded by, the river Tay, near Tay-Bridge, having a south aspect, and a good deal of natural Wood. The Hill abounds with Muir Game, and fine Trout Fishing in the Lakes, and Salmon and Trout Fishing in the river Tay. No Leases on this Estate; upon granting them a considerable rise may be expected. There is a Mansion-house, built in the year 1777, consisting of a Parlour, 15 feet by 14 feet 2 inches; a Bed Room, 15 feet by 12 feet 4 inches; Kitchen and Milk-house behind.—Second Floor, a Bed Room, 15 feet by 14 feet 9 inches; another Bed Room, 15 feet by 12 feet 4 inches.—Third Floor, a Bed Room, 12 feet by 12 feet 6 inches, and a large Garret.

T H I R D.

The Lands of PITCASTLE, in the parish of Logierait, which holds of a subject superior, consisting of

The lands of Killiechassie as described in the Newcastle Courant on Saturday 27th October 1787 – British Newspaper Archives

textured woollen fabric, was a significant product of the area. Often woven in distinctive patterns and earthy tones, it was very suitable for clothing, especially outdoor-wear like jackets and trousers.

Work for a Scottish weaver, which had previously been very labour intensive and often took place in small, cramped spaces within their homes or workshops had, since the Industrial Revolution, seen significant changes to the industry. New mechanized looms were being introduced and factories had begun springing up in some towns and cities.

Weaving was a skilled trade passed down through generations, and many weavers belonged to a community where knowledge and techniques were shared. James was keen to learn so had to convince someone locally to take him on.



Scottish weaving style c 1790

The weaving skills and techniques of Scottish weavers were highly regarded, and their fabrics were much sought after for their quality and craftsmanship. These were not just linens tweeds and wool fabrics but since the Dress Act of 1746 had been repealed in 1782, tartan and plaid were back in fashion.

These were significant in Scottish culture. Tartan was traditionally associated with different clans, [hence its ban/prohibition] each having its distinct pattern. Plaids were large pieces of fabric worn as cloaks or shawls.

When a youthful James arose now on a morning, typically, at that time, he would have donned baggy woollen trousers, which allowed him the freedom of movement necessary for his work, followed by first, his

rough-on-the-skin woolen shirt and then the waistcoat he wore on top of the shirt, which at least gave him some additional warmth but also allowed him to stretch his arms, when needed. The leather uppers of his wooden soled clogs were scuffed by contact with the machinery he used daily but the shoes gave him some protection from the mud and rough ground outside, as well as any late frosts.

Stepping out from the family home at Cùil of Killiechassie in the summer of 1799, on his way into the growing settlement of Aberfeldy, he could see flags fluttering from the towers of Castle Menzies, two miles to the west. In the summer months the river was sometimes low enough to wade across but generally James took the slightly longer route over the Tay, or General Wade bridge⁴. Originally the William Adam designed bridge had been part of the military road linking the garrisons at Ruthven, Fort George, Fort Augustus and Fort William but nowadays the traffic was people and animals crossing. You could stand in the middle above the central of the five arches and look up or down river, mesmerised and marvelling at once, at the volume of water passing along the green banks beneath.

The Dress Act 1746, also known as the Disclathing Act, was part of the Act of Proscription which came into force on 1 August 1746, post Jacobite rebellion, and made wearing "the Highland Dress...including the kilt...by men and boys illegal in Scotland north of the Highland line running from Perth in the east to Dumbarton in the West". Within two years, Highland aristocrats set up the Highland Society of Edinburgh and soon other clubs followed with aims including promoting "the general use of the ancient Highland dress".

James didn't put his apron on until he was beside his weaving apparatus and then considered his tools; he needed to start by gathering enough of the raw material, maybe wool or cotton, then he had to prepare a yarn by spinning it onto bobbins or spools, although most days this was already done. Once that was completed, he had to set up the loom. This involved assembling and checking the frame, attaching the warp or lengthwise threads, and threading them through the heddles and reed. This process required skill and precision to ensure the warp was evenly tensioned. Once the loom was set up, the actual weaving began. James, the Weaver, would sit at the loom and pass the weft, the crosswise thread, through the warp threads, creating the fabric. Different patterns and designs could be achieved by adjusting the position of the warp threads and using different-coloured weft threads.

Once the weaving was complete, the fabric would undergo finishing processes like washing, bleaching, or dyeing to prepare it for sale or further use.

