A Short History & Guide to The Hotel and Estate

Dunkeld House Estate lies at the gateway to 'Highland Perthshire'. The home of the Earls of Atholl since 1529, it is situated in an area rich in beauty, wildlife and history.

Osprey majestically fish the River Tay for Salmon and Trout while Capercaillie, Black Cock and Wildcat lurk in the surrounding forests and hills. Take a step back into the last century, and rejoice in the beauties of nature, the sight of mountains, and the pure air by taking a walk, through the grounds of the estate using this leaflet as your guide…But first, a brief history of Dunkeld House.

Dunkeld House as it was 1932

Dunkeld House, under construction, circa 1900

The first residence of the Earls of Atholl was blown up by Cromwell's troops in 1654 and old Dunkeld House was begun in 1676 to replace it, situated in Old Dunkeld behind the Cathedral.

A London architect, Mr Hopper, reported on the dangerous condition of the house in 1828 and persuaded the 4th Duke of the need to build another. At this time, the Duke had bought an old inn, which was situated on the Cathedral lawn. In 1811 this was made into a dwelling house for the Dukes retired governess, Miss Ogg. However, the inn was now needed for the Duke himself to live in during the building for the new house. (Miss Ogg was sent to the Isle of Man, then owned by the Atholls). The Duke took up residence which was enlarged and renamed St. Adamans Cottage. Queen Victoria stayed there on more than one occasion — she describes it in her journals.

The second residence was begun by the 4th Duke - 'The Planting Duke' in 1828 but never completed. It was built as a wager between the Lords Breadalbane and Murthly with the Duke of Atholl, each undertaking to build a palace outshining the other two in magnificence. However, the Earl of Breadalbane was the only one to complete his palace Taymouth Castle. On the death of the 4th Duke, his palace, was two storeys, a 96ft gallery, vast staircase and elegant chapel and having cost upwards of £20,000 was still less than half finished.

It was not until 1898 that the 7th Duke chose the secluded site between the Kings Seat and the American gardens. This was to be the present Dunkeld House, situated a mile further up river from the original houses. In May 1899, St. Adamans Cottage, the unfinished palace and the brick buildings were demolished and the stone used to build the new house.

Also transferred from the old house were the existing fireplace in the imposing front hall and the carvings on the balustrades leading to the first floor of the older part of this hotel, as was the stained glass window on the far left of the fireplace showing the Atholl Arms and motto "Furth (forth), and fortune fill the fetters (handcuffs)."

The origin of the motto is as follows:

In 1475 King James III of Scotland sent for Lord Murray and told him to capture the rebellious Lord MacDonald, Lord of the Isles. The King gave him a dagger to protect himself, fetters and a key with which to lock them. Lord Murray eventually succeeded in capturing the Lord of the Isles and brought him back to the King. For this service he was created the First Earl of Atholl.

In 1703 this was altered to Dukedom of Atholl. An additional point of interest is the weather vane above the entrance to the hotel, in the shape of an otter. This was transferred from the kennels — now the Estate Office which used to house the Otter Hounds.

4th Duke of Atholl and Family *by David Allen (1744-1796)*

Shooting Party, 1885

Young Fisherman, 1900

The Duchess died in Italy in 1902, and the 7th Duke in 1917. The 8th Duke and his Duchess spend much of their time here and were very sorry when they had at last to sell the property to Sir Archibald Lyle in the 1930's.

Louisa Moncrieffe, 7th Duchess at Dunkeld House, circa 1901

Soon after this the house changed hands again and became, as it is at present, Dunkeld House Hotel. During World War II the building was used by an evacuated girl's school and was subsequently taken back into use as a hotel after the War.

"The great characters from Scotland's rich past have dallied here."

As you look out across the 280 acres of Dunkeld Estate, pause for a moment and savour the surroundings as many of the great characters from Scotland's past have done. Malcolm Canmore, son of King Duncan, used branches from Birnam Wood to conceal the size of his army as he marched against MacBeth - an event which influenced William Shakespeare many centuries later. Robert the Bruce, King of Scots, rested in the Estate woods after his followers were annihilated at the Battle of Methven in 1306. And that luckless lass, Mary Queen of Scots, dismounted for refreshments here on her way to visit the Earl of Atholl at the Castle of Blair in the summer of 1564.

