THE OSWALDS OF GORTAN

Prompted by events elsewhere, public statues have recently come under unprecedented critical scrutiny, and this brings to mind a man with local connections, whose statue occupies a prime site in Glasgow's George Square. For good measure, he also had a Clyde paddle steamer named after him, and could even point to two Glasgow streets bearing his surname. The individual in question is James Oswald, M.P., and the local connection is that for a time he was laird of Gortan estate, at Glen Douglas. Gortan is of further interest in that during the time of the Oswalds, it served as the birthplace of John Dewar, one of Scotland's most acclaimed collectors of Gaelic folk tales. The lands of Gortan can also lay claim to having probably played a pivotal role in helping to bring closure to a deadly blood feud between the Colquhoun and McFarlane clan chiefs.

The Oswalds were a family of wealthy Glasgow merchants, well established in the city before the middle of the 18th century. One of them, Alexander Oswald (1738-1813), the father of James, had varied business interests, domestic and overseas. It was he who would begin the link with Gortan. The book "The Old Country Houses of the Old Glasgow Gentry", by John Guthrie Smith (1870) describes him thus:-

"He was a shrewd and enterprising man of business, and was engaged in various undertakings besides his own foreign trade. He was a partner in the South Sugar House Company.....he became sole proprietor of Ure's "Great Work" for the making of ropes.....he was an early and successful investor in building ground"..... The very mention of the word "sugar" at that period immediately conjures up visions of slavery and human exploitation. However, the book goes on to state:-

"But from the main business of the day he held aloof. He had tempting West Indian offers, but he refused them all: he would not, directly or indirectly, mix himself up with slavery". We are also informed that Alexander took a keen interest in the Andersonian University, and was one of the founders of the Royal Infirmary. Politically,he was a staunch Whig, and favoured reform.

In 1781, Alexander purchased the estate of Shield Hall, extending to 300 acres, and was thereafter known as Alexander Oswald of Shield Hall. A further purchase of land took place in 1798, when he bought Gortan, located by Loch Long, and bounded on two sides by Glen Douglas and Glen Mallan. The buying up of country estates formed an important line of business for others in the family as well.

Alexander and his wife, Margaret Dundas, had a number of children, their eldest son being James who inherited his father's estate, following the latter's death in 1813. James seems to have been minded at this juncture to part with Gortan. In a letter sent to an Andrew Mitchell in 1814, he writes : "The Farm extends to 3 or 3 ½ miles. The land is dry, with good pasture and some heath. I do not know how many acres could be made arable.....the pasture comprises 320 acres or so. I have been proprietor for 12-13 years. There are some cattle and some arable land. There are no leases. A house on the ground, which accommodates the herd and his family, was built a few years ago....the asking price is £4,000". In the event, no sale was concluded. The comment about "the herd and his family" is quite possibly a reference to the Dewar family, whose head, Alexander Dewar, worked on a farm there for much, possibly all, of the period of Oswald ownership.

Although Gortan was not sold off at this stage, a sale did come about in 1829, the buyer being Sir James Colquhoun of Luss, who was in any case the feudal superior. A memorandum of 1828 states; "Mr Oswald sells to Sir James Colquhoun the lands of Gortan and Craggan, Barony of Luss, Parish of Row, for £2,990, payable on 15 May 1829".

The timing of the sale may reflect the fact that Oswald was becoming ever more involved in politics, and in particular with the campaign to extend the franchise. Like his father, he was a committed Whig. Turning once more Smith's book, the author comments:-

"James Oswald was an outspoken Liberal. He took a keen interest in the debates that preceded the Reform Bill of 1832, and presided at the memorable meeting on Glasgow Green.". The author goes on to stress that, notwithstanding his politics, Oswald was respected by all: "When party feeling ran highest, his private qualities made him liked by those who most disliked his politics". His commitment was such that he stood as a Whig in the General Election of 1832, and was returned as

one of two M.P.'s for Glasgow, the other being James Ewing of Strathleven. The Reform Act of which he had been such a strong advocate was very successful in relative terms- in Scotland it increased the electorate from 5,000 to 65,000 out of a population of around 2 million, but universal suffrage was obviously still a long way off.

As an M.P., it was written of Oswald: “He was a powerful orator, and was a steady, consistent and honourable man....he seldom troubled the House unless he had something particular to say”. He remained in Parliament until 1837, when he stood down. However, the lure of politics saw him returned again in 1839, and he remained as a Glasgow M.P., until 1847. He died on 3 June 1853.

