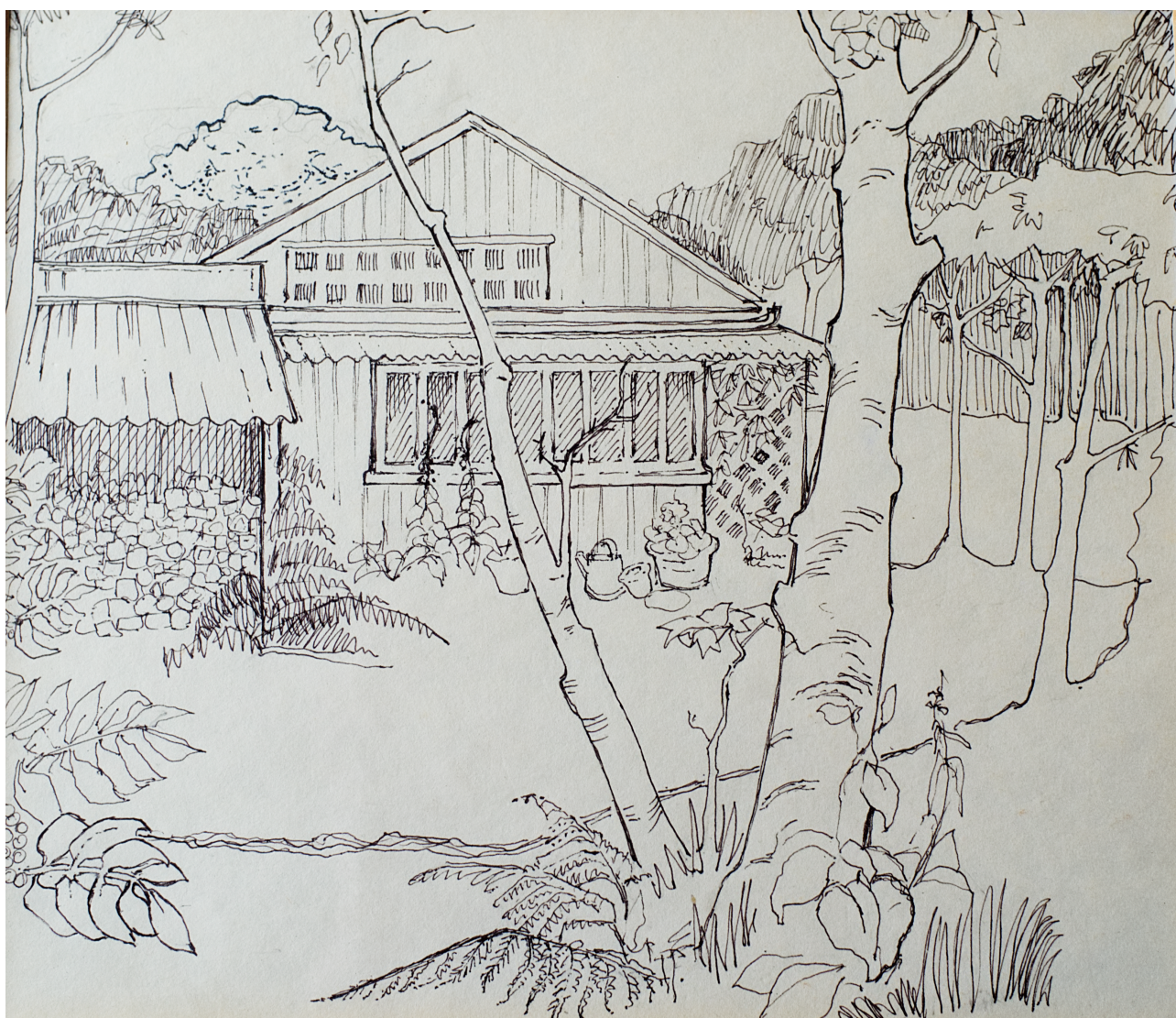


The Observatory

Pitlochry, Perthshire, Scotland

User Manual

<http://observatorypitlochry.com/>



1. My Thoughts...

I fell in love at first sight with The Observatory when I visited in early 1998. I came to write an article and ended up buying the place. For me it conjured up *Swallows and Amazons* and the simple wooden summerhouses on Sweden's Baltic archipelago that I had visited as a child.

