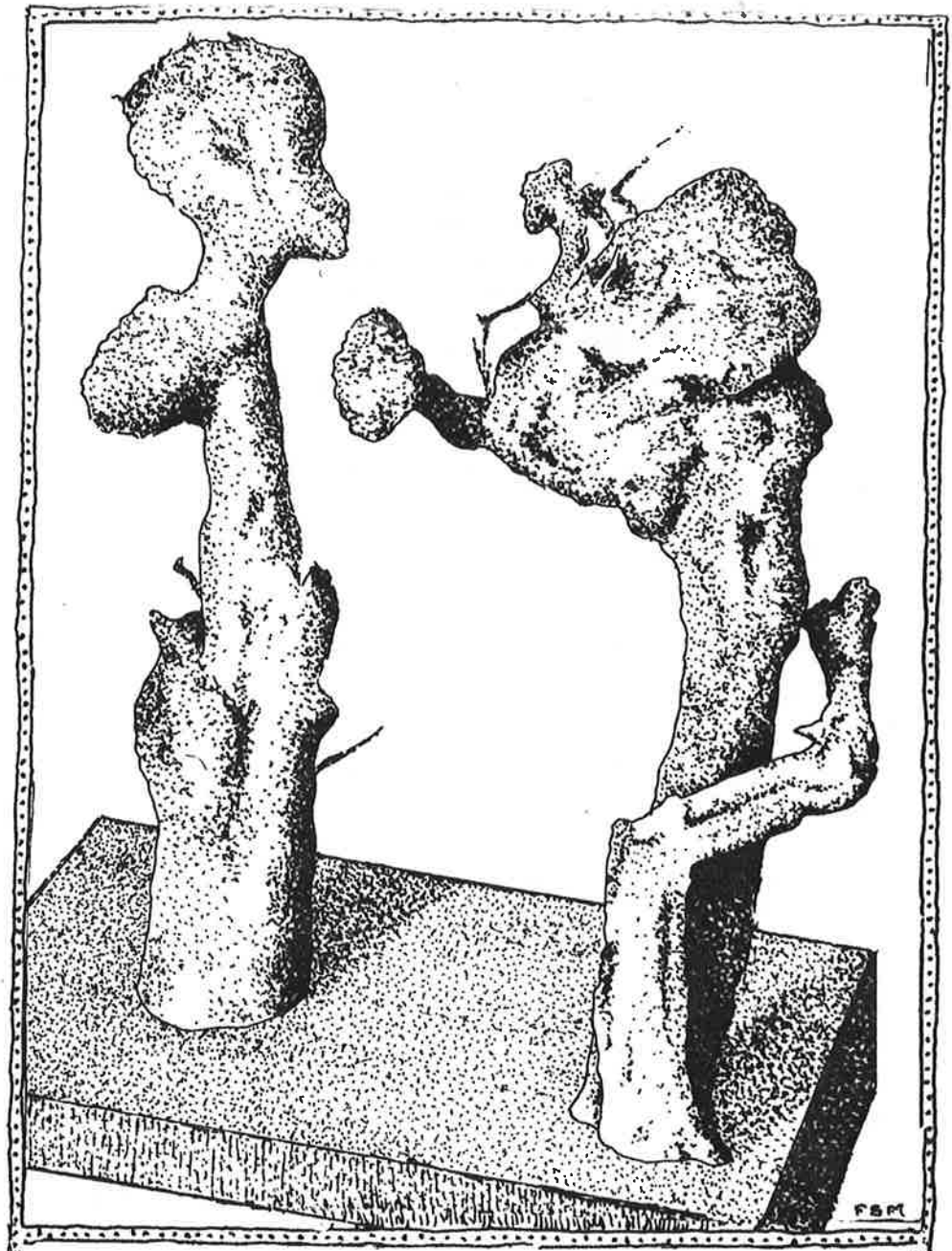

The KIST '40

T H E K I S T

The Magazine of
The Natural History & Antiquarian Society
of Mid-Argyll

PRESIDENT: Dr Lamont McNab, JP, MB, FSAScot.

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NUMBER FORTY, Autumn 1990

EDITOR: Dr F S Mackenna, MA, FSA.

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Hon.Secretary for Membership & Publications
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PRICE: 60p (post and packing extra)

The Society's year runs from 1st September to 31st August. Members are reminded that subscriptions for 1990/91 are now due. £3 (£4.50 for a couple). Please make cheques payable to N.H.A.S.M.A

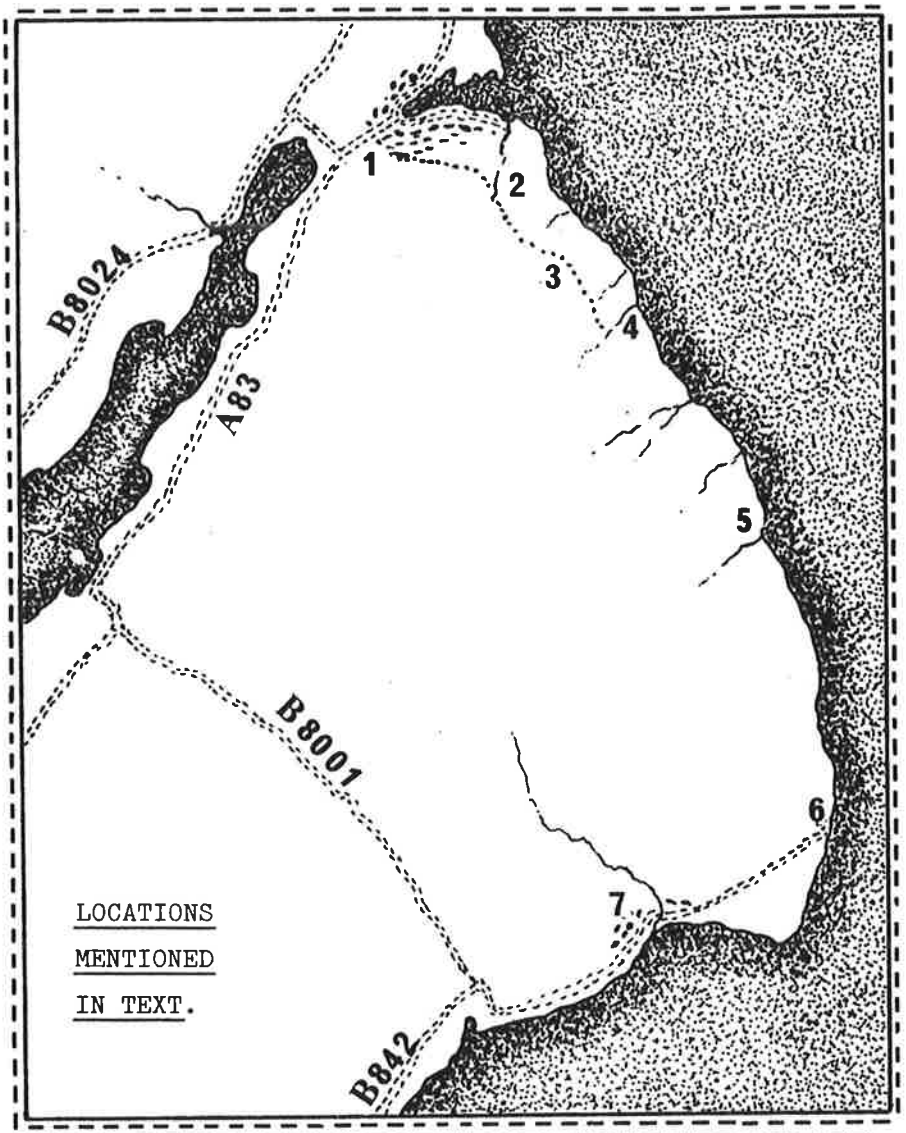
The DESTRUCTION of the TARBERT-SKIPNESS TRACK

F.S.Mackenna

Nobody coming in to Tarbert from the north and taking a careful look at the hillside rising behind the harbour can fail to see a demarcating line sloping upwards across the heathery and rocky ground to disappear round the contour towards the skyline. This is the start of the ancient trackway between Tarbert and Skipness, and is indeed practically all that is left of it since the disastrous proliferation of forestry work obliterated not only the track but also the multitude of old sites connected with it. The map on page 6 gives some idea of the extent of this invasion in the North Kintyre area.