Mainly due to his commitment to extending the franchise, Oswald became one of the favourite sons of Glasgow. In 1856, friends and admirers commissioned a statue by Marochetti. Originally erected at Sandyford Place, just off Sauchiehall Street, it was moved to the north-east corner of George Square in 1875, in part at least to serve as a political foil to the statue of Sir Robert Peel, which had been there since 1859. There Oswald still stands, gazing out in his frock coat, and holding his top hat and cane in one hand. With that knack possessed by Glaswegians to coin down-to-earth descriptions, the statue became known simply as “the man with the hat”.

In fact, the upturned hat created a challenge for small boys, who vied to land a stone in it, which leads to the unlikely-sounding story that no less than Joseph Conrad was challenged by Neil Munro to do exactly that, in order to qualify as “an honorary Glaswegian”. After several attempts, Conrad succeeded. The incident can in fact be corroborated as true, and is recounted in Lesley Lendrum's biography of Munro, who was her grandfather. The episode took place in September 1898, when the two great writers dined together at the nearby North British Hotel. Munro described Conrad as “like a ship's officer in shore clothes”. That was some 20 years before Munro took up residence in Helensburgh.

A further tribute to Oswald came in the form of a Clyde paddle steamer named in his honour. Launched in 1834 from the yard of Scott's of Bowling, the James Oswald was soon placed on the Glasgow- Garelochhead daily run. Her master, Stewart Boyd, resided in the village.

Yet another reminder of Oswald comes through two Glasgow street named after him. Thus, there is an Oswald Street next to Central Station. However, the name is said to date from 1817, before Oswald came to public attention, and is attributed to this being the western boundary of property he owned there, rather than a mark of honour. There is, or was, also an Oswald Street in Bridgeton- the name does not seem to feature on modern maps. Once again, the name is said to have derived from the proximity of property owned by him, namely the Barrowfield Spinning Factory. This was in fact a cotton mill, which could raise suspicions of a possible indirect link with slavery. This may help explain the inclusion of Oswald Street in a list of Glasgow streets targeted by a pressure group seeking name changes on account of alleged links with slavery.

Is there any other evidence linking James Oswald with slavery?. The authoritative listings of the Slavery Compensation Commission, now available online, do not include his name, although that in itself does not disprove a possible link. One name that does appear, however, is that of his cousin, Richard Alexander Oswald, who died in 1841, and who bequeathed to James several country estates that he owned, including Auchincruive, in Ayrshire. The listing also includes a James Oswald, M.P., but that is another person from an earlier period, who represented Fife seats in Parliament.

JOHN DEWAR: COLLECTOR OF TRADITIONS

Turning now to the Dewar family mentioned earlier, their connection with Gortan and the Oswalds dates from soon after the 1798 purchase by Alexander Oswald. Alexander Dewar and Mary McFarlane, both natives of Arrochar parish, were married at Arrochar in 1798. Their first born child, Alexander, was born at Firkin, on Loch Lomondside, the following year. However, parish records show that their next child, Peter, was born at Craganbreck, Row (Rhu) parish, in 1801. John, the focus of this account, was also born there, in 1802. He would be followed by no less than seven other siblings up until 1820, all born at Craganbreck bar the last two, who were recorded as born at Gortan. It should be noted that there was an actual settlement called Gortan, from which the estate took its name. It was located near Glen Douglas road end.

The trouble with Craganbreck is that it does not seem to feature in other records, nor does it appear on any known maps. How then are we to know that Craganbreck formed part of the Gortan estate?. At this juncture, tribute should be paid to Sue Furness of Tarbet. Having learned of John Dewar's local origins through the investigations of D.J. Johnston Smith, she was kind enough to pass on this intelligence to the present writer. Most helpfully, she also drew attention to several people who were researching Dewar. In consequence, acknowledgement is also due to Ronnie Black and Andrew Wiseman, both of Edinburgh University, whose labours have provided invaluable detail utilised in this account.

In essence, the puzzle over the location of Craganbreck was solved at a stroke. It turns out that Dewar himself provides a vital clue, quoted in the introduction to the book “Popular Tales of the West Highlands, V1, by J. F. Campbell (1860) . Dewar states:- “I remember, upwards of fifty years ago, when I was a boy, my father lived in the farest (sic) north house in the valley called Glen na Callanach”. This name, which still appears on modern maps, though long obsolete in colloquial usage, effectively comprises the upper part of Glen Mallan, which joins seamlessly with Glen Douglas at its northern extremity. Providentially, Ross's map of 1777 shows two buildings, marked Craggan, at that location. There is no other settlement shown on this or other old maps on the Row (west) side of the glen. It would thus seem that Craggan and Craganbreck are effectively synonymous. It is known from other sources that Craggan did indeed form part of Gortan estate.