The Observatory serves as a family home for much of the year and is let at other times, so that more people can enjoy the house and surroundings, and to meet some of the costs of maintaining the property.

The Observatory has a fascinating story. There is a short history and copies of some original documents elsewhere in this folder. At observatorypitlochry.com you will find a rich library of archives, stories and documents relating to the house and the area more generally.

If you experience any difficulties, or have any accidents that damage the property or its fittings do let us know straight away so that they can be dealt with before the property is next used.

Should you have any problems while staying at The Observatory, please contact, in the first instance, its caretaker Kirsteen Scott. Her address is: 44 East Moulin Road, Pitlochry, Perthshire PH16 5ET. Her phone number is 07709 549978.

If you need to contact me for any reason, please do so on 07984 165251, or email on tim@tim-dawson.com.

I hope that you have an enjoyable stay.

Tim Dawson

2. *Fire Precautions*

As you are staying in a wooden house, in a woodland area, please take extra care to avoid fires. You can do this by:

- never lighting fires on the grounds
- not smoking in the house
- always using the fire guard when the wood burning stove is open and closing its main door when it is unattended
- not using coal in the wood-burning stove
- not using candles.

There are two fire extinguishes. The one in the kitchen is for electrical fires. The one in the conservatory is for non-electrical fires.

3. *Security*

You may be in the country, but Pitlochry is a busy area and security is important.

You should shut and lock all the doors and windows whenever you leave the house.

On arrival you will find all the windows locked. Most guests find it unnecessary to open the windows – ventilation tends to be well-provided for by the doors and even on hot days, the house is kept cool by the surrounding trees.

If you do want to open any windows, the keys are kept beside the central heating controls, immediately on the right as you enter the main room. Should you open them, it is vital that windows are locked whenever the house is left unattended.

The alarm system will be de-activated during your visit. Please do not touch the control panel.

The double doors overlooking the Loch should always be locked when the building is going to be left empty, even for a few minutes.

The proprietors cannot accept responsibility for loss or damage to your property while you stay at The Observatory.

4. Heating The Observatory

The Observatory is well insulated and reasonably easy to heat. I have spent many happy Christmas and Hogmanays here and have known the outside temperature to drop as low as –12 degrees centigrade. It remains cosy within.

A system of oil-fired central heating warms the entire building to a comfortable level. The system also heats a hot water tank that will fill one very generous bath, or two shallower ones. The shower creates its own hot water, so does not affect the reserves in the tank.

When the weather requires it, you should find the heating on when you arrive. Thereafter, the heating is programmed to come on at the following times: 6.20 am to 8.30 am and 4.30 to 10.30 pm. If you need central heating outside these times please use the ‘advance’ control. Please do not leave the heating on when you don’t need it.

Guests are encouraged to supplement heating in the main room with the wood burning stove. It is not strictly needed, but makes a lovely centrepiece. See the separate instruction elsewhere in this folder.

Please do not use the Rayburn unless you have already made arrangements to do so. It does work, but takes several hours to become fully operational and requires a lot of cleaning. If you find that you need to use it for some reason, please follow these instructions.

The best fuel for the Rayburn is anthracite, a very dense, slow-burning coal. This is what you will find in the coal bunker. However, anthracite is challenging to ignite. The easiest means to do so is to light a fire in the Rayburn with something else. Wood, peat, or ordinary house coal will do. Once this is burning, slowly introduce anthracite on top. Fuel other than anthracite produces a lot of smoke, which is a pain, and means that you have to open and close the fire box quickly. Once lit, the fire must be ‘riddled’ (with the vertically moving lever below the firebox) every few hours. If riddled and fed properly, it will burn overnight. You must also regularly – approximately twice daily – remove the ash, let it cool, and place in the bin.

5. Using The Woodburning Stove

The stove is a potential fire hazard in a wooden house, so please follow these instructions carefully.

The stove is designed to create an attractive centrepiece when open. When maximum heat is required the doors should be closed and the air vents opened. It will then radiate heat in the manner of a giant, very hot, radiator. It can become much too hot to touch, so keep small children at a distance.

Light the stove as you would a normal fire (full instructions below, in case you are unfamiliar). Feel free to use wood, but do not use coal – it is very hard to light and far more difficult to clean up.

Make four or five newspaper sticks by opening up entire newspapers at the centre pages, rolling them tightly and then tying them in one or two knots. Scrunch up three or four newspaper pages into balls and place these in the empty stove. Alternatively collect kindling from the grounds, or use firelighters.

