The Gilchrist Family of Ospisdale

by

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Dornoch

THE GILCHRIST FAMILY.

This is the story of a family which lived in Sutherland from about the middle of the Eighteenth Century, until comparatively recently. This family was neither famous nor particularly wealthy, but members of it contributed to the development and prosperity of the County over the years, and for that reason, if for no other, deserve to be remembered. Because they lived in the same house, accumulating letters, bills, farm accounts and other family memorabilia, over a period of many years, they unwittingly compiled a unique and valuable slice of local history which the last surviving member of that family wisely decided must go eventually to the Scottish Record Office. Many boxes of papers were despatched in that lady's lifetime, those left at the time of her death, were but a small fraction of the whole, so obviously this story must be incomplete, and probably incorrect in some details, but nevertheless, I hope it may give a few glimpses of a long-vanished way of life and be of some interest to the people of Dornoch and the surrounding country.

The first Dugald Gilchrist, or at least the first of whom there is any record, came from Kilmichael in Argyllshire, and, after starting his working life as a tutor, came to Sutherland in 1737 to become Factor to the Earl of Sutherland, a post he retained until he retired in 1757, when he left Dunrobin and went to live in Lothbeg until his death in 1797.
He was said to be a man of great shrewdness and the highest personal integrity, and, never marrying himself, helped to support his brothers and sisters financially. In 1783, he purchased the estate of Ospisdale near Dornoch from Robert Gray, and since he did not find it convenient to live in it himself, he let it to a kinsman, William Munro of Achany, who was there for some 13 years. Under the terms of his will however, the estate went to his great nephew, a grandson of a half-brother, another Dugald, who was 24 years old at the time, and who had some difficulty in getting the Munros to move out of the house so that he could reside in it himself. When eventually they did move out, they went to live at Uppat about 20 miles further north. The mother of this younger Dugald was Margaret Ross, the last of the Ross's of Tollie and Achanloich (a branch of the Ross family at Balnagown), but this distintion did not bring with it any financial advantage, and he always had to work hard to make his lands profitable, and even at the end of his life could hardly have been described as a rich man.

It was probably old Dugald's influence that procured for his great-nephew a commission in the Sutherland Volunteers (the Fencibles), and later, when this regiment had been reduced, he transferred to the Ross-shire Militia. In 1800, while stationed in Aberdeen, he met and married Catherine Rose, a niece of William Munro of Achany, a 16 year old, who was ten years his junior, and said to be quite a beauty. A few months after his marriage, he was posted to Shetland to command the garrison at Fort Charlotte, remaining there for two years until peace was declared in 1802. By this time he had achieved the rank of Major, and he now retired from the army and was able to give his whole attention to his estate.

He installed a man called George Herkes as grieve, who remained at Ospisdale for many years. Whenever his master was away from home, Herkes wrote regularly giving full reports of the work in hand - ploughing, wood-cutting and so on- showing complete understanding of the farm routine and giving details as to the state of men and animals alike. Herkes' letter and farm accounts are marvels of neatness and clarity, with delightful flourishes around his signature, and there are little added grumbles about the weather with snippets of local gossip, such as "Mr. Leslie in Dornoch turned off his wife upon suspishon (sic) of her not being honest to him, but by the advice of the Minister, Mr. Bethune of Dornoch, he was prevailed upon to bring her back again to his house and children". The final page of each letter was ruled in columns, and showed dates since the previous letter, and what work was accomplished each morning and afternoon (Sundays of course were always blank), and also what the weather had been like, so Dugald would have known exactly what had gone on on the farm in his absence. One letter written in 1802, states, "The bull is coming finely on since the fresh weather came on. I hope he will be good beef in short time.Your fine little sweet child Margaret is very well and comes out to see me ploughing - I shall never forget to mention about your dear child Captain. I have a particular regard for Margaret - she is a fine sweet healthful child and good natured". this was Dugald and Catherine's eldest daughter, who would only have been a toddler at the time. These letters and reports written by Herkes certainly disprove the nonsense which is sometimes talked about primitive Highlanders who could only speak the Gaelic. He could well have come from Shetland originally, where there are still many with the similar name of Harcus.

Major Gilchrist had a fund of energy unusual in a Highland Laird, and became increasingly involved in County business in addition to farming. At Ospisdale his nearest neighbour was George Dempster, M.P. for Perth Burghs, who had purchased the Estate of Skibo in 1794 and a sheep farm at Pulrossie some time later. The main object of Dempster's life was to persuade Highland proprietors to adopt a proper system of encouraging their tenants towards a more modern approach to life. He was deeply concerned, as were many others, at the tide of emigration which was sweeping over Scotland, but he saw that nothing could be done to improve the lot of the country people without an improvement in the road system, for at that time the western parts of Invernesshire, Ross-shire, Sutherland and Caithness were still utterly inaccesible to carriages and almost to horsemen too. A good many years were to pass before the Government in London took up the problem of emigration from the Highlands, but eventually, urged on by Scottish M.P's and the owners of large estates, a Parliamentary Committee of Roads and Bridges was set up in 1801. The Commissioners employed the genius of Telford in making a general survey of the Highlands, and his reports and recommendations enabled them to direct successfully the greatest public works yet undertaken in the north. Nevertheless, many difficulties were encountered in laying the foundations of a road system in the Highlands. There were no large contractors such as we know today, and contracts were taken up by proprietors and substantial farmers who knew nothing of road making themselves, but made sub-contracts with mason's and others, who had not always sufficient knowledge themselves to avoid problems in the collecting of materials and payment of their men.

Major Gilchrist was one of these proprietors. With a partner named Christie, who had worked for Telford in Aberdeenshire, he took a contract to build a new road from Tain to Bonar. This he carried out successfully. Then, without Christie, who had not been a very satisfactory partner, he contracted for an extension of the new road along the Sutherland coast, which had just been completed as far as Golspie.

This road was to run by Drummuie down to Littleferry, and on the other side of Strath Fleet from the ferry to Evelix. The Major's bridge over the Evelix River still stands - it has been preserved as a relic of the road which first carried our ancestors in their new gigs and smart chaises along the coast. From Evelix, the road ran past Skibo and Ospisdale, and through Spinningdale to Creich. As first planned, this road was to reach the shores of the Dornoch Firth just below Creich House (now a ruin) where there was a favourite crossing for cattle on their way to markets in the south, but Telford, after a careful survey, decided to bridge the Firth at Bonar.

Large gangs of men were employed on the road - one wonders if they were local men, or if, as was more likely, they had come from a distance, attracted by the regular work and pay, which averaged 1/6d to 2/- a day. Tools had to be provided, and thus local smiths were kept busy.

The men also had to be housed and fed, oatmeal being the main part of their diet, and the administrative responsibilities must have been heavy, and involved Major Gilchrist in a certain amount of travelling. Some old hotel bills exist from about this time - one from the Inn at Bonar, and another from the Black Bull Inn at Banff. Overnight accommodation was usually 2/-, while breakfast and dinner together amounted to 7/-, with 6d charged for a dog. The bills were so printed to include every kind of alcoholic refreshment as well as meals, food for servants, fodder for horses, and end rather nicely "to more punch and more wine!" Since everything appeared to be obtainable the Major's bills were very modest.

In 1809 Major Gilchrist took a lease of the sheep farm at Rhynie from the Sutherland Estate. This land carried about 800 ewes, and the sale of sheep, mutton and the wool-clip formed a large portion of his farming business. He had also become one of the Commissioners of Supply for the County, and so indeed was a busy man. By this time, George Dempster has transferred Skibo to a niece, since he had no heir of his own. This lady had married a Colonel William Soper, who added the name of Dempster to his own, and they took up residence at Skibo. It may have been that, finding himself the owner of a fine Highland Estate, the situation rather went to Colonel Soper Dempster's head, or perhaps he had a natural tendency towards litigation, which made him an uneasy neighbour. As long as George Dempster himself had held Skibo there had been no disputes about boundaries, but once Colonel Soper Dempster was settled in, he laid claims to lands that would have completely altered the boundaries of Skibo, Ospisdale, Creich and Airdens. The argument developed into a long drawn out lawsuit, involving the depositions of witnesses declaring where their grandfathers, and even their great grandfathers had grazed their cattle, and there was even a further law suit concerning the removal of stones for road building from Newton Point, but Colonel Soper Dempster lost both cases and died shortly afterwards. He was succeeded by his son George Soper Dempster, who was obviously cast in a different mould from his father, and thereafter relations between the two households were always most amicable.

Telford's graceful bridge over the Kyle was opened in 1812, the Creich road as far as Bonar by then being completed. It delighted the people of Ross-shire who could now drive from Tain to Dornoch without having to cross the Firth at the Meikle Ferry. For the heavy travelling carriages of those days crossing on the Ferry was a hazardous business, and might easily entail wading ashore with all the discomfort of wet feet for the pasengers. In 1813 Major Gilchrist was made collector of Cess and Assessments, a post he held until 1834. He succeeded Captain Kenneth Mackay, a descendant of the Reay family, who lived at old Embo House and farmed extensively. Old Dugald Gilchrist had also held this post from 1779 until his death in 1797, and during his time and that of his successors the salary had remained at £50 per annum. The completion of the road from Drummuie to Bonar, and the crossing of the Kyle, emphasized the desolation of the interior of Sutherland, still a wilderness of bog and heather without a single road, but with innumerable streams that, after a few hours of rain, could convert into torrents, cutting off large tracts of land from any connection with the coast. After a prolonged survey it was settled that a road from Bonar to Tongue, a distance of over 50 miles, would open up the County, despite the forseen difficulties in making a road where no track had even existed before. Contracts for the projected road varied enormously in price according to the experience of the contractors, but finally Major Gilchrist was awarded the contract at a price of £16,831. Work on the road could only be carried out during the summer months. Barracks had to be built to shelter the workmen and great quantities of oatmeal purchased to feed them. One purchase alone was for 270 bolls (20 tons), bought from James Craig, Victual Merchant, in Thurso in 1814. Work on the road was begun in that year and not finished until 1819, and by this time repairs were already a problem. This was the Major's last road building effort, and from now on he had become more interested in farming and improving his house and garden at Ospisdale.

