

HARBOURING HERITAGE – A HISTORY OF FORTROSE HARBOUR PART 2



HARBOUR INDUSTRIES



This map ¹was drawn-up for the **1832** Scottish Reform Act. It is the earliest known map showing the harbour. The accompanying report lists Fortrose as a small place possessing a few fishing boats but having no trade or manufacturers worth noting, concluding that 'these places [Fortrose & Rosemarkie] have long been stationary.' The report may have been a bit harsh as it notes the 1821 Burgh & Parish population as 1571 while in 1831 it is 1799 which is a 14.5% increase in 10 years. Similarly, the number of houses increases from 325 to 344 (6%). It is also at variance with the report that Telford delivered to the Commissioners in 1828 (see below).

The map shows the **distillery** – the Eilean Dubh – clearly one of the first harbour industries. While it was legal to distil before 1823, changes in the law that year made the licensing much simpler and from 1824 onwards many more distilleries were registered. The Eilean Dubh was presumably established between 1824 and 1832 and its location must be due in part to the harbour – possibly ease of access to barley being exported via the harbour or perhaps because coal was being imported and was used for the drying process and to fire the stills or perhaps because of the ease of

¹ D Pocock Collection
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transporting the finished whisky? – most likely a combination of all of these factors.

THE BUSIEST PART OF TOWN

In 1828, little more than 10 years after the harbour was completed, Telford reported to the Commissioners on the outcome of all the work and expenditure. Regarding Fortrose Harbour he was clearly satisfied but he also highlighted that it was good that toll-dues had been authorized to pay for any repairs (having a ready fund for repairs became quite an issue in the 1850s for many Highland harbours).

The Shipping Piers at the burgh town of Fortrose and village of Avoch have fully suited the objects for which they were built, and have hitherto remained in tolerably perfect order; but it were well that Toll-dues, as authorized by the Act, were also established at these places, to meet the expence of any casual repair. I have added the only Statement (N° 14.) I have been able to procure, with regard to the trade carried on at both.

Statement No 14 is quite revealing. It was drawn-up by John Dempster, Shoremaster.

56 HIGHLAND ROADS *and* BRIDGES, *and* HARBOURS, &c.

N° 14.

[See p. 39 of Mr. Mitchell's Letter.]

MEMORANDA respecting the HARBOURS at FORTROSE and AVOCH,
by John Dempster, Shoremaster.

He recorded vessels as:

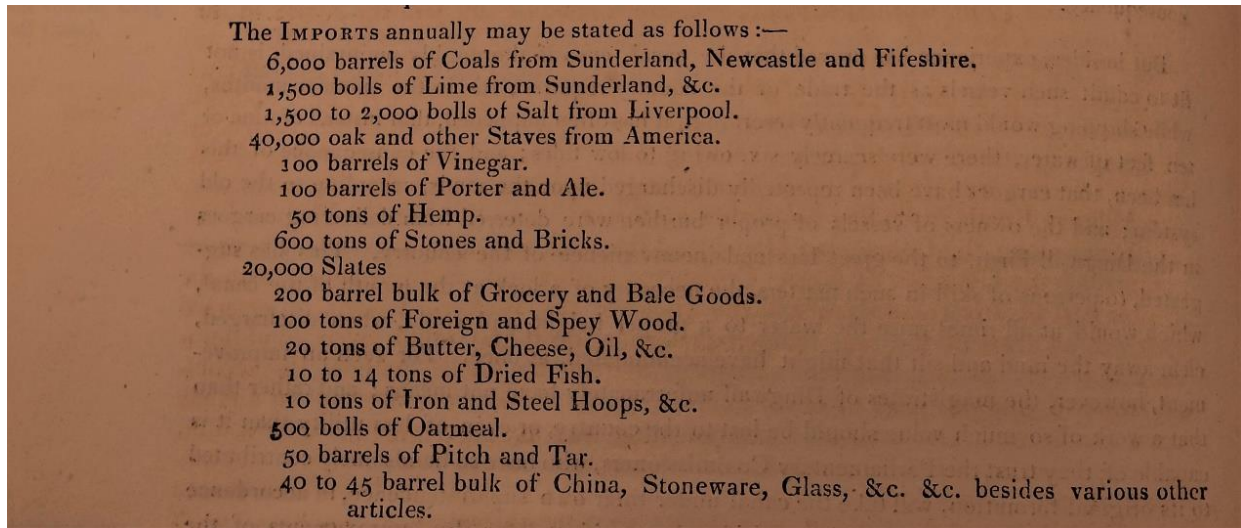
FORTROSE.

Harbours of Fort-
rose and Avoch.

THE Vessels which frequent this Harbour are the London, Leith, Aberdeen and Dundee regular traders, and four small vessels which belong to Fortrose; but there are also occasionally vessels from Russia, Ireland, Liverpool, Sunderland, Newcastle, the Firth of Forth and various other quarters.

