



ARDNAMURCHAN HISTORY
& HERITAGE ASSOCIATION

A LOCAL GUIDE TO
Glendrian

The site of Glendrian, an abandoned crofting township, is a Scheduled Monument, Historic Scotland describing it as, “of national importance because of it’s potential to contribute to our understanding of post-medieval settlement and economy. The buildings are varied in date and style and contain evidence for the complex history of settlement on the site.” A 2011 survey of the site identified 19 houses, 3 shielings (temporary summer shelters), 2 house/byres, 1 bothy, a bothy/byre and one other ‘building’, as well as one possible ‘prehistoric’ structure which might be “the remains of a hut circle.”

The name Glendrian or Glendryen derives from the Gaelic Gleann Droigheann meaning ‘blackthorn glen’. The first written reference, in 1619, is to an Allester McEan Voir VcEan in ‘Glendreane’ as one of the Maclains involved in depredations against Donald Campbell of Barbreck and besieging Mingary Castle.

In the earliest reference to Glendrian, the Register of the Great Seal of Scotland Vol XI1667, the Earl of Argyll’s possessions were listed as including “..., the 2½ merk lands of Auchinhaw and Glenindryane...” ‘Auchinhaw’ is probably Achnaha.

Following the 1715 rising, on 27th April 1716 all the male inhabitants of Ardnamurchan, on whichever side they fought, were obliged to hand in their arms at Mingary Castle.

The men from Glendrian were listed as John MacColl, John McIllichreist, Donald McKenzie, Alexander Campbell, John McLachan, and Donald McLachlan. For comparison, Achnaha listed 7 men.

The earliest map showing 'Glendrien' is Alexander Bruce's map of 1733. Alexander Murray, in his 1737 survey of Ardnamurchan Estate, stated that 'Glendrien' had 6 families and a total population of 29, comprising 6 men, 8 women and 15 children. Its land covered 2,220 acres, high compared to other local settlements, and the 'penny land', a measure used in calculating rent, was five, average for West Ardnamurchan. The tenants, according to Murray, are given as Duncan McEacharn ($\frac{1}{4}$ of the 5 penny lands), Patrick McIlvraw ($\frac{1}{4}$), John McLachlan ($\frac{1}{8}$), Dougald McIlvraw ($\frac{1}{8}$), Donald McDonald ($\frac{1}{8}$) and Duncan Henderson ($\frac{1}{8}$). On its pastoral land the tenants were permitted to graze up to 48 cows, 16 horses and 48 sheep.

Roy's Military map, drawn in the 1750s, has no record of Glendrian, but Achnaha is marked twice. Roy's map is remarkably accurate, so it is probable that the more easterly of the two settlements is Glendrian.

William Bald's map (Fig.2) of 1806 shows 17 buildings and two enclosures organised, as many of the communally-run villages were, as a nucleated settlement. Glendrian's common grazings extended across a large area, running up to the north coast.

Fig. 2 – A sample of Bald's map

Here, quite separate from the main settlement, are a group of 4 small fields close to an inlet, Port Eigin-aig, with the remains of a stone jetty. This may have been Glendrian's 'fishing port'.

Bald's records state that the settlement had 2,047.52 acres with 53.83 arable, 34.85 cultivated with the spade, and 1,958.84 moor and pasture. Its tenants, according to Alexander Low's follow up account in 1807, were John McLauchlan and 5 others. Low recommended that the settlement be cleared and joined to Achnaha to be sold as a sheep farm.

This did not happen, and in the 1841 census records a population of 39, 20 male and 19 female, gathered into 8 households, so the settlement

wasn't unduly overcrowded with recent immigrants from settlements cleared elsewhere. All households are headed by a 'Farmer' or 'Shepherd' except on: Mary Stuart was a 'Cottar', a landless squatter.

By the time the first detailed Ordnance Survey maps of the area were published in the 1870's, Glendrian had been reorganised into a crofting township, with each crofter's house located on a strip of croft land. This reflects a change from a communally-run settlement to one where arable land was worked by the individual crofter.

