

## Ulva School

I was teaching at Gruline School when it was closed in 1970 due to a dispute about the water supply. The children of the school would be transferred to Salen Primary School after the summer holidays.

During the intervening time a vacancy came up in Ulva School and I was asked would I transfer there after Easter until the teacher situation was settled. I agreed.

So after Easter 1970 I took up duty in the school. I made a very quick visit to the school during the holiday and learnt some of the 'ropes' from the leaving Teacher.

As I was not to live in the school house the only key arriving in my mail was that of the School itself.

On my first day, I collected Mairi MacFadyen from Killimore on my way to school. Mairi had been a pupil at Gruline, and would be in Primary 7

I suppose one would call it a culture shock in a way. Gruline was a one roomed school, but had electricity, toilets & cloakroom that were in the entrance hall to the classroom.

Ulva had not changed since it had been built in 1870. The school & house were joint building. A small porch at the front had a door on the west side, that went into the school. The door at the other side of the porch was the house entrance.

Inside the porch was a sink and draining board and a calor gas water heater. Along the wall between the sink & the classroom door were a row of coat pegs for the children.

The water supply was a spring roughly half a mile up the hill by Corkamull cottage.

The classroom was very much as when Mrs Ingram taught there. One room, high ceiling, two large windows and a coal burning stove sitting out into the room. NO ELECTRICITY. A blackboard and one large storage cupboard. Under the windows there was also storage for school materials. One of these cupboards was the public library. The desks were of solid oak, two desks joined to form one unit. The desks top lifted and books etc were stored there.

The teachers desk was ....possibly the original high desk that arrived with the school when it was new. Teacher's chair was suitably high to be able to see across the desk.

The coal fired stove was lit by the cleaner and through out the winter was kept stoked by the incumbent teacher

I soon discovered that the boys enjoyed the short breaks to fill the coal hod.

Calor gas light was another thing altogether. I was instructed by the cleaner that to light the 4 lights in the classroom I MUST always light the one in the far away corner first, otherwise the gas would not flow through the pipe around the room. I remember I always left the subject of hot water until one of the Cameron sisters came to deal with the gas water heater in the porch.

That dealt with, where were the toilets. Boys at the bottom of the playground Girl's Toilet backed on to the boys but the door was in the school house garden, and at that time so was the teacher's. As I said I was not given the key to the school house as I was not going to live there.

That was it.

## **Pupils**

The pupils at the school in 1970 were a scattered, and remained so throughout my years at the school.

Andrew Durie came from Gometra. He lodged at Ulva Ferry house with the family. He came to school with the 3 Ferry children. That was the four children crossing from the Island every day.

With the exception of Mhari from Killimore the other pupils were all from Torloisk to Kilbrennan area.

Roddy MacRae Balligown was the school driver...his own car was the transport.

Over the years the school numbers were up and down, at one point there were 27 pupils and within a few years there were just 5

The children came and went as their parents moved in and out of work for the estates.

As estates changed hands so did the school numbers. There was a direct connection.

In 1970 there were 3 Estates literally “feeding” the school.

Killichronan the estate covered Gruline to Oskamull ( Hoodbarrs)

Torloisk covered Laggan Ulva to Burg in the North (Compton)

Isle of Ulva & Gometra. (Lady Congleton & Col. Howard her son-in-law in Gometra.)

These estates all employed shepherds, cattle men, tractor men, managers, gardeners and other workers. All supplied with houses. It is a fact that many of my earlier pupils had family & ancestors going back into the 1700’s all having lived within the same area.

A highlight of the year was afternoon tea for pupils as the guests of lady Congleton. This was every year before the summer holidays. Tea served in the dining room and afterwards the freedom of the gardens.

But times changed and estates changed hands and with it came the exit of families. It was during this time that the school was threatened with closure. Numbers were low and people with families were not being employed. The One thing that kept the school going was the fact that there were pupils from Ulva who had to cross that narrow stretch of water daily.

