

A watercolor illustration of a landscape. The sky is filled with soft, blended washes of light blue, lavender, and pale yellow. Below the sky, a range of low hills or mountains is depicted with horizontal bands of color, including shades of purple, blue, and brown. In the foreground, a large, dark brown rock formation stands prominently, its surface textured with various shades of brown and purple. The ground around the rock is a mix of yellow, brown, and purple washes, suggesting a rocky or uneven terrain. The overall style is soft and atmospheric, typical of watercolor art.

CARLIN MAGGIE

AND OTHER STORIES FROM THE BISHOPSHIRE

Retold by
DAVID M MUNRO

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FOREWORD

Within the bounds of the old county of Kinross there lies a rich heritage of tales and legends, some dating back many centuries. I have been collecting these stories for some years now and in this slim volume I retell five tales relating to that part of Kinross-shire known as the Bishopshire. They are based on original sources including old charters, poems and local histories and, no doubt, they have been modified over the years by various writers and story tellers. I have tried to retell these legendary stories in a way that sets the scene more fully without straying too far from the narrative as I have received it.

The publication of these tales has been made possible through the 'Our Portmoak: Uncovering stories from the Past' project supported by Kinross (Marshall) Museum and funded by the Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic Environment Scotland in 2017 to celebrate the Year of History, Heritage and Archaeology.

David M Munro
September 2017

**Of morning-dreams presage approaching fate;
And morning-dreams, as poets tell, are true,
Led by pale ghosts, I enter Death's dark gate,
And bid the realms of light and life adieu.**

Michael Bruce, *Elegy written in spring* (1767)

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CARLIN MAGGIE

THE brow of the Bishop Hill is a wild place to walk even on a fine day. Here, where the steep, gorse and bracken-covered fore brae meets the grassy, gently sloping back brae, there is no shelter from the elements. As the weather comes in from the west and rising air rushes up the hillside, the relentless force and turbulence of the wind can make it near impossible to remain upright. When it rains or snows it is an even more fearsome place for man or beast to be. Shepherds of old aptly called this the “Wind and Weather Line,” a name little used today but recorded for posterity by the Kinnesswood parchment-maker John Birrell on his Plan of Kinnesswood Eastside Lands. This survey was carried out in 1796 for the local portioners or bonnet lairds who were beginning to modernise the landscape and create the farms we see today. Although these men were improvers and modernisers, they knew the hills well and for a while continued to use the old names for features, some of which were associated with tales of the supernatural.

Over half a century after John Birrell drew his plan, land surveyors returned to the Bishop Hill to collect data for the first map of the area to be produced by the Ordnance Survey. Just below the Wind and Weather Line they would have seen a 30-foot pillar of volcanic rock standing proud of its parent outcrop of quartz dolerite. The outer edge of a lava sill, this outcrop forms a hard ridge-top layer protecting the softer limestone and sandstones below. This natural stone monument, known locally as Carlin Maggie, would have been pointed out to them, possibly by a local quarryman named Stothart whose surname the surveyors gave to a meltwater channel forming a deep ravine stretching from near the base of the stone pillar down to the foot of the hill. Sandstone quarried for house building from a seam beneath the quartz dolerite sill would have been rolled down this “row” to be collected by cart below. Stothart, or Stoddard, may also have herded cattle on this the Wester Balgedie portion of the the Bishop Hill, for his name derives from the office of ‘stot-herd,’ the man who looks after stots or bullocks. The sandstone quarry, Stothart Row and pillar bearing the name Carlin and Daughter

all found their way onto the six-inch-to-the-mile Ordnance Survey Map eventually published in September 1856. Nearly a mile to the north beyond Glen Vale, on the south-facing slope of West Lomond, rocks scattered over the hillside also bear the name “Devil’s Burden”.

For generations these hills were believed to be the home of witches, warlocks, fairies and other ghostly creatures whose presence is still linked with local place names. At the Townhead of Kinnesswood, The Napix, or Fairy Hill, and the Fairy Steps just beyond form a gateway to another world. The young Michael Bruce, the “Gentle Poet of Lochleven,” who often walked this way to herd cattle on the fore brae wrote in his Ode Written in Autumn:

*“My steps when innocent and young,
These fairy paths pursued;
And wandering o’er the wild I sung
My fancies to the wood.”*

Bruce’s friend the parchment and vellum maker John Birrell also noted on his 1796 plan a limestone quarry to the south of the Whitecraigs known as the Fairy Doors. This would have been the entrance to the fairy underworld. Go there and put your ear to the great slabs of rock that form the doors. Listen for the sounds of fairy music, as many a shepherd lad has done in the past, and remember the old rhyme:

*“On Lomond’s slopes the warlocks grim,
And fairy brownies danced,
Wae unca tales o’ auld lang syne,
Held Younkers oft entranced.”*

Though separated by some distance, the stone pillar known as Carlin Maggie and the Devil’s Burden rock field are linked in a story of witchcraft that has been told to youngsters at many a fireside hearth in the Bishopshire from one generation to the next on fearful nights when wind and weather foul enveloped the townships at the foot of the Lomond Hills.

