

Ledmore and Migdale Memories

In Spring 2014 people met in Dornoch and Bonar Bridge to share memories about Ledmore and Migdale wood. In a short time a wealth of information was gathered shedding light on the heritage in the area, the forests, the Canadian logging camps, settlements, illicit stills, wildlife and much more. These transcripts provide a glimpse into how important this area has been to people for generations, and how important it is to ask people to share memories and photographs of their area.

The project was part of the Woodland Trust Scotland's 'People and Trees' project for Ledmore and Migdale wood, a three year programme of events, activities and improvements, with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and and E.ON Rosehall Community Fund (administered by Foundation Scotland). The sessions were facilitated by Susan Kruse of Archaeology for Communities in the Highlands (ARCH) who prepared this transcript. Any corrections or additions should be sent to Eleanor Garty, Site Manager / Woodland Creation Adviser – Highlands, at EleanorGarty@woodlandtrust.org.uk or The Woodland Trust Scotland, Old Manse, Jemimaville, Dingwall IV7 8LU.



Photo: HistoryLinks Archive



Photo: Glenys Munro

Ledmore & Migdale Memories

Sessions 29-4-2014, 6-5-2014 and 13-5-2014, Open Day 6-6-2014, with additional information submitted.

Attending:

Dornoch: Cliff Beck, Sandie Beck, Alasdair Cameron (AC), Anne Coombs (AnC), David Findlay, Eleanor Garty, Blossom Gow, Sue Higgins, Susan Kruse, Janet MacKay, Avril MacLennan (AvM), Christine Matheson, Penny Paterson, Juliet Robinson, Betty Rutherford, Louise Suggett, Christine Taylor, Garry Taylor, Arthur Teska, Margaret Thomson, Peter Wild, Verity Walker, Rosemary Wright

Bonar Bridge: Michael Baird, Nigel Baird, Alasdair Cameron (AC), Irene Chisholm, Sandy Chisholm, Sonia Dobson, Marion Fraser, Gary Gruber (GaC), Susan Kruse, Gregor Laing, Alison MacKenzie (AIM), Anne MacKenzie (AnM), Kenny Mackenzie, Ella Mackenzie (EM), Sandy MacKenzie, Valerie Mackenzie-Harris, George MacLeod, Fiona MacLeod, Hamish Matheson, Bruce Milne, Eunice Milne (EuM), Glenys Munro, Alex Murray (AM), Pat Read, Gavin Ross, Marianne Ross, Gavin Suggett, John Taylor, Garry Taylor, Russell Taylor, Sally Thomson, Chris Williams, Betty Wright, Andy Wright

Additional Information: Glen Grant (GG), Sarah Horne (SaH), Hugh Mackay (HuM), Isa Ross, Morag Chalmers

Numbers beginning MHG and EHG refer to Highland Historic Environment Record her.highland.gov.uk

Estates and ownership (details from EG)

The woodland was part of two estates: Pulrossie and Creich which were both later subsumed within Skibo Estate.

Creich: Creich was in various hands during the 18thC including William Creech, the Edinburgh bookseller and later publisher of Burns. In 1833 the estate was acquired by the Duke of Sutherland. In 1899 it was purchased by Andrew Carnegie.

Pulrossie In 1430 King James I granted the lands of Pulrossie to Angus Murray. The Murrays, and their descendants held the lands until the 1770s. It was bought by George Dempster of Dunnichen in 1789. In 1898 it was acquired by Andrew Carnegie.

Skibo Castle was the residence of the Bishops of Caithness from the 12th century until 1545, when the estate was given to John Gray. The Grays continued to hold the lands into the mid-late 18th C. It was bought in 1786 by George Dempster. In 1898 it was acquired by Andrew Carnegie.

Thus in the late 18th Century Pulrossie and Skibo were united under the ownership of George Dempster of Dunnichen and his half-brother John, and then in the late 19th Century all three holdings came into the ownership of Andrew Carnegie and were incorporated into his Skibo Estate.

4 boundary markers are on the 1st edition OS map. According to HER (MHG27564), two are located and two are lost; EG has only seen one, but has yet to look for the second. They have P on one side for Pulrossie and C on the other for Creich. JR with photo.

It was long known to be a wooded area. The Old Statistical Account from the 1790s mentions the woodlands.

There is also a story that James Robertson Justice wanted to buy the wood from Skibo, but the Skibo estate would not sell, and instead sold him one oak tree near the shore which was fenced off (PP's husband and AT). This tree was on the house side of the road and a court case ruled that it belonged to Skibo Estate who owned the oak trees on the north side of the road. The house road-side

fence was made round this tree making a "V" which was a trap for rubbish. When GG bought this house, Skibo Estate kindly let him make the fence straight and then he was able to tidy things up. In the late 70's a four ton limb fell off, landing on the drive-way. Skibo Estate then agreed to fell and remove the tree for safety. The stump is still to be seen. (GG)

Felling and Planting of trees

- Historical research is being undertaken by project by Malcolm Bangor-Jones. The first record of the oakwood is 1628 which refers to 'the wood and pasture of Leadmoir' (Calendar of Writs of Munro of Foulis 1299-1823, edited C T McInnes, Scottish Record Society, 1940, Edinburgh pp.53-54, no. 184).
- There is also a bit of oakwood near Loch Migdale, and a record of cutting in the 1790s (Caledonian Mercury 20 August 1796). The oaks are still there and show clear evidence of having been coppiced in the past.
- Documents provide some evidence of cutting of forests. The earliest record of oak being cut on Pulrossie is in the 1760's (NRS CS29), but it is not clear whether this is Ledmore oakwood, Migdale oakwood, or another wood on the estate. It does say that it occurred close to the sea, so maybe it refers to Ledmore.
- The first clear record of Ledmore oakwood being cut is in 1809 (Caledonian Mercury 26 June 1809). It appears that Ledmore oakwood was last cut in 1850s (EG). CB heard that it was cut twice in the 19th century. Oakwood is generally on 25 year cycle, with coppicing (EG)
- GG cannot recall the date that Grant brothers were given a commission to cut down Spinnindale oakwood for timber to build a church in Glasgow. They did not make money as the saws they used did not stand up to the hard oak. One brother returned home to Speyside (the Clan Grant homeland), but the other stayed where the Spinningdale House/mill is now. He was evicted and GG believes went to Achnasnich (over the hill) where GG's forefathers came from to Dornoch.
- Within memory AT recalls the north facing slope of the glen above Spinningdale was felled in two stages. They felled right up the hill and over the top – it was all birch. The felling was done by Skibo employees who were living beside Clashmore Hall. AT got some of it for burning, but most rotted in situ.
- BG's father (Mr James Whittet) was factor at Skibo from 1932 to the 1960s. He was very keen on trees and involved in replanting
- There was a nursery at Creich on Duke of Sutherland's property . Nursery Cottage appears on the 1st and 2nd edition OS maps. The 1st edition OS map (1870s) appears to show a laid out garden with three rows of large trees behind the cottage, and depicts a well. GS has located the well, but it is a simple depression, not a stone lined structure. In living memory the house was known as Forester's Cottage (MT); an account of receipts and payments of 1857 also records 'Forester's House Creech' (NLS Dep. 313/1881). The house is now covered with ivy (MT). In the Sutherland papers there are record of payments to workers in the nursery from 1835-37; thereafter tree seedlings appear to have been bought in from nurseries in Cromarty and Forres. In 1882 there is a reference to 'cleaning of the nursery' as a job planned for that year. A nursery is also depicted on maps at Skibo, but could have been for vegetables etc. There were also glasshouses with peaches, nectarines and grapes (LS).
- Documents show clearly that not only timber, but also bark for tanning, was a major crop from the oakwood. For example, there is a record of it going to Inverness in 1762-1767 (NRS CS29), it is mentioned in the Old Statistical Account of the 1790s, and a shoemaker from Proncy was arrested for stealing bark (NRS JP32/5/7). Other uses mentioned are ship timber, and cart wheel spokes. There are no memories of charcoal burning, nor any documentary references to charcoal making on site. There is one record in 1836 of a boat of wood going to Golspie for charcoal (EG).

