

Remembered times in the Glen – Will Stewart, O.B.E., born 1902, war correspondent and editor for Northcliffe Newspapers, retired to Bleaton Hallet Lodge, 1981.

Starting at the top of Blackwater, 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. He had to retire, leaving no member of his family in the practice in Blairgowrie, because his 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, and 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, incidentally, 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 millstone as late as 1970. Blacklunans Post Office now is closed, up the hill, 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 fine four-poster bed, which was taken out and broken up.

Come down the road and, just before you get to the old post office and up the hill, is the old schoolhouse. It is bigger now, because it was the house where my grandparents lived for many years and brought up a family of six sons and two daughters. They moved to Dundee for work.

Further down, we come to Drumfork, and there Mrs Walker Munro still lives, probably with her son. If we go through the steading and up to a little disused graveyard in the fields there, we find among the other stones that of my great-grandparents. The stone reads "In memory of James Stewart, who died at Middleton, Dalrulzion, 8<sup>th</sup> March, 1894, aged 74, and Agnes Tait, wife of above, who died 25<sup>th</sup> January, 1915, aged 88".

My great-grandfather had been miller at Milton of Blacklunans. He had come sometime in the middle of the last century from Strathdon.

In the Blackwater school register, are found the names of Stewart, Cuthbert, Lamond, Straiton, Campbell, Graham, Jackson, Ferguson, etc. The school is now converted into a centre for climbers.

The Mains, the farm on the right 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.

On to Dalrulzion Hotel, which was the 'big house' in my young days, owned by a Lancashire mill-owner (I think) and he owned the Dalrulzion estate. Down at the Craigton was the gamekeeper's house and kennels, and he owned Loch Mharaich up on the hill. I used to go out beating with his parties on the shooting days.

Come down to the 'Blue Bridge', blue ever since I was a boy; across there is Easter Bleaton farm and, beyond that, the Faulds, where David and Betty Waddell now live, and a house in which I have slept.

Back to the main road, is the Middleton farm, and beyond is Craigton farm, which is owned by James Jackson. He is also the tenant of Blackhall farm, over the Bleaton bridge and up the hill. It will break his heart to be leaving Blackhall come term-time, as his family have been in it for fifty years.

Below Persie church (being used as a farm building) is Auchinleash. This is the old manse where the incumbent in my days was Tammy Smith, a real character of a minister.

Middleton of Dalrulzion Farm was farmed, in my young days, by my great-uncle, Charles Stewart, with his wife, Isabella Campbell. On the farm, which consisted of six fields and the moor, was Middleton Cottage. It stood between the farm buildings and the Blue Bridge, and was occupied last century and early this century by my great-grandparents.

I spent many a day and night in this cottage. It was but a but and ben under a thatched roof, with a little room at the back. There was no sanitation and no water laid on. There was a peat fire, which never went out, with a sway over it. The windows would not open. On the mantelpiece were pictures of Lord Kitchener, Earl Roberts, Baden Powell, and a framed set of verses. This was written by one of the sons, in memory of his brother, who was lost on the hill in a winter storm beyond Easter Bleaton.

To get water for the house, we had to take two pails and walk up to the Blue Bridge and, a little beyond it, there was a hole in the dyke, where we got down several steps to the edge of the river, just where the Pulloch burn joins the Blackwater, where we filled the pails. This was a daily routine.

I don't know when the cottage was demolished. It was after I went to London. There is a postbox at the roadside. In my day, the shed at the end of the cottage was a woodshed, but it was also used as the mailshed. Mail coming up the Glen, would unload the local mail there, and the local postman would sort it in the shed. Behind that mailbox, there is now a caravan park, which causes me distress every time I pass it.

My recollection of life at the Middleton was that it was so full of people. There was my great-uncle, Charlie, a patriarchal figure, and his wife, Aunt Bella. They had no children, but she had a brother, who was retarded, mentally and physically, Charlie Campbell. He was a beautiful old man, with white hair and blue eyes. He carried his right arm above his head. He used a stick all the time. Kirning butter was one of his things, while singing away to himself.

Aunt Bella had a maid, who was sometimes a relative, and sometimes a girl from Glasgow. There was a horseman and a cattleman about the place the whole time. There were dogs and always a collie, called Tweed. There were pigs, two herds of Aberdeen Angus cattle, and a bull, and two horses.

When a stallion came up the road with his driver to serve the mares in the area, the ceremony was carried out in the open road. When cows were brought to the bull for service, again it would be on the road. Traffic just didn't exist.