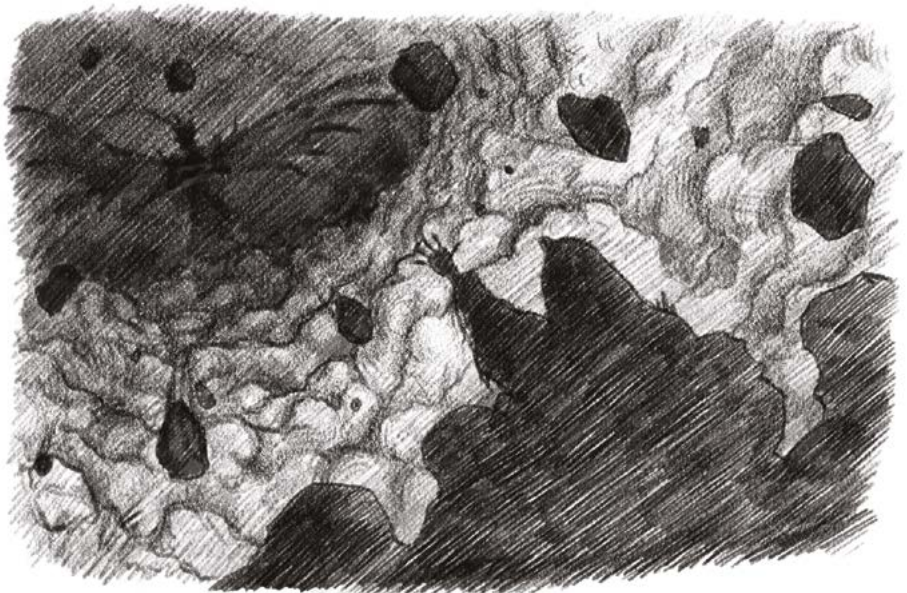
Maggie was a “carlin,” a Lowland Scots word for an old hag or a witch. She lived with her daughter on the moor within sight of the lums of Wester Balgedie and frequently consorted with the witches, warlocks and fairies to be found in these parts. Her spells and potions were legendary in Kinross-shire and her ability to communicate with the Devil was talked about in every household from Auchmuirbridge to Crook of Devon. It was always best to give Maggie a wide berth unless you needed to sell your soul in exchange for a favour or wished to sup with the Devil.

To prove that she was the most powerful presence in the land, Carlin Maggie decided one day to challenge the Devil. Now, when Malvolio in Shakespeare’s Twelfth Night is incited by Sir Toby Belch to “defy the Devil,” he warns him that to “speak ill of the devil” is a dangerous thing to do. Maggie took no heed of the misgivings of her sister carlins and confronted Satan, challenging him to a contest of strength. Who was more powerful, the Devil or Carlin Maggie? Both insulted and amused by her temerity, the Devil agreed to accept this challenge. The meeting place was the Wind and Weather Line at the head of the fore brae of the Bishop Hill; the time was midnight.

It was a wild night, such as had rarely been seen in the Bishopshire before. The wind blew with unimaginable force from all directions and the waters of Loch Leven, whipped into a fury, reflected a sky torn asunder with lightning from horizon to horizon. Deafening thunder shook each house in the valley to its foundations and the shutters of every window remained closed tight, not a soul daring to peak out even for a moment to witness the contest.

Carlin Maggie, with her fearful daughter hanging on to the hem of her mother’s flapping gown, sent powerful shafts of lightning skywards in an attempt to outdo the Devil’s onslaught. Shaft after shaft was delivered until, with nothing left to throw at the Devil, the witch and her quivering child looked up into a sky that seemed to turn darker and darker by the minute. For a while the wind died down to a whisper and the thunder and lightning abated. Was the battle over? Had Carlin Maggie triumphed?

Then, out of nowhere, a steely cold wind arose. Starting as a light breeze wafting along the Wind and Weather Line from Kilmagad Wood, it picked up speed whistling past the Fairy Doors, Whitecraigs and The Pinnels towards the luckless pair. Within minutes Maggie and her daughter were caught up in a tempest of immense force. The wind blew and blew, reaching a crescendo that even frightened the old hag herself. Ghostly apparitions appeared, swooping and swirling around the doomed couple warning them that the Devil was on his way. "Your fate you cannot now avoid," cackled one demon; "Your prison awaits," laughed another. Suddenly, without warning, the wind died away and the apparitions disappeared. A second later, huge boulders began to fall from the sky like massive hail stones. Helpless to defend herself, Maggie surrendered to the storm of rocks hurled down on her by the Devil and within minutes found herself imprisoned in a tomb of stone.



"Helpless to defend herself, Maggie surrendered to the storm of rocks hurled down on her by the Devil and within minutes found herself imprisoned in a tomb of stone."

Having won the battle with plenty of stones to spare, the Devil dropped the remainder of his burden on the slopes of West Lomond before disappearing triumphant into the night. If you want to see the Devil's Burden today, just go to Glenvale and look for the boulder-strewn hillside.

One of the stones which fell short of its mark split almost in two as it landed in the turf on the Wind and Weather Line. Ever after known as the Riven Stone, this rock came to be used as a boundary stone in the 18th century when the commony on the Bishop Hill was divided amongst the townships and farms of the Bishopshire. It conveniently found itself not only on the border between the fore brae and back brae, but also on the march between the Lands of Kinnesswood and Balneathil.

As for the wicked witch Maggie and her unfortunate daughter, the Devil decreed that they would remain imprisoned in stone until wind and weather set them free. Sadly, Carlin Maggie has not survived her imprisonment. The Devil allowed the wind and weather to take its course but not in the way everyone expected. In a cruel twist of fate the old woman was decapitated in the 1980s when an icy frost in partnership with a bitter cold winter wind sliced off her head which tumbled down into the quarry below. Perhaps Carlin Maggie's daughter, also entombed amidst boulders, may some day be freed by wind and weather and allowed to take her revenge. But beware, a headless ghost has been seen in the Welteringholm Quarry near Wester Balgedie. Could this be our Maggie?