Compared with the rest of Scotland, Knapdale and Kintyre were far behind in the matter of roads; indeed in mapping the Ducal estate in 1734 Cowley shows nothing of that kind south of Inveraray, though it is thought possible that this was omission and not fact, for only twenty years later Roy shows a 'road' from Lochgilphead to Tarbert going by Loch Caolisport, thence by Ormsary to the head of the West Loch, thereby avoiding the inhospitable Sliabh Ghaoil area, though there was indeed a more direct track between Tarbert and Stronachullin high above the Loch Fyne shore. The Ormsary road divided at the West loch with a branch to Tarbert and one down the east side of Kintyre more or less following the modern line. From this another branch left at Redhouse to mount the hill and reach Skipness. It must not be forgotten that these roads were usually little more than tracks. After another 25 years the Taylor and Skinner Road Book shows a more road-like construction, but it is not with tracks which eventually developed into actual roads that we are concerned here, but with a track which remained in that category throughout its existence. Not that it should be regarded as a single entity for the whole of its extent, for as will be described hereafter, it served, on its way southwards an increasing number of inhabited sites and must in consequence have had many tributary pathways to augment its primary route.

A direct path between Tarbert and Skipness was in use beyond recorded time which was much shorter than the one from Redhouse, but which, at the same time, was of very



1 TARBERT
2 ALLT BEITHE
3 TRACK as shown on maps
4 MRS BLACK'S TREE
5 LAGGAN
6 SKIPNESS PIER
7 SKIPNESS

much greater hazard. The coast between the two localities is steep-to and effectively rules out any sea-level passage. At a higher level there are innumerable gullies whose depth until one is well up on the high ground precludes anything approaching ease of passage. Attaining to higher ground brought another danger, in the shape of 'bottomless' morasses which were capable of engulfing any unwary sheep or other livestock in a matter of minutes.

Old Tarbert residents maintain that the track leading from the village, as noted in our opening sentences was at one time looked on as the possible route for a more conventional road, but the instigator, Stonefield, failed to secure support from his neighbour, Skipness, and the idea was abandoned.

Although the old track was much used in the past it had gradually become less important to the many communities it served, and until the latest O.S.map appeared in 1987 only the first 2¾miles were shown - now even that small portion is omitted. The commencement of the track soon enters the area which Mr John Smith fully described in Kist 36, Allt Beithe: The Desertion of a Settlement. In spite of the fact that the whole of this eastern part of North Kintyre, until forestry took over, has for long been without any sign of constructive human enterprise it was not by any means always so, for the late Captain Angus Graham of Skipness gave a highly interesting and important paper in the Proceedings of the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland (1918-19, 19-20) describing the signs of surprisingly diversified former occupation and activity which he had located between Skipness and Tarbert, chief amongst them being Turf Huts - small buildings formed of turf or a combination of that and stone, occurring most usually in groups rather than singly, and the walls never remaining above 2ft high though the area enclosed by them varied widely, from 18ft 6ins by 6ft 6ins down to a diameter of only 4ft. They seem to have been utterly basic and occur over the entire length of the coastal region south of Tarbert, steadily increasing towards Skipness. In describing the huts which he had found the author several times refers their position to "the path", so apparently he could trace its course southwards although it was

not shown on the map. Starting at the Tarbert end and continuing to the level of Skipness Pier, he noted over 50 antiquarian sites with a total of individual huts three times that figure. Often in close association were flat areas or platforms of uncertain use, but many yielded charcoal and slag, the latter presumably indicating a bloomery. There was also evidence, especially in the Laggan area, of distilling. These various structures seem to cover a considerable span of time; some at least were occupied as summer sheilings in a not-too-distant past.

Returning to the path itself it is on record that a frequent user of the Tarbert end was a woman who traversed it with a concealed load of illicit whisky. On reaching the burn where the map-recorded track ceased she made her way down to a conspicuous tree and gave a signal to any fishing boats in sight that refreshment was available if they came ashore. It was a much-appreciated service and the location became a recognised sailing and fishing mark 'Mrs Black's Tree'. The tree itself has long since vanished though people still alive remember seeing the stump and its site is pointed out to coastal sailors.

The northern part of the path was of great use to the present writer many years ago when he had to make a precarious way over the darkening hills to Tarbert after his yacht had foundered on this part of the coast.

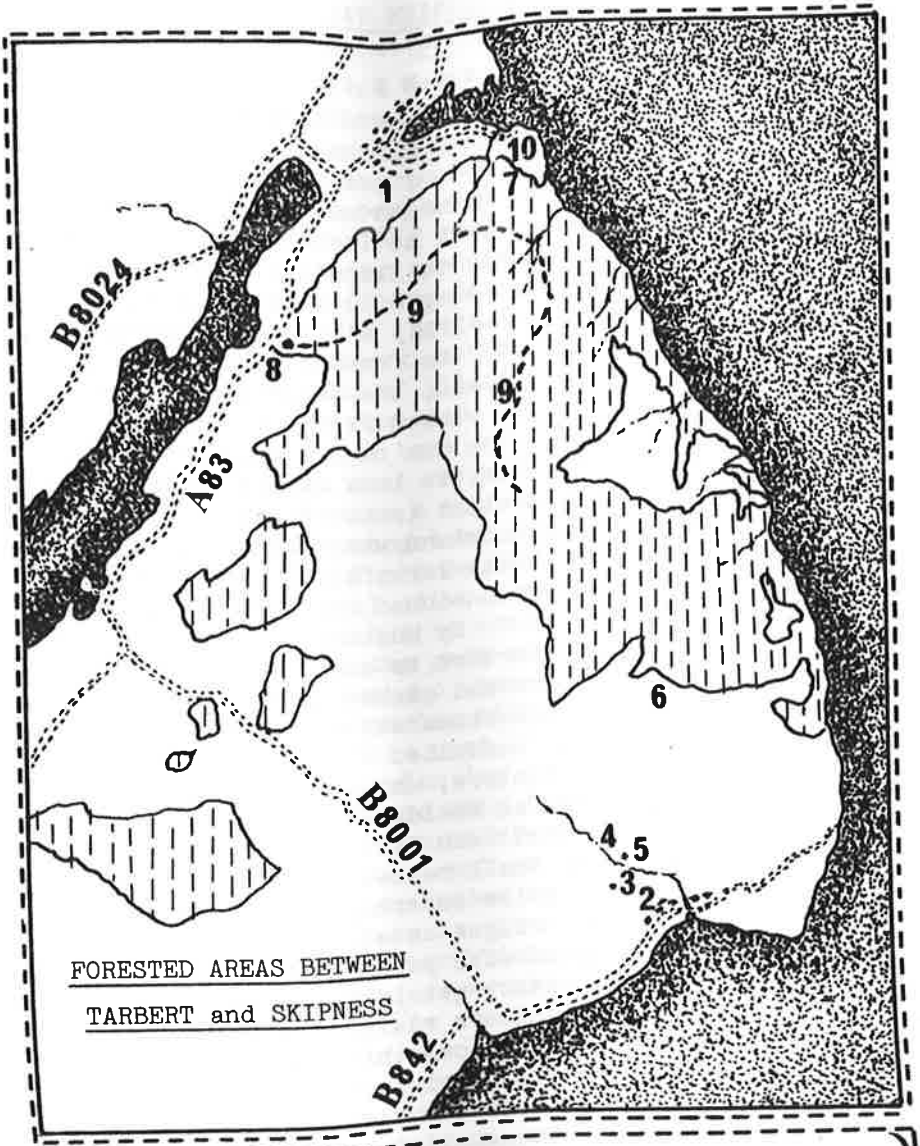
The deplorable and unrelenting spread of forestry work constitutes a dire threat to many features such as these old tracks and sites, both prehistoric and later. The claim is made that in cases such as the Tarbert-Skipness path the line has been demarcated by planting hard-woods rather than conifers. This is pious nonsense and utterly useless, as Mrs Clark's paper which follows on the next page shows. Even if such a convention did succeed in its objective what about the the complete destruction of surface features involved in the eventual removal of mature trees, even if the initial preparation of the ground had not already obliterated them all. As an Irishman might say "They must think us right gaums to believe that!". Another deplorable aspect of this activity lies in its impact on the scenic attractions of the affected areas. Speaking as a practising painter one can only call it a disaster. The execrations of future generations will be well deserved. THÀ MO NÀIR' OIRIBH!