The day's routine was interesting. Milking would be done about 5 a.m., then we would come in for breakfast. After that, the animals were taken out to graze, or ploughing, whatever was going on at the time. By 10.30, time for our pieces. We'd sit down wherever we were, and it would be brought out to us by the maid. Then we would work on till dinner time. Meanwhile, the dairy work was going on, making butter and cheese. Dinner came, and we always had a rest. Afternoon was a repetition of the morning with a break for a piece again, and high tea at six o'clock. Tend to the animals, and bring in the cattle. About 8 p.m., after supper, we would settle down to prayers and

reading from the Good Book, which was done very sonorously by my great-uncle. He really was very good at it, and that was it, early to bed.

Now from the beginning of the year to the end, more or less, it began with great excitement about the curling. We went off to bonspiels whenever the conditions were right. Come February, there was the Perth Bull sales. Then the spring field work and lambing. By early summer, it was out to the moor to cut and stack peat, and then came hay making. The feature of this was there lived in Balcraggan, which is beyond Soilzarie, way down in the dip, three old maids, sisters, the Misses Macintosh. They would come along in their long dresses and sunbonnets as a threesome, and work in the fields on the hay. When the harvest came, they would come again. Now when they went home at night – they would be chatting away all day – it took the form of them having a meal and sitting round the fire, and there would be no conversation at all, except one would say ‘aye, aye’, and another would say ‘well, well’, and the third would say ‘yes, yes’ – and that was all.

After the harvest was in, the milking would begin, and Uncle Charlie and his noisy mill run, not by water but by engine power of some kind.

Come September, great excitement because the Mount Blair show was on. It was always held on the Saturday after the Braemar games, which, in those days, was held on a Thursday.

One summer’s day we had a day’s fishing on Drumore Loch. My great-uncle, during our lunch, had been talking with Steele, the gamekeeper, about the forthcoming Mount Blair Show agricultural. Back in the office at Dundee, that night, I asked the country sub-editor, who organised this particular schedule, if I could be given the chance to cover the show for the Dundee Courier, on which, at this time, I was what was called, the telephone clerk, and my job was to take copy over the telephone. I had done no actual reporting. He discussed this with the Agricultural Correspondent and the Editor, and I was given the all-clear. So, on the first weekend in September, I made my way up the Glen. Looking back from 1988, I see that I witnessed an aspect of British life and practically a passing of an era. First with my bicycle in the guard’s van, I progressed by a section of the old Caledonian Railway, that went from Dundee West Station, half round the city, then meandered through parts of Forfarshire and into Perthshire. The train travelled so slowly that people could climb out and pick flowers and return safely. The engine and the few coaches in their vivid blue and white livery had a dignity that those familiar with British Railways nowadays cannot comprehend. The passengers were people of the countryside and, listening to them, one obtained detailed farming knowledge of the farms and villages and small towns past which we crept, and the stations at which we dawdled. All this has gone. Blairgowrie was the terminal station. I knew it not only as the station I used, but the railway from which, with horse and cart, we collected bags of seed and fertilizer for the farm.

It had one major claim to distinction – Queen Victoria had once arrived there to drive in coach and four up our Glen on the way to Balmoral. At the head of the Glen, men of Glenshee had unyoked the team of horses and themselves pulled her up the Devil’s Elbow to the Cairnwell at the county border, where men from Aberdeenshire were waiting to take over.

From Blairgowrie, a horse bus ran, daily, otherwise transport possibilities were to journey as far Bridge of Cally by the extraordinary omnibus operated by the Aldchlappie Hotel, Kirkmichael, and then by my great-uncle’s horse and trap, or by bicycle. The omnibus, named Highland Mary, had rows of seats open to the winds but, on stanchions, a roof that was also a giant luggage rack, and a big boot at the rear. Some Monday mornings, when weekend guests were city bound, the sight of this monster, fully loaded, and with some daredevils on the roof and others in the boot, rumbling down the Glen at what then seemed a terrific speed, was a fascinating spectacle. Road traffic was

then light and, at all hamlets and farms, chickens, dogs, cows, sheep and children, were scared at the sudden uproar. For me, at that time, there was no choice but to cycle the eleven miles up to the Middleton Farm, where I arrived for supper.