COLIN MCVOGUL'S WELL

ON the face of it, the Lomond Hills are a haven of peace and tranquillity where you can walk for hours amidst what the Kinnesswood poet Michael Bruce called 'nature's scene' and never meet another soul. Here your encounters are with the fluffy heads of bog cotton bobbing in the breeze over the Lint White Moss on the Back Brae of Wester Balgedie, or sheep munching on young heather as you navigate your way around Archie's Loch and then perhaps skylarks twittering overhead as you emerge through piles of limestone waste at the Clatteringwell Quarry. All seems calm, but this calmness belies the fact that for centuries rights to land have been hotly contested, sometimes violently.

It was to resolve one such dispute between Bishop Walter of St Andrews and Sir Henry Arnot of Arnot Tower that, on 9th March 1389, 22 men gathered by the River Leven in the East Carse east of Scotlandwell. This was a curious, hand-picked collection of men – seven knights, seven gentlemen and eight commoners – whose purpose in coming here was to 'perambulate' or walk the boundary between the bishop's demesne lands of the barony of Kinnesswood, also known as the Bishopshire, and the demesne lands of the lordship of Arnot.

To the locals, this gathering of 'the more well-to-do, nobler and older' men of the Sheriffdom of Fife must have appeared an odd assortment of characters, hardly the types you would expect to see clambering over the hills on a cold day at the end of a long, hard winter. There were still patches of snow lying in the Crooked Rigs above Scotlandwell and some of the more portly men muttered amongst themselves at the prospect of wading through the boggy carse land before climbing up the steep southern face of the Bishop Hill to meet goodness knows what on the far side of Kinneston Craigs.

Chief amongst the men assembled that day was Robert Stewart, Earl of Fife and Menteith, a powerful man who did not waste any time in getting things under way once everyone had arrived. After a short briefing, knights, gentlemen and commoners set out on their long trek

to determine the exact line of the 'march' or boundary between the disputed lands. At a number of places they stopped to hear evidence as to the direction that line would take between one known point and the next and a scribe dutifully recorded each decision on a parchment. Each of these short breaks gave the less fit amongst them a chance to catch their breath before setting off again.

From the River Leven they set out northwards across the carse, following a drainage ditch that connected with a burn between the steading at Kinneston and the Brewstertown where beer was produced for consumption in the Great Hall at Arnot Tower. This was where the terrain changed from boggy marshland to a wet, grassy slope that caused endless hilarity amongst the 'commoners' as the 'more well-to-do' knights and gentlemen, one after another, fell flat on their faces losing all their dignity in the process. Making slow progress, they climbed inch by inch up the hillside past cultivated land until they arrived at St John's Well in the shelter of Kinneston Craigs. The water provided welcome refreshment, replacing the perspiration that had already started to flow from the brows of almost all of the party. Even the Earl of Fife, more used to riding a horse than scrambling up a hillside was showing signs of fatigue.

One final push brought the long straggling line of men to the summit of Kinneston Craigs. From here they could see the route ahead as it dropped downwards from the Reid Height to the Back Burn, before rising up again through the Berry Lea on the steep, south-facing slope of Munduff Hill. Exposed to a cold easterly wind blowing along the ridge, they did not linger long but started to pick their way down hill through thick tufts of grass and boulders. Not far from the ridge they stopped at a low lying knoll known as the Dead Man's Grave from where they began to debate long and hard the exact line of the boundary to the next point, a well named Tulynbogill.

"We could be a long time arguing o'er this part of the march," said one of the commoners to another. "The well has a funny way o' moving about and that's the cause o' all this fuss."

The debate began. Charters were read and re-read and the origins of the place-names involved were discussed at length. “Maist o’ this is nonsense,” the commoner went on. “I’ll bargain nane o’ these gentry hae heard aboot Culen a Vogul, a tale well kent in these pairts.” “I’m frae Kinghorn and ken little o’ these airts,” said the other commoner, “tell me, who was this man Culen a Vogul?” So it was here on the Dead Man’s Grave, ignoring the lengthy discussion being led by the Earl of Fife, that the first commoner went head to head with his companion to relate a story of events that took place over 500 years earlier on this exact spot.

It appears that the heroic exploits of Culen a Vogul were locally passed down from one generation to the next in a ballad that recalled unsettled times following the union of the Scots and the Picts under Kenneth McAlpine in 843. Amongst the first wave of Gaelic speaking Scots to arrive in West Fife were Duff Ogg, or Young Duff, Kenneth McBriach and the son of the herdsman, known as Colin McVogul or Culen a Vogul. All three had acquired title to land in the Lomond Hills where, in the summer months, they occupied shielings that offered their cattle fresh grazing out of reach of the cornlands in the low lying grounds below.

It was about 860 that peace was shattered in Scotland. Displaced Picts united with Britons from the south and with Vikings led by a chief named Starchar began to raid the coast of Fife. Penetrating inland they launched a raid into the Lomond Hills while the herders of Duff Ogg, Kenneth McBriach and Colin McVogul were at the summer shielings looking after their cattle. The three men valiantly defended their followers and, as the ballad says, after many skirmishes and much slaughter on both sides, they got the better of the raiders and chased them off. Afraid that the enemy would return, Duff Ogg, McBriach and McVogul remained in the hills ready to protect their lands and the families living there.

