

Derry Lodge

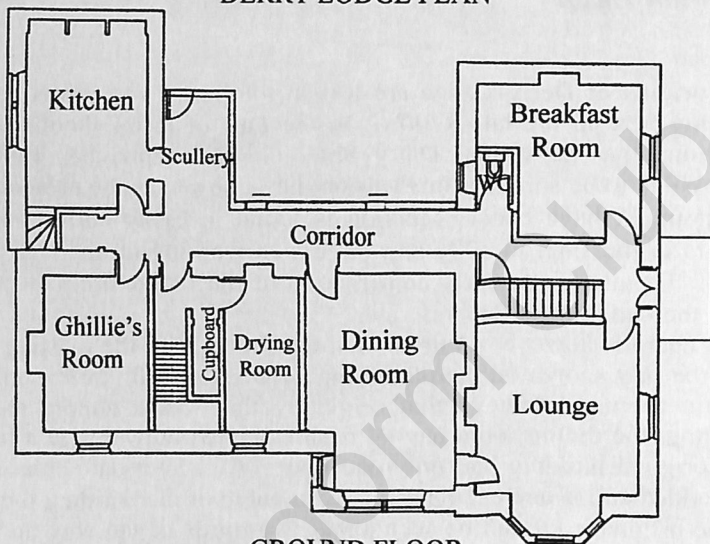
Graham Ewen

The origins of Derry Lodge are lost in the past. There was certainly a shieling here in the late 1700's. In the Earl of Fife's shooting diary he mentions that he visited Dairy Shiel on 26th September 1791. It is impossible to be sure that this was on the same site as the present building but it might have been. Mention is found in estate correspondence of repairs to the shiel in 1794 and three men working on the Derry road in 1798. Details of the early construction of the Lodge are totally missing from the Duff House Papers.

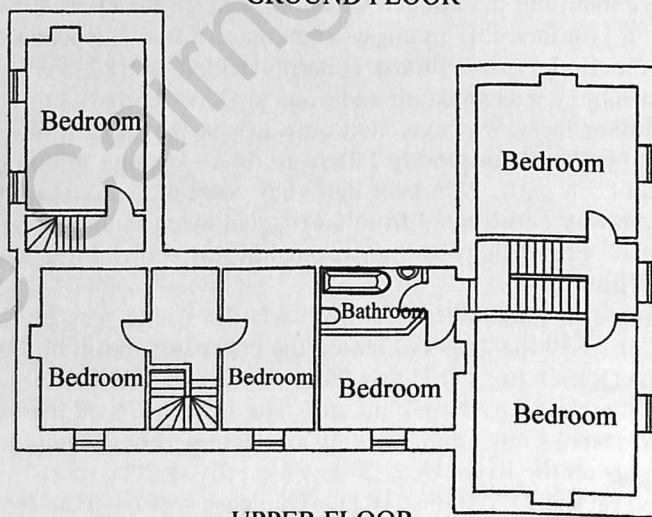
There is however no doubt that the first part of the existing building was the part shown on the plan lying between the Ghillie's room and the Dining room. I believe that originally this was a simple rectangular building, the dining room having been extended outwards at a later date. The original building had only one floor. At a later date a second floor was added and if one examines the west gable of the building the V shape of the original roof can be seen about two-thirds of the way up the wall. The wing containing the kitchen was built next, probably as a two-floored building. It is impossible to guess when these events happened. The east wing of the Lodge was almost certainly added in 1873, when a large amount of money was spent on additions to Derry Lodge. I think it likely that the dining room was extended outwards at the same time. The way the Lodge was built originally left it as three separate buildings with a staircase in each part. At a later date they were to be connected together by a passageway constructed from corrugated iron running along the back of the house. The scullery at the west end of this corridor was also built of corrugated iron.

During the time of the fourth Earl, the estate was being run by Trustees. In 1830 the Trustees leased the entire area north of the Dee and west of the Quoich to a Sir Henry Goodriche from 1st July 1830 for seven years at a rental of £1,200 per annum. The lease included the use of Mar Lodge and Derry Lodge and all rights of shooting but did not include any fishing rights on the River Dee. This lease proved to be short-lived, as Sir Henry died on the 21st August 1833. The lease was taken on by the Duke of Leeds on a year to year basis for the same rent. There is no doubt that the Duke of Leeds made use of Derry Lodge during his tenure, as evidenced by a dispute over firewood which took place in 1851. The cause of this dispute appears to have been that some of the Duke's servants were interfered with, and the threat of an interdict held out, while they

