

Growing Up
on an
Ardnamurchan Croft

by

Mary MacGillivray

An Ardnamurchan Croft

Introduction

I grew up in Ormsaigbeg which, along with Ormsaigmore and Kilchoan crofting townships, form the present village of Kilchoan in Argyllshire. They lie at the western end of the Ardnamurchan peninsula which sticks out into the Atlantic Ocean to the west of Fort William. Although it is only fifty miles to the Fort, it takes almost two hours to drive there down single track roads.

Ormsaigbeg – *Ormsaig-bheag* in Gaelic – dates back to Viking times; its name is taken from the Norse words *ormr*, a serpent, and *vik*, a bay, with the Gaelic word *bheag* meaning little.



An old postcard showing Ormsaigbeg, with Kilchoan and Ben Hiant in the distance

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Mary MacGillivray outside Port Beag croft house in June 2010

1. My Family

My parents were Duncan and Elizabeth Carmichael of Port Beag in Ormsaigbeg, and I was the second of their seven children.

My father's father, also Duncan, was born in 1839 on Lismore, an island to the north of Oban. He moved to Ormsaigbeg when he married Sarah Livingston. My grandfather was a crofter but he was also a stonemason: he built some of the fine stone walls still standing at Ardnamurchan Point Lighthouse. Sarah, my

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grandmother, was born in Acharacle. When she was a child, she lived in the house which is now called Lighthouse View.

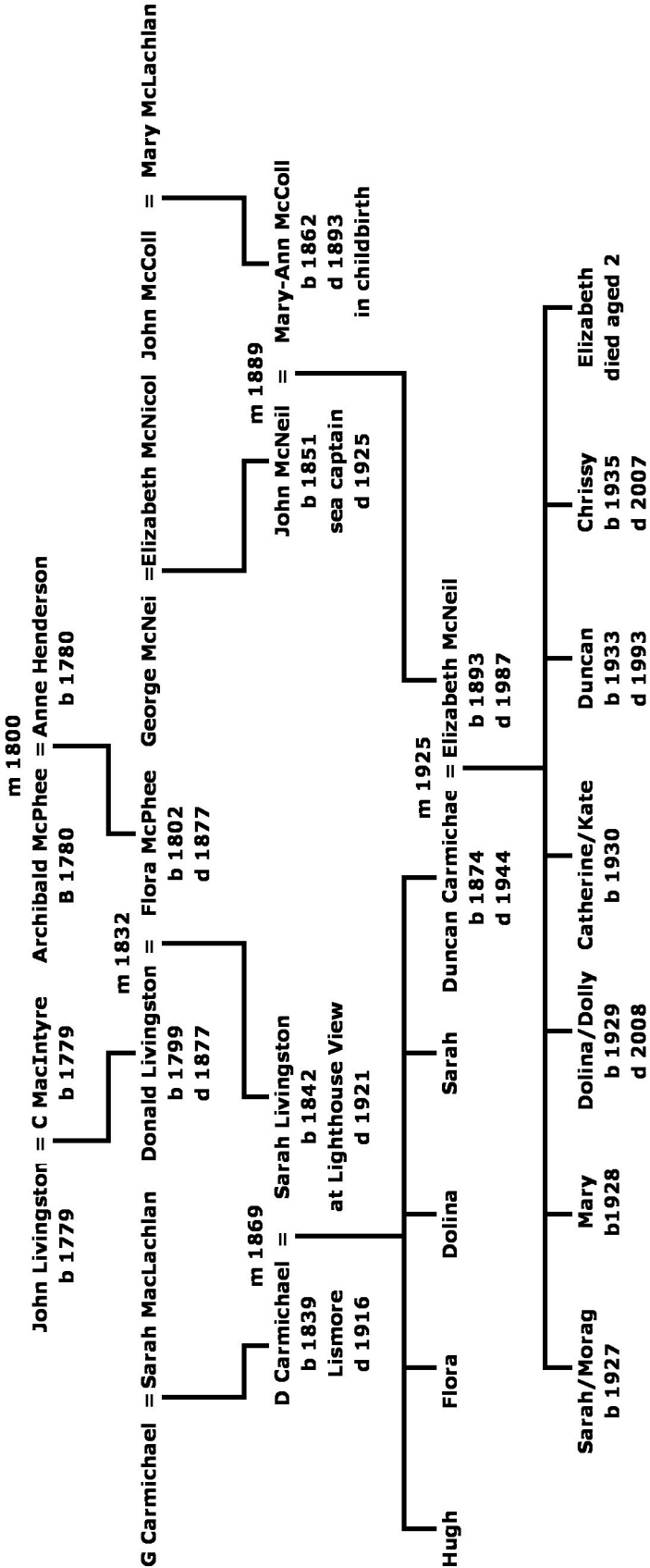
My father was one of five children, all born in Ormsaigbeg. The eldest was Hugh, Eddie Rose's grandfather; the second was Flora, who had Ben More in Kilchoan and was Baldi MacPhail's grandmother; the third was Dolina; the fourth Sarah; and Duncan, my father, was the youngest.

