

PART 2. WHENCE CAME THEY?

GLENSHEE PROJECT 1988

Six of us sat round our fireside at Bleaton Hallett Lodge on the afternoon of November 16 1987. The date was significant only in the sense that it happened to be my 80th birthday. Margaret and Iain Smart from Auchinleash, Persie, and Valerie and Leslie Johnston from Lorien, Kirkmichael, had come to share our modest celebration. We had proved on an earlier occasion that they are congenial company. This made the occasion very gladsome.

Our talk turned as it had turned earlier to old times and in my mind was a remark made by Iain on that earlier occasion, "What a pity our grandfathers didn't leave better records of their times." I looked around, between us we had personal experiences of medicine, university research and lecturing, physiotherapy, of education, publishing and collecting valuable books, of graphology, amateur painting, philosophy and journalism and it occurred to me that we might do for our times a simple record. I proposed that each of us on our birthdays in 1988 should do a talk and in that talk basically answer two questions. 1. How I became a "Glenner" in Glenshee, and 2. Remembered times in the Glen. To my intense pleasure the proposal was accepted unanimously. It was a lovely birthday present.

The first date to come up was Valerie Johnston, February 8; unfortunately snow on the roads and winter illnesses caused us to postpone. But now it appears that I have to do today's talk. This is Feb 17 1988 and I would like you to think of the Glen in part, that is from where Shee water becomes Blackwater and down following the Blackwater river to Bridge of Cally where the Blackwater joins the Ardle and becomes the Ericht. This is a distance of about 10 miles and today we whizz through it in about 10 minutes, but in my day it was a big step. It took us an hour or more to walk or cycle and with a horse and cart even longer perhaps.

Now if we start up at the top of this section Cray church is closed and this is perhaps significant of what the Glen is as it appears to me today. I may before I finish give you the idea that it is reminiscent of "How Green was My Valley," because this is the theme really. Cray Church is closed, Dalnaglar Castle is turned into flats, Cray House is, I think, more or less closed and the owners make use of a little bungalow further down the Glen. Mount Blair Lodge has one occupant; Mrs Shaw lives there, widowed in the last year. Her husband was a very well known doctor in the Glen, who should have been succeeded by his son, had to retire leaving no member of his family in the practice in Blairgowrie because the son who was to have followed him was killed in an avalanche in Austria 10, 15 years ago.

Now come further down the Glen on the back road, round by Mount Blair; the crofts are very deserted these days, there are sheep in the fields but very little sign of life otherwise. We come down to the Milton which was a well run farm when Stewart Cameron was there and incidently it was the site of the mill at Milton which was run by my great grandfather. Marty, my wife, and I have explored that area and could find no trace of that mill, though Tony Woodman, the former postman of the Royal Mail, said that he saw the mill stone as late as 1970. Pathetic really to look at it from my point of view now. Blacklunans Post Office is closed, up the hill there Drumore is but a shadow of what it was. In Professor Ramsay's day it was a very good house and he built a magnificent staircase for his invalid daughter. He also had a magnificent four-poster bed which was taken out, broken up before we knew about it; Marty and I had slept in it on our honeymoon.

We had come up the Glen from Pitlochry to get back to heather hills and we had in mind to buy this lodge at Bleaton Hallet. We didn't disclose in the beginning our connection with the Glen but Jean and Janet, the two waitresses, discovered what the connection was and Janet Cameron brought her father up there. Her father, when he was 12, had taken my father, when he was 6, to my father's first day at Blackwater School. We had a hectic evening. In those days, when it was turned into a hotel, there was no bar. If you wanted a drink you went into the back kitchen. So we were invited down and we went into the back kitchen and Marty was greeted through the blue smoke and haze and everything with the exclamation "Mrs Baur, what on earth are you doing here?" and, as she was registered as Mrs Stewart, there was a certain embarrassment. We were both right, I was right in registering her as Mrs Stewart and the fellow who called out hadn't heard, and correctly called Mrs Baur. It was the manw who had bought her old car when she left Glen Prosen.

Now come down that road again and turn off just before you get to the old post office and up the hill there is the Old Schoolhouse. It is bigger now than it was in my early days because it was the house where my grandfather and grandmother lived for many years and brought up a family of 6 sons and 2 daughters. They moved to Dundee for work for the youngsters late in the last century or early in the present century. I think the house is well occupied these days but I am not sure.

Down again through that road we come to Drumfork and there Mrs Walker Munro still lives, probably with her son. She is very old and the house is somewhat dead. If we go through the steading at Drumfork and up to a little disused graveyard in the fields there, we find among other gravestones that of my great grandfather and great grandmother and their family. The memorial stone reads "In memory of James Stewart who died at Middleton, Dalrulzion, 8 March 1894 aged 74 years and Agnes Tait, wife of the above who died 25 January 1915 aged 88

years." The stone also records two persons of whom we have no knowledge - Isabella Stewart who died 3 January 1882 aged 20 years and Jane Ann Stewart who died 26 March 1872 aged 11 weeks. My great grandfather had been the miller at Milton of Blacklunans and before that he had been the miller at Mill of Cosh in Aberdeenshire and he had come sometime in the middle of last century from Strathdon. Marty and I went up to Strathdon one year and looked at the graveyard up there and it was so full of Stewarts we couldn't discover which were ours. We had been also up to Mill of Cosh and it is extraordinary that whereas the mill at Milton of Blacklunans has gone completely the one at Mill of Cosh not only stands but has been reconstituted. To my pleasure I was photographed standing against my great grandfather's millwheel.

Now let's go down the road from the graveyard to the school house at the Blackwater which was closed just two years ago after celebrating its centenary. I was fortunate due to the kindness of the teacher in seeing registers of the years when my family were taken there and I have in front of me at this moment one from these, the 80s of last century when my father's name appears with my uncle's and on that same list are names which are familiar in the Glen today, Cuthbert, Lamond, Straiton, Campbell, Graham, Jackson, Ferguson and so on. The school is now converted into some sort of centre for climbers.

The Mains, the farm on the right just below the school is now occupied by David Stewart and his wife. In former years it was a very busy place indeed with the family there, many sons and a daughter and I will come to them in my next talk.

Down yet again, the Dalrulzion Hotel, which was "the big house" in my young day, owned by a Lancashire mill owner (I think he was and he owned the Dalrulzion Estate. Down at the Craigton he had his gamekeeper's house and his kennels and he owned Loch Mvarach up on the hill and I used to go out beating with his parties on the shooting days.

Come down now to the "Blue Bridge", blue ever since I was a boy; across there is the Easter Bleaton Farm and beyond that the Faulds where David and Betty Waddell now live and a house in which I have slept - I think I have slept in 6 or 7 houses in the Glen altogether.

Come back to the main road and down to the Middleton Farm. Now I shan't say much about the Middleton Farm at this point because it will be the centre of my next talk. Beyond, down there, is the Craigton Farm which is owned by James Jackson now and he is also the tenant of Blackhall Farm up the side road across our bridge. and it will break his heart to be leaving Blackhall Farm come term time this year because his family have been in it for 50 years.