

14.

Below the Craigton Farm where there is a bit of woodland now, there stood a cottage and we had this in 1919 when "the boys" were coming home from the First World War and I will talk about that later on too. The Hotel, the Glenshee Inn as they call it nowadays - it's had several names - in my young days it was a mill, a sawmill. It's well occupied and going well these days, it is one of the bright spots in the Glen I should think.

And we come down to the bridge over the falls, Bleaton Hallet Falls of Dalrulzion and up past our lodge is Bleaton Hallet house itself, which used to be the stables or carriage block of the main Bleaton Hallet House which was destroyed by one of its owners, rather a pathetic sight nowadays, some of the walls are still standing, the walled garden is still in existence, of course the stones are lying about. The roof is no longer there.

Up the side road we come to Dalvattan where George Hughes lived. He was the gardener for many years at Bleaton Hallet and he was in later years a postman and very good about plants and flowers and everything and about the history of the Glen and of Bleaton Hallet.

Up beyond that again is Drumlin where two Dr Fergusons now live in their holiday times. I think they have retired from practice in Dundee and they live in Longforgan. This place has a memory for me in the sense that my stepmother's parents were married in Drumlin over 100 years ago.

Up the hill is Blackhall Farm where James Jackson is now completing in 1988 a tenure which goes back 50 years and it will break his heart to leave this place which is so dear to him, but he owns the Craigton and he has built himself a bungalow there for his retirement. To come down the hill again we come to the bridge at Bleaton Hallet, a Bailey bridge nowadays. It used to be a stone bridge, not a humpback or anything like that, just a plain stone bridge which was very charming and ideal for the setting. It was demolished by order of the Council in 1955 because it was no longer capable, so they said, of carrying farm traffic. It was blown up and in its place was put a Bailey Bridge, which we were told would last for 4 years; actually it lasted 24 and has been replaced by another Bailey Bridge, which is now 3 or 4 years old.

Down the Glen now we come to Auchinflower, which at one time was a posting inn where horses were kept for relay changes as the carriages went up and down the Glen. That was before my day. Nowadays I gather it is let off in holiday flats. Opposite there is Persie Church or what was Persie Church. It was closed as a church I think about 20 years ago. I was very sorry about that as it was one of the two churches where our family worshipped and I had the privilege at times of ringing the bell.

Below Persie Church - incidentally Persie Church is now up for sale yet again; it has been used as a farm building and one doesn't know what its future will be - below Persie Church is Auchinleash where Iain and Margaret Smart live. This is the old Manse for the Church where the incumbent in my day was Tammy Smith, a really character of a minister.

We then go down to the Blackpark and below there there isn't much to talk about because the old buildings are away from the roadside and we come to Bridge of Cally which is the end of this particular journey.

I would like now to talk about the Middleton Farm or to give it its full title Middleton of Dalrulzion. This was farmed in my young day by my great uncle Charles Macintosh Stewart with his wife, Isabella Campbell, but on the farm which consisted of 6 fields and the moor there was a cottage, the 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. My great grandfather, James Stewart, died in the 1890s, but my great grandmother lived on, with her sister Jessie Tait for company, in the cottage until her death in 1913.

Now I spent many a day and night in this cottage. It was a but and a ben under a thatched roof with a little room at the back and there was no sanitation and no water supply laid on. There was a peat fire which never went out with a svey over it and the decorations in the house were very primitive. The windows, for instance, would not open; they were fastened tight the whole time. On the mantelpiece stood 3 or 4 old tea caddies with pictures of Lord Kitchener, Earl Roberts, Baden Powell and other South African heroes and also I remember there was a framed set of verses. This was written by one of the sons of the family 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 and there was a hole in the wall in the dyke there and we got down several steps to the river edge and just where the Pulloch Burn joins the Blackwater we filled those pails and carried them all the way back to the cottage. This was a daily routine.

There was an outhouse down the garden. When I slept in the ben of the but and ben there was a box bed there, just as there was in the but and when I lay in bed I could look up at the ceiling of the bed and it was lined with pages from The Scotsman. That I think is how I began my newspaper reading.

Aunt Jessie was a great character, a real old Highland lady, but there was one day when I had her in the fear of death. We were out on the moors cutting peat and stacking it and just before we broke for dinner I noticed a movement on the

hill side. I went towards it and as I approached a doe ran away. I went up to where she had been lying and there was a fawn. I picked up the fawn and took it back to the cottage where we were having our dinner that day and the moment I stepped in with this in my arms Aunt Jessie went wild. "Oh laddie," she said, "Laddie, take that away! You'll have the police on us." She was of that generation which was in fear and trembling of the Laird and all his works.

