

# THE LAIRDS OF OTTER

by  
Willie Logan



Edited by John F A Rankin ©



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## HEADINGS

	Page
<i>Preface</i>	8
<i>The Old Laird</i>	11
<i>Origin of the name</i>	12
<i>Fishing rights</i>	13
<i>Arrival of Patrick Rankin</i>	13
<i>Steamer rivalry</i>	14
<i>John MacLachlan meets the laird</i>	15
<i>Kilfinan Bay - 1852</i>	16
<i>Out of season work - Irish workmen</i>	17
<i>Garry</i>	18
<i>Refurbishment</i>	19
<i>Years of progress</i>	20
<i>James Mackie and Kilfinan Estate</i>	22
<i>Incorporation of Kilfinan Estate</i>	23
<i>Mackie's return to Otter</i>	24
<i>The enlarged Otter</i>	25
<i>Sea freight</i>	25
<i>Annfield parks</i>	26
<i>Keeping the peace</i>	27
<i>Annfield Cottage</i>	28
<i>Ardgadden - deferred</i>	29
<i>Fearnoch</i>	29
<i>Lindsaig</i>	30
<i>Inverryne</i>	32
<i>Drum</i>	33
<i>Lime kilns</i>	34
<i>Lindsaig mill</i>	35
<i>John Logan comes to Otter</i>	36
<i>The laird's household</i>	37
<i>Village life</i>	38
<i>Willie's home</i>	39

## HEADINGS

Continued

<i>Land improved</i>	40
<i>Straightening of Kilfinan burn</i>	41
<i>The Rankin mausoleum</i>	42
<i>Young Patrick</i>	43
<i>The laird's smithy</i>	44
<i>The Misses Rankin</i>	45
<i>The boathouse</i>	45
<i>Red faces</i>	47
<i>The church at Kilbride</i>	48
<i>Family origins</i>	49
<i>Responsibilities to the Church</i>	51
<i>Kilfinan farm - deferred</i>	52
<i>A start on Ardgadden</i>	53
<i>Death of the Old Laird</i>	54
<i>Trusteeship</i>	54
<i>Kilfinan Hotel</i>	55
<i>Jock's Lodge</i>	56
<i>Tighanraidh</i>	57
<i>The Minister's grazing rights</i>	58
<i>The succession</i>	59
<i>Absent laird</i>	60
<i>Jock Scott in bother</i>	60
<i>Tenants at Otter</i>	61
<i>The curling match</i>	63
<i>Short-lived lairds</i>	64
<i>The Major W B Rankin era</i>	65
<i>Factor James Main</i>	66
<i>Pier project</i>	67
<i>The reduction in cultivation</i>	67
<i>Sawmill</i>	68
<i>Bootmaker Leitch</i>	68

## HEADINGS

Continued

<i>Children at Kilfinan School</i>	69
<i>The mail contract</i>	70
<i>Smithies</i>	70
<i>The promised land at Drum Point</i>	72
<i>Guy Rankin at Otter</i>	72
<i>Kilfinan fishermen</i>	73
<i>Continuity</i>	73
<i>Factor James Barton</i>	73
<i>Willie as Gamekeeper</i>	74
<i>Copper at Otter</i>	75
<i>Miners' accommodation</i>	76
<i>Transporting the ore</i>	77
<i>The Great War</i>	78
<i>After the war</i>	79
<i>Motor Launch 'Otter'</i>	79
<i>Adventure at sea</i>	80
<i>Guy Rankin's opinion</i>	81
<i>Encounters with poachers</i>	82
<i>Two wild men</i>	83
<i>Another chase at sea</i>	84
<i>Pursuit to Tarbert</i>	85
<i>Laird Rankin joins the hunt</i>	87
<i>Poachers from Ardrishaig</i>	90
<i>My reputation lives on</i>	92
<i>Time marches on</i>	92
<i>Park Cottage</i>	93
<i>River bank dispute</i>	94
<i>Copper again</i>	96
<i>Another laird ...</i>	98
<i>Otter! Otter! Where is that place?</i>	101
<i>Appendix 1: Data from gravestones</i>	103
<i>Appendix 2: Notes on the Rankins of Otter, Cleddans etc.</i>	104

## Illustrations

Otter House	Front cover
Logans and Rankins	10
Steamship Azalea	14
Northern gateway to Otter House	21
James Mackie and the postmaster	23
Dan Martin	26
Annfield Cottage	28
Fearnoch farm	30
Lindsaig farm	31
Inveryne farm	32
Drum farm	33
Lime kiln in Kilfinan	34
Lindsaig mill, cottage and smithy	36
John Logan at 80	37
The Logans at Home farm	40
The Rankin mausoleum	43
The boathouse	46
Kilfinan farm	55
Kilfinan Hotel	56
Jock's Lodge	57
Tighanraidh	58
Percy Aitken's canoe <i>Cis</i>	62
The folding boat	63
Otter House extension	66
Kilfinan School	69
Smithy at West Lindsaig	71
Motor Launch <i>Otter</i>	80
Guy Rankin	82
Park Cottage	94
Tigh Cladaich and Auchalick Bay	100
The author	Back cover

## Editor's preface

“Willie, you really must write it all down, for posterity.”

It was my mother speaking, as we sheltered from a sudden shower.

Willie Logan had met me and my sister for the first time that summer and he was already like an uncle to us. He was about 80 and staying at Jocks Lodge; he had appeared at Park Cottage that morning with a Winchester rifle and the image of a rabbit crayoned on a piece of cardboard. We all walked up beside Kilfinan burn to the disused coppermine, an ideal place for target practice - and a place where I would later spend happy hours stalking live rabbits. After a half hour of expert and patient instruction on the skills of stalking and shooting rabbits, on came the rain and Willie led us to a natural shelter under the overhang of the high bank of the burn.

“A handy place to lie in wait for salmon poachers” he commented. “You’d be surprised at the methods they use - dynamite, cyanide - I mind one local poacher - he spotted a salmon lying under the bank of the ‘Minister’s pool’ there, whipped his kilt off and slipped into the pool to ‘guddle’ the fish - he brought his hand slowly up under the salmon from behind, grabbed it behind the gills and hurled it onto the bank. But I got to



his kilt before he did!”

At least a year passed and my parents were at Park Cottage again when Willie appeared on the doorstep. There were no telephones in the village and it was quite normal to visit uninvited.

Willie laid on the table an exercise book containing twenty six pages of neat and closely-written text. The story recounted above was not in the book, but he did write down some other anecdotes, as well as a lot of previously unrecorded local history - much of it passed on to Willie by his father.

Here is Willie's book - unaltered apart from the addition of a few notes.



**This photograph, taken in 1947, shows Jack, the last of the Rankin lairds, with his children Hazel and John, flanked by Willie Logan on the left and his brother David on the right**

Otter Estate, situated on the sunny Eastern slopes of Loch Fyne, Argyll, world-famed for its herring fishing, is one of the beauty spots of the Western Highlands.

## The Old Laird

The Estate was acquired in the year 1852 by Patrick Rankin, coal owner and laird of Cleddans and Auchengray Estates in Lanarkshire. What induced that man to come to, at that time, such an outlandish spot from his familiar Lanarkshire scenes we can only conjecture. Certainly the new laird developed an intense love for the place and had not long arrived when his fame spread around as a pioneer in the reclamation of land and in transforming his estate from a barren waste into a prosperous countryside. Just as the names may seem a bit complicated to the reader, so too the titles - let us give a detailed explanatory statement so that the situation be correctly understood.

## Origin of the name

Otter Estate, when purchased by Patrick Rankin, consisted of Otter House, what are now known as the Home Policies, parks, woodlands etc., Tighanraidh hill with arable land adjoining, West and East Lindsaig farms, Fearnoch and Ardgadden farms; in all about 2140 acres. Let us now haste back to the former owners, Campbells. We are familiar with the name Otter Ferry,

Otter\* Spit - long sandbank with lighthouse at the end - these subjects were situated on what at that time was termed Otter Estate.

One of the Campbell lairds sold part of this estate to another Campbell, retaining East and West Lindsaig, Fearnoch and Ardgaddan; he bought the small Estate of Auchagoyle and came down and took up residence at the small two-flatted building known up to that time as Auchagoyle House. Retaining his Title Deeds, Fishing Rights as well, this Campbell called his new estate Otter, leaving his successors to find a name for the estate at Otter Ferry. Ballimore, this estate was termed, and succeeding owners of that property have felt a bit sore at the name

*\* Norse derivation, meaning a spit - Ed.*

'Otter' being transferred - one in particular would not condescend to say 'Otter' but said 'Kilfinan Estate' instead.

## Fishing rights

As already mentioned, fishing rights were transferred and these constituted an exclusive right to take salmon and sea trout on the coastline from mid Kilfinan Bay to Largiemore Burn in the north where it bordered the Castle Lachlan Estate. These fishing rights were exercised for a considerable number of years by Patrick Rankin's agents and the writer's father said he had many a good catch of salmon and sea trout up as far as Largiemore Burn. Owing to distance and time involved the fishing rights were allowed to lapse through not being exercised and in later years fishing for sea trout was confined to within the Fearnoch boundary in the north.

## Arrival of Patrick Rankin

With these explanatory statements we will now return to Otter House where the new laird, Patrick Rankin and family are domiciled. It is

difficult at this stage to give any precise account of the new laird's arrival, what were the members of his family and what his household staff consisted of, how he got his furniture there. Certainly the furniture did not come by road as no traction existed in those days.



Steamship Azalia

## Steamer rivalry

Clyde steamers were then in their infancy and great rivalry existed between two shipping

companies, Williamson, and Buchanan, who each serviced a steamer to Tighnabruaich and Kames - so keen was the competition that one of the steamers gave a free bottle of ginger beer to passengers travelling on a 6d fare from Tighnabruaich to Rothesay.

From this we may reasonably conclude that the laird of Otter would give the shipping men a trial with his furniture removal. Whether he got his bottle of ginger beer or not is another matter.

