

## LOCAL HISTORY with TED COWAN

# LOCHENBRECK



Lochenbreck (Loch of Trout) on what was the Woodhall Estate, Balmaghie, was for a long time - "time immemorial" according to one reporter - a place of resort for folk in search of cures for such diseases as ague, stomach pains and "many female weaknesses" at the nearby Chalybeate well.

There was a small house offering lodgings but in 1790 it lacked a road. Feus or building leases, however, were to be had on "very moderate terms". By 1844 an inn was available - S R Crockett referred to it as a spa and hotel which, in 1904, was "renewing its youth". In 1908 it was taken over as a private house. The loch is still very popular with fishermen. When the Arctic explorer, John Richardson from Dumfries, published his book on *Fishes in the Fauna Boreali-Americana or the Zoology of the Northern Parts of British America* series, an enormous project which he conceived and launched, he illustrated the entry on salmo fario, or Scottish burn trout, with a specimen from Lochenbreck. He

and his brother Peter, who lived at Disdow, Gatehouse, were, like so many who preceded and followed them, much taken with the loch and its surrounding scenery. Lochenbreck is just off the glorious Lauriston - Gatehouse road. It inspired Malcolm Harper to verse:

*Dear aye to me is the bricht  
glancing Burnie  
That rins mang the rocks  
in the deep shady dell  
But dearer an brichter to me  
than them a is  
The lassie I lo'ed at  
Lochenbreck Well!*

He recalled that during bad weather the lads and lassies staying at the hotel would retreat to the Well House for "fun, frolic and banter".

Kenick Hill to the east of the loch was known as the 'Hill of Health'. On the same theme an analyst opined that the well waters would be found efficacious as a beverage. "The mineral ingredients of which the waters are composed are sulphate and carbonate of lime, with iron and traces of carbonate of magnesia." Burns probably looked for something more stimulating when, or rather if, he passed through. It was claimed on the basis of no evidence that he wrote his song 'Scots Wha Hae' in the Change House at Lochenbreck when he was en-route to Kirkcudbright.

For amusement there were bowling and croquet greens. A mile away on the Lauriston road stood Burnside

Cottage, home of two sisters, Tibbie and Maggie McGhie, who were said to be the "last representatives of the McGhies of Balmaghie", a clan which some believed to be one of the oldest in Galloway. Tibbie composed poems and organised levees in her cottage, for the hotel guests and others who showed up for the crack and the fun, as well as for a glimpse into the Galloway past. One of her poems entitled Thoughts on First Seeing a Railway Train requires no explanation:

*An auld wife she sat down to sew,  
As wi her specs she loked through;  
She saw a train come across  
the Dee,  
Oh! What a woner's thing,  
said she.*

Maggie reputedly attended to domestic matters, keeping the cottage immaculate and the hens fed. The painting by Malcolm Harper is unusual in showing an interior. The seated lady is probably Maggie but I may be wrong, and any information on the two ladies would be very welcome.

The closest metropolis was and is Clauchanpluck, uninspiringly renamed Lauriston by a nineteenth century proprietor. It was for a time the meeting place for the presbytery of Kirkcudbright. Crockett attended the local school. Some years ago, when I asked a resident how many folk living in the village were actually born there, he replied that there used to be two but one had recently emigrated to Crossmichael!

Ted Cowan



Maggie McGhie's Cottage by Malcolm Harper




## New Galloway Golf Club

Founded 1902  
[www.nggc.co.uk](http://www.nggc.co.uk)  
 - 01644 420737 -  
 Buggies now available for hire  
**VISITORS AND NEW MEMBERS WELCOME**