The 1861 census records an increased population, of ten households occupied by 24 males and 23 females. All heads of households were described as 'Farmers in Common' but other adults were identified as 'Agricultural Labourer' (4) or 'Domestic Servant' (4), though it isn't clear whether their work was within the community or outside. This census follows the second round of evictions on Ardnamurchan Estate, the Swordles being cleared in 1852. The population of Glendrian was now at a peak of 47.

The 1881 census showed that the population, 10 males and 10 females gathered into 5 households had halved in twenty years. All were born on Ardnamurchan. Three are listed as crofters, two as scholars, two as agricultural labourers, one as farm servant, one as general servant, and two were paupers, both women, one living alone, one with her son.

The Ordnance Survey map of 1897 shows that some buildings had disappeared and that more had been abandoned, so only eight are marked as roofed, yet some of the croft field walls which appear to have been incomplete in 1872 have been completed.

The continuing fall in population is confirmed in the 1901 census: 11 people occupied Glendrian, 6 male and 5 female, in 3 households. Two are recorded as farmers, two as crofters, and one as a 'Worker'.

By the second decade of the 1900s the population was reduced to two families, the Hendersons in Building 13 and the MacLachlans in Building 9.

The MacLachlan croft was abandoned in 1925/6. Donald and Mary Henderson's son Angus was born in 1940, soon after which the family, which included Donald's mother, Annie, moved to Kilchoan.

While in 1948 large areas of Ardnamurchan Estate were sold off, Glendrian was retained, and it remains part of the Estate.

The map on page 1 shows the main structures that can be seen on the ground today, most of which were in use during the crofting period. The two-storey house, 13, which dominates the area, was the last to be occupied (Fig. 4).

Fig. 4 – Building 13

It stands amongst the buildings on the site of the original settlement, and shows several stages of development, having started single-storey with rounded corners. After the upper storey was added, it was mortared on the outside and plastered within. It has fireplaces at either end on the ground floor, and a fireplace on the upper floor. Until recently, sheets of

the corrugated iron roof were still in place. Beside it are its associated byres and store rooms (Fig. 5).

Fig. 5 – View of building 13

The penultimate house to be occupied, 9, has gable ends, a porch on the southwest side, was rendered, and had a hearth at the northwest end. Below it is a walled kale yard (vegetable garden), and the extensive structure 11, is animal enclosures. Building 7 was a garage for a car kept by the owner.

Structures 1, 2 and 3 are good examples of dwelling houses associated with the early crofting period, though house 1 seems to have been abandoned very quickly. Their dimensions average 10m x 5.5m, they have rounded corners and had hipped roofs. There are small windows on

either side of a central front door. Within, they had two rooms, to right and left of the entrance.

Just to the northwest of structure 12 can be seen some footings of a building which may date back to the pre-crofting settlement.

Why did Glendrian Die?

Unlike most of the deserted villages of Ardnamurchan, Glendrian was not cleared between 1828 and 1852 to make way either for commercial sheep farming or for Estate use. Its population was at its peak in about 1861, after which it began to fall, though it wasn't abandoned for another eighty years.

On the earliest Ordnance Survey map the main track out of Glendrian is shown running due south, passing to the east of Druim Liath, a route that can still be followed today, to join the Achnaha-Kilchoan track near Creagan Airgid. In all subsequent maps, the track runs due west to join the Achnaha to Kilchoan road, one which steadily developed as the settlements of Achnaha and Sanna grew, and was tarmacked in the 1920s.

While it may only be indirect evidence, the township of Plocaig, near Sanna, which in the mid-19th century had a much larger population than Sanna, suffered the same fate as Glendrian after the road was put through to Sanna.

This suggests that the cause of both Plocaig and Glendrian's fall must have been lifestyle and access: faced with a hard crofting life, people preferred to either live in a township which had services and good communications or, as happened to some of the last Glendrian families, to move abroad, for example to Canada.