**Extracts from memoires of Chrisabell Jean McDougall Henderson Brodie Crawford (nee McVicar)**

06/01/1920 – 07/01/2007

*Written for one of her granddaughters, Catriona, when she was asked to prepare a family history as part of a primary school project.*

‘On the 6th of January 1993, I will be 73 years old.

When I look back on my life, it seems divided into different sections – almost like several different lives for one person.

My first clear memories of my early childhood at Laglingarton, by Loch Fyne, are of the kitchen with its box bed where my sister Colina and I slept. There was a curtain covered with roses which could be drawn across to keep out the lamplight when we went to sleep. Colina was my elder sister – she was born while my father was in France at the 1914 war. Colina’s first language was Gaelic as my mother and her granduncle who lived with us, spoke nothing else when she was small. When my father came home from war, they all spoke English as my father was not a Gaelic speaker. As a result, English was my own first language.

As well as our cosy box bed, I can remember other vivid details of our kitchen! The open range was kept polished with black lead and the trivet and fender were polished steel. On one side of the range sat a big iron kettle – also polished with black lead – it was always filled with water as there was no indoor water-supply. Water was carried indoors from a spout in the stream (water was captured from the stream and directed to a continuous flowing outlet). About a hundred yards from the house, there was a small shed which contained a dry closet (toilet). No indoor sanitation in those days!

Behind the kitchen door there was a ‘wag-at-the-wall’ clock with a brass pendulum, kept wound by a pulley method of two brass weights and chains. Colina and I were always being told not to slam the door, or the clock would be ‘put off the balance’!

The kitchen dresser was laden with jugs and jars – filled to the brim with jams and jellies – all from the fruits we grew and picked ourselves. Bramble, gooseberry, black and red currant – and endless mixtures known as ‘matrimony jam’. A huge brass jelly pan hung from the pantry ceiling.

All my mother’s ‘treasures’ were in the parlour – green carpet, soft velvet chairs, polished table and side tables and family pictures. We were rarely allowed to go in there! It was used only for special occasions, for local visitors who came at New Year – or for unexpected visitors less well known to the family.

A big event in our young lives was when my father managed to pipe water from the burn to a tap by the back door. My mother always kept the outdoor brass tap brightly polished as it was so special! My father also built a ‘dairy’ for my mother - in a shady spot, where she was able to store eggs, milk and the homemade butter.

As children, we loved milking time - I can still hear my mother saying, ‘byre time again’ and we’d put on our wellies and oilskins. She’d collect her milk cans and jug with a clatter, and I can hear the sound of her collecting water to wash the cows, ready for milking. The byre was always warm with up to six cows in there. In winter, perhaps only two cows would be ‘in milk’ – Blanche and Vera were the two most likely to have calving past. On a dark morning, we lit the byre lamp which hung from a hook above the byre ‘path’. My mother would wash the cows and set her three-legged stool in place. She always spoke to the cows as she milked and often sang to them – any song with a rhythm to match the movements of her hands – often in Gaelic. I sat on a wee stool on the far side of the byre path – just like my mother’s. The cats and my father’s dogs waited patiently for their drink of milk – together with any young calves still being fed milk from a bottle or pail.

When the milking was done, we strained the milk through a muslin cloth into a flat milk basin, to ‘set’ for cream. We kept back only enough to fill a jug to last through the day. More milk would be set at the evening milking. The cream was of course for butter. Churning took place on a Friday. The butter had to be made and baking done before Sunday, when only necessary jobs were done – feeding animals, milking cows – no extra things. When the butter was made, it was in a plunge churn. Many times, I took turns to do that, as I was growing up. Sometimes it took an age! I was always thankful when we saw the first curdles of butter in the churn – at least then you knew that another quarter of an hour or so, would do it! When the butter had ‘gathered’ it was lifted into a wooden tub and washed with countless tubs of water until all the milk was removed. The butter was then worked and patted until it could be printed with the thistle pat. This was a round wooden pat with a thistle deeply carved on the surface. It gave a delightful print to the butter – and a tub with six or so half pound prints was a satisfying finish to a churning!