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The imports were recorded as:

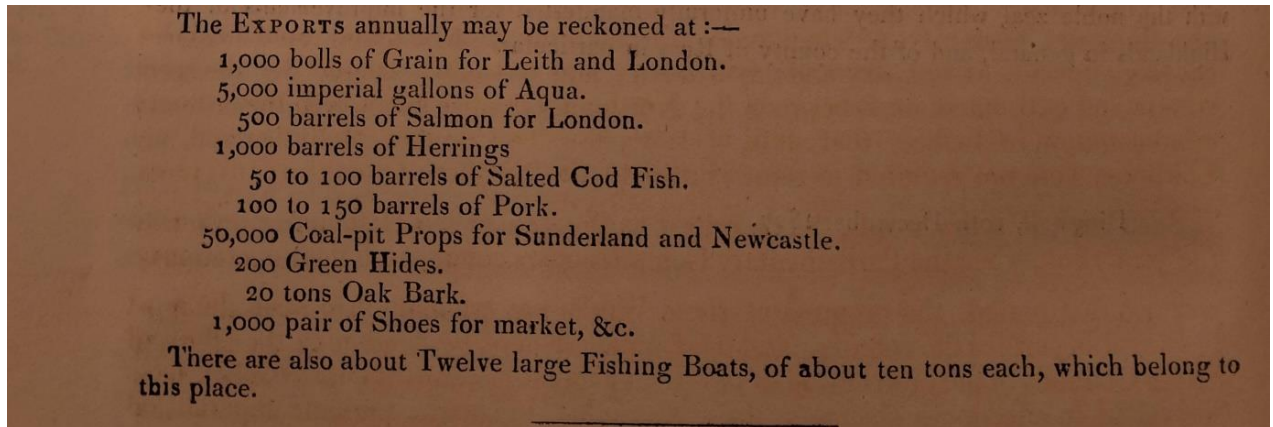


(A 'boll' is of course equivalent to 4 'firlots'. And of course, a 'firlot' is equivalent to 4 'pecks'. A firlot could be equivalent to 21 or 31 pints of water depending upon what was being measured. For salt it is 21 pints so a boll would be 84 pints (10 ½ gallons) and '2000 bolls of salt from Liverpool' would equal 21 000 gallons! Weight equivalents of one boll are given in a trade dictionary of 1863 as follows: Flour 140 pounds; Peas or beans 280 pounds; Oats 264 pounds; Barley 320 pounds; Oatmeal 140 pounds. '500 bolls of oatmeal' = 70 000 lbs or 31.25 imperial tons.)

This accords well with the original Memorial (see Part 1) which stated that importing of lime was necessary and Telford's own report mentioning the importation of coal. Indeed, coal remained a major import for the harbour right-up to the outbreak of WW2. Other items on the list are interesting. The oak staves and hoops are quite likely associated with barrel making for the distillery – while today whole used barrels are imported from the USA, that would have been uneconomic in the 1820s so it would seem likely that the barrels were broken down for reassembly which would also imply an active cooperage. The vinegar and salt indicate active pickling – were some barrels used for pickled food? The list of exports would indicate this to be so. Slates, stones, bricks, timber all indicated a building industry (possible small vessels too from the 'Foreign and Spey Wood').

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The exports were listed as:



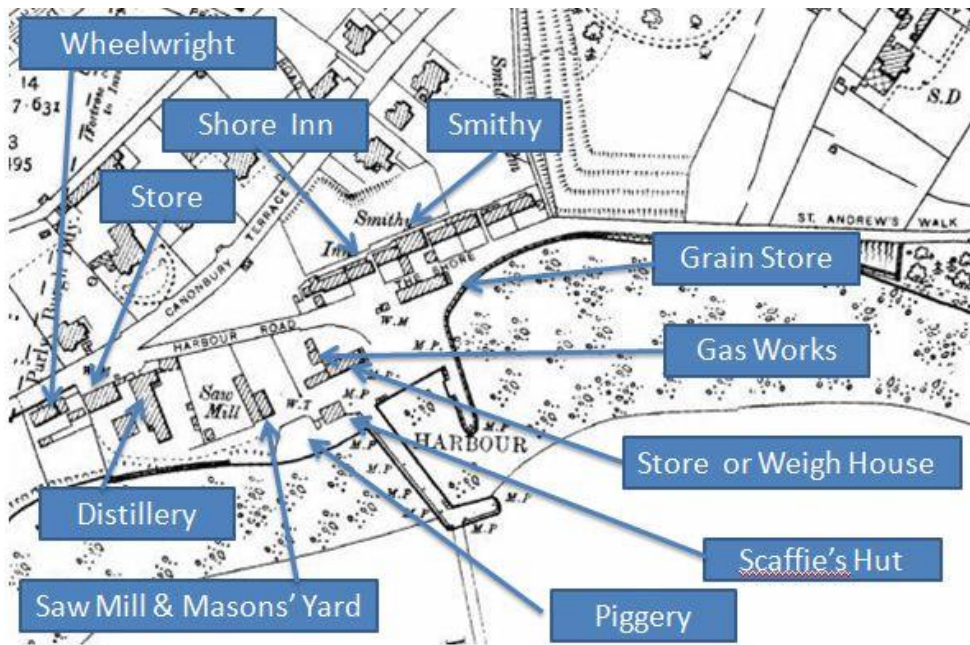
Again, grain exporting was one of the Memorialists aims. The 5 000 imperial gallons of 'Aqua' surely refer to Aqua Vitae ('water of life') ie whisky! This equates to 32 470 modern bottles of whisky. The pickled food stuff is self-evident, and the 12 large fishing boats were obviously involved in providing the fish. Pit-props was another export that lasted until WW2 and it made a good return cargo for the colliers bringing in the coal. The 1 000 pairs of shoes is remarkable and it is generally thought that around 20 shoemakers were working in Fortrose although the reason for such a concentration is obscure. This level of activity seems to be at odds with the 1832 report of a 'stationary place' with 'no trade or manufacturers worth noting'.

In 1868 the **Fortrose Gaslight Company** built a gas works to provide gas to the few who could afford it. The project was begun by Provost Grant, Dr Mackenzie, Bailie Hossack, Mr John Smith, Mr James Munro, and Mr Finnie (the ex-Town Clerk)². Mr John Henderson took over the roles of secretary & treasurer from Mr Finnie in 1870. Unfortunately, it went bankrupt after five years as there were too few consumers and prices were high as a result of the low volume although the buildings still appear in photos from the early 1900s. At various times around the harbour there was also a pub – the **Shore Inn** – a **smithy**, a **piggery**, a **sawmill**, a **wheelwright** and a **mason's yard**, various **stores** and more recently even a Fire Station³. With the establishment of a regular ferry service (see Part 3), tourism became an industry.