DERRY LODGE PLAN



GROUND FLOOR



UPPER FLOOR

The use of the rooms depicted on this plan corresponds with the use made of them by the Cairngorm Club from 1951 to 1966.

were employed in collecting firewood around Derry, to which the Duke considered he was fairly and legally entitled. The matter was fully investigated by the Trustees, who obviously considered that what had happened was a very small problem compared with the huge amount of money that the Duke had spent on the estate over the previous eighteen years, without any security of tenure. This included £21,000 in rent and around £7,000 on the preservation of the forest. The meeting concluded by declaring that the wood in question was the property of the Duke and that the matter should therefore be dropped.

When the fourth Earl died in 1857 he was succeeded by his nephew, who became the fifth Earl. At this point the Trusteeship was wound up and the fifth Earl took full responsibility for the whole estate. It was at this time that the estate resumed spending money in the area of Glen Lui. In 1856 there is an account from an Alex McDonald, mason, and others for mason work at a new house in Glen Lui (presumably Luibeg). The following year repairs were done to the larder and coach house at Derry Shieling. These were probably situated where the present large shed stands, just to the west of the Lodge itself. In the same year a new water closet was built at Derry; this was obviously an outside one as there is an account for lead for the roof. At the end of December there is an account for sawing wood for new houses at Derry Shieling. Could this be the extension to the Lodge which contains the kitchen, or is it merely referring to office houses? In the same year a stable was erected at Derry, but there is no indication of exactly where. At some point a shelter of some kind was built for the use of ghillies. It was called the Ghillies' Hall. I have no idea when it was built, but in 1894 it was reshingled.

Queen Victoria briefly visited Derry Lodge in 1859. She mentions driving there on her way to climb Ben Macdhui, which she did by pony from there. She also mentions that the party stopped there on the return journey and found some tea, which they had in the shieling, but there is no description of the place or any mention of people staying there. The Ordnance Survey name books, which were printed at the time of the original survey, presumably in the early 1860s, describe Derry as being a one-storey building in good condition.

The census returns from 1841 to 1901 give some insight into the use that was made of the property. In 1841 there is only one house listed under Glenlui. It was occupied by a William McHardy, with his wife and four of a family. He is described simply as a male servant. In 1851, the one house was occupied by a Peter McHardy, a gamekeeper, with his wife and eight of a family. By 1861 there are two properties listed under Glen Lui. The first, now called Derry Lodge, was occupied by a Hugh McCrostie, a deer watcher. The other property was called Glenlui Lodge,

and was occupied by another deer watcher, Alexander McDonald, his wife and four family. In 1871 Derry Lodge was uninhabited. The other property, now called Luibeg, was occupied by a Ronald McDonald, a gamekeeper. In 1881 Peter Miller, a gamekeeper, lived at Derry Lodge and John Mcintosh, another gamekeeper, and his wife lived at Luibeg. In 1891 Donald Fraser, a gamekeeper, and his wife lived at Derry Lodge, while John Mcintosh, another gamekeeper, and his wife and two family lived at Luibeg. Both were still there in 1901.

An inventory of the furnishings at Derry Lodge dated 26th March 1912 shows that the Lodge was furnished to a very high standard. It is too long to include it all here, so I will restrict myself to the contents of the dining room. There were: "mahogany buffet, French China dessert set (27 pieces), Oak couch & three chairs in American cloth, Deal table, Mahogany table end, Steel rail fender & set fire irons, Brussels carpet & rug, Mantelpiece mirror in gilt frame, seven Leech's sporting prints and two oil paintings, Scotch arm chair & three chairs and three Holland blinds and rollers". While the list looks impressive, there are some obvious deficiencies. While it emphasizes the 27-piece dessert set, there are only six chairs and apparently no dishes for earlier courses. Elsewhere there are five bedrooms listed, but only three beds.

