

MEMORIES OF CHILDHOOD IN
DORNOCH
1939 – 1945

By
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Memories of Childhood in Dornoch 1939 – 1945

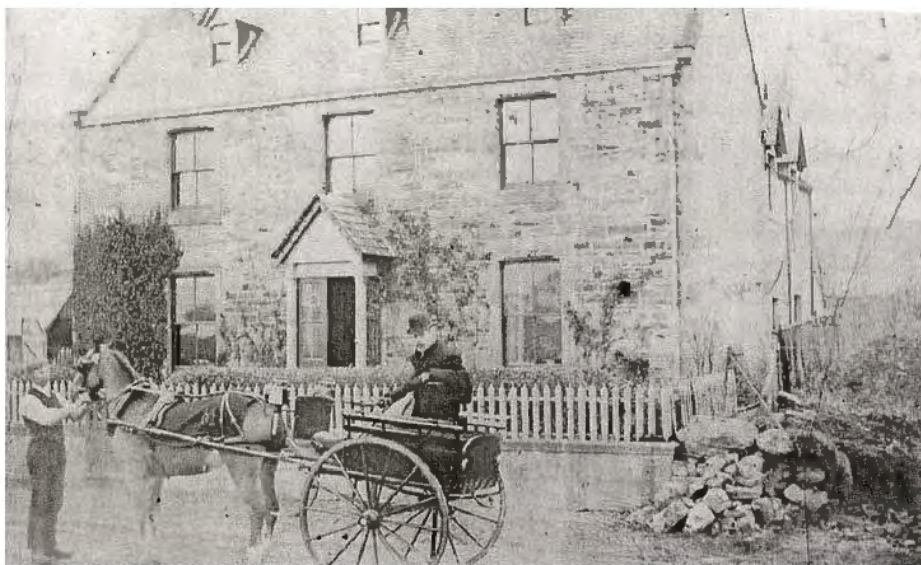
My parents were married in Edinburgh in March 1930. Edinburgh was my mother's home and she had met my father at the University. My mother graduated as a doctor and my father as a solicitor, training with firstly Dove Lockhart and Smart and then with Todds Murray and Jamieson. We still have a letter written by one of the Partners in Dove Lockhart and Smart, to my grandfather concerning my father's health and well being!



My parents, A.J. Macrae and Margaret McMurray, 1st March 1930.



Bonar Grandpa and Granny with Uncle Ken (left) and my father (A.J. Macrae) 1907



My father's home.

Kyle House, Bonar Bridge, Sutherlandshire

My father was born and grew up in Bonar Bridge where his father was the local G.P., Dr James D. Macrae. Around 1929 he returned north after graduating and joined a Dornoch solicitor Mr J. H. Arthur, the firm eventually becoming Arthur and Macrae.

Their offices were in the present Clydesdale Bank Building in Castle Street. A few years later my father set up his own Practice and when he was appointed Sheriff Clerk of Sutherland, he moved to the County Buildings in the Square.

In 1929 he bought Balvraid House which he renamed "Inveran House", after his mother's family home at Inveran, Invershin. My maternal grandfather had died in 1906, and my maternal grandmother was by this time (1930) living in America. During the 1940's, she was nanny to film star Lana Turner's daughter Cheryl. Granny had been a children's nurse in the hospital where Cheryl was born, and had been sent home with the new baby. She stayed with Lana Turner until Cheryl was five years old. During the war Granny's parcels to us were a real treat. How they all arrived safely here was a small miracle!



My Grandmother's home, The Inveran Hotel



My home, Inveran House, Dornoch, 1930's



My maternal Grandmother, Molly McMurray



Lana Turner with Cheryl and Turhan Bey

My brother Alistair was born in 1932, I was born in 1934, and Colin in 1939. So we all grew up in wartime.

Alister and I were christened at home by the Rev. Dr. Bentinck, quite a common practise then, but by the time Colin came to be christened, this took place in the Cathedral.

War was declared on the 3rd September 1939. I had just begun school. I can remember my father telling us of the outbreak of war with Germany and I remember feeling quite frightened. Soon afterwards shops began to sell war toys and we were taken to buy tin helmets like the soldiers wore. When we heard a 'plane fly overhead, we would run for shelter under the dining room table, as we had been told that that would be a safe place to shelter. We never did have a proper shelter.

Soon we had to get our I. D. Cards, gas masks, and ration books and later, in 1941, clothing coupons. As a baby Colin's gas mask was a dome shaped contraption into which he could be placed. When he became a toddler, he was given a 'Mickey Mouse' mask. We thought this was splendid, much nicer than ours. Around this time we had to register with a grocer and I think also with a butcher. Food rationing began in 1940, buff coloured Ration Books for adults and green for children aged 5 and under. In 1942 even soap was rationed.

Cathie Swanson was our live-in Maid, of whom we were very fond. She had a bedroom upstairs, but her toilet was outside the back door of the kitchen next to the coal shed. Luckily for her the toilet froze so often in winter, it was abandoned and she could come 'inside'. Her bedroom floor was laid with linoleum, but she had a little rug by her bed.

The kitchen was always warm as there was a black cast iron wood and coal burning range for cooking and baking and heating the water. Toast was made by piercing a slice of bread with a long-handled fork and holding the bread in front of the fire in the open grate. Cathie made little butter pats and butter balls using two wooden bats, for our tea, I remember.

Every spring, spring cleaning took place when Cathie would spend a great deal of her time beating the house carpets. These were taken out on the lawn and beaten with bamboo 'bats' shaped like tennis racquets. This was reckoned to be the best way to get dust out of a carpet.

The kitchen was Cathie's sitting room where she entertained her soldier boyfriend there in the evenings. She was always singing the popular songs of the moment, teaching me the words as she went along. I remember "South of the Border", "The White Cliffs of Dover", and "Run Rabbit Run", etc. She also taught me the Lambeth Walk. There was no central heating in the house, so in winter bedrooms were freezing cold, as indeed were other rooms we didn't use regularly. The only heating in the bedrooms was a one-bar electric fire. We each had a stone hot water bottle put in our beds at night.

When we awoke in the mornings we often saw wonderful frost patterns on our bedroom windows. In the coldest weather there was a black portable paraffin stove that could be moved around the house.

Off the kitchen was a cold stone-floored scullery which had sinks, and an electric boiler for 'boiling' clothes. There was also a mangle. Washing was always hung out to dry in the back garden. 'Washing' was never hung out on a Sunday.

Inveran House had been one of the first houses in Dornoch to have electricity, as a generator had been installed in a shed in the garden. It was run on batteries, and I still have one of the shapely dark green glass bottles that held the sulphuric acid for these batteries. It makes a nice ornament.

The generator shed eventually became 'my' shed where I played 'houses' with my school friends. During the war there were still some houses, usually in the countryside with no electricity. Light for these homes was supplied by paraffin lamps.



Poles Road outside Inveran House in the 1940's



Colin aged 10 months

Most afternoons in 1940-42 a young girl, Violet, came to wheel us out, this involved taking Colin in his pram with me walking beside her. The pram was used by all three of us; note how deep and solid it was. Violet must have been just 14 years old, but that was the school leaving age then. I loved those walks, for she took us to places we should never have gone to otherwise. Sometimes we went into her home which was 'Kintail', Cromarty Road, and she gave us thin-wine biscuits to eat.

There was a gardener who came to work two or three days each week. The garden produced vegetables, rhubarb and different fruit bushes and apple trees. There was a huge cherry tree. Tomatoes were grown in the porch. We made jam and bottled fruit. We were encouraged to cultivate more in our own gardens. 'Dig for Victory' was a slogan of the time.



Remembrance Day in the 1930's. Father is front row on left

Before the war, Dornoch was a very sociable town with bridge parties, whist drives, dinner parties and tea parties amongst friends. Coffee mornings were unknown. All this changed with the coming of war. Cathie left us to work in munitions and most of the young men and girls were called up, either to the services or to work in factories or on the land.

Householders with gardens could keep up to 12 hens and a rooster. A part of our garden was fenced off beside the sheds to make a hen run, and we made one of our sheds the hen shed.



We made pets of some of them – there was ‘Fairy’ and ‘Blackie’. They often escaped from their run and my brothers and I would search the garden for nests they had made and in which they had laid eggs.

Eggs were pickled during the laying season for use later. In the larder there was a large vat with a lid, for pickling eggs in water glass. I remember Colin being wheeled in his pram with me alongside walking to Evelix Farm where Mr Mackay sold us eggs for pickling. At Camore there was a garden nursery, where we could buy vegetables and plants if we wished.

No food was ever wasted, and all scraps ended up in the Hen’s pail, kept in the scullery. Towards the end of the war, if we ever wasted food we were reminded of the starving children of Europe. In Holland, children were truly starving by then.

The larder was a walk-in small room with stone floor and stone shelves, facing north, it was always freezing cold, but it kept food fairly fresh.

Dried egg powder became available fairly early in wartime, and I really liked scrambled eggs and omelettes made from reconstituted eggs. The powder was also used in cake recipes and in baking generally.

Mock-cream could be made from dried milk powder (also now available) and with water, margarine and sugar, and it was quite pleasant as real cream was very scarce. Food rationing began fairly soon, butter, margarine, sugar, tea, bacon, milk, cheese and meat were the first foods to be rationed. Even jams and marmalades were rationed.