Make a thin taper of paper and light it with a match. Use this to light the newspaper balls at several points. Once they are ablaze, place the newspaper sticks on top to the burning pile. Once these have caught, place one or two logs on top of them. Smaller pieces of wood obviously light more easily, but even the largest logs should light from paper if they are dry. Close the front of the stove (the oven gloves are the easiest way to do this) and ensure that the two horizontal air slots are open. Within ten minutes the fire should be roaring. Open the front and insert the mesh fireguard.

Put on more logs one at a time. Filling the fire too full creates the risk of logs falling out and sends more heat up the (insulated) chimney rather than heating the room.

Do not tamper with the damper (this is operated by the lever at the back of the stove where it connects to the flue). It should always remain open.

Doors closed and vent open is the maximum burning position and consumes a lot of wood. The stove should not be left like this once the fire is burning.

Nothing should be left within three feet of the stove when lit – particularly drying clothes.

I provide logs when I can, but do not guarantee a supply. They are available from the Co-op, Pitlochry Hardware Store, and the petrol station. If you drive, House of Bruar do huge sacks of peat for less than £10, that provides sufficient fuel for many days.

If all this sounds complicated, don't give up, the stove has made a lot of people very happy over the years.

6. *Refuse Collection*

There are two wheelie bins on the site. The green lid bin is for general waste, the blue lid bin is for dry, mixed recycling. The latter includes: newspaper, magazines and junk mail, cardboard, food and drinks cartons (e.g. Tetra Pak) Cardboard packaging and food sleeves, toilet and kitchen roll tubes, food and drinks cans, biscuit and sweet tins, metal jar lids, plastic bottles and containers, yoghurt pots, shampoo and detergent bottles, plastic drinks and sauce bottles, and plastic bottle tops.

It is important that the bins are put out on Thursday evenings, for collection early on Friday mornings. The blue and green bins go out on alternate weeks. The schedule is as follows.

2022

Jan	Feb	Mar	Apr	May	Jun
14 28	7 21	11 25	4 18	11 25	4 18
8 22	1 15	29 1	6 20	13 27	3 17
10 24	17 31	24 7	31 14	7 21	14 28
Jul	Aug	Sep	Oct	Nov	Dec
1 15	8 22	12 26	5 19	9 23	16 30
29 1	26 9	30 13	7 21	14 28	21 4
6 20	13 27	20 3	27 10	4 18	11 25
27 10	3 17	10 24	17 31	24 7	31 14

There is also an excellent recycling site on Bridge Street (just before the petrol station) where, for the moment, they do not require evidence of residency.

7. *Shopping and recreation*

Good, fresh food – bread, fruit, vegetables, fish and meat, is available from the shops on, or just off, Atholl Road (Pitlochry's main road).

The nearest supermarket is the Co-op on West Moulin Road (turn left off Atholl Road opposite WH Smith). All the major supermarkets will deliver to The

Observatory, although securing a slot can require several weeks of pre-planning. Other shopping notes.

The nearest **big supermarkets** are in Perth. Asda is on the main road into the city, Sainsbury's and Tesco are just off the first turning into Perth after the Inverlamond roundabout.

There are two **chemists** on Atholl Road, Davisons (<https://www.davidsonschemists.co.uk/branches/pitlochry/>) and Lloyds.

There are various **fish dealers** who visit the town selling from their vans. The Buckie Fishman generally comes on Tuesday and Fridays and can be contacted at gaiusbowie@yahoo.co.uk. Arbroath Fisheries visit on Wednesdays 01241 872331 campbell.scott163@btinternet.com. Paul Scott, for whom I have no contact, is reputed to come on Thursdays. All sell from various spots on Atholl Road between 10 am and midday. They are all amenable to pre-orders and even delivering to The Observatory.

Bicycles can be hired from Escape Route <https://www.escape-route.co.uk>, 01796 473859.

House of Bruar, seven miles up the A9 is celebrated by some as 'The Harrods of the North'. It has an excellent food hall, probably the best self-service roadside restaurant in the UK (at a price), and acres and acres of tweed, cashmere and woollens. It also sells fishing tackle, slightly Edwardian toys, and 'art' for those who wish to decorate their homes with representations of field animals in every imaginable medium.