There was a relatively modern shepherd's cottage, in proximity to the site, into the 1960's, by that time known as High Craggan . With the coming of what would become RNAD Glen Douglas early in that decade, however, the house was subsequently demolished, and the site landscaped, leaving little trace of what had gone before. Even so, the survival of nearby turf dykes points to a pre-improvement farming presence.

If further proof of a link between the Dewars and the Oswalds were needed, it is provided by the naming of one of the Dewar children born at Craganbreck. Christened Mary Oswald Dewar, the child's middle name surely suggests an Oswald laird who was held in high esteem.

Little has come to light so far about John Dewar's upbringing, and in particular, about what formal education, if any, he may have received. His father, Alexander Dewar, appears to have been employed by the Oswalds as a farm manager, though perhaps not initially in that capacity. Whatever the case with John's early education, in adult life he was certainly at home with both English and Gaelic. While he could express himself fluently in both written and spoken English, a few basic grammatical shortcomings in his letters might suggest that little formal schooling had come his way: in other words, it may point to a self-taught man.

Of particular interest is Dewar's ability, developed at some stage, to follow written Gaelic. This capability may well have stemmed from the availability of Biblical texts in Gaelic. Such a version of the New Testament was published in 1766, but was adapted from Irish Gaelic. However, a Scots Gaelic equivalent became available from 1796, thanks to the work of Rev. Dr. John Stuart, the minister at Luss. As an aside, it is worth noting that the formal system of education then in use had, for the most part, little use for Gaelic, with reading and writing normally being strictly in English. In some schools, pupils could even be punished if heard conversing in Gaelic on school premises.

It should be emphasised that young John was brought up in a world where the oral tradition was still very strong, and people were kept well entertained by a seemingly inexhaustible supply of tales of all kinds. In this part of the country, it should be noted that Gaelic was still in common usage, and the stories were often told in this language. New tales were often circulated by people like chapmen, cobblers and tailors,whose work took them around the countryside. Many of the stories were set in the West Highlands, but much more exotic places could also feature. Late in life, John recalled that as a boy, he had heard a story about two brothers and forty thieves, with "sesame" as the magic word- a story in fact from the "Arabian Nights". Some tales going their rounds appear to have been quite uninhibited, and were certainly not for the prudish.

It is clear that John found many of the tales a source of endless fascination, particularly those which dealt with real people, places and events. Crucially, he also appears to have been blessed with a first class sense of recall, and by the time he was around eight years of age, was well able to commit many of them to memory.

As an adult, John found employment as a woodsman, or sawyer. Much of his time was spent in making fencing posts. One remarkable aspect of his life is that he never seems to have had his own home, being generally a lodger. In the census of 1841, he is living with his father, by then a cottar and widower, at Firkin, with John being described as a sawyer. The census of 1851 finds him as a lodger with the Cumming family at Hill of Camsail, Rosneath. Interestingly, the head of household, Archibald Cumming, is also listed as a sawyer. The 1861 census again sees John at Rosneath, this time as a lodger with Jane Dewar. It is not known if she was a relative. In general, he appears to have looked on Rosneath as his home base, and was apparently on the payroll of the Duke of Argyll's Rosneath Estate. He also seems to have had a hand in running a shop at Rosneath for a spell. In 1871, he is a lodger at Relief Land, in Inveraray. The following year, a sick man, his last days were spent at the home of younger brother, Donald, at Lang's Land, West Bridgend, Dumbarton, where he died on 13 December 1872, aged 70 years. He was interred in the family plot at Arrochar churchyard,

Dewar appears to have led a simple existence, which at the same time was well-organised- he kept meticulous records of personal expenditure. Very little is known about his private life, and most disappointingly, not a single image of him has come to light.

His life could easily have begun and ended in total obscurity had not some intriguing news come his way when in late middle age. In 1859, while staying at Glendaruel, he got word that someone called J. F. Campbell of Islay was looking for folk tales, and furthermore, was willing to pay for suitable material. Dewar supplied him with a number of stories, and Campbell was evidently suitably impressed: a number appeared in his book "Popular Tales of the West Highlands", Volume 1, published in 1860. These had originally been rendered in Gaelic, but Campbell subsequently translated them into English.