One day, not long after the battle had seemingly been won, Colin McVogul stopped at a well in the valley of the Back Burn where he drank deep, quenching his thirst on what was an unusually hot summer

day. Unknown to him, a party of raiders had managed to slip back into the hills without being noticed. Emerging from the shrubbery on the hillside nearby, they let loose a volley of arrows that seared through the air felling Colin McVogul in an instant. Duff Ogg, who had caught sight of the attack from a distance after the men emerged from their cover, raced across the open countryside with sword in hand. Outnumbered and exposed, he was cut down before he could even get close to his dying companion.

It was up to the third Scot, Kenneth McBriach, with the sons of the other two, to fight back and expel the raiders. A heroic battle that lasted several days took place before the Vikings, Picts and Britons were put to the sword. Next to a well in the valley of the Back Burn, Hector McVogul found the lifeless corpse of his father who had been killed, it is said, when “twenty arrows fastened at once in his body.” He was buried where he fell by the side of the well which, for ever after, was named Culen a Vogul’s Well. The brave Duff Ogg was also buried where he fell at a place still known as the Dead Man’s Grave and the hill opposite was named Mount Duff or Munduff in his honour. This tale is the earliest record of land in the Lomond Hills being contested.



"Next to a well in the valley of the Back Burn, Hector McVogul found the lifeless corpse of his father who had been killed, it is said, when 'twenty arrows fastened at once in his body.'"

By the time the commoner had told the tale of Colin McVogul's Well to his colleague, it was time to move on, and for the rest of the day the knights, gentlemen and commoners trekked wearily over the Lomonds until the perambulation of the march finally came to an end at Harperleas.

As a foot note to this story, we move on nearly 400 years to the 18th century when Robert Bogie of Kinneston and other farmers of the Bishopshire raised an action in the Sheriff Court in Kinross against David Inglis of Feal who had been "casting peats and divots, and other fuel" on land which they claimed belonged to the Bishopshire. At the conclusion of the court case in 1724 the Sheriff ordered march stones to be laid down, but it was not long before they were mysteriously moved. This led to a seemingly endless catalogue of court cases between subsequent owners of Kinneston and Feal that dragged on for another 70 years until 1793.

On each occasion, farmers, shepherds and herdsmen all appeared to give evidence in court. One of these was 55-year-old William Barclay from Falkland who swore under oath on 21st December 1762 "That he knows a well on the Bishophill, commonly called the Shoggle-Boggle Well: That the same is a spring so full, as he the deponent, has oft drunk out of the same, by lifting up the water with his bonnet."

The same old boundary was in dispute once again. This time the focus of attention was our legendary well whose exact position was not quite clear. From Colin McVogul's Well, the scene of our 9th-century tale, to Tulynbogill in the 14th century perambulation and finally the quaintly-named Shoggle-Boggle Well of endless court cases in the 1700s. How names do change over time.

THE ENCHANTED TREE

THERE was a time in these parts long, long ago, before Prior Andrew Wyntoun had written his *Orygynale Cronykil* and before names like Kinross or even Loch Leven had been coined. Stories were passed from one generation to the next by word of mouth and bards or poets kept alive the memory of events and of people such as the fair Levina who lived with her aging father in a turf cottage close to the side of the loch.

Levina was the old man's pride and joy and nothing pleased him more than to watch after her and see her grow into the perfect picture of her mother as a youth. She looked after her old father and helped him herd his sheep and tend the cottage garden with loving care. She loved to wander through the woods collecting plants to bring back to the garden or watch out for birds she had not seen before. As time went by, she was able to name each new flower she had planted in the garden and each new bird she had spotted hopping from branch to branch in the forest.

Described by a poet as "Fair as the morn, and beautiful as May," Levina's golden hair and rosy cheeks attracted the attention of many of the young shepherd boys in the area. They would come up to her as she walked through the woods collecting plants for the garden but if they could not tell her the name of a new flower she had discovered she would smile sweetly and then disappear through the trees laughing as she went. For company the enchanting Levina preferred to spend time with her father or with the older, wiser woodmen who could tell her about the plants of the forest.

As the years passed by the garden created by Levina grew more and more colourful and fragrant with the blossoms of flowers and shrubs that had been collected, planted and nurtured by her fair hand. By and by, to find new plants she had to travel further and further afield to satisfy her never ending search. On one such expedition she lost track of time as she wandered blissfully through a landscape bursting with life that had been watered by a morning shower of rain. Stopping for a rest on a small hilltop overlooking the distant loch, Levina fell asleep for a

while. The May breeze wafting over her face eventually woke her from her sleep and as she stood up ready to set off she noticed a young man looking at her golden locks glittering in the sun from the edge of the woodland.

Equipped with a bow and a quiver of arrows, the youth was obviously not a shepherd but a hunter. Clearly he too was captivated by the lovely Levina and approaching her with a rose in his hand engaged her in conversation.

“Come, let us collect the wild things of the wood together” he said. “If you will marry me, I will bring you the choicest flowers, apples and nuts of the forest which I own. All the fields and trees that you can see will be yours.”

For the first time in her life Levina felt attracted to an admirer, but she resisted his advances saying “I spend my days looking after my kind old father and had you been a shepherd who might have fed his flock beside mine I might have listened to the voice of love and walked with you all day until the summer sun fades over the distant horizon. Do not vex a heart that never can be yours.”

