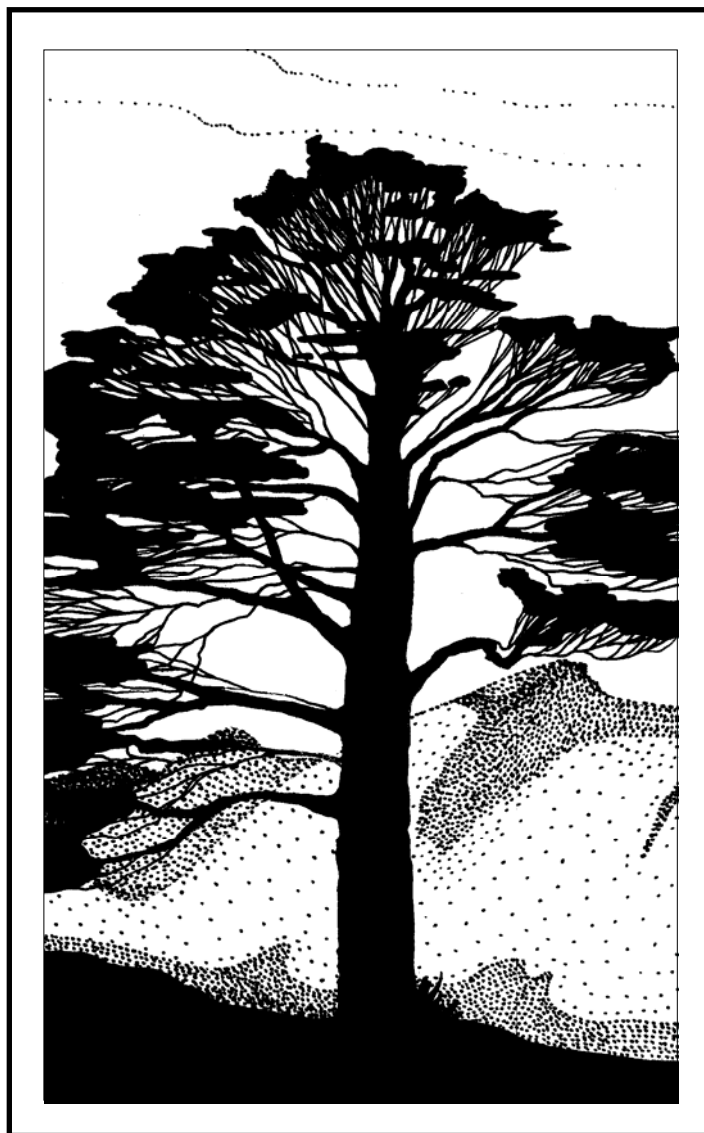


# **SCOTTISH WOODLAND HISTORY DISCUSSION GROUP**

**notes, I**



**FIRST MEETING – 1 FEBRUARY 1996**

**STIRLING UNIVERSITY**

SCOTTISH WOODLAND HISTORY DISCUSSION GROUP  
NOTES FROM THE FIRST MEETING – FEBRUARY 1996

CONTENTS

**Sources of woodland history: Location of archive material**

Fiona Watson - - - - - 2

**Sources of woodland history - old maps**

Jeffrey Stone - - - - - 4

**Sources of woodland history - estate papers**

Alan Macdonald - - - - - 5

**Sources of woodland history - travellers' accounts before 1830**

Chris Smout - - - - - 7

**Sources of woodland history: the Statistical Accounts**

Christopher Dingwall - - - - - 10

**Editorial notes:**

This the first meeting of the SWHDG was held in Lecture Theatre B4 of Stirling University on 1<sup>st</sup> Feb 1996. Unlike later one-day SWHDG annual Meetings, which were all held at SNH's Battleby Centre auditorium, this meeting took the format of a training course when various experts gave talks (as listed above) on the various documentary sources for woodland history research. The lecturers' hand-outs form the basis of this first year's SWHDG Notes, which were issued to members in May 1996. After Chris Dingwall's talk, Fiona Watson reviewed existing woodland history studies ongoing at the time.

Note also that the conference Scottish Ancient Woodland History held the previous year at Battleby on 6 April 1995, organised by University of St Andrews Institute for Environmental History and sponsored by Historic Scotland, was a fore-runner to the setting up of the SWHDG. The proceedings of that conference together with other invited papers form the contents of the book: Scottish Woodland History, edited by TC Smout, published in 1997 by Scottish Cultural Press, Edinburgh. ISBN: 1 898218536.

