

Dornoch Academy **double anniversary**



Friends reunited at reunion

Hamish Mackay, who was a pupil at Dornoch Academy from 1959 to 1964, now lives in Aberdeen, and is a semi-retired journalist, sometime politician and community activist. Here, in the second of his articles, he reports on a stunningly memorable day for Dornoch Academy.

THE afternoon was devoted to pomp and ceremony with the re-enactment of the 1963 opening of the current Dornoch Academy by the Queen Mother, and celebrating the 100th anniversary of education on the site in suitably reverend fashion.

Come evening, the action switched to a markedly exuberant reunion ceilidh dance in a cavernous marquee on the mildest of autumn evenings. Obviously the Gods were with us.

I anticipated that the luminaries from the Swinging Sixties would predominate. And I was right. The tantalising question was: Would we recognise each other? And would there be much oohing and aahing, and ahuggin' and akissin' with friends.

The answer was a definite yes. More than 300 people made merry and in a neat marketing ploy, every drink was £2 – and, understandably, there was a tendency to buy large ones.

I have always hidden an innate shyness with a brash exterior, and I slipped into the wallflower mode – waiting to pounce on a familiar face and hang on to them for dear life.

Initially, it was almost a reprise of those ghastly school socials where the girls danced with each other and the boys stroked their Brylcreemed quiffs, and spoke earnestly about important matters like football.

It was all change. Big boys now, the boys (bald

pates do not require gels) enthusiastically embarked on hugely energetic sets of eightsome reels and strip the willow. Was there a Tardis lurking outside?

Last September, a seemingly innocuous bout of shingles turned into something more serious for me. I developed an affliction called post herpetic neuralgia which damaged the nerves in my stomach and back.

It is a woeful affliction, and despite a cocktail of expensive drugs and very high doses of morphine, I suffer daily. There is no cure and I await guinea pig pain management treatment. I suspect I have aged at least 10 years in acquiring a gaunt appearance.

And dancing was out.

So it was unsettling that among the huge array of old photographs adorning several corridors of the school, I came upon a chubby me and Roberta Gunn, from Melness, posing insouciantly for the photographer. My attire was a less-than-elegant nondescript duffel coat. Maybe duffel coats were "in" in 1962, but I doubt it.

The ceilidh was wholly run by volunteers, and what a superb job they did. Including a majestic buffet, at £5 a ticket, it was the sale of the century.

I peered in vain for people whom I would like to have met up with, and was so disappointed to discover that some of my classmates had come and gone as the night wore on.

The ladies were certainly in the ascendancy and opted for lapel badges. Thus I had a wonderful night peering at bosoms (all in the cause of identification, I must add.). I had flashbacks to Mary Quant, Dusty Springfield, Cathy McGowan and all that.

Fortuitously, when I left the comfortable womb of Dornoch Academy and headed south to study for a journalism degree at what is now the University of

Westminster, London was the trendiest city on the planet. I secured a part-time job as a waiter at the prestigious Café Royal and my daily trek involved sauntering along Carnaby Street and frequenting the famous Marquee Club where groups like the Rolling Stones came to prominence, and Lord save us, are still strutting their stuff on stage while I am sizing up zimmers.

William Wordsworth, alluding to the French Revolution, wrote: "Bliss was it in that dawn to be alive, but to be young was very heaven." And I steadfastly maintain that we children of the 1960s were hugely blessed to be entering adulthood in one of the most exciting decades of all time.

Thus I was mortified when Annella swooped upon a bunch of us would-have-been groovers, and loudly exclaimed: "Hamish, do you remember saying in 1963 that the Beatles would never last." But I hugged her all the same, delighted to see she had lost none of her panache.

I fulsomely apologise for missing out on people whom I should have greeted ...but it was difficult to keep one's bearings, overwhelmed by the sheer vivacity of more than 300 folk having a ball.

Amidst all this gaiety and enervating ~~eratic~~ ^{eratic}, there was a strong undercurrent of sadness, remembering those who had gone long before their time; meeting those who had become widows or widowers at a relatively early age; divorcees; and those with serious illnesses.

I recalled my shock and disbelief, on reading of the tragic death of my classmate and fellow hosteller, Maurice Campbell, killed while climbing cliffs near his home in Kinlochbarvie. Aged 13, death was still a mystery. I couldn't comprehend why Maurice wouldn't be coming back after the summer holiday.

The girls were certainly in the ascendancy – was there a gender imbalance on the school roll back then? Absorbing a maelstrom of memories, I embraced Diane, from Dornoch, who had scarcely changed in 50 years; and the sisterhood included the Addison girls and the May girls, also from Dornoch; and the Mackay girls, from a large family in Bettyhill.

Perhaps I can persuade the Editor to afford space to pen more memories of life at Dornoch Academy in the 1960s. Like when we beat Golspie High on their home pitch to lift the Paynter Cup, and had the unbelievable arrogance to parade the trophy along Golspie's Main Street as if we were Bobby Moore and his band of world beaters.

The evening ended most poignantly. Robert, whom I had met briefly earlier, pulled me into a corner and said quietly: "I just want to thank you for the kindness and fairness with which you, as a prefect, treated me in the hostel and school. You stood out among many others in your caring attitude to us younger boys."

I slipped outside as the tears pricked my eyes. It was one of the most wonderful compliments I have ever had in my life – 50 years on. And I vividly remembered my campaign to rid both the school and the hostel of that abominable and degrading punishment line: "Improper behaviour necessitate appropriate chastisement."

A kilted rector, John Garvie, well past midnight, still somehow had the strength to deliver a comprehensive vote of thanks.

I join him in saluting a great team who worked together so industriously and cheerily in marking one of the most chequered days in the rich history of Dornoch Academy. Their contribution merits alpha grades all round!