- Transport of the timber and bark from the wood would have been by a variety of means. Documents mention by boat or cart. Horses have been used in the past to transport wood within memory. In 1952 after a big storm, a contractor named Mr Skene from Camore came with his horses to clear blown over trees behind Migdale rock (LS) He is said to have exported his timber by rail from Ardgay (CM). He is said to have made enough money from this operation to build his house.
- It is likely that horses would have been used to take the timber to the shore, for forwarding on by boat, perhaps by Newton Point (HM). Ospisdale Brae would have been difficult for horses to cart timber (LS). A sawmill at Rosehall used a barge to transport timber to Bonar Bridge using the tides for then collection by boat; only one man, Mr Bethune, could pilot the narrow channel, and when he died no one else could do it. This is described in Duncan Munro 'Wood in his Blood, the Duncan Munro Story' published by Alness Community Association (information supplied by AC). The Bethune family has only recently left the village. In wartime years, presumably wood was transported by Canadian Forestry Corp trucks (AC).
- A number of crofts have a few massive douglas firs, planted presumably at times of reforestation in the area (SC).
- A big fire around 1948 burned about three quarters of young plantation on the Creich side of the loch (SC).
- The area to the north of the woods, north of Loch an Lagain, was purchased by the Forestry Commission in 1983 and planted with trees for the first time between 1984 and 1989. There are old crofts still to be seen within it, though it was sensitively planted around these settlements. It is probably due to be felled in the next 10-15 years. (HuM)

Woodland Management

- Documents from the late 1700s reference woodkeepers whose job in part was to stop theft of bark (NRS CS29; NRS JP32/5/7)
- AT used to stalk deer in the woods to keep their numbers down. LS remembers deer by the loch.

Mills

- Corn mill to the east of eastern end of Loch Migdale (MHG19302). It is mentioned in a document of 1815: Donald Munro tenant in Lonemore testifies that he is "well acquainted with the Miln called Muillin-sufeeah upon the burn issuing from Loch Migdol, the meaning of which the Interpreter stated to mean the Miln of the fairies... also called mullin gleannan meaning the Miln in the Glen... he does not know when this Miln was built but it was built before he was born, ... belongs to the Estate of Skibo..." "Miln called the Miln of the fairies was only used when they could not command water at the other Miln of Migdol" [other end of Loch Migdale]' ([NRS CS235/G/30/1](#)). This mill is on the first edition OS map of the 1870s, but marked as unroofed on the 2nd ed map of 1904. It was located at the junction of two burns, and a lade is depicted. Today the ruins can still be seen.
- There was also a mill below Kyleog (IR). On the 1815 map, there appears to be a mill pond depicted in this area.
- A threshing mill is depicted and labelled ('thrashing mill') on the 1st edition OS map; it is depicted by not labelled as such on the 2nd edition map (MHG21126). GM has photos of the threshing mill taken at different periods. It is no longer there.
- Spinningdale Mill (MHG10195). Very short-lived (1792-1806). Said to be a cotton mill. Published and anecdotal accounts give different information about the mill, with John Shaw's book *Water Power in Scotland 1550-1870* saying it was handpowered, some saying steam, and others, including John Evan's book *Gentleman Usher. The Life & Times of George Dempster 1732-1818* and research by Malcolm Bangor-Jones, saying it was water powered. It is most likely to be water-powered. The building is extremely unsafe, so internal details

should **not** be verified by investigation! AnC also reported that foundations for the stables still survive there, and possibly weaving sheds immediately below the road. AnC noted that the RCAHMS on Canmore is not accurate in its depiction of the Engine House – doors and windows should be on the ground floor. Some people have heard that the mill was also used for flax which was imported. This may be confusion with the flax mills at Newton Point (see below), but HistoryLinks Museum was given two sheets which were reputedly woven at the mill in 1806 (SH).

- According to John Evan's book *Gentleman Usher* (see above), George Dempster and his nephew made the Balnoe Company and built Newton Point as a port with the idea of building two water-powered weaving sheds there for flax, and ultimately to create a new town. The venture was unsuccessful, in part due to problems with water power, and the operation was moved to Spinningdale. GS has read that the Napoleonic Wars put a stop to imported flax.