We are also indebted to Argyll Publishing for kind permission to utilise the drawing on the front cover by Irene MacKenzie of the pine tree which appears on page 153 in Hugh Fife, *Warriors and Guardians: Native Highland Trees*. This drawing was borrowed from Notes II .

## Sources of woodland history; Location of archive material

### **Scottish Record Office, General Register House, Edinburgh: open 9 am.-4.30 pm.**

The Record Office is probably the first port of call for any in-depth study of woodland history. Its archive holdings are catalogued with varying degrees of helpfulness (ie, ranging from incredibly helpful to fairly useless). Its categories of holdings of potential use to those interested in woodland history are:-

Burgh council records

Records of British Railways Board

Records of British Coal Board

Records of Crown Estate Commissioners, including Commissioners of Woods, 1565-1930

Exchequer Records, including Forfeited Estates

Forestry Commission records

Gifts and Deposits (the main body of the collection, divided up into estates/families). Don't forget that lawyers' collections can be particularly useful, since many kept important estate archives for their clients.

Register of Deeds (by year)

Register of Sasines (by area)

Sheriff Court records

Within the Record Office (but not exclusively) is contained information on:-

National Register of Archives for Scotland (N.R.A.S.). This catalogues those estate papers still held by the owners. Permission to use these archives should be obtained via the N.R.A.S. (address given in the catalogues).

Historical Manuscripts Commission. Many volumes of documents from a wide variety of sources.

Local Authority Archives. Many researchers will have come from the other direction, ie. they will already have consulted Strathclyde Regional Archives, etc., but they are all catalogued in the S.R.O.

West Register House (in Charlotte Square) has all the maps pertaining to the Record Office's archives, among other things.

We should also remember that the Record Office is in the process of putting their catalogues onto computer. This means that you can key in a place-name, or specify a time period in which you are interested, and all the records conforming to your criteria and computerised this far will come onto the screen. Useful for providing information as to which written catalogues might be of use.

**National Library of Scotland, George IV Bridge, Edinburgh: open 10 am.- 8 pm.**

It is very easy to overlook the N.L.S. as a source for estate papers. Despite the fact that the cataloguing system for documents is not great, it is still worth having a look. The library's connection with lawyers (the manuscript collection began life as the advocate's library) means that many important charters, agreements, letters are to be found here. A goldmine, if you have the time to dig.

Also contains many printed sources, which are an undervalued source. Register of Great Seal, for example, (which began in 1307) can give important information on land ownership.

**Other sources**

Local libraries, university libraries (which often have the N.R.A. catalogues and H.M.C. volumes). Also, the N.L.S. map library in Causewayside, Edinburgh is well worth visiting, as is the Royal Commission for Ancient and Historic Monuments (R.C.A.H.M.S.) headquarters in Bernard Terrace, Edinburgh, where the National Monuments Record is held, including many air photographs (though at least two weeks notice is required for an appointment to see the aerial photographs).

**The pitfalls**

It is very difficult, when on a restricted timescale, to know what to target. One of the easiest ways to save time is to find out who owned the estate you are interested in and when. Loretta Timperley's *A Directory of Landownership in Scotland, c.1770*, Scottish Record Society, New Series 5 (Edinburgh, 1976) is very useful. Finding out who were the factors on an estate can also be very useful. For example, Campbell of Monzie was often factor for Breadalbane, and important correspondence can be found in his estate papers relating to his master. But there is little you can do if the cataloguing is so vague that you end up hauling everything out with no idea whether or not it's of any use.

There is no point in pretending that palaeography is easy. From the eighteenth century, things start to look up. The worst handwriting is not medieval, but sixteenth/seventeenth century. Basic illegibility is the norm. The handwriting may put you off initially, but everyone has to go through these days of agony. I find it useful to construct an alphabet once I have managed to work out the odd letter.

