

From Our Old Files

25 YEARS AGO (September 16th, 1988)

SCIENTIFIC tests are to be carried out in houses around Helmsdale to check out the existence of radon gas, which comes out of the ground naturally and is believed to be a cause of lung cancer.

The National Radiological Protection Board (NRPB) is to carry out a survey for the Scottish Development Department monitoring the effects of radon gas in granite areas on Deeside and in east Sutherland. The survey could involve hundreds of homes in both areas, according to Mr Michael Reardon of the NRPB. He said: "North East Sutherland has been chosen because of the geology of its underlying rocks. You tend to have higher than average uranium content in the ground. That produces the radon gas and that creeps into the houses."

THE rundown in Forestry Commission employment in the Bettyhill and Strathnaver area is giving cause for concern to the local community council.

At their most recent meeting in Bettyhill, members were told that around 14 jobs had been lost in the 1980s, including two for professional foresters and one for a clerk. Private forestry had completely failed to make up for this shortfall.

The council is to write to the Forestry Commission and to the Secretary of State for Scotland in protest at the cutbacks.

MISS Jemima Murdie, a patient in Migdale Hospital, Bonar Bridge, became Sutherland's fourth centenarian - surely a record for a population of 13,200 people - last Sunday.

THE Nature Conservancy Council (NCC), which failed to obtain a lease of Granite Villa, Fountain Road, Golspie, for an office, have now applied for planning permission to change the use of the late Jimmy Miller's empty newsagents shop in Main Street.

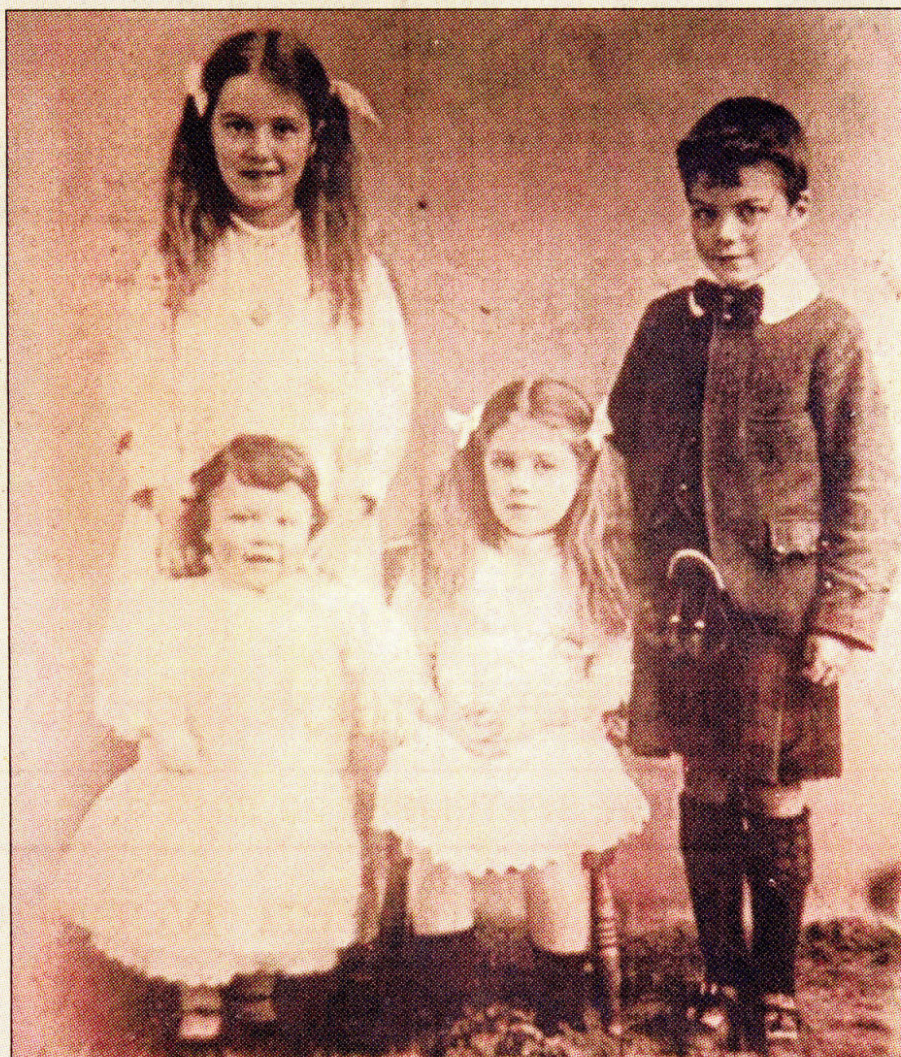
The NCC have indicated it wishes to enlarge its staff in the North by as many as 10 in a five-year plan to take in new designations of protected areas in the flow country.

TWO old rifles and a rusted shotgun plus less than 50 rounds of ammunition, is the total haul of firearms handed in to police in Sutherland so far in the September amnesty.

50 YEARS AGO (September 20th, 1963)

NEXT Wednesday (September 25) will see a historic occasion in the burgh of Dornoch - when Queen Elizabeth the Queen Mother officially opens the new Dornoch Academy in the presence of pupils, staff, parents and invited guests. It will be the first official royal visit during this century at least, to the burgh.