Sawmills

- Documentary research refers to early sawmills in Spinningdale (*details to be obtained from Malcolm Bangor-Jones*).
- Spinningdale Sawmill is shown on the 2nd ed OS map of 1904, but not the 1st edition map of the 1870s. It was located near the village on a path opposite Badarroch, but does not appear in aerial photographs. HM remembers a sawmill at Spinningdale before the Canadians came.
- A sawmill is also at Skibo, and appears on old maps (BG).
- Mobile sawmills may also have been used in the wood. A document describing conditions of sale dated 1891 (NLS 10225 Woods Box, folder 2) notes that 'A Site for a Steam Engine and Sawing Machinery will be pointed out – and also the roads by which the timber may be Carted.'
- There was a pre-war sawmill at the western end of Loch Migdale, near the end of the golf course (SC).
- The Canadian Forestry Corps had sawmills at Skibo A and Skibo B (see below).
- After the war a sawmill was built near the CFC mill in 1952-3, needed to deal with all the trees which came down in the storm. There is still said to be sawdust there (BM, CT)
- There used to be a sawmill at the Ardgay end of Bonar Bridge – Andersons (HM)

Watercourses

- There is a sluice gate at the eastern end of Loch Migdale built as part of the hydro scheme at Spinningdale house (see below), where the owner, Mr Chance, was invoking a right related to Spinningdale Mill. The sluice gate resulted in flooding on lands belonging to AM's grandfather, and he received compensation (AM). However, there was an earlier sluice gate at this position, since it appears on a map of 1815 (GS). Perhaps this was for Spinningdale Mill or feeding the nearby corn mill. MT remembers a metal and wood sluice gate which she used to clamber over. The current sluice gate is concrete, but the stopper no longer exists (DF).
- There is a sluice gate with tank near Spinningdale House (Canmore 13847 with picture). This was also related to the hydro scheme (AnC, MF). The tank is still there, as well as a lot of concrete foundations which relate to the scheme (BM, HM). BM, EuM & GM remember the hydro shed, a wooden structure on a concrete base. It deteriorated and JR Justice did not repair. HM has renewed the wood on the tank. (HM)
- Originally the burn flowed from Loch Migdale, then went into a bog, and then emerged as a burn again near Balnaling (MHG19307). This is clearly visible in the 1st edition OS map. By the time of the 2nd edition (1904), there is a distinct water course (Spinningdale Burn) for the whole route. Mr Gregor MacLeod of Tain remembers digging a ditch in the bog about 20

years ago, and coming across a timber-lined lade (info to SK).] EG has seen the remnants of the lade in the bog. It was constructed with big square nails (EuM, BM).

Settlements and crofts

- The 1st edition OS map of 1870s shows settlements and old paths within the forested area, indicating that they pre-date at least the last planting. There are townships with more than one farmhouse identified at Creag na Sroine, Spinningdale, Bailenacuile, an unnamed one north of the Fairy Glen (MHG 193206), Kyleoag and Migdale Rock.
- The maps also show individual farmhouses. Balnaling (MHG19307) had two buildings in 1870s but by 1904 (2nd ed OS), all buildings are unroofed. No buildings are visible today
- Dates and reasons for clearances for the settlements in the Ledmore & Migdale area need further research.
- Spinningdale Bog long had a reputation of being unsafe to walk in (HM, GM). GM remembers as a child being told not to walk there – and that this was one rule they obeyed. The bog had a number of adders in it.
- Spinningdale had a tea room, pictured in several postcards. PP's husband, who grew up in Clashmore and had family in Spinningdale, remembers the café in the 1960s, and that it also had a shop and later on a petrol pump. SaH used to be taken into the shop (by the pumps) in the 50's on the way home from the dentist in Dornoch where we were given a treat of an ice cream. There was also a camp site run in the 1960s by the Macrae family (PP). Gordon and Norah Lyon owned Spinningdale Stores, the Post Office, petrol station and tearooms (formerly Macrae's Stores) from 1978 to 1983 (HistoryLinks archive 2008_020_116).
- George Dingwall told SaH that he remembered a man they called 'Moonlight' bringing groceries to Spinningdale with a horse and cart, arriving at 10 at night and then driving back to Bonar with a lamp on the cart. He also remembered cycling to Bonar for dances with a girl on his handlebars.
- Mrs Vass from Airdens, the grand-aunt of AM, and her husband John Vass from Balintore, had the inn in Spinningdale (AM). It had a reputation as a 'watering hole' on the way to the station. AM related a story that Andrew Carnegie's head coachman nodded off on the way, and the horses stopped at the inn. Mr Carnegie asked why they had stopped, and the coachman said that the wheel was overheating so they needed to stop.
- The Old Mill Inn was in operation in the 1950s, run by Amy (?Mackenzie). Then Jock MacCulloch took it over, followed by Mr Ramsay. But people especially remember when Johnny Warner had it from the 1963/4 to 1988. He was of Polish origin, and came to Britain after the war, having escaped from both Russian and German camps (AvM, GG). Under Johnny Warner it gained a good reputation for his steak suppers, with standing room only from Friday through to Sunday nights, cars parked all the way down the road to the petrol pumps/tea rooms (AvM, GG, PP's husband). A variety of people had the inn after he left.
- Badarroch in Spinningdale is unusually a three storey house. It was said to have been built by Carnegie for his Policies Manager (CW via EG). Later it belonged to AM's relatives, the Vass family. His father's cousin, Mina Vass, lived there and he remembers his aunt "Teanie" taking him by horse and trap to visit. Mina's sister, Annie Vass, was lady's maid to Mrs Carnegie. (AM)
- The 2nd edition OS map of 1904 shows the Free Library on the Bonar Bridge – Clashmore road at NH 67816 89635. The building is still there.
- Spinningdale House was built by Mr Chance, and later bought by the actor James Robertson Justice. GG was told it was built in 1922/24. Mr Chance camped in a tent all over Sutherland until he found this site. He left the tent, went home to England, leaving instructions for the house, which he designed, to be built where the tent was and at that angle. When he died a nephew inherited his estate, and in the 1950s sold it to James Robertson Justice who in turn gifted it to Baroness Irena Meyendorf (who became his wife). JR Justice became very ill, and

in 1970 she sold the house to GG. He got on well with the family. When Mrs Justice was selling, James chased all 'buyers' away, but when she told him that GG had bought it, he was delighted. He died not long after (GG). PP's husband remembers that Prince Philip and Prince Charles visited when it was owned by JR Justice, and that the Prince Charles visited the shop to buy sweets. GM has pictures of a royal visit.