Dewar's sample stories were sent initially to the Duke's chamberlain at Inveraray, and a letter enclosed with them provides a fascinating insight as to his abilities. Dewar comments that it has been a long time since he had read anything in Gaelic, and had never before written anything in that language. Considering just how much he would subsequently write in Gaelic, his capacity to do so demonstrates just what abundant talent he possessed. Fortunately for posterity, the chamberlain did pass on the material to J. F. Campbell as requested, paying Dewar £1 for his efforts.

John Francis Campbell was a remarkable man in his own right. Possessed of enormous energy, ability and drive, he was the classic driven man. He had many interests, and happily from the point of view of this account, one of these was in the field of Gaelic folk tales. In this respect he was ideally placed, being extremely competent in both written and spoken Gaelic. Educated at Eton and Edinburgh University, Campbell also happened to be a cousin of the Duke of Argyll, and was on excellent terms with him. Almost certainly, this all helped pave the way for what happened subsequently.

Dewar and Campbell first met in 1860, at a meeting in Inveraray, arranged by the latter, and aimed at bringing together those identified as potential collectors of folk tales. Campbell was to play a crucial role in Dewar's future role, guiding and encouraging him to travel in the West

Highlands and record suitable stories. However, it is important to note that at this stage, Dewar was still working as a woodsman. In 1862, his health took a turn for the worse. Beset with palpitations of the heart, he found that he was in no fit state to keep up as before. This may have played a part in his effective secondment from work to focus exclusively on the task of locating suitable people and recording their tales. J. F. Campbell wrote that year: “He is a precise accurate old man with a wonderful memory and small (sic) imagination”, and the following year noted: “I think this old fellow will get a very curious collection if he is allowed to go on”.

John Dewar most certainly rewarded the faith and confidence placed in him by Campbell. He seems generally to have had a lot of freedom about where to go, and how to spend his time. His commitment was impressive by any standards. For example, he would try to get a number of versions of a story from different storytellers- up to half a dozen, if thought beneficial. He would then integrate material from the different renderings to make as complete and seamless a story as possible. Next, he would painstakingly write out in Gaelic the final version, formed in beautiful copperplate script, referring to a dictionary, as necessary.

A remarkable aspect about Dewar's methodology is that he strove not to interrupt storytellers in mid flight, as must have been tempting at times, where something needed clarification. Instead, he waited until they had finished, in order not to interrupt the flow of the narrative. This was only due to Dewar's prodigious ability to memorise what was being said. Even so, in order to assist himself, he developed an ad hoc system of shorthand, an impressive feat in its own right.

Dewar amassed an incredible amount of material in the decade or so spent on his mission. It is reckoned there are about a million and a quarter words in total, bound up in ten large volumes. Seven of these are kept with the Argyll archives at Inveraray, with the other three stored at the National Library in Edinburgh. It is calculated he collected stories from well over 300 people.

His style has been criticised on various grounds, and indeed J .F. Campbell felt impelled at times to ask him to make changes. For instance, Campbell quickly realised that Dewar's written Gaelic was very different from the way he spoke it. This came out in the way he wrote down the stories he heard. Dialogue usually formed an important element in the oral rendition, but Dewar's text took mainly the form of narrative. Campbell made it clear he wanted change, with plenty of dialogue to the fore. At the same time, he was wise enough to recognise that Dewar's main aptitude lay in stories dealing with real people, places and events, as opposed to supernatural and mythological tales, and so he chose to work to Dewar's strengths.

One intriguing aspect of the tales is that words sometimes cropped up where neither the storyteller nor Dewar as scribe could tell their meaning. However, he was usually able to work out the likely meaning from the context. As J. F. Campbell put it: “Dewar is a very intelligent man”. Such words were in fact often from Old Gaelic, hinting at the antiquity of some of the accounts.

The Dewar collection is regarded by students of Highland folklore as unique, and has been described as “the first oral history project ever conducted in Scotland”. . So what is it about his work that sets him apart? Scholars like Ronnie Black have characterised his work as follows: - “The Dewar manuscripts represent history from the bottom up....they provide descriptions of historical events which can never be bettered by other sources. These include....the Battle of Glen Fruin, the Massacre of Dunaverty, and the Appin Murder...”. In other words, Dewar's stories may be folk tales, but they are far from being fairy stories. With Dewar's roots in the Arrochar area, a goodly number of his writings are set in what is now Helensburgh and Lomond.