A CAUTIONARY TALE
(With reference to the preceding)

Adeline O M Clark

Two years ago three of us, an old friend of mine, her daughter and myself, decided we should like to walk the Skipness to Tarbert track. I had walked it two or three years previously, twice: from Tarbert to the boundary fence at the highest point and back to Tarbert, and from Skipness to the same point and back to Skipness. It would, we thought, make a pleasant easy hill-walk for a good day. My husband drove us to Caolfin, a little way above Skipness. We all set off up the forestry road, a gentle climb through light woodland, the Skipness river running in the valley below. We paused from time to time, to try to spot the remains of the dun on the high ground above the river on the far side, to look at old deserted houses and to inspect some derelict ironworkings. The road emerged on to high open moorland where we walked on in the warm spring sunshine, with larks singing overhead, till we arrived at the aforementioned boundary fence. Here we had a picnic lunch. My husband then went back to Caolfin and drove to Tarbert to await our return.

We crossed the fence and picked up the start of the track to Tarbert. Unfortunately we had not, when planning this expedition, consulted the new 1/50,000 Landranger map of North Kintyre, which shows the whole area from the fence as far as Mealdarroch, on the south side of the entrance to East Loch Tarbert, in a tasteful shade of green dotted with small representations of trees. The track vanished in a criss-crossing maze of deep furrows, and high ridges, the ridges covered with large lumps of peaty soil and planted with young conifers. As far as direction goes one cannot get lost up there on a clear day, Loch Fyne being always visible from high points. My friend's daughter, being some thirty years younger than either of us, climbed up various rocky knolls to try to spot the line of the track, but always came down again shaking her head. Eventually we observed, about half a mile to our left, the new extension of the forestry road from Corranbuie, and decided to make for that, as walking on it would be easier. We were not aware that between us and the road was an extremely steep drop and rise; how-



1 TARBERT
2 SKIPNESS
3 CAOLFIN
4 SKIPNESS RIVER
5 DUN
6 BOUNDARY FENCE
7 MEALDARROCH
8 CORRANBUIE
9 FORESTRY ROAD (approx.)
10 "Sir RUDI'S ROAD"

ever we negotiated this, partly on hands and knees, and scrambled up on to the road, which in the manner of many forestry roads was not pointing in the direction we actually wanted to go, (though we realised it would lead us back to Tarbert in the end, even if via Corranbuie). At this juncture however, bumping along the road in a cloud of dust, came a forestry landrover whose two occupants in the roles of dei ex machina gave us a lift to a point above Mealdarroch whence we made our way in a leisurely fashion down towards "Sir Rudi's road" leading to Mealdarroch Bay at the east end of the Pier Road. As we began the descent I noticed far below us at the top of the road the Coastguard's landrover and remarked that it must have come to rescue us (we were about two hours overdue). There is many a true word spoken in jest.

My husband had decided to come to the top of "Sir Rudi's road" to meet us as we came off the hill. As the time came round to an hour after our expected appearance visions of broken legs, heart attacks and bottomless peat bogs began to cross his mind. He recollected that the son of our neighbour the Coastguard worked in the forestry and would have a key to the gates on the forestry road from Corranbuie. He drove home and enlisted the lad's help; he obligingly came up to the top of "Sir Rudi's road", in the Coastguard's landrover, not having a forestry one at the time, to check if we had arrived. As we had not, he set off for Corranbuie, while my husband resumed his vigil. We turned up about half-an-hour later. Fortunately a short length of the forestry road on the hill is visible from this point and we were able to signal to our rescuer that we had returned safely. (He was very nice about it afterwards!)

I understand that the Tarbert to Skipness track has been marked out by the planting of deciduous trees such as rowan and birch along its edges, but we certainly did not identify it. Anyone planning to walk the track should do a little reconnaisence first!

This event restored the balance in our household. When we lived in West Yorkshire my husband, sailing single-handed from Tarbert back to the Lune Estuary, was driven by bad weather into Ravenglass late on a Sunday, whence he was given a lift to the M6 by a Mountain Rescue team.

THE NIGHT THE SEA CAME IN

Marion Campbell

This is not a Mid Argyll record, though I was told of it in Kilberry, by a lady who was then our oldest inhabitant, and who is no longer here to give permission to publish. She was a native of Lismore, and came here as a young wife in the days of my grandfather 'Old Kilberry'.

Her childhood home was one of a row of houses near the shore, houses like those at Auchindrain, each consisting of a kitchen and parlour with a small lobby and behind it a narrow room called 'the transe' or 'closet' (pronounced close-it) with a window in the back wall; the main rooms looked to the front - in this case, directly to the shore, for it was the nearest of all to the sea. On the night of the great adventure, her elder brothers were abed in the room and she and her next sister in one of the boxbeds in the kitchen. Their mother was in the other box-bed, with the baby in his cradle nearby; the father was off the island, probably gone with others to ship peats home from the mainland (Lismore has no peat, being a mass of limestone).

She remembered waking and looking out of the bed - a lamp was kept alight all night, because of the baby - and seeing the cradle floating like a boat, 'like Moses in the bulrushes'. This was fascinating and absorbed her attention. She could hear the baby snuffling quietly in the other bed, so that was all right; but then her mother moved, and did an extraordinary thing. She stood up in the bed and took down from the high shelf, of all things, her Sunday boots, and put them on. Now strange things might be going on, but even a four-year-old knew we were in the middle of a week.

The mother proceeded to get out of bed, kilting her nightgown, and put the baby in beside the little girls (to their delight; the younger sister was beginning to wake up too). Then she took the lamp and waded away. This was slightly worrying but they soon heard her speaking to the boys in the room and then, oddly, moving about in the closet, whose wall was a partition behind their bed. She seemed to be opening the back window; very curious.

