

The following recollections and incidents in the life of Daniel McEwen were taken down by me, Margaret Burnley Campbell, in January 1909, in his own words as nearly as possible. Old Dan was seated beside me in the Ormidale dining room and he partly talked himself and partly was led on by my questions to tell what he could remember.

He was then 89 years of age, having been born in Clachan Glendaruel on January 16th 1820.

My father, John McEwen, was school master at Clachan when I was born. My mother's name was Margaret Weir, and she was born at Lephinkeeman on the Ormidale Estate beyond Ballochindrain farm house where the 'laraichen' of the houses are still plainly to be seen.

Her father was Donald Weir, crofter and gardener at Ormidale (great grandfather of Neil Weir now overseer at Ormidale).

My father's father came from Otter way from Cnoe McEwen. I remember about my father's mother – an old woman who died in a 'thack' house at 'Port na N-Oitireach' (Otter Ferry). I do not mind ever seeing her, but I remember going over with a horse and cart to fetch her furniture when she died. I got the horse and cart from the Gillises at Camquhart. I would be about eight years old then – a lump of a boy.

The school house at Chlachan where I was born is now a joiner's shop. It was slated so long as I can remember it.

The wee byre in the corner of the Ormidale two acre field at Chlachan was the old school house, before my time, that was.

These were my brothers and sister, Duncan, James, John, Daniel, Peter, Sandy, Thomas, George, Neil and Mary.

Duncan was a shoemaker in the Glen. James was a servant with Captain Ormidale (Captain Alexander Campbell R.N.) till he died at Roseneath. Then he was a butler for a time with the late Colonel at Ormidale, and he was

afterwards steward on a yacht and died of cholera at Stranraer. John was a working man and died in Australia. Peter was a shepherd. He went to Australia with the Blacks Stronarden, and was drowned there. Sandy was a shoemaker. Thomas was working at the foundries in Greenock. George went away to England with a gentleman who was shooting at Ormidale with the late Colonel and who took a big fancy to him. He married in England and went away to Australia where he kept a diary. I do not know if he is living or dead. I got the last letter from him about 10 years ago.

Neil was in a man of war for 22 years. When his time was out he came home to the Glen. He went away again after that with the trading boats and he was drowned.

Mary was the eldest. She also went away to Australia with some weans from Glasgow as a nurse.

I remember the kilts being on me when I was a boy. It was not tartan but 'Hielan Plaiding'. My mother spun the wool and it was sent to Housten, Greenock, to be woven and then she made the kilts.

I had porridge and milk in the morning, potatoes and herring at dinner time, porridge again at night. There was no tea at that time. When my mother married, tea cost 9/- a pound.

I was seven or eight years old when my father died, and then I went to herd cattle with James Weir, Achatengain, and I stayed three years there. A year after my father's death the family left the school house and my mother had a house built for her at Stronefian, called 'Tomdarive' – a heather thatched house it was. There was a school at Stronefian for the family and they went out to herd cows also.

My father taught both Gaelic and English and Peter Sinclair was the next master at Clachan after he died.

After being three years at Achatengain, Dan went away to be a tailor with John McLean, piper, at Daleek for five or eight years. You can see the ruins still of the house at Daleek. There I learnt the pipes as well as the tailor's trade.

There was another tailor in the Glen called Donald Black and all the men got their clothes made by the tailors. There were also two weavers in the Glen – two brothers, Duncan and Donald MacLean. The women all spun the wool at home and many sent it to Housten for weaving. Housten charged 1/- a yard for weaving or 1/6 for dyeing, spinning and weaving. It was cheaper to send wool to Housten. The weavers charged 4d or 5d a yard.

They were brewing at Lephinkeeman. They were brewing whisky there, and it was Neil Weir – Nancy's father – and Sandy Weir a cousin of mine that were doing it. The gauger was stopping over at Otter Ferry and he got word what

was going on, and he came over and my uncle Peter Weir met him and took him into his house where the brewing was going on all the time in an old byre without, while the gauger was within. My uncle treated him well and put him to bed and when he left in the morning they put two bottles of whisky in his pocket when he went back to Otter. The gauger 'kent' well fine all about it, but as he did not see it, he could not report it.

There was one still where the pier is now, one at Ormidale, one at Lephinkeeman, one at Achdachiranmore, one at Achatengain, one at Pephinkill. They would get 9/- a gallon for the whisky, without a drop of water in it.