By the 1820's the Major's family was more or less grown up and most of them were with him at home. His elder son, another Dugald, had gone to Edinburgh to study law and to read History, but he did not seem to have become very successful. His father feared that his son preferred the social life of the capital to his studies, but the real reason may have been that the young man was not strong and was subject to fainting fits which were alarming to witness. He died young, due to one of these attacks,on the morning of what was to have been his wedding day. The second son, Daniel, born in 1803 stayed at home to assist his father and grew to be a very capable farmer. He seems to have taken over where George Herkes left off, writing long and detailed letters to his father whenever the latter was away from home. Many of these were sent to a London address in the Haymarket, and presumably this house was both a pied-a-terre in town, and an office. There is a letter in the form of an advice note for two boxes, each containing six legs of beef and one also containing "a sheep, cut in two, without the head, which you will send to Mr. Gilchrist at 19 The Haymarket". In the same shipment there is a box containing nine sheep, another two (boxes)of pork,and fifteen live wedders, so the Major was into the cattle business in quite a big way. The letter goes on "kindly return all ropes, boxes and cloths - cloths marked with a 'G' in red". The meat was sent south by steamboat from Invergordon and was presumably salted. Sheep were extremely important, and eventually the Gilchrists owned vast tracts of land at Shinness and Blairich as well as locally, and also at Shandwick and other places in Ross-shire. The first

record of anything resembling an agricultural show was a Sheep Show which took place at Golspie on 23rd August 1827 when the first prize for a class of six tups was as high as £7, and a prize of ten sovereigns was awarded to a pen of fifteen yearling Cheviot ewes - big money at that time.
A nephew, Dugald Leckie, stayed in Liverpool and handled the wool side of the business. His letters to his Uncle are masterpieces of calligraphy and politeness. All goods were despatched from Sutherland by sea, usually from Invergordon, and in 1838 a steamer carrying a cargo of wool went ashore off the east coast, near Dunbar. The agents wrote to say that at least some of the wool was saved, but that the whole quantity was insured for £2,200, which must have meant a lot of wool in those days. A number of men were employed as shepherds on the various farms and sheepruns. These were signed up for work from one Whitsuntide to the next, and the rate of pay was usually 15/- a month with bed and board, or 21/- if the men lived out. The latter also got a boll of oatmeal a month, plus keep for two cows and about 70 sheep, also a horse if they had one, or the use of an estate horse if they did not.In some cases a small plot of land was allowed them for growing potatoes. In return they had to agree that they would undertake any work that was allocated to them, and that they would remain "faithful, obliging, attentive and honest". A number of these agreements still e exist, written in a good copper plate hand by someone else, and signed with either a shaky signature, or with simply a cross. Shepherds and herdsmen lived and died in the same service, and the bond between master and employed was still one of mutual sympathy. A letter from one George Orr written in April 1822 requests a position as grieve, saying that he has "a family that is very fit for making hay." He got the job, but "as you are advanced in years, you are not fit for a Highland charge - although this is a small one - I will therefore consider you as the shepherd", and Orr goes on to imply that his sons will do most of the work! His remuneration was as usual - sheep, two cows, a horse "fit to lead in the hay, and oatmeal with an extra boll for your children's trouble at the hay". The farm workers have familiar names - Mackay, Brown, Polson, Wilson ... one wonders if their descendants are still living in this neighbourhood to-day.

Horses were indispensable of course, and Major Gilchrist was in fact the first land-owner in the north to use horses in place of oxen. The horses at Ospisdale ranged from heavy draught animals to ponies for the children and we even know the names of some of them - Polly, Major, Glasgow, Hamilton and Bess. James Ross, the blacksmith at Lairg, did a lot of work for the Estate, and submitted lengthy bills annually, with amounts for shoeing, mending pots and pans, mending carts, "laying a sock or coulter" (sharpening a ploughshare or blade) and many smaller items. Shoes for the large horses cost 1/- each, while those for the ponies were 9d each. The total bill for fifteen months (1822-3) was £6.18s.9d, the following year marginally less, even though there were at least three items charged each month. Tradesmen like Ross and others were kept waiting a long time for their money - bills were only paid once a year at best.

With the road building contracts behind him and the farm prospering, Major Gilchrist turned his attention to the improvement of his house, and was his own architect. This would have been in the first half of the 1820's. The plans included clearing away the old domestic quarters at the front of the house, and building a new wing which was joined to the back of the old house overlooking the garden. On the ground floor was a dining room and kitchen, servants hall etc. and above was a new drawing room with three bedrooms beyond.

Unfortunately, when this wing was nearly finished, it was realised that there was no way of reaching the bedrooms except through the drawing room, so a long passage had to be built onto the drawing room wall, with a single window at the end and a flat roof above. It was at this time that the thatch was removed and the whole building slated. The materials for all this work were obtained locally - cobbles from the Firth at Newton Point, hewn stone and pavings from a Brora merchant, William Robertson. There is a list of some of the masons who worked on the house, with small sums of money written against their names - usually £2 (with oatmeal in addition), presumably one month's wages. One of the men was Alex Hood - there is a firm of monumental masons in Dingwall today with the same name - could there be any connection?

Some years later another wing was added which joined the servants hall at right angles - this provided a laundry, dairy and "bottle cellars", though these cellars were not actually underground. The dairy had a stone shelf all round it holding great bowls of milk and cream, and one of the cellars held a 30 gallon cask of whisky which was never allowed to be less than half-full for the next hundred years. All visitors, coachmen and messengers who came to Ospisdale were offered refreshment, and most would choose to take a dram, though the fishwife who walked from Embo every week, with her creel on her back, would be invited to sit in the servants hall, and given a cup of tea and a "piece". Miss Lyon also used to tell of the smaller cask for brandy (the drink of gentlemen in those days) which from time to time was left empty overnight on the sill of an open downstairs window, and before morning would be miraculously filled, and no questions asked, though it is difficult to believe that such a correct and public figure as Major Gilchrist, whose father John had been in the Customs and Excise service in Dingwall many years before, would have stooped to drinking contraband liquor! Claret was purchased in huge barrels direct from the Continent, and, like most other goods, came by sea, either to Newton Point or Invergordon, whence the Ospisdale ox-carts were sent to haul it home. It was bottled there in bottles which had the initials 'D.G.' impressed in the glass, and which were just thrown away when the house was finally sold. They would have been collector's pieces today. Whilst on the subject of strong drink, another of Miss Lyon's stories concerned the 'postie' of those days. There is a pile of stones near the Whiteface cross-roads, all that is left of the little local post office. A postman walked from there down to Dornoch each day to collect the mail. Ospisdale and Skibo were the last houses on his round, and letters for both the big houses were carried separately in leather pouches, marked with brass name-plates. Apparently, for years he never missed a working day, winter or summer, except at New Year, when local hospitality became too much for him, and he was liable to collapse into the ditch at the roadside! Snow must have presented a problem in some winters though there was a snow plough at Skibo, drawn by eight horses, which would have helped to a certain extent.

But to return to the house and it's owner ... the house was now completed, as much as it was to be for the next sixty years or so, and attention was turned to furnishing it in a befitting manner. A letter from Tain dated April 1814 announced that the 'Hope' (probably a coastal vessel) was on her way from Inverness, and would be landing a kitchen stove for Ospisdale at Dornoch shortly, and the freight due would be 13/-d, alas, there are no further details. The occupants of the house would have to wait another eleven years before there was any suggestion of plumbing, but in June 1825 there was an estimate for the installation of a 'patent water closet with cesspool' which would cost £5, free on board at Leith, and with 5% discount for cash. If this estimate was accepted, this surely must have been one of the first lavatories to be installed in the Highlands. In November 1825 a shipload of furniture arrived, also from Leith on board the 'Janet' and was offloaded at Helmsdale. The Major was advised by an agent there to send his own horses to collect it. It would mean two days work for them, but "there would be less risk of it being injured". Sadly, there seems to be no bill for this consignment, but Miss Lyon used to tell how her beautiful Hepplewhite-style dining chairs, which were made locally about this time for Ospisdale, originally cost 10/-d each.

In 1822 a consignment of lamps, with shades and wicks, arrived from a London firm, John Appleton of Ludgate Street. The account is on beautifully decorated paper, and advertises that he can supply lamps for 'Doors, Streets, Balls, Routs and Carriages', and that he can also install 'Speaking Pipes'. A further large consignment from another London firm consisted of carpets, rugs and doormats amounting to well over £60. This included three large carpets (Best Brussels at 5/6d per square yard) and a quantity of stair carpeting (Superfine Venetian at 3/-d per yard). By this time the house must have been both comfortable and handsome, and a source of great satisfaction to the family. Major Gilchrist also owned a house in Tain, which had originally been acquired to house his children during their school days at the Academy there. In the 1830's a lot of work was done to this house. Donald Murray of Tain, who described himself as a cabinet maker, must have been a man of many parts. He re-thatched part of the roof, made a drain in front of the house, put in a grate (5/6d) and fitted new locks. He also made palliasses, upholstered furniture, repaired the gig and supplied "mettle macheenary for a mangle". The strangest item on his bill was "to payment for medicine for the old miller - 3/6d" Murray also appeared to have collected the rent for the house on Major Gilchrist's behalf, and perhaps just as well he did, as his bill runs from 1830 to 1840 without any mention of payment on account.

The Gilchrist daughters, Margaret ("the beautiful Miss Gilchrist"), Catherine, Alexa and Georgina had grown up and acquired the usual accomplishments of the day - music, sketching, needlework - and in addition some of the less usual ones in that they not only spoke French and Italian reasonably well, but had some knowledge of the classics also - reputedly rising at 5 a.m. to study Latin and Greek! They travelled on occasion with their father to Edinburgh and London, and there still exists a slip of paper headed Theatre Royal, Covent Garden and showing that six places had been reserved for the Dress Circle for Friday 27 May 1825 for Major Gilchrist and his party. It would have been nice to know what play they were to see, but no other details were given. On this occasion they travelled to London by sea with the London and Edinburgh Steam Packet Co., on board "The Tourist" and the cost of the cabins was 4½ gns each. This

seems reasonably inexpensive, since only a few years previously (1818) a ticket for one inside place on the Caledonian Coach running from Edinburgh to Inverness cost £4.15.0d, while the fare between Edinburgh and London by coach was £9.0.0d. Perhaps as a result of a particularly good wool-clip, Major Gilchrist took Margaret and Catherine on an extensive tour of the Continent in 1835. They were away for ten weeks and Margaret kept a journal describing their travels, but this is described in another Chapter. Margaret Gilchrist never married. Miss Lyon had a large portrait of her, and she was indeed lovely to look at. There was also a much smaller picture of her in which she is wearing a riding habit, with a smart black 'topper' and a veil. One supposes she returned to Ospisdale when her education was completed to keep house for her father, and later she travelled to some extent on the Continent, eventually dying in Paris in 1858. When Catherine married George Ross of Pitcalnie (the last hereditary Chief of Clan Ross) in 1837, the couple spent an elaborate honeymoon in Germany, and Margaret, her favourite sister, accompanied them!