## John MacLachlan meets the Laird

On the day of the laird's arrival a small boy coming up the shore road below Otter House saw a strange apparition, something he had never seen before. A tall man wearing a big brown 'tile' hat coming towards him; the boy felt inclined to turn and run, but kept bravely on. On meeting, the big man spoke very kindly and asked the boy a great many questions. Where he stayed? Who his father was? and many other questions. This boy and the laird, for the new laird he happened to be, became

great friends, and the boy helped his pal sometimes with his wee barrow when he was busy at excavation work. The boy's name was John MacLachlan and he lived at that time in the vicinity of the present Shore Cottage. His father, Parrick Allister, or Capt Peter MacLachlan to give him his due title, owned the sailing smack 'Lizzie' about 35 tons carrying capacity and this vessel supplied not only the needs of Kilfinan but a large stretch of Loch Fyne side as well.

## Kilfinan Bay - 1852

The writer has often tried to visualise Patrick Rankin as he walked down the rough track to the shore on his tour of inspection and how interested he must have been in the sight that awaited him on getting down. Loch Fyne was then in its heyday as a herring fishing ground and some twenty fishing boats, each managed by three men, set out from Kilfinan Bay weekly in the course of the fishing season.

Nonsense! a present day onlooker will exclaim. Where on earth could all those men stay? Yes they had their humble dwellings alright. If one looks carefully at all the glens, hillsides, in the



vicinity of Kilfinan, the remains of dwellings are certainly there. How quickly any sign of man's habitation on this earth vanishes. In some places you may see a few old trees and nearby a heap of stones overgrown with the inevitable nettle and one can hardly realise that here in the past young children romped and played, grown-ups went to their daily task and love, comedy, tragedy played their part. Now all is silent, as if life never existed. So it is with the Fishermen's Green, one time termed 'Emribowie' Green, opposite the present-day coalhouse near the mouth of Kilfinan Burn. On that green it was quite common to see sixty men mending nets on a Saturday afternoon and a great stretch of poles along the river bank for drying nets.

## Out of season work - Irish workmen

All this has been given in detail as it supplies a valuable key to Patrick Rankin's wonderful accomplishment in the transformation of his new estate. Here was the labour, or part of it. During the winter the fishermen were to a great extent unemployed, jobbing about their crofts

and so forth, and were glad to earn something to eke out the family income. So that the new laird had no difficulty in getting labour for his many projects. Later a number of Irish labourers were employed and while this pushed on the work it did not make for harmony as the Irishmen and natives had many a fight. One of the first things the laird did was to raise the weekly wage from 12/- to 18/- and there was trouble here as Campbell, Balliemore, had to follow suit, and was much displeased about it.

So annoyed was Campbell that he came down to see Laird Rankin over the matter, but it was rather a sharp interview and the wage increase was to stand. Aye! said Patrick, your men may manage on 12/- a week and they will steal the remainder. With his workmen the new laird was hailed as a hero, but there is an amusing sequel to this. If his men were getting a better pay than their neighbours they speedily found that they had to work.

## Garry

Coming on a squad of his Irish workmen rather suddenly one day he spied one of them working with his jacket on. Garry! Garry! You can't work with your jacket on, said the laird.

The Irishman's ready wit rose to the occasion:  
Sorry Sor, I've nae shirt.

Dear! Dear! said the Laird, I'll soon get you a  
shirt and off he went and brought Garry a shirt.

The effect of this on the workmen was magical  
and right willingly they put their hearts into  
their work. No more working with jackets on  
when employed by Laird Rankin.

In the passing we must here place on record a  
matter of kindly interest. The said Irishman  
Garry worked on Otter Estate with unswerving  
loyalty for the remainder of his life, latterly  
jobbing about the different farms.

In his latter days, Gavin Rankin, laird, granted  
Garry a pension and a house at the Newlands,  
and there he ended his days in peace.

Well known to the writer in his boyhood, Garry  
was of a short stocky type of build and  
brimming with humour, and simply loved to  
talk about his old Master. "Shure! Bedad! The  
Old Laird was a Gentleman."

## Refurbishment

Mention has been made earlier of Otter House  
being a small two-flatted building and any

office buildings there were must have been very primitive. No fences existed as a boundary along the avenue side and cattle ranged up to and all around the house. Matters were well thought out and carefully planned by the new Laird.

A start was made with the House first and a new wing added, then the office buildings as they stand today, also the Home Farm buildings. Walled garden with tool house. Then the bridge at the gates where the road crosses to the Bleaching Green and old nursery. A great deal of work was done in carrying out the whole project, but in three years it was completed with the date inscribed in freestone

P.R.

1855

## Years of progress

Having the home quarters set right the improvement net spread ever outwards. The S.S. Lizzie was chartered to convey iron fencing for the avenue and shore road, 18 tons 10 cwt of railings. Then the iron gates, pillars and stonework came from the Old College, Glasgow.



The northern gateway to Otter House,  
as it survives to this day

Having this completed, it was now a case of planning the layout of arable land into sections, also the layout of woodlands. Right well was the matter planned, but it must have taken a man with a very stout heart and a lot of patience to bring the matter to fruition. Years, of course, it did take and details of this will be given later.

## James Mackie and Kilfinan Estate

While all the work was going on in the Otter House area other interests had to be looked after as well. There was Ardgaddan, Fearnoch and East and West Lindsaig farms to attend to, including tenants' requirements.

Now at this stage we will draw into the picture a very worthy man, James Mackie, drystone mason, a man who was 60 years on Otter Estate and served under five Rankin lairds. Mackie at the time we are referring to resided at a little cottage above Fearnoch farmhouse.

Laird Rankin employed Mackie to do some building alterations to the present ploughman's cottage, altering it from a thatched roof to a slated roof. Somehow or other they had a dispute and Mackie chucked up the contract. Laird Rankin of course was annoyed too.

On account of this quarrel Mackie had to shift from his Fearnoch quarters to Kilfinan Estate to be out of Laird Rankin's jurisdiction. Now the sequel is very amusing as told to me by Mackie himself.



James Mackie beside Kilfinan Post Office, with  
D Leitch, postmaster, in the doorway

## Incorporation of Kilfinan Estate

Kilfinan Estate at that time consisted of Kilfinan farm, Drum farm, Inveryne farm and the two public houses - the Black Bull, present Post Office, and Kilfinan Hotel. Kilfinan Estate was owned by a certain McAllister of Loupe Estate, Kintyre. Mrs Mackie was employed by Laird Rankin as dairymaid and continued on even after the quarrel. One morning the Laird said to Mrs Mackie "Tell Mackie I want to see

him". I went over, said Mackie, and the Laird delivered a thunderbolt. "I've bought Kilfinan Estate, Mackie, and be damned to you. You'll need to work for me now." Aye! said Mackie, I had to work for him, and I have worked on Otter Estate ever since, a matter of 60 years - and he qualified it all with a hearty laugh.

## Mackie's return to Otter

During the estrangement with the Laird, Mackie obtained employment at the building of Glen Caladh Castle, Kyles of Bute (owner Stephenson) and walked to his work every morning over Kilfinan Hill and Ben Bhreac and back the same way to Kilfinan after his day's work. Later he assisted to build some of the Tighnabruaich villas and was fortunate to get lodgings there and be saved the long tramp over the hill. So that when Laird Rankin's ultimatum came it was with much relief Mackie accepted the offer of employment and the tenancy of his house in the vicinity of the later copper mine workings was secure.



## The enlarged Otter

With the purchase of Kilfinan Estate at the sum of £15,500, we now have Otter Estate as it stands today, and the total acreage is increased to well over 4000 acres. The purchase meant undertaking many liabilities, but this was firmly faced, and step by step work proceeded. All the farm buildings at that time were in a very primitive condition, cottages on the estate, likewise, thatched roofs everywhere, slating practically unknown. As already stated the net of improvement ever widened. A very worthy man John Arthur was in charge of the labourers, while David Reid, forester, had another gang; work steadily proceeded and things began to take shape in the home policies.

## Sea freight

Drainage was also carried on and many cargoes of drainage tiles and Irish shell zinc were brought in to the beach by S.S. Lizzie. Apparently this vessel was too small for the work in hand, so Capt. MacLachlan acquired a larger vessel, 60 tons carrying capacity, the

"Kilpatrick Maid". Well known to the writer this boat was, in his boyhood days.

## Annfield parks

The reclamation of wild scrubby moorland to constitute arable land is a slow process as we all know and that is what was carried out on the Annfield parks as we know them today.



Dan Martin, tenant of Shore Cottage for many years

Two experienced men Rob MacLachlan and Dan Martin were employed blasting the rock where it outcropped to a certain depth. Then carters conveyed this rock to the site of the walls already mapped out and soil was taken from turf or "fak" dykes to level off the holes from which the stones had been blasted.

## Keeping the peace

With a lot of men working together on the place it was only natural they should have their petty disputes and grievances; for a time all went with their sorrows to the laird. However, he soon cured that and, latterly, not a soul would go near him with a complaint. The plan adopted was - should Murphy go to the Laird with a complaint about Flannigan's behaviour, the Laird would go direct to Flannigan and tell him what the complainer had said about him. Then there was a miniature "Donnybrook". While Mackie was building the dividing wall between the fields below Bellevue, the carter complained to the Laird that Mackie was using an awful lot of lime for building. Straight went the Laird to Mackie and told him what the carter had said. The very angry builder then sought out the

carter and they had the matter out. After this the Laird could mingle with the workmen undisturbed, peace reigned, no more grievances or tale bearing.

## Annfield Cottage

In the passing mention should be made of Annfield Cottage situated near the top end of the dividing wall which we have just referred to.



Editor's note: The present day (1990s) Annfield Cottage - pictured above - is a stone-built cottage, beside the road above the Annfield Parks; it undoubtedly existed in the author's time. For many years it was the home of Ena Mathieson, an employee of the Estate and friend of three generations of Rankins.

This cottage, a butt & ben, was occupied by Malcolm MacKellar, an old estate worker, and his family. Many years afterwards, in Gavin Rankin's time, the stones from this cottage, now in ruins, were carted to build a kennel in the wood at the top end of the Kennel Park.

## Ardgadden - deferred

Hark! What noise is that? 'Tis the Old Laird's voice. Hey! Hey! Hey! You doon there wi' that pen. What d'ye mean by a' this skiddlin' an' writing. Get on with the work. Get on with the building of my farm steadings.