² From an undated newspaper article by Mr John Henderson

³ Information from Elizabeth Sutherland

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The map above shows the location of the various industries – while many overlapped in time they were not all active at the same time. There was some interaction between the industries. For example, George Taylor's grandfather, the wheelwright, would wheel his wooden cartwheels down to Michael Home's smithy to have iron bands fitted.

As already speculated the **Eilean Dubh distillery** probably benefitted from grain exported from the harbour and the coal that was imported. The distillery worked for a number of years as can be seen from this extract from the Inverness Courier dated 18 December 1856:

"Distillery and Utensils for Sale

There will be sold, by Public Roup, on the Premises, on Wednesday, the 31st day of December current, at Twelve o'clock, noon, The Fortrose Distillery Buildings and Ground, as sometime possessed by, and in so far as the same belong to the Trust Estate of John MacBean, lately Distiller, Fortrose; and also the whole Works and Utensils therewith connected, consisting of two Copper Stills, Pipes and Worms attached thereto; Tank for Worm; two Furnaces; Copper Boiler; Underback and Cooler; Metal of Kiln and Furnace; Malt Mill, and various other articles.

The Subjects for Sale will be shown by Kenneth Mackenzie, jun., Rosemarkie, Trustee of the Estate, who will be prepared to give all necessary information to intending offerers.

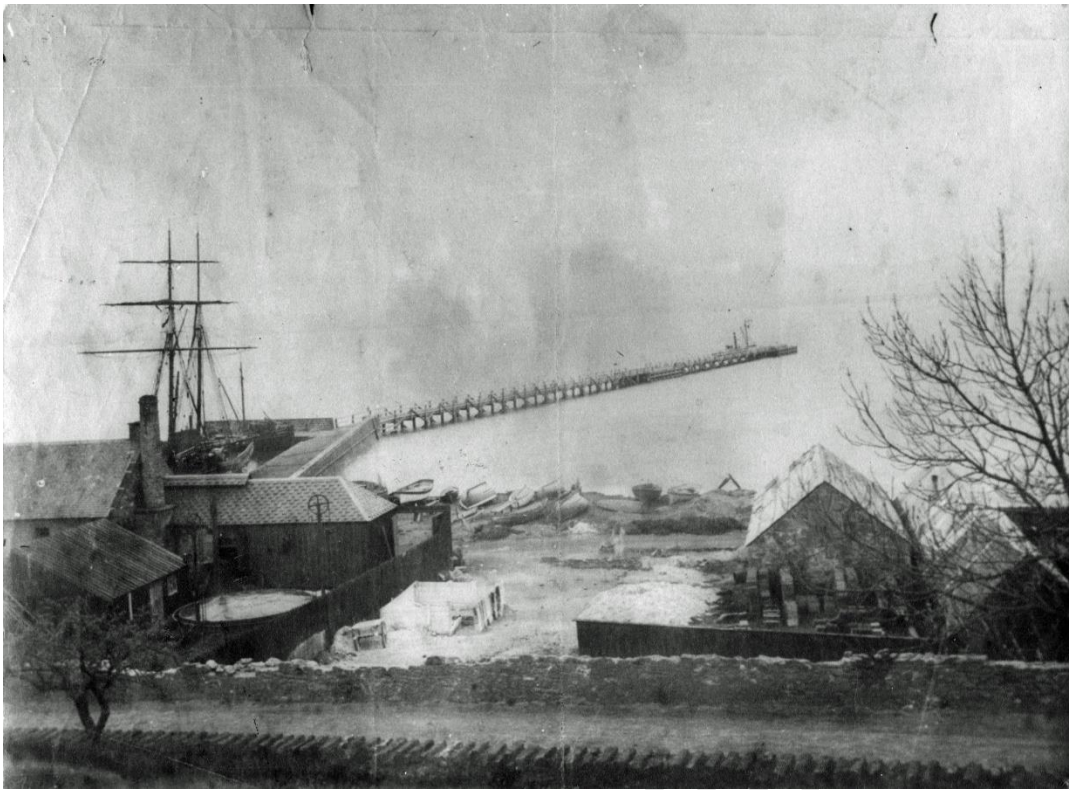
Rosemarkie, December 8, 1856."

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This is a map from **1871** (published in 1881). It shows some of the fine villas built since 1832 implying some wealth was in the town. It names the gas works and the sawmill (space presently occupied by post Second World War bungalows). The long building west of the sawmill aligned NNW – SSE was the distillery and this building still exists and is partly converted into apartments. The water for the distillery came from a dam to the north of the main road in the area occupied now by The Oaks. The mason's yard was attached to the sawmill. The 'PH' is the Shore Inn – now a garden for Marine Cottage. The building nearest to the harbour and with a weighing machine to its rear was the Harbour Store (also known as the Weigh House or Steamer Store) and was the earliest building established at the harbour. 'MP' is for mooring posts and 'WT' is a water tap.

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This is an unusual view of the harbour⁴. As well as providing a good perspective of the pier (opened in 1882 – see Part 3) it also shows a sailing vessel believed to be the ***Dispatch*** (see Part 4) so is probably post 1892. The enlargement below shows the gas works with its circular '**gasometer**' which is butting on to the Harbour Store left of the chimney⁵ (This space was occupied by 'Harbourside' built in 1956 and demolished in 2021). The various large metal mooring posts around the harbour today are thought to be part of the gas retorts – 'reuse' is nothing new!