Many rationed goods such as cheese, butter, margarine, lard, and sugar were measured out by the shopkeeper himself. The ration for margarine was 4oz, butter 2oz, bacon 4oz and tea 2oz per week per person. The jam ration was 1lb for 2 months. Real coffee was very scarce. One egg was available. Hoarding or stockpiling was punishable by a fine or imprisonment.

Imported foods became very scarce. Soon chocolates and sweets were rationed, a separate Sweetie Coupon Book was issued as it was reckoned that children going to choose their own sweets might lose the book, and therefore better to lose the small sweetie-coupon book, than the larger Family Ration book.

After lunch each day we were given our sweetie ration. That was usually two sweets or two little pieces of chocolate. As sugar was rationed we never put sugar in our tea or coffee, a good habit for later life! Porridge was always a breakfast starter, which I hated, normally followed by something cooked, perhaps bacon, egg or kippers. Bread wasn't rationed during the war, but had to be rationed after the war ended, because of shortages in Europe.


A new kind of bread had appeared which was called National bread and this bread had 'added goodness' to it for our health. Any stale bread was heated in the oven and became 'rusks'. Bananas disappeared, but we cooked parsnips in banana essence and we thought that that was like the real thing. Soon a new kind of flour appeared; it was called National flour and was light brown in colour again with added 'goodness'.

Meat was rationed by price. Sometimes my father would be given a present of a piece of salmon, or a haunch of venison in lieu of a fee. The venison would hang in the larder for some days, dripping blood on to an ashet on the floor before being cooked.

Rabbit was a popular dish with us, and there was a plentiful supply of rabbits around Dornoch. Rabbit wasn't rationed.

Ox-tails made a wonderful stew, and another treat was a boiled sheep's head, delicious, and again not on the meat ration.

At morning playtime each child was given a $\frac{1}{3}$ of a pint of milk everyday in a small bottle. We had to line up for our milk, and then we ate our 'pieces'! The Ministry of Food distributed pamphlets with recipes and advice on how to make nutritious meals out of our rations.



MINISTRY OF FOOD

HOW TO PLAN MEALS FOR CHILDREN

DIET FOR A CHILD FROM 12 TO 17 YEARS

One food from each of the groups (a), (b), (c), (d) should be served at each meal.

Breakfast 8.0 - 8.30 a.m.

(a) Whole-grain Cereal.—1-2 cupfuls of:—porridge, or wheatmealies, or wheatflake preparations, or stewed fruit (in hot weather) with milk.
 (b) An Egg (once a week), or Bacon with 2-4 oz. potato, or 1-2 oz. bread, or fish (twice a week) (herrings if possible).
 (c) National Bread.—2-4 whole slices as:—toast with
 (d) Butter.—2-3 teaspoonfuls, or margarine, or dripping, or bacon fat.
 (e) Cocoa or Tea to drink.

10.0 - 11.0 a.m.

Milk.— $\frac{1}{3}$ pint (at school).

Dinner 12.30 - 1.0 p.m.

(a) Meat, Fish or Cheese.—2-3 tablespoonfuls of:—beef or mutton, or liver or kidney, or brains, or sweetbread, or chicken, or rabbit, or fish (fresh, salt or dried), or cheese (1-2, tablespoonfuls).
 (b) Cooked Fresh Vegetables.—2-3 heaped tablespoonfuls of cabbage or greens, or cauliflower, or spinach, or sprouts, or swedes or parsnips, or carrots, or peas or beans.
 (c) Potatoes.—3-4 heaped tablespoonfuls.
 (d) Pudding.—3-4 tablespoonfuls of milk pudding, or blancmange, or fruit or sweet tart or flan, or steamed pudding, or baked pudding, or stewed fruit and custard, etc.
 (e) National Bread.—1-2 whole slices.
 (f) Water to drink.
 NOTE.—Dried peas, beans or lentils should be added to the meat, fish or cheese portion, if a full serving cannot be obtained through rationing or shortage.

Tea 4.30 - 5.0 p.m.

(a) National Bread.—3-5 whole slices with:—
 (b) Butter.—2-3 teaspoonfuls, or margarine, or dripping with:—
 (c) Raw Salad, or raw shredded vegetable, or vegetable sandwich filling.
 (d) Cake.—1-2 slices, or Rusks or Biscuits.

Supper 7.0 - 8.0 p.m.

(a) Pulse Vegetable Dish, or Cheese, or Fish with:—
 (b) Cooked Fresh Vegetables.—2-3 heaped tablespoonfuls (see dinner), or salad with:—
 (c) Potatoes.—3-4 heaped tablespoonfuls.
 (d) National Bread.—2-4 whole slices with:—
 (e) Butter.—2 teaspoonfuls, or margarine with:—
 (f) Jam, or syrup, or vegetable extract, or paste.
 (g) Cocoa, Coffee or Soup to drink.

RECIPES (E)

FOR CHILDREN

12 - 17 YEARS

BREAKFAST DISHES

(Sufficient for two children)

Porridge

2-3 ozs. medium oatmeal.
 1-pint of water.
 Salt.

Method.—Soak oatmeal overnight. Put in a pan, bring to the boil and cook slowly for about $\frac{1}{2}$ -hour, stirring occasionally (use a double pan if possible). Add salt and serve with milk.

Wheatmealies

4-6 oz. slices national bread $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. thick.

Method.—Cut into $\frac{1}{2}$ -in. squares. Put on a baking sheet and bake in a slow oven till brown and crisp. Store in a tin. Serve 1-2 cupfuls to each child.

Fish Cakes

4 ozs. fish (cooked).
 2 ozs. potato.
 Salt and pepper.

Method.—Squeeze extra water out of bread. Mix all the ingredients together, season. Form into cakes and roll in browned crumbs and fry or bake.

Sausage and Beans

$\frac{1}{2}$ -lb. sausage.
 4 ozs. cooked beans.

Method.—Prick sausage and fry slowly till cooked. Remove from pan and fry beans in fat from sausage. Serve sausage and beans together.

Bacon and Potato Scones

8 ozs. cooked potatoes.
 2 ozs. cooked bacon.
 2 teaspoonfuls chopped parsley.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ -teaspoonful mixed herbs.
 Salt and pepper.

Method.—Chop up cooked bacon and mix with potatoes, parsley, herbs and seasoning. Form mixture into cakes and fry in fat in which bacon was cooked till cakes are brown.

Bacon and Potato Cakes

8 ozs. cooked mashed potato.
 2 ozs. chopped grilled bacon.
 Seasoning.

Method.—Mix together and form into cakes, roll in crumbs and either fry or bake in a hot oven.

LEAFLET NUMBER 6



SANDWICH SPREADS

and Fillings

PARSLEY AND CHEESE OR POTATO SPREAD

Mix butter or margarine with a little chopped parsley, grated cheese and seasoning. Spread on the bread and make up into a sandwich. Parsley can also be mixed with the mashed potato.

SPINACH AND CHEESE FILLING

Wash spinach well, shred very finely, mix with a little grated cheese and seasoning, and put between slices of bread and butter.

WATERCRESS FILLING

Wash watercress thoroughly, chop finely and season. Put between layers of bread and butter.

CHEESE AND CABBAGE OR CABBAGE AND POTATO

Wash the cabbage and shred finely. Mix a little grated cheese with soft margarine and spread this on slices of bread. Put the cabbage between and form into sandwiches. Shredded cabbage can also be mixed with mashed potato, creamed with household milk.

SPROUT AND VEGETABLE EXTRACT OR POTATO FILLING

Wash sprouts and shred finely, and use to fill sandwiches of bread and margarine, spread with a little vegetable extract. Sprouts can also be mixed with mashed potato creamed with household milk.

PUDDINGS

(Sufficient for two children)

Chocolate Mould

2 ozs. cornflour or custard powder. $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint water.
 $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz. sugar. $\frac{1}{4}$ -teaspoonful vanilla.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint milk. 6 teaspoonfuls cocoa.

Method.—Put two-thirds of the milk and water into pan. Bring to boil. Mix cornflour, sugar, cocoa and vanilla together with the rest of the milk and water. Add to hot milk and water. Bring to the boil, cook for 3 minutes. Stir very well until mixture thickens. Rinse out mould with cold water. Pour in mixture, leave to cool, then turn out.

Baked Apple

Bake the whole apple in the oven. When quite soft remove skin, mash, sweeten slightly and serve.

Bread and Butter Pudding

2 oz. bread (one slice). 2 oz. fruit.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ -oz. margarine. $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint custard.

Method.—Spread margarine on bread. Cut bread into cubes. Arrange layers of bread cubes and fruit in small pie-dish, pour custard over this and bake in moderate oven till brown.

Milk Pudding

$1\frac{1}{2}$ -2 oz. rice, tapioca, etc. 1 oz. household milk.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint milk. $1\frac{1}{2}$ oz. sugar.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint water. Grated nutmeg.

Method.—Reconstitute the dried milk by sprinkling it into $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint of warm water and whisking well. Wash the cereal and put into greased pie-dish. Pour over the fresh household milk. Add the sugar. Grate a little nutmeg on top. Bake in a slow oven.

Egg Custard

1 pt. milk. 3 dried eggs. 2 teaspoonfuls sugar.

Method.—Reconstitute the eggs by mixing 3 level tablespoonfuls dried egg with 6 tablespoonfuls water till smooth. Heat the milk and pour over eggs and return to pan. Cook slowly till thickened, add sugar and serve in custard cups.

