

## DALMUNZIE DOSSIER

The 2 ½ mile long Dalmunzie Railway was privately owned, it was founded and financed by Sir Archibald Birkmyre (1876 – 1935). Sir Archibald made his fortune from his family's Jute manufacturing and merchandising business. Factories were in Bengal, India.

Birkmyre Bros had offices at no. 6 Clive Row, Calcutta, their UK operations traded out of Glasgow under the name of The Greenock Rope Company.

It is also possible that at one time they had interests in Dundee which was a major centre for the hessian trade where it was made into sacks for carrying goods.

Sir Archibald's forebears however left the shores of the Firth of Tay to seek their fortunes by the banks of the Hooghly in India. Sir Archibald Birkmyre's father, Henry, eventually managing to open a small jute mill in the Calcutta area in 1875 to process the rough plant fibre. Birkmyre Bros were established.

A second mill "Hastings Mill" at Serampore was fitted with electric lighting in 1894 so that it could operate day and night.

Very soon jute manufacture in Bengal was in direct competition with Dundee as more and more mills were built. Rivalry between the two centres became intense.

From small beginnings in 1870 jute manufacture rose to become India's highest export earner between 1920 – 1928 at 25% of all goods sold abroad. Cotton at this time was 18%

Food stuffs, including tea, later took the dominant position.

The jute wallahs alongside Sir Archibald Birkmyre were Sir Edward Benthall of Bird & Co and Sir Alexander Murray of Thomas Duff & Co.

Having taken control of the business at a relatively young age Archibald Birkmyre became chairman of the Indian Jute Mills Association, four

times between 1904 – 1916. He was also able to donate a major sum of money to the Queen Victoria Memorial Museum in Calcutta which exhibited the history of British rule in India.

Lord Curzon the viceroy at the time thanked him for his “handsome gesture” which certainly moved Archibald up a notch or two into the higher echelons of the very strict pecking order of the Raj, the leading members of which were the Governors and Viceroys followed by Military Officers.

Despite its huge contribution to the British Empire jute was regarded as a poor relation to other trades, much to Archibald’s chagrin it never received the recognition it deserved back home in Great Britain.

Archibald became a Knight Bachelor in 1917 and a Baronet in 1921 for his vital services, manufacturing sand bags in World War 1 and in the following years when David Lloyd George was trying to rebuild the British economy after the devastating conflict.

The honour means that all subsequent elder male heirs are entitled to be called Sir.

Except perhaps for his education Archie must have spent many years in India, however by the time he was 30 he was to be found more and more in Britain, managing the family concerns in this country and settling down with his wife Anne.

Sir Archibald probably lived in several properties in the UK including a Surrey address which was convenient for London.

From 1907 – 1919 Sir Archie rented the Dalmunzie Estate in the Spittal of Glenshee where a man of his class could enjoy the excellent shooting opportunities to be had on the high moors.

As well as grouse and stags, hares and rabbits also provided good targets plus any passing ducks and snipe.

More than likely Sir Archibald Birkmyre was a keen shot having plenty of practise whilst in India where for many wealthy gentry hunting expeditions were a thrilling pastime. It is not recorded whether Sir Archie managed to kill a tiger, whilst he was in the sub continent.





At Dalmunzie Sir Archibald would have kept a Game Book in which he would have recorded his "bag" for the season.

If the mammals and birds were in plentiful supply it would have been easy for a good shot to achieve 1000 kills of various sorts per year.

When the estate was put on the market in 1920 Sir Archibald Birkmyre had no hesitation in buying it outright.

Previously the original house on the land where Archie and Anne resided during the shooting season was very small indeed, it was just room enough to cope with his children, boys Henry and Archy when they visited Scotland.

The Birkmyre family were the first people to occupy the tiny dwelling initially but once it came into their possession Sir Archibald Birkmyre immediately set about enlarging it on a massive scale transforming the humble house into a prominent Scottish baronial residence of considerable style and elegance.

Once upon a time there was a castle at Dalmunzie, mounds marked the spot where it stood, iron boundary markers with D on one side indicated the limits of its territory. On the other side an I was etched for Invercauld.

No expense was spared on the imposing new building which it would seem must have been part of Sir Archibald's grand plan if the estate ever came into his ownership.

He seized the opportunity with both hands and in no time at all his schemes came into fruition, this included a 9 hole golf course laid out by Baird one of the top golf course architects of his day, also a fine croquet lawn was put down in front of the mansion.

The greatest achievement though was the 2 ½ mile narrow gauge railway.

Prior to the coming of the railway, parties of game hunters had to face a long tiring trek, they shouldered all their supplies or rode ponies over the rough sapping ground to reach their base of operations.



Once the 2 ½ mile trudge to Glenlochsie Lodge was finally gained, quite often in atrocious weather conditions it would take some considerable time for preparations to be completed before shooting or stalking activities could commence.

As well as alleviating the long walk in, several other factors seemed to have motivated the jute tycoons decision to construct a railway in his “back garden” leading to the mountains.

Undoubtedly the spark for the idea came about when Sir Archibald Birkmyre heard and more than likely visited the shooting estate of Sir William Lithgow – the magnet of Greenock shipyards fame.