⁴ Groam House Museum Collection

⁵ Groam House Museum Collection

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The picture above gives some details of the **mason's yard** (left) and **sawmill** (right). Visible drawn-up on the shore are a number of small open boats – probably used for salmon fishing.



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This is the **Shore Inn** probably taken early in the 20th century⁶ Below is a close-up of the sign above the door which says 'Shore Inn, John Smith licensed to retail beer, spirits & wines'. The lady may be 'Frugal Maggie' – the publican was known as 'Thrifty John'⁷.



The Shore Inn still appears on the 1905/6 map but had gone by the early 1930s⁸

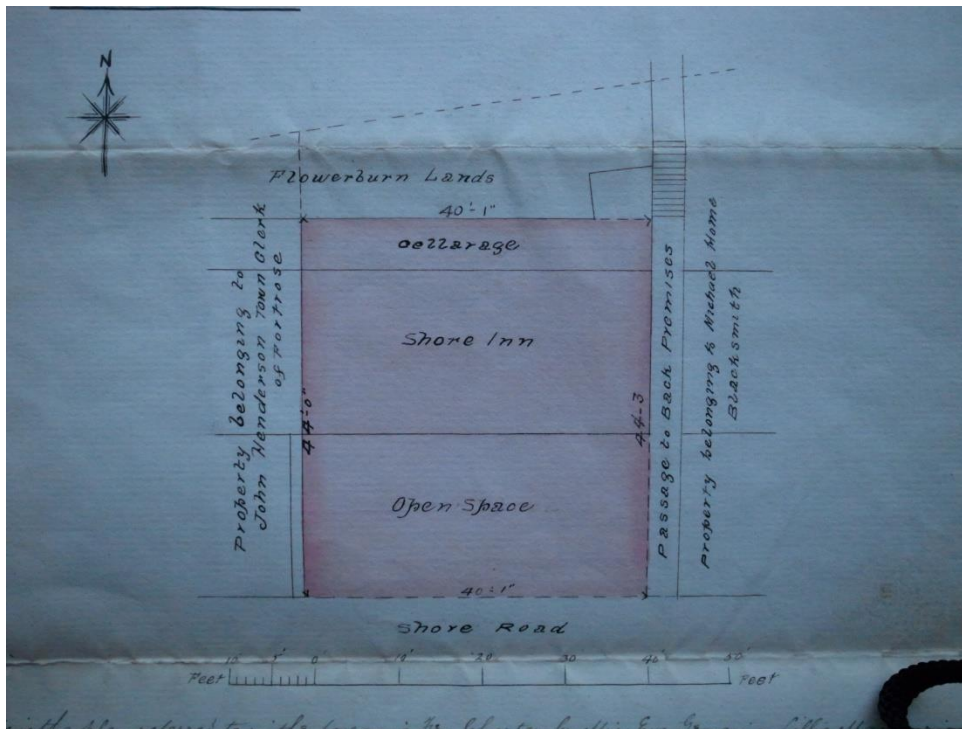
From papers regarding the Shore-Inn held by the Mrs Kathleen Armstrong, previous owner of Marine Cottage, whose garage and garden encompasses the space previously occupied by the inn, the **title was quite involved**. In 1895 Miss Eva Mackenzie of Flowerburn had completed a Feu Charter in favour of Miss Janet Stewart 'and others' (equally between 4 other members of the Stewart family!) on a 'piece of ground at the shore of Fortrose on which a Public House has been erected'. The pub is shown on the 1871 map so up to 1895 it is reasonable to suppose that Miss Mackenzie had tenants running the pub. The 1895 plan shows the property to the west as belonging to John Henderson, Town Clerk of Fortrose, with a passage to the east between the inn and property belonging to Michael Home, blacksmith.

⁶ Groam House Museum Collection

⁷ Groam house Museum have dated the photo to 1899 and identified the lady as Hannah Mackenzie

⁸ Information from George Taylor

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Plan from the 1895 Feu Charter relating to the Shore Inn

On 20th November 1901, the property was sold to 'Mrs Alice Mary Williamson or Smith residing at the Shore Inn Fortrose widow of John Smith Contractor & Inn Keeper at Fortrose' for £420 indicating that up to this point the Smiths had been the tenants. Alice Smith then used the Inn as security (via a bond) for a loan of £350 from John David Davidson, Solicitor, Forres. John David Davidson died in 1903 and the bond passed to another group of solicitors acting as trustees. Alice Smith managed a partial discharge (£100) of the bond in 1905 but the solicitors then 'assigned' the remaining bond in favour of Mrs Mary Ann Isabella Davidson of Inverness. Alice Smith finally discharged the debt in May 1908 through what appears to have been a sale to '**John Mackenzie, Ship Captain**, recently at Pier House, Kenmore, Perthshire, now proprietor of the Shore Inn'. John Mackenzie paid Ann Davidson £400 and Alice Smith £100. However, other documents show that John Mackenzie had borrowed the £400 from Ann Davidson rather than paid her via an agreement at 5% interest and later documents indicate that he had borrowed the £100 too from Alice Smith.

Unfortunately, business did not go well for Captain John Mackenzie and on 13 June 1910 he had to sign a document which began:

'I John Mackenzie, Inn Keeper Shore Inn Fortrose considering that my affairs have become embarrassed, and that I am unable to pay the several debts due by me, in consequence of which I have been requested to grant a Trust Disposition and Conveyance for behoof of my Creditors,

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as aftermentioned; Therefore I the said John Mackenzie do hereby Alienate, Dispose, Assign, Convey, and Make over from me and heirs, executors, and successors, to and in favour of John Reid Sutherland, Solicitor, Inverness.'

