

Muir

Editor's note: Graham Ewen, Honoray President of the Club, has published the results of his historical research in numerous issues of the Journal. They include articles on the village and the estate of Inverey and the associated lairds, Glen Ey, Dalmore, Allanaquoich and in the last issue, Derrylodge. In this issue he sets out the complicated history of the Club Cottage we now call Muir but which was originally known by another name.

The Moor of Inverey

Graham Ewen

The area called the Moor of Inverey covered an area extending from near the bridge across the Black Burn, at Blackburn Cottage westwards to the far end of the flat ground near where the Canadian Bridge used to stand. A 1787 map of Inverey, which had obviously been prepared to assist with a reorganisation of holdings, simply shows the area as Stoney Moor. All the holdings to the east were always listed under Little Inverey and those to the west were listed under Linn of Dee. The Moor may have extended up the hill to the south in places, but much of the hillside was probably covered in woodland called the Wood of Badiness. This area was not originally populated and was simply used as a grazing ground by the inhabitants of Little Inverey. As such it attracted little notice in the Estate records except for some complaints by the local factor that the tenants kept making muirburn in this area, which endangered the nearby fir woods.

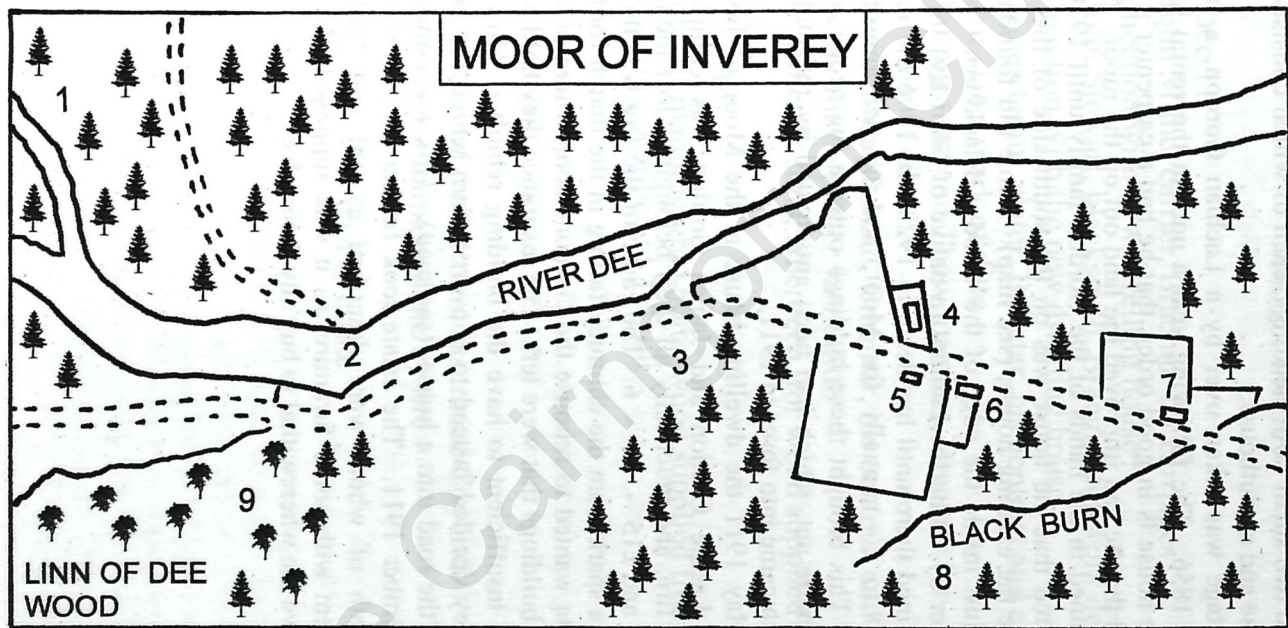
The first mention of any other economic activity in this area comes in a letter from James Stuart, the local factor to Lord Fife, dated 27th July 1795, in which he stated that the trenching of the moor and houses was going forward, but offers his opinion that the cost of doing so will far exceed any profit, for the expense would be great and the soil was very bad. By the 9th October he reported that the moor was now ploughed and manure was being spread on it. At this time it would appear that the estate was farming this new land on

its own account, By July 1798 the horses were still being employed in carting stones off the new ploughed land and carrying manure to it.