After that admonition we really must get down to it. Ardgadden farm is first examined (tenant Crawford). The buildings on this farm were in such dilapidated condition and such would be the difficulties in making a road that it was decided to delay matters here for a time.

## Fearnoch

Fearnoch (tenant MacIntyre) was next examined. Yes, an immediate start to renew farm buildings was decided on here. A general

layout of arable land in sections, woodlands likewise, and the necessary walls and fences erected. Further a barn, and water-power threshing mill were erected as we see them today.



Fearnoch farmhouse and outbuildings

## Lindsaig

Next, East and West Lindsaig (tenants MacCallum) were surveyed. Now here we have a problem. As the buildings of both places were in a deplorable condition and the sites of both

entirely unsuitable, a decision was arrived at to form the two holdings into one farm and build a new farm steading complete with threshing mill.

That the site was well chosen we can judge today, not only for roads, but water power.

Peter Wilson, a Lanarkshire farmer, was the first tenant of the new farm. The ruins of East Lindsaig can still be seen about 300 yards east of the present farm steading. West Lindsaig was on the site of the present Lindsaig Cottage.



Lindsaig farm outbuildings - on the site of former East Lindsaig

## Inveryne

Inveryne was the next tackled (tenant Moran\*); the farm buildings here were in a similar condition to the others and a new farm steading had to be erected, two workmen's cottages, and the farm complete with threshing mill.



Land had to be laid out in sections, and the necessary walls and fences erected.

*\*Note: By chance at Inveryne in 1995 I met Andrew Thomson (I have his address), who is a descendant of tenant Moran - Ed.*



## Drum

Drum Farm is next taken in hand (tenant unknown) with the same difficulty as in Lindsaig. A new site had to be chosen for the farm steading. The old farm buildings were at Low Drum (the ruins can still be seen); a more central site was needed for convenient working of the land. The newly sited buildings also get advantage of a good supply of water from a never-failing spring.

No water power was however available to run a threshing mill, so a horse-operated mill was installed; tenants seemed to manage alright on this until in later years an engine was fitted. The stone required for building Drum farm steading was quarried from the limestone quarries near the building site by Rob MacLachlan and Dan Martin, and they also burned the necessary lime for building purposes from said limestone in a kiln adjoining the water fountain at the roadside.

## Lime kilns

The burning of limestone appears to have been quite commonplace at this period as evidenced by the lime kilns in the district.



[This disused kiln is at the centre of the village](#)

In the writer's time at Otter two limestone experts were taken round the various quarries and samples taken; their report (to Mr Barton, the estate factor) was that there was too much sand in the limestone to make it worthwhile working commercially.

## Lindsaig mill

Now we will take into the picture a very valuable asset to Otter Estate and to the whole community at that time - Lindsaig meal mill, in its present site.

All the buildings were renewed and the mill put in thorough working order. In the capable hands of Malcolm MacIntyre the needs of the whole countryside were served. Oats were carted by farmers from far and near to the mill, even from Glendaruel, and they got the oatmeal in due course. The miller also had a little shop where tobacco and confections could be had. In later years the milling was carried on by James MacIntyre, and a daughter still tenants one of the mill houses.



Lindsaig Mill with the cottage on left, smithy  
on the right - the mill was painstakingly restored around 1985

## John Logan comes to Otter

Now we come to a very interesting stage in our narrative and from now on we are in more intimate touch with the Old Laird's household.

It was customary for the Laird of Otter to pay customary visits to his Estates in Lanarkshire, Cleddans and Auchengray, to collect rents and mining royalties, and to inspect things generally. On the visit we are about to describe, he called on farmer Joseph Logan, Milncroft, Cleddans Estate, ascertaining that his eldest son John (my father) was employed as ploughman

at Wester Myvatt; so the Old Laird went there, with the result that he engaged this hefty 25 year old, who already had cups and medals to his credit for ploughing. To Patrick Rankin's great credit he took a paternal interest in this young man and installed him in Otter House in a room above his own bedroom.



The author's father at about 80 years of age

## The laird's household

Aye! my father said, that was to hear when I came in at night and went out in the morning. Be that as it may, great kindness was shown, and in fact they were all one family. For the first time we get an intimate view of Laird Rankin's household. There was the Laird himself, Dr Rankin his brother, Patrick Rankin

(grandson), Annie Rankin (granddaughter). The household staff consisted of Old Jean, housekeeper, maids three - Helen Wilkie, Jeanie Dow and Elizabeth Baird (my mother).

## Village life

My father used to talk in his later days about the first night he spent at Otter, saying he felt inclined to do a bunk the next day and make for Lanarkshire. He paid a visit to the Black Bull, and to the other pub further down the road, and what fighting and quarrelling went on among the natives and Irishmen. McPherson shouted to O'Brien 'Haud yer tongue! Whit are ye makin' a' the noise about!' Shure! Be me sowl! said O'Brien, Niver, niver, since I left Donegal did I git sich impidence. I'll larn ye - and made a swipe at McPherson. Go fer him said McCallum to McPherson. Bedad! are you in this too, big leathery face, tak' that, and gave one to McCallum.

Our friend Rob was in this too and a big Irishman got him down and was punching away when Rob managed to get his hand into his jacket and got hold of his knife. Pushing the closed knife hard against the Irishman's

stomach Rob said, hoo will this knife fit yer belly, and his opponent fearing a puncture speedily let go and jumped to his feet. Rob was up in an instant too and this time gave a better account of himself. John Spiers (farm hand) and John Logan quietly slipped away.

## Willie's home

Yes, the Laird was quite right in keeping the newcomer under his wing and had he not promised the Lady at Milncroft that he would see her son was alright? Alright!!! We should jolly well say he was.

In two years time John Logan married Elizabeth Baird and they were installed in the Home farm where they lived happily for sixty years and raised seven of a family, five sons and two daughters.

Sixty years married, sixty years in the same house, and just a month between them when they died. Truly a happy ending, aged 86 and 83 respectively.



John and Elizabeth outside the Home farm, where they brought up their seven children in two rooms  
(Willie on left of picture)

## Land improved

With an additional hand on the job, and especially as he was well up in agriculture, the Laird's plans were brought more quickly to fruition. The reclaimed land was swiftly brought under the plough and each field was green cropped and sown out in rotation, and seeing the land had been tile drained previously



it now responded well to the treatment. Despite the introduction of the rabbit to the area during the early fifties, at the period of which we write it was practically non-existent; no mention was made of rabbits at any rate.

Sheep were much the same, no mention made of them. Highland cattle were predominant. On Kilfinan hill at this time the stock was Highland cattle, no sheep.

Now, back to the thread of our story.

## Straightening of Kilfinan burn

About this time the Laird had another great project in hand - straightening the course of Kilfinan Burn. As we see the Burn today we note that its course from hill downwards to the bend at bottom is very straight. This project entailed an enormous amount of labour. So much labour that we couldn't imagine a scheme like that being undertaken today. However, this wonderful pioneer saw it would benefit him in his agricultural work and give him straight fields to plough instead of ever so many bends so he had the job carried out.

## The Rankin mausoleum

Now we have reached a period when a shadow is about to be cast over Otter House and its occupants. Dr Rankin had been in failing health for some time and died in this year, 1867, at the age of 70. Matters had now to be pushed on to have a private mausoleum erected, and meanwhile Dr Rankin was interred in the old churchyard, down at bottom end. The necessary granite was ordered for the mausoleum, Capt. MacLachlan's services brought in with S.S. Kilpatrick and material landed on the beach. Work was speedily set agoing, rock foundation blasted away on the mausoleum site, and then the building erected and sand carted from the shore by John Logan and others to fill in the cavity - and thus we have the Rankin mausoleum as it stands today.

Dr Rankin's remains were removed from the old churchyard and duly interred in the new cemetery.

It was customary on occasions like this to serve refreshments and readers will not perhaps be surprised to know that Old Dan fell into the burn during the removal operation.



[The Rankin family mausoleum at Kilfinan churchyard](#)

## Young Patrick

So busy have we been on building and land work that so far no time has been spared to bring the young Laird, Patrick Rankin, into the scene - grandson of the Old Laird. But henceforward we shall hear more about him. Young Patrick, apparently, had not the characteristics of his grandfather. One thing, he was not of very robust health and this we know means everything in life; this no doubt

accounted for him following different pursuits. Very fond of sport he was. He had a small yacht, the Albatross and with Sandy MacFarlane as his skipper they had quite a good time sailing and fishing. Sandy was an expert salmon fisher; he worked a number of stake nets so that Otter House was kept well supplied with sea trout and salmon. What the Old Laird thought of these proceedings we can just imagine. What benefit was this to the land? At any rate the fishermen sometimes returning in the early morning from an all night splash-netting pulled the rowing boat in behind Ardgadden Island so as the Laird would not see them, and one of the culprits was the man who stayed in the room above the Laird. They all had a great time of it and certainly did not weary.

## The laird's smithy

In what is now an old ruin adjoining the back road just above Otter House, the Laird had a blacksmith's shop of his own and spent his spare time there. What was he making? Yes, what was he making, that was the query. The

Laird took good care nobody knew what he was manufacturing because he always shut the door behind him when he came to answer a knock.

In these days that might be called the 'closed shop principle'.

Anyway we can rest assured the craftsman was making something useful. Perhaps a spear to settle definitely the wage question with Campbell, Balliemore.

## The Misses Rankin

Little information is available regarding the Laird's grand-daughters, Miss Annie and Miss Margaret Rankin. The former married James Mitchell, banker, Bannockburn, and the latter married John Allston, Town Clerk, Airdrie. The writer heard much mention of Miss Annie as one of the family at Otter House, but strange no mention of Miss Margaret so we must conclude she was married earlier, or domiciled more at Cleddans.

## The boathouse

As already stated young Patrick was very fond of sport and to further this he decided on his

own to build a boathouse to house his boats. James Mackie and Sandy Robertson were engaged to do this and all the work had to be done in their spare time. A ten hour day was the working rule at that time, so Mackie and Robertson were at the boathouse early and late until completed.



