

Dear Jeff,

Thank you for writing back to me regarding my request to use your Thistle Finial query in the Castle of Mey Newsletter, and appreciate the quandary you are in regarding the law suit. The restoration of the thistle leaves of finial this being carried out is very impressive.

Forgive my delay in response, but I have been giving the history of your Thistle Finial a great deal of thought and these are the results:-

### **Synopsis**

I'd like to begin by saying that it is more than likely the Thistle that sits on the gable end of Carfrae Cottage, London, Ontario did come from the Castle of Mey as there is always some truth in traditional oral accounts like these.

1.1. But there seems to be two versions as to who actually acquired the Thistle.

The first version suggests that Archie McCullough – the 2<sup>nd</sup> owner of Carfrae Cottage himself received it from Queen Elizabeth during WWII, along with other officers at Castle Mey, Scotland.

But this is under question as Archie McCulloch never served in the war or was stationed at the Castle Mey.

1.2. Nor could Queen Elizabeth have presented the thistles during WWII which was fought between Sept. 1939 to Sept. 1945. This is because Her Majesty did not know anything about the Castle until August 1952.

1.3. So this account cannot be true.

2.1 The second version says the Thistle was a gift to Archie McCullough given by an unnamed nephew who served in the Second World War. He acquired the Thistle when he was stationed near Castle Mey. The Thistle came from the Castle's iron fence which was being dismantled for materials needed in the war effort.

2.2. This version it very likely to be true, as there was a Military Training Camp of the Independent Army Brigade on the land to the east of the Castle. This was one of many camps built throughout Great Britain to provide training to the men from all parts of the country who had been called up to build up an infantry taskforce in Britain at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> World War.

2.3. There indeed was a call for iron metal to be collected as Iron had become an important commodity for military materials required to fight in the war.

2.4. So far all of this is true.

2.5. The question arises about a. the Thistle as part of an iron fence & b. how it was acquired.

2.6. 1.a. So far there are only the words of the oral tradition account to say it comes from Castle Mey, which I reckon is true – as said – there is always some truth in these traditional accounts orally handed down.

1,b, But I think that this Thistle was one of part of the decorations on the gate at the Castle not from a fence, as it is of high quality and so well made.

1.c I believe this part of the gate that was illicitly removed with the stone Pillars at the entrance to the Castle in Dec 1942. The theft of which was reported to the Highland Division Military Headquarters as found in the Factor's Letters. If the theft also included the gate, this requires to be checked out.

1.d. Any story that was attached to it was embellished to hide its illicit procurement as in Version 1. Or just simply told as in Version 2 which just gives the straightforward true facts.

## Evidence

1.1. In this most recent of your emails of 5<sup>th</sup> April you write *'The Scotch thistle, affixed at the top of the gable, was reputedly placed there by Archie McCullough, property owner of Carfrae Cottage (1944-1972) who received it from Queen Elizabeth during WWII along with other officers at Castle Mey, Scotland'*

1.2. In the booklet that goes with the house which you sent to me reads *'The pierced decorative barge-boards, the finial, and the primitive pointed attic window head added to the charm. An iron thistle mounted on top of the finial was a gift to Archie McCullough, the second owner of the Cottage, from a nephew who served in the Second World War. The nephew, stationed near Castle May in Scotland, procured the thistle from the castle's iron fence, which was being dismantled for materials needed in the war.'*

(Ref. This little House History of Carfrae Cottage of the Thistle. Carfrae Cottage Architecture: The Exterior p.10)

2.1 You also write in the same email *'Archie was 51 at the beginning of the war in 1939 and was a "linesman for London Hydro". There is no evidence that he was ever in the war or stationed at Barrogill Castle.'*

2.2.1 So according to this history book it was Archie McCullough's unnamed nephew who *'procured the thistle'* when he was stationed near Castle Mey and who served in the Second World War and gave it as a gift to his uncle.