As far as bringing the stories to the wider public is concerned, the big challenges stem from their being written in Gaelic, along with the sheer volume of them. At the behest of the Marquis of Lorne, a noted Gaelic scholar, Hector McLean, was commissioned to translate a number of them into English in the period 1879-1881- a demanding task in its own right. However, his translations were not published, and lay at Inveraray Castle for many years. In 1964, thanks to the then Duke's policy of granting access to his library, another distinguished Gaelic academic, Rev. John McKechnie, was enabled to edit the translated material and have it published in book form, entitled “The Dewar Manuscripts, Volume 1”- there is a copy in Helensburgh Library. It should be emphasised that although this is quite a large book, it still represents only a small fraction of the

total collection.

Since then, there have been various plans to publish more of the manuscripts in English, but a series of hurdles have conspired to thwart most efforts, at least until recently. Happily, a strong effort is currently underway to change all that. A team, led by Ronnie Black, is making a determined effort to work on the collection. It should be emphasised that a fair amount of the content holds out the promise of local interest. For instance, one of the stories already translated deals with the adventures of Robert the Bruce in the Loch Lomond area, at a difficult point in his career.

This work is on-going and it is worth noting that help is always welcome from those with an interest, especially in the tricky field of identifying old place-names. The work is being conducted under the auspices of Friends of Argyll Papers, and the archivist, Alison Diamond, is eager to hear from people who may be interested in assisting this truly epic and ground-breaking project. The Friends can be contacted via :- www.friendsoftheargyllpapers.org.uk.

We now move on to look at the history of Gortan itself.

THE STORY OF GORTAN

The lands of Gortan are mentioned in a charter of 1522, when John Colquhoun of Luss granted the lands of Tullichintaull and Gortan to his natural son, Patrick Colquhoun, and his heirs-male. Tullichintaull was a farm lying adjacent to Gortan, on the north side. As with a number of these old settlements, the origins of Gortan could well go back further still, but there are no surviving records to hand. Timothy Pont's map of the 1590's shows the settlement of Gortan lying a little above the present Glen Douglas road end.

In 1587, Sir Humphrey Colquhoun granted a precept (acknowledgement) to Robert Colquhoun of Ballernickmoir, as heir of the deceased Humphrey Colquhoun of Tullychintaull, his father, in the lands of Gortan. It can thus be seen that the Colquhouns of Luss were at this time firmly in control of the destiny of Gortan.

However, as the 17th century found its feet, it would appear that a sea change had taken place, with McFarlane of Arrochar now in the driving seat. A similar change took place at Tullichintaull. Such changes in lairdship at this time are calculated to raise a few eyebrows, given the deadly blood feud that had existed between the chiefs of Colquhoun and McFarlane in the closing decades of the 16th century. Sir Humphrey Colquhoun and Humphrey McFarlane were but two casualties of this vendetta. Relations were further strained by legal action raised by Colquhoun, alleging numerous thefts of livestock and plenishings by the McFarlanes. The gathering pibroch of the Clan McFarlane,"Thogail nam Bo" (The Lifting of the Cattle), is certainly suggestive of their philosophy in those troubled times.

As evidence of a dramatic change in circumstances, D. J. Johnston Smith, author of a Master's thesis on the McFarlanes, found a document among the McFarlane papers at the Procurator's Library in Glasgow, stating:- "In 1619, John McFarlane. 15th Clan Chief, made an assignation to his grandson, James, of the lands of Gortan....". Again, a land deed of 1622 discloses that "John McFarlane of Arrochar, for certain sums of money, sold the lands of Gortan, in the lordship and barony of Luss, parish of Rosneath, to Andrew McFarlane, lawful son of Andrew McCoull McFarlane, Blairvoyak, to be held of the granter and his heirs-male in fee and heritage forever". So just how did such a change come about, given the erstwhile bad blood between the two clan chiefs?.

It has been suggested that the explanation lies in a deal arrived at between the two, aimed at bringing closure to their differences. James MacFarlane, author of "History of Clan MacFarlane" (1922), argues that a partial reconciliation served as precursor to a more general deal. He refers to an accommodation arrived at in 1603 between Alexander Colquhoun of Luss, and some of the McFarlanes, namely the McFarlanes of Gartartan, a cadet house of McFarlane of Arrochar. Given that this was not long after the Battle of Glen Fruin, could the timing be significant?.