After some time she returned with the lamp, collected the baby and told the girls to get dressed as best they could in the dark. Then she came back, minus the baby, and lifted the girls and carried them to the closet. The

back window, a very small one, was indeed open, and she posted her daughters one by one through it, into the arms of men waiting outside with lanterns. (It should be explained, for those who do not know this type of house, that there is commonly a stone-walled trench along the rear wall, to keep it dry, with a garden or stackyard beyond, almost level with the eaves. The rescuers were kneeling on the far edge of the trench).

They were carried away through the darkness and taken to the house of the narrator's best friend, where they were tucked up in a bed full of children, including their own baby. There were various brothers about, and presently their mother arrived (though goodness knows, said the narrator, how she had managed out of that wee window). So everything was all right, delightful, but the best was yet to come. There was water in this house too, just a wee bit, not enough to float a cradle, but when the woman of the house had made tea for everyone, the man of the house put the cups on a plank and floated them over the floor to the children. No Sunday School Treat ever included such an excellent entertainment; it was the highlight of the whole adventure.

Next day they found the doors of the houses blocked with big cobbles and seaweed, and there was more sport, no school for the older children while the mess was cleared away, and after that the sea drained out of the houses and mats and bedding went out to dry. And there was a fine tale to tell the father when he came back.

One old man had actually seen what had happened. He had a skiff on the shore, propped up while he worked on the hull, and just before he went to bed he took a turn down the shore to see she was right. A fine starry night it was too, and clear all round; but then the hills began to disappear, and the lower stars, and there was a noise like no noise he had heard, and the sea fell on the island. So it was he who ran to the houses higher up the slope and began to organise the rescue-party. (The skiff survived, though she came down on her side).

What can have caused a tidal wave of that magnitude, and are there any other records of it striking? I have not been able to check dates but could it have been the great wave that passed several times round the globe after the Krakatoa eruption? Whatever it was, it gave one small girl a wonderful night's adventure.

RHODODENDRONS: BEAUTIFUL BUT DEADLY

F.S.Mackenna

The west coast of Scotland, perhaps to a greater extent than any other part of the country, is famed for its rhododendron gardens with their colonies of 'tender' species which in less favoured areas have to eke out their existence under glass. But if their growers feel smug about the advantages of their location, there is one aspect of their lives which gives rise to great frustration, namely the damage done to some of their best plants by roe deer. At first we had dismissed their lamentations by the easy assurance that "rhododendrons are poisonous - you must be wrong in blaming deer", but it soon became evident that they were correct. Further enquiries revealed the fact that only certain species were eaten by deer, though any plants with bare stems were liable to be damaged when the animals used them as rubbing-posts to remove the 'velvet' from their horns.

The knowledge of poisonous rhododendrons goes back some three thousand years. So how can this equate with the proved fact of deer-browsing? The only possible explanation seems to be that not all rhododendrons are poisonous and that the deer (and no doubt other herbivores) can distinguish the 'safe' from the 'unsafe' species. It is unlikely that deer have evolved even a selective immunity.

It has been established that rhododendrons and azaleas produce one of the most deadly natural poisons known to man, though apart from its lethal qualities the chemistry of this poison has only been brought out in modern times. Our ancestors knew that it worked but not how, and were active in availing themselves of its properties far and wide. Apart from sorting out personal problems the poison had uses in everyday life, for even in ancient times it was known that pounded rhododendron leaves put into a pool caused paralysis of any adjacent fish, bringing them to the surface.

In the distant past too, it was widely recognised that honey produced by bees from rhododendrons was intensely poisonous, causing vomiting, purging and prostration, and it is on record that this effect was taken advantage of between warring armies. Those which were not overwhelmed

while incapacitated recovered fully in about four days. It is stated that Xenophon's soldiers were poisoned by nectar from the common azalea Rh.luteum. Greek and Roman history provides many examples of battles which were lost through the incapacity of honey-poisoned troops.

The Greek pharmacologist Dioscorides, in his De materia medica (about 50AD) claims that the poisonous honey has certain properties, such as removing bruises and clearing the complexion. This materia medica was still in print and use in 1478. The effects of taking poisoned honey were declared to be similar to those brought on by aconite. It was only a small step to regarding not only its nectar but the plant itself as poisonous.

Coming to more modern times we find the subject figuring in scientific literature, with descriptions of the sensations which followed the eating, intentionally or otherwise, of infected honey; a sudden dizziness which was at once cleared by emesis. Failing this, there were succeeding paroxysms and physical prostration and visual disturbance. In severe cases convulsions would supervene and possibly death or at least a prolonged period of incapacity. Fatalities occurred most usually in the young.

Not every author could be followed implicitly; some two hundred years ago a German chemist announced that an infusion of the leaves of Rh.chrysanthum relieved rheumatic pains. The remedy was widely taken up by the medical authorities and in one instance, despite the extremely alarming side effects, administration continued for three months; this patient survived for nine months. A large number of patients suffered similarly.

Oddly we have particulars of the effect of rhododendron leaves on a deer at this time: "After a few minutes the animal started to beat on the ground, to stagger and shake its head, then it fell to its knees and could not rise but seemed to lose consciousness for several hours, but with occasional muscular rigors. Eventually it recovered completely." Apparently this effect was noted also in wild deer.

Coming to modern times we read of several species of rhododendron being used medicinally, Rh.chrysanthum, Rh. ferrugineum, Rh.degronianum, Rh.brachycarpum and Rh.campanulatum. It was established that the effect was that

of a narcotic on the higher brain centres, the severity of symptoms depending on the dosage.

Apart from the effect on humans, much attention has been paid to the reactions of animals. In Britain it was noted that they did not usually eat rhododendrons, but those that did were adversely affected. Reports world-wide concur in noting this general avoidance of the plants by grazing animals and on the frequency of fatality in those which eat them.

It may be of interest to note that modern methods of research have now contrived to isolate from rhododendrons a substance known as Acetylandromedol which is proving of use in the treatment of high blood pressure.

It would be satisfactory if one could add that it was usual, after some of his precious plants had been cropped by deer, for the infuriated gardener to find the marauders lying about incapable of movement, but this happy sequel has not been reported. It seems as if the animals had some sense which guided them to those species which could be eaten with safety. The following list comprises the Series which seem to be particularly susceptible to attack; Anthopogon, Azalea, Cinnabarinum, Concatenans, Maddenii, Saluenense, Triflorum and Scabrifolium. Of these the Cinnabarinum Series are the most vulnerable. It will be noted that none of the 'large-leaved' species are at risk apart from damage to their bark by horn-scraping.

The only remedy lies in making access to such plants impossible. Ideally of course a full-scale deer fence is the answer but even for a relatively small garden this can be economically impossible. The only alternative lies in protecting vulnerable plants with individual rings of unattractive wire netting. Apart from damage done by grazing there is still the problem of bark scraping, but here no remedy can be suggested since all plants with a main trunk, be it large or small, are at risk and not all can be protected.

In Sichuan Rhododendrons of China an illustration shows a large apiary with three keepers at the foot of a slope dotted with flowering rhododendrons. "Like a blanket blooming shrubbery of R.rigidum extends far and wide, from the slope to the hill top undulating endlessly, a natural storehouse of honey for bee keepers ..." R.rigidum is in the Cinnabarinum Series, noted earlier as non-toxic.