Then for the real activity, the grooming of the bull calf, the horses and the saddlery, and the ewes and lambs, for the morrow's show yard. It was the time of the great boom in Aberdeen Angus cattle. Every year at the Perth sales in February, there were fortunes to be made with pedigree quality bulls or bull calves. One of our neighbouring farms, Easter Bleaton, was run by partners, Marshall and Mitchell, and for several years they were widely known. Once, when attending Perth sales with my great-uncle and father, I got bored at one stage and picked up my great-uncle's walking stick and twisted it in my hands. Suddenly, he plucked it from me and shouted an apology to the auctioneer. I had just signalled a bid for a bull calf going for 2,000 guineas!

In those days, there were few mechanical aids and no electric light, but there was plenty of labour and, that evening, the farmer, his wife and the wife's maid, the ploughman, the men in the bothy and I, started to polish the saddlery and hooves, brushed and combed the animals, fixed coloured ribbons on bridles, collars and saddles, till the cows were milked in the gloaming. Then, indoors, and in the oil-lit farm kitchen with the peat fire which never went out and the big cooking pot, the pails of water from the pump and the scrubbed white wood table, and the wag-it-the-wa' clock and the big bed, we had the night's reading and prayer. The sonorous voice of my great-uncle and his reading set off the emotions, and when we sank to our knees on the stone flags for our prayers, his reading was echoed by our 'amens'. There was then a silence for private worship with only the sounds of the hiss of the boiling kettle above the heat of the glowing peat and the hard tick of the wag-it-the-wa'.

To bed, then, by candlelight, and a book. And the wholesome fear lest I be discovered wasting the candle by my stern great-aunt.

And in the morning, a sight not to be seen nowadays, standing in the porch, covered with late blooming honeysuckle beginning, in the growing heat of the day to perfume the already glorious Highland, air, we watched a seemingly endless line of people in their best clothes, cattle, horses and sheep, in their best too, walking up the Glen to the show field, a couple of miles north of the Middleton. There were many horse-drawn vehicles, the very occasional car but it was all in the old style, for the motor had not yet claimed ascendancy and domination in the daily life of man. I helped in the lining up of our stock and their attendants, the collie dog going nearly mad with excitement, and acted as policeman when a gap in the traffic permitted us to open the farmyard gates and take our place.

Then I fetched my cycle and pedalled quickly along the flank of the procession and on to the show yard under the mass of Mount Blair by the Blackwater River. My time was spent in the Secretary's tent, copying down results. In the afternoon, it was possible to find time to watch the horses and their sports. Then back to the farm with our beasts and our prizes – praise be, our bull calf had justified all our hopes! Then to bed down the animals for the night, and get ready with thanksgiving and praise for the morrow's sermon. After the noon kirk, I cycled the thirty miles back to Dundee – no trains on Sunday – and handed in my copy, and began my night's work. The Country Sub had a few queries that required accommodation; when I saw the first edition I found he had given me a very good show. I was, of course, never paid a penny for it, nor in those days did one expect it. Looking back, I should place that day in September, 1924.

When I look back, as I sometimes do, I realise with quite a shock that my involvement in the Blackwater has spanned the time from the horse age to the space age. A surprising statement? Not really. When I was a boy, there was no means of transport in the Glen but horse-drawn vehicles. Today, in 1988, you go indoors of an evening, switch on your television and get your weather report by satellite transmission or photographs and, may you be forgiven, your entertainment by satellite transmission from the United States!

In this era, horse age to space age, so much has happened, so many surprising things have happened in connection with Glen life. Take electricity. Till the 1950's, when it was brought as far north as Glenkilry, the only electricity in the Glen was by privately owned generators, with all their peculiar troubles. Otherwise the 'Big Hoose', the local hotels had to depend on container gas, oil lamps, candles, even cruses. And from Glenkilry to the Spittal, it has to wait until 1960 or 1961.

Now look at plumbing, from the days when a house had no inside water or toilet, it proceeded to pumps and then to pipeline distribution of water from our own springs or burns. But there were no all-round gains. Sometimes in the 1960s, herds were abandoned and today, the local farmer, as well as the adjacent residents, get their milk in cartons from a wagon that comes up every other day. Progress?

The telephone – aha! In my youth, the only telephones were in post offices and doctors' surgeries and chemists' shops, and in grocers' stores. I still remember being brought to a friendly grocer's in Dundee to receive a pre-arranged call from my father, then in Cupar, Fife. It was an event out of this world. But today, farmers talk to farmers and, more importantly, farmers' wives talk to farmers' wives without thinking twice about the matter. And then, there is the CB Radio. In the old days, the only market place for gossip between farmers' wives was outside the kirk after the service on the Sabbath.

