

Lorn on the Map - a cartographic voyage over four centuries

by Chris Fleet, National Library of Scotland

A kind invitation to speak to Lorn Archaeological and Historical Society in February 2012, provided an opportunity to focus on the early maps of Lorn over four centuries. The chronology of maps of this area is interesting, mapped in great detail in the late sixteenth century by Timothy Pont, and in the 18th century by military engineers and estate surveyors, but with large gaps in between with little surviving evidence of cartographic work. Then in the 19th century there is a real burst of mapping, for feuing land, planning for the new railway, promoting tourism, and planning infrastructure, against a backdrop of state-funded, immensely detailed maps by Ordnance Survey and the Hydrographic Office. The high-point of Oban's mapping in terms of detail was in 1868 when the town was mapped at 1:500 scale on 17 large sheets, with contour lines accurately surveyed for every four feet in height! Twentieth century mapping by Ordnance Survey, and twenty-first century mapping by Google or Microsoft has never mapped Oban in such detail, and satellite imagery by Google of Oban and environs in February 2012 also seems to be about 100 yards out of place....!

Historic maps, of course, provide a graphic window into the history and geography of Lorn at particular points in time, but they do much more. Every map is a selection of real-world features for a particular purpose, and when we link this into changing technologies of surveying and of printing, and the very different audiences for whom these maps were made, the maps reveal a great deal about the changing cultures and historical contexts in which they were made.

For example, the surviving sketch maps of Timothy Pont were packaged into a luxury atlas for the European super-rich by the Dutch map publisher Joan Blaeu in 1654. Blaeu's *Atlas Maior* was the most expensive book that money could buy, and this very much influenced the sumptuous colouring and style of the Blaeu maps. The military engineers under the superintendence of William Roy who mapped Highland Scotland between 1747-1752 were interested in a rapid reconnaissance survey of the landscape for army officers and military commanders, picking out the most significant relief, woodland, roads, bridges, rivers and settlements, of value

for attack and defence. Estate factors and surveyors who closely followed the military engineers, often under the employ of the Dukes of Argyll, provide a very different perspective on the landscape, with an eye to its agricultural improvement, reorganisation, acreages, and infrastructure, against a backdrop of the need to raise revenue on estates and the commodification of estate resources. Both military and estate maps were often beautifully drafted by hand in pen with a watercolour wash, and for an extremely limited map-reading audience, in contrast to the late nineteenth century tourist mapping, which were printed cheaply by lithography in colour for a mass-market. When we look at who was mapping, why, how, and who they were mapping for, it can reveal a great deal about the broader history of Lorn and Oban in addition to real changes on the ground.

Space does not allow an exhaustive review of every map, but rather a selection of particular characters and institutions who played a major part in mapping Lorn. Of course, pride of place has to go to Timothy Pont, and the Lorn area is fortunate in having quite good coverage of surviving original manuscript maps by Pont. Pont 14 covers mid-Argyll, from Dunoon to Inverary and shows the entire length of Loch Awe, with 478 names. It also has useful sketches of the major castles and tower houses, including Kilchurn Castle and Innis Chonnel. Pont 12 includes five separate maps of the coast of Argyll, including a detail of Muckairn east of Oban on the south shore of Loch Etive. In an area barely 2 x 3 inches across on the original manuscript, Pont names seventeen settlements, four rivers, two lochs, a district, a glen, a mountain and a moss including Glen Lonan, and Loch Nant (Figure 1). As is the case for other parts of Scotland, the printed Bleau mapping shows less detail, but shows it more clearly and attractively. Blaeu's *Lorna* map also has excellent detail of the many islands in the Firth of Lorn, and a dedication to the Lord Lyon, James Balfour of Denmilne, who briefly gained possession of the Pont maps in the 1620s, and assisted with their eventual publication. Together with Pont's descriptive notes on the region, transcribed by Robert Gordon from Pont's original survey in the *Topographical Notices of Scotland*, there is patchy but detailed coverage of the Lorn region.