Although there are rental lists from 1785 onwards there is no specific mention made of the Moor of Inverey until the list of 1823. From 1785 until 1809 Meikle Inverey and Little Inverey were listed separately, but from 1810 to 1822 all the tenants were lumped together on one list under Inverey. From 1823 – 1827 only two tenants are listed for Moor of Inverey, an Alex McDonald paying an annual rent of £1 5s and James Miller who paid £2. These rents were low compared with the rest of the Estate. The tenants in Little Inverey paid an average of around £4 18s while the rents in Meikle Inverey averages around £6 3s.

From 1828 there were three tenants, the additional one being a Widow Thomson, whose annual rental was £1. James Miller had by this time died and his widow is now listed as the tenant. In 1837 these rentals were reduced by a third because the Earl of Fife had taken over their shielings in Glen Connie and thrown them into the deer forest. In 1844 Widow Miller at Moor of Inverey presented a petition to the Trustees of the late James, Earl of Fife, describing the injury done to her croft by the flood of 1829 (the Muckle Spate), and craving that a stone bulwark should be erected for its protection. This request was considered by the Trustees at a meeting in Turriff on 24th October 1844. The Committee, having heard from the factor that the place was not worth the expense of bulwarking, agreed to allow her a donation of 4 bolls of meal in charity to the widow annually. Why this request was not made much sooner after the Muckle Spate remains a mystery.

By this time it becomes clear that Widow Miller occupied the holding that became the Muir Cottage of today, Widow Thomson was in the holding that became Blackburn Cottage and Widow MacDonald was in the other holding, which was demolished by order of the Trustees, when she gave up the holding in 1866, (see Map). Thereafter there were only two holdings on the Moor of Inverey. The Ordnance Survey name books, which are held in the National Archives of Scotland in Edinburgh, contain notes made by the Ordnance Survey during their original survey of the area. They list two buildings under the name "Muir", the first time this



KEY

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|--------------------------------|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Canadian Camp | 4. Present Muir Cottage Site | 7. Blackburn Cottage |
| 2. Site of Canadian Bridge | 5. Former Muir Cottage Site | 8. Old Water Supply Source |
| 3. Possible Site of "The Camp" | 6. Other Holding | 9. New Water Supply Source |

variant of the spelling has been found. The entry states that this name refers to two small farm steadings, each of which consists of a dwelling house and an outhouse.

Moor Cottage was taken over by a Lachlan Gordon, a house carpenter in 1856. The following year a note in the rental ledger states that the house is in good order, that he had a carpenter's shop adjoining and that he had improved the land out on the moor. Moor Cottage remained in the hands of the Gordon family until 1920. It should be noted that the house was on the south side of the main road, opposite the existing house, (see map). Some old foundations can be seen just inside the edge of the wood. Blackburn Cottage was taken over by Catherine Lamont (a native of Glen Ey) in 1876 and she remained there until her death in 1923. In 1906 the rentals were reduced to 2/- annually for Moor, and 1/- per annum for Blackburn. This brought these holdings outside the scope of the security of tenure act, which had been anticipated by the Duke of Fife and which came into force in 1911.

On 10th May 1911 the dwelling house at the Moor of Inverey occupied by Lachie Gordon and James Gordon was completely destroyed by fire, and practically all their belongings lost including two watches and £15 - 12 - 6. The cause of the fire was thought to have been a spark from the chimney falling in the thatch roof. At first the Estate wanted to rehouse the Gordons somewhere else and demolish the buildings that were left. The insurance they held on the building was insufficient to have the building rebuilt. However, eventually they decided instead to convert a barn which lay on the other side of the road into a house, (see map). This was completed on 27th September 1911. The estate took further pity on the two Gordon's, both of whom were described as old and frail, by supplying them with some furniture, as it was supposed that they would not have the wherewithal to buy any themselves.

Account for the conversion of a barn to a dwelling house at
Moor of Inverey

1911 Dec 11

Paid John Milne, carrier, Braemar for carriages in connection with new dwelling house	£3 10 0d
Paid John Stewart, blacksmith, Braemar for work done in connection with the new dwelling house	1 7 2
Paid James Grant, slater, Ballater, his contract and extra work for slater work of ditto	37 0 0
Paid Livingstone and Thow, painters, Braemar for painter work of ditto	2 15 0
Paid Donald MacDonald, Braemar, his contract and extra work for carpenter work ditto	20 10 0
Paid R. Miller & sons, Aberdeen, for wood supplied for ditto	16 2 4
1912 Sep 30	
To value of manufactured home wood supplied from Estate during year ended 31 st . ult	1 2 1

Less Received from Royal Insurance Coy Ltd.
Aberdeen, for damage done by fire

60 0 0

Net cost to estate

£22 6 0

In 1915 the out houses of the above property had become ruinous and at Lachie Gordon's request a new wooden shed was erected, and the tenant was to remove the old houses and renounce all claim to them. This was probably the wooden annex which was still attached to the house in 1949.

