

'COME NORTH': GLASSERT GAME BOOKS AND DIARIES

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Through the kindness of the Joynson family, the archives department of the University of Stirling has acquired some very interesting material from the Glassert estate at Aberfoyle. This is the first instalment, or so it is hoped, of what will be a much larger deposit of estate and family papers, and it certainly whets the appetite for what may follow. There is one personal diary for the year 1885, which rather stands in isolation, and five game books; two from the later nineteenth century (1874-1878, and 1885-1886,) and three from the second quarter of the twentieth century; 1925-1935, 1935-1939, and 1940-1942.

The diary for 1885, the author of whom is not given, but is clearly one of the senior members (perhaps on internal evidence Mary Hampson, whose husband then had the lease of the Glassert) sheds light on the everyday life of a well to do English family. Her life appears to have been a round of visiting and being visited, of letters sent and received (e.g. from Biarritz), of sermons heard and talks attended by themselves or friends. An entry for Saturday 21 March 1885 notes that one of the Joynsons (D[orothy?]) had called to report what a "*delightful meeting that they had hearing Miss Booth speak*"; perhaps the wife or daughter of the Salvation Army's General Booth? This family was part of what had become an established pattern of migration for quite a number of well-to-do English families, of going north to Scotland for the summer and the shooting. It had started fifty years or so earlier with parties of young men roughing it on the moors, but by this period, thanks to better transport and accommodation, the whole household – ladies, servants, children – was decamping north. And they were going earlier in the year: in the late spring or early summer, not just for the glorious twelfth, returning only in the autumn. This particular family departed their English home in mid May and set out for Scotland, as the diarist concisely records (Wed., 13 May 1885)

Left for Scotland. Altringham Station at 1 o'clock . Met Jane Forshar at Victoria Station Manchester. Left at 2.30 Arrived in Edinburgh at 8.40 – drove to the Royal, had an excellent dinner and a good night. [Thursday] Did a little shopping – called on Mr Patterson – went to the Academy and left for Aberfoyle in afternoon. Arrived at the Glassert about 7 o'clock.'

It was a steady, unflustered, predictable railway journey: very different from fifty years earlier when the first outriders had forayed north by boat and coach. The family's link to the area had started in 1833, or so Peter Joynson has suggested in his compilation *Local Past*, when Edward Joynson and a friend toured the Trossachs, prompted by Scott's *Rob Roy*. Enchanted with Loch Ard, they resolved to return and did so some sixteen years later when in 1849 they leased shootings in the area from the Duke of Montrose. The bachelor gathering of young sportsmen using bothies, forming and reforming syndicates, was later to lead to colonisation by their extended family, building

or renovating substantial properties for their summers. The Hampsons took Couligartan in 1852 and later Glassert (1865): the Jones Duchray Castle, and William Joynson (then 70) leasing Alstkeith house and the shootings at Ledard from Whitsun 1871. The 1874 gamebook starts with a summary of game killed, – “our fifth year”.

The game books are not just bare records of what was shot, where and when, and by whom, but are thickened by comment, as to how the dogs worked, what the weather was like, who shot well, and which drives worked. Some of this is humdrum; – e.g. August 12 1876 “a very hot day. Walter Barratt with Peter and two brown dogs shot the moor east of Tinkler but did not find birds plentiful”. But there are also notes of occurrences, a woodcock carrying her young, a grouse chased by a hawk into some railings. The later volumes contain letters to *The Field* on shooting matters, including long runs of bags, photographs and drawings. There are biographies of the keepers, perhaps prepared for retirement presentations, such as Peter McAlpine who retired in 1945 after thirty-three years’ service. There are glimpses of family history: there is a note in the game book for 1942 that Captain Joynson, a major in the Black Watch home battalion, had died of wounds sustained accidentally in a Home Guard exercise on August 3, 1942. To a considerable extent, Peter Joynson has already quarried the game books in his *Local Past*, which was published in 1996 and is an eclectic and valuable volume of life in and around Aberfoyle. This draws on these game books and other family material for recollections and observation, as well as splicing in information from, for example, the Statistical Accounts. In his introduction, Mr Joynson acknowledged that much of the information had been extracted from his father’s “comprehensive game books and other writings”.