My father went seafaring when he was young but, after he returned to Ormsaigbeg, he worked for some time at Glenborrodale Castle. He used to be picked up by car and taken to the castle. He also worked for the Fascadale fisheries, living with three other men in the bothy at Fascadale. He met Elizabeth when she returned to Sanna. They married on 14th August 1925 in Acharacle Parish Church. On the marriage certificate it states that my father was 47 but, if he was born in 1874, he would have been 51.

My mother, Elizabeth, or Eliza, was born in Glasgow. Her father, John MacNeil, was a sea captain, and her mother, Mary-Ann McColl, had local connections in Sanna.

Elizabeth was an only child because her mother, Mary-Ann, died in childbirth. John took my mother to Sanna, where she was lodged with a cousin on my mother's side, Bess Campbell, who had a small thatched cottage near Corrisgeir, Baldina MacDonald's house. John also died so Bess was left to bring my mother up. Elizabeth had no Gaelic when she arrived from Glasgow, which made life very difficult for her. She went to Achosnich School but fell pregnant, so she returned to Glasgow where she had the baby.

The Carmichael Family Tree



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When my mother returned to Sanna she brought her baby son, John MacNeil, with her. He later became our postman, covering all the villages at this end of the peninsula on a bicycle. He married Flora Henderson from Achnaha, and bought Caol Muile in Kilchoan, but they had no children. We children did not know that John was our half-brother until we were quite old, even though he came and helped on our croft. Flora died before John, so when John died in September 1983 his croft and the house were left to my sister Dolly. Her husband, Ian Ramon, still lives there and works the croft.

Bess Campbell later worked in Edinburgh but returned to Kilchoan, where she shared a house with her brother Alec.



Port Beag in about 1940, before the porch and the central dormer were added. The little girl standing in the doorway is Moira MacKechnie.

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My family, in order of birth, were Sarah, who preferred to be called Morag (1), who was born in 1927. I was next, (2), born in 1928. Dolina, who was called Dolly (3), was born in 1929, and died in 2008. Next was Catherine, who we called Kate (4), born in 1930, followed by my only brother, Duncan (5), who was born in 1933 and died in 1993. Chrissy (6) was born in 1935 and died in 2007. I had one other sister, the youngest, Elizabeth, who died aged 2 in an epidemic of scarlet fever.

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We were all born in our home, Port Beag, with the District Nurse in attendance. The District Nurse lived in the Nurse's Cottage opposite Kilchoan House Hotel. The nearest doctor was at Salen. He could be summoned by telephone, which was in the Post Office, at that time in Dougald MacDonald's house, Crobhein. All the children had scarlet fever at the same time as baby Elizabeth. Kate had it so badly she had to be taken to hospital in Oban; even so, it left her with permanent hearing loss.

Before I was born, my father had broken his upper leg bone while carrying two containers of paraffin, used for the lights, from the shop to the house. It broke so badly that it protruded at the hip. He should have been sent away to the hospital in Oban but he wasn't, so the bone never healed properly, leaving him with a permanent limp. This was so crippling that, in my memory, my father never really worked on the croft. However, he did do some work. For example, he made the coffins, as and when they were needed, for the poorer people in the village, the better off having their coffins brought in. He did this in the garage next to the Ferry Stores – it is now the store room – and Lachlan Cameron, the owner, came and collected him when someone had died. We children knew when he was making a coffin but, when we went past the shop on our way to and from school, we were not allowed in to see him while he was at work. Although he was good at carpentry – for example, he made a chest of drawers for Port Beag and beds for Bella MacDiarmid, Dodie Logan's grandmother, at Lag na Lion – he didn't do woodwork for other people.