The hunter, lost in love, would not give up so easily. Holding her trembling hand he breathed the softest and sincerest expressions of love. “If I were to inherit the Scottish throne,” he said, “you could be my queen and men would say a fairer head had never worn a crown.” The couple spent the rest of the day walking together through the woodland far from the girl’s turf cottage by the loch.

Next day the amorous hunter found Levina waiting for him on a flowery bank by a spring under the shade of a willow tree. She had been won over by his charm and by his love for nature. Together they walked back to Levina’s home where she showed him the garden that she had created from all of the plants of the forest. He was captivated by the beauty of the place which mirrored the beauty of its creator and decided to stay in this enchanting paradise.

Blissfully happy, the lovers decided to marry and live together in this idyllic haven close to the loch. On the morning of their wedding day Levina put on her most beautiful dress and wandered through the

woods with her bride's maids collecting sweet smelling herbs to strew on the wedding bed that night. They reached the shore of the loch and looked out over the water to a verdant island only ever visited by brides on their wedding day. On this sacred island there grew an enchanted apple tree whose golden fruit was picked by each bride to give to her groom as a pledge of her love and a token of happiness ever after.

Stepping into a small boat with one of her maids, Levina sailed out to the enchanted island in the loch. There, amidst a wild garden of blossoms more than equal to the one she had created, she found the enchanted tree and picked two of the sacred apples, one for herself and one for her lover. Never having been to this mystical island before, it crossed her mind that this was a tree she had not seen on her wanderings through the forest all these years. Would it not be wonderful to have one growing in her garden and be able to pick its fruit every year? On either side of the tree she noticed two miniature apple trees complete with blossom and fruit. Without a thought she uprooted one of the miniature trees from the soil to take home with her to plant in her garden paradise.

No sooner had she wrested the young apple tree from the ground than a great sound like a chilling shriek of woe rang across the loch and the island began to shake under her feet. Trembling and pale with fright, both Levina and her maid raced back to the boat with hearts pounding. They rowed furiously towards the shore which they could see in the distance but as they reached the middle of the loch a whirlwind rose up, lashing the waters of the loch into a furious tempest. Sent by the angry demon of the enchanted island, the storm overturned the small boat which sank beneath the waves, taking Levina and her bride's maid to the bottom of the loch. Three times the bride's maids on the shore waiting for her return saw Levina's head and hands rise from the water; three times they saw her sink and then with a final scream of despair she disappeared below the waves, falling lifeless to her watery grave. The storm eventually passed and the waters of the loch became placid once again.

All day and all night Levina's grief-stricken lover walked the shore of the loch looking for his bride. Day after day he paced the sandy fringes of the water, occasionally believing he could see the ghost of his lost Levina, until eventually, wracked with grief, he died of a broken heart.

For ever after poets told the tale of golden-haired Levina and brides-to-be walked beside the loch shedding tears for the two lovers. To this day the loch bears the name Loch Leven after the girl who drowned in its waters after taking more than the fruit offered by the enchanted tree.



"They reached the shore of the loch and looked out over the water to a verdant islet only ever visited by brides on their wedding day."

THE GHOST OF THE GULLET BRIDGE

WHEN the mist lies low over the East and West Carse of Scotlandwell Moss your imagination can run wild as you drive slowly southwards along the Causeway from Scotlandwell towards Lochend Farm. You had better take it easy for who knows what awaits you as you approach the bend in the road that brings you to the Old Gullet Bridge close to the entrance to the Scottish Gliding Union's airfield at Portmoak.

The Old Gullet Bridge crosses the former course of the River Leven prior to the lowering of Loch Leven in the 1830s, a river course that twisted and turned all the way to Auchmuir Bridge from the south-east corner of Loch Leven. The New Gullet or New Cut Bridge a hundred yards further on crosses the post 1830 river which flows as straight as an arrow from the loch four miles eastwards through carse lands that are now cultivated right up to the river's edge.

When the Edinburgh land surveyor John Bell drew a map of this corner of Kinross-shire in 1796 it was marshy wetland only fit for supplying reeds for thatching the houses of Scotlandwell or for grazing cattle. In those days, men like Robert Scarlett fished for eels on the river at Lochend, catching these silvery serpents with a net, a spear known as a 'leister' or a trap called an eel ark or 'gullet'. Derived from the old French word 'goulet' meaning a throat, the so-called Gullets of Lochleven had been fished for centuries until industrial pollution brought an end to the trade in the 19th century. In 1524 Cardinal Beaton of St Andrews granted Robert Douglas of Lochleven the 'Gulottes of Lochleven' and as late as 1616 the annual rent of the old ecclesiastical Barony of the Bishopshire included payment in the form of eight barrels of salted eels from the River Leven.

Crossing the carse lands has always been a hazardous business. In 1621 the Causeway was declared, in a petition to the Privy Council raised by local parishioners, to be "so worne and decayit that it is become impassable for men or horssees, sua that merchantis and passingeris travelling that way ar oftymes in danger of their lyves and pakis, and

some has perrisht, and sindrie horse and packis has bene cassin away...” Some repairs were made to the road over the wild open marshland where bitterns used to stalk fish and a wooden bridge was built over the river at the Old Gullets. Little over half a century later the parishioners of Portmoak were again petitioning the Privy Council to build a new and more solid stone bridge over the River Leven at Lochend. This time it was in response to a fatal accident that had shocked everyone for miles around.