The school was the stopping place for the travelling Shop Vans. Almost every day was the calling time for a van visit. Brown’s, Macfarlane’s, Butcher’s all from Tobermory. Whytes van from Salen and the required Bank Van. Didn’t matter if the special van hadn’t your required ‘bit’ that day, it would arrive out carried by one of the other vans.

## **School Life**

The day began at 9am and closed at 4pm, this was altered to 9a.m. to 3.30pm. The afternoon break was cut out, and this shorter school day was better for the children travelling across to Ulva and up to the Torloisk area.

An undisputed rule was should the ferry man come to collect the children early, or at lunch time they went. Their trip to school was governed by tides and weather whatever season of the year.

Until 1975 the School came under Argyll & Bute. They supplied us with all we needed. Even nibs for the wooden pens, ink to fill the desk inkwells with and pencils with rubbers at the top. Lurking in the shadows was progress.

Early in 1970 Argyll & Bute decided to take out the old desks and bring in tables for the children to sit around and plastic chairs with lethal metal legs, to sit on. Teacher was issued with an oak table ( two drawers ) and a similar chair. Along with these came the all encompassing trolley with plastic drawers/trays. This is where children's work was to be stored. We even received 2 beautiful oak cupboards. **No electricity yet**

At some point I was given the key to the house and permission to make use of the building. Meals were served in the living room which also became the staff room.

The pupils participated every year in the Drama festival, and were duly proud of their trophies. Making scenery was a triumph, limited space and whatever was needed was manufactured. No bin collection all empty boxes came into the school along with anything else looking as though we could use it.

The day of participation ...always a Friday...was an adventure in itself. Scenery and children up to Aros Hall for a short dress rehearsal. Then lunch at the Mishnish and back to the hall to get ready for the show. When we won it, that made for great excitement and win it we did.

Around 1975 we worked along with the National Geographic for their article on the Inner Hebrides

### **Still no electricy**

In May 1975 Argyll & Bute became part of Strathclyde and we had a new Educational System.

School life during these years was not restricted by Health & Saftey, we used common sense and Parental permission.

The sun was out, so lessons went out. Playtime was over the road to climb the trees and build vantage points. Boys and girls. Strange, they went, they climbed yet there were never any injuries or falls.

Maths & tables, English, spelling & reading during the morning, outside in the sun.

Visits to the shore covered Biology, Science even Maths, then back to school with the treasures collected to write up our finds.

Scottish history meant up to Corkamull, Achacharn and the Dun. Burg, Duart and Ulva & Gometra. Even a day with the FC following felling & planting, all clambering into teachers VW caravette

The sun didn't always shine we had a great deal of snow from Dec to Feb/March. Torloisk children could not get, I walked from Killiemore Cottage to School and back in the afternoon. There were real snow drifts then, deep, but great for playing in for those who made school.

A visit to the new Pulp Mill in Corpach and closer to home a look around the Court and prison cells in Tobermory. Now Flats and area Offices.

Then came electricity. The school was the first building to be lit up and Rona MacColl, the youngest child in the school was lifted up to press the switch. Of course ALL the local people were there along with the tea, sandwiches and cakes.

Having been 'lit-up' A&B gave us the extension. The building of classroom, porch, staff room and indoor toilets went forward around us, a great deal to watch during playtime.

The connecting door from the old room to the new entrance was knocked through. Well actually drilled, the old wall was at least 3ft thick. I remember it well because one day three school inspectors arrived. Don't know who were more astonished HMI, the children, the teacher or the workmen

So what could we do, well we celebrated with a Ceilidh and invited all the old pupils we could find. The very oldest was 100 years old Mrs Cameron on Lismore. She had been born in Acnaharn. Unable to get we sent her flowers. Her nephew Roddy MacNeill, and Lachie MacNeil were also special guests

Then we really plunged in to the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Television, first Computer...just the one. Simple calculator for each child and a hand held Phone for the teacher to carry around the classroom came a little later.