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My father was a stonemason like his father, work he could only do with someone to help with the labouring. For example, he built the wall that surrounds Ben More cottage which was his sister, Flora's house. When he built the porch on our house, Port Beag, my mother passed him the stones.

My father smoked a pipe but only had a drink on rent day. Once a month he went to the hotel with the other men where they waited until the rent slips arrived from the auctioneers – brought up to the hotel by one of the village children. The auctioneers had a shed and animal pens where Alan and Cath Mews have their new house. My father would then go down to the auctioneers to pay. The landlord for Port Beag and its croft was Alasdair MacKenzie who lived down south, but his brother, Campbell, lived at Caberfeidh, which is now called Dorlinn House.

My father was a great Gaelic singer. He sang in the house, particularly when people came visiting at New Year. They would stay for hours, while he served whisky in small glasses.

My mother had relatives in Glasgow who came to stay with us every year for the first two weeks of July, the Glasgow Fair. The Howies had three daughters, Nan, May and Jean, so five additional people had to be squeezed into our tiny croft house which had two rooms downstairs and two upstairs. Kate and I shared a bed with Nan, but when Kate and Nan woke in the morning they sent me downstairs to bring them tea and a piece of bread – for which I got a row from her mother. I do not have happy memories of these visits: the house was too crowded.

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My father died in Kilchoan on 7th October 1944. His death certificate states that he was 68 when he died but, if he was born in 1874, he would have been 70. My mother died in Kilchoan on 22nd May 1987, when she would have been 94.

2. Croft 55



Port Beag today

Ormsaigbeg's Croft 55, on which Port Beag stands, runs from the Ormsaigbeg common grazings on the lower slopes of *Druim na Gearr Leacainn* to the shores of the Sound of Mull. Its house faces southeastwards, so we had views from our windows across

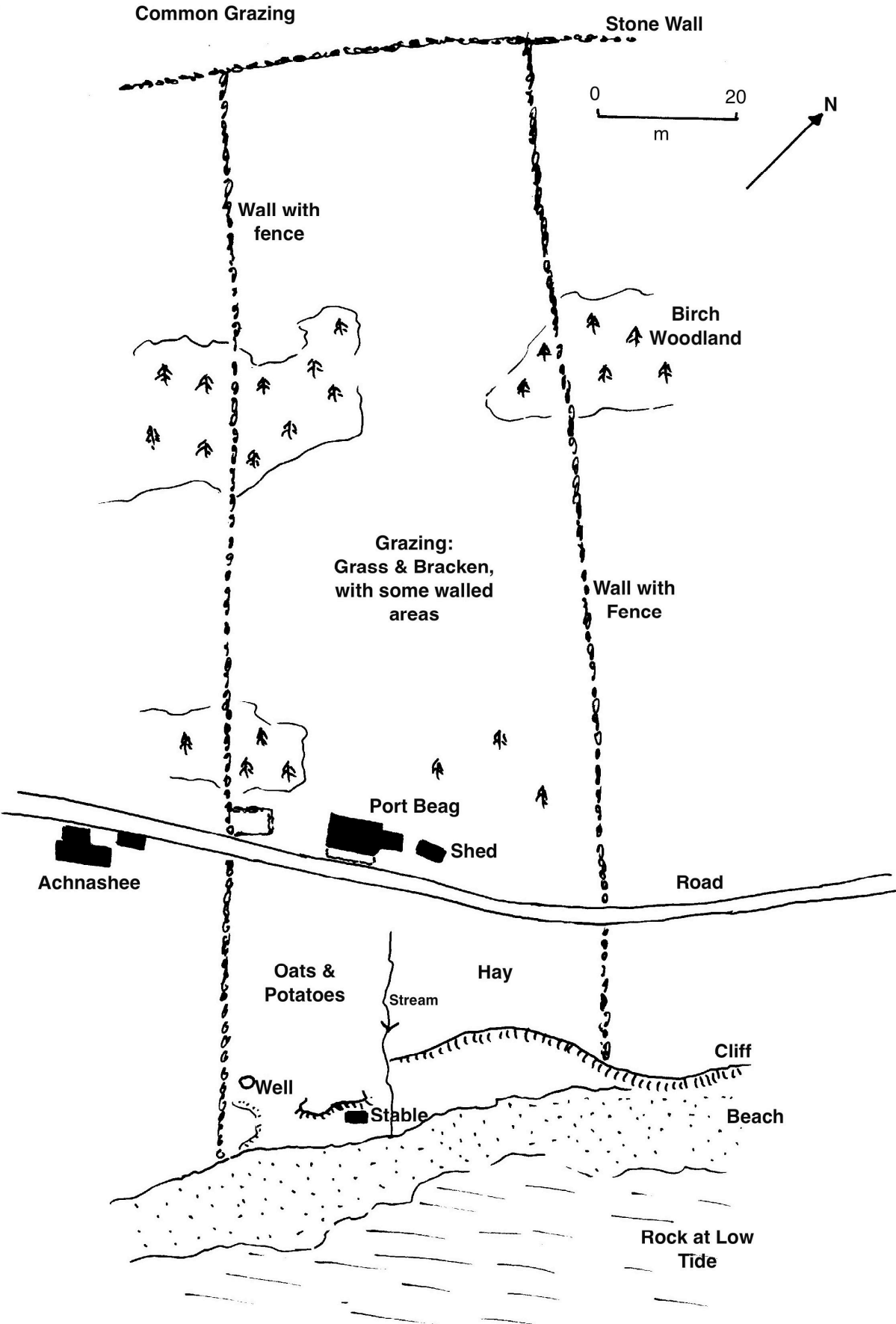
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the water to the island of Mull and Morvern, which is part of the mainland.

