

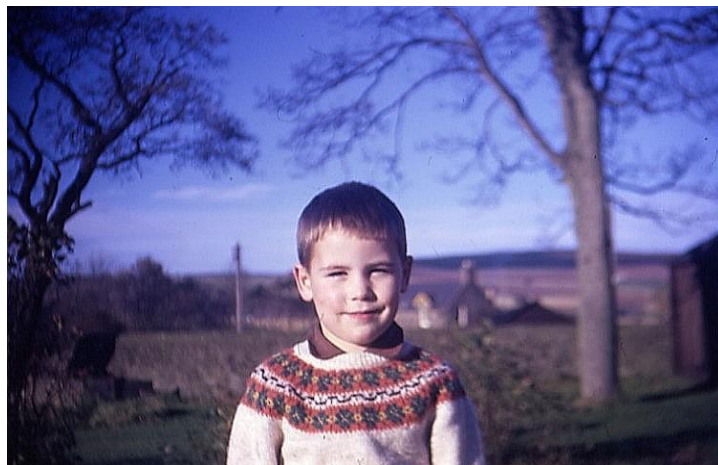
Chapter 80

St Cyrus – December 1969 to December 1970 – Part Two

In the months prior to the successful ‘Messiah’ recital in December, Olive and I decided to make attempts to leave St Cyrus by my applying for headteacher posts back in Stirlingshire. We both felt that up North we were too far away from our aging parents in the Midlands, and that it would be good for both of us, and our three children, to return to our ‘home stomping grounds’. Thus in October, I applied for the position of Headteacher at the three-teacher school in Gargunnoch Village, six miles west of Stirling. I was successful at interview and thus immediately gave Kincardineshire Education Authority the required three months notice of our intended departure. This new appointment was not a promotion as such ... it was more of a sideways move similar sized school and exactly the same salary ... but it was welcomed by our families in Kilsyth and Glasgow ... especially by my Dad who relished the prospect of father and son both being headteachers in the same county at the same time; albeit he was in charge of the largest primary school in Stirlingshire, Kilsyth, and I would be looking after one of the smallest!

My starting date was agreed as 1st February, 1971, and preparations for the removal of our household effects occupied our thoughts over the succeeding Christmas period, with everything to be organised and ready by mid-January not the best time of the year for a ‘flitting’! News of our intended move spread quickly around the locality, and it was flattering to behold the disappointment of parents and rugby mates as they congratulated us on the one hand, but, in the next breath, expressed sorrow at our feeling that we must leave them. Evan, however, was very excited at the prospect and could barely wait to be off ‘and down the road’ to Stirling; Kerr and Lindsay though were really too young to appreciate what was going on!

Evan in October, 1970



Kerr in October, 1970



Another matter of prime importance to me arose in the December, when I was surprised to learn that my application for Degree studies in the newly instituted OPEN UNIVERSITY had been successful. Initially, my request for consideration had been rejected on the grounds that I was ‘over-qualified’ for entry, but due to there being insufficient applicants from ‘unqualified’ people, the OU authorities reversed their earlier decision and welcomed my intended participation. So, at last I had a chance to upgrade my excellent ‘diploma’ status to ‘degree’ status over a number of years by distance learning. As the Scottish education market was by 1970 beginning to see degree status as a pre-requisite for promotion to posts like Lecturer in Colleges of Education, where my ambitions lay, I was determined to grasp the OU offer, and thus possible eventual fulfilment of my personal aims. Olive wholeheartedly supported this renewal of my studies, and indeed, without her full co-operation, my doing a full-time village dominie’s job and community service, with further studies into the bargain, while both of us raised three of a family, could not even have been contemplated! I smiled at my potential ‘overdosing’ as I again remembered my mother saying to me in my teens, “John, there are never enough hours in the day for you to do so many things simultaneously ... but, nonetheless, you always go on and do them.”

Before, I settled down to start my preliminary OU Foundation Study in Mathematics, I had to survive two official farewell functions. The school presentation ceremony and tea was easily and gratefully enjoyed in the last week in January, but the earlier boisterous Thursday evening send-off from my rugby pals in Montrose proved unforgettable in its demands on the alcohol-survival stamina that I had never possessed, nor had ever before sought! In typical rugby fraternity tradition, I was feted and presented with an engraved pewter tankard, which subsequently was appropriated as the essential vessel for the evening’s drinking game of ‘Buzz’ and ‘Fuzz-Buzz’. I was ‘dragooned’ into taking-part in this game that I had studiously avoided over my past years in such companies ... but I thought I did quite well when downing a few pints each time, when like many others, I was called on to ‘pay’ for any error in concentration made. But, unbeknown to me, the beer as it approached my seat was being ‘spiked’ with whisky! The next thing I vaguely remember was being bundled into John Forbes’

Rolls Royce and apparently, it seemed to me, was ‘flying’ home to St Cyrus in great comfort. I had never before been ‘tipsy’ far less ‘drunk’ in my life, but Olive assures me I was ‘weel oot the gemme’ when I staggered into our living-room, and eventually crawled to bed.... was then sick for the rest of the night ... and of course was unable to report for school on the Friday morning the school staff having been warned not to expect any sight of me until Monday! In much later retrospect, I was pleasantly ‘chuffed’ at being honoured as I had been ... and these rugby pals are my pals for life!

At the end of January, 1971, ‘Bill Handy Removers’ were the carriers we entrusted to empty the Schoolhouse and transport our effects in two large vans to Gargunnock. They did quite well ... but not well enough ... as they forgot to empty one cupboard containing an ironing-board and other accoutrements and unasked, they contrived to load four bags of coal and one of dross at the back of one van! Experienced ‘flitters’ as we were, the arrival and unloading of this van at Gargunnock became a nightmare, as the dross bag had burst en route, and had defied all the efforts of many dust-sheets to protect the accompanying furniture. There was black dust everywhere, but luckily our carpets had been in the other van! Also, we can smile now as we picture the car journey in our Ford Corsair down the road an hour or two after the removal vans laden with three children in the back seat almost buried under a mountain of ironing-board, brushes, shovels etc. At least the weather had been dry, and after a long, long day, with beds made up on bare-boarded bedroom floors, all five of us slept well in our new ‘1850s’ home. The settling-in work started on the morrow, but it then continued, with various difficulties faced, for a few weeks thereafter.

Lindsay at the Schoolhouse front-door in February, 1971



Gargunnock - 1971



The expanding village in the 1990s



The Schoolhouse which in the late 1970s became the Community Centre