Fig. 1. Timothy Pont's sketch map of Muckairn from Pont 12 (ca. 1583-1614)

During the 18th century, the Dukes of Argyll were responsible directly and indirectly for the most important mapping projects relating to the area. John Cowley prepared a detailed *Map of such part of His Grace the Duke of Argyle's heritable dukedom* in 1734, and Cowley was also employed by Sir Alexander Murray of Stanhope, the mineral prospector, to map the recently discovered lead near Strontian. These maps were published by Murray in his *True interest of Great Britain, Ireland, and our Plantations* in 1740. James Dorret was valet to the 3rd Duke of Argyll, and he both drew and engraved the finest printed map of mid-18th century Scotland, based on detailed assistance from the 3rd Duke, and manuscript surveys undertaken at the 3rd Duke's expense. George Langlands and his son Alexander were employed by the 5th Duke of Argyll as an agricultural advisor and surveyor from ca. 1771 to 1810, and with his son drafted detailed maps of Argyll estates - showing enclosure, drainage, harbours and fisheries. They drew on these to publish the main county map of Argyll in 1801, at a scale of 2 miles to the inch (Figure 2). The Edinburgh publisher John Thomson records in his *Atlas of Scotland* (1832) that Langlands' county map did not

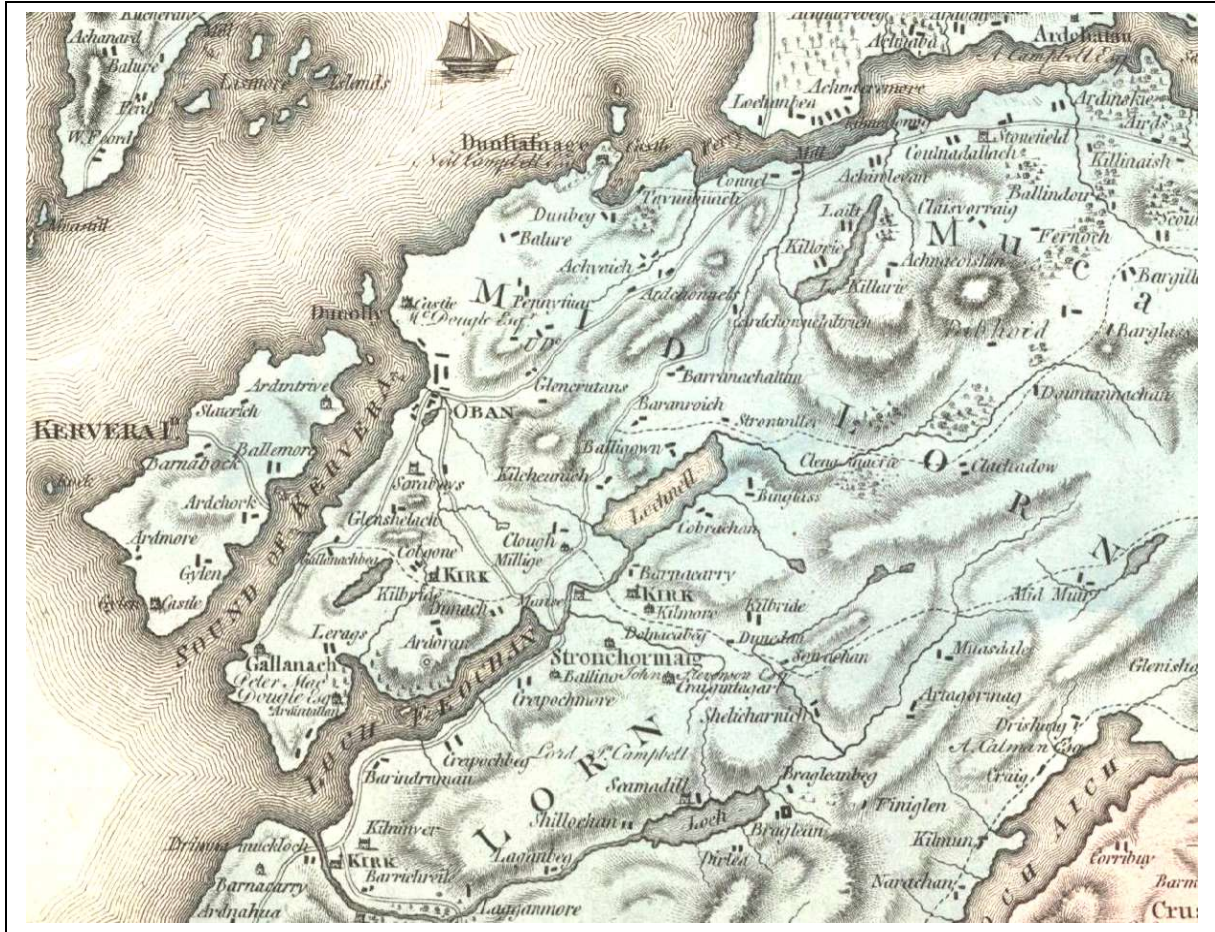


Fig. 2. George and Alexander Langlands' *...Map of Argyllshire...* (1801)

sell well, a fate shared by many Highland county maps, and the opportunity was taken to substantially revise it for the 1824 Thomson county map of Argyll. This used the updated information from John Arrowsmith's monumental 1807 map of Scotland, as well as six named landowners taking responsibility for various districts.

In the 1790s, both the Admiralty Hydrographic Office and what became Ordnance Survey were founded, although it was to be some decades before they began active work in Scotland. Admiral Henry Otter, who spent two decades surveying the difficult West Coast and Hebridean Waters for the Admiralty was a resident of Oban, and owned what is now the Manor House Hotel from 1845. Otter's charts were highly regarded and an immense improvement on previous nautical surveys, whilst in his private life, Otter himself was an interesting fellow, apparently fond of an early morning swim, naked, from the rocks just near the Manor House Hotel, and a member of the Plymouth Brethren. It was his custom to conduct

evangelistic surveys whilst visiting various remote harbours, as well as painting religious slogans on nearby rocks. Visitors to Tobermory Pier can still read in large letters, "God is Love" which has been freshly painted every summer since Otter's days. The Admiralty charts were regularly revised for the busy waters from Oban right through to the present day, and often give good detail of the landward areas at different dates from Ordnance Survey (Figure 3).

