

Article 7: George Lawrie reminisces about his childhood at Cairn Mude croft on Stothill.

This article is reproduced by kind permission of Kathleen Northcroft and the publisher Lindy Cheyne. Kathleen's husband David produced 2 volumes of *Grampian Lives*, taking time to collect early memories of Aberdeenshire folk from 1900 -1950. *Grampian Lives: v. 1: Living Through the Twentieth Century in the Small Towns and Settlements of North-East Scotland (Early Lives and Memories 1900-1950)*.

This story is about George Lawrie from Cairn Mude farm. George was born in 1932 ,the middle child in a family of 10.

In Article 6 we documented the story of George Smith, born into a family of 9 in a Stothill croft. By the time the Lawries moved to Cairn Mude farm the various tumbledown crofts were in ruins. But still how noisy and full of life the farm must have been in the 1930s with 10 bairns.

Now, all that can be heard around the farm ruins is the souging of the wind in the tall sitkas as they crowd in on that space.

Immerse yourself in the life of a young country lad in the 1930s.....



Remains of Cairn Mude farmhouse in 2022



Fourteen in the family

My father started as a farm servant. I was one of 12, bang in the middle of them all, so he was needing a larger house for us all. That's when he took a farm over Lumphanan way and became a tenant farmer.

How they both managed it all I often wonder. All I know is it worked out all right at the time. Father was a good provider for us all. There was never a butcher's shop and never a coal merchant in Lumphanan that ever got our custom. He'd go out into the woods and come back with what was needed. It was a case of pheasants, hares, rabbits, grouse – you could call him poacher, I suppose, but it was all out of sheer necessity. He'd go out with his gun and come back with what was needed.

There wasn't running water in the house, never. We'd to go a quarter of a mile for our water. Ah well, just, that's what we had. There wasn't just water for the house to fetch, but for the animals, too. A never-ending task. We'd take hares down to the well and skin and wash them there to save the journey with the full buckets of water. It wasn't till after the war that my parents ever knew what it was like to be able to turn on a tap and see water coming out of it in their own home.



'Fourteen bodies in one wee hoose'

The Lawries at a family reunion in later life. George is front row extreme right. The occasion was Mr and Mrs John and Jean Lawrie's Golden Wedding, 1952.

My mother was an excellent home manager. She was a great baker – oatcakes, scones, pancakes – and all on the open fire with the girdle. We never starved, but I was meagrely dressed. As the sixth all I got were hand-me-downs, stuff that had been patched and mended time and again. We all had our jobs to do as we got older. Mine was chopping the sticks and getting them in. And we all had to take our turn in going off with the bucket to fetch another load of water.

You'd to walk three miles to the school – no other option. It was just a cart-track and in the snow – and we had real storms in them days – you'd be walking along on top of the snow when suddenly, 'pumpf!' you'd be falling through a drift and the others would have to pull you out and you'd get to the school with your clothes all soaked through.

My parents gave us all a good upbringing, oh aye. There were 14 bodies in the one house, but we all found somewhere to lay down our head. It would be a case of top and tail, all in the bed together. You kept warm! It all seems quite hard now, but at the time it never seemed to us that we might be suffering in any way. Everyone was in much the same boat. You'd go to the school in patched trousers and battered sheen, but you'd look around and see the others in the class were much the same. I mind once coming home with a full jotter and telling my parents I needed a new one – they just handed me a rubber and told me to get on with it. In those days such things weren't provided by the school; you had to buy all that. When the teacher held a wee competition, she would offer a jotter as the prize. I can't imagine any kid these days being thrilled by that, can you?

My father and my mother just had to work and work. He didn't even get much of a retirement. You could say he died of sheer exhaustion. He'd spent a lifetime doing as much as he could to turn a penny. On the farm he would take a broom dog to the sides of the fields to get as much under the plough as he could. He'd take this fork to pull out the roots of broom and that was real punishing work, I can tell you. He was done by the time he was 65 and no wonder.

You just had to use whatever came to hand in those days. The farm had wet, sour kind of soil; you'd sow in the grains and they'd aye be shifting. We couldn't buy in fertilisers so the dung from the cattle had to be spread over the fields. Father would go to the mart and come back with a 'leg horse': this was some old clapped-out horse that could just about be used for half a day's work at a time – it was too old and done for more, but he could get it for £5 and it would have to do. Then we'd go to the old ruined crofts round about and take the lime out of the stones. That was used as grit for the hens. Waste not want not. You'd go up the hill and cut down bracken and Father would build up a ruck so we'd have bedding aye handy for the cattle. Or I'd cut down ferns to get cover for the tattie pits. I'd go over the ground after the hairst with a smiler rake so as to get up every bit of straw I could – bedding again.

In the house, you had cement floors; no need for a Hoover – a brush would do the job. You'd put a sack down and that would be your carpet. We had a caff saik bed – an old hessian sack full of chaff from the threshing mill – and we'd all wriggle into that. It was fine and warm – just the job as long as there were no thistles in it. There were so many of us that some had to just bed down on the floor in a shakkin doon.

When I think of the kind of society we live in now where folk just throw away clothes and food and without a thought to how they might still be used, well I often think that my parents could have lived out o' among the fingers of the folk today – the stuff they just pick up and throw away as rubbish. Jean and I get quite amused when we hear Gordon Brown going on about 'prudence'. It's an old fashioned kind of message, but that's the way we had to live then – prudence, taking care, using up whatever's to hand. Nobody seems to believe in thrift or saving up now, but that's the way we were brought up. We've aye paid cash up front; now when they ask for your credit card and you tell them you haven't got one, they look at you as if you must be stupid.