One wild and windy night a message came to the Reverend William Mackay, Minister of the Parish of Portmoak, that a parishioner who lay seriously ill at Findatie Farm on the south side of Loch Leven wanted to have him by his side to pray either for recovery or safe passage to the hereafter. Without hesitation Mackay saddled up his horse and set off from the Manse close to the edge of Portmoak Moss. Not wishing to leave his young daughter on her own on such a fearful night, he decided to take her with him. Up she leapt onto the horse behind her father, clutching her slender arms around his waste. Off they went up the manse lane and past the Church before descending the Howgate into the village of Scotlandwell and out onto the open Causeway. With the wind cutting across the carse from the west and rain beginning to fall they made their way, heads bent, across the peat towards Lochend Farm. Rounding the corner they approached the Gullet Bridge over the River Leven, but as they crossed the fragile and rickety wooden bridge a sudden gust of wind frightened the horse causing it to rear up. The minister’s daughter lost her grip and fell headlong into the river where she drowned in a torrent of water as her father tried desperately to reach her, but in vain.

Following this grim incident, David Birrell, factor of the Barony of the Bishopshire, raised money locally for “building a bridge at the gullets on the eist end of Loch Leven” and the Privy Council passed an Act calling for “voluntary contributions throughout the kingdom”. Eventually, in 1710, a new and much safer three-arched stone bridge spanning the River Leven was erected. Known as the Gullet Bridge, this place was ever after associated not only with the death of the daughter of the Minister of the Parish of Portmoak but with other ghostly stories.

No one ever lingered long at the bridge over the River Leven for fear of encountering the ghost of the Gullet Bridge. A passer-by had been violently ambushed here by a robber, a local man who had fallen on hard times. Lurking beneath a hawthorn tree by the bridge he leapt out, taking his victim by surprise. Pulling him from his horse onto the muddy road, the robber struck the traveller with a wooden club, killing him instantly. As he knelt over the mud-spattered body, the murderer recognised the traveller as a farmer from Ballingry who from time to time went to the corn market in Kinnesswood. Rifling the man's pockets, all the murderer could find was a pocket watch and a few coins before scurrying off along the Causeway.

In his attempt to sell the watch, the robber was subsequently identified as the murderer, arrested and sent for trial in Kinross. Sentenced to death for his crime, he was hanged a few days later on the Gallows Knowe mid-way between Kinross and Milnathort. Some of those who had witnessed the hanging of his body from the gibbet later swore that in the gloaming or the dead of night his ghost could be seen at the Gullet Bridge hiding under the hawthorn tree near the scene of the crime.

Some years later, on a cold and blustery winter's night when no one in their right mind should be venturing out of doors away from the warmth of the hearth, a ploughman at Findatie Farm on the south



"No one ever lingered long at the bridge over the River Leven for fear of encountering the ghost of the Gullet Bridge."

side of Loch Leven was preparing to make the journey to Scotlandwell as midnight approached. The reason for this reckless expedition was to find a midwife who would help his wife give birth to a child expected within the next few hours. Throwing a sheepskin saddle onto the back of his horse and tossing a blanket over his shoulders he set off past the Leckerstane to the head of the Causeway leading down to the Gullet Bridge. As he set off, a bitter wind laced with snow thrashed the water of Loch Leven sending an icy chill across the carse lands on either side of the River Leven. But as he turned the corner, the snow clouds began to disperse and a shaft of moonlight cast a beam onto the road before him lighting the way to Lochend Farm which he could just make out in the distance. As he approached the Gullet Bridge moonlight silhouetted an aged hawthorn tree by the roadside not far ahead. Till then the ploughman had been riding, head bowed behind the horse's mane to protect him from the biting wind and snow, but as he approached the old bridge he slowed his pace and glanced to one side thinking he could see someone crouched beneath the tree whose ice and snow-covered branches now shone brightly in the moonlight. As he passed, the figure beneath the hawthorn tree by the bridge suddenly sprung up at him, mounting the sheepskin saddle and grabbing him round the waist. For a moment the Findatie ploughman in a fit of panic fought furiously to unseat his attacker, but try as he did he could not shake him off or release his grip.

In a bid to calm him down the mystery man begged the ploughman to hear what he had to say and not be afraid. No evil was intended and he would come to no harm. Reigning in his horse by the Gullet Bridge, the Findatie ploughman listened as a deep hoarse voice behind his head revealed both a prophecy and a warning. His journey in search of a midwife would be successful and a healthy young boy would be born at Findatie that night. But that was not all. In years to come the mystery man would return to meet the ploughman's son on Benarty Hill at a place where "neither reeking lum nor growing tree, nor running stream were to be seen." There, he growled, he would do a service to the young man, an act that would allow his wandering spirit

to rest in peace for a crime he had committed near that very spot. His last words, though, were a warning to the ploughman's family. If they valued their lives, none of them should eat and drink at the same meal bread baked at Kirkness and ale brewed at the nearby Shanks of Navity. His mission completed, the ghostly figure released his grip and with a chilling scream threw himself off the horse and over the parapet of the bridge into the River Leven below.

Shaken by his encounter at the Gullet Bridge, the ploughman made his way into Scotlandwell where he found a midwife. The storm had completely abated by then and they returned to Findatie Farm in the early hours of the morning, the road over the carse lit by moonlight all the way. A handsome son was born to the ploughman and his wife that night.