The mail coach ticket for the journey from Hamburg to Berlin still exists - one ticket for three seats for 'Mr. Ross, his Lady and Miss Gilchrist' and states that the coach will leave on Thursday 22 June at 8 o'clock precisely. The Royal Prussian Mail Coach office certainly catered for foreigners as, surprisingly, it is printed in English, and the cash columns have spaces for dollars (thalers?) Groschen and Pence, and 4/9d is written across all three columns in ink - what can that mean? The length of the journey is also written on the ticket as being 38 miles, which must certainly be an error. What eventually happened to Georgina is not known. She was alleged to be delicate despite all that dancing, and she probably died young. There was a fifth daughter, Mary-Ann, about whom we know almost nothing beyond the fact that she became a Mrs. Purvis, although Miss Lyon had a beautiful miniature of her, with a lock of her hair, intricately plaited under the glass at the back of the oval frame.

Daniel, now the owner of the house and estate, married Jane Reoch, the daughter of an Edinburgh ship owner in 1842, and in due course became the father of two sons, Dugald and John, and three daughters, Margaret, Catherine and Georgina, their names being almost exactly the same as those in the previous generation, which rather adds to the complication of sorting out the family history. Farming and his family were Daniel Gilchrist's whole life. His estate covered many acres and he was an early member of the Scottish Agricultural Society. Over the years he accumulated a number of silver cups and other trophies won by his livestock in the show ring, and in 1855 he exhibited cattle at the Paris Exhibition. These beasts were walked from Sutherland to Leith in charge of a Gaelic-speaking herd, who apparently had no problems of communication once he was on French soil. The animals did well, and to celebrate this, Daniel purchased a very pretty French papier-mache chair, inlaid with mother-of-pearl, as a present for his wife. He also gave orders that the cattle must return to Scotland by the same route as they had come, claiming that they were far too good to be converted into beef to feed the French! Shortly before his marriage, Daniel had purchased a number of articles of clothing from Messrs. Macfarlane and MacDonald of Buchanan Street, Glasgow, including a saxony coat, dark green for £2.15.0d, a 'patent waterproof hat' for 18/-d and two cotton nightcaps at 1/-d each. Ten years later a firm of Edinburgh outfitters supplied what sounds to be a similar coat (but with sporting buttons) for £2.18.0d...those were the days, when inflation was almost unknown. It is sad that no bills for Jane's dresses were found - possibly

they were made at home, or by a local seamstress, but a Tain draper, William Murray, supplied quantities of material, ribbons and thread, and 600 sewing needles were bought in (in one consignment) from a London haberdasher - 1/1d a hundred - how could they have needed so many? There is a scribbled reminder on the back of a visiting card "Ball dress for Georgina" and a bill for a Leghorn Straw Bonnet purchased in London for £2. Messrs. Grieve and Oliver ('Hatters to the Queen') supplied a gentleman's 'Fine Satin Hat' for one guinea, with hats for the boys at 10/6d each and at about this time, finest Jamaican Coffee cost 1/7d per pound, and tea (of unspecified quality) was 4/-d per pound, which is roughly what it cost as late as the 1930's.

Though whisky was generally considered the panacea for all ills (as perhaps it still is) and a cask containing 10½ gallons from John Haig cost £3.15.6d in 1825, the services of Dr. Ross of Golspie were sometimes required. Since all his visits had to be made in his gig, his charge of 10/-d a visit doesn't seem unreasonable, with medicines extra at 1/-d or 1/6d. In 1845, little Dugald Gilchrist, then aged two, must have been very ill for a time, as Dr. Ross visited him on six occasions within eleven days. Some years later, in 1854, the good Doctor wrote to Daniel asking as a favour that 'yr coachman speak to the boy John Gordon whom I saw at Ospisdale the other day, and say to him that I will give him 35/-d in the half year, with his clothes and washing, if he comes to me as a boy and perhaps you will be kind enough to let me know the result as soon as convenient, so that if he declines, I may look out for another. If he does engage, if you give him the shilling, I shall honestly repay you! This is the wage I have been in the habit of giving the first half year, and afterwards £2.' This seems a fairly generous wage, even allowing that the boy would have been expected to work all hours. Indoor servants, especially the women would have been paid much less. The shilling he was to be given if he accepted the doctor's offer was, one supposes, to seal the contract - in other words, the civilian equivalent of the King's (or Queen's) shilling given to a man when he enlisted in the army. A question comes to mind as I write about Dr. Ross. How would he have been summoned in the first place? A posted letter would have tekn too long, so doubtless a stable lad would have been despatched over to Golspie with a message - all somewhat time consuming - but of course every household of any size had a medicine cupboard and housewives were adept in dispensing pills and draughts for minor ailments, and the Doctor was summoned only as a last resort.

Jane Reoch Gilchrist was a girl of 23 when she married Daniel, and though used to sophisticated city life in Edinburgh, seems never to have missed it and soon grew to love her new home. She became a superlative housekeeper, famous especially for her mutton-hams, and other meats preserved for winter use, and for baking and her jams. She had actually seen Sir Walter Scott, and her youth had touched the old age of people to whom the memories and tales of the '45 were still fresh. She had a beautiful voice and played the piano proficiently, and was therefore frequently called on to entertain dinner guests. When their children were old enough, they were sent to school in the south, and had to travel, first in the gig to Little Ferry and thence by sea to Burghead in a horrible little steamboat which felt as though it was going to turn turtle in the bad weather. The girls went to Cheltenham Ladies College, and of course stayed

there throughout the year, spending Christmas holidays in the home of the famous Miss Beales, Cheltenham's redoubtable headmistress. The two boys attended Inverness Academy.

Shortly before Daniel's death, he was presented with a large silver salver inscribed 'To Daniel Gilchrist Esq., of Ospisdale as a tribute of gratitude from the parishioners of Creich April 1857' which must surely be proof of the affection and respect in which he was held in the District, and beyond. He died in 1857, and was survived by his Wife for almost half a century. She continued to oversee the running of the house and farm for many years, and was assisted by her two sons, Dugald and John, (though neither of these seemed as dedicated to farming life as their father had been), and by a Colonel Mackintosh, who was her Factor. Neither of the sons married, and both predeceased their mother, who was a devoted member of the Church, attending Dornoch Cathedral (there is a memorial tablet to her on the wall there) and Creich Church on alternate Sundays. At that time the church stood in the burial ground north of Bonar Bridge. Towards the end of her life Mrs. Gilchrist presented the church with a fine set of Communion silver, still in use today, and to mark Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee she paid for a special dinner for the inmates of Migdale Hospital, at that time a Poor Law Institution.

The boys seemed to have led rather aimless lives without independant careers; for some reason, their mother was deeply opposed to service life, so there was no encouragement to enter the army or navy, and with no leanings towards the Church or the Law, what was there for the sons of gentlemen to do in those days, after they had shot everything that moved on their estates? The eldest daughter, Margaret, like her Aunt of the same name, did not marry either, and it was she who discovered a treasure trove of family letters and accounts stored away in a barn at Ospisdale, and it is from those papers that these notes about the Gilchrist family have been gleaned. Catherine married Hugh Rose of Tarlogie about 1880, and had a family of four. Unfortunately, this marriage ended in divorce - more shocking in those days than it is now-and the younger generation of that branch of the family rather lost touch with their relations in Sutherland. Georgina Jane, (known to her family as Naini) married a naval officer, Alex Lyon, in 1883. The Lyons came from Cheshire, but owned a sheep farm in New Zealand, and so it was in New Zealand that Alex and Naini started their married life, and where their only child Kathleen was born two years later.

She was the last known survivor of the Gilchrist family of Ospisdale, and was such an interesting character that she deserves, and will get, a chapter all to herself.

MRS. DUGALD GILCHRIST.

Catherine Rose married Dugald Gilchrist in 1800 when she was a girl of 16 or 17, and he ten years her senior. How or when they met is not known, but her home was some distance away from Ospisdale, and she was of the family of Tilliesnaught in Mar. Dugald was an officer in the Fencibles, (a regiment raised by the Countess of Sutherland in 1793) eventually attaining the rank of Major.

Catherine was descended on her father's side from General Middleton, one of Charles II's commanders who played a minor role in Dornoch's history, and on her mother's from Andrew Ross of Shandwick, and so therefore it must have seemed a most suitable match, for Dugald had recently inherited the Ospisdale estate from his great uncle, and was already a man of some standing in Sutherland.

The marriage certainly started very happily. While Dugald was away with his regiment in Shetland, his bride wrote:

"Your letters are my chief, my only enjoyment. This is chapel week - I go to church every day with every reason that must oppress my mind in regard to my absent lord .... the plants look delightfully fresh-all the Dutch flowers are blown and smell and look so fragrant - just like you when you are fresh and blooming from the open air. I have found a person to graft heels in your black silk stockings" , which shows that she had a care for his possessions, too.

Her mother was staying with her at this time. "My mother desires to be remembered to you in the warmest, kindliest and most affectionate manner, she loves you so much that I am almost jealous .... people say that matrimony is a cure for love, but I do not think of it that way ... it would certainly kill me if I could suppose for one moment your affectionate feelings towards me had suffered any diminution".

They had by this time been married about two months. She used to go to the quay to await the arrival of any ship from Shetland that might bring mail ... "I always carry one of your letters in my pocket until I receive another one, and then after reading them over, I deposit them (my richest treasures) in my bureau... sweet Ospisdale, I expect to pass many happy tranquil days there, blessed with your society".

But alas, this happiness was not to last for ever. Mrs. Rose, her mother, died within months, and afterwards Catherine and her ever increasing family were left very much on their own, with only occasional visits from her husband. In all, she had eight babies, three sons (one dying in infancy) and five daughters, born between 1801 and 1811. There were doubtless plenty of servants, and people working on the estate, but nevertheless, it must have been a lonely life, as there are, nor were then, few sizeable houses in the vicinity, and social horizons were limited by the distance that a horse could carry a rider or draw a carriage.

By 1806 Dugald Gilchrist had left the army, but was still away, either in Edinburgh or London attending to his business affairs for much of the time. From a letter from his wife, addressed to him in London, and dated February of that year, one gathers that there had been a certain amount of disagreement between them, indeed there is a coolness, even though the letter ends with "affectionate esteem and sincere love, I remain, dearest Dugald, your warmly attached Catherine G". But whatever Catherine's shortcomings may have been (and nothing specific is mentioned at this stage) life cannot have been easy at Ospisdale. The winter was hard "I am told that never was such a fall of snow seen in this country". In another letter she writes that being the mistress of "the big house" she felt bound to supply gifts of food and sometimes of wine to elderly tenants, particularly in cases of illness, "when we have barely enough for this household", and she had to buy fodder for the few cows which they had overwintered.