After the death of the Duke of Fife in 1912, the lavish expenditure on the estate, which had been the order of the day during his lifetime, came to a sudden end. The cause of this was the introduction of death duties in 1894, which would have been very costly as far as the Duke's estate was concerned. However some developments did take place at Derry in the years leading up to the Second World War. A new shed was built in 1924 to replace a number of old sheds, which were demolished. The new shed had a concrete base and the rest of the structure is a wooden frame covered with corrugated iron. It still stands today. A new larder was built in 1926. In 1936 a bathroom was installed in the Lodge. It was taken off the bedroom which it adjoins. Apart from the plumbing, the work necessitated building a partition to separate the new bathroom from the bedroom and the installation of a skylight in the roof to provide light. Also in 1936, a new coal and stick shed was erected directly behind the kitchen. A new water closet was built behind this shed to replace one which had been inside the old coal and stick shed. This would have been intended for use by servants, ghillies, etc. There is also correspondence concerning making new curtains and installing curtain runners and curtain poles. New electric bells were installed in place of the old ringing ones. The pony stables were built in 1937 or 1938. Prior to 1912 all this work would have been done by outside tradesmen, but as much of the above work as possible was carried out by estate employees.

In May 1916 a German Zeppelin was seen flying over Derry Lodge. It was spotted by Neil Bynack, who at that time lived at Luibeg. Apparently the crew had got lost because of bad weather. They later dropped their bombs at various places between Lumsden and Inch and eventually crash-landed in Norway, where presumably they would have been interned.

The increasing popularity of hillwalking led to Derry becoming the starting point for an increasing number of mountain rescues. A first aid post was set up in 1938, consisting of a stretcher and other equipment. This was sponsored by a body called The First Aid Committee of Climbing Clubs. It was kept in a locked shed at Luibeg, but oddly it was the keeper at Derry Lodge who held the key. In the post-war years an emergency telephone was installed at Luibeg. From 1967 onwards Aberdeen Mountain Rescue team have had the use of the old pony stables at Derry, and in November 1977 the emergency telephone was moved there.

It is difficult to ascertain exactly what use the estate made of the lodge from the time the Duke of Leeds left. There is no doubt that for most of the time from 1860 onwards until the Second World War it was used as a home for a gamekeeper. In 1924 a party from the Scottish Mountaineering Club was accommodated there and stabling was provided for their horses. It seems the lodge was empty at that time as Mrs Macdonald from Luibeg was instructed to put on fires for them. It seems unlikely that much use was made of the accommodation by shooting tenants, apart from it serving as an emergency shelter or a place for picnics. The shortage of furniture would tend to suggest this. The lack of a bathroom would probably not have appealed to the type of guests who were being entertained. For example, I have a picture of a fishing party standing in front of Derry Lodge, one of whom was Edward VII, when still Prince of Wales. The Duchess of Fife seemed to have plans for the place in the 1930s, when she had a bathroom added and various other improvements done, but whatever these were, they came to nothing because of the Second World War.

Derry Lodge was requisitioned by the army on the 26th October 1942, presumably to provide accommodation for troops, who would be training on the hills round about. The estate removed all the furniture and fittings prior to this event and these were stored for the time being in the ballroom at Mar Lodge. Mr Beattie, the gamekeeper who stayed at Luibeg, was employed on a part-time basis at Derry as gardener and caretaker, and the army paid part of his wages for the duration of the requisition. The requisition was relinquished on 12th December 1944 and by all accounts the building was left in a rather filthy condition, so much so that according



Derry Lodge in its Heyday

to the Estate Factor, it was difficult to detect whether there was any damage to the walls and woodwork. There was also substantial damage to the Derry road caused by all the military vehicles using it. The estate later claimed around £2,700 damages from the War Department of which £2,200 was for the damage to the road. The Estate Factor at this time presumed that the Duchess of Fife would wish all the furniture and fittings returned to Derry, but this had to be deferred for the time being because of the shortage of tradesmen at this time.

It was around November 1945 that the Cairngorm Club first made enquiries as to whether Derry Lodge might become available for lease, but were informed that this was out of the question. The Estate Factor, however, did suggest that it might be possible to allow the Club to erect a small hut on a site to be agreed, away from the Lodge and the keeper's house, although he doubted if the Duchess of Fife would agree to such a proposal. However the Factor was very favourably disposed towards the Cairngorm Club, and by March 1949 he had obtained, perhaps somewhat reluctantly, the Duchess's approval for such a hut to be erected on the following terms: it was to be built on a site chosen by the Estate; plans of the building were to be submitted to the Estate for approval before any building work started; the hut was to be kept clean and tidy and no litter left about it and to be kept locked when not in use by members of the Cairngorm Club; any damage done to the Derry road, culverts or bridges

during the construction would have to be made good by the Club to the entire satisfaction of the Estate.