The Ormsaigbeg road passes right in front of the house, which is on the north side of the road and separated from it by a small flower garden and low wall. To the east of the croft stood a byre with a hen house and, separate from that, a hay shed. The hay shed has gone, the stone from its walls used to build the slipway below the Ferry Stores. To the west of the house was a grassy 'washing green' where there were lines for drying the clothes. Beyond that was a small walled garden in which my mother grew blackcurrants, gooseberries and raspberries. To protect the plants from rats, they were surrounded by broken jam jars. There was a gate from the garden onto the road. An 8ft high straw stack also stood in the garden.

The croft was separated from the common grazings by a drystone wall, and from the crofts on either side by stone walls and fences. The croft to the west of us, Achnashee, was owned by Archie Campbell and his wife Marion, who came from Glasgow. Archie built his own boat, which still stands against a stone wall at the bottom of the croft. It was while he was building it that he felt unwell, came up to the house, and died of a heart attack. The Campbells had two children, Alison and Russell; Russell still has the croft but works away. The croft to the east of us, Loch Nell, was owned by Colin MacCulloch. Colin was a cousin of Ian Cameron, Gillespie the postie's father, who inherited the croft. He sold some of the land to Bill Green, who built Coimh Lionadh, and to Ursula Hodgkinson, who built Rubh na Geall. Ian Cameron passed the croft to his son, Gillespie's brother, also Ian, who still

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has it, but the croft house is a ruin just above the road: all that can be seen is the fallen stone chimney.

In the area above our house we kept two cows on land that was largely grass, heather and bracken. In the summer they were out all night but in the winter they spent the night in the byre. The cows were called down to the byre every day for milking, where they were given some hay. My mother did the milking but if she was away one of us girls – usually Morag or me – had to do it. We didn't like this job as the cows kicked us, though it helped if we tied the beast's tail to its leg. Each year the cows were dried off before being taken to the bull. During this time, a month or so, we had milk from Craigard, where the crofter was Donald MacPhail, father of Ann, Mary-Jane, Ian and Alastair.

The cows were taken to the bull when they came into season in early spring. The bull came from an agricultural centre and was provided free. He was kept on Pinkie's croft, owned in those days by his mother, Katie Connell, and her brother Colin. The bull spent the night in their shed but, each morning, Colin took him up to the field above the road. The rest of the township's crofts helped by taking turns in feeding him. We sisters were very frightened of the bull so, when we carried our hay along, we asked Colin to take it into the field.

When the cows calved, which happened in the byre, the calf was kept in a pen in the hay shed. Each day when it was in use, the byre had to be mucked out by one of us children, the manure being taken across the road and dumped at the top of the lower field. None of us liked this job but we took turns.

