

DORNOCH SWRI - THROUGH THE AGES

Until the year of twenty-six, the Girl's Club used to meet,
In the reading room. Territorial Hall, just off Castle Street.
But in April 1926 plans were set in motion –
A Dornoch branch of the WRI was indeed their notion.

A committee then they had to form, from folks who'd do their share
To get the whole thing going, and Mrs Robichaud took the chair.
The ball soon started rolling with a picnic on the shore.
Plenty food, then races, shared with Birichen and Clashmore.

Next came the serious business – a syllabus to form –
Speakers, classes, concerts, dances – the list goes on and on.
“We'll start with a real attraction” the committee then decides.
‘Big game hunting in Africa’ – illustrated with lanternslides.

Miss Mould of Dornoch Castle, then invited all those present
To view her trophies, all on show, from her travels to that continent.
A rhino and a buffalo head, large tusks and a zebra skin.
Imagine the outcry today - if we were to do such a thing!

From early accounts we learn that the women were fully aware
Of how to make slippers, loose covers or rugs, or economical household repairs.
One meeting they made up a tub frock, that was won later that on in the night,
By the member whose guess, of the number of peas in a bottle, turned out to be right.

Each year they had an assortment of social events on their card,
Dances and concerts, a bulb show, and a night to remember our Bard.
Some wonderful outfits were worn at their '27 Fancy Dress Ball.
Two hundred people attended the event in the Territorial Hall

By the 30s they'd entered an era where folks wanted to learn something new,
Classes like millinery, upholstery, and even folk dancing, to name but a few.
Singers once paid them a visit, with sewing machines, by the way.
Then Cadbury's gave them a demo – wonder if they left any Milk Tray!

Some members, real keen on Drama, had their talent put to the test,
When the Anstruther Gray Scottish final saw them on stage with the best.
Mrs. Sykes once treated the Institute to tea in the Tain Royal Hotel.
£10 paid their fare and also their tea – and into the pictures as well!

Tongue twisters, and quizzes, fast knitting as well, were just some of their competitions.
Could you draw a pig, blindfolded of course, or sing, say or pay up a threepence?
The winner of one competition had one shilling at most to produce
An item in craft or in cookery – 1st was a dinner for two and a little boy's suit!

The onset of war made full use of the talents and time of each lady,
There was fund-raising, jam making, knitting, of course, for those in the army, airforce or navy.

Socks by the hundred were sent away, with mittens and helmets and mufflers.
While servicemen here were invited to tea, served by the Institute's spinsters!

In '43, to their Burns Night, they invited some foreign male guests,
They'd come from Canada, via Clashmore working their way through the forests.
The ladies were good organisers, a 'Welcome Home Fund' they had started,
By the end of the war their kitty had soared – a thousand pounds they'd collected.

Membership numbers in those days were large, as many as seventy attended.
One night they'd to fork out sixpence each, for Princess Elizabeth and her intended.
Another outing had been planned, this time a day to Elgin.
The total cost of their day out was one pound and one shilling.

January 25th in '49, must be an 'Immortal Memory',
Two hundred folk sat down to dine on haggis and baking and tea.
Spare a thought for the hostesses there, what a nightmare it must have been
Tatties to peel, turnips to mash and hundreds of dishes to clean!

Brora members entertained one night – their theme 'The Gay Nineties'.
A forward looking Institute – no just one with good long memories.
A lady came to make do, or mend, - nothing was wasted she felt,
And from oddments of parachute silk, made a nightie, a handbag and suspender belt.

By '51 suggestions were made to buy a fancy new urn,
Electric they said would be a fine choice, if the council would put the power in.
The lack of power in the Chambers, was the cause too, we hear tell,
Of the non-appearance of Hoover, to show off their latest model!

The Institute also ran film shows to give the kids a treat,
Members' children got in free; the rest paid sixpence for a seat.
A summer outing in the fifties was a gastronomic tour it would seem,
With coffee in Dingwall, at Cromarty lunch, high tea in Rosemarkie and a cuppa at Altnamain!

Their competitions were varied, with sometimes an unusual one.
Imagine the scene when the ladies had to whistle a tune – oh what fun!
One night the Committee decided it needed some funds, and hence
A pair of nylons was raffled, raising twenty-three shillings and sixpence.

In '53 their role numbered an amazing eighty-six names.
But reports show December's small turnout, for only forty-seven folk came.
By now they had purchased a cooker, not electric, but powered by gas,
So Calor paid them a visit, making dishes to delight every lass.

