

History of the "Coigs".

From the 18th century the former area of Schephin was known as the Coigs, or Fifths. The five Cougs were: Coignascalen (place of the tents or huts) - transhumance?; Coignafeuinternich (place where the smith worked – or another interpretation – place of rough grass); Coignavullin (place of the mill); Coignashie (place of the fairies); Coignafearn (place of the alders). Grant pg.21).

By the time there were written records of the past here (12th century), the Coigs were used as shielings by some farmers from Badenoch (Grant pg.21). This is an excellent example of transhumance, where animals and their carers moved up to the high pastures for the summer months. Sir Aeneas Mackintosh, who became chief of clan Mackintosh in 1770, is recorded as sending his cattle up to the shieling at Coignafearn in the summer (Grant pg. 176)

There were refinements and additions to this system of agriculture, as mentioned later, but it was explained by a long-term Tomatin resident that the taking of sheep up the strath to the Coigs was still practised until just after the Second World War. However, crofters were also working their land at the Coigs.

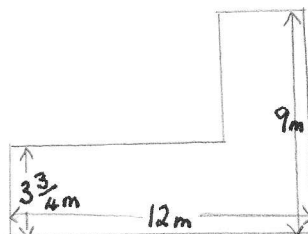
Changes in Highland agriculture occurred in the 19th century, when the moving of cattle gave way to the rearing of sheep. However, there is no evidence of "clearances" in the Coigs, although these occurred on the Corrybrough estate lower down Strathdearn (Grant pg. 74)

Later in the 19th century, shooting for sport became the dominant activity, and Coignafearn was rated one of the finest moors in the district. In 1876 Alfred Donald became the 26th chief of Mackintosh, and it was during his chieftainship that shooting on the Strathdearn estates probably reached the peak of its fame. In one year, 1913 – at Coignafearn (39,000 acres), 5000 grouse were shot, and in 1938, 86 stags (Margaret Mackintosh of Mackintosh: "The History of the Clan Mackintosh and the Clan Chattan" pp64-65. Published, Macdonald publishers (revised edition) 1982).

Coignafeuinternich at Present.

At Coignafeuinternich itself, there are the remains of at least 12 buildings, most of which are now hidden in the forest plantation. Most were houses, with at least 4 fireplaces visible, and one building had a fireplace visible at both ends. Some had barns or storage attached to one side of the house. The visible remains of the ruins – none have roofs remaining – were built from local, large stones, often undressed. (see photographs 1-17). In what was the nearby Coignavullin, one building was probably a mill, as there are remains of a vertical mill wheel housing (see photograph 22).

One of the houses, typical of some of the rest, had the following measurements:-



The next house to it was rectangular, and measured 15m by 3.5m, with a fireplace at one end. A number of others had only about 1m. of wall standing. There is also evidence of field enclosures near the buildings, on the flood plain of the R. Findhorn. (See photograph 20). One of the buildings was also a school. (Kenneth A. Macrae, "Northern Narrative" pg.172. Moray Press 1955).

Development and Decline.

I have no evidence of precisely when this township was built, except that the "Coigs" names are recorded in the 18th century (Dalarossie Churchyard Records), and Coignafeuinternich is shown on the 1st edition of the One Inch Ordnance Survey Map (1861-1891).

However, the township was not recorded at all in the 1841 Census, but by 1851 6 households were recorded, with 20 residents: by 1871 there were 7 households with 29 residents. In both these records most households were crafting, with land holdings varying in size from 4 acres to 16 acres.

By 1871, however, none of the above families are recorded, and Coignafeuinternich is not recorded as a settlement. The only 2 recorded Coigs are Coignafearn and Coignascalan. Nevertheless, there is a privately owned booklet produced in 1906: "Record of the Coming of Age of Alexander Mackintosh the Younger of Mackintosh, 6th August 1906". In this, there were four residents still at Coignafeuinternich and six at Coignashie. So far, these two differing accounts, (the National Census and the above record) are not reconciled. Village memory suggests that the last resident – a Mr. MacGillivray – left around 1942.

Today, Coignafeuinternich lies almost forgotten in an evergreen plantation. There was a 2002 proposal to fell the trees from this archaeological site (Forestry File Ref. FCC/3752), probably by the present owner of the Coignafearn estate. However, this has so far not happened.