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DHHL: 2004. 179. 003

A PRESS and Journal report of the closure of Earl's Cross Hostel, Dornoch, revived many memories among boys from remoter areas of Sutherland, to whom, over a 43-year period, it acted as a substitute home during secondary schooldays at Dornoch Academy or Golspie High School.

Among those for whom it stirred recollections was Alness shoe shop proprietor Mr Sandy MacRae, one of the very first Earl's Cross intake. Mr MacRae (59), originally from Spinningdale, has provided a picture of the lads who spent the first year there, in 1949-50.

□ WILLIE MORRISON

He recalls: "I was among pupils transferred from Bonar Bridge School to Dornoch Academy, when Bonar was downgraded from a six-year school.

"I was on the fifth year in Dornoch Academy during the first year of Earl's Cross. What struck me particularly when comparing the boys of that time and the boys in last week's picture, is how casually dressed were the last intake, compared with ourselves, all in suits and collars and ties."

Mr MacRae subsequently

ran the shop and filling station at Spinningdale, until selling up and moving to Alness 16 years ago.

He has been able to name all but one of his contemporaries, and in most cases also to tell where they came from.

Pictured (rear, from left) Ross MacDonald, Bonar Bridge (deceased); Donald Urquhart, Tongue; Kenny MacLeod, Stoer; Unidentified; Frank Wilson, Tongue; Uisdean MacLean, Lochinver; John Mackay, Tongue; Angus Gillies, Tongue; Willie Mackay (John Mackay's brother); Colin MacKenzie, Lochinver; (middle, from left) Harvey

MacDonald, Scourie (deceased); Donald MacLean, Bettyhill; Willie Mackay, Embo; Ian Munro, Lochinver; Murdo Mackay, Sheigra; Donald Murray, Stoer; Sandy MacDonald (Harvey's brother); Peter MacDonald; Miss Katie Reid, domestic staff; (front, from left) John MacRae, Little Assynt; Sandy MacRae, Spinningdale; Donald MacAulay, Drumbeg (deceased); warden Hugh MacLeod, Scourie, his wife Mary and sons Donald and Murray; Tommy Murray, Bonar Bridge; Norman Elliott, Achfary; Maurice MacLeod, Lochinver.