



How the Cowal Chronicle of Jan 17th 1898 commented on the way some viewed the Co-op

POOR, PROUD AND EXILED

by Murdo MacDonald & Michael Davis

Sir Duncan Campbell of Barcaldine, who died in 1926, cut an eccentric figure during his life. So much so, in fact, that the reporter who announced his death in the Campbeltown Courier of 5th June of that year, could not find a single headline to do the job. In the event he used three: "Tragedy of a Highland Laird", "Poor, proud and exiled" and "Death in a London Taxi." The article, found by Murdo MacDonald, rehearses the rather strange lifestyle of the Laird who gradually restored Barcaldine Castle from a ruined shell from the 1890s onward. The restoration was unusual for its time, in that it did not interfere with the external appearance of the existing building, even retaining the original window yetts. During the restoration these defensive grills were, or so it is said, hinged to open in the event of fire! It was presumably the expense of this slow restoration, which prevented the Laird from permanently occupying it.

"*There could not have been a more splendid gentleman living,*" was the tribute paid by Mrs Knighting, his housekeeper for 13 years to Sir Duncan Campbell, the Scottish Baronet, who died in a London taxicab last Wednesday afternoon. Hereditary Keeper of Barcaldine Castle, Ledaig, Argyllshire, which he had not the means to occupy, Sir Duncan lived almost the life of a recluse at 16 Ridgway Place, Wimbledon, London. He allowed only candles in his rooms, the walls of which are hung with dirks, claymores, fencing foils, swords

of many kinds, and antlers. He lived in the past, engrossing himself in the study of the history of his clan, but he always visited Barcaldine Castle once a year. His mother and sister died at Wimbledon, and for many years the rooms in which they died were never opened. In Wimbledon (says The Daily Mail) he was a familiar figure with his long hair, tall and gaunt figure, strange stumbling gait, and old mackintosh, which seemed a part of himself.

His love of his clan was the ruling passion of his life, but although an aristocrat at heart he was the friend of all and was greatly beloved. Sometimes friends would timidly suggest that his old and stained mackintosh should be changed for a new one. "Oh, no, this one's good enough for me," he would reply. He had a strange habit of having his hair cut with his hat on, and he would pay the hairdresser penny by penny, counting the money out into his hand.

The successor to the barony is Lieut. Colonel Alexander W. Dennistoun, a cousin, who is 78 years of age, and a retired colonel of the Indian Army, now living in Sussex.

A quick look at "Who was who 1916-28" reveals that, despite his eccentricity, Sir Duncan had at one time or another managed to hold down the office of J. P., Gentleman Usher of the Green Rod, Secretary to the order of the Thistle, Captain in The Black Watch, and a member of the Royal Company of Archers. His recreations were given as "visiting scenes of historical and antiquarian interest, churches etc." *The Book of Barcaldine* by A. Campbell Fraser, published in 1936, throws a little more light on this curious personality. The bachelor baronet apparently bought and restored Barcaldine Castle in the hope that "he might bring his mother and sisters to live there. But it was not to be. Ere the Castle was re-conditioned they had all passed away, and to live there alone was more than he could bear. Instead, most generously, he placed the Castle at the disposal of several of his friends to spend there a summer holiday. Latterly he himself lived very much the life of a recluse, most generous to any old retainer, or any scheme connected with the district. Only on himself was he sparing and frugal."

"At his death, exactly thirty years after he had recovered the Castle, he was buried beside his mother and sisters in Bowes Giffard Churchyard, Essex of which he was Lord of the Manor. The day of his funeral was a day of soft rain and a low mist hung over the ground, blocking out any distant view. As the coffin emerged from the church and his faithful piper, Mackenzie, began to play a lament, it was difficult to believe we were not in Argyllshire – the land he loved so well."