And think then of rabbits. It was common then for my great-uncle of an evening in the summer to take down his shotgun from the rack, call me and call Tweed, the collie, and wander down a dykeside and, in half an hour, get sufficient rabbits, hale and hearty, to provide meals for a week. Now, of course, there is myxomatosis. The alternative was, on very wet days, when little work could be done, to take down our rods and go down to the riverbank. On many such nights, the river would be in spate, and we would dangle our worms in what earlier in the day had been a grassy hollow, and fish out a dozen or so brown trout, without the slightest difficulty. You can't do that today.

Forestry. Now here is a complaint. Opposite our house is a hillside. No one consulted us, but it was planted with young trees. It is now a forest and hides, among other things, the famous old rocking stone. Gone is my heather hillside, gone the views of Blackwater and Glenshee that we had and worse, the scrub trees on the riverside, striving for life, have grown up to fifty or so.

Let's go back to the beginning, the coming of the horseless carriage and the mechanical horse, and also the powered bicycle. It changed the Glen so much.

I cannot recall the first horseless carriage in the Glen, but I do remember earlier incidents. I was probably first acquainted with the horseless carriage when a chartered vehicle came up and stood outside the Middleton to disperse letters and newspapers. It was, in effect, the brake with an engine instead of a horse. There was a bench for the driver and two passengers, behind was a brake in the style of that pulled by horses, benches along either side, passengers facing each other, fixed roof on stanchions, waterproof shields that could be pulled down in inclement weather. Now that gives rise to a story. So far as I know, the post office contract with McLennans for delivery of mail up the Glen lasted till the 1960s. The last driver under the McLennan banner was Davie Cray, a real

personality. When he came towards you with a handful of mail and newspapers, with his pipe stuck firmly in the side of his mouth, you saw a real Scotsman ready to take on the powers of the world. I always had a mental picture of David in the 1914-18 war, wearing a Black Watch uniform, in a trenched defence system, awaiting the approach of a Prussian guardsman, saying "What the de'il do you think you're dae'n?" Anyway, Davie drove the McLennan van six days a week. On the seventh day, he did not rest. He got out his own car, parked his wife in the passenger seat, and drove up the Glen, just to be sure all was well.

I will digress for one more story, a classic, I think. David Cray was persuaded one year to drive to London. He came back earlier than his friends had anticipated. They asked how he had got on. "Ach", said Davie, "I was ga'in into London, and when I got near traffic lights, I found I was in the wrong dreel, so I just turned round and came home again".

A memory of cars in the Glen that sticks in my memory was that of the year 1919. To explain. My father had been exempted from military service till 1917, because he was graded as the sole support of his widowed mother, but shortage of men caused a revision. He was called up, and became a leading driver in a field artillery unit, which transferred to France in 1918, and became a flying column. He went missing in the German push of 1918, but eventually turned up. After the Armistice, he spent his time riding horses round Mons, Wellington battlefield areas. It was decided he should be claimed for agricultural service on the Middleton farm. Thus it was that long, hot summer of 1919, we found ourselves as a family living in a cottage a hundred yards south of the Craighton farm. It no longer exists today. On Sundays, when no work was done on the Middleton, we lay down on the hillside and every now and then, we would spot a pillar of dust arising from the vicinity of Auchenflower. The roads were not then macadamised. As the car, or cars, drew abreast of us, we would wave. If the motorists failed to respond, we would deem them to be 'salaried people'. If they responded, we would declare them to be 'wages people'.

Great-Uncle Charlie had bought a car, second-hand, from Grassicks in Blairgowrie. It was a 1908 Argyll. The Argyll cars were built in Scotland. It had magnificent sweeping lines for an open tourer, a hood that pulled up when required, brake and gear levers on the outside, petrol tin on the foot board and great brass acetylene headlights. It was the first car bought and based in the Blackwater.

But before we even had time to admire it, we, as a family, came up from Dundee and were uplifted from Bridge of Cally to Middleton Farm. Great-Uncle Charlie commandeered us and, with a pole and furled flag on his arm, raced us up to the T-junction of the Kirkmichael road with the Blairgowrie-Braemar road. He made a hole in the bank of the road, inserted his pole and unfurled his flag, the Union flag. Then he directed us towards the traffic coming from Kirkmichael. This we did. There was none for an hour. Then three cars came. In the first was King George V and Queen Mary, in the second was their luggage, in the third whatever security obtained at that time. As the first car swept around the bend, we gave a cheer. King George raised his right hand to his Balmoral bonnet, Queen Mary, wearing her usual toque, bowed gracefully. It was all over in a minute but, thanks to Uncle Charlie, we had done our duty. At this time, the King and Queen were paying an annual visit to the Macintosh of Macintosh at Moy Hall, Inverness, and, on this day, they were proceeding from Moy Hall to Balmoral Castle. For us in those days, it was a great event.