In 1799, not only had James found himself and learned a trade, he had found a sweetheart. How and where he met Grizel MacIntosh – no relation to his mother – remains a mystery but on the 4th of July she gave birth to a son, who they named Duncan. In 1799, birth out of wedlock was not uncommon in Scotland. While it wasn't necessarily the norm or openly accepted, instances of children born to unmarried parents did occur, and the frequency varied across different regions and social classes.

In rural areas and among certain communities, such occurrences might have been more accepted or managed within the community. However, socially and legally, children born outside of marriage often faced stigma and potential challenges, especially in terms of legal rights, inheritance, and social standing. The level of acceptance or tolerance toward such births also depended on factors like family values, religious beliefs, and community attitudes prevalent in different regions or among different social groups.

In any event, no record has been found so far of any irregular marriage (see below) but a record does exist for their 'formal' marriage on the 17th of January 1801, in Dull Parish, Perthshire - eighteen months after James was born. On the 5th of September, eight months later, their second child, a daughter Margaret, was born...

The laws of marriage were quite different in Scotland than England. In Scotland, marriage was based on the principles of mutual consent and both 'regular' and 'irregular' marriages were recognised by law. Regular marriages were those performed by the clergy after the publication of banns but there were three forms of irregular marriage in Scotland:

1. *Per verba de praesenti* – A present exchange of consent by words by both parties to be married, privately or informally given, to be man and wife. Ideally this exchange would be performed in front of witnesses; a marriage contract without was still legal but much more difficult to prove.



Weaver at work on a typical loom of the 18th century – Perthshire, Crieff and Strathearn Local History Society

2. *Per verba de futuro subsequente copula* – A promise of future marriage without a present exchange of consent, ‘followed at a subsequent time by carnal intercourse’.
3. Marriage by cohabitation with habit and repute. Generally, this meant a couple living together and publicly behaving as though they are man and wife. This could include being affectionate, and referring to each other as ‘husband’ and ‘wife’. Also known as a ‘common law’ marriage, this was not so much a form of marriage, but a separate type of evidence which could be used to establish that a marriage had taken place. If a couple had lived and presented themselves as married for an extended period of time, there was a presumption that there had been a previous exchange of consent.

Irregular marriages remained valid until 1939 because the Scots held to the simple doctrine that any two unmarried people of lawful age (until 1929 12 for a girl, 14 for a boy) that wished to get married, if they were physically capable and not within the prohibited degrees of kinship, ‘and they both freely expressed this wish and freely accepted each other in marriage, then they were married’ (T. C. Smout). Consent made the marriage, not the clergy nor the civil official, and there were no restrictions on where and when the marriage might take place, nor a requirement that witnesses be present to prove its validity.

Scotland People.gov.uk

James’s father Robert continued to work around the Killiechassie estate and local area although in 1804 the estate had changed hands again and was now owned by the previous owner’s son, Robert Stewart-Fleming who, for the next fifty or so years, would manage the estate from his home in London.

During this period, Scotland, like the rest of Britain, was affected by the Napoleonic Wars, which brought economic challenges and military conscription. The wars influenced trade, disrupted industries, and impacted the economy. Perthshire was no different and people from the Scottish Highlands were conscripted or volunteered to fight in the Wars. The British Army recruited soldiers from various regions of the United Kingdom, including Scotland, to bolster its forces during the conflicts against Napoleon's armies. Highlanders, known for their martial traditions and military prowess, were actively recruited into the British military although, at times, this involved conscription and even press gangs, especially in areas where volunteers were insufficient to meet the military's needs. Information about whether either Robert or James Dewar served, have yet to be researched. [NB. It’s important to note that while some people volunteered for patriotic or economic reasons, others were forcibly conscripted, which led to resistance and discontent among certain Highland communities. The conscription and its impact on the Highlands became subjects of debate and controversy during and long after the Napoleonic era.]

The Napoleonic Wars, (1799–1815) the series of wars that ranged France against shifting alliances of European powers. Originally an attempt to maintain French strength established by the French Revolutionary Wars, they became efforts by Napoleon to affirm his supremacy in the balance of European power. A victory over Austria at the Battle of Marengo (1800) left France the dominant power on the continent. Only Britain remained strong, and its victory at the Battle of Trafalgar (1805) ended Napoleon’s threat to invade England.

