Our People and Places

This booklet is full of interesting information about place names, folklore, history and stories from the Kyle of Sutherland. All of the stories were collected by Fèis a’ Chaolais participants who interviewed local people about the heritage of the area.
The Archiving Project is a new Fèisean nan Gàidheal development that aims to encourage Fèis participants from across Scotland to collect, record and present local heritage from their own areas. As part of the project, Fèis a’ Chaolais participants in Bonar Bridge have been busy interviewing local people, both in Gaelic and English, to learn more about the heritage of the area. This unique booklet includes a selection of the material collected during the project, including memories, stories, folklore and beliefs as well as pictures drawn by the participants that represent the meaning of local Gaelic place names. In the third section of the booklet, you will find the interviews conducted in Gaelic, with a Gaelic transcription and English translation. All of the transcriptions and translations reflect the dialect and language of the informant as accurately as possible. We hope you enjoy reading this unique booklet.

Emily Edwards, Archiving Officer, Fèisean nan Gàidheal
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Le taing mhòr dha na buidhnean a leanas:

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Bonar Bridge, Migdale, Ardgay, Spinningdale
Sandy Chisholm, Bunty Gordon, Robin Ross, Barbara Murray,
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“I was born in Bonar Bridge over sixty years ago and I stay in the same house – I was born in the house that I still live in.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Sandy Siosalach
Interview with Sandy Chisholm

Leanne: Can you tell us about where you were born and brought up?
Sandy: I was born in Bonar Bridge over sixty years ago and I stay in the same house – I was born in the house that I still live in.

Leanne: Did any of your family speak Gaelic?
Sandy: Yes my mother spoke Gaelic, her mother was from Achiltibuie on the West Coast. My mother and her sisters, there were a lot of them, there were over ten of them and if they wanted to speak about us they all talked in Gaelic because we couldn’t understand them. All the things they didn’t want us to know they talked in Gaelic so we knew they were talking about us and something they didn’t want us to know! We couldn’t speak Gaelic, we knew bits, we knew some of the words but we didn’t know much. What does your mam do?
Leanne: She doesn’t do that but she sends us away to another room!
Emily: You’re the opposite now though you can speak Gaelic so your mum can’t understand what you’re saying!

Leanne: Do you remember people speaking Gaelic in the community?
Sandy: A bit yes. The older people did – I suppose I’m an older person now but when I was your age the older ones would be speaking Gaelic when they got together.

Leanne: What do you work as?
Sandy: I work as a crofter now but I was quite a lot of different things. I was a joiner for a long number of years and I was a water bailiff for a number of years too. In those days there was an awful lot of salmon that went past the bridge here – thousands of them. There were special fishing stations, three down below the bridge and three up above the bridge and about eight men employed in each of those fishing stations. They caught a lot of fish and they went down on the trains to London and all over. An awful lot of local people were employed in the fishing in those days. Then the fish got less and they caught them all down at Portmahomack [laughing] and didn’t let them come up! Your great-grandad Leanne would be employed at it. I only spent about one week at the fishing stations when I was about fifteen because someone was off on holiday and I stood in for him for a week. You had to go with the tides, and at a certain stage of the tides the nets would go out and you’d be out maybe at five in the morning or three in the morning and through the day so it was all different times when you went out on the fishing stations. There were a lot of men about here working on them but the water bailiff was different. Fish went away up the rivers and we had to go up and stop them stealing them out of the rivers. You’ll have heard the stories Leanne where your granny came from – they used to put nets out there and your granny would have been brought up on them!

Emily: Did you enjoy being the water bailiff?
Sandy: Yes it was fine but all summer you’d be out all through the nights most of the time and there was some good fun and some good laughs chasing ones! They’d be annoyed through the day and giving you cheek and threatening to give you a bashing. We used to go down to Portmahomack sometimes too, round
Tarbatness, we’d get reports of people putting nets out and we’d have to go away down there. We went down to get their nets and frighten them off. It was quite good fun! We were just like policemen of the rivers but there had to be somebody if not they would take all the salmon and there would be none left at all. There’s a lot less salmon now than there was away back then. Bonar depended a lot on the salmon that came up by.

Leanne: How many brothers and sisters do you have?
Sandy: I’ve no brothers but I’ve four sisters. Two of them were teachers in Edinburgh and Glasgow and one of them was a nurse in Edinburgh and one is Cameron’s granny! She was a keeper’s wife away up in Oykel.

Duncan: Where did you go to school?
Sandy: I went to school in Bonar Bridge and the first day I went to school – I can still mind it – I went on a horse and cart. That’s how I went to school the first day. It’s not very far to the school only about half a mile but I got a lift from an old man with a horse and cart. There were very few cars then, maybe two or three in the whole of the village – and I’m not all that old.

Sandy: I can remember seeing my very first television set. We were maybe about Duncan’s age and we were in the school up there and the old headmaster, we called him Pome, that was his nickname, he was quite a clever man but no use as a teacher. He built his own television and I mind all the classes were taken through to his house and there was a big box but the screen was a wee black and white thing. He set up all the parts and he built it all himself – he had a great brain for that type of thing but he shouldn’t have been a teacher. He built his own television away back over fifty years ago and that was the first television I saw.

Emily: An did it work?
Sandy: It was very fuzzy but you could see the picture. You wouldn’t be very pleased with it today I suppose.

Duncan: Could you hear it?
Sandy: Oh yes you had sound as well.

Duncan: How many pupils and teachers were there in the school?
Sandy: Now they all go away at primary seven to Dornoch or Tain but then they went right on to three years of secondary and if they wanted to go on they went to Dornoch. I went to secondary in Bonar Bridge and just a year or two before that, they could go right on to do their Highers in Bonar. My sisters were the first that went to Dornoch but they are a bit older. I was fifteen when I left school in 1958 at Christmas and I started as an apprentice joiner in the January and I did that for twenty eight years.

Duncan: Who were your friends at school?
Sandy: The ones I liked – the ones I didn’t like weren’t my friends!

Duncan: Were you naughty or good at school?
Sandy: A bit of both!

Duncan: What subjects did you do?
Sandy: I did French for three years and I still can’t talk much of it! Algebra and all those things and art and they used to have a wood working thing. The technical drawing teacher did the woodwork and there used to be a lot of travelling teachers then. There was a cookery teacher for the girls and a music teacher – The Walking Wardrobe’ they called her! She had terrible big coats and fur coats and everything on so her nickname was The Walking Wardrobe’! The art teacher came from Lairg and she was a very odd woman and they called her Jessie Lovely - she was very odd as the arty kinds can be! They all had nicknames; there was one called Mag, one called Daint and one called Sock and Specky!

Cameron: Why was one called Sock?
Sandy: Oh I can tell you that story too Cameron. Her father was a blacksmith in the village here and all the boys and girls from the crofts way out in the country, what they would do, you know what the sock on the plough is? It’s the bit on the front that cuts the ground, that’s on the old horse ploughs – you’ll have seen them lying about. The wee bit on the front got worn and they would all take their socks to school so Sock would take them down to her dad to get them built up again and get more metal on them. Then she would take them back the next day. That’s how she was called Sock!

Cameron: Has your family lived on the croft for a long time?
Sandy: Since the Battle of Culloden. My forebears fought on both sides – the brothers were on each side at Culloden and brother fought brother seemingly. My branch of it on the Jacobite side fled Culloden and they came up and they swam the Kyle and went up and took over the bit of land where we are now.
So, they swam the Kyle and that’s how the story goes. They were Chisholms and it shows the names of the brothers on both sides. So we’ve been there since 1746. I’ve always intended on going to the battlefield but I’ve never been yet.

Cameron: Can you tell us about crofting?
Sandy: Well yes there were an awful lot more people about then. I was lifting tatties yesterday and there’s hardly anybody has tatties nowadays. There were three of us but in those days there would be maybe twenty people helping you do it. There would be people helping you with everything you did as there was a lot of people about but nowadays there are very few. Everything was much harder work then, nowadays you can do an awful lot with tractors and new tools and things. You’ll see the old ploughs now painted and sitting in front of people’s gardens as ornaments.

Duncan: We’ve got loads of horseshoes hanging from our house on nails.
Sandy: If you’ve horseshoes Duncan make sure they’re up the way – a horseshoe is good luck but if you put it down the way all the luck will fall out so you have to put them up the way. Now there’s a picture of me on a horse and that horse used to come down to the village to the blacksmith...The shoes would get worn or fall off and the horse had to get his shoes on to go on the road...so we went down to the blacksmith in the village – that’s where the socks went to get sorted.

Emily: Who made the soup and how did they make it?
Sandy: Oh my mam probably made the soup but it was my job to take the sheep’s head to get it singed. But then, when you killed the sheep you had to eat the whole sheep before it got rotten – there were no freezers then – so you had to eat the whole sheep. There was a lot of sheep to be eaten in less than a fortnight so you had sheep for breakfast and supper for a whole fortnight and you were fed up to the teeth with it. I mind one of my sisters crying, ‘I’m not wanting anymore homemade sheep!’ [laughing] Oh you’d be sick of it but probably you’d give some off to the neighbour and when they killed theirs you’d get some so it would be sort of spread a bitty that way.

There wasn’t much money about in those days and it was the same with the eggs. There were a lot of vans that came round, the grocery van and the butchers van, and at your age we’d be stealing the eggs and we’d swap the egg for maybe two marshmallows! Sometimes in the summer when all my cousins were about, there’d be about twenty of us, my mother wouldn’t get an egg because we’d be off with all the eggs taking them to the van to get marshmallows!

Emily: Were there a few shops in Bonar?
Sandy: Oh there were a few. There was the blacksmiths shop, the saddlers shop that did all leather things, there was a tailors where you could get jackets or anything made. There were three butchers in the village and now there’s one between the whole area. Three or four hotels too – it was a much busier place in that way. Now everybody just jumps in the car and goes away to the Co-op in Tain and takes a big basket full of stuff.

Cameron: Where did you get your nickname Gossie from?
Sandy: Do you know this Cameron I haven’t a clue! I had four sisters that were always at me, I was nearer the youngest and it probably came from there.
Rona: Can you tell me about where you were born and brought up?
Bunty: I was born and brought up about four miles south of Ardgay at Midfearn.

Rona: Did any of your family speak Gaelic?
Bunty: No, I’m afraid not. I think maybe parents and grandparents did then, but in those days they used to use Gaelic to speak about the kids!

Rona: Do you remember people speaking Gaelic in the community?
Bunty: Yes there were one or two. The Williamsons on Church Street spoke Gaelic.

Rona: What did you work as?
Bunty: I worked in the Post Office all my life – thirty nine years in the Ardgay Post Office.

Emily: So have you lived in this area all your life?
Bunty: Yes I have. I’ve been in the West End for the past fifty four years...I thought I was going to be called up to the Services after I registered but they made a bit of a mistake because they forgot that every Post Office had somebody reserved because if everybody was called up then the Post Office would fall apart altogether. There were two reserved for Ardgay because it was a mail office and I think there was one for Bonar too. Rona’s granny of course worked in the Bonar Post Office and I think she must have been there through part of the war.

Cameron: Where did you go to school?
Bunty: We had our own school at Midfearn. It was a side school and there were up to thirty pupils at times. You would never believe that now. We had one teacher and she came from Tain. She was a wonderful teacher how she could handle all these classes. She was a Ross from Tain, Kate Ross.

Emily: Were you in the same school all the way through your education?
Bunty: Yes I was and then I had to get out and work for my living. I was about fifteen or sixteen when I left the school.

Cameron: What did you work as?
Bunty: No special subjects it was just general education. We did do history and geography and algebra and the general subjects. We didn’t do languages. We had art lessons and singing lessons but it was all with the one teacher – there were no visiting teachers like there are now. The one teacher did the lot and this is how I think she was a wonderful person.

Emily: Did you enjoy school?
Bunty: I liked school yes.

Cameron: What games did you play at school?
Bunty: Rounders, hide and seek, skipping of course – I can’t really remember! Occasionally we played football or cricket with the boys.

Rona: Can you tell us what it was like during the war?
Bunty: Well I told you that I was working thirty nine years in the Post Office and that included six years of the war. I worked in the Ardgay Post Office and I had to cycle twelve miles a day the round journey to and from work. We started work about quarter to nine and we had no lunch break like they do now and we didn’t close the counter until seven o’ clock at night. We had to put out a mail after that and balance our books. So really we

“I worked in the Post Office all my life – thirty nine years in the Ardgay Post Office.”
were working from about just before nine to sometimes just before eight at night. On Saturday the door was open until nine o’clock because that was the time when men worked mostly all week, they worked on Saturday morning maybe and the people from the glens would come down to the village and do their shopping in the evening. So the shops were always open until nine o’clock and we had to stay open as well. We worked long hours, very long hours.

Emily: What was it like during the war itself?
Bunty: Well, do any of you eat sweeties?
Rona: Sometimes!
Cameron: Yes!
Bunty: Well we could only buy certain things if we got coupons. You couldn’t go into a shop and say, ‘I want that and that,’ only if you had coupons you could buy it. Well, we got about four ounces of sweeties or chocolate to last you for a week – about the size of a KitKat. For about six or seven years we never saw a banana, an orange, a lemon, a pineapple or a melon because they all came from abroad. We just had apples and maybe garden plants. These things weren’t the priority, ammunition was. We just had to do without. That was one thing but we got about four ounces of butter and about four ounces of meat but we had chickens. Some people had lambs that they could kill but it was very difficult. We had gardens of course so we grew a lot of vegetables and we would have a lot of broth and every Sunday a bit of boiling beef. The pan of broth would last for two or three days.

Most of the young people were away in the services and the area was inundated with incoming troops. There were about five hundred Canadians who came here to cut the woods and they had two camps at the end of Loch Migdale. There was another one at Rosehall of about the same size. There was a sawmill at the station at Invershin. So that would be about seven or eight hundred Canadians here and there were lots of little groups of service men who came into the district for short spells. They were training for specific events that they were going off on. There were a few Cameron Highlanders and Invercharron House was taken over by the Royal Artillery and Fearn Lodge was the headquarters of the Canadian forestry core. After they had been here for a while, before D-Day – D-Day was the day the Continent was invaded – the Canadians became combat then and they landed along at the next beach to the British, in France. Quite a few of them were killed as well.

Somebody asked me if there were streetlights in Bonar during the war but there were no streetlights anywhere! You weren’t allowed to show a light at all – we had no electricity in those days of course and we had to fill paraffin lamps for our light and our cooking was done on an open fire. If there was a peak of light showing out your door or window, you had to have heavy curtains so that no kind of light was showing at all, if it was spotted the Bobby was at your door, ‘Get that light out!’ If planes came over they would see the lights and even if you were cycling, or people who had cars, they actually couldn’t move around without some light but there was a sort of shade on it facing the ground. It was very difficult.

Emily: When did electricity come to the area?
Bunty: Well the Hydro scheme started not terribly long after the war. It would be the early fifties before everybody had electricity. Some people had their own generators before that if they had plenty of money. Fearn Lodge had a turbine up on the Struie Road for their private supply. You can still see it there and maybe they still use it for some purpose.

Emily: What about your own job at the Post Office during the war – what was that like?
Bunty: It was quite difficult. When they were doing this thing in Ardgay they thought I would know most of the people whose names were on the war memorial. Well, I did but the other side of it is that I was probably the one who took the telegram to tell them they were no longer with us. It was very disturbing.

Emily: It must have been a very difficult job to do.
Bunty: Two station masters at Ardgay lost sons but so did a lot of people. People I knew well. There are two girls on the Ardgay memorial, one was in the Queen Alexandra nursing and she was on her way out to Italy to a field and a camp when the ship she was on was sunk. There was another girl from Culrain, in fact they were both from Culrain, she was in the WAACS and she was killed at Cardiff and she had a military funeral in Kincardine.

Cameron: Do you know any other stories that you would like to tell us about?
Bunty: There used to be a big house on the other side of the bridge which people now refer to as the pink House but it was never the Pink House it was South Bonar. I objected to it being called the Pink House just because somebody painted it pink! That was one of the first ins on over the bridge but there was no bridge there then. The bridge wasn’t opened until around 1810s - the first bridge lasted eighty years and it was destroyed by flood in 1892 and the next one lasted about the same and this one is the third bridge.

Rona: Before that there was a ferry.
Bunty: That’s right because there was a ship came over from the Meikle Ferry that was going to the Lammas Fair in Tain and it was overloaded and it capsized and everybody was lost. It was after that the need for a bridge was more obvious – the disaster was in 1812. So the Bonar Bridge was built after that.

Rona: One of the bridges was built by Thomas Telford.
Bunty: That’s right Rona. He was a great engineer and when he was asked to build this bridge he said, ‘Well I’ll have to shift the River Carron,’ because the Carron used to enter the firth about half way over the Ardgay road and he said he would have to shift the Carron otherwise he would
have to build two bridges – one down here which takes the River Shin and one to take the Carron. People thought he was mad but if you look up the way you’ll see where the wall was built to divert the Carron River and it joins the other two in front of the village so it was the one bridge that was built. I can remember once in my lifetime where it followed its old course. There was a cloudburst and the breakwater couldn’t take all the water and it shot across the road like it did in years gone by. That was during the war, it was in the summer because we came over to Bonar from Ardgay to the pictures. The Canadians when they were here they had their own cinematograph and they used to show pictures in the hall. They were general releases – they were very modern and they used to open to anybody. We walked over to Bonar to the pictures and we walked on the dyke because the water was so deep! We were mad! Then on the way home of course some of the Canadians had to go back to Fearn Lodge and we got a lift with them in their trucks. They used to get very good films and very good concert parties too up at their camps and they would invite people up to their camps. That was the first time I tasted peanut butter! They were great for their peanut butter.

Emily: Did any of the Canadians meet a wife and stay here?

Bunty: I don’t know but some girls married them and went out to Canada. One of my school pals is still alive in Canada and her husband was one of the people who was here during the war. There were several girls went out to Canada after the war. They took their brides with them!

Rona: How did you know my granny?

Bunty: I knew your granny, Jean Mackenzie she was then, because she came to work with me. She worked in the Post Office in Bonar when I was in Ardgay so we knew each other that way and then we both got married of course and we were away from the Post Office for a wee while. Then after that I went back to the Post Office in Ardgay for another twenty years and your granny would come and relieve either myself or whoever was working at the time for holidays or sickness. We had great fun. She got a kick out of life and she was very funny. She was a very nice person and your grandfather was a nice person too. He was in the army, in the Royal Engineers during the war.
Emily: Is there anything else you’d like to tell us?

Bunty: Well, of course there was no health service then – you had to pay the doctor. The health service came in after the war. We really don’t know that we are lucky now. We can get so much free.

Emily: What was Halloween like when you were young?

Bunty: Oh we went out dressed up and we thought nobody knew who we were! I can remember walking through snow. It would just be old coats and that – beg, borrow or steal! We usually had a false face and of course at Christmas we had no holiday. Christmas day was one of our busiest days. There were loads of Christmas cards but we had New Year’s day off. I can remember the first year the shops decided to take Christmas day off and they forgot to tell the Post Office that they were doing this and we were so terribly busy in the run up to Christmas that I hadn’t been to a shop to get the Christmas dinner. I thought, ‘I’ll get it very early in the morning on Christmas day’, and of course I went to the shop and it was closed! We had corned beef and cabbage for our Christmas dinner! The funny thing about it was my mother-in-law who was a widow and lived just along the road – I had invited her and she must have thought, ‘What kind of wife did my son get a hold of?’ Oh I never felt so ashamed in my life. That would have been in around 1957 because I wasn’t very long married. After that there were far more holidays and we got Christmas day off.

Emily: What was New Year like?

Bunty: Oh New Year was far livelier than Christmas and the men used to gather at somebody’s house and they would go round all the houses and pick up somebody else at the next house and there would be a dozen of them before they would get finished. They would be a wee bit tipsy as well of course!

Emily: Would there be music?

Bunty: There would be home music – we had no TV. Some people had radios but they were operated on a battery cause there was no electricity. People had gramophones and a lot of people played the accordion. Some of the men played the accordion and the violin and they used to play and there would be singing and dancing.

Emily: Was there much piping?

Bunty: Not in the house but a lot of people did play the pipes! It was a long time before people had televisions but sometimes one person in an area had a TV and if there was anything very special on you would be invited to go and view it. The reception wasn’t very good then and it was black and white. You stepped in at the right time when everything is already here!

To get back to the war we used to have a special week every year to raise funds and it went on for the whole week. We had a lot of organising concerts, whists and fancy dress parades and you would go round with collecting boxes and they had a name on each week. The first one that I can recall was Dig for Victory and that was to encourage people to grow their own vegetables. Then there was Wings for Victory and that was to buy spitfires. Lend to Defend the Right to be Free was another week when you put whatever you could afford into savings which were used then for whatever they were needed. There were six or seven weeks but my memory is failing me! We’d be exhausted at the end of the week because when there was a function outside and boxes went round they were taken into the Post Office and we had to count them all! I’ve seen us getting home at ten o’clock at night or after that before we counted all the money.
“...there was more Gaelic then but we weren’t encouraged to speak Gaelic in school or at no time were we encouraged to speak Gaelic - but it’s quite a change now.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Robin Ros  
Interview with Robin Ross

Rona: Can you tell me about where you were born and brought up?  
Robin: Oh well I was born a long time ago! I was born in 1930 and I was brought up in Heatherlea on a croft.

Rona: Did any of your family speak Gaelic?  
Robin: My father and mother spoke Gaelic very fluently and they used to talk in Gaelic when they didn’t want me to know what they were talking about. They didn’t encourage me to talk in Gaelic although I picked up a few words here and there.

Rona: Do you remember people speaking Gaelic in the community?  
Robin: My father and mother spoke Gaelic very fluently and they used to talk in Gaelic when they didn’t want me to know what they were talking about. They didn’t encourage me to talk in Gaelic although I picked up a few words here and there.

Rona: Where did you go to school?  
Robin: Well I was – I don’t know if you would call it lucky or not – but the school was on our croft. I could run to school and I could run back home for my dinner and run back to school and then back home again at night and it would only take about five minutes. Then I went to Ardgay School – which is now Gledfield School – and that’s where I finished my education.

Rona: What did you work as?  
Robin: I did various things. I was working for the Post Office delivering mail, I did fencing and I worked quite a bit with tractors and bulldozers and things like that. I try to do as little as I can now!

Rona: Has your family lived on the croft for a long time?  
Robin: Yes for a quite long time. My grandfather, I don’t know if he was born on the croft but he was there for a long time anyway – I’m not sure about any further back than that.
Annie Rose: Can you tell us about crofting?
Robin: Crofting then was quite different. Everybody then milked a cow and of course we had to clean out the byre and all this. Very different now.

Emily: Did you just have the one cow?
Robin: No, we had four cows and quite a lot of blackface sheep with horns.

Emily: Did you have to milk the cows?
Robin: Yes, I did but it was mostly my mother that did the milking. She made butter and crowdie.

Rona: I like crowdie and oatcakes!
Robin: At one time we had a pig and the pig was killed and of course that kept us going all winter anyway and quite a bit more. Most people had a pig and it was salted but salt pig wasn’t very appetising – I can assure you that! My father was a postman and so we weren’t dependent on the croft for a livelihood. He used to have a bicycle of course.

Emily: What crops did you grow?
Robin: We grew oats, turnips, potatoes and that was about it. We were fairly self-sufficient – most folk were then.

Annie Rose: What special tools did you have for crofting?
Robin: Well just a plough for the horses and anything that would break up the ground. We had a cart of course for carting things around. We started off with big iron wheels and then we got very modernised and we got rubber wheels off an old vehicle – that was considered to be very modern! We made that ourselves. We also cut peats for the fire.

Emily: How many horses did you have?
Robin: We used to have just one horse but it took two horses to pull a plough so we shared with a neighbour.

Rona: How has crofting changed?
Robin: It’s changed an awful lot. Most crofters now have tractors and machinery but all we had was a horse. Crofts have got much bigger and very few crofters depend on the croft – they just have the croft as a sideline and they have another job. We had that too of course but not many folk did. Quite a lot of folk were brought up on the croft without any other income. The other thing of course is that I was brought up during the war – the Second World War not the First World War! Everything was rationed and one thing I did learn was then was not to waste any food and to this day I hate seeing any food wasted. You’ll see people eat half a plateful of food and the rest is binned and I hate seeing that. Food is still sacred to me.

Rona: We usually give it to the dogs or use it for another day.

Emily: Can you tell us a bit more about the rationing?
Robin: Well we were only allowed a certain amount of anything and we had a ration book and we had to hand in coupons for anything we got. Strangely enough, sweets were rationed and everyone took their ration – for all we didn’t eat sweets before – everybody took their ration no matter what age they were. I guess everybody tried to get what they could. Even clothes were rationed, if you wanted to buy a new jumper or anything you needed a coupon. But we were lucky in the country of course, rather than in the town because we were growing our own food. We would send parcels down to relatives we had in Glasgow to help them out a bit. We’d sometimes send a hen - feathers and all! And eggs of course, we sent eggs down to them. We didn’t need it, but you could get powdered eggs if you can believe that.

Rona: That doesn’t sound very nice!

Emily: What was it like with the men being away during the war?
Robin: Well, in some ways it didn’t make all that much difference to us compared to in the town. There was no enemy activity up our way really – we would see the odd bomber maybe but we weren’t quite sure who it belonged to. The women also had to do a lot of the men’s work that they wouldn’t have done otherwise and some of the local girls went to work in factories in various places like down in England. They were making planes and ammunition and a lot of women worked down there and a lot of them never came back of course ’cause they got married down there.

