

Gael's Fire the Event of My Lifetime  
By; Kelly d Whittaker

I had received an invitation to Gael's Fire an event in December 2010. I read about the Tay Rail



Bridge Disaster Memorial Trust which jingled a bell or two for me. I had been told a story back in the early 1990s about a rail bridge which went down in Scotland back in the 1870s. I began reading about the Tay Bridge Disaster realising this is the very bridge I had been told about all those years ago.

The Tay Rail Bridge had been one of the world's most ingenious engineering feats of the time! The bridge was over a mile long and stretched across the Tay from Dundee to the Southern Highlands of Eastern Scotland. The Bridge was designed by Bouche. It was a gem in Queen Victoria's Crown! No one expected what would follow just 18 months after the bridge was open for service. A bad storm came in from the North Sea with high winds. The Edinburgh train crossed the

bridge at approximately 19.15 pm on the 28<sup>th</sup> December 1879. The force of the storm was so great; the train went right over the side of the Tay Rail Bridge. The old newspaper clipping catches the story with such intensity; no other stories can duplicate this wonderful story!

The Sea was too rough to go out immediately but rescue operations began at sunrise the next day.



The rescue team tried in vain to find all the bodies. A number of victims were never recovered. Several bodies washed ashore months later.

This was a sad day in Scotland's race in the industrial revolution. The engineer Bouche was so devastated by the disaster; he died just a couple of years later. The stumps of the original Tay Rail Bridge was left to be a break for the engineers who built the new Tay Rail Bridge.



Stuart Morris of Balgonie wanted to make a proper memorial to all the victims. One of his great grandmother's was on the train when it went over into the Silver Tay that cold December night.

Morris had met the RT Burns Club members at the 2009 Homecoming. He enlisted the help of Rose Marie, Anne MacPhearson and the RT Burns club when he went public with the Tay Rail Bridge Memorial Trust in December 2010. The website for the RT Burns

Club is; <http://www.rtburnsclub.com>.

Rose Marie and Anne MacPhearson got busy creating and put together the event 'Gael's Fire' to take place the 25<sup>th</sup> of March 2011 at Balgonie Castle. I intended to buy tickets for my mother and I to attend the event, I never knew I would have the honour of helping out such a great cause!

Rose Marie put the website together and enlisted my help with graphics. I had volunteered a day or two earlier to make Thank You graphics for those who donated to the TRBDMT.

<http://thetaymemorial.com/>. The website was up and running. Morris received his Scottish not for profit number and certification and the wheels were in motion. The Trust was off the ground!

Rose Marie put together an excellent venue for the evening. Anne MacPhearson secured the following artists to appear; Donald Kay as Robert Burns, The Sorries, Scottish Folk singers, Clanadonia, Scottish Rock and Gari Glaysher, Tenor-Opera Cross-over. Lee Murray was selected as the caterer and Keith James King as the announcer. We also had a special treat of Regis, Whisky Mad who gave lectures on whisky. Anne MacPhearson also took care of all the press releases.



Time was drawing near and I was asked to go up a day early to assist with cleaning and decorating. Stuart Morris insisted I wear lots of layers of clothing for the weather may still be cold.

I was picked up at the train station by Morris who is a practicing modern day jacobite. For me, it was exciting to be collected by a Scotsman in a kilt!

(In the picture; Stuart, myself and Laird Balgonie Walking away)

Stuart took me around Glenrothes in his SUV and told me the history of the 11<sup>th</sup> century church. I was looking at a gothic steeple instead of what Stuart was trying to show me. I was a poor pupil this day!

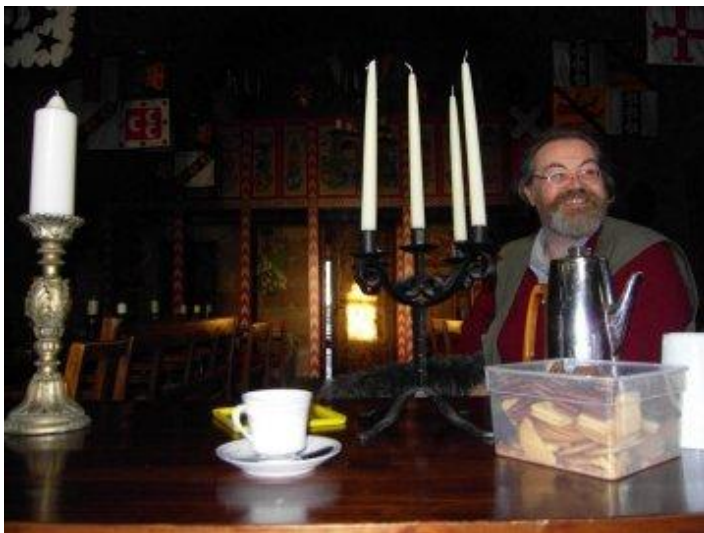
We arrived at Balgonie with smiles on our faces. Laird Balgonie was showing someone for a possible wedding, around while Stuart gave me the grand tour! Around 17.00 hours, Farooqi the Fife News Reporter showed up to help me with the rooms we would be using for Gael's Fire the following evening.