Sir William had built a private narrow gauge railway on his land at Gleddoch overlooking the Clyde in Renfrewshire for his own shooting parties comfort and ease of travel to the moors.

Sir Archibald was considering upgrading the overland route to Glenlochsie Lodge but was inspired by what he had witnessed at Gleddoch, so he immediately started drawing up plans to build a similar railway for himself to rival that of his Greenock business compatriot.

The geography of the land at Dalmunzie would mean that something special would have to be constructed but Sir Archibald was undaunted from the enterprise which lay ahead of him for he already had the experience of narrow gauge railway journeys at Darjeeling in Western Bengal, India, which lay not a great distance away from his jute mills.

This 2ft gauge railway took passengers high up to the cooler altitudes of the hill station overlooking the Himalayas to escape the burning heat of the Indian plains.

It was here that the British retreated each summer using the railways spiral formations and double reverse zig zags to gain the necessary height to reach its final destination at 2150 metres or 7054 feet above sea level.

Judging from the expertise Sir Archibald had used to build his golf links it is hard to believe that he did not employ professional consultants to at least briefly advise him on the best course of action to take for his own railway.

I cannot trace any firm evidence but maybe Babbie, Shaw & Morton of Glasgow were involved for a short period of time, this company were the consulting engineers for the 2 ft. gauge Leighton Buzzard Light Railway situated in Bedfordshire, England whose line was built in 1919 just 6 months before the Dalmunzie venture.

The volunteer run Leighton Buzzard Narrow Gauge Railway is still operating today, its 2  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile length of track contains several steep inclines one of which is 1 in 25. It also operated petrol locomotives in its early years of exactly the same type that were to be sent to Dalmunzie the following year.

Further proof in the form of a letter from W B Shaw indicates at this time that he was involved in an important contract in Scotland, although this does not mean it was located at Dalmunzie.

Nevertheless the question must be asked, "was all this more than a coincidence?"

Whatever happened the fact is that Sir Archibald turned to his own trusted engineer for the actual construction of his private railway.

Percival Thomas Rose was the man put in charge of the whole project, he had previously overseen the running of Sir Archibald Birkmyre's jute factories in India and probably at least once would have travelled on the "little" railway at Darjeeling where he would have been very impressed with the engineering skills of the line.

It was Percival Rose who recommended a gauge of 2ft 6" for the Dalmunzie Railway, he decided that because of the tricky terrain a wider gauge than the usual 2ft. would give far more adhesion and stability.

A survey of the proposed route, (maybe after a feasibility study with outside counsels) indicated to Percival that a zig-zag incline would be a sensible step to take to gain much needed height at a critical point about half way along the line.

The gentler lower levels that rise up to become Creag a'Chaise, a hill conveniently sited along the way would be the ideal position.



A number of sleepers from the initial consignment were later to be used. A squad of eight Irishmen, a road gang from Braemar, were employed to dig out the trackbed there being no earth moving machines available. All the hard graft was done with picks, shovels and crowbars plus the occasional few odd sticks of gelignite to remove, or split the larger rocks blocking the passage of the permanent way.

After enquiries Sir Archibald Birkmyre was extremely lucky in sourcing a supply of all the rails he needed locally in Aberdeenshire.

The 18lb per foot rails were apparently once used to lay a light railway in France during World War 1 and were returned to stock after hostilities had ended.

The track was being held in reserve at a secret location just in case it was needed again elsewhere in the future, but it suddenly became surplus to requirements.

Sir Archibald managed to acquire the rails "dirt cheap" presumably after speaking to an official in the Ministry of Defence.

At the same time a quantity of timber sleepers were purchased to begin the first stages of the track laying stratagem, this included three branch lines radiating back towards the main house from the main line station alignment.

Two tracks went into a newly constructed and very plush engine and carriage shed, whilst a possible latter addition oriented to the door of a game larder where grouse and venison could be hung near the kitchens.

Two other sidings exist further up the line, one which I guess was located in a long gully carved out of the rock face at the bottom end of the double reverse zig-zag. This branch was probably the one mentioned in Tramways of the Tay Valley by Alan W Brotchie as leading to a water pump (maybe a natural spring). It is separated from the main line by a gap of 10 inches. When this bit of track was used a wagon would have been manhandled across the intervening space.

The water was used to top up the locomotives radiators, the petrol pump for the engines fuel was situated beside the station area at Dalmunzie House.

A number of sleepers from the initial consignment were later to be used spasmodically along various short sections of the rail route but no more were ordered due to a new development.

In a brilliant brainwave the concept of using reinforced concrete sleepers for the vast majority of the 2 ½ mile long line was born.

After a few experiments it was quickly realised that the new material would be better suited for the task at hand.

I cannot find out what prompted the notion of using reinforced concrete sleepers instead of the traditional wooden variety. Was it because timber sleepers were expensive or perhaps being not available locally they were hard to find and deliver. Maybe it was thought the life expectancy of the timber would mean they would expire very fast and it would be a full time job to replace them.

