

Cover: Grantown Square 1860's

This early photograph was taken in the 1860's before the building of the 1868 Courthouse at the far end of the Square. Then, the Square, Grantown's market place, had a water pump where youngsters were sent to collect the day's water. The town's original water supply was from the burn which flowed through Burnfield. Later water was piped into town using wooden water pipes, one of which can be seen at the museum. The pump in the Square like those in the High Street and at the West End attracted, morning and evening, a fair number of young men and women: the lassies to collect the water and the lads to gain favour and win hearts by offering to carry the water. This pump even merited an ode published in 1865 by James Horne:

*Old wives loudly laud thee for thy water palatable
Young men laud thee for something more reputable.*



January: A snowy Square



Grantown has been described as "A town for all Seasons" for both summer and winter holidays. Snowy winter weather has always been able to bring both joy and sorrow. Winter sports have long been popular with skiing and sledging curling and skating. Grantown Grammar School was the only school in the country with skiing on the curriculum and they even made their own skis. Pathe News in the 1960's featured youngsters skiing to school along snowy streets.

It was the severe weather of February 1881 "*while outdoor labour is in abeyance, and rural amusements, with the exception of skating and curling are from the severity of the season at a discount ...*" that local publisher Angus Stuart decided to start a local newspaper, "The Grantown Supplement".

That year rail travel was severely disrupted and two years later on Dava Moor, a train carrying livestock was marooned under snow for seven days.

February: The Orphanage



Speyside House, was built in 1766 for Lady Anne Duff, Sir James Grant's mother-in-law, and later became, briefly, Grantown's main inn. The "Big Hoose". as it was known, then housed the Grammar School and in 1796 the Speyside Charity School, the first orphanage in the Highlands.

The building was almost completely rebuilt in the 1820's. With the clock tower financed largely from an unused 1813 local collection

for “Russian Sufferers” of the Napoleonic Wars. The public subscriptions thus used came from scores of local people with donations from five shillings to fifty guineas. The list of subscribers included: Col. F. W. Grant (future 6th Earl of Seafield), local ministers such as “Parson John” of Abernethy, local farmers such as the two Alexander Grants of Tullochgorm and Tullochgriban, two local factors, the doctor, the schoolmaster, the innkeeper and two excisemen, and many local shopkeepers, craftsmen and traders – the town’s principal weaver, the dyer, the cartwright and William Laing, Grantown’s watchmaker. The clock was finally installed by George Smith, clockmaker, Forres.

The Speyside Orphanage closed in 1975 and was sold to Highland Council in 1979. Just as the orphanage building, now Speyside House, had been opened as a heritage centre, it was sold by the Council in 1986 to a private contractor for conversion into flats.

March: Cairngorms and Railway

In the foreground of this photo is the 1863 Inverness and Perth Joint Railway Company Highland Main Line whose principal architect was Joseph Mitchell. It was one of two lines which reached Grantown that year.

The Cairngorm Mountains tell tales of both human endeavour and nature’s heritage. Celtic mythology has it that the high tops were created by the goddess Beirra. They were the legendary homes of departed heroes and the domain of such as Mag Moulach, the mountain goddess who nurtured and protected early tribes.



The first recorded ascent of both Ben Nevis and Cairngorm was by a botanist, James Robertson, in 1771. The mountains became the haunt of explorers, mountaineers and later, skiers. Queen Victoria, even, reached the summit of Ben Macdhui in October 1859.

The Cairngorm Climbing Club, formed in 1887, is the oldest in the country. Skiing was being taught to Grantown youngsters as early as 1908. The Cairngorms became a training

ground for various military units: from the brigade of territorials from Fort George brought to Strathspey by Colonel Malcolm in the early 1900s to the famous Norwegian Kompagni Ligne during World War Two.

April: Lochindorb

Lochindorb, the “the ill-natured loch” is dominated by Lochindorb Castle built in the 13th century and destroyed in 1456 on the orders of the king. It has now been tenantless for over five hundred years. Nettles fill its silent courtyard, trees and even a gooseberry bush peer over its roofless walls and only the cries of moorfowl are heard in that ancient solitude. Yet what tales these walls have to tell. Edward I “Longshanks” arrived at Lochindorb on 28th September 1303 and stayed there for ten days hunting during the day and feasting at night in the great hall: the loch illuminated by torches on the tower and battlements and the camp fires of the common soldiery around the lochside.