This is similar to calling in the Receiver. John Sutherland then put-up the Shore Inn for **disposal via a public roup** on 29 March 1911 with an 'upset' price of £520 (effectively the reserve). The articles of roup record the creditors as Arthur Bell & Sons, wine merchants (£200) and Archibald Arrol & Sons, Brewers, (£200) – it would appear that the winner of the roup would also take on these debts. In another strange twist in the story, the purchase, for £525, was made by 'Mrs Margaret Macdonald or Mackenzie, **wife** of the said John Mackenzie.' The £520 then cleared the debt to Ann Davidson (including interest) and to Ann Smith now remarried and also known as Finlayson (who had in the meantime passed on her bond Mrs Susanna Myers or Jeans, wife of Alfred Jeans, Wine Merchant, Forres!). After that, the trail goes cold but at some subsequent point the land becomes part of Marine Cottage's garden.



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This photograph⁹ shows the Harbour Store 'through' the masts of the small fishing boat. The Harbour Store stood until around 1949¹⁰. The gap in the buildings in the foreground is where the Shore Inn stood. The building to the right is the barn now known as 'Quay House' (and referred to as such from here onwards). The origins of **Quay House** are sometimes mis-reported. In some references it is listed as a granary (grain store) built in 1813 – probably because it has been confused with the Harbour Store. Both building have external steps on their east gable but the Harbour Store steps run-up from the front (south side) of the building whereas the Quay House steps run-up from the rear (north side). Both the Harbour Store and Quay House would have been used to store grain.

Quay House does not appear on the 1871 map and is first seen on the chart with the application to build a pier dated 1878. The deeds show that the use of the land was acquired from the Burgh (common land) by **Michael Home**, Blacksmith of Rosemarkie, at a public roup (auction) on 17 July 1869. His was the only bid having offered £1 10s per year in Feu Duty. It seems unlikely that Michael Home built on the land although he did operate the smithy to the rear of Quay House. Michael Home passed (assigned) the land to **Kenneth Mackenzie**, ship owner of Courthill, Rosemarkie on 18 May 1872. Mackenzie held the land until 18 May 1896 so it is highly likely that it was he who built the original structure. Mackenzie passed the land to **Andrew Maciver** described as 'sometime Accountant of the Caledonian Bank Limited, Fortrose, and thereafter Corn and Meal Merchant, Fortrose. Andrew Maciver must have had financial difficulties as his 'estates' were sequestrated, and **Thomas Henderson** acquired the title on 3 April 1902. There is a story locally that Lipton's the grocers acquired the building as a store in anticipation that Fortrose would be used as a naval base and would require supplies – however, this did not happen despite many fleet manoeuvres in the Firth before the First World War. George Taylor recalled seeing a Lipton's sign on the building but nothing is recorded in the deeds however the Fortrose Town Council meeting of 18 November 1912 records:

Submitted letter from Mr A. Dunlop Munro, manager at Greenock for Messrs William Miller Ltd., Portsea, dated 13th instant as to the store at the Fortrose Pier, that it may not be required by them for another year if the report is correct that Fortrose is likely to be discontinued as a base for the Torpedo Boats. The letter was ordered to lie on the table in the meantime.

William Miller was a naval contractor who provided canteen facilities (similar to the more recent NAAFI) so this may be behind the Lipton's story although the store referred to is probably the Harbour Store, not 'Quay House'.