**Useful phone numbers**

S.R.O. (General Register House), 1 Princes St. (0131) 556 6585

National Library, George IV Bridge, (0131) 226 4531; Fax (0131) 220 6662

Map Library, 33 Salisbury PL, (0131) 226 4531

Royal Commission, 16 Bernard Terrace, (0131) 662 1456; Fax (0131) 662 1477 & (0131) 662 1499

Fiona Watson

## Sources of woodland history; old maps

### **Introduction:**

- a) Map content as a product of the map-maker's intentions
- b) Chronological limits of maps as sources
- c) Scale as a determinant of map content

### **Four major episodes in the history of Scotland's cartography:**

1. Pont/Gordon/Blaue (1583-1654)
  - a) Map-makers' objectives - priority to locating settlements
  - b) Evidence of woodland not being systematically recorded
  - c) Evidence of deliberate/verifiable recording of woodland
  - d) Later drafts provide less convincing evidence
2. The military survey of Scotland (1747-1755)
  - a) Map-makers' objectives not necessarily self-evident
  - b) The original protraction more reliable than the fair copy
3. Planning and the improving movement (late 18th and 19th centuries)
  - a) Pre-improvement plans
  - b) Implementation plans
4. The Ordnance Survey in Scotland
  - a) Evolving objectives from 1847
  - b) 1:10 560 as the basic scale

### **References:**

- Jeffrey C. Stone, 1989, *The Pont Manuscript Maps of Scotland*, Map Collector Publications, Tring.
- Graeme Whittington, 1986, 'The Roy map: the protracted and fair copies, parts 1 & 2', *Scottish Geographical Magazine* 102(1), 18-28 & 102(2), 66-73.
- Ian H. Adams, 1975, 'Economic process and the Scottish land surveyor<sup>1</sup>', *Imago Mundi*, 27, 13-18.
- J.B. Harley, 1975, *Ordnance Survey Maps a descriptive manual*, Ordnance Survey, Southampton.
- D.G. Moir (ed.), 1973 & 1983, *The Early Maps of Scotland to 1850*, parts 1 & 2, Royal Scottish Geographical Society, Edinburgh.
- J.N. Moore, 1991, The historical cartography of Scotland. A guide to the literature of Scottish maps and map-making prior to the Ordnance Survey, *O'Dell Memorial Monograph*, 24, University of Aberdeen.

Also:-

*Peter May: Land Surveyor*, ed. I. Adams, Scottish Historical Society, 4th Series, vol. 15 (Edinburgh, 1979)

Jeffrey Stone

## **Sources of woodland history; estate papers**

Information available from most estate records can be gleaned from a variety of record types.

### **MAPS AND PLANS**

Detailed maps before the eighteenth century are rare but in that period the number of maps and plans began to take off. The sorts of things they portray differ widely depending on the purpose of the survey and the idiosyncrasies of the surveyor.

Some plans, normally the earlier ones from the mid-eighteenth century, were comprehensive accounts of the estate and were therefore very detailed. In such a plan, there is a lot of accurate information which can be checked by looking in the present-day landscape for traces of such things as dykes and abandoned dwellings.

Some plans were made for a specific purpose, such as enclosure, the rearrangement of tenancies or the building of roads and canals. They are not therefore accurate representations of everything that was on the ground. They showed only things relevant to the project. Woodland might thus be portrayed only if it was going to get in the way of any proposed improvement or if it was of sufficient importance or value that its site had to be avoided.

#### *Surveyors' Reports:*

They provide descriptive information which can clarify the purpose for which the map was drawn. They include details of tree species, the condition of the woods and if, and how, they were cared for. They may also carry figures relating to the acreages of woodland.

### **FINANCIAL RECORDS**

Factors' accounts often give details not only of what particular expenses were devoted to, but also when, and in what way. They show how many people were regularly employed to look after woodland, and how much they were paid. Particular accounts, for example, those of gardeners, can reveal what sort of trees were being raised and planted out, which ones were grown from seed, and which were bought in.

The most fruitful type of financial records relate to agreements with commercial companies, showing what sorts of timber were sold and what they were sold for. They also might show how the woods were to be treated during the extraction of timber - what things the extractor was, and was not, allowed to do in the wood.

### **CHARTERS, TACKS AND LEASES**

These contain much of the earliest information available and most estates have a large collection. They show the holder's rights to their lands, so they have been preserved more carefully than all other classes of record. In a feu charter, lands were granted in perpetuity. The grantor could place conditions upon the grantee's use of the land and could even reserve aspects of the use of that land to himself. This led to a servitude where the grantor (and his successors) had the right to exploit woodlands on what were effectively the grantee's lands.

In tacks and leases, land was granted for fixed terms, which could vary from as little as one year, to as many as 99 years. The lease or tack would contain certain conditions relating to the resources of the tenancy. If woodland lay on the tenancy, conditions relating to the care and use of it would have been included. Leases and tacks can show changes in land use which the charters in perpetuity cannot reveal. At the renewal of every lease, the landlord could change the conditions of the tenancy and thus any processes of change in management can be monitored.

