

LOCHBROOM DURING WW2

Extracts from *A Hundred Years in Wester Ross* by Donald Shaw, pub. 2002

1939:

Britain declared war on Germany on 3rd September. Local territorials were mobilised. The 4th Seaforths, as part of 152 (Highland) Brigade of the 51st Highland Division, were sent to Saarland to guard the Maginot Line.

Ullapool Charities Entertainment and Linen League sent Christmas boxes to 94 servicemen in December. Each box contained one iced Christmas cake with regimental badge, a large box of mixed biscuits, a box of sweets, a pair of socks or helmet, a pocket testament, and 50 cigarettes. Non-smokers received (instead of cigarettes) a box of cheese, a packet of dates, a half-pound of chocolate, and a packet of stamped letter-cards. The pocket testament was inscribed with an “encouraging message” from Mrs Fraser, Leckmelm.

1940:

Rationing and other restrictions began to affect daily life at home. From January, sugar, bacon and butter were rationed. Meat was not rationed until March, but housewives were still required to register with a nominated butcher in January. The *Ross-shire Journal* reported that the county had survived the first week of rationing without problems. Supplies had been plentiful.

The War Secretary announced that the kilt would no longer be worn by troops, and would be replaced by battledress. *For walking out, all ranks in possession of kilts will wear them until they are worn out. There will be no further issue during the war except to pipers and drummers.*

Severe storms caused damage in February. The wooden pier at the head of Loch Broom, built by German prisoners during the last war, was wrecked, floating down the loch in two pieces, which were caught by locals and used for firewood.

Protected area established: From Monday 11th March a new Government Order, *the Defence of the Realm Act, Protected Area order*, designated much of Scotland as a prohibited area, including Wester Ross. Public concern over possible effects of this order on travel and tourism prompted the War Minister to respond: *There is no reason why the new Order should discourage visitors to the Highlands and Islands, either for holiday or business purposes, by persons of satisfactory credentials.*

Military pickets were on duty in protected areas from that Monday. Soldiers examined permits at road and rail junctions, and travellers by rail and bus from Inverness had to produce their pass or, if living within the protected area, a certificate of residence or identity card. It was reported there was heavy demand for the new Certificate of Residence and Identity Cards throughout Ross-shire.

Men born in 1914, or between 10th March and 6th April 1920, were called up in April. Already those born in 1915-1919 had been conscripted. The new enlistment affected 972 Highland men. On seven successive Saturdays from 15th June to the end of July, men born between 1906 and 1912 (aged 28-33) were required to enlist. By the end of 1940 all men aged 18-36 had been called up. Fishing ceased to be designated as a reserved occupation, so fishermen were now liable for conscription.

Boy Scouts in Ullapool began a weekly collection of scrap paper. At a meeting of Lochbroom District Council, Mr Vyner of Lochbroom Trading Company offered to convey waste-paper and other scrap to appropriate markets in his boat *Penola* free of charge. Scrap iron and waste paper collected in Ullapool was sent south by boat and fetched the sum of £24 for the Ross & Cromarty POW Fund. Additionally, Penny-a-week collections were made on behalf of the Red Cross.

Due to a shortage of men, the minimum age for tractor-drivers on public roads was reduced from 21 to 17. Farmworkers aged 21 or over were declared to be in a reserved occupation, and therefore no longer liable to call-up. Later in the year the age at which farm-work became a reserved occupation was lowered to 18. Any farmworkers presently in another job were required to return to agricultural work if they left that job. The Caledonian Park football pitch in Ullapool was ploughed up and planted.

Defence Volunteers for Ross-shire: May 1940

Ex-officers and members of the British Legion and others aged 17 to 65 who had a knowledge of firearms, were asked to enrol at the nearest police station. At this stage the main requirement for the force was to keep watch for enemy parachutists. Later in the month, it was reported that 1,356 men had joined up in Ross-shire. In August the Local Defence Volunteers were re-named the Home Guard at Winston Churchill's request.

From the summer of 1940 everyone was required to carry a National Identity Card and urged to carry a gas-mask.

A good start to the herring-fishing season was report at Ullapool in October.

A whist drive and a dance were held in the Masonic Hall, Ullapool to raise money for black-out curtains for the village hall.

1941:

Gruinard Island was used to conduct experiments in biological weapons. Canisters of anthrax were fired from the mainland onto the island, killing its population of sheep.

1944:

Strathcanaird School closed. The children transferred to Ullapool School.

Extract from an Oral History project “**Voices from their Past**” which was undertaken by pupils of Ullapool Primary School in 2005 with elderly residents **Mary** and **Donnie Mackenzie**..

Mary said:

“There were troops, actually - part-time soldiers - stationed in Ullapool. You'll recognise that; that's the drill hall. That's where they did their training. And in the house, in my day until the war started, there was always a sergeant living there. And they trained there once or twice a week with the sergeant, and these are the buses come to take them away.”