- Mr Chance created a target near the house, situated below Humpton near the shore. A small wee railway was built with a small incline. A plywood stag was then released along the track, and shooters situated on a tall tree would shoot at the target. You can still see the line of the railway (HM)
- The wooden public hall at Spinningdale was located beside the house called Hall. CT remembers going to dances there in the 1950s. The building is not remembered after the 1970s. JM has a picture.
- Neil Tuanach owned a croft further up the Migdale road from Torroy (NH 650 915). He was a grand uncle of AM. AM remembers putting cattle there and cutting rushes for thatch, although the croft was not lived on then. He remembers stacking the sheaves in a circle to become a pointed stack. Six or seven stacks were made each year – and attracted a lot of rats. The corn was thrashed to feed to the cattle, with their own threshing mill driven by a paraffin oil engine and a portable threshing mill powered by a steam traction engine coming to some of the crofts.
- A document of 1798 lists leases of around 30 tenants. Some of the names are still local including Murrays (AM's family, from Murrays of Pulrossie), Frasers, Leith, Matheson, Chisholm. Mr Chisholm was at Culnara (at the free church junction) - long time family in the area. Alec Chisholm was a great comic. (AM). General Leith had a connection with Achanny. He bought it because he thought it was part of his inheritance (V M-H).
- Crofts all had rights to cut peats on their common ground. HM still cuts his peats on the road to Sleastreay. Traditionally the first week of May is when cutting starts.
- Newton Point was used to import and export materials including wood and coal from Dornoch (MT). John Evan's book *Gentleman Usher...* said that cotton was imported there via Glasgow, for use in Spinningdale Mill (reported by AnC). On the 1st edition OS map of the 1870s two buildings are shown, one unroofed. On the 2nd edition OS map of 1904 only the roofed building is shown (slightly altered), but now there is also a boat house to the east, and a Tank is labelled between the two. The 2nd edition map also shows the pier. MT remembers two buildings there and a weighing machine (a picture of the weighing machine is on the HistoryLinks archive). The mound was reputedly an icehouse. The boat house was probably built for Andrew Carnegie's boat Sea Breeze, and then used or re-built for her grandfather's yacht (Windcrest II) which was much larger, and had to be winched up into the boat house. The rails are still going into the sea. There is also a stone-lined well there, with good water despite being so close to the sea. MT also remembers Newton Point cottage, built after the 1900s for Mr & Mrs Edgar, the Skibo mechanic who looked after the boat amongst other things. Water was pumped up to the tank close to the cottage and then gravity fed down (MT)
- Ardgay had a number of shops within living memory – Church to Church (V M-H). HistoryLinks archive has a picture (2007_102_032).

Wartime Canadian Forestry Camps (CFCs) and other wartime memories

- There are said to have been 2 WWI CFC camps in the area (AC). Christopher Uncles' book *Memories of East Sutherland* has a picture showing timber being loaded at Ardgay Station c. 1917. The caption mentions c. 400 American lumbermen coming to cut trees between Creich and Bonar Bridge where they erected great sawmills and bothies. The caption also says these operations extended into Strathcarron. Steve Copley of KOSH has researched WWI timber operations, and published an article in the *Northern Times* 19 Nov. 2010 and 26

Nov 2010. He notes that the forestry workers came from New England, and people there also raised money to purchase 122 horses and 10 mobile sawmills, each with a portable steam engine and boiler. The Board of Trade oversaw the works, with its headquarters at Seabank in Ardgay, which also included a small hospital and veterinary hospital; later they moved to Ardgay House. When works started, three of the sawmills were working on Skibo estate. Horses were used to transport trees to the mills. 'Wood shod sheds' were used to remove logs from some of the steep slopes. Ardgay Station was enlarged to accommodate up to 30 wagons to facilitate transport of the wood. (info from Steve Copley's articles). Sarah Horne's book 'More moments from Memories' p. 26 has pictures of the WWI camp and Americans on the station.

- There was a WWI wartime timber yard at Dornoch Station (AC). AnC was also told that there were probable wartime remains near junction of A9 and southern road into Dornoch.
- SH reported that a visitor to HistoryLinks who had lived locally as a child reported that there was a WWI gun dumped at the quarry north of the golf course in Dornoch which the local Home Guard used as practice for their home made Molotov cocktails. The museum was also told about a second gun which had been dumped in the Witch's Pond (HistoryLinks info 2004.118).
- William Wonders' book, *The Sawdust Fusiliers*, describes three CFC camps in the area in WWII: Skibo A near the eastern end of Migdale Loch, Skibo B (closer to Spinningdale), and Skibo C/Clashmore.
 - Skibo A: The camp is located just off the path leading from the end of Loch Migdale towards the public road (NH 652 905). There is a cleared section with bits of concrete, still surviving (AnC and DF). AM remembers being in the camp and sawmill. The huts were wooden (not nissen huts). The huts were above the path and the hall/cookhouse below it towards the outflow burn (AM). Below Skibo A, not too far from where the path from Migdale joins the public road and near where the burn comes down from Kyleoag, is an area with concrete foundations (NH 661 907). AM remembers this as the sawmill site. He remembers ponds for the logs, and an elevator with spikes to lift the logs out of the water. The sawmill would have been fired by a big diesel engine, possibly brought by train (AC). There were dances at the camp – AM sneaked from home into one, and MF attended dances there. AM recalls one dance had WREN's bussed in, perhaps from Fearn. According to Wonders, Skibo A was occupied by Company 30 1942-44 by men from New Brunswick.
 - Skibo B: This was located on the Achue Road, on the left hand side (JM, CT) (NH 682 900). PP's mother-in-law and JM's mother-in-law heard that there was a cinema there, and there were a number of dances (HM). There was also a sawmill there, with a pond about four feet deep for washing the logs. The logs were then hooked with a pole onto an elevator leading to the saw which was on the upper floor. The circular saw blades were large – around four to five feet. The saw mill was capable of cutting large timber to different sizes. The cut timber was stacked on the Achue road, possibly to go off by train (HM). Mr Macrae owned the local shop/post office at the time and was very good to them, doing a big 'bartering' trade with them. He was so popular, that when he died in the 1970s, the Canadians sent representatives to his funeral from Canada (GG). According to Wonders Skibo B was occupied by Company 29 in 1942-3 by men from New Brunswick, by company 13 in 1943-44 by men from Nova Scotia and by Company 1 in 1943-44 by men from Ottawa. There is a photo of No 1 company dated 1943 in the Historylinks archive.
 - Skibo C / Clashmore : This camp was located near the junction of the A949 and A9 at a place known locally as the Black Pool because it was very boggy (PP, BG). There is a modern house on the site now. BG has a photo of CFC men from Clashmore, and

remembers them as the 'nicest set of boys you could meet, never caused any trouble.' AvM has pictures, originally belonging to Jimmy MacKay, showing soldiers at this camp and one showing the huts. BG remembers dances here too. The corps band came once a month and the WRI made teas (BG). The camp had a big NAAFI and used to take some of the Dornoch children there and entertain them, providing sweets (GG). According to Wonders, this was occupied by Company 26 in 1942-3 by men from New Brunswick.