The children were all ill at various times, and the baby was in the care of a wet nurse whose milk had suddenly dried up. Catherine had apparently undertaken to employ the woman for six months - the woman did not wish to break the agreement, and Catherine felt that she could not - "I did not like to object to it, though I wished her away, though only to rid the house of one mouth (to feed)" Food indeed seemed scarce - "the butcher only offered £8.10.0d for the large cow, so of course she is here yet. I killed one of the small ones who, contrary to what you expected, was far gone in calf, and is tough indifferent beef". She goes on "I would have given anything you had been at home". Poor Catherine! She obviously still loved Dugald, but loneliness, added to the strain and worry of running a large menage on a limited budget was beginning to get too much for a 22 year old to bear, and she sought consolation, as so many others have done before and since, in alcoholic refreshment. This of course displeased, and doubtless worried, her husband, but as yet the subject had not been referred to in so many words, though in a letter a year later she says, "I am extravagant enough to drink a bottle of porter each day .... but when better will not do so. We are ill off for fresh meat, but hope that will be remedied when you come, which I hope will be soon. The children are well ... they now have plenty of milk, two of the cows have calved since you left home". The letter ends rather pathetically, "The child crying for me will relieve you from a continuance of this most stupid scrawl, and with most affectionate love, I am my most dear husband's affectionate Catherine Gilchrist. P.S. We will require candles this winter".

There is a gap in the letters of about five years, and it seems that during this time, Catherine must have overstepped the mark to such an extent that her husband could no longer have her in his house, and he found a place in which she could stay in her native Aberdeen. She writes long and rambling letters, very difficult to read, pleading with him to allow her to return home ... "my bewildered and half recollected thoughts cannot suggest any plea in my defence, I believe there is none. You will therefore have the more merit in restoring me to your presence, unhappy wretch that I am, that I cannot say to love and esteem, and to my innocent infants, on whom otherwise such a stain will be cast forever...how I would labour night and day to please you and if you recall me, may the Great God in Heaven grant me neither peace here nor hereafter if I ever break my promise of abjuring every kind of liquor except when sickness or deathbed render it necessary... oh! forgive me, oh! forgive me this and all the rest". As usual, there is a postscript "the cheapest, meanest place (to live) is 5/-d, beef 10d per lb (it was only 6d in Sutherland) a few strawberries as to keep my mouth moist half a day cost 6d".

Catherine's sister, Diana Rose, wrote from Aberdeen about the same time imploring Dugald to make better arrangements for his wife, "to put her in a more retired place, as she is not fit at all times to be her own guide", but of course we do not know what reactions either of these letters, or indeed several others from Catherine, produced. Catherine writes again "who can describe the sorrows of a disconsolate mother-for heaven's sake restore me to my children - Heaven will accept the pangs I feel at this moment as some atonement for my crimes and my future life shall be devoted to proving how sensible I will be to your goodness in recalling me. Write and relieve my bursting heart...". These letters read as though they would touch a heart of stone, as indeed they were intended to do, but Dugald Gilchrist must have known what he was doing. He must have been sorely tried in the past, and given her chance after chance to break her drinking habit; nevertheless, the fact that these letters have survived for so many years, is perhaps indicative of the fact that, despite everything, he still retained some shreds of affection for her, but could it not have been a mistake to send her so far from home, from all her friends and family, where she had no occupation (at least at first), and where there was all too much time to mix with doubtful company, and drink whatever she could lay her hands on. She was kept on a very tight budget for obvious reasons ... not more than £100 per annum and apart from her rent (usually 5/-)coal food and laundry to pay for, so the one time mistress of Ospisdale found herself in sadly reduced circumstances, which are referred to in every letter.

She remained in Scotland, latterly in Edinburgh, for some years, but in December 1826 she was removed to Kennington in London, travelling by sea on board the 'Sir Walter Scott' She was supposedly going to live in the care of a Dr. Macleod, but she writes back to say that when she arrived at his address, he said he knew nothing about her and would have nothing to do with her, which must have been disappointing for everyone. About the same time as she left for the south, young Dugald, then aged 24 years, and studying law in Edinburgh, wrote to his father to say that he had seen his mother before she left (he had evidently been instructed to do this) he refers to her as 'Mrs. R.' or just 'she' - no mention of her as Mother. "When I saw her, everything that was proper was promised for the future - such promises are to be listend to, as I am aware, with the utmost caution; from the seeming earnestness and sincerity and penitence which accompanied them (whether summoned up for the occasion I cannot say), I am inclined to hope that a most salutary change will take place. Time will show". He goes on to say that, while he has the greatest respect for his father's judgement, and appreciates how much he has already had to put up with, he ventures to suggest that his mother might be placed in a more comfortable situation, and given the wherewithal to make her independant of her own work for subsistence.. "she would be in less temptation's way and would not be brought continuously into contact with women of her own propensity, into whose company, if not willingly, she must sometimes now necessarily fall".

What could the work be that young Dugald refers to? Opportunities for gentlewomen were, to say the least, limited .... one can but hope that her work was confined to plying her needle. "She is now becoming an old woman (at 40), and if not altogether insane, as years advance upon her, must see her abandoned life and reform her conduct". But despite her son's pleas, Catherine's lot in London seemed to be little improved, and she told him she would have to seek work as soon as she got there. It was not many months before she was living in Yorkshire, in a rural district near Malton, where presumably living was cheaper. Nevertheless, short of money as she always was, she managed, especially in the earlier years, to send gifts of books to her children from time to time, and to buy knitting wool and so on, as well as expend a considerable amount on postage.

She writes to young Dugald as unhappily as before "would to God you could prevail on Mr. G. to alter his mind in regard to my place of residence". A P.S. to the letter from London (11 December 1826) "will you let me have my writing box - you did promise it and my cloathes (sic), though they never came".

She was now lodging with some tradespeople in Sherriff Hutton (near Malton) and "here I am safe from all temptations". In a further letter she presses him for news of the others, and suggests he might send her a shirt and a pair of stockings to be used as patterns to make him some new ones. "It would be my greatest pride to help you a little, though it were but half a dozen shirts and a few stockings". Perhaps she really had reformed by now and one wonders if the shirts and stockings ever materialised. That letter, dated December 1827, was the last from the poor lady.

One further letter remains in this sad little bundle - one from a certain Donald Munro in Lincoln, dated October 1833, announcing Catherine's death in Newark (Notts) some time previously (no date given) and enclosing the surgeon's certificate. Mr. Munro was evidently a lawyer acting on Dugald's behalf. He writes "I have given orders that she should be interred decently, though with as little pomp as possible, and I have advanced money to suffice until I have time to settle her affairs". Poor unhappy Catherine, her situation was without doubt caused by "that degrading propensity which has brought so much misery on herself and her connections" as one writer so delicately put it, but it is sad to think that she died so far from home and family (indeed she hadn't set eyes on most of her children for so many years that only the two or three elder ones would have any recollection of her), and she was still under 50 years old.

THE CHILDRENS EDUCATION.

Major Gilchrist of Ospisdale was what one would nowadays be described as a single-parent family, bringing up his family of three boys and five girls more or less alone. The children were born between 1801 and 1811 and at that time there were no suitable schools within easy reach of his somewhat remote country house, so he made a sensible decision to purchase a house in Tain, which could be reached comparatively easily via Meikle Ferry, and in which his children might stay whilst attending school in the town. One Mary Ross was installed in the house to look after the young people - she was probably some relation of the Gilchrists as she signed the only letter which still exists "your affectionate aunt, Mary Ross", though no one of that name appears on the family tree. The boys started their education at home in the care of a tutor, Mr. Drummond, but beyond that fact we know little though they doubtless continued their education at Tain Academy.

The girls may well all have started their education in Tain also - Georgina the youngest certainly did - but in 1815 Margaret, the eldest daughter was sent to school at Killingworth near Newcastle where she remained for some 18 months. This establishment was run by three spinster sisters, the Misses Tate, who obviously took good care of their pupils and taught them to the best of their ability. We have detailed bills for Margaret's expenses during the time she was there, and they give some insight into the curriculum and day to day lives of the girls. Boarding fees for the half-year were £15.15.0d, the subjects taught including English, Writing, French,Geography, Drawing and of course Music and Dancing. Strangly enough no mention is made of History at this stage, and although Italian was also taught, Margaret did not appear to learn it. The fees for all these subjects were charged separately, averaging £3.10.0d for the half year, and extras such as "Tea in the evening for a year" amounted to £1.11.6d, with laundry costing £1.12.0d. A charge of £4.4.0d was made for the "Midsummer Holidays" which indicates that there was no question of a child who lived so far away returning home during her time at the school. Major Gilchrist was never a wealthy man and found the school expenses hard to meet, but he was pleased with his daughter's progress. Even so, in the spring of 1816, he wrote to Miss Hannah Tate (who seems to have dealt with all the correspondence) suggesting that Margaret should leave school, though she could only have been about 15 years old at the time. Miss Tate replies in May of that year that "it is not against our regulations to quit school at the time you mention for Miss. Gilchrist's doing so..... but I hope you perhaps may be induced to prolong her stay as she is yet so young, and the studies she is engaged with require a good deal of time to make the proficiency you wish". But leave school Margaret had to do that autumn, breaking her journey back to Sutherland with a long visit to Glasgow to stay with a great-aunt and uncle, Mary and William Penman.

About the same time it seems that Major Gilchrist wrote to the Misses Tate to say that if he were going to be able to send his younger daughters to their school, they would have to make a reduction in their fees. This they did somewhat reluctantly, particularly asking that the Major would not mention the matter to his friends! Consequently, Alexa, who was a year younger than Margaret, followed her sister to Killingworth. She didn't seem to settle down as quickly as Margaret had done, "being grave for some time,

but is now beginning to laugh and look more cheeful" as Miss Tate wrote in October - she also said that the child was well, though alas no fatter than when she arrived, and that she found difficulty in applying herself to her studies, though subsequent letters showed she was making progress. History had now found its way into the curriculum and Alexa discovers "a good comprehension of it". The half yearly accounts were always accompanied by a private letter, a sort of progress report, the earlier ones ending with the words "Your Obliged and Obedient Servant, Hannah Tate" while later they grow less formal and finish "I remain, dear Sir, your obliged and sincere friend".

Since the girls were more or less at school permanently, Miss Tate had to provide both clothes and pocket money. There is a charge of £1.14.6d for a satin spencer, and a net frock cost £2.2.0d Translate these sums into today's money and it will be seen that clothes were not cheap. A pair of stays cost 14.0d and a pelisse £1.16.0d

By 17th December Miss Tate is much more satisfied with her pupil except that she is "deficient in arithmetic" and "though she is an exceedingly fine girl, she has sometimes shown an impatience of temper which it will be necessary to watch over and correct when she returns home". In October 1817 Alexa left Killingworth, and like her elder sister returned home via Glasgow. It would be fascinating to know how the girls travelled. No mention of this is made except that in a later letter a coach fare of 12.0d is referred to, but the route of the coach is not given. It is more than likely that the girls, like other people, travelled by sea from Leith to Invergordon or Golspie.

