4 The Black Isle: Cromarty, Rosemarkie & Fortrose

This peninsula is almost surrounded by the deep water Cromarty Firth in the north and Moray Firth in the south with Ben Wyvis, rising to over 1000 metres, providing a backdrop to the north. Until the building of the new Kessock and Cromarty road bridges in the early 1980s, the Black Isle suffered from poor land links. Historically the firths were a water highway linking the small settlements and parish churches sited close to the shore. Today the small towns and villages of the Black Isle are easy to reach; take some time to discover their links with Davidson history.

Historically the Cromarty Firth has been a trading and fishing port, a naval base and an oil rig construction yard; today the harbour provides safe anchorage for stacked oil rigs, as well as a port of call for many visiting cruise ships. The scale of some of these vessels dwarf the small scale houses in places such as Cromarty, but they also provide a reminder link with the past when the sea road was the way out for many from this part of the Scotland when they emigrated.

Visiting Cruise Ship

The wildlife to be seen is another draw. Bottlenose dolphins, porpoises, and seals can be observed at sea. The Red Kite has been reintroduced and flourishes, while Ospreys sometimes visit. Udale Bay and Nigg are both have important bird reserves.

Emigration Stone

Cromarty

Cromarty, a small town located at the eastern end of the peninsula; 700 years old, and for centuries dependant on the sea road. Today the 18th/19th century architecture is recognized as the "jewel in the crown of Scottish vernacular architecture".

A Cromarty Merchant's House

A Cromarty Cottage

Cromarty East Church. This church which dates back to the 17th century, featured in the 2006 series of the BBC Restoration programme. It is a beautiful building with a T-plan interior. There are pews on the ground floor as well as in upper lofts. The church records on display include details which show the status of some of the **Davidson** families in the early 1700s, including the ancestors of the **Davidson of Tulloch** family.

The survey records of the surrounding graveyard are also on display in the church. Although many of the inscriptions of the table graves are no longer readable, the records include details of Davidsons buried here.

Back inside this church, there is a large memorial to Arabella Lucy Ross, one of the daughters of Duncan Davidson 4th Laird of Tulloch and his first wife.

The relationship between the Ross family and this **Davidson** family spanned well over 100 years.

The **Davidsons of Tulloch** can trace their rise to prominence to the time in the 1750s that George Ross, a lawyer, took on a young apprentice **Henry Davidson** from Cromarty. This is the same Davidson who later purchased Tulloch Castle in 1762.

Cromarty East Church

Interior of Cromarty East Church

Arabella Lucy Ross Memorial

Cromarty Court House

Cromarty Court House

The Cromarty Court House built by George Ross which is now a museum provides the visitor with a sense of what life was like in this town in past centuries. It also houses a useful set of records about Cromarty for researchers.

The Hugh Miller Museum next door to the Court House, includes interesting displays about the life of Cromarty's most famous son, the geologist and writer Hugh Miller 1802–1855 as well as details about his family. His daughter Harriet married **Rev John Davidson 1834–1881** in 1863. The couple travelled to Australia where John became a distinguished theologian at Adelaide University, Australia, and is today commemorated in the Australian Dictionary of Biography.

St Regulus Graveyard includes a pair of elaborately carved table graves which commemorate the burial of **Alexander Davidson and his 3 wives**. Alexander was originally a lawyer in Fortrose and later became Sheriff Clerk of Cromarty. He died in 1734. His grandson was the **Henry Davidson** who later purchased Tulloch Castle in 1762. This graveyard is located on a small wooded hill overlooking Cromarty town, opposite the tunnel entrance to Cromarty House, which George Ross had specially built so he did not have to see his servants and tradesmen coming and going to his then newly built mansion.

St Regulus Graveyard: Davidson Table Graves

St Regulus Graveyard

The Royal Hotel, Cromarty [formerly the Admiral Napier Hotel] was reopened in 1896 with the new name it still holds by a **William Davidson**. Later the hotel passed to his wife **Grace Davidson** who ran the hotel until her death in 1905. This hotel is situated in a fine location close by the tiny Cromarty harbour. Some of the buildings which make up the hotel date back to at least 1796, but the first indication of there being an inn here is in 1825.

Royal Hotel, Cromarty

Cromarty Harbour beside the Royal Hotel

Newton, the site of a large farm which is located about a mile south west of Cromarty.

We know that **Donald Davidson**, the earliest recorded ancestor of the **Davidsons of Tulloch** can be traced back to "West Newton" in the *Register of Sasines* in the National Archives of Scotland in the latter part of the 17th Century.

Davidston, another large farm which is located about three miles south west of Cromarty.

There are claims in Logan & MacIan's book *"The Clans of the Scottish Highlands"* published in 1845 that state the Davidsons settled in Davidston sometime in the 15th century. No record of this can be found in the National Archives of Scotland. The name probably derives from David of Denouen who was granted land in this part of Cromarty in the 13th century.

Rosemarkie

The Groam House Museum is a tiny gem of a museum which contains an excellent permanent display of Pictish stones, in particular the Rosemarkie Cross Slab, as well as interesting background information. This museum is a must for any visitor to the Black Isle.

Groam House Museum

A few yards away is **Rosemarkie Parish Church and Graveyard** which overlooks the Moray Firth with fine views across to Fort George. This graveyard, which has been surveyed by the Highland Family History Society contains several Davidson graves with interesting inscriptions including one which was erected to commemorate the life of one **John Davidson** who died on the island of Barbados in the West Indies in 1856.

Rosemarkie Graveyard

The Brahan Seer Memorial at Chanonry Point near Fortrose

Brahan Seer Memorial

The Seer, thought to be Coinneach Odhar was born on the Isle of Lewis in about 1650. His predictions handed down via the oral tradition have been well known to Highlanders over the centuries. One of the many predictions was … *"the day will come when there will be a laird of Tulloch who will kill four wives in succession, but the fifth shall kill him"*. This prophesy was well known to **Duncan Davidson 1800–1881**.

This Laird of Tulloch had five wives; four of his wives predeceased him having died from natural causes, while his fifth wife outlived him. He died from catching pneumonia after attending the Royal Review in Edinburgh … his death certificate actually reports that he died as a result of 'cardiac and renal disease'.

The memorial to the Seer was cast by the boys of Fortrose Academy in 1969 at Chanonry Point, Fortrose, allegedly the site of the Seer being put to death by burning.