



A STORY OF LAGREACH HOUSE  
**THE HOUSE**  
AT

**LA  
GRE  
ACH** & THE GREEN PARK HOTEL

## ONCE UPON A TIME

Grace and Jane Cowan built the House at Lagreach (Lagreach. *n. Scot. Gaelic*: a hollow in the heather). The seven acre site north of the village of Pitlochry lay between the bank of the River Tummel and the road to the old Clunie Bridge. The ladies were sisters, from Edinburgh's New Town. Who were the Cowans, and what were their origins?

From the mists of time a procession of Cowans entered around 1630. First came the mariners and shipmasters, the merchants of grain in the Linlithgowshire town of Borrowstounness, once the second most important port in Scotland after Leith. The forest of whalers' masts in the old harbour and the tree-fringed meadows of Lagreach are linked in a story which echoes the changing character of a country.

## WHO WERE THE COWANS?





# THE COWANS

From the mid 1600s Cowan mariners carried the prized Bo'ness salt and coal to Europe, returning with Baltic timber and grain. Enriched by this maritime trade, Cowan shipmasters came ashore and prospered anew. Cowan merchants survived the rebellion of 1745 and the ravages of

bands of wild highland men, but they could only watch with apprehension the relentless progress of the trench of the Great Canal. The opening in 1790 of the Forth and Clyde canal rang a death knell for the port of Bo'ness, and shifted the commercial balance of the central lowlands of Scotland.

## THREE BROTHERS

The Three Cowan Brothers, descendants of three earlier seafaring generations, each bore the title, 'Merchant of Bo'ness'. Around 1760 the youngest, **Andrew Cowan**, quit the town as a matter of political prudence. His grain business in Kirkcaldy brought commercial success, the office of Provost, and in 1781 the feudal rights to land in Edinburgh's South Side which enriched Cowan pockets for a further hundred years.

**John Cowan** traded in grain, was a pillar of the Kirk, and became baron bailie - the magisterial appointee of the Duke of Hamilton, the town's feudal superior. At his house 'Seaview' John Cowan entertained Robert Burns to the spectacle of horse racing on the sands below. He died in his town, Bo'ness, in 1811.

**Robert Cowan**, the youngest of the three brothers, read the runes and trekked west. Sufficiently established in business by 1780 to buy into the Grahamston brewery on Glasgow's Broomielaw, he had fathered a dynasty by the turn of the century. Robert Cowan married well; Lillias Horsburgh's family traced its line back to the ancient Earls of Wigton and Perth. In the course of 28 years Lillias Horsburgh bore Robert Cowan 14 children. Understandably perhaps, she did not enjoy good health in later life.

As the nineteenth century began Robert Cowan was joined in business by his two eldest sons, and installed another in his Anderston brewery. In the marriage of his fifth son, Walter, he took particular pleasure; Walter Cowan married Jane Grindlay, the daughter of an old friend from a well respected. Bo'ness family.

# THE GRINDLAYS

Foreseeing the demise of Bo'ness, as had Robert Cowan, the **Grindlay family** moved east, to Leith. There they built a business in grain. Soon after his marriage to Jane Grindlay, Walter Cowan entered the commercial union which was to last the rest of his own working life, as well as that of his eldest surviving son, James Grindlay Cowan. Each in turn became the 'Cowan' in Grindlay, Cowan & Company, Grain Merchants in Leith.

**James Grindlay Cowan** in his late thirties had followed the example of his Grindlay uncles by buying property in Edinburgh's fashionable New Town. With his wife and a baby son, he moved to a house facing south across the leafy gardens of Drummond Place. The date, 1844.



**Business flourished.** James Grindlay Cowan inherited property from both his Cowan and Grindlay forebears, invested in the new railway stocks, and became a very wealthy man.

Why he should have left his home and four young children, accompanied by only his wife and a valet, to die in a secluded country mansion at Glenfarg remains a matter of speculation; and why did his wife Susan also die there five days later, in November 1854, leaving her two sons and two daughters, orphans at home in Edinburgh?