It was later a home of Alexander Stewart, the warlike lord of Lochindorb and Badenoch, “Wolf of Badenoch”, son of King Robert II of Scotland. He resented the church possession of

tracts of land in Badenoch and his feud with the Bishop of Moray led to the sack of Forres in 1390 and the burning of Elgin Cathedral.

One grim feature of the castle was the water pit vault. It looked like an ordinary well and it was deep enough under the level of the loch for its paved floor to be covered by some 3 feet of water. Into this was lowered the prisoner who could neither kneel nor sit for fear of drowning but had to stand to await his eventual release.

Nevertheless Alexander Stewart was buried in Dunkeld Cathedral with the inscription on his tomb "of good memory".

May: Castle road and the Garth

The road running North-East from the Square leads across Dava Moor to Forres and Nairn. Previously it led directly to Old Grantown and Castle Grant. The layout of buildings shows the typical "house and half house" arrangement. The 1960's police station stands on the site of the town's first inn, later the first Grantown School, whose school master, James Innes, left one night without paying his debts.

The house now known as the Garth was built for Sir James Grant's clerk in 1769. This building was soon turned into a woolen manufactory once employing 42 people. The town's first physician, William Moffat, stayed here at one time as did the ministers.



Later it was, in 1907, briefly the summer residence of Victorian best selling novelist, Marie Corelli, favourite of Queen Victoria. She was in fact the only author invited to the coronation of Edward VII. Amusingly her then devoted public would have been quite horrified by her private life with her lover Bertha Vyver. Bruce Lockhart tells that whilst in Grantown "she took herself very seriously. When she drove down the High Street with her ponies and her Pomeranians, she made Grantown take her

seriously. Perhaps that is why", he wrote, "although she inspired me in no way to write, she gave me the impression that authors were not only rich but very important people."

During WWII the building, like many in Grantown, was requisitioned for military use. In 1940 it was commandeered for remnants of the 51st Highland Division who were billeted here.

June: The Grant Arms Hotel

Close to Old Grantown, near Castle Grant was the district's main Inn. This was on the road north at Ballieward and built for £100 in 1755 by David Frew, master mason, who had been working on the Castle Grant extensions.

Ten years later, amongst the first buildings in New Grantown was what has become the Grant Arms Hotel. It started life as a linen manufactory. This unsuccessful venture was quickly followed by a brewing, baking and butchermeat business. The town's principal Inn then in neighbouring premises, switched its business in 1781 to the brewery thus marking the beginning of the hotel as fully licensed premises.



Over the years, the hotel has accommodated many famous visitors – none more so than Queen Victoria and Albert on their first ever stay in a public inn. This was recorded in her journal of Tuesday September 4 1860. The building, too, has had many changes and additions since its origins in 1765, including a Scottish Baronial replacement of that part in which Queen Victoria stayed.

July: The High Street (late 1940's?)

The buildings of Grantown's High Street may outwardly have changed little themselves over the last hundred years but the shops and businesses are mostly very different. No longer will you find petrol pumps on the street nor awnings shading the displays. The number of hotels is less. Though the Ben Mhor, a former temperance hotel remains, the Strathspey and the Palace are no more. The shops, each with a special story to tell provide a wide range of goods and services to attract visitors and meet local needs. The oldest establishment is Beale and Pyper going back well over a hundred years as has the building firm and A&W Laing now on the site of the BP and Shell Mex location.



The Victoria Christian Institute from where this photo was taken, was completed just after 1897, Jubilee Year, helped largely by public subscription. It boasted a tea room, reading room and library and is now a multi-function community centre with a small theatre and a “soft play” area.

August: The Bathing Pool

This ever popular spot is now a destination for visitors as well as residents. “Wild swimming” has become an accepted adventure pastime. Nevertheless, the Spey is a deep and dangerous river. It is Scotland's fastest flowing and, including its source waters, the longest in Scotland. It has a history, alas, of drownings and of disastrous floods. During the “Muckle Flood” of 1829 a large part of the Grantown end of the old bridge was destroyed including large parts of one parapet and the small arch. Even worse, some fifty years earlier, the middle arch was seriously damaged and urgent repairs had to be carried out. The builders toiled into December working on Sundays and into the night by torch-light. £5.14.5 was spent on “bread, beer and whisky” to the masons and men while employed working in the water.



The Spey was also used for transporting timber down stream for construction and ship building. Here at the “bathing pool” timber was landed for the completion of Grantown's first house and carted to its site in the Square.

