Tighcladich – John MacInnes

Tighcladich, on the eastern shore of Loch Fyne, lies within the boundary of Ardkinglas Estate. It consists of four houses, each built facing towards the Loch. It was once part of Laglingartan farm.

The first date, of the existence of Laglingartan, is in the transcript of a 1550 Charter, in the archives at Ardkinglas. The Charter is in Latin but translated gives Sir Colin Campbell, the feudal rights to lands, including, the 6 merkands of the two Laglingartans (Laglingartonmor and Laglingartan beg).

Tighcladich is first referred to, in a rental of the Estate dated 1787/88, stating that, “Laglingartanmor and Clady House, are let at silver rent of £40.” In 1791, a reference to the two Laglingartans, includes “the pendicle\* of Laglingartanmor called Cladich House.”

\*A pendicle is “a small piece of land forming part of a larger holding or farm, often let to a sub-tenant.”

Tighcladich, is marked on George Langland’s map dated 1795, but there is no reference to it on Roy’s map dated 1750.

Changes to the whole country in the second half of the 18th century led to the making of settlements like Tighcladich.

Herring fishing in Lochfyne, at the middle of the 18th century, was very successful. People were leaving farming to become fishermen. In the first Census, published in 1841, three of the four heads of households at Tighcladich described themselves as ‘fishermen.’ In 1869 two householders registered fishing boats under The Sea Fisheries Act 1868. One was a half deck smack and the other a skiff, but it is interesting to note, that the crews also worked as ‘landsmen.’ This shows that they had to work both on the land and the sea to make a living.

A farm labourer, in the early part of the 19th century, earned around £12 a year. A drift net fisherman could make between £20 - £30 a year. The good times of the fishing didn’t last, by the end of the 19th century, new laws on the methods of fishing and the overfishing of the loch, saw many of the boats being deregistered, including the ones at Tighcladich.

In 1870, the earliest known surveyed plan of Tighcladich was taken. It isn’t known if the houses were self-built by the tenants or built by the Estate. There is no evidence of any of the building being older than 1787/88 and they are typical of the style of houses of the second half of the 18th century. Into the beginning of the 20th century, most of the houses had thatched roofs. Through time these were changed to slates and corrugated iron.

The first house with a slated roof was Shield Cottage, this was the home of John McVicar, a mason, who came to Tighcladich sometime before 1871. A carved relief stone shield is attached to the front of the house, with the date 1871 on it.

“This shield was given to John McVicar by a Captain Stone, who lived at The Lodge, St. Catherines, and has no relation to the building of the house. The house was owned by the Estate and rented and roofed by John McVicar.” This information given by his grand-daughter, Mrs. J. M. Borland.

The original cottages had two rooms. A kitchen/living room and a bedroom. A loft above accessed by a ladder. A small window, high in the lee gable, of some of the houses, allowed light into the loft space, this was called ‘the oar window’. It could be used to allow access and storage, for a number of long pieces of gear required for fishing boats.

Cooking was on an open fire. The cooking pots and kettle hung over the fire on an iron chain, which was suspended from an iron bar, this was called ‘a swee.’ The iron bar was built into the gable of the house. Peat was the main fuel, in later years coal took over from peat. It was delivered by puffer.

In 1864 the staple diet of a fishing community like Tighcladich would have been fish and potatoes, especially herring. Fresh in summer and autumn and salted in barrels for use during the winter months.

A piece of land, beside the house, would be used to grow potatoes. The ground would be fertilised with seaweed and manure, from the cow, which most households kept. It also provided them with milk, which in turn gave them butter and a type of cheese. Oats to make porridge and oat cakes, were either bought in or grown.

The early means of lighting was ‘a cruise lamp.’ This was an open metal dish, with a spout, into which a wick, made from several skinned rushes was laid, the fuel was, homemade cod liver oil. Most households also had metal moulds to make candles. These were made from melted down mutton fat.

Box beds were in the kitchen and the bedroom. Most houses had ‘a kist.’ A box for keeping blankets in. The furniture was wooden, table, chairs and dressers. Brown, blue and white crockery, would have been on the dresser.

In the 1851 Census, Tighcladich had its own weavers. The wool coming from a small flock of sheep that were kept at Tighcladich.

The 1881 Census showed that most of the residents of Tighcladich spoke Gaelic but by the 1891 Census it had dropped to less than half.

The Census of 1841 gives four houses at Tighcladich. 1861, five houses. 1881, six houses. 1891, five houses and now at the beginning of the 21st century, there are four houses, most of which are holiday homes.