*MV Otter on its launching rails outside the boathouse, ca.1922*

The Old Laird viewed all this with disfavour, but put no obstacle in the way. so many, many needful things required to be done to improve the place that he had no time for anything outside of that.

## Red faces

It was customary for the Laird sometimes of an evening to pay a visit to the old laundry where the workmen were enjoying a smoke and a bit of leisure after their day's work. Coming in one day he eyed John Logan keenly. "That's awfu' like one of my clay pipes you are smoking". The immediate and rather evasive reply was "Dae ye think naebody has a pipe like this but yersel'?" It happened to be one of the Laird's pipes right enough; the smoker had broken his own and Auld Jean the housekeeper had obliged.

Allow Patrick he wasn't so easy done: the maids in the house had instructions to bring a jug of water every morning from the flagpole spring (in front of Otter House) and sometimes when busy they tried to diddle their master by taking the water from a tap. That just wouldn't work. Patrick knew the difference - and the maids heard all about it.

## The church at Kilbride

It may interest readers to hear a story about Laird Rankin told to me by a Minister about 55 years ago [1893? - Ed.]. The Minister of Kilfinan Church at the time with which the story deals was named Stark. There was a project at the time to build a Mission Station at Kilbride beyond Millhouse, and the Minister enlisted the services of Laird Rankin to help him raise the necessary funds. The two worthies set off to Lanarkshire to interview some of the Laird's wealthy friends. They got on grand and while visiting a certain Mrs Addie who was very nice to them Laird Rankin told her she resembled Empress Eugene very much. When the lady went out of the room for a moment, maybe to look for her purse, the Minister said to the Laird "I'm sure you never saw Empress Eugene". "I did, I saw her likeness on a jug", said the Laird. How the Rev Gavin Mason heard that story I don't know, but from that we need not be surprised to hear that shortly afterwards the erection of Kilbride Church was an established fact. Kilbride has been incorporated with Kilfinan Church since its erection and serviced by the Kilfinan Minister,



and it is very interesting and gratifying to know that over a span of well nigh a hundred years with a greatly depopulated area, Kilbride Church is in a very flourishing condition today. All honour to you Patrick. Many who enter that church today may have no knowledge as to how, or when it was built, but when readers think of that little trip to Lanarkshire - there was a man doing his utmost to help in a good and worthy cause, and the result stands out today.

[The regular use of Kilbride Church ceased in the 1980s - Ed.]

## Family origins

The work spent on Otter Estate was now yielding good results; first class crops were being obtained from the wasteland brought under cultivation and the Laird was continually on the move among his men. One day while accompanied by young Patrick and John Logan near the flagpole spring in Otter House field the Old Laird and Patrick had a very heated argument. Dae ye no' think men were as wise lang syne as they are yet, exclaimed the old Laird. This was a poser for young Patrick and we have not got his reply. Anyway the writer

backs old Patrick and can prove that he was dead correct. If men were not as wise lang syne as they are yet, why did John Rankin\* court and marry that bonnie lass of his?

*[\*presumably refers to his nephew, who married Anna Thomson about 1860 - Ed.]*

Why did stalwart Jamie Young court and marry bonnie Maggie Rankin? Aye! And why did that young farmer of Milncroft court and marry bonnie Helen Shanks o' Airdrie, her mother Nellie Black was a cousin of Mrs Patrick Rankin of Cleddans. All those men were very wise indeed.

*[Trying to solve the riddles -*

- 1) The Old Laird's nephew Patrick (3rd of Cleddans) married Helen Black; their daughter Margaret married **John** Young & had a son James **Eric** Rankin Young, who inherited Cleddans.
- 2) apparently this Helen Black had a cousin Nellie who married a Shanks; their daughter Helen (of Airdrie) married a Logan of Milncroft, Cleddans Estate (see p.14). Willie refers to his mother (p 16) as Elizabeth Baird, so presumably Helen was his grandmother, making Willie Logan a 4th cousin of James and Michael Young, and of

Peter, Helen & Ruth Monteith - unlikely as Willie was born 50 years before most of these.

- 3) The same Patrick's niece Jeannie married a Shanks, whose daughter Elspeth lived in Airdrie ..... coincidence? - *Ed.*]

That's why we the descendants are so good looking. This of course includes the present Laird of Otter [*Dr JR*], the Young Laird [*JFAR*] and the Laird of Cleddans [*Eric Young*]. Wise! Indeed!

## Responsibilities to the Church

Noo, Noo, haud yer tongue. Old Patrick wis aye right. With the purchase of Kilfinan Estate the Laird of Otter shouldered further responsibilities to Kilfinan Church in the payment of increased 'Teinds' and joint liability with the other Heritors in the upkeep of church and manse. The Minister's salary was practically derived from the Teinds, which consisted of a levy on all the proprietors, or Heritors as they were called, within the bounds of Kilfinan Parish. This was payable in the value of so many bolls of oats or barley, according to the assessment on each estate. The

estates within Kilfinan Parish were Balliemore, Otter, Ormidale (Cravounechan), Ardmarnoch, Ardlamont, Poltalloch (Auchenlochan), Tighnabruaich and Glen Caladh. With the passing of the Church of Scotland Act 1929, Kilfinan church and manse were put in order by the Heritors and taken over by the Church of Scotland Trustees; Heritors were then free from further responsibility regarding upkeep.

## Kilfinan farm - deferred

We now come to a matter that must have caused Laird Rankin grave concern. With all the farm steadings on the estate in first class order excepting Kilfinan and Ardgadden farms, we are now brought to a standstill.

Kilfinan farm steading was if anything in a worse condition than the others had been and, as McPhaill the tenant had a lease, Laird Rankin had to wait until this expired. Further, the Minister held certain grazing rights on Kilfinan farm and this was a matter that required careful adjustment to prevent friction in the future - two tenants could not very well occupy the same holding.

After due consideration it was decided to hold the matter over meantime and attention was concentrated on Ardgadden farm, as the tenant's lease there (Crawford) was about to expire.

## A start on Ardgadden

Ardgadden farm - perhaps the most romantic spot on Otter Estate. Nearby the ruins of the old farm buildings is the site of McEwen's Castle, situated on a rocky promontory adjoining the coast. In bygone days the clan McEwen held sway from Kilfinan Burn in the south to Largiemore in the north, where they bordered the clan MacLachlan. South of Kilfinan Burn the clan Lamont held sway.

Ardgadden farm was just a small holding but an attractive one, containing enough arable land to make it worth working. The road question, however, was a great drawback, entry to the farm and exit. Laird Rankin had made up his mind to put the farm in thorough working order and for a surety he would have surmounted all the difficulties, had he been spared. The site chosen for the new farm buildings adjoined the South Ardgadden ruins and the excavated foundation can be seen to this day. A start was

made preparing the site, and stone and lime carted to the job, but it was not to be.

## Death of the Old Laird

Laird Rankin had been in failing health for some time and died before his cherished project was even right started. Aged 85 years the Old Laird was, and the year 1873. In the space of 21 years during his lairdship he made a wonderful change in the countryside with which he had to do, and created a great deal of happiness in the homes of many poor people. Simply pathetic it was to hear some of the old fishermen talk about the Old Laird, he was their hero. All honour to a very worthy man.

## Trusteeship

After the passing of the Old Laird the right of succession to Otter Estate was disputed as to whether it should go to the female side, or follow the male line, and a long period of litigation followed. In the interval Trustees were appointed, a resident factor engaged and estate work was again got under way. A start was

made with the building of a new farm steading on Kilfinan farm and the material which the Old Laird had intended for Ardgadden was used at Kilfinan.



Kilfinan farmhouse and outbuildings - much the same as they were after being renovated during the trusteeship

## Kilfinan Hotel

The building of the new hotel at Kilfinan was also completed about this time and we have the hotel as it stands today. The old hotel, or pub, was a very primitive small building and comparable with the original thatched buildings on the estate.



When Willie wrote this, Kilfinan Hotel had four letting bedrooms, a battery-driven wireless, a wind-up gramophone, paraffin lamps and a black kitchen range; since then it has been transformed by new laird Nicholas Wills, with the former stables incorporated and the number of letting bedrooms increased to eleven.

## Jock's Lodge

A cottage was erected at West Lindsaig, and there John Scott the estate Factor took up residence - known as Jock's Lodge, and still termed that on the valuation roll.





Jock's Lodge was Willie's holiday home in retirement

## Tighanraidh

On the completion of Kilfinan farm steading the farm was let to John Arthur, estate foreman, and the lands of Tighanraidh were incorporated in Kilfinan farm. Formerly Tighanraidh was a small holding on the original Auchagoyle estate. Baldie McNair, tenant, died about this time and his widow was given the tenancy of South Lodge, Otter.



Tighanraidh

## The Minister's grazing rights

In the year 1878 we have on record the terms of an agreement between Patrick Rankin Esq. representing the Trustees of the late Patrick Rankin Esq. and the Rev. Angus Mcphee, Minister of Kilfinan Parish Church, that Otter Estate shall hand over approximately 7 acres of land adjoining The Glebe to the Kilfinan Minister in lieu of the Minister's claim to any grazing on Otter Estate. The agreement was drawn up, duly signed, and everything all in order - and a good job that it was, as it was put to the test 57 years afterwards.

## The succession

The lawsuit over the line of succession seems to have been a very long drawn out affair and it would appear that young Patrick never enjoyed the pleasures or suffered the worries of lairdship. In the aforementioned bargain with the church in 1878 we have Patrick Rankin acting on behalf of the late Patrick Rankin's Trustees, and in the Argyll valuation roll 1880-81 we have Miss Annie Rankin given as tenant of Otter House while the Proprietors are given as the late Patrick Rankin's Trustees. Young Patrick Rankin died in January 1880, seven years after the Old Laird, and as mention is still made of Trustees the lawsuit was apparently dragging on, year 1880-81.

Eventually a decision was given by the Court of Session that the right of succession to Otter Estate should follow the male line, and in consequence of this decision Patrick Rankin, eldest son of Matthew Rankin, Garngibbock, and nephew of the deceased laird of Otter, now succeeded to the lairdship of Otter, Auchengray and Cleddans estates.

## Absent laird

The new laird took up residence at Cleddans, and with the marriage at this time of Miss Annie Rankin to James Mitchell, banker, Airdrie, the tenancy of Otter House became vacant.