Bonnie Prince Charlie's Highland Army twice rested near the hotel. Firstly on 3rd September 1745, during their triumphant march south to Derby - while their commander, Lord George Murray, sent the traditional 'Fiery Cross' into the glens to recruit more men. They rested here again - this time en route for defeat at the Battle of Culloden where, on 16th April 1746, the hopes of the Roman Catholic Stuart succession came to a bloody end.

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The beauty and enchantment of Dunkeld has inspired many authors. William and Dorothy Wordsworth visited the area in 1803 and 1814. Beatrix Potter, the author and naturalist, and the artist, John Everett Millais, have provided us with beautiful and long lasting memorials of their affection for this area. Several noted Millais works were painted around Dunkeld. Water colour studies and Fungi by Beatrix Potter can be viewed at Perth Museum by appointment. On Tuesday, 6th September 1842, Queen Victoria and her entourage first entered Perthshire. Queen Victoria recorded her impressions of Dunkeld.

"The peeps of Dunkeld, with the River Tay deep in the bottom, and the view of the Bridge and Cathedral surrounded by the high wooded hills, as you approach it, were lovely in the extreme."

Walk 1

King's Seat

King's Seat is the name given to this small hill, said to have the site of a bronze age fort, rebuilt 2000 years ago by the Picts, to command this route to the Highlands. It was a safe natural stronghold known in Pictish times (443 AD - 843AD) as Dunghaildhum — the name of course, being changed and now given to the village of Dunkeld. Dunkeld was thought to have been the home of a Neolithic Race of copper skinned, dark haired locals who probably erected the standing stone – an oblong slab of schist –which lies in the field behind *Poiney Lodge*, 300ft above sea level. The Romans were also here in 138AD.

St Colmes Well

St Colmes Well is found nearby. St Columba visited Dunkeld on his way to convert the Picts and rested beside the well. St Columba's importance to Dunkeld is such that he is depicted in a scene in *Dunkeld Cathedral* in a stained glass window. The summit is best approached through the woods from the west and the short walk results in spectacular views north up the Tay Valley to *Ben Vrackie* (841m), and south overlooking the whole Estate, with Dunkeld Village and Birnam Hill beyond. Scan the skies for *Buzzards* or, in winter months, even a *Golden Eagle*.

The West Grotto

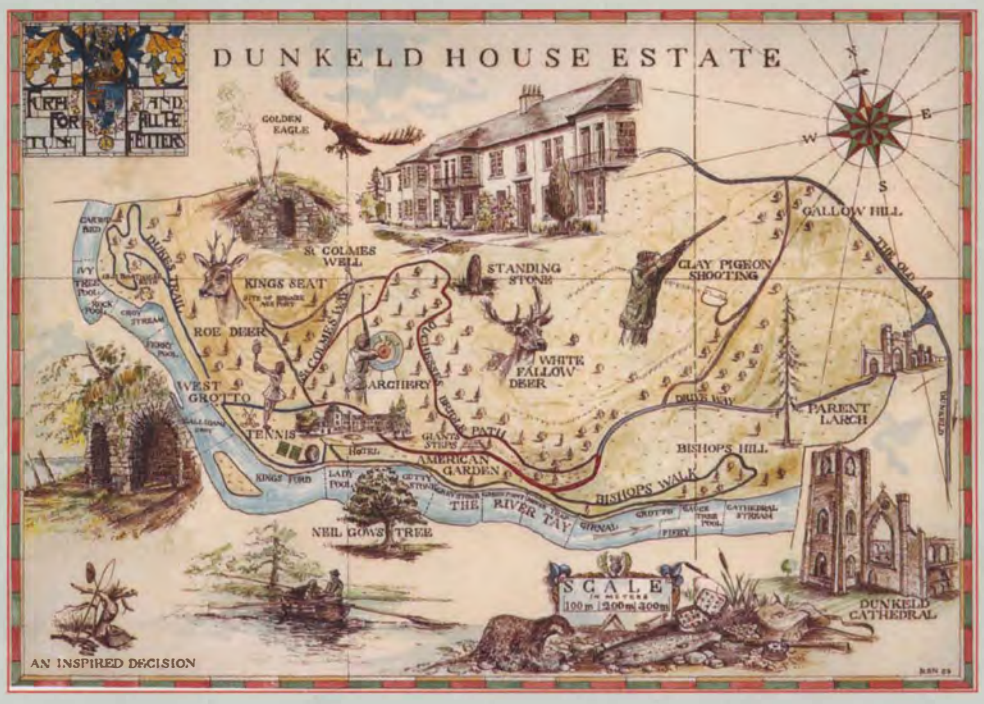
This is an unusual domed chamber with a gothic arched frontage, thought to be the design of *Robert Morris* in 1756, it is an excellent spot to rest a while, with views over the River Tay towards the forest covered slopes at *Craigvinean* (468m).