After Lachie Gordon died in 1920 there were a number of tenants, mostly fairly short term between then and 1949 when the Club took on the lease of the property. The first was a C. MacDonald who was removed from Claybokie on 26th May 1922. He was only there for a short time and was replaced by John Christie, who had been a gamekeeper at the Linn on 19th October of that year. Christie had a cow and this necessitated the building of a byre, which of course is now the woodshed. By 1939 a B. Robertson was the tenant. In a letter to the factor, dated 4th January 1939 he complains about the small size of the house, stating that it was too small for a family, the fact that the kitchen range smokes badly and the water supply being very poor. He had tried to use a force pump to cure this but it was no use.

In 19th September 1927 a boy called John Lindsay was admitted to the school in Inverey. His address was given as The Camp, The Moor of Inverey. This was followed on the 18th February 1929 by two girls, Betty and Jessie Newlands, presumably sisters, who also came from The Camp, The Moor of Inverey. Unfortunately the teacher omitted to fill in their dates of leaving in the admission register, and so how long they stayed there is unknown. It seems likely that they were travelling people, The 1900 O.S map shows a disused sand pit with road access at point 3 on the accompanying map. Although no trace of this remains today, a certain amount of hard standing survived here off the road right up until the 1950's and caravans and tents could often be seen at this point at that time. It seems quite likely that the Camp mentioned would have been here.

The area of hill opposite Moor Cottage (ie the future Muir), was completely wooded before the Second World War. This area of woodland was cut down by the Canadian Forestry Corps during the war years. They also constructed a bridge across the Dee at the West end of the Moor of Inverey, to connect their camp with the main road, which became known as the Canadian Bridge, (see map). The bridge had a narrow gauge railway crossing it. This railway led from their

camp, across the bridge and seemed to follow the far side of the public road eastwards. I do not know how far it went.

During the war years a family of Ellis's were in residence. However by the time in early 1949, when the Cairngorm Club was showing an interest in the property, it was about to be occupied by workmen employed by John McAdam, civil engineering contractors, Mugiemoos Road, Aberdeen. They were building a fish ladder on the Falls of Lui for the River Dee Salmon Fishery Board and they were to have a six months lease from 28th May. At the same time Aberdeen County Council was trying to requisition the cottage for homeless people. A party of at least four Club Members carried out an inspection of the property in July 1949. The party consisted of Col. E. Birnie Reid, William A. Ewen and at least two others. Negotiations were opened with the estate and by August an agreement in principle had been reached and a six year lease was signed at the beginning of November, despite the fact that McAdam's men were still in residence. Vagaries in the weather were blamed for the delay in finishing the fish ladder contract. Macadam's men were eventually shifted to Woodside Cottage in May 1950

Despite the presence of McAdam's men, structural alterations were started in 1949. Partitions were removed in the stone built part of the building to change it from a three roomed area to one of two rooms, a small room which was to be a bedroom and a larger room, which was to be the common room. Interestingly the wood from these partitions was carefully removed and taken away by the estate to be stored in a dry place of safety somewhere around Mar Lodge, so that the partitions could be restored in future, on the Club's waygoing. Priority was given to the water supply, which at the time consisted of a stand pipe in the garden, which didn't work at all. The water supply came from a burn on the hillside opposite and club volunteers had a very hard time digging up the old lead pipe and replacing it with a copper pipe. The old lead pipe had at least 17 leaks on it. The new pipe was connected to a new sink, which had been installed in the new common room. At this time the water supply was carried over the Black Burn in a wooden box shape similar to the structure which to this day carries the water supply across the River Ey to Meikle Inverey, (see map). This was eventually removed and the pipe sunk underneath the Black Burn. During 1950 the wooden annex had a proper floor laid and

hardboard linings put on the walls to provide two bedrooms. They both proved to be rather draughty due to the presence of badly fitted outside doors on both rooms. The cottage was opened to members without ceremony in June 1950. The first Huts Custodian was Robert Bain. The following year a new fence was erected along the north and east boundaries of the property. At the time toilet facilities consisted of an Elsan which was located in a small hut, adjoining the wooden annex. Lighting was by a Tilley lamp, which hung from a hook in the ceiling of the common room, and ordinary oil wick lamps elsewhere. Due to the forestry operations which took place during the war, there was plenty of wood brash lying about, which members of the Club were able to collect and saw up for firewood. Fresh milk and eggs could be obtained locally and Messrs Collie, general grocers, Braemar, delivered by van on Fridays. At this point there was accommodation for 12 people, sleeping in three four bunk rooms.