### **LEGAL RECORDS**

The most common cases brought before courts related to the taking of wood by tenants for the construction or repair of their houses. Other offences such as destruction of woods by felling, or unauthorised grazing of animals within prohibited parts of woods, illustrate how regulations were obeyed (or not!). Estate regulations were often formulated in the baron courts of the estates. Regulations for the tenants' use of woods would then be publicised - this is especially important in areas and periods where the majority of tenants had no leases, merely holding their lands from one year to the next.

### **ESTATE CORRESPONDENCE**

Letters provide descriptions of work being carried out on the estate, what it involved, and how it progressed. This is most visible in correspondence between officers within the estates and between them and the landlord. Correspondence between the estate and timber merchants, etc., can, along with contracts and financial records, provide information about how strictly an estate wanted to control the use of its woods and how often timber was harvested from particular parts of the estate.

Alan Macdonald

### **Sources of woodland history; travellers' accounts before 1830**

Travellers' accounts can be rewarding, but usually yield only a small amount of information apiece for anyone interested in woods. How useful they are depends partly on for whom they were written and on the intentions and interests of the author. Dr. Johnson's famous observations on Scotland in 1773, for example, are valueless for the woodland historian. He writes as a great literary figure for other *literati*, his intention, among other things, being to tease the Scots, and, in particular, his friend and travelling companion, James Boswell. He had no interest in the natural world as he found it, or even in how it might be improved; he wanted to see the Highlanders not the Highlands, for he was fascinated by people. His one comment on trees, or rather, on their complete absence in the Lowland countryside, is demonstrably false. Public figures, writing for effect, and with anthropological interests, are of no use to woodland historians.

The great stream of romantic travellers, who wrote so many volumes between about 1770 and the end of the nineteenth century, are often equally unrewarding. Their main audience was other self-absorbed romantics, and their interest in scenery was usually merely aesthetic or generalised. They may describe a vista as "grand" or "with beetling woods", but there is usually little there that cannot be gleaned more accurately from other sources. Some, however, are more interesting. J.E. Bowman, for example, who left 800 pages of manuscript that were edited and published only in 1986, was an amateur botanist and a friend of the naturalist engraver Thomas Berwick. He had a better eye than average for the countryside. His journey from Castle Urquhart to Inverness, for example, as well as brilliantly describing the atmosphere of a summer evening on Loch Ness, also describes the species composition of the lochside woodlands, imparting information unobtainable from a contemporary map or any other sources. Most romantic travellers are, nevertheless, an excellent read: the best strategy is to read them for enjoyment, and as a bonus.

The most useful travellers are the rare ones whose intended audience was interested in the natural world for its own sake, or in how it could be 'improved'. The best example is James Robertson, who was sent by Professor Hope on a series of journeys between 1767 and 1771 to explore the botany of the Highlands. His accounts of, for example, Abemethy or Rothiemurchus, or of the Strathglass-Great Glen area, though often brief, are exact and useful. Similarly, Thomas Pennant, travelling between 1769 and 1772, has a good deal to say about woodland. His evidence is indispensable for Upper Deeside. Professor John Walker toured the Hebrides for the Annexed Estates Commissioners between 1764 and 1771, and his account of such woods as he encountered (as on Skye) are detailed and useful.

A further category are what might be called the "topographers", who tried to describe the country for the benefit of others, as in a guidebook. Their usefulness again depends on how they interpreted their audience. If they assumed the readers would be more interested in great houses than in the wider countryside, they will, like Daniel Defoe and J. Macky early in the eighteenth century, be of real use for the history of planted woodlands but of less value for natural woodland. If, like the itineraries by Heron, Lettice and others late in the eighteenth century, they were guides for the romantic travellers, they may describe and even illustrate woodland views, though their pictures are not, as a rule, botanically accurate enough to identify species of tree, except to distinguish deciduous from coniferous. In a class by itself is *Macfarlane's Geographical Collections*, an invaluable compilation of parish and district accounts mostly originating between ca.1590 and 1723 from local "experts" (some parish ministers, some independent savants like Sir Robert Gordon). A forerunner of the *Statistical Accounts*, it is crammed with brief but very useful comments about woods in a period when other information is often very scarce.