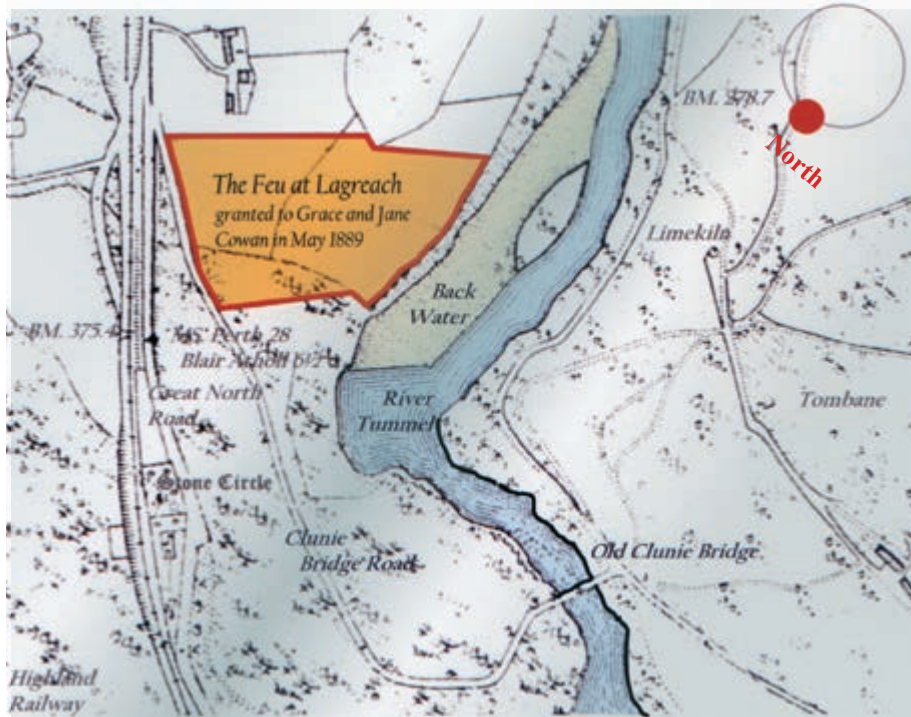
# THE MISSES COWAN

The elder daughter **Grace Louisa Campbell Cowan** was then eight years old, and her sister **Jane Eleanor Cowan** just three. The girls grew up in the family home in Drummond Place, along with their two brothers.

Between the girls in age was John Howard Campbell Cowan. He left Edinburgh to take holy orders in England, returning only in his last years. Walter Cowan was James Grindlay Cowan's eldest child, the boy for whom his father had expectations of a career in one of the professions. In the event, he took a commission in the Army, rose to the rank of Captain, married the Irish born daughter of a Lieutenant General, and settled into the life of a landed proprietor, the master of Strone House at Bridge of Cally.

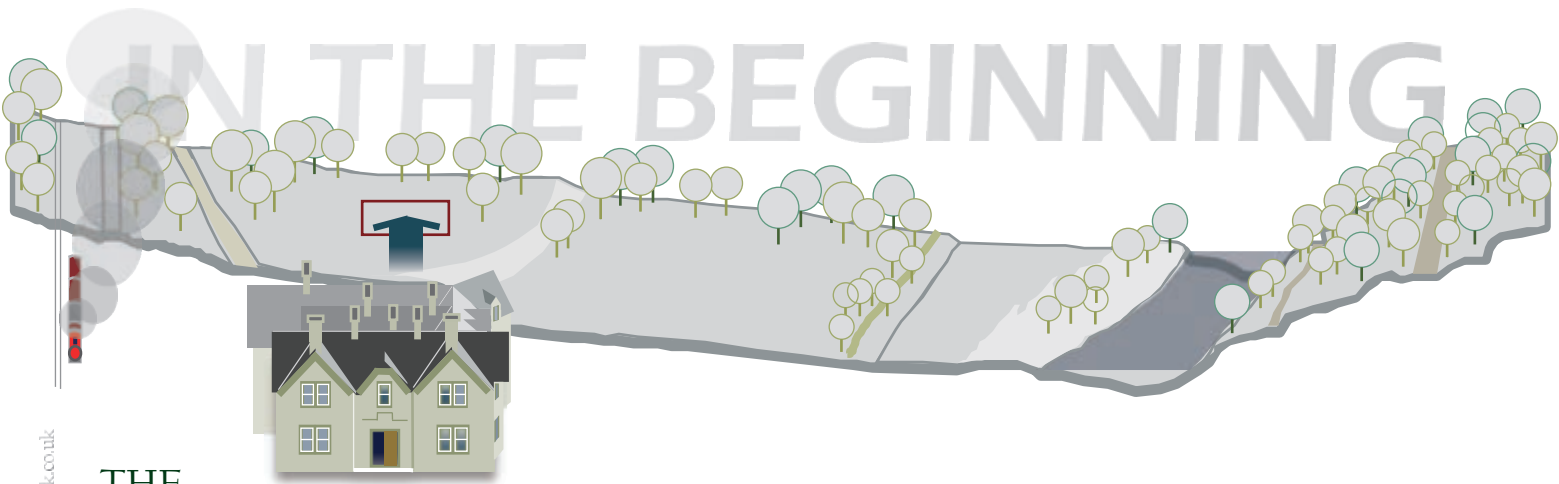
Neither of his sisters married. In due course the family house in Drummond Place was sold. It seems likely that, singly or together, Grace and Jane Cowan for a while followed their brother's example in renting country houses.