It was after the Club took over the cottage that the spelling "Muir" came to be used. In all the correspondence in the Estate papers prior to this time it was always called Moor Cottage. At that time the word Muir appeared on the Ordnance Survey map about half a mile west of the present building. I can distinctly remember my father mentioning to George Taylor that the building was marked as Muir on the map. Thus possibly the new usage was simply the result of a map reading error. The modern map of course shows Muir Cottage in the right place, but the other "Muir" is also shown where it has been all along.

Catherine Lamont is the last entry in the Estate Rental Ledger relating to Blackburn Cottage. She died in Nazereth House, Aberdeen on 11th January 1923. On her death certificate she is described as a Lodging House Keeper, although in all the Census entries up to 1911 she described herself as a crofter. The cottage was taken over by a Charles MacIntosh on or around 23rd April 1923 when he had three children admitted to the Roman Catholic School. He was an estate Labourer paying no rent, which explains why his name does not appear in the Rental Ledger. He was still there in 1936, when he was apparently reprimanded for appearing at Colonel Farquharson of Invercauld's funeral rather under the influence of drink, while wearing Mar Check Tweed. By 1950 the Scottish Youth Hostels Association were showing an interest in the Cottage, and after negotiations obtained a lease of the building at a nominal rent.

In 1954 the Scottish Hydro Electric Board extended the public electricity supply to the village of Inverey. Cooking and lighting were thereafter by electricity and at Muir a slot meter was installed to pay for it. Users of the cottage had to make sure they had a good supply of coins with them for this purpose. The following year, 1955, the lease was renewed for a further six years

In 1958 the small porch on the east side of the cottage was replaced with a much larger structure, which was to consist of a small bathroom and kitchen. The maximum length was restricted to the distance between the two windows on that wall and the width was also restricted by the fact that it was to be a flat roof. Work started at Easter time and continued mostly at weekends until the summer time. It also involved the construction of a septic tank and soak away which are located in the wood, not far from the woodshed. Once finished the sink and cooking facilities had been moved into the new kitchen area. The bathroom consisted of a small foot bath, a wash hand basin and a toilet. Once this was in operation the Elsan was disposed of, and the shed that housed it was demolished.

In 1959 Peter Howgate took over as Huts Custodian from Robert Bain, who had retired to live in Crieff. He continued in this post until 1967, when Ken Fraser took over for a short time. During this time a new weir was constructed across the burn to try and improve the water flow into the supply tank. This was to be the first of many attempts to improve the water supply since the original installation in 1950.

In 1962 the Canadian Bridge, which had become a well known landmark in the area, was demolished. It had been damaged by the flood of July 1956, which washed away the Luibeg Bridge. The bridge became impassable to motor vehicles and could only be used by cyclists and walkers. It was a very useful shortcut for those going to Derry Lodge. The excuse for the demolition was given that the bridge had become unsafe, but I think that with the sale of Mar Lodge to the Panchaud brothers, the possible complications of a private bridge joining what had become two different estates could have had something to do with it. Ricardo's Bridge across the River Ey was later similarly demolished immediately upon the sale of the Dalvorar Beat to the Panchauds. In the early 1960's the hill opposite Muir was replanted with trees. This involved the erection of miles of fencing and took several years to complete. A special one sided style was

erected on the south side of the fence to give club members access to the water supply for Muir. A portable ladder, kept in the wood shed at Muir had to be used on the north side of the fence to get access to the stile on the other side.