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We kept about twenty blackface sheep on the common grazings at the back of the croft, where they ran with a couple of hundred others. Ours could be distinguished by the cuts made on their ears, though the new-born lambs were marked with dye. The sheep did come down onto the croft, when they grazed both above and below the road, but this wasn't strictly allowed as Ormsaigbeg is a 'closed' township, which meant that animals, with the exception of the milking cows, should be kept off the croft land. The township had a tup who ran with the ewes. When they came to lamb, the ewes were left to their own devices. The lambs were sold through the auctioneers and went out by boat from the jetty. My family never ate lamb – it was too valuable as a cash earner.

We kept between ten and sixteen hens and one or two cockerels, all black leghorn. They spent their day in the field below the road, going as far as the beach, but were kept in a shed on the end of the byre at night. They provided eggs and meat for the pot, but some were sent, live, to relatives in Glasgow as Christmas presents. To do this, we tied their legs with an address label attached, and took them to Dougald MacDonald in the post office, then in Crobheinn. The hen house also had to be cleaned out, and that was thrown, with the cow manure, onto the other side of the road.

We grew potatoes, oats and hay on the gently sloping field below the road, potatoes in the western part, then the oats, and, across the little burn, the hay. The crop land was prepared each year by spreading the manure from the cows and hens, then adding seaweed from the beach, which was hard work. The field was ploughed by two big Clydesdale horses using our own plough,

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which was, until recently, still on the croft, and then harrowed. The horses were brought over from Achosnich by Neil Cameron, father of Magnus, and he was paid cash for his work. My mother fed him a lunch of herring and golden wonder potatoes. Although Neil walked home for the night, the horses stayed and were fed by us, before being moved on to another croft next day. I liked looking after the Clydesdales.

The middle part of the field was put down to potatoes, mostly Kerrs Pink. After the horses had ploughed the land, my family walked behind them pushing the seed potatoes into the soil. Mostly, the seed potatoes were ones we had kept from the previous year but my father did buy some in. After the harvest, the potatoes were placed in a pit for keeping. The pit was in the middle of the potato field, about 4ft in diameter and 4ft deep, and lined with bracken. It held enough potatoes to keep us for a year. Some of the potatoes became rotten as a result of the blight but we cooked and fed them to the chickens.

The seed for the oats was scattered by my father until he was handicapped in his accident, after which Neil Cameron helped. The seed corn was held in a canvas bag and broadcast. It didn't require any cultivation or further fertilizer. When it was cut, a job which was done by John MacNeil, my half-brother, we children made stooks which were piled into a straw stack. The straw was used to bed the cows in the Byre but, before it was given to them, the grain was stripped off for the chickens. Bracken was cut for bedding for the cattle. Some grain was stored in a cupboard in the house and was used to feed the cows.

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The hay was cut using a scythe, a job done by John MacNeil, my mother's eldest son, who lived at Coile Muile, which was later Dolly's house. We children had to follow behind John picking out the 'black men' from the hay before it could be gathered and carried up to the shed. Picking out the 'black men', a plant related to the thistle, was a job we hated but it had to be done as it was bad for the animals to eat.



The croft, seen from the sea. Our well is at left, centre of the picture, and the horse's byre just to the right of the cave.

We kept a horse in a small bothy just above the beach – the remains of the building are still there. I can't remember whether we also had a cart. It was the children's job to put the horse into its stable each evening with some hay.

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At the western end of the beach, pulled above the tide line, my father kept his boat, the *Mairi-bhan-og*. He won a silver trophy in the 1900 regatta in her, but her main use was for fishing. He and Colin Connell went out after cod, which they sold to the Fascadale fisheries. They were kept in the ice house, which is now the toilet block between the Ferry Stores and the Ferry House. My father did not use his boat after his accident, but it was easy to catch fish: my mother might put on some potatoes to cook and ask my father to go out and catch some, which didn't take long. He used a rod and line which he cast off the beach below our house. He caught herring, mackerel and cuddies (saithe).

3. In & Around the House

Port Beag has four rooms, two upstairs and two down. Facing the house from the road, the left, upstairs room I shared with Morag. The one at top right was Kate, Dolly and Chrissy's. Duncan slept in the same room as my parents, at bottom right. The fourth room was the living room. On the beds we had sheets and army blankets – three on each bed during the winter – but we were still cold.