- Kyle of Sutherland Heritage Society has pictures of one of the CFC camp given by Bunty Gordon; the pictures are in an album kept in Kincardine Old Church (V M-H)
- The Canadians were very popular locally, often visiting homes or local people would go to the camps (AM, BG). PP's mother-in-law, Dorothy Matheson, nee Gunn, visited the Loch Migdale camp as a girl where she had tea with condensed milk for the first time. She was particularly friendly with a soldier named Jones who came to a ceilidh in her uncle Alec's croft house in Spinningdale. Sadly Jones died in the war. AM remembers Canadians coming to Badbea for a New Year's Day meal.
- AM remembers going to one of the dances, leaving his bicycle at Bonar Bridge Hall. It was gone when he came back after the dance. Later he saw the bicycle at sports day, and was told it belonged to a logger at Clashmore. He went with the local policeman to the camps, where his bike was found, having been through a number of hands in the meantime, and he was able to get it back.
- The camps had pigs which were fed leftovers.
- JM recalled that in winter and early spring the cattle were grazed in the woods (not in summer). There were just a few of them and they usually came home at night, but sometimes they didn't come home. Janet's late husband Willie would say 'they'll be at the Camp' and they would go up there at Achue and find the cows. The cattle liked lying there, probably because it was warm on the sawdust. That was the only reason the Janet knew about the former Canadian camp by the Achue road.
- The camps had large stockpiles of timber for firewood. When the CFC left, local people helped themselves to the timber. According to an article in The Sunday Post 12 May 1946 (**check date**), they were burned by the Board of Trade, to the indignation of local folk. Other stories suggest however that it may not have been the government who burned the timber.
- When the CFC left, they took all their equipment. One or two huts and the officer's mess were left (HM), but no one can recall what happened to them.
- Canadians, including one black man, helped GM's grandfather on the croft at nights. His grandfather had been wounded in WWI. (GR)
- AM remembers other CFC camps at Invershin, Rosehall (with sawmill); according to Wonders this was Company 17 in 1941-1943, with men from Ottawa. Newfoundlanders were at Edderton (EM) and Golspie, near Backies (BG). Indians and Poles were in Dornoch (AC, BG). There is a story that one of the Indians was buried sitting up (BG) (see below). There were also foresters from Honduras near Golspie (PP, AC) and Sikhs at Lairg (AC). Argyle & Sutherland Highlanders were in the Station Hotel in Dornoch, and Norwegian Troops were stationed in Earl's Cross (GG). Bunty Gordon recalled wartime troops and activities in Sarah Horne's book 'More Moments from Memories' pp. 26-7. Lornie Currie's memories of the war years in Dornoch are in HistoryLinks Museum (SH), and appended to this transcript.
- GG recalls the Indian troops were in Dornoch, stationed in the Station Hotel, Golf Road where Dun Rest etc is now, and houses. They had hundreds of mules. One day he was walking past some of the Indian troops with his father, and they obviously said something not nice. GG's father opened up in Hindi, and they stood at attention saluting. When GG used to go past with a friend after that they always got saluted. On another occasion at the Station Hotel, now Dornoch Hotel, some of the Indians were kneeling to one of the cows of

Simy Bain (a local worthy). GG laughed while watching, and an Indian officer came up to him and explained their religion. He was very nice and GG was very ashamed. There were sheep in the grounds of the hotel, and he used to watch them being caught and killed. Two Indians died and are buried in Proncynain Cemetery, Dornoch, buried in a sitting position, facing east, and then covered by a mound. Simy Bain was the grave digger and he always said that a good shower of rain would have their heads showing! (GG)

- Canadians in WWII did not have horses (AM). In general CFC brought their own caterpillar tractors (AC)
- Some local women married Canadians, including AT's aunt. He was posted off in the war, and died several weeks later. Mita MacKenzie, a friend of MF, married and went to Canada after the war. HM's aunt married the chef at Skibo A (Stan Karatwetz), and went to Canada after the war (HM). A few Canadians stayed after the war, including Jimmy Bell who was very involved in Dornoch heritage. Colin Ploughman was a Newfoundlander, and still lives in Golspie. However, Newfoundlanders did not work in the Spinningdale/Clashmore area (AvM). Some local women are also reported to have married American loggers in WWI.
- The Home Guard met at Lairg, Dornoch, Golspie, Bonar Bridge and Brora. GG watched their activities as a boy whenever possible. The only action the Guard had was when there was a call to protect Dornoch beach from invaders – but it turned out to be a practice. His father, Bob Grant, joined the Sutherland Home Guard. He had to record every horse in Sutherland and Caithness secretly. When WWII was declared, he had to requisition all those suitable for the Lovat Scouts, with the owners taking them to the Mound railway station. If the owners were reasonable he would leave what he could and pay top price, but some were awkward and then he was harder. From memory he paid between £10 and £30 a horse (£30 to reasonable, £10 to awkward). One estate hid their horses, so he threatened arrest and then took the lot (Cambusmore, Wignall) (GG). Bob Grant had been in WWI, and in fact every force he served in had the initials SH – Sutherland Highlands / Seaforth Highlanders / Scottish Horse / Sind Horse and Sutherland Home Guard!). He even brought back two horses from India. In Lairg, one of his cousins, Charlie Sutherland, very religious Free Church, refused to let his sons parade on Sunday. His father got the police sgt and went to the house, and told him he was being arrested because Hitler was not going to stop fighting on Sunday for him. The sons never missed another parade (GG).
- When a boy, GG and a friend went to see the Home Guard practice at Dornoch Golf Course. After a grenade sent shrapnel flying, they went into a slit trench that was there. (GG)
- AM remembers a mock exercise with Bonar Bridge defended by the Home Guard, attacked by the 9th Seaforths – who went through the defence. GG also remembers the attackers as 'The Argyles' stationed in Dornoch. His father and his commander Lt Col. Ian Campbell were told by an umpire that they had been killed. Tempers flared to say the least (GG).
- KM's late brother in law told him that he was in the Ross Shire Home Guard when a teenager and one of their tasks was to man a road block between Ardgay and Bonar. The famous Colonel Cuthbert, factor of Ardress estate, was in charge and used to send an alarm to the unit and then set off by car to see if he could get through the road block before it was manned. He was successful on several occasions but one day the unit suspected that he was to test them and they were ready. They waited until the colonel was almost through before pulling the barbed wire entanglement across the road. He was unable to stop and his car was none the better of its entanglement with barbed wire. They waited for the wrath of the colonel to descend on their heads but he was delighted and congratulated them on their good work. (KM)
- Harry Blythe, keeper at Cambusmore at the start of the war, and subsequently keeper at Skibo, told LS and MT that he was in the Auxiliary Unit, and that there was a cache of ammunition beside the loch (GS); he may also have worked with the Skibo keeper. This was very secret – even Harry's wife didn't know he was a member. LS was shown this ammo

cache by Harry Blythe which was on the north side of Migdale Loch at the east end (LS). GM and EuM were told about the ammo dumps, but thought they were supposed to be on the north side of Migdale rock. They did see near the loch a hole near the path which had been caved in, and wonder now if this might have been the site of the ammo dump.