Catherine was the last of the sisters to go to the school, taking Alexa's place there and remaining until 1824. A letter from Catherine to her father still exists in which she thanks him for a letter which took three weeks to reach her from Ospisdale, and she then goes on to say that she is suffering from chicken pox but is now better. Miss Jane Tate adds a postscript to say that "she was nearly recovered before, owing to the state of the roads, we could procure any assistance". How disastrous for anyone needing a doctor in a hurry!. Catherine also wrote to Alexa to say how disappointed she is that she is not being allowed to return home during the summer of 1823. At the same time an account is sent to the Major which includes an item of one guinea "for drawing teeth", and 11/10d for the doctor's attention and some medicine when she had chicken pox. Catherine remained in the care of the Misses Tate for longer than her sisters, that is until November 1824. A year later Major Gilchrist received a letter from the Tates saying that they were closing the school at Killingworth and going to live in Cumberland, so that there was no question of Georgina following the older girls. Since Catherine remained at the school for so long a period, her clothes had to be purchased locally, and the bills for them remain. A parasol 14/-d, a small trunk 7/-d, walking shoes 6/6d,. a Leghorn bonnet £1.15.0d and enough black silk to make an apron cost 7/-d. There are several mentions of gloves, both long and short, items without which no lady could have been seen out-of-doors, and a "wreath for my hair" which was 13/-d though it cost but 3d to have their hair cut. Catherine evidently made some of her own clothes as several lengths of material are charged for as well as payment "to the woman who assisted me, and for trimmings". Dresses at this time, especially for the young, were comparatively simple, falling straight from a high waist to the hem - half a century later, in the days of bustles and boning, home dressmaking would

have been a very different matter. Major Gilchrist must indeed have found his family expensive, and he was on occasion somewhat slow in paying his bills. Indeed, even after the school closed, Miss Tate had cause to mention (in a postscript to a letter to Margaret) that £18.13.0d was still outstanding from the previous year, but early in 1826 she wrote to thank their father for his remittance, so all was well eventually.

Georgina remained in Tain in the care of Aunt Mary Ross. Her school accounts are sparse, but one account, for only two months, survives. Music (½ an hour each day) French, needlework and English-total £1.17.0d. She also had dancing lessons from one Joseph Lowe for one guinea. Aunt Mary purchased a hat for her for 5/6d, evidently untrimmed as an extra 2/6d was expended on ribbon and lining for it, and she also paid 1/6d for tartan for a Highland Bonnet with a further half-crown for a feather for same! Georgina must have been fond of dancing, as there are items for Ball tickets (1/6d) dancing shoes and the mending of these. Aunt Mary writes to Margaret on 19th May 1823, after the Major had paid a visit to Tain and left some money for Georgina's expenses " "I have paid the things that was got for Georgina - I will enclose the accounts. The only pair of (dancing shoes) that would fit, and was to be had here, cost 5/-d which is too large a cost... I hear the last Ball is to be on Friday week when I hope you and dear Alexa and your father will come over to see her dance. Mr. Lowe says she is very much improved in her Dancing - indeed I think she is - she is a good little girl. I assure you that I let nothing pass with her that I think is not right and proper....I hope you will bring a Ball Frock for her - I think white is the best colour, but you are the best judge. I ever am with best good wishes to you and all friends, Your ever affec. Aunt Mary Ross. P.S. I have not paid Mr. Murray's account. I will do so if you please. He is indeed a Dear Man to deal with. G. begs her love to you, her Father and Sister...your new maid will be with you on the 27th." So Aunt Mary was useful in ways other than caring for the younger generation - she was able to find servants as well!

And so schooldays ended, the children all returned home, and the Major could have congratulated himself on his successful single-handed efforts to bring up and educate his family. I think the girls were particularly fortunate in receiving a good general education, as well as acquiring the usual ladylike skills, at a time when much less attention was paid to female education than it is today, and judging from what letters and accounts remain, they made better use of it in later years than did their brothers.

A HOLIDAY ON THE CONTINENT-1835.

An account, with extracts from her diary, of a tour taken by Miss Margaret Gilchrist of Ospisdale, accompanied by her Father and Sister, during the summer of 1835.

In June 1835, after spending three weeks 'amid the splendours and heat of London' Margaret, Catherine and their father, Major Gilchrist of Ospisdale, left on the 27th of the month for a continental tour, embarking, early that morning from Tower Stairs, on board SS The Earl of Liverpool. No mention is made as to how the little party had reached London from Sutherland, but it is more than probable that they travelled by sea, either from Littleferry or Invergordon. The sail down the Thames was delightful, but the weather became more windy in the Channel, and they did not reach Ostend until 1 o'clock the following morning after a somewhat rough passage. They travelled with trunks and carpet bags, and must have indeed have required quite a quantity of baggage for what was to be a lengthy trip. They stayed at The Hotel de la Cour Imperiale and were given tea and bread and butter before going to their beds. Later that Sunday morning they attended Mass at the old church of St. Peter, and afterwards found 'shops open, music and dancing, vegetables for sale in the street, which betrayed to us for the first time the habits of a Catholic country'.Ostend was at that time a small town of between 12,000 and 13,000 people and Margaret remarks that they 'saw few of the better class, but those of the lower reminded us of our own Highlanders, especially the women who wear dark blue cloaks with hoods over the head, and no bonnets. The children and young girls all have neat white caps and look very clean.'

The following day they went on to Bruges, travelling in the Diligence, which was a public stage coach. This took some two hours. They liked Bruges and found it a clean place, surrounded by pretty country. They put up at the Hotel du Commerce where 'the table d'hote was good, the wine bad and the coffee indifferent and served without cream'. The next stage of their journey was to Ghent by canal, the boat being pulled by four horses at walking pace. They had 'an excellent dinner on board in the little mirrored salon, which, with wine and servants, cost 8 francs'. They were all three ardent sightseers and almost immediately went off to explore the town. 'Our first object of curiosity was to see the Beguine Sisters at Vespers in the Chapel of the Beguinage - the establishment consists of 700. Their dress black with a white linen veil which, on going out, they fold up and place flat on their heads, giving a very odd appearance. The nuns as far as I saw were old and ugly'. They visited several churches, including St. Bavon, but no mention is made of the famous Van Eyck alterpiece. They went to a flower show, so even then Ghent was renowned for its flowers, as it still is today.

The next stop was Antwerp, where as usual they visited the Cathedral and other churches, looked at Reuben's tomb and walked over the ramparts 'under a broiling sun', leaving on the evening Diligence for Brussels and getting there at 10 p.m. 'just in time to secure good rooms'. The next day being Sunday, they went to Mass at St. Gudule, and later to an English service with a sermon. It is interesting to note how many Church services in English are held in continental towns (mainly during the summer months) which shows that travelling in Europe is nothing new for the British.

They stayed four nights in Brussels, which Margaret describes as a very pretty town. On Tuesday 7th July, they drove to Namur, their next overnight stop, via the Battlefield of Waterloo, where they had a Belgian lady guide who 'fought the battle over with us'. This was only 20 years after the battle, but even then it was a tourist spot, with the mound surmounted by the Lion Memorial, up which they ascended to get a good view of the surrounding country.

The Gilchrists passed through Namur, staying one night, and on to Liege for two. They enjoyed Namur for its pretty views, and thought Liege delightful with handsome modern houses. They must have left Liege early on the 10th as they breakfasted at Chaudfontaine - 'a beautiful little spot in a charming valley'-7 miles outside the town and frequented for its natural warm baths, though no mention was made of this Scottish family availing themselves of this facility.

Two days later they were in Aachen and must have been glad to get there as they were 'very much tired' after a cramped journey. They stayed here for a day or two and obviously found the whole place, but particularly the Cathedral, with it's connections with Charlemagne, most interesting, and descriptions of the town and it's wonders took up several pages in Margaret's journal. They also had to have their passports visa'd here,a performance which was to be repeated several times during the tour, as were Customs checks, but the hotel was a good one, the best they had yet struck, and it was even possible to have hot baths, which must indeed have been a luxury. No further mention is made of baths hot or otherwise, until they are in Dieppe, and almost home.

But now they are in Germany, or to be more exact, in Prussia, and they are not over impressed by the landscape....'the soil appears poor....no enclosures for miles .... crops grown in small patches...the roads as bad as possible - we crawl along at 4 m.p.h. but preparations seem to be in prospect for having them macadamised....few or no carriages, but very many huge country carts with five horses, loaded with teazel, wool and other farm crops.'

Eventually, they reach Cologne 'through a fine old gate' and drive to their hotel in the Breitestrasse (this belied it's name and proved to be very narrow) which was excellent and 'elegantly furnished'. There are long descriptions of the Cathedral and the town generally - it seems that Margaret must have had some knowledge of German as she was able to converse to some extent with people in the hotel and elsewhere and 'the natives seemed obliging and willing to direct them'.

The streets were 'dirty and extremely ill-paved...with no apparent means of carrying off the waste water, very different in it's nature from the celebrated eau-de-cologne, of which we bought a case'. From Colgone they embarked on the steamer 'Stadt Mainz' for what must have been a magical journey up the Rhine as far as Coblenz, and thence by road again to Frankfurt. Margaret's description of the scenery, the houses, the crops make fascinating reading .... she remarks that Frankfurt is a 'free town with about 40,000 inhabitants, with a succession of gardens and shrubberies, pretty villas and tea-drinking arbours.... about 5,000 Jews live here including Mrs. Rothschild, the mother of the great banker. They travel on through Darmstadt ('the Duke of Darmstadt's palace has nothing magnificent about it on the outside') to Heidelburg - she mentions the

castle and the famous bridge, but Heidelburg was apparently a noisy place after dark, making sleep impossible. Then Carlsruhe and on to Baden Baden, where the hotels are all full and they are obliged to go into lodgings at 48 fr a week. The Sunday that they were there they were able to hear an English church service, with a good sermon. During the (Sunday) evening promenade in the public gardens, our Scottish travellers were somewhat disconcerted to see gambling going on, with smartly dressed people taking wine, coffee or ices in an 'orange grove'. The evening was cool and beautiful after a hot day 'but no remembrance of the Sabbath appeared in this mixed concourse'. The next morning Margaret 'mounted on an ass in a sort of saddle chair' rode to the top of one of the surrounding hills to get a view of the town.