With the coming of the internal combustion engine, life changed. Take the servants, for instance. The normal drill was for the milking and feeding of the cattle to be done early, the herd or herds let out to the fields. Breakfast was special prayers, seeing it was the Lord's day, then preparations for the kirk. If I was around, I would be the one sent out to the moor to bring in the mare, Polly, always an agreeable task for me. I would stable her and give her a modest feed and drink, then, while I

went to put on my Sunday best, the others having already done so, she would be harnessed and yoked to the brake.

Around 11 a.m., she and the brake would be brought out to the road and the cry would be raised, "We're ready". Great Aunt Bell, my mother and any other lady who was bidding at the time at Middleton, would descend in state at a slow pace, then climb into the rear section of the vehicle. Great Uncle Charlie would mount the driving seat and my father and I would fit in along the bench, bringing up the storm rug over our knees. Tweed, the collie, would take up position underneath the brake. The four or five mile drive up the Glen would be done at a stately pace, never overtaking any other vehicle but, as we overtook pedestrians, Uncle Charlie would check the mare, a mere technical effort, and in passing we would have a gossip with them.

On arrival at the kirk, the ladies would descend. They would find other worshippers to have a word with. We would drive over to the stable. Tweed would be tethered to a post, the mare would be unyoked and guided into a stall, but not unharnessed, although she would be given some oats from a bag carried underneath the vehicle. Then we would enter the kirk.

Cray church was United Free Church of Scotland, which meant it was a breakaway from the Church of Scotland. At the time of which I write, it was about fifty or sixty years old. Who had designed it, I do not know, but its layout, semi-circular with a sloping floor and rising tiers of pews, made me think that the architect had had in mind a Scottish covenanting conventical in the hills, with the minister there in the pulpit in front, looking up at his congregation. Preachers were greatly esteemed and accurately assessed on the time and length of their sermons. The little harmonium did its best to direct our singing.

Everyone was in their Sunday best and exhibiting proper manners for the Sabbath. It was at least an hour and a half after the start when the real business of the day started. Ladies who had not seen each other for a week, were gathered and exchanged their news. The men lit their pipes and swapped news of beasts and crops and markets and of horsemen, cattlemen and loons, and noted which of these had come to the kirk on foot or bicycle. Time stood still, but eventually we got moving. Tweed was taken away from his noisy interchanges with other dogs, Polly would be brought out of the stable, and Dilly would be yoked. But there was no immediate move off. The Argyll changed all that!

Milking and feeding of animals was done at a quicker pace, breakfast and Sunday prayers were not exactly rushed, but not exactly extended. Instead of being sent out to the moor for the mare, I was given a duster and ordered to wipe down the chassis of the Argyll with particular attention to the big brass headlights. In the yard, Great Uncle Charles checked the radiator and looked knowingly at the engine, and close the bonnet. He came round to a position in the driving seat and played with the advance and retard arms, which were set on the steering wheel. Then he swung the handle at the front of the vehicle to start the engine. It failed to fire. He came round the vehicle and readjusted the settings of the advance and retard. He returned to the handle and swung again. This was repeated three or four times with intermediate priming-up of the engine system. At last it fired. He raced around the car, stowed the handle, and climbed into the driving seat, drove the car out into the road, shouting, "It's going, it's going", then "Come on, come on". The ladies, accustomed to dignified approaches, did not hurry, so he called again, "I don't want it to stall, hurry, hurry!" They hurried. They entered the rear section of the Argyll, sitting in state. A disconsolate Tweed, tethered in the yard, was abandoned. My father and I sat in front.

As we wended our way up the Glen, we overtook horse-drawn brakes and passed pedestrians, calling out, "We can't stop". We reached the kirk and parked it for a quick get-away, when we had finally achieved the firing of the engine after the service. Some colliers looked in vain for Tweed. The ladies arriving in state, swept in. The minister, in his sermon, talked of astonishing and bewildering advances. We humbly bent our heads, and prayed that all would be well. After service, the get-together was condensed because Uncle Charlie went straight to the Argyll, played with advance and retard, swung the handle and, was it a miracle? The engine fired. He yelled to us, "Come on", and the ladies did so. My father and I mounted the driving bench and we proceeded down the Glen without, on this occasion, having the opportunity to overtake vehicles or pedestrians, and we were early for dinner.

Will Stewart.