Memories of The Shore Cottage, Tighcladich by Mrs. Margaret Le May 2007

From information that I obtained from my uncle he seems to think that my distant relative William Hunter Kerr took over the rent of Tighcladich possibly in the 1930’s or early 1940’s.

It is a bit of a mystery why or how he had the rent of the cottage from the estate as he was actually a manager in a sugar refinery in Greenock and kept a home there. In those days in particular the cottages on an estate tended to be for estate workers or as grace and favour homes for past employees.

When Willie retired he spent a large part of his time at Tighcladich.

Willie Kerr was a bachelor and he died in the early nineteen sixties which is when Mrs. McVicar took over the cottage. I believe at this stage the estate carried out improvements to the cottage.

None of the family that I spoke to remembers the cottage having a name; we always just said we were going to Tighcladich.

I was taken there for the first time in 1949 when I was a few months old which must have been quite a feat as we lived in Greenock and my parents didn’t own a car at that stage. My father had only returned from serving with the RAF in Egypt in 1946 and I imagine in post-war Britain they were pleased to be having a family holiday.

Obviously, I don’t know how the journey was made on that visit and my older sister doesn’t remember either, but I do know from photographs that my large old-fashioned coach-built pram was there as well!

I believe they may have taken the steamer from Gourock to Dunoon and then bus to Strachur or St. Catherines and a taxi from there to the cottage. I certainly remember taking this journey as a little girl.

Then, as now, there were the four cottages – the one immediately behind Shore Cottage was Mrs. Janet Luke’s, the one to the left going up the hill was Mrs. Campbell’s and the one at the back was Mr. and Mrs. McPherson’s. Mrs. Campbell’s cottage appears to be the one that has changed most, and I presume has had additions built on to it. I seem to remember quite a high hedge round it as you went up the hill and not being able to see much of the cottage from the path. I saw when I was down recently that the configurations of the paths around the cottages have changed too.

I think Mrs. Luke and Mrs. Campbell were widows and Mr. and Mrs. McPherson lived there with their daughter Christina who I think worked either at the St. Catherines Hotel or at one of the big houses between Tighcladich and St. Catherines. They had another daughter, whose name I don’t remember, and Michael and Hazel lived with them also.

Mr. McPherson I assume worked on the estate and he had the field at the front which he worked. They use to, in the summer, rent out the little house on the side of their cottage and often when we went there the McGill family from Greenock were there too. They had three boys and we all used to play together.

My earliest memories of the cottage, from the early 1950’s, were that there was no running water and no indoor lavatory or bathroom. We used to get buckets of water from the burn beside the cottage and there was a chemical toilet at the back right-hand corner of the garden in a little hut and another lavatory in the little house at the side of the cottage which is now the kitchen. I can’t imagine how difficult it must have been for my mother having my sister as a little girl and me there as a baby, especially as it was in the days before disposable nappies and easy-care fabrics!

I do remember the excitement the year we went when there was running cold water in the kitchen! I don’t ever remember there being hot water, it was a case of boiling kettles of water constantly.

The upstairs of the cottage is much as I remember it apart from the dormer windows, there were only skylights when we stayed there.

The biggest changes are downstairs. I think you probably used what had been the existing kitchen until quite recently before it became a bedroom. The old Belfast sink was under the kitchen window and where the wood-burner is now I seem to remember there was an old kitchen range.

At the back corner of the left-hand wall of what was then the kitchen there was another room which was used as a bedroom and which I presume is now the bathroom.

The front porch was quite different; it was not glazed, and it was constructed of what looked like logs of wood painted green. There were seats along either side. I do remember that there was virtually no wireless reception and we often had to sit on the porch with a small radio to hear the news. Not so great on wet days I have to say!

The lounge is basically unchanged other than there was no door into what is now the kitchen. There was a lovely Victorian fireplace with high mantelpiece over it which had a chenille-type fabric round the top, but this has obviously been replaced by the tiled fireplace that is there now. The room had a real feel of a Victorian parlour and I still remember the lovely glass oil lamps in this room which were obviously from the days before electricity and which I presume were still used in case of power failures.

Probably the part that has changed most is what we called the “wee house” and is now the new kitchen, utility room and bathroom. It was made of corrugated iron and was divided into two rooms. The first big one that you entered housed the chemical toilet and lots of tools, fishing nets, etc. and the other room which was off that could be used as a bedroom. I remember it was the place that as children we went to play games like Monopoly when the weather was bad, which in Argyllshire can be quite often!

The garden was full of fruit bushes when we used to visit and every year, we had to pick the fruit and my poor mother had to make jam – some holiday!

I think I now realise why my mother insisted that half of our holiday was spent at a small hotel in Rothesay!

Another thing we had to do every year was rebuild the jetty for Willie’s hundred-year-old rowing boat which we used constantly for fishing. This involved gathering big stones and putting them in place. I do remember being rowed over to Inveraray and having to watch out for the basking sharks, which were common, in case they upset the boat by coming too close.

There was also a commercial ferry that went from St. Catherines’ pier to Inveraray which I am sure no longer exists.

Every day we would walk along to the post office or Connie’s as we called it after the name of the postmistress, to collect papers and buy sweets and a few basic supplies.

We used to hang a little pail out for the farmer to leave us milk every day and there was an old-fashioned meat safe which kept things slightly cool. No refrigeration in those days!

There was a Mr. Hatton who used to farm nearby, and I presume he left the milk. I remember he used to drive along the road in front of the house with his beautiful sheep dogs every day and I do remember going to watch the sheep being clipped and dipped there on occasions.

I seem to think there was a Mr. Weir who farmed Ardno, but I wouldn’t swear to this.

There was no real shop to speak of and we relied mainly on vans which came regularly, probably from Inveraray or Dunoon, and stopped at the back of the houses just off the main road. I still remember the pleasure of hearing the van blowing its horn and running up to see what was on offer. There was a grocer’s van, fishmonger, butcher and I think a baker. Changed days – somehow Tesco’s doesn’t have the same romance attached to it! It was quite a social occasion as all the women and children would be waiting their turn and chatting away to each other.

Although, as you will know, the weather is not always the best in this part of the world, there were many beautiful days and I have lovely memories of waking up and looking out of the skylight on a sunny day with the loch like a mill pond and seeing seals basking on the rocks in front of the house and Highland cattle paddling at the shore.

It makes me sound really old now, but when I think of the times, I spent at Tighcladich they were amongst the happiest childhood memories that I have. There was no television or any other forms of ready-made entertainment, but we would be out playing all day until called in for meals or bed. The burn at the left-hand side of the house used to be wider and full of water and that was one of the first places we would start playing. There were also old ruins along the road a little bit, where the white garage is now on the shore side, and that always had to be explored. I do remember what was then called the Highland and Islands cinema coming to the St. Catherines hall on occasions to show films which was a great treat. I do remember having to take a cushion along as the old wooden seats were rather hard.

The only real downside to holidays at Tighcladich, apart from lack of flushing loos and a bath, were the midges and clegs (horse-flies)! We always had to remember to pack the Dimp to keep the insects at bay and I think my father used it as a good excuse to have a cigarette as that was supposed to deter the midges.

Carefree days with nothing to do and all day to do it!