

## GROWING UP ON A GLENS FARM NINETY YEARS AGO

*Compiled by Dominic O'Loan*

*The diary of Annie McKillop (née Smith) born 1920, died 2011. For an older generation this is a nostalgic account of life in The Glens almost one hundred years ago; for a younger generation it is a vivid account of a way of life which has long gone. It also tells of the joys and the tragedies of life in The Glens all those years ago.*

I came to live at my grandparents' home in Upper Cloghs after my father died, when I was just fourteen months old.



*The house in Cloghs townland in which Annie McKillop was reared. Unlike most houses ninety years ago, it was a very substantial building; the quality of the stone work is obvious and afforded the large McNaughton family plenty of room.*

The household consisted of grandparents, uncles Pat, Archie, Charlie, Dan, auntie Rosie, Maggie, Sarah, and my elder sister, Mary. The house was a newly built farm house of the time, two large bedrooms upstairs, each would accommodate two double beds and other furniture, large living room, kitchen with open fire, a hob at each side of the grate (approx 4') with crane, chains and crooks. There was a fire tile at one side of the fire where the kettle mostly sat and boiled, overhead was the fireboard where the tea-caddy and salt-box stayed and some ornaments sat; the stairs went up from the front door beside the sitting-room door.





*The fireplace was fairly typical of the time. The crane has still two sets of chains and one crook attached. Two hobs are also shown; these were useful to set pots and pans on to keep food warm. The surround has been removed.*

The sitting-room was a nice square room, windows front and back, draped in net curtains (full length) and a geranium in the window. The fireplace was cast-iron with mahogany overmantle, and family photographs sat upon it; on the front wall hung a large photograph of my uncle Jamie. He was drowned on 25 December 1914 aged twenty-two years along with his granduncle, Captain Jamie McKeegan, and cousin, Hugh McKeegan, (shoemaker). *The Gem* was mined off Scarborough having left Newcastle, and although they were warned of minefields (British) all were lost but three – the mate, James McCambridge from Ballymena, a sailor named Rice from County Down and another man from Stornaway. As a child, whenever I entered that room, Jamie was always looking down at me and he seemed to be always watching me. Strange to say I still have that photo today; it was given to me by my uncle Dan, not long before he died.



The outhouses consisted of a barn, stable, byre, hen-house and duck 'crue'. (Gaelic *cro*, a hut)



*Mick Quinn standing in front of the byre and the pig-crue. Mick gave invaluable help in verifying much of the information.*

The stock mostly was five or six cows, three horses, sheep, always a goat, and of course a sow, hens, ducks and geese. There were the familiar farmyard sounds in the morning of quacking ducks, crowing rooster, squealing pigs and an odd 'moo' from the cows; I often long to hear them again. The day started about 8.00 am, grandparents up, then all the young by degrees – some to school, some to feed the animals and then to the field. The women fed the poultry, let them out and then fed the pigs and calves and finally when the dust settled in the byre, the milking was done. The baking had to be done early in the day – all griddle soda, sometimes fadge (potato bread). The dinner was always in the middle of the day, potatoes, cabbage or turnip and duck eggs, maybe bacon. There was always cod, dried fish hanging up to the hob side of the fire. You just cut a piece off as required for dinner. The fish was cooked in the pot of potatoes; you filled the pot (five to six gallon) up to three-quarters full of potatoes, then put in the fish and put on another layer of potatoes. The fish cooked well and the potatoes tasted beautiful. The breeds of potatoes were Irish Whites, Puritans, Kerr's Pinks and Aran Victors. Granny



would serve white sauce or boiled milk with plenty of butter added; it was delicious.

The clothes were serviceable and stood lots of patching and wear. Boots were hob-nailed or sparbled\* and socks and jerseys – 'ganseys' (Gaelic *geansaí*, a jumper or sweater) were all hand-knit. My aunts made all their skirts, dresses and blouses; all their jumpers and cardigans were hand-knit. Their outer coats and suits were bought from Arthur McAlister's shop and at Christmas they would get a more stylish dress to go to the dances in McBride's Hotel and Dan's Hall on New Year's night. (It was a fashion parade of evening wear.) Times were hard and money almost non-existent, but I remember how everyone of the family had to dress well on Sunday; they wore suits and hats, the suits were mostly made by the local tailor – Dan McMullan; the girls wore costumes or coats and hats. The Sunday clothes were very well cared for and would last for ages – men's suits would maybe last five years or more.

One by one the family moved away; first I remember to go was Pat. He left in 1923 to join his brothers, John and Alex, in Vancouver. In 1924 Archie went to Vancouver and was later joined by his sweetheart, Rosie Gore. They married and had six children. Neither of them ever came back.

Rosie got married (1929) and lived locally; Maggie married (1932) and went to Glendun to live; Charlie married (1933) and lived locally; Dan joined the RUC in 1930, spent his life in Tyrone, married a Tyrone woman and lived there. Pat returned home in 1931 to farm and never left again, and Sarah married in 1936 and lived locally. John did come home later in life but his parents were long dead and Alex came home in 1930, stayed six months and never saw his parents again.

My early childhood years were happy; my sister and Aunt Sarah were still at school. We had some swings and jumps and played in the burn with sticks for wee boats. Then in 1925 my sister came home from school with a pain in her knee and was buried the next Thursday. The doctor said it was 'sleeping sickness', but there was no isolation from the rest of us. I think she died from blood poisoning. She suffered so much, they were glad to see her at rest.

\* Sparbles were small rounded studs driven into the soles of new boots to protect the leather. They greatly increased the life of the shoes/boots and gave a good grip on slippery surfaces.