Emily: Do people still talk a lot about the Clearances?
Robin: Well strangely enough, a lot of local history, folk are more interested in it now than they ever were before. I never heard about the Clearances and we never got what we would call modern history in school. We were all taught about 1314 and Bonnie Prince Charlie and all that. The Clearances seem to be much more talked about now than then...I get a lot of phone calls from people all over the world trying to trace their ancestors. There was somebody phoning me only two days ago and he knows more about that than I do and he’s living in the Central Belt somewhere. My father would have been able to answer a lot of these questions but folk didn’t seem to worry about passing it on then.
“The keepers and the shepherds and the crofters all congregated in Bonar – like Inverness or Tain is our shopping centre now, Bonar was the shopping centre then.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Barbara Mhoireach
Interview with Barbara Murray

Carron: Can you tell us about where you were born and brought up?
Barbara: Yes, I was born at Garbh Leathad – that’s where I was born and brought up. Then I got married and lived somewhere else for a while and then I went back there to Garbh Leathad until we decided to move to Bonar. So I’ve been here all my life – I’ve never lived anywhere but Bonar.

Kirsty: Did any of your family speak Gaelic and do you remember people speaking Gaelic in the community?
Barbara: Not my immediate family but my maternal grandfather didn’t speak any English and my paternal grandfather had no Gaelic, so Gaelic died out in the two families because only one partner spoke Gaelic. By the time my mother and father were school age speaking Gaelic was frowned upon. Slowly but surely the language died out in our family. It was very common that only one person in the family spoke Gaelic. I can’t imagine how they managed to have conversations – I often wondered! [laughing] The children understood it more than they spoke it and yes I do remember Gaelic speakers in the community. There was a gentleman called Jock Calder, who lived at Kinnabadd and his son went on to be headmaster at Embo. They were fluent Gaelic speakers.

Annie Rose: What do you work as?
Barbara: Well now I’m retired but when I left school I worked for five years in the Post Office in Bonar and then I married and brought up my children. Then I worked in Migdale Hospitascal as an occupational therapy helper.

Annie Rose: Where did you go to school?
Barbara: I went to school in Bonar and it was a senior secondary then. We were there until we were fifteen and then we had to go to Dornoch Academy before we went on to uni or college. That’s what I wanted to do but a job came up in the Post Office and in those days if there was a job you took it. Not in all families but in mine that’s how it happened. I knew everybody in the village and from a huge area because then Bonar was the centre. The keepers and the shepherds and the crofters all congregated in Bonar – like Inverness or Tain is our shopping centre now, Bonar was the shopping centre then.

The shops were open until at least six o’ clock at night and the bank was open every day. Saturday morning was a really busy day in the village because they came from the outlying areas. When I went to school I had to walk half a mile but I was lucky because the school car came round early but I still had to walk half a mile to get to the car. My sister and her age group had to walk all the way from Garbh Leathad and beyond. We went in at nine o’ clock in the morning and we were there until four in the afternoon because the car took us all home again and there was no option. It was just what we were used to and we didn’t know any better. Sometimes, especially in the summer when the mornings and evenings were bright there would be work to do. There were hens to feed and water to carry in from the well if not before you went to school then certainly after you came home. The byre would have to be mucked out or water carried in for the cattle, if there was a cow having a new calf her water had to be brought into her. We were expected to do these things as well as go to school. No matter what else though your homework had to be done first – you
had to sit down and do your homework. It had to be done and done properly there was no excuses! It wasn’t even with a biro but a bottle of ink and a pen with a nib in it and you can imagine how we scratched away at our homework. We had a paraffin lamp when I was really little then dad got a Tilley lamp which had paraffin in a tank and you had to pump air into the tank to force the paraffin up to the wick at the top of it and it was wonderful because it gave warmth as well as light.

Kirsty: How many pupils and teachers were there?
Barbara: There were two infant teachers and primary three and four had a teacher. By the time I went into primary five there was only five of us in primary five and the new teacher was starting to do primary six and seven. So the new teacher was asked, because there was only five of us, would she take us on because there was a huge primary one intake. This Miss Matheson, I’m sure you’ll hear other people talking about her, she said, ‘Yes’. I’ve always felt privileged that Miss Matheson was my teacher for three years. It was an absolute bonus because if we worked well all week at our class work, Friday afternoons were ours – we either did nature study, out for a walk if the weather was good, or handwork, sewing or knitting. We had an art teacher visiting the school so we didn’t do that so much on Fridays. We did a lot of identifying trees and plants, birds, birdsong. It was really good – I loved school.

Carron: What subjects did you do?
Barbara: Well, up until primary seven it was just maths, English, history, geography. Our class teachers gave us sewing and knitting, we didn’t have a visiting cookery or home craft teacher until we were into secondary. We had a visiting gym teacher which was really good – there was loads of things to do. Then when you went into secondary you could do languages Latin or French. We had science then as well and maths progressed into algebra and geometry. It was a qualifying exam you sat in primary seven that dictated whether or not you were clever enough to do a languages course or a standard course. You were given a bit of leeway but if you failed to do your languages course it was woodwork for the boys and home crafts for the girls but we all got athletics.

Caroline: From what area did they come to the secondary?
Barbara: By the time I went into first year Larachan and Invershin schools were still primary schools but they came in for secondary school and from Rosehall too.

Carron: Can you tell us about Bonar Bridge during the war?
Barbara: I was only born in 1941 so I really don’t know much about the actual war years but I do remember a celebration. I’m not sure if it was VE day or what but I can really remember the feeling of excitement. The cattle were fed, the hens were in and everything was done early and we all had to get into what was our good clothes - we had our home clothes, our school clothes, our Sunday clothes or good clothes. My mam and dad had bikes and my dad took me down on the crossbar to whatever was happening in the village. There was a pipe band – I think it was probably the Ardgay Bonar pipe band. I was little and I remember my mother hanging on to me and my memory of this celebration was legs and bottoms of skirts, khaki trousers, plus fours, tweed trousers, hand-knitted stockings and brogue shoes! That’s my memory of this celebration and I’ve no idea what it was! I remember men in sailor’s uniforms because they had the collars with the white band round it half way down their backs it seemed to me.

Annie Rose: Do you know any other stories that you would like to tell us about?
Barbara: The rationing during the war didn’t affect me – it must have been my mother’s worry but I wasn’t aware of it. Being born in 1941 I didn’t know anything else – it’s what I was born with and I grew up with and not knowing anything better you didn’t miss it. We had milk and rabbits and eggs and what we had was shared. Many many mornings on my way to school I’d be either taking a pail of milk to a neighbour or on my way home from school I’d be taking milk because the neighbours needed milk or were short of eggs or butter or crowdie – it was all shared. It was like real communal. When somebody was ill, maybe one lady would be down with the flu, one neighbour would do the washing, somebody else would go with baking, somebody else would see that the kids were fed and it was just a whole different world. I find it quite sad that neighbours
don’t know neighbours anymore or don’t want to know their neighbours anymore. It was a safe feeling. You were never afraid of people and yes we were told just who not to talk to and not to speak to strangers or anything but within our own village we were safe and happy. Strangers were welcomed – there was no suspicion. We didn’t know what racism was – we had an English lady who was a neighbour and she was lovely and she was just accepted as who she was. It’s hard to explain to you now what it was really like because it was so different from what you know.

Caroline: And of course there was no electricity, no telly, no Nintendos, no computers – what was that like?

Barbara: We had a radio and when the news or a political broadcast or it might even have been news of the war – although I wasn’t aware of it – you could hardly breathe when this broadcast was being made and the news was on. You just sat quite. We were encouraged to read and unto this day I enjoy reading. I said about the pen and ink and even typewriters weren’t common then and the teller in the bank – it was all handwritten. The five years I was in the Post Office it was all pen and ink. There were no calculators and you had to do it all in your head – mental arithmetic was very important. We carried water from the well and we had water barrels collecting rain water off the roof for washing clothes.

Caroline: Did many people play instruments for entertainment?

Barbara: Well some people were self-taught. Nobody in my house did but it was great to go to the neighbours where they would have a windy-up gramophone. Somebody said to me, “Where did you learn to dance?” I’m not boasting about it but I don’t remember a time when I didn’t because a few of us would gather in a neighbour’s house and if there was enough of us we would be doing a Petronella and actually dancing in a wee kitchen...”

“And snow storms, I was once off school for six weeks completely in the 1950s. We were allowed to go back to school once the weather settled enough that it was safe and there would be no drift or blizzard – once it got frosty we were allowed to walk to school. Behind Drumbhan the road there was reopened by the county workmen with spades – they didn’t have diggers to do it. Jimmy Fraser was taking us to school and he had children from Migdale and Sleastary and Rhinamain, Anne Calder and I and Ùisdean and Simon Mackenzie from Airdens. He went up by Migdale and Sleastary and came along the crossroads back from Airdens and when he reached where the snow had been cut it was so deep and so long that he wouldn’t take his car with us through it. He backed out and got turned and he took us back down to the school and he was able to take us back over Tulloch Hill instead. It was so high and covering such a distance that he wouldn’t take us through it. This was a man who served in the Second World War and the RAF and had seen things he never would tell us about and yet he was frightened to take us through the snow. I’m so sorry there’s no photos or anything to show people. I make it sound like the good old times but it was hard. Yes we were happy but we didn’t know anything else and I feel sad that a lot of the modern stuff is not as healthy and clean. It’s invading – I mean you don’t have to think to count anymore; your computer corrects your spelling for you. I think a lot has been lost but there’s a lot of good advances been made – to think that you can send a photo of your grandchildren to Canada in seconds – that’s just amazing! My dad’s family emigrated over there and that must have been like a death to my granny, four of her sixteen children emigrated. The people that emigrated, she must have known that she wouldn’t see them again. It’s a whole new world now – the good old days weren’t always good but I’m not sure that the modern days are all that good either. Each age knows its own experiences. Just think in forty years you’ll be sitting here telling some children what it was like sitting with this old wifey!

My dad used to work in the sawmill and on a Saturday he used to deliver firewood and if I was due a day off and I would be allowed to go in the lorry with him. There was this old lady in Ardgay and I thought she was the oldest person I’d ever seen – I was about six or seven. She had her hair tied up in a bun, long black dresses, flowery overalls, black overalls, hand-knitted stockings and cardigans and I really thought she was the oldest person I’d ever seen. Time passed and I was forty four when I got a job at Migdale and I thought she must have known that she wouldn’t see them again. It’s a whole new world now – the good old days weren’t always good but I’m not sure that the modern days are all that good either. Each age knows its own experiences. Just think in forty years you’ll be sitting here telling some children what it was like sitting with this old wifey!
knitting socks. Do you know this I just couldn’t even say hello to her because it just hit me like a wallop. When I thought she was the oldest person I’d ever ever met in my life she then was the age that I was then. It hit me that age is irrelevant.

Caroline: Was there anyone in the village that spoke Gaelic then?
Barbara: Sandy Chisholm’s aunt and uncle and grandfather were Gaelic speaking and my last memory of Mrs Chisholm, Sandy’s mother, is her holding my hand upstairs in Migdale and singing the 23rd psalm in Gaelic. I still feel quite emotional about it when I think about it. So it was spoken and my in-laws, not my mother-in-law but her brother, was a fluent Gaelic speaker. A lot of people think Gaelic was a new language to the area but it wasn’t at all, it was the native tongue and I think it would have continued so if it hadn’t been discouraged in school. I’d like to wish you good luck with your Gaelic too. I wish I’d had the chance to do it. There was a minister here who taught us some Gaelic so that we could go to the Mod. We had a choir and took great delight in telling everyone when we came home that we got second but we never told them that it was only us and Lochinver competing!

Drochaid a’ Bhanna (bridge of the bottom ford)
Bonar Bridge by Renee Soszka
“I was born in Inverness but I was brought up in Spinningdale and I’ve been in Spinningdale all my life.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Hamish MacMhathain
Interview with Hamish Matheson

Carron: Can you tell us about where you were born and brought up?
Hamish: I was born in Inverness but I was brought up in Spinningdale and I’ve been in Spinningdale all my life.

Kirsty: Did any of your family speak Gaelic and do you remember people speaking Gaelic in the community?
Hamish: No, none of my family spoke Gaelic but people use odd words of Gaelic and that but not much conversation.

Carron: What did you work as?
Hamish: I worked as a joiner after I left school but I left school when I was fourteen and I came to work in Bonar Bridge.

Fiona: Did you always work locally as a joiner?
Hamish: Yes aye. After I started on my own I worked for the Highland Council down in Inverness and that. I was two or three years down there doing that working on schools and that but it was always from here I was working yes. I was nineteen years with A. MacAughtrie and then I started on my own. I’ve been thirty seven years on my own.

Kirsty: Where did you go to school and how did you get there?
Hamish: I went to Larachan School and I walked - everybody walked. In the wintertime maybe there’d be only two of us in school with all the snow. The ones out in the hills and that, they couldn’t get to school. There would be just two of us in school in the wintertime. Larachan School I went to, then after I qualified I came to Bonar Bridge School.

Kirsty: How many pupils and teachers were there?
Hamish: In Larachan there was one teacher and thirty three pupils and I can’t remember in Bonar!

Fiona: What age did they finish school in Bonar in those days?
Hamish: They went right up to the Highers – to finishing school age, about fourteen years. The last ones that I remember up there was Hugh Matheson, I think he belonged to Lochinver or from the west coast, Donald MacKillop and there was a girl as well. That was the last ones who sat their Highers before they changed over. I know the headmaster, he was wanting me to go to Dornoch but I wouldn’t go.

When I got a job I could leave school and so I got a job and I started work.

Carron: What subjects did you do?
Hamish: We used to have to do French which I didn’t like! Arithmetic, English, maths, gym and there was no canteen. We had to take a packed lunch with us for midday and we got a cup of milk and it was the same in Larachan. In fact, in wintertime when there was nobody else in school, the two of us, we used to walk down to Fload at Whiteface and we used to walk along the top of the dykes because of the depth of snow! We’d go down there and we’d have a pail of milk, I think it was about a gallon or a gallon and a half of milk, and that came back and there was cups laid out on a shelf in the school for you. We got a cup of milk fill and then we had to drink as much of the milk as we could if not it was wasted.

Kirsty: Can you tell us about the Canadian wood cutters?
Hamish: Well the Canadian wood cutters came here and there was one lot at the end of Migdale Loch – there was one camp there. Then there was another camp above Spinningdale and one at
Clashmore and there was a hundred men in each camp so three hundred in total. They cut the all the wood right from Creag na Sroine, the oak wood as you are going into Spinningdale, and right along to Migdale Loch. Then they missed a bit at Migdale there because the trees were too young to cut and then from there they went right along the back of Spinningdale to Clashmore and they were two years at that.

Fiona: Can you explain why they needed to bring over the Canadian wood cutters?

Hamish: Well, the men here were all in the war so there was nobody about to do it. The Canadians also had the equipment, I have never seen anything like it even to this day the stuff that they had. They had huge Caterpillars and they would take the whole tree right round the road there. They took it all into a sawmill that was just above our house there and everything was washed and a big manny called Toby had a big long stick with a hook on the end of it and he would catch the logs out on the water and take it in. Then it caught on an elevator and it went right up into the mill. Everything was cut up, up at the top of the mill, and then all the slabs and sawdust and that dropped down. Then there was a wee engine with two or three trailers on it and it took all the wood away out. That’s how in Spinningdale it is called the Mill Brae – that was the Achue Road. When we were bairns we would get on the back of this thing! They used to take slabs down because my granny was great at making scones and pancakes and we had a cow for milk and butter and crowdie and all this and they loved that. They used to come down wi’ the lorries and dump them in the field. Now, the field at the back of our house was completely full of wood and we thought to ourselves, ‘We’ll never ever use all this’ – but we did! The Canadians were really nice and they had canteens there and you weren’t allowed to go into the canteen but you could give money to some of the Canadians when they were going in! They used to have packets of biscuits – cookies they called them – but they were like shortbread and a tuppence it was for a packet of them. You used to give a tuppence to the bloke going in, ‘Could you get me a packet of biscuits? One night I mind I ended up wi’ fifteen packets and I was fair chuffed wi’ myself! But, I mean, everything was rationed o’ clock to get to her house cause we’d always get a boiled egg from her! Getting a boiled egg at that time was a great thing cause nobody had hens. Oh we were awful chuffed wi’ this boiled egg for lunch.

Fiona: Did any of the Canadians settle here or did they all go away again?

Hamish: No my auntie got married to one of them. He was the cook at Thirty Camp – that was at the end of Migdale. She went off out to Canada but she wasn’t long out there when Stan died. I lost touch with my auntie but she came home in 1979. When she went out at first it took a week to sail from New York to Canada on the boat.

But they were very very good the Canadians and they used to have big tins o’ beans cause we would get in for our lunch if you were out in the wood with them. They always came back at twelve o’ clock to have their meal so we used to get in and we’d get beans and stuff like that and oh it was great to get food! Cause everything was rationed and you only got so much tea and so much sugar and that and it was very very scarce and you’d need the money to buy it along with that. It was a great thing to get food free.

Kirsty: Has your family lived on the croft for a long time?

Hamish: Yes aye. This is the fifth generation now.

Carron: Can you tell us about crofting?

Hamish: Well I think you should know crofting! We had one cow and the neighbours next door they had a ewe and she had three lambs – triplets – which was very very unusual in these days. Of course the weak lamb, this crofter manny gave me the lamb, so it was a pet – but I knew perfectly well that he thought the lamb was going to die so that’s why I got it because he wasn’t going to be bothered with it. The lamb turned out a lovely big sheep and I mind going to the Golspie show with it and it got first prize – we won the championship with it! The manny was thon mad that he’d given the lamb away! She was born in May and May was her name. Then we had two cows, a cow and a heifer and I mind they were both due to calve about New Year time and I don’t know what happened but they both died.
We lost both of them and that was the end of my granny crofting until I took over the croft.

I was going to go to Glasgow to work — my relations wanted me to go to Glasgow to work to be a painter but I didn’t want to go to Glasgow so I waited and my granny said, ‘If you’ll wait — you’ll get the croft.’ So that’s how I landed wi’ the croft. I was twenty one when I got the croft. So then I started with six sheep and then a cow and I’ll never forget the cow — it went to a sale in Dingwall and Willie MacKay and there was this two heifers from Skye and oh they were na very big and he says, ‘We’ll buy one each,’ but the two came in at the same time and I was bidding on them and I got them. So then we had a terrible argument cause we were both wanting the same one. It was fifteen pound we paid for each of them and he said, ‘Right I’m no wanting that one,’ and I said, ‘Right then — just take the blooming thing.’ And you know this, that cow never ever had a calf and he had to sell her and the one I had had lovely calves! So it worked out perfect and that was my start on crofting.

“Well the Canadian wood cutters came here and there was one lot at the end of Migdale Loch — there was one camp there. Then there was another camp above Spinningdale and one at Clashmore…”

Hughie Murray Cnoc Dhu, he used to stay away out in the hill and he said to the yardsman, ‘That lambs are not sold — I came up wi’ that fella.’ So I got them through and I swore I would never ever go back to Lairg and I never ever did. I always go to Dingwall. Lairg is a swear word to me!

Kirsty: What did you do for fun when you were young?

Hamish: Well mostly it was football that we used to play down at Spinningdale at the crossroads. The people at where the garage is now, the couple there had a nice garden with dahlias and stuff in the garden and we used to play in the wee parkie just in front of their house. Sometimes the ball would go up and over the road and bounce on the road and land in their garden so whoever was the fastest had to jump the fence and catch the ball because if not they went off wi’ the ball on you! You had to be fit — I wish I could do it today! Sometimes we’d maybe go off a walk in the wood and that to see how many different kinds of birds we could see. Football was the main thing though.
Leanne: Can you tell me about where you were born and brought up?
Anne: I was born on a croft in Migdale called Culnara in 1944 and I had three older sisters and a brother and I was the youngest.

Leanne: Did any of your family speak Gaelic?
Anne: My mother spoke Gaelic and her sisters.

Leanne: Do you remember people speaking Gaelic in the community in Bonar Bridge?
Anne: Not really but my mother and aunties used to speak it to each other - I think they didn’t want us to know what they were saying! That’s the only time I used to hear them. They never talked Gaelic to the children at all.

Leanne: Where did you go to school?
Anne: Bonar Bridge Primary.

Leanne: What subjects did you do?
Anne: We did reading, writing, sewing, gym, art and music and we called our teacher the Walking Wardrobe because she used to arrive and she was packed with clothes always! Every time I put on lots of clothes now I think of the Walking Wardrobe. It was just singing that we did in the music class.

Leanne: Were you good at school?
Anne: I was quite good and I was good at sports. We were all good at sports in our family.

Leanne: What was Halloween like?
Anne: It was great! My brother, a friend of his and I used to go out every year. We got dressed up and we had lots of fireworks and we walked everywhere – right round Airdens and Migdale. We reached my grandfathers last and however much we had he made it up to a pound. Sometimes it was one o’clock in the morning we’d arrive at his! He used to watch for us coming because he’d see the fireworks coming from house to house – he would see them and he would know we were arriving. We’d be dressed just in old clothes not dressed as something as such. Everybody used to play tricks on each other and they would take a gate off somewhere and put it in a field and then they would take a horse out of a field and put it in somebody else’s field and swap horses! One time my father’s cart was found down in the golf course about quarter of a mile away! There was always tricks played on each other and everyone was frightened to get up in the morning not knowing what was done to them!

Leanne: What was Christmas and New Year like?
Anne: Christmas was good and we held Christmas. When I was young we used to have a film show in the village hall in the afternoons and then in our house we always had a party and we had some friends round. We just had a big tea and I always remember there was dumpling and Santa Claus always came to us. It wasn’t a holiday in the village – the shops were usually open on Christmas day and the post came. I remember one Christmas they were thrashing the corn at our house and there were lots of men to feed as well and then we had a party so it must have been a lot of work for our mother. We just had a stove to cook on.
New Year was a great celebration and it was a holiday and I can’t remember waiting up to take in the bells at twelve o’clock but the next day we always had frying steak for breakfast – I don’t know why! I think that was the only time I ever tasted it and then my brother and I used to go up to our neighbours, bachelors, three of them who lived together – two were there on holiday and one stayed there all the time. He always had in raspberry or strawberry wine for us so we used to go up there and get this and we continued going up every day until we had finished the bottle. I can’t remember people coming in but we always went up to our grandfather’s on New Year’s night and we had a terrible treat of jelly and peaches and I always ended up going to sleep and waiting there until the morning. We always played Scottish music on the radiogram – it was Calum Kennedy and Fergie and all that sort of things and much older ones than that too I suppose when I was younger. Everybody had a radiogram or a record player. None of our family played the pipes or the fiddle or that although my brother actually was learning to play the pipes – I forgot about that. There was a joiner who lived quite near us and we used to go up one night a week and I used to go with my brother and he used to make us do jobs for him in his workshop for hours and then he would give him ten minutes on the chanter! Then my brother gave up.

Leanne: Can you tell us anything about Croick church?
Anne: Well, when I lived in Bonar, Ardgay was like the other end of the world to us – it was so far away! I didn’t know anything about Croick church then and I only know now what I’ve read about it and the Clearances. The Clearances weren’t really talked about.

Leanne: Were any of your ancestors involved in the Clearances?
Anne: Yes they were. I think an uncle of mine, there was no bridge in Bonar then, and there is a story that he had to go somewhere to warn people that these men were coming and they had a horn of some kind that they blew. My brother has it in the house still. They never talked about the Clearances to us. We never knew about it until we were adults. I did hear things that they brought. They used to ask for tea in a pail and things and people used to feed them and that and then there was Mrs MacNeil and she used to come round with a case selling stuff as well.

Leanne: Can you remember the travellers coming to Bonar Bridge?
Anne: Oh yes - that was part of our life. They came and they sold tins and pails and clothes pegs and there used to be a lot of tramps came too. My father was in the war with one of the tramps called MacPhee and they always came to us and they slept in the barn. They always came at the same time every year and my brother and I were over in the barn after they left playing at being tramps! There was lots of people who came round selling stuff but they were different from the tramps I suppose. There wasn’t a lot of them but this MacPhee fellow came with his wife and we weren’t frightened of them – my father used to welcome this MacPhee with open arms. It was useful though because you couldn’t buy these beans in those days were looked down on ‘a tin of beans.’

We had Brownies and Guides and Mrs MacGregor, the doctor’s wife, took the Brownies and she took the Guides with the headmaster’s wife and we loved that. Also, we walked to school and in the winter we walked on the dykes because there was so much snow - it was as high as the dykes. There was very little road clearance then. I think we used to get more snow then or maybe it was just that it wasn’t cleared then so it seemed like more.