Scrap Bread Pudding

$\frac{1}{2}$ -pint custard.
 4 oz. stale bread soaked in cold water and squeezed thoroughly.
 4 teaspoonfuls sugar.
 Few sultanas.

Method.—Put the soaked bread into greased dish and cover with the custard, fruit and sugar. Put a little fat on top if possible and bake in moderate oven for about 25 minutes.

Cake Trifle

2 oz. stale cake.
 2 teaspoonfuls jam.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ -pint sweetened custard.

Method.—Spread cake with jam. Cut into cubes. Put into an individual dish. Pour over custard.

Steamed Chocolate Duff

4 oz. flour. 2 teaspoonfuls sugar.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ -teaspoonful baking powder. 1 oz. fat.
 2 teaspoonfuls cocoa. 1 oz. grated raw potato.
 Milk and water.

Method.—Rub fat into the flour. Mix all ingredients together. Make into a soft dough with the liquid. Steam in a small greased mould for about 30-40 minutes.

SUPPER DISHES

(Sufficient for 2 Children)

Vegetables in Cheese Sauce

$\frac{1}{2}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$ lb. cooked mixed vegetables.
 $\frac{1}{2}$ pint cheese sauce.
 Browned breadcrumbs.

Method.—Mix the vegetables and cheese sauce, pour into a pie dish and sprinkle with browned breadcrumbs. Brown in a moderate oven.

Cheese Jacket Potatoes

Scrub 2 potatoes and prick with a skewer or fork. Bake on the rack in a moderate oven for about $\frac{3}{4}$ -1 hour. Cut down the centre and scoop out the inside of the potato; mix this with $1\frac{1}{2}$ -2 oz. cheese, seasoning and a little sauce or milk to moisten. Pile back into the case and serve hot.

My mother soon became involved in war work (voluntary). She was given the job of distributing welfare foods to mothers and children in Dornoch. Orange juice, cod liver oil and national dried milk could be purchased cheaply with coupons. Sometimes a mother would give my mother her unwanted coupons, and we then enjoyed orange juice and dried milk, but not the cod liver oil which we were given daily. She used various venues for distributing these foods, and one spell was from a little room where the charity shop is today. Another spell was in the Deanery, upstairs, where the offices of Ewan Harris & Co, are now.

Fish wasn't rationed, but there were scarcities as so many fishermen were called up into the navy. I remember Embo fishwives calling at our house with their creels very early in the war having walked to Dornoch from Embo. Tinned fish was available on coupons or 'points'.

My father was called up for service, but was reprieved as it was deemed that the Sheriff Clerk had a necessary role to play in local affairs. He nevertheless joined the Home Guard and A.R.P.

The Home Guard met every Thursday night in the Drill Hall, now the Jail Shop. He was also delegated to be an ambulance driver, if that was ever required. They practised shooting at a rifle range on the Links. I think they had a lot of fun as well.

If we were invaded, my father had a secret task, which was to take the most important County records and documents away from Dornoch to a place of safety in a cave somewhere in Sutherland. Sadly he never told us where that was, or even that he had made the journey. He had a small petrol allowance for his duties, and sometimes we children would go with him for the run. We spent what seemed ages, sitting in the car, cold and bored, waiting for him to finish his business. We played I-spy, or the Minster's Cat, to while away the time. Most cars then had no heating or radios. There were no indicator lights either, and if one wished to turn left or right one flicked a switch which put out an orange indicator lever on the left of the car to turn left, and on the right of the car to turn right. If a car had no indicators, one had to use hand signals through the open window, driver's side.



Family car in the 1930's

In winter and in snowy conditions, chains were fixed onto the car wheels. The car lights had to be half covered with some kind of blackout, and no street lights were allowed. We all carried torches.



If we ever went to our father's office in the County Buildings, we were always fascinated by the large copier or duplicating machine which copied his letters etc, in a purple ink, very messy and smudgy. It was pressed down by rotating a bar handle on the top. He also had a set of handcuffs in his office drawer.

Most people had bicycles and I certainly remember my first bike arriving from somewhere in the Midlands of England when I was seven years old. It came by train to Dornoch Station, and was delivered to the house on Wordies Cart, drawn by the lovely Clydesdale horse we all knew so well. That was definitely a highlight of my life. Before that I had had a scooter. If we had a puncture we easily mended the tyre ourselves with a 'kit', dipping the inner tube in a basin of water to locate the leak.

Soon poles and staves were hammered into the sands at the edge of the Firth to repel an invading force, but I don't remember any being knocked into the sands at our 'beach'.

A shelter was erected on the headland, 16th fairway, for the Royal Observer Corps to observe planes and ships. It was manned 24 hours a day.

Before the war, Dornoch had a busy social life. The Station Hotel was fairly grand and had its own small orchestra, which played for dinner dancing. Sometimes the County Ball was held there. Soon after war was declared the hotel was requisitioned as billets. Other hotels and large houses were likewise 'taken over'. Indian soldiers arrived with their mules and beautiful horses. Their mounted soldiers were very striking. They were billeted in the Station Hotel and in Earls Cross House. Polish soldiers were in the West Church Hall, and also in Nissen huts to the rear of the Hall, on the adjoining car park and on the ground where the bungalows are today.

Norwegian officers were in Burghfield House, with some in Abden House, now the North Highland College. There were Canadian lumberjacks at Clashmore.

More Indians were in Nissen huts and tents along Golf Road, between Church Street and the bowling green, and it was there that we children would go to watch them cooking their huge pancakes (chapattis) out of doors. The R.A.F. were in the Royal Golf Hotel and I remember going there to a children's Christmas party, given us by the R.A.F. Colin cried so much he had to be taken home. There were also Scottish and Highland Regiments in Dornoch at various times throughout the war.

The W.V.S. ran a canteen in the Social Club on Schoolhill, in the evenings for the servicemen and women. My mother was a member of the W.V.S. and she was one of the ladies on duty on Monday nights. The uniform was a nice green overall, which had a wine coloured badge on the pocket.

The local people were encouraged to invite a lonely soldier into their homes especially at Christmas time. We entertained two Norwegians, one, whose name I still remember, Captain Gundelach, and the other, his friend. After the war they kept in touch with us and sent us cards and presents, once a beautiful picture book of Norway.

There was a very active W.R.I. in wartime. My mother was the President for two sessions then. The Drama Society was also very popular, and they could fill the Drill Hall with their productions for two or three evenings in a row.

There were Brownies, Guides, Scouts, Cubs and for older girls, the Girls Training Corps, and for older boys, the Cadets.

Badminton was popular and played in the Drill Hall and in the school. Golf of course went on as usual, except on the Ladies Course (now part of the Struie course) as it was taken over by the R.A.F. as part of the aerodrome. My parents played regularly, my father once won the 'longest drive' competition. What excitement!

The Golf Professional's shop was across the road from today's Clubhouse. It was a unique little building with a narrow veranda at the front and the posts were thick tree trunks. As our parents were members of the Golf Club, we children assumed that we could play on the Main Course as well, which we did.

Before the war there were two or three public tennis courts (now only one). There was a Private Court off Kennedy Avenue for the Royal Golf Hotel.

The weekly Saturday night dances in the Drill Hall were a great night out, but I was far too young ever to attend. Sadly one of my worst war memories is connected to a dance. A truck load of Polish soldiers had been over to Brora to a dance one evening, and on returning to Dornoch their truck ran out of control, not far from our house, near the Poles Road cemetery. I think three soldiers were killed instantly and several injured. Colin remembers the brains on the wall, but I wouldn't go to look.

In the cemetery there are the gravestones of three Indians, who died whilst here. They are placed at an angle, to face Mecca. Another sad event was the ditching in the Firth of a Sunderland flying boat. My mother saw the actual crash from an upstairs window and we rushed upstairs by which time we saw several heads bobbing in the water – all saved.

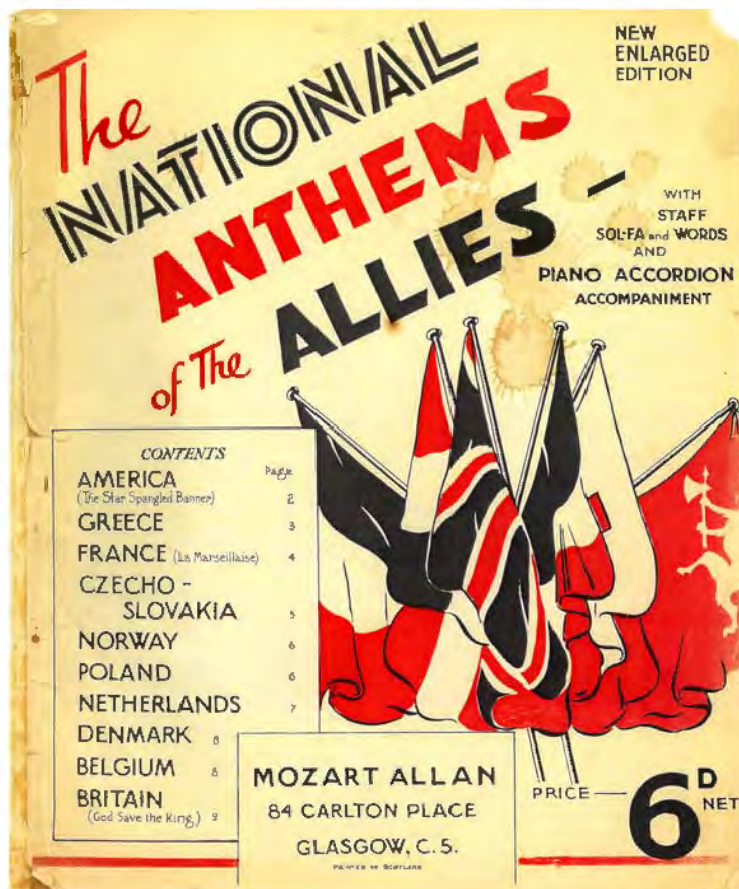
During the war we children were allowed to run around Dornoch with no restrictions. That seems very strange today when we are so afraid of letting our children out of sight. I never heard of any abuse of children then and this at a time when Dornoch was full of strangers. Sometimes we would go to the Witch's Pool on the Low Golf course. It had water lying in it then, and we threw stones into it. We were told that the pool was bottomless! Golfers had to play over the Witch's Pool in those days, No. 8 on the "Low Course" as we called Struie then.