During the time that the Club had the use of Derry Lodge demand for places at Muir tended to be weak, especially in the summer time, when most members would prefer to go to Derry as it lay nearer to the hills. At this time the cottage was let out to family parties at reduced prices, during the summer holidays in order to create a demand. When the Club gave up the lease of Derry Lodge on Whitsunday 1967, there was an immediate increase in demand for places at Muir. This led to some restrictions being put in place for members of other clubs who wished to come to Muir. A short time later Captain Ramsay announced that he would look favourably on any request by the Club to purchase Muir. Negotiations began in 1968 but proved to be extremely protracted, but were eventually concluded with entry at 28th February 1972. A contentious issue in the proposed title, which stated that the property belongs to the Cairngorm Club, which effectively would have meant that the Club could never sell the place. This was eventually watered down to allow sales to other walking groups. The purchase price was £1,275 - 50 new pence.

The fact that Muir Cottage was to come into the Club's ownership paved the way to expensive improvements, which could not have been justified, had the property still been rented. The cost of these were to be met by the Taylor bequest, which had been left for this purpose. The plans eventually agreed involved the demolition of the existing wooden annex, to be replaced by a much larger structure approximately four times the size of the old structure. It was to be of a log cabin type construction which could be assembled fairly quickly and therefore very suitable for such a remote site. The new main door enters the extension through a verandah into a vestibule and then into a fairly large hall. This is surrounded by two six bunk dormitories, one four bunk and one two bunk. There are also two wash rooms rooms and a small lounge and a drying room for wet clothes. In the original cottage the one remaining partition was to be removed making for a much bigger common room. The fireplace was removed to the opposite end. The kitchen/bathroom extension was to be gutted and knocked into one room, which was the new kitchen. It also involved

moving the large water storage tank from the upper corner of old bathroom into the attic. The bulk of this work was carried out by a contractor from Innerleithen, but a lot of the finishing jobs including installation of bunks and painting were carried out by Club members in order to reduce costs. Peter Howgate had by now returned for a second stint as Huts Custodian and he supervised all the necessary work which was done by these volunteers. This work was only just completed in time for the planned official opening on 1st July 1973. The Taylor bequest did not quite cover the whole cost, but grants were obtained from various other bodies which made up the relatively small shortfall. The cottage was reopened by the Club's Honorary President Col. E. Birnie Reid in the presence of over 100 people including Captain Alexander Ramsey of Mar, Councillor George Collie of Aberdeen City Council, Mr John Russell representing Aberdeenshire Council and a cousin of the late George Taylor, Mrs M. Mackenzie of Nethybridge.

During the time that Denis Hardy was Huts Custodian two major problems became apparent. The first of these related to the water supply which required quite a lot of maintenance to keep it working properly. Movement of stones and bits of wood in the burn tended to block the intake from the burn from time to time and these had to be cleaned out. The water storage tank on the hill also used to silt up rapidly and this had to be cleared out regularly too. The flow of water at best of times was not very good and I can remember George Taylor saying, probably at the time of the 1958 extension, that he had bitterly regretted installing such a small pipe from the burn to the cottage. It was only a half inch pipe. However by 1975 the problems with the water supply seemed to be increasing. The trees which had been planted in the early 60's were growing and there seemed, possibly as a result of this, to be a reduction of water flow in the burn. Another factor was probably that the increased accommodation, showering facilities etc had led to an increase in demand for water. It was to be many years before this problem was resolved. The second problem was one of water seeping through the west wall of the new extension and an attempt was made to solve this by fitting weather boarding on the outside of the west wall.

During the time that Eddie Martin was huts custodian (1980 - 1993) the following maintenance jobs became necessary. The weather

boarding on the walls of the woodshed were substantially replaced especially on the south and west sides, the original boarding having become rotten. The sole plates on which the walls rested, also made of wood, had to be replaced for the same reason. Over a period of years all the windows in the cottage were double glazed. A new soak away had to be constructed for the septic tank, and this was not surprising because the old soak away was never properly made, an old rubbish tip having been used for the purpose. The weather boarding which had been fixed on the west wall of the dormitory block had not proved to be a success. Water seepage had continued to be a problem especially when the wind blew strongly from the west. The old weather boarding was removed and replaced by new weather boarding supplied by Invercauld Estate. This time a waterproof membrane was fitted to the outside of the west wall before the new weather boarding was put in place. The new weather boards also have a much bigger overlap than the original ones. Another problem that occurred at this time related to the kitchen roof which had been built in 1958. It was of cement and asbestos construction and was beginning to leak to some extent. Such roofs are difficult to repair and eventually the asbestos sheets were taken off and replaced by boards, which were then covered in felt.