The next halt was at the Hotel Fortune at Offenburg (most comfortable) and the landlord, Herr Phahler, who spoke English well, and also dealt in wine, showed them his cellars and on the strength of this Papa ordered a quantity of wine to be shipped back to Scotland. I have actually seen the bill for the same consignment among Miss Lyon's papers. It was written on a piece of paper with a handsome picture of the vineyards as a letterhead, and was in good English. The wine was contained in two tuns, (equal to 400 bottles), and sent by sea to Invergordon, from whence it was carried by ox-cart to Ospisdale, and bottled there in Major Gilchrists own bottles, each with a "DG" impressed onto the glass (the cost was £24). Breakfast in the Offenburg Hotel was 'beautiful, with a fine display of fruit'. A brief stop at Freiburg to look at the Cathedral, and then on through the Black Forest and into Switzerland.

The Gilchrists spent one night at the Hotel Falk in Schaffhausen, and had a look at the Rhine falls, and then went on to Zurich, getting occassional glimpses of the 'beautiful blue Rhine' through the trees. All this travelling was done, over very rough roads - poor Papa felt ill at a small village called Arth, and no wonder. He was 62 years old, elderly for that time. They rested at Arth for some litle time before going on to Lucerne, where Margaret was fascinated by the roofed bridges, ornamented with pictures. (They saw the Lion Monument, and the place where William Tell shot his arrow, admired the views of Mount Pilatus and the varied national costumes of the Swiss peasants, which are described in some detail. The roads improved as they neared Berne, and they were thankful for this as they were anxious to get there quickly in the hopes of getting some news from home ..they had now been away for about 5 weeks. They stayed at an Hotel in Berne, considered to be a good one, but it had 'a greater assortment of fleas then we had yet met with'. Their letters were awaiting them in the care of the British Consul - two from Alexa and Dan, and another from Daniel dated somewhat later (12 July) and posted in Inverness (it was by now 3 August) with an account of the sheep and wool markets, which doubtless pleased Papa, since Daniel's transaction had been satisfactory, and all was well at home. Another Cathedral had to be inspected, but there was time to write home and a packet of letters for posting to England and Scotland was left with the Consul. The coachman who had driven them from Baden was here dismissed, and paid 9½ Napoleons for his work. A 3 hour drive took the party to Thun - 'a dirty little place - very old' - but the views were wonderful, and from their hotel, the Freyenhof, they had their first sight of the Jungfrau, and also saw it later by moonlight 'in its white nightcap'. On August 6th they drove to Interlaken, getting there in time for breakfast, and finding that the lodgings there, to which they had been recommended, were rather

second-rate, but since their stay there was to be brief, they decided to endure them. The cost for board and lodging, exclusive of wine, was 5 francs - the usual rate in this village - and they took the table d'hote at 4 p.m. They explored the countryside around Interlaken, sometimes by carriage, sometimes on horseback, admiring 'the huge Eiger with it's snowy front while the Mittenberg and Watterhorn frown over the glacier at their base and the Schreckhorner towers beyond'. They went also to Grindlewald and Lauterbrunnen, and Margaret remarks on the many walnut, apple and cherry trees which grew luxuriantly there. The Lake of Brienz was mentioned but not so the town of that name, which must have been even more charming then than it is now. On Sunday the 9th they 'heard the English service read in a small chapel fitted up for the purpose, by a clergyman who we understand comes every season to officiate gratis for the benefit of the travellers who congregate here annually in great numbers'. The next day they were anxious to retrace their steps in the hopes of finding more mail in Berne so a boat was hired to taken them back to Thun. This boat had four hands and did the 15 mile journey in 2½ hours for the sum of 9 francs, and from Thun they went again by boat down the River Aar to Berne. They met the Consul by chance in the street, only to learn that the letters had been sent to Interlaken, where they hadn't thought of looking for them, and now they would have to wait until they reached Geneva.

The next stop was Friberg which they reached at 10 o'clock in the evening, but, as usual, they were up early next morning to look at the Cathedral. There they hired a carriage for three days to take them to Vevey and Chillon and back, and had a hot drive over hilly roads, but at least there was very little traffic. They reached Bulle in 5 hours, staying at 'Le Cheval Blanc' - 'a dirty looking inn, undergoing repairs, but we had good bedrooms and got excellent tea, butter and the first good cream'. Breakfast next morning consisted of chamois killed on the neighbouring hills, which they did not consider as good as Scottish venison. The landlord appeared to be a man of taste and had a large collection of flowers...Catherine took some plants from here 'to give them a chance of a visit to Scotland'. Vevey was eventually reached after 5 hours on the road, and from there a visit was paid to Chillon some 5 or 6 miles further on, and all were suitably impressed by the 500 year old (then) castle standing in the Lake - 'the dungeons appeared airy and comfortable!'. They returned to Geneva by steamer, passing Lausanne and other smaller towns, 'under a boiling sun', but were able to cool off next day when it rained hard. In Geneva they wandered around the town (alas! no mail) and looked at watches and jewellery but 'made no bargains'. Church again on Sunday, and later a promenade on the ramparts and through the Botanic Gardens, with which they were unimpressed.

From Geneva to Chamonix, and it rained almost all the way, but Chamonix proved pleasant with 'nice looking villas near the town with very English looking grounds' In Savoy they drove through a valley which caused Papa to remark that it very much resembled the Ross-shire Conon, but he couldn't have noticed the vineyards. Despite the rain, they got a fine view of Mont Blanc, even though by now the evenings were starting to draw in and it was soon dark. Next morning they were up early (again) to take a char-a-banc drive around the neighbourhood, through very wild country. The horses halted at one point for the party to look at a collection of stones and minerals found in the local mountains 'kept there to tempt travellers of all tastes' After an excellent breakfast 'a la fourchette', the Gilchrists joined up with another group of tourists (8 in all) and mounted on mules,

rode off to inspect the glaciers and look at even finer views. Presumably the Gilchrist girls were well used to riding, and just as well they were, as Margaret writes 'For the nervous and inexperienced it is, at first setting out on the ascent, a serious looking business, but when assured of the steadiness of the mules and the care of the guides, one forgets everything but the grandeur and the novelty and the picturesquness of the situation...the appearance of this mass of ice (the glacier) is exactly like the waves of the deeply agitated ocean - in length it extends many leagues, the breadth does not appear a quarter of a mile - thousands of rhododendrons grow almost to its very edge and many other wild plants that I have never seen'. It rained most of the way down, but at least they had seen the glacier. They left Chamonix on the 19th in their bumpy char-a-banc and got back to Geneva at 9 p.m. 'quite fatigued after this long day's drive, but charmed and enchanted with all we had seen'.

On August 20th they took their places in the Diligence for Dijon, where several hours were passed in looking at M. Tissot's watches and jewellery ('I bought upwards of £40 worth'), and after this they made directly for Paris,spending two nights in the coach, which must have been tiring and uncomfortable to say the least ..'twice in the course of one evening we narrowly missed being overturned, the road was steep with a great pull for the horses, and the driver we believed was a little tipsy'. They found the French wayside inns where they were obliged to stop for meals not up to the standard of the Swiss and German ones - 'we had to pass through a dirty kitchen to get to a dirty salon' - and frequently their baggage was looked at by Custom officials-indeed at Bellegarde it was 'plombed!'. They must indeed have been thankful to reach Paris.

This they did on the morning of August 25th, and remained for 12 days. They stayed at the Hotel de l'Europe in the Rue Rivoli, overlooking the Tuilleries gardens, and from there they did the usual tourist things - the Louvre, the Invalides, visited Versailles and the porcelain factory at Sevres, went to the opera and met some Scottish friends - a Mrs Ross and Sir F. McKenzie ...all very delightful and the descriptions of everything take up many pages in her diary. They also had meals in several different restaurants, but one evening chose to eat at their hotel, having the meal sent up to their rooms. They had fish, chops, turkey, duck and apple fritters...it was pronounced not very good, and yet with wine, cost almost a pound sterling! However, at Meurice's a day or two later they had 'among many good things, frogs and kidneys dressed in champagne' - alas, there is no mention of the price.

By Sunday 6th September the Grand Tour was almost at an end. They 'bid adieu to Paris, which I liked very much and travelled by the Diligence right on to Dieppe. Reached Dieppe about 5 o'clock on Monday morning, went in to the old church built by William the Conqueror, looked at the carved ivory works which are very pretty and had a refreshing hot salt water bath'.

And so ended the holiday of a lifetime. One cannot but admire the energy and stamina of the Gilchrist sisters (then aged 34 and 27 respectively) and indeed also that of Papa, who perhaps was glad to get home to his sheep and the quiet pastures of Ospisdale. He died some 5 years later; Margaret survived, unmarried until she was 56, while Catherine later married George Ross of Pitcalnie and achieved the ripe old age (for those days) of 80 years.

While Margaret kept her meticulous and comprehensive journal of this long excursion, reference is made to Catherine's sketches, made whenever time allowed and when views warranted them, but alas these have long since been lost...what a splendid accompaniment to the journal they would have made!.

THE GARDEN.

For those people who still look on the northernmost counties of the British Isles as forming part of the arctic regions, a glance at the papers pertaining to Major Gilchrist's gardens at Ospisdale in Sutherland would come as a surprise. A garden of sorts must have existed there for many years before the Major took it over, but according to bills etc., that we have, his embellishment of it started around 1810 and continued until his death in 1840. While the diet of the ordinary folk in this part of the country included only such vegetables as potatoes, turnips, onions and possibly carrots, a consignment of seeds for Ospisdale, ordered from Dickson and Co., of Edinburgh in March 1813, included cabbage, asparagus, broccoli, lettuce, radishes, cauliflower, celery and 'pease and spinnage', with in some cases several varieties of each vegetable. The bill for this lot came to £39.12.11d, a huge amount for that time, but the order also included some unspecified flower seeds, 3,000 larch seedlings, various other young trees and a hedging knife. All was despatched by sea and the charges for carriage and packing amounted to 12/-d. Though this consignment came from Edinburgh, most of the garden requirements came from two Inverness firms - Donald and John Fraser and Co., and Dickson and Gibbs. The latter also had a nursery at Tain in the care of one James Munro. This meant that orders could be sent by ferry across the Dornoch Firth, and thence by carriers cart to Ospisdale, with comparative ease. Mr. Gibbs was assiduous in writing to the Major to solicit or acknowledge orders - one dated, surprisingly enough, New Year's Day 1820, reads 'Last harvest having been unusually fine we are supplied with a choice assortment of seeds - their quality we can recommend and the prices are uncommonly low. We always have on hand a select assortment of garden tools, and our nurseries are as usual stocked with every description of forest and fruit trees suited to the climate of Scotland...' If he wrote at such length to all his customers, Mr. Gibbs must indeed have been a busy man. On occasion he wrote to say that he would wait upon the Major at Ospisdale, but further letters say that he was sorry to find that the Major had been obliged to be away from home at the time of the visit, but whether Mr. Gibbs met his esteemed customer or not, the Major was always assured of the best of attention at all times etc. Since there was a considerable amount of land to be forested around Ospisdale, and the Major was also purchasing on behalf of the Marquis of Stafford and Lord Ashburton of Rosehall, the orders were large, and small wonder that he deserved, and got, this attention. As a tailpiece to some of the letters, Mr. Gibbs dares to express a discreet hope that the good Major will soon see his way to settling last year's account .. an account rendered in December 1814 was for goods supplied early in 1813 - a long time, by our standards, to keep a tradesman waiting for his money.

