

On February 8th, 1989, the group gathered at Lorient and the hosts were Leslie and Valerie Johnston. Everyone was present except for Ian Smart who was overseas and the speaker was Margaret Smart, who said:

Well, as you can imagine I was horrified at the thought of a second house, especially in the state it was in and having already bought the very pleasant terraced house in Dundee. But the situation was fabulous and just what we had been looking for all the previous year. Somehow we managed to scrape together the necessary hundreds of pounds for a deposit and borrowed the rest through a life insurance policy, finally paying it off some 15 years later. So for the first 10 years this became our weekend and holiday house.

We had bought one of the first Mini vans when we arrived from Canada in 1960 and every weekend the three girls, the weekend food and necessary clothes were piled into the back of the van and we came up to get a breath of fresh Glenshee air.

We had no money so could do nothing very dramatic to renovate the house. The wind whistled straight through as none of the windows fitted. We tried to heat just one small room with a very inadequate fireplace and when I think back on it now it must have all been very spartan, cold and uncomfortable. But we were happy, the girls built endless houses in the woods and we started on the garden.

All our friends in Dundee offered us any furniture that they were throwing out and we never refused anything. However one Easter about five years later I fell through the floor boards at the bottom of the stairs and when we investigated there was white fluffy mycelium of dry rot as far as the eye could see. The Rentokil man came and said they could do something but it would cost £250 and with no guarantee. So we decided to tackle it ourselves. We lifted all the floor boards, carried out barrow loads of earth from beneath the boards, pulled down walls, painted all the wood and stone walls with anti dry rot solution and this state continued for another 18 months. We had holes in the ceilings, walked on joists and went upstairs by means of a ladder.

Gradually, gradually it all improved, with Dan Webster coming to put down a proper damp course and Dan Menzies replacing the walls and in 1972 we decided to move up here permanently. The Dundee house was sold and we had spare cash to put into double glazing and make a few other improvements.

When Norrie Tarbet bought the manse in 1956 he had paid £850 for the house, the kirk and 9 acres of glebe. He had sold the kirk and the glebe to the then owner of Persie House and had kept half an acre of land round the manse. There were four big, rather ugly trees in front of the house, otherwise it was very exposed with only low scrub birch surrounding the land, constantly munched by the cows. So in 1965 we negotiated with

Mr. Colville who owned Persie House at that time and we were able to buy another 2 acres at £50 an acre.

We then erected a fence with anti rabbit netting at the bottom and anti deer wire at the top, all of which was very hard work, hammering in the stobs and digging in the strainers. After which we planted over 3,000 trees, 1,000 larch, 1,000 Scots pines, and 500 each of Sitka and Norway spruce as well as a smattering of specimen trees. We expected many to die, but in fact most of them survived and though we have done a lot of thinning they are still too close together and are beginning to get far too tall, but they do provide us with shelter and screen us from the road.

Over the years we have had visits from various people associated with the manse. One of the best known ministers, old Tam Smith, had two nieces who regularly stayed with him. They have both been here, with tales of helping the minister to build his garage and they also described the fabulous conservatory that he had along the whole of the west wall with a big boiler in it and a potted palm tree and a wind up gramophone. When we bought the manse there was a small, ghastly greenhouse, made by Norrie Tarbet out of old car windscreens.

As for the kirk it has been a barn for as long as we have been up here, growing more and more dilapidated. It has now been bought by a London architect for £26,000 with about 4 acres

of land surrounding it. What is also interesting is that both old Tam Smith's nieces and the grandson of a later minister who has visited us said that all the land to the north of the manse was common grazing. I wonder how and when it became part of the Persie empire?