They were brewing one time at Achachiranmore and somebody reported them, and the gaugers – two of them – came from Dunoon. The old Baron was at Stronefian at the time, and hearing the gaugers were coming he sent his man through the hill to the McKellars Achachiranmore to warn them that the gaugers were coming. The old Baron then took them in and gave them dinner to detain them, and when they got to Achachiranmore there was nothing to be seen but old barrels.

There was a big still in the wood above the house. There was old Neil Weir in it and Peter Weir and old Ormidale 'kent' fine they were at it and he was getting the whisky from them himself. (I was always told that one of those at this still was old Dan himself !) ~~MBCG. 178~~

There were heaps of people in the Glen when I was young – sometimes two marriages in the month.

On 'Latha na bainnse' the company would be going to Clachan, and my father would be going to tell the minister that they were coming – that was at the old Manse which is now a washhouse. The company would be coming with a piper and a gun firing. You would hear them miles away. Campbell was the minister's name, and everybody was married in the kirk at that time.. They would play the pipes down to the kirkyard gate but not inside. The best man had to pay 1/- before they could get the kirk opened, for the scholars would go down and lock the kirk door when they heard the party coming, so that they would not get in, and the shilling was for writing quills for the school. Then old Campbell the minister would come and marry them, and one man would be stationed at the door outside the kirkyard and as soon as the marriage was done, someone inside gave a signal, and the man outside fired a shot, and the piper would play them up to the old public house – the Inns it was called. They were served with a round of wine, and then the dancing commenced, and the minister Campbell and my father danced the first reel and then the minister would go away, but my father would stop with the company.

They would be married about 12 o'clock and they would dance the whole night through till the morning. May be they would go home to where the bride was living and there would be supper and there would be plenty of whisky

also. They had two days at a heap of the weddings in those days, and the next day they would be going up to Clachan again, dancing and playing and drinking.

There were hundreds and hundreds in the Glen when I was young. Captain Campbell of Glenaruel was giving a great shintying at Glenaruel on New Year's Day, and he was splendid shintier was the Laird himself, and there was a barrel of whisky out at the end of the house, and you could take as much as you liked. There were old women there also selling oranges and sweeties.

The people would be leaving the glens one by one. There was nobody to blame for it I don't think. There was no work in the Glen for the people, and they had to go to the low country.

I married that year there was a failure of the potatoes (1846). I would be about 26 when I married. My wife's name was Margaret Sinclair, daughter of the late Angus Sinclair. He was a drover and lived at Stronefian. She was three years with the Buchanans, Stronefian, and after that she came to Ormidale as a dairy maid, and when she left Ormidale she went to the Campbells, Glenaruel. I was married at Ardachople by Mr Russel the Free Church Minister who was on his way from Loch Striven to get married himself.

I was working at Rothesay in the saw pits for four years before that. They sent me down to Ayr also. I was three months there, and afterwards to Castle Toward, cutting wood, but the work was too heavy for me, and very nearly killed me.

I had a sister in Glasgow, and we went there, the wife and me, after we were married, and stopped there two days and then came home. We went by the 'Mary Jane', an old steamer from Colintraive – Macintyre was captain – and we went out in a small boat for there was no pier then.

There was a splendid crop of potatoes the year the disease came, but the pits tumbled in with rot after they were 'howked'. Any of the potatoes that stood, they were sending away to Rothesay where they put up a big factory to make stiffening starch. We stopped at Stronefian with my mother, and we were at Stronefian when my two daughters were born – Margaret McEwen who died of galloping consumption at fifteen, and Annie who married Alex Smith.

The year that Charles Macintyre came to Achnagarron farm, when James Henderson left, they wanted a field to be drained, and one John Leach wrote the bargain, and I went with him to help finish the work. It was the late Colonel (Colonel Robert Campbell of Ormidale) that was paying us. We got our pay for what we did and he would be coming every second day to see if we did right. Good pay it was, 6d for six yards. One day, the late Colonel sent for me to see if I would work the horses for a month till the new ploughman would come, and I told him I was not very good at ploughing, but I would do my

best, and I worked the horses from April till the term. Very well, the term came, and no more need of me, I thought, but old Donald Smith who was working the saw mill went away and the late Colonel put me into his place, and I worked the saw mill for fifty years in Ormidale, and then Duncan Maclachlan took my place for I was old and could not see to sharp the saws and so I had to stop it.