There was a training camp for the newly formed Independent Army Brigade which was set up in the grounds of the Castle from 1941 to. This is one of many camps set up to turn raw recruits into soldiers all over the country. The soldiers were then sent to the various Regiments to serve King and Country.

2.2.2 So Archie McCullough's nephew would have been stationed here.

(Ref. Factor's Letter. Barrogill Castle. Book 27. 6/3/1940 -15/7/1948)

There is no suggestion that Archie McCullough was ever stationed there or that he procured the thistle or that he served in the war on the history given.

2.2.3. In the same sentence it reads *'the nephew.....procured the thistle from the castle's iron fence, which was being dismantled for materials needed in the war.'*

This has a hint of truth in this sentence, as Iron was indeed needed for the war.

Iron was used in all forms of armaments and obviously became much in demand. One source was the compulsory requisition of metal in any form, which of course included iron gates & railings. So that much is true.

In the Factor's letters, there is a furious letter from the Factor to the Head of the Highland division of Independent Army Brigade in nearby Halkirk, reporting the loss of the entrance to the Castle and possibly the gate had been unofficially removed by the army. It could be seen that some entrepreneurial soldier decided to sell off the thistles as memorabilia to make money (quartermasters were known for these dubious skills) hence the thistle was possibly 'acquired'.

Archie McCullough's nephew took advantage of what was on offer. To cover up its illicit source, the first version behind how it was procured has been impressively embellished.

(Ref. Factor's Letters 30<sup>th</sup> Dec. 1942 & following letters). I think it is possible this is where the Thistle came from. (This I could investigate further by research the letters in more detail).

3.1. *'The Scotch thistle, affixed at the top of the gable, was reputedly placed there by Archie McCullough, property owner of Carfrae Cottage (1944-1972) who received it from Queen Elizabeth during WWII along with other officers at Castle Mey, Scotland'*

I raise several points from this sentence.

3.2. Archie McCullough had the thistle made into a finial and he placed it proudly on his house.

3.3 No-one, least of all Archie McCullough, could have received the thistle from Queen Elizabeth (the wife and consort of George VI - as opposed to Queen Elizabeth II her daughter, who died last year) during WWII, as she did not know about the Castle at that time. Her Majesty first learnt about the Castle on her first visit to Caithness in August 1952 when she stayed with her friends in Dunnet (on an estate about 8 miles west from the Castle) whilst recovering from the death of her husband George VI who had died in March of that year).

3.4. The use of the word 'officers' doesn't fit well into the sentence. Both the Castle and its adjoining 24 acres of land were commandeered by the Government. The land was for building the training camp which was made up of several nissen huts, to accommodate 120 men. The old granary which were used as stables cum garage to be adapted into the mess for the recruits.

The Castle itself was for the sole use of the officers of the Black Watch and Royal Scots Regiments as a Mess for rest and recovery. They never trained or served there.

3.5. Whilst the Castle and the camp were near each other, the training Troops and the Officers never mixed socially. Nor did they enter each other's 'territory'.

3.6. The Castle Name. At the time when the Camp was built in 1942, the castle was known as Barrogill Castle. It had been officially renamed Barrogill Castle in 1866 when the 14<sup>th</sup> Earl was granted the title 'Baron Barrogill' by Queen Victoria for his services to her as her Lord in Waiting.

When the Castle was built between 1566 and 1572, it was called Mey Castle by the 1<sup>st</sup> Laird of Mey, William Sinclair.

William the son of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Laird, George Sinclair, called himself, William Sinclair of Barrogill. So the castle was known both unofficially as Barrogill Castle and officially as Mey Castle until 1866 when it was officially renamed Barrogill Castle.

When Queen Elizabeth as Queen Mother, bought the castle in 1952, she changed the name to Castle of Mey.

The point of this history of its name, is the use of Castle Mey in the description. It is possible that when the history of Carfrae House was written, the use of Barrogill Castle was obsolete, and for recognition as the castle owned by the Queen Mother, 'Mey Castle' was used, but its named interpreted by the author in a different country thousands of miles away.

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