We kept our clothes in a chest-of-drawers made by my father. Clothes and shoes came from a social worker called Hugh MacPherson in Acharacle as our parents couldn't afford to buy them. I can't remember how they arrived – perhaps by post. Our winter footwear was a 'tackety boot', a black, leather, ankle-high boot with metal tacks in the soles, which laced up the front, and in summer we had sandals.

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Hugh MacPherson visited the village regularly. As well as distributing clothing, he did jobs like fumigate the house after the terrible outbreak of scarlet fever which made Kate so ill and caused the death of Elizabeth. Many people, including old people, needed his help but he did not give them food or money. Life for my family was particularly difficult because my father had been crippled, so he had to walk with the help of crutches. He couldn't earn a wage, and he did no work on the croft, so much of the burden fell on my mother.

We cooked on a big, cast iron range. Peat was one of the fuels used, and my mother cut it from a field on the left along the Sanna road. It was brought to the house by horse and cart, and stacked at the end of the byre. We also burnt coal. Each year we bought one ton of it, which came from Lachlan Cameron at the Ferry Stores, but it was brought straight up to the house by cart when the main coal delivery came in on a puffer. The coal was kept in the shed with the calves and the hay, and there was enough to last us a year, but extra coal could be bought from the coalree at the Stores. I'm not sure who owned the horse and cart but I know that Colin Connell, whose sister was Katy, mother of Ian and Alastair (Pinkie), had a horse.

All water for house use was brought up from the well, which was towards the bottom of the field close to the beach. The well hole is still visible today, filled with scrap metal. The water level was high enough for a bucket to be dipped into it, and the water was good to drink. Later a tank was built, using cement, in one of the 'park' areas at the back of the house, a stone-walled enclosure to

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keep the cattle out. This was piped down to a tap above the sink, which was below the living room window facing the sea.

Other furniture in the living room included a big dresser with two cupboards underneath in which the pots and pans were kept. The upper part consisted of wooden shelves, each with a piece of wood along the front, so plates could be stored there. My father had built a cupboard into a corner, and shelved it: the bucket of water was kept there. There was also a big chest, about 6ft long, which was divided into two. In one side, in bags, my mother kept flour, in the other grain for the chickens and the cows, also in bags – we children would take a handful out when needed. My father had a chair next to the chest, and used to rest his arm on it. My mother also had a chair, and there were some wooden chairs at the dining table, but the children largely sat, and ate, on the floor.

Before the piped water came in, all the household's water was carried up from the well in a galvanised iron bucket. It took two children to carry it, which we had to do each day after school, although there were big arguments about who would do it. The household probably used about 4 buckets a day, the rest being carried up by my mother. Water ready for use was stored in the cupboard in the living room. As well as being used for cooking, it was used to wash the children. We washed our faces and hands morning and evening, but I have no memory of cleaning my teeth.

We had a bath once a week. The water was heated in big kettles on the range and then poured into a galvanised iron bath in front of the range. The children took turns in bathing. We used a bar of Sunlight soap, also for washing our hair.

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While we grew some of our food, we also bought food from the shop run by Campbell MacKenzie at Dorlinn House – Campbell's brother, Alastair, was our landlord. Campbell was very kind to my mother who probably never fully paid her bills. Campbell came round in a van with the groceries on board, and my mother went out to the van to choose what she needed. The stock was good, and we bought things like bread, butter (which was kept in a bowl of water), sugar, tea, salt meat, and fresh vegetables.

My mother's aunt, Mary MacColl, had a small thatched cottage above where the Hunters' house now stands, and my mother would visit her some evenings. When this happened, my father was left to put us children to bed. Normally, we went very early but he would allow us to stay up, playing draughts and other games, but he chased us off to bed before my mother came in. By comparison, my mother was very strict, and 'leathered' us with a belt – a leather strap split into three at the end.

