

# From Our Old Files

## 25 YEARS AGO (January 12, 1979)

Mothers-to-be in north Sutherland have had a more positive assurance about future maternity services than those on the east coast.

The Highland Health Board have told Bettyhill, Altnaharra and Strathnaver Community Council that the general practitioner maternity unit is to remain at Dunbar Hospital, Thurso, and should be able to provide a wider scope of service than is normally available for a GP maternity unit.

The community council had written asking the Board to reconsider the transfer of specialist maternity services to Wick when Phase II of the Caithness Central Hospital is completed.

But the Board agreed to tell the council that it intends to maintain its policy that all specialist services should be integrated in the Central Hospital.

Said a Board statement from Inverness recently: "Even when the Henderson Maternity Unit was open, 50 per cent of mothers from Wick and East Sutherland were delivered in the specialist unit at Thurso. The Board expects that the future general practitioner unit at Thurso will accept at least 50 per cent of the mothers from north and west Caithness and from north Sutherland."

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Members of Sutherland's housing committee are not in favour of council tenants paying their rent by Giro-cheque, preferring the retention of the services of the two county rent collectors.

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Mr Robert Beaton, chairman of Golspie's Community Council and leader of the fight to retain mains gas supplies in Golspie, has accused the Scottish Gas Board of leaving his council "in the dark".

## 50 YEARS AGO (January 8, 1954)

The foundations of a circular farmhouse built in the Iron Age — about 2000 years ago — have just been excavated near the Free Presbyterian Church at Evelix, Dornoch.

The work was undertaken by the Ministry of Works at the request of Sutherland County Council, who wanted to cut off a dangerous corner on the trunk road at this point. The archaeologists engaged were Mr and Mrs A Rae, Edinburgh, who finished their excavations on Christmas night. ...

"So few such circles have been dug in Scotland that it was important records should be kept of this one," Mr Rae told the Northern Times. "The one puzzling feature is that the entrance was in the

wrong place. It was west-north-west, and most are south-east. The circle was in an extremely good state of preservation. The surrounding wall, which was built mainly of turf with a few stones, was three feet thick, and we estimate, between four and five feet high, judging from the debris. The outside base was circled by a ring of boulders. To support the roof there were four posts round the hearth in the middle of the circle — we uncovered the holes into which the poles had been planted. Outside these were smaller posts which were used to prop up the larger posts and take the strain.

"The hearth was a pretty good one," said Mr Rae. "It was made of 17 flat stones and formed a rectangle about 2ft 6ins by 3ft. The inside floor was cobbled all the way with pretty large stones. But the most interesting feature was the extraordinary entrance. Just inside there was a kind of screen or draught excluder — in other words a lobby — so that they had architectural ideas even in those days. The circle was not regular. The site, which had been planted with firs which were cut in the First World War, was covered with whin."

The standing joke among Mr Rae's squad of unskilled workers was that they were looking for a "pot of gold for Christmas". Anyone who passed and asked what was going on was told the search was for a pot of gold.

"These Sutherland roadmen were as interested as any graduates I have taken on such work," added Mr Rae. "They were as careful as they could be and never took action without consulting me. They made a good job of it."

The men engaged were Murdo Macpherson, Achvandra Muir (foreman), Alick Mackay, G Hendry, Hugh Munro, Hugh Mackay, George Gordon, and W Mackay (Birichen) and Robert Grant (Evelix).

By some misunderstanding, the Evelix circle has been designated the "Clashmore" circle by the Ministry of Works and people interested have been searching in that vicinity — in vain, of course.

## 75 YEARS AGO (January 10, 1929)

Many wireless listeners who heard an unusual news item broadcast on New Year's Eve from 5XX and all stations may have wondered what story lay behind the simple announcement. To their surprise, listeners heard the announcer say that "Neil Gillies, a native of St Kilda, 43 years of age, died in the West Highlands Cottage Hospital at Oban on the 26th of this month, and was buried at Bennyfair Cemetery, Oban, on the 28th."

Before the item was broadcast it was explained that St Kilda was such a lonely island that it was cut off from ordinary telephonic or telegraphic communication. And that it was hoped that people on this isolated spot would pick up the sad message. What makes the message so pathetic is the fact that the dead man left a widow and two children in St Kilda, and unless the message was received on the island, they are still in ignorance of his death. The broadcast was due to a Mr A G Ferguson, who formerly lived on the island, and was living in Oban, having heard of Mr Gillies' death. Knowing St Kilda's complete isolation from the world, and remembering that some years ago the BBC kindly presented the islanders with a wireless set, he wrote to Sir John Reith, and asked him to broadcast the news.

No one knows whether the message was picked up on the island or not, and it may be weeks before the uncertainty is cleared up. This was the first time a message had been broadcast specially for St Kilda.

## 100 YEARS AGO (January 7, 1904)

BONAR BRIDGE — The first day of January is now generally observed as New Year's day throughout the parishes of Creich and Kincardine. On Thursday night, the weather being clear, frosty, and otherwise typical, a good deal of outdoor demonstrations took place on the advent of 1904. On the Bonar side of the Kyle, a committee was set up composed of Messrs J Fraser, Norman Ross, Hugh Mackenzie, Donald Ross and William Ross who carried out elaborate arrangements. At midnight bonfires were blazing, bagpipes playing, drums beating, and guns firing in all directions. On the Ardgay side there were musical processions with torches and flambeaus. All over, everything passed off quite harmoniously though hilariously; and the decorous manner in which the first day of the year was spent was a credit to the district. A good many private entertainments took place, but none of a public nature.

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BONAR BRIDGE — Probably the most uncommon New Year gift that came to Sutherland this season was that received by Miss Mackay, West End, Bonar, which took the form of a frozen lamb all the way from New Zealand from a brother. This lamb was one of several hundreds sent through the Gear Coy., Ltd., Wellington, by New Zealanders as Christmas and New Year presents to their friends at home. It was of excellent quality, and no one who tasted it could possibly imagine it had travelled so far.