The river provides good feeding for many birds including the *Dipper*, coloured brown with a conspicuous white front and a habit of constantly bob-bing up and down when standing on rocks. The *Grey Wag Tail*, in spite of its name, has bright yellow underpants, which contrast boldly with its blue-grey back and long black tail, it is frequently seen at the waters edge. This is also a good place from which to see the *Red Breasted Merganser* and the *Goosander*, both of which dive in search of small fish. The Goosander is one of the few ducks to nest in tree holes.

Walk 2

The Old Boat House

The small sandy beach below the ruins of the old boathouse provides a good opportunity to spot the footprints of *Fallow Deer* after they have come down from the woods to drink. The woods behind the boat house comprise young Birch, Oak and Beech and, in late spring are carpeted with *Blue-bells*, *Primrose* and *Celandine*, giving way in late summer to *Wood Sage* and *Devils Bit Scabious*. Semi-natural woodland such as found on the estate is the richest habitat for bird species because of the variety of available food and nest sites. During spring, and summer, the extra effort of a pre-breakfast walk will be well rewarded by the wealth and beauty of bird song.



Walk 3

Bishops Walk

This wood next to the Cathedral has many fine trees such as the *Douglas Fir*, *Beech* and *Yew*. The most noteworthy is close to the Cathedral (identified by a notice at its base) – the one remaining of the group of 'parent' Larches planted in 1738 by the 2nd Duke of Atholl. From this source came the seeds for the great Larch Plantings for which Atholl Estates became famous. The 2nd, 3rd and 4th Dukes (the 4th Duke being known as the planting Duke) planted an incredible 14 million Larch trees, between 1738 and 1830. The Estate woods provide homes for both the native *Red Squirrels*, evidence of whose presence easily seen in the form of freshly stripped pinecones and also the *Scottish Crossbill*, a bird species unique to Britain.

The East Grotto

The *East Grotto* - buried deep into the wall dates from about the same time as the *West Grotto* although it is more closed in.

Wades Road

General Wade's military road to Inverness was built because of the governments desire to keep peace in the Highlands by allowing its troops to move freely. Wade started his road from Inver and crossed the River by the *Old West Ferry*. The wall retaining the bank is a later addition and now provides a home for *Lichens* and *mosses*. *Wood Sorrel* grows in its cracks and in summer, its base has blue splashes of colour from *Speedwells* and *Forget-me-nots*.

The American Garden

The Garden was laid out in the mid Century amid *Oak* and *Beech Trees*. Initially, a variety of *Rhododendrons*, *Azaleas* and other flowering shrubs were planted. Tall hybrid Rhododendrons now dominate. Varieties of conifers were planted, most since 1867, and today the large specimens of *Silver* and *Noble Fir* and *West Himalayan Spruce* are of national importance.

The Deer on Dunkeld Estate

Two species of deer can be found on the estate - the *Roe* and much larger *Fallow*, The Roe are normally seen singly or in pairs, with the male buck having short antlers. Both the buck and the female doe are grey/brown in winter and foxy red in summer.

The Fallow deer are normally seen in small herds, their most distinctive feature being their nine-inch long tails, which are black on top and white below. The colour of coat varies. On the Dunkeld Estate it is dark brown in winter and in summer changes to various shades of brown with chestnut/white spots.

White Fallow are also seen on the Estate - although they are not true albinos. The buck can carry splendid antlers, which are cast in spring, growing again during the summer months for the 'rutting' or 'mating' season in late October During this time the bucks advertise their presence by 'groaning'. This rutting call may be heard over half a mile away.