Britannica

The Highland military, such as the Black Watch (Royal Highland Regiment) and other Scottish regiments, played crucial roles in the Napoleonic Wars. They were known for their distinctive tartans, fighting skills, and bravery on the battlefield.

Maybe James, the Weaver, wove some of the tartan for their kilts.

No sooner had the Napoleonic Wars finished, than Highlanders returning to, in particular, Sutherland, found themselves being evicted from their crofts and the land they worked in what was known as the ‘Sutherland clearances’.

The famous Sutherland clearances took place between 1814 and 1820. Tenants, who were not very profitable, were evicted in favour of profitable sheep runs; an unfenced tract of land operated by squatters. This was nothing new. The phenomenon of clearing had started well

Not far to the west of Aberfeldy is the village of Fortingall where the church Yew tree is reported, by the Woodland Trust, to be between 2000 and 3000 years old. According to local legend, Pontius Pilate was ‘born in its’ shade and played there as a child. Situated as it is, in the scenic Glen Lyon, the longest glen in Scotland; stretching for 32 miles and forming part of the 48,400 hectare Loch Rannoch and Glen Lyon National Scenic Area. The glen itself was described by Sir Walter Scott as the ""...longest, loneliest and loveliest glen in Scotland...".

The area abounds in mystery and magic and the local area has one of the richest concentrations of prehistoric archaeological sites in Scotland, including Càrn nam Marbh, the ‘Cairn of the Dead’. Other sites include the Fortingall stone circle and standing stones; including the Bridge of Lyon, ‘four-poster’ stone settings.

before then and continued throughout the first half of the 19th century.

James and Grizel continued to live in, what today is termed, ‘an area of outstanding natural beauty’, in their home near the banks of the river Tay.

Epilogue

In the 1841 Census there were but two James Dewar’s in Killiechassie; the first was 75 and the second was a fifty-six-year-old man whose wife ‘Bell’, bore him two children. His occupation was noted as Agricultural Labourer. They lived in the wooded area around Tombuie, one mile the other side of the Killiechassie Estate from Cùil. However, in the 1851 Census there was only one James Dewar of a suitable age and married to Bell. He was noted as a farm labourer of two acres.

In the last census before he died, James was noted, in 1861, as eighty-years-old and living, as a pauper, at number 6, Cùil, Killiechassie. His wife now is named Isabella and is ten years his junior. Information contained in the Census has yet to be corroborated.

James might have seen the old mansion being demolished and a grand new building, erected in 1865, taking its place. The new house’s turrets and spires were as high as the local loch was deep, thus allowing, superstition has it, for a Celtic water spirit to live there.

The estate, including the grand house shown in the photograph, would continue to change hands many times over the following years and is documented at Appendix 1 but James would not live to see it. In 2023 CANMORE, part of Historic Environment Scotland, lists four

elements of the Killiechassie estate; Killiechassie, Steading, the Dovecot, a Burial Ground and Mausoleum and a Country House, all from the 19th Century and a possible 18th Century Chapel.

The last time the estate changed hands was in 2001 when its magical setting and mesmerising landscape were bought by the author J.K.Rowling, famous author of the Harry Potter series.



Killiechassie, near Aberfeldy, Perthshire. Courtesy the Stewart Society

By 1867 James was suffering from Chronic Bronchitis and after a year, his weakened body could take no more and he died on 3rd October 1868 at the place where he had been born 85 years before, the Cùil of Killiechassie.



Killiechassie house is shown, centred on the map – Courtesy Historic Environment Scotland's - PastMaps

References

¹ <https://scottishhistorysociety.com/the-highland-clearances/>

² <https://breadalbane-heritage.org.uk/projects/killiechassie-burial-ground/timeline-for-the-ownership-of-killiechassie-estate/>

³ Sir John Sinclair, First:Statistical Account of Scotland, page 691

⁴ Perth & Kinross Council - Aberfeldy Conservation Area Appraisal, November 2008

<https://creweheritagesupporters.co.uk>

The Loom Room

Appendix 1

Killiechassie History

In 1706 it was feued by the 1st Duke of Atholl to Rev. Robert Stewart; descended from the Wolf of Badenoch and thence King Robert II, he was minister of Killin from 1679-1728. The natives called him 'Curam an t-saoghail' meaning 'care of the world' since he so often preached on that subject. During his years in Killin he 'neither kept register or scrolls, but monopolised all the dues payable to the Clerk, Bedal, and Poor Box, all the time he stayed there'. By his death he had amassed sufficient funds to buy an estate in Strathtay for each of his four sons: Duncan received Blackhill; Alexander, Clochfoldich; Robert, Derculich and the eldest, James, was given Killiechassie.