## Jock Scott in bother

With a resident factor on Otter the new laird was saved any trouble in estate management and matters proceeded normally as regards estate work, but an incident that occurred during this Factor's term of office set the lower end of the parish in an uproar. John Scott, better known as Jock, thought the old kirk would look nicer with a walkway around it and made a start with the job. The mail contract in those days was in the hands of Stewart, Cora Inn, Otter Ferry, and the mail was serviced by a horse-drawn vehicle, gig or wagonette. The mail driver, a great wag, carried a greatly exaggerated tale to Tighnabruaich of the desecration that was going on in Kilfinan churchyard and the result was a small army of

enraged fishermen and many others came up to deal with the situation. On arrival these men seized all spades, shovels, barrows and planks and flung them into the burn behind the graveyard. Luckily John Scott wasn't on the scene as he would have gone into the burn with the tools. So that was that, just a little incident in the passing.

## Tenants at Otter

No new work of any importance was carried out by the new laird, more a question of keeping good what had already been done.

Otter House and shootings were now let for a year to a gentleman named Aitken, and a canoe belonging to his son Percy lay in Otter boathouse for many years and may still be there.

The mahogany canoe, pictured overleaf, was built by James Messenger of Teddington; it was sold by the Rankin family (in a poor state of repair) in 1984; the buyer's name cannot be found - to the frustration of the Teddington Society. Named *Cis*, it had clearly been one of a pair. What became of *Trans*?



After the tenancy of Mr Aitken, Otter House and shootings were rented in 1882 by John Ferguson of Taylor & Ferguson Wine & Spirit Merchants, Glasgow and this gentleman's family occupied Otter House for well nigh 60 years: a long time in the history of the place and the greatest change in that time may be said to be the depopulation of the countryside.

For the sake of completeness I have to record (facing page) this product of the Shellbend Folding Boat Co, Liverpool, which probably lay neglected in Otter boathouse for seventy years, then briefly became the favourite of the Rankin children before being sold in 1990. Totally eclipsed by the advent of the inflatable dinghy, this heavy and unstable mahogany boat surprised the auctioneer by fetching £400.



## The curling match

Little is known about Patrick Rankin as laird as he only visited Otter at intervals; all his main interests lay at Cleddans. However he created much joy in the hearts of Otter curlers by inviting a rink (4 men) to play a match on a rink near Auchengray one frosty winter's day. The Otter curlers arrived in due course, all in great form, and the match started. Time passed quickly and lunchtime arrived when a halt was called. The laird did his guests well and had a

sumptuous lunch prepared. Irish Stew!! Choice mutton, potatoes and vegetables stewed in a huge pot. Boy! Oh, Boy! No wonder the curlers smacked their lips when they heard of it. The boiling hot pot was carried to near the seat of play and carefully covered to keep it hot. In due course the curlers formed in a circle around the pot, all in great expectation and great smacking of lips. When Lo! Behold! All that was seen when the coverings were removed was a round hole in the ice. The hot pot had done the trick and gone to the bottom of the loch. Oh! What did the curlers say? I leave it to you dear reader. What would you say if your dinner disappeared under your very nose. You'd look at your neighbour and the look of consternation there would give you a hearty laugh. Anyway this incident provided John Logan with many a good laugh in the evening of his days. Needless to say the host provided a makeshift meal with all speed. So much for the curlers.

## Short-lived lairds

Patrick Rankin's tenure as laird was destined to be short as he died in 1887 aged 69 years.



Gavin Rankin, brother of the deceased, now came next in succession and John Rankin, younger brother, took over the factorship of Otter. Their term was also very short, just four years. Gavin died in 1891 and his brother John shortly after.

The line of succession to Otter now reverted to a nephew - Patrick Rankin's eldest son Matthew. This young man, a lawyer by profession, was only spared for four years after succeeding to the estates, as he died in 1895, aged 35 years. During Matthew's time, however, an additional storey and billiard room was added to Otter House at the request of the shooting tenant, who had a family of eight. At this period game preservation was at its height; during the shooting season Mr Ferguson, the tenant, had numerous guests, so Otter House [picture overleaf] was enlarged in 1893.

## The Major W B Rankin era

William Black Rankin now succeeded to Otter and this laird was fated to enjoy the longest spell of all, a matter of 49 years. Much happened in that space of time and the writer

will endeavour to give some particulars.



Plans for the extension of Otter House, drawn up in 1892 by Alex McG Mitchell, Coatbridge



## Factor James Main

James Main, Airdrie, conducted the factorship of Otter at this time and had done so under Matthew Rankin. A little man the factor was, with a very officious manner, and seems to have been disliked by one and all on his rent collection visits. Our friend old Rob MacLachlan said of the factor "This wee factor

buddy should only come to Otter each spring - that spike at the end of his lame leg would do grand for dibbling in cabbages." The writer was only a boy in school at the time, but remembers quite well.

## Pier project

About this period some excitement was caused when the S.S. Minard Castle came into Kilfinan Bay one afternoon and took soundings at Ardgadden and Drum Points with a view to the erection of a pier. Drum Point was said to be the place selected, but nothing more was heard of the scheme.

## The reduction in cultivation

Before proceeding further let us go back a good many years and review matters from the time of the Old Laird's death.

At this time all the land in the Home farm was under full cultivation and a great number of men, casual and regular, were employed on the estate.

On the decease of the Old Laird, all the land

was gradually sowed into pasture and the fields let to farmers on the estate for grazing. The staff of workmen was also reduced to two men in Patrick Rankin's time - John Logan and James Mackie.

## Sawmill

Casual labour was allowed when any special project was on, and James MacIntyre, joiner, Lindsaig Mill, assisted when saw milling was in progress.

The sawmill in those days was run by water power at Kilfinan farm steading and it was really astonishing the amount of wood sawn per day considering the lack of facilities. Five hundred completed stobs was the record for one day's sawing, three men.

## Bootmaker Leitch

As time went on Neil Leitch, bootmaker, residing at present post office, *[now a private house - he is in the picture on Page 23. Ed.]* rented all Home Farm parks and, with the aid of

two sons, carried on the grazing of same with cattle and sheep for many years. Byres and a stable were erected adjoining the post office and the enterprising cobbler also got a share of the estate cartage.

## Children at Kilfinan School

At this period some sixty five children attended Kilfinan school and sometimes of an evening there was a little trouble as the scholars wending their way homeward met the herd of cattle coming down the brae towards their byre. One evening one of the boys interfered with one of the cows and the irate flockmaster pinned him down in the roadside ditch. Instead of the boy falling into tears he looked up angrily at his aggressor whose beard was brushing his cheek and said "Man! You're a richt bad yin."

No more interference with the cattle.



With declining numbers the school closed down about 1950.

With the aid of a bequest from laird Dr Jack Rankin the schoolroom was converted in the 1980s into a community hall

## The mail contract

The mail contract about this time changed hands from James Stewart to William Addams, succeeding tenant of Cora Inn, Otter Ferry. In later years the mail contract was taken over by Duncan Cameron, proprietor of Kilfinan Hotel, followed in later years by Peter Simpson, a later proprietor of Kilfinan Hotel. On the advent of the motor car the mail contract was taken over by Archie MacBride, Kames, and is still carried on by the same firm.

[Archie MacBride's wife had the doubtful honour of conveying the notorious 1893 Ardlamont murderer from the scene of the crime to Tighnabruaich pier; Archie's descendants have continued to run a (horseless) taxi service in the parish until recent times - Ed.]

## Smithies

Mention should be made of the smithy at Lindsaig Mill, which was erected by the Old Laird. This smithy was serviced by Hugh MacCallum, blacksmith, Millhouse, who came up one day weekly to meet the requirements of

the district.



In common with the adjacent mill, the former smithy has been restored as a private house

At a much earlier period a smithy existed at the north end of Kilfinan Bay, near a little burn at Ardgadden, but all trace of this has long since vanished.

## The promised land at Drum Point

Now let us consider Drum Point - 'The Promised Land'. Why did it get that name? The writer can only conjecture that it was land promised to Cottars or crofters who lived there. Certainly it is very interesting to examine the old ruins now almost obliterated. Old Rob told of a joiner who lived there and made coffins. A tombstone in Kilfinan churchyard, left of doorway, gives the name of one McIvor who lived at Drum Point.

## Guy Rankin at Otter

Now let us pass to something more cheerful. At the mouth of that little burn at Drum Point was Guy Rankin's favourite spot with his splash-net for catching salmon and sea trout. Evening suitable, tide suitable, it was a sure go for getting some fish.

[Note: Guy, who was a nephew of Matthew and uncle of John, the last Rankin laird, resided near Rothesay and often visited Otter by sea with his wife and daughters (more of Guy later) -Ed.]



## Kilfinan fishermen

Now let us pay homage to the last of the once famous Kilfinan fishing fleet - the old 'Industry', a sailing vessel about 35 feet in length. Owned by three brothers, Dugald, Donald and Rob MacLachlan. During the fishing season this vessel set out from the bay every Monday morning and returned on Saturday, welcomed by all the people around with their baskets to obtain a liberal supply of fine fresh herring.

## Continuity

For many years things went on uneventfully in William Black Rankin's lairdship. Same old tenants, same workmen, and peace and tranquillity reigned. A matter of keeping buildings and all connected with the estate in repair.

## Factor James Barton

Early in 1900 the laird dispensed with the services of James Main, his factor, and engaged

James R. Barton as factor, a young man trained in an Edinburgh law agent's office. The new factor quickly showed he had a thorough understanding of estate management. A man of sterling character, he held the respect of all he had dealings with in the long period of over forty years he had connection with Otter, Cleddans and Auchengray estates. Always ready to help and advise, a man whom it was a privilege to know. Even an old farmer grudgingly admitted "Nae doot the factor is an awfu' nice man, but an awfu' man to screw money oot o' ye".

## Willie as Gamekeeper

At the age of 26 the writer was married and went to Otter as gamekeeper to the shooting tenant, John Ferguson, in the year 1906. Game was disappointingly low at that time, but with care things were soon brought up to the required level and plenty of game for all. In 1913 through advancing years Mr Ferguson gave up the shootings, but retained the tenancy of Otter House.

