

## **THE MCCAIG TOWER**

### **THE MAN**

John Stuart McCaig of Muckairn and Soroba, the son of Malcolm McCaig Clachan House, Lismore, being one of five sons and daughters, was born in 1824 on the Island of Lismore.

Some of the family died in infancy but those who came to the mainland were successful in their careers. John Stuart McCaig settled in Oban where he became a well-known and esteemed banker. McCaig prospered in Oban and owned a considerable amount of property in the town including a large portion of George Street, (the main shopping centre) the local Gas Work and the North Pier, which is commonly known today as MacBrayne's Pier. He also purchased the estates of Muckairn and Soroba which are situated not far from the town.

He developed his interests in art and writing and as indicated on the inscription over the entrance to his Tower, he became known as an art critic and an essayist.

He took a great interest in the town and its population serving on the town council as a councillor and then from 1871 to 1875 as Chief Magistrate. At that time Oban was not entitled to have a Provost so that during this particular period he could rightly be considered to be the number one citizen of Oban

John Stuart McCaig who remained a bachelor died on 29<sup>th</sup> June 1902.

### **THE MCCAIG TOWER**

This granite built tower situated on Battery Hill is a well-known land mark to tourists of the West Highlands. It is always a source of interest and wonder, many and varied are the stories told to visitors concerning its building and also what John Stuart McCaig proposed to do with the tower. This leaflet endeavours to give the tourist the true history.

Work commenced on the tower in 1897, the granite being hewn from a local quarry at Bonawe on the northern shores of Loch Etive. McCaig had noticed that a large number of skilled masons were out of work for long periods during the winter months and one of his main reasons for building the tower was to provide work and relieve unemployment. In this connection he permitted work on the tower only when these masons were unable to secure work locally. The other principal reason was to build a memorial to the McCaig Family

The tower has been likened to a miniature Colosseum but this is not quite correct as the Roman amphitheatre is oval in shape with circular headed windows whereas the tower forms a circle with pointed windows.

At present there are two tiers of windows on the tower but it is understood that there was to have been a third tier and an observation tower of approximately 100 feet was then to have been added.

Round the parapet of the tower, McCaig proposed to erect statues, large figures of himself, his father and mother, his brothers and sisters. These statues were to be modelled in either bronze or stone were to cost not less than £1,000 each and were to be taken from photographs of his family. This particular work was to be carried out by young Scottish artists and sculptors as he desired to

encourage these arts in Scotland. In addition he made provision for similar towers to be built on his estates at Muckairn and Soroba.

John Stuart McCaig was a man who kept his own counsel and his intentions were his own secret. It is understood however, that his wishes lay in the direction of a Museum and Art Gallery for the use of town's people and tourists. When work on the tower ceased at his death, well over £5,000 had been spent on the project, a considerable amount of money in those days.

There is a memorial tablet over the entrance arch to the tower, the inscription on which states "Erected in 1900 by John Stuart McCaig. Art Critic and Philosophical Essayist and Banker, Oban". This tablet was unveiled in 1900 and to mark the occasion a cannon was dragged up to the site and fired.

For those of an enquiring or statistical mind, the tower stands approximately 230 feet above sea level, the height of the wall varying from 30 feet to 47 feet according to the different levels of the ground. The walls are over two feet thick and the circumference about 210 yards. It has an entry arch with two windows above it; in the tower tier there are 44 windows whilst in the top there are 50. In addition beneath the tower tier there are two windows and what might be two doorways.

The Tower is well worth a visit and the visitor is more than repaid for his labours by the magnificence of the view; a gorgeous sweep of scenery which takes in the islands of Mull, Lismore, Kerrera and the mainland of Morvern together with the waters surrounding them. A sunset seen from the Tower windows is a memorable experience, the awe and majesty of the scene will long live in the memory.

Taken from *The McCaig Tower* published by Oban and District Shopkeepers Association