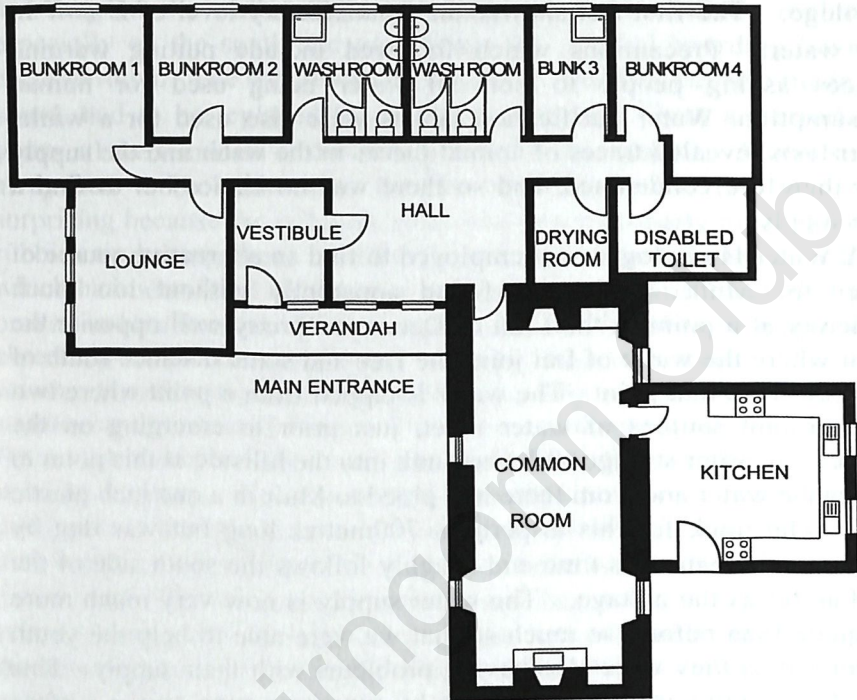
During this period there were two fires in the Cottage. The first one occurred in one of the dormitories where a gym shoe fell down the back of one of the heaters and started to smoulder. This led to the curtains catching fire but apparently all the wood in that area was fireproof so the only damage was a bit of minor scorching. The second fire was potentially much more serious and happened in the common room. It is thought that some socks which had been hung up above the stove fell down on to it and took fire. This led to the wood panelling on the adjacent wall taking fire and almost half the wall panelling on that gable was burnt. Fortunately all the doors were shut and the fire apparently starved of oxygen simply went out. Those who were staying in the Cottage at the time were unaware of what had happened until they got up in the morning. It was decided it would be safer to remove what was left of the wood panelling from that wall and replace it with cement roughcast.

In the second half of the 1980's it became compulsory to have our water tested by the local authority, which of course charged us for the

privilege. The first test showed an unsatisfactory level of *E coli* in the water. Precautions which followed include putting warning notices asking people to boil all water being used for human consumption. Water purification tablets were also used for a while. Later tests revealed traces of animal faeces in the water and the supply was therefore condemned, and so there was no choice but to find a new supply.

A Water Hydrologist was employed to find an alternative source of water for Muir. This was found apparently without too much difficulty at a point in the Linn of Dee wood pretty well opposite the point where the water of Lui joins the Dee and some distance south of the road from that point. The water is tapped from a point where two underground sources of water meet, just prior to emerging on the surface. A water storage tank was sunk into the hillside at this point to gather the water and from there it is piped to Muir in a one inch plastic pipe. The track for this is perhaps 700metres long but was dug by mechanical means this time and roughly follows the south side of the road as far as the cottage. The water supply is now very much more adequate than before, so much so that we were able to help the youth hostel out as they were also having problems with their supply. This was done temporarily to begin with by running a pipe on the surface through the wood from just inside our gate, but this has since been trenched in to make it permanent. Now that the water is coming from an underground source it should be much safer than it was before, but it still has to be tested every year. (See map).

In October 2004 Muir was closed to allow for a further major refurbishment to take place, (see floor plan overleaf). The existing kitchen, which had been originally built in 1958, was demolished. It was rebuilt the same width as before but now extended right out to the line of the boundary fence. The floor level of the new kitchen was raised to be level with that of the rest of the cottage. This was made possible by the adoption of a pitched roof in the new building, which did not have the constrictions caused by the use of a flat roof as in the old kitchen. The new kitchen is much bigger than the old one and the cooking, washing and storage facilities greatly expanded.