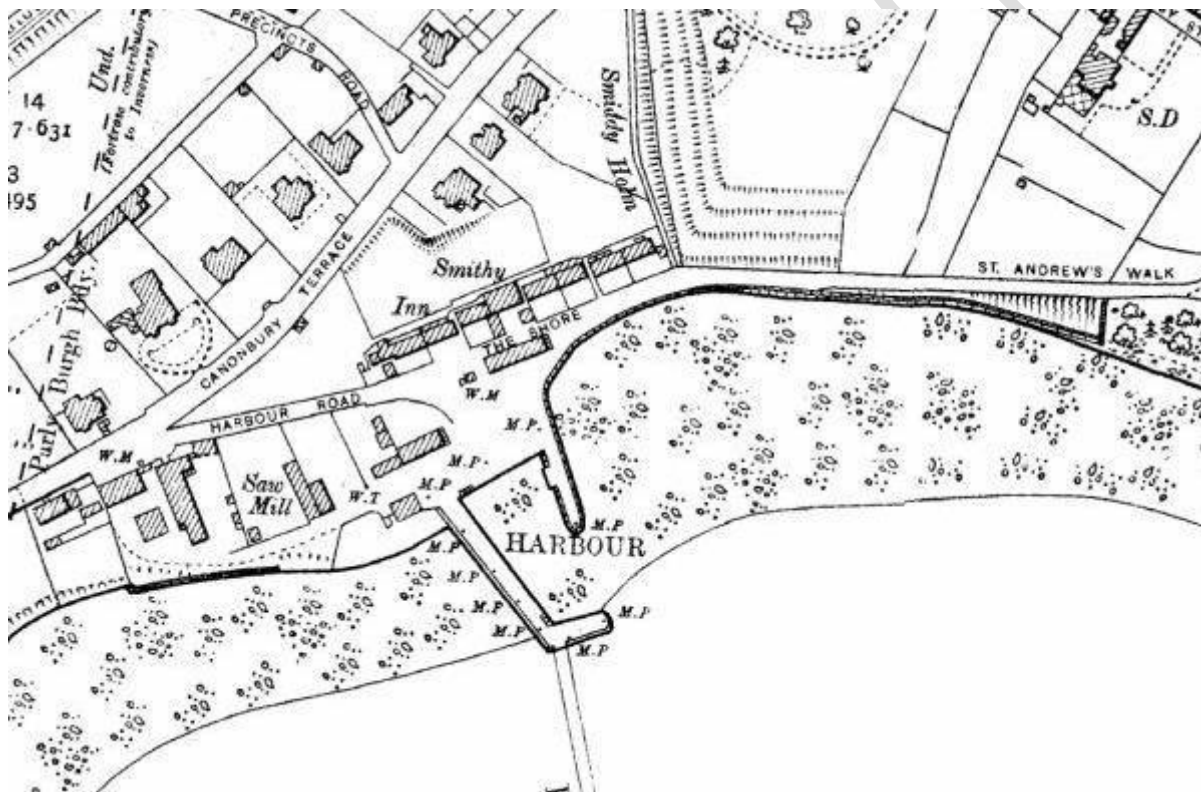
⁹ Groam House Museum Collection

¹⁰ Information from George Taylor

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Thomas Henderson passed title of 'Quay House' to the **Highland Agricultural Company Limited** on 13 June 1935 for £400. At some point later, the title was acquired by Mackay family who also operated the West End Stores, and they sold the building in 1961 to the factor of Rosehaugh Estate who converted it to a dwelling.

The enormous stacks of wood show how active the sawmill (owned by **Wylie's**) was. The mill produced pit props, railway sleepers and wagon beds¹¹ and worked through to the 1920s although the harbour continued to handle timber cargos until the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. For those intimate with the mud in the harbour it is interesting to note that the level 80 to 90 years ago is similar to today's judged by the steps in the North-West corner.



The map above shows the situation in **1905/6**. The gas works is no longer noted although some of the building is still shown. The row of 3 houses on the brae above the shore cottages has been built (Arawa – the middle house – is known to have been built in 1896¹²) and there the smithy east of the Shore Inn is also shown. Quay House also appears to the south of the smithy. There is a building south of the old gas works - this was the **scaffie's hut** where the 'bin' man kept his horse and cart. George Taylor

¹¹ Information from George Taylor

¹² Information from David Pocock

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recalled that prior to the Second World War the scaffie was Dan Cameron who was a First World War veteran – George would occasionally feed the horse if Dan Cameron was on holiday. The scaffie's horse appears frequently in the Burgh around WW2. The hut disappeared in the early 1950s¹³ and the area around the hut was the town midden – now part of the dinghy park (which was extended seawards in the 1960s)! The 'M.P' on the map denotes mooring posts and the 'W.M' weighing machines. At the top of Harbour Road there is a W.M outside a building which still exists and is known as the **West End Stores** (now 2 dwellings). This had been a general merchant's store run by J & T Henderson (we will hear more about John Henderson later on – Thomas Henderson has already been mentioned as the owner of Quay House from 1902 to 1935) selling cattle feed, iron mongery, coal and stoves¹⁴. There were 2 coal chutes in front of the West End Stores (under the windows) that dropped in to 2 large storage areas under the building accessible from the south via large barn doors. The coal was man handled up the hill from the harbour before being fed into the chutes to drop back to near harbour level. Later on an external storage shed was built behind the building and the base and some retaining walls still exist. The West End Stores carried on until the 1990s owned by the MacKay family before being converted to dwellings. West of these stores was the Taylor family home (Craigwood – built in 1875 by George Taylor's grandfather) and workshops (originally on the ground floor but later on in a separate shed as the ground floor was need for living space as the family expanded) for wheel making, joinery and funeral services including coffin making.

¹³ Information from George Taylor

¹⁴ Information from George Taylor

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This fine view is taken from a glass plate produced by Valentine's and is in the Groam House Museum collection. The railway line is visible in the foreground indicating that the picture is **1894 or later**. The 3 houses, including Arawa on the southside of the main road have yet to be built which indicates that the picture is **before 1896**. This is corroborated to some extent because the Rosehaugh Estate Office, later to become Kindeace Lodge which was built sometime before 1904, is also absent from the picture although there does appear to be a mound of rubble or other material close to the area where the office was built.

The large house in the middle ground is **Craig Dhu** owned by Thomas Henderson.

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Mound of rubble close to where Kindeace Lodge is today.