Then, in the spring of 1889, Archibald Edward Butter of the Estate of Faskally just north of Pitlochry granted the Misses Cowan a feu charter for seven beautiful acres, one rood and fourteen poles on the bend of the River Tummel, just below Clunie Bridge. On that land the sisters Grace and Jane Cowan erected the **House at Lagreath**, as prescribed by the feu charter: a dwelling house and offices costing not less than £2000 sterling. There they lived overlooking the river for nearly fifty years, the remainder of their long lives.



The Lagreath feu and the River Tummel, based on the Ordnance Survey of 1865, by permission of the Trustees of the National Library of Scotland. Scale: c. 1:6,000





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## THE HOUSE AT LAGREACH

was set in the upper meadow of a long green park on the River Tummel. Bounded by woodland to the north, and on the east by the road and rail routes heading north to Inverness, the grounds at Lagreach were well sheltered, yet open to the glorious river prospect.

## THE FEU CHARTER

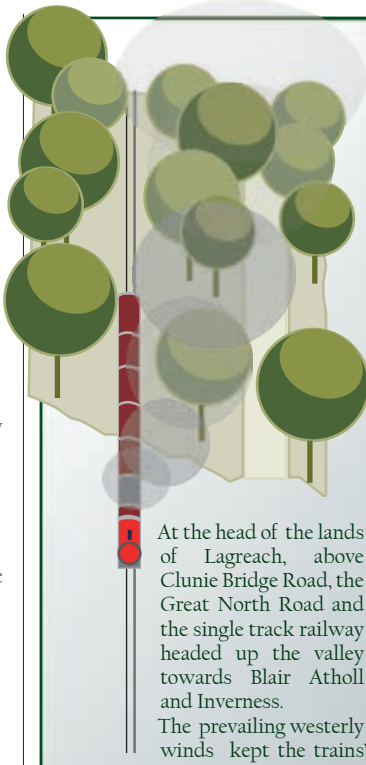
The feu charter required the Cowans to build only a private residence on their land at Lagreach, a substantial house and offices; to lay out the whole estate as 'garden or pleasure ground'; and to refrain from indulging in trade there, or selling malt liquors. So they did.

A handsome house was built in local stone. The principal public rooms faced south west across the garden to the wooded banks of Tombane, and the two sturdy stone arches of the old Clunie Bridge, beyond the bend in the river.

The Cowan sisters, unmarried and fortyish, came to Pitlochry in 1890. From the steep incline of the road to Clunie Bridge their carriage would turn sharply into the drive along the garden terrace with its view over the lower meadow to the fringe of trees which defined the river bank.

There the Misses Cowan enjoyed the pleasures of a fine salmon river - but not its fishing rights, which were reserved to the feudal superiors, the Butters of Faskally. In Lagreach House the two Cowan ladies entertained an increasingly distinguished family, and became well respected members of the Pitlochry community.

Grace and Jane Cowan ran a house of some style, with a coach and coachman, a butler and house staff. They built a tennis court in the garden of Lagreach and endowed a trophy to be contested annually between the golf clubs of Pitlochry and Blair Atholl. The first match, between teams of twelve and over eighteen holes, was to be played in October 1910 at the Pitlochry course. On the appointed Saturday, *The Scotsman* reported, Blair Atholl arrived two men short and lost 10 - 1.