Bonar had lots of shops and you didn’t need to go anywhere else for shopping. There was the Co-op which was McKenzie Harris’s place and I used to get new sandals there every summer. A pair of brown Clark’s sandals – I can still see them! There was a lot of shops up the West End – there was three grocers shops up there and Bowies bakers. The vans came round every day though so my mother never had to go to the village. We didn’t get pocket money but my brother and I and a friend used to take an egg from the henhouse and when the Co-op van came we handed over the egg and it was worth a tuppence ha’penny and we got a chocolate wafer for it. Sometimes we managed to get two eggs but any more than that he wouldn’t take it because he thought we’d found an old nest of rotten eggs and he wouldn’t take them. We always went up to my grandfather’s on a Sunday night and if for some reason we didn’t go, my mother went on a Monday and that was the day the Co-op van came and she used to leave us a list and we used to write on the bottom of the list ‘a tin of beans.’
so terribly you would never eat beans and we used to get this tin of beans and we would take it to the shed and eat it, my brother and I! Then we used to bury the tin! There wasn’t any collection of rubbish in those days either, we had the midden and we threw everything on the midden. I don’t know where it went after that but of course we didn’t use tins in those days. Tinned fruit was just for Christmas and the day of the Communion which was a big day in Bonar. That was a big day of special treats and it was just once a year and you went to church and never got out until about three o’clock from about twelve. We just went on the Sunday but the more religious people went from the Friday until the Monday. You weren’t allowed to hang out washing on a Sunday or you didn’t knit or do anything. The Communion was in August. We used to get party dresses at MacDonald’s shop, that was a shop for ladies clothes and we used to get our party dresses there. I think our clothes were mostly homemade when we were little. We never got much holidays either – my holiday was going up the road to my grandfathers which was a mile away up the road! I had to pass my house to go to Bonar for shopping and I’d be so embarrassed ’cause I’d been away from home for two nights – I felt I’d been away for a year! I’d be all embarrassed passing the house. Other holidays we got was Guide camps – that was our holiday and I remember being in Edinburgh and Invergordon and sometimes I would stay on at my aunties on a holiday in Edinburgh. She was very strict but I remember she took me to the tattoo. When I was at a camp there my sister had started nursing in Edinburgh and she came to the camp to see me and brought me a box of Maltesers!
“At the age of eleven I left Elphin to attend Bonar Bridge Senior Secondary School. There was no hostel accommodation so I lived in the west end of the village with the Stewart family…”

Agallamh còmhla ri Marion Fhriseal
Interview with Marion Fraser

Rona: Can you tell us where you were born and brought up?
Marion: I was born in the parish of Assynt, bordering your parish of Creich. I was brought up in the crofting township of Elphin. All pupils attending Elphin Public School, on sitting the qualifying examination, had to leave home to attend a school with a secondary department. I chose Bonar Bridge.

Kirsty: How did you get to school?
Marion: My home was within walking distance of Elphin Primary School. At the age of eleven I left Elphin to attend Bonar Bridge Senior Secondary School. There was no hostel accommodation so I lived in the west end of the village with the Stewart family with whom I went to the Free Church every Sunday. The village was not as big as it is in your time, so the main population attending the church service lived in the crofting communities of Tulloch, Airdens and Migdale. At the end of each term I returned to Elphin to be with my parents.

Rona: What was it like when you moved to Bonar?
Marion: In 1948 there were many more shops than there are today. The reason is that the road system was changed to the detriment of communities west of a new bridge officially named the Dornoch Firth Crossing being built in 1991. This resulted in the loss of trade in Ardgay, Bonar, Spinningdale and Lairg. The main route, the A9, no longer services those communities so that it caused businesses to close, leaving properties empty and, over time, looking less attractive.

Fiona: Can you remember how many shops there were?
Marion: After World War II, two of the three butcher shops in the village had their own slaughterhouses. There were three bakery shops, two of which sold groceries as well. In the close where Bell-Ingram’s estate agents office is, a lady had a dressmaking business. Where Bell-Ingram operates there was a jewellers shop. ‘Ross the Butchers’ also had their shop in that property block with the living accommodation accessed by entering through the well-built arch. The family car could be driven to the house door. The slaughterhouse was on past the house and the animals were taken in from the path behind the properties. The path was used as a basis for Tulloch Road when houses were built in 1950 or thereabout. I should tell you that there are many natural springs along by the path and wells were constructed from which you could draw lovely cold pure water. In the west end of the village in Lairg Road there were two shoe repair shops, almost next door to one of those was Bowies (Mackays) bake house and grocery shop. When I was your age I thought that Danny Mackenzie the baker was the best baker because he baked lovely cream cookies as well as all sorts of small bread and big loaves. And not only that – Mrs Mackenzie sold sweeties from large jars, sherbet fountains and Tobermory tatties. It took a long time for the hard candy to melt in the mouth to reach the surprise treat in the middle of the tattie! The butchers Matheson & MacLeod trade from that building now. Next door, on the corner of Lairg Road, Mrs Polson had the Post Office and newsagents business. The corner shop is now the village hardware store where you can also buy plants as well as hoes and spades. When Catherine Polson retired newspapers were sold in the Kyle bakery
for a short time after which William Manson took over the news agency. He and his German born wife also sold fish and chips in a little shop next to Ben View near Craigard in Lairg Road. When I was going to school Craigard was an up-market boarding house where my best friend lived. She married a gamekeeper who lived in Swardale after which they emigrated to New Zealand. Many years later, after I married our schooldays contemporary James Fraser - we opened a restaurant situated in the centre of the village in Foundry Bank on Migdale Road, on the way to your school and to the golf course. My best friend’s daughter came over from New Zealand to visit her cousin in Craigard and helped me in The Chequered Flag Licensed Restaurant for a summer season. She enjoyed meeting all the young people who came into the snack bar at The Chequered Flag for ice drinks, hot chocolate, ice cream and sweets.

Mr and Mrs Manson sold the chip shop to Max Whythe and the building was adapted to accommodate a hairdressing business set up by Max. The Mansons then bought a bigger property, in order to be able to sell confectionary and ice cream as well as magazines and newspapers, at the east end of the village. It was quite a large gent’s tailoring business employing six men including Sammy MacDonald, who later bought the business when Donald Mackenzie retired. After Sammy’s day his family inherited the enterprise, when the shop became known as MacDonald the tailor, although the tailoring business eventually ceased and drapery was the operative word to describe the surviving business, until closure in 1995. The Scottish Co-operative Society had a drapery shop in Lairg Road, where Ali Ross the tailor had traded has now reverted to use as a private house. In the east end of the village there was a saddlery shop and a purpose-built pharmacy where James Moir M.P.S dealt with the doctors’ prescriptions. The doctor, J.D. MacRae, lived and had his surgery in Kyle House, now a guest house. The pharmacy building has recently been refurbished to accommodate offices for the Badbea Crofters and others. Carting was very much to the fore in the days when the first bridge was built in 1811-12 to cross the Kyle of Sutherland. The offices occupied by Ardgay Data are on the site of Hugh Mackenzie the carter’s croft land and buildings. The only surviving bakery and main food store is the Kyle bakery, in the centre of the village.

Rona: Can you remember people speaking Gaelic in the community?
Marion: Not as many as I used to hear in Elphin, but I do remember Alasdair Calder Kinnabadi adjudicating at a Gaelic song competition I took part in and won! At that time An Comunn Gaidhealach provided tutors to visit schools in preparation for Mod entry.

“There is a story that the Norsemen arrived at Newton Point and walked up to Acharry, above Spinningdale - the Vikings came in there and left their boats at Newton Point and walked along the ridge to the battle which culminated at Drimlea.”

Rona: When did you start working in the art shop?
Marion: The art shop was opened as an experiment when I closed the snack bar in 1996, to encourage, particularly young people, to develop their artistic abilities in various fields. We had to extend the range of materials for those who prefer craftwork rather than art. That is when I stopped being a restaurateur in 2001 to look after the art shop.

Rona: Can you tell us about place names? What does Migdale come from?
Marion: Migdale is a Norse name, not a Gaelic name. Airdens means ‘high places’ and Bonar Bridge [Drochaid a’ Bhanna] is ‘at the foot of the ford’. Ardgay [Aìrd Ghaoidhe] is ‘high wind’. There is the loch up there Loch Buidhe, ‘the yellow loch’ and Creich [Creich] means ‘boundary’.

Emily: Do you know any stories connected with the place names?
Marion: When I retired from my restaurant here I started a history society and I provided the information for the Gaelic place names in the book. There is a story that the Norsemen arrived at Newton Point and walked up to Acharry, above Spinningdale - the Vikings came in there and left their boats at Newton Point and walked along the ridge to the battle which culminated at Drimlea. Drimlea [Druim Liath] means grey ridge which means that the land is poor. So that’s the story with that battle which the natives won in 1031 - the battle of Drimlea.

Fiona: Are there as many Norse names as Gaelic names?
Marion: No there’s not. Swordale, Spinningdale, Rossal are Norse but there aren’t many around here but there are more in Caithness

Rona: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?
Marion: There are many stories. The residue, ‘clinkers’ from the old foundry at the end of the old path, now Tulloch Road, was dumped in a corner of your great-grandfather’s Carn Mhor croft land which he had decided to take into cultivation. When old Carn Mhor, Mackenzie, made the discovery he decided to sell the foundry spoil to the shipping agent, down at the pier. Since he was an enterprising fellow he knew that the product could be used as ballast in an empty ship. At times when a ship discharged its cargo of coal to the waiting carters there was no outgoing load of timber available for despatch. That was the moment for old Davie to do a deal! Did you know that a crofter in the Corshellach area was an accomplished fiddler whose wife Hennie (Henrietta) taught country dancing in their kitchen? I am sure there are many more interesting stories for you to research.
Inbhir Sin, Cùl Rathain, Innis nan Lìon, Luirg

Alasdair MacRath  
Jenny NicCòinnich  
Sandy Chalmers  
Mary Ann Weston  
Ailig Moireach

Invershin, Culrain, Rosehall, Lairg  
Alasdair MacRae, Jenny Mackenzie, Sandy Chalmers,  
Mary Ann Weston, Alexander Murray
“I play the fiddle and I was shown how to tune the fiddle by Willie MacDonald at Amat and that was basically it – I never had a music lesson in my life.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Alasdair MacRath
Interview with Alasdair MacRae

Leanne: Can you tell us where you were born and brought up?
Alasdair: I was born near Ardgay, in Dounie and brought up on Gruinards farm. Then later I moved to Altas and then to here, East Durcha. My father retired and we came up here because this was the old family home, since 1870. The family came from Aberdeenshire here, that was my mother’s side of the family and my father came from the west coast, Glenelg.

Emily: Why did they move here in 1870?
Alasdair: It was because the land was put up for lease. There was almost nothing here and the land was bought over by speculators and they were trying to lease it out and create money from that. It was advertised in the Banffshire Journal in 1870 – I’ve a copy of the advert somewhere. All these Aberdeenshire people came here and the reason for them being from the Aberdeenshire area was that they were considered to be hard working people whereas the natives, the locals were lazy! That was the proprietor’s opinion and that’s why he chose people from Aberdeenshire because they had reputations and we’ve seen all the work that they did, digging fields up, gathering stones, building dykes and farm buildings and it was tremendous work that they did. It was all by hand – no machines. That was the Lobbans and that’s how they came here.

Leanne: Did any of your family speak Gaelic?
Alasdair: Yes, my father did but my mother didn’t.

Leanne: Where did you go to school?
Alasdair: I went to Croick School for primary school – it’s up Strathcarron. Then I went to Tain Academy. There was about eight pupils in Croick School sometimes it was up to ten or down to six but it was that sort of numbers. Tain Academy would have been around two hundred. I was eleven when I went there.

Emily: How did you find moving to Tain Academy having been in the wee school at Croick?
Alasdair: Oh it was a great adventure getting on the buses and that. We had a minibus from home to Ardgay and then we got on the service bus which had travelled from Dornoch round Ardgay and we got on there to Tain. I had a friend who lived in Bonar so he was always first on the bus and he kept the back seat for me. We liked the back seat because we could see everything that was going on all the way down the bus. We would sit in the middle and keep the feet up and keep anyone else out except the chosen few. There was just that one fellow from Bonar that went to Tain, he was from Birchfield and the alternative for him was Dingwall Academy because there was no way of him getting to Ardgay on a daily basis so he stayed with his grandad in Bonar so that he could go to Tain. He would get home at the weekends.

Caroline: What subjects did you do in Tain?
Alasdair: My favourite subjects were maths, which I was really good at, and technical subjects. I remember the maths teacher coming into the class after the exam and he got a loose sheet of paper and his comments were, ‘Well, Alasdair’s done it again!’ I used to get a hundred percent or ninety five or ninety eight
percent quite frequently. I had the ability to do mental arithmetic very fast and that meant I could get through the exam paper very quickly and I then spent the rest of the time working back from the result that I had to the question and cross checking the whole thing. I liked the technical subjects and you can see it – I took the whole house apart and rebuilt it! So that was the benefit of that. The lowest I was ever in technical subjects was one term I was first equal and that term I'd had mumps, chicken pox and German measles all one after the other. That term another boy equalled my exam.

Caroline: Did you get music at school?
Alasdair: Yes we did but I detested it because it was singing classical songs which I had no interest in whatsoever. We never had any Scots songs or anything traditional.

Caroline: So did you do Scottish stuff at home?
Alasdair: The radio was always on and my father was a Gaelic singer but he probably needed a lot of whisky to get going! He could play the pipes and the melodion so he had a lot of music in him, you know. I play the fiddle and I was shown how to tune the fiddle by Willie MacDonald at Amat and that was basically it – I never had a music lesson in my life. I took it on myself to read music – I taught myself to do that. That wasn’t difficult because you knew the tune and you had the sheet of music and I thought this is the note and that’s where it is on the page and you work it out and it sticks after a wee while.

Leanne: What was your job?
Alasdair: My first job, I used to work when I was in school and I used to work with the gamekeepers at Gruinards during the school holidays. They’d be out grouse shooting and I’d get a chance to go fishing and things like that and I used to get paid for it. That was the first job, then when we came round here I started at the Forestry Commission and that would be 1963 and up Glencassley. They are felling the trees just now and these are some of the trees I planted forty five years ago. After that I spent two years at Glencalvie Estate, Benmore Estate it was called then, which was good at the salmon fishing in Bonar and everything from Oykle right west to Benmore. So I spent a lot of time on the River Oykle at the fishing and then in the wintertime at the deer stalking. I was sixteen years at that and then I went for a change and I started selling insurance! I didn’t really like it but that was another period of about sixteen years and then I took early retirement because my health wasn’t so good. Our office for that was in Tain but I did it from home and my area was from Midfearn to Durness and Lochinver and everything in-between. It was a huge area and you’d travel for hours on end before you saw anybody and you hoped that they were going to buy a policy from you to make it worth your while. During all that time of course I’ve been working on the croft. We had a sheep stock, ponies and I was doing all the work that was necessary here – the fencing, ditching, reseeding, ploughing and all that things.

Leanne: What was Christmas and New Year like?
Alasdair: Christmas we always had a school party and that was quite exciting because it was in Gruinards Lodge and that was really exciting being in a huge mansion, you know. It was all done out and we danced and our school teacher was Willie MacDonald Amat’s wife, Molly, and we were taught formal dancing. Gay Gordons and Strip the Willow and all these set dances so we had to do that in the lodge. We had to sing in choirs and there would only be about maybe eight of us in it. To me one of the highlights was Ronnie Ross’s father, he was the gamekeeper and an excellent fiddler and he played the fiddle for the dance music and I really loved that. That stuck in my mind and that was one of the reasons I started to play it. I still remember some of the tunes that he played. I didn’t start to play the fiddle until I was about sixteen and I remembered some of the tunes that he played ten years before that and even although I hadn’t played in-between, these tunes were still in my head and I was able to play them. Then the highlight was the Christmas tree and the big polished staircase at the end of the hall and it was a really grand place. The highlight was going through to the dining room and we had our supper and we had sweets and puddings and ice cream and Christmas crackers and we were pulling them and it was great. That was very very memorable.

We didn’t really have Christmas at home. We got our Christmas stocking from our parents, which was a real stocking because my father wore plus fours and always in the very bottom was an apple and an orange and then sweets of various kinds and a Christmas cracker. Maybe there would be a wee wooden car but there wasn’t much really. To us as a family, Christmas wasn’t really a celebration at all. You can say, in a way, the different attitude of the proprietors who were from the south because they were already celebrating Christmas – it was a big event to them and they sort of introduced that to the Lodge and consequently it was being given to the kids. Before that there was nothing to it.
New Year wasn’t a children’s thing it was more for the parents. There were quite a few people going around the old people and the neighbours and that. There was New Year parties, our neighbours, the Mackenzies next door had a party and we went as a family to it. The men sat there chatting about old times and cows and sheep and thing like that and supping away at drams! Us kids got hored to death with that! There was a New Year dance at Amat but we never went to that, that seemed to be outside our territory somehow.

Leanne: Were there many ceilidhs around?
Alasdair: If you mean ceilidhs people visiting others - our neighbours used to visit and spend quite a few hours and have cups of tea, chat and drams and that was probably more the right meaning of ceilidh. Nowadays it’s a function in the hall. We would have Donnie Mackenzie Doune and Alec Mackenzie and Davey Stag (Ross), Derek Campbell but Davey Stag he was a postman and he had a wee van and he lived quite close to Alec Mackenzie. He would come along with Davey Stag and he would bring him to the house with bags of corn for my father to put through the bruiser to make the bruised oats for the sheep and that was a ceilidh night. They came in and did the work and my father would start up the engine, it was an old engine so you had to crank it to start it up, and filled it up with the oats which got crushed going through the machine and then they refilled the bags. In the meantime my mother was making a spread on the table of tea and scones – she was always baking. They would come in and have their food and their drams and they would chat away for a couple of hours or more. That was fun.

Leanne: Who were the well known musicians in the area?
Alasdair: Well, Geordie Ross, Geordie the Keeper we called him – he was a fiddle player. Willie MacDonald Amat played the fiddle and the accordion as well. He taught James Moffat and Alec Mackenzie was a fiddle player. There was a lot of fiddle players, the Rosses, Brian Ross’s family – they were fiddle players as well. There was MacGregors in Amat too, one of the uncles, Charlie MacGregor, was a very very good fiddle player. He worked on the roads and he used to do the side drains and he was doing the top end of the strath, he would go round on his bicycle then one day he disappeared and he never came home. There was a search for him and they found his bicycle way up past Croick School and they found him up the hill and he had died. He must have taken a heart attack or something the poor man was a great fiddle player and that’s his fiddle I’ve got there. His sister gave it to me and that was my first fiddle. I spent six months at Amat after I left school because the man there, Jimmy MacGregor, had died suddenly and his wife came to my father to ask if I would look after the animals over the winter until her son came home. She gave me the fiddle, which was her brother Charlie’s, and next door was Willie MacDonald’s house and so that’s how I learned the fiddle from Willie MacDonald.

“...our neighbours used to visit and spend quite a few hours and have cups of tea, chat and drams and that was probably more the right meaning of ceilidh.”

Leanne: Can you remember the travellers coming to this area?
Alasdair: At Gruinards, the Williamsons came on a regular basis. They lived in Ardgay and it was Katie Williamson and she had a basket or sometimes a shawl and she had all this goods inside – like a dumpling it was all tied together. She had a way of tying it so that it had a loop on it which she tucked under her shoulder and she would walk miles and miles. She came quite regularly and she would come and she would sit down and she spoke Gaelic as all the traveller people did. There’s an expression of ‘tinker’s Gaelic’. They say that ‘tinker’s Gaelic’ is not pure Gaelic it’s influenced from the Romany and it’s mixed up. My father said that sometimes it was difficult to understand but anyway, they would be nattering away in Gaelic for ages and ages. She would lay down the bag on the floor, open it out and she would be giving out things like hair grips, buttons, needles, threads, combs, press studs all that sort of things. Quite often she would give items like that to my mother and for that my mother would give her something in lieu, sometimes she would pay her but usually it was half a dozen eggs or a dozen eggs depending on what she got or a bottle of milk. It was sort of barter you know, and she would go away happily with that. They lived in Ardgay in the wintertime but come the summertime, in May they would hitch up the horse and cart and they would head west. They seemed to have a route of their own. Some of them went north but Katie went west and they would camp down the road here by the big pine trees at Rosehall, and to Elphin and Kylesku. I think it was Donnie Mackenzie’s father Alec, he used to come into our house and he used to lie back on the armchair, there was big wooden arms on the chair, and he used to lecture. He used to say to my father, ‘Now it’s like this Roddy’, and he would thump the arms of the chair and this occasion the Queen was opening the bridge at Kylesku and old Alec was in the house and he gets on this subject and my father sort of prompts him on, ‘What do you think about this Alec?’ ‘It’s like this Roddy, I canna understand the fuss they are making about the Queen going up there to open the bridge. Now there’s Katie Williamson and she’s up there every summer and there’s never a word about her!’ I’ll never forget that even though I was quite young at the time. But the Williamsons, they were really nice people. They were honest, genuine, trustworthy people.

There was other ones too but she was the principle one. There was another manny used to come but I don’t have very clear memories of him. His name was John Galloway and he basically did the same thing, he tried to sell his wares. There was another one came and he had one arm and we called him Wingy but they said that he was a bit disturbed because he had been wounded in the war and it left him not quite right. He used to come from time to time.
Caroline: What was the outbuilding there used for?
Alasdair: That was the mill that was used for thrashing the corn. I think it was the old hammer mill – it wasn’t a very sophisticated thing. It would have fanners on it for taking the chaff off and then there was the drum for hammering and it would have been very roughly done. It was quite a small unit but that’s what it was.

Emily: When did they stop using it?
Alasdair: Well, my mother remembered using it. Now that would be about 1930, up until about then it would have still been used. There was two families you see, my mother was the second half of the family. Willie Lobban’s first wife died and they had three kids then the mother died and Willie Lobban married again and my mother was one of the second family. Then the second wife died and the oldest sister of the first family, looked after the rest as some of them were quite young. So there was no man about, Willie went off and there was no man to do the work so that’s really why it all ceased I think. It’s an interesting mill and mill wheel and the race and the dam. It’s all surface water, there’s no burn or stream comes in. There was a drain dug to take the water into the dam but there’s no natural stream there at all so they had to shut the sluice gate and wait a day or a couple of days for the surface water to fill the dam and then they could do the thrashing. My mother used to say that she could remember many times when she was a wee kid, the oldest sister getting them up in the middle of the night, ‘Come on! Get up! We must go and do the thrashing because the dam is full!’ It had been raining and there was enough water to get the thrashing done. She hated it – having to get out in the middle of the night. It would be dark and spooky and this mill rattling away and water gushing past. It was a tough life.

Caroline: Do you know anything about when the Canadians were here during the war?
Alasdair: They were here during the last war and they had a camp down in the woods and they were cutting the timber for the war effort. Some of them stayed on and they married. There was no men about during the war and 1 heard old Johnny Matheson, he used to say that there was comments being made about the Canadians coming in and going off with all the women and any local man wouldn’t get a look in at all. Once they left and the men came back from the war, those that did come back, the women weren’t interested in them. There was regular dances here in Rosehall and that’s where they all paired up.

Emily: Did you ever hear much about the Clearances when you were younger?
Alasdair: No, it wasn’t being talked about much. Until recent years it was something that was very much being suppressed. The gentry who were perpetrators of the exodus of a lot of the indigenous people, they maintained an influence. We lived for a short time in a house down there, before we came here, and we didn’t pay rent for it because if you paid a rent for it you had security of tenure over the land and you couldn’t get a house back. There was things that needed to be done that hadn’t been done and we’d spoken to the landlord about it and they never ever did it, you know. One day I said to my mother, ‘Look, allow me, I’ll go and speak to him and see that this gets done.’ She was absolutely horrified and she said, ‘You can’t do that, you can’t speak to him.'
he’s the proprietor. What are you talking about? How dare you. You can’t do that. That was the attitude - the fear they’d instilled in the people. Think of it today, how on earth all these intelligent people allowed themselves to be rounded up and exported – it’s unbelievable. But that’s a lot to do with the influence the gentry, the ruling class, had on them. It’s only in recent years that it has come to light and people talk about it more freely. I’ve looked into it quite a lot and it’s dreadful the things that were done. Even that little house down there which was the original family home, there was two crofts and they were joined about 1917 and our family moved to this one which was the bigger one and the little house was left empty. There was various people allowed to live in it – the pearlys were in it at one time. In 1955, the landlord sold it to an English couple and our family never did anything about it but it was theirs – they had built it with their own muscle power and the landlord sold it over their heads. They didn’t do anything about it because they were afraid they would upset the landlord.

Caroline: Did you used to go to the Invercharron Games?
Alasdair: There was no Invercharron Games when I was young but what we used to go to was the dog trials. It was year about, one year Invercharron and the following year it would be at Creich. We used to go to that. There was Coronation Sports – that was a big day in Ardgay. Gledfield School, Croick School, Culrain School and probably Bonar School too were there.

Caroline: Did you win any races?
Alasdair: Oh I was dandy aye! I won a few of the races but the one we didn’t win, we were third and it was the three legged race and I’ve never forgiven him to this day! The other boy just couldn’t get his feet right – he was putting his forward and mine was going back and we landed in a heap! Then we managed to scramble it to third I think.
“In Culrain we didn’t go and buy fancy clothes to dress up at Halloween – we used to find old jackets and turn them outside in and sometimes we’d put on a kilt and we went round every house in the village.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Jenny NicCoinnich
Interview with Jenny Mackenzie

Carron: Can you tell us about where you were born and brought up?
Jenny: I was born in the very north of Scotland in Thurso and that was a long long time ago. I came to this part of the world when I was fifteen because my father took a farm near the castle called Culrain Mains and we all had to come from Thurso to here. We didn’t like it, after being in a little town it was not what we were looking for as teenagers but we soon got to like it and I love it now – I’ve been here a long long time.