My sister Colina and I loved to be with our Great Uncle Colin, who lived with the family until his death, when I was eleven. Whatever he was doing, we were never far away – cutting hay, hoeing turnips, earthing potatoes – we were there! At lunchtime he had peas meal porridge, boiled rice or barley – always with milk. He had a jar of oatmeal mixed with cold water to drink. He worked all day long – with no breaks apart from the time it took to eat his lunch – until the midges arrived in the evening! He taught us the names of wildflowers and passed on all his knowledge of life and nature. In the evenings, he taught us old Jacobite songs – I still have all the words imprinted in my memory.

One dreadfully upsetting day, Mr MacNair, who was the overseer for roadworks, arrived with the news that he intended using the stone from the two ruined houses where my grandmother and great grandmother had lived, to form the foundations of a new section of road. My Great-uncle Colin, together with his seven brothers and sisters had been born and raised there. He tried to stop the cottages being demolished by seeking support from the Factor, Mr Ballingaull, but to no avail. The stone from these buildings, so precious to him, were used for the road construction.

One Autumn job was to pickle mutton. This involved a large wooden barrel with a slab of stone on top. The pickle mix was coarse salt (like hailstones) and saltpetre (a yellow powder). Quantities of the salt and saltpetre were placed in the barrel which was then filled with water. After much stirring, I’d be sent to fetch a fresh egg from the hen house - if the pickle was right the egg would float. Only the best pieces of mutton were pickled - then used in winter to make soup with added kale and vegetables.

In September, hay and oat straw were brought into the stackyard and built into stacks with the help of neighbours. These were thatched by my father to keep out the rain. The straw was fed to the Highland Cattle in winter – one sheaf of each daily, for every cow.

Every Spring, blanket washing had to be carried out – good sunny weather being an essential part of the operation! A fire was lit beside the burn and an iron boiler set over the fire to provide boiling water. We needed stacks of good dry sticks to get the fire going and lots of others to add to keep it burning. Baths and tubs were brought out of doors and filled with hot water. A scoop of soft soap (it came in cans) was worked round in the hot water to make sapples (soapy water). Then – blankets in, shoes off and we trod the blankets as they tread grapes in Spain. My Great-Uncle Colin helped my Mother to wring out by twisting the blankets around a thick spurtle. I remember how lovely it was to gather them in, folding all the clean fresh blankets which smelt of soft soap and fresh air.

All through the year, there were special days, often involving the help of kind neighbours – Spring dipping and marking lambs, yeld ewe clipping, milk clipping, white-washing the buildings, preparations for summer visitors to the Laglingarton cottages – all jobs demanding preparation and hard work.

When I was five, I started school at St Catherines. My sister Colina was seven. Ruby, who lived next door, was a lovely, sensible girl of eleven or twelve and she looked after me in school. My first teacher was Mrs McGregor. At lunchtime we went to Ruby’s grandparents at Hafton. Ruby’s ‘Granny Luke’ made soup for us and my mother helped by contributing salted mutton. We always said a Grace before our meal at Granny Luke’s house. When Mrs MacGregor, my first teacher, retired, we had a temporary teacher, Mrs McPherson. She was very strict and was always shouting or ‘strapping’ someone. She was followed by Miss McIntyre – she was charming and lovely.

I left school at the age of 14 and began a new chapter of my life. I was sent to Achnagoul, near Inveraray, to work for a Mrs Munro and her son as a companion/housemaid. Mrs Munro was the elderly mother of a local teacher, so my own mother trusted that I would be safe in this household. One of my responsibilities was to milk their cow twice daily. I was very used to milking our own cows at Laglingarton – but at my new job, I had to walk a mile through tall bracken to collect the cow, milk her, then wash all the milk pails and utensils in the burn. It was so difficult to wash milk dishes in freezing cold water! Then I had to make a further walk of a mile through the bracken to return the cow to her field. This whole exercise was repeated every day – night and morning – whatever the weather! Mrs Munro’s son, Peter, was a gamekeeper and kept six large dogs in kennels. I was responsible for the care of the dogs when he was off with shooting parties. Aside from care of the cow and dogs, I washed dishes, scrubbed whitewood floors and chairs. Nothing I did pleased Mrs Munro and it was a very unhappy experience for a 14-year-old girl! I left after six months and went home to my mother.