I left the school at 13½. In those days you could get exemption that let you off the last six months before the leaving age. You had to stay at home during that time; those were the conditions. My parents were keen to get me away from the school as soon as possible, so I could help about the house and on the farm. None of the 12 of us ever got the chance to go on at school; the family budget just wouldn't run to it.

In later life only two of us went very far away: a sister went to Australia and my eldest brother went down to London, but the other 10 all got jobs all round about, mostly in farming or trades connected with the land in some way. Right up till our parents died we would always be there for them and for each other. There wasn't one of us but our parents knew they could turn to and there wasn't one who wouldn't give over a pound to another if the need was there.

Jean: One of the saddest experiences I ever had was when George's parents retired

We had a caff saik bed full of chaff from the threshing mill and we'd all wriggle into that. It was fine and warm – just the job as long as there were no thistles in it.



'It was what a country boy did in those days'
George in 1950, aged 18

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for £1 a
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The first
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I went to
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and bought
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suit; it cost
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from the farm and we were helping with the packing up. George's mother handed me the certificate which granted him his exemption to leave school early and do you know, she handed it over to me as if it was an honours degree. That was all he had to show for his years at the Lumphanan School; a certificate of exemption.

George: It was the lack of money and all the work that had to be done. School meant clothes to be bought, jotters and pencils to be got. They needed me at home as soon as possible to keep the farm going. They did their best with what they'd got. We were all given a good upbringing and with good homely food aye on the table. We were a loving family.

I got a job at the mill for £1 a week and my keep. The first thing I did was save up to get a Sunday suit. I went to MacKay's in Union Street and bought a second hand RAF suit; it cost all of £2. I was so proud of it that I would hang it up in the bothy covered in paper to protect it. The next was to get a pair of new sheen. I would polish and polish them till you could see your own face in the black leather uppers. Up till then I'd just had to go around in cast-offs; all I had was just what you stood up in.

Jean: When we got married and George's mother was round at the house, I opened the wardrobe door and she looked at what was inside and she said, 'Dae aa thae claes belong to oor George?'. In those days you just had the one change of underclothing which had to be washed and changed, turn about. And George's mother washed his clothes right up till the day of his marriage. She would charge him for it. I remember when he got married she said to him, 'Mind ye owe me fer three manths' washin'. But she had no real alternative: he was earning and she had so very little for herself.

George and Jean Lawrie, born 1931 and 1924: Lumphanan

Extract ends

Around Cairn Mude croft today



The dry stone wall-edged track from Cairn Mude farmhouse to the steading, 2022



Looking up the track from the well site to the steading, 2022



Remains of a small building next to Cairn Mude farmhouse, 2022



Cairn Mude croft steading, 2022



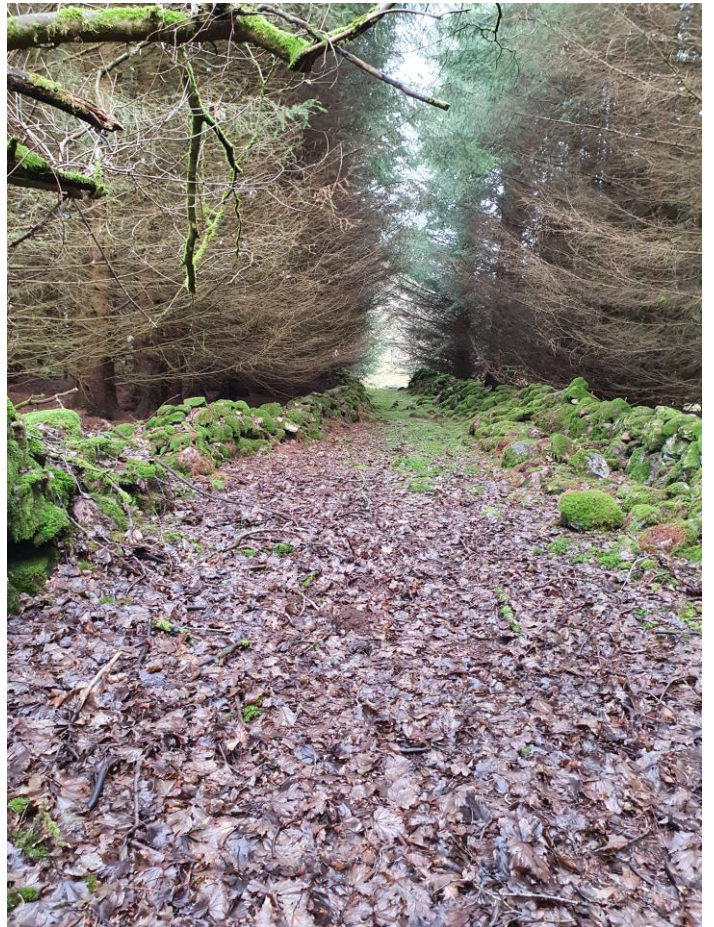
*Cairn Mude
steading, 2022*



*Track to Cairn Mude
croft enveloped by
20th century forestry
plantation. 2022*



From the well outflow at Cairn Mude, looking south west. 2022



Cairn Mude croft track, 2022