After many years, all that the ghost of the Gullet Bridge had predicted came true. The ploughman's son, while minding sheep on Benarty Hill, met a strange man with a deep hoarse voice who gave him a watch and some money to be returned to the family of their rightful owner. This done, the mystery man, his conscience now clear, walked over the brow of the hill in the direction of Gruoch's Well and was never seen again.

The one thing that the ghost had forgotten to do before he disappeared from Benarty was to remind the young lad of the prophecy connected with the ale and the bread given to his father many years earlier at that chilling moonlight encounter by the Gullet Bridge. One day, now older in years, the ploughman's son attended the funeral of a near neighbour from Brackly Farm on the south side of Loch Leven. Returning from the burial in the kirkyard of Portmoak, the farmers of Portmoak Parish gathered at Brackly for a meal. Unknown to the ploughman's son this feast included bread baked at Kirkness and ale brewed at the Shanks of Navity. Not thinking of the ghostly advice given to his father, he consumed both. Within an hour he was taken with a sudden fit before collapsing dead on the floor in front of stunned fellow farmers. The terrible warning made by the Ghost of the Gullet Bridge had been fulfilled.

THE ROCK OF THE IRISHMEN

THERE is a story told in Portmoak Parish, one of the oldest ever told in Scotland, of a young man with a fiery temper named Mochan who lived in these parts over a thousand years ago. His homestead stood on the southern edge of the carse land through which the old River Leven wound its way eastwards from Loch Leven to Auchmuir Bridge. This was a rich hunting ground, with birds a plenty and both trout and eels to be taken from loch and river. Mochan grew wealthy fishing the silvery eels, for eels were a particular delicacy at the tables of churchmen, nobles and royalty. He had not far to go to find a market. The Culdee monks on St Serf's Island and the occasional royal visitor to Loch Leven Castle were regular customers and sometimes he would travel much further afield to fairs in Perth, Dunfermline, Stirling and Edinburgh.

Often Mochan would be seen tending his eel arcs or 'gullets', traps set in the river a mile to the south of Scotlandwell. In September, when the eels began to migrate in large numbers from the loch down to the sea, he had particularly rich pickings in the company of bitterns and herons eager to fill their bellies before the onset of winter. Loading his cart with barrels of eels preserved in salt obtained from traders who came up from the salt pans on the Fife coast, young Mochan regularly set off along the treacherous Causeway that crossed the carse land to sell his catch.

Leaving home one day with a harvest of salted eels, Mochan bid farewell to his mother and the two servant girls who helped look after the house and cook the daily meals. As he reached the head of the Causeway at the beginning of his long journey, he glanced homewards to see the peat reek rising through the thatch into the cold air above. Soon he would be back much the richer from selling his latest catch to the gentry of Stirling.

Mochan had not long disappeared over the horizon beyond Loch Leven when a band of men approached the River Leven from the south. These were Irishmen, traders in salt which they obtained

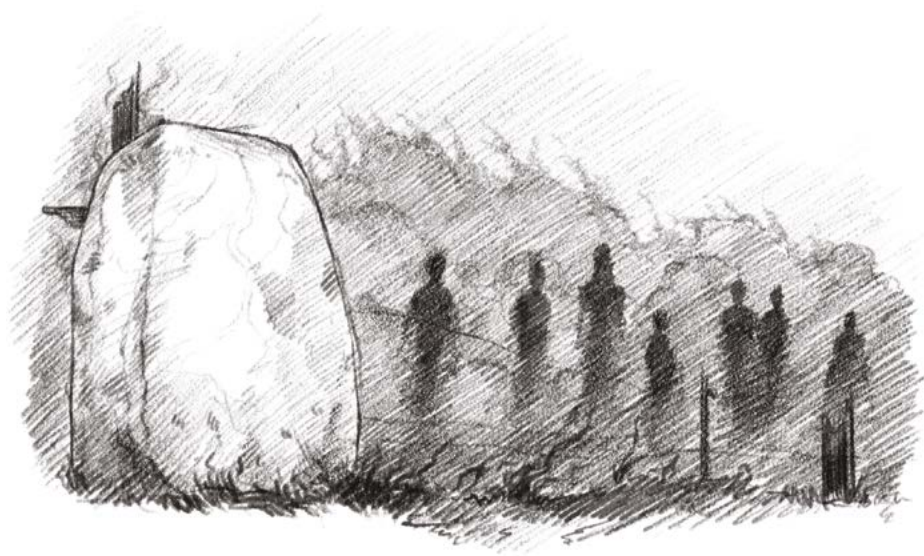
by burning seaweed and other coastal vegetation then boiling up the remaining ash with water. The king had granted them a royal charter engaging them in this lucrative industry on the Fife coast and with the arrival of autumn they were touring inland communities selling salt to those busy preserving food before the onset of winter. These men were regular visitors to Mochan's homestead, supplying him with the salt he used to preserve his eels.

In his absence, Mochan's mother made the Irishmen welcome. Attracted by the smell of a freshly cooked goose that had lately winged its way towards Loch Leven from the far north, they eagerly came indoors to join the women folk for dinner. Ale was produced, the conversation flowed and late into the night the sound of voices singing Irish ballads could be heard as far away as Findatie and Kirkness. Making themselves at home, the Irish salt traders needed no invitation to linger a few days while they visited the fermtouns in the surrounding area to sell their produce. Each evening they returned to be looked after by Mochan's mother and the servant girls who much enjoyed their company.

