

31st October 2025

Truth

"Pure truth no one has seen, nor shall ever know."

Xenophanes, *Fragments*

Little Loch Shin is an artificial loch, created by a hydroelectric dam scheme, close to the village of Lairg, in Sutherland in the North of Scotland. Lairg is a beautiful little village, whose population of 891 swells considerably in the summer months with an influx of visitors to a spectacularly beautiful part of the country. Not far from the shoreline, and on a tiny islet, sits a small, wooden dwelling, known locally as "Broon's Hoose". The popular story is that a local poacher, Jock Broon, built this little house in 1884. Broon was allegedly gifted the island by a local laird for teaching him how to distil whisky. He built his "Wee Hoose" to mark his new status but died shortly after in a hunting accident. It was never intended for habitation, that's for sure, for it couldn't accommodate anyone over two feet tall!

But there's also a different story, that the house was constructed more recently, probably as a float for the Lairg Gala, the "Jock Broon" story being invented by the locals thereafter. I suspect they didn't want to throw away such a fine representation of a Highland cottage, and the island by the shore of the loch was as good a place for it as any. Whatever story is correct, Broon's Hoose remains a popular and much-loved landmark.

We'll never know the truth. One story of Broon's Hoose is as good as another. Each represents a piece of the truth that will draw us in to find out a little more, about a little house, on a little island, in Little Loch Shin.

What is truth of Halloween, when we dress up to scare off evil spirits? What is truth on All-Hallows Eve, when we remember the ever-present spirits of the departed? What is truth in our beliefs in the eternity of the soul, the gathering of loved ones in the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven? We have our ideas, which we hold to strongly, so that we can be sustained by faith. We have our stories, to tell and retell, from the ancients to current thinkers and preachers, stories to help us make sense of things. But today, I'm with the Greek philosopher, Xenophanes. "Pure truth, no one has seen" – in Lairg or anywhere else. "Pure truth ... no one shall ever know". Not ever, no matter how compelling a story might be.

A prayer for today

*Lord, when I think I know the truth, guide me into an exploration
of the Truth I don't yet know, but that's still waiting to be explored. Amen*