We lived at Lohead for nineteen years, and then at Waudk Mill. I must tell you now I worked one day for old Ormidale (John Campbell of Ormidale, father of Colonel Robert Campbell – he died 1842 aged 84 years). That's four lairds I have worked for. I was in Ballochindrain with the Fletchers gathering potatoes – a little boy I was at the time, and they sent me down with a horse to harrow the potato ground at Ormidale. Well, when I was finished, I was going away home and old Ormidale met me and clapped me on the shoulder and said 'You're a clever boy, what's your name ?' and put his hand in his pocket and meant to give me a sixpence, and he took out his purse but he hadna a sixpence, and he told me to ask for it another day, but I hadna the face to ask him for it ever. Oh yes ! I mind old Ormidale well. He spoke the Gaelic fine. The late Colonel could understand it well enough, but I never heard him speaking it.

Old Ormidale used to chase us with a stick if we took the geans. There was a heap of gean trees down by the bridge ! We dared not touch the mussels either. One day old Ormidale caught us taking some. He said 'Bheir mi ort airson a bhi thu goid no maroach.'

I was taking my dinner in the saw mill one day and I said to myself I think I'll go to the big garden and get some gooseberries and I was 'thrang' picking the gooseberries when I heard the gate open and who was this but Miss Emily (afterwards Mrs Connal) and I ran off and got through the hedge and I tore all my shirt and had to put on my jacket to hide it. I told Mrs Connal after, it was me that was taking the gooseberries, for I was not at peace till I told her.

The Laird of Ballochyle used to come to Ormidale. He was a soldier in India a long time, and he was stopping at Kirn for a time. The late Colonel had a yacht for sailing, and he was going once to Kirn to see him, and he wanted me to go with him and John Hogg the foxhunter also. There was no pier at Ormidale at that time, and no road to Craig. We went one Friday from Craig and got a fine day going. We stopped at Kirn that night, and an awful night it was. In the morning the boat was full of water, but we left about 10 o'clock in a strong breeze of North wind, and when we came to Toward Point we had to run into shelter and put in three reefs to the sail. We then had the sail too small and we were driven down by the Cumbræes and we got ashore on the Bute side. Well I, Dan, said then, 'If I go ashore I will walk home.'

After that the wind slackened, and we had to row from Rothesay, and we didna get home till 2 o'clock on Sunday morning, and we didna tell we were so late getting home on a Sunday morning.

The Glendaruel people and our people had week about trawling on the piece of river above the Bridge, as the bank was too high on the Glendaruel side. 'Lag Ghleann' it was called. Sometimes a dozen salmon were got, sometimes more or less. They used to draw the nets once a fortnight on the Ormidale water. We did it after six o'clock and the pay we were getting was a glass of whisky. But Mrs Campbell was terrible against the whisky, and the Colonel would say, 'they were drinking whisky long before I saw them', and if he would send for me in the evening, he would be sitting at his toddy, and he would give me a glass. He was awful good to me – terrible good.

Every one would be fishing when the river was right – poor and rich. I offer saw a dozen on the river at Ormidale.

Shall I tell you of the time I was drunk ? When I was fourteen and learning my trade at Daleek I went with the men the night they were running the whisky out of the pot. I never saw them doing it before. Well I was sitting in beside the big fire and they went out and there was an old cup near by and I put it under the tap and filled it and then drunk it up full of whisky. When I tried to rise I tumbled down a big bank and they had to carry me home on their backs.

There used to be hundreds of brown hares at Ormidale when I first came there. One night when I was coming down from Waulkmill I saw some beast I didna ken near Colusion pool, and I told the Colonel about it. What was this I found out but rabbits, but he said 'young hares, Dan !' I found out that John Hogg the foxhunter went down to Caladh and snared a pair or two and put them on the banks of the Colusion.

That's the way that rabbits came to Ormidale, and they increased very fast. They were feeding them with turnips in the winter. It was one, Oldham, brought them to Caladh.

I heard them speaking of a gentleman who was stopping at Ormidale and he died and they buried him in the family burying ground. I don't mind his name.