Gossip travels fast, and it was not long before Mochan got to hear about the Irishmen who had taken up lodgings in his house. Seething with rage he beat a track homewards, but as he approached he was spotted by his mother. Knowing how bad-tempered he could be, she quickly closed the door and barred it, hoping to explain away the situation before her son did anything rash. Mochan would not listen to his mother's pleas for forgiveness and called on the Irishmen to come out and face him. This they were too afraid to do.

Before long the disturbance attracted a crowd of local onlookers who watched as Mochan, in his rage, ranted at the top of his voice and threw stones at the house. This went on until dusk approached then, to their horror, Mochan set fire to a piece of cloth which he attached to an arrow. Letting it loose from his bow, the arrow streaked across the twilight sky towards the house where it imbedded itself in the thatched roof. Within seconds the whole roof was ablaze and to the sounds of screaming within, Mochan and the stunned onlookers, who by now had grown into a large crowd, stood and watched as the fire raged throughout the building.

No one inside the house survived that terrible night. The Irishmen, the servant girls and Mochan's mother all perished. By morning, all that was left were burning embers and one large stone that had supported a corner of Mochan's home. For ever after, that stone was known as the "Rock of the Irishmen."



*"... all that was left were burning embers
and one large stone that had supported a corner
of Mochan's home."*

Also by the same author

Kinross in old picture postcards (European Library, 1985)

Loch Leven and the River Leven: A landscape transformed (River Leven Trust, 1994)

Lochore Meadows: The making of a Fife landscape (Fife Council, 2012)

Where Poets Dream'd: A guide to the Michael Bruce Way (Scotlandwell in Bloom, 2013)

Loch Leven, 'The great meeting-place and sanctuary': A guide to the Loch Leven Heritage Trail (2015)

SOURCES

Carlin Maggie

The story of the duel between the devil and the witch Carlin Maggie has been passed down verbally in Portmoak for many generations. It first appears in print in a poem by the Falkland writer Charles Gulland, author of *The Lomond Hills – A Poem* by the author of *Sylvanus* (C. Gulland) published in Cupar. The 2nd Edition published in Cupar in 1877 was used as a source by John Ewart Simpkins in briefly retelling the story on pages 4-5 of his *County Folk-Lore Vol. VII: Examples of printed folk-lore concerning Fife* with some notes on Clackmannan and Kinross-shires, published by the Folklore-Society in 1914.

Colin McVogul's Well

This story draws on a 14th-century boundary dispute that involved a perambulation or walking of the march between the lands of Arnot and the demesne lands of the barony of Kinnesswood belonging to the Bishop of St Andrews. This took place on 9th March 1389 under the supervision of Robert Stewart, Earl of Fife and Menteith. A record of the perambulation was made by the Bishop in the form of a charter, a copy of which is now held in the National Archives of Scotland (GD150/263 f.32r-v). Written mostly in Latin, the description of locations on the marches between the two lands are in Older Scots. Reference is made to a place called Tulynbogill or Tuly'n' of Bogill, thought to mean 'mound of the bog', a name preserved in later 18th-century disputes recorded in Sheriff Court Records as the Shoggle Boggle Well. See *The Place-Names of Kinross-shire* by Simon Taylor with Peter McNiven and Eila Williamson (Shaun Tyas, 2017). An alternative meaning for this name is suggested in a story told in an early ballad referred to in James Arnott's *The House of Arnot and some of its branches* (1918). This account provides the basis for the story told here.

The Enchanted Tree

The story of Levina, “*Fair as the morn, and beautiful as May,*” is told by the ‘Gentle Poet of Lochleven’, Michael Bruce (1746-67) in his poem *Lochleven* written while he was teaching at Forest Mill less than a year before his death. This epic poem, comprising 650 lines of blank verse, was Bruce’s longest poem.

The Ghost of the Gullet Bridge

Local historian T M Tod senior of West Brackly farm told this traditional local tale in an article entitled “*The Ghost of the Gullet Bridge*” published in the *Kinross-shire Advertiser* in the 1850s.

The Rock of the Irishmen

A group of property records in the cartulary of St Andrews Priory sheds light on place names associated with the march or boundary around the lands of Kirkness which had been granted to the Culdee house of Lochleven on St Serf’s Island by Macbeth and his wife Gruoch during the mid-11th century. A century later, a prominent Fife landowner, Robert the Burgundian, lord of Lochoreshire, laid claim to a quarter of Kirkness, precipitating a dispute that led to the monks detailing the boundaries with specific reference to certain place names, one of which is the Saxum Hiberniensium or Rock of the Irishmen. The story told here derives from one of these documents which describes “How Macbethad son of Findlaech and Gruoch gave Kirkness to St Serf.”

WITHIN THE BOUNDS OF THE OLD COUNTY OF
KINROSS THERE LIES A RICH HERITAGE OF TALES AND
LEGENDS, SOME DATING BACK MANY CENTURIES...

...when the hopes and fears of people were often reflected in specific locations that were believed to be the haunt of ghosts, witches, fairies and the devil. Within these pages, five stories each reflect places such as the rocky outcrop of Carlin Maggie, a well in the Lomond Hills, an enchanted island on Loch Leven, a bridge over the old River Leven and a large rock that came to mark a contested boundary. The power of unseen forces, heroism, taking what is not rightfully yours and territorial disputes are all at the heart of these morality tales which have survived for generations by word of mouth or through reference in charters and ballads of olden times. Firmly rooted in and around that part of the Parish of Portmoak known as the Bishopshire, these tales vividly connect us with those who lived in different times in this corner of Kinross-shire.

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