Could it be that concrete sleepers were used on other railways (not necessary narrow gauge) and shown to be a good idea.

Then perhaps it might have been a brand new revolutionary idea, the perfect solution to combat the Scottish artic conditions to be found at such a height close by the catchment area of the Cairngorm configuration.

In a well thought out programme the “navvies” were instructed to cast the reinforced concrete sleepers during the harsh winter months when the snow completely covered the hillsides and prevented any track laying at all.

The sleepers were made on the spot very near the improvements to the “big house”, altogether about 2,500 were moulded before being transferred as required onto two small flat wagons to be taken to the ever expanding rail head.

About 10 sleepers were needed for each length of track. On the return journey back to base the flat wagons were loaded with rocks to be used for the new additions to the house, some of this stone might have been blasted creating several small quarries in the vicinity of the line.

Some of the stone could have been broken up still further and recycled to make the reinforced concrete sleepers.



## LOCOMOTIVES

The choice of ordering Simplex locomotives made by Motor Rail of Bedfordshire might have been made after seeing them working on Sir William Lithgow's estate or by the recommendation of Babbie, Shaw & Morton. Alternatively it could have been a man from the M.O.D. where the rail was purchased.

Simplex's had a first class proven record of working well in extreme conditions ferrying ammunition and shells to the trenches in the 1<sup>st</sup> World War and returning with the wounded and dying.

They were easy to operate and maintain.

The vast majority operating behind the Western Front were 2ft. gauge they had bow or boat shaped frames to support the engine whereas the few 2ft 6" gauge locomotives had straight channel frames.

Following a letter sent by P T Rose Esq a quotation for one 20 BHP 2 ½ ton 2ft. 6" gauge Simplex petrol locomotive was posted to him by Motor Rail, this included two name plates DALMUNZIE in cast brass to be fitted on the engine bonnets.

Sir Archibald Birkmyre signed the contract on the 4<sup>th</sup> September 1920 for an agreed sum of £709.00. The above resulted in locomotive Works no. 2014 being supplied for collection by Sir Archibald Birkmyre to Blairgowrie Station on the Caledonian Railway on the 23<sup>rd</sup> September 1920.

A special coupling link was sent on the 8<sup>th</sup> February 1921. After trials Sir Archibald was extremely pleased with the Simplex and on the 8<sup>th</sup> January 1921 once more signed a contract for another Simplex Works no 2086 to be named GLENLOCHSIE.

The £709.00 cost was increased by £13. and 8 shillings for the addition of an acetylene headlight.

The second locomotive was delivered on 18<sup>th</sup> July 1921, both were painted in an apple green livery.

It would appear from archive records that both Simplex's were purchased second-hand, fully overhauled and refurbished from stock that had seen active service behind the front lines in the 1<sup>st</sup> World War.

A petrol railcar built by McEwan, Platt & Co Ltd of Wickford, Essex was also obtained in 1921.

This combined engine and coach was a disaster and only frequently used thereafter. It had only 10 horse power and because it was too high geared the locomotive struggled to deal with the steep gradients.

It was thought, rather than go to the bother of assembling the full train, that the later acquisition would save time if just a few guests wanted an easy days shooting or a pleasure trip to the end of the line.

The troublesome McEwan Platt could be driven from either end by transferring the gear and direction levers. It was also very high off the ground, some six inches taller than the other carriages and didn't really fit in with those gillies who preferred the straight forward controls of the Simplex's

The locomotive was apparently sold, circa 1940 to the War Department.

The Simplex operated on the Dalmunzie Railway for many years after, both DALMUNZIE and GLENLOCHSIE were often seen linked together double heading, one engine leading whilst the other was connected in the reverse direction, this enabled the drivers to liase with each other without the noise of the locomotives motors placed in between them to disrupt their teamwork.

It was sad to learn that sometime in 1962 GLENLOCHSIE was involved in a derailment and suffered damage beyond repair.

It is not reported just where along the line the accident happened, one can only imagine that the calamity occurred near a steep gradient which probably meant that the locomotive was travelling at a great speed this caused the engine to turn over as it crashed instead of just falling off the rails.



In my mind's eye I visualise one of GLENLOCHSIE regular drivers desperately struggling to gain control of the locomotive as with every passing second it gathered speed to plunge down the fearsome zig-zag zone.

It had been raining and the track was very wet and slippery, despite fully applying the brakes the wheels could not get a grip of the rails.

The helpless driver has no choice to leap clear as the 2 ½ ton locomotive hurtled over the lip of the bottom embankment leaving a 100 yard scar in the ground and a trail of debris in its wake.

The driver shocked and shaken by the near death incident looks down at the wreckage of GLENLOCHSIE lying beneath him, now upturned amongst a grave of boulders with one of its wheels still slowly spinning round.

All the above is conjecture, for Simon Winton paints a different picture of a drunken joy-rider.

GLENLOCHSIE was broken up and used as spare parts for DALMUNZIE in 1963.

## CARRIAGES AND WAGONS

Two lovely varnished carriages were bought to Dalmunzie in 1920, both were about 10 ft in length by 6 ft. wide, they are said to have been used as officers observation coaches in the 1<sup>st</sup> World War.