A CONCOMITANT of the 1745 REBELLION

JACOBITE PRISONERS in LONDON

From 1745-47 the Lieutenant-Governor of the Tower was Lieut-General Williamson, who was notable for his relatively humane outlook on his duties, though not by any means lax. His responsibilities included the other military prisons in the London area, with them Tilbury Fort, whose Commanding Officer Edward Massey wrote to him as follows on 31st August 1746:-

"Sir, I think it necessary to represent what I always apprehended would be ye consequence of crouding such a number of people (especially such scabby Lousy villians) together, that a contagious distemper is now in the Fort, and unless the present rain, which is now falling, may in some measure retard its progress, will greatly increase, and I wish may not spread, for which ye very hard duty of the garrison will I fear, in some Degree contribute. Mr Bolgar the surgeon, who had ye care of the Sick Rebells, being no longer able to support the stench, having wt his assistant, his son, been at Death's door some time ago and now again taken ill, throws up, by a letter to the Commissioner of the Sick and Wounded, his charge. My Lieutenant, I dont expect will live till morning. Captain Cayran, when he waits on you, will by word of mouth add what is too tedious for a letter. He joyns his regards and respects to those of Sir Yr most Humble most obliged and most obedient servant, Ed. Massey.

Our compliments attend yr Lady and Miss Williamson."

In addition to his verbal report Captain Cayran also gave in a written statement (oddly in French):-

"Mémoire pour empêcher que l'Infection n'augmente à Tilbury Fort, et il y a à craindre qu'elle ne se répande dans tout le pays. Premièrement il faut brûler tous leurs habits et leur en donner d'autres, après il faut bien les purger et les guérir de la Galle, les faire bien laver, leur couper les cheveux, brûler les perruques de ceux qui en portent, leur donner un bonnet et deux chemises à chacun et les faire changer toutes les semaines. Pour cet effet il faut trouver quelque vielle maison de campagne inhabitée, ou il y aura des Écuries et Granges

avec un jardin qui soit bien muré, pour qu'ils puissent s'y promener et prendre l'air. Par là, les soldats qui les garderont n'auraient aucun communication avec eux. On enverra ceux qui se porteront bien dans la dite maison et les malades resteront à Tilbury Fort. On leur fera beaucoup plus de place. Il faut donner au malades les nourritures conformes à leurs estomacs. Il faut aussi des garçons-chirurgiens et des gens pour servir les malades. Avoir des lits de paille et des couvertures pour qu'ils se puissent coucher. De cette manière on les tiendra nets. Il faut leur donner changement de nourriture et leur accorder un quart de bière par jour et une verre d'eau de vie; je compte que six sous par homme par jour fera l'affair. Il faut aussi brûler dans toutes les chambres des drogues pour chasser l'infection et brûler aussi dans le Four des chose propres à purifier l'air."

[Memorandum to prevent the increase of infection at Tilbury Fort and the fear of its spreading through the country. Firstly it is necessary to burn all their clothes and give them others, to purge them well and rid them of bile, make them wash well, cut their hair, burn the wigs of those who have them. give them a cap and two shirts each and make them change them every week.

For this purpose it will be necessary to find some old empty country house with stables and barns with a walled garden where they can walk and take the air. Above all, the soldiers who guard them must have no communication with them. Those who are doing well would be sent to this said house, and the invalids would remain at Tilbury Fort, with plenty of space. The sick must be given suitable food, and also surgeons and nursing staff. Straw beds and coverlets for them to lie on; in this way they can be kept clean. They must have varied diet and an allowance of a quart of beer daily and a glass of brandy; I consider that six sous daily per man will suffice. It will also be necessary to burn chemicals in every room to overcome the infection and also to burn things suitable for clearing the air in the stoves. Ed.]

Captain Cayran certainly had advanced ideas, but lack of funds and support from above hindered him. Even when he rose to being Governor of Tilbury the following year,

there was no marked change.

The prisoners had arrived in batches throughout the summer after Culloden, being carried south in a variety of warships and other boats. No numbers are recorded for those in the Fort and crowded on the hulks alongside, but it is believed that of these latter, even worse off than those ashore, an excess of 400 died. When another batch of prisoners was due in November Williamson wrote that he hoped they would not be allocated to the Tower "as he does not want to be troubled with low fellows."

We do not know if any of Captain Cayran's suggestions bore fruit but there is evidence of Williamson's tolerant attitude in general towards his prisoners, not all of whom were 'low fellows'; his mandate related to Prisoners of State, amongst whom were Tullibarden, Traquair (and his wife), Derwentwater, Archibald Stewart (Provost of Edinburgh), Balmerino, Cromartie, Kilmarnock and Lovat. Some of these personages lodged in the Governor's house, sometimes at his personal expense, and there is no doubt that the worries connected with his professional duties contributed very greatly to his declining health and eventual death. Asthmatic and other chest troubles gained the upper hand despite a concession which allowed him to move into adjacent Islington every night, a move reported in the following letter to the Duke of Newcastle dated from that place on 25th January 1746-7.

"Worthy Sir,

I stayed in the Tower til I had breath to sustain me, but the Doctor Monrow and Apothecary Trowton saw plainly that if I stay'd a night longer in the Tower it might be my last, and therefore my wife hurried away to this place to get convenient lodgings, and in the evening of last night I got here wearied and spent with my asthmatic fever. I rested pritty well, and the doctor begins too soon to sing of victorie. I find I live and that's all, for I don't seem to have the spirit of life in me and would willingly resign life for assurance that by His Majesty's bounty my wife and child should have the necessaries of life when I am no more. ....."

A plea on May 19th that he be appointed Lieut-Governor of Minorca failed, and he died on November 9th.

...oooOooo...

'TOWING THROUGH'

D.E.McD.

[This paper, reprinted by kind permission from the 1961 Clyde Cruising Club Journal, is a version of one by the same writer which we featured in Kist 22, but as it deals more fully with the subject and is of greater value as a record, we are glad to be allowed to use it.]

The article on the Crinan Canal brought back many happy memories of my early years of cruising at the near beginning of this century, and during the last summer I made it my business again to visit the canal and see for myself the changes half a century has brought.

I watched between twenty and thirty boats 'go through'. All but one (and he was towed by another) went under their own power and the exception was only because his motor wouldn't go, not because he had not got one. What a transformation!

In the days of my youth a boat going through under its own power brought the crowds to the bank to watch the stinking contraption go past and I know that my brother and I used to pray they would have a breakdown and suffer the humiliation before us all of having in the end to come back to good old Dobbin - I cant say whether we were just consumed with jealousy or had an innate aversion to change but I do remember that our hopes were often fulfilled.

In those days one could only get into, or out of, Ardrishaig Basin for two hours (two, I think, but it may have been three) on either side of high water and, going north, one almost invariably missed the tide unless, as was frequently done, a night was spent at Tarbert on the way up. One then anchored either in the loch off the Anchor Hotel (not if the wind was coming from the south) or between the breakwater and the pier. Doing the latter nearly every stranger, first time there, went aground on the shelf south of the pier.

While waiting for the tide a runner would row out and one engaged him to 'help through' and got him to arrange for a horse and tracker. As soon as there was water enough one towed into the Sea Lock with the dinghy or, in the case of smaller boats, paddled in (paddles or sweeps were standard equipment in every yacht), then were manhandled into the Basin. According to the time of day, the crew ready, and weather conditions, one might go on to a berth anywhere along either bank right up as far as

No4 wharf which was vacant from about 2pm on one day till about noon on the next as the Linnet, the Canal packet whose wharf it was, lay at Crinan overnight.

The tracker and his horse came along to wherever one may have lain overnight at the scheduled time and one's longest warp was made fast to the heavy chain trace and brought to the yacht to be secured about ten feet up the mast - and off went the cavalcade.