Dickson and Gibbs supplied young trees and shrubs, and there was an order placed with them towards the end of 1813 for 100,000 2 year-old Scots Firs for the sum of £5. Their list of shrubs issued in 1814 was impressive, including as it did 11 kinds of clematis, 10 of honeysuckle, several magnolias and 100 varieties of rose, and most interesting of all to the writer is Kalmia Latifolia, one of the prettiest shrubs imaginable which grows wild over much of the United States and is known as Mountain Laurel or the Calico Bush, but which now seems to be almost unheard of in northern Britain.

Frasers (of Bridge Street, Inverness) also issued a price list from time to time, and there is a copy of it dated 1815.. It makes unexpected reading, listing no fewer than 65 varieties of apple (of which only 4 were 'ornamental', presumably crab-apples) with such curious names as Summer Strawberry, Dridge's Early, Norfolk Beefin and Cat's Head. Fifty kinds of gooseberry are listed, varieties never heard of today such as Hulm's Dumplin, Mr. Tup and Black Virgin - one wonders what they were like? Of plumbs (sic) there were 24 kinds, 37 of cherries, and 8 of apricots with names like Early Masculine and Roman. These together with the peaches and nectarines were expensive, from 2/6d to 5/- each, whereas the apple trees were but 1/- each, and named gooseberries a mere 4d (Dutch flower roots were also advertised - presumably tulip and other bulbs.) A long list of trees included maples at 5/- per 100 and walnuts at 30/- per 100. Ospisdale with it's south facing walled garden seemed to have been an excellent place in which to grow fruit of all kinds; melons and cucumbers were also grown, though doubtless under glass. The invoices from both Dickson and Gibbs and Frasers were written in the most beautiful copperplate handwriting on heavy quality paper, the former decorated with a small engraving of a bread fruit tree, while those of Frasers had a similar size picture of a rose bush in a pot at the top of each page.

Flowers generally do not appear to have been ordered so frequently and not in such quantities as the other things for the garden, but in 1847 Dicksons were asked to supply 10/- worth of unspecified flower seeds, together with German asters, sweet peas, four standard rose trees and two white moss rose bushes 'if hardy enough to stand the climate'. There is also mention of batchelor's buttons, short stemmed aquilegia in purple or pink, agrostemma (lychnis), feverfew, southernwood (said to be good for whitening the teeth) delphiniums, sunflowers, mignonette, lupins, ten-week stock, convolvulus (to us a mere weed) love-lies-bleeding and Chrysanthemums, also a 'Paper white primrose which makes a cushion of white in the Spring', so the place must indeed have been colourful. Much earlier in 1818, there is a record that an order was placed with Hugh Rose of Tarlogie for 21,000 boxwood (presumably seedlings at 5/- per 1,000 so one can imagine that the flower beds were surrounded by little box hedges.

And what of the gardeners that tended these plants? Their names are now forgotten, but we read that at the beginning of the 19th century the men at Ospisdale were paid about £10 annually for their work, while their wives and children helping with the weeding or at harvest time would have received very much less. There is a record, dated 1812, of an unnamed gardener's wife and her daughter Catherine employed carrying sacks of barley into the Mill and getting paid at the rate of ½d per sack, though we are not told how far the sacks had to be carried. The doyen of all Sutherland gardeners must surely be old William Munro who cared for the garden at Rosehall for 70 years, and died in 1820 aged 102. He came there in 1740 to work for the Baillie family, and Major General Baillie eventually left him a pension of £5 per annum in his will. When the estate was sold to Lord Ashburton in 1805, Munro was taken on with the estate and Lord Ashburton put him into one of the new lodges that he had had built, and from time to time ordered that a bottle of port be sent to the old man who, in his 90s was becoming frail. When Munro died, Lord Ashburton ordered a tombstone for him from London as a surprise for his family, and this stone may still be seen, worn but decypherable, in the little graveyard near the banks of the Cassley.

Today the garden of Ospisdale, after a succession of owners, still remains beautiful and productive, even though somewhat reduced in area and made more labour-saving, adapting to the conditions which prevail almost 200 years after Major Gilchrist first strode through it, full of ideas for it's development and beautification.

MISS LYON

5.6.1885 - 15.4.1983.

The little old lady, accompanied by a small and aged white fox terrier, walking through the streets of Dornoch, was a familiar sight a few years ago. Almost everyone knew her, if only by sight - she did not know everybody ... "how could anyone be expected to know all these people ",her overall term for almost everyone who was younger than she was, or who had come to live in the town since she had first known it? To the casual observer her clothes might have looked a little shabby, though closer inspection would have revealed that they were good, and had once been expensive, and she almost always wore at least some of her jewellery - a beautiful diamond crescent brooch, dangling ear-rings of aquamarine or amethyst, large lumps of these same stones set into brooches, a gold naval crown, pretty rings. She wore them not to impress, just because they were part of her heritage, had been left to her by her mother and grandmother, and they were there simply to be worn. She lived in an undistinguished house in the middle of the town and no one, looking at it from the outside, could have guessed what treasures there were within. Indeed, it might have been difficult for the untrained eye to notice them, covered as most of them were in a layer of dust and the clutter of day to day living. Like the jewellery, her pictures, furniture and silver had all been left to her, and were relics of a sometimes happier and much more interesting past, constant reminders of places and people connected with her youth, and therefore much to be cherished (if not dusted) on that account, and not for their intrinsic value only..almost everything in the house had a story attached to it. There are no prizes for guessing the subject of these notes...most people locally will realise that the old lady was Miss Kathleen Jane Lyon, who lived in the small house in Castle Street for the last sixteen years of her life, and whose forebears owned and occupied Ospisdale House in the county of Sutherland from 1797 until 1929.

There were other treasures in that house too - boxes of letters, photographs, documents, maps and ledgers, some going back over two hundred years, and all providing a fascinating window on the 19th century world. It is from these papers that I have been able to compile the previous chapters. Actually, the ones with which I have been privileged to deal were but a fraction of the number she had originally, around 50 boxes of them having gone to the Record Office in Edinburgh during her lifetime.

Miss Lyon was born in New Zealand in 1885, the daughter of a naval officer, Alex Lyon and Georgiana Jane Gilchrist Lyon, known as Nainie within the family circle. Her father had left the navy to go to New Zealand to run a sheep farm which had been purchased by his father, a Liverpool businessman, as an investment. Whatever made this gentleman imagine that his son, who had embarked on his naval career at the age of twelve, and had no experience whatsoever of either farming or estate management,would be able to make a success of this venture, is hard to understand, and the newly wed Lyons were definitely not successful. They first lived in lodgings (£1 a week each) and later moved into a house which they seemed to like well enough, though there was not enough money to furnish it properly, and worse still - servants were hard to get and expensive. It may seem ridiculous to us now, but Nainie Gilchrist had been brought up on a cushion of domestic help and life without a houseful of servants must have seemed to her to be

almost insupportable. She wrote to her mother that her expenditure on 'help' amounted to £128 a year 'without any comfort' whereas 'you, with five in the house, only spend £96'. Even Commander Lyon had to assist on occasion with filling baths and emptying them. True, they had a string of horses, which was some consolation, since Nainie loved to ride and was an excellent horsewoman, but horseflesh was cheap in the New Zealand of the 1880s (£5 would buy a good hack) and when times got really hard and they tried to sell one or two of them, no buyers could be found. Incidentally, there was horsemanship on the other side of the family too. Kathleens Lyon's paternal grandfather had been a keen rider to hounds and on occasion had hunted with the Empress Elizabeth of Austria, who from time to time came to England, mainly to indulge her love of the sport but partly perhaps to escape for a while the rigours of Viennese court life. Small wonder therefore, that Kathleen too was completely at home in the saddle when she was young - there is a charming photograph of her on her pony, together with her parents and groom, taken standing in the middle of what is now the A9, by the stone which stands at the roadside not far from the gates of Ospisdale. This stone had fallen in a field, and the Lyons had retrieved it and re-erected it, and maybe this picture was taken to celebrate the event. But to return to New Zealand ... money, or rather lack of it, was always a serious problem, and this together with the terrible boredom 'every day is the same' eventually got Nainie down and increased the desperate homesickness which she suffered from the beginning. She kept hens and a few cows, hoping she would be able to make enough butter to sell, altered and made clothes for herself and the baby, while at the same time they lived very simply, but finances did not seem to improve. Mrs. Gilchrist, Nainie's mother, did what she could, sent what money she could spare even though not, by now, well off herself, and she possibly even paid for their passages on the one occasion that they returned to Scotland for a holiday. This was when Kathleen was about a year old, and it was whilst on the return voyage that she was held in the arms of an old gentleman who had actually been present at the execution of Marie Antoinette in Paris in 1793. This man's father had been a minister in Paris at the time of the Terror and when the date of the Queen's execution was set, had been told that he and his whole family should make a point of being present if he wished things to go well for them in the future. The old man on the steamship was but an infant in arms at the time, and of course remembered nothing about it, but what a link with the past that encounter was! After this trip the family returned to New Zealand for a few years, coming back to Britain for good when Kathleen was six or seven years old. All that she could recall about that voyage was that the ship had called at Colombo and the passengers were able to go ashore for a few hours. Rickshaws were lined up on the quay waiting to be hired and little Kathleen, always modest, was allowed to choose which one she preferred - she said she immediately chose the one pulled by a coolie who appeared to be wearing more clothes than the rest!.