The shootings were taken over by Laird Rankin and keeper's services also.

## Copper at Otter

Now we come to a very interesting part - the origin of the Otter copper mine. Early in 1900 a young lad (a coachman's son) while out with a hill pony accompanying the shooting party happened to pick up a green stone which interested him greatly. This stone was taken to Glasgow and analysed. The result was that in 1911 a 'company promoter and prospector' named Taylor arrived at Otter and stayed in the hotel. He engaged two locals - our old friend Johnnie MacLachlan, now advanced in years, and Sandie Gillies [*father of Johnnie Gillies, who served the estate for 45 years - Ed*] - and the trio searched all over Otter for signs of copper ore. Great success met their efforts. This period was the heyday of that expert little miner, the rabbit. Burrows all over the place and with the earth scraped out it was so easy to look for samples among the fresh earth.

Very encouraging signs of copper were seen on Inveryne, Drum and Kilfinan farms; the result was that in 1912 the Otter Copper Company was formed with a capital of £15,000. After the formation of the copper company and the appointment of a manager, matters were

energetically pushed forward. A few experienced miners were brought onto the job and with the aid of local labour things speedily took shape. Mine headquarters were established at the Kilfinan farm workings and a number of corrugated iron sheds erected - including a large shed to house a 52 hp Tangye engine and an air compressor, another three-compartment shed for office, stores and smithy, other two sheds housing equipment and copper ore.

## Miners' accommodation

Once a real start was made everything looked very promising: a plentiful supply of copper ore was being obtained and preparations were made to house an increased staff. With this in view a double cottage was built at Bellevue to house two married men, and a dormitory building with sixteen cubicles to house sixteen single men. When these were occupied some thirty men were engaged at the copper mine.

In 1912-13 copper mining was in full progress; a working had been established at Inveryne, adjoining the farm entrance road, another behind Drum farmhouse near the water supply

tank. A five ton pocket of ore was found at the Kilfinan farm mine at this time; the ore was said to be of 50% quality and this aroused great hopes, but it turned out to be just a small pocket.

## Transporting the ore

Getting the ore despatched created a great deal of labour and expense. The ore was first of all put in sacks, then carted to the shore by P Simpson, Kilfinan Hotel, then taken out to a sailing vessel by rowing boat, and the cargo shipped to Swansea. On one occasion the S.S. Meiard Castle came into the bay and 400 bags of ore were put on board.

John MacKenzie, mine foreman, told the writer that, had this mine been in Mexico where he had worked, it would have paid alright where all the smelting apparatus and equipment was on the job and cut out all this unnecessary expense in freight. Even with as low a percentage as 2½ % MacKenzie said it would have paid.

## The Great War

Work proceeded steadily over two years; a bungalow was planned for the mine manager, sited above Lindsaig mill, on the Lindsaig side of the road, but in 1914 things began to slow down a bit. The copper company's capital was getting low and on the outbreak of war in August the men were asked to volunteer for the Services - and to their credit they responded to a man. This was to all practical purposes the end of the Otter Copper Company, and it went into liquidation in 1919. Rent payable to Otter Estate was supposed to be £100 annually, but this was never paid and at the winding up of affairs all the sheds and various other equipment fell to Laird Rankin.

With the war on it was a case of 'all hands on deck'. Major Rankin, the laird, went to India on garrison duty. James R Barton, Factor, kept on the management of the various estates and did Home Guard duty. William Logan joined up and served in France, Belgium and Italy. Demobbed in February 1919 and back to the old job. Right well had the factor looked after things during the war and everything correct and going smoothly on Major Rankin's return from India.

## After the war

D Leitch, who tenanted all the home parks, gave them up about this time and left the district. James Telfer, a cattle dealer, then rented the parks for a few years and on his giving them up the parks were roused annually to estate tenants and various outsiders. This continued during laird William Black Rankin's term of lairdship.

The 1914-18 war over and the laird back, sport was resumed in a modified way; when the shooting season opened Laird Rankin accompanied by his nephews John, and William Monteith and Eric Young, arrived at Otter and many a happy day they had.

## Motor Launch 'Otter'

In 1921 the motor boat 'Otter' was built on order by Smith, Tighnabruaich, at a cost of £200, complete with moorings, and this added a great deal to the variety of sport.

Splash-netting was a great pastime on these trips and on one occasion, accompanied by John Logan, 150 sea trout were caught, which I think would be a record.



MV Otter moored off Tighnabruaich, 1989

## Adventure at sea

The thought of the old 'Otter' brings back many kindly and happy memories. A certain John McGrigor, W.S., Edinburgh, accompanied by his son, friends of the laird's, came to stay in the hotel and the writer had instructions to entertain them. One day we set off for Inveraray and the lawyer man visited the courthouse. Here a veritable treasure of old manuscripts was examined, very old and interesting documents, and the visitor was so charmed he said he would return the following year, which he did. On our way home, passing Loch Gair, I noticed there was a little trouble ahead. Very stormy at Otter Spit and an easterly gale brewing. The



waterproof cover on Otter was laced as far as possible as a protection, but when rounding the spit water got into the engine and we had to take to the oars, heading straight towards the shore. Little headway was made and it certainly looked as if we would be blown across the loch. Changing oars and a word of encouragement to Mr McGrigor, we persevered and foot by foot we edged in to the shore in front of Balliemore House. Then, keeping close to the shore all the way, we eventually arrived at the boathouse, about 12.30 midnight. How the laird did chuckle when he heard of the trials of his elderly friend.

[In later years laird Dr Jack Rankin and his family had a remarkably similar adventure in the 'Otter' when its then elderly Kelvin engine failed on the north side of Otter Ferry Spit - Ed.]

## Guy Rankin's opinion

Shortly after the 'Otter' was purchased, Guy Rankin arrived in the bay one day with his yacht; after having a trial run in the motor boat he gave a very favourable verdict on her seaworthiness. The boat was too small, though; should have had cabin accommodation so that the owner and his friends could have taken a trip up the Western Isles. That was the opinion

of an expert yachtsman. Guy was a great sportsman, dearly loved his yacht and the trips to Otter accompanied by Mrs Rankin and the two girls (the bereavement came later - loss of one of the girls).



This photo of the laird's nephew was supplied by Guy's daughter Mary Hamilton, who was well known to me - Ed.

## Encounters with Poachers

Sea trout and salmon poaching was rife at this time and the writer with his pal Sam

MacNaughton, Ardmarnoch keeper, had many encounters with poaching boats, mainly from Tarbert, but odd boats from Ardrishaig too.

John Logan was much against interfering with these poachers. Leave them alone. Wasn't Sandy Mitchell nearly drowned at Ardgadden through interfering with these men?

## Two wild men

Still Sam and I persevered. A tonic to us both when, one night at Inveryne we encountered two very wild men. On seeing our boat approach they hurriedly lifted their net and made off towards Tarbert. With the aid of the outboard engine we soon caught them up and a wordy battle proceeded between Sam and one of the burly poachers. "You two ought to be ashamed of yourselves, loafing about an estate wasting your own and your master's time" the poacher said.

Sam gave a very cutting reply which fairly roused the poacher. Standing up in the boat he shook his fist angrily and made an effort to pull off his big oilskin coat. Then roared "If I had you here I do not know what I would not do to you" - which threat causes a smile to this day, thirty years afterwards.

## Another chase at sea

We gave up the chase that night, to meet them again in the near future: another night we were down we found a net set at right angles to the shore at Barr Point and a lighter loading sand inshore. We challenged this boat about the net and were told it was only set to catch 'twa or three mackerel', not trout. The men who are after trout, they said, are at the burn mouth - and hearing sounds we went over. We found two men in a boat busy lifting their net which had been set across the mouth of the burn. On being challenged the men speedily got their net in and made off towards Tarbert. The outboard engine soon pulled them up and when we got to close quarters up went their oars prepared to strike. Sam stood up in our boat, lifted his gun from the seat and made a great show of loading the gun with two empty cartridge cases. Down went the poachers' oars and they brought their boat ashore as directed. I took possession of the sea trout, which on being weighed later amounted to 75 lb. I then said we would also be required to take possession of the net. On hearing this the two

men pleaded for mercy - they had got the loan of the boat and net from a friend and only had the use of them for the night. Conditionally, I said they could keep the net; they must promise never to come back again, and to report to the Tarbert Police when they got over. They kept their word - I never saw them again.

## Pursuit to Tarbert

Knowing full well the two 'wild men' would come back, I prepared for them. When the weather and tide suited I hired a car and went down to Tighnabruaich one evening for the policeman.

Setting out from the boathouse with the outboard, we picked up Sam at Drum Point and headed for Inveryne Bay. Half way down we took to the oars, moving very quietly. On getting to Inveryne Bay we listened: yes, there was a boat at the mouth of the burn. Quietly rowing in we got a salute from the poaching boat - Keep clear of that b--- net, we are fishing. Now was the policeman's turn - "In the name of the law I demand to search that boat" "Tae hell wi' the law" he was told, as the poachers lifted their net and made off. Once

again the outboard speedily pulled them up, and on getting sight of the policeman they quietened down. The policeman told them they would require to come ashore and they followed us in to a selected spot. On landing we found the men had only six sea trout, herring size, in the boat, which I took possession of. After some argument the policeman said he would require to take possession of the net - then one of the poachers made a swipe at him with an oar which he was lucky to evade. Both en then rushed to their boat and the chase was on again. We quickly followed and the cruise was on till near Tarbert Harbour. Daylight was now breaking and the herring fleet was returning after their night's fishing. The nearer to Tarbert the more hesitant became the two men in the boat. Finally they rowed alongside one of the trawlers and we did likewise. The policeman took the names and addresses of the two men and formally charged them, after cutting a sample from their splash net. We then returned home. When the poaching case was due to come up in court it was found there were no two such men in Tarbert, they had given the wrong names. Diddled we were that time, although a fisherman in Tarbert

told me afterwards we had fairly got the better of the two worthies, whom he knew personally. Maybe, I said, but we didn't manage a prosecution.