As evidence of a more general settlement, James MacFarlane highlights a decree issued by the Lords of Secret Council in February 1610. At the centre of their deliberations was a legal action against Alexander Colquhoun of Luss, raised by one Gillemor MacIlerich of Little Hills, Glen, who had sought Colquhoun to exhibit one of his tenants, John MacDouill Vic Neill MacFarlane, whom, he alleged, had murdered his daughter, Catherine. The Lords of Secret Council acquitted Colquhoun from any such action, referring to the erstwhile feud between the two clans, and pointing out that to proceed with the action could serve to renew and revive the feud. To quote from their judgement:-
" (It) is now agreed by His Majesty's special direction reconciled and agreed, and the barbarous and detestable cruelties which fell out upon the occasion of that feud altogether removed. …..".
The Crown in fact had been working hard behind the scenes, with involvement on the part of great nobles, such as the Duke of Lennox, and with bonds and cautions being required. This may have been as part of a wider drive by King James the Sixth to bring under control the lawlessness that prevailed in various parts of the country.

A reconciliation between the Colquhouns and McFarlanes would certainly go a long way to

explaining the change in ownership of Gortan at this seminal period in history. However, as we shall subsequently see, the Colquhouns of Luss remained as feudal superiors in the hierarchy that then existed, with all land ultimately being held of The Crown.

So just who were the new lairds of Gortan? James MacFarlane comments in his book that Dugal, the second son of Walter McFarlane, 9th Clan Chief, founded the family of Tullichintaull, from whom came the McFarlanes of Finnart, Gortan, etc. Sir William Fraser offers us a clue about their genesis in his book "The Chiefs of Colquhoun" (1869). He states:- "The lands of Gortan were granted by the McFarlanes of Arrochar to a younger branch of the family, who were usually designated as of Gartartan". Gartartan is, or was, located near Gartmore, Perthshire, and Gartmore Castle is said to have been built by them towards the end of the 16th century.

The main point is that thenceforth, there was to be a succession of McFarlane lairds of Gortan, who would hold sway for the best part of the next two centuries. As might be expected, many of the tenants were of the name of McFarlane.

No information has come to light about any major ups or downs affecting the Gortan lairds until the time of Malcolm McFarlane, who was laird in the early 1730's. At that juncture, financial problems seem to have come to the fore, though no clues have emerged as to the root cause. Whatever the background, in 1733, Malcolm found it necessary to borrow £300 from the Glasgow-based firm of Peter Murdoch and Sons. Over the years, the Murdochs were to play a vital role in public life, providing Glasgow with two Provosts. However, they were also hard nosed businessmen, and the loan was to be paid back by 1774 at the latest. Interest was of course chargeable on the capital.

Evidence of early problems with meeting the terms of the contract emerges through references to decreets of adjudication, letters of horning, and so on, with the pursuers seeking to take possession of the lands of Gortan. Such processes appear to have been at work from as early as 1736.

By 1768, it becomes apparent from lawyers' letters that little, if any of the capital had been paid back. One legal agent who was at the centre of affairs was Thomas Graham, who was in fact a nephew of Agnes Buchanan, spouse of Malcolm McFarlane. Among the Oswald papers is a scribbled note from William McEwan to Graham . McEwan, most likely a legal agent himself, discloses that he had spoken to "Gortan" (presumably the heir), earlier that day. He also refers to John having "gone west". Letters like these are typically cryptic and enigmatic, making it difficult to work out exactly what is going on. However, using clues from the letters and other sources, it can be inferred the heir is a John McFarlane, and that the reference to "gone west" refers to the West Indies.

A letter of 1774, from Thomas Graham to John Murdoch, of the family that made the loan of 1733, is very telling, and is worth quoting:-

"When I paid you £200 for the disposition of your claim to Gortan, I did it, and advanced to the heir about £30 more, in view of his promise to extinguish the debt, or at least keep down the interest, instead of which he has been away since 1768, and has nor remitted the £30, nor a shilling of the principal.....a great disappointment.....He has not written to me since 1770. I am heartily sorry for the difficulties. I wrote to him I would use some method of getting payment....it will be necessary to produce the adjudication....".

In fact, there survives a letter of 1768, sent by John McFarlane from St Kitts, the recipient being Thomas Graham. Unfortunately, it contains nothing of any substance. The presence of McFarlane in that place, and at that time, is surely suggestive. It is hard to see beyond some sort of connection with the sugar plantations there. Was this part of a desperate attempt to make money? Unfortunately, it is only possible to speculate in the absence of more information. McFarlane remains a shadowy figure throughout, and nothing further about him has come to light.