There are now two cookers, two microwave ovens, two sinks and two fridge freezers and ample work surfaces and cupboard storage. They provide plenty of room for two separate parties to prepare a meal at the same time. Other major improvements made at the time included the provision of disabled ramps leading to the outer doors, the widening of the passageway between the common room and the rest of the building to allow access for wheel-chairs and the provision of a disabled toilet. A substantial amount of electrical rewiring was also done at this time.

This project costing around £75,000 was funded from donations by Club members (22.5%), the remaining money coming from grants from Cairngorm National Park LEADER + (40%), Aberdeenshire Council (16%), Aberdeen City Council (8.5), Scottish Mountaineering Trust (6.5%), and the Lottery Awards for All Fund (6.5%). In order to meet the demands of the funding bodies the Club had to change its legal status and is now classed as a Community Amateur Sports Club. Muir was officially reopened on Friday March

25th 2005 by the Club Honorary President Anne Cordiner. This was followed by a celebratory ceilidh/dinner on the Saturday night in the Stag Ballroom at Mar Lodge.

Such was the demand for places at Muir, especially at weekends, that sometimes our own members were unable to get accommodation even when planning ahead. In order to solve this problem the small lounge situated on the west side of the building has now been set aside for the use of Cairngorm Club members only. There are now two beds and two mattresses stored there and so there are always four guaranteed places for Club members. This notionally increases the capacity of the Hut from 18 to 22.

All the dormitories have been equipped with new bunks. These have fixed step ladders fitted to them to allow safe access to the upper bunks which are also fitted with guard rails to prevent people falling out of them.

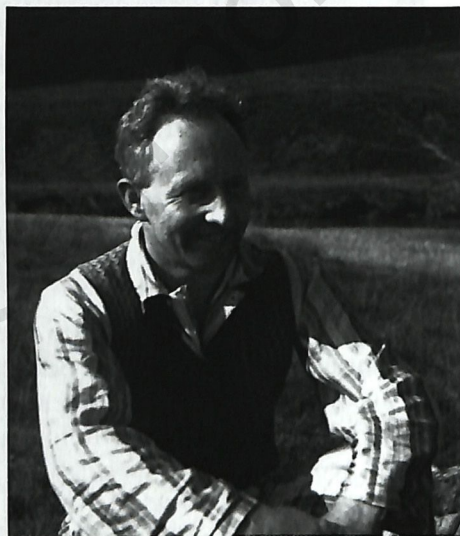
The Scottish Youth Hostels Association decided in 2007 to close around eight of the smaller hostels. The list included the hostel at Inverey, which it had occupied since 1950. The closure took place in 2008. Blackburn Cottage has now been taken over by North East Wing ATC based at Gordon Barracks, Bridge of Don, as an outdoor activity centre for ATC cadets. It is intended primarily for local cadets, but it is available for other wings. They have carried out some improvements, notably the installation of a new kitchen and some improvements in the dormitories. The accommodation is still very cramped compared with that of Muir.

At the time of writing, Muir Cottage has been a climbing hut for more than sixty years, during which time it has performed its primary purpose of providing accommodation in the area for parties of hill walkers and climbers. From 1967 onwards, following the closure of Derry Lodge, the hut has been very busy, especially at weekends. It is still possible to find quiet times midweek. Usage by members of other clubs far exceeds usage by our own members. The hut has also been used by school parties, scouts, girl guides and disabled groups. A large barbecue was held in the grounds on the Sunday of the Club's hundredth anniversary, following a visit the night before to Ben Macdui and the Shelter Stone. This was repeated for the 125th anniversary, (see page 19). A Burn's Supper, held on the weekend nearest Burns Night, has become a fixture of the calendar.

The building has been very extensively altered and improved since the Club took it over in 1949, and the facilities provided are now quite superb, making Muir possibly the best climbing club hut in Scotland. A plaque on the wall of the common room records the Club's gratitude to George A. Taylor whose bequest originally made the whole project possible. It reads as follows;

The Cairngorm Club,
Muir of Inverey
1972

Purchased and extended through the benefaction of GEORGE A. TAYLOR, MA, BSc, PhD. (1905 – 1964), CIVIL ENGINEER and some time Honorary Member of the Club.



George Taylor

Most of the early 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.



A photograph of Muir taken by George Taylor in 1950. The seated figures are William A. Ewen and Robert Bain.