There were bushes along the canal bank (though not nearly so many as there are today [1960] and these used to foul the tow and every time this happened the yacht was pulled sharply in towards the bank and the helmsman had constantly to be on the alert to check her and then to ease her out gently so as not to pull the horse into the water. If there was a following wind and the yacht had some way on her there was always a flurry at the gates across the towpath as, of course, the yacht used to get ahead of the horse while the gate was opened and shut and there was always a little excitement till normal progress was resumed, especially when, as sometimes happened, the tow rope had to be removed to get it over the fence beside the gate, and the horse, thinking this meant his task was over, turned and set off (usually at a near gallop and with a yelling tracker in pursuit) back towards Ardrishaig, his stable and his dinner.

Bridges and locks were, of course, a major problem as, with no reverse, the crew had to be very quick with the ropes and a hand was always stationed right aft ready to throw a bucket over the stern to act as a drag. Where there was a wide part of the canal immediately below the lock and the width was on the towpath side (like No5 lock) it was always a bit tricky getting in as the warp was seldom long enough to allow the horse to fetch the necessary circuit and it had to be cast off. It was a nice point calculating when to do this and carry enough way (and not too much) to get into the line of the lock, then into the lock itself. I still remember the expression of bored resignation on the tracker's and lock-keeper's faces when there was any miscalculation and the bowsprit smacked either the lead-in wall or the top gate, or the yacht drifted back yards short of its objective. The close-to locks at Dunardry were always man-hauled through while the horse and tracker had a breather as they waited for their charge at the bottom of the hill. The yard or two of

fencing to which the horse was tethered was still in existence up till a few years ago.

Then there was the problem of meeting another yacht. The west-bound one cast off her tow and if there was a strong wind blowing there was a lot of fun getting hooked on again and many a time one had to resort to the dinghy to get the tow-rope back to the towpath side. If one met the Linnet or if she was due to overtake one shortly, one had to get into the bank and stay there till she passed. The locks at Cairnbaan and Dunardry were always kept ready for her and nobody was allowed to move while she was working through - this could add an hour or more to the time taken for the trip.

At some of the wide curves in the east reach where the reeds grow far out the two rope would be stretched taut and to its limit and the wretched horse would be advancing almost crabwise and we boys always expected to see him pulled into the canal - he never was that I saw but I am told it was not an altogether infrequent occurrence. I have seen, however, many a yacht come into Crinan festooned with the reeds she had torn out by the roots as she ploughed through them.

It was an exhausting passage, not the pleasant easy trip of today and few were prepared to go on straight to sea on its completion - but it was the source of a lot of laughs, a source the auxiliary engine has pretty well dried up.

There were many 'characters' along the banks. Dougie at No4 lock, MacSweeney at Crinan and MacFadyen at Cairnbaan spring to mind and, of course, Miss Cunningham. She gave every yacht owner near heart failure every time they went through her bridge at Lochgilphead. She was an adept at judging a yacht's speed of advance and kept a look out through a window - seeing but not being seen - and only appeared at the last possible moment (when the foredeck hand had blown his whistle till he was exhausted) and then she proceeded at a maddeningly slow and deliberate pace to work the bridge-opening mechanism - never at any time looking up or showing in any way that she was aware of the yacht's existence. She was a tiny wee lady and every turn of the winch handle almost took her off her feet. She was never late with the opening but was never more than ten seconds too early. Many a yachtsman panicked as he neared the bridge and ran his craft into the

bank quite unnecessarily and much to the indignation of the tracker (and presumably of the horse, who took the resultant jolt on his shoulders); and there was Mr Bruce the Pier and Harbourmaster at Ardrishaig and the deserved recipient of a decoration in the last war. He was always most helpful but what a confirmed pessimist he was! It was always going to rain that afternoon or evening - the good weather was always finished for that year, and it would be blowing a gale tomorrow.

I dont remember how a horse was fixed coming east as I dont think there was a telephone at Crinan. It may have been telegraphed for but I suspect one just waited till another yacht arrived from the east and used that horse as it made its way back to Ardrishaig.

There was an alternative method of 'going through'- one principally resorted to by the young and/or impecunious. The yacht could be man-handled the whole way with always the chance of a following or beam breeze that would permit the use of the jib.

When my elder brother and I reached the age of indiscretion we were allowed by our father to take his yacht up north by ourselves helped by a friend. Besides giving us the Canal Dues (30/- each way) he gave us the £2 necessary for the two hirings of the tracker. When we arrived at Ardrishaig there was a fine breeze from the SSE and we were able to do without a horse and sailed right through, only having to paddle an odd hundred yards or so here and there when the jib would not draw. With the extreme optimism of youth we assumed we could do the same coming home and spent the £2 up north on riotous living (£2 would probably have fed the three of us for the whole fortnight in those days). But when we arrived back at Crinan it was blowing a near gale of easterly wind. Our father was due to arrive at Tarbert next day to take over the boat and we had not more than a couple of bob between us! We manhandled that yacht every stricken yard of the whole nine statute miles. Every yard a penance and a Labour of Hercules. Stopping to take a breather for a moment meant a terrific struggle to get her underway again and indeed nearly all our strength was needed to prevent her going full speed back the way she had come.

HOW I FIRST MET OUR EDITOR

G.H.Bignall

As a young boy in the mid twenties I stood in admiration and anticipation at the gangway of the Clyde paddle steamer as a sailor loudly intoned "Rothesay, Kyles of Bute, Kilchattan Bay and Arran". Docks and vessels both large and small seemed then to betoken romantic adventures and fabulous tales of derring-do. This particular day was to be my first salt water sail in a vessel of any consequence.

My father had driven the family up from Nottingham on this, the first of many Scottish holidays, in his new Sunbeam. It was a green coloured four seater tourer with a retractable hood and celluloid side windows. The hood was often folded down, which operation not infrequently resulted in trapped fingers and tears. As an open tourer the back seat passengers availed themselves of their own windscreen which swivelled upwards and was fixed at the required angle by engaging matching ratchets; it had wings at either side which one adjusted to deflect the onrush of air. Dependent along the base of the whole device hung an impervious cloth material designed to minimise draught around the legs. My mother, when motoring, secured her hat in swathes of tulle tied under the chin. In cold weather rugs and foot muffs were essential, and the luggage was strapped on to a carrier at the rear of the car. Punctures were not all that infrequent and were viewed as unavoidable but time wasting.

On that journey north a night was spent at Windermere before tackling the Kirkstone Pass, the surface of which I hazily recall was very gravelly. With not a little relief the summit was reached, whereupon my father discovered that he had left his wallet and cheque book at the hotel and promptly returned successfully to retrieve them. It is odd how one's memory is littered with the clear recall of certain events which stand out in oceans of time.

We stayed at the Skelmorlie Hydro in Wemyss Bay, which was great fun as sometimes I was allowed to stay up and take part in the organised party games after dinner. On one occasion my brother and I won an indoor putting competition and received a box of chocolates as a prize.

After offering it round the contents had been somewhat depleted and of the remainder I was allowed but one until after breakfast in the morning. Children then seemed more willing to respect authority than the young do now, but in my day its flouting was certainly not unknown.

The Clyde steamers were for me a great source of joy though I do not recall details of the many trips we made, but I watched with intense interest the process of casting off, coming alongside, making fast; I listened for the skipper to telegraph to the engine room and waited for the acknowledgment therefrom, and the throbbing of the engines, the deep throated siren, the rattle of the steam winch and the billowing black smoke from the funnel, and away we went as the paddles smacked the water astern.