I missed Mary very much, as Sarah was grown up and had to work about the farm and I had no company to play with. Sarah would promise to take me to school and every day she went without me. This morning I was up in time, and crying to go to school. My grandmother just says 'take her with you today, as she will many a day be crying to stay at home.' But I loved school and never missed. We always wore slips over our jumpers and skirts; they were cotton and easy to wash and dry.

We set off down the fields through the garden gate, through the 'skeagh' (Gaelic *sceagh*, a thornbush) field, spring-well field, the meadow, into Calhame,\* two fields, then Calhame meadow, through the Calhame gate and down the loanin to Maggie Murray's, over the bridge at the mill and down the road to Glenaan school. In winter time this was a very wet and dirty run and as we wore only boots (wellingtons were not much in use then); our legs were soaking coming through the marshes.

The teacher, Joe McLaughlin, used to stand us up at the open fire to dry off and you could see the smoke rising off us. Then in summer we went bare-footed down the fields; summer mornings the path would be thick with snails and I refused to walk on them. I would stand and cry 'sneeks ('snails') Sarah' and she was so good to me, carried me on her back.

My teacher was Miss Kathleen Duffy (spinster). We started off with green slates and to write we used chalk. I was well advanced when I did start; I knew the letters and could count to one hundred and I knew the clock. We changed from desks, to standing in a semi-circle around the teacher to read and do spellings, while the first and second classes were doing written work; we changed over half hourly. We had to buy all our books and stationery, but Miss Duffy's sister, Maggie, had a stationery shop and we gave our money to Kathleen and next morning she would have it up to us. She lived in Cushendall.

We learned to sew and knit in a small way, but I learned more of that at home. Aunt Maggie was a dressmaker, very handy, and would cut down old dresses for me and then 'Biddy the Pack' used to come around selling remnants of cloth, threads and needles – we always

\* Calhame – 'cold home' (Ulster Scots); here it probably refers more to poor damp ground than to an actual home/house.



had a sewing machine. We later used to get remnant bundles from the catalogue for a few shillings. We started school at 9.45 am and finished at 3 pm. At school we learned maths, algebra, geometry, English, geography, Religious Knowledge and handcrafts. About a year after I started school, Sarah finished and went to work to Mary McKillop (farmers). After that my new friend was my next farm neighbour, Madge McNaughton. We went home from school her way and it took us all evening; we played wee houses and shops and schools, all up along the lane to Madge's house.



*The pupils of Glennaan school (1929). Annie McKillop and her best friend Madge McNaughton are in the left hand side, second row from front.*

We visited Ossian's Grave frequently. We used to eat whin blossoms, haws and surrocks – I suppose we got extra vitamins from them. A short distance from the school was Mary Delargy's shop. At lunch time everybody headed for the shop even we had no money. Mary always gave us a sweet. There were no dinners then; we carried a piece of soda-bread and butter for our lunch and took a drink of water from the open well down beside the river. We used to paddle in the river and try to catch trout.



As I got older I would have some wee jobs, take water in, fill a bag of turf for the fire and wash dishes. I used to take some tea and something to eat to the men in the fields, and always went wherever my grandfather was, and very often he would send me to the house to carry a live turf with a stick to light his pipe (matches were scarce). I spent a lot of time trying to catch butterflies in the meadow and *gathering May flowers* and rockets for my May altar. I can never remember being bored; there was always a tree to climb or some skipping to be done. I always got a new sleeping doll every Christmas – also 'Snakes and Ladders', 'Ludo' or draughts. I liked draughts best; my grandfather taught me how to play and soon afterwards I was able to beat him – that was a great achievement!

Winter time was a time for céilidhing, with friends and neighbours. It was a happy, jovial time around the big turf fire and the porridge pot bubbling on the crook for the supper. Everyone got tea and soda-bread, the craic was good, talking about farming, news from America, old history of the Glens and relationships, even law-suits and rights-of-way. Some of the visitors would enjoy telling a few lies and having fun out of their neighbour. Weddings and funerals would also get a run. It was all harmless enough and nobody was offended. The most of them left by eleven o' clock and the family prepared for bed. The rosary was always said by all the family and then the day ended.

Christmas was a pleasant time, a lot of visitors coming and going, uncles, aunts and grand aunts, the extended family community. There was a lot of folklore discussed and of course there were always the letters with dollars in them from Vancouver. They used to have a saying 'Did you have a word or a letter?' which meant, if it was a letter there was some money in it.

For Christmas Day we always had a goose; it was stuffed with potatoes, thyme, sage, onions, parsley, bits of liver and some flour and salt added. Then the goose was boiled in the big ten-gallon pot, for soup, and afterwards roasted in the oven pot and fat from the boiling made beautiful gravy. There was plenty of turnip, onions, leeks, parsley and peas added for soup; plenty of Kerr's pinks potatoes completed the dinner. It was delicious and everyone was satisfied. Christmas evening the young folk went out to a dance in McBride's Hotel and on New Year's Night to Dan's Hall in Cushendall (now the auction mart). It was all evening wear. The next morning was spent describing the style and who was the grandest or 'belle of the ball'.



*Lint pulling - Springwell Field, Clogh, 1935*



*Annie McKillop (née Smith), Pat McNaughton, James McKillop, ('Smokey'), Capt Patrick McDonnell, Alex McNaughton (Annie's Grandfather), Patrick McKillop ('PK').*



*Annie McKillop (centre) with group of friends*

*(To be continued in next year's journal - 'Work on the Farm')*