Sìne: Did any of your family speak Gaelic or do you remember people speaking Gaelic in this area?
Jenny: None of my family speak Gaelic but when I was member of the Lairg Gaelic choir I had to learn little phrases which I’ve now lost. There was no Gaelic spoken in our home but I used to hear people with a smattering of Gaelic now and again.

Sìne: Where did you go to school?
Jenny: I went to school in the West Public School in Thurso and then onto the Miller Academy. I would be fifteen when I left school and I had left school only a few months when I moved here. We had huge classes in Thurso and I seem to remember fifty in one class and one teacher but that was unusual I think, probably about thirty would be the average, especially in Miller Academy. I lived opposite where the new college is in Caithness. I was born in this big rambling house which was demolished a few years ago because it was too old. It was in one of the fields that was taken over to build the college.

Carron: Which subjects did you do?
Jenny: When I went on to Higher Grade I wanted to do domestic but the rector asked to see me and he said that I was very capable of doing a language so I went on and did that. I did a little bit of French and a little bit of Latin.

Carron: What was your job?
Jenny: My first career was nursing but at one stage my health broke down and nursing was too hard for me so I went to college in Edinburgh for a year and I did business studies. I loved Edinburgh. My late sister was a lecturer in the college and it was a very cold place – but I liked it. Iain Campbell at Balblair farm wrote to me and asked me would I like to come and be his secretary to the hill sheep farm that he and his son owned. So I went there and I was with them for five years until I married. That’s my career. That was a very happy time and I’m still very friendly with them and my designation was private secretary. They had a big hill sheep forest farm, I think it was something 46,000 acres – it was huge. There was a lot of work to be done there but I loved it.

Sìne: What was Halloween like when you were little?
Jenny: It was brilliant! In Culrain we didn’t go and buy fancy clothes to dress up at Halloween – we used to find old jackets and turn them outside in and sometimes we’d put on a kilt and we went round every house in the village. We didn’t get anything until we did something – we either had to dance or sing or say a poem and we had great fun. We used to dunk for apples and the treacle scones. I always make the kids now tell a joke or say a poem or something. We got maybe an apple or a few nuts from people, or maybe a biscuit but we never got money.
Carron: What was Christmas and New Year like?
Jenny: I’m one of ten children and Christmas for us was just a case of Santa coming and filling out stockings and in the bottom we got an apple or an orange and a little sugar piggy. Then we always got something that we needed like pants or a vest and in the top we always got a cracker. We didn’t get toys because there was too many of us. On Christmas day it was just like an ordinary day except that mum made a very nice dinner for us. New Year was our thing and not Christmas. New Year was different because we had a festival at New Year and the neighbours came in and first footed and some of them had musical instruments, accordions, and they played. We were allowed to stay up, the older ones, and it was lovely. Even in Culrain we would walk up the strath a long way, we would go to Achnahanat. We would have a wee party in every house and they would always have cold meats and food for us and then we’d come back and we didn’t do so much in the village, it was more outside the village. I always remember that I’d promised my mother that I would make a breakfast on New Year’s Day so sometimes I was out all night then I’d come home, make the breakfast and then went to bed for a couple of hours – then it all started again! We’d be drinking too you see. It was good fun and everybody enjoyed it and there would be dancing in the houses.

Caroline: Can you tell us anything about Croick church?
Jenny: We used to get trampies coming to the farm at Culrain and my mother used to give them tea or whatever and they wanted to sleep overnight in the barn where there was straw. My father always allowed them to do that but he took their cigarettes and matches away from them in case they set the barn on fire. They were very nice and polite people. In the morning they would get their pail filled with fresh tea and off they went. They always came back regularly but only for one night then they’d be away again. The other trampies that I was in touch with was up in Migdale Hospital. I nursed there for a short period and the trampies were allowed to come for a short period and we cleaned them up and fed them and gave them clothing and then they went away. They couldn’t do that too often, I can’t remember how often. That outer building at Migdale, that’s where the caretaker lived and he used to take them in and then pass them into the hospital to us and we had to clean them up and that wasn’t easy I tell you. We cut their hair and cut their nails and gave them a bath. Most of them were lovely people. We always had a cupboard of clothes in Migdale because it was a poor house at one time so we used to give them even lovely suits sometimes so they came for that, then off they went. Then we had the tinkies selling at the doors with baskets. They would sell clothes pegs and little things and we always bought something. They walked for miles with these baskets. The other thing in Thurso that I remember about my childhood was the fishermen’s wives met the boats at the little harbour and they had creels and they filled them with fish. They all had a race to get to the houses that they knew would buy the fish! They used to come to our farm in Thurso and there would be maybe twelve in the house at one time and my mum could buy enough fish for a meal for two shillings. They used to ask for newspaper and we had a wee wall outside and they used to clean all the fish and wrap up the remains and take that away and they gave that to their men for bait for fishing. Nothing was wasted. It was a cheap meal and my mother would boil the cod and she made her own butter, so she would put enough butter in a bowl and just before the fish was ready she would set the bowl in the pan with the water to melt it and she served the cod and poured this melted butter over the cod - it was lovely. We had our own poultry and we had ducks – we loved duck eggs when we were little children and we had our special ducks – we thought! So we used to go out in the morning when we were getting our breakfast ready for school, our mum would be doing it, and we found the eggs in the nest that the duck had laid and we had a duck egg boiled nearly every day after our porridge. We used to say, ‘That’s not your egg – my duck laid that egg!’ It was good fun.

Caroline: Did you have chores round the farm?
Jenny: Oh yes, absolutely. Our routine would be when I came home from school, I would be about ten by this time, we had to change straight away. Sometimes my mum would be in the field with my father and so there would be a jug of milk and scones on the table and we helped ourselves and then we went to the hayfield or whatever field they were working in with the horses, no tractors, and we would have fun running round the stooks. We helped too and then as a treat we used to get to ride home on the horses back. In the house we all had chores to do, we had no carpets but we had to polish the floors, wash the dishes. After dinner my mum went out to milk the cows and so the older ones had to clear the table, do the dishes, sweep the floor and I don’t
were cooked separately and there would be bigger pieces of carrots. The potatoes were boiled with cream and another one with skimmed milk. We loved that skimmed milk. We had to turn the churn for making the butter and it would go on! Sometimes if you were lucky you got butter fairly soon, other times you had to churn and churn and churn. We had paraffin lamps with glass and on a Saturday we had to clean all the glass and fill them up with paraffin ready.

My mother only washed once a week on a Monday but she washed all day long by hand. All the whites had to be boiled – we had a courtyard with a fireplace outside and a huge pan and I can remember them boiling there and the stick for poking them down. She had four long, long clothes lines and they would be nearly full because there were seven girls in our family and you can imagine the dresses in the summer and all that. She ironed with a box iron and you put the inside part in the fire and when it’s red hot you put it in this sort of case and then you have to iron with it and sometimes a bit of soot would come off on the nice clean things – it was awful. And the starch, collars were starched – it was hard work!

Caroline: What about for cooking?

Jenny: We always had stoves and I suppose that helped to heat the house as well. We didn’t have wood at that time in Caithness but that’s a fallacy because they are growing now. It was a coal fire but cooking was much simpler then – mum would make a big pot of broth and she would put the meat that we were going to eat in the actual pot and as well as all the veg cut up she would have large pieces of turnip and bigger pieces of carrots. The potatoes were cooked separately and there would probably be a rice pudding in the oven.

She only had the big pan, the little tattie pan and the oven. We had meat hot one day and cold the next day – I hated the second day. We had a lot of chickens because we had them and she would roast them in the oven. It was simple compared with what we did.

When I was older and after we came to Culrain, at Christmas my mother used to have turkeys, ducks, geese, chickens and a lot of our friends – that’s what she gave them for Christmas. When she was plucking the feathers I was always with her and I could gut a chicken when I was young because I was doing it for so long. We had to singe them, clean them all up and parcel them up and deliver them to the people she was giving them to. It was very busy at Christmas time. Some of them went away by post! My mother made cushions and pillows with the feathers. I think she put them in the oven – maybe to kill the bugs or something. She made rugs with rags too. Suppose your clothes were done, she would cut it all in long strips - well, we did that bit! Then the base for the rug had all holes in it and she had a sort of big tool with a point in it and she put that in and pulled a bit of this thing up and she did some beautiful designs in them. That’s what she did at nights, in the evenings. Latterly she went on to woollen things. That’s what she did at nights, in the evenings. She made cushions and pillows with the feathers. I think she put them in the oven – maybe to kill the bugs or something. She made rugs with rags too. Suppose your clothes were done, she would cut it all in long strips - well, we did that bit! Then the base for the rug had all holes in it and she had a sort of big tool with a point in it and she put that in and pulled a bit of this thing up and she did some beautiful designs in them. That’s what she did at nights, in the evenings. Latterly she went on to woollen things. That’s what she did at nights, in the evenings.
Prince Olav used to walk down through the village of Culrain with all their servants and they used to speak to us and King Håkon had a stick with a point at the end of the stick and if he saw a weed he used to pull it out. We were thrilled as young girls with all these good looking Norwegian chaps roaming around. I don’t know how long he stayed for—not very long I don’t think.

Caroline: What were their clothes like for the banquet?

Jenny: Oh yes, evening dress. The Duke of Sutherland was there and people remarked that he would be eating from china that had been stolen from Dunrobin! The castle at that time belonged to Lord Salvesen, who was one of the shipping people and that’s why King Håkon, being Norwegian—that was the contact I think. They were all beautifully attired I must say, and Malcolm preceding them with the pipes was lovely. I’ll never forget that—but the peas that I shelled! I think it was seventeen couples which meant that thirty four people sat down at the banquet so they needed quite a lot of peas! I think there was a dance in the ballroom afterwards but we were too busy cleaning up in the kitchen to see anything of that. It was some do I can tell you. It was a great thing for Culrain.

Caroline: Would there be any pictures of that?

Jenny: I wouldn’t think so, you see it was all so secret because he was in exile, King Håkon and Prince Olav. I don’t think many people knew that they were coming up here.

Caroline: What was it like during the war?

Jenny: We had Polish soldiers guarding the bridge during the war because the bridge at Invershin was the only rail route to the north of Scotland so it had to be guarded. I can remember too when the Royal Oak sunk. I was in Thurso and all the survivors came to Thurso and they were housed in the town hall and the Salvation Army looked after them and everybody gave what they could to feed and clothe them. There’s a very strong Salvation Army group in Thurso—I think still to this day and they’ve done a lot of good. I also remember where I was the day that war was declared—we were allowed, a group of girls, to camp in my father’s field. It was the first time we were allowed to do it and we were all excited and we slept in it Saturday night and on Sunday morning war was declared. The police came to my dad and said, ‘Get the tent down.’, because if they light a lamp the enemy can see that so we had to abandon the camping holiday. Funnily enough though we were delighted because we got a day off school—we didn’t realise what war meant entirely. I would be thirteen then.
Annie Rose: Can you tell us where you were born and brought up?
Sandy: I was born in Dingwall and my family had the Invershin hotel and I moved south when I was quite young. I came back in 1971 when my grandfather died and left me his house & I've lived in Invershin ever since.

Leanne: What was it like when you moved to Bonar Bridge?
Sandy: Well, I had a paper shop in Bonar Bridge so I lived in the village for ten years and it was a very good place to live – friendly, with lots of craic and the community seemed to come together very well. It was a very nice, friendly village and still is.

Annie Rose: Do you remember people speaking Gaelic in the community?
Sandy: Yes. Some of my neighbours had the Gaelic and my neighbour Christy reads Am Bratach.

Leanne: What did you work as?
Sandy: Well, I’ve worked in quite a few jobs. One of the best ones was working on the netting station in Bonar. In the old days, everybody worked in that netting station. The crofters in the summer would work there and it was quite a tough job. You had to work night and day, rowing out the big boats in the dark, putting out the heavy nets, then rowing back and pulling them in to get the fish. The fish were loaded onto a tractor and Johnny Carnmhor would take them to the railway station, from where they were taken south. They were beautiful big silver salmon. The salmon fishing is very important to Bonar Bridge and has been for the last four hundred years. In fact, it was mentioned in the parish records in the 1600s that Bonar Bridge was the centre of salmon excellence, even then. There used to be five netting stations and at the top of the tide they all put out their nets to catch the salmon.

You had to work every twelve hours. It wasn’t like a normal job where you went to work at nine and finished at five – with the salmon, you had to work with the tide which was every twelve hours. You had to be out no matter if it was hail, rain or snow and there was no shelter. A lot of the people couldn’t swim and we were rowing in the dark!

Fiona: How many men would be working at a time?
Sandy: Well, there were two shots in Bonar – the Bonar shot just above the bridge where there was a wee tin hut and the winch, and there was the river shot down below Bonar Bridge. There were seven men on each station. One man, the towman, pulled the boat while two men rowed it round, then everyone pulled in the net. You did that all the time, it was a cycle, round and round. In the 70s, this was big scale. There were two tractor loads coming a day with trailers right up to the sky with salmon boxes. There was one year when a massive amount of salmon were caught.

“The salmon fishing is very important to Bonar Bridge and has been for the last four hundred years.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Sandy Chalmers
Interview with Sandy Chalmers

Sandy Chalmers, Annie Rose Rothach agus Leanne Rothach
I can't remember now how many but it was thousands of fish in a very short time - just in June and July. The estate owner made an awful lot of money because they were beautiful fish.

**Sandy: Do you eat salmon?**

Annie Rose and Leanne: Yes!

Sandy: I love wild salmon, in fact I had salmon last night. So the salmon were very important to Bonar Bridge and if you go to the church, you'll see a picture of the salmon in the stained glass window and also embroidered on the altar cloth. So it was very important to the whole culture of Bonar Bridge. Johnny Carnmhor ran it for forty years and he really was the salmon fishing - he did everything and there was a lot of work involved. He had to get gravel to make up the footpaths so you could walk up and down and he had to bring the shed and winch out. Once the fishing started, you couldn't not be there - you had to be there. If you were five minutes late you were put off, so the times were very important. At every tide, you'd see all the fishermen walking down to the Kyle to meet in the hut where there was a big ice making machine. In the old days, Migdale loch would freeze over and they'd bring down the ice by horse and cart and put it in the ice house in Ardgay. The ice would stay frozen right through the summer in the cold ice house. In modern times, the ice was made by machine which was much easier then having to break up great big slabs.

**Fiona: Was ice packed into the boxes with the salmon?**

Sandy: Yes, it was - to keep the fish fresh. They'd go straight to Aberdeen or London on the night train. It was a big job loading them up because you had to take them to Ardgay station on the tractor, load them off the trailer, then cross over the railway line because it was the down train that took them. The boxes were so heavy! When you finished work for the day, your muscles were sore after all the rowing and heavy lifting. It was a physical and demanding job. As I said before, most of the crofters did it and they could tell you about it. Barbara's dad, he ran the Bay shot which was between Bonar and Ardgay - the pensioners did that shot because the current wasn't so strong there. The water came in and out gently but where we were, especially if there had been a lot of rain and the river was flowing fast, it was challenging rowing across it and we were all physically fit, dealing with the power of the water.

The other thing was that you knew everything that was going on in the village because you saw all the comings and goings, being up all night. There were no secrets at all - we could see who was going where and what they were doing! In the summer, we could hear people talking because sound travels across water and you'd be sitting quietly and able to hear what people were saying. In the summer too, there were coaches of tourists who parked opposite the post office to take photos - it was a popular attraction. It finished in 1996 but it had been going on for nearly four hundred years so you can see how important it was for the village.

**Leanne: What sort of boat did the fishers use?**

Sandy: It was called a cobble. It was a big, wooden heavy boat with two sets of oars- big heavy oars and two men rowing it. The man in front had to direct it and he really had to know where he was going. Towards the end of the season the boats were leaking and you had to get a bucket and bail them out - so that was a bit of a problem! They were very old boats and there was plenty of room in them. They used to row the Salmon Queen across too for the start of Salmon Queen week and it was all done up with flowers and it was beautiful. We had to take them out of the water every year, turn them upside down, then paint and put tar on them.

**Annie Rose: How many boats were there?**

Sandy: Well, there was one in the bay and four in Bonar Bridge. There was another one further up called the Craggan shot which wasn't done by the estate but by a man called Alex Smith. As you go over the bridge you could see all the boats tied up there. The tide changes a lot, sometimes it's very big, the spring tides and other times it's very slow, called the neaps.

Leanne: What equipment did you use?

Sandy: The fish come out!

Sandy: Absolutely. Sometimes we'd have to stop and there was a special needle for sewing up the mesh. In one tide, you'd do twelve out and back in again with both boats, so that's twenty four times a net would be going into the water and coming out in six hours. So the net was very important - it was very big, very heavy and when it comes in, it's lying on the shore in a big muddle with all sorts of stuff caught in it, bits of seaweed and twigs and so on. There's a piece of wood about the size of a table and you'd stand on it, wobbling about in the water and lay the net out on it. It had to be laid right so that it would go out smoothly. You couldn't just throw it out in a lump, you had to pile it in coils so that it went out without tangling. You had to make sure it was really clean and stacked properly. It had big, heavy lead weights on the bottom and big corks on the top so that it was like a curtain in the water. So it was just the boats, the wooden oars, the net and winch, because in a stream tide, it couldn't be pulled in by hand.

Annie Rose: Was it a difficult living to make?

Sandy: Well, you got used to it. There was no point in complaining because, if you saw it was going to be really heavy rain and hail, it didn't make any difference - you knew you had to go out and work in it. You didn't have a choice - you had to go out working. You had a pair of waders on and an oilskin jacket and you got soaked because they didn't keep the rain off. You were soaked to the skin. It was hard in that way but then, when it was a lovely summer morning and you'd see the sun rise and it was calm with the birds singing, it was a beautiful job - you couldn't ask for better. But in bad conditions it was tough - especially in the dark. I loved the job because there was a rhythm and every twelve hours you knew where you had to be. It didn't matter where you were or
Oh, I don’t know. Of course everybody and then, ‘Where’s my sandwiches?’ energy doing all the pulling and rowing very physical and you burnt up a lot of and you’d come back starving because you know, they’d hide your piece box jokes and playing jokes on people too.

Sandy: The public weren’t allowed to come near because it was dangerous – it was written in your contract of employment. Of course there was one problem I haven’t told you about – the toilet! We won’t go into details but it was difficult because there wasn’t one! Anyway, some people would walk down the path to see us, you see. When we stopped for our piece, the swans would come along and there was a pair who were tame and they’d come right up to your hand and we’d give them a bit of a sandwich. That was fantastic that was – I loved that. But yeah, unlike Bettyhill where they let other people help, in Bonar it was totally not allowed – just the people who were working there only.

Fiona: It was probably more dangerous here because it was a bigger netting station and faster moving water and they didn’t have winches in Bettyhill either.

Sandy: Some people lost their fingers in the winches. Thinking back on it, there were four of you winching and it brought in the rope, then it brought in the net and then, when the net was in, you brought it in by hand and there were the salmon. You banged them on the head and put them in a box and started going out again – it was like a big circle.

Leanne: Do you know any stories about fishing?
Sandy: I know lots of stories about fishing but I can’t really talk about most of them! There was lots of fun and telling jokes and playing jokes on people too. You know, they’d hide your piece box and you’d come back starving because you’d get very hungry in the job as it was very physical and you burnt up a lot of energy doing all the pulling and rowing and then, ‘Where’s my sandwiches?’ ‘Oh, I don’t know’. Of course everybody knew because they’d put them under the salmon and they’d gone ashore! They put the piece box in with the salmon so this poor bloke was starving and we weren’t going to give him a sandwich! Lots of games were played like that and you got to know people very well because everybody has good and had days and sometimes they’re in a bad temper or upset because something sad had happened to them so you got to know them really well. Even to this day, all the people I worked with on the netting station, if we ever get together, we often talk about the memories of that job. Young boys in the school holidays would work there, never any girls. The pay in 1991 was £120 a week which was quite good money for a young boy at school and it was good for them because it made them strong, made them tough and they wouldn’t moan about the weather like kids do today! In those days, you and you were in a dark boat – in all my time amongst all the people who worked there, only two or three people fell in the water and they were all rescued. I mean, you had to be safe and you sat in the middle of the boat and didn’t lean over the side or try to tip the boat – that would have been stupid – we had to be sensible like that. The balance was very important, you had to be in the right place so that the boat was level, so that it was easier to row.

We used to have the boat race – that was good. That was at the Salmon Queen week and all six boats would row down from the bridge, right down to the bay and then turn round and row back against the water coming down. It was really really hard work. I did that for about five or six years, rowing with Kob Sinclair who worked at the netting station for many years - I think about twenty years. The first prize was a bottle of whisky and we won it a couple of times. These were really strong men and sometimes the boats were level and it was, ‘Oh, who is going to win? And it was really exciting with people cheering from the shore. The girls used to have a race too in the big boats and I was very impressed with some of these ladies and it was all for the bottle of whisky of course. There was a lot of fun to be had there.

Over the whole time, it was amazing that there were no accidents. I’d heard of one or two people losing their fingers in the winch but nothing worse and, considering how dangerous it was, that was pretty good.

Fiona: What about the salmon fishing bothy at the other side of the river – was it used for storing equipment?
Sandy: That was a workshop where the nets were stored as well as the oars in winter. There were lots of beautiful old wood tools in there because they repaired the boats themselves. When you’re pulling boats across the shore, the stones wear away the bottom of the boats so they have to be turned over, take out the damaged plank and shape another one to go in which is a great skill. Johnny Carnmhor was the only one to go in

“In the old days, Migdale loch would freeze over and they’d bring down the ice by horse and cart and put it in the ice house in Ardgay.”
there, we only went if we lost an oar. The tin hut was our shelter, you could go in there for lunch but it was about the size of this table – very small! You’d all sit in there close together but sometimes it was good to get out of the wind coming down the river. You’d sit there, all seven of you, and it was quite funny in the dark, you had to be careful not to tip over anyone’s flask because you needed hot food in that job, I can tell you – a hot coffee or tea.

Something I didn’t say about the job was that you were allowed to keep the sea trout. That was a perk because the pay wasn’t that good and you could sell the trout, and we did. On a Friday you’d have a few trout because by July you’d maybe get three or four each. We’d get a few quid, go to the pub and have a good time! That’s very much what it was like on a Friday night. The sea trout were delicious, better than salmon I think.

I think the important thing that young people need to understand about Bonar Bridge is that there are five rivers passing Bonar – five big famous salmon rivers; the Carron, the Shin, the Cassley, the Oykel and the Evelix where you pay £1000 a week to fish. These rivers make a lot of money and give work to the gillies who help people catch fish and the water bailiffs who protect the rivers from poachers. So salmon is very important to this area and has been for four hundred years. Because there’s no netting now, people won’t know about it but it is very important that it went on and that it was a major part of life in this village. It fitted in with the harvest and haymaking and ploughing and, way back in time before the second world war, they would start in January. For months you’d be out there with ice on the boats and nets and it was freezing cold. They didn’t have rubber waders then, they had leather ones which leaked so you didn’t want to get your feet wet when it was cold in January. As time went on, the time you actually went fishing with the net became less and less. It started in May, then in June but it always finished on September 30th. Then they brought it in closer and closer until in the end it was only going for four weeks in 1994 and 1995. The owners wanted all the salmon to go up the rivers so that they could make much more money from people fishing with a rod, rather than the salmon ending up in the nets downstream. Most netting stations have closed now for this reason. There used to be netting stations all over but I can only think of one now which is down by the Cromarty bridge. They’ve stopped at Balintore and Portmahomack – all the fishing stations have been stopped to conserve the salmon.

Do you know about the life of a salmon? The salmon are the king of all fish – it’s a marvellous fish. It is born in a river, a special place in the river, a special pool and when it gets bigger, it goes all the way up to Greenland because, underneath the icecap it feeds and gets bigger, then it swims back again, right back to the exact same place it was born and lays its eggs there. This journey involves huge distances, avoiding predators like seals and other nets, and leaping huge waterfalls at times, but it has to get there. After the female lays her eggs, she gets very thin, they are skin and bone after making this massive journey and giving birth to maybe five thousand eggs. She makes a wee hole in the gravel in the bottom of the river and lays the eggs, then the male comes along and puts his stuff in there. The eggs hatch into tiny little fish who get bigger and then are washed down to the sea and as soon as they get there, they turn to silver, having been grey black in the river. They grow stronger and go all the way to Greenland which is about three thousand miles away.

It’s only recently that they’ve found out where the salmon go because some scientists were in submarines under the icecap and they saw these big dark shadows and thought it was another submarine but it wasn’t – it was thousands and thousands of North Atlantic salmon. They all go to the same place to feed and live on plankton. The amazing thing is how they find their way back to the same river. Nobody can understand how they tell – there are no signposts out there to say Bonar Bridge turn right! That’s the miracle of them. Even though there is no fishing happening now, who knows, it might one day start up again. I would like to see that.
“I was working on the railway in Bonar during the last war. I was doing signalling because the men were away.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Mary Ann Weston
Interview with Mary Ann Weston

Leanne: Can you tell me about where you were born and brought up?
Mary Ann: I was born in Auchintoul, Altas and I was brought up there.

Leanne: Do you remember people speaking Gaelic in the community?
Mary Ann: Yes, my father spoke Gaelic and he used to speak Gaelic with his neighbours. Most of them spoke Gaelic then. My mother didn't know Gaelic and therefore it wasn't spoken in the house. My mother was from the Black Isle and my father was born in Altas. That was his old home and he was born there and his father before that.