All houses had to conform to the blackout regulations. My parents fixed black tape around all our windows. Black curtains were made for every window and the blinds which were cream coloured were dyed black. Some people put sticky tape in a criss-cross pattern over the whole window (if the windows shattered, the tape would limit the shattering).

On the roof of the Police Station, which then was the large house situated between Shore Road and Dornoch Antiques and Collectables, was the air-raid siren. The siren had two distinct sounds, the first one warned us of an imminent air-raid, and the second wail told us that the air-raid was over. Of course there were no bombs dropped on Sutherland during the war.

Policemen really did patrol the streets, twice each day, morning and late afternoon. The policeman we most feared we called 'Dick Barton'. He was quite strict with us and would report any bad behaviour to our parents.

Everyone listened to the wireless. The news was always listened to. Before the 9 o'clock news on Sunday evenings, the National Anthems of all our allies were played. I learnt to play some of the Anthems of our allies.



When we ran home from school for our lunch (no school dinners then) we heard 'Workers Playtime', a variety show usually coming from a factory or a forces canteen. These shows had all the best performers of the day taking part.

At five o'clock, every weekday we listened to 'Children's Hour' with 'Uncle Mac'. In the evenings there were weekly favourites such as I.T.M.A. (It's That Man Again), Much Binding in the Marsh, The Brains Trust (a sort of Any Questions), Forces Favourites (record requests). 'Music while you work' was broadcast mornings and afternoons, and there were many other popular programmes. There were regular hints on cooking, and even a 'radio doctor' to give us advice.

In the evenings we sometimes played card games, Snap, Happy Families and Lexicon were favourites. Board games were popular and we could play Ping Pong on the dining room table. When we were older we played the old fashioned gramophone with old fashioned records. 'Pop' records were unheard of. In the summer, we played tennis on the lawn by fixing a long rope across it.



Colin – golf on the lawn



Tennis on the lawn

We had a tree-house which was simply two or three planks laid over branches of a large tree. The sides were formed by hanging rugs. My brothers played football on the bottom lawn with their friends. Sometimes a smaller boy would have to act as a goalpost.

At school most teachers were strict disciplinarians. Of course, the strap was always there, and used too. I received it once, for ‘talking’. There was a strap at home also! I received it only once, when I hit Alister on the head with a hammer.



Colin still has the home strap!

First thing in the morning we lined up outside the school in our classes, and then went to our classrooms. The teacher would say ‘All stand, hands clasped, eyes closed “Our Father which art in Heaven”’. Before we began lessons, we had a short discussion on war news. Any of our victories were greeted by cheers and clapping. In Primary 1, we used slates. Every day we had reading, writing, spelling and arithmetic. We sat in rows at individual desks. We chanted our ‘Tables’ for years. Calculators were unheard of.

Our jotters usually had ‘Tables’ printed on the book covers.

Below is the cast of the operetta Princess Chrysanthemum performed in 1937 or 38. Alister Macrae is near the middle as one of the Sprites of the Night.



Paper, pencils and ink were scarce. Books were used year after year, and often shabby. There were weekly wireless programmes for schools which we enjoyed. Our Janitor, Maggie Crawford, was a very strong person. She had to stoke the furnace which was under the school down some outdoor steps. She cleaned the whole school. I don't think she ever had an assistant. She even awarded unofficial prizes. Once I received a bible, and another time, a book "Lord Clive and Warren Hastings" by Macaulay, inscribed 'For the most obedient girl in school during all play hours', Lorna Macrae 3rd! signed M Crawford, Janitor.

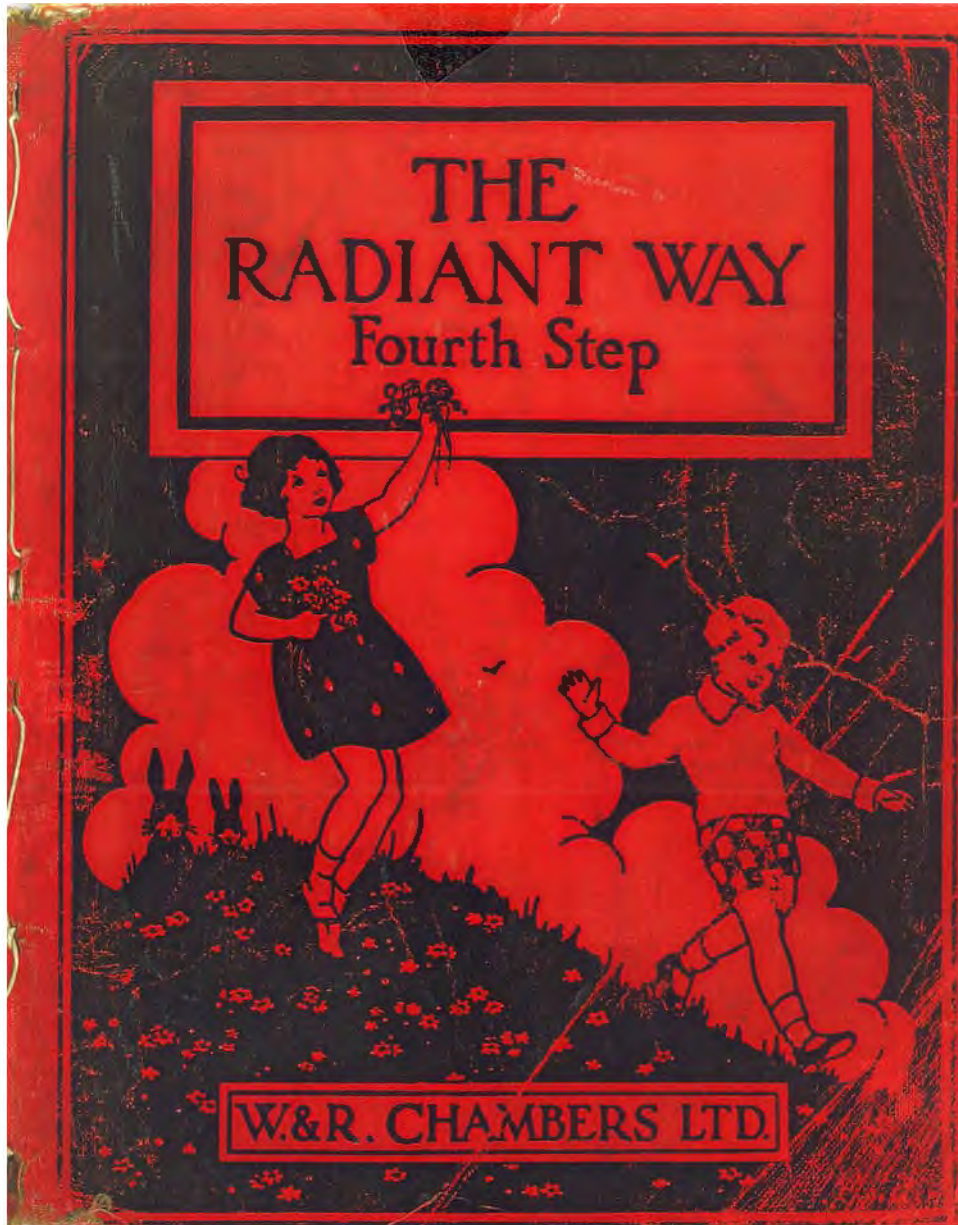
Maggie invited me to her daughter Daisy's wedding, which took place in her house in Carnaig Street (I think) Littletown. I must have been about 8 or 9 years old. Another guest at the wedding was Mrs Melville who lived in the Castle, as Mrs Sykes' companion. I wore a cut down dress of my Mother's coloured red, white and blue. It must have been a 'Coronation' dress (1937).

In those days, weddings and funerals often took place at home, - after funeral services, most of the mourners would walk to the cemetery.

During school play time we would play skipping, or hop scotch played with a nice flat stone or tile. 'Statues' was another game. Boys usually played football. If it was a rainy day we were allowed to stay indoors, girls at one end of the school, boys at another.

Throughout school, starting with the primary classes, we ran through the gamut of literature learning by heart verse and prose.

We began with the Catechism, then on to Psalms, into Golden Treasury Poems and Ballads and ending with Shakespeare's blank verse. This took up a lot of homework time, and most evenings we had plenty of homework set for us as well.



This was our reading book when we were six or seven years old. 'Spellings' came with every story.

2. One day, a lady, called Mrs Be-done-by-as-you-did, came with sea-cakes and sea-toffee for good water babies.
3. She did not give Tom any. She popped a stone into his mouth.
4. This made Tom sad, so another kind lady said she would send some one to teach Tom to behave.
5. She sent Ellie, who had slept in the snow-white bed, and whom he had last seen standing on the shore.