In terms of chronological cover, there are virtually no useful mediaeval travellers accounts, and little that is of more than incidental value before the seventeenth century. Even in that century, the comments of travellers are often more rude than insightful - c.f. Sir Antony Weldon, in 1617: "had Christ been betrayed in this country (as doubtless he should, had he come as a stranger), Judas had sooner found the grace of repentance than a tree to hang himself on". Nevertheless, there are valuable comments, like Taylor the Water Poet's enthusiastic account of the woods of Mar, and Thomas Kirk's account of the suspicious reception he had when he went to visit the Amat complex of woods in Sutherland. These early tours were conveniently edited by P. Hume Brown at the end of the last century. And, of course, there are for the seventeenth century the descriptions in *Macfarlane's Geographical Collections*.

The eighteenth century was a golden age of traveller's accounts and tours, including, as well as the very useful authors already mentioned, writers like Thomas Hurt, whose letters from the Highlands described society between the two main Jacobite Risings, and Alexander Wight, who went round Scotland in the 1770s and 1780s to inspect the improvement potential of many estates. For those authors like Defoe, Pennant and Burt, whose works have been reprinted in various editions, it is essential to select an unabridged text.

As the romantic travellers increased in number in the late eighteenth century, the task of sifting the gold from the dross becomes greater. Dorothy Wordsworth is among the gold: she is such a sharp observer that she says interesting things about woods even when they are not her main concern, so her account (for example) of travelling through Glencoe to Tyndrum and beyond gives incidental information about the relict Caledonian pine of the area. On the other hand, the great arbiter of picturesque taste in an earlier generation to the Wordsworths, William Gilpin, left on an irritating book, characteristically criticising woodlands for being insufficiently pleasing. Yet the edition of Gilpin's *Remarks* edited by Thomas Dick Lauder in 1834 is a very valuable source, as Lauder was himself a laird and forester and wrote a detailed commentary with (for instance) observation on the destruction and subsequent regeneration in Rothiemurchus. Romantic tourists were joined by the 1780s by the first sportsmen, some of whom also wrote useful "tours": the very first was Colonel Thornton, who was given a present of goshawks by the laird of Rothiemurchus. In the nineteenth century, guidebooks multiply but the old type of travellers' accounts gradually begin to go out of fashion. One or two memoirs of this period are useful, of which those of Elizabeth Grant of Rothiemurchus are outstanding for their detail of forest exploitation in Strathspey.

Where can we look for bibliographical help? Mitchell and Cash, though not containing anything published since the start of this century provide in their *Contributions to the Bibliography of Scottish Topography*, a good point of departure. J.E. Handley's *Scottish Farming in the Eighteenth Century* has an excellent list of sources for that period, and the bibliography of M.L. Anderson *History of Scottish Forestry* is also useful.

Travellers' accounts as a source in isolation often appear relatively unrewarding, but in association with maps, estate papers, *Statistical Accounts*, and so forth, they can sometimes provide the pieces in the jigsaw that give the whole pattern a meaning.

Chris Smout

### **Some travellers' accounts and other texts mentioned:**

1. J.E. Bowman, *The Highlands and Islands: a nineteenth century tour* [1825] (Gloucester, 1986)
2. D.M. Henderson and J.H. Dickson (eds.), *A Naturalist in the Highlands: James Robertson, his life and travels in Scotland, 1767-1771* (Edinburgh, 1994)
3. T. Pennant, *A Tour in Scotland 1769; A Tour in Scotland and Voyage to the Hebrides, 1772*, (several early editions)
4. M.M McKay (ed.), *Early Travellers in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1891)
5. Daniel Defoe, *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain*, (1726. A two-volume edn. published 1962)
6. J. Macky, *A Journey Through Scotland* (1723)
7. R. Heron, *Observations Made in a Journey through the Western Counties of Scotland* (Perth, 1793)
8. R. Heron, *Scotland Described* (Edinburgh, 1797)
9. J. Lettice, *Letters on a Tour Through Various Parts of Scotland* (London, 1794)
10. A. Mitchell (ed.) *Geographical Collections Relating to Scotland, made by Walter Macfarlane* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1906-8), 3 vols.
11. P. Hume Brown (ed.), *Early Travellers in Scotland* (Edinburgh, 1891)
12. P. Hume Brown (ed.), *Tours in Scotland, 1677 and 1681 by Thomas Kirk and Ralph Thoresby* (Edinburgh, 1892)
13. Thomas Burt, *Letters from a Gentleman in the North of Scotland to his Friend in London* (1759 and later edns.)
14. Alexander Wight, *Present State of Husbandry in Scotland*, 4 vols. (1778-84)
15. Dorothy Wordsworth, *A Tour in Scotland in 1803* (latest edn., Edinburgh, 1981)
16. William Gilpin, *Remarks on Forest Scenery and Other Woodland Views* (ed. T.D. Lauder, Edinburgh, 1834)
17. Thomas Thornton, *A Sporting Tour Through the Northern Parts of England and Great Part of the Highlands of Scotland* (London, 1804)
18. Elizabeth Grant, *Memoirs of a Highland Lady* (ed. Lady Strachy, London, 1911 and other edns.)