The enclosed, glazed window 1<sup>st</sup> Class "saloon" carriage was apparently delivered complete with a card table and a cocktail cabinet. If this story is true these were removed to make way for four comfortable seats in upholstered leather. A large leather arm chair was fitted at the other end of the coach on a swivel, this allowed the grouse shooter or deer stalker to quickly turn around with his gun or telescope. This of course must have been Sir Archibald Birkmyre's personal seat.

The second open carriage seated eight people on two way style tram seats, it had pull down canvas blinds which kept out the worse of the Scottish weather and midges.

The carriages had their own independent stanchion braking systems, fitted by Motor Rail which allowed them to free wheel and coast down hill back to Dalmunzie House by themselves without "running away".

Two small flat wagons were also kept on the railway, they were initially used to transport sleepers when the railway was being constructed and to ferry stone back to Dalmunzie House when it was being enlarged. Later they came into their own, being the ideal conveyance for bringing down from the hills the bulky carcasses of game birds or stags, on arrival the wagons were manoeuvred to a special siding leading to the main houses larders.



## OPERATIONS

Work started on the construction of the railway and the enlarged main house in the Spring of 1920.

In 1921 it was announced that Sir Archibald Birkmyre had been awarded the title of Baronet, so as the future Dalmunzie House was just a building site at this time I suspect he and his relatives celebrated the news with a couple of magnums of champagne at Busbridge Hall in Godalming, Surrey, his main address in those days.

It would be nice to believe that Sir Archibald had set a target date of 12<sup>th</sup> August 1922 (the Glorious 12<sup>th</sup>) for the Grand Opening of his new baronial home and at the same time the Dalmunzie Railway.

Here was the ideal opportunity to proclaim his well deserved aggrandisement to the elite of society. If this happened it must have been a truly splendid occasion.

No doubt the nobility and other distinguished figures were invited to the conspicuous ceremony to celebrate Sir Archibald's marvellous achievements. He would have been a proud man to realise his dreams had been accomplished.

Sir Archibald Birkmyre's head chauffeur Hugh Reginald Green probably had the task of collecting a few of the leading personalities of the day and their elegant wives who had travelled by train to Blairgowrie Station, some 20 or more miles away, and to deliver them without distress to Dalmunzie.

On arrival they would have been welcomed by Sir Archibald and probably offered a drink by Redman the butler before being shown to their rooms.

Posh frocks and evening jackets would be hung up for any creases to drop out in readiness for the soiree to be held later that evening. Any tiny tots not already in bed would be left in the care of nanny, Olive, an Anglo-Indian whilst the adults mixed together.

In between the musical performances that were to follow perhaps some of the polite conversation drifted towards the newly built railway stretching up and away into the moors. Maybe by the time the party had ended the group of guests had heard so much about the little line that they were *eager to see it for themselves.*

After porridge the next morning I can imagine an exuberant Sir Archibald, eager to show off his new creation, leading his willing participants to the station, just a stones throw from the house, where the wee train was waiting for them.

As the aristocracy assembled around the locomotives there stood chauffeur Hugh Reginald Green (known as Reg to his family) to explain the workings of the engines.

Reg had been selected to drive the first passenger train up the Glen and had spent many weeks previously learning the peculiarities of the track with Percival Rose acting as his tutor.

I suspect the first few trips up to the terminus of the line at Glenlochsie Lodge consisted of shooting parties keen to commemorate the Glorious 12<sup>th</sup> whilst those taken later in the day were pleasure trips participated in by the ladies.

My guess is that in the evening the whole triumphal day was celebrated with the pomp and pageant of a firework display.

The most vaunted railway had been a great success.

Commentators today would think the Dalmunzie Railway was very ostentatious of Sir Archibald Birkmyre, there is a case to answer, but I think it was a sound business proposition. It was something different to attract the rich “guns” to the shooting on the estate as well as eliminating the long slog to the moors.

In any case, Sir Archibald could afford his pleasures, so why not.

It was only a short time later that chauffeur Reg was sent to France by Sir Archibald to help build a Hispano Suisa Sedanca De Ville motor car, a gleaming monster in maroon with gold coach lines and brass lamps fitted on the “A” pillars, this is how the wealthy live I suppose.



At the end of each hunting season it was traditional to hold a Gillies Ball to celebrate the successful outcome of the grouse and stag stalking months.

This customary event for the staff and estate workers was attended by Sir Archibald Birkmyre, his family and close and trusted friends.

The idea was to have a good old get together which broke down any social barriers for the evening.

Bag pipers played whilst everybody mixed and danced reels together well into the early hours of the following morning.

In the years that followed the opening of the railway gillies acted as the locomotive drivers to take the hunters to the end of the line at Glenlochsie Lodge. This building quickly became defunct and unoccupied because of the coming of the railway.

Abandoned and neglected it was allowed to deteriorate, now due to the ravishes of time it has become the dilapidated derelict domicile it is today.