62

6. Tom soon became as good and kind as Ellie. In a very short time, she was able to invite him to her home on Sundays, and sometimes even on week-days.

(Adapted from 'Water Babies,' by Charles Kingsley.)



Revisal

quarrel friend magic juice head
noise angel honey fairies write
strange walls fight bright Billy
hawthorn both juniper berries
country dirty Ellie lady done able

53

“The Water Babies” above, and “Greyfriar’s Bobby” were my favourite stories.

1. blue	glue	true
2. bull	full	pull
3. bush	push	

GREYFRIARS BOBBY
PART I

Edinburgh always mouth

1. This is a true story of a faithful little terrier called ‘Greyfriars Bobby.’
2. Bobby’s master was a farmer, and every week Bobby went with him to the market in

8

3. At one o’clock, they used to go to a shop near the market for dinner. Bobby’s mid-day meal was always a big bun.
4. When Bobby was a few years old, Mr Gray, his master, died, and was laid to rest in Greyfriars Churchyard, not far from the market place.
5. A few days later, at one o’clock, the owner of the shop saw Bobby push the door open.

9

We regularly had ‘tests’, sometimes even on a weekly basis, and then we were given our ‘places’ in the seating arrangements. ‘Top’ places were always at the back of the class.

Our history books showed us a map of the Empire in red, stretching round the Globe. We loved to hear of famous Scots, King Robert the Bruce and William Wallace, David Livingstone and our own Andrew Carnegie. At home we had the ten volumes of the Children's Encyclopaedia which we often read throughout our childhood.

We knew all about Helen Keller, a famous American lady who was blind, deaf and dumb. She came to Scotland in the 1930's and stayed with my Granduncle, William Macrae, at Arcan Farm, Muir of Ord. She was to devote her life to helping the disabled.

My friends in Primary one were Mollie, Violet, Shona, David, Peter, Roderick, Robert and dear Hugh Munro. I shall never forget the day a teacher said to me "Lorna Macrae, you just opened your mouth to see what came out".

As we grew older, 'rounders' was played in the field on the west side of the school. It wasn't a real playing field; the grass was rarely cut, but we liked to play there.

The toilets for the Primary School were outside, quite a walk away from the school. Always cold and miserable.

We spent a lot of time playing outdoors, whatever the weather. In winter we went sledging and throwing snowballs. We sledged in the field opposite our house, dragging our sledge to the highest point, where the houses in Rowan Crescent are today.

When we were older we went skating. We skated at Loch-an-Treel, and sometimes on the sea side hollow of the 16th Fairway., below the little cliff and close to the beach.

Curling also took place on Loch-an-Treel and of course on the pond at the Meadows.

We collected cigarette cards, film stars were very popular. Pictures of the Princesses were also collected and stuck in scrapbooks. We mixed 'glue' for our scrapbooks by mixing flour with water. Boys collected stamps and coins and military badges.

My brothers had a Meccano set which they liked to work with. They made up models of ships and aeroplanes and collected cards of trains and planes. We read the 'Dandy' and 'Beano', for older children and adults the 'Picture Post' was very popular. Football matches were organised – Bishopfield versus the Town.

School holidays were looked forward to, but we didn't go away anywhere distant in war time, perhaps a weekend in Inverness or a trip to Bonar Bridge to visit our Grandparents.

Some of my best memories of going to Granny and Grandpa's at Kyle House were the New Years Day lunches. Each year, even in wartime we had a marvellous day with them at Bonar. Lunch was a real "Christmas day feast" with all the usual fare. Crackers were on the table which we thought were tremendous fun. There was no Christmas tree or decorations there, as New Years day took precedence over Christmas. A maid, dressed in a black dress with white apron and cap stood in the dining room all through the meal, passing plates around.



Granny and Grandpa's maid, Violet Lobban, from Rosehall

After the meal we all retired to the drawing room, still on our best behaviour, where we had to perform our party pieces. Granny especially liked Scottish songs and music. Before long we were ushered back to the dinning room (which by the way was a dark room with dark furniture and large family portraits on the walls, these portraits made us children laugh) where the table had been cleared and set with all sorts of tea time baking. Alister and I could hardly find room for our tea, but we did our best to eat up.

When we went to our Grandparent's home we all had to 'perform', play the piano, sing or maybe dance the 'Highland Fling'. However if the day was a Sunday, we escaped lightly and all we were asked to do was to sing 'Jesus Loves Me'. Granny (Bonar) organised a yearly tea party at the Aultnamain Inn for my family and for our cousin Audrey and her parents.

My Father and Uncle Ken were never offered alcohol by Grandpa until they were 30 years old. All the guests were offered a drink, whisky for the men and sherry for the ladies. We children were served lemonade, which was a real treat as at home lemonade was only given to us on our birthdays or on other special occasions.

Sometimes Grandpa would be called from the table to see to a patient, as the surgery was in the house. Other times he might be called out to a patient, which meant that Alex Macdonald the chauffeur drove him, for Grandpa had never learned to drive a car. Alex was with Grandpa for over 40 years.



Alex Macdonald, the chauffeur, with the car



Dr. J.D. Macrae with 'Crusoe'

Grandpa's black Newfoundland dog was a huge animal. He was very placid and he gave us rides on his back. "Crusoe" was his name, no doubt called after R.M. Ballantyne's book "Dog Crusoe", a popular children's book of the early 20th century. "Crusoe" would often be soaking wet, having had a swim in the Kyle over the road from the house. Sixty years on I called my bearded collie dog "Crusoe"!

Alex, Uncle Ken and Grandpa patented a car lamp which they named the "Mac". It must have made an impact because I have a cutting from the Northern Times dated October 8th 1931 describing this lamp. "The Mac © is worthy of a trial by every motorist whose duties necessitate travelling by night", says the Northern Times.

I have in my possession one of those lamps, which was given to me by Margaret Macrae (no relation) in 2005, she is a grand daughter of Alex Macdonald, I also have a copy of the Patent. Unfortunately nothing ever came of this invention.

To travel to Inverness would take 2 hours by car going over Struie Hill and round through Dingwall. The journey would take 4 hours by bus and sometimes the buses were utility buses which had wooden seats. Colin remembers a 'gas' bus which towed a generator.

One thing that fascinated us when we shopped in Inverness (in the large stores) was the way our 'change' was given to us. Our money would be handed to the assistant who then put it into a little cylinder, which she either attached to a wire pulley system, or inserted into a tube pipe and vacuum system. The cylinder was then whisked away, usually upwards, to the Cashier's office. The cylinder then returned by the same route, with our receipt and change inside.

Once in our hotel in Inverness, we children somehow managed to topple over a wardrobe in our room – not very popular with our parents.

Tattie holidays came along in early autumn and were a nice break. We also had a day off school on Fast days.

Occasionally there were film shows in the Council Chambers. These were shown by a Dr Chandra, an Indian from the Ministry of Information. He always showed cartoons after the serious films, Mickey Mouse, Charlie Chaplin or Laurel and Hardy. We children loved those films. Sometimes a film would break down and then how we moaned!

At the end of the war the film shows were in the West Church Hall, which had balcony seats, the most expensive. Colin always went to the downstairs front seats which cost 9d.

My brothers and I had piano lessons from a Miss Anderson, who took a little room at the side of Kyle View, on Evelix Road. She always had a little open fire there with a kettle on the boil. We would run across the field to our lessons. In spring time in these fields we would see a farm worker sowing seeds by hand from a 'tray' which hung from his neck. These fields are now school playing fields.

In summer in the fields were stooks and then large haystacks, which would be covered with huge tarpaulins of canvas. We spent many happy hours, sliding down these haystacks. Another summer activity was to go with friends to the barns at Balloan and Achley, and jump from the topmost level onto the straw below.

Another outdoor pastime was to go paddling along the Dornoch Burn behind Achley. Once we found a dead sheep in the water but we came to no harm.

The fields held plenty of rabbits and stewed rabbit became a regular meal in most households. There always seemed to be farm workers in the fields, too rarely seen now. In the autumn potatoes and turnips were lifted and stored in fields under a mound of turf. Also in the fields could be seen huge flock of birds pecking away especially after the corn was cut. In wartime corn etc was still being cut by hand using scythes.

At the beginning of the war we took our gas masks to school, but soon everyone became complacent, and we began to leave them at home.

Alister once saw a German plane flying over the Cathedral as he cycled down Castle Street. Very occasionally German planes were seen here, but in fact no bombs were ever dropped on Sutherland.

I remember once having an air raid practice in school. The whole school had to assemble in the central corridor, and we all lay down with our gas masks beside us. This was regarded as great fun and a good diversion from lessons.

Every Wednesday was 'savings day' when we were expected to bring perhaps a shilling to put into savings certificates. Miss Mackay (Bubbles) collected the money for the Primary classes, and one pupil of her class would be sent round the classrooms to gather the savings money. I loved being chosen to complete this task – another diversion in the school day.

Christmas at school was a happy time. The Duke of Sutherland provided a wonderful tall tree which was erected in the gym. It always looked beautiful once it was decorated, even magical. The parties were a highlight when we all dressed in our best clothes, and played the usual games, such as 'The grand old Duke of York', 'The Farmer's in his Den' and 'London Bridge' and so on.