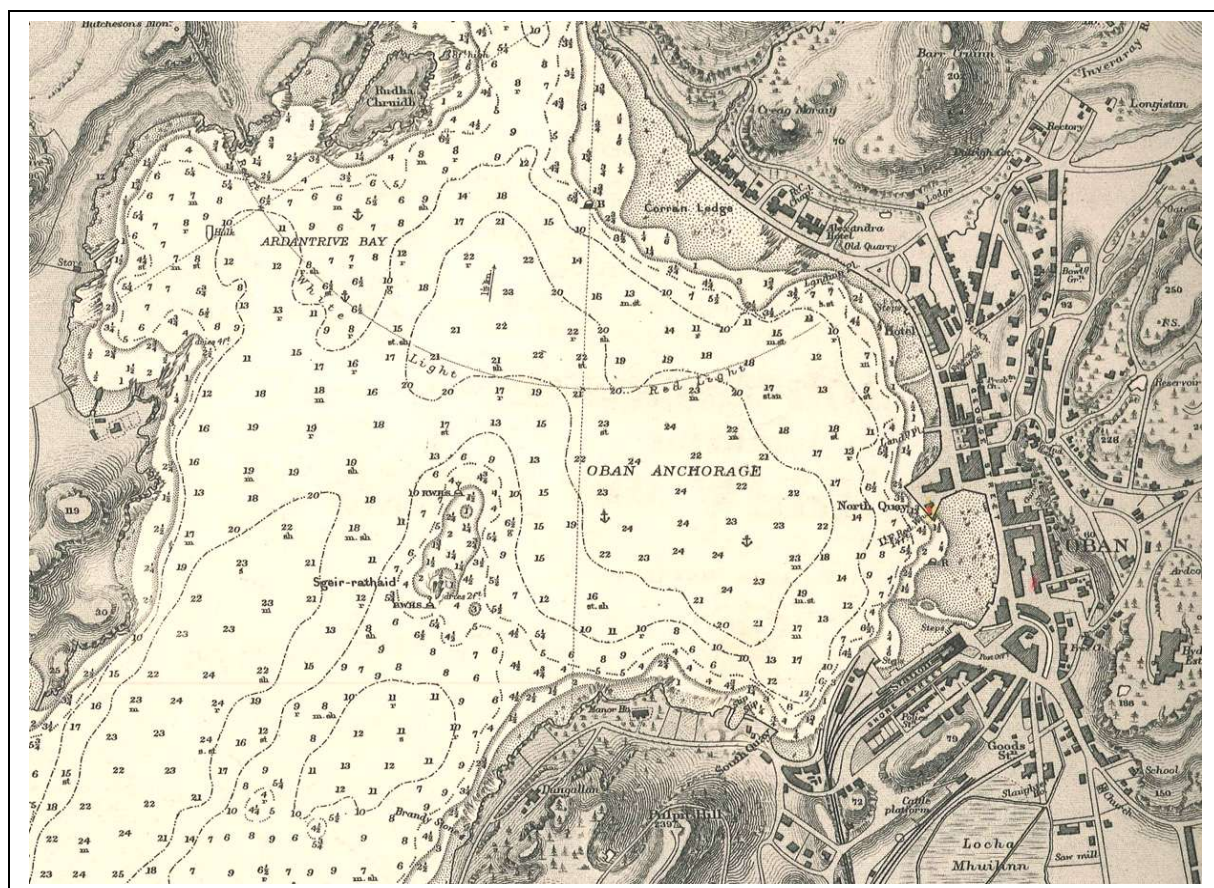


Fig. 3. Admiralty Chart 1790 of *Oban and Approaches*, including *Kerrera Sound* (1893)

Ordnance Survey also had close associations with Oban, using it as the headquarters of their Hebridean Survey between 1865-1870. Lorn was very well mapped by Ordnance Survey, with useful maps at one-inch to the mile (1:63,360) and six-inch to the mile (1:10,560) for all areas at regular 30-40 intervals from the 1860s. More settled areas near the coasts and shores of Loch Etive were mapped too at the more detailed 25 inch to the mile (1:2,500) scale, whilst Oban itself was mapped at the even larger ten foot to the mile (1:500) scale. The Oban Town Council financed this specially detailed survey - generally only towns with more than 4,000

people were mapped at the 1:1056 and 1:500 scales, and Oban fell well below this in the 1860s - and it provides an impressive mass of information. At this scale any feature over 6 inches wide could be shown, and consequently bollards, lamp-posts, pavements, steps, the position of free-standing trees, and garden paths are all shown without generalisation. These maps were important too for planning the improvement of sanitation, and features relating to water supply, sewerage and drainage are shown, including fire plugs, hydrants, water taps, manholes, and stop-cocks. The maps are also uniquely useful in showing the interiors of public buildings (Figure 4)