There weren't many other children in Ormsaigbeg. My best friend was Ann MacPhail – Annie – who lived at Craigard. Annie's older sister, Mary-Jane, was Morag's friend. The four of us would play houses in the quarry on the Craigard side of Port Beag, building our own houses and using broken crockery and other cast-offs from home. Dolly sometimes joined us but if Kate came she was told to 'go home'. I remember putting foxglove flowers on my fingers as gloves, even though they were said to be poisonous. The only other child in Ormsaigbeg was Jimie-Archie Cameron. He lived up at Coilum with his mother, Archina Cameron. Archina wasn't married, Jimie-Archie's father being one of the

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men who worked on the road. Later, Archina moved to Achosnich when she married Neil Cameron who kept the Clydesdale horses, leaving Jimie-Archie at Coilum with his grandmother, Maggie Cameron.

We children hardly ever went down to the beach – our mother discouraged us – and never went swimming. But we did go skating on the ice when it formed on the small lochan, *Lochan na Nal*, in front of Waters Edge, which wasn't every year.

My mother used to visit her great friend Mrs Stevenson at Sanna. She would take two children with her, which we didn't like as we had to walk all the way and, when we got there, had to sit and say nothing rather than go out and play.

During the war I remember ships passing with barrage balloons above them and that we covered the windows with black cloth. Glenborrodale Castle was taken over by Marines who came to the dances in Kilchoan and bothered the girls. I remember when the fighter plane crashed into the hills above the village, near the twin lochans, with some of the wreckage going into the water. The body of the pilot was taken to the Salen Hotel. I also remember that bodies were washed up along the beach, mostly on the north shore, and that one of them was buried in Kilchoan cemetery. Rationing didn't have much effect on my family.

4. At School

Everyone walked to and from school, a distance of about a mile and a half from Port Beag. The school was housed in what is now the teacher's house, next to the hotel, and had one classroom for all the children, aged from five to fourteen. Other than two short breaks and an hour's lunch break, the time between nine and four was spent in the classroom. Lunch consisted of sandwiches made by my mother, and a cup of tea made by the teacher. We ate outside in the playground unless it was very wet. The school room was heated by a big coal stove which the teacher looked after.



Kilchoan School, 1938

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With me (1) in the school were my sisters, Morag (2), Dolly (3) and Kate (4), Jimmy-Archie Cameron (5) from Coilum, Mary-Jane (6), Annie (7), Alasdair (8) and Iain MacPhail (9) from Craigard, the four Cleasby children (C) whose father worked on the estate, Iain MacDonald (10) and his twin brother Cameron (11), whose father was the minister and lived in the church manse, Ian MacLachlan and his brother Alan who lived at Ben Hiant and whose father was away at sea, and Ali (Alina) MacPhail (12). Ali's mother, Lizzie Cameron, lived at Church Cottage but she later married Calum MacDiarmid and moved to Burnbank in Ormsaigbeg. They didn't have any children, so Burnbank passed to Calum's brother Donald, father of Moira, Alasdair and Hugh. Ali married Peter MacIntyre and stayed in Church Cottage. Also in the picture are Mairi MacLellan (13), Ishbel MacKechnie (14) and Annie MacPherson (15).

For all the time I was at school, our teacher was Miss MacKinnon. Her name was Mary, she was single, and she came from Tobermory. When she left, Annie MacMillan, who came from Kilchoan, took over; she was a relative of Eilidh MacMillan (Eilidh MacPhail, Sonachan), who had helped in the school. As far as I can remember, our Miss MacKinnon didn't have any help other than someone who cleaned, so it must have been a lonely job for her. After she left school Dolly used to clean the school, though my mother officially had the job and was paid for it.

We hated school. The teacher used the strap on us if we were naughty. She hit the girls on their open hands and the boys on their bottoms. Kate was so annoyed at having the strap that, when

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the teacher wasn't looking, she threw it through a trap door into the roof space – I think one of the boys opened the trap. The teacher couldn't find it and was very angry, but, although all the children knew where it was, no-one told her. As far as I know, the strap is still there. Kate was very naughty and often fought with Iain MacDonald who later followed his father into the ministry.

Most of the children took an exam called the 'Qualifier', which was sent to the school from Dunoon. I sat it at the same time as Ian MacPhail and Dolly, when I was fourteen. We were all very surprised when we passed. Some of the children didn't take the exam and left without any qualification. Only one of us, Annie MacPhail from Craigard, went to secondary school. She left when she was 11 to go to Oban, where she boarded in the hostel. She was away for a whole term at a time. Mary-Jane was just as clever but she couldn't go because the family had to pay, and they could only afford to send one child. Annie became a secondary school teacher.