Leanne: Where did you go to school?
Mary Ann: In Rosehall and there was two teachers – a schoolmaster and a teacher for the younger ones. I left that school when I was fourteen and we had the primary teacher, Mrs Faulkner, and then we had Mr Crawford – that was many moons ago!

Caroline: What subjects did you cover?
Mary Ann: English and arithmetic was my best – history and geography I didn't care for it at all! We had sewing and cooking and that.

Leanne: What was your job?
Mary Ann: I went to the nursing for a while but I took the measles and I took them very bad and I came home for so long and that was it, I never went back. I did the nursing training in Arbroath and my cousin was there before me and she wanted me to go with her you see. I was there for a few months before I took the measles and I was in the children's ward and I liked it there. Of course they had the measles and so I took the measles and that was it. After then I was home and did different things but I worked at home.

Leanne: How has crofting changed?
Mary Ann: My father had the croft and we all had to help with that. We did all the jobs but I loved the horses. That was my favourite. We had two working horses on the croft for ploughing and harrowing and we walked behind them. Oh and gathering stones and weeds – don’t mention that! We all had to work. We had cattle and sheep and hens and turkeys. My mother was great for the turkeys. They had lovely eggs the turkeys – beautiful. They were bigger than the hen's eggs so we would eat them and my mother would sell them too. My mother had bees too, hives of bees and we took the honey off them. They were down in the garden at the front of the house. I got stung often enough. She used to sell it – you would get the wooden sections and the bees would fill it up and she would sell the sections.

Leanne: What was Altas like during the war?
Mary Ann: I was working on the railway in Bonar during the last war. I was doing signalling because the men were away. I was there for two years and I liked it. The trains were busy with the troops going north and I was on duty there at night on my own. You had to have the tablets and have them out for the train to go through. It was a round disk and the train didn't stop it just picked it out of the machine as it was passing. There was a signal box and you had to change it every time there was a train coming down from the north or coming up from the south. There were porters and
the station master. It was pretty lonely at nights but there was an office. I cycled from Bonar because I stayed with my sister at the time in the council houses.

Caroline: What about the shopping?
Mary Ann: We had a wee shop in the Altas, the Post Office, and if you wanted a proper shop you had to cycle it or walk it. There was vans from Bonar coming round with groceries. There was the butchers van – he didn’t come round that often but the groceries, there was Bowies van and another grocer van.

Leanne: What was Christmas and New Year like?
Mary Ann: Well, not like it is today, that’s for sure. They used to hold the New Year – it was the big thing. Christmas wasn’t like what it is today, it was the New Year in them days that was more important. They used to gather in a certain house and take in the New Year. They would gather in my father’s house and he would have the gramophone going and it was quite good. My neighbour Robbie Munro had the fiddle too and we would be dancing too. We would get a stocking at Christmas and a meal but there was work as normal. The meal was all laid out on a big table and it would be chicken roast or something like that.

Caroline: What games would you play?
Mary Ann: We used to make houses wi’ all the stones and skipping, hopscotch and that sort of things. The boys had their own things, kicking the ball around and that.

Caroline: Did your house have running water and electricity?
Mary Ann: No. We took the water from the well over in the field and we had to carry all the water and it was just the lamps with the mantles – the Tilley lamps. I can’t remember when we first got electricity. We took our washing to the well and would light the fire there and heat the water there and do the washing instead of carting it the other way. It was different altogether. For washing the blankets you put them the tubs and paddled with your feet in them. We did the washing every week or so weather permitting. In the winter we just had to do the best we could. We had cows for milk and we made butter and crowdie – we did all that.

Emily: Whose job was it to milk the cows?
Mary Ann: Any of us. I had three brothers and two sisters.

Caroline: Did you have to get up early in the morning?
Mary Ann: We just got up for school and we had to walk to school over a mile. We took our pack lunch to school there was no hot food just whatever you took from home. It was mostly oatcakes, scones, pancakes that my mother made. The children of today wouldn’t know what to do if they had to go back to that.

Emily: Did you leave the croft very often?
Mary Ann: Not very often but there was the Feill Eiteachan over in Ardgay. That was the main sale in the year and my father used to come with sheep or cattle and they used to walk from Altas down to Ardgay to sell them and walk home. It used to be a great sale and it was a great day that. They came from different places for it, from Rogart and Tain and round there but not from away up Thurso way. It was just animals that they were selling. It was just once a year – that was the one big trip out.

Caroline: You were saying that your mam used to cycle to Tain?
Mary Ann: Yes, she would cycle to Tain to buy something special.

Caroline: What sort of shops were there in Bonar?
Mary Ann: There was quite a few. A shoemaker and all sorts and a draper shop, a chemist. There was the leather shop and there were a lot more then than now. The Bridge, the Caley and Dunroamin hotels and I was working at the station when the Balnagown Hotel burnt down in Ardgay.
“S ann às Allt na Car a tha mi, faisg air an rathad bho Dhrochaid a’ Bhanna dhan Luìr.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Ailig Moireach
Interview with Alexander Murray

Annie Rose: Càite an do rugadh agus thoadh sibh?
Ailig: ‘S ann às Allt na Car a tha mi, faisg air an rathad bho Dhrochaid a’ Bhanna dhan Luìr. Bhà mi ann an Sgoil Inbhir Sin agus dh’haoadainn a bhith a’ coiseachd dà mhìle bho Allt na Car gu Inbhir Sin anns a’ mhàdainn agus feasgar a’ tighinn air aìs.

Annie Rose: Where were you born and brought up?
Alex: I’m from Aultnagar, near the road from Bonar to Lairg. I was in Invershin School and I would walk two miles from Aultnagar to Invershin in the morning and in the afternoon coming back.

Taran: An robh mòran Gàidhlig anns an teaghlach agaibh?
Ailig: Uill, bha beagan aig an taigh, ach a’ chiaid àite far an robh mi a’ fuireach an deòdh dhomh pòsadh b’e An Talamh Fuar, Canada, Winnipeg, airson dà bhiadhna agus bha mise a’ fuireach le caileach bho Eilean Leòdhas agus throisich mi Gàidhlig an sin, agus bha mi a’ dèanamh beagan ’s beagan. Anns an eaglais anns an robh sinn aig an am, bha iad a’ searmonachadh agus a’ teagasg anns a’ Ghaidhlig anns gach àite. Bha mi a’ tuigsinn an uair sin.

Emily: Càite an do dh’ionnsaich sibh Gàidhlig ma tha?
Ailig: Uill, bha beagan aig an taigh, ach a’ chiaid àite far an robh mi a’ fuireach an deòdh dhomh pòsadh b’e An Talamh Fuar, Canada, Winnipeg, airson dà bhiadhna agus bha mise a’ fuireach le caileach bho Eilean Leòdhas agus throisich mi Gàidhlig an sin, agus bha mi a’ dèanamh beagan ’s beagan. Anns an eaglais anns an robh sinn aig an am, bha iad a’ searmonachadh agus a’ teagasg anns a’ Ghaidhlig anns gach àite. Bha mi a’ tuigsinn an uair sin.

Taran: Dè an obair a bh’ agaibh?
Ailig: Nuair a bha mi san sgoil ann an Drochaid a’ Bhanna, thoisich an Darna Cogadh agus bha mi ceithir bliadhna anns an Royal Air Force agus dh’ionnsaich mi a bhith a’ dol sanadh air agus an deòdh sin thàinig mi a’ air ais agus bha mi ann an baile Cambridge agus Glaschu ag ionnsachadh. Thoisch mi a bhith nam mhìnistear ann an 1954 agus tha mi air a bhith nam mhìnistear airson còig bliadhnaichean is leth-cheud. Phòs mi san aon bliadhna agus tha mo bhean fhathast a’ fuireach leamh! Ann an 1956 chaidh sinn dhan Chomraich agus bha seachd clannagain agus chaidh iad dòn sgoil a’ Chomraich agus dhan àrd-sgoil anns a’ Phloc. Chaidh iad ann air bata agus fhuair iad dhachaidh aig an deireadh-seachdain.

Annie Rose: Càite an do rugadh agus thoadh sibh?
Ailig: ‘S ann às Allt na Car a tha mi, faisg air an rathad bho Dhrochaid a’ Bhanna dhan Luìr. Bhà mi ann an Sgoil Inbhir Sin agus dh’haoadainn a bhith a’ coiseachd dà mhìle bho Allt na Car gu Inbhir Sin anns a’ mhàdainn agus feasgar a’ tighinn air aìs.

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Taran: What was your job?
Alex: When I was in school in Bonar, the Second World War started and I was four years in the Air Force and I learnt to fly and after that I came back and I was in Cambridge and Glasgow learning. I started as a minister in 1954 and I have been a minister for fifty-five years and I got married in the same year and my wife still stays with me! In 1956 we went to Applecross and we had seven children and they went to school in Applecross and to high school in Plockton. They went by boat and only got home at the weekend.

Emily: How long were you in Applecross?
Alex: Twenty-eight years. We left in 1984 and I came to Lairg and I was twenty years a minister in Lairg. Now I'm supposed to be retired but I take a few services and I took a service last weekend so I'm still preaching!

Emily: How did you like being in Lairg?
Alex: It was like coming home really. Everybody in Bonar speaks to me by my first name and quite a few in Lairg too. Living in Aultnagar we used to go to church in Lairg sometimes because it was five miles away and Bonar was six miles away.

Annie Rose: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?
Alex: Well, I still cut the peats. You go up to the moor and you have a knife and you put it down and it's quite soft. Somebody picks it up and throws it on the bank and you leave it for two or three weeks if the weather is good. Then you put it in little stacks and then if you get another two or three weeks of good weather then, sometimes you have to put it into a second stack but not this year, and it comes home in about September or so. We used to make stacks outside. At the beginning of the war the able-bodied men were all away in the Seaforths or the Lovat Scouts and I was always big and clumsy and from class four I was going to help at the peat banks. So, the way they did the peat banks here, each house did it one day and they had a squad of six or seven men and I went to thirteen peat banks one year. This one, we were at our own one for Badbea and Alec Chisholm was next to me in the row and I was out at the end and there was an old bank had been cut at that side. I wasn't looking properly and it was a huge long peat because it was the last one in the row and this thing came at me — boom it caught me and I went head over heels in the heather! Alec was looking round at the weather 'Oh Alexander did you fall? There was me picking myself up! He was a real comic. I heard a story just today that he was telling people that when I was four years old I was asked what I wanted to be and according to the story I wanted to be a minister when I was four years old! The thing was that my uncle John, he was a professor of theology and he was my father's brother. I suppose that was my influence — I wanted to be like Uncle John. He has written quite a lot of books, if you ever hear of Professor John Murray of Westminster Seminary. He was out in America most of his life, Philadelphia and Pennsylvania and he died in 1975 at Badbea.

The other thing I've done in recent years is that I'm chair of the Highland Theological College in Dingwall which is one of the constituent colleges of the University of the Highlands and Islands. That college has been on the go now since 1994 and we are doing all the different courses; what you call an access course where you can get in, there's a BA in Theology and a BA honours, there's a Doctor of Ministry and there's a Master of Theology and there are PhDs. We do all of these. I was involved in the setting up of it. The first principal Andrew MacGowan and myself, we hatched the plot up in the manse in Lairg.

Now, we've got the fish farms here. We started off at Migdale as Migdale Smolt Limited. We've taken over the old chemist shop — that's our office. That's quite an industry because my son Hugh is running it and my son-in-law is the transport manager and we employ about two dozen people. We've got Migdale, Merkland, Shin, Loch Damh near Shieldaig in Wester Ross and now last year we've got in Loch Ness — we joke we are growing little monsters! That's not true but maybe we are feeding them! Certainly in my grandchildren — I've got thirteen of them and I've now got a great-grandchild. The beauty about the fish farm is that it has made so much work for my family. It's really been quite amazing how it has grown.

Emily: Do you know anything about the drovers in Ardgay?
Alex: There was the sale that they called the Feil Eiteachan and that stone that is in Ardgay is the Eiteachan stone. It's now cemented in but that market used to be moveable according to where the stone was and there used to be rivalry between Bonar and Ardgay to get hold of that stone and take it up to the market stance — that's what they called it when I was young but it's the present golf course now. That's where the drover's did their business. You came with your cow or whatever and stood there and somebody came along and made an offer to you. The market was wherever the Eiteachan stone was but eventually the Ardgay people cemented into the memorial there so it's not so easy to move it!

Emily: Was it quite a big affair?
Alex: Well, we didn't move about in these days so the lamb sales were very important for the crofters as it was their main time of income. The sale days used to be a big event. If you got a good price for your lambs or your beasts or your stirsks they would be going into the hotel here or whatnot. The traveller folk would be round too and there is a story about one of them who met the minister in my church, Rev. Ewan MacQueen, a Gaelic speaker from Skye. He met one of the old travellers down at the sale and he had a dram or two and who did he see coming towards him but Rev. MacQueen and that wasn't good news! So he took courage in the both hands and went to him and said, 'You know Mr MacQueen, we are not in a way to be spoken to today.' [laughing]
Agallamhan anns a’ Ghàidhlig

Hamish MacAoidh
Màiri Rothach
Essie Stiùbhart
Alasdair MacMhaoirn
Ailig Iain MacUilleim
Tormod Iain Dòmhnallach
Lily Byron

Interviews in Gaelic
Hamish MacKay, Mairi Munro, Essie Stewart, Alasdair Mearns,
Alec John Williamson, Norman John MacDonald, Lily Byron
“Bha a’ mhòr chuid den bhaile a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig aig an àm sin. Bha clann a’ tighinn dhan sgoil gun facal Beurla idir.”

Agallamh cómhlacht ri Hamish MacAoidh

Interview with Hamish MacKay

Taran: Càite an do rugadh agus thogadh sibh?
Hamish: Rugadh mi ann an Earabol faisg air Dòrnoch ann an 1932 agus bha sin trí mìosan an dèidh mo phàrantan a’ tighinn air ais bho Chanada.

Emily: Dè bha iad a’ dèanamh ann an Canada?
Hamish: Chaidh mo mhàthair gu Canada roimhe Chogadh Mhòr air sgrath ’s nach robh obair ann an Earabol aig an àm sin. Bha m’athair air a’ mhuir – seòladair – agus ’he jumped ship’ ann an Halifax, Alba Nuadh agus chaidh e gu Toronto agus choinnich e ri mo mhàthair agus phòs iad ann a’ shin. Bha mac aca agus an dèidh sin thàinig iad air ais gu Earabol.

Emily: Càite an deach sibh dhan sgoil?
Hamish: An toiseach chaidh mi dha Sgoil an Alltan Dubh faisg air a’ Pholl Bàn ach air sgrath ’s gun robh mi thin agus mo bhràthair a’ cluich san loch air an rathad dachaigh, chuir m’athair sinn gu sgoil eile ann an ACHd Il Bhuidhe. Bha sinn ann an sin airson dà bhliadhna ach chaidh sinn air ais gu Earabol agus bha sinn ann am Bun-sgoil Earabol airson ceithir no còig bliadhnaichean. Chaidh mi dhan ard-sgoil ann an Dòrnoch agus an dèidh sin chaithd mi dhan sgoil ann an Glaschu ann am bliadhna ceathramh.

Emily: An robh mòran Gàidhlig ga bruidhinn?

Emily: An robh sibh a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig aig an taigh?
Hamish: Ò bha.

Taran: Where were you born and brought up?
Hamish: I was born in Embo near Dornoch in 1932 and that was three months after my parents returned from Canada.

Emily: What were they doing in Canada?
Hamish: My mother went to Canada before the Great War because there was no work in Embo at that time. My father was at sea – a sailor – and he jumped ship in Halifax, Nova Scotia and he went to Toronto and he met my mother and they married there. They had a son and after that they came back to Embo.

Emily: Where did you go to school?
Hamish: At first I went to Altandhu School near Polbain but because myself and my brother were playing in the loch on the way home, my father put us to Achiltibuie School. We were there for two years but we went back to Embo and we were in Embo Primary School for four or five years. I went to secondary school in Dornoch and after that we went to school in Glasgow in the fourth year.

Emily: Was there much Gaelic spoken?
Hamish: There was a little in Achiltibuie but there was a lot in Embo. Most of the village was Gaelic speaking at that time. The children were coming to school without a word of English.

Emily: Did you speak Gaelic at home?
Hamish: Oh yes.
Taran: Dè an obair a bh' agaibh?
Hamish: An deidh an sgoil fhàgail bha mi nam fhear-teagaisg agus bha mi nam chrèadhadair ann an sgoil.

Emily: Dé na h-obraichean a bh aig na daoine ann an Earabol?
Hamish: Roimh a' Choagadh Mhòr bha iad aig a’ sgnadan. 'S e iasgairean a bh' annsta uile sa bhaile ach an deidh a' choagadh dhlìthabh na sgnadan – cha roh bhn sgnadan ann. Air sghath 's sin chaidh sin gu Glaschu airson obair fhaghinn. Bha sinn a' faighinn sgnadan sàillte agus sgnadan ùr agus sgnadan smocadh. Bha gu leòr bheò ann am Baile Earabol aig an am sin – bha lios aig a h-uile fear agus bha paiteas buntàta agus min-chòirche bho na tuathanaich.

Emily: An do dhlìthabh mòran daoine nuair a dhlìthabh na sgnadan?
Hamish: Air sghath 's sin chaidh mòran sluaigh sa bhaile gu Na Stàitean Aonaichte agus Canada agus àitean eile – Austraila cuideachd. Cha roh bhn mòran fhheadhainn air fhaghail – bha iad uile a’ dol air fàlbh.

Emily: Dé na priomh rudan a tha air atharrachadh san sàgair?

Taran: A bhèil sgèulachdan sam bith agaibh?
Hamish: Anns an Dàrna Cogadh, ‘s e sin an dàna salachd bha gu leòr rudan a’ tachairt anns a bhaile. Bha saighdear a’ tighinn bho Ghaslagh le Bren gun carriers. Bha saighdear eich eich bho Polaidh agus bha plèanaichean. Aon uair, chunnaic sinn spy nuair a bha sinn anns an sgoil agus bha e na duine mòr faisg air seachd troighean de dhlìthaid. Bha e faisg air a’ sgoil agus còta mòr leathan donn air. Ruith sinn agus dhlìthaghnaich sinn air, ‘A hheidh thu nad German spy?’ Thug e gàire agus dhlìthabh e ach an ath latha, fhuaire air na poileas greim air ann an Inbhir Nis agus ‘s e spy a bh’ ann.

Emily: Dé bha e a’ déanamh faisg air an sgoil agaibhse?
Hamish: Bha sinn faisg air a’ mhluir ais bha sinn a’ smaoinheadhachd gun tàinig e bho bhàta.

Emily: An rothb rud sam bith sònraichte a’ tachairt aig am na Nollaig no a Bhliadhna Ùir?
Hamish: Chan eil mòran cuimhneachadh agam air Nollaig ach fhuaire mi treàna anns an stocadh agam. Ach, cha roh bhnurlar air an taigh, ‘s e pebbles a bh’ ann mar urlar agus cha b' urrainn dhomh cluich leis an treàna! Bha mi a’ cluich leis an treàna air a’ bhòrd agus cha roh am bòrd ach beag. Bha sin gle h'hrónach!

Taran: A bhèil rud sam bith eile a tha sibh airson inne dhluinn?
Hamish: An deidh a’ tighinn air ais bho Achd Ille Bhuidhe bha mo sheannmhair gle sheann air aig an uair sin agus chuir mi nhathair mise a dhlìthuireach le mo sheannmhair. Bha mi a’ fuireach còmhla ri mo sheannmhair airson tri’i ceithir bliadhnaichean. Bha sin gle

Taran: Do you have any stories?
Hamish: In the Second World War there were a lot of things happening in the village. Soldiers were coming from Glasgow with Bren gun carriers. There were soldiers on horses from Poland and there were planes. One time, we saw a spy when we were in school and he was a big man nearly seven foot tall. He was near the school and a big brown leather coat on him. We ran and we asked him, ‘Are you a German spy?’ He laughed and he left the next day, the police got hold of him in Inverness and he was a spy.

Emily: What was he doing near your school?
Hamish: Because of that many of the population in the village went to the United States and Canada – Australia too. There weren't many left – they were all going away.

Taran: What are the main changes you've seen in the area?
Hamish: They built roads and they put lights on the roads and they put toilets in the houses. They put water in the houses – there was no water. They had a pump on every road. When I was in Embo there were five surnames; MacKay, Fraser, Cumming, Grant, Ross – that was it. Now there are lots of other names, English names.

Emily: What jobs did people do in Embo?
Hamish: Before the Great War they were at the herring. They were all fishermen in the village but after the war the herring left – there were no herring. Because of that we went to Glasgow to get work. We got salt herring and fresh herring and smoked herring. Embo was lively enough at that time – everyone had a garden and there was a lot of potatoes and oatmeal from the farmers.

Emily: Did many people leave when the herring left?
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Bha mòran sneachd ann aig an às sin, chan eil sneachd sam bith ann an-nis agus bha na lochan reòhte agus bha sinn a’ cur tarragan anns na brògan againn agus bha sinn a' sleamhnachadh air an dheigh. Bha sinn a’ dol an deìdh na coineanan airson biadh – cha robh mòran feòil ann aig deireadh a’ chogadh. Bha sinn ag iasgach, bha sinn a’ snàmh anns a’ mhuir, bha sinn a’ leum bhon chala anns a’ mhuir.

There was a lot of snow at that time, there is no snow now and the lochs were frozen and we put nails in our shoes and we were sliding on the ice. We went after the rabbits for food – there wasn’t much meat at the end of the war. We were fishing, we were swimming in the sea and jumping from the harbour into the sea.
“Bha mi ag obair anns an taigh-eiridinn ann an Goillspidh. Bha mi ag obair ann airson fichead sa naoi deug bliadhnaichean.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Màiri Rothach
Interview with Mairi Munro

Fiona: An innis sibh dhuinn càite an do rugadh sibh agus càite an do thogadh sibh?
Mairi: Rugadh mi ann an Caoldaraigh, baile beag eadar Inbhir Gòrdan is Baile Dhubhthaich. An uair sin nuair a bha mi seachd bliadhna a dh’aois, fhuaire m’athair obair mar gheamair ann an Loch an Inbhir airson Vestey – b’e fear-seilbh a bh’ ann.

Ruairidh: Càite an deach sibh dhan sgōil agus an robh an sgōil a’ cordadh ribh?
Mairi: Chaidh mi dha Sgoil Loch an Inbhir agus chòrd an sgōil rium. Bha e math agus bha uídhe aig an maighstir-sgoile ann a’ Ghaidhlig. S’e ann a Leòdhas a bha e, Aonghas Ros, agus bha uídh aige ann an òrain Gàidhlig. Chaidh sinn gu Mòdan ionadail agus nàiseanta. Chaidh mi dhan árd-sgoil ann an Dòrnoch nuair a bha mi ann a’ cheathramh bliadhna.

Ruairidh: An robh mòran Gàidhlig ann an Cataibh?
Mairi: Cha chuala mi mòran Gàidhlig ach bha Gàidhlig aig na seann daoine. Bha mi a’ seinn Gàidhlig tro na bliadhnaichean nam aonar agus anns na coisirean ach dh’ionnsaich mi Gàidhlig nuair a leig mi dhiom mo dhreuchd.

Fiona: Dè an obair a bh’ agaibh?
Mairi: Bha mi ag obair anns an taigh-eiridinn ann an Goillspidh. Bha mi ag obair ann airson fichead sa naoi deug bliadhnaichean.

Ruairidh: Dè na h-obraichean cumanta san sgìre seo?
Mairi: Tha mi a’ smaointinn gum b’e croitearan a bh’ anna. Bha cuid de na daoine ag iasgach agus b’e croitearan a bha na bu chumanta anns an sgìre. Bha gàeamairean, daoine a’ deanamh saor, ag obair air an seilbhach b’ e croitearan a cumanta.

Fiona: Can you tell me where you were born and brought up?
Mairi: I was born in Kildary, a wee village between Invergordon and Tain. Then when I was seven years old, my father got a job as a keeper in Lochinver for Vestey – he was a landowner.

Ruairidh: Where did you go to school and did you enjoy school?
Mairi: I went to Lochinver School and I enjoyed school. It was good and our headmaster was interested in Gaelic. He was from Lewis, Angus Ross, and he was interested in Gaelic songs. We went to the local and national Mods. I went to high school in Dornoch when I was in fourth year.

Ruairidh: Was there much Gaelic in Sutherland?
Mairi: I didn’t hear much Gaelic but the older people had Gaelic. I sung in Gaelic through the years both solo and in choirs but I learned Gaelic when I stopped working.

Fiona: What was your job?
Mairi: I worked in the hospital in Golspie. I worked there for thirty nine years.

Ruairidh: What were the common jobs in this area?
Mairi: I think they were crofters. Some of the men were fishing and crofters were most common in the area. There were keepers, people doing joinery and working on the estate but crofters were most common.
Ruairidh: Were there many ceilidhs?
Mairi: There were ceilidhs and concerts and well known singers came, such as Calum Kennedy, to the town hall and there were dances. There were ceilidhs in the houses around and in my parent's house. There were Gaelic songs and people coming in and they had Gaelic.