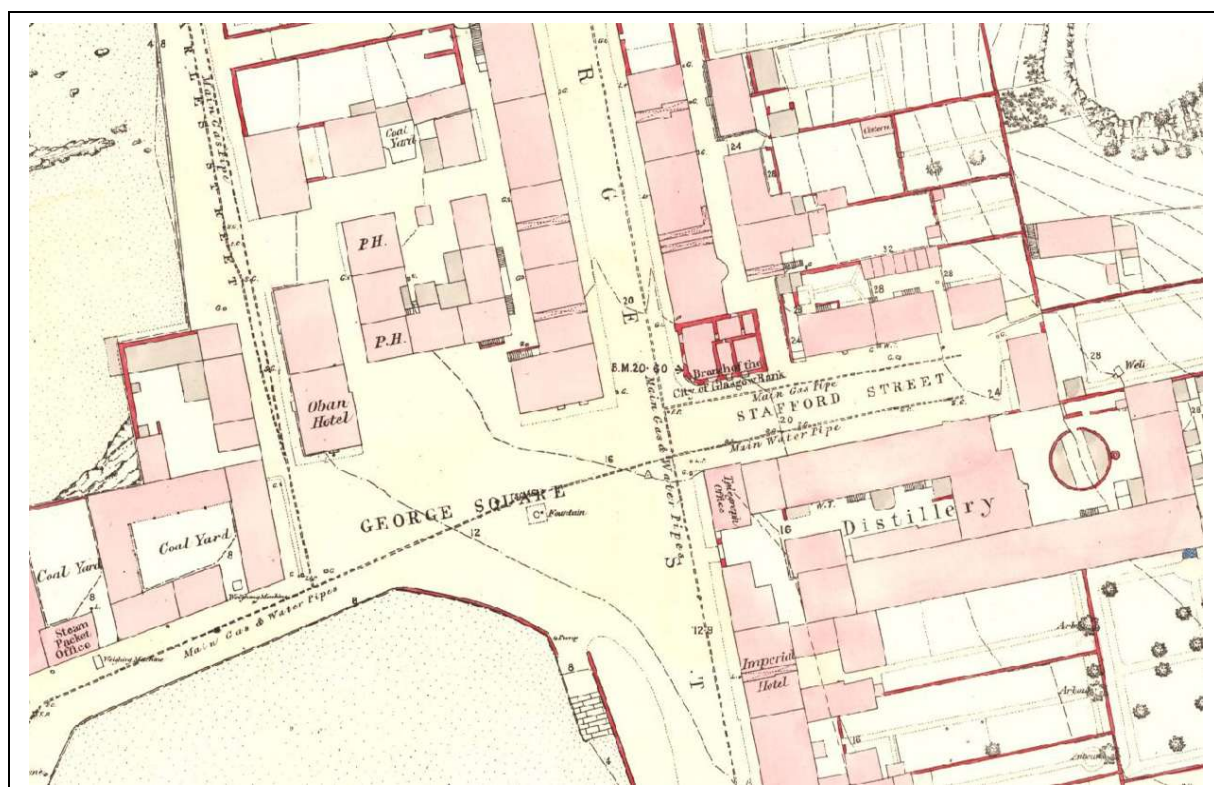


Fig. 4. A detail from the Ordnance Survey 1:500 *Town Plan of Oban* (1868)

Large scale feuing plans in the 19th century provide an interesting complement to OS maps, encouraging the expansion of Oban to the north, with real development proceeding along broadly similar lines. William Corsar's *Plan of Proposed Feus at the Town of Oban* (1844) records the feuing of land for building from the area just north of Stafford Street and George Square to the Oban Burn. From 1876, George Grant Mackay acquired 2,400 acres of the former Marquis of Breadalbane's Dunollie estates, the area north of the Oban Burn reaching towards Dunollie. The

Proposed Feuing Plan of part of the Lands of Dunolly (1867) records the plans for laying and building properties on this newly acquired area. Many feus were taken by local builders, and the area was rapidly transformed, although as noted in Groome's *Ordnance Gazetteer* in 1884, "admirers of Oban have not thought that all the tenements erected there contribute to the beauty of the burgh".

The National Library of Scotland is also fortunate in holding the archives of John Bartholomew & Son, the internationally famous cartographic firm, based in Edinburgh. Bartholomew was one of the most successful commercial cartographers in Scotland, experts in reusing and repackaging information, particularly from Ordnance Survey, and printing it in colour with additional details to meet a varied and expanding market. By the late 19th century Bartholomew was printing numerous maps of Oban and environs for the Caledonian Railway (Figure 5), for local directories, for steamer and cycling routes, for Adam and Charles Black's regional guidebooks, and smaller-scale tourist mapping, including their famous Half-Inch series with stunning layer-colouring for relief. Oban is the smallest town in Scotland that appears as a special town plan in Bartholomew's *Survey Atlas of Scotland* (1895 and 1912), their monumental folio atlas of the country, perhaps reflecting something of how important Oban was for Bartholomew.