To make the occasion all the more spectacular, the Queen Mother is expected to arrive in a helicopter, landing at the Meadows Park. When she and her party arrive at the Dornoch Hotel for lunch, she will hear the burgh pipe band playing a tune composed in her honour by their pipemajor Mr Kenneth Macrae. A copy of



Brora native Rona Knox, who now lives in Inverness, sent in this charming family picture which she estimates dates back around a century. It shows her dad, John Murray (right), with his two sisters Katherine (back left) and Barbara (centre) and brother Robert, who could easily be mistaken for a girl because of his clothing. The family grew up in Kildonan in the early years of the last century. Both boys became gamekeepers and John's last post was at Uppat with the Countess of Sutherland while Robert, known as Toosh, worked at Laggan, near Fort William. Eldest sibling Katherine, known as Bee, went to work in service in South Africa and married there. One of her daughters is now living in Newcastle. Barbara, known as Bunnie, lived in Dornoch - her married name was Bethune.

the tune, entitled *The Queen Mother's Visit to Dornoch*, will be presented to Her Majesty.

SUTHERLAND roads committee wants a three-span bridge (estimated to cost £31,000) built across the Blackwater river at Balnacoll to obviate the use of the existing ford which is often impassable for motor traffic because of the depth of the water.

The road which links the parishes of Clyne and Rogart, is most popular with tourists in summer and for some years past, Sutherland County Council have been negotiating with the local proprietor, Mrs WP Tyser, of Gordonbush, on the question of the site of the proposed bridge.

PROSPECTS of a valuable new industry being created in north west Sutherland by the discovery of a huge belt of potassium rich shale are revealed in a report of the Geological Survey of Great Britain.

So far it is purely a scientist's find. No commercial interests have yet been approached for their opinion or to investigate the economic potentialities of the deposit.

AT a recent meeting of the Tongue and Farr District council, it was resolved that the recently built blocks of houses be named Rossal Place. The name is closely connected with the Strathnaver evictions and it is appropriate that it should be perpetuated. A private house near the site of

the council houses already bears the name.

75 YEARS AGO (September 22nd, 1938)

MORE warships are arriving daily at Invergordon to join the Home Fleet. On Saturday the cruisers Glasgow and Coventry arrived, and on Sunday the cruiser Cornwall cast anchor in the Cromarty Firth.

The line of vessels now extends to about five miles.

During the weekend, shore leave was on an extended scale and the streets of Invergordon, notwithstanding torrential rain, were crowded with sailors.

During Saturday afternoon the recreation grounds were the scene of much activity, thousands of sailors being assembled around the barricades to watch their favourite football teams from the various vessels.

Several of the warships were open to the public on Sunday and the weather being fine, sightseers poured into Invergordon by train, bus and car.

THOUGH the Maginot Line has become a topic of constant conversation, little is generally known of the man from whom it derives its name.

André Maginot was Minister of War during the early stages of the scheme to build a gigantic system of fortifications which now guards France's eastern frontier.

This was in 1929 when he was in the Tardieu Cabinet. He died in 1932 three

years before the £60,000,000 plan had been completed.

Maginot was a picturesque figure, 6ft 2ins tall, erect and soldierly. Before the war he had been Under-Secretary for War and in 1913 attempted to form a new Centre party, the Entente Democratique et Republicaine.

The party came to nothing and in 1914 he joined up as a private. Promoted sergeant, he lost a leg at Verdun. A memorial to him can be seen at Fort Souville, 18 miles from Verdun.

PERTH'S new air mail service is going to make a big difference to everybody living in the north. At present the afternoon mails from many parts of the counties of Inverness, Ross and Cromarty and Sutherland, come into the Perth sorting office during the night after the last dispatch for London has gone.

With the new air service, letters will go down to London by plane in the forenoon and will be delivered in the central districts in the early afternoon and in Greater London in the evening. There will thus be a saving of from 12 to 18 hours.

100 YEARS AGO (September 18th, 1913)

THE *London Gazette* on Friday night contained notice of the appointment of George Granville, Duke of Sutherland, to be His Majesty's Lieutenant of the County of Sutherland in the room of Cromartie, Duke of Sutherland, deceased.

THE parish church of Creich is one of the finest buildings of its kind in the north of Scotland. It is handsomely furnished and the congregation has the satisfaction of knowing that it is free of debt.

THERE was a rather sharp encounter at Sutherland Valuation Court, held on Tuesday at Golspie, over an appeal by Clynelish Distillery Company against the valuation of £435 placed on the distillery. They asked to have it reduced to £370.

The assessor pointed out that the former valuation of £350 had been fixed when the output was 21,000 gallons or an average of 33,000 gallons for three years.

NOW, according to the manager's own figures, the output had increased to 55,300 gallons, or an average of 47,000 gallons for the last three years.

Taking that into account and the erection of the additional warehouses, he thought he had been very moderate.

The valuation court decided by four votes to three that the valuation be fixed at £400.

Mr AN Macaulay, solicitor, Golspie, for the appellants, asked for a case to be stated for an appeal.

THE vacancy in the pastorate of the Lairg Free Church, which lasted for about six years, was happily filled on Tuesday when Rev DM Begbie was ordained as a minister and inducted to the pastoral charge of the Lairg congregation.