

The following article is from an edited talk by Donald Morrison MBE which took place in Strachur Memorial Hall. If anyone can give us more information about this talk please contact us. To read the whole talk please scroll down.

There were healthy people throughout the parish - Strachur in the rural district of Cowal. Many of them lived to a very very ripe old age. My maternal great-grandmother lived a natural life until she was 94 years of age. And of course there was that exceptional gentleman, by name Grieve of Coireantee, who lived down Loch Eckside who reached the authentic age of 108 years and he was interviewed by a reporter some time before he died; the reporter of course asked him the inevitable question, what do you attribute to your longevity. And his reply was: I had two regulations that I strictly adhered to. The first one was that I never would drink whisky without water and the second ruling was that I never drank water without whisky. There you are folks, if you want to live a long age, that is your lesson.

Now I remember we had a doctor here at one time. Before the National Health Service came in, the local doctor here would dispense all his own medicine and I remember we had an elderly locum and if you paid him a visit, for example with a stomach complaint, he would mix up a white coloured bottle and he would say, give it a good shake before you take a dose of it and that it will put you right. Well, if it didn't put you right and you paid him a return visit, he would give you a pink coloured bottle this time and said again give it a good shake and that will fix it. And I suppose it was just the same concoction just a different colour. Well if it did fix it then he was satisfied there was nothing very much wrong with you.

It was around the early 1950s before this district received the mains power from the hydro electric and that was a boon and a blessing I can tell you. But previous to that, with the exception of the people who had their own private supplies, the main lighting was the old time-honoured paraffin lamp. Now the very first house in the parish of Strachur to have electric light installed was Glenbranter Mansion

House, during the time that the late Sir Harry Lauder owned and resided there. And sadly that fine old house was demolished in 1956.

The next house to have a supply of their own was the mansion house down here and then Montgomery's garage and house and the baker and grocer's shop at the Clachan. Now there were six shops in the village at that time and it was said that the owner of the Clachan shop was proud of the fact that his shop was the only one which had a modern supply of lighting. So he put a notice on his shop window stating that "this shop is lit by electric current". An old lady hurried into the shop and took a quick glance at the notice and completely misread it. She said to the girl in the shop: "I will take a pound of those electric currants that you are advertising in the shop window. If I cannot get them to light," she said, "I will just make a cake."

In 1920 when the first wireless signal was received in this part of the country the first house in the district to have a wireless set installed was the Montgomery's house at the Clachan and at that time, the late Mr John Montgomery, Margaret and Cathie's father, on a Saturday night, would take a note of the football results as they were announced and then he would post the results and any other spectacular news in the Post Office window and it was there for all to see. That was a service that everyone in the district knew and appreciated and it carried on throughout the district until people had their own sets installed.

It was about 1930 that Strachur received a delivery of Sunday papers and that delivery was served by a Dunoon man by the name of Joe Higgins, commonly known as Smiling Joe because he had a perpetual grin on his face. Joe's transport was a push bike and early on a Sunday morning he would load up with the Sunday papers and peddle all the way up to Strachur and carry out the house to house delivery. At that time the Sunday Post cost 2d and Joe added a delivery fee of 1d. So he had to sell 240 papers before he made a pound. Of course, a pound at that time would account for about half his week's wages. However, there were some people in the district who thought it was very unchristian-like to buy and read papers on a Sunday and those

people, of course, are entitled to their views. There was one man I knew and he, much against better judgement used to secretly buy the Sunday paper but to ease his conscience, he did not read it until the Monday night; what difference that made, I do not know.

Now during the summer months there used to be quite a number of people come into the district looking for casual work or any kind of work they could find, and there was one couple, a young couple who came in from one of the small islands. And while they stayed in this district during the summer they camped along the lochside.

One bright summer morning, their very first child was born. The father was over the top with excitement, he wanted everyone to know and he dashed off to the nearest house running and shouting, "We had a baby this morning!, We had a baby this morning!" And when he finally took control of himself, the man of the house congratulated him. And again "We had a baby this morning! We had a baby this morning! And guess what it is?" And the man of the house replies: "It's a boy." "Oh no" the father says, "It's not a wee boy, oh no, no, no; it's not a wee boy. Guess again!" And the man of the house says: "It's a girl." "Och!" says the proud father, "Somebody must have told you!"

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More stories and excerpts from the memories of Donald Morrison MBE will appear on this page and also throughout the website where relevant.