His son Robert led 34 of his Derculich tenants to fight in the 1745 Rising. Appointed a major in the Atholl Brigade, he and his men were the right flank company of the right battalion at Culloden. The major and three of his tenants survived the battle and made it home. A fifth survivor, married the year before Culloden, was captured after the battle and sent as a prisoner to an English town but escaped and returned home sometime later. His wife, thinking he was dead, had married again. He came to the house, looked in the window and saw his wife with a baby and her second husband sitting opposite her at the fireside. He let them be and left the area for good after divulging his circumstances to a neighbour to tell many years later.

The Rev. Robert Stewart and his descendants were interred in the small private burial ground of Killiechassie, by the side of the main road, which was recently restored and maintained by the Breadalbane Heritage Society. The oldest gravestone whose dates can still be read stands in memory of an Adam Stewart, born 1733, died 1811. Robert Stewart Flemyng of Killiechassie bought the superiority of the estate from the Duke of Atholl in 1812.

From the Stewart Flemyngs the property came into the ownership of a Mr H. G. Gordon, who built and lived in the present mansion house, but in the course of a year or two it was purchased by Mr E.O. Douglas, a benefactor of the Aberfeldy and District Cottage Hospital. Within the past century the Estate has been steadily shrinking in size and changed ownership a number of times amongst whom have been Lord Barnby of Blyth, Captain J. E. B. Radcliffe, Mr William Hood, and Mr Walter Nicoll. Since World War II the owners have been, from memory, Mr and Mrs Cole, who previously lived at Campden House, Chipping Campden, Jock and Mrs Hanchett-Taylor, James and Dierdre Boscawen, Jamie and Angie Thompson and, finally, Freddi.

The currant Killiechassie House was built in 1865 to replace an older house which occupied a site on a level piece of ground on a natural terrace about 100 yards further east. A little way up the drive there is an old sycamore tree which is called Prince Charlie's Tree, the story being that, during his wanderings in the Highlands, Prince Charles spent a night under its shade. The stone lintel of the front doorway of the old house is built into a rockery facing the front door of the new. It bears a religious inscription.

At the entrance gate to the mansion house the stones in which the iron railing is fixed are composed of limestone from Clach an Tartair, in Findynate hill. The Carn Mor (big cairn) is situated near the north-eastern boundary of the estate, and there in winter the tinkers used to camp. The chapel or church from which the estate got its name is situated right above the little village of Chapelton. The church was in existence 700 years ago but there is no sign now either of it or of the adjacent burial ground except a single standing stone, uninscribed, though burials are said to have taken place here up to about the 1740s. They ceased when the ferry carrying a funeral party across the Tay capsized, drowning all on board. There are some very deep pools on the Tay on this property, notably 'Poll gheal Ghoil' – 'white boiling pool'. As the river leaves the estate it enters 'Pool-an-Doran' – 'the otter's pool'.

Near the western boundary of Killiechassie is a spot called An Stair Ghorach. There is a ford on the Tay here haunted by a water kelpie that used to cry prior to a death by drowning 'Thainig Uair, ach cha d'thainig an duine' – 'the hour has come but not the man'. Invariably after this someone was drowned at the ford.

The road above the house towards Tombuie runs through Bealaidh an Tuim – an eerie spot that used to be avoided by people at night. It was supposed to be haunted by the Devil in person. The name signifies Broom of the Tom or Mound.

In the 17th century the estate was owned by members of Clan Murray who were the Dukes of Atholl. Later proprietors of Killiechassie included the Robertson family, who belonged to the house of Struan. In 1727 the estate was owned by the Reverend Robert Stewart (see next section), who left money for a chapel to be built there. On his death in 1729 he was buried here, followed by his wife, Anne, a year later. According to legend, Bonnie Prince Charlie was reputed to have sheltered in a sycamore tree here on his retreat to Inverness during the Jacobite Uprising in 1746. A small loch in the vicinity, is also, according to superstition, occupied by a Celtic water spirit.

breadalbane-heritage.org.uk



Killiechassie - Aberfeldy, Perthshire from Stewart Society

Appendix 2