The gillies who drove the locomotives were as far as I can ascertain in date order were as follows:-

Percival Rose  
Hugh Reginald Green

David Sandiman  
Jimmy Ramsay  
Sandy McDonald  
Davie Gruer  
Hamish Blaikie

The journey time took about 20 – 25 minutes depending whether or not the steep zig-zag gradient had to be sanded to obtain grip on the rails.

Simplex loco's were fitted with 4 sand boxes directly in front of the wheels to allow for forward and reverse directions.

Over the years the drivers learnt the skills needed to ease the 2 ½ ton engines up the switchback thus avoiding wheel spinning and slipping. On numerous occasions the train would make several attempts to reach the top of the brae, going back to the bottom to try and try again before a successful run.

As can be imagined a great deal of sand was dispensed over the years when the track was wet and greasy. The carriages were pushed up the zig-zag which included parts that were 1 in 12.

I cannot discover any witnesses who recall whether it was ever necessary to split the train in two to get up the hill, that is leaving one of the carriages at the lower section of track whilst the other one was taken to the summit separately.

The first carriage would be securely braked whilst the engine went back down to collect the second coach before proceeding as normal.

If there were any concerns about mounting the zig-zag with a full train both DALMUNZIE and GLENLOCHSIE would double head the train, they would then act as shunters using the unison of the combined horse power to propel the carriages up the steep bank.

Once the double reverse was accomplished and the top section of track-bed was gained the train would continue in the ordinary way with the coaches being hauled to the rail head.

After GLENLOCHSIE's demise it was left to DALMUNZIE to do all the work. In the case of large parties of visitors perhaps it was more convenient to haul just one carriage at a time to the far end of the line before returning to pick up the next band of budding nimrods.

On most journeys a flat wagon was hitched to the rear of the train, it might have been a providential, and more confidence providing move if a brakeman was positioned here however photographs reveal only young



lads or dogs on the truck, lying along the wooden boards with not a care in the world. Large hampers of food were also placed on the wagon.

Once the terminus station was reached and the passengers had disembarked the carriages were diverted into a siding so that the locomotive could be released.

It was customary practice that as soon as the engine was uncoupled from the rolling stock that it would set off back down the line to the big house.

Very often on the upward journey the open carriage was placed in front of the locomotive.

Two "guns" sat in the coach on either side with orders to shoot any birds that gave them a chance, the train only stopped to pick up any dead game, which was quite often.

In later years it was not uncommon, for wealthy American "sharp shooters" for example, to kill 10 brace of grouse from firing, sitting down, from the carriages as they journeyed along to Glenlochsie Lodge.

## STALKING

I feel that I must explain the importance of stalking to the economy of large Scottish estates and why it is necessary to control the number of stags each year.

For centuries, Kings and Lords of the land together with other high born gentry, have hunted. It is a traditional way of life that has been established for generations.

It is still a "sport" mainly carried out and enjoyed by the moneyed classes who have the time and opportunities to become "a good shot".

The breeding cycle of deer is dominated by just one stag who attracts to itself all the female deer (hinds) in its area.

The hinds are impressed by the size of the stags antlers and fighting skills which would ensure healthy strong deer in the future.

For the above reason stags fight amongst themselves for the right to breed with the hinds. Often one stag can control its group of hinds for several years which can lead to inbreeding in the future. It is for this reason that it is necessary to cull the older stags each year.

Estate owners also do not want over grazing to occur.

The love of country sports in Scotland was firmly established by 1130 when King David started his royal hunting forests bringing in management policies for the conservation of game and habitat.

During the following centuries very strict rules were laid down with very strong punishments for offenders.

Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at Balmoral were very keen to promote and continue the well understood Gaelic culture during the period of their reign. At this time the sporting estate was born to cater for the huge growth of hunting interest amongst the Victorian gentlemen who thought of Scotland as a veritable arcadia.

The mountain scenery and fast running burns being reproduced in many paintings of which Landseer was the most famous artist.

The Highlands in Scotland are the ideal home for stags who roam on the vast estates. The owners rely on the yearly influx of wealthy stag stalkers to maintain the land.

The stalking season begins in late August and lasts until November each year.

Small parties set off early in the morning with a local gillie to try and find the stags. These are very hard to find in the vast wilderness but often can be glimpsed through telescopes wandering near their groups of hinds.

A long walk of several miles to get up wind of the stag then follows, there is normally hardly any cover to hide behind so stalkers must take a chance to try and find a boulder or hillock which the stag might be heading towards and intercept it.



Once in position the stalker will probably have only one chance to shoot at the stag broadside on.

The heart is the target, anywhere else will cause pain and suffering to the stag, even when a clean shot is delivered the stag gallops off for a distance of 50 yards or so before falling.

If the kill is successful the stag is galled on the spot i.e. his heart and liver are cut out. These are left for foxes and crows to feed on.

The stag then is dragged to a place where an estate lad can lead a pony and here the animal is loaded onto the back of a pony.

Back at the lodge the beast is weighed (average 15 stone) and its head removed, the stalker gets to keep the antlers. The best are 8 – 10 pointers. A stag with 12 pointers on his antlers is called a Royal, and is a good trophy to have on the walls in the hall back home.

Five stags a day is good but often stalkers come back empty handed.