At the head of the lands of Lagreach, above Clunie Bridge Road, the Great North Road and the single track railway headed up the valley towards Blair Atholl and Inverness. The prevailing westerly winds kept the trains' billowing smoke away from the Cowans' House at Lagreach - on most days.

## THE HIGHLAND RAILWAY CO.

As a centre of trade and tourism Pitlochry was a creation of the railway age. The Highland Railway Company was incorporated in July 1854. There followed a period of survey, planning and patient acquisition of land. Once construction work commenced, however, the track snaked speedily northwards. The railway was duly opened from Dunkeld to Pitlochry on 1 June 1863. By 9 September the next section also, from Pitlochry to Aviemore, was operational.

Overnight, Pitlochry, for many years Moulin's 'poor relation', assumed new importance as a channel for goods and livestock to the city markets. Soon Pitlochry became a gateway to the Highlands for an ever increasing number of visitors from the Scottish Lowlands and beyond. To all who came the town was well pleased to reveal the delights and opportunities of the land romanticised in novel and verse by Sir Walter Scott, and made accessible by the Highland Railway Company.



## Pitlochry's Oldest Inhabitant DEATH OF MISS GRACE COWAN

Pitlochry's oldest residenter has passed away in the person of Miss Grace L. C. Cowan, whose death occurred at Lagreach House in her 91st year. Deceased was the last survivor of the family of the late Mr Jas. Grindlay Cowan, Edinburgh, and with her sister, the late Miss Jane Cowan, took up residence at Lagreach House, which they built about fifty years ago.

Miss Cowan took a warm interest in social and philanthropic organisations, and was the oldest member of the Holy Trinity Episcopal Church. She was a lady of gracious personality, and was a highly respected member of the community, in which she had been so long a resident.

The funeral took place to the Dean Cemetery, Edinburgh. Prior to the removal of the coffin by motor coach, a funeral service was conducted in Holy Trinity Church by the Rector, the Rev. H. McNaught, who also accompanied the cortege to Edinburgh.

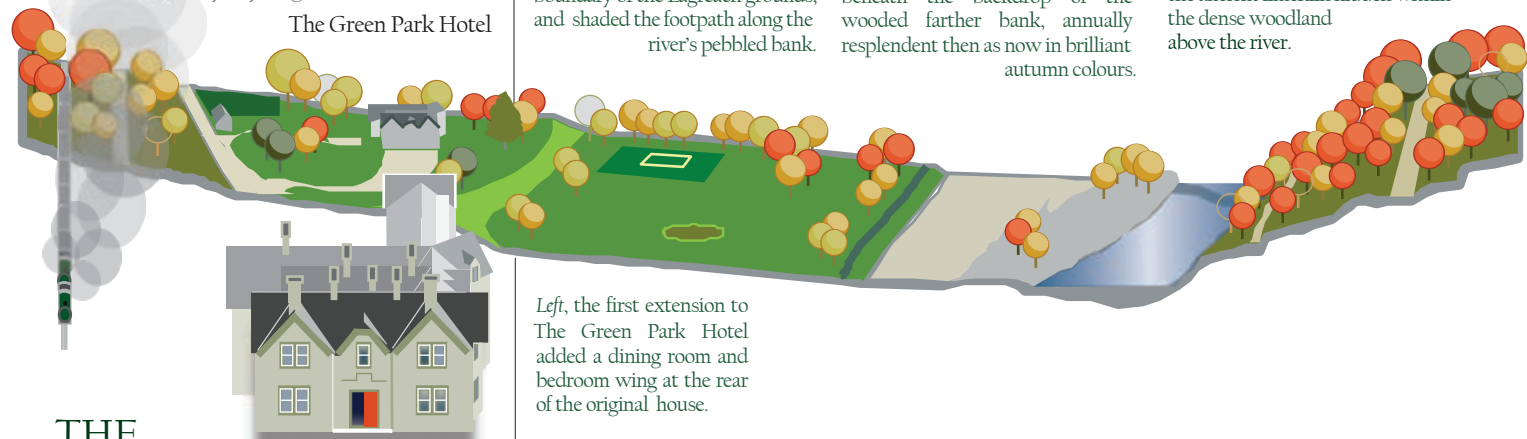
## A THIRD COWAN

By 1912 two Cowan ladies had become three. Winifred Cowan's father, Captain Walter Cowan of Strone House, Bridge of Cally, died when she was still a child. Soon after she had completed her education at Landsdowne House in Edinburgh her mother was committed to a mental institution. Grace and Jane gave their young niece Winifred a home at Lagreach.