Seeing off buses with Territorials 1939

Photo courtesy of Peter Newling

They were in the front line, going across to France. And you see that girl there, that pram? Well, I'm a hundred percent sure that's me. See? Now, most of these boys went across to France and they were taken prisoner at St. Valery - that's how you've got St. Valery Place along there nowadays - and some of them walked hundreds of miles to prisoner of war camps in Poland.

Interviewer: *Did evacuees come to Ullapool?*

Mary: *Not really. Some of the fishermen brought their families from the east coast and that was dreadful because we couldn't understand them; they had a language all of their own. A girl was a quinie and a boy was a loonie, and I can remember going home and talking about quinies and loonies and my mother giving me what for.*

Interviewer: *What did you do to help in the war?*

Mary: *Well, I'll tell you one thing, the Girl Guides went out and gathered stuff called sphagnum moss. Well, that was used to make dressings in the First World War - wound dressings. And we went up the hill, just at Moss Bridge there, up the hill up that way; that's where the best sphagnum moss was. And then we took it to a house out at Corrie which then belonged to our commissioner, and on a Saturday we spent the whole day cleaning all that - getting all the little twigs and little beasties and everything out of it - and then it was stitched into muslin bags and used for dressings.*

Donnie: *And made into little packs about that size. On the soldiers' uniforms there's a wee pocket there, and you had that in there. Every soldier had to have one.*

Extracts from Recollections of Isle Martin by Jackie Boa, April 1998

Our family went to Isle Martin from the Beaully area in April of 1940. My father took on the tenancy of the island from the then owner Commander C G Vyner. He was also assured of part-time work in the flour mill which operated on the island. There was a ferry service by a motor launch and the ferryman was Kenny Mackenzie and was employed by Commander Vyner.



Flour mill workers crossing to Isle Martin

Photo: Courtesy of the Ullapool Museum Trust

The flour mill which was taken over by the Ministry of Food at the early commencement of hostilities was closed down in 1942. This was quite a blow to us because apart from cheap feeding stuff for our animals we also had free electricity from a generator in the mill. On Sundays when the mill was idle we reverted to Tilly or Aladdin lamps. All the machinery in the mill was powered by a single cylinder Robson diesel engine.

The men who worked at the mill were all local – some from Ullapool, others from Morefield, Rhue, Strathcanaird, Letters and Loggie. Ian Campbell from Blughasary and his brother Donnie were there. Ian was called up to the army in 1939 and was captured in France and was a POW in Germany until the war ended (p.39). His brother Donnie left his job on the island to join the Merchant Navy. The men from Letters and Loggie stayed for the week in a bothy beside the mill.

The wheat for the mill was transported from Liverpool by a ship named “Penola”. She arrived at the island about once a month with a cargo of wheat which was discharged by derrick onto the pier in 2¼ cwt. Sacks. There was a light railway from the pier to the mill but the bogies were not powered and had to be pushed by the men. The “Penola” spent about 4 or 5 days at the island and took a return cargo of flour back to Liverpool.

The MacRae brothers would come to Loch Kanaird in the month of November to set drift nets for the Kanaird herring. These were small, plump herrings and were first class for salting. Various tradesmen from Ullapool would come to the island from time to time to carry out maintenance and repairs.

Our first teacher in the school on the island was Nan Mackenzie from Market Street, Ullapool. However, she only continued in the post for about six weeks and then left, I believe to join the WRNS. Then we were taught by Rebecca Ross from Ladysmith Street. She was there for quite a number of years cycling to and from Ullapool, quite often in atrocious weather, and then across by ferry to Isle Martin.

Although the flour mill had closed down Commander Vyner had guaranteed he would maintain the ferry service on a restricted basis – in other words twice daily for the conveyance of our teacher. There was another family on the island – the Murrays. Mr Murray was the mill foreman but when it closed they left.

The flour mill re-opened in 1945 at the end of the war when the Ministry of Food handed it back to Commander Vyner and he put it back into production. The mill survived two short years and was closed down in 1947.

Fishing:

Over the years, when the herring failed to materialise in the waters around Loch Broom, the local fishing fleet went into decline and the villagers had to look elsewhere for their livelihoods. However, the industry received a boost during the Second World War when fishing on the east coast became too hazardous because of the mining of those coastal waters. Ullapool pier had to be almost doubled in size to cope with the increased activity. However, it was not long before the stocks became so depleted that a total ban was placed on the herring fishery.

Forestry

Britain's resources were being drained by the war and there was a lack of available labour to log and cut the wood in the forests. The timber was much needed for a range of uses including pit props in the coal mining industry, which in turn produced the fuel for large scale manufacturing in the war.

The British Honduran Forestry Unit played a vital role in maintaining timber supplies during World War Two. Almost 900 forestry workers arrived in Scotland at the end of 1941 and were billeted across the country. Some were sent to the Ullapool area and found the locals were not welcoming. *“They were nervous and confused because they had never seen people of colour before.”* In 1943, before the war was over, the forestry unit was disbanded and the loggers were given the choice between repatriation, or remaining in Britain.