For obvious reasons a narrow gauge railway going up into the highlands would doubtless be a great help to bring back any venison killed.

So the carriages and flat wagon would be left at Glenlochsie Lodge Station marooned amongst the bonny banks and braes until the grouse shooters or stalkers wearily returned at the end of their days sport.

In the stalking months of August, September, October and November a highland pony or garron as it is known in Scotland accompanied the train all the way to the old lodge, it often walked in front of the locomotive at a leisurely pace of some two or three miles an hour.

A report on the Internet states that the garron was lead by a game-keeper holding a red flag !!!

The pony of course was used to ferry food and drink out onto the barren moorland many miles away from the railway line and of course to carry the carcasses of the dead stags back to the flat wagon afterwards ready for transporting them directly to the Dalmunzie House larders using the narrow gauge railway.

What the Dalmunzie Railway is remembered for today, more than anything else was all the tremendous fun and exciting experience of the down hill run. The foreboding tales related beforehand only served to increase the thrill of it all, the hunters loved it and talked non-stop about their own participation in the event for years later, to anybody that would listen.

The above is born out in the correspondence received whilst carrying out this research. Without fail everybody mentioned the free wheeling gravity train and how they avoided disaster themselves, also the sense of relief when it was all over. Surviving unscathed doing something with an element of risk attached seemed to be good fun. However for the most part, they were in safe hands, the fear being only in their minds.

The same scene of enjoyment was set to continue among Sir Archibald Birkmyre's many friends and acquaintances, for many years this included many top ranking dignitaries and politicians such as Winston Churchill who was not adverse to a pleasant days grouse shooting high up on the moors surrounding Dalmunzie House.

Sir W Childs then head of Scotland Yard was also a keen sportsman.

Every year Sir Archibald spent the winter months at his property in Surrey before the annual move to the Spittal of Glenshee took place in time for the new shooting season to begin.

Whilst he was absent no doubt he received regular reports from his gamekeepers about the situation at Dalmunzie and the prospects for shooting which lay ahead.

Great excitement was generated amongst Sir Archibald's servants and cooks when the announcement was made to prepare for the long trip up to Scotland. For the next week they hustled and bustled carefully packing everything that was needed.

On arrival Dalmunzie suddenly became a hive of activity as there was a lot to do before the first of Sir Archibald's many guests were due to be entertained.



The same procedure was used by the grouse shooters and their fellow companions once they returned from the butts after a successful days sport.

I don't know whether the hunters showed any signs of anxiety upon boarding the carriages that had been left at Glenlochsie Lodge in readiness for the return journey but all faced the same nerve wrecking plight.

The railway was down hill all the way to the big house, this meant the coaches would be able to free wheel homeward by gravity all by themselves.

With hearts in their mouths and full of trepidation of the unknown roller coaster ride ahead, they set off, each carriage had its own independent braking system, a round wheeled handle mounted on a stanchion which controlled the descent.

The would be passengers had heard of the hair raising stores told each night over the brandies back at Dalmunzie House but now they had to face the daunting experience for themselves.

Would they too have a tale to tell later on whilst downing a well deserved double dram beside the warming glow of a lovely log fire.

Of course the hunters faith in the braking system would be sorely tested as the switchback section approached, this could be very very tricky at times when the rails were wet and slippery.

At the top the gradient was 1 in 12 so it was a bit scary if you started to slither, apparently you could slide as fast with the brakes fully locked tight as you could with them turning. Nevertheless despite the difficulties the drivers, regular gillies soon got to know just how much brake power to apply to get everybody to the bottom section of track safely.

There were a few minor derailments to contend with each year but the sudden jarring stop was seemed to be expected and only served to increase the adrenaline rush of the descent, the carriage was always lifted back onto the track afterwards in just a few minutes, without too many broken bones or bruises.

In the case of the railway the line was inspected for any problems and the loco's overhauled and oiled.

Over the course of many years Sir Archibald accompanied by his wife Lady Anne made frequent return trips to India to oversee his affairs.

Whilst on one visit in 1932 the couple managed to combine business with pleasure travelling to Darjeeling once again riding on the little narrow gauge train to reach the mountain retreat.

It would appear that either at Dalmunzie or Darjeeling Sir Archibald was able to relax and enjoy the fruits of his endeavours.

Dalmunzie was a very light hearted place in the 1920's and early 1930's, full of gaiety and laughter. Everybody was always full of high spirits particularly so when Sir Archibald was around..

All this was to change with the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939 but before this grievous event occurred Sir Archibald Birkmyre passed away on the 24<sup>th</sup> June 1935, he was buried in the little churchyard at Spittal of Glenshee near the entrance to his beloved Dalmunzie Estate, he was aged 59.

The Dowager Lady Birkmyre continued to share her life between Dalmunzie and Godalming with the assistance of her sons Henry (Sir) and Archy but the war years meant things would never be the same again, the special carefree atmosphere of Dalmunzie which Sir Archibald had instilled had disappeared.



## THE WINTON FAMILY

The Dalmunzie Estate was sold in 1946 to Denis Winton, a fighter pilot from the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War. He decided to transform the baronial house into a hotel and to keep the little railway operating for the expedience grouse shooters and stalkers.