- There was also an underground base at Airdens (c NH 617 942), like a nissen hut underground. It is in a secluded spot, containing bunks and stores with nothing visible above or obvious vent holes, and does not appear to be a cold war nuclear bunk. There was a metal hatch (which would have been hidden from view) and a metal ladder going down to the main part. There was also an escape tunnel which came out at a small burn below the 'hide'. When KM first saw it was in good condition, but has now fallen in. Kids used to play in it. He believes it was for the Secret Army Auxiliary Unit (KM) .
- When GG's father died in 1978, GG sent all his military paraphernalia to the National Army Museum in Chelsea, London, including saddlery, uniforms, turbans, swords, polo sticks etc, as well as some diaries, including all of his Indian diaries. Unfortunately his father's early diaries were destroyed (GG).
- Other wartime memories can be found in Sarah Horne's books and on HistoryLinks archive.

Other Wartime Remains

- Invershin Bridge was guarded throughout the war (AM)
- There is a pillbox in RT's garden (RT), one of a number in the area
- There are barricade blocks on Culrain Road (RT)

Prehistoric Remains

- There is an unusual concentration of Neolithic chambered cairns in and around the wood. Also the Migdale Hoard (early Bronze Age) , other bronze axeheads and cist burials show a Bronze Age presence. Dun Creich hillfort, Loch Migdale crannog and finds such as the iron spade shoe from Swordale show Iron Age presence. There are also round houses (hut circles), probably dating to Bronze Age and Iron Age. Altogether they show an area settled in the prehistoric times (SK).
- The henge at the west end of Loch Migdale was (re)excavated by Time Team. (V M-H). Similar small henges in the eastern Highlands are now thought to be Bronze Age in date (SK)
- MC's son found a Bronze Age axehead at Migdale, now in the National Museums of Scotland in Edinburgh (MC)

Recreation

- HistoryLinks has good photos of the Fairy Glen walk which opened in 1907. There were a number of bridges – MF and AM remember 13, but others including LS and MT remember 9 – and a cabin at the top (featured in one of HistoryLinks' photos). Only one bridge is there now (called the Carnegie Bridge), and it is a rebuilt one of a later date, but some foundations of the original bridges can be seen. After Carnegie's death, visitors to the area, many from abroad, used to come to the tea room in Spinningdale and then walk up to the cabin. They were able to step onto the slate roof from the back, and many scratched their names on the slates (HM). A well supplied water there; HM has a picture of it. The cabin burnt down after the war (GS).
- Skibo estate also had a 'cottage on the moor' at Aulnagar where Andrew Carnegie and family could go when there were too many guests at Skibo (AM). This is a large hunting lodge – was later a hotel (GS). AM was given a book when at Invershin primary school, in which it was described as a cottage. Aulnagar was used as a battle school during the war and before that an RAF post (AM).
- AM's father went fishing with Andrew Carnegie who had a number of fishing lochs on his estate. His father said that Andrew Carnegie was forever tangling his lines.

Schools

- A National School is depicted on the 1st edition OS map of the 1870s at NH 67512 89742, but not on the 2nd, when Larachan School is depicted to the east. The late Alex Gunn told about pupils coming to the school with peats for the fire (AM). CT was told that the occupant of Torroy was the schoolteacher at the National School.
- Larachan school – AM was told this was built by Dempster with the intention of becoming a lodge if local crofts were cleared. However, the current building dates to 1878, so this building cannot have been built by George Dempster (SH). The estate was owned at that time by Evan Charles Sutherland-Walker (EG). Its location was dangerous as a school, being so close to the road; a child was killed by a passing vehicle, and the grave is in Creich churchyard (CT, GS). HM remembers Jeannie Dingwall picked her bag which was on the bench, and a huge adder under it bit her. HM was sent with her to the sickbay at the CFC camp, and then she was driven to Golspie where she was treated, and she recovered. Larachan School closed in 1964 (SH) and is now a private house. A picture of the children in 1945-6 is in the HistoryLinks archive, and HM has identified all of them.
- There was a two room school at Clashmore, used primarily by children on the Skibo estate (BG). BG received a school prize from Mrs Louise Carnegie for art. BG has photos of the school; there are 32 pupils pictured at the school. HistoryLinks archives show that the first school was built in 1859. It was bought by Andrew Carnegie in 1898 and a new school was built in 1939 by Mrs Carnegie (SH). It was situated on the East Drive. It closed in 1968 and the children were then bussed to Dornoch. The building was used as a joinery workshop after closure. It is now a private house.
- AM went to primary school at Invershin school (part of Skibo estate)
- There was a side school at Sleastreay (AM). Jean Calder described her memories of it in Sarah Horne's book 'Moments from Memories' p. 36.
- Bonar Bridge had a nursery, primary and secondary technical school (V M-H). MF came from Assynt to Bonar to the senior secondary school into the 1940s. AM's brother had to go to Dornoch for secondary. Sarah Horne's book includes a number of photos and memories of Bonar Bridge.

Church

- The Preaching stone is on the shore of Loch Migdale below the scree below Migdale Rock, at the west end of Migdale Rock near a turn in the path. In Gaelic it was called *àite cuideachd* i.e. place together. Gatherings were held there 50 years before the Disruptions, but for many of the same reasons, with people coming from Spinningdale and Bonar Bridge. There is a stone at just the right height to hold a Bible (AM). The site is still visible.
- A picture of an outdoor service 'in the woods near Migdale' in Christopher Uncles' book *Memories of East Sutherland* (p. 32), is not the preaching site on Migdale Loch. GR's grandfather Donald was treasurer years of the Free Kirk for over 40 years, and then his cousin Donald for 40 years after that. GR heard from his father that the outdoor services were held across the road from the church, and that up to 900 people come to hear Gustavus Aird preach. (GR). MC remembers the preaching site looking down on to the old Free Church Manse. Gustavus Aird is known to have held large communion gatherings outdoors in the 1880s, and perhaps this photograph relates to one of these (MR, citing Life of Gustavus Aird by Alexander Macrae).
- Before the Free Church was built at Migdale, there was a temporary wooden structure (GM). The current church dates to 1881, but the first church was erected in 1843 (Listed Building report). The Free Church at Migdale sat 1000+ people but MC has attended funerals there where people stood outside (MC).

