

I call this piece Horse Age to Space Age. When I look back as sometimes I 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 connexion with Glen life. Take electricity. Till the 1950s when it was brought as far north as Glenilry, 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 Glenilry to the Spittal it had 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 and cartons from a wagon that comes up every other day. Progress?

The telephone - ah ha! 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 grocers 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 river bank. 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 50 feet 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 the delivery of mail up the Glen lasted till the 1960s. The last driver under the McLennan banner was Davie Gray, 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 Davie in the 1914-18 war, wearing a Black Watch uniform, in a trenched defence system, and awaiting the approach of a Prussian guardsman, saying, "What the deevil 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. Davie Gray 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 gain into London, and when I got near traffic lights I found I was in the wrang dreel so I just turned roond and cam hame again."

A memory of cars in the Glen that sticks in my mind 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

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service on the Middleton Farm. Thus it was in that long hot summer of 1919 we found ourselves as a family living in a cottage 100 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 salaried people, if they responded we would declare them to be wages people.

My next experience was when my Great Uncle John, manager of a furniture factory in Dundee, built his own motor car from scratch. If he had pursued this what might we not have become! Multi-millionaires? When he felt he had succeeded, he aimed to drive it to, (would you be surprised?) the Blackwater! In those days everyone worked half days on Saturdays, so as a school boy I was the one person available to ride with Great Uncle John as a passenger, starting in the morning. We drove off along the road to the foot of Camperdown Woods, up there and in Birkhall and Muirhead of Liff we were confronted by an official road sign which said "10 miles an hour." This we observed but then puttered out to an unanticipated halt. Later with hangdog expressions we were pushed back to Dundee. Great Uncle John said, "We will try again next week." This we did and this time we got to Coupar Angus and then had to retire as before. "Next week" said Uncle John. This time, (Halleluia!) we did it. All the 30 miles from Dundee to Middleton Farm. What a high tea we had that night!

Meantime Great Uncle Charlie had bought a car secondhand, from Grassicks, I think, in Blairgowrie. It was a 1908 Argyll. The Argyll cars were built in Scotland. It had magnificent sweeping lines for a 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 had even 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 from the Kirkmichael Road to the Blairgowrie-Braemar road we gave a cheer. King George raised his right hand to his Balmoral bonnet and 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