One matter that can be clarified is that Malcolm McFarlane of Gortan had died around, or perhaps before, this date. In 1770, a tack (lease) was made by Agnes Buchanan and Thomas Graham, to Patrick McLean, tenant in Makleglen, parish of Lochgoilhead, presumably a farmer. The terms of the tack may be worth quoting:-

" The said lands, presently possessed by John and Walter McFarlane (are to be leased) for the space of 10 years from 10 May, 1771.....reserved from the tack is that maile of land called Craggan.....with sole right of cutting wood, brush and timber from said whole lands of Gortan and Craggan yearly.....There is a limit of 45 cows, 45 sheep, and 4 horses or mares...." It may also be of interest to note that signatories to the contract were able to sign their names, bar McLean, who could only provide his mark. This brings out the point that there were still many people, especially from the more remote areas, who, through simply having had no formal education, were illiterate. Also of note is the reservation of Craggan from the tack. Could this be because the laird's house was located there? Ross's map of 1777 shows two buildings at the site, one depicted as a conventional habitation, but with another, somewhat superior building, though not so grand as those of Colquhoun of Luss or McFarlane of Arrochar.. We might even speculate that the Craggan name could refer to the laird's house, while Craganbreck might have been the tenant's abode.(see account of the Dewar family)

A letter from Thomas Graham to Sir James Colquhoun of Luss, dating from 1773, is seemingly part of a determined effort by the former to settle debts, and put the affairs of Gortan on a more stable footing. The involvement of Sir James is on account of the Colquhouns of Luss being next up the ladder in the hierarchy of land holding, as it then functioned. Graham's letter is of interest in that he gives us some useful information on the functioning of the estate. Thus:-

"The lands have been, and still are, possessed by the widow, who is my aunt, and is, by virtue of a total life-rent, possessed of ¼ of the lands herself. The other ¾ were set in 1758 at £10-£11 per tack, which expired in 1771, when the same was set for £22 + 2 wedders (sheep), out of which the widow pays the feu-duty. She is allowed to keep 15 cows, 15 sheep, and 2 horses or mares...."

Something that stands out here is the farming regime implied by these documents. Given that a widespread and rapid switch from subsistence to commercial farming was then stirring in this part of the South-West Highlands, it is evident that a traditional form of agriculture still prevailed at Gortan. Given the financial pressures stemming from the loan of 1733 and its aftermath, it might seem surprising that Gortan was not being given over to large-scale cattle or sheep husbandry.

Graham appears to have met with success in his drive for stability: nothing of concern has come to attention from 1774 until the sale of the estate in 1798. Following a complex series of legal steps, the ownership of Gortan was at that point transferred to Alexander Oswald. The then McFarlane representatives comprised Ann, Elizabeth and Margaret McFarlane, daughters of the late Malcolm McFarlane and Agnes Buchanan. Thus, the long McFarlane association with Gortan came to an end.

The new laird appears to have wasted little time in making his mark. A precept of warning was issued by him in 1799 against what were presumably existing tenants. Although the precept may simply have been following the standard protocol of the time, to the present day observer it comes over as quite harsh. It runs:-

".....Charge George McLellan, senior, residing in Preistelloch, and George McLellan, junior, residing in Drumfad, to flit and remove themselves, their sub-tenants and cottars, and dependants and their families, servants, cattle, goods and gears furth of the lands of Gortan, extending to the 40/- land of old extent, with houses, biggins, etc, comprehending the lands commonly called Craggan and others, Barony of Luss, Parish of Row, against the term of Whitsun next, 1799".

The suggestion is that this step helped cleared the way for the arrival of the Dewar family shortly after. As noted elsewhere, John Dewar, the renowned folklorist, was born to Alexander and Mary Dewar on the estate in 1802.

It is unknown if the Oswalds spent much time at their new acquisition, but given their many other interests, it seems reasonable to doubt if this were the case. If so, they would have had to place a good deal of reliance on those who were managing the land on their behalf. Little detailed information has come to hand in this regard. James Oswald sold Gortan to Sir James Colquhoun for £2,990, on 15 May 1829. It is important to note that from then on, Gortan ceased to function as an estate in its own right, being now effectively another farm within the Colquhoun landholding portfolio.

