



## **Drumnadrochit and Fort Urquhart by Ray Pearce**

Hello everyone, my true story starts back in 1966, lies dormant for 50 years and springs back to life in 2016.

1966 was the year England won the World Cup which I saw on German TV in Bavaria whilst on holiday in Garmisch-Partenkirchen. The two towns had united in 1935, the year of my birth .I was the Sub Manager of our Hinckley branch when a lady customer called into the branch to enquire if we had a branch in Drumnadrochit. I had never heard of the place so asked the lady where it was. Scotland she said. Now in those days each branch had a copy of the World Bankers almanac. This contained lists of all countries, their towns and cities and banks so, if a customer was moving or had business in say, Timbuktu we would know there are 5 banks, mostly of French origin, there.

It so happened that there was a branch of the National Commercial Bank of Scotland, our main agent there. In those days English did not have branches in towns in Scotland apart from commercial offices in Glasgow and Edinburgh. So the lady's account was transferred to Scotland and I thought no more about it for 50 years.

In 2016 five of us retired bankers decided we would like to go to Inverness for a short break. David, alas no longer with us organised the trip. We went by train from King's Cross to Inverness First Class on the 12 noon Highland Chieftain train. None of us wanted to pay over £400 for the journey but David knew his way round the rail bargains and we all received an e-mail from him saying he could get the trip for £126 return .There was instant agreement from us and so we undertook this long journey arriving at Inverness at 8.10 pm that evening .I had been told not to sit for 8 hours and so every 90 minutes or so I would set off walking down the train. I got to know our fellow travellers after several walks which added to the journey. Meals and snacks, tea and coffee were brought to us at our seats and it was a most agreeable journey. I particularly remember the stop at York, crossing the Tyne at Newcastle and entering Scotland at Berwick on Tweed.

The hotel was opposite the station and after a brilliant breakfast went to the tourist office to plan some trips. I would add here that I phoned the hotel in the summer to be told all meals would be left in cardboard boxes outside the rooms because of lockdown .How things have changed. One of the train trips we did was to Aviemore and a steam train trip on the Strathspey railway to Boat of Garten. This railway was used in the TV series Monarch of the Glen with Richard Briers and Susan Hampshire.

Another train trip was to the Kyle of Lochalsh from where I gazed over to the Isle of Skye .This impressed me so much that I took a holiday on Skye the following year through Visit Scotland .I had hoped to visit the Isle of Mull in 2020 but this was not possible.

We decided on a boat trip the following day through the Caledonian Canal and on to Loch Ness. The canal was opened in 1822 and connects Inverness in the East to near Fort William in the West. It was designed and built by Thomas Telford. The boat trip goes as far as Fort Urquhart on Loch Ness and then back to Inverness. The skipper points out places of interest and says "There on the left is Drumnadrochit". That rings a bell I thought and that computer in my head remembered that 50 years ago I transferred a customer's account there from Hinckley .A few facts about Drumnadrochit, the name is from the Scottish Gaelic Druim na Drochaid meaning a ridge on a bridge. The population is just over 1000. There is no railway station, it is 16 miles from Inverness but there is a bus service from there .I will find a picture of Fort Urquhart the ruins of which are quite picturesque. The boat stopped there and we took on board a group of people from Japan before returning to Inverness.

The last day of the short break meant an early start from Inverness, the rest of the party went on to King's Cross but I got off at York and then a train back to Birmingham and home. I hope you have enjoyed this short trip to Scotland. Ray Pearce 27/28<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

