

“A Childhood at Rannoch”, Part 4

Selected articles from the Rannoch School magazines

Introduction

In Part 1 of “A Childhood at Rannoch” I wrote briefly about the history of the Dall Estate at Rannoch. Here is a much more detailed overview of the families connected to Dall and their history, found in the “Rannoch Record, Vol. 1, No. 2, November 1964, pages 5 - 7. When I contacted John Dunthorne to ask for his permission to retype his text, he wrote back, “My memory of those first few editions was that I wrote nearly all the content. No-one else believed that it would get off the ground!” That is true as “J.D.” regularly appears in the earliest Rannoch Record volumes. In the section “Notes and Jottings” of Vol. 1, March 1964, No. 1, page 6, my father’s name is also mentioned for the first time. “New masters at Rannoch last September were Ian Wood, M.A., A. M. Zaluski, A.R.C.M, E. G. Cholerton, F.R.S.A., D.C. Hughes, B.SC.” In addition, I noted that soil was transported to Rannoch School, just like Captain Wentworth probably did for his walled garden at Dall. “Earth, gifted by Mr Cameron of Tummel, has arrived for the new hockey pitch. Now, where were the hockey pitches in 1964? The Rannoch magazines have been archived by the *Rannoch Association Trust* and are available as pdf scans from www.exrannoch.com.

An Outline History of Dall Estate

Dall House and the surrounding areas have long been associated with the Robertson Clan, so its history is inevitably tied in with that of the family.

The Robertson family can be traced back as far as the 11th century and it is believed that they are the oldest surviving family in Scotland. They are, in fact, descended from Malcolm 1 (1005 – 1034) whose grandson was King Duncan, the same who was murdered in Shakespeare’s “Macbeth”. Duncan’s brother, Malcolm, Earl of Athole, had four grandchildren. The eldest, Constantine, died early so when the two sisters of the family married and took the title out of the family and family lands were left to the youngest child, Conan (he and his descendants are mentioned in charters of the 13th, 14th and 15th centuries as possessing very large tracts of land in what is now Perthshire). Conan had a great-grandson, Duncan de Atholia, and it was he who led the Clan in battle at Bannockburn under Robert the Bruce. In his great admiration for the Bruce, Duncan named his son Robert after him, and thus the name Robertson was adopted by his descendants.

The Clan has always been noted for its loyalty and war-like ardour, and, as was the rule rather than the exception in those days, the ardour found an outlet in such internecine feuds as the famous Raid of Angus when Strowan (the Robertson Chief whom we would now call Struan) and his supporters killed most of the principle gentry of that country. The Clan’s loyalty was expressed in terms of support for the Royal Line and this loyalty had been well rewarded in the days of the Bruce; but when, in the 17th and 18th centuries it was attached to the ill-fated Stuart cause then it bore bitter fruit. Between the days when the Clan fought for Charles 1 under Montrose and the rebellion of 1745 their fighting strength shrank from 800 men to scarcely 200; the end of the Stuarts was also the end of the Robertsons as a powerful force in

Scotland. Indeed after the death of the 13th Chief in 1749 the estate was taken over by the Commissioners of Forfeited Estates until 1784.

From the survey of the Commissioners we find that Strowan had a house on the east side of the mouth of the Carrie Burn which was burned down in 1716. He then built another one on the west side which was burned down and rebuilt around 1751. This seems to have formed the basis of the rumour of a previous house at Dall which was supposed to have been razed, as there are no records of a house at Dall previous to the present one. Dall House was designed by Thomas MacKenzie of Aberdeen in 1854 and is described in the records of the Scottish Development Department as “2/3 storey harled with dormer heads, 4 story circular entrance tower corbelled on to square at 3rd floor level. Simply Scots baronial.” The house was built in



Drawing by Nevill Mangin, found in the Rannoch Magazine 1979-1980

1855 and over the front door can be seen a monogram of the initials G.D.R. (George Duncan Robertson) and M.S. (Robertson's wife Mary Stewart). This is interesting for the custom of carving such a monogram over the main entrance was usually reserved for the newly-weds, whereas at the time of the erection of Dall House Robertson had been married for 13 years. The house did not fill its intended role for long as it was sold to Thomas Frederick Charles Vernon Wentworth of Yorkshire on 27th June 1860. Robertson went to live at Dunalastair, where he died at the age of 48 in 1864 and his wife went to live at another of the family homes, the Barracks.

The estate passed into fit hands as the Wentworths were nearly as old a family as the Robertsons, having lived at Wentworth

Woodhouse (now the property of the 10th Earl of Fitzwilliam) since the 13th century. The most famous of the family is Thomas Wentworth (1593 – 1641), the first Earl of Strafford and Chief Adviser to Charles I (for whom the Robertsons fought under Montrose). As with the Robertsons, his loyal support brought only tragedy and he was succeeded by William Wentworth, the second earl, but he died in 1695 without issue, whereupon the estate passed into other hands. When he died all his titles died with him except for one, the Barony of Raby, and this went to his younger brother's grandson, Thomas Wentworth. Thomas was very conscious of his family's name and set out to reestablish it in Wentworth country by buying land at Stainsborough and there building Wentworth Castle, some time after 1720.

Thomas's descendants built up the family fortune again by exploiting the Yorkshire coal fields and it was with this money that his namesake bought Dall in 1860. When Thomas died in 1894 the estate passed to his son, Bruce Canning Vernon Wentworth, who was M.P. for Brighton from 1893 – 1906 and was well known in the army as a Captain in the Grenadier

Guards. He was very fond of gardening, and in the old greenhouse, which is now Stoke, he grew one of the most flourishing vines in Scotland. It is said that he even had top-soil carted up from his Yorkshire estate to build up the walled garden and the hill behind where he planted many strange and exotic shrubs and trees such as the rare American Oak which still stands in front of the Potteries dormitories. Soon after Captain Wentworth's death in 1951 at the age of 89 his heirs sold the estate to the Forestry Commission, while Wentworth Castle was retained by his nephew, Major Charles Wentworth.

And so the estate passed into government control for the second time in its history, although for a very different reason. The Forestry Commission continue to develop the Black Wood and are endeavouring to reintroduce the native Calidonian Pine which has very nearly died out. Who knows but that this will have been achieved in 50 years or so. Time might have turned a full circle and Rannoch could be very much as it was when the Robertsons came in the 11th century ... except, of course, for one very important addition.

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Bruce Canning Vernon-Wentworth in 1895, found in Wikipedia

John Dunthorne