While the beginning of a new chapter, one might speculate as to whether the Dewar family continued to live at Gortan. The last recorded child to be born there to Alexander and Mary Dewar was James, in 1820. As far as the Old Parish Registers are concerned, no births at either Craggan, Craganbreck or Gortan crop up subsequently. Such records are in no way a substitute for a census, but the lack of recorded births is certainly noteworthy. Had any young couples taken up residence, it seems reasonable to suppose that there would have been births. On the other hand, with the Dewars now an ageing couple, their continued presence could explain the lack of births. Close scrutiny of the Colquhoun papers might provide clues.

It is not until the Census of 1841 that the set-up is revealed. At Craggan is Duncan McLellan (40), an agricultural labourer, with Isabella Collins (20), a female servant, being the only other member of household. Gortan itself has John Campbell, a herring fisher, along with his wife and four children in residence. In other words, there is now only one man working what were the lands of Gortan. The term "agricultural labourer" could well refer to a shepherd. Note that by the time of that census, Alexander Dewar is living as a cottar and widower at Firkin, Arrochar parish. His age is given as 65, though ages of adults in that census are rounded down to the nearest 5 years. Can we assume that he was retired? The Census of 1851 informs us that Craggan now has the unmarried Donald McLellan, a farmer, as head of household, along with no less than five male and female servants, while Gortan has two families in residence.

By the time of the 1861 Census, a major change has taken place. It is known from other sources that a large, modern farmhouse was built at what had been Gortan, around 1855, and this subsequently went under the name of Craggan Farm. Robert and Jane McLean are present with their three childen, along with two other relatives, two servants and three lodgers. Two other houses are listed as Craggan cottages: one was in proximity to the farm house, while another was most likely at the site of the original Craggan. Over time, the farmhouse would become known as Low Craggan, while the cottage on, or near, the site of the former Dewar home would become known as High Craggan.

It may well also have been around this time that the area of land comprising the farm was greatly extended. Given that the lands of Gortan and much of the surrounding area were now part of Luss Estates, coupled with the fact that several of the surrounding farms fell empty around this time, it would have been an opportune moment to do so. What is beyond dispute is that such a move did happen at some stage, with the farm doubling, if not tripling in area.. Commercial rearing of blackface sheep, coupled with the presence of some cattle, predominated- there was never much suitable land
for arable farming. The very name "gortan", means a small enclosure.

There seems to have been some ambiguity over the use of the Gortan name, which continues to be appear on Ordnance Survey maps into the 20th century. The most likely explanation is that the name was confined latterly to a little cottage near the farmhouse, probably demolished around the turn of the 20th century.

The last farmer at Craggan was Graham Cooper, who came from Helensburgh, the family home being at Pinelea, East Montrose Street. He and wife Mary took up a tenancy of the farm around 1925. They were resident there until the early 1930's, during which time son Douglas was born. At that stage, however, Dugald Black, their live-in shepherd, married. The Coopers now moved to Helensburgh, enabling Dugald and Agnes Archibald, his bride, to set up home in the farmhouse.

Graham must have been a busy man, because in addition to running the farm, he established Cairndhu House as a hotel after the War. (see recent Helensburgh Heritage Trust website article on Cairndhu House) A quiet, balding, refined-looking man with horn rimmed glasses and a gabardine coat, he would drive to visit his shepherds on a weekly basis, delivering the week's supply of messages. For recreation, he was a keen tennis player, and was a founder-member of Craighelen Tennis Club.

Dugald Black, originally from Lismore, remained as shepherd on the farm until his retirement in 1957, when he was presented with a long-service silver medal by Sir Ivar Colquhoun, in recognition of 30 years of service with the same employer (actually 32 years!). Following Dugald's

retirement, Duncan McNiven, who had been the married shepherd at High Craggan, now moved down to Low Craggan. Another married shepherd, Billy Scott, eldest son of the signalman at Glen Douglas Halt, then took up residence at High Craggan- all somewhat reminiscent of a game of chess!

That was essentially the set-up that prevailed until the early 1960's, when the construction of the Admiralty ammunition depot at Glen Douglas changed everything. Most of the land that had comprised Craggan Farm was bought by the MOD, with cessation of the sheep farming that had prevailed until that point. The ground was mostly planted with Sitka spruce, with the existing houses being demolished, and the sites cleared and landscaped. It was the end of an era. The Cooper family did, however keep up the farming tradition, as son Douglas went on to farm for many years at Glenmollachan, by upper Glen Luss.