As we grew older, we learned country dances for parties, the 'Haymakers' being the easiest. Then on to the Highland Schottische, St Bernard's Waltz and so on. Party food was in a paper 'baggie', and we would each receive a little gift from Santa.

Birthday parties were usually small affairs. We would invite just a few friends for tea after school, and afterwards play in the garden. We always had our birthday tea at the dining room table with my mother sitting at one end and usually my father would come home early from the office and he would sit at the other end!

The W.R.I. always gave a very good Christmas Party for the children, and the Sunday School party was enjoyed as well. So, at Christmas, we had several parties to look forward to. On Christmas afternoon most people listened to the King's broadcast. Christmas Day in Dornoch was not necessarily a holiday for shops or businesses, and even the Post was delivered on Christmas day.

New Years Day was much more of a holiday for everyone. First footing was a general activity, and could stretch for two or even three days! First footers always took with them a little bottle of spirits, a piece of coal, and maybe a little something to eat, such as shortbread or black bun.

We children liked to decorate the Hall at Inveran with paper decorations and with silver bells, which were used year after year, and sometimes we ourselves made paper decorations. We hung up our stockings on Christmas Eve hoping for the best. In the toe we always found some raisins and a piece of fruit and maybe a chocolate biscuit. The fruit was usually a mandarin or an orange, Gillespies, (now M G Ross) a newsagents & toy shop had a rear room which was like an Aladdin's cave at Christmas time, and we were allowed to make two or three visits there and choose something we would like. Colin's favourite was Dinky toys.

One Christmas we had a real treat as my parent won a live goose in a raffle. It joined our hens for a few weeks and ended up as our Christmas day dinner.

We were allowed an extra ration of dried fruit for the festive season, as most families made their own puddings and mincemeat in those days. We children had to stir the pudding mixture as best we could before it was cooked, just for luck. Little silver charms and threepenny bits were wrapped in greaseproof paper and stirred in, again for luck.

After Christmas we would keep the nicest cards and turn them into calendars, by adding calendar tabs. In January, Burns Night was celebrated by local clubs and groups as today. Haggis wasn't rationed. On Easter Sunday we rolled eggs we had dyed in cochineal. Chocolate eggs were a rarity.

Another yearly ritual was Hallow'een, when we dressed up and joined our friends to go 'guising'. We would visit several houses and each of us had to either sing or recite. We always ended up at our teacher's house where we would 'dook' for apples. Money was never given to us.

Winter weather, now looking back seems to have been colder. Snow lay deeper and drifts of snow were all around. Water pipes froze and electricity failed. The roadmen fixed a snow plough to the front of their lorry, and one or two men stood on the back of the lorry shovelling spades of sand on to the road. The school would close early in stormy weather to let the country children get home safely.

Coal was rationed, but we could buy logs which the Canadian lumberjacks had cut at the Clashmore Woods. We all took a turn sawing the logs if they were too long for our fireplace. Sometimes we just chopped them with a hatchet. We could also buy peat to augment our fuel, but it was smoky and dusty. We children would be sent out to the shrubbery to collect kindlers to light the fire. We hated this in cold weather. If the twigs were too damp, we rolled up old newspapers into balls, and used them as kindling. A 'fire brick' was placed on either side of the open fire to save coal.

Brora coal mine was a working mine then and sometimes our coal was Brora coal. We had a fairly large coal shed at the back of the house and the coal was delivered in sacks carried on the coalmen's back. I think they were sacks of 112lbs (or 50kg). Briquettes were unrationed. These were small brick sized blocks made of compressed coal dust and sawdust. However when burning they were smoky and dusty.

We went to Sunday School every Sunday afternoon. We enjoyed this as we met our friends again. Every month we received a magazine 'Morning Rays' for the youngest, and then 'Greatheart' for the older ones. When I started Sunday School my class went to the Vestry of the Cathedral. We sat on very small wooden chairs which we arranged round the small room. After Sunday school we sometimes had a drink of water from the fountain on the Green. There was an 'iron' cup there attached by a chain to the side of the basin.



A Morning Prayer

O Son of Man, who
walked each day
A humble road,
serene and strong,
Go with me now
upon life's way,
My comrade all the
journey long.

If light and joy
should be my part,
Then share with me
the shining hour;
If clouds should
come, speak to
my heart
The word of com-
fort, love and
power.

(The School
Assembly).



An Evening Prayer

Lighten our dark-
ness, we beseech
Thee, O Lord; and
by Thy great mercy
defend us from all
perils and dangers
of this night; for
the love of Thy only
Son, our Saviour,
Jesus Christ.

(Book of Common
Order)

SEPTEMBER, 1944

ONE PENNY

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Nature Comrades

ABOUT five years ago, we talked about the mole, but, as we left so much unsaid, I think we should renew our chat, especially as Naturalists regard the mole as one of the most interesting wild animals in the world.



Last August, I was walking by the hedgerow, near to the river, when, to my joy, I caught sight of a mole in the grassy slope by my side.

I had just time to admire its glossy black coat, and long pointed nose, when, as if conscious of being watched, it disappeared into a hole.

It was easy to judge that its home was not far away, so I carefully examined the spot, and, just as I had expected, found five neatly scooped-out holes, which would lead to its earthy home.

Near to the main entrance was a large stone, so I took out my fountain-pen and printed on the stone: "Mole Cottage." I wanted to mark the spot, so that I could come next day to try and catch another glimpse of my little friend.

For several days I revisited Mole Cottage, without success. Perhaps the mole resented being watched, and may be had removed to another part of the hedgerow; anyway, I never saw him again.

The mole is an expert little digger, and in a single night can make a tunnel 100 yards in length.

As the mole only measures about 5 inches, it means that the tunnel is 720 times its own length. Isn't that an amazing bit of work?

However, in spite of the mole's smallness, it has great strength in its short fore-feet, and it can throw back the earth at a wonderful speed.

The mole has an unsatisfiable appetite, and consumes quantities of worms, grub, small birds, and lizards, but he will not touch vegetables of any kind.

But it seems hardly fair to call him greedy, because if the mole is deprived of food for more than eight hours he would die.

GERTRUDE M'CUULOCK.

Children's Corner

DEAR BOYS AND GIRLS—Here are the results of the drawing competition from January to June. It is a great pity more of you did not try to draw the scenes; those who did try, I'm sure, enjoyed doing it.

1st Prize—Sybil Hawkins (7½). 2nd Prize (equal)—Helen Sinclair (11) and Lorna

Macrae (10). 3rd Prize (equal)—Alec Middleton (6), David Middleton (8), David Stewart (8).

This month you might make up a *short* poem about your holidays. Send your poem in by the 20th September to the Editor, 9 Coltbridge Terrace, Edinburgh, 15.

THE CUPBOARD

The fairies have a cupboard,
Where they keep the nicest things,
And when a fairy tears her frock,
Or needs to mend her wings,
She hurries to the cupboard.
They have every kind of thread,
From palest pink and lavender,
To dusky brown and red.

Other things are to be found,
Things that fairies use,
Necklaces of sparkling rain,
Little sunbeam shoes,
Dandelion cloaks that tick
Are in the cupboard, too;
The fairies have so many things,
I've only named a few.

I. E. S.

The Sunday School Picnic in the summer was great fun. Once we went by bus to Balvraid School for the picnic, we sang all the way there and all the way back. Another summer the picnic was just on Dornoch beach.

We went to church every fortnight. I went with my father one Sunday, while Alister went with my mother the next. There always had to be someone at home until Colin was of church going age. We sat in the West Aisle. The left front pew was the Manse pew, second pew was Mrs Macrae, Netherwood's pew, and she always turned round and gave us pandrops. She was always dressed in brown. We had the 3rd pew, which we shared with Miss Davidson, the French teacher at school, but as she always sang in the choir, we usually had the pew to ourselves.

By the time Colin came with us to church, of course, we more or less filled the row. Sometimes an old lady sat in the corner of our seat, whose name I cannot remember, but I do remember the day she dropped the 'plate'! My father was a Deacon, and he was regularly 'on the collection' as we called it.



In our Sunday best clothes

Every pew was named – there was a little square card holder fitted at the aisle end of all pews, and written on the card was one's name and the number of seats one 'paid' for.

Sermons were very long in those days, but we were kept in order by our parents. All the ladies and girls wore hats. It was unheard of for a woman to be seen in Church without her head covered. On the way home from the Cathedral, we usually met the Free Church worshippers on their way to their service.



Church Parade after the war. My father is middle second row

After the war, both Churches began their services at the same hour, and a bus service was run from the country places to bring them in, and then take home the worshippers of both Churches. This bus service ran for several years. Taking one's car to church during the war was almost unheard of. We weren't allowed to play outdoor games or card games on Sundays, but these rules relaxed somewhat as the years passed.

The Minister of the Cathedral, Mr Levack, was called up as a Padre to the forces, and then Mr Reith came as our Minister. He seemed very old to me. He was very tall, white haired and always wore black. He was kindly and gentle. He was in fact an uncle of the famous 'Reith' of the B.B.C.

The Manse in those days was the large house at the Meadows, which now houses the Highland Council.

The Episcopal Church was open for services throughout the war years, and Catholics had their worship at Mrs Robichaud's house at Oversteps, now the old folk's home.

There was a Free Presbyterian Church at Evelix, which we called "The Tin Temple". It was actually a "Tin Tabernacle" and was a pre-fabricated building. They were constructed of iron and timber and flat-packed to travel by rail. Perhaps the Evelix Church was transported by rail to the newly opened station at Dornoch (?1902).