John Hogg had a heap of hounds for the foxes, big and little. You never heard such a noise when they got the scent of the roe. If any gentlemen were coming to Ormidale we would be hunting the roes. We started from Craig and we were not to loose the dogs unless we saw the roes, and the gentlemen were in the passes. There was a very good pass above Lothead. I was with the Colonel always, and one day one of the gentlemen shot at a roe and didna kill the beast. It went away back and they sent me to find it. I was up on the high rock and I saw the roe dead nelow me, and going down I caught hold of a bit of heather, and it gave way, and Dan went to the bottom. I broke a wee bone in my shoulder, but I never let on a word and took the roe on my back to the shooters. Next day Dan could not lift his hand. Then I told them the tumble I had and the Colonel sent me up to MacKellar the doctor at Clachan and he strapped me up.

There were gentry often coming in winter to hunt the roes. A Mr Crookes who lived in Gourrock used to come. One day at the pass above Sheffield the roes came and the hounds after them. Mr Crookes killed the two of them right and left. Another day we were after the roes with our ain Colonel. I was always with him and he was short sighted and I was telling him when the roes would be coming.

We heard the dogs coming and the roes before them, and we were at the back of the knowe. I told the late Colonel that they were coming, and he killed the two right and left. The Colonel was an awful good shot when he could see. The late Colonel and Neil Weir were going to the hill; to shoot grouse. There was [plenty of black game and I heard of a red deer that old Ormidale was feeding, and when old Ormidale died I heard the story how the deer made an awful roar at the time of the funerasl and went off and was shot after at the head of the Glen, at tronarden. I heard also that they were feeding pheasants in old Ormidale's time.

Mrs Campbell lived twenty years after the Colonel and I was Ormidale at the time. She was awful good to me too. I was working in the flower garden every day. She was terribly particular, and she would be watching me from the drawing room window.

I mind your mother and her sister when they came home from school. They had a nice black pony and they were fond of old stories. I mind Miss Alexa too.

Your mother and me would be casting out sometimes. We would not always be agreeing very well, but she was awful good to me.

I saw you first in the field down there after coming from Australia. You were dressed in white and it was the time of 'howking' potatoes. You would be about 4 years old and a good lump ye were at the time. I mind how ye gave me a knife and I have the knife in my house yet.

I was well liked in Ormidale, o4r I would not be 60 years in it. All the lairds liked me, and were terrible, terrible kind to me.

It is a good thing in my last days that I have a good character. Now, my dear lady, I canna mind more, but if I do you will get it.

Many the things Dan saw in Ormidale in 60 years.

During the summer of 1909 my old friend was out with barrow, hoe and rake on the avenue ervery fine day. No persuasion would keep him at hôme. 'My dear Lady' he would say, 'Dan would weary to death if he could not come up

to Ormidale' and he really felt that things would go wrong were he not to walk up every day, if only to fetch his milk and take a look around.

His old age was singularly serene and contented, in his two roomed cottage at Waulkmill with an old housekeeper, and the near neighbourhood of his granddaughter Polly Fisher, who was married to the keeper at Candahar, just across the river. His wife Peggy died about 10 years previously. She was a fine looking woman with a sharp, amusing tongue, and had a long and painful illness. All the sadder from the fact that their dearly beloved daughter Annie, Mts Smith, took ill and died before her mother, who was never told of her death.

Truly a man's life 'consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth', and Dan's happiness was the result of a long life of thrifty carefulness, spent uprightly in honest toil, without envy, without reproach, full of kindly interest in his neighbours and loyal affections for his friends at the 'big house'.

It was in January 1910 when we were away in Edinburgh that his illness began, and although he was sitting in his armchair when we returned, a picturesque figure in red night cap and dressing gown, he never again saw his beloved Ormidale, but tenderly nursed by his granddaughter, with the assistance of a district nurse, he passed away peacefully to his rest on the morning of May 3rd 1910, keeping all his faculties practically unimpaired. His last words to me the night before he died as he reluctantly let go my hand were, 'My dear lady, you'll come again in the morning.'

Alas, that never again shall we see that kindly old face smiling at us, and waving a greeting as we passed. There is instead a blank that can never be filled, a regret that constantly recurs, a knowledge that life will be always poorer than before.

The remains of Dan McEwen lie in Kilmodan church yard next to those of his father and mother.