There Winifred Cowan remained while her aunts grew old. Aunt Jane, the younger, died in 1934, leaving Winifred her half share of the house; Grace Cowan, Pitlochry's oldest resident, died two years later, and bequeathed to her niece half her residual estate - the other half going to Winifred's younger brother, Captain James Cowan. To Winifred alone came the second half of the House at Lagreach.

# FOR SALE

Winifred Cowan placed the property in the hands of Edinburgh agents. Offers were invited. On 30th January 1938 the house and its grounds were sold for the sum of £1000. On that very day, Lagreath House became The Green Park Hotel



## THE GREEN PARK HOTEL

Granted their superiors' permission to use the house as a hotel, the new owners lost no time in extending the property. They made the first real changes to the house in its fifty years' history during these few months between their acquisition in the January of 1938 and the following autumn, when private development was halted by martial events elsewhere.

The new owners of the House at Lagreath built a major extension. The original accommodation was enlarged substantially, transforming the house into a hotel. To the south-east there rose a spacious three storey structure, most of which survives to this day. Above the new ground floor dining room and kitchen was built a double sided bedroom wing linked into the upper floor of the old house. An attic floor of bedrooms commanded views over the long garden, and a panorama of the wooded river valley and the mountain ridge beyond. The Cowans' six bedrooms had become 27.



The Green Park Hotel and the River Tummel as they appeared throughout the War years. This photograph, taken from the old Clunie Bridge around 1948, conveys the grandeur of the setting of the house, high above the river valley.

Beyond the tidy lawns around the house lay the river meadow. There the Cowan ladies made a pleasure garden. They planted new trees and shrubbery, and laid out a tennis court, apart from the house yet convenient for the service of match-sustaining refreshments. Along the foot of the meadow, below, a tree belt marked the boundary of the Lagreath grounds, and shaded the footpath along the river's pebbled bank.

Here the Tummel ran in two channels. Immediately beyond the path lay the often dry bed of the Back Water, left below. In spite the river would spill into the Back Water, isolating the narrow, grassy central island, whose copse of trees and bushes endured periodic drenching. The main channel of the river, right below, ran dark and deep, beneath the backdrop of the wooded farther bank, annually resplendent then as now in brilliant autumn colours.

On this western slope, and almost at the water's edge, ran the old road from Clunie Bridge - the 'Road to the Isles', according to a rather fanciful reporter from *The Scotsman*. Hugging the Tummel's right bank, it lead down to Dalreach House and the monks' ancient ferry crossing at Port-na-Craig. Higher on the bank, lay the Tombane estate road, and the ancient limekiln hidden within the dense woodland above the river.

Left, the first extension to The Green Park Hotel added a dining room and bedroom wing at the rear of the original house.

## SECOND WORLD WAR

The War changed Pitlochry, Perthshire and the North of Scotland. Non-essential travel was actively discouraged. Much of the country was designated a restricted zone, and even southern Perthshire and Stirlingshire became military training areas. Hotels struggled to attract wartime custom. Many country estates were requisitioned to billet the host of army units assembling to embark on the Clyde in the troopship convoys bound for the Allies' first major seaborne assault, the *Operation Torch* landings in North Africa.



Within an hour's drive from the Green Park, Lance Bombardier Harry Seacombe and Gunner Gardiner, posted to Kippenross House with the 132nd (Welsh) Field Regiment, Royal Artillery, contemplated the uncertainties of foreign travel. They may have found singularly attractive a 1942 advertisement in *The Scotsman*.

### THE GREEN PARK HOTEL PITLOCHRY (THE SAFETY ZONE)

Marvellously situated in 7 Acres of Beautiful Grounds. 5 minutes level walk to Village. Excellent Cuisine. Hot and Cold throughout. Central Heating  
Spring Terms from £5 5s  
'Phone, 37

Survival of hostilities came as a profound relief to all parties concerned.

## THE DAM

Post-war year austerities precluded any further expansion of the hotel buildings, but the extensive grounds laid out by the Misses Cowan remained a well advertised attraction.