Children also helped with the war effort, and as a Brownie, I was once detailed to collect 'tins'. These would then be re-invented as a war machine of some sort. One Saturday morning my friend and I set off with our sacks to collect tins from the houses at our end of the town. On our route was Burghfield House, then occupied by Norwegian soldiers. We went to the back door and were given lots of unwashed food tins. We took so long on our round, giggling as we went with no thought of time, that when I reached home I found my parents out looking for me, as it was now 2.45p.m. That was the first and only time I went tin collecting. I remember one exciting Saturday with the Brownies when we went 'tracking' through the woods opposite the station, in the Baden Powell manner.

A Brownie concert once took place in the open air, in our garden at Inveran House. We put out all the chairs from the house, round the bottom lawn, and as many rugs and cushions we could find. I think it was a success and the weather stayed fine. I remember an older girl singing 'The Last Time I saw Paris', very popular at the time.

At the end of the Summer Term we sometimes had a sing-song in the gym. Miss Strachan, the English teacher, playing the piano. We were given a copy of the National Song Book and we sang all our favourites "Swanee River", "Loch Lomand" "Cockles and Mussels", "John Peel", "The Keel Row" and always a 'round' maybe "Three Blind Mice"! Great fun for all.

Later in the war we Brownies and Guides went to Dunrobin Castle to entertain the recuperating forces there as the Castle had been transformed into a convalescent home for wounded servicemen. They were all wearing a blue uniform. I had to sing a solo, always the same one, 'Jeannie with the Light Brown Hair'. I like the song but hated having to sing in public. At all our concerts we would display our country dancing skills. The 'Petronella' was a favourite.

When I became a Guide, I was 10 years old and thought I was quite grown up. We worked for our badges and I collected quite a few. We went for some splendid cycle runs, once to Skelbo Castle and another time to Criech, where we picnicked near the ruins of an old mansion which had once been the home of the Beaton family. We were told that Mary Beaton one of Mary, Queen of Scots' four Mary's, was related to this Beaton family. I never actually proved that this was true!



In Guide uniform

With the Guides I cycled into the country to collect brambles for jam. We also collected brambles and rose hips on school outings. The fruit was then turned into jelly by Miss Jenny Macrae, the domestic science teacher, who was also our popular Guide captain.

Early in the war some evacuees from the cities came to Dornoch to live with relations. We ourselves had a London cousin, Alison, who came to stay for a term or two. We also had family friends from Edinburgh who came for some weeks. Most of the evacuees however returned home after the threat of invasion passed in weeks rather than months.

Across the fields from Inveran at Westfield Brian and Gordon Campbell came to stay with their aunt, Mrs Carver, and at Broomhill, Mr Arthur's granddaughter Jean came from York. These three incomers soon became our friends.

Each year the County Medical Officer came to the Academy to examine every child. He was Dr. Kenneth Macrae, my uncle in fact. There was also a school dentist who came to look at our teeth. In those days gas was used when extractions were necessary, and we saw many a sick pupil afterwards in the cloakrooms. Most of us caught all the childhood illnesses, mumps, measles, chickenpox and whooping cough. However people called out the doctor, only if they were really ill.

We ourselves rarely went to the surgery, just for inoculations or injections. We cured ourselves by going to the chemist, Mr Wickham, and buying some medicine. At home we would be given a hot toddy for a cold made by mixing a little whisky with hot water and sugar and lemon if we had one.

My uncle was the doctor in charge of Cambusavie Hospital, the fever and tuberculosis hospital near the Mound. At Christmas we went to sing carols to the patients there along with the church choir.

The local Dentist during the war was Mr Howie, who had his practice in the High Street. A visit to the dentist then was always dreaded. I think cocaine was used to kill pain.

We loved the summer holidays especially as the whole country had double summertime, which meant that here it was quite light until eleven o'clock or even later. We played for hours on the beach, and I taught myself to swim in the sea.

We always took a 'piece' with us, which was simply a sandwich of bread and jam. We ate this after our swim. There were beach huts in the 'bents'. We had the use of one of those huts for one or two summers. The Station Hotel had two blocks of huts which had five or six separate 'huts' in each block for their guests. There was also a large open fronted wooden shelter for public use, standing where the lifeboat shed is today.

About 150 yards towards Embo, from this large shelter, was the swimming pool, built possibly in the late 1920's. It had been constructed using the natural rock formation with the gaps filled by walls of a mix of cement, stones and bricks. Even today one comes across broken pieces of pool wall and there is still about 10 yards left of the southern side wall in place. The stumps of the valve can still be seen as well.

The ravages of the sea and wind broke the walls down within a few years of construction. It must have been delightful and well sheltered from the north and north eastern winds by the natural headland and high rocks. I believe that Mr Arthur, my father's one time partner, was one of those local people responsible for the building of the pool.

Clothes rationing with coupons had began in 1941 and the following year 'utility clothes' appeared. These were mass produced clothes made to a certain standard. Children in a family always wore hand-me-downs. Demonstrations were given to all ladies organisations, showing them how to re-fashion existing outfits. My mother being petite, altered some of her clothes into my clothes. We bought a small black 'last', so that we could mend our own boots and shoes. 'Soles' and 'heels' were available to buy. I think every child had Wellington boots.

Curtains of black cloth were sewn for windows, but no pieces were wasted and sewn together scraps became my witch's outfit for Halloween.

Sheets that became worn were cut down the middle and then sewn together again sides to middle!

Shirts had collars removed then turned round and sewn back on again, or a new collar could be made from the tail of a shirt. Patches were sewn on to the elbows of men's and boys jackets. 'Make do and mend' was a slogan of the time.

Stockings for Ladies became scarce and of course needed 'coupons' so some ladies coloured their legs with a cosmetic 'paint' a suntan colour, and drew a mock seam down the backs of their legs. 'Tights' of course didn't exist. We children wore knee-high woollen socks in winter, and ankle socks in summer though usually we were bare-legged all summer.

Knitting was a universal activity, and ladies knitting groups were formed. They knitted comforts for the troops, and for their families they made jumpers, cardigans, socks, scarves, gloves, bonnets and babies clothes. 'Holes' in clothes were always darned or patched. Socks could be given new life by being ripped back from toe to heel and then knitting on a new foot. Rag rugs were made of odds and ends of material, because soft furnishings and furniture was scarce and rationed, 'utility' furniture appeared in shops and was made to a universal standard and design.

In the kitchen even pots and pans could be mended with little metal patches that were placed over the hole or leak, and then screwed fast.

In Primary 3 we sewed an apron with cross over straps, and added a little embroidery. That took us a whole year, and I still have that apron. In Miss Mackay's Class 5 we knitted socks and sewed a pair of knickers. Turning the heel of the sock was difficult and I think Miss Mackay did most of the 'turning' for us. All our wool began as a skein and had to be wound into a ball by one girl holding out the skein while another wound the wool into the ball. In the qualifying class we wove scarves on small looms.

We wore sandals in the summer and the toes were cut out when our feet grew too large for the sandals to make them fit comfortably. Slippers could be made from pieces of felt.

The Brownies and Guides knitted little squares which were then sewn together to make blankets for 'comforts' for the troops.

Mrs Sykes who owned the Castle, sometimes had bridge and whist parties to which my mother would go to raise more funds for the troops.

Fund raising was continuous. There were concerts put on by Guides, Brownies, Scouts etc., usually in the Drill Hall. As a Brownie, I remember acting "Where are you going to my pretty maid". I was the swain and Doran Strachan was the Pretty Maid.

Fetes, large and small were organised. My mother was now a Vice-President of the Sutherland Red Cross Society, and she was involved in organising a Red Cross fete and sale of work in the Drill Hall. I think this was the occasion when Duchess Eileen came to present the prizes. I was seven and my task was to sell flower buttonholes, which were set on a tray hung by a ribbon round my neck. I was very worried about giving the correct change if required.



Lorna and Colin at the Red Cross fete in 1941

At those fetes there was usually a fancy dress parade for children, and even baby shows with prizes! There was always a 'Bran Tub' filled with sawdust which was full of little parcels. One paid 3d. or 6d. for a dip in the Tub. There were raffles and tombolas and a few competitions of one kind or another.

In 1944 the school held a large sale of work and what we had 'made' had to be bought by our parents. My class organised the bric-a-brac stall, and we made the most money £70.

At another fund raiser, we children went down to the Meadows, and could have a little ride in a tank. It was a bumpy experience. When tanks were on manoeuvres they took up practically the whole width of the road to our house, Poles Road then wasn't as wide as it is today.

We liked to go and look at the planes on the airfield. We weren't allowed near, but we could see them and the large guard dogs. One excitement for us was the day a large bomber over shot the runway and ended up in the Burn. There were other plane crashes to go and see, one at Proncy and another at Skelbo. The Wellington Bombers seemed very large to us.

In 1941, the King's brother the Duke of Kent was killed when his plane crashed into a mountain in Sutherland. We were quite thrilled when we heard that the King had passed near Dornoch on his way to visit the accident spot.

Another King who actually came to Dornoch was King Haakon of Norway. We only heard about the visit afterwards. After the war the Norwegians presented Dornoch with an inscribed golden plaque, thanking the people of the town for their kindness towards their soldiers during the years they were billeted here. This plaque can be seen in the Cathedral.

Travelling during the war could be difficult. Petrol was strictly rationed, and trains were often disrupted. Priority was given to service personnel. Trains through Inverness were always crowded because of the service men and women passing to and from Invergordon and the air and naval bases at Wick and the Orkneys.