Even though there were children of many different ages and abilities, Miss MacKinnon taught us all in one classroom. We were split into a lower and a higher class. Each year, the children moved desks, the older ones sitting in a group at double desks, the smaller ones at single desks. The desks had a lid which raised up, and an ink well for the pens. The teacher sat at a high desk at the front. Miss MacKinnon taught us using a blackboard and chalk but, as far as I can remember, we never had a text book. We were given jotters, pens and pencils. None of this went home – we weren't given any homework. The subjects I remember were English, Arithmetic, Geometry, History, and Art. One of the tasks

in Art was to make displays using pressed flowers. Kate was so good at this she won a prize.

Although my mother and father could speak English, at home the family spoke Gaelic, so, before I went to school, I didn't understand English. But at school we weren't allowed to use Gaelic – in fact, we didn't dare use it – so I had to learn quickly. Even in the playground we had to talk to each other in English. I don't think Miss MacKinnon spoke Gaelic. Once I had learnt English, we used it when we were playing together at home – but never with my parents.

5. Leaving School

When I left school, I went to work for Campbell MacKenzie who lived at Caberfeidh – which is now called Dorlinn House. I cleaned, made the fires, and did the washing using a rotating drum called a 'torpedo'. I moved from Port Beag to Ben More to help my cousin Jessie look after her father, Archie MacDonald. Archie had been married to Flora, my aunt – my father's older sister. Jessie's husband, Duncan Cameron, had gone away to work on the *Loch Earn*, the MacBrayne ship which took passengers and goods from Oban to Tobermory and Kilchoan. It came in to Kilchoan Bay every day. Johnnie Cameron who, with his brother Lachlan and sister Bella, owned The Ferry Stores, used his boat to transfer passengers and cargo to and from the *Loch Earn*.

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When her father Archie died, Jessie moved to Oban, so I went to live with her sister, Helen MacPhail, at Tigh an Uilt, where I did the housework while I continued to work at Caberfeidh. Helen was the mother of Iain and Baldi MacPhail. When Helen's husband Donny returned from the war, I moved back to Port Beag and worked at The Ferry House for Lachlan and Lachlan's sister, Bella. I was never paid very much, but Bella used to give me 2/6d and a packet of cigarettes every Wednesday so I could go with my friends to the old Hall to watch a picture (film). On Fridays we went to a ceilidh in the Hall. The only refreshments were cups of tea – there wasn't anything to eat, and certainly no other drinks.

My sister Morag worked, and lived, at the Sonachan. It was run by Joanne Mitchell who owned Tigh Nisbet. I left Kilchoan to work for her sister, Chris Barnard, in Kilmartin, and it was while I was there, in 1944, that I heard that my father had died. I travelled back to Kilchoan on the *Loch Earn* with the coffin – when he stopped making them, they all had to be brought in to the village. I didn't return to Kilmartin after that but stayed at Port Beag and worked at the Kilchoan House Hotel. I met my husband, Dougald, at that time. He lived at Camas Fearsa in Glen More, which is where I moved in 1950 after we married.

Later we moved away from Ardnamurchan, but I had to return with my children to look after my mother. My husband followed and lived with us at Port Beag, but he died of cancer, aged 57.

To earn some money, my mother used to let the house during the summer while she lived in a caravan on the opposite side of the road from the house – it had been given her by the Coultards at

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Achateny. Kate was also at home, working at the Ferry Stores. When the house was let, Kate, my children and I slept in a shed in what used to be the vegetable garden.

My mother became increasingly dependent on me, so I could not work, but I managed to get my present house at Glashbheinn. For some time she was in a wheelchair, but she finally became bedridden. The District Nurse visited her each day, and it was during one of those visits that she died.

The croft is still in the family, but it is no longer worked. The house and the land are separate. The house may soon be sold off.



Port Beag from the Ormsaigbeg road, looking towards Glashbheinn

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Photos on pages 3, 10, 16 and 27 – Jon Haylett

Photo on page 22 – Iain MacDonald

The photos on pages 7 and 22, and many more old photos of the Ardnamurchan area, can be seen on the West Ardnamurchan Vintage Photographs site at:

<http://www.flickr.com/groups/westardnamurchanvintagephotographs/>