What is the value of this accession?

First it gives an insight into the sporting – golf as well grouse features large – and general interests of a landed family. Religion brooks large; committed Anglicans in England, they were as keen episcopalians in Scotland, and were active supporters of the church at Aberfoyle. They took a deep interest in the natural history of the area. Peter Joynson’s father and uncle – Ralph – were keen and knowledgeable observers of the land, and in the game books took time to analyse the records of bags. He wanted to know why numbers of game and other species varied. A letter of his to the *Field*, ‘*Blackcock and Pheasants*’, using his own estate records, was published in September 1924. His hypothesis was that the increase in pheasants was directly linked to the decrease in blackgame; his surmise was that the male blackcock was outfought by the cock pheasant with its spurs. Dogs were a particular passion of his and his brother Ralph. The first spaniels had been introduced on the estate two generations previously in 1872, and retrievers in 1876, whereas before only pointers or setters had been used for walking up. An entry for July 7 1934 records the death by sunstroke of Belt, aged about 8, “the last of our setters and pointers”. The spaniels that the Joynsons bred, trained and worked, became renowned, and had considerable success in field trial championships. In February 1937, or so

the game book records, one dog was sold for the very considerable sum of £120 to an American, Martin Hogan of Illinois. Sent out by the Queen Mary, it went on to be a field trials champion in the USA.

There is much, as might be expected on the management of the moors, on the techniques tried to preserve the grouse stock and then to harvest them once the season started. 6-8 brace of Yorkshire birds were put down at Dunruig in 1895, as part of an experiment to improve the local stock. Originally, as with all Highland moors, all the days involved walking up with dogs. Driving, by which the birds were brought by beaters to the guns in butts, was only introduced in early 1890s, (cf 'Notes on Game', "*Driving really started in 1896 though the first drive attempted actually took place in 1890*"). This technique allowed the less fit and the more elderly good sport, and the siting of the butts took considerable planning. Indeed there was clearly adjustment and innovation as heather cover altered, with new drives tried. In August 1934, the game book records that Tinkler and West Gashoile were driven to experimental positions near the Gangers' Pass, "to great success". There were difficulties with the loss of ground to forestry, and problems with bracken. The last game book is of value in shedding light on what happened during the second world war when the general assumption is that game shooting came to an end.

Environmental historians will be interested in the quantitative evidence as to the recorded bags of game, good years and bad, peacetime and war, and indeed fortunes of the fishings in the area for which long runs – over decades – are recorded. Joynson had privileged access to material – estate records and other material – of real value, some of which has since disappeared. At the end of the Game book for 1934 he quotes from an old source – a hotel register- for 1862 to 1868 which lists boats, rods and catches on Loch Ard. He also mentions an Aberfoyle fishing club and refers to a fishing hut built on the island by the Stirling Fishing club in 1839. There are extensive and lengthy records for the fishings on other waters – Loch Katrine and the Lake of Mentieth. And, of course there are local incidents that add colour to our knowledge of the area. In 1922 poachers dynamited the Blacklinn on the Duchray water, taking eight fish. Game keepers, and water bailiffs had their work cut out.

There are wider questions which these sources alone cannot answer. We can sense what the Joynsons and others like them enjoyed in their Scottish summers. What we would wish to explore is what the economics of their estates were; how far English money underwrote the Highland experience, first as tenants and then as proprietors. Their love of field sports cost them money, but how much? Little, after all, was to be recouped from the sale of game; indeed the 1874 game book starts with a list of those to whom grouse were given; the minister and the schoolmaster each one brace, the church precentor 2 hares, and the post boy two rabbits. For what light we have, we are grateful; to what there may be, we look forward.