### **Useful bibliographies in:-**

19. A.. Mitchell and C.G. Cash, *Contributions to the Bibliography of Scottish Topography* (Scottish History Society, Edinburgh, 1917)
20. J.E. Handley, *Scottish Farming in the Eighteenth Century* (London, 1953)
21. M.L. Anderson, *History of Scottish Forestry* (Edinburgh, 1967)

## Sources of woodland history; the Statistical Accounts

Most historical research involves putting together a variety of pieces of information, like the separate pieces of a jigsaw, drawn from as wide a range of sources as possible, in the hope that they will combine to reveal a picture that makes some kind of sense. In any study of the Scottish landscape in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the so-called *Statistical Accounts* are a vital - though sometimes rather frustrating - part of that jigsaw. This paper also includes a discussion of what are known as the *County Surveys of Agriculture* which were carried out around the turn of the nineteenth century; these complement the parish accounts, and can often help fill in gaps which exist in the picture painted by the *Statistical Accounts*.

### **Origin of the *Statistical Accounts***

The first 'account' - now generally referred to as the *Old Statistical Account of Scotland* - arose from the work of one man, Sir John Sinclair of Ulbster, who discovered that there were no reliable information sources on which he could base an account of the history and current state of agriculture in Scotland which he was seeking to compile. He conceived the idea of a questionnaire of some 160 separate points covering a wide variety of subjects which was then distributed throughout the country to the minister for each parish who each year attended the General Assembly of the Church of Scotland in Edinburgh. Sinclair's stated intention was to "ascertain the quantum of happiness enjoyed by its (Scotland's) inhabitants and the means of its future improvement". The information was published over a number of years as the returns came in during the 1790s. Such was the success of this survey that it was repeated in a second, very similar, exercise carried out in the late 1830s and 1840s which led to the publication of the *Second or New Statistical Account of Scotland*. A further survey, known as the *Third Statistical Account of Scotland*, was begun after World War II, but its publication has been fairly patchy and erratic, and the information contained in it can normally be gleaned more easily from other sources.

### **Case-study: woods near Dunkeld**

In talking about the value of the *Statistical Accounts* as a source of information for woodland history, I think it is probably helpful to go from the specific towards the general - to use a 'case study' to illustrate both the strengths and weakness of the *Accounts*. I will focus on the area around Dunkeld in Perthshire, on the edge of the Grampian Highlands.

### **ROY'S MILITARY SURVEY (1747-1755)**

It is clear from Roys survey, which draws a distinction between native woodland and plantation that a good deal of semi-natural woodland survived in the vicinity of Dunkeld into the mid-18th century, especially around the mouth of Strathbraan on the opposite bank of the River Tay from the town of Dunkeld

### **STEUART - DUNKELD 1765**

A painting commissioned from Charles Steuart by John Murray, 3rd Duke of Atholl in 1765 clearly shows a strip of fairly mature, apparently native woodland running up the southern side of Strathbraan.

## STOBIE'S MAP 1784

By chance, the land on each bank of the River Braan was in two different ownerships at the time - that to the north being part of the extensive Atholl Estates and that to the south part of Murthly. Someone standing at the Third Duke of Atholl's Hermitage, marked on James Stobie's map, would therefore be looking across the river onto Murthly.

## STEUART - FALLS OF BRAAN 1765

This view is precisely what we see in another painting by Charles Stuart in 1765, taken from the Hermitage and looking at the Black Linn Falls on the Braan. By a happy coincidence we find that, just a year or two before this painting was made, the ground on the left-hand side of the picture had been the subject of an exchange of letters between the 3rd Duke of Atholl and Sir John Stewart of Murthly.