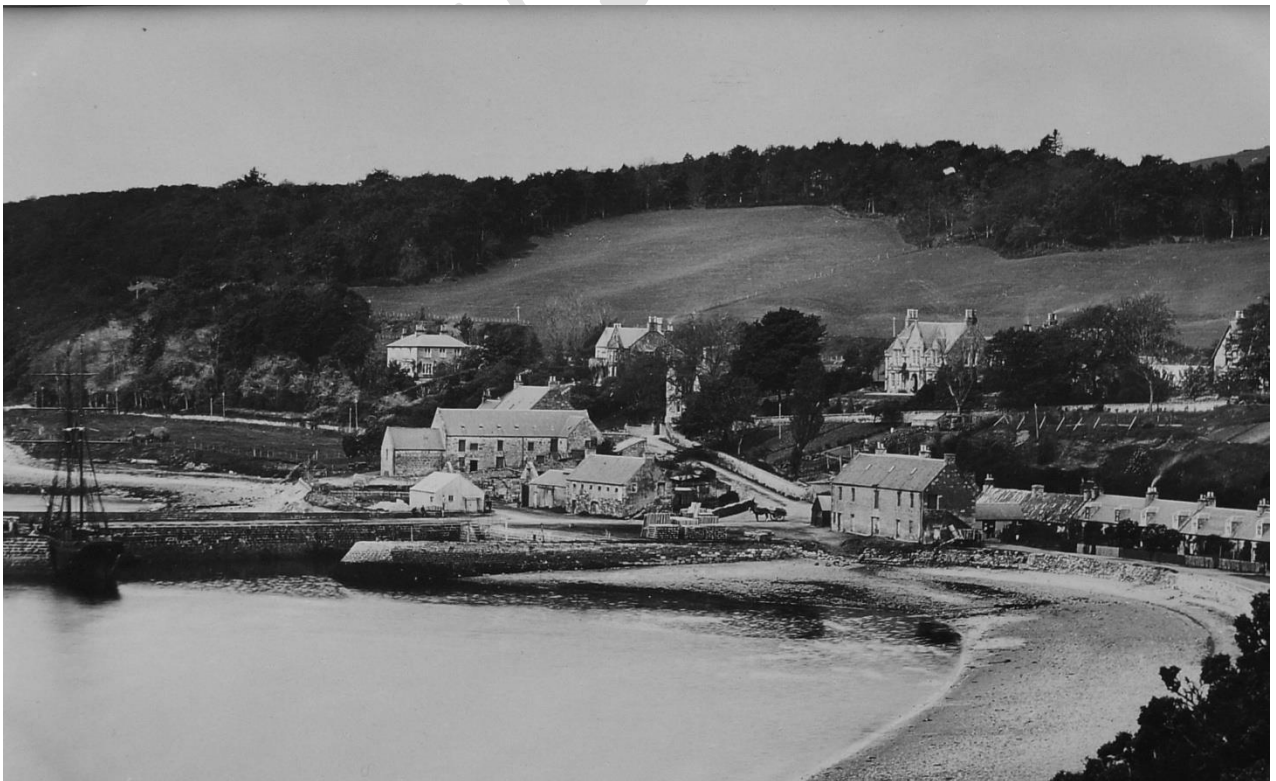


The gas works' chimney is visible centre frame.

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There are at least 2 vessels in the harbour. The schooner could be the **Annie**. The other vessel has a very tall single mast (with top mast). The tide is quite low with Craig an Roan rocks visible. The closest building is Craigwood with the West End Stores to the left; the stepped building is the distillery.



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This very good quality picture¹⁵ is as interesting for the information at the **peripheries** as it is at the centre. It dates from after the Rosehaugh Estate Office (now Kindeace Lodge) was built (circa 1904).

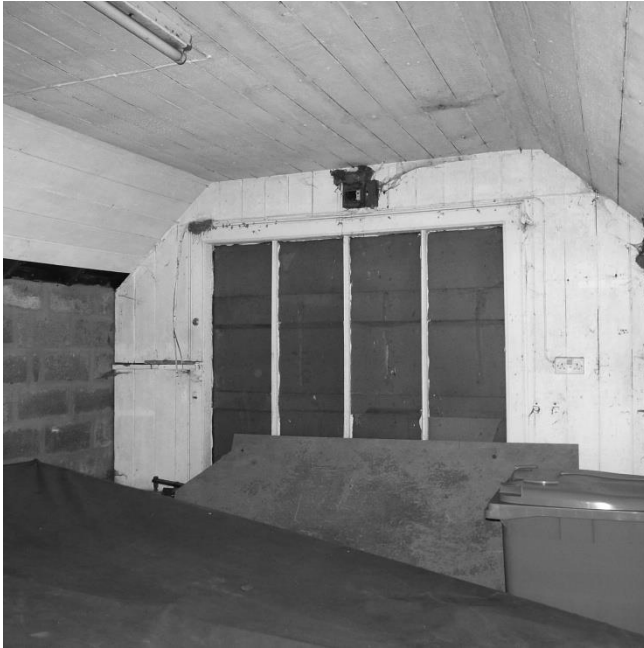


This enlargement gives a rare view of the 2 buildings behind Quay House that are no longer there – the nearer one of these was the **smithy** operated by Michael Home. The Shore-Inn deeds indicate that the further building (probably thatched) also belonged to Michael Home. The roof line of Marine Cottage can just be seen 'above' Quay House and the end gable of the Shore-Inn is also visible. The hut to the left of Quay House – now part of the area occupied by the Clubhouse - is for a **weigh machine**. The traverse extension to the smithy has a **bicycle** in front of a wide door. The traverse extension still exists and has been extended as a garage for Quay House.

¹⁵ D Pocock collection

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George Taylor recalled it as the workshop for George MacFarlane who stayed at Fuchsia Cottage (in the photo above with the dormer windows). George Taylor remembered that the workshop had a glazed window in the south gable and this is still present but has been blocked off externally.

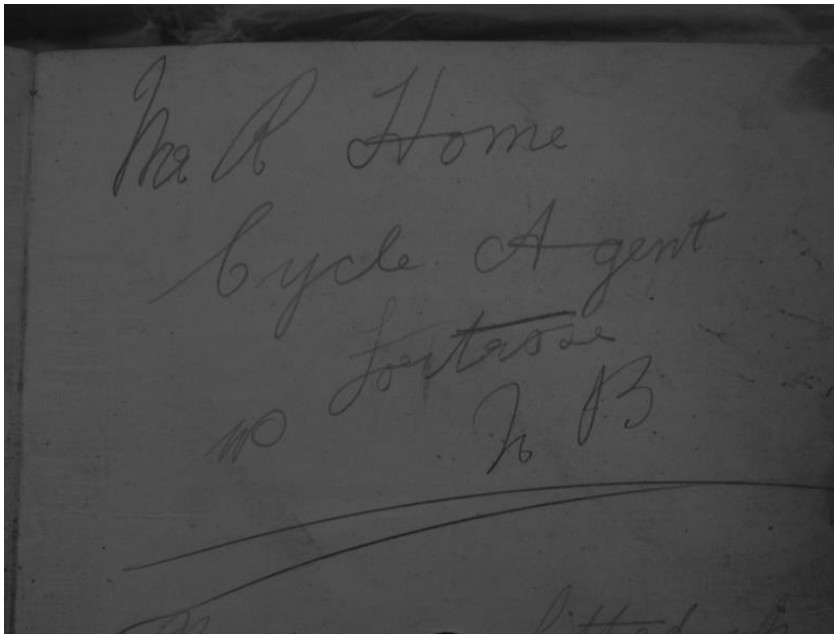


The blocked off window in the old workshop.

