

I came to Mull in 1986 to take on the job of manager at Killiechronan Estate.

The thing I remember most is the people and the characters that were around then.

I had to wind down after working on the mainland and adapt to the pace of life. Things take longer because of the restrictions of being on an island and I found it hard to adjust to it.

My first contact with the Ulva Ferry area was when I was asked by Iain Munro at a farmer's meeting to come over to Ulva to view his bluefaced Leicester tups and see what I thought of them,

I remember getting on the ferry to Ulva and seeing a very smart man wearing a suit and carrying a pristine looking briefcase and thinking it looked odd. When I got to the other side there was a reception party waiting and I thought this was amazing getting a welcome like this.

This feeling was short-lived when they all clambered round this smart looking man and lead him up to the ferry house.

I followed on and found out that he was a wine salesman and his briefcase was filled with various wines for tasting in the hope that orders would be made.

There was quite a community on Ulva then and they were all there for this occasion and the BT men working there also popped in for a wee try.

Needless to say it got quite merry and every wine had to be sampled and more than once to be sure. Many orders were made and this smart man went away very happy with a big order list.

Iain Munro said to me to come up to Bracadale for a cup of tea before going to look at his tups. I have now with experience come to regard a cup of tea with suspicion as when I got there the cup of tea was followed by a bottle of whiskey on the table and by tradition the top taken off and thrown away.

I have very vague recollections of seeing Iain's prime blue faced Leicester tups but I am sure they were wonderful and bigger than I had ever seen. Fortunately I was not looking to buy.

That was my first experience of Ulva.

When I was at Killiechronan the local minister used to come and help me every Monday on the farm. He had the start of Parkinsons and he found that it really helped him to get away from the human flock to the animal variety. It helped him unwind a lot.

Bill was full of energy and enthusiasm and that along with the Parkinsons was a potent mix that brought out a hyperactivity that could cause havoc amongst the livestock.

Over time he adapted very well and he was brilliant on a pushbike when we were moving cattle around and I remember some spectacular handbrake turns and manoeuvres.

He was keen to help me train a young dog called Mist who was also very hyperactive and the two of them together could be like an explosion.

Bill started the services at Ulva church which became very popular especially and I have good memories of the songs and stories and also the animals that were involved in these services.

Mist would follow him and she loved the water. This caused panic when she dived off the ferry and Bill had to drag her out soaking everyone on board. She also would lie in the pulpit while he gave his sermon and I remember seeing the paws come and a head appear giving a big yawn which caused a fair bit of humour.

There were more people involved in the farming then and that is something that has changed a lot.

A farmer's meeting then was packed out and the after meeting would carry on until about 5 in the morning. Everyone was younger then and some of the same faces are still there but a lot older.

It is a sign of a decline in the young people entering the industry which is sad and also concerning as that is the future that is draining away.

I remember having many ceilidhs on Ulva and on the morning after we would pay a visit to Jane Anne who always asked me to sing for her. This was accompanied by a glass full of whisky which she always insisted be drunk. This was sometimes quite a challenge after the night before. She would sit there with a smile as she listened to the music. Old Lachie would sometimes be there and he would always ask for "The Flowers of Edinburgh" on the fiddle. He had a great knowledge of music.

He amazed me in that he would row all round the island at his age.