## Laird Rankin joins the hunt

Another incident occurred when the laird was residing in Otter House for a few days during the month of July. What are you doing this afternoon, he asked one morning after we had had a walk around. Well, I said, I'm awfully bothered with sea trout poachers just now, and I unfolded the plan I had. I propose taking the rowing boat and outboard engine down to Inveryne Bay, pulling the boat up among the whins and leaving the engine there all ready for an affray tonight.

You are putting yourself to a lot of unnecessary trouble, was the laird's reply. You'll never stop that, I replied; we have an hotel on the place, anglers come there, and I feel sorry to see these men fishing away when I know not a fish can get up the burn owing to these poachers. I'll come with you, said the laird. In the afternoon we set out with the boat and had a lovely sail down to the south corner of the Barr hill. The

boat was pulled up among the whins, the engine left beside it and off we set for home through the hill - being a lovely afternoon we had a very enjoyable walk. That evening about dusk eight stalwart men slipped quietly in among the whins beside the boat, which was really only a few yards from the water's edge. Five men were instructed to wait quietly till the poachers had their net almost set, which would be about 150 yards set in a half circle, shore to shore across the burn mouth. Then the men were to rush like blazes, grab the end of the net, and secure as much of the net as possible. The other three men would launch the boat and try to get the registration number of the trawler that had the poachers' rowing boat in tow.

What a lovely evening that was - it lingers still in my memory. A curlew called cheerily to his mate as flood tide approached and sea birds clattered away further inshore. We had not been waiting long when we heard the familiar beat, beat of the Kelvin engine approaching from seaward. In, in, the fishing boat came, with the small boat in tow and dropped anchor about 50 yards from where we lay. Then the rowing boat cast off, came inshore and dropped the end of



their net with weight attached on the very spot where it was expected to be laid. Quietly and speedily the poachers laid their net and at length the crucial moment arrived. With one rush our boys grabbed the net and - Boy! oh Boy! What a tug of war team. Fit for the Olympic Games. Yard by yard the net was pulled in - of course there was pandemonium at the poachers' end. Cursing! The air was full of brimstone. The boat crew duly got it launched, but on approaching the large fishing boat found the registration number concealed and a man on board vowed vengeance with a big oar if we came any further. With a ú60 engine on our stern I decided it was best to join forces and, even if there wasn't a prosecution, make sure of the net. With the full team pulling, the net came in by leaps and bounds. The poaching boat hadn't a ghost of a chance and to prevent their being pulled ashore the poachers threw out the portion of net they had gathered in. Then their tune changed, they began pleading to get their net back. Only out for two or three mackerel they were. The old story, I told them, they would not get their net back and they'd be prosecuted for poaching. The air again became sulphurous. What cursing, enough to frighten

all the fish out of the bay. So that was that. Laird Rankin asked the following morning how we got on. No case for prosecution, I said, but we got a grand net about 200 yards long - worth about £10 at that time.

## Poachers from Ardrishaig

Now Just one little story which describes my last encounter with the fraternity. One night I went out alone with the boat and net to try and get a few fish for the shooters who were departing the next day. I had just got the half of my net set when, confound it, I heard the beat, beat of an engine approaching from Ardrishaig direction. I hurriedly lifted the net and rowed the boat up near the coalhouse; leaving the boat there, I walked in the shadow of the land, about midnight it would be, towards Shore cottage road. A fishing boat had come into the mouth of the burn; two men in a small boat cast off and began to set their net across the burn - flood tide it was.

Hurrying up to Shore cottage, where Henry Russell then stayed, I tapped on the window.

Poachers netting the burn - will you come down? In a minute or two Henry appeared. Any

weapon handy in case they get nasty? Henry pointed to an old coal axe: how's that? The very dab, I said. On going down we found the end of the net was a few yards from the shore and the poachers at the far end. I waded out to the waist, grabbed the end of the net and pulled it in to Henry. With two on the job we made more speed and the cursing began at the other end. As they drew near it was certainly no place for any Minister. I waded into the water again to secure as much of the net as possible and thought I was going to get my Chips right enough as the poachers vowed what they would do. I then thought very hopefully of the axe in my pocket. If I can evade their oars and get to close quarters there will be something doing. When just about an oar's length away the poachers did an unheard of thing, they cut their net and off. Henry and I stretched out the portion of net we had secured and measured it: thirteen yards long and nine feet deep.

That was my last actual encounter with sea trout poachers. Readers will be tired pondering over this long tale about sea poaching, but it goes to show that what appears to be a very quiet and lonely coastline in daytime can be a very lively locality at midnight.

and nine feet deep.

That was my last actual encounter with sea trout poachers. Readers will be tired pondering over this long tale about sea poaching, but it goes to show that what appears to be a very quiet and lonely coastline in daytime can be a very lively locality at midnight.

## My reputation lives on

Two years ago on the mail steamer, I met an old salmon fisher who just a short time before had been talking to some of the Tarbert boys. My! he said, You were a richt bad yin wi' these Tarbert boys an' they think you're still at Otter. Good, I replied, I am glad they think that.

## Time marches on

Now back to the thread of our story. For a long period of years things moved very uneventfully in William Black Rankin's time. The factor paid his half-yearly visits to collect rents. Same old tenants, little change in the place and a good many of the old natives still to the fore, every one a character in themselves. However, when

the circle was broken the old hands dropped off one by one, and no one took their place - the population steadily went down. James Mackie died in the spring of 1926 aged 83 - worked till within a few days of his death. John Logan retired in the autumn of 1926 and he missed his old workmate greatly, 60 years they worked together. In July 1927 Mrs J Logan died aged 83 and John Logan died in August aged 86.

William Logan then took over the management and things proceeded uneventfully for a good many years. A few odd changes in farm tenants and householders. The laird arrived in August with his friends for grouse shooting and again at New Year time for pheasant shooting, and many enjoyable days were spent on the moor and in the coverts.

## Park Cottage

In 1930 Park Cottage was built and this made a marked difference with modern conveniences. A new kennel was also built, with railings and doors from the old kennels to complete the job; the whole thing was a vast improvement on the old way of working.



This photo of Park Cottage was provided by Willie himself, probably dating from his own residence as Overseer - it was certainly taken long before Dr Jack Rankin's extension ca1960

## River bank dispute

In 1934-35 there was a regular Battle Royal between the Minister and Otter Estate, on account of the Minister cutting trees and claiming part of the river bank adjoining the glebe. The Minister was shown a map and cautioned, but still the tree cutting went on. Seeing a newly cut tree one morning, I immediately got the hotel lorry and took the tree to the sawmill. Going back to the scene of operations, I wasn't there long when the

Minister appeared over the bank and what an angry man. You lifted a tree from here? Yes. Well, you'll put it back at once. Nothing of the kind, the tree is Otter Estate property. The wordy battle went on and if I remember correctly it was to end in my being locked up. I went home and immediately wrote out my resignation as Elder and Session Clerk and then off to Edinburgh. Luckily I found the laird and factor in the office on arrival. An interesting scene followed as all the plans and documents relating to the glebe and Otter Estate were laid out on a table. Yes, I had acted quite correctly. Otter Estate had taken good care to reserve the river bank and nine feet from its summit for a road when the plans were drawn out. Col. Arthur, architect, was engaged to represent Otter Estate and a Mr Rodger, architect, to represent the Church of Scotland. Both arrived in the same car on the day. I met them at Kilfinan bridge; the Minister was there too. Getting the chance of a quiet word with the Colonel I whispered - Mind! Waterloo wasn't half as important as this. The Colonel laughed and said, Don't worry, it will turn out alright. And turn out alright it did for Otter Estate. At the time I had 300 stobs, the necessary postsand

stays all in readiness to erect a fence, but the laird thought a fence was a lot of unnecessary expense. Quite true, but we know how these things crop up by unscrupulous individuals.

## Copper again

About 1934-35 a Mr Pettigrew accompanied by a Swedish engineer named Scanberg had another try at copper prospecting. Deep boring it was this time and at least three deep bores were tried at various sites. No sign of copper was found in these operations. I saw the contents of these borings - a white substance, perhaps limestone. However, this was hit or miss - there might easily be copper nearby and the bore miss it. Now that I am on the subject it may interest readers to know that I called at Edinburgh Museum in June 1956 and enquired if a sample of copper ore from the Otter Copper Company had been lodged there in the year 1912. The officials were awfully decent about it and put themselves to a great deal of trouble searching the vaults. One sample was found from Erins, near Tarbert; a nice heavy bit of ore it was. In the past I was often told that a stratum or vein of limestone stretched from Stonefield



Estate under Loch Fyne and outcropped at Inverlyne and the same vein of limestone stretches through Drum and Kilfinan farms and outcrops on Strone farm, Balliemore. It is quite reasonable to think that if a pocket of five tons copper ore was found in one spot in that long stretch of about three miles another pocket might be found containing a large quantity of ore. Who can foretell the future. Perhaps copper mining may start again some day. I asked Dennis Fitzpatrick, one of the first copper miners at Otter, while on his deathbed at Dunoon Cottage Hospital. Do you think, Dennis, there is any quantity of copper ore at Otter? Of course there is, he replied, if they go about it the right way.. That was the opinion of an experienced miner.

[Since this book was written, the biggest search yet for copper on Otter has been undertaken over more than a year by the Brunswick Mining Co of Canada. Although the drillings gave promising results, Brunswick eventually decided that the project was not viable. Ed.]

## Another laird ...

In the long article I have written I have tried to give an account of the happenings on Otter Estate from the Old Laird's time down to the term of William Black Rankin's lairdship - information given by my father, and by many of the old natives who have long since departed. My own term on Otter Estate, as keeper and latterly as overseer, was 32 years. I retired in 1938 and David Logan, my brother, took over the managership. The outbreak of the second world war in 1939 - fresh in all our minds and little need be said about it.

In 1944 Laird William Black Rankin died and Dr John Rankin, Oxford, succeeded to Otter Estate.

In the new laird we have a man with a good many of the characteristics of the Old Laird, his redoubtable ancestor Old Patrick. Love of farming may be classed as one, and given the same conditions as existed in the old days the writer is quite sure he would give every bit as good an account of himself as Old Patrick did. In the limited space of the Home parks the stock of sheep and cattle in the height of summer grazing is comparable with the more extensive

grazing in some of the farms, which says a great deal. More elbow room is needed though, more ground to expand.