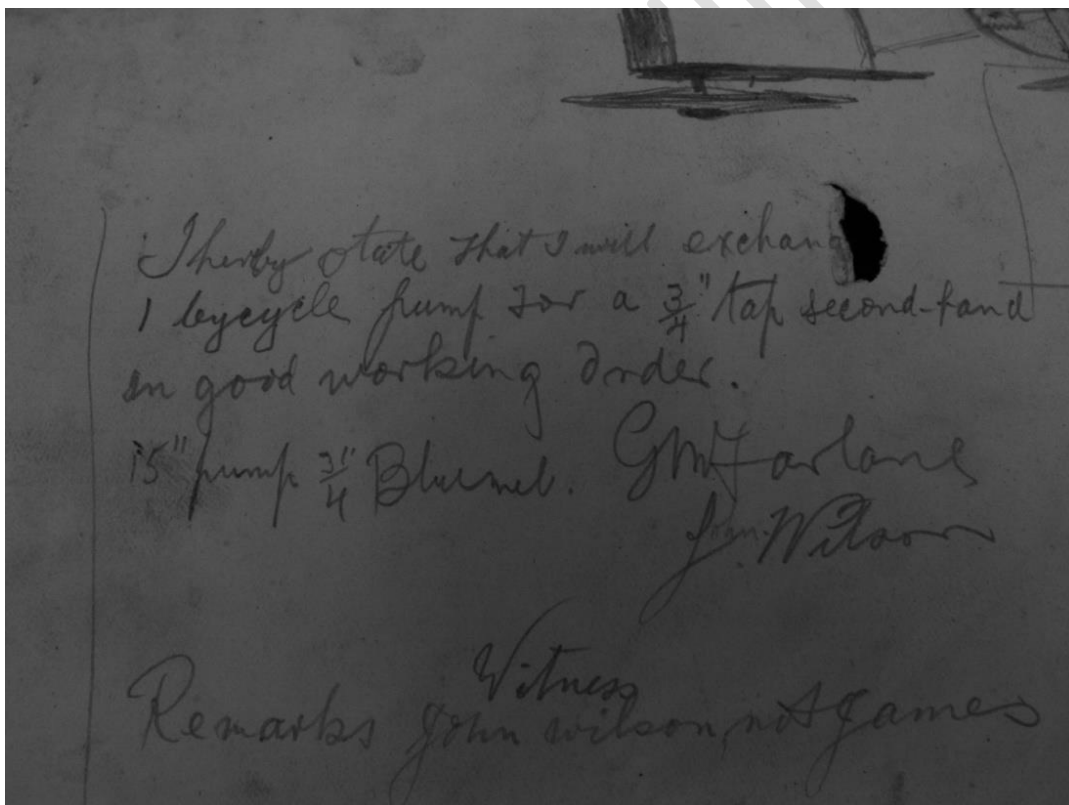
George also believed that at one point around the First World War a bicycle hire business was run from this building. This has been corroborated by hire records held by Groam House Museum¹⁶ which show Mr R Home as the Cycle Agent, Fortrose. Mr R Home was Bob Home, the son of Michael Home the blacksmith.

¹⁶ ROMGH.1993.7 Register: cycle/garage 1913-28 &
ROMGH.1993.9 Garage Records Fortrose 1928-40

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George MacFarlane would seem to have had a business association with Bob Home and this entry appears in the records:



It records a swop of a bicycle pump for a second-hand tap – John Wilson being a plumber.

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This photo¹⁷ shows Bob Home with the moustache with John Wilson standing behind him. Top left is Jack Stewart who was a grocer on the high street (the same Jack Stewart who is believed to be in one of the pictures of the pier in Part 3). George MacFarlane's brother Jimmy ran the garage business in the high street and at some point the cycle hire records went up to the garage and eventually were given to Groam House Museum.

¹⁷ From the late Neil Wilson, son of John Wilson, via John Mackenzie
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The photo above shows the private garage owned by Jimmy MacFarlane that used to stand parallel with George MacFarlane's workshop/bicycle hire building. Jimmy's garage was demolished in late 2013 and new private garage has been erected in its place.

The records list cycle hires in 1913 and then again in 1921; until late 1921, all the hires recorded are to navy personnel and the location of the building, at the harbour but after the ferry services had long been terminated and well away from the railway station, hints that the business was aimed at the Royal Navy sailors on shore leave. There is more detail in Part 5.

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This shows all that remains of the smithy today:



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This enlargement shows 2 **people sitting on the wall** by the scaffie's hut. The roof is off the building that was the mason's and there is no sign of the building (sawmill) that had stood immediately behind it. There are piles of timber in front of Quay House, so this probably dates to the period when the sawmill had stopped working but timber from a sawmill in Avoch was still being loaded at the harbour.

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This photo shows a very quiet scene taken **shortly before the Second World War**. The Shore Inn has gone and the Harbour Store and Quay House appear to be deserted. The piles of timber are also gone but mooring lines on the left indicate the presence of a vessel. The motorboat (**the Lizzie**) and dinghy belonged to Bob Home¹⁸. The remains of the wooden posts used to hold vessels off the sloping wall of the mole or Eastern wall are still evident. The car in front of Marine Cottage is a Morris 8 and may be the same car that appears later on with the *Jesmond* and *Fernside* (Part 4).

¹⁸ Information from George Taylor
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