September: Castle Grant

Although the Grants first acquired land in Strathspey as early as 1316, at Inverallan, it was not until 1536 that there is reference to a tower or keep in Freuchie or Ballachastell, or “Balloch Castle: the Castle of the Pass”. This tower then became an L plan Castle and by the end of that century a Z plan building with a tower at each corner. Successive alterations and additions led

to the Adam brothers extensions of the 1750s. This resulted in the massive granite faced north front that a century later Queen Victoria ungraciously described as looking like a factory.



The greatest of all the Chiefs of Grant, the Good Sir James, “Ruler of Strathspey” for almost half a century made Castle Grant his home until his death in 1811. From here Sir James brought Strathspey into the modern world – a social and economic revolution. Visitors ranged from great figures of the Scottish enlightenment such as Lord Kames to literary giants such as Robert Burns and to clansmen and their families like the prolific letter writer, Mrs Ann Grant of Laggan.

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have seen the castle occupied by Indian troops during the second world war and owned by a variety of people. It was put on the market in 1983 at a price of around £30,000 with successive owners and a chequered history, David Ward, Paul Dobson, Graham Keeler, Ian Bailey-Scudamore, Craig Whyte and Now Russian Tycoon Sergey Fedotov.

October: Shinty

For many years shinty was one of the town’s main sports. It was played in Grantown throughout the 19th century. One of the highlights was the annual Ne’er Day shinty match in the square. This lasted for much of the day with a collection being taken at lunchtime, it is said, to cover the expenses of repairing broken windows. Matches were played in Graham’s Park until Woodside Avenue houses in the 1880’s took over the field. Shinty was played by youngsters on the slopes of Burnfield. The Grantown Camanachd Club was initiated on Tuesday 15th November 1892 at a meeting in the Public Hall Ante-Room. The first matches were played on the Black Park which was heavily criticised for its uneven surface. The team soon became known as the Grantown Butchers! Several teams emerged in the following years, The Seafield Shinty Club, The Spey Bridge Club, the Grantown Cowal Shinty Club, Ancients and Moderns, Married vs Singles as well as selects chosen by key players. There was a brief revival in 1921 when Grantown beat Glenurquhart 7-0.



One of the “duties” of clubs in Grantown was to entertain “society” with a ball in the Public Hall. The newly formed Camanachd club was no exception. On Friday January 20th 1893 they held what became known as one of the best dances of the year. “There were upwards of 70 couples present, and dancing was kept up without intermission from 10 o’clock till about 5 o’clock in the morning.”

The sporting tradition is carried on by Strathspey Camanachd whose first matches were played adjacent to the site of Old Grantown.

November: Strathspey Hotel

What was until a few years ago the Strathspey Hotel, a B listed building, was erected in 1806 by John Grant, a carpenter, as a house. Around 1850 it became an inn run by James Dunbar “Innkeeper in Grantown” and hence it became known as “Dunbar’s Hotel”. Thus it became third in status after the Grant Arms and the Black Bull (later the Palace). After a succession of

owners the hotel became empty around 2002. Subsequently it became for a short while a café bar and for many years lay empty. Now it is being converted into flats.



The building stands on the corner of Spey Avenue – the New Road. It replaced the older Military Road not many yards to the East. The military road, Caulfield’s road, through Anagach was used from 1754 until 1810 when George Brown chose easier access to the town through Miss Grant’s garden and the military road was diverted along the river further to the west. The “new road” was built by soldiers discharged after Waterloo. Many lodged in the town.

An interesting feature still visible is the stonebreakers yard opposite the wood manager’s house, Elm Grove.

December: Skating Pond, March 1909



The Skating Pond, popular with skaters and curlers, is an artificial pond. Now largely overgrown, it used to be drained each year and the reeds cut by men with scythes. When winters were longer and colder than of late, skating was possible for many months of the year. In January 1898 the newly formed skating club had over 100 members.

Curling is one of Grantown’s oldest sports and the Strathspey Curling Club dates back to 1856. In 1929 they won the coveted national Carsebreck trophy. Major curling competitions or bonspiels were held on the skating pond and earlier on its predecessor where the curling ponds are today. Although these were during what we now call “old fashioned winters” even then there were not always the right conditions having only been suitable some 30 times in the last 100 years.

Matches against teams from around the North were regularly reported in the press. Silver cups, medals and curling stones were provided for winners of the “roaring game” at these events though on one occasion the prize was two boll of meal and on another a barrel of herring! In 1960 the club represented Scotland in the British Airways Curling Cup competition in Wengen in Switzerland.

On the opposite side of the burn is the former dam of the Kylintra sawmill, where once bobbins were made for Coates of Paisley.