Fishing is available on many of the rivers in and around Pitlochry. The best starting point for permits is the Tourist Information Centre 01796 472215.

Outdoor, adrenalin pursuits are offered by Nae Limits (naelimits.co.uk), that operates from a unit at Ballinluig, three miles south of Pitlochry. These include rafting, canyoning, quad bike treks and similar.

There are lots of **golf courses** in the area, most of which offer lots of visitors tee times. The Pitlochry course is spectacularly sited and a round can be had for £25 (pitlochrygolf.co.uk).

Pitlochry Festival Theatre, on the other side of the Dam runs an impressive season every year and makes for a delightful summer evening out (pitlochryfestivaltheatre.com).

Our nearest **cinema** is The Birks, in Aberfeldy. It runs a fairly conventional program, but merits a visit just to enjoy the refurbished building (birkscinema.co.uk). The cinema in Perth is a fine, art deco shell (formerly the Caledonian cinema), that since purchase by the G1 Group has been known as The Perth Playhouse or the IMAX Playhouse (perthplayhouse.co.uk).

8. *Pets*

Cats, dogs and smaller pets are welcome at The Observatory. However, it is vital that no evidence of their stay remains after you leave.

Obviously this means that animals that are likely to gnaw at or scratch the furniture or other parts of the house should not be allowed across the threshold.

Equally importantly, no animal hairs should be left on the furniture. The best way to ensure this is not to allow pets onto the furniture. If allowing pets on the furniture is unavoidable, a blanket or similar should be employed to prevent their hairs adhering to the furniture. I would be grateful if you would employ your own blankets for this purpose. If your pets have a blanket on which they frequently sleep or sit, this should only be put on furniture on top of some other suitable blanket.

Removing animal hairs from furniture is very time consuming. In the event of this being necessary, an additional charge and an administration charge will be levied.

In the garden, evidence of animal stays should also be removed.

9. *Additional Notes*

Washing machine and dryer are much the same as any others. The water in Pitlochry is very soft, so little detergent is required.

Television. The best starting point for the television is the ‘home’ key on the remote. From this, terrestrial and Freeview channels are accessible. Subscription services such as Netflix, Disney, Spotify, and Amazon Prime may be available, or you could hook up using your own passwords. Exactly how easy it is to then remove your passwords, I am not sure. Hopefully, in the event of anyone leaving the set accessing their own premium services, no one will use pay-per-view services, but obviously, I can’t guarantee this.

If any of my services are still logged in, feel free to use them, but please do not use pay-per-view services.

Garden furniture is kept in the conservatory at the end of the main room. Please don’t leave them outside over night and return them to the conservatory at the end of your stay.

Hair dryer, is in the left-hand side of the big white cupboard.

Iron, is in the left-hand side of the big while cupboard. The ironing board is stacked to the left of the big white cupboard, beside the bathroom.

First Aid Box, is in the bathroom cabinet.

Tables, please make use of the table mats when putting hot dishes on the dining or coffee tables.

Extra bedding, is in the big white cupboard.

Sofa beds, both the blue sofas open up and can be slept on. Please exercise extreme caution if moving either of these. They should be lifted and carried by two people. If dragged, the legs can break. Opening them requires a person at each end of the sofa. Each must lift the back of the sofa and guide the peg at the bottom through the slot in the frame.

Power cuts, are not unknown in Pitlochry, particularly during storms. Fortunately, because the town is the largest settlement in the area, on previous occasions power has been returned within an hour of it going off. The

rechargeable torch/lamp in the kitchen is for use should there be a power cut during the evening. If you use this, please recharge.

Septic tank, Drainage at the house is to a septic tank. Please put nothing down the toilet but human waste and conventional soft toilet paper. Flushing anything else can cause a blockage almost immediately.

Respect for our neighbours, Arriving and leaving the house requires you to pass close by our neighbours at Glengarry. Please be respectful of their desire for privacy and quiet, particularly early in the morning and during the evening and night.

Healthcare, Pitlochry Community Hospital and the Atholl Medical Center share a site that is scarcely 100 meters from The Observatory. To reach it, start as though walking to the railway station. Once you have nearly reached the northbound signal box the road forks, to the left taking you on to the station's platform, to the right, down a steep, rough track that ends in the hospital's car park. At the time of writing, an old sign advertising pony tracking at the Armoury Stables still stands at the side of the track. If you need to drive to the hospital, it is necessary to drive on to Atholl Road, and turn right after the war memorial and then turn right again once you have passed under the railway bridge.