I became reacquainted with the Clyde when my wife and I decided to buy a 40 foot Spey ketch from Jones Buckie in May 1963. We sailed her down to the Gareloch through the Caledonian and Crinan Canals. During that summer we put into Tarbert for the first time late in the evening. The tide was full, lights shimmered in the inky water and the whole effect was tempting us to venture ashore but we resisted. I had intended to leave on the morrow but we didn't; instead we explored the village and Rebecca saw a 'very pretty cottage' which fate decided was to be ours seven years later.

That season was drawing to a close, our son was back at school and as I needed help for the return voyage to Buckie, I approached Lt.Cdr. Robert Young of Jones Buckie Shipyard who said he knew of a 'mad doctor' living in Tarbert who did great work for the RNLI and spent all his time sailing. Arrangements were concluded for the Doctor to board 'Spey Rebecca' at the Gareloch on the afternoon prior to the voyage north on the morrow. We were quietly taking lunch when 'Willie' came alongside in the launch carrying our 'Doctor'; there he stood, all six foot two inches of him in a regalia almost suitable for a Naval Commander; and that, gentle reader, was my initial meeting with our distinguished Editor. Over the years we developed a friendship which has continued until today - note the qualification! Subsequently he accompanied the family on many occasions through fair weather and foul, through minor adventures and misadventures.

An IRISH WAY of DOING THINGS

Editorial Musings

The following snippets are resurrected from a long-past youth spent in Ireland; none of them have been invented or even 'tidied up!'

Conversation at a Dublin front-door. Caller: "Shin?". Maid: "Shiz". Perfect mutual understanding.

Mistress interrogating maid returning from answering a caller's knock; "Who was that?" "'Twas nobody Miss only somebody looking for the wrong number."

On being told of a fatal accident one would ask if the victim had been 'killed' or 'killed dead'; if the former he had succumbed, if the latter his destruction had been instantaneous.

On hearing of a birth it was necessary to ask if it was "a girl or a child"; to use the word "boy" was to invite trouble in case they overheard and stole the boy, leaving one of their own mis-shapen offspring in his place.

Intending tram-car passenger, before choosing a seat, "Does this side go to Howth?" It did.

A Co.Kildare off-duty policeman hearing of the approach of his sergeant, jumped over an adjacent wall, forgetful of the sheer drop beyond. "His legs wuz druv intil his stummik". A remarkable example of compressibility!

Countrywoman remarking on the activities of fleas: "Its not what they ait [eat], its the continual tramplin'."

Dublin-bred professor after a tussle with a rebellious class over a maliciously hidden piece of apparatus - "Now yous can go!"

Nurse in Dublin hospital asking post-operation patient to turn over - "Bring yourself with you."

Country patient: "I was wantin' a bottle but he only giv me a prod."

There were practical advantages to this lightsome way of life. If we looked, for instance, like being late for a train (station two miles away) the hall-boy was sent on a bicycle to warn the Station Master of our intentions, knowing that the train would be detained till 'the Quality' arrived in the brougham.

All this, as stated at the outset, was long, long ago!

THE FIRST STEAMBOAT

Tom Baird

We are assured in all directions that the invention of steam navigation was the work of William Symington, with or without the name of Miller tagged on. An example comes from Geo. Blake, who should have known better, publishing in 1937: "On the 14th of October, 1788, the poet Robert Burns among others witnessed the remarkable spectacle of a boat, its paddles turned by a steam engine, cross the waters of Dalswinton Loch, Dumfriesshire, at a speed of five miles an hour; the vessel being the joint product of an inventive young man called William Symington and his patron, a retired banker, Patrick Miller of Dalswinton.."

That exemplifies what is everywhere presented as fact, yet it is utterly mistaken and its continued assertion flies in the face of available evidence. Before giving some of this it is necessary to set the scene.

Patrick Miller, proprietor of the estate of Dalswinton employed James Taylor as tutor; in due course this man formed the idea of applying steam to take the place of manpower in turning the paddles of a boat. He persuaded his employer of the practicability of the idea, and the latter agreed to provide a boat, all materials and to bear all expenses of the enterprise. Taylor understandably required professional help in the actual construction of the engine, and turned to a schooldays acquaintance, a William Symington, at that time employed by the Wanlockhead Works. Eventually a point was reached where a full-dress public trial could take place on Dalswinton Loch on 14th October 1788. Success attended the trial, with an estimated speed of 4mph being attained In all contemporary notices there is no single hint of Symington's being in any way the originator of the idea.

It is fairly obvious that Symington quickly realised the potential of the marine steam engine and he is stated to have taken out a patent. This may well be so, but it does not necessarily invest him with any claim to have been the true inventor of the process; the credit of producing the first steamboat is Taylor's and Miller's though almost certainly Symington tried to 'cash in' on it by effecting improvements. This could have made subsequent patenting of a development possible. Yet even in this

there is more than a hint of Symington's insecurity of position, for he wrote to Taylor from Glasgow on 9th February 1821 (thirty-four years after the Dalswinton trial) "Sir, In terms of our former agreement when making experiments of sailing by the steam engine, I hereby bind and oblige myself to convey to you, by regular assignation, the one half of the interest and proceeds of the patent taken out by me upon that invention, when an opportunity occurs of executing the deed, or when required ...."

Is it likely that such an offer, obviously following on protests by Taylor, would have been made unless Symington felt unsure of his ground? Further proof lies in the fact that Taylor's widow and family got a Government pension whereas, quoting Blake again, "William Symington spent the last few years of his life in London, cadging for a pension. He died disappointed ...." These two circumstances go a long way towards establishing the validity of Taylor's position and the falsity of Symington's.

Many other testimonies to Taylor's true status in the matter could be quoted, but two must suffice:- In 1833 a Leadhills magistrate, who knew both Taylor and Symington, said - "Respecting the origin of steam navigation, the first hint I ever heard of applying that power to the propelling of vessels was from my late and much-respected acquaintance, Mr James Taylor, when in the family of Mr Miller, Dalswinton .... I have also heard the late Mr William Symington talk over the above-mentioned subject, and he highly complimented Mr Taylor on his discovery." Secondly there is an affidavit of Alexander Hamilton of Mauchline:- "Mr Symington distinctly and repeatedly admitted and declared to the deponent and to the said James Taylor that he had nothing to do with the application of steam to propel vessels, except that he was engineer (employed by the said James Taylor and Mr Miller) who made the steam engine which was first applied to test the invention of the said James Taylor. Mr Symington .... openly and distinctly avowed that the said James Taylor was the true inventor of navigating vessels by steam."

Taylor died at Cumnock on 18th September 1825, aged 72 and his wife lived to be 94.

The Symington myth has become so widely credited that

it is highly unlikely that it can now be put in its true place, despite the strongest possible counter evidence.

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[At first sight the subject of this paper may seem to have little connection with our area and normal interests but in fact this is not so. Following on the invention of a steam-propelled boat as described here, a successor was built, to become the first commercially-run steamboat Comet. During its short existence this boat used the Crinan Canal and was eventually wrecked on Craignish Point. So it seems that the events related by Mr Baird impinged, if only at second-hand, on Mid-Argyll and should in consequence be understood by our Membership.

The above-mentioned writer Blake quotes a contemporary opinion on the use of steam, which piously declared that ships should use "the Almichty's ain win' and no' wi' the deil's sunfire and brimstane!" Editor.]

...oooOooo...