- The 1913 Church of Scotland at Bonar was supported by Carnegie. It has a special window – there are only two other similar ones, at Skibo and Dornoch (IC, AM)
- There was a pray room in Spinningdale which was really small building where PP's husband Archie remembers being taken in the 60's. The building is still there.(PP)

Shore

- Coal for Skibo was brought in at Newton Point (GS)

Communications (roads/bridges etc)

- AM's grandfather (known locally as Sandy Level) built roads for Andrew Carnegie. AM relates that he used to take out his snuff box and give Andrew Carnegie a pinch. When he built the Clashmore to Loch Laggan road, after he was paid he divided the money equally among all the squad (AM)
- The bridge over the Spinningdale Burn was replaced within memory, although GM has a photo showing the old bridge, when the threshing mills were still situated below it. The lade was piped under the new bridge (GM)
- The Meikle Ferry was important for connecting Ross-shire and Sutherland. LS remembers Skibo employees going to the dances in the 1950s using this ferry, and failing to get back because they were too late for the ferryman.
- There were two paths from both sides of Loch Migdale leading to Creich church, used to take coffins to the church and for walking to/from services. The western one goes through the golf course, the eastern one can still be followed although it is somewhat overgrown (SC, HM, CW)
- V M-H was told by the previous librarian, Catherine Murray, would walk from Aultnagar to Bonar Bridge without going by any roads. She would stay in the village during the week, then back on Friday nights.

Whisky

- The Creich Distillery is mentioned in a document dated 1836 (NLS Dep. 313/1910), but no one can remember stories about it. GS has forwarded a letter by Malcolm Bangor-Jones to the Northern Times which reported that a distillery was established in 1826 at Badarroch, when Hugh Houston owned the Creich estate. It was housed in a warehouse built 3 years earlier. Production peaked in 1828-9 and it ceased production in 1832. The distillery was at Creich was opposite Creich manse beyond the farm workers cottages down at the waterside (MC). MF also heard of a distillery at the east end of Bonar Bridge.
- Several stories of illicit stills are known. There was supposed to be one on the north side of Migdale Rock (GS). GS and LS were shown one near Loch a' Ghiubhais by Danny Mackay; MT also saw it. GM heard about another one on the hill down between Larachan and the water. Further afield, AW and BW were told about one in Strathcarron, which is situated in a dip, with water close by and the remains of a derelict building. It was said to have burnt juniper, and had reputedly gone out of use by the 1940s, though there is a story that a barrel remains hidden. GM was told there were lots of stills in the Birichen area above Dornoch.
- There are also tales of excisemen in the area. One story related to AM was that the exciseman would swirl a stick in the burn, and if he found oil, he would go looking for the still. GG was told a story about two brothers working one on an island in Loch Laoigh, which was larger before the loch was dammed for the Dornoch water supply. There was a track just under water from the shore to the island. The still was worked by two brothers. One went on the island to make whisky and the other stayed up the hill to keep a lookout. The brother on lookout fell asleep, and woke up to see the excise man with a horse and cart arresting his brother. There was no argument and the brother helped the excise man to load the whisky and still equipment into the cart, and then both took off to the Dornoch police.

The other brother crept up behind the card (as the two men were leading the horse down the hill), and bit by bit emptied the cart. When it was out of sight he collected everything and hit it. On reaching Dornoch the exciseman and the accused went to take in the evidence. None, so no case to answer. The site of the still survives today (GG).

- There is a track road from Badninish which goes up to Loch Laoigh. About a mile up there is a ruined building where a man lived on his own and it was known as 'The Smugglers'. GG's father as a youth bought his Hogmanny whisky from him and said it would blow your head off. (GG)
- A relation in the Rearquhar area heard that he had been given away, and the exciseman was coming. He managed to dismantle the still and hid the worm in the thatched roof of another relative and it was never found, and no case was made. (GG)
- Distilling not seen as a sin. A Mr Urquhart said to the minister 'Mr Colquhoun, you won't believe where I am going today – to prison – how thankful I am that it is nothing wrong that I did'. (AM)
- GG's father lived at Achosnich as a boy. He was told to go and shoot a hare, but not to go to the Loch Lannsaidh burn. However, he knew there were hare's there and went to see. About two-thirds of the way up on the southeast side he fell through into a still den. There was a false roof heather which he had stood on. Needless to say he was grounded! (GG)

Wildlife in the Wood

- PP's husband and his grandfather saw a kangaroo in the Fairy Glen in the 1960s. It turned out to have been an escapee from somewhere else in Scotland.
- Squirrels have been spotted in local memory, last seen in hazel near Larachan and in the Fairy Glen about 15 years ago (GM). The last reported siting was 2009 (EG)
- AM remembers white hares on Migdale Hill
- GM remembers seeing pure wildcats at Skibo and over Skibo around 15 years ago, but recent sightings appear to be mixed breeds. It was not uncommon to see a pure wildcat at Spinningdale House in the 1970s/1980s.
- AM remembers corncrakes in Migdale hayfields – though no one remembers any recently. They were seen on the back Tulloch road c. 40 years ago (EM). AvM heard one in the Birichen area about 10-12 years ago.
- MT remembers there was a scheme to bring sea trout up to Loch Migdale, though it did not come to anything.

People

- Mr Chance of Spinningdale House is remembered as being dapper, wearing chamois gloves, and with a brass telescope (BG)
- John Bethune was a colourful character from Spinningdale who went searching for treasure abroad, never to find it, but after his death it treasure was discovered (EG)

Other

- The woods round Loch Migdale always had holly trees with loads of berries PP remembers picking holly in the 1980s.
- Andrew Carnegie had the west drive built to connect the sides of the estate and to avoid Ospisdale Brae (LS)
- There is a tunnel made of small stones in an arch to the north of Migdale Rock at NH 647 914 (MHG29873). The HER entry records that George Murry found it while clearing windblown trees in 1953. The Highland Council archaeologist suggested it might be an elaborate field drain. Or might it relate to wartime activity? Margaret and William Thompson have crawled down a tunnel when children (GS) – perhaps this is the same one? Margaret is sceptical that it was a drain, and wonders if it is a prehistoric souterrain (MT). SC has also seen it.