After they had quit New Zealand for good, the Lyons lived in London for a time though of course there were the wonderful summers in Sutherland to look forward to, when hats and gloves and the other trappings of town life could be abandoned, and a child could run wild. But though she may have run wild all week, Kathleen, like other Victorian children, had to go to church on Sundays. They went alternately to Dornoch Cathedral and to Creich Church, which sadly no longer stands where she remembered it. Services started at 1 p.m. so there was no question of a Sunday dinner, but

Kathleen said she well remembered coming home after service to a marvellous high tea, with goodies that included home-cured ham and Grannie's wonderful gingerbread! Whilst in London, Kathleen went to a private day school, but for the final year of her education she was able to follow in her mother's footsteps and go to Cheltenham Ladies College. There she revelled in English Literature, polished up her French and enjoyed the art classes, but foundered absolutely when it came to mathematics, so much so that she was allowed to give up the subject and choose another in its place. She chose photography, which was somewhat advanced for those days, but she certainly profited from the experience and she became an excellent photographer, and was even able in later years to sell some of her photographs to magazines such as Country Life and the Scottish Field. She spent two years after she had left school studying at the Paris School of Art ('you needn't think that I don't know what the male body looks like - in Paris we had living models in the Life Class'), and it was not until after her death that her portfolio and an album were found, and we realised what a very competent artist she had become - her watercolours of local Sutherland scenes were especially pleasing. Also about this time she learned to be a proficient skater, going to a rink at one of the London clubs. She was photographed there, wearing a hat and a long skirt, with only the tips of her boots and skates visible - what would she have thought of the minimal skirts worn by the skating girls of today?

Around the year 1901 the Lyons left London and came to live permanently at Ospisdale in order to help and look after Granny Gilchrist, who was by now into her 80s. Both her sons had died, as had the spinster Aunt Margaret, while Aunt Kate (Catherine) was married and living far away from home. Life must have been quiet, even humdrum, at the old house in those days; as usual, there was very little money to come and go on but I feel sure that Kathleen was happy enough. She loved the place, especially the garden, and she had her dog (a previous Trixie who later came to grief through getting under the wheels of the governess cart outside the Clashmore Inn), and her water colours, and there were occasional visits from relations including some from a favourite cousin, Nigel, a young naval officer. Her mother too was supremely happy just to be living again in her old home. Nigel, whose surname I never remember hearing and who doesn't seem to appear on the family tree, sadly went down with his ship in 1916, taking with him, we suspect, a bundle of hopes and dreams. She had a little glass scent-bottle on her dressing table which had been a present from him, and she asked that this might be placed in her coffin eventually, but this was not possible as she had also asked to be cremated, so we put it in the casket containing her ashes, together with the photographs of Nigel - taken at various stages of his naval career - which we had found in the house. He was a very nice looking young man.

At various times the Lyons managed to spend one or two summers abroad and explored parts of Germany and less well known spots such as the Dalmatian coast and the foothills of the Dolomites, places which today are over-run with tourists but in the pre-1914 years must have been remote and unusual, and very inexpensive into the bargain, but these trips were only achieved in the years when both house and shooting had been successfully let for the season.

During the first World War life must have become even more quiet and seemingly remote. Kathleen was desperately anxious to undertake some kind of war work, and nursing seemed the obvious choice, but her mother was loath to let her go. Not only had Commander Lyon returned to some sort of naval appointment, but the gardeners and other servants had left to join up and she was needed at home. She found herself trying hard to maintain the garden (she said that after the war she never willingly grew another vegetable!), bicycling down to Dornoch to do the shopping and generally coping with the household. When the war was over, her father, whose health had been precarious for years, became an invalid and her mother too was getting increasingly frail, so poor Kathleen had her hands full. She kept poultry and bees, and even tried her hand at breeding pigs in an attempt to augment their slender resources, though this last effort seems not to have been successful. In the end, it all became too much for them, and the estate was put on the market, and finally sold in 1929 - house, land, grouse-moor, the lot for £11,000. To make matters worse, the shock and sadness of leaving Ospisdale affected Mrs. Lyon's mind, and she lost her memory completely. They went to live in a small house on the outskirts of Chester with the idea of being nearer to some of the Lyon relations. Here both her parents died, her father leaving the pathetic sum of only £104.9.5d

After this Kathleen moved again, this time to Overton-on-Dee a few miles away just over the border into Wales. This used to be a pretty place, and perhaps still is, and there for a few years she enjoyed a freedom she had never known before, and had time to plan her garden, write articles for magazines, use her camera and paint-brush, as well as doing a certain amount of work for the Red Cross. The daily domestic chores, which she had always found very boring, were taken care of by Annie who came to her as a sort of housekeeper and general factotum, and who stayed until she (Annie) died. Kathleen had a fondness for Annie, even though she said that the woman was unreliable with money and an inveterate gambler, if only in a small way, and used money which had been given her for other expenses, such as insurance stamps, for her flutters; she also removed articles from the house which were never used and would never (she thought) be missed, and pawned them. I thought this was horrifying and wondered how anyone could keep a servant who did such things until I learned that the unfortunate Annie was never actually paid - 'She was an illegitimate orphan, and I took her in and gave her a home -surely that was enough' - well, it all depends on how one looks at things, I suppose.

When the second war started, Kathleen was then in her early 50s, and having been forced by circumstances to miss helping during 1914-1918, was determined not to let the next one pass her by, so she joined the ATS and soon found herself Recruiting Sergeant in the small Welsh town of Wrexham. She was able to go there daily in her little car and I'm sure she must have enjoyed this new experience, but her army career was short-lived .. she became seriously ill with meningitis after a few months and had to retire permanently from service life.

Kathleen had been back to Sutherland several times on short visits, but around 1955 she decided she would like to come back for good, so when a small house in Dornoch, 12 Castle Street, became available, she promptly

purchased it for a very modest sum, and moved up with Annie, her dog, cat and as many of her possessions as she could fit into the house. The dog was not another Trixie, but a 'rescue' of indeterminate breed, referred to merely as 'the old dog'. After his death, she acquired the third and last Trixie, a smooth haired fox terrier, much beloved by her mistress. In Dornoch life continued much as it had in Overton - she painted some charming water colours of local places, made her small back garden a blaze of colour in summer, and wrote a good deal, including the start of a history of the Gilchrists of Ospisdale, though it is unlikely that this was ever finished. The faithful Annie cleaned the house after a fashion, looked after the animals and did the cooking, as well as serving the meals..this routine continued until a sad day when she was taken ill, and removed to hospital where she died. Thus it came about that at the age of 80, Kathleen had to teach herself to cook, she who hadn't so much as boiled an egg up until then. She managed this remarkably well - a souffle was no problem to her and her layer cakes were beautiful to behold - but it was sad to see her, towards the end of her life, having her meals alone in her dark and somewhat Edwardian kitchen, because the dining room was too cold. She had been brought up to better things, and her thoughts must have gone back to the old days at Ospisdale and her grandmother's lavish table.

By the time we came to live in Dornoch, Kathleen was 89, still wonderfully active, but finding it something of a problem to summon enough energy to give Trixie the exercise she needed, so, since I was walking my own dog almost every day, Trixie came with us and we all became good friends. Later on, I went to the house even more regularly to help with some of the simple chores, or just for a chat, and found her such entertaining company. Her stories of Highland life in the days of her youth were wonderful, and she was a mine of information on so many subjects - archaeology, the old Sutherland families, antiques - the list is endless, and in listening to them I was repaid a thousandfold for the little I did for her. My only regret is that I did not listen more carefully or ask more questions. One of her stories concerned a great uncle of her grandmothers who lived to be well over 90. Her grandmother well remembered being told by this old man when he was a small child his home had been in Preston Pans, and after the battle in 1746 the English soldiers had come to the house to ask for water. His mother had given it to them, and milk and bread as well - what a link with history! She also used to tell how she had all but danced her feet off at the Northern Meeting in Inverness in Edwardian days, describing some of the interesting and unusual people who used to be there. Once an Indian maharajah was one of the guests and dazzled everyone with the magnificence of his jewels, and there was another gentleman who got a little tipsy, and insisted on trying to dance with a curtain! But her thoughts were not always of the past..she kept up with the news of the day, despite the fact that she steadfastly refused to have television in her house. Indeed she derived great satisfaction from being able to tell an investigator from the BBC that she did not have a set, and wouldn't have one if it was presented to her as a gift! However, she did occasionally look at other people's, and indeed spent the last Saturday afternoon of her life watching the Grand National in our house on what she always referred to as 'the coloured radio'!

Time catches up with all of us eventually, and the day came when coping with the trials and troubles of daily life became too much for her, and she had to retire to Cambusavie Hospital as a long term patient, while Trixie now about 17, came to stay with us. It was necessary to be a dedicated dog-lover to cope with Trixie...the household at No 12 had always revolved around her and so it was not her fault that she was a very spoilt little dog, and would snap at the hand that fed, and any other hand, if things did not suit. We had her for just over a year and during that time I took her up to the hospital every week. I cannot imagine any other hospital anywhere

being so tolerant and understanding...the dog was allowed everywhere, even on the bed, and if it happened to be mealtime while we were visiting, a small separate portion always arrived for Trixie. She finally succumbed in February 1983 aged over 18, and her mistress, at nearly 98, followed her two months later. I could have wished it had been the other way around, but we cannot arrange these things, and finally Kathleen departed peacefully in her sleep, having been up and dressed as usual the previous day, wandering through the wards and talking to other patients. Who could ask for more than that at such an age? She was the last surviving member, as far as is known, of the Gilchrist family, a great and unforgettable lady, whom to know was indeed a privilege, and whose like we may not see again.

THE NORTHERN TIMES, FEBRUARY 24, 1989

Heritage Society — In spite of the wild wintry weather on Thursday evening, members of the Dornoch Heritage Society turned out in force to attend the talk on the "Gilchrists of Ospisdale," given by Mrs Cynthia Swallow.

Six years ago, on the death of Miss Kathleen Lyon, whose mother was a Gilchrist, Mrs Swallow was asked to sort out five desks full of letters, documents and bills belonging to the family, some of them dating back to the 18th century.

Using information gleaned from these papers, Mrs Swallow gave a most fascinating, and at times highly humorous account of the activities of the various members of the family, particularly those of Major Dugald Gilchrist, his, alas, pitifully alcoholic wife and their sons and daughters.

The boys and girls obtained most of their education at Tain Academy, but in their teens, the girls were sent to a school in Yorkshire which charged 15 guineas a term for board and 1 guinea for each subject taken.

The formidable and autocratic Miss Lyon herself was sent to the Cheltenham Ladies' College and there, because she was so hopeless at Mathematics, was allowed to study Photography instead, a wise decision as several of her splendid photographs displayed at the meeting testified!

Mr Donnie MacDonald expressed the pleasure of the audience at Mrs Swallow's excellent talk, his opening remark that it was most appropriate that a dedicated bird watcher like himself should give the vote of thanks to a Swallow was greatly appreciated by all.

The next meeting of the Heritage Society is on Wednesday, March 8, when Dr Malcolm Bangor-Jones will be lecturing on the subject of "The Clearances in Sutherland."