

MEMORIES OF DORNOCH BY A LADY OF 88

Miss Macleod's Letter to Mrs Alford

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In the 1930s we used to reckon that 5 weeks in Scotland - 2 at Hockey Camp at Ballater, and 3 at Dornoch in rooms - cost us £35. This included, as a rule, a length of Pirie tweed. Now that amount would barely pay for one day at one of the Hotels.

I have a Dornoch "Guide Book for 19 " giving the names of 29 people who kept "rooms with or without attendance". (I think that Willie Skinner took photocopies of some of the pages) but most of these were abandoned after World War II.

I read a book or an article recently which stated that when Dornoch first became patronised by visitors they were all well-off and took houses of residents. Few stayed in the only Hotel - the Sutherland Arms - and apparently none in rooms. As usual this information was very inaccurate. In the years before World War I there was a group of families who met year after year and most of them were in rooms. One family stayed at the Station Hotel and one or two leased houses for 8 weeks or so, taking their own servants and bed and table linen.

I have a "Guide to Dornoch" published in 1906; written by John Sutherland, House Agent and Accountant and Secretary of the Royal Dornoch Golf Club. It gives a list of 34 Furnished Houses for letting. One or two mention Cooking with Attendance. All mention Bathroom with Hot and Cold Water and practically all finish with the number of minutes needed to reach the links. There must have been some pretty fast walkers in those days (no cars of course) as practically all the houses on the road above the city, now called I think Burghfield Road but then The Terrace, gave times of 6 minutes; Oversteps and St. Andrews 3 minutes. There are also advertised 21 apartments - only 7 of which had Bathrooms.

In 1903, 1907 to 1911 and in 1913 we stayed at Mrs Campbell's in High Street. She also kept a "Tea Rooms" - no Bathroom - just a hip bath.

In 1906 we were at Mrs John Bell's in Castle Street which was over the shop of D. J. Macleod, jeweller etc. The names of many shopkeepers are the same - Gillespie's, A. J. Weir, John Grant (Butcher), W. A. Macdonald, R. R. Johnstone and W. S. Fraser in High Street have only recently changed their name.

The professional was J. D. Currie who handmade the clubs he sold. I still have a putter, bought in 1913 (I think) and a mid-iron (a No.4). There were no stainless steel clubs in those days - one had to polish them with sandpaper.

The Club House for the "Upper Course" was what afterwards became the professional's shop - now demolished. The "Lower Course" (the Ladies') had recently been extended from 12 to 18 holes - most of them rather flat and uninteresting, stretching towards the sea and back again.

Before World War I my sister and I used to have 4 somes with Frank Buist and Jim Mackintosh on the "Lower Links". The Ladies' Club House, I think, still stands as a greenkeepers' tool house etc. just by the 6th hole of the "Struie Course". The first time we ever played on the "Upper (sic) Course" was in 1910 when one morning we were told to play there, as the men were to go on the "Lower (sic) Course".

The Buists took Abden as their summer residence in 1908, I think. The "Guide Book" mentions 2 private hotels and 3 public hotels.

We stayed in many different houses in Dornoch and visited friends in others. So a good many still have "associations" attached to them.

The next 6 years we stayed with Mrs Budge at Ajmere Cottage in Sutherland Road. Very active years - once it was so warm that we even bathed before breakfast! There was usually a weekend after camp before she could take us on September 1st so we spent it at the Roslyn Hotel in Castle Street.

In 1939 the only rooms we could rent were in Carnaig Street but we never got there because about 24th August my brother, who was by that time Military Assistant to Gen. Ironside at the War Office, warned us that the agreement signed between Germany and Russia meant that war was inevitable.

No going to Dornoch again all through World War II but in 1946, 7 and 8 we stayed with Mrs Robichaud at Oversteps. She had lived there since her marriage about 1898 and introduced us to some of the "residents". Until then our friends had mostly been from the annual visitors who, I fear, spoke of the "residents" rather patronisingly as "the locals", but owing to new friends made among them, my sister and I really did begin to feel that we were not incomers but belonged.

From 1954 to 1976 we stayed at Burghfield.

As time went on few visitors stayed for more than a fortnight instead of the former month, 6 or even 8 weeks. Again the same families used to come for several years in succession - for instance Lord Johnstone and his wife, and a family from Salisbury called Fletcher (Mrs Fletcher's name is on the Winners' Board for one year, I forget which).

We had annual foursomes with residents - the Grant twins and Mrs Skinner and Mrs J. A. Macdonald or sometimes Miss Matty Macrae, and usually played with residents in Mrs Buist's Mixed Foursomes, having asked Tosh Mackintosh of the Post Office to find us partners. One year he said "I'll just have to play with you myself". I remember that he always putted with a No.2 or 5 iron.

During World War I of course we could not get there, but went back after 7 years absence to stay with the Buists at Abden. One day in 1920 we went to see Angus Pirie of Rogart who was at his loom in a little place almost opposite to Allt Dearg, Sander Macdonald's house now. When we asked Mr Pirie if he remembered us he said "Fine wee trotties ye were then, runnin' about after your mother".

He used to design his own tweeds giving them names like "Waves of the Sea".

After spending the morning in fine weather on the beach, we used to arrange to go for picnics within walking distance - the Earl's Cross woods or the Sawmill Woods or sometimes in a field off the Poles Road.

I think that it was in 1910 that we hired bicycles and increased the range of favourite spots for picnics - the Evelix Burn, Little Ferry and a spot almost opposite the old Larachan School with a wonderful view of Dun Creich and the Firth.

Only two families had cars, the Buists and the Buchanans. I remember a drive in 1909 by Rogart and Lairg where we had tea at the Invershin Hotel with such marvellous scones that one did not want anything else.

I think that the 1920s were the years during which the Wethered family were regular visitors to Dornoch staying in A. J. Ryle's house (Randalls). I remember one year that we were looking forward to seeing her - possibly 1930 - but she was not visible because of chicken-pox! (Bobby Jones' assessment of Joyce Wethered).

In 1930 an aunt offered to pay for a holiday for us. Naturally we plumped for Dornoch and had about 10 days at the old Sutherland Arms Hotel.

I see that I have n't mentioned the subscriptions in the "Guide Book" :-

Members

Gentlemen - Entrance fee	21/-	Ladies - Entrance fee	5/-
Annual sub.	10/-	Annual sub.	5/-
Locker rent	3/-	Locker rent	2/6

Visitors

Gentlemen - 1 wk. 7/0    2 wks. 15/-    3 wks. £1-0-0  
4 wks. £1-5-0    2/0 a wk. thereafter locker included

Ladies    - 5/- a wk. for 1st month  
2/- a wk. thereafter locker included

Daily Visitors

Gentlemen - 1/6                                  Ladies - 1/-

Caddies' fees - Old Course - with which staggering information I had really better "hole out".

Yours sincerely,

E. A. Macleod.

MISS MACLEOD ON PUTTING

Don't look up too soon. My brother says that one of the old professionals used to say " 'it and 'ark " Jessie Anderson's "pendulum swing". I also found useful and - personally - I found that humming a little tune in waltz time helped to make a rhythmical putt.