Ruairidh: What are the main things that have changed in the area that you can remember?
Mairi: Well, there are a lot of people coming to Golspie from other countries. From England, Italy, Ireland and it is changing a lot. I have lived in Golspie for more than fifty years but I don't know many people now.

Emily: Why did you move to Golspie initially?
Mairi: I wanted to work in a hospital and I got a job there and I stayed there and I married a man from Golspie. We have two children but my husband passed away in 2001. I'm a nurse and I've been in Golspie a long time.

Ruairidh: Did anything special happen at Christmas or New Year?
Mairi: When I lived in Lochinver the landowner gave all the children in Lochinver a party. Father Christmas was there too and we got a present from Father Christmas. There were parties at Hogmanay.

Ruairidh: Is there anything else you would like to tell us about?
Mairi: When I was with my grandmother in Ardgay at New Year, my father fired a gun on the hour of the New Year.

“Nuair a bha mi le mo sheanmhair anns an Àird Ghaoithe aig a’ Bhliadhna Ûr, bha m’ athair a’ leigeil a’ ghunna aig uair na Bhliadhna Ûire.”
“Bhidh sinn a’ siubhal airson sia mìosan den bhliadhna agus bha taigh againn ann an Luirg agus bha sinn a’ còmhnaidh anns an taigh a bha sin sia mìosan den bhliadhna.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Essie Stiùbhart
Interview with Essie Stewart

Johan: Caite an do rugadh sibh agus caite an do thogadh sibh?
Essie: Rugadh mi ann an Eadardan agus thogadh mi ann an Luirg.

Leanne: De mar a bha an doigh beatha agaibh nuair a bha sibh òg?
Essie: Bha doigh beatha gu math eadar-dhealaichte. Bhiodh sinn a’ siubhal airson sia mìosan den bhliadhna agus bha taigh againn ann an Luirg agus bha sinn a’ còmhnaidh anns an taigh a bha sin sia mìosan den bhliadhna. Aig am Càisge gu cha mhor Òidhche Shamh’ bhiodh sinn a’ siubhal le each is cairt.

Rona: An robh rudan ann nach robh a’ còrdadh ribh nuair a bha sibh a’ siubhal?
Essie: Iomadach rud! Droch aimsie! Bha tòrr rudan beaga, nuair a bha an t-side dona is nuair a bhiodh rudan a’ dol nar h-aghaidh agus a’ feuchainn ri beòshlaint a dhéanamh ann an suidheachadh dh’fhaodh nach robh ro mhath. Bha iomadach rud nach robh a’ còrdadh rium ach ’s e doigh beatha a bh’ ann agus ’s e doigh beatha anns an deach mise a thogail. Cha robh dol a-mach ann, dh’fhéumainn an rud a bha mo phàrantan dhéanamh. Cha robh dol a-mach ann ach a dhéanamh mar a bha iadsan ga dhéanamh.

Rona: Caite an deach sibh dhan sgoil?
Essie: Ann an Luirg agus anns an am sin ’s e sgoil junior secondary a bh’ ann agus bha mi ann an Sgoil Luirg gus an robh mi còig bhliadhna deug.

Rona: An robh an sgoil a’ còrdadh ribh?
Essie: Bha. Bha an sgoil a’ còrdadh rium.

Johan: Can you tell us where you were born and brought up?
Essie: I was born in Edderton and I was brought up in Lairg.

Leanne: What was your way of life like when you were young?
Essie: It was a very different way of life. We would travel for six months of the year and we had a house in Lairg and we lived in that house for six months of the year. At Easter time until almost Halloween, we travelled with a horse and cart.

Rona: Were there things that you didn’t enjoy when you were travelling?
Essie: Many things! Bad weather! There were a lot of little things, when the weather was bad or when things wouldn’t go our way and trying to make a living in a situation that wasn’t too good. There were many things that I didn’t enjoy but it was a way of life and it was a way of life that I was brought up in. There was no getting out of it. I had to do what my parents did. There was no getting out of it but to do what they did.

Rona: Where did you go to school?
Essie: In Lairg and at that time it was a junior secondary and I was in Lairg School until I was fifteen.

Rona: Did you enjoy school?
Essie: Yes. I enjoyed school.
Leanne: Do you know any stories about this area?
Essie: I'll tell you a wee story that you might enjoy. Many years ago, my great-grandfather was walking between Tuiteam and Oykel on a Sunday night, a beautiful clear night and his son was with him. It wasn't late, it was only about ten o'clock at night and they saw coming opposite them this man, a tall thin man and a long black coat on him and a tall black hat. Just before they met this man, my great-grandfather saw a florin lying on the road and he picked it up and he never put it in his pocket – he held it in his fist. When this man came, they said, 'Good evening' or 'Lovely evening' or whatever they said to him and he didn't say a word but he put his hand out like that and my great-grandfather put the florin in his hand and when they looked there was no sign of him. He left just like mist and there was no sign of that man. Was it a ghost or just something they saw? He told that story many times.

Leanne: Do you have any information about place names in this area?
Essie: Well, Migdale – that's where my mother was born on 17th February 1909 in a tent. That was a hundred years ago since my mother was born in Migdale. There was snow on the ground.
Johan: An robh Gàidhlig cumanta anns an sgìre seo?
Essie: Chan eil morran fios agam mu sgìre a’ Bhanna ach tha mi a’ deanamh dheth, ’s e mo bheachd gun robh, o chionn iodachd bhiadhna air ais gun robh Gàidhlig sa bhaile. ’S e Gàidhlig a bhiodh daoine a’ cleachdadh. Ann an Luirg far an deach mise a thogail, bha Gàidhlig cha mhor anns a h-uile taigh agus tha mi cinnseach gun robh a’ Bhanna an aon rud. Ach mar a tha e ann an a h-uile h-àite eile, tha e air a crionadh.

Fiona: An robh thu a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig faid na tide nuair a bha thu òg?
Essie: Bha, fad na tide. ’S e Gàidhlig a bha san taigh againn agus bha mi a’ bhaileadh a dh’aois mus robh facal Beurla agam. Bha mi a’ dol dhan sgòil mus robh facal Beurla agam. ’Yes’ is ‘No’ – ’s e sin a bh’ agam gus an deach mi dhan a’ sgòil. Ach, cha robh e doirbh Beurla ionnsachadh.

Rona: Dè an obair a bh’ agaibh?
Essie: Nuair a dh’fhàg mi an sgòil bha mi a’ deanamh, tha mi cinnseach gun chanadh tu san latha an-diugh, home help. Mus do dh’fhàg mi an sgòil bha mi còmhla ri boireannach ann an Luirg, phòs a nighean agus bhaleanabh beaga eise agus an latha a bha i a’ tìghinn dachaigh bhon ospadal leis an leanabh, chochaidh i. Bha mise a’ toirt cuideachd dha a mathair, seannmhair a’ leanabh. Bha i dona le siatag agus cha robh mòran comas aice na làmh agus bha mise a’ toirt beagan cuideachaidh dhi agus bha sin mus do dh’fhàg mi sgòil. Nuair a dh’fhàg mi an sgòil bha mi ag obair mar home help. Nuair a phòs mi, cha robh mi ach òg, bha mi seachd bliadhna deug agus an uair sin bhiodh sinn a’ deanamh a h-uile seòrsa obair – obair tuathanais is rudan den t-seòrsa sin.

Leanne: An robh mòran cèilidhean mu chuairt air Luirg?
Essie: Bha anns na làithnean sin. Cha mhor a’ h-uile seachdain nach biodh rudeigin ann is dannsaichean cuideachd.

Leanne: Có na comhlan-ciùil?
Essie: Ul’ s e coeal Gàidhealach agus bha mòran às an àite a’ cluich a bhogsa, no bha fhidhlearan agus seinnidh aigein aigein. Bha Argo Cameron agus cha robh e ach òg ag i an àm – bha ean an-còmhnaidh aig na cèilidhean. Bhiodh còmhla’ a tìghinn bhò aitean eile – The Blue Notes is Hector MacRae – ’s iad a bha popular aig an àm. Bha gu leòr còmhlan-ciùil a’ dol mun cuairt aig an àm sin. Tha cuimhne ’am aon uair a bhith ann an Drochaid a’ Bhanna anns an talla agus ’s e Lain Powlie a cluichiu – ’s e iomachd bliadhna bhon uair sin. An uair sin toiseach an leithid Calum Kennedy agus Andy Stewart agus na Alexander Brothers a’ dol air chuaireachd. Bha còmhlaìní Eireannach a’ dol mun cuairt cuideachd, leithid Bridie Gallagher is mar sin. Tha sin a’ dol air dha a’ bhaile le-chuedan.

Johan: Dè prionnadh rudan a tha air atharrachadh san sgìre seo air a bhheil cuimhne agaibh?
Essie: Tha na càraichean ann mar aon rud – tha cuimhne ‘am nuair a bha na h-eich bhitheanta. Cha robh leubhairsean ann agus bha bùithtean anns a’ bhaile a tha seo. Tha sin air drochaid úr fhaighinn agus tha na taigh-hean-òsta air dàinadh. Dh’fhólbh na h-eich agus thainig na tractaran. Cha robh mòran g’ aig an robh fòn agus fòn-làimh.

Johan: Was Gaelic common in this area?
Essie: I don’t know much about the Bonar area but I would expect, in my opinion that it was because years ago there was Gaelic in the village. It was Gaelic that people would use. In Lairg where I was brought up, Gaelic was in almost every house and I’m sure Bonar was the same. But as it is in every place it has declined.

Fiona: Did you speak Gaelic all the time when you were young?
Essie: Yes, all the time. It was Gaelic we spoke in our house and I was six years old before I had a word of English. I was going to school before I had a word of English. ‘Yes’ and ‘No’ – that’s what I had until I went to school. But, it wasn’t difficult learning English.

Rona: What was your job?
Essie: When I left school I was doing, I’m sure they would say today, home help. Before I left school I was with a woman in Lairg, her daughter married and she had a wee baby and the day she was coming home from the hospital with the baby, she passed away. I helped the mother, the grandmother of the baby. She was bad with rheumatism and she wasn’t able to use her hands much and I gave her some help and that was before I left school. When I left school I was working as a home help. When I got married, I was only young, I was seventeen and then we would do every sort of work – farm work and things of that sort.

Leanne: Were there many ceilidhs in Lairg?
Essie: There were in those days. Almost every week there would be something on and dances too.

Leanne: Who were the bands?
Essie: Well it was Highland music and many locals played the box, or there were fiddlers and singers. There was Argo Cameron and he was young at the time – he was always at the ceilidhs. Bands would come from other places - The Blue Notes and Hector MacRae – they were popular at the time. There were a lot of bands on tour around at that time. I remember one time being in Bonar Bridge in the hall and it was Ian Powrie playing – it’s many years since then. Then the likes of Calum Kennedy and Andy Stewart and the Alexander Brothers were going on tour. Irish bands were touring too, like Bridie Gallagher and that. That’s going back to the fifties.

Johan: What are the main things that have changed in the area that you can remember?
Essie: There are cars for one thing – I remember when the horses were common. There was no television and there were shops in this village. We have got a new bridge and the hotels have closed. The horses have gone and the tractors have come. There weren’t many who had a phone
Tha iomadach atharrachadh air an àite. Tha tòrr mòr taighean ùr air a dhol suas. Dh’fholtbh an t-iasgach agus na bradan agus tha mi cinnteach gu bheil iomadach rud eil’!

Rona: An robh rud sam bith sònraichte aig Oidhche Shamhna no an Nollaige no a’ Bhliadhna Ùr?

Essie: Oidhche Shamhna bhiodh sinn direach dol a-mach is dol mu chuairt na dorsain agus bha againn ri rudeigin a dhèanamh – rann beag no òran agus ’s e sin direach mar a tha sihb fhein a dhèanamh an-diùgh. Cha robh sinne a’ cumail a’ Nollaig – ’s e direach latha mar latha eile a bh’ ann. Bha a h-uile duine ag obair air latha Nollaig. Ach a’ Bhliadhna Ùr, bhiodh sin diofraichte – bhiodh cruinneachadh de dhaoine aig a’ Bhliadhna Ùr agus chan urrainn dhomhsa bruidhinn ach airson an fhèadhainn againn fhin ach chan fhaca mi a-riamh fad na bliadhna ach aig a’ Bhliadhna Ùr botal uisge-beatha san taigh. Bhiodh mo mhàthair a’ dèanamh dumpling agus bha àmhainn againn ach cha robh e ag obair ro mhath agus nuair a bha mise òg bhiodh cuideigin a’ dhèanamh cèic dhùinn – cèic a’ Bhliadhna Ùr. Bha latha sònraichte ann agus bhiodh na càirdean a’ tighinn agus na h-uile gin ag òl drams agus bhiodh cèilidh a’ dol bho mhoch gu dubh.

and a mobile phone. There are many changes in the area. A lot of new houses have gone up. The fishing has gone and the salmon and I’m sure many more things!

Rona: Was there anything special at Halloween or Christmas time or New Year?

Essie: Halloween we would be just going out around the doors and we had to do something – a wee rhyme or a song and that’s just like what you do today. We didn’t celebrate Christmas – it was just a day like any other day. Everybody worked on Christmas day. But at New Year, that would be different – there would be a gathering of people at New Year and I can only speak for my own people but I never saw all year a bottle of whisky in the house except at New Year. My mother would make dumpling and we had an oven but it didn’t work very well and when I was young someone would make a cake for us – a New Year cake. It was a special day and our friends would come and everyone drinking drams and a ceilidh would be happening from early to late.
“S ann à Sgìr’ Raoird a bha mo mhàthair agus ‘s ann às a’ Mhanachainn a bha m’ athair.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Alasdair MacMhaoirn
Interview with Alasdair Mearns

Rona: Càite an do rugadh sibh agus càite an do thogadh sibh?
Alasdair: Uill, tha sin furasta ri ràdh – rugadh is thogadh mi ann an àite gu math beag leis an a’inn Uptergrove faisg air Orillia ann an Ontario, Canada. ‘S ann à Sgìr’ Raoird a bha mo mhàthair agus ‘s ann às a’ Mhanachainn a bha m’ athair. Bha iad a’ smaoineachadh gun robh gnothaichean na b’ fheàrr ann an Canada agus dh’fhalbh iad ann an 1956 agus thàinig mi fhinn dhan t-saoghail dà bhliadhna an dèidh sin. Tha triùr pheathraichean agam agus rugadh iad anns a’ Mhanachainn agus is mise an aon coigach san teaghlach!

Rona: Càite an deach sibh dhan sgoil?
Alasdair: Chaidh mi dhan sgoil ann an Uptergrove an toiseach agus cha robh ann ach dà rùm. Ach, bha mi a’ smaoineachadh gun robh mi gu math fortanach, chaidh mo pheathraithean gu sgoil agus bha dà rùm ann cuideachd ach bha e cho aosta bha tuill anns na ballachan. Tha e dha-rìribh fuar ann an Canada o’s Gheamhradh agus bha a’ chlann nan suidhe ann le còtaichean, adan is miotagan a’ feuchainn ris na leasan an a dhèanamh. Chaidh mi fhin gu sgoil ur a d’hìdeoin nach robh anach an dà rùm. Sin far an deach dhi dhan sgoil agus tha e fhathast ann cuideachd ged a tha e nas motha an-dràsta. An uair sin dhi’fhàlbh sinn bho tuathanachas, bha mi’ athair ag obair air tuathanas agus dha sgoil leis an aisteach gu bhaile agus bha mi aig co-dhùi ceithir diofar sgoiltean on a bha sinn a’ gluasad mad chuairt bho am gu am.

Rona: An robh an sgoil a’ còrdadh ribbh?
Alasdair: Cha robh. B’ fhéarr leum a bhith ag obair aig an taigh no cuide ri na beathaichean nuair a bha sinn air tuathanas. Cha robh e idir a’ còrdadh riumsa. Aig an aon am cha robh caraidean agam nuair a bha mi aig an taigh gu h-àraidh nuair a bha sinn aig

Rona: Where were you born and brought up?
Alasdair: Well, that’s easy to say – I was born and brought up in a small place called Uptergrove near Orillia in Ontario, Canada. My mother was from Rogart and my father was from Beauly. They thought things would be better in Canada and they left in 1956 and I came into the world two years after that. I have three sisters and they were born in Beauly and I’m the only stranger in the family!

Rona: Where did you go to school?
Alasdair: I went to school in Uptergrove first and there were only two rooms. But, I thought that I was lucky, my sisters went to a school and there were two rooms there too but it was so old there were holes in the walls. It is especially cold in Canada in the winter and the children were sitting with coats, hats and gloves trying to do their lessons. I went to a new school even though there were only two rooms. That’s where I went to school and it’s still there too although it’s bigger now. Then we left from the farm, my father was working on a farm at first and we went to a town and I was at at least four different schools as we were moving around from time to time.

Rona: Did you enjoy school?
Alasdair: No. I preferred to be working at home or with the animals when we were on the farm. I didn’t enjoy it at all. At the same time I didn’t have friends when I was at home especially when we were at the farm – except the cats! We didn’t have a dog, we had lots of cats and they were
tuathanas – a’ chait! Cha roibh cu’ agaunn, bha gu leòr cuait’ agaunn agus is iad na caraidean agam nuair a bha mi o! Bha mi nas cofturtaile le beathaichean na bha mi le ma’ an duine!

Rona: An roibh Gàidhlig cumanta san gheòire?
Alasdair: Cha roibh. Cha roibh òs móran Albannaich ann far an roibh mi aig fior thoisich – ‘s e Canéideanch a bh’ anna a bh’ iad a’ tighinn bho teaghlaichd a’ thàinig a’ Éirinn, an cuid a motha diubh aig am na Gorta Mòra. Bha tomosa de Ghàidhlig aig mo mhàthair agus thòisich mi ri ionnsachd cuide ri mo mhàthair. Cha roibh sinn a’ cleachadh Gàidhlig mar chànan làithneil an taigh idir aca dheireach, aig ire reusanta òn fhuair mi a-mach gun roibh a’ Ghàidhlig ann agus airson adhharb air choireigin ghabh mi ùidh ann agus thòisich mi ceistean a chuir agus ag ionnsachd stuth agus beag air bheag fhuair mi barradh is barrachd.

Nuair a chaithd sinn a-steach dhian a’ bhail mi, thachair mi ri boireannach à Leòdhhas agus chaidh mi dhan taigh aice. Cha roibh sinn a’ deànmh leasan an mar a shaoileadh tu a-dheireach a’ leughadh stuth agus a’ dol thairis air stuth agus beag air bheag, chul eil fhiòg agam ciamar ach thàinig mi a chuid dhian dhan ire far an roibh còmhraidh agam.

Rona: An roibh sibh a’ clinntinn Gàidhlig nuair a bha sibh òg?
Alasdair: Dèreach bhò mo mhàthair – abairtean is faicail is gnothaichean mar siud. Cha roibh Gàidhlig a’ m’athair idir, Uill, cha bu chòir dhomh sin a ’raidh, bha gè gè bheag aige ach bha Gàidhlig aig mo mhàthair-sa gef-tà. Anns an teaghlich agha thà Gàidhlig air a bhith a’ tighinn a-steach thar na ginealaichean aird dhian a-steachd na mathairean.

Rona: Dè an obair a bh’ a’ agaibh?
Alasdair: Uill, töisichdir mi le oileithidh – bha sin rud beag diofraichte. Às déidh ard-sgoil fhàgain chaithd mi dhan oileithidh agus cha roibh mi cinnteach idir dè bha mi dàl a dhèanamh. Leis a sin, b’ urrainn dhomhsa matha a dhèanamh agus cha chaidh mi gu taobhsaidheann. Rinn mi ceum ann an molecular genetics. Ach, tha cothrom ann espectives a dhèanamh, sin cùrseichean a tha suas dhuit fhèin agus rinn mi eachraidh na h-Alba anns a h-uile ceum – a h-uile turas a bh’ ann. Às déidh ceithir bliadhna a’ cur seachad agus bha e gu math doirbh – cha robh mi uabhasach math a h-uile ceum – a h-uile turas a bh’ ann. Às déidh in tradh fhèin agus rinn mi eachdraidh na h-Alba anns an molecular genetics. Ach, cha robh fhoill a dèanachd.

Rona: Was Gaelic common in the area?
Alasdair: No. There weren’t even many Scottish people where I was at the beginning – they were Canadians but they came from Irish families, most of them at the time of the Great Famine. My mother had some Gaelic and I started learning with her. We didn’t use Gaelic as the family language at home, but at quite a young age I found out about Gaelic and for some reason I took an interest in it and I started asking questions and learning stuff and little by little I got more and more. When we went to the town, I met a woman from Lewis and I went to her house. We didn’t do proper lessons as you would think but just reading things and going over things little by little, I don’t know how, but I came on to the level where I could converse.

Rona: Did you hear much Gaelic when you were young?
Alasdair: Just from my mother – sayings and words and things like that. My father didn’t have Gaelic. Well, I shouldn’t say that, he had very little but his mother spoke Gaelic however. In my family Gaelic has come through the generations through the mother’s side.

Rona: What was your job?
Alasdair: Well, I’ll start at university – that was a bit different. After leaving high school I went to university and I wasn’t at all sure what I was going to do. With that, I could do maths and I went to the science side. I did a degree in molecular genetics. But, there was the opportunity to do electives, that was courses that were up to yourself and I did Scottish history at every step – every time. After spending four years it was quite difficult – I wasn’t at all well in the class but I was good in the laboratory. I was better working on my own on things. Anyway, I didn’t know what I was going to do even after that but I thought, ‘Perhaps I should do something that I enjoy’. I expected to go to the Celtic Department at St Francis Xavier University in Antigonish, Nova Scotia, but, I was young and foolish and I thought I should take a year out to make some money and at the end of the year I didn’t have another penny! Also, in between times they stopped the course which was the family language at home, but at quite a young age I found out about Gaelic and for some reason I took an interest in it and I started asking questions and learning stuff and little by little I got more and more. When we went to the town, I met a woman from Lewis and I went to her house. We didn’t do proper lessons as you would think but just reading things and going over things little by little, I don’t know how, but I came on to the level where I could converse.
Bha sàbhall againn agus chaidh e a dhèanamh an àird mar sheòrsa de studio airson a’ teagasc cáinain agus fad naoi bliadhnaitean, sin an rud a rinn mi. Thàinig daoine bho air seadh Alba, Na Stàitean, Canada is a h-uile h-àite airson Gàidhlig a thoighidh.

Rona: Dé obair a bh’ aig ur n-athair?
Alasdair: Bha m’ athair às a’ Mhanachain mar a thuirt mi agus bha e air leth ainmeil mar chluicheadair chamanachd. ’S e tuathanach a bh’ ann agus bha sgioba camanachd a bha air leth soirbheachail aig a’ Mhanachain anns na 1950an. ’S e junior team a bh’ ann ach ’s e sin an leagus as airde a bh’ ann an uair sin air sgath ’s a’ chogaidh. Chaidh an uiread de dhaoine a mharbhadh agus cha robh senior team ann. Sin aon rud a ’s urrainn dhomh cantainn mu dheidhinn.

Rona: A bheil sgeulachdan sam bith agaibh mu dheidhinn na Fuadaichean?
Alasdair: Tha gu leòr ann mun teaghlaich agam fhin aghus ag sìtre. Bu choir dhinn chuimhneachadh orra a dhål’heumas cantainn airson gum bi fios againn gun do thachair e ach, aig an aon àm, ’s e àm ann a bhith a’ gluasad air adhart agus a bhith a’ faighinn air ais an fhéarann a chaidh a chall. ’S ann a Srath Mòr a bha teaghlaich mo mhàthair agus nuair a chaidh iad am faighinn a’ chluicheadaidh a-mach, a rèir coltais fhìnaidh iad àite a’ chòid Drochaid a’ Bhanna, faisg air Loch Lagan agus tha àite ann leis an ainm Ach na Cuach ach ’s ann tro phòsaidhean a tha dh’fheumas sìtre ann.Gàidhlig turas agus mhothaich mi gur e ’chan àl’ a bha e ag ràdh an àite ’chan eil: Tha e inntinneach ann am pairt sin den teaghlaich co-dhìu gun robh Gàidhlig a cinn a tuath fhadhast beò às dèidh cud air leth bliadhna. Nuair a bha mi òg ag iomansachadh bho mo mhàthair, ’s e ’càma tha sibh?’ a bha sinn a’ cantainn agus chan e ’ciamar a tha sibh?’ no ’dè mar a tha sibh?’ agus cha chuala mi an aon rud ach aon turas agus ’s ann ann an Canada a bha e ann an àite Embro faisg air Woodstock agus chaidh gu leòr dhoine a’ Srìr’ a Gaelic centre on my croft in Rogart. We had a barn and it was done up as a sort of studio for teaching languages and for nine years, that’s what I did. People came from across Scotland, the States, Canada and every place to learn Gaelic.

Rona: What was your father’s job?
Alasdair: My father was from Beauly as I said and he was a very well known shinty player. He was a farmer and there was a very successful shinty team in Beauly in the 1950s. It was a junior team but that was the highest league at that time because of the war. Many people were killed and there wasn’t a senior team. That’s one thing I can say about him.