It was also a novelty for the paying guests, who wanted to travel up the Glen in luxury and to admire the fine scenery all around them en route.

The railway operated on the same principals as before with the gillies and occasionally a few beaters driving the locomotives. Sandy McDonald was the number 1 driver. He lived in a cottage close to the entrance driveway to the Dalmunzie Estate. The pony boy was Malcolm.

The “patern” of the grouse shooting organised by Denis Winton from the Dalmunzie Hotel, in those days took the form of a driven day over established butts on Finnegan Moor on the Saturday. Denis rented the shooting on Finnegan from the Mackenzie-Smith family. His own moor, behind the Hotel was shot on a ‘walked up’ basis by the same team of guns, usually 7 or 8 in number on the Monday and the Green Hill, on the left hand side of the drive approaching the hotel, on the Wednesday. Therefore, a party could enjoy a week or so away from home, including travel, with 3 days shooting over different ground.

The bag of grouse shot, varied according to both the breeding season, weather etc. and the marksmanship of the party. An average driven day on Finnegan in those days would be between 40 & 60 brace, often including a few, perhaps between 3 to 6, Blackgame. Occasionally a few wild English partridge would be shot from the small fields around Finnegan Farm, in the late afternoon. Sometimes the odd Rabbit or Grey Hare would be shot, however hunters were generally encouraged not to shoot ‘ground game’ particularly on the walked up days on both ‘safety’ grounds (pellets ricocheting from rocks etc) and the fact that they were weighty to carry back to the train or pony, often a good mile or more away.

The train was used on the Monday. Normally departing, with carriages, around 10 am and returning possibly about 5 pm. Again the amount /

number of 'bag' shot varied but on an average Monday behind the Hotel could be between 20 and 35 brace of grouse and often included a few Ptarmigan, (these birds are only found over 2,000 feet above sea level). The staff and non participating hotel guests invariably came out to wave **adieu**. Both the departure and arrival back were quite an occasion and spectacle, in which everyone took considerable interest. The whole affair, chugging its way through the heather and rocks was quite unique. Not only was it a useful and practical form of conveyance to get some distance into the hill but it was wonderful to be seeking our quarry via unusual but lovely transport from a previous era. The Dalmunzie Train was very much a feature of many most enjoyable grouse shooting holidays.

On returning from the respective Moors the Grouse were hung in the ventilated Game Larder (still in existence albeit in need of some restoration) at the rear of Dalmunzie Hotel, quite close to the Engine & Carriage House. Dependant upon the weather they would be hung for between 3 & 10 days before being prepared for the table. On Grouse shooting days a pony was used to take the lunch and refreshments from the point that the train stopped, following the guns, at some distance into the hill.

The Stag and Deer Shooting (Culling) normally started at the end of September and went on during October & November. The train was used regularly for both transporting the stalkers into the hills beyond the derelict 'Lodge' and for bringing back the fallen beasts to the Game Larder at Dalmunzie. A pony was used to bring the beasts from the point of fall, to the train.

During forays into the hill it was not unusual to disturb herds of red deer of considerable size. Sometimes even unsettling a herd of well over 1000, probably nearer 2000 beasts in a Corrie far beyond the derelict lodge and the end of the rail line. It would have been a magical and most memorable sight, watching them race over the horizon, almost in single file.

Dalmunzie was quite well known for its stalking.



The staff at Dalmunzie in the 1960's and 70's were largely Australian girls, imported annually by Denis through a London agency. Always pretty, competent and obliging girls, they loved the shooting/stalking parties, a hotel full of chaps away from home and intent upon enjoying themselves plus all the fun and frivolity that went with the occasion. The Saturday night usually developed into a real party with dancing etc. The girls composed a hilarious song, often sung well into the early hours – it started 'The Dalmunzie train went into the hill – and she blew – and she blew – and she blew'. They then invented, to suit each recurring party, a number of verses, mostly somewhat irreverent, characterising Denis and the various visitors staying at the time, and their antics. The regularly repeated chorus went 'The Dalmunzie train went into the hill – and she blew – and she blew – and she blew'. Tremendous fun particularly after a good meal and a number of 'drams' in good company. Happy days indeed.

Except for two episodes life at Dalmunzie continued without any major changes from the time Denis Winton bought the Estate in 1946 to 1978, a total of 32 years.

In 1955 the estate was advertised in *Country Life* as being for sale complete with narrow gauge railway, it would appear that no transactions were ever entered into.

The above exercise might have been undertaken when Denis separated from his wife and a new lady entered his life to assist him, most ably, in running the hotel, entertaining the guests and keeping the staff in order. Her name was Adrienne, better known today as novelist now writing under the name of "Alexandra Raife".

I wonder if any of her books feature or allude to any events that occurred at Dalmunzie. The title "Belonging" might contain a few clues.

The second event was the 1962 accident to locomotive GLENLOCHSIE. The subject of the crash has become a bit of a mystery. Letters mention "I remember hearing of the destruction of the locomotive" or "somebody told me of the smash but I don't know what happened" and "I vaguely recall hearing of it". Guests of the Hotel asked about GLENLOCHSIE but got no answers.