Otter is a goodly inheritance and as a sporting estate is second to none in Scotland for its size, as can be proved by game records. From an agricultural point of view the situation of the estate lends itself well to intensive arable farming, with a lot of the land having a southerly exposure.

We will not enter the agriculture versus forestry controversy. Both do well on Otter, each in its own place.

It may interest readers to know that a great deal of the timber cut down of late years was grown from seed in a nursery adjoining the sawmill, and very interesting work it was. Larch, Sitka and Norway Spruce, Scots Fir, Corsican and Austrian Pine and Douglas Fir.

The years roll on and time brings the inevitable changes. David Logan has been retired for some years, pensioned, and resides at the Home farm. James Ferguson now looks after the estate work, assisted by Duncan Thomson, and thus the work goes on. Rankin lairds have been in possession of Otter now for well over a hundred years and it is the writer's hope that they may

continue for many many years to come. The present Laird Rankin and his good lady have a stalwart promising son and heir in John and a winsom daughter in Hazel, so the line of succession is secure. May all that is good and best in the world attend you all and many happy days and years at Otter.

[In 1977 Dr Rankin sold most of Otter to Nicholas Wills, retaining only Inveryne. This too was sold, to Nicholas Ferguson in 1989, apart from Auchalick Bay, which remains in the ownership of the Rankin family. Ed.]



Tigh Cladaich and Auchalick Bay

## Otter! Otter! Where is that place?

Gosh! Bless us! Have you never heard of it. 'Tis where the sun always shines and the natives require specially made hats to protect them from the ever beaming rays of that tropical sun. And that healthgiving ozone streaming softly over the western hills from the Atlantic. Why! Folk never grow old at Otter. Now I come to the end. Be good and you'll be happy, and make the little verse that follows your motto.

*William Logan*

**With a big stout heart to a long  
steep hill  
You can get there with a smile;  
With a kindly thought and an end  
in view  
You can cut short many a mile.**

**Let courage every day be your  
guiding star always -  
Keep right on to the end of the  
road,  
keep right on to the end;  
Tho' the way be long let your  
heart be strong,  
Keep right on round the bend.**

**Tho' you're tired and weary  
still journey on  
till you come to your happy abode  
(Otter),  
Where all your love you've been  
dreaming of  
will be there at the end of the road.**

*(Harry Lauder)*

APPENDIX 1

Information read from gravestones  
at Kilfinan Churchyard

John Logan d. 11.8.1927 aged 86 (b. 1841)  
his wife Elizabeth Baird d. 13.7.1927  
aged 82 (b. 1845)  
Willie Logan d. 18.10.1966 aged 86 (b.1880)  
his wife Elizabeth J H McKellar  
d. 7.3.1933 aged 58 (b. 1875)  
Josiah Logan d. 1946 aged 75 (b. 1871)  
David Logan d. 16.9.1969 aged 84 (b. 1885)  
Helen Shanks Logan d. 1945 aged 67 (b. 1878)

- . . . -

Patrick Rankin of Otter & Auchengray d. Otter  
House 5.3.1873 aged 83 (b.1790)  
Patrick Rankin Jr. d. Otter House 10.1.1880  
aged 35 (b. 1845)  
Dr William Rankin d. Otter House 9.12.1867  
aged 70 (b. 1797)  
Dr John\* Rankin d. 24.12.1981 aged 85  
(b. 1896) *\*generally known as Jack*  
his wife Muriel Steele d. 13.8.1981 aged 82

## APPENDIX 2

# Notes on the Rankins of Otter, Cleddans etc.

*Sources:* Arnold Francis Steele (brother-in-law of John Rankin, 6th of Otter)

*(italicised entries by JFA Rankin, mainly from 'Mr Young of Rothesay Terrace, Edinburgh', via Willie Logan).*

*PATRICK b.1640, of Riskend, Kilsyth*

*WALTER (1671-1732)*

*PATRICK (b 1732)* was Laird of Mavisbank and other places at the end of VIII c and lived in Mavisbank House.

*PATRICK (the 'Old Laird') (1788\*-1873 \*plaque at Kilfinan says he died 5.3.1873 aged 83)* was born in Mavisbank House. Lieutenant in a company of Volunteers raised in 1819. Member of Airdrie Town Council. He bought Auchengray about 1855 for £35,000 (in 1890 it was bringing in about £9000 pa) and bought South Medrox(?) about 1868. He was a partner in ?Addin Miller & Rankin of Langsloan Iron Works; the partnership was formed about 1837. Entailed his estates 1869 (codicil 1872).

*JAMES THOMSON* married Anna Thomson of Whiterigg, a wealthy heiress, and lived in Auchengray House. Practised as a solicitor in Airdrie for eight years then retired (his cousin John Rankin carrying on the business). Elected to Airdrie Town Council in 1846 he was Provost of Airdrie from 1848 till 1856 without a break. Died at Auchengray House.

*MARGARET THOMSON* and *ANNE* were excluded from their grandfather's entail but inherited their mother's wealth.

*PATRICK "The Young Laird", grandson of the 'Old Laird' (1845-1880).*

At his death the estates were still in the hands of the trustees, who included Margaret Thomson Rankin's husband John M Alston and Anne Rankin's father-in-law, David Mitchell. These two for obvious reasons would not like the entail and to prevent the heirs succeeding took advantage of a clause in the entail which laid down that bonds of £10,000 on each of the estates should be paid



## The Lairds of Otter

- 105 -

up from revenue before the heirs could enter into possession. The trustees tried to keep the revenue down (the hotel at Kilfinan was built at this time from revenue) and would not accept an offer from the heirs of entail to pay off the bonds in cash. The latter then raised an action in the Court of Session. The trustees were made to accept the offer of the heirs, the bonds were paid off, the trust wound up and the heirs of entail succeeded to the estates.

WALTER was born in Mavisbank House. He studied Arts at Glasgow University then, in 1813, medicine. He qualified as a surgeon in 1817 and settled in Airdrie, where he entered the Town Council in 1823, became a Baillie in 1927 and was Provost of Airdrie from 1842 to 1845. He was a JP, a member of the Lanarkshire Yeomanry Cavalry and from 1830 a Director in Airdrie Gas Light Coy. He died on 8th May 1848 of typhus fever caught in the course of his professional duties.

JANET SHAW lived at Willowbank House, Airdrie, where she died on 1st June 1915.

PATRICK (1818-1887)(*son of Matthew of Garngibbock*) was born at Willowbank House; studied medicine at Glasgow and Edinburgh Universities, graduating from the latter in 1858 (*aged 40, year of his marriage?*). He was an MD, Laird of East Glenborn and a member of the first Airdrie School Board in 1873. After 'The Young Laird' he was heir of entail to Otter, Cleddans, Auchengray and Mavisbank but died before\* he could succeed.

*[\*The other Patrick, 'The Young Laird' died before he could succeed, as indicated by his memorial plaque at Kilfinan - was this Patrick also deprived of his inheritance by the trustees?]*

MATTHEW was born at Mavisbank House.

PATRICK continued to live at Garngibbock after inheriting Cleddans and Auchengray (the former he let to his younger brother John Rankin). He was a coalmaster at Dungaval, a JP and a member of New Monkland School Board from 1876, being Chairman 1882-1886.

GAVIN (1824-1891, unmarried) was an original member of New Monkland School Board 1873-1876, President of Quvdvian? Bowling Club in 1879 and first Hon. President of Airdrie Lawn Tennis Club in 1888. By his will dated 1890 he he left substantial legacies to many nephews and nieces, grandnephews and grandnieces and the residue of his estate including the lands of North Mynot abc? to his brother John Rankin (the legacies came to over £15,000 and the residue was said to be worth over £30,000)

Otter and Mavisbank passed to Matthew Rankin of Cleddans and Auchengray in accordance with the entail of 'old' Patrick.

## The Lairds of Otter

- 106 -

JOHN was a solicitor and took over the business of his cousin Provost James Thomson Rankin. His first partner was James Mitchell (his brother-in law) who soon retired and was succeeded by Gavin Black Motherwell of West Glenborn, the firm becoming Rankin & Motherwell. He lived at Cleddans House, which he rented first from his uncle then from his brother. When the Curdrun? Volunteers were raised in 1860 he was appointed Lieutenant.

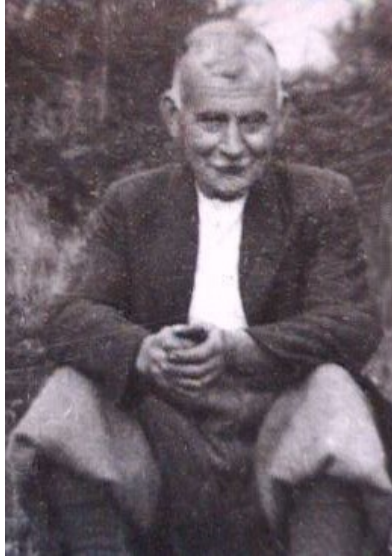
MATTHEW succeeded his father in Cleddans and Auchengray and his uncle in Otter and Mavisbank. He was a member of New Monkland School Board in 1886.

WILLIAM BLACK became a Writer to the Signet in 1889 and was a JP. During the first world war he served as a Major in the 4th Battalion HLI in India. He was a member of New Monkland School Board, Chairman of the New Monkland Parish Council, President in 1921 of the New Monkland Society, President of the Auchengray Agricultural Society, Captain - and in 1944 Vice President - of Murrayfield Golf Club, Chairman of Wilsons and Clyde Coal Coy. and of the Darngavel Coal Coy.

The Lairds of Otter

- 107 -

## The Lairds of Otter



The author was born and raised, along with his two sisters and three brothers, on Otter Estate. The family lived in a two-roomed apartment of the Home Farm building, which is still standing.

Willie - like his father before him - worked most of his life on Otter; after his retirement he was given the use of Jock's Lodge as a holiday home until his death in 1966 at the age of 86. His younger brother David also worked many years for the estate, ending his days at the Home Farm.

Willie wrote this booklet at the request of Muriel Rankin, wife of the last of the Rankin lairds. It is edited and printed by Muriel's son.