

Childhood Memories by Avril Patterson



I have just been to visit Bennachie and I thought you might be interested in my story.

I first visited Oyne in 1938/39 with my parents; sailing from Tyneside to Aberdeen (in the Aberdonian?). We caught a bus to Oyne where we continued to walk along the road until we reached a track on the left. We walked up the track and there on the left was Burngrains where my father's uncle Sandy and Aunt Susanna (brother and sister) lived. I remember they were old but they still had their croft.

All I remember about the house were the very thick walls. But in the yard there were a great many chickens roaming

around. At the corner of the house there was a hole in the ground with a wooden cover – the well. Uncle Sandy grew vegetables including kale which I had never seen before. He also had a beehive. Beyond the garden was a field with a cow. Aunt Susanna made butter by turning a handle in a wooden churn.

One day some neighbours arrived and the hay was cut and arranged in little piles with rakes and pitchforks. I “helped”.

I remember a pile of wood arranged like a wigwam where the little birds sat. I suppose it was their winter fuel.

We ate broth with home grown vegetables and a large plate of potatoes in the middle of the table.

Whether you got any meat or not was “pot luck” according to my father.

One day we walked up the track. There was another house on the left where an old man lived alone with his old dog. There was a crystal clear stream burbling over pebbles. Beyond there were heather moors.

I had my photograph taken sitting on the bridge over the Gaudie(?) burn. Also just outside of Oyne Aunt Barbara (a widow?) lived alone in a house backing on to the railway line.

My second memory is less clear. We visited again about 1946, 47. By then Sandy and Susanna were very old so they no longer had the cow, but still had a few chickens.

We never visited again. I suppose they were old and died. My father was born in Foyers in Invernesshire in 1905 and left Scotland for Tyneside when he was 6 years old. However his mother, Wilhamina Mortimer lived and was married in Oyne. She was dead when I was born. My father died in 1955 but before then he often talked with great affection for Scotland; the crystal burns and the heather moors. He lived in industrial Tyneside where he worked in the shipyards which he hated. He loved Bennachie but we never returned after the deaths of Sandy and Susanna.

I was surprised that my memories were so accurate as I found the house and track up the mountain immediately. My daughter and I walked up beyond the tree line and I managed to reach Little Oxen Craig where we had Aberdeenshire spread out before us. Patches of sunlight moved across the landscape.

It was a moving experience. My daughter and I both love growing things. My father passed on his passion for the countryside, which is maybe why I remember Bennachie so well.

I was surprised that my memories were so accurate. The only thing I got wrong was Mither Tap (which always had a hat of cloud) wasn't where I expected it to be.

These are scraps of memory in a moment of time. However my father's mother lived in Oyne and that goes back some time, so I hope this is of some interest to you. Your book doesn't mention crofts on the 'Back o' Bennachie'. It was just Bennachie to me.

Mrs Avril Patterson
nee (Simpson)