Needless to say, no work was done on Thursday because Laird, Lady and younger Balgonie took Farooqi and me to the Great Hall for coffee and biscuits. We talked and laughed until it was too dark to clean!

I found out so much history while sitting there drinking coffee. I also met the Balgonie deer hounds. Sin and Fen, (male and female) and I fell in love!

I had to admit I have English ancestors in which Stuart reassured me they were really Scots because they were from Northumberland! I was blushing all shades of red by this time!



Stuart just teased me a little bit about it. Farooqi was able to catch his teasing on camera.

I was the colour of Stuart's shirt by this time!

The smile never left my face. Stuart took me back to my hotel and agreed to collect me the next day at 12.30. I was almost in a panic because I didn't think that was enough time to get everything accomplished. The entertainers were due in around 14.00

to do rehearsal and we were asked to have coffee and sandwiches for them.

Stuart collected me at 12.30 just like a proper gentleman Scot. We went to Balgonie and I went up the stairs to say hello to Laird and Lady. Lady Balgonie almost had the sandwiches made. Stuart then took me down to see the rooms.

He took me to the chapel first; it was all clean and set up! We then went into the main reception which was already cleaned and ready to go then finally the great hall. All I could do is look up at Stuart in complete astonishment. He had already done all the work and all that was left for me was to see to the sandwiches and coffee for the entertainers.

I started to carry the two trays of sandwiches and Stuart took them off me and nearly ran down the stairs to the main reception hall.

The first to arrive were Gari Glaysher and Keith James King.

Laird Balgonie, Gari Glaysher and Stuart the Og of Balgonie.

Time was getting on and there was a wreck on the Forth car bridge so everyone was running late. I asked Stuart to drive me back to my hotel and I would get a taxi back to the castle.

I had less than an hour to get ready.

Gael's Fire at Balgonie was due to begin and I had to be there because I was designated one of the greeters.

I rushed through putting on 4 layers of clothes and trying to deal with my thick mane of hair in which I had cut quite a lot for Gael's Fire!



I arrived and the only one in a medieval outfit! I did get to wear my ancient Stewart tartan and badge my mother had sent me!

I had arrived before most of the entertainers and video crews. Farooqi with Channel Fife news was waiting and he kindly took most of these pictures.

Lady Balgonie and I began greeting people as they arrived. Stuart and his father were champions on manners and behaviour. Their chivalry would put any southern gentleman to shame!

(The video crew, Jim and Chris Muldoon of TW Productions)

(Lady Balgonie coming forward to meet them)



Gael's Fire has begun! Just in the short time I was gone, Stuart had lit every candle in every room we were to use. Balgonie had come to life! The old 14<sup>th</sup> century castle was expressing joy from every stone and corner of the grounds.



We had a fine display of Scottish Tartans and Colours. We even had Mr Mike Lemetti, the first Italian to get awarded an Italian Tartan. His company is called Clan Italia.



Regis and his lovely wife did the whisky presentation in the Reception Hall. His presentation was so good; people were coming to me to say they never knew half the things Regis discussed during his presentation.



Donald  
Kay

portrayed Robert Burns. He was very convincing! Everyone enjoyed his recital!

The Sorries were next with their toe tapping folk music. They both are very talented and had the guests smiling from ear to ear.



I had the honours of sitting at the head table with Stuart. Typical me cannot keep my mouth shut! We were trying to get Clanadonia to come in to sit



with us. They had ran very late because of the wreck and were hungry! We finally got them into the head table.



The Chieftain of Clanadonia is sitting beside Stuart. I had the youngest member of the band sitting beside me. Stuart is giving his speech. He did very well. Morris gave his speech during our lovely meal which was catered by Lee Murray of the Laurelbank Hotel, Markinch.

Clanadonia is a Scottish Style Rock band.  
Very Tribal!



To finish the evening with grandeur was the tenor Gari Glaysher. His voice combined with the acoustics of the Great Hall actually brought tears to my eyes!



Gael's Fire was about raising money for the Tay Rail Bridge Disaster Memorial Trust. With the combined efforts of everyone, RT Burns club was able to raise £1700 for the TRBDMT. The Charismatic Announcer, Keith James King and his lovely wife, Teresa were a valuable asset to the evening. Keith is also an actor! This was a special day for Teresa who was celebrating her Birthday!



Both evenings at Balgonie are ones for this southern gal of Scottish ancestry to always remember! It was like a dream come true.

The magic of the castle and crew created an atmosphere of pure splendour.

Everyone left with big smiles on their faces and happiness in their hearts. Laird and Lady Balgonie were so very kind and friendly. Their love of their son and their castle is very evident for they did not sit at the head table, they sat with the crowd!

\*All pictures are from Paul Stirling Taylor, Farooqi and Jim Muldoon.