While I’d been off at Mrs Munro’s house, lots of things had changed at Laglingarton! My family had now moved into the ‘main’ house, beside the steading. Uncle Colin’s former house had been renovated for Jenny and Roddy, by the Ardkinglas Estate. Lady Noble thought it an excellent project. A new range cooker was installed in each house, so for the first time we had hot water on tap! It made such a difference for my mother to be nearer to the byre and livestock, so all in all, a good improvement!

When I was 16, I went to work for Lady George Campbell at Strachur. She needed a kitchen maid for the summer season. I shared a room with Betty (scullery maid) and Greta (parlour maid). We were extremely busy with our chores, as there were lots of house parties with many house guests – we had one afternoon free each week and had to be back in the house by 10pm – or else! I found Lady George to be a first-class, splendid person. Her son, Ivor, had been killed in the 1914 war and her husband, Lord George, had passed away some years before I worked there. I was taken on as permanent staff and spent the winter months in London and summer in Argyll. How carefree our London and Strachur days were! When the family were in Strachur for the summer, the maids were allowed to attend the local dances. Mrs Gilmour, the head Parlour maid, was an excellent dressmaker and helped us all to make beautiful dresses! Lady George was the kindest person and when I wanted to move on to a different job, she insisted that I should continue to live at 3 Branston Square, her London town-house, while I trained as a hairdresser at Mason Stewarts on Brook Street.

While I was in London, my sister Colina married Hugh Hatton and they went to live in Lochgilphead. Hugh was called-up for WW2, very soon after their marriage.

With the onset of war – and help scarce – I was needed at home on the farm.

When I try to remember the beginning of the war, the first thing that springs to mind is that it came as such a complete shock to all of us! We had been told that the 1914 – 1918 war was the ‘war to end all wars’.

Without delay, food was rationed – and we were all given gas masks, ration books, clothes coupons and identity cards. Rationing was quite dreadful – the quantities of food were so small and it was impossible to buy fruit – especially bananas! We were lucky to have milk and eggs most of the time.

Our farm – and almost all farms round Loch Fyne were requisitioned for training the Army. The shores were bordered with barbed wire in huge, tangled rolls, tanks and guns – soldiers everywhere. Mother was never done making cups of tea for the poor boys – indeed, most of them weren’t much more than children. Soldiers had to learn how to approach the shore on barges – and get through the barbed wire tangles and lots of other booby traps – all part of their training. All of the local families had to take in children from Glasgow to let them escape the bombing. We had the cottage – normally used for summer visitors – so we took in two mothers and two wee girls. Our evacuees arrived in a great thunderstorm – though it wasn’t winter. Thunder rolled and torrential rain poured down as the bus dropped them off. Nicol Luke said it was a judgement (he was church elder). We weren’t sure what he was thinking or who was being judged! The mums were ‘town’ girls in high-heeled shoes. Life at Laglingarton must indeed have been a shock! They complained that it was too quiet for them and didn’t stay for long. Auntie Jenny (my father’s cousin at Tigh Claddich had two great wee boys all through the war – David and John Hood. They didn’t want to go back to Glasgow they liked staying with Auntie Jenny so much – so you see, some settled well.

We got lots of black cotton for the black-out. One could be in dreadful trouble for a chink of light showing. We were instructed by the Department of Agriculture to plant lots of potatoes – food was so badly needed. The thought was sound -‘food for beast and body’ – the snag was that it was so difficult to harvest them. With a constant ‘attack’ being enacted by night and day, the soldiers trampled over the ploughed ground, ruining the crops. School children were given ten days of ‘potato holiday’ to help to harvest the crop. Sometimes that helped – sometimes not. Sometimes crops just rotted in the field if the weather was wet – it was the same all over. The only bombs near to us, landed in the grounds of Ardkinglas making huge craters. It was thought they were aiming at Arrochar.

We all listened to Mr Churchill – we couldn’t have survived without him. He inspired everyone – never thinking of defeat, only of winning.

In the years following the war, I continued to work at Laglingarton with my parents – I was also able to work as a hairdresser locally, thanks to my London training! In April 1948, at Cairndow Church. I married John Crawford from Balliemore Farm, Strachur. I left Laglingarton to live at Kildalton Farm on Islay.

**That was the beginning of the next chapter on my life……’**