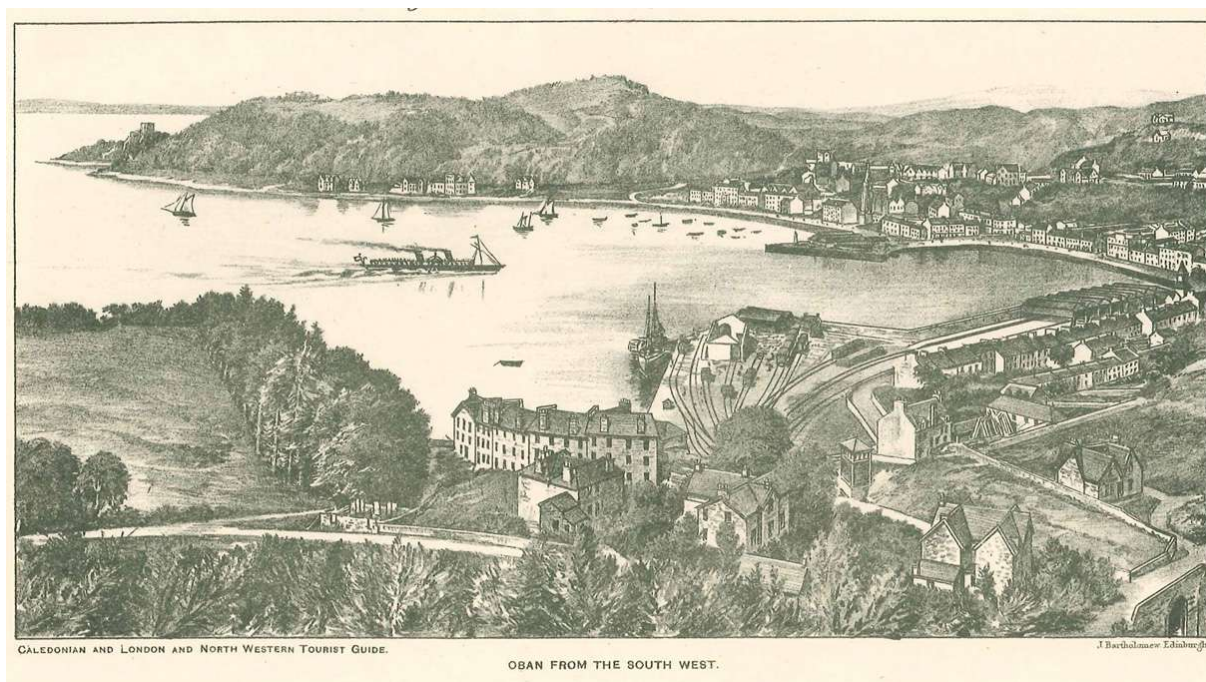


Fig. 5. The *Caledonian, London and North-Western Tourist Guide* (1886), with map and this accompanying view printed by Bartholomew

Fortunately today, nearly all of these maps can be easily consulted online through the National Library of Scotland's website. For some years we have made available the historic county mapping from Pont to Thomson, along with early marine charts, military maps including the Roy Military Survey, and smaller-scale maps of Scotland as a whole. In the last year we have also made available all the Ordnance Survey maps of Scotland from the 1840s to the 1950s (some 40,000 sheets), allowing a chronology of detailed changes in topography on the ground to be viewed. The *ScotlandsPlaces* website also provides a useful portal for online mapping, including some of the early estate maps from the National Records of Scotland.

Website addresses:

National Library of Scotland maps: <http://maps.nls.uk>

Bartholomew Archive catalogue:
<http://digital.nls.uk/bartholomew/resources.html>

ScotlandsPlaces: <http://www.scotlandsplaces.gov.uk/>

References

Cregeen, E. (ed.), *Argyll Estate instructions: Mull, Morvern, Tiree 1771-1805* (Edinburgh: Scottish History Society, 1964) provides useful insight into Argyll estate factoring and George Langlands.

Fleet, C., Wilkes, W. & Withers, C.W.J., *Scotland: Mapping the Nation* (Edinburgh: Birlinn, 2011) provides an illustrated thematic history of Scottish mapping.

Gibson, R. *The Scottish Countryside: its Changing Face, 1700-2000* (Edinburgh: John Donald, 2007) is particularly good on rural estate mapping held by the National Records of Scotland.

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