## CLOSURE

The surprise closure of the Dalmunzie Railway was announced in 1978, it would seem that due to “paying” hotel guests travelling over the track it was no longer classified as a private railway and as such came under the Government Railway Inspectors Regulations. The railway was never open to the general public.

A sum of over £60,000 was reported as the sum needed to upgrade the railway and meet the new operational standards required.

There were also worries about the safety issues concerning stopping the train on the steep zig zag section.

Other preserved enthusiast railways at this time were having to air brake their rolling stock, at vast expense, to comply with the new acts that had been introduced by the Government of the day. They were planning to denationalise British Rail at the time.

The above was a tremendous outlay for Denis Winton and certainly not worth the huge expenditure involved. Denis would never hope to recoup the prohibitive costs involved, inevitably the only choice he had was to close the railway down.

The Dalmunzie Railway had operated for over 56 years bringing much pleasure and fun to all that had travelled on the line as well as saving hours of weary walking.

It was a sad day when the adventures by train to Glenlochsie Lodge and the return trip to Dalmunzie House came to an end.

Amid great despondency and reluctance the decision to dismantle the railway was taken.

In May 1978 the upper end of track was lifted by a gang of 5 men, the lower section was removed in August 1978.



The rail and hundreds of concrete sleepers (probably still in panels) were purchased for laying at the National Tractor and Farm Museum situated at Hunday near Stockton on Tees in Northumberland.

The Simplex "DALMUNZIE" and the two tiny carriages were also transported to the museum where it was intended to run them over a 1 ½ mile stretch of line circulating around a lake and back.

The museum which started in a small way in 1964 as a private collection of restored agricultural machinery by John Moffitt gradually grew into one of the finest exhibitions to be seen anywhere in the country.

Despite reports that the locomotive was sent away for overhaul and restoration there is no record that DALMUNZIE ever ran on the Hunday track, only put on display.

It would appear that Mr Moffitt had run into the same problems of legislation and red tape that had forced the Dalmunzie Railway to close.

In 1988 the National Tractor and Farm Museum let it be known that it was willing to dispose of its railway artefacts.

Meanwhile in 1981 back at Dalmunzie, Denis Winton had sold the house and estate, the buyer was Tom Campbell who ran the Hotel for a period of 6 years before Simon Winton, Denis's son repurchased the property bringing it back into the family name again.

I don't know how Simon Winton found out that the locomotive and old carriages were up for sale at the Hunday Museum, maybe he had first refusal if they ever came on the market again. He had only just moved back into Dalmunzie House when he heard about their availability in October 1988.

By November 1988 the locomotive DALMUNZIE and the two vintage carriages had been transported back to Scotland.

Simon obviously had very fond memories of riding on and maybe driving the engine up and down the line when he was a youngster.

As well as sentimental reasons, I think Simon really appreciated the strong links the rolling stock had with Dalmunzie and wanted to preserve as much as possible the history of the Estate.

Although talk over the intervening 14 years has mentioned relaying about 1 mile of track leading down to the bottom end of the old zig zag incline, in reality a short section of line of about 500 yards would be a gratifying commencement to any long term intentions.

Simon Winton has purchased a small amount of rail ready to begin the initial step but this lies stacked in the long grass at the back of the hotel.

The much needed impetus to embark on any project relies on the repairs to DALMUNZIE's engine which looks like it might be seized up after lying idle for such a long time.

I am sure as soon as the locomotive has been reconditioned the momentum will be in place to restore the two lovely carriages to their original glory, shortly afterwards.

The track could be laid down in a large circle and a push me, pull me operation put in place with DALMUNZIE placed inbetween the two coaches, this layout might satisfy any railway inspector's regulations without incurring enormous expense.

It is vital that when DALMUNZIE is overhauled to working condition that it gets regular runs to keep the engine moving and well oiled.

If any of the above does not come to fruition then maybe a cosmetic job can be done on the unique rolling stock so that they can be displayed undercover at Dalmunzie.

A small museum with old photographs and cine film could be created under the banner of "Scotland's First Mountain Railway" maybe a small booklet could be produced to sell to visitors interested in the exhibits and their distinctive history.

We have so much to thank Sir Archibald Birkmyre for together with his chief engineer Percival Rose for creating the Dalmunzie Railway. Vision and wealth coupled with practical skills built the line.



It might have been a little ostentatious but it served extremely well the needs of Sir Archibald and his illustrious sporting guests.

The Railway proved to be very beneficial for Denis Winton when he turned Dalmunzie House into a hotel and sporting centre. His visitors found the little train very useful indeed and had lots of fun travelling on the line especially when free wheeling down the precipitous zig zag section. This amazing double reverse turned out to be a tremendous godsend, it became a wonderful talking point which attracted grouse shooters and stalkers to Dalmunzie and to return every year.

Today Simon Winton has to be thanked for preserving for the future an important slice of Scottish History. We wish him every success in restoring and recording the golden days of the Dalmunzie Railway – Scotland's First Mountain Railway.