The Duke had evidently conveyed his displeasure to Sir John that he had been obliged to purchase the stand of trees in the left foreground of the picture so as to preserve the amenity of his beloved Hermitage. Stewart's reply, dating from 1763, reveals that the wood on the south side of the river was, in fact, a coppice wood then being cut on a regular basis.

Sir - I have the honour of yours of the 6th inst. this moment. The contents surprizes me and gives me great concern, finding that you have been obliged to purchase the few trees of the wood of Tarfowack from the people who had purchased the wood at last cutting. For I declare on my honour I gave particular and strict orders ... that the trees opposite the Hermitage should be excepted from the sale ... I am sorry that by the entail, it is not in my power to give or sell you the property of that tryfling bank which contributes to the beauty of your charming Hermitage.

A fifty-seven year lease of the wood was eventually concluded between the two parties in 1768, the Duke's agent commenting that

... fifty-seven years will do for the living, and those unborn may renew the struggle for themselves.

What we see in the foreground of this picture is a wood of apparently multi-stemmed trees of c.20 or 25 years growth, strongly suggestive of a coppice wood - the trees bought a few years earlier by the 3rd Duke. The background of the picture, on the other hand, shows a few rather spindly trees and some dense tufts of foliage close to the ground - surely recently cut coppice-stools which were by then starting to re-grow.

## STOBIE'S MAP 1815

What, then, can the *Statistical Accounts* add to such a picture. The woodland in question falls within the parish of Little Dunkeld. We are fortunate that the Rev. John Robertson, author of the *Old Statistical Account* for Little Dunkeld, was interested in agriculture generally and in woodland management in particular. He recorded the following observations on the woods in his parish.

The natural woods, which make no trifling part of the wealth of the parish, consist mostly of oak; and grow in smaller and larger clumps along the banks of the Tay, all except one wood in the east end of Strathbraan. The grounds that produce them are, for the most part, of very poor quality, so steep as to be inaccessible to the plough, and incapable of cultivation. These woods are treated in the way of coppice, being commonly sold to woodcutters, and felled when from 20 to 25 years old. Where the oak grows thick and unmixed with other wood, it sells at the rate of from £25 to £40, and has lately sold so high as £54 per acres. Where it grows thin, or interspersed with birch, the acre is not of near so much value. But a crop, 24 years old, of all the oak coppice in the parish would fetch at least £10,000 sterling. It occupies about 800 acres of ground. The proprietors are improving their oak woods by inclosing them with stone walls, and filling up the vacant spaces with planted oak. The extirpation of the birch and other baser woods, would also be a great improvement. The birch woods of which there are near 200 acres, and treated also as coppice, are not worth, at 22 years old, above £2 per acre.

This picture is reinforced - albeit in rather less detail - in the *New Statistical Account* published in the 1840s, fifty years or so later.

In the districts of Murthly and the Bishopric (the area to the north of the River Braan) there is a considerable extent of woods. The planted trees are oak, ash, Scotch fir, larch and plane. The indigenous are birch and hazel. The oak and fir are of most extent, and also the most profitable. The former is divided into coppices, which are successively cut down once in twenty years, and affords a good return for land in other respects of little value. It fetches a good price for the sake of the bark; and, in the summer season, gives employment to a good many people.

Taken together, these accounts give us a picture of continuity, implying perhaps that the stands of semi-natural birch and oak woodland were being managed on a more or less sustainable basis. It also suggests that, with the 'extirpation of baser woods', the native element of the woodland was being progressively reduced.

### **SMITH - DUNKELD c.1800**

We know, too, from other evidence such as Roy's Military Survey, and from a painting of Dunkeld by John Smith of c.1800 that there were similar areas of semi-natural woodland in neighbouring Dunkeld parish, just across the River Tay from the Hermitage. Yet here we encounter one of the real difficulties of using the *Statistical Accounts* - that is, that they reflect the interests of their authors. For the anonymous account of the parish of Dunkeld tells us next to nothing about the woodland there.

In cases such as this, it may be possible to infer a certain amount from the accounts of neighbouring parishes, and to build up a general picture of woodland management in the area. For example, the account for the neighbouring parish of Dowally refers to either 20 or 25 year cycles of cutting, depending on the landowner concerned (25 years in the case of the Duke of Atholl). We can probably infer from this that most of the woodland in Dunkeld, much of it on Atholl land, is likely to have been cut on a 25-year cycle.