A GENTLE HINT

A Tarbert anecdote tells of a droll worthy who had been entrusted with the job of holding the Laird's horse. On relinquishing his charge he asked quietly "If somebody asks me what I got what will I say?" (per Nicol McCallien)

NOTE on the COVER

The cover of this issue cannot fail to attract notice, but it is doubtful if a satisfactory understanding can be expected despite its simplicity. Many years ago on Mull an old hawthorn bush was remarked on account of its stunted appearance. It had obviously been gnawed over a long period by deer or sheep with resultant callus formation. Two of these hypertrophied growths arrested attention on account of their obvious anthropomorphism. They were in the exact relationship which was subsequently closely adhered to, with the aid of photographs, when they were varnished and mounted as shown. Absolutely no 'improvement' was carried out - they appear exactly as they did when found, only their original height of some twenty inches was reduced.

BOOK REVIEWS

DISCOVERING ARRAN: Alastair Gemmell

This reviewer, faced with yet another 'guide book', soon became aware that his gloomy expectations had been premature and completely ill-founded to such an extent that it was with genuine regret that the last page was reached. The author's style is one of notable and sustained clarity, and each section, ranging from earliest days through the arrival of man to "The Future of Arran" proves to be unfailingly absorbing. Even in the case of potentially esoteric subjects such as archaeology and geology, where a less skilled writer could produce alarm and frustration in the general mind, every page is compulsive reading. Mr Gemmell has known Arran since his early youth and his absorption in and understanding of the subject is boundless. A measure of his skill lies in the treatment of contentious subjects such as forestry and the changes brought about by ease of transport - all aspects are presented and the reader has the continuous stimulus of deciding his own reactions. The concluding section gives highly practical and detailed directions for six excursions on foot and/or by car which cover the whole island; in themselves interesting subjects for even 'past it' armchair readers. Highest praise goes to Mrs Leiper for her excellent maps, which are models of clarity. In reiteration it is a book which cannot be over-praised so far as textual contents go and in no respect can improvement be suggested. This cannot be said of the illustrations, for the process used in their reproduction gives an overall dark effect - indeed one of them shows golfers apparently playing at midnight under an arc-light. Worst of all is the ugly inartistic cover which will do nothing to recommend this most excellent book to public attention. It seems almost to have been a deliberate choice of the least attractive of the innumerable scenes presented by the whole island. To make matters even worse (an achievement in itself) the superposition of the publishers' utterly pointless garishly-outlined rectangle compounds the unfortunate effect.

DISCOVERING ARRAN. Alastair Gemmell.
John Donald Publishers. £7.50

DISCOVERING SPEYSIDE: Francis Thompson

A guide-book this is not. For practical purposes the visitor new to Speyside would require a more geographically based account, and also an O.S.map. There is indeed as frontispiece a summary map of the course of the Spey which shows many of the place-names mentioned in the text, but by no means all; this is particularly frustrating when reading the chapter on the tributaries of the Spey; and N is not indicated. However maps and guide-books are easily obtainable, whereas much of the information contained in this book is not available elsewhere in such compact form. The author is fascinated by people and events, anecdote and legend; each place has its peculiar background, its own stories. You will not be told how to find your way about some town or village but you will be introduced to the past, which partly at least explains its present. The larger scale is not neglected; there are good accounts of Wade's roads; of the great days of the timber industry when large rafts of logs were sent floating down the Spey; of the commercial undertakings of the York Building Company; of the shipbuilding in the 18th and 19th century at Garmouth and Kingston; of the modern whisky industry. We are told also about the Wolf of Badenoch; about Sir John Cope's tangles with the Jacobites; about the stormy history of Ruthven Barracks, and much more. It makes interesting and enjoyable reading. It might have benefited however from more careful revision; there is much repetition, some of it word for word, e.g. the introduction of reindeer p.24 and p.69, the tale of the deadly hogsheads of brandy p.78 and p.133, and the exploits of Col.Thornton who shot everything in sight p.62 and p.145 (and passim). A few misprints and infelicities of expression might have been removed, e.g.p.123 'bodah' for 'bodach', and p.76 'welcome' for 'welcoming'; and did Aaron Hill really hope to make olive oil from beech nuts?

There are three short appendices; a useful note on the Speyside Way, an even more useful section on "Walking the Hills - Precautions for Walkers", and a brief discussion of the derivation of "Spey". The illustrations are not numbered or clearly related to the adjacent text, forming perhaps a picture book before reading the text. A.C.

DISCOVERING SPEYSIDE. Francis Thompson
John Donald Publications Ltd. £7.50

DISCOVERING ARGYLL MULL & IONA: Willie Orr

The writing of this book presented its author with an immense challenge, quite apart from all considerations of geography (it is an area of extreme complexity in every respect), for he undertook to satisfy the requirements of historians, botanists, ornithologists, antiquarians, tourists, geologists, agriculturists, economists, folklorists - indeed the needs and interests of a cross-section of society. True, the dedicated sailor, the mountaineer and the road hog will look in vain for stimulus, but with that caveat it remains to declare at the outset that we have here a most excellent and satisfying book. This verdict may gain support from the fact that we found it impossible to lay aside once we started it, and completed a first reading, at some personal inconvenience, on the day we received it.

The contents are in seven parts: Approaches, Oban and North-west Lorn, North and East Mull, Ross of Mull and Iona, Lochgilphead, South and West Lorn, South Appin and Lismore, Ardgour, Morvern and Ardnamurchan. This list alone, to anyone with even superficial knowledge of these areas, indicates the complexity of the scenario.

At this point one may bring up what is almost the only source for dissatisfaction, namely the two maps which are utterly futile and useless. What was needed, apart from a more accomplished drawing and lettering was a map for each section. Still on the subject of production it is good to report comparatively few misprints, probably not more than half a dozen. The illustrations are excellent and adequate. There is a hiatus on p.35 where the text fails to connect with the following page, and on p.41 the view at Rest and be Thankful "down the glen to Loch Fyne" is west not east. At Lochgilphead the building is the Clock Lodge, not Tower, and yet again the story of Orde and the child is wrongly given. Where so many minor antiquities and points of interest are detailed with care it might have been expected that one close to a main road the 'Watchman Stone' at Barbreck would be with them. The description of Kilchattan church on Luing (p.159) could, if followed closely, be frustrating for anyone looking for "some early 'graffiti' depicting late medieval galleys, one with a wolf-head prow", which from the text would be

sought on grave-slabs when in fact they occur on stones in the walls of the ruined chapel. This reviewer can claim some authority on the subject as he described and illustrated the scribings, both known and newly located, in Kist 26 (1983).

Writing of activities such as new communities we have this heartening passage concerning Craobh Harbour - "In trying to create a Highland village, mixing traditional materials with modern styles, the architects have produced the most incongruous settlement in Argyll. The twenty-first century Baronial Style of some of the buildings is quite incompatable with the surrounding scenery."

The author's style is easy and relaxed, and his ability to bring to life the scenes he describes is quite remarkable. Coupled with this is an ever-present aim to give the first-time visitor adequate information regarding the hazards or limitations of the road he is taking. Economists will find much to ponder in the great number of examples of population change and their cause.

In short, as already stated, it is a book which has something for everyone and much for many, and it can be recommended with complete assurance to travellers and arm-chair-readers alike. But those maps ....!

DISCOVERING ARGYLL MULL & IONA. Willie Orr
John Donald Publishers Ltd. £7.50

The SHEILING: Albert Bil.

For sheer dulness and unreadability this volume merits a high rating. However as a textbook which presents the case of the Central Scottish Highlands it is the result of a thorough and meticulous research of this specialised subject and may be considered as an important work of reference although the author's literary style does little to aid comprehension. Chapter 11 and even the following one are less arid but the relief is not maintained. The high technical quality of the production is all that we have come to expect from John Donald.

The Sheiling: 1600 - 1840. Albert Bil. MA PhD
John Donald Publishers Ltd. £25