Rona: Do you have any stories about the Clearances?
Alasdair: There’s some about my own family and in the area. We should remember them, it has to be said, so that we know that they happened, but at the same time, it’s time to be moving forward and to get back the land that was lost. My mother’s family were from Strathmore and when they were cleared, apparently they got a place at the back of Bonar Bridge, near Loch Lagan and there is a place with the name Ach na Cuach but it was through marriages that they came to Rogart. An old cousin of mine used to be alive in Lairg in the same family and I heard him speaking Gaelic once and I noticed it was ‘chan àl’ he was saying instead of ‘chan eil.’ It is interesting in that part of the family anyway that Gaelic of the north was still alive after a hundred and fifty years. When I was young learning from my mother it was ‘ca’ma tha sibh?’ that we were saying and not ‘ciamar a tha sibh?’ or ‘dè mar a tha sibh?’ and I never heard the same thing except one time and it was in Canada in a place Embro near Woodstock and they were a lot of people from Rogart and Dornoch and Lairg that
Rona: A bheil cail eile a tha sibh airson innsle dhùinn?
Alasdair: Tha mi a’ smaoinneachadh gu bheil thu a’ sireadh sceul no dhà agus tha aon dhùbh nach eil sgiobhte, fhad sa tha fhios agam, ann an aite sam bith eile. A dh’aindeoin nach eil e a’ moladh Sgìr’ Raoidh mòran’s ann mu dheidhinn an duine m’uireadh a chaidh a chrochadh ann an Sgìr’ Raoidh. A rèir coltais agus c’òig a tha fhios cuine, bho chionn nan cian, fhuaras balach òg marbh air a bhàthadh a’ fleòdradh ann an loch a’ chreidir Aird Achadh ann an Sgìr’ Raoidh. Tha an loch fhathast ann agus’s e Lochan Ghille – an loch a bha aig a’ ghille. Tha a h-uile cail a’ stobadh ri cheile mar a tha thu gu cantaimh. Tha daoine a’ smaoinneachadh gur e murt a bh’n ann agus chan e rudd nach a bh’n ann agus a rèir coltais thàimh mnimitir an aite ri cheile, far an robh clach speisealta air choireigin agus bhà a h-uile duine an làmhnach a’ chur air a’ chlaich agus a’ cantaimh gu bheil iad neo-chiontach. Òrainn uagd aon duine duine agus na muireadh an càirdeachd, a rèir colt a thachair sinn ri cailleach agus thuirt i, ’Oh you’re from Scotland – ca’m a tha sibh?’ Dìreach mar a thuirt mo mhàthair fhein.

Rona: Is there anywhere else you would like to tell us about?
Alasdair: I think you are looking for a story or two and there’s one of them isn’t written down, as far as I know, in any other place. Although it’s not praising Rogart much it’s about the last man to be hanged in Rogart. Apparently and who knows when, a long time ago, a young boy was found drowned floating in a loch at the back of Ardachu in Rogart. The loch is still there and it’s Lochan a’ Ghille – the loch of the boy. It all runs together when you say it. People think it was a murder and it wasn’t something natural and apparently the locals came together where there was some sort of special stone and everyone had to put their hand on the stone and say that they were not guilty. They came to one man and when he took his hand off the stone it was red like blood. Everyone knew he had done a bad thing and he was taken away to the hanging place that is still there, where the church is in Pitfure, if you go uphill, one way reaches Rhiandoggie, and the other goes round to Little Rogart and there is a hill in the middle and it’s on that hill the man was hanged. The man was taken away and hanged and that was the last man to be hanged in Rogart.

Cuideachd, a rèir colt a bha taibhse againgn far a bheil an taigh againn agus na Rosses ri a taobh – anns a’ phios eadarainn chunnacaidh a taibhse. A rèir mar a cha mu chuala mi bhaoi phuill mo sheanmhair, bhà cuideigin a’ dol mu chuairt aghus a’ creic seudan. Chan eil fhios agam c’o leagadh bhà a’ fuireach ann an taigh nan Rosach an-dràsta a chò dh’fhuireadh e aird eantrach anns an taigh. Ach, chan fhacan a’ riach e a deòdh sin. Rud a thà cumanta gu leòr – ’s e seòrsa de chèard a bh’ ann a bha a’ dol mu chuirteach do dhùi agus cha robh dhùine a’ smaoinneachadh mòran mu dheidhinn. Ach, goirid às deòdh sin, bha nighean anns an taigh agus bha i a’ dol mu chuirteach le seidhe a’ chream. Bha fhios aig a h-uile duine nach eile aird eadair sam bith aca airson an leithid den rud a cheannach. Leis a’ sin, thòiseach daoine a’ smaoinneachadh gu robh murt ann – abair a’it de, thabhach, a bha robh caomh air an taibhse – neònach. Aig an araidh den oidheche bhiodh na coin uile a’ combhartaich. Chan eil fhios agam dè cho fad sa bha seo a’ dol air adhart ach bha e a’ dol air adhart agus a rèir na chuala mi co-dhùi, thachair ministeir staided in Embro. I was there with a friend of mine from Scotland and he wanted to see places that were historically connected to Scotland and in some way we met an old woman and she said, ’Oh you’re from Scotland – ca’m a tha sibh?’ Just as my own mother said it.

“Tha daoine a’ smaoinneachadh gur e murt a bh’n ann agus chan e rudd nach a bh’n ann agus a rèir coltais thàimh mnimitir an aite ri cheile, far an robh clach speisealta air choireigin agus bhà a h-uile duine an lùm a’ chur air a’ chlaich agus a’ cantaimh gu bheil iad neo-chiontach.”

Also, apparently we had a ghost where our house is and the Rosses next to us – in the land between us they saw a ghost. According to what I heard and I heard it from my granny’s sister, there was somebody going around selling jewels. I don’t know who the family was that was staying in the Rosses house at the time but he stayed the night in that house. But, he was never seen again after then. That was common enough – he was a sort of traveller that travelled around anyway and people didn’t think much of it. But, a while after then, there was a girl in the house and she was going around with jewels on her. Everyone knew they didn’t have any money to buy that sort of thing. With that, people started to think there had been a murder – what a place full of murderers! Anyway, a while after that, someone saw a ghost going across the road between the piece of land between myself and my neighbour, and there was no head on the ghost – strange. At a particular time of the night the dogs would bark. I don’t know how long this went on but it went on and according to what I heard
ris an taibhse agus ge b’e na thachair eatorra chan fhacas a-ríthist e agus sguir na coin a bhith a’ comhairty. Bliadhnaichean agus bliadhnaichean às deidh sin bha mo shin-sheanair suas a’ bhraigh a’ sealgairachd rabaidean agus fhuaire claiseann agus bha a h-uile duine a’ cantainn an uair sin, ‘Sin ceann an duine bochd a bhí eile le seoladh, Chaidh an claiseann dhan taigh-tasgaidh ann an Caisteal Dùn Robain.

Bha mi a’ feuchainn ri gàrradh a chàradh uaireigin agus nuair a bha mi a’ gluasad na clachan dè fhuaire mi ach cogaidh le tòrr airson soèc is a h-uile rud. Chan eil fios agam dè cheo aosta sa tha e ach tha cuimhne agam mo mhàthair a’ cantainn nuair a bha i òg gun robh uniform bho Chogadh a’ Chrimea agus’ s docha gun robh i air chauch leis agus mar a tha clann dèanach d’ fàgail stuth agus gur e sin a fhuaire mi. Tha tha fhathast agam.

Tha gu leòr sgeulachdan ann nam b’ urrainn dhomh dìreach dìreach smaoinneasachd orra! Tha dà no thri gnothaichean ann. Faisg air an talamh choimhearsnaichd air a’ bhràigh aireol nan taighean, tha fuaran ann le uisge dearg ann. A rèir col’ais b’abhaist daoine a bhith tighinn bho fad fad is farraing airson deoch uisge fhaighinn agus bha e math airson do shlàinte. Tha cuimhne agam air mo mhàthair a’ dèanamh seòrsa de liosta de na daoine a fhuaire slàinte as deidh a bhith tinn. Tha sin ann agus tha tobar air cùl an taigh ag a bha car neònach agus a rèir col’ais, chan fhaca mi fhitn dad, ach chunnaic daoine eile spiorad no taibhse ri taobh na tobrach. A rèir col’ais tha rudhead agus agus gu feum sinn ann tobar a’ cumail glan air in iad a’ sinn uabhasach soirbh cheilidh agus a rèir col’ais tha bhràghachd obair agamsa ri dheànamh air an tobar! Tha gu leòr sgeulachdan ann nam b’ urrainn dhomh dìreach dìreach smaoinneasachd orra! Tha dà no thri gnothaichean ann. Faisg air an talamh choimhearsnaichd air a’ bhràigh aireol nan taighean, tha fuaran ann le uisge dearg ann. A rèir col’ais b’abhaist daoine a bhith tighinn bho fad fad is farraing airson deoch uisge fhaighinn agus bha e math airson do shlàinte. Tha cuimhne agam air mo mhàthair a’ dèanamh seòrsa de liosta de na daoine a fhuaire slàinte as deidh a bhith tinn. Tha sin ann agus tha tobar air cùl an taigh ag a bha car neònach agus a rèir col’ais, chan fhaca mi fhitn dad, ach chunnaic daoine eile spiorad no taibhse ri taobh na tobrach. A rèir col’ais tha rudhead agus agus gu feum sinn ann tobar a’ cumail glan air in iad a’ sinn uabhasach soirbh cheilidh agus a rèir col’ais tha bhràghachd obair agamsa ri dheànamh air an tobar!

I was trying to fix the garden once and when I was moving the stones what did I find but a helmet with a hole for plume and everything. I don’t know how old it is but I remember my mother saying when she was young that there was a uniform from the Crimean War and maybe she was playing with it and as children just leave things and that’s what I found. I still have it.

There are a lot of stories if I could think of them! There are two or three things. Near the common ground on the brae behind the houses, there is a spring with red water. Apparently people used to come from far and wide for a drink of water and it was good for your health. I remember my mother making a sort of list of the people who got their health after being ill. There is that and there is a well behind our house that is a bit strange and apparently, I never saw anything, but other people have seen a spirit or a ghost beside the well. Apparently there is something there and we must keep the well clean or we won’t be terribly successful and apparently I have more work to do on the well!

I heard as well that there is a warriors grave, beside our house in a field to the west but there is no sign of it. I remember asking my grandmother about it but she didn’t want to tell me. Maybe she thought I would be out with a spade or something! I was talking to a neighbour about it and he heard the same story and he said that when they were making the road two-way from the single track thirty years ago, they were all waiting for something but they never got it.

Feis a’ Chaolais
“Uill, rugadh mise ann an Eadardan agus rugadh m’ athair ann an Srath Chonainn agus rugadh mo mhàthair ann an Luîr… Bha sinn fad nar làithean ann an Eadardan – fad mo latha-sa co-dhiù.”

Agallamh còmhla ri Ailig Iain MacUilleim
Interview with Alec John Williamson

Leanne: An innis sibh dhuint càite an do rugadh sibh agus càite an do thogadh sibh?
Ailig Iain: Uill, rugadh mise ann an Eadardan agus rugadh m’ athair ann an Srath Chonainn agus rugadh mo mhàthair ann an Luîrgh ach chaidh i a togail ann an Eilean Sgitheanach. Bha sinn fad nar làithean ann an Eadardan – fad mo latha-sa co-dhiù. Chaidh mi dhan sgoil an Eadardan agus chaidh mi dhan sgoil ann am Baile Dhubhaich. Bhiodh sinn a’ falbh aig Càisge agus cha bhiodh sinn dhachaidh gu Samhan’. Bhiodh sinn dhol dhan Eilean Sgitheanach agus bhiodh sinn dhol a Loch Carrann, a-staigh Gleann Eilg, a-staigh Cinn Tàile agus bhiodh sinn ann an taobh isteach dhe Siarrachd Rois – bhiodh sinn a’ dol a’ sin. Uairean bhiodh sinn a’ dol a-staigh Cataibh agus uairean eil’ biodh mo theaghlaich a’ dol dha na h-Eileanan an Lar – Uibhist is Barraigh. Bha m’ athair anns a h-uile eilean nuair a bha e òg ach cha deach mise ann a-riamh. Bha. Rèitich e fhèin agus mo mhàthair air a bhàta a’ tighinn air ais a Uibhist! [gàireachdainn] Aidh, sin far an do rèitich iad agus thainig iad a Phhort Righ agus phòs iad ann am Port Righ. Bha iad treis mhòr san eilean – ghabh iad còmhnaidh ann an sin airson faisg air fichead bliadhna. Bha e aig a’ Choigadh Mhòr agus chaidh e a leòn anns a ghàidhean. Chaidh e a-staigh dhan nuair a bha e ann an Ulapul, bha e a’ fuireach ann an Ulapul airson treis agus thuirt e, ‘Tha e cho math dhomh mi fhè’ a dhol a-staigh no thèidh e iarradh orm agus gheobh mi an regiment a tha mi ag iarradh.’ Agus sin a rinn e.

Leanne: Can you tell us where you were born and brought up?
Alec John: Well, I was born in Edderton and my father was born in Strathconon and my mother was born in Lairg but she was brought up on the Isle of Skye. We were all our days in Edderton – all my days anyway. I went to the school in Edderton and I went to the school in Tain. We would be away at Easter and we wouldn’t be back until Halloween. We would go to the Isle of Skye and we would go to Lochcarron, to Glenelg, to Kintail and we would be in the west side of Ross-Shire – we would go there. Sometimes we would be going to Sutherland and other times my family would be going to the Western Isles - Uist and Barra. My father was in every island when he was young, but I never went there. Yes. Himself and my mother got engaged on the boat coming back from Uist! [laughing] Aye, that’s where they got engaged and they came to Portree and they got married in Portree. They were a long time on the island – they stayed there for almost twenty years. He was at the First World War and he was wounded on his arm. He went into the army when he was in Ullapool, he was staying in Ullapool for a while and he said, ‘I’m as well to enlist or get conscripted and I’ll get the regiment that I want.’ And that’s what he did.

Leanne: An innse sibh dhuint mar a bha an doigh beatha agaibh nuair a bha sibh òg?
Ailig Iain: Mar a thuirt mi riut mar thà, bhiodh sinn faisg air sia miosan air falbh. Shin mar a bha sinn a’ deànanmh nar beòshlainn
Leanne: Càite an robb sibh a 'fuireach anns a' gheamhradh?
Ailig Iain: Ann an Eadaradan – bha sinn a' fuireach ann an Eadaradan. 
Ach, chan ann far a bheil mi an diugh. Tha mi an diugh ann an aon de taighean a' chonach a' uair sin bha sinn a' fuireach suas air mullach Eadaradan, àite ris an can iad an Leachanaich agus s'e sin far an deach mi mo thogail agus shin far an do rugadh mi.

Leanne: A hile sgeulachdian agaibh mun sgire seo?
Ailig Iain: Thall taobh Siorrachd Rois, rugadh mi athair ann an àite ris an canadadh iad Srath Chonainn agus bha sgeulachd bheag air an àite a bheàin sin. S'e a bh' ann, bha duine agus bha e a' treabhadh agus bha e a-mach leis na h-each – cha robh tractaran no a' dol ann an uair sin. Tha seo bho chionn àireamh bliadhnaichean agus bha e a' phàirc agus bha e a' treabhadh agus bhual soc a' chrann – bhual e air clach agus chuir e stad air na h-each. Ghluais e a' chlach, thug e a' chlach a' mach far a robb toll anns an rtuth agus thug e sùil agus chunnaic e' bodach beag beag beag mar sin.

Ghabh e iongantas agus thuirt e, 'Cò às a thàinig tu?'
Thuiridh e, 'Cha d' thàinig mi dhe cloinn Adhaimh agus cha buin mi dhuth agus dhan dream bhon tainig Abraham, ach bha mi ann an seo mus robh duine eile.

Ach thuirt e, 'Chuir thu mi a' mo dhaachaig'.
'Tha mi duilich,' thuirt e, 'tha mi duilich. Cha robh mise a' cialachadh sin idir, thuirt e, 'se e dìreach an crann gun do bhualais e air a' chlach.'

'Uill,' thuirt e, 'a bheil thu a' faicinn a' phàirc seo?'
'Tha,'

'Uill, an e seo a' phàirc agada?'

'S e. Seo a' phàirc agama,'

'Ach, chan eil e gle mhath,' thuirt e.

'Chan eil, tha mi a creid Sinn nach eil,' thuirt e.

'Uill, às deidh seo,' thuirt e, 'bios a' phàirc math agus an t-ainm a bheir thu air a' phàirc, 's e Pàirc a' Phailteas. Ge b'e dè chuireas tu ann,' thuirt e, 'ma chuireas tu siol ann, no bunntàta ann, gheobh thusa deich nu dhl'haodadh dusan,' thuirt e, 'thairis air na curu thu sios.'

We would be selling horses and buying horses. My father would make tin. Now, we would send a letter to Aberdeen or Edinburgh and we would get hardware and haberdashery and from that we would use some of it to make a profit, and horses and the tin. We would be away, as I said, at Easter and we wouldn't be back until Halloween. I believe we would be back before Halloween! Sometimes it was easy enough to make your living and other things it would be hard. Sometimes the area you were travelling to would be quite poor and they would be staying at home until there would be money from the lambs. They would sell the lambs before they would have money for their own living. Sometimes it would be difficult enough. But, when we arrived home in the winter and we were all working – there were farms there. There would be crofts which we would work on. Although I would be in school sometimes I would work and be making our living.

Leanne: Where did you live in the winter?
Alec John: In Edderton – we lived in Edderton. But, not where I am today. I'm now in one of the council houses but then we were living up at the top of Edderton, a place they call Leachonich and that's where I was brought up and that's where I was born.

Leanne: Do you have stories about this area?
Alec John: Over in Ross-shire, my father was born in a place that they call Strathconon and there was a wee story about that place. What is was, there was a man and he was ploughing and he was out with the horses – there was no tractors or that going at that time. This was a number of years ago and he was in the field and he was ploughing and the sock of the plough hit a stone and he stopped the horses. He moved the stone, he took the stone out where there was a hole in the rig and he looked and he saw a tiny little old man.

He was shocked and he said, 'Where did you come from?'
He said, 'I didn't come from the children of Adam and I don't belong to you and to the folk that Abraham came from, but I was here before any of them.'

And he said, 'You put me from my home.'
'I'm sorry,' he said, 'I'm sorry. I didn't mean that at all,' he said, 'it was just that the plough hit the stone.'

'Well,' he said, 'do you see this field?'

'Yes.'

'Well, is this your field?'

'Yes. This is my field.'

'But, it's not very good,' he said.

'No, I believe it's not,' he said.

'Well, after this,' he said, 'the field will be good and the name you will give the field is the Field of Plenty. Whatever you plant there,' he said, 'if you plant seed of any kind, or potatoes, you'll get ten or even a dozen,' he said, 'over what you planted.'
Thuirt e, 'Bidh sin ghlè mhath.' 

'Ach, ma theur thu ri duine no ri boireannach,' thuirt e, 'gum faca tu mise aig a' phairc, bios a' phairc na gort agus cha toir i dhith ach an deantaon agus copagan agus ròineagan — shin a gheobh thu. Chan fhaigh thu ni ma dh'innseas tu gum fac' tu mi fhinn. 'Nis,' thuirt e, 'tha mise air falbh gu pàirc air choireigin eil: Cùimhnich na innis dhan a' bhean agad agus na innis dha duine.'

'Ghle mhath ma-tha,' thuirt e, 'ni mi sin.'

Nis thàinig an duine dhachaidh agus cha d' thuirt e guth ri creutair. Nis, chuir e bàrr gu sàbhailte agus rinne e a' treabhadh agus rinne e an obair earraigh agus an ath bliadhna, gu dè an bàrr a bh' aige air a' phairc sin — gu leòr buntat', gu leòr coire, eòrna no de chuir e sios bha iad air a dhiameamh ó dh'fhaodadh dusan uair air ais. Bha e a-nis gèile mhath dheth agus bha e bearteach ach aon latha, bha iad aig an fhoghar agus bha iad a' toirt a' bhàrr agus thuirt e a' bhean aige. Tha a' phaire seo mar seo agus chan eil ein dhe na pàircean eil. 'O thruth e, 'tha stòrridh mu dheilthinn sin.' Thuirt i, 'Gu dè gheachadh a th' ann?' 'Chàin urrainn dhomh innse dhut,' thuirt e, 'ach, ma bheir thu do mhoiannan,' thuirt e, 'nach can thu guth ri duine eil, innisdir mi dhuit. Agus dh'innse e nuair a bha e a' treabhadh a' phairc nuair a bhual a' chèir ann air a' chlach agus am bodach beag, 'Chunnnaic mi e agus thuirt e rium ge b'de pàirc a bha seo, gum e Pàirc a' Phailteas agus sin an t-a'innm a thug mi air. Agus thuirt i, 'Cha can mise guth ri duine.'

Bha cabhag oirre gus an ag faigheadh i dachaigh gus innse dha a nàbaidh. Nis, ghabh e tha airreir air Srath Chonainn — tha an stòrridh ann. Chuir e sios an bàrr am bliadhna sin, an ath bliadhna cha robb ni a' sin ach ròineagan, deanntagan agus copagan agus dh'fholbh Pàirc a' Phailteas. Sin e agus thachair sin ann an Srath Chonainn.

Alec John: Bha feadhainn ann agus bha Gàidhlig ann an Eadardan sibh òg?

Leanne: An robh Gàidhlig cumanta an t-sgìre nuair a bha aon uair.

Alec John: Bha feadhainn ann agus bha Gàidhlig ann an Eadardan sibh òg?

Leanne: Do you have any information about place names in the area?

Alec John: Gaelic names most of them. I was born in Leachonich, that is now Rheguile, there is Pollagharrie, Poll an Toire, Rhanich, Bogrow, Little Daan, Meikle Daan, Meikle Gluich, Blackpark, Ardmore, Ardvannie — they're all Gaelic names. That's all in Edderton.

Leanne: Was Gaelic common in this area when you were young?

Alec John: There were a few speakers and there was Gaelic in Edderton at one time. There were three languages spoken, there was Norse, there was Gaelic and there was English.

Leanne: What was your job?

Alec John: Well, I left school early — I left at thirteen and my mother wasn't alive and there wasn't much money in the house. My brother went to the army at the time of the war and he did the springtime work and the next year, whatever crops he had on that field — plenty potatoes, plenty oats, barley or whatever he planted they made back oh maybe a dozen times. He was now very well off and he was rich but one day, they were at the harvest and they were taking in the crops and his wife said, 'This field is like this and none of the other fields are.' 'Oh' he said, 'there's a story about that.' She said, 'What's the story?' 'I can't tell you' he said, 'but, if you swear' he said, 'you won't say a word to another man, I'll tell you.' And he told when he was ploughing the field and the plough hit the stone and the wee old man 'I saw him and he said to me whatever field this was, it was The Field of Plenty and that was the name I gave it.' And she said, 'I won't say a word to anyone.'

She was in a hurry until she would get home to tell her neighbour about it. Now, over in Strathconon the story is there. He put down the crops that year, the next year there was nothing there except ferns, nettles and docken leaves and The Field of Plenty was gone. That's it and that happened over in Strathconon.
agus a’ togaill buntat’ agus bha gu leòr obair ann. Nuair a thàinig mi gu ochd bliadhna deug, chaidh mi dhan arm, bha agam ri agus cha robh cogadh ann an uair sin. ‘S e a bh’ ann Seirbheis Nàiseanta agus chaidh mi mo chur air falbh agus bha mi ann gus an robh mi fichead bhliadhna. Bha mi dà bhliadhna san arm agus bha mi air a’ phoileas san arm, Regimental Police, sin a bha mi a’ déanamh. An uair sin fhuaire mi de-mob agus thainig mi dhachaigh. Bha mi fichead bhliadhna an uair sin. Nis, bha mi a’ obair sa forestry agus bha mi a-riamh ag obair air tuathanasan a’ seò is a’ sin agus bha mi bhliadhna air fichead nuair a dh’holbhinn ann a’-rithist. Chaidh sinn suas Loch an Inbhir agus sios Meaghratha, tha sin ann an Galladh, an ath bhliadhna ach robh mòran air a dhéanamh air – cha robh iad ag iarraidh tan bhon nuair a thainig a’ staigh a’ phlastaig. Is cha robh mòran ag iarraidh eich, croitean agus na tuathanasan, bha iad mechanised nuair a thainig na thainig na tractaran a-staigh. Cha robh mòran feum a bhith air falbh. An ath bhliadhna, dh’holbhinn mi a-rithist ach fuirich nis – cha do dh’holbh. Cha chreid mi nach tainig an cutachd orm agus phòs mi agus dh’holbhinn mi an ath bhliadhna cuide ri a’ bhean agam. Bha sinn sios ann an Earra-Ghael agus cha robh mise air fòllbh hno sin. Chan eil mi a-nis a’ subhail idir – dìreach bhon living room dhan a’ toilet!

Leanne: Were there many ceilidhs around Edderton?

Alec John: Oh there were a lot. There were ceilidhs and especially around the time of year when Christmas would come and Hogmanay would come. I was born the night before New Year – Hogmanay. My grandmother came and she was the midwife and she hit me where she had to and I took the bottle right away!
Leanne: Did anything special happen at Halloween?