- Andrew Carnegie was quite concerned about possibility of war, even going to see the Kaiser to try and prevent the war (GS). He was at Aultnagar when war broke out in 1914, and AM's father was the one who broke the news. It was a devastating blow to Andrew Carnegie (AM, GS).
- Ore was mined at Rosehall and then taken to the foundry at Bonar Bridge by sleds, perhaps in the 1800s. MF's house is built on the foundry. The Smithy is still there (MF)
- There is a monument to Andrew Carnegie at the top of Larachan Hill, with a plaque on it. The steps are no longer there. (HM)
- David Findlay photographed the remains of a horse drawn sled near Torroy in 2006. He will go back to see if it is still there.
- When GG told his father's 90 year old brother when he bought Spinningdale House, expecting him to give him a row for spending so much money, all he said was 'Well done, the Grants have got it back at last' – the Grants had lived on the site of the house/mill before Spinningdale House was built. GG's father then told him that he had intended to buy it from Chance's nephew but his mother would not leave Dornoch – so that it was his mother's fault he had to pay 8 times as much.
- Elsewhere light railways were used to move timber to sawmills/ports. In Nov 1917 an engine was dispatched to work the railway lines for the 129th company of the CFC, and after the war an advertisement for 'Timber in Light Railway in Woods and at Little Ferry' appears to confirm that the CFC put in a railway for moving timber. The exact route of the railway is not known, but as over 10 miles of liner track was offered for sale the implication is that several local plantations were connected. The Timber Supply Dept also leased the pier at Little Ferry from the Duke to transport the timber, so perhaps the railway led there (information in Cox, David & Krupa, Christopher (1992). *The Kerry Tramway and other timber light railways*, supplied by SH).
- MT remembers that her father remembered Skibo covered in ancient Scots Pine.
- There was a post office at Migdale between 1880 and 1899 (SaH). The post office and shop was in the Chisholm's current house, used as such until the 1930s. There is still a damp patch where the salt was stored, and a line across the ceiling where there was a partition. (IC) In the 1891 census, Charlotte Chisholm is listed as the postmistress (information from MR).
- Ice for Skibo Castle was sent from Inverness and landed at Ardvoan Point (south of Cuthill farm) and it was then transported by horse and cart by John Grant & Sons, Dornoch to the Castle (GG)
- MC has a map relating to a dispute between two estates with boundaries in the Ledmore & Migdale area

Personal memories from Lorna Currie of the Second World War

Supplied by Sue Higgins, HistoryLinks, with permission of Lorna Currie.

Soon poles and staves were hammered into the sands at the edge of the Firth to repel an invading force, but I don't remember any being knocked into the sands at our 'beach'.

A shelter was erected on the headland, 16th fairway, for the Royal Observer Corps to observe planes and ships. It was manned 24 hours a day.

Before the war, Dornoch had a busy social life. The Station Hotel was fairly grand and had its own small orchestra, which played for dinner dancing. Sometimes the County Ball was held there. Soon after war was declared the hotel was requisitioned as billets. Other hotels and large houses were likewise 'taken over'. Indian soldiers arrived with their mules and beautiful horses. Their mounted soldiers were very striking. They were billeted in the Station Hotel and in Earls Cross House. Polish soldiers were in the West Church Hall, and also in Nissen huts to the rear of the Hall, on the adjoining car park and on the ground where the bungalows are today.

Norwegian officers were in Burghfield House, with some in Abden House, now the North Highland College. There were Canadian lumberjacks at Clashmore.

More Indians were in Nissen huts and tents along Golf Road, between Church Street and the bowling green, and it was there that we children would go to watch them cooking their huge pancakes (chapattis) out of doors. The R.A.F. were in the Royal Golf Hotel and I remember going there to a children's Christmas party, given us by the R.A.F. Colin cried so much he had to be taken home. There were also Scottish and Highland Regiments in Dornoch at various times throughout the war.

The W.V.S. ran a canteen in the Social Club on Schoolhill, in the evenings for the servicemen and women. My mother was a member of the W.V.S. and she was one of the ladies on duty on Monday nights. The uniform was a nice green overall, which had a wine coloured badge on the pocket. The local people were encouraged to invite a lonely soldier into their homes especially at Christmas time. We entertained two Norwegians, one, whose name I still remember, Captain Gundelach, and the other, his friend. After the war they kept in touch with us and sent us cards and presents, once a beautiful picture book of Norway.

There was a very active W.R.I. in wartime. My mother was the President for two sessions then. The Drama Society was also very popular, and they could fill the Drill Hall with their productions for two or three evenings in a row.

There were Brownies, Guides, Scouts, Cubs and for older girls, the Girls Training Corps, and for older boys, the Cadets.

Badminton was popular and played in the Drill Hall and in the school. Golf of course went on as usual, except on the Ladies Course (now part of the Struie course) as it was taken over by the R.A.F. as part of the aerodrome. My parents played regularly, my father once won the 'longest drive' competition. What excitement!

The Golf Professional's shop was across the road from today's Clubhouse. It was a unique little building with a narrow veranda at the front and the posts were thick tree trunks. As our parents were members of the Golf Club, we children assumed that we could play on the Main Course as well, which we did.

Before the war there were two or three public tennis courts (now only one). There was a Private Court off Kennedy Avenue for the Royal Golf Hotel.

The weekly Saturday night dances in the Drill Hall were a great night out, but I was far too young ever to attend. Sadly one of my worst war memories is connected to a dance. A truck load of Polish soldiers had been over to Brora to a dance one evening, and on returning to Dornoch their truck ran out of control, not far from our house, near the Poles Road cemetery. I think three soldiers were killed instantly and several injured. Colin remembers the brains on the wall, but I wouldn't go to look.

In the cemetery there are the gravestones of three Indians, who died whilst here. They are placed at an angle, to face Mecca. Another sad event was the ditching in the Firth of a Sunderland flying boat. My mother saw the actual crash from an upstairs window and we rushed upstairs by which time we saw several heads bobbing in the water – all saved.

During the war we children were allowed to run around Dornoch with no restrictions. That seems very strange today when we are so afraid of letting our children out of sight. I never heard of any abuse of children then and this at a time when Dornoch was full of strangers. Sometimes we would go to the Witch's Pool on the Low Golf course. It had water lying in it then, and we threw stones into it. We were told that the pool was bottomless! Golfers had to play over the Witch's Pool in those days, No. 8 on the "Low Course" as we called Struie then.

All houses had to conform to the blackout regulations. My parents fixed black tape around all our windows. Black curtains were made for every window and the blinds which were cream coloured were dyed black. Some people put sticky tape in a criss-cross pattern over the whole window (if the windows shattered, the tape would limit the shattering).

On the roof of the Police Station, which then was the large house situated between Shore Road and Dornoch Antiques and Collectables, was the air-raid siren. The siren had two distinct sounds, the first one warned us of an imminent air-raid, and the second wail told us that the air-raid was over. Of course there were no bombs dropped on Sutherland during the war.

The Meikle Ferry was in regular use during the war. We once cycled to the ferry with our London cousin, put our bikes in the boat, and Sandy, the ferryman rowed us over to the Tain side. We then cycled into Tain, bought ice cream, cycled back to the ferry where we raised the white flag and waited for Sandy to row across and collect us.