The GP practice has generally been very happy to provide medical assistance to visitors, when the need has arisen.

10. The Story Of The Observatory

The Observatory was built in about 1906 by Professor George Forbes, a former Professor of Natural Philosophy at Anderson's University, Glasgow (the forerunner of the University of Strathclyde). He was also a pioneer of hydro-electric power, an electrical engineer and an astronomer. The author of many books, he supervised the first attempts to generate electricity from the power of Niagara Falls. In 1874 Forbes led a British expedition to Hawaii to observe the transit of Venus. He returned to Scotland via Peking and St Petersburg, crossing the Gobi Desert and Siberia in 1875 when he was just 25, and such journeys were almost unheard of.

As Professor of Natural Philosophy he invented the carbon brush, a vital component of dynamos to this day. Much later he developed a gunsight that was used by the Royal Navy during World War One.

It was his interest in astronomy that led him to Pitlochry. Even in the early years of this century, light pollution in many areas made it harder to see the stars. Forbes had holidayed in the Perthshire town with his parents and knew that once one was a few hundred yards from the main street, the dark of the highlands is all-embracing. In the late 1870s, Forbes had used Pitlochry as the base for his experiments with Dr J Young to determine the velocity of light.

Much later, the local landowners, the Butters, allowed him to use a knoll of land that stood above the river Tummel. There he built a simple wooden structure, which he liked to call 'The Shed', with a large area that he could use as a study and living quarters downstairs and an observatory on the roof. He moved his library of 4,000 books in and lived out most the rest of his days there - watching the stars and writing a dozen more books - some scholarly and others intended to introduce young people to the delights of astronomy.

Forbes' reasons for choosing the spot are clear today. His 'Shed' is on a steeply banked hillock. Since Forbes' time, the river has been dammed and now a wide expanse of loch stands before the house - it is used to generate electricity by a means that still utilises the technology Forbes helped to develop. Beyond the loch, looking due west, is an uninterrupted view of Cammoch Hill and Meall a'Charra.

And although Pitlochry has grown considerably since then, the Observatory is still remarkably secluded. The railway line forms the western boundary for most of the centre of the town. Because the Observatory is on the other side of the tracks, there has been very little development around it.

When Forbes died in 1936 his priceless books became part of the library at St Andrews University, of which his father, James Forbes, had been vice chancellor. But he was by no means the only remarkable resident the Observatory has known.

Forbes willed his house to his niece, Dame Katherine Jane Trefusis-Forbes. During World War One she served as a member of Women's Volunteer Reserve. As Britain re-armed again towards the end of the 1930s she was picked out to help develop the women's armed forces. And when the Women's Auxiliary Air Force was established in 1939, she was appointed its first director, with the rank Air Chief Commander. In this role she undertook tours of duty in North America and the Far East.

During this time the Observatory was used to provide holiday respite for senior British army officers. Some locals believe that Field Marshall Montgomery was among the war-time residents but no conclusive proof of this has yet been found.

At the end of the war Dame Katherine happily retired to a more peaceful life in Pitlochry, and initiated a programme of substantial improvements. Two bedrooms were added to the original structure, mains plumbing was installed and a proper kitchen created. She even had built an additional room in which her maid could stay. (This was on the site of the 'new' bedroom, beyond the kitchen. It had become entirely ramshackle by the late 1980s. A friend and I built the 'new' bedroom in 2005 on the footprint of the Maid's room.)

Trefusis-Forbes remained unmarried until she was 67 when she accepted the proposal of Sir Robert Alexander Watson-Watt, the Brechin-born inventor of radar. The couple lived out their last years together largely in Pitlochry. They died in the mid-1970s and are buried together in the Churchyard of Holy Trinity Church (the Episcopal Church at the 'bottom' of town).

The Observatory stood unused for several years but was eventually purchased in 1980 by Ann Stewart. A native of Pitlochry, she knew of the Observatory's existence only because her father had installed its plumbing. She and her partner, the architect Michael Willis, undertook a programme of restoration and further modernisation whilst retaining the essential character of the property. This included the installation of a wood-burning stove, central heating and substantial insulation. After enjoying the Observatory for 18 years, she sold it to me in 1998.