However, only two months later in May, the Club was offered a lease for Muir Cottage in Inverey, then called Moor Cottage. It was currently leased to the firm of Messrs McAdam, contractors, to accommodate the workmen who were constructing the fish ladder at the Falls of Lui at that time, but was expected to become available about six months later. The Estate Factor noted in a communication to the Duchess of Fife's representative in London that if this lease could be arranged it would probably avoid the erection of a hut in Glen Derry.

Two years later there was a complete change of heart. The Duchess had indicated to the Estate Factor that perhaps Derry might be let after all. There had been an enquiry in February 1951 from a Mr Maddocks of Ballachulish, who wanted to turn it into a guest house. This proposal was turned down. On the Easter Weekend, Mr G.A. Taylor and Mr W.A. Ewen of the Cairngorm Club were shown round the Lodge by Bob Scott, the keeper at Luibeg. Thereafter negotiations took place to draw up a lease. These were concluded by 7th June 1951 and the main points of the lease were as follows:

1. It is agreed that the subject of let shall consist of the main building at Derry Lodge, with coal shed but excluding all other buildings there.
2. The lease, subject to adjustment, shall be for a period of 15 years, with breaks in favour of either party at the end of 5 or 10 years, with entry as from Whitsunday 1951.
3. The rent for the first five years to be £15 per annum, payable at the term of Martinmas for the half year preceding and the half year following, the first year's rent being payable at Martinmas 1951. The rent for the remaining ten years of the lease to be £25 per annum and payable yearly at each term of Martinmas.
4. The Cairngorm Club will take over the whole premises under the let in its present condition and carry out all necessary internal improvements and repairs at their own expense to the satisfaction of the proprietors and free of compensation by the proprietors at the termination of the tenancy. No structural repairs are to be carried out to the subjects without the written consent of the proprietors. The proprietors will maintain the building in a wind and watertight condition
5. It is stipulated that the Club will refrain from organizing any excursions in the area during the stalking season from the 20th August to 9th October in each year during the currency of the lease. (It was to be agreed the following year that members could

- arrange such trips on the condition that they confer with Bob Scott about their choice of route beforehand.)
6. Access for vehicles (excluding charabancs and heavy vehicles for which special permits would be required) will be available by the road from Linn of Dee to Derry Lodge. The existing fee of 2/6 for the use of the key for the lock on Derry Gate will continue to be charged but will be restricted to 2/6 per double journey for members of the Club staying several days at Derry Lodge.
 7. There will be no objection to the Club gathering and using for fuel any dead wood in the neighbourhood of Derry Lodge.
 8. Accommodation shall be provided in the Lodge for two Estate Ghillies during the stalking season, free of charge to the proprietors. Such ghillies are to provide their own bedding, cooking utensils and fire.

When the Club took over Derry, it was still more or less in the condition that the army had left it in 1944. Huge black marks covered the walls in most of the rooms, probably soot caused by some kind of cooking stoves. A good clean-up and a lick of paint made the Lodge presentable again, all the labour being done by volunteers. There was no real structural damage, except that a bit of flooring had to be replaced in the room that was called the dining room. The timber for this job, which was not done until 1952, was supplied free of charge by the estate. The Lodge was furnished to accommodate 24 people, single beds being provided rather than bunks as at Muir.

Once it was ready, the Lodge was very comfortable during the summer months but less so in winter. It was not possible to use the hot water system because the pipes all had to be drained to avoid frost damage. Consequently all hot water had to be heated in kettles. Perhaps more serious was the fact that the corrugated iron scullery and passageway at the back of the building, very draughty at the best of times, could not keep the snow out during blizzard conditions and the passage used to fill up with snow. The low roof was also a nightmare for taller people. It was decided that the whole structure should be replaced, and as this would obviously be an expensive job, the Club made an attempt to persuade the estate to extend the lease by a further ten years to Whitsunday 1976. The Estate would not hear of this, but did guarantee that the lease would definitely be allowed to run its full course to Whitsunday 1966, i.e. dropping the five- and ten-year break options. On this basis the Club decided to go ahead with the job.

Work started on the evening of the 1st July 1955 and was completed in a fortnight. The new building was constructed of T-beam cavity concrete blocks, had an aluminium roof, and the corridor windows were of

glass bricks. The floor was built of precast concrete slabs, and of course the roof was higher than before. Once again the estate supplied the wood used free of charge. Various other jobs were also completed during this fortnight, including painting almost all the exterior woodwork of the Lodge, replacing the copper cold-water pipes between the kitchen and the bathroom with larger bore alkathene pipe, and a masonry dwarf wall was built along the bottom of the slope behind the lodge. Altogether about twenty people took part.