The accounts of other surrounding parishes help to fill out the picture, sometimes including interesting comments and observations. There is a detailed account of Clunie (1791), to the east, where 20 or 24 year cycles of cutting were the norm. Here the Rev. William MacRitchie described changes which were occurring in the local economy at the time, with much of the work now being done by:

... wood cutting companies who purchase it, with certain reservations, from the proprietors, and send the bark to a great distance, to Dundee, Forfar, Brechin, etc.

He goes on to note that:

The wood-cutters do not draw such profits from this business now, as they did formerly, owing partly to the proprietors of the oak becoming of late more sensible of its value, partly to different companies setting up in opposition to one another, and partly due to some members of the same company not paying due attention to their particular departments.

That coppice management was a long-established practice in the area, however, is implied in a footnote which states that:

This country does not produce one half of the natural wood now that it appears to have produced some hundred years ago.

The same footnote suggests that the extension of arable cultivation, combined with uncontrolled grazing by cattle and a failure to thin the young stocks properly, were all contributing to a gradual fall in the value of the surviving coppice woods in the parish. MacRitchie also expressed his own personal view that coppicing itself exhausted the ground and that it might ultimately prove unsustainable without a fallow period.

The ground that produces trees, like the ground that successively produces any other exhaustive crop, must, in a certain number of years, become wasted and fatigued, and consequently must require a certain period of repose.

In reading the *Statistical Accounts*, therefore, we ought also to be aware that their authors' prejudices may be reflected in the descriptions, especially where the minister, as was not uncommon, was related - whether by blood or in a financial sense - to the landowner whom they were describing. Some ministers would be prejudiced in favour of the landowners and would therefore be tempted to flatter the owners and to exaggerate what they were describing, while others might equally be prejudiced against the owners and might be tempted to ignore or belittle what they saw. Inconsistencies of this sort are evident in both the *Statistical Accounts*.

To summarise, therefore, the good points are:-

- that the *Old Statistical Accounts* are more or less complementary to Roy's Military Survey and to the numerous County Maps produced between about 1750 and the end of the eighteenth century, and may, therefore, usefully be read in conjunction with them. The *New Statistical Accounts*, likewise, can usefully be read in conjunction with the First Editions Ordnance Survey, which, for much of Scotland at least, dates from the mid-nineteenth century.
- that each *Statistical Account* paints a country-wide account taken more or less at one moment in time - the first in the 1790s, the second in the 1840s - based on a fairly standardised approach, allowing comparisons in time to be made between the two different accounts of the same parish, or in space between two or more different parishes.

- that they often record the changes which were in progress at the time, and may include personal comments and observations, all of which may add a great deal to bald statistical facts.

At the same tune, the disadvantages are:-

- that overall coverage is very patchy, and almost entirely dependent on the particular knowledge and/or interest of the author.
- that accounts may hide - or indeed reveal - the personal prejudices of their author
- while most were written by the incumbent ministers, in the absence of the returns, some accounts were compiled by Sir John Sinclair himself, based on information supplied by others who were probably less familiar with the parishes in question.
- far too many of the entries in the *Second Statistical Account* have merely reiterated the entries from the previous *Account*.

This is why I should like to draw attention to the nationwide *County Surveys of Agriculture* compiled around the turn of the nineteenth century - some of them by the same parish ministers who were responsible for compiling the *Old Statistical Accounts* - as in the case of the parish of Callander, for example. Carried out for the benefit of the government's Board of Agriculture and Internal Improvement, these surveys were intended to give an overview of agricultural and other rural practices, and to highlight and promote promising developments. While they were usually less specific as to place, they often went into great detail on such things as management techniques, and cropping practices. They are probably less prone to personal bias of the sort which I have described for the *Statistical Accounts*. Circulated among the principal landowners in draft during the 1790s, most were published c.1800 or a little later. Where specific information is not to be found in the *Statistical Accounts*, the *Surveys of General Agriculture* help to fill in the gaps in our knowledge and to provide a general background or context within which the rather more specific *Statistical Accounts* can be studied. In some cases they may contain detailed accounts of specific estates, where these were perceived to be good examples of management - for example, a detailed description in the survey of Kincardineshire of the planting of the woodland at The Burn, near Edzell, at the end of the 18th century.

Christopher Dingwall

(The basic message being given here, and also iterated in the previous papers, is the need for corroboration from a number of sources)