In '56 the Hydro Board put temporary power in the Chambers,
When new equipment went on show with helpful hints for members.
By '57, a new problem arose, for petrol was then on ration.
“We'll have to cancel the Bulb Show”, was the cry of the Federation.

A Festival in London one year, invited SWRI to attend.
In turn each Institute was asked some cartons of shortbread to send.
Six ladies from here were selected, their baking to send to this show.
Into the box their name and address, and recipe all had to go.

Well some of the goodies did travel to countries some distance away.
A letter from a Rhodesian lady asked Nannie to send more her way.
Still they had fun competitions, a wedding telegram they'd once to write,
Using the letters of the demonstration – it was ‘Stamen Craft’ that night.

Our Institute deserves a mention for being so up-to-date,
As to have a display with a hula-hoop, at a meeting in fifty-eight.
For a curio competition one evening, the ladies brought interesting things,
Like a book of Psalms – 400 years old, and a dish made from butterfly wings.

Competitions were often decided with pennies given as votes,
‘We've raised two shillings and eight pence tonight’, their secretary quotes.
The Rural's renowned for refreshments, for its savouries, baking and tea.
They've had samples from Melrose and Brooke Bond, and entertained with ads from TV.

One evening in October there was a certain chill in the air,
When a demonstration with tasting was given, - it was Walls Ice Cream, who were there.
Next meeting was equally icy when Bird's Eye came to call.
There were samples and raffles in plenty and, at tea, cream cakes for all.

Kath Munro became President around this time, a popular choice – on the ball
We read in the minutes, one evening she made Humpty Dumpty, complete with his wall.
A lady came to one meeting; a cover up was her intent,
Her goods for all shapes and sizes were Gossards foundation garments!

The Anstruther Gray Drama Final took place in Dornoch one year.
The members worked hard for two days and from the minutes we hear
That thanks went to Nannie for bookings, and those who saw dishes were clean,
To Kath for her floral arrangements, and Mrs. MacRae for playing ‘The Queen’.

At the end of that year the Toastmasters had their speaking skills put to the test.
Then they judged that night's contest – deciding which member was best –
The winner was our own Daisy, and I know you'll all wonder why
Every member that night had to enter, well, the men judged their ankles –oh my!

A lesson in decimals soon followed, when they replaced our old LSD.
“There’s 5 pence instead of a shilling, and a pound’s now got a hundred P!”
Inge formed a song and dance group, way back in the early seventies,
They were always busy along the East Coast, entertaining at Old Folks’ Parties.

By the eighties we held annual whist drives – where some played whilst others made tea,
And let’s not forget Mrs. Fitz’s jumble sales, where nothing cost more than 20p!
That lady presented a trophy, to win it is each member’s goal,
There are two dozen names engraved on it, it’s the Stewart-Fitzroy rosebowl.

From early days our golfing members have put our name upon the map
In Arbroath in ’71 t’was Cathy and Daisy, who wore the Sutherland cap.
Now several others have joined them and put their ball on the tee
Nell and Hannah, then Cathy and Ann have proudly brought home a trophy.

At the start of the nineties Headquarters were holding a special event
All institutes were asked to produce ‘15 minutes entertainment’.
At once we took up this challenge, the ‘Cambridge Diet team gave it their all
We didn’t bring back any trophy but we’d laughter filling the hall!

And who’ll ever forget our friend Agnes – a tribute-I feel we must pay,
To someone so dear and so willing who entertained in so many ways.
We remember her dressed as a fairy, and in a kilt with a frying pan sporran,
As a crow on a wa’, Kirk Beadle an’ a’, but most of all as Red Robin.

We’ve had outings to castles, to gardens and shops.
With Ray as our driver we’ve found wonderful spots.
We’ve lunched in an abbey, had tea once at Glamis,
Been to Elgin and Ullapool, Blair Atholl and Banff.

One year we went to Glasgow and the Garden Festival, where
We had so much to do and see and went up the tower that was there.
We’ve been to Baxter’s, Johnstone’s and Brodie with lots of things to buy.
And though we never made the ferry, we have crossed the bridge to Skye.

We’ve had slide shows and some videos, and food from a microwave.
Homeopathy, relaxation, and hints on what to save.
There’s been sewing and knitting and crochet and we’ve painted with irons and wax,
Imagine what they’ll think of our lifestyle when in the future they read all our facts!

We look now to the future and put our trust in they
Who carry forth our Rural and see it on its way.
We wish the best to everyone, who’ll enjoy the things we’ve done,
And hope that they will also have such memories and such fun.

LET’S TOAST OUR RURAL – TO DORNOCH.