



The Inn at Loch Shell

When the Lochs Parish Minister, Rev. Robert Finlayson, wrote his contribution to the second statistical account in 1833, he stated that his Manse at Keose and the Farmhouse at Valamus were the only two houses in the Parish of Lochs that were built with stone and lime. There was also, he said, three dwelling houses in the Parish built with stone and clay, all occupied by farmers of which only one was slated, the Inn at Loch Shell which is the only Inn in the Parish.

In describing the location of the 'Inn', Rev. Robert Finlayson used the blanket term 'Loch Shell' and not Shell Head; therefore the precise location of the 'Inn' is in some doubt. We know that the term 'Loch Shell' was sometimes used loosely for any location on the shores of Loch Shell, for instance, when the crofters were cleared from Lemreway and Orinsay in 1843, these two villages were referred to as Loch Shell.

Many people maintain the location of the 'Inn' was Shell Head, but Duncan Macrae who was head gamekeeper at Eishkin for many years maintained strongly that the building at Shell Head could not have been the 'Inn', because it was a more modest building, more like a sheiling, and certainly never slated and no lime or mortar used in its construction. The building there was just an ordinary dry stone wall building, built of inferior building stones, more like a seasonal building.

Duncan Macrae explained that Shell Head was the market stance for Park because it was very convenient and central for the drovers to meet there and take delivery of any stock coming from Lochs Brollum, Claidh and Seaforth. He felt that perhaps in season the man at the sheiling sold a dram and it just got the name of an 'Inn' seeing it was at the market place and a dram was available. There was no sign of cultivation or any other buildings nearer than two miles away.

Duncan put forward the theory that in all probability there was a drinking place frequented by seamen near where Eishkin Lodge stands now, and he said that he saw an old chart of over 100 years old done by Captain Otter R.N. showing Eishkin House marked where the boat house stands now. That, he said, might have been the 'Inn' where Lord Teignmouth called at for a drink in 1829 and tried to get a boy to guide him to Valamus.

Also, Duncan said that Aulay Macleod son of Angus, who was born at Shell Head and was at Park until he retired as a very old man in 1906, used to tell them that lots of sailing ships used to be anchored for months on end at Loch Shell waiting for a favourable wind and tide to carry them South through the Minch and out into the Atlantic in daylight. There were any amount of spirits and tobacco to be got on them, and he said it was these boats that introduced the woodworm in these parts.

Duncan also stated that he used to hear Murdo Macinnes, the missionary 'Murchadh Neill' from 32 Lemreway, who often preached all over Southern Park, talking about these things, yet none of these men mentioned an 'Inn' at Shell Head.

Rev. Robert Finlayson only came to Lochs in 1831 and he was only there two years when he wrote his contribution for the second statistical account. He may have been relying on the oral tradition which might have been mistaken about the real location of the 'Inn'.

However, there must have been a building somewhere in the area of Loch Shell that passed by the name of 'The Inn at Loch Shell'. It would be interesting to hear from anyone with more information.

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AN ARCHIVE RECORD FROM THE ANGUS MACLEOD ARCHIVE www.angusmacleodarchive.org.uk

Author: Angus Macleod

Date:

Original document title: The 'Inn' at Loch Shell

Location in physical archive: Series K, File 1, Section 24

NRAS reference: NRAS 4336/1/9/1