I don't know when the cottage was demolished; it was after I went to London, but all that remains today of it is this. There is a post box at the road side and the Royal Mail stops there every day and empties it even if there is nothing to collect. This is because in my day the shed at the end of the cottage was a wood shed really but was also used as the mail shed. The mail coming up the Glen would off-load the local mail here and the local postman or postwoman would sort it in the shed, then distribute it and come back in the afternoon with the outgoing mail which was picked up. Behind that postbox there is now a caravan park, which causes me a pang of distress every time I pass it.

To come down now to the farm, this was a good old fashioned Scottish farmhouse. It no longer exists, it was burnt down by a vandal three, four years ago, but in my day it had a front room and a kitchen and three bedrooms up a tight little stair. It had no water inside, but there was a pump in the garden and there was an outhouse down the garden. Now my recollection of life in the Middleton was that it was so full of people, there was my Great Uncle Charlie, a patriarchal figure if ever there was one, and his wife, Aunt Bella. They had no children but she had a brother who was younger than she was and who was mentally and physically retarded, Charlie Campbell. He was a beautiful old man, or getting to be old in my day, with silver white hair, blue blue eyes and a very healthy complexion, but the eyes were vacant. He carried his right arm up above his head, and it went wiggle, waggle as he walked. His left leg was bent at the knee and he used a stick all the time. He just did odd jobs about the place, nothing much, but kirning the butter was one of his things. He would sit there kirning away and singing to himself. He had two notable features. One was that he would engage you in conversation and would inevitably turn it around to the fact that should he die in the winter would they carry his coffin on the top of the wall because the snow blocked the road and the other thing was that we prayed before every meal and he sat with eyes closed. As we opened our eyes there would be Charlie's hand creeping out to the dishes on the table, grabbing something from it.

Aunt Bella had a maid and this was sometimes a young relative and sometimes a girl from Glasgow. There being no sons, we had a horseman and a cattleman and they were about the place the whole time. There were dogs and there was, among the

dogs, always a collie called Sweed. We had pigs. We had two herds of black cattle, Aberdeen Angus, and a bull. There were two horses in the stable, the older was Old Jess, the younger was her daughter, Polly. They were there for many many years, and Old Jess was a great favourite of mine.

I would be sent out to the moor to bring in the horses and being a little lad at the time, I couldn't get up on her broad back until I placed her at a hummock on the moor and she would stand there very patiently while I went about 20 feet away and then took a running approach at my jump and get up and then would come home happily.

I was one day left in charge of letting the cattle out after dinner and nobody had explained to me then the facts of life and I made the mistake of letting the wrong herd out first with the result that Aunt Bella came rushing out swearing and waving her apron and everything trying to keep the bull away from a cow he hadn't seen. Talking of that it was a feature of the place that when the travelling stallion came up the road with his driver, a horseman, to serve the mares in the area the ceremony would be carried out in the open road. When cows were brought to the bull for service the ceremony again would be carried out on the open road. Traffic just didn't exist in those days.

The day's routine was interesting, milking would be done about 6 o'clock in the morning and then we'd come in for breakfast and after that we'd take the animals out to graze or ploughing or whatever was going on at the time. By 10.30 it was time for our piece, we'd sit down wherever we were and it would be brought out to us by the maid. And then we'd go on to dinner time. Meanwhile the dairy work was going on, the skimming and making of butter and cheese. Dinner time came and we always had a rest. Afternoon was more or less a repetition of the morning with a break for a piece again and high tea about 6 o'clock. Tend to the animals and bringing in the cattle. At about 8 o'clock after supper we would settle down to prayers and a reading of a piece from the Good Book which was done very sonorously by my great uncle. He really was very good at it. and that was it, and early to bed. That was the day's routine.

Now from the beginning of the year to the end - more or less it began with a great excitement about the curling. We went off to bonspiels whenever the conditions were right. Come February there was the Perth Bull Sales - I will have something to say about that later on - and then the spring field work and lambing. By early summer it was out, out to the moor to cut and stack peat and then came the 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 and they would come along in their long dresses and their sun bonnets as a threesome and work in the fields on the

hay. When harvest came they would come again. Now when they went home at night - they would be chatting away all day - but when they went home at night it apparently 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 one would say, "Well, well" and the third one would say "Yes, yes" - that was all.

After the harvest was in the milling 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 the loch at Drumore . My great uncle during our lunch had been talking with Steele, the gamekeeper, about the forthcoming Mount Blair agricultural show. Back in the office at Dundee that night I asked the country sub-editor who organized 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 the 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 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 details of 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 we 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 her way to Balmoral. At the head of the Glen the 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 as Bridge of