The decision to build a power station and dam across the River Tummel at Pitlochry shocked many, seeming to threaten the town's hard won reputation, and placing in jeopardy not only the lucrative fisheries on the Tummel but the very existence of The Green Park Hotel.

Pitlochry feared disruption of its community by unruly gangs of construction workers. The imminent disfigurement of a beautiful Perthshire valley by inundation became the subject of intense debate, both locally and in the national press. Hoteliers predicted financial ruin; losing the Tummel under a huge reservoir would surely destroy the tourist business on which the town and county had thrived.

The Hydro-Electric Board, established in the darkest days of the War to plan post-war power generation, devised the Tummel-Garry project.

At the Public Enquiry held in Edinburgh in the spring of 1945 the Board presented its case well. While there were concerns about the aesthetics of the Pitlochry Dam, the planners had contrived skilfully to minimise damage to the valley. The flooded riverside playing fields above the dam would be replaced with fine new facilities at the south end of the town. For the loss of old Clunie Bridge two new bridges would be built. Furthermore, no property in Pitlochry would lose land to the dam. None except one: The Green Park Hotel at Lagreath.



# THE GREEN PARK HOTEL



## THE PITLOCHRY LOCH

The Pitlochry Dam was not the ruin of the town. But it changed the landscape in dramatic fashion.

### *The Scotsman*

21 August 1950

#### Old Cluny Bridge Site Disappears

The new Pitlochry Loch, which forms the major part of the Tummel Garry hydro-electric scheme, is expected to reach its maximum height of 300 feet above sea level this morning. Controlled flooding of the area of the dam was started on August 8 and was limited at the time to the salmon ladder at the Pitlochry end. At midnight on Saturday [19 August] further flood water was released, and last night the waters reached a height of 298 feet.

Since the week-end flooding, however, the sight of the parapet of the old Cluny Bridge, the demolition of which was disputed at the time of the inquiry, has completely disappeared.

The North of Scotland Hydro Electric Board asked the folk of Pitlochry what their new reservoir might be called. The Burgh Council duly deliberated, and chose to call it **Loch Faskally**.

The new loch proved to be a major visitor attraction, and the presence at the head of the loch of the much respected Fresh Water Fisheries Laboratory reasserted the importance of salmon on the Tummel, bringing international acclaim to the laboratory

## TOURISM

In the 1960s tourism became central to the economic revival of the Highlands. Subsidies were offered to hoteliers willing to expand.

Building extra bedrooms could attract a valuable cash grant.



The Green Park Hotel grew wings, north and south. The front of the house was extended northwards in traditional materials under a slated roof, to match the style of the Cowans' original frontage. To the rear of the house, beyond the dining room, a Garden Wing of bedrooms was built in the manner of the times, and every room enjoyed the loch view which had become so important to the hotel's success in an ever more competitive market in the town.

**The old house also saw change.** Two bow fronted additions created a new Reception Area, enlarging the hallway of the house, and outside the Cowans' Dining Room - the southern half of what is now the hotel's main lounge - a spacious sun room was built to increase the guest facilities within the hotel and, of course, to take advantage of the hotel's unique view across the new Loch Faskally.

The austerity of these grey, post war years began eventually to recede. Monochrome postcards were soon superseded by views in glorious colour.

Tourism thrived. Growing car ownership encouraged an increasing number of visitors from the south to sample the delights of the Highlands.



Hotels and post card publishers alike prospered. Pitlochry basked in commercial sunshine, but nearly choked on the volume of road traffic which struggled through the town. Atholl Road was not only the town's main street for shopping and social exchange, it was also the trunk route between Perth and Inverness. As the railway system was curtailed, the Great North Road, the A9, was obliged to carry ever rising volumes of both private and commercial traffic - all pressing through Pitlochry along a road laid out in the 1800s when congestion was the meeting of two horse drawn carts.

**The bypass provided wonderful relief,** and returned Pitlochry to its own. The new road, threaded through the woods of the Tombane estate, crossed the Tummel on the third Clunie Bridge. The first had been lost to inundation; a second remained, the elegant aluminium footbridge; and the A9 bypass added a third.