At Invergordon we could see the huge oil tanks for the ships fuelling at the port. I clearly remember the dreadful noise of bombs being dropped at Invergordon not far from Dornoch as the 'crow flies'. There was a Fleet Air Arm airfield at Evanton.

When the evacuation was announced of an area across the Firth from Dornoch, my father told us that we, in Dornoch might have to have evacuated families billeted with us, we children were very thrilled at the prospect. This never happened.

The Meikle Ferry was in regular use during the war. We once cycled to the ferry with our London cousin, put our bikes in the boat, and Sandy, the ferryman rowed us over to the Tain side. We then cycled into Tain, bought ice cream, cycled back to the ferry where we raised the white flag and waited for Sandy to row across and collect us.



Mother and Alister outside the Sutherland Arms Hotel in 1936 (at a wedding)

The burning down of the Sutherland Arms Hotel was a sad event that I remember quite well. As usual we were all down in the Square to see this and another burning I saw was at Cheadle House in the High Street, where the bookshop now stands.

Hearing of the deaths of local boys was always very sad for us. Quite a number survived but with permanent injuries.

When we went to the beach to swim and play, we would see patches of oil and tar clinging to the rocks. We knew this meant that a ship had been sunk in the North Sea. The beach was somewhat marred by the long sewer pipe which ran out to sea from near the Dornoch Burn. We were told not to bathe too close to the sewer. In those days it was quite normal for the effluent to be discharged into the sea!

Dornoch in the 1930's must have been a very good shopping town and if one couldn't leave town easily, everything was there. Five grocers shops, one where Luigi's is, called T. S. Matheson, another, Slater's, where the Post Office is, and three more in the High Street. All these shops had messenger boys with bicycles. The cycles had deep front baskets for carrying the groceries to homes around the town, Gillespies, where M. G. Ross is today, was the newsagent, tobacconist and stationers.

There was another little stationers and tobacconists – Willie Moore's in Castle Street where Dornoch Outdoor is now. We bought our school jotters and pencils at Willie Moore's. Newspapers were printed with fewer pages as the war progressed. The Northern Times was very thin!

Country Images housed a sweetie and tobacconist shop, and was next door but one to a butchers shop, Munro & Grant. There was another butcher's shop, John Grant & Sons, where the supermarket is in Cathedral Square today.

There were two bakeries, one where the Spar Food Market is in Castle Street, and that was Mrs Macrae's. As well as selling bakery goods, she had a shelf of large old fashioned glass sweetie bottles, which always looked so inviting. The other bakers shop was in the High Street, Omands it was called, now where the Daisy Chain is. I think it had a little tea room as well.

There was a cycle/electrical shop, Wills, in the High Street, and another electrician's shop at the other end of the street, next to the little bridge over the Dornoch Burn. In Castle Street there was a 'shoemakers' just across the road from the Eagle Hotel. The 'Eagle' is still functioning today and quite different from the old-fashioned men's pub that it was in the past.

There was a hairdresser's, McGregor's, with separate salons for women and men, now part of John Grant & Sons, opposite the Cathedral's West Gate.

In St. Gilberts Street, was the dairy, Wrights, and behind their house, now named 'Glenaldie' was the Byre for the cows. Sometimes we went there to watch the milking, and Mr Wright always made us feel welcome. The dairy made the most delicious ice cream ever, but there were a few ice cream free years, because of milk rationing. Our milk was delivered each morning to the house, Pete Wright came to Inveran with a horse and cart and we took out our milk jugs for him to ladle in our ration.

He had two horses, one called Daisy (brown) and the other named Bess who was black. Sometimes Pete would give us a ride in the cart as far up the road as Balloan and then back again. We thought that was wonderful. The fields around Inveran were ploughed by 'Daisy' and 'Bess', dragging a plough with a ploughman guiding them.

The cows grazed in the fields around Inveran House and we would see them being driven up from the byre in the morning and then back to the byre in the late afternoon.

The old Post Office, which still has Post Office carved in stone over the door, was where the Jail Coffee Shop is today, and opposite the old Post Office across the square was the Police Station at Shore Road.

Frazers of Perth was a very fine tweed and clothing shop where the Lowry Tearooms are, but if we wanted wool or blankets or rugs we went to the Mill at Rogart.

There were three other clothes shops, W. S. Fraser in the High Street, now the Cathedral Café, another where Dornoch Antiques and Collectables is in the Square and a third where Castle Close Antiques is.

This clothes shop was George Moir's shop and he was in fact the Cathedral organist in the late 40's, as well as running a dance band which played at dances all around Dornoch.

Near to the Station was the telephone exchange. In those days when one wished to make a call, one had to ask the operator to get the number required for us.

At one time there was also a Jewellers shop but I cannot recall where it was. R. R. Johnson was the chemists, and still on the same site as all those years ago, under a different name today. Perfume and make-up was sold at the Chemist's, but we tried to make our own perfume by gathering rose petals. This never turned out correctly. A burnt out match stick could be an eye brow pencil, and weak tea could be a hair colouring.

There was one tailor, Mr Simpson, who ran his business at his home, 1 Sutherland Road. I was once in his work room, upstairs, the walls covered with hanging garments, and the floor covered with bolts of cloth and cloth patterns. He was reputed to be a very good tailor.

As paper became scarcer and scarcer, we never threw any paper bags away. They were shaken and folded and used again and again. One took one's own paper bags to go shopping. Envelopes were re-used by covering the open end with a stick-on label.

There were two banks, as today, one in the High Street, the other in Castle Street. In those days the bank managers and their families lived in the Bank Houses of which the bank offices were an integral part.

The Smiddy was down at the Meadows and we sometimes went to watch the blacksmith shoeing a horse at his forge.

Before the war the train was well used for goods traffic as well as by passengers. We often went down there to see the 'Coffee Pot' as we called the engine. Sometimes we put pennies on the rails, and waited to see the result after the engine rolled over them. (A dangerous practice, but we didn't give it a thought). Every level crossing had its gatekeeper who lived beside the track. Across the road from the Station was a stone quarry. Today there is a house and garden there.

Above the station on the grassy slope, was the grave of a Viking or so we believed. Whether it was or not, I was never able to prove (I now know that it was a Celtic grave!)

Towards the end of the war German prisoners came to Sutherland. There was a camp for them at Culmaily, and they were driven by truck each day to and from their work, mostly on farms. There was one young soldier, Johnnie, who worked in Dornoch, at Robertson & Porters Garage. We used to speak to him as he waited on Castle Street to be collected after his days work. He was only 16 years.

I remember once travelling from Inverness to Edinburgh at the end of the war and German prisoners were in a compartment in our coach, with the blinds drawn down.

Two Germans once ran away, but were soon recaptured and taken to the Dornoch Police Station. Somehow they got away again, but were found hiding under the Dornoch Burn Bridge. There were also Italian prisoners near Dornoch.

War soon ended after the atomic bombs were dropped on Japan, but when we heard the news we cheered and jumped for joy in our class. Later, Colin remembers going to the station to watch parts of planes being loaded on the train, to be taken south for disposal.

A noteworthy day around this time was when a boy in my class came to school with a real banana, the first banana we had seen for years. His father had a grocers shop.

Towards the end of the war the first double decker buses came to Dornoch. I remember that we were all allowed to stand up and look out of our classroom windows to see this wonder.

Around this time we were each given a French pen-pal. My one lived in Valenciennes. She wrote to me in French and I wrote to her in English!

Victory in Europe Day was the 8th of May 1945. It came as no real surprise, for we knew that the end of the war was imminent. The best thing for me that day was that my friend, Marina, brought along to my house, a tiny gray and white kitten and after some persuasion my mother said that we could keep her. We called her 'Vicky'.

We had had two dogs in the wartime, firstly a bulldog, Prince, who was shot dead by a farmer for straying into his fields, and secondly a Samoyed, Rimsky, who had to be given back to the kennels of his birth for sheep worrying. No more dogs after that.



Lorna with Vicky who was born on VE Day



Rimsky the Samoyed

V.J. Day (Victory over Japan) came on the 14th of August 1945, and after that there was a huge bonfire on the Golf Course, near to the 18th Green to celebrate.

My family was invited to see this spectacle from General Davidson's house in Grange Road. It was a very wet night, but we thought it was wonderful.

Now that the war was over, I remember wondering just what news could there possibly be in the newspapers.

Just after the war ended, the dairy started to make ice cream again. One could buy a two penny; a four penny, or a six penny 'cone' or 'Slider'; and a little later on a Fish and Chip Shop opened. This was owned by Mr. 'San' McGregor. The Chip Shop was in a small cottage down the little lane from Castle Street, behind no. 5 Castle Street.

After the war, a few of Dornoch's service men and women came back to the Academy to study for the 'Highers' Certificates to enable them to go to University or College. I remember them sitting at the back of our classroom and always very diligent!



Inveran house on Victory Day 1945

There was yet one more concert in the Drill Hall. This was a Welcome Home concert for the servicemen and women, yet again I sang “Jeannie with the light brown hair” thankfully for the last time.



My class at the end of the war



A school sports day and picnic at the Meadows dated 8 June 1946. I am 4th from the left in the seated back row. Colin is sitting 7th from the left in the front row.

These were truly six momentous years in our lives but at least another six years were to pass before life returned to normal. One could say that things were never the same again.

Lorna (Macrae) Currie
March 2006.