Alec John: Yes and I'll tell you what it was on Halloween. You had a custom on Halloween – I never saw it but I heard my father talking about it and my grandfather told it to my father. When he was a young boy, at Halloween, there would be two ladies – they wouldn’t be married – two young ladies a bit older than you though. They would have a ball of yarn and they would throw the yarn over, they would hold the end and throw the yarn out. Somebody would come – I don’t know if it was a supernatural thing but, when whatever it was would take it, when he would take hold of the end of it you had to speak to him. My great-grandmother and her sister, they did this and wasn’t there a man going about – a sort of tramp and he would go about and he wasn’t right, you know. Alasdair Burke was his name and they called him in Gaelic Alasdair Bùirc. When they threw the yarn out, their uncle came and he knew very well what they were doing. The second girl said to the other girl, ‘Pull it, pull it – he’ll speak!’ Now, she was expecting her future spouse would speak to her, the person they were going to marry – that he would speak after that. ‘Pull it, pull it!’

‘Who is that?’ she said, ‘Who is that?’ It was her uncle that was on it!

‘Alasdair Burke!’

‘Oh I’m going to marry Alasdair Burke!’

That’s what happened at Halloween! Alasdair Burke!’ he said! ‘Oh Lord I have to marry Alasdair Burke!’ [laughing]
Rona: An innis sibh dhuinn càite an do rugadh agus thogadh siabh?
Tormod: ’S e ceist duilich a tha sin chionn tha fhios ’am cá’ an do rugadh mi – rugadh mi air a’ Chomraich air taobh siar Alba ach thogadh mi ann an Eilean Leòdhais. Bha m’ athair is mo mhàthair, bha iad thall air a’ Chomraich nuair a rugadh mi. Chan eil mòran cuimhne agam air a’ Chomraich chionn dh’fhág mi nuair a bha mi tri bliadhna d’haois. Thogadh mi ann an Eilean Leòdhais air Eilean Bheàrnaraigh taobh siar Eilean Leòdhais. Ma thig thu a-ach a air eathar a-mach air eathar a-mach a Beàrnaraigh is a’ fàgail taobh siar Eilean Leòdhais, chan eil càil eadar thuais is na Stàitean Aonaichte. Tha cuimhne ’am nuair a bha mi nam bhalach gun deach fhèadhainn a-ach agus stad einsean air an eathar aca agus bha iad air chail airson tri latha. Lorg iad iad agus bha iad an ire mhath tri chaireal den rathad a-nall dha na Stàitean Aonaichte. Bha sin mun do thoisich rudan mar na Maor-chladaich le helicopter, cha robh càil aca ach eathaichean-teasairginn timcheall. Chaidh mi mo thogail ann am Beàrnaraigh agus bha mi sa Sgoil MhicNeacail ann an Steòrnabhagh.

Emily: Carson a bha ur pàrantan air a’ Chomraich?
Tormod: Bha m’ athair air obair ann. Bha e na missionary air a’ Chomraich agus dh’fhág sinn a’ Chomraich agus chaidh sinna a Ghleann Eilg air toisach.

Annie Rose: Cuine agus carson a thainig sibh gu Drochaid a’ Bhanna?
Tormod: Thainig mise a Dhrochaid a’ Bhanna chionn phòs mi ann. Tha mo bhean à Drochaid a’ Bhanna is rugadh i air cùl a’ bhaile an seo bho chionn còrr is leth-chuedh bliadhna. Bha mise ag obair air a’ phoileas agus bha ise ag obair air a’ phoileas agus choinnichinn sibh agus

Rona: Can you tell us where you were born and brought up?
Norman: That’s a difficult question because I know where I was born – I was born in Applecross on the west coast of Scotland and I was brought up on the Island of Lewis. My father and mother, they were over in Applecross when I was born. I don’t have much memory of Applecross because I left when I was three years old. I was brought up on the Island of Lewis, on Bernera on the west side of the Island of Lewis. If you go out on a boat from Bernera and leaving the west side of the Island of Lewis, there is nothing between you and the United States. I remember when I was a boy a few people went out fishing and the engine stopped on their boat and they were lost for three days. They found them and they were just about three quarters of the way over to the United States. That was before things like the Coastguards with helicopters, they didn’t have anything but lifeboats around. I was brought up on Bernera and I went to Nicolson School in Stornoway.

Emily: Why were your parents in Applecross?
Norman: My father worked there. He was a missionary in Applecross and we left Applecross and we went to Glenelg first.

Annie Rose: When and why did you come to Bonar Bridge?
Norman: I came to Bonar Bridge because I got married there. My wife is from Bonar Bridge and she was born at the back of the village here over fifty years ago. I was
phós sinn. Bha sinn air feadh ceann a tuath na h-Alba agus thog sinn ar teaghlach air feadh an àite, ach thill mise air ais a dh'obair ann an Dornoch agus tha e bhio chionn còrr is fèichd bhliadhna on a thainig mi gu Dornoch. Nuair a thainig mise gu Dornoch an toiseach, thog sinn taigh ann an Drochaid a’ Bhanna agus tha sinn air a bhith ann bhon uair sin.

Rona: A bhile cuimhne agaibh air daoine a’ bruidhinn Gàidhlig anns an sgìre seo?

Tormod: Chan eil ach tha mi a’ chuinntinn daoine a’ cleachdadh facail, tha mo bhean gu h-àraid a’ cleachdadh facail agus bidh i a’ faighneachd dhomh, ‘Cò às a thainig sin? An e facal Gàidhlig a bh’ ann mi a chionn fhada?’ Is mar is trice tha buntainneas ris a’ Gàidhlig. Ged nach eil mi a’ chuinntinn Gàidhlig air a bruidhinn, tha na facail ann. Tha na fuaimean an aon rud, an ire mhath mar a bho dhiodh iad sa Ghaidhlig.

Rona: An roibh Gàidhlig eadar-dhealaichte an se bhon Ghaedhlig agaibh fhéin?

Tormod: Bha Gàidhlig eadar-dhealaichte ach cha roibh e mòran eadar-dhealaichte. Bho chionn treis air ais, sgiobh mi mun na pàipearan chionn tha soildhine air an rathad aig Croit a’ Phuirt aig ceann na drochaid a tha a’ sealltainn dhut cail sibh a’ dol. Tha e gead chuir suas gu Ferrycroft. Nis, chan e Gàidhlig ceart air mo shon–sa a th’ ann an Croit a’ Phuirt chionn s’e aiseag a Gàidhlig airson ferry. A chur air m’fregaigrit bho tè a thogadh ann an Earabol agus bha isg a radh gum biodh iad an-còmhnaidh a’ dol chun a’ phort – cha roibh iad ag radh gun roibh iad a’ dol a dh’fhàighinn aiseag. Tha faclann eadar-dhealaichte air a cleachdadh airson rudan. S e air mhath an aon Ghaedhlig a th’an ged a tha eadar-dhealaichd Gàidhlig anns an uile sgìr.

Annie Rose: Dé an obair a bh’ agaibh?

Tormod: Mar a thuirt mi bha mi air a’ phoileas – sin an obair a bh’ agham. Bha e diofracraichte agus ged a bha mi ag obair air feadh an àite air a’ phoileas – ’s e profession math a th’an. Ged a tha thu a’ deiligeadh ri rudan a tha cudromach, uairean eile bha bhan cuibhinn a’ tachairt cuideachd. Ged a dh’fhéumadh tu dol a dh’fhàiteachan agus dh’fhéumadh aodann ceart a bhith ort, bha e math dha-rìribh.

Rona: An roibh mòran ceàidheadh ann an Drochaid a Bhanna?

Tormod: S’e ceàidheadh thaughe mar bu thrice a th’ ann. Cha bhi cuimhne agaibhse air ach mus taimig teabhusan chun an t-àite, nuair a bha biodh na laithichean ghoirid is gum biodh na feasgaran fada, biodh iad an-còmhnaidh a’ dol chun na taigheadh an an fhoras a’ dhéanamh ceàidheadh agus a dhéanamh a-mach don littir a dh’fhàighinn. Tha biodh aig obair air na croitean agus air na laitichean fad an latha achar air an odlach biodh iad a’ dol bhò thaigh gu taigh. Mar is trice, biodh fhìos sa bhailte càite am biodh na taigheadh ceàidheadh, càite am biodh na taigheadh na bh’ fhéarr far an tigeadh daoinn a-steach agus biodh iad cruin Àn t-sìol – biodh iad timeachan te an teine. Biodh cuideigin a’ cluich melodeon agus cuideigin a’ cluich air a’ moothie, cuideigin air an fhìdhheadh agus a’ seinn ann an Gàidhlig no Beurla no rud sam bith! Biodh iad a’ cumail ceàidheadh a’ dol air feadh an àite.

Rona: Tha mise a’ dol ag iomadsachadh fidheall agus tha mi ag iomadsachadh hogs-a-cìuil.

Tormod: Chuala mi thu aig ceàidheadh anns an Àird Ghaiothe – ’s math sin! working for the police and she was working for the police and we met and we married. We were all over the north of Scotland and we raised our family all over the place, but I returned to work in Dornoch and it is over twenty years since I came to Dornoch. When I came to Dornoch at first, we built a house in Bonar Bridge and we have been there ever since.

Rona: Do you remember people speaking Gaelic in this area?

Norman: No but I hear people using words, my wife especially uses words and she asks me, ‘Where did that come from? Was it a Gaelic word originally?’ Usually there is a connection with Gaelic. Although I don’t hear Gaelic spoken, the Gaelic words are there. The sounds are the same thing, just about as they would be in Gaelic.

Rona: Was the Gaelic different here from your own Gaelic?

Norman: Gaelic was different but it wasn’t much different. A while ago, I wrote to the papers because there is a sign on the road, ‘Croit a’ Phuirt’ at the head of the bridge that shows you where to go. It puts you up to Ferrycroft. Now, ‘Croit a’ Phuirt’ is not correct Gaelic to me because ‘aiseag’ is the Gaelic for ferry. But, I got a reply from a lady that was brought up in Embo and she said that they would always go to the ‘port’ – they didn’t say they were going to get an ‘aiseag’. Different words are used for things. It’s basically the same Gaelic although there are differences in Gaelic in every area.

Annie Rose: What work did you do?

Norman: As I said I was in the police – that was my job. It was different and although I was working all over the place with the police – it’s a good profession. Although you are dealing with things that are important, at other times funny things happened too. Although you had to go to places and you had to have a proper face on you, it was great.

Rona: Were there many ceilidhs in Bonar Bridge?

Norman: It was usually house ceilidhs. You won’t remember but before television came to the place, when the days were short and the evenings long, they would always go to the house next door to visit and to see what was happening. They would work on the crofts and the lots all day but in the evening they would go from house to house. Usually, there would be local knowledge as to where the ceilidhs houses were, but the best houses were for people to go and gather together – they would be around the fire. Someone would be playing the melodeon and someone would play the moothie, someone on the fiddle and singing in Gaelic or English or anything! They would have ceilidhs all over the place.

Rona: I am going to learn the fiddle and I am learning the
Annie Rose: Dè na priomh rudan a tha air atharrachadh anns an sgìre air a bheil cuimhne agaibh?
Tormod: Cha chreid mi nach e an rud as motha a thàinig dha sgìre s’ e an drochaid eadar Baile Dhúbhthaich agus Dòrnoch. Mus do dh’hosgail an drochaid sin bha a h-uile car a bha a’ dol gu tuath no a’ dol dhan iar – a h-uile car a bh’ ann bha iad a’ tíghinn tro Àird Ghaoithe agus Drochaid a’ Bhanna. Mar sin, bha an rathad a tha a’ dol seachad an seo, bha e trang le càraichean agus bhiodh daoine a’ stad an-dràsta is a-rithist is a’ ceannach rudan. Bho thàinig an drochaid úr, chan eil leth uiread no cairteal de dh’uiread de chàraichean no laráidhean mòra no connadh a’ dol gu tuath no gu deas. Sin an eadar-dhealachadh as motha a tha mise a’ faicinn.
Rona: A bheil rud sam bith eile a tha sibh airson innse dhuinn?
Tormod: Tha mise nam bhall den Chomunn Eachdraidh a tha timcheall air an t-àite agus bho chionn treis air ais, lorg mi rud an seò a tha ag innse mèl a bha iad a’ pàighdeadh airson a h-uile croit air cul a’ bhaile air ais ann an 1890. ’S e 185 an aireamh air a’ chroit a’ghada Rona, agus ann an 1890 bha iad a’ pàighdeadh tri notaichean agus cog’ tastan. ’S e sin an seann airgead a bh’ aca an uair sin – tha na tri notaichean an aon rud acher tha cog’ tastan, fichead sa cog’ sgìllinn san latha an-dhugh. Sin am mal a bha iad a’ pàighdeadh fad na bliadhna mar is trice. Bha tè bhochd an seò Seasaig Rosach agus cha robh ise a’ pàighdeadh ach då not – ’s dochu gur e croit nas lugha a bh’ aice. Sin e a-nis.

Annie Rose: What are the main changes in the area that you can remember?
Norman: I think the biggest thing that has come to the area is the bridge between Tain and Dornoch. Before that bridge opened every car that was going north or west – every car came through Ardgay and Bonar Bridge. For that reason, the road that goes past here, it was busy with cars and people stopped every now and again and bought things. Since the new bridge came, not half or even a quarter of the cars or big lorries or fuel are going north or south. That’s the biggest change that I have seen.
Rona: Is there anything else that you would like to tell us about?
Norman: I’m a member of the History Society around this area and I found this thing that tells the rent that they were paying for every croft at the back of the village back in 1890. Number 185 is the number of your croft Rona, and in 1890 they were paying three pounds and five shillings. That was the old money they had at the time – the three pounds are the same but five shillings is twenty five pence today. That was the rent they were usually paying for a year. There was a poor lady here, Jessie Ross and she only paid two pounds – maybe she had a smaller croft. That’s it now.
Interview with Lily Byron

Donnchadh: Càite an do rugadh sibh agus càite an do thogadh sibh?
Lily: Rugadh mi agus thogadh mi anns an Àird Ghaoithe.

Donnchadh: Càite an deach sibh dhan sgoil agus an robh an sgoil a’ còrdadh ribh?
Lily: Chaidh mi dha Bhun-sgoil Gledfield anns an Àird Ghaoithe agus dha Acadamaidh Baile Dhubhthaich agus chòrd sin rium.

Ciorstaidh: An robh Gàidhlig cumanta san sgìre seo?
Lily: Cha robh ach chuala mi mòran òrain Gàidhlig agus bha Gàidhlig aig m’ athair.

Donnchadh: Dè an obair a bh’ agaibh?
Lily: B’e tidsear a bh’ annam anns a’ bhun-sgoil agus ann an Dùn Èideann bha mi ann a sgoil airson clann le duilgheadasan ionnsachaidh.
Donnchadh: Bha thu a’ teagasg sinne nuair a bha an tidal na aig dheth!
Lily: Bha.

Ciorstaidh: Dè na h-obraichean a bha cumanta san sgìre?
Lily: Bha iasgairean ann agus obair anns a’ chuaraidh, anns a’ choille agus bha mòran banaltraman. Bha mise ag obair anns an Lady Ross Café cuideachd.

Donnchadh: An robh mòran cèilidhean mun cuairt air an Àird Ghaoithe?
Lily: Bha mòran consaratan ann ach bha na cèilidhean anns na taighean. Bha mo mhàthair a’ cluich piano agus mo bhhrathair air a’ bhòsga ach bha sin aig an taigh. Bha iad a’ ghabhail órain cuideachd. Bha consaratan ann an talla a’ bhaile, bha òrain Gàidhlig agus Beurla agus bha duine a’ cluich air an t-sàbh! Bha dannsa Gàidhealach ann cuideachd agus bha boireannach a bha gè eòbhairn – no children’s theatre. Bha e uabhasach math!
Lily: Blue Star with George Peat on saxophone and oh he was good. There was BBA or Bonar Bridge Ardgay and dances Saturday and Friday every week. There was a cinema in Tain and we went there and we bought chips in Pericciini’s and came back on the last bus.

Kirsty: What were the main changes in the area that you can remember?
Lily: There were no Féisean when I was young and we couldn't learn Gaelic.

Duncan: Do you have any stories about the Clearances?
Lily: Well we were cleared by Lady Ross Balnagown in 1948. There were two crofts and my father was a tailor — not a crofter. Lady Ross said, ‘If you don’t run the croft you have to get out.’ The man next door, he ran the two crofts but Lady Ross wanted to change things when her husband died, Charles Ross of Balnagown. She was advertising the house when we were still in it and my mother was in the hospital. I was five years old and I still remember it.

Duncan: Did anything special happen at Christmas time or New Year?
Lily: People worked on Christmas day. My father worked but there was a party for the children with Father Christmas. New Year was really big, my mother cleaned the whole house and we were ready with food and drink. The children drank cordial and the neighbours came in. New Year’s day, we went to our neighbours house and we played ‘hunt the thimble’ and we listened to the gramophone. We were in the room with the fire, that was the best room in the house and we didn’t use it every day — we used it for funerals or at New Year. We called it ‘the room.’ We didn’t have electricity, we had Tilley or Aladdin lamps and we didn’t have water in the house — my father went to the well.

Kirsty: What did you play when you were young?
Lily: Hide and seek, and there was a game we played in school — we were very influenced by the comics we read. At that time, there was a comic called ‘The Eagle’ for the boys and ‘The Girl’ for the girls. There was always something serialised and there was one about Miriam from the Bible and the slaves in Egypt and we were very taken with this. It was terrible because the boys were slave drivers and the girls had to carry stones in their skirts and we played it every day for weeks until

Donnchadh: Who were the bands?
Lily: Blue Star le George Peat air saxophone is ö bha e math. Bha BBA no Bonar Bridge Ardgay agus bha dannsaichean Disathairne agus Diòchoine gach seachdain. Bha taigh-deilbh ann am Baile Dhùbhthaich agus caidh sinn ann agus cheannach sinn chips ann an Pericciini’s agus thill sinn dhachaigh air a’ bhus mu dheireadh.

Ciorstaithd: De na priomh radan a tha air atharrachadh anns an sgìre air a bheil cuimhne agaibh?
Lily: Cha robh Féisean ann nuair a bha mi óg agus cha b’ urrainn dhuinn Gàidhlig ionnsachadh.

Donnchadh: A bheil sgeulachdan sam bith agaibh mu dheidhinn na Fuadaichean?
Lily: Uill chaidh sinne fuadachdhe le Lady Ross Balnagown ann an 1948. Bha dá choirit ann agus s’e tàillear a bh’ annam m’ athair – cha b’e croitear. Thuirt Lady Ross, ‘If you don’t run the croft you have to get out.’ An duine an ath dhoras, ruith e an dá choirit ach bha Lady Ross airson cuisean atharrachadh nuair a chaochail an duine aice, Charles Ross of Balnagown. Bha i a’ sanasachd an taigh nuair a bha sinn fhathast ann agus bha mo mhàthair anns an ospadal. Bha mi còig bliadhna agus tha cuimhne agam air fhathast.

Donnchadh: An robh rud sam bith sönraichte a’ tachart aig am na Nollaige no a’ Bhliadhna Ùir?
Lily: Bha na daoine ag obair lattha na Nollaige. Bha m’ athair ag obair ach bha partidaidh ann airson na cloinne le Bodach na Nollaige. Bha a’ Bhliadhna Ùir gle mhor, ghiann mo mhàthair an taigh gu léir agus bha sinn deiseil le biadh agus deoch. Dhiol a’ chlann cordial agus thàinig na nàbaidhean a-steach. Latha na Bhliadhna Ùire, chaidh sinn dhachaigh air a bhalachadh. Latha na Bhliadhna Ùire, chaidh sinn dhachaigh air a bhalachadh. Latha na Bhliadhna Ùire, chaidh sinn dhachaigh air a bhalachadh.

Ciorstaithd: De bha sibh a’ chluich nuair a bha sibh óg?
Lily: Hide and seek, chluich sinn le cairtsean agus drafts agus bha geama againn a chluich sinn anns an sgòil – bha buaidh aig na comics a leugh sinn oirnn. Aig an am sin, bha comic ann The Eagle’ airson na balaich agus The Girl’ airson na nigheanan. Bha an-còmhnaidh a leugh sinn mu dheidhinn Miriam anns a’ Bhioabail agus na slaves anns an Eiphit agus chòrd seòrann. Bha e uabhasach oir b’e slave drivers a bh’ anns na balaich agus bha aig na nigheanan creagan a ghìolán anns na sgiortachan agus chluich sinn e gach latha airson seachdain agus thàinig sinn nuair a bh’ airson a raon-cluiche. Dh’theumadh sinn.
Footprints Bridge’ a chuir sinn air. Sheall mi e dha mo chlann agus ceumannan beaga ann agus sheall m’ athair iad dhuinn. B’e ‘Fairy – dhà no trì dhiubh. Anns na clachan anns an drochaid, bha ceumannan beaga mu trì òirlich de dh’fhaide anns na clachan rathad. Mun do dh’atharraich iad an rathad, bha drochaid ann agus bha ceumannan beaga mu trì òirlich de dh’fhaide anns na clachan – dhà no trí dhiubh.

“Mun do dh’atharraich iad an rathad, bha drochaid ann agus bha ceumannan beaga mu trì órlich de dh’fhaide anns na clachan – dhà no trí dhiubh.”

When you go out of Ardgay towards Kincardine, they’ve changed the road now, but Kincardine hurn comes down and now I think it just goes under the road. Before they changed the road, there was a bridge there and there were little footprints about three inches long in the stones – two or three of them. In the stone of the bridge, there were tiny little footprints and my father used to take us and show us. We called it the ‘Fairy Footprints Bridge.’ I took my kids to see it too and they just loved it. It really did look like prints of little feet. When they made the new road, it’s all on top of the old bridge so I don’t know if you can see them now. It was a really special place.

The Old Kincardine Church used to be open in the summertime until the late 1950s and we liked it when church was there because we had to walk and a whole lot of us would walk together and we’d have great fun going there. That was only in the summer because they had no heating or lighting. We all went to church every Sunday and to Sunday school. The church played a big part in our lives when we were little. You know I told you we were put out of the house we were in, well there was eight of us, my mother, my father, my grandfather, my granny’s cousin and the four
kids and we had nowhere to go. An old woman in Ardgay died and we got that house and it wasn't very nice and the chimney smoked – no matter what you did, if there was a north wind the chimney used to smoke so you had to open the window and the back door so the smoke would go out. If you weren't choked with smoke you were freezing cold, so the reason I liked the church was because it was warm and there was no smoke. We had a lovely teacher, the minister’s wife, Mrs MacDougall and she told us stories about the little boys she taught in Africa. She would show us pictures of their life in Africa so we had a good time.

Drochaid a’ Bhanna (bridge of the bottom ford)
Bonar Bridge by Jessie Munro
Com-pàirtichean Fèis a’ Chaolais
Fèis a’ Chaolais Participants
Thèid Sinn
Faclan le Iain Rothach

Sèist
O thèid sinn, thèid sinn le sugairt, agus aoidh
O thèid sinn, thèid sinn deònach
O thèid sinn, thèid sinn thairis air an t-Struidh
Gu muinntir ar dàimh ’us ar n-eolais

Rannan
Ged a bha sinn bliadhntan fada fada bhuath,
Am Baile Chluaidh a’ còmhnuidh
Car tamul beag gun treig sinn
Air gairm ’us gun tèid sinn
A dh’haotainn an gràidh ’us an comhraidh.

Gun toir sinn cuairt, a-rithist do’n taobh-tuath,
Is thèid sinn ruaig do Dhornoch;
Is chi sinn Droit-an-aigh,
Is fa comhair air gach taobh,
Na caistealan, na pàircean ’s na lointean.

Is chi sinn an caol, air ’m faca sinn, le gaoith,
Na bàtaichean aotrom seoladh;
Is chi sinn na beanntan,
A gleidheadh sneachd ’s an t-samhradh,
Is chi sinn na h-aimhnichean bóidheach.

Is chi sinn na glinn, mu’n ait ’s an d’ rugadh sinn
’S am bitheadh sinn aotrom gorach;
Is chi sinn na coilltean,
Le aighear is toil-inntinn
’S am bitheadh sinn a cluinntinn a smeòrach.
Fèis a’ Chaolais: Our People and Places

is one of a series of booklets produced by Fèisean nan Gàidheal as part of The Archiving Project, where Fèis participants are collecting and recording songs, tunes, stories and folklore from their own areas.

Further details about the project can be found at: www.feisean.org/archivingproject

“Le bhith ag obair a-measg Fèisean ann an iomadh coimhearsnachd, bha mi riamh den bheachd gun robh cóir aig na com-pàirtichean barrachd fhàighinn a-mach mu dhualchais na sgrìe aca fhein – na sgéulachdan agus an t-seòrsa cainnt a th’aig na daoine – cho math ris na h-òrain agus an ceòl. Tha mi air leth toilichte gu bheil sin air tighinn troimhe anns a’ phróiseact luachmhor seo agus tha mi an dòchas gum bi com-pàirtichean aig Fèisean a’ déanamh feum den stuth a chaidh a chruinneachadh airson iomadh bliadhna fhathast agus gum bi iad a’ cur ris an tasglann a chaidh a steidheachadh.

Art MacCarmaig, Stiùiriche, Fèisean nan Gàidheal

Working with Fèisean in many communities, I was always of the opinion that participants should find out more about the heritage of their own area – the stories and the language of the people – as well as the songs and the music. I am extremely happy that is what is coming through this valuable project and I hope that Fèis participants will make use of the materials collected for many years to come and will add to the archive that has been established.”

Arthur Cormack, Chief Executive Officer, Fèisean nan Gàidheal