A special School library van now called once a term for the children to choose their own library books. Those books came off the van in box loads

Now we were in the modern world, I expanded into the outer world. We went youth hostelling to Eglinton Hostel in Edinburgh. Whilst there we were invited by the Colonel of the Regiment to a private visit to the Castle. We were there specially to see the famous painting of the Return of the Scottish Flag to Savary (Morvern) This flag had been guarded by the Livingston's of Savary and the two remaining sons living, after the battle of Culloden brought it to their Mother. This special visit was arranged by Colonel Anderson because Mrs Ingram and her sons Alasdair and Douglas were pupils and direct descendants from the Livingston's in the picture

Connection with a Shetland school came about through a local girl going to teach there.

A prize was given to the older pupils for an entry into a competition for the the Royal Show in Ingleston. It was of Bird life in the Forests. I do remember some really excellent paper sculpture of Birds being made by P6 & P7

The pupils went even further afield, to exchange work and knowledge with Tasmania pupils and the town of Oban and the Islands of Ulva & Iona out there.

A joint project with a Primary School in Sydney and an Aboriginal School for the Celebration of Lachlan MacQuarrie father of New South Wales. As MacQuarrie had left Oskamull when he was young to go to school in Edinburgh and little is known of his Mull childhood, the children did a history of Mull during his time. Models were made, the most ambitious one was of a house with furniture that came apart so that it could be packed for posting and re-assembled in Sydney The older pupils looked into Parish records to find others living here in the late 1700's.

A film was made of a day in the life of our school for the Time capsule, this I remember went in the Diplomatic bag from Edinburgh. It took a wee bit of time to get it filmed. The Capping stone carved as a Celtic cross for the Official cairn was chosen by the pupils of Ulva and went along at the same time.

The Australia Commissioner visited the school later on and presented us with a certificate and a book. Shona Ingram and David Munro accepted these gifts for the School

Because my husband and I were already deep into genealogy we connected the children to a family in Sydney who were directly descended from Lachlan MacQuarrie's sister.

We continued to make visits and have outdoor activities because the Health & Safety had yet to rear it's ugly head. Parental permission, well behaved children and away we went.

Stay for a week along with Iona School to Aviemore and travelling around the area. This time in a borrowed (from Oban High School ) blue Mini Bus.

A trip in Iain Morrisons boat was one to remember. Along with Lochdonhead school we set out on a glorious spring morning heading first to Staffa then on to Lunga. Iain landed us on Lunga , where we ate our picnics then wandered off to enjoy the Island. Shortly after 10'clock Iain came hurrying up to us wanting every one back into the boat as soon as possible, a storm was coming in from the West...and we could see the long low black clouds.

We all made it as the storm hit. Strict orders NO ONE WAS TO MOVE AT ALL. Mrs Ingram myself , the children and two visitors literally anchored ourselves to each other on a sheltered seat. For the next 3 hours we viewed the sky one minute and the ocean the next all the time in a cross wind.

As Iain wove in and out of the Islands and aimed for Loch Tuath we sang every hymn, carol, nursery rhyme and song we knew. I remember doing the Hokey Cokey to keep warm.

I do not know who was happier to enter the relative calm of Loch Tuath but certainly the welcoming committee of parents on the pier were more than pleased to see their 'wains' home. It must be recorded...none of the Ulva group were sea sick.

School went on in the new building and into our lives came Rules and Regulations. Everything had to be done by the book and written up afterwards. We had a secretary, a phone to carry around in school so that no one was able to say "didn't hear it" Visiting teachers came and went. A teacher Mrs Durie was employed to specialise with a child with special needs.

I think it was at this time we made our last big trip. We went by sea to the Isle of Coll, to Breachacadh Castle on a visit.

School numbers had fallen as families left and houses were empty. The Fish farm came but most of the workers travelled from outside the area.

Mrs Durie left and Mrs Ingram returned to work full time as the special teacher. She had come full circle.

In 1992 I retired.