No other major works took place during the remainder of the lease apart from maintenance repairs and painting. The lease expired in 1966 and by then this part of the estate had new owners. At first it seemed that the £25 per annum rent would be increased to £500 but after negotiations the new owners agreed on an annual rental of £100, plus a charge for the use of the road of £150, and the lease to be of only one year's duration. The Club Committee decided to accept this, but it became increasingly obvious during the year that it would be hopelessly uneconomic to continue. The Lodge was badly needing painting and other repairs, and, without any security of tenure, it would have been foolish to spend a lot of money on it. The Club therefore gave up the lease of Derry at Whitsunday 1967. The new owners were John and Gerald Panchaud, Swiss businessmen.

The original road to Derry, built in the 1790's, started at Claybokie and skirted round the hill to where the Black Bridge now is, and from there followed the present route to Derry. The existing road from the public road to the Black Bridge was built at a later date. It is shown on the 1866 O.S. Map, but the Black Bridge is shown as a footbridge. I do not know when the bridge was widened to become a road bridge, but it was certainly many years before 1913, when it required major repairs. Up until 1930 those who were lucky enough to own a motor car could use the Derry road freely without any restriction. However in 1930 a gate was erected and the road was closed to the general public. Thereafter only those with permission from the estate were allowed to use the road, and only as far as a small car park at the entrance to the Derry Wood. Another gate was erected across the road at this point, and a fence constructed along the edge of the wood for some distance either side of the gate. A notice beside the gate instructed walkers that the right of way went down the side of the wood to the river and then along the river bank until past the Lodge. On numerous occasions in the years to come the Cairngorm Club obtained permission to take a bus up to Derry, but of course buses were not as big then as they are now. When the Club got the lease of Derry, members then had motor access to the Lodge itself. The use of the old right of way declined from this time. When the Black Bridge was

badly damaged by the spate of 1956 the Cairngorm Club gave a donation of 50 guineas towards its repair. At the start of the Panchaud ownership of the estate, keys were freely handed out to anybody at the bar at the back of Mar Lodge. Then one day this stopped and since then the road has remained closed to the general public.

Since the Cairngorm Club left, the Lodge has lain empty and became subject to vandalism. Windows got broken and people were breaking in and using the Lodge as a shelter. This was no doubt a major factor in the decision by the estate to stop issuing keys for the Derry Lodge road. Eventually all the windows and doors were boarded up to make the place secure. Unfortunately two skylights in the roof got broken and were never repaired. The loss of the use of the Lodge was a sad blow to Club members and also to members of other clubs who had stayed at Derry from time to time. It was a magnificent situation for a climbing club hut, and its loss means that all the hills in the Central Cairngorms now have at least an extra six miles walking for those who wish to climb them. When Bob Scott retired in 1972, he was not replaced and so there would have no longer been any real supervision of what was happening in the Derry Lodge area.

The Panchauds sold out to an American named Von Kluge in 1989. He carried out a huge number of improvements to properties on the estate and spoke at one point of repairing all the shooting lodges. Alas, that was not to be, and he in turn sold the estate to the National Trust in 1995. The National Trust has repaired the roof at Derry to prevent further damage, making the Lodge once again wind and waterproof. I recently visited Derry Lodge with Susan Bain, the archaeologist employed by the National Trust and was shocked at the condition of the interior. All the plumbing fittings, sinks, bath and toilets have been ripped out. All the fireplaces have suffered the same fate, but they were nowhere to be seen. Did someone take them away? Large areas of lath and plaster have been ripped off the walls and in some places floorboards have been ripped up. Near the bottom of the middle stairway, below one of the broken skylights, a wooden lintel supporting a masonry wall is badly rotten and the wall is presently being held up by acro-jacks. The single storey extension to the dining room has subsided badly and needs to be rebuilt.

The removal of plaster and lath from the bedroom above the ghillie's room revealed the existence the remains of a window, looking into the bedroom above the kitchen. It was this discovery that revealed that the middle section of the Lodge is the oldest part, and not the part containing the kitchen which is what I had previously thought. The National Trust has not yet decided on a suitable use for the property, but when they do there will obviously be a huge expense in restoring the Lodge to a

habitable condition.

Much of the information on which this article is based derives from the Duff House Papers, which are held in the Special Libraries and Archives of the University of Aberdeen, and also from some private papers kindly lent to me by Captain Nicolson.

The Cairngorm Club