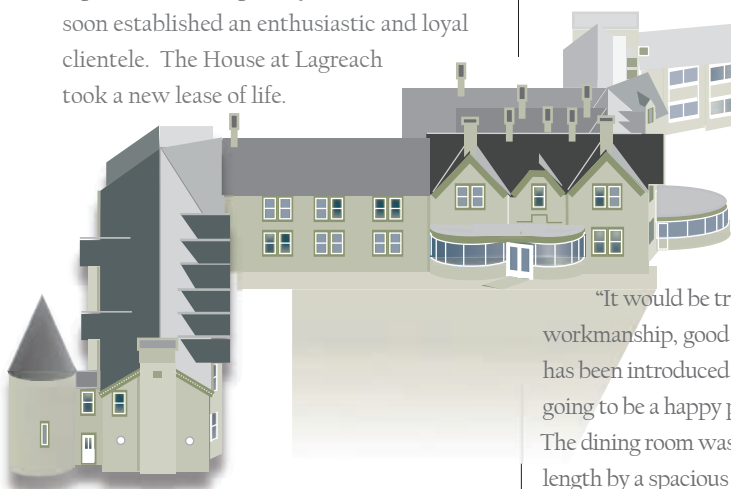
Above: The Green Park Hotel of the early 1950s marked the new loch's arrival with a postcard recording the first extension.

Right: The ever changing view from The Green Park changed again when the Pitlochry Bypass sailed across Loch Faskally on a new, award winning bridge.



**THE McMENEMIES** bought The Green Park in 1996. Smokers for all seasons were banished to a small wooden summer house, which covered behind a screen of guests' cars. The hotel's growing reputation for hospitality and fine cuisine soon established an enthusiastic and loyal clientele. The House at Lagreath took a new lease of life.

When the new Tower Wing's imminent completion in the summer of 2005 was announced in the Green Park Newsletter the McMenemies made no secret of their pride in the new arrival.



Guest numbers grew.

Demand for accommodation resulted in longer advance booking times and sometimes in disappointment. Expansion became essential. Throughout 2004 plans were laid. The new extensions were to be designed to enhance the venerable old house and also reflect the Green Park's singular style and standards.

"It would be true to say that a lot of fine workmanship, good humour and fellowship has been introduced into its construction. It is going to be a happy place in which to stay". The dining room was enlarged along its entire length by a spacious **Garden Conservatory**. All this new accommodation enjoyed the unique vista of water and woodland, against the same backdrop of grand Perthshire hills that had so pleased the Cowans - with Loch Faskally no less a pleasure in the twenty first century than the River Tummel a hundred years and more before.

Right: The gabled bay windows of the Cowans' house are echoed in the frontage of the new Tower Wing.



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## WOULD THE COWANS HAVE APPROVED?

When the Cowan sisters bought the land at Lagreath - 'the hollow in the heather' - they laid the foundations, in every sense, of a house destined to take pride and pleasure in its sheltered setting. Of course the principal rooms faced south and west across the garden to the river and the valley of the Tummel above Clunie Bridge; but it was the prospect of taking breakfast in company with the morning sun as it climbed above the south eastern hills that prompted the skewed bay at the corner of the old house - now the jigsaw chicane between hotel lounge and dining room. It is not difficult to imagine the pleasure of the Misses Cowan starting each day with such a noble view down their Tummel valley. The long meadow stretching to the river has now given way to the ever changing waters of the Loch. Yet, in the loch's reflection of woodland and mountain, it seems the passage of the years has only enhanced the pleasures of the Cowans' House at Lagreath.



The Lady of Lagreath, and Loch Faskally.

What would Grace and Jane have thought?

By 1950 the house they knew had been much extended, and the dam had transformed its setting. Would the sisters not have taken both changes in their stride? After all, Cowans had been pioneers for generations - in commerce and medicine, and in technical innovation. As railways spread across the continents, it was James Grindlay Cowan, the merchant in Leith, who invested in the new technology. In the twentieth century hydro- electricity generation was similarly pioneering, bringing power to a needy country, and a commercial stimulus to the Highlands - both of which the Cowan sisters would surely have endorsed enthusiastically.

When the Hydro Board dammed the Tummel at Pitlochry half the lands at Lagreath slipped below the waters of the loch. Yet perhaps the spirit of **Grace Louisa Campbell Cowan** and **Jane Eleanor Cowan**, the daughters of a grain merchant in Leith, keeps watch still over the ever changing face of Loch Faskally.

Who knows?

Research and Design by Ronald W. Gardiner, Sandwood, Edinburgh.