

# The Railway and the Burgh

At Kingussie there was a small, curious, chattering crowd of people who, however, did not really make us out, but evidently suspected who we were. Grant and Brown kept them off the carriages and gave them evasive answers, directing them to the wrong carriage which was most amusing.

Leaves from the Journal of our Life in the Highlands, Queen Victoria, writing about 1861

The remote, and in some respects inaccessible, parts of the Highlands will be opened up to a degree formerly unknown, and will be brought into direct communication with the south. Apart from the immense facilities which the new line will afford to tourists, there can be no doubt that it will have great influence in stimulating industry and trade.

Dundee Courier, 11th September 1863

The arrival of the railway to Kingussie in 1863 was a turning point in its history. In only about thirty years it was transformed from a relatively poor and isolated village to a thriving resort town. It was the means by which summer visitors would arrive for their holidays. All manner of goods could now be easily transported in or out. It became the rest stop for trains between Perth and Inverness; a busy refreshments room provided breakfast or dinner baskets, pre-ordered by passengers; local tea ladies kept the troops supplied during the wars.

Imagine the scene before restaurant cars were in use. Trains then made five-minute stops during which passengers could alight for a cup of tea (one penny) and a Paris bun in one of the two refreshment rooms (employing 12 of a staff) or buy extra reading material from the bookstall. Meanwhile the 'basket men' were delivering food baskets, containing hot meals cooked in the refreshment rooms, to the passengers whose orders had been telegraphed ahead from Perth or Inverness. Up to 500 baskets were sometimes supplied on busy days.

The engine would be topped up with water from the tank which was filled by a special pipeline from the mill dam up the Gynack. If it was getting dark another pair of workers, one walking along the carriage roofs carrying a torch and another on the platform would be lighting the gas lamps in the carriages. At night the station was lit by acetylene gas produced in its own plant which could use up to 1cwt of carbide per day. Supervising the scene and welcoming visitors would be the stationmaster, immaculately dressed in tail coat and gold braided hat.

The busiest time of the year was just before 'the twelfth' when all the shooting parties arrived. Sometimes one party would come by its own train and several others would each take half of a London train. At the station, a fleet of horse carriages would await them and it was not unusual to find up to 20 horses and carts, with hay frames, being used to transport the luggage of one party to its shooting lodge.

Kingussie Station, an article by Bill Middlemiss  
Strathspey & Badenoch Herald, 3rd February 1984

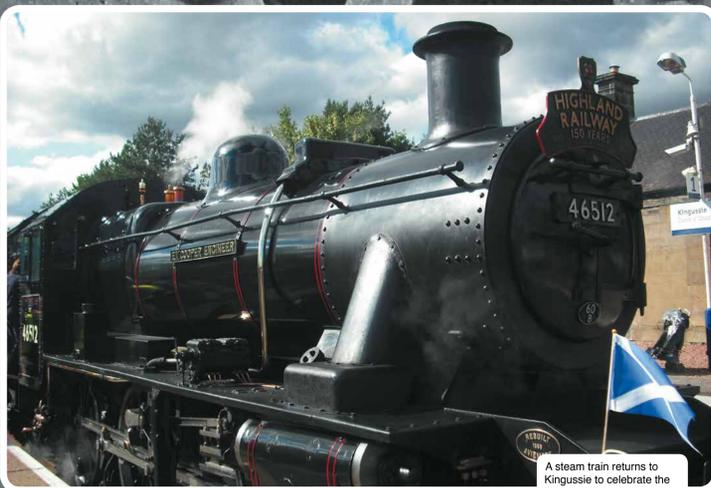
"A gentleman, Willy Johnstone, the driver; he was what you would call a fast railway driver, he would come with the Johnstone train from Kincaig to Kingussie in five minutes... five... six minutes. He was that popular that some such as you or me would go to Kincaig on the old six-twenty, three-forty from Perth, and time the gentleman... sit with your watch, time him till you would stop in Kingussie station. And in those days the drivers had a basket, you know, for their piece, instead of the piece tins that they have nowadays, and the boy would be drummed up to the Star Hotel before he went home for his supper... by the crowd that worked with him. Its right enough, I've seen it myself!"

Duncan MacDonald, BOHP 1984



"The station actually was a sort of focal point in those days and especially during the first war and there was an excellent tea service supplied; a lot of local ladies formed this and they supplied teas on the platform for troops passing through. It was great; in fact that station was the place in those days where, if you wanted to meet people and see what was going on, you made for the station."

William Johnstone, BOHP 1984



A steam train returns to Kingussie to celebrate the 150th anniversary of the coming of the railway, 2013.

"It was very exciting for the local people as soon as the summer season came round to see the number of staff and personnel who came to all of the lodges. The lodges were open always from about 6th August in preparation for the great day of the 12th, and all of the lodges were filled and all of the staff came, mostly by train, and the London train emptied them onto Kingussie platform round about eight o'clock in the morning, and then these people had to be transported by charabanc to all the lodges north of Kingussie and south of Kingussie, but they were all filled by the 12th of August. And I remember well because I would spend probably two to three hours between seven o'clock and nine at night doing in Morse, all the recording of the bags from the shooting."

Cath Hunter, BOHP 1984



Signalman, Jock Hay in the 1960s. (Courtesy of John Moyce)

In 1867, Kingussie was created a Police Burgh, thereby becoming a town, rather than a village. This was a means of governing and carrying out improvements. A group of commissioners was elected annually to oversee matters such as street paving, lighting, cleansing, water and gas supplies, preventing infectious diseases and appointing police officers.

## From the Kingussie Burgh Records:

**1866:** Recommends the introduction of clean water into the village to be made available to the inhabitants by means of fountains conveniently placed along the different streets and the thorough drainage of the village.

The Reporters recommend the buying of a low flat piece of land beyond the boundaries of the burgh into which the sewage of the burgh could be easily made to discharge itself.

Many of the people of Kingussie take water for cooking purposes from the mill lade running along the back of the High Street and that said lade is made the receptacle of much of the filth of the neighbourhood. In particular there are a carding mill and a waulk mill on the lade above the village and much of the washing of the place is made there and thus the water much polluted.

**1870:** The Records report that three closes are in a nasty state because of the build-up of what they called 'nuisances'.

Great injury to the pumps and street is occasioned by the practice of washing at the pumps.

**1871:** Advertising the manure of the burgh for sale.

J. McPherson, carter, not to allow his dung to accumulate.

Mr MacDonald, druggist, to get the liquid manure dried up at the dung-hill.

J. McPherson, tailor, to have his dung hill further removed from the house. The pig house to be thoroughly cleaned.

(Information supplied by David Taylor)

"In these days even by goods train, if I sent a letter today, I knew I'd have the stuff on the doorstep the day after tomorrow. They made up a wagon load for each station - in Buchanan Street which was the main goods depot for the LM&S - and it was just dropped off at the siding; came in about four o'clock in the morning and was just shoved into the siding and that was that. I wish they'd get back to these methods!"

Malcolm Fraser, BOHP 1984

Kingussie station in the 1970s.



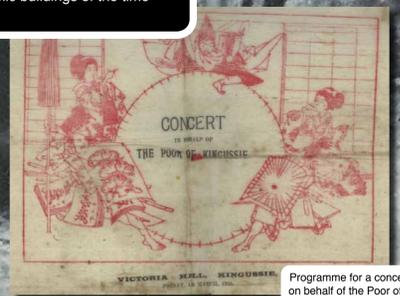
As part of the on-going improvements of the later 19th century, Kingussie Public School was built in Ruthven Road in 1875, replacing the previous building on the High Street. Kingussie had an excellent educational reputation and through the efforts of the minister, Rev. Kenneth MacKenzie, pupils came to the school from the Hebrides on a church bursary scheme that provided them with an opportunity to study Latin and Greek and to train for the ministry or other professions. These pupils boarded in various houses in the town, providing a vital source of income for local landladies. Other public buildings of the time include the Victoria Hall, 1877.



Kingussie School, built 1875, with the Free Church building of 1877 to the left.



The facade of the Victoria Hall, built for the Queen's Jubilee in 1877, now part of the Badenoch Centre.